A Praxis of Oral Homiletics: Preaching from the Heart

Weiwen Tu

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A PRAXIS OF ORAL HOMILETICS:
PREACHING FROM THE HEART

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Weiwen Tu

May 2019
A PRAXIS OF ORAL HOMILETICS:
PREACHING FROM THE HEART

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ABSTRACT

A PRAXIS OF ORAL HOMILETICS:
PREACHING FROM THE HEART

By
Weiwen Tu
May 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Calvin L. Troup

Christian preaching has been a central and significant custom to the practitioners of biblically confessional and creedal communities in worship, evangelization, and discipleship. Yet modern preachers confront two challenges presented by the New Homiletic and the media environment. Undue favor toward narrative-based form, audience-oriented eventfulness at the expense of biblical authority, and shifting media that alter the preacher’s identity and incapacitate the preacher’s orality have led to a dissonant handling of form and content and thus a profound decline in the quality of the Christian pulpit.

This project grows out of an attempt to integrate an Augustinian hermeneutic and homiletic, Ciceronian coordinates, and an Ongian perspective on orality and literacy. It proposes an oral homiletic praxis, in anticipation of rectifying current homiletic deficiencies, that proceeds in the fashion of comprehension-internalization-proclamation.
The design and plan of this homiletic praxis fulfills Augustine’s two-sided scheme of treating the Holy Scriptures, performs Cicero’s five rhetorical arts, and proclaims the gospel in a spontaneous, memorable, extemporaneous, and eventful way like the speakers of primary oral cultures do.

A sound praxis of oral homiletics fuses form and content, oriented toward a harmonious treatment of scriptural authenticity and contemporary eventfulness. The acknowledgement of human depravity in temporality demands a Christian *inventio* that can address the reality of complex and obscure signs with faith, hope, and charity. The delivery carries force from the heart, breaks through the barrier of literacy, and connects listeners together in an empathetic way. Throughout the whole process of sermonic preparation and proclamation, the interplay between the skills of biblical interpretation and the practices of orality presents the picture of a literate, textual message first taken in and then spoken out orally by the preacher.
DEDICATION

To the loving Trinity who is to be enjoyed solely.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

1. Research Question

How might Ciceronian rhetoric, in light of Augustine’s insights regarding hermeneutics and homiletics as well as Walter Ong’s contributions concerning orality and literacy, strengthen contemporary homiletic praxis?

Christian preaching has been a central concern to the practitioners of biblically confessional and creedal communities in worship, evangelization, and discipleship. Yet modern preachers are impotent to undertake this service due to ignorance of orality caused, to a great degree, by the contemporary media environment, as T. David Gordon indicates (15, 58–59). The unduly audience-oriented tendency induced by the New Homiletic, meanwhile, has endangered the authority of biblical texts. Confronted with these challenges, thus, this project attempts to propose a kind of oral homiletic that both reflects biblical authenticity and engages audience’s attentiveness.

Cicero’s rhetorical theory has been mined by Christian orators since Augustine distributed On Christian Doctrine, and it arguably still sheds light on the composition of sound, logical, and effective messages. Ciceronian rhetoric, particularly the inseparability of matter and form, can assist preachers in the consideration of issue, argument, evidence, sermonic design, and attentiveness to audience, which can help them accomplish a steadfast resonance between biblical content and faithful listeners.

Furthermore, Ong’s scholarship reminds us of the powerful and impressive oral ability people possessed before widespread literacy in human society. Thus, this project is suggesting a homiletic praxis from these elements: the restoration of Ciceronian rhetoric in homiletics through
both the implications of Augustine’s insights on hermeneutic and homiletics and Ong’s insights on orality and literacy.

2. Literature Review

Aiming at the Protestant evangelical preacher, pastor, and student, this project will work from an Augustinian perspective on hermeneutic and homiletics that unites with Ciceronian rhetoric and Ongian insights on orality and literacy to synthesize a guide for oral homiletic praxis today. At the same time, homiletic literatures from various Christian traditions will be consulted, considered with theological, hermeneutical, and homiletic discernment. The proceedings will review the current condition of homiletic scholarship; Ciceronian rhetoric and its relationship to Christian homiletics; and Ongian orality and literacy related to its potential to enhance homiletic praxis.

The normal homiletic approach, influenced by Ciceronian rhetoric, has been to present a thesis. Ancient orators employed a formula or stasis to discover what can be said about a subject by inventing an argument or thesis. Orators determined whether the issue at hand concerned definition, factuality, or quality, then composed a thesis, a statement of the argument, accordingly. This approach helps to ensure unity in the oration, since a statement has only one subject and every paragraph elaborates on one idea that serves the theme (Wilson, Preaching 9). In light of this rhetorical theory, Johann Michael Reu argues that the theme must be rooted in a biblical passage, representing the main thought of a text and not merely this or that secondary thought (437). This treatment of extracting theme sentences from an objective exposition of the text’s singular meaning represents a traditional understanding of sermonic preparation. Based on this theme sentence methodology, the homiletic design of Henry Grady Davis not only reflects Ciceronian inseparability of substance and form but also proposes a revolutionary insight on the organic growth of sermonic ideas, which means the sermon is to be an idea that grows. His
suggestion considers two questions: “What am I to talk about?” and “What does this mean/What must be said?” This opens up a new way of considering a theme sentence: a double-barreled or two-pronged approach (Davis 139–50). Most of the homiletic discussions of a theme sentence afterward follow variations of his idea.

Haddon W. Robinson, one of the most influential teachers in evangelical homiletics in late twentieth and early twenty-first century, admits his indebtedness to Davis’s work. Following a thematic approach, he advocates that preachers identify a “big idea” composed of a subject and complement. The subject is always stated as a question: “What am I talking about?” The complement completes the subject and asks, “What am I saying about what I am talking about?” The big idea, thus, is formed when the subject and the complement are joined (H. Robinson, Biblical 21–22). Subsequently, preachers compose the sermon through cultivating this big idea in three developmental questions: “What does this mean?”, “Is it true?”, and “What difference does it make?” (50–66).

Bryan Chapell contributes a double-barreled way of obtaining a theme sentence from an explicitly theological approach. Basically, he argues that for all of the differences between the biblical situations and today, humans remain in a fallen condition, his approach termed the Fallen Condition Focus (FCF) of a biblical text. The FCF is the mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with the first-hand readers (hearers) of the biblical passages, and both demand the grace of the scriptures. The unifying theme of the sermon—that is, the essential thing that concerns the message—is how the truths of the biblical passage address an FCF (Chapell, Christ-Centered 269–72).

Credited as the forerunner of the New Homiletic, Fred B. Craddock distinguishes himself by his inductive and narrative preaching, which has helped preachers envision new ways of engaging audiences. He devises his own two-pronged approach to engage more fully the
performative aspect of preaching so as to produce the rhetorical intent of the biblical text in the pew. To accomplish this, Craddock encourages preachers to ask the question “What is the text saying?” at the end of the exegetical process and then to state the main idea of the text in one simple and succinct sentence. To ensure that the sermon does not become too abstract or exclusively intellectual, the preachers should additionally ask, “What is the text doing?” In doing so, Craddock’s inductive preaching attempts to invite the audiences to re-create the preacher’s inductive experience of understanding the textual message (Craddock 125).

The theme sentence approach, however, is not without its critics. David Buttrick, working from a phenomenological perspective, delves into how sermons form in the consciousness of listeners. He works against rationalistic approaches to preaching, such as preaching in three points that develop a single proposition. Instead, Buttrick advocates a series of moves. Each move functions as a camera that brings a field of meaning into focus and connects logically with the next one (Buttrick 23–69). In contrast to the one unified thesis statement for the whole sermon, he proposes three to five thesis statements, one for each move and all linked by connective logic. Unlike the theme sentence approach, which is based on the value of clear thinking and a certain logical connectedness, Buttrick’s purpose of proposing these moves does not deal with the object of focus in itself, but provides the lens through which one looks at the Bible and human life so that by the end of the viewing, a field of meaning has taken shape in one’s mind (Wilson, Preaching 17). Following Buttrick, Richard Eslinger also rejects the cognitive hermeneutic that reduces the biblical text to a main idea or a single point. Instead, he suggests a postliberal hermeneutic that interprets the Scriptures by means of a cultural-linguistic model in contrast to the cognitive model and the experiential-expressive model—the former has its ideological root in the Enlightenment while the latter in the Romanticism (Eslinger, Narrative 12-26). Eslinger argues that the interpretation of the sacred stories should occur within a
particular believing community, thereby it can present an image-narrative-based alternative to propositional truth in sermons. He adopts Buttrick’s model of linked chain, though without his tight linear thread. He envisions the sermon as episodic and mobile, either a series of textual images or a narrative plot, or a mixture of the two (Wilson, Preaching 17–18). Another voice against the theme sentence approach comes from Eugene L. Lowry, whose narrative-based, five-stage homiletical plot is far from propositional in its structure. He discards the traditional way of sermonic construction, which he calls “paste-up,” and upholds a narrative form of sermon that moves primarily by logical movement, or by the shifting impact of image or images, or by the process of a story line, like an “event-in-time” (Lowry xix–xx). A sermonic movement is akin to the dramatic plot that reveals the central itch, which will be an issue, and the solution will serve as the scratch, which happens at the intersection of human predicament and gospel. In so doing, the sermon is to be tentative, evocative, poetic, and dancing at the edge of mystery (Wilson, Preaching 19). In short, the practitioners of the New Homiletic often preach in a way that is “often less theologically and conceptually weighty, more dialogical and conversational in tone, less linear in structure, and more open-ended” (Long, “And” 170).

The emergence of the New Homiletic, on the one hand, encourages preachers to be more attentive to sermonic shape and congregational connection; on the other hand, it diminishes biblical authority due to its re-orientation to communal, existential experience between preachers and audiences. This challenge to homiletic theory and praxis is expressed clearly in an exclusive issue of The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, in which a group of evangelical scholars explore the origin, presuppositions, and possible evaluations of the New Homiletic. The threat to homiletics today, however, can come from outside the field of homiletics as well. Observing the societal change, Gordon alarmingly points out a widespread decline in preachers’ abilities to read and write fluently, which subsequently leads to the incapability to preach well.
From the standpoint of media ecology, Gordon indicates that preachers’ sensibilities have been altered by the shift from language-based to image-based electronic media. The subtitle of his book, *Why Johnny Can’t Preach*, portrays the ways contemporary media have refashioned modern messengers of God’s Word, and he calls for attention to and remedies for this predicament (Gordon 16). Brian T. Hartley, likewise, warns that the alteration of the human sensorium by three successive stages, from oral to typographic to electronic culture, has created a “rhetoric of bad faith.” He warns, “The danger of this naïve use of the medium is that the gospel simply becomes a means of salvation that appears under the guise of entertainment” (Hartley 28).

Responding to the challenge of the contemporary media environment, some homiletic scholars suggest attending to the dynamic between orality and literacy and specifically the benefits of oral homiletic praxis. Integrating orality into effective preaching is not innovative; it dates back to the pre-modern era when literacy had not established dominance in the communicative arena. Preachers only need to rediscover it. For example, Dave McClellan advocates an oral homiletic practice of composing and preparing the sermon, one more adapted to the auditory apparatus (*Preaching* 111–54; “Recovering”; “The Unfinished”). In virtue of this oral approach to mapping a sermon, McClellan expects a climactic moment of homiletic praxis to flow naturally in the preparing preacher, from the inside out (“Mapping” 69–74). This way of oral composition is no less taxing an endeavor than preparation through literate script because it requires preachers to dig into something deeper than abstract words on paper. The recovery and application of orality not only opens a new way to prepare the sermon but also enhances the sermonic delivery. Exploring Ongian orality and literacy, Michael E. Williams demonstrates five distinctive features of oral homiletics: presence, relationship, community, immediacy, and imagination (2–4). Grant Lovejoy reminds us, meanwhile, that one might conduct a good
exposition yet fail to communicate the message well due to lack of dynamic interplay between orality and literacy. A productive approach to utilize orality, he suggests, is to respect the literary genre of the biblical text and to preserve its communicational dynamics in sermons (Lovejoy 30).

In addition to homiletic literatures, scholarly works from the field of rhetoric and philosophy of communication also cast light on Christian preaching. The Journal of Communication and Religion, the Quarterly Journal of Speech, and Speech Monographs, for example, contain a great number of essays relating to the topics of preaching, homiletic theory, and historical and contemporary practice of Christian rhetoric, to name but a few relevant topics. Their publications reflect on the emerging trend of narrative-based homiletics in recent decades, advocating preaching as storytelling (Shuster). Exploring the tight relationship between homiletics, hermeneutic, theology, and Christian rhetoric, scholars examine how Christian rhetoric has been heavily shaped by the doctrine of incarnation (Chase; Troup “Rhetorical”), how the homiletic theory of Buttrick was influenced by the hermeneutic philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer (Kisner), and how Paul the Apostle utilized Ciceronian refutation throughout the first epistle to the Corinthians (Mueller). The rhetorical and structural analysis of speeches of renowned preachers such as Robert South (Mattis), Henry Beecher (Crocker, “Rhetorical Influence”), George Whitefield (King), Harry Emerson Fosdick (Crocker, “Rhetorical Theory”; Vaugh and Stillman), and Phillips Brooks (Hance; Hochmuth) illuminate the theory and practice of Christian rhetoric.

Next, this section will briefly explicate distinct features of Cicero’s rhetorical theory and its deep influence upon Christian preaching. One central concern in Ciceronian rhetoric deals with the inseparability of content and form. In his youthful work, Cicero keenly indicates that “wisdom without eloquence does too little for the good of states, but that eloquence without wisdom is generally highly disadvantageous and is never helpful” (De Inventione 1.1.1). Later in
De Oratore, he further elaborates, “Every speech consists of matter and words, and the words cannot fall into place if you remove the matter, nor can the matter have clarity if you withdraw the words” (3.5.19–20). No matter what the subject is concerned with, “the flow of language though running in different channels does not spring from different sources, and wherever it goes, the same supply of matter and equipment of style go with it.” Then Cicero adds, “it is impossible to achieve an ornate style without first procuring ideas and putting them into shape, and at the same time that no idea can possess distinction without lucidity of style” (3.6.23–24). Essentially, he is arguing that the key to becoming an eloquent speaker consists of the balanced emphasis on matter and style. “For excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter he speaks about” and fits it out with a style “that is harmonious, graceful, and marked by a certain artistry and polish.” When the two are united, furthermore, he “will state [the matter] better and more gracefully than the actual discoverer and the specialist” (De Oratore 1.11.48–51).

An eloquent speech begins with identifying appropriate arguments through the Ciceronian wisdom of invention, his first rhetorical canon, which is articulated in his various treatises, including De Inventione, De Oratore, and Topica. According to Cicero’s definition, topics identify the region of an argument, and arguments indicate the route or direction of reasoning that firmly establish a matter (Topica 2.8). Topics can be divided into two kinds, inherent and external. The former is derived from the very nature of the subject, while the latter is brought in from outside. Both inherent and external topics function to prove and validate the arguments and to win conviction of the audiences. Meanwhile, the speech cannot effectively engage audiences unless integrating the Ciceronian wisdom of style, which is made explicit throughout his De Oratore, Orator, and other rhetorical works. Although many kinds of styles are good and sound, Cicero argues there is a rule to regulate the ornate style. Eloquent style
requires four qualities: correct diction, lucidity, ornate language, and appropriateness of style. The former two qualities belong to elementary education, aiming at correct speaking and understandable statements; the latter two he elaborates in detail. In order to achieve ornate language, Cicero indicates, one starts with vocabulary because “all oratory is made up of words” (De Oratore 3.37.149). Orators give prominence to the matter through employing rare words, new coinages, and metaphors; they then consider the structure of the sentence, including its arrangement and rhythm. The order of words “produces a well-knit, connected style, with a smooth and even flow,” while rhythm is designed “to give pleasure to the ear” (De Oratore 3.43.171–44.173). As to the appropriateness of style, Cicero reminds us “no single kind of oratory suits every cause or audience or speaker or occasion,” which means that orators not only conform the style to the matter but also wisely accord it with different circumstances (De Oratore 3.55.210–12). Thus, Cicero introduces three oratorical styles: plain, tempered, and grandiloquent (Orator 5.20–6.21), arguing that each style corresponds to respective function: to prove, to please, and to persuade. Here, Cicero coins the appropriateness of style propriety and explains, “it is certainly obvious that totally different styles must be used, not only in the different parts of the speech, but also that whole speeches must be now in one style, now in another” (Orator 21.69–22.74). Thus, an eloquent speaker should be proficient in discussing “trivial matters in a plain style, matters of moderate significance in the tempered style, and weighty affairs in the grand manner” (Orator 29.101).

Since the Christian church emerged out of the Hellenistic world, the proclamation of the Word of God had inevitably been influenced by Greco-Roman rhetoric. Early in the first century, the apologists made use of ancient philosophy and rhetoric to persuade “those in positions of power to take a more sympathetic view of the Christians and especially to cease legal persecution of them” (Kennedy, Classical 133). Later on, many ecclesiastical leaders in early
eras of Christianity, such as Gregory of Nazianzus and John Chrysostom in the Greek church and Tertullian, Cyprian, Jerome, and Ambrose in the Latin church, were all well educated in classical rhetoric. They expressed, however, opposite attitudes toward whether pagan philosophy and rhetoric should be utilized and adopted in the ecclesiastical setting. James J. Murphy well portrayed this Christian dilemma and debate on the utilization of pagan rhetoric and described Augustine’s solution to it. Augustine’s rhetorical treatise *On Christian Doctrine* (*OCD*) is crucial in setting the tone for successive Christian preachers, and in it, he “recommends Cicero as the preceptor of the Christian orator” (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 62). Following Cicero’s rhetoric, Augustine taught preachers to employ three oratorical styles, plain, middle, and grand, to fulfill three sermonic duties, to teach, to delight, and to move. In this manner, Ciceronian rhetoric was adapted into Christian rhetoric as the church relied on *OCD* to equip the pastorate to communicate, teach, and preach.

Ong’s scholarship regarding orality and literacy can not only help preachers revitalize oral ability and engage the audience’s attentiveness but also advance their theory and praxis of an oral homiletic. Ong credits God’s word, which appears in the manner of revelation, as a “distinctively personal cast of the relationship between man and God in the Hebreo-Christian tradition” (Ong, *The Presence* 12). The word of God is primarily the spoken word in the first place, then written down for storage. The reciprocal communication between God and man involves both the oral-aural and visual sensorium, yet “the spoken word retains always for the Christian some special value” (14). This special value is particularly obvious in proclaiming the “Good News about the Word”. To share the Gospel “is itself likewise tied to the spoken word of man. For it is the business of those who know this truth to make it known to all other men by use of the word in preaching, where the human word exists in a mysterious connection with the divine” (13). There is a wonder happening in the event where the Word, Jesus Christ, is
proclaimed through the human spoken word; it is a living event and an indicative sign of the true church. The Word is dwelling among His people whenever it is spoken out.

However, man’s encounter with the divine in the living event of preaching confronts obstacles. The progress of communication media has brought confusion about orality and literacy, or spoken and written word. Transformations of the word have been marked historically by three successive stages: oral-aural, script, and electronic. Contemporary men intimately tie to the written word and consequently have difficulty “to sense what the spoken word actually is” (Ong, The Presence 19). Moreover, they tend to regard the oral-aural cultures as illiterate or pre-literate. This failure to treat oral culture and orality in its own right inevitably influences the relationships of man to God and the understanding of the nature of the Bible since both are underpinned orally. When analyzing transformations of the word and the human sensorium through three stages, Ong does not contrast orality and literacy as pro and con. He mainly explains the loss of oral potential as literacy ascended through the progress of communication media, and he indicates the importance of the spoken word in our life-world since it is more real and more related to present actuality. The spoken word, after all, is lively, existential, and eventful (Ong, The Presence 113).

Ong’s analysis of the characteristics of ancient orality helps to recover and retain the wonder of the encounter with God in the preaching event. Ong enumerates and discusses nine tenets of the psychodynamics of orality: additive, aggregative, redundant, conservative, close to the human lifeworld, agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory, homeostatic, and situational (Orality 36–57). In addition, Ong suggests that verbal memory skills in ancient oral cultures developed human oral potential. Unlike the way literates memorize through the written word, oral memorization relies heavily upon formulas. Verbal memory does not ask orators to memorize and repeat the materials in the exact same word-unit, but work in a metric and
formulaic way that they never speak the same way twice, though repeating the regularity of the meter. “Basically the same formulas and themes recurred,” Ong adds, “but they were stitched together or ‘rhapsodized’ differently in each rendition even by the same poet, depending on audience reaction, the mood of the poet or of the occasion, and other social and psychological factors” (*Orality* 59). Moreover, working through story line, or employing narrative can also equip preachers to speak orally in this electronic age. Ong reminds us that “knowledge and discourse come out of human experience and that the elemental way to process human experience verbally is to give an account of it more or less as it really comes into being and exists, embedded in the flow of time. Developing a story line is a way of dealing with this flow” (*Orality* 137). To memorize knowledge in abstract format is difficult, but people find it difficult to forget each successive plot of a story that you intend to share. Here again, Ong points out that “one of the places where oral mnemonic structures and procedures manifest themselves most spectacularly is in their effect on narrative plot” (*Orality* 138).

### 3. Interpretive Approach

Starting from an Augustinian perspective of hermeneutics and homiletics, especially from his rhetorical theory in *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, this project will revisit major characteristics of Ciceronian rhetoric, in *De Inventione*, *De Oratore*, *Brutus*, *Orator*, and *Topica*, since they have brought forth profound contributions in ecclesiastical services, particularly in preaching and teaching the gospel. Augustine, undoubtedly, is the pivot person who adapts Ciceronian rhetoric to a Christian orientation. Together with an Augustinian literacy of hermeneutics and the orality of homiletics, Ong’s scholarship of orality and literacy will guide us toward the tenets and praxis of oral homiletics today. Ong’s scholarly works never depart from his religious spirit, and his widespread publications, specifically *The Presence of the Word* and *Orality and Literacy*, can revive the oral abilities of preachers to meet the challenge of the
contemporary media environment, which has altered the human sensorium and diminished our sensibility to reality, orality, and truth.

4. Chapter Outline and Description

Chapter 1: Introduction

The current chapter provides an introductory description of this project. The whole chapter is divided into four major parts. The first section specifies the research question and issues to which this project is addressed. Second, the literature review explores the scope and emphasis of scholarship in the fields of homiletics, rhetoric, and philosophy of communication from which the arguments of this project will spring. Next, the interpretive approach identifies three main figures with whom this project is in dialogue. The literatures listed will serve as the pivotal resources to construct this project. The final section describes the outline and content of each chapter, presenting the plan of arguments.

Chapter 2: The Current Condition of Homiletics

Christian preaching has been centered in ecclesiastical worship, education, and evangelization since the emergence of Christianity. Yet, there remain challenges for homiletic practice today. The New Homiletic, a theological and hermeneutic movement appearing around the mid-twentieth century, is a reaction to the rhetorical theme-sentence approach, and it moves away from a proposition-based toward a narrative-based, audience-oriented sermonic preparation. Through exploring the New Homiletic’s presuppositions en route to evaluating it theologically and hermeneutically, this chapter will identify the challenges the New Homiletic presents to homiletic praxis. Secondly, homiletic practice also suffers from the progressive media environment. Examining homiletics through the lens of media ecology, T. David Gordon, along with other homiletics scholars, points out that the human sensorium has been altered by shifting media and has led preachers to become insensible to truth and reality. At the same time, the
widespread immersion into electronic usage not only makes preachers incapable of reading and writing well but also creates a bad rhetoric of faith. This chapter will also explore this homiletic feebleness to communicate the gospel faithfully and engage the pew orally.

Chapter 3: Augustinian Rhetoric and Philosophy of Communication

Augustine is a pillar of Christian theology and, of course, of the philosophy of hermeneutics and homiletics. His *On Christian Doctrine* has been acclaimed as the masterpiece re-orienting ancient philosophical and oratorical wisdom into Christian rhetoric, a work that has enhanced the training and preparation of members of the pastorate from generation to generation. At the same time, this chapter will also examine his rhetoric and philosophy of communication grounded in another piece of his beloved literature, *Confessions*. Augustine has manifested a sound Christian rhetoric grounded in creedal faith intertwined with oratorical wisdom, and has thus provided an entry point through which Ciceronian rhetoric can be faithfully followed.

Chapter 4: Ciceronian Coordinates

Irreplaceable is Cicero’s role in the history of rhetoric. Not only does his *Topica* further explicate Aristotelian rhetoric but his other oratorical literatures, such as *De Inventione*, *De Oratore*, *Brutus*, and *Orator*, have also guided rhetorical practice, theory, and education from his day to now. His works, through Augustine, have influenced sermonic preparation since the early days of the Christian church. This chapter will look at coordinates of Ciceronian rhetoric that can still shed light on contemporary homiletic praxis, and will pay special attention to his insistence on the inseparability of content and form throughout his oratorical literatures. Both wisdom and eloquence are required and interrelated in persuasion. Ciceronian wisdom of invention, particularly finding suitable topics to compose arguments, will be integrated with other rhetorical canons, especially style and memory, so as to provide and describe tenets of oral homiletic praxis.
Chapter 5: Recovery of Orality through Ong

This chapter, through an Ongian lens, seeks to discover the dynamics between orality and literacy, to recover the psychodynamics of orality, and to regain oral abilities once possessed in the pre-modern age. The three sequential stages from oral to typographic to electronic do not cancel one another out but, rather, have built upon one another successively, with the result that today all three exist. Yet the altered human sensorium in the contemporary media environment erodes the role of orality in the living event of Christian preaching, and thus takes away the wonder in that encounter of God and man. An oral homiletic praxis calls for the consideration of the auditory apparatus, integrating verbal memory skills that shift the sermonic preparation from literate script to oral-aural potential. In so doing, a sound oral homiletic expects that the presence of God and of man would be confluent in the proclamation of God’s Word.

Chapter 6: Proposing an Oral Homiletic Praxis

Reacting to the aforementioned challenges to contemporary homiletics, this chapter will integrate Augustinian hermeneutics and homiletics, Ciceronian rhetoric, and Ongian orality and literacy to propose a praxis of oral homiletics that can assist preachers in engaging listeners with textual matter through a recovered oral-aural apparatus. On the one hand, the theological and theoretical foundation of oral homiletics reflects biblical authenticity and authority, while it engages listeners in the real life-world through the preaching event. The practice of oral homiletics, on the other hand, that retains instinctively an oral-aural apparatus complemented by literate ability will elevate the attentiveness of audiences with faithful textual matter. To achieve this goal, this project is proposing a praxis of oral homiletics by the restoration of Ciceronian rhetoric in homiletics through both the implications of Augustine’s insights on hermeneutic and homiletics and Ong’s insights on orality and literacy.
Chapter 2
The Current Condition of Homiletics

Sound Christian preaching frames content and form equitably. The pulpit deficient in biblically-driven content forfeits its credentials to proclaim the Word of God. Sermons falling short of redemptive grace given through the Cross degenerate into advice for self-actualization, promotions for ministerial achievement, and instructions from a moral to-do list. These types of messages would sound indistinguishable from “[messages] of morally conscientious Muslims, Unitarians, Buddhists, or Hindus” (Chapell, Christ-Centered 294). Meanwhile, the sermonic form has gone astray by falling into one of two tendencies. On the one hand, the dynamics of preaching are dulled when preachers enumerate the grammatical details of scriptures and recite a bevy of biblical commentaries on the stage. These exegetical tasks are crucial in sermonic preparation, yet tiresome in the oral venue. To captivate the audience’s attention, on the other hand, preachers mistreat the sermonic form with stirring testimonies, poignant stories, flamboyant gestures, dramatic tones, and ornate vocabularies at the expense of authentically doctrinal concepts. While leaving the sanctuary, people feel emotionally entertained and mentally excited, but without being spiritually inspired. Both practices corrode the sermonic form since the ministry of God’s Word “should not be a human performance that merely entertains nor a dry recitation of principles” (Keller 14). The emergence of the New Homiletic and the transformation of the media environment, furthermore, worsened the already awkward exercises of rhetorical content and form. The sermons of the New Homiletic are “often less theologically and conceptually weighty, more dialogical and conversational in tone, less linear in structure, and more open-ended” (Long, “And” 170). This homiletic fashion emphasizes sermonic shape and congregational connection, overvalues communal and existential experience.
between preachers and audiences, but corrodes the biblical authority of the sermon. Besides furthering the shift from language-based to image-based communication, electronic media has led to a widespread decline in preachers’ abilities to read and write, and thus in their capability to preach well. This penetration of societal and cultural changes alters not only preachers’ self-identification but also their sensibility to rhetorical acumen.

This research project is grounded on the strong conviction that Christian preaching has been and will continue to be an effective way of communicating God’s Word regardless of the rapidly changing conditions in worldview, culture, technology, and social structure. Facing the challenges to contemporary preaching, preachers demand a balanced emphasis on form and content by means of rhetorical erudition. As Cicero indicates, “Excellence in speaking cannot be made manifest unless the speaker fully comprehends the matter” and composes “a style that is harmonious, graceful, and marked by a certain artistry and polish” (De Oratore 1.11.48–12.50).

Thus, this project suggests a homiletic praxis that restores Ciceronian rhetoric in preaching through a re-energizing of Augustine’s insights in hermeneutics and homiletics, in combination with Ong’s contributions on orality and literacy. This chapter will investigate the relation between rhetoric and homiletics in the first place, then discuss two specific challenges for contemporary preaching brought about by both the New Homiletic and the transformation of the media environment. I do not reject the insights of the New Homiletic nor the contributions of the emerging media, but I am concerned about unmindful acceptance of homiletic methodologies and technological conveniences without a corresponding understanding of their potential threats to Christian preaching. Written from the vantage point of rhetorical theory and philosophy of communication, this project proposes a praxis of oral homiletics that both reflects biblical authenticity and engages the audience’s attentiveness.
Ancient rhetoric nurtured the growth of Christian preaching from the time that the church began springing from the soil of Greco-Roman culture and from the seed of the Hebrew scriptures. Since the time of the early church fathers, Christian homiletics looked to the Bible and to theology for what to say, and to classical rhetorical training for how to say it. This mixed marriage—biblical homiletics being Jewish in background and rhetoric being Greek in essence—however, deteriorated under Barthian theology in the early 1900s, though Karl Barth did not pioneer this new fashion of preaching. Barth’s emphasis upon the transcendent power of God’s Word, though noble in its theological method, resulted in ignoring the role of listeners in the preaching event. Eventually, such dull sermons bored the people in the pews with theological language in the abstract (Buttrick, Homiletic 18; Long, “And” 176-77). In reaction to this clash between theology and homiletic practice, the New Homiletic emerged during the second half of the last century, drawing a different homiletics from a new hermeneutics. I will trace its theological and hermeneutical presuppositions through a series of hermeneutical turns beginning from Friedrich Schleiermacher, via Martin Heidegger and Rudolf Bultmann, to the exponents of the New Hermeneutic—Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs. This philosophical investigation strives to show the cardinal principles of the New Hermeneutic and to reveal its influence upon the New Homiletic. Subsequently, through examining three representative voices of the New Homiletic—Fred Craddock’s inductive method, David Buttrick’s phenomenological approach, and Eugene Lowry’s narrative plot—this section ventures to disclose the misleading implications of the New Homiletic and to warn of its malicious impacts upon Christian preaching. Next, I will explore another crisis to contemporary preaching that comes from the transformed media environment, which the Church has rarely and barely recognized up to now yet concerning which, the insightful scholarship of media ecologists can provide assistance. The fruitful interaction between media ecology and theology can reveal the deficiency of the
preaching ministry provoked by the current media context. The spirit of individualism and conformity in the techno-modernized culture coerces preachers to reorient their sermonic content and form and reconstructs the preacher’s self-image from a traditionally esteemed ambassador of God to a manager or psychologist. Meanwhile, the pervasive impact of mass media also discredits preachers’ literacy and orality, skills that have traditionally undergirded Christian preaching. The progression of communication media has initiated a widespread decline in preachers’ ability to read and write fluently, which makes them less capable of preaching well.

1. The Relation of and Separation between Homiletics and Rhetoric

The record of the earliest Christian preaching remains sparsely except for several missionary sermons of Paul and Peter recited in Acts. These sermonic orations usually began with the Old Testament prophetic sayings, then claimed that the prophecy had been fulfilled in Jesus and witnessed to by the apostles, and finally appealed to the audiences to repent and believe the gospel. Arguably, as O. C. Edwards Jr. proposes, this uniform style of speech may merely reflect Luke’s extraordinary literacy and “what Luke thought the missionary preaching of his own day should be like” (7), instead of giving us a real, historical sense of preaching at that time. This pattern of reading scriptures, interpreting passages, and exhorting audiences, however, mirrored the services of Jewish synagogues in the Hellenistic period and gave birth to the Christian homily. Justin Martyr’s description in *The First Apology* exemplified this fashion: “[O]n the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader has finished, the Ruler in a discourse instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things” (71). The similarity in worship patterns does not identify the Christian homily with the Jewish sermon, however, because of its different format and content. Instead of
Jewish themes, Christian proclamation strived to establish Jesus’ messianic credentials and to affirm His death and resurrection as a fulfillment of prophecy.

Besides its Jewish heritage, Christian preaching absorbed oratorical wisdom from Greco-Roman rhetoric, which had been widely employed in varied occasions of public speaking, such as the courts of law, legislative assemblies, and ceremonial events. In virtue of the educational system, Christian orators acquired and demonstrated the richness of classical rhetoric. Early in the first century, apologists had made use of ancient philosophy and rhetoric to persuade “those in positions of power to take a more sympathetic view of the Christians and especially to cease legal persecution of them” (Kennedy, Classical 133). Melito of Sardis’s Homily on the Passover well reflected Gorgianic figures, including “phrases or clauses with contrasting thought (antithesis), often of equal length (parison); rhyme at the ends of clauses (homoeoteleuton); and a fondness for sound play of all sorts (paronomasia)” (Kennedy, A New History 20). Origen, the first systematic theologian, preached in “a simple, generally Attic, style, filled with direct address, imperatives, and rhetorical questions to maintain audience contact” (Kennedy, Classical 140). During the time of doctrinal controversies in Asia Minor in the second half of the fourth century, the Cappadocian Fathers—Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus—declared their theological stance with oratorical devices. Their sermons illustrated virtually every figure of speech and rhetorical device, signaling the effective integration of classical rhetoric and Christian preaching. In approximately the same period, the finest Christian preacher in Greek was John Chrysostom, often called John the Golden Mouth. He was born and educated under a famous rhetorician, Libanius, in Antioch where, in the New Testament era, the name “Christian” was first given. His gifted talents in speaking and writing earned him fame from his adolescence and later in his pastorate, first in Antioch then in Constantinople, such that his congregations often applauded during his preaching, even though he discouraged them from
doing so. In fact, rhetorical devices had become second nature to him so that in his homilies he mastered various stylistic skills—metaphor, simile, comparison, proof, paraphrase, paradox, pleonasm, and paronomasia—to help the congregations understand his ideas and acquiesce to his appeal that they live a moral and spiritual life (O. Edwards 80–81). The devotion to oratorical arts in the works of the Cappadocian Fathers and Chrysostom led to a trend among young Christians in their times to study classical rhetoric. Thus, “the Christian communities,” Kennedy describes, “were less and less a simple company of simple folk content with the message of the gospel” (Classical 146).

The incorporation of classical rhetoric into Christian preaching reached its summit in Augustine. He was once a well-trained orator and rhetorical professor, but then was converted to Christianity and eventually became the bishop of Hippo. More than one century before Augustine, ecclesiastical leaders had debated on whether classical rhetoric, along with other artifacts of the pagan culture, should be adopted into ecclesiastical services. One of the famous oppositions came from Tertullian: “What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” This assertion was echoed by Jerome, a contemporary of Augustine: “We ought not to drink the cup of Christ and the cup of devils at the same time” (Murphy, Rhetoric 49–53). But many Church Fathers did not resist sternly because they had mixed feelings toward this conclusion on the issue. On the one hand, they studied, taught, and benefitted from classical rhetoric in their vocational or ecclesiastical duties; on the other hand, however, they were concerned that excess ornament in eloquence would taint Christian belief and seduce men away from God. Augustine’s contribution lay in resolving this dilemma through his treatise On Christian Doctrine (OCD), which set the tone for ages to come. OCD includes four books and divides the tractatio scripturarum, the treatment of Scriptures, into two tasks—hermeneutics and homiletics. The first three books attend to the ways of conceiving and interpreting the scriptural texts, while the last
book “contains an outspoken plea for the use of eloquentia in Christian oratory, making the volume what has been called ‘the first manual of Christian rhetoric’” (Murphy, Rhetoric 58). Augustine argues that “the art of eloquence should be put into active service, and not rejected out of hand because it is tainted with paganism” (59). He demonstrates the concordance of scriptural styles with the Ciceronian three levels of style and thus approves the worth and validity of employing rhetorical art in the pastoral service. Augustine soberly recognizes the danger of “Platonic rhetorical heresy,” which misleadingly believes “that the man possessed of truth will ipso facto be able to communicate the truth to others,” and he vigorously “urge[s] a union of both matter and form in Christian preaching” (60). Augustinian principles in OCD thus served as the major preceptive treatise on preaching and helped later writers to weave rhetorical principles into their manuals of ars praedicandi, used to train preachers of the Church throughout the medieval period and the Reformation age, and up to the nineteenth century.

The enthusiastic reception of rhetoric still characterized the nineteenth century, as circulated in homiletic literature and preaching ministries. One such exponent of the fusion of homiletic and rhetoric was George Campbell, a Scottish Enlightenment philosopher of rhetoric, whose Lectures on Pulpit Eloquence published and circulated posthumously. Ebenezer Porter, a professor of sacred rhetoric and the first American who composed a systematic work on homiletics, encouraged the study of rhetorical principles in order to achieve a skillful and powerful pulpit ministry (iii–iv). Another professor of sacred rhetoric, William Shedd, promoted “a masculine and vigorous Rhetoric, wedded with an earnest and active Pastoral zeal” (iv). Daniel Kidder argues that Christian preaching is a higher science to which rhetoric and logic are tributary (4-5). Robert Dabney straightforwardly announces that his homiletic work is essentially generated from a legacy of classical rhetoric: “If man is by nature a creature of reason and conscience; if duty, forecast, judgment, will, desire of legitimate success, are natural to him, then
surely he does not obey, but violates his nature when he discards the use of adapted means for his ends” (16). In his inaugural edition of *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, John A. Broadus not only regards homiletics as “rhetoric applied to this particular kind of speaking” but also encourages his students to read general works of rhetoric from Aristotle, Cicero and Quintilian to George Campbell and Richard Whately, along with specifically homiletic treatises that range from Chrysostom and Augustine to contemporary writers (30–37). All these are but a few examples showing the close relation between homiletics and rhetoric inherited from Augustinian principles.

But things have changed since Barthian theology eliminated rhetoric from being an active companion of homiletics. Barth, insisting the transcendence of God, vigorously asserts that the salvation of humanity comes only from above. Christian preaching should thus not rely upon any human capacity, including rhetorical devices, but merely spring from the ultimate action of God as gift, especially since humanity, in Barth’s estimation, is deaf to the gospel no matter how well it is presented. In a similar dilemma to the criticism of Christian rhetoric in Augustine’s age, Barth regards what rhetoric has provided for Christian preaching as merely “elaborate theories of human communication” (Long, “And” 176). He detaches rhetorical devices from homiletic practice and even disallows sermon introductions so that the contact with the congregations would solely come from the gospel itself rather than from oratorical strategies (Long, “And” 177). Buttrick moans that “biblical preaching has been paralyzed by Barthian fear of cultural accommodations and, as a result, has recited scripture to churchly faith in a small stained-glass echo chamber” (*Homiletic* 18). Barthian advocates unduly favored content over form to an extent that they “ignored the art of imaginative communication and bored people in the pulpit . . . they often made poor rhetorical choices and fell into the trap of producing overly abstract and didactic
sermons” (Long, “And” 178). Out of this clash of homiletic practice emerged the New Homiletic.

2. The New Homiletic’s Challenges to Christian Preaching

Advocates of the New Homiletic generally agree that traditional preaching is critically ill since its old sermonic forms are no longer heard. The stubborn arrangement of “three points and a poem” resembles “three pegs in a board, equal in height and distance from each other,” an incoherent form cynically criticized by Craddock (56). The scientific revolution and linguistic change have outdated the doctrinal locution once habitual in the old days. Meanwhile, the pervasive brevity of media artifacts such as TV commercials has curtailed audiences’ attention spans and corroded their discursive comprehension that is crucial for propositional preaching to resonate with them. Furthermore, the formerly esteemed authorities of priesthood, religious institution, and the scriptures have been shunned with the collapse of Christendom. This post-Christian world, as a result, labels the authoritative tone of the conceptual sermon as dogmatic and peremptory indoctrination.

Finally, the discrepancy between biblical studies and proclamation makes the traditional sermons unwanted (Eslinger, A New Hearing 11). Approaching the Bible with scientific and critical hermeneutics has evoked two homiletic problems. First, preachers prioritize biblical knowledge at the expense of touching audiences’ situations and experiences. Second, the rational approach—such as literary, historical, textual, and form criticism—confines the biblical literature into a rigid, static, and inert schema against which story, image, and poetry inherently come into conflict. When narrative and poetic life is inhibited, the proclamation is reduced to an objective proposition encased in ineffectual monologue. Since “faith comes from hearing” (Rom. 10.17), the New Homiletic calls for a new hearing that traditional forms fail to fulfill and appeals to a new sermonic design that can arouse the pathos of the listeners.
The term New Homiletic was coined by David James Randolph and defined as “the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers” (1). He expects a happening, an event, through which those in the pews can run into a participatory experience with the senses of “encounter, engagement, and dialogue,” evoked by only one man vocalizing at the time of the sermon (7). Proponents expect that this eventfulness can offer a “needed corrective” to the mix-up between sermons and lectures, worship services and debating arenas (Thompson 9). They believe the New Homiletic can cure the sermonic disease through “its turn to the listeners, its recognition of the eventfulness of the sermon, its awareness of the revelatory quality of biblical genres, and its focus on inductive movement” (Radford 5). Methodologically, this new trend of homiletic movement has received a cordial welcome and made a profound influence. Scott M. Gibson depicts:

The New Homiletic introduces a new way of listening to the Bible, a new way of understanding reality and the expression of this new reality in practical situations, and it provides a new way of understanding preaching. The central concern is not what a sermon is, but what a sermon does. The shift is made from traditional homiletics based on determining the original meaning of the text to sermon as speech-event which discloses its meaning through its relationship to its context, to the faith, and to the listener and community. The sermon is seen as an event or experience. (“Defining” 20–21)

In a nutshell, the New Homiletic elevates the participation of listeners, highlights the relevance of ancient texts to contemporary situations, and accentuates the format of inductive movement. Thereby, advocates allege that a new light has been shed on homiletic practice and a new hearing can be attained.

The New Homiletic awakens the power of rhetorical form in the pulpit, which was left behind by deductive preaching. Nevertheless, it also generates new challenges to sound ministry.
of the Word. The elevation of oratorical form at the expense of sound content has undermined
the biblical authority and textual authenticity of New Homiletic sermons. The rigid rejection of
objective propositions puzzles the audiences with uncertain conclusions. The undue exercise of
story, metaphor, and dialogue muffles multiple voices of biblical genres, which, in turn, causes
the art of oratorical form to be undervalued (Plantinga, “Dancing” 77–79). The New Homiletic
may have yielded some gains, but its assumptions have also incurred some losses. To better
assess its pros and cons to Christian preaching, I will explore its propositional origin from the
New Hermeneutic and its hermeneutical root in the scholarship of Bultmann, Heidegger, and
Schleiermacher. Closer examination of these hermeneutical concepts genealogically may
disclose the presuppositions of the New Homiletic and satisfy a need in current homiletic study.

2.1 The Principles of the New Hermeneutic

The New Hermeneutic is a Protestant theological movement that has spread from Europe
to America, a continuum of the discovery of genuine understanding stemming from
Schleiermacher, via Dilthey and Heidegger, to Gadamer and Bultmann (Frame 401–02). Two
leading proponents of the New Hermeneutic, Fuchs and Ebeling, were experienced pastors and
pupils of Bultmann, and they were concerned that Christian preaching had become irrelevant and
ineffective because of the linguistic discrepancy between the biblical tradition and contemporary
world. Their inquiry concerned how the ancient text might become a living word that is heard
anew and strike home in the present (Thiselton 308). They advanced less a collection of
expository rules than the actualization of authentic understanding, as Schleiermacher asks: “How
is all or any utterance, whether spoken or written, really ‘understood’?” (Palmer 86). The
following principles of the New Hermeneutic manifest their attempt to answer this question in
the light of their philosophical predecessors.
The New Hermeneutic aims not to abandon the historical-critical method but to highlight the hermeneutical function of the word as the access to real understanding in the first place. Traditionally, the word event or language event is regarded as something obscure to understanding while hermeneutical methods as the remedy. However, the traditional hermeneutical rules cannot produce understanding; they instead merely serve as preconditions to remove the hindrances and to let language perform its hermeneutical function. “The primary phenomenon in the realm of understanding is not understanding OF language, but understanding THROUGH language,” Ebeling contends (93). The hermeneutical problem lies not in the word itself but in the situation where the word event is constrained. The word itself is not the object of understanding; rather, when the language event happens according to its determined purpose, the word “opens up and mediates understanding, i.e., brings something to understanding . . . there is no need of any aid to understanding, but it is itself an aid to understanding” (Ebeling 93–94). Furthermore, the means by which hermeneutics can remove the linguistic obstacle still lies in the word event.

Therefore, Ebeling emphasizes that “the content and object of hermeneutic is the word event as such . . . Hermeneutics as the theory of understanding must therefore be the theory of words” (95). This cardinal feature of the New Hermeneutic of reorienting hermeneutics from practically disciplined rules to the theory of understanding is, by its nature, linguistic and thus gains its inheritance from the groundbreaking work of Schleiermacher. Hermeneutics, originally, “was supposed to support, secure, and clarify an already accepted understanding (of the Bible as theological hermeneutics; of classical antiquity as philosophical hermeneutics)”; however, Schleiermacher made a qualitative change in making understanding possible and in initiating understanding in each individual incident (Kimmerle 114). His ambition to make hermeneutics the art of understanding has made it universally applicable through grammatical and
psychological penetration into the mental process of the speaker. This reversal of composition is
dependent upon the principle of the hermeneutical circle that had dawned on Schleiermacher and
that many year later would be advanced as “the importance of preunderstanding in all
understanding” (Palmer 95). Since understanding occurs in a comparatively referential operation,
the hermeneutical circle presupposes not only the reciprocal interaction between the part and the
whole but also the intuitive, mutual understanding of both language and subject-matter between
the speaker and the hearer (Palmer 86–88). This hermeneutical circle has been theorized in
Diltheyian historicality (Palmer 118), modified in the Heideggerian “ontological structure of
understanding” (Gadamer 293–94), advanced in the Gadamerian fusion of horizons (Gadamer
305), and illuminated in Bultmannian preunderstanding.

The presupposition of Bultmann’s hermeneutics asserts that presuppositionless exegesis
is impossible. Understanding inevitably involves the preacher’s subjective questions to the texts,
and, at the same time, it requires their preunderstanding of the subject-matter of the texts.
Bultmann illustrates that one cannot understand economic history without presuppositional
knowledge about economy and society (Stanton 67). His assertion mirrors Dilthey’s
hermeneutics in life’s historicality that “there can be no ‘presuppositionless’ understanding . . .
Since we understand always from within our own horizon . . . understand by constant reference
to our experience” (Palmer 121). Or, as Heidegger says, “interpretation is grounded in something
we have in advance . . . something we see in advance . . . something we grasp in advance”; then
he stresses that “interpretation is never a presuppositionless apprehending of something
presented to us” (Being 191–92). Or, as Gadamer asserts, “a hermeneutical situation is
determined by the prejudices that we bring with us” (304).

This development and modification of the hermeneutical circle, ultimately, has
undergirded the second cardinal principle of the New Hermeneutic, termed “common
understanding,” “mutual understanding,” “agreement,” or “empathy” (Thiselton 311). Following the lead of his hermeneutical predecessors, Ebeling agrees, “Only where there is already previous understanding can understanding take place. Only a man who is already concerned with the matter in question can be claimed for it” (96). Likewise, Fuchs declares that hermeneutics is a linguistic task aided by empathy to initiate understanding. Just like Jesus built a mutual understanding with his listeners through parables, modern preachers also “re-create that common world of understanding which is the necessary basis of effective communication of language and appropriation of its truth” (Thiselton 311). Mutual understanding, nonetheless, is not confined within a cognitive exchange of language, as Thiselton reminds us:

Like Heidegger’s category of “world”, it is pre-conceptual. “It is neither a subjective nor an objective phenomenon but both together, for world is prior to and encompasses both.” It is therefore, for Fuchs as for Gadamer, primarily a “linguistic” phenomenon, reflecting ways in which men have come to terms with themselves and with their world. (311)

The New Hermeneutic thus implies that the understanding of biblical texts cannot happen without reference to the subjective experience of the interpreters. Their preunderstanding urges them to interact with the text and forms the mutual understanding at a pre-conscious level to fulfill the grounds for effective, real hermeneutics.

The third cardinal feature of the New Hermeneutic is still linguistic, yet turns to the performative function of words. Fuchs regards Christian preaching as a ‘language event (Sprachereignis)’, which is synonymous with Ebeling’s term ‘word event (Wortgeschehen)’ (J. Robinson 57). These two believe that the word event brings forth not merely information but also action; Jesus’ words aim not just to talk but to call. Thus, when the Word of God speaks anew to us, it pledges an action and initiates an event. In a language event, the biblical text turns from being an object under investigation to being a subject guiding the preacher and the congregation.
Fuchs exemplifies this hermeneutic insight vividly: “The text is therefore not just the servant that transmits kerygmatic formulations, but rather a master that directs us into the language-context of our existence” (Thiselton 312). This transposition of subjectivity and objectivity contradicts the traditional hermeneutics, yet it further portrays the next important characteristic of the New Hermeneutic, which is the converted relation between the interpreter and the text.

The subject-object dualism of Cartesian epistemology separates the subjectivity of the interpreter from the objectivity of knowledge. The interpreter is an active, lively subject exploring the text as a passive, inert object through scientific investigation. However, the New Hermeneutic inverts this subject-object relation, as James M. Robinson contends,

The flow of the traditional relation between subject and object, in which the subject interrogates the object, and, if he masters it, obtains from it his answer, has been significantly reversed. For it is now the object—which should henceforth be called the subject matter—that puts the subject in question. (23–24)

The New Hermeneutic models this reversion on Gadamer’s fusion of horizons, which is a modification of hermeneutical circle. Thiselton explains it succinctly: Every interpreter approaches the text with his own preliminary questions that are confined in certain presuppositions or prejudgments. His preunderstanding of the subject-matter of the text is “limited, provisional, and even liable to distortion.” Then, “the text, in turn, speaks back to the hearer: it begins to interpret him; it sheds light on his own situation and . . . questions.” After his initial question has been revised more adequately, “the text itself now speaks more clearly and intelligibly” to him. As this hermeneutic circle proceeds, the interpreter can gain deeper understanding while being spoken to and interpreted by the text itself (Thiselton 316). Therefore, understanding occurs in the moment that the text plays the dynamic role in creating the fusion and illuminating the experience, as Ebeling puts it, “Words produce understanding only by
appealing to experience and leading to experience” (Ebeling 96). This reversion of the subject-object relation testifies what Fuchs says, “It is not dependent on our good pleasure to know the truth, insofar as the truth has us ourselves as its object” (143).

In short, the principles of the New Hermeneutic can be summarized in this way. The re-emphasis of the hermeneutical function of the word is the focal point of the first magnitude. The way to speak the biblical language anew is not repetition or paraphrase in modern locution but when the Word of God comes to speech. Hermeneutical rules are nothing more than preconditions to let the language event occur, since understanding is not understanding of language, but understanding through language, as Ebeling tells us. Second, the answer to the hermeneutical problem “How do I come to understand?” leads to the core of the New Hermeneutic, the phenomenon of empathy. Fuchs and Ebeling, following their hermeneutical predecessors, believe that genuine understanding occurs when the mutual understanding between the speaker and the hearer arrives. Next, the New Hermeneutic attends to the performative function of scriptural language. The Word proclaimed is the word event, not merely to transmit information, but to call, to pledge, and to promise. Thus, preaching is not talking about scripture but including the hearers’ experience in the happening of language event. Finally, the subject-object relation between the interpreter and the text has been reversed because understanding is viewed in terms of experience rather than knowledge. Only when the text interprets the interpreter, speaks to his prejudice, revises his provisional questions, and sheds light on his preunderstanding can a deeper understanding take place.

These assumptions have facilitated the emergence of the New Homiletic. The hermeneutical problem—how ancient texts can be spoken anew—has challenged homiletic theory and practice as well. The practitioners of the New Homiletic endeavor to increase the listeners’ participation in the language event, to engage their experiences, and to help them
achieve genuine understanding. Three representative voices—Fred Craddock’s inductive method, David Buttrick’s phenomenological approach, and Eugene Lowry’s narrative plot—will be used to encompass the general premises of the New Homiletic. The following discussion of the assumptions and shortcomings of each methodology seeks to explain how the New Homiletic curtails the value of scriptural authority, bewilders people on the journey of spiritual maturity, eclipses the clarity of biblical truth, and disregards the richness of biblical genre. A serious preacher should not naively accept the methodologies of the New Homiletic without perceiving its drawbacks. Hopefully, several decades after it began, the disclosure of New Homiletic presuppositions gives preachers clear warning not to uncritically welcome it.

2.2 Fred Craddock’s Inductive Method

Many scholars have traced the origin of the New Homiletic to Fred Craddock, whose seminal book, As One without Authority, promoted an inductive way to engage listeners. Craddock advised that we speak the ancient texts in a new way for the new situation so that the scripture would be “the address of God to the hearer who sits before the text open to its becoming Word of God” (114, italics added). This idea of “becoming” views preaching as an “event” in which the preacher and the congregation become “co-creators of the sermonic experience” (Gibson, “Defining” 22). The nexus of this sermonic experience lies in the preeminence of the spoken word as it “has come newly alive” in the electronic age (Craddock 26–27). Since speaking and thinking correlate in a concurrent and coefficient fashion, Craddock identifies human nature with human speech within which both thought and reality reveal themselves at the same time. The transmission of the spoken word not only involves “a consciousness of movement, change, uncertainty, openness to interruption, and, of course, insecurity” but also characterizes the real life-event, reminds us of the existence of self and of others around us, and sustains the relationship between people (27–29). In this fashion, spoken
words can function beyond signs, indicating verifiable information to constitute the reality of human existence, to give meaning to human experience, to encourage dialogue in community, to demonstrate lived events of individuals and societies, and to discover value in the world. Just as the Word of God is an event, a happening, a life situation in history, so also is man’s word an event, one through which all living creatures got their names. The spontaneity, contingency, and immediacy of spoken words characterize “not only the supreme event of human existence but the very being of man,” Craddock concludes (36–37). The linguistic study and philosophical investigation of the phenomenon of oral communication has assured us of the centrality of spoken words in the construction of self-existence, live-event, and communal experience. This is the way with which Christian preaching should accord, Craddock expects.

Meanwhile, Craddock’s inductive method reflects the assumptions of the New Hermeneutic, attempting to smooth away the discrepancy between ancient text and modern listeners, between archaic language and contemporary ears, and between biblical studies and proclamation. His central premise echoes Fuchs and Ebeling in that understanding is through language, through human speaking. Craddock says:

One does not begin with the idea that we have in the New Testament verbal statements that are obscure into which we must introduce the light of understanding; rather, one listens to the Word hopeful that it will shed light on our own situation which is obscure.

The Word of God is not interpreted; it interprets. (42)

Preachers start the sermonic preparation by listening; before they can proclaim the text, they must first listen to it. Craddock calls for “a new angle of vision” within biblical hermeneutics to traverse the biblical world and modern church (Eslinger, A New Hearing 102). To bridge the gap between the two worlds—ancient and contemporary—again Craddock appeals to spoken words. Preachers need not only to paraphrase the biblical text in a contemporary, common idiom to
create fresh language in the ears of the congregation but also to attend to the text’s performative power to produce its rhetorical intended effect in hearers’ minds because “Words are deeds” (Craddock 34). Preaching invites the congregation to voyage with the preacher; as Wilson comments, “When the sermon is doing something akin to what the text is doing,” the people and the preacher are “on the right track” (Preaching 12). The creation of the “interpretive experience” in preaching parallels Gadamerian Erfahrung—an “integrative event” that the pulpit and the pews, through spoken words, undergo, participating “in a coming to understanding of text together” (Reid et al. 2). Instead of announcing the pedagogical content, preaching sustains the language event in which listeners can experience the gospel along with the preacher’s own course of hermeneutic understanding. There is no predetermined truth in this event because the preacher and the congregation are co-creators of the sermonic experience. This inductive movement invites listeners to walk through the journey without a pre-given conclusion, but instead to arrive at their own, and thus this type of sermon fits “the American way of life” (Craddock 57–58).

Based upon these linguistic and hermeneutic preconceptions, Craddock suggests that the proclaimed Scripture has spontaneous authority and the preaching event is co-authored by the preacher and listener. He concurs with Barth and Bultmann in appealing to the Second Helvetic Confession: “Preaching the Word of God is the Word of God” (39). When encountered by humans in private reading or in public preaching, the Word of God, “is not simply the content of the tradition, nor an application of that content to present issues, but rather the Word of God is the address of God to the hearer who sits before the text open to its becoming [the] Word of God.” Then, Craddock highlights the most critical point that “God’s Word is God’s Word to the reader/listener, not a word about God gleaned from the documents” (114). Nevertheless, this interpretation of the little present tense “is” of the Second Helvetic Confession contradicts the
Creed and the Protestant tradition. The credo teaches that the genuineness and goodness of the Word of God, when being proclaimed lawfully, will not be tainted by the sinful nature of the preacher. However, the misleading interpretation above regards the written form of the Scripture as merely an earthly composition by certain men at certain times in certain places and as an inert document differentiated from the actual revelation. Here, only in the event of Christian proclamation can God’s Word become a living word. Only in that moment is the Scripture no longer static and silent; it is being and becoming God’s Word simultaneously endowed with authoritative energy. God’s Word in the spoken word not only brings out motion, action, and engagement but also belongs to the present, announcing that “the time of the Kingdom is now” (Craddock 44). This devaluation of written Scripture has seriously injured its revelatory authority. This misconception, furthermore, has made the historical authenticity of the Bible irrelevant; as Craddock argues, “we are saved by faith, not historical legitimization . . . Making a place for faith beyond the support of historical research is also removing faith from the threat of historical research, which means security par excellence” (41).

Craddock’s inductive method invites listeners to participate in the interpretive journey of preachers. Through the power of spoken words, the pulpit and the pew co-create the preaching event within which the written scripture becomes the revelatory Word of God. This communal experience arouses a new hearing; however, his assertions raise “serious questions about the nature of inspiration and biblical revelation” (Gibson, “Defining” 25). Craddock ignores the historical genuineness of the Scripture, valuing it only if it is proclaimed in a right way and faith is induced accordingly. However, if the Bible cannot directly represent divine revelation faithfully grounded in historical authenticity, then how trustworthy can it be. The assumption of Craddock’s inductive method has overstated the importance of the experiential encounter of listeners and, through this, has undermined biblical authority. His attempt to remedy ineffective
forms of traditional preaching, ironically, ends up hurting the sound content of Christian preaching.

2.3 David Buttrick’s Phenomenological Approach

Buttrick’s homiletics concerns the linguistic fluctuations paralyzing traditional preaching and begins with how performative language functions in consciousness through the sermonic moves that mirror the scriptural sequences. His conception of human consciousness compares with Gadamer’s phenomenon of understanding since both refer to a Heideggerian ontological and phenomenological approach to language and understanding (Kisner 11). Buttrick invokes Gadamerian and Heideggerian phenomenology of language at the outset: “[L]anguage names the world into consciousness” (Homiletic 8). He evidently calls human beings homo loquens since we live in language—we do, relate, and think within language (173–74). His homiletic theory inquires how sermons mediate understanding in consciousness (320), hence his phenomenological approach.

Rather than as inert language or static object, Buttrick regards scriptures as films with movement of thought, event, or image and as episodes with sequence of logic and idea. These “systems of structural telling,” Buttrick asserts, “can be analyzed with literary categories—time, space, character, ‘point-of-view,’” which resemble the arrangement in narrative, but are not limited to narrative material alone. Since “all language involves structured speaking, a sequence of ideas or images logically designed,’ preachers can employ the same concept to decipher the plot and logic of non-narrative passages (Buttrick, “Interpretation” 51). In his approach, the sermonic preparation should begin with seeking out the “theo-logic” by which the biblical authors designed the sequences of the episode, and the focus within each episode that signifies the meaning of each scriptural movement. Instead of the historical issues behind the texts, the
logic of scriptural structure and the focus of authorial concern are what count (Eslinger, *A New Hearing* 138).

Moreover, Buttrick defends the role of the human experiences in hermeneutic consciousness through the preaching event. “Preaching is obviously more than talking about the Bible. . . . [it] must dare to name God in conjunction with the world of live experience” (Buttrick, *Homiletic* 18). Since God’s great salvation is for the world and in the world, Buttrick believes that we can grasp where the Word of God is working out in the world through naming events of grace in human experiences. When God is connected to lived experience in preaching events, biblical texts become meaningful. In so doing, Buttrick boldly asserts that “[o]ur understanding of life interprets scripture,” because preaching can enlighten congregational hermeneutics, “teaching congregations to interpret experience in the light of scripture and scripture in view of experience” (19).

Once the preacher identifies the theo-logic of the scriptures, she then attunes the sermonic structure to the logical sequence of scriptural episodes. In so doing, the sermon can induce understanding in consciousness via a logical sequence from one idea to another. Buttrick names this continuous movement of language shaping each idea into a bundle of words “moves.” He intends for the design of sermonic moves not only to say something but also to do something, namely, form faith-consciousness according to the performative function of the scriptures. Moves, like a series of rhetorical units, should tie together in some sort of logical progression that not only expresses a meaning but also includes “images, cadences, metaphors, and syntactic patterns so that meaning may be seen and felt and formed in astonishing ways” (*Homiletic* 26). Buttrick’s sermonic move takes on “the instrument of focus, the lens through which one looks at the Bible and life so that by the end of the viewing, a field of meaning has taken shape in one’s mind” (Wilson, *Preaching* 17). Buttrick deemed the sermon a linguistic phenomenon that creates
understanding in human consciousness through coupling lived experience with the Word of God in a logical movement of words.

Designing sermonic moves as linguistic phenomena contributes to a smooth preaching experience. However, the assumptions of Buttrick’s phenomenological approach jeopardize scriptural credence. His emphasis on the internal structure and movement of the biblical texts without attending to their historical authenticity and movement comes at the price of their authoritative affirmation. How can a gospel without genuine historicity give real hope to people in distress? Also, Buttrick overstates the derivation of sermonic movement from textual logic. This leads to a dilemma in which some portions of the Scripture are unpreachable if this kind of logical structure is unavailable, as Buttrick admits, acknowledging that “the Psalms and other hymnic material in the Bible are not susceptible to homiletic treatment” (Eslinger, A New Hearing 165).

Buttrick’s phenomenological approach attempts to attune human consciousness to scriptural logic. His invention of sermonic moves reflects not only the textual episodes but also the performative functions of the text. Nevertheless, his devaluation of scriptural authenticity and overemphasis on textual logic corrodes biblical authority (Bender 36). After all, the whole canon is the Word of God, indispensable to a sound gospel, which cannot be discriminated against by whether its inner textual logic is discernible to preachers. A sermonic practice that unduly favors the form over the content can hardly contribute to a healthy, authentic Christian proclamation.

2.4 Eugene Lowry’s Narrative Plot

Arranging the sermon according to the idea of plot characterizes Lowry’s narrative preaching, since his approach begins with this intriguing and preliminary question: “What is the form of a homiletical idea?” (2). He argues that “until we resolve the issue of form, it is fruitless to ask how one begins to work toward it” (3). Traditional preachers tend to view the sermon as a
thing and the sermonic preparation as the process of construction. The preacher appears like an engineer putting small pieces together according to the blueprint. This part-to-whole mindset fails by making a sermon into “a static collection of inanimate parts” that merely attends to the substance of various points instead of the “transitions which are the key to sermonic process,” as Lowery says in his criticism (7–9). To vitalize the homiletical idea and root in the gospel, therefore, Lowery proposes to view preachers as artists developing living matter and facilitating a process in sermonic art. The best way to portray a sermon with such a lively process is, borrowing the notion of drama, plot. Just like a drama holding the viewers in tension and giving the remedy in the end, a sermon brings a sense of discrepancy to the congregation and resolves the issues in the light of the gospel (12). This sermonic tension not only energizes the formation of the homiletical idea but also sustains it throughout the whole preaching event (21). “Plot!” Lowry firmly proclaims, “is the key term for a reshaped image of the sermon. Preaching is storytelling. A sermon is a narrative art form” (12). This assertion reflects the title of his book, *The Homiletical Plot.*

The sermonic plot would imitate the TV series plot, which begins with a felt tension then moves toward a predictable outcome because the hero will survive and appear again in the next episode. What is left is an unknown process in between. Likewise, the congregation come to the church with the expectation that the gospel of Jesus Christ would provide them a remedy one way or another, and the preacher ought to keep this suspension, or ambiguity, before hearers’ minds while moving the hearers from problem to solution. This process of narrative experience shapes the sermonic form as an *event-in-time* (Lowry 24–26). This process is happening in time and sequence and can be described in five stages: upsetting the equilibrium, analyzing the discrepancy, disclosing the clue to resolution, experiencing the gospel, and anticipating the consequences; they can be abbreviated as: Oops, Ugh, Aha, Whee, and Yeah (26).
Lowry revolutionizes the sermonic form by means of treating the sermon as an event-in-time rather than as a spatial paradigm, which is “static, rationalistic, and discursive” (Eslinger, *A New Hearing* 64). The problem of preparing the sermon as the spatial construction, as Lowry indicates, “is born of an image of sermon-building as *assemblage* which is founded upon our unconscious understanding of reality as meaningfully related pieces” (Lowry 5). The shift from space to time in his mentality of sermon preparation formulates the proclamation as a happening event that invites audiences to experience the process from itch to scratch, from problem to solution, and from tension to relief. The listeners do not focus on a theme, as a spatial model would expect, but on “the events within its duration” (Eslinger, *A New Hearing* 67). While upholding narrative as the form of the sermon, the homiletical plot also turns away from clarity to ambiguity. A plot, Eslinger contends, “has as its means ambiguity and suspense, and the question becomes one of correspondence (is the plot ‘real’ to life?) rather than coherence” (*A New Hearing* 68). The preacher aims not to provide logical consequence but to sustain the ambiguity and suspense throughout the sermon until the resolution’s time has come. In short, Lowry’s homiletical plot views sermonic preparation as development rather than a metaphoric “construction,” the sermonic form as narrative rather than structure, the sermonic means as ambiguity instead of clarity, and the sermonic goal as happening in place of understanding. Sermon is an event-in-time, an “ordering of experience within a narrative plot” (Gibson, “Defining” 22).

Two major pitfalls of Lowry’s homiletical plot can be noted here. First, the narrative form becomes Lowry’s one and only sermonic form, which in turn does not fit and cannot be deployed smoothly with other kinds of text, such as lament, laws, correspondences, or apocalyptic literature. As Davis has warned, “the story is not for everyday use as the form of the entire sermon. It is not suitable for every kind of text or theme . . . and overuse or incautious use
of it will make a man’s work seem artificial, posed, and therefore insincere” (161–62). There are critical issues—such as doctrinal debate, historical reflection, and theological inquiry—that cannot be resolved through narrative form. Second, another disadvantage is that narrative form would sometimes slip into ambiguity. Since story communicates ideas in more indirect, oblique ways, the point is made, by definition, in a less explicit, clear manner, and thus the audiences, in the end, are often left in the wilderness without a real direction to truth. Or, as Sidney Greidanus suggests, narrative form makes “the sermon vulnerable to widely divergent interpretations” (153).

Lowry’s homiletical plot enlightens us with a new perspective on the sermonic form. Sustaining the felt tension through storytelling indeed creates a new way of hearing in homiletical practice. Preachers can benefit from his method especially in its way of composing the sermon as a fluent articulation instead of an inert assemblage. However, his insistence on narrative form leads to another trap of rigid sermonic practice. Many passages are unable to fit the narrative design, whether in their textual formats or their theological intentions. To forcefully bend those texts into a homiletical plot not only creates an awkward form but also presents us with ambiguous effects. Rhetorical wisdom, on the other hand, reminds us to match each kind of message with its corresponding style.

2.5 The Dilemmas of the New Homiletic

The New Homiletic attempts to rectify the limits of propositional preaching through revitalizing the sermonic form and valuing the listeners’ experience. The adoption of induction, narrative, story, symbol, and metaphor addresses the consciousness of the people in the pews on the one hand while it escapes the boredom of fixed, predictable sermonic form on the other hand. However, the undue attention to the form creates another predicament for the form-content
standard. When incorporating the gains of the New Homiletic, a sensitivity to its weaknesses will sustain the well-being of the preaching ministry.

The elevation of listeners in the preaching event accords with the postmodern milieu, but it curtails the value of scriptural authority. The New Homiletic has rejected “the general recognition of . . . the authority of Scripture” (Craddock 14), and it suggests that one initiate sermonic preparation with the particularity of human experience rather than the biblical text. When the homiletical focus shifts from biblical content to life event, the authority is reoriented to the listeners or to the relationship between the experience co-created by the preacher and the congregation instead of authority residing in the Scripture, which then becomes not even indispensable in preaching. “So, let us be willing to say boldly,” Buttrick urges, “that it is possible to preach the Word of God without so much as mentioning scripture . . . we must not say that preaching from scripture is requisite for sermons to be the Word of God” (Homiletic 458). Appeal to the Scripture or to ecclesiastical traditions becomes suspect and carries no weight. The traditional model of authority “descending from God to Christ to scripture to sermon could lead to a terrifying arrogance that not only contradicts [the] gospel but destroys preaching” (Homiletic 458). Thus, the sermon must be grounded in the existential experience of listeners. This loss of scriptural authority, however, fails to fulfill the sermonic function to teach, instruct, reprove, and correct (2 Tim. 3.16). Without authority, the Scripture cannot claim obedience and response from the people. If the weight of preaching lies in the subjective experiences of listeners, people feel no obligation to answer the divine call with all their heart, soul, and might. Moreover, clergymen do not assume the authority of the pulpit. Preachers do not stand above or beyond the congregation; instead, they stand under the authority of the scriptures just as the congregation does. A preacher is authorized because he or she is sent to the Scripture on behalf of the congregation to listen for and to bear witness to the truth. The preacher’s authority, if there
is a kind of authority, comes from the ordination, the call to preach, and “being ‘sworn in’ as a witness” (Long, The Witness 53).

To create and sustain eventfulness, “the New Homiletic strategically does not announce a conclusion. Instead, there is an intentional delay of the preacher’s meaning” (Gibson, “Defining” 23). The announcement of conceptual argument at the outset is suspect because the open-ended sermon expects and encourages individuals to freely determine their own conclusion and implications after the sermonic event. The experience of “awful freedom,” Craddock considers, “implements the doctrine of the priesthood of believers” (67). Nevertheless, accentuating listeners’ experiences leads to an individualistic orientation, which then results in a spiritually immature community. The democratic and dialogic appearance of the New Homiletic fails to construct a corporate body of Christ since Christian faith matures “when life experiences are interpreted in the light of the Christian tradition in order to understand and do the will of God amid ongoing events in which that person is involved” (Radford 8). Individual experience is significant but it also has the potential to lead listeners astray if they lack spiritual guidance to work out its meaning and to submit experience to the leading of God’s Word. Meanwhile, there is an epistemological crisis in Christian preaching that comes when one presumes individual experience as the foundation of meaning and understanding. The subjective orientation assumes that truth is obtained through the intersection or coincidence of multiple story lines where “meaning can be transferred between individuals” (Chapell, “When Narrative” 9). As a result, preachers are tempted to bend the Scriptures to reach the horizons of the life experiences of listeners, or to re-create the biblical world in accordance with contemporary cultural experience (C. Campbell 149). This “great reversal” raises a serious threat to the nature of inspiration and revelation: that “[t]he world absorbs the Bible, rather than Scripture absorbing the world” (C. Campbell 165). “There is no biblical reason to presume,” Chapell aptly argues, “that the
differing personal contexts of individuals create such radically different pre-understandings that consistent transfer of a text’s meaning is precluded, or that the meaning is so individualized as to be a unique product of each person” (“When Narrative” 13).

The excessive pursuit of eventfulness, moreover, inappropriately prioritizes stylistic technique over articulate account. The New Homiletic has focused too much on elaborate form “to the neglect of a clear understanding of the aims of preaching” (Thompson 11), which are to enlighten and to summon the congregation to live by the Word of God. Since the direct and conceptual dictation seems static and boring at times, the New Homiletic sustains the listeners’ interest with inductive arrangement, narrative plot, and contradictory tension, and it leads them to “dance the edge of mystery” by manipulating “analogy, metaphoric tease, and the ‘tensiveness’ of parabolic thought” (Plantinga, “Dancing” 74), providing the relief and entertainment at the end of the sermon. For the New Homiletic, propositional truth is verboten, the predetermined conclusion suspect, and the sermonic goal unpredictable. The richness of eventfulness is accomplished at the expense of lucid content. At the end of the ceremony, listeners “may find themselves struck by the potentially misty quality of sermons designed in this way,” Plantinga warns (“Dancing” 75). No certain truth, but idle pleasure, is found there.

Finally, advocates of the New Homiletic neglect the magnificence of biblical genres and the power of propositional revelation. They follow Averil Cameron’s lead that “Christianity was a religion with a story” (89), but they overly adhere to narrative preaching, story-telling, inductive movement as the primary, and sometime the only, mode of discourse. They judge propositional truth as assertive, untrustworthy, and nontransferable since meaning is subjective for individuals. Thus, they reject “any use of assertions, claims, declarations, or statements,” which they believe insufficient to transfer meaning consistently, but instead recommend the use of “poetic, evocative language” to earn the subjective consent of listeners (Plantinga, “Dancing”
76–77). However, the presumption of the non-transferability of propositions violates common sense and confronts scriptural principles that human beings are all created in the image of God, inherently sharing enough common ground to allow meaningful interaction (Chapell, “When Narrative” 13). Moreover, the Bible contains a genre spectrum accordant with the varying purposes of biblical writers. The “one size fits all” form of narrative preaching not only constrains the richness of the gospel into a single voice but also often fails to unleash the impact of certain biblical genres. Narrative is one voice among many, but not the voice above all. Conforming sermonic form to the narrative structure of narrative Scriptures is natural and reasonable, but coercing different genres into narrative style hamstrings preachers. Narrative preaching has its own right, but not exclusive rights, to the modern pulpit.

3. The Decay of Preaching under Media Environment

The crisis of an imbalanced form-content standard traces its causes not only to the New Homiletic but also to the presence of changing media that alter the preacher’s identity and incapacitate the preacher’s orality. The intensity and multiplicity of communication media have produced considerable societal, cultural, educational, political, and religious changes. One of their most notorious characteristics is giving excessive favor to image over audition, replacing the habits of reading and writing with watching image-based media. This is a natural outcome of the “Graphic Revolution” in which image is destined to assume the central role of transmitting information (Boorstin 13). Under this circumstance, preachers fail to act in accordance with biblical images and become incompetent in their reading, writing, and effective proclaiming because they immerse themselves within “a culture dominated by images, even moving images” (Gordon 35). The decay of the preaching ministry will be examined from the perspective of media ecology as we proceed.
Media ecology is a kind of interpretive discipline, not about the message, but about the medium that carries the message. Its basic assumption is that we should view “complex communication systems as environments” where occur “the interactions of communications media, technology, technique, and processes with human feeling, thought, value, and behavior” (Nystrom 3). This scholarly discipline primarily asks “how media of communication affect human perception, understanding, feeling, and value; and how our interaction with media facilitates or impedes our chances of survival” (Postman, “The Reformed” 161).

This scholarly inquiry has its philosophical roots in antiquity. As told by Plato, Theuth, the divinity of invention, came to Thamus, the king of Egypt. He prided himself on the innovation of writing to improve memory and wisdom. Theuth was told, however, that the invention of writing will produce forgetfulness and a semblance of wisdom, since it imprisons the human’s exercise of memory to texts and passes information along without wise judgment (Plato 68–69). Likewise, Heidegger warns of the threat of modern technology to hinder humans from the exhibition of truth. Technology is derived from the Greek word techne, which is associated with episteme from the earliest times until Plato; both are meant as knowing about and specializing in something. The essence of technology in the ancient era, thus, was to reveal (aletheia) a bringing-forth (poiesis) of truth. In a perspective advanced by modern physics, however, technology turns away from revealing to enframing, which means that modern technology potentially hinders the bringing-forth event, stops the unveiling of truth, and reduces human ability to seek or respond to the revealing of truth (Heidegger, The Questions 12–27). The study of media ecology is the expansion and extension of Plato’s and Heidegger’s philosophical concerns.

Ong once proposed that theology would change as communicative forms change since “the state of theological thinking and the modes of communication in a given culture at a given
time are perhaps somehow correlatives” (“Communications” 462). Later, this idea was termed as Ong’s binocular view of communication and theology (Soukup, “Scholarship” 180). The formation of early Christian creeds and their related controversies, for instance, “involved a clash between the primary oral mentality and the literate mentality” (T. Farrell, “Early” 133). Ong’s view is echoed by other media ecologists as well. Inspired by Psalm 115, Marshall McLuhan warns contemporary people that “the beholding of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them” (Understanding 45). Neil Postman was also deeply concerned about the phenomenon of technopoly, which has expanded modern bureaucracy to claim sovereignty over every aspect of societal affairs. Echoing C. S. Lewis, bureaucracy, in its essence, is identical with Hell (Postman, Technopoly 84–85). Likewise, Jacques Ellul portrays blind use of technique as the Christian image of the Devil. He critically points out that la technique—the dominant spirit of modern society—has created the invasion of images not only in the society but also in the church. Christian art demonstrates a form of religious conflict between image and word in God’s Church and has humiliated the value of God’s Word. The visualization of church is an error and temptation transforming “revelation and faith into religion (thus imitating the world’s religions)” (Ellul, The Humiliation 200). Consequently, Ellul calls for iconoclastic rhetoric and open language as a remedy to free the captive word (The Humiliation 256–65). Geraldine E. Forsberg approaches the interconnectedness of media ecology and theology from the perspective of general semantics and she describes the interlocking of communications media and theology:

Media ecology can inform theology about the ways media shape and influence theology; the ways theological content is influenced by media; the ways theological education are influenced by the media. Media ecology provides a way of understanding theology; it provides a way of analyzing changes in the church; and, it provides pedagogical insight for teaching future theologians. Theology, on the other hand, can provide media ecology
with an underlying moral foundation from which to critique media and technology. Theology can provide an alternative environment for critique of the technological system. Theology can give insight into the relationship between communication and culture.

(152)

Every medium is a tool, a technology invented with “an inherent bias . . . a predisposition toward being used in certain ways”, the point is that no medium is entirely neutral (Postman, *Amusing* 84). As McLuhan’s famed dictum—the medium is the message—implies, how humans treat personal and social affairs is inevitably reconstructed, in both positive and negative ways, by “the change of scale or pace or pattern” of the medium introduced into our lives (*Understanding* 7–8). Christian preachers are not immune to this vulnerability. Media ecology can assist the Church, from a different vantage point, to examine this cultural domination over preachers and the ministry of the Word, which has been overlooked by the ecclesiastical field. The proceeding discussion will disclose the ways modern technology and communications media alter the preacher’s image and sensorium. The awareness of clerical deficiency is no more than the beginning. From the perspective of media ecology, subsequent chapters will suggest a present homiletic that is both rhetorically sound and biblically dependable.

3.1 *Reconstruction of Preachers’ Images in a Techno-Modernized Culture*

Since the official beginning of American nationhood, the social milieu of this newborn nation was plastic and open for propagating technical phenomenon transmitted from Europe at the dawn of the nineteenth century. As Ellul tells us, American society soon became a model for technique (*The Technological* 58–60). Today, technique has produced a modernized society that lives the “dynamic interaction” between individualism and conformity (Wells, *No Place* 138). Being saturated with this techno-modernized civilization, Protestant theology has been dislodged to the periphery of the modern Church. The modernization does not attack Protestant orthodoxy,
nor cause it to be invisible, but instead makes it irrelevant. Consequently, the preacher’s identity has been redefined and his or her ministry of the Word has been trivialized by the unconscious contextualization of modernized culture and communications media. The image of clergy has been modified from vocation to profession. The professionalized pastorate is less like the herald of the gospel than the manager of church programs or the psychologist of mental happiness. This is the cultural outcome of the techno-modernized society where individualism and conformity interplay. These two characteristics are unlikely to be compatible, because individualism aspires to personal freedom while conformity common equality. David F. Wells argues, however, that the popularization of mass media, particularly television, brings them all together in American culture. The succeeding paragraphs will investigate how individualism and conformity, undergirded by communications media, displace Protestant orthodoxy and redefine preachers’ images.

That the emergence of individualism has been fostered by the printing press has gained broad consensus (Ong, *The Presence* 54). The habit of acquiring knowledge once was conducted through communal recitation, but that method has now been gradually superseded by individual meditation. There emerged a newly reading public, which, by its very nature, was “more atomistic and individualistic than a hearing one”; thus, “a traditional sense of community . . . was probably weakened by the duplication of identical messages which brought the solitary reader to the fore” (Eisenstein 132). This transformation led to “the sense of personal privacy that marks modern society” (Ong, *Orality* 128). The spirit of individualism promoted by the printing press was accustomed to a logical, linear, and discursive deliberation. However, other kinds of individuality intensified by technological media have different mindsets. Take television as an example. Its composition of continuous images is fragmentary and less definitional. Its impulse is feeling, sentiment, and imagination, through the linkage of dramatic appearance. The receivers
are not required to comprehend those images through intellectual activity but to complete them with sentimental gratification (Postman, *Amusing 86*). A television program’s conclusion is open to private interpretation and corresponds to individual experience. Sitting in front of television, one is immersed in an individualistic, private self-world where the external world is blocked, the sense of community is lost, and the value of subjective entertainment is upheld.

This overflowing self-movement in Christianity can be illuminated in various titles of Christian publications, such as Harry Emerson Fosdick’s *On Being a Real Person*, Clyde M. Narramore’s *This Way to Happiness*, Robert Schuller’s *Self-Love*, and Joel Osteen’s *Your Best Life Now*. This pursuit of self-actualization, hedonistic savvy, and emotional or psychological contentment from an allegedly Christian sources characterizes “an incessant preoccupation with the hitherto ‘undiscovered’ complexities of one’s individual subjectivity” (Wells, *No Place* 175–76). When *Christianity Today* began, the majority of its content was committed to biblically derived truth and conscientiously deliberated orthodoxy. In reaction to the temptations of marketing strategy and consumerism, however, the formerly serious ideas have been replaced by stories, testimonies, and experiences of successful individuals, churches, and ministries, as well as various advertisements of jobs, fund-raising events, recruitment for educational institutions, and colorful graphics that complement and cater to leisurely reading. The focus has shifted from “doctrinally framed” to “therapeutically constructed” faith; the concern is not about truth, but “psychological survival”; the knowledge of God is thus eclipsed by the attention to the self (207–11).

Genuine orthodoxy has been undermined by the spirit of modern individuality, because some have “proceeded to seek assurance of faith not in terms of the objective truthfulness of the biblical teaching but in terms of the efficacy of its subjective experience” (Wells, *No Place* 172). In like manner, sermons have been adapted to this consumer-oriented fashion and are expected to
be amusing and entertaining rather than instructional and thought-provoking. The contemporary pulpit has been seduced to present a “slickly packaged experience” since individualism “demand[s] instant access to authentic reality,” which is to be “felt rather than cognitively realized” (173). This sermonic practice, which favors emotion over cognition, has become a technical means by itself (Ellul, *The Technological* 19). The contemporary media environment creates an unhealthy individuality, which forgets that the self has been twisted by sin and deprived of sound relationships both with God and with others. Deceitful self-absorption assumes the perfectibility of human nature, which is fatal to theology and thus to faithful preaching. When self becomes pivotal, one craves the experience of God instead of the truth of God. When self-denial before God is neglected, the pulpit merely amuses the pew with “symbols of reality that interpret inner experience” (Wells, *No Place* 184).

Communications media not only encourage individualism but also promote conformity at the same time. As McLuhan indicates, people seen on television “seem to be endowed” with “a charismatic or mystic character,” which “does not have its basis in concepts or ideas, but seems to creep in uninvited and unexplained” (*Understanding* 336). Through broadcast of alluring commercials, sensational news, conspicuous dramas, and enthusiastic talk-shows, the emblematic power of television has created a homogeneous popular culture to which people conform themselves as they dine, clothe, reside, ride, speak, and spend holidays in the same way as people seen on television do. Meanwhile, individuals can receive the instant information, share the general experience, and meld into the national consciousness at the same pace while they inhabit spaces apart from one another (Wells, *No Place* 198). When the funeral service of President Kennedy was beaming into homes, conformity occurred in “an occasion with the character of corporate participation” (McLuhan, *Understanding* 337). Furthermore, the memorial service of the US space shuttle Challenger, first on television, then on the Internet, was a pivotal
religious, national experience, which not only demonstrated “vibrant innovation for traditional religious expression” (H. Campbell 311) but also “demonstrated the power of the computer medium to unite a community in a time of crisis” (Lochhead 52). Communications media has produced conformity through the technique of socialization and standardization.

As mentioned earlier, individualism has dislocated theology to the periphery of the modern Church and has encouraged the therapeutic sermon in the pulpit. Likewise, conformity also has led to two substantial drawbacks, one in the social milieu, which leads to another in the ecclesiastical setting. The social problem is a cultural phenomenon called Everyperson, a problem bred by the concurrence of individualism and conformity and fostered by the democratic psyche and mass media. Everyperson is a psychological reflection of the democratic worldview, asserting that “culture and truth are properly governed by and used for the people and, further, that the custodians of culture and truth must exercise their custodial responsibilities within the jaws of popular consensus” (Wells, No Place 188–89). This American way of revering individualism and conformity has been extended from the political system to encompass the marketplace, dress, food, leisure, transportation, and even religion. The psyche of Everyperson commends equal life-styles and demands equal opportunity to success, but at the same time, it conforms oneself with a larger entity and thereby obliterates the American inaugural spirit of displaying one’s uniqueness (192–93). The programmers of mass media, whether film, television, or other kinds, arrange the images in a specific sequence for us. They provide a constructed reality with a certain rhythm of viewing, which is different from the rhythm of reading written words in books (Ellul, The Humiliation 141). They control the pace, formulate a virtual reality, and thus produce a “sacred power” to coerce the majority into a public, collective experience. Through its electronic and virtual connections, mass media indoctrinate individuals into the ways they can obtain a lifestyle as the rest of the mass population from coast to coast do.
The problem is, when the conformity is based on feelings, experiences, and images instead of on intellect, cognitions, and ideas, this virtual culture becomes banal, empty, and shallow. This conformity produces a homogeneous, yet post-literate, Everyperson filled with fake optimism and an a-literate mind. The Puritan once constructed a literate society in which children were immediately schooled when they began the settlements in America (Wells, *No Place* 194–96). This remarkable achievement of such a high degree of literacy has been repressed by the image-based media in society today. What television provides is a populist culture that “cares little for the printed word and the kind of discourse that goes with it,” and television has assumed the dominant position in not only American society in general but also American religious community (197). Television is fashioning a tribe in which meaning is determined less by the word and thought than by the image and experience (202). In short, the social crisis of Everyperson is that it has generated an a-literate, impersonal society within which individuals seek self-understanding through image and experience, creating meaning by their own hand, yet they desire to validate their own view through public opinion trumpeted in television or other media.

Furthermore, the religious knowledge has been democratized and the definition of faith has been shifted from trained clergy to the unskilled populace since the ecclesiastical domain has been infiltrated by the Everyperson spirit. This change has its pros and cons. While the populist faith elevates its identification with people and encourages its evangelical groups to win souls, it also produces a kind of “savage anti-clericalism,” which aims to destroy “the monopoly of classically educated and university trained clergymen” (Wells, *No Place* 205). This anti-intellectualism has redefined the idea of church leadership and has reconstructed the image of preachers. John R. W. Stott, a renowned evangelical leader in the last century, once sketched the image of clergyman in a little book, *The Preacher’s Portrait*. He states that the clergies, while
standing in the pulpit, should identify themselves with a trustworthy steward distributing the biblical message “which God has entrusted to men and which is now preserved in the Scriptures” (17), a bold herald confronting this bewildering world with the necessity of repentance from sin and faith in Christ (58), and a humble servant trusting the power of God’s Word, Christ’s Cross, and the Holy Spirit, which today can still empower church ministries, and renouncing the plausible words of secular propaganda, which merely please, attract, or win popularity with psychological techniques (108–19).

However, this image of the preacher portrayed in the New Testament Scriptures has been eclipsed by the modernized, individualistic, conformist, and democratic society today. In a society asserting individuality—all while conforming the self to populist culture—pastoral leadership suffers in that assertion’s powerful undertow. Pastors are not expected to obtain and proclaim the knowledge reflecting God’s truth, but rather popular opinion (Wells, No Place 215). What matters in the pastorate is not theological ideas but humorous addresses that effectively affect the emotions and echo the experiences of the mass population. Christian faith that appeals to reason is now subordinated to feelings and intuitions since our image-based culture excludes thoughtful criticism and discards deliberate discourse (Ellul, The Humiliation 114–33). In order to keep applause reverberation from the pew, preachers listen less to scriptural words but more to the voices of the marketplace; they announce less of the sound doctrines but more of managerial know-hows and psychological skills; they commit less to the pastoral vocation but more to their professional career. The biblically derived proclamation has been dislodged from the center of the modern pulpit and the image of clergyman has been altered to fit this individualistic and conformist society. Today, preachers are regarded more as marketing managers to promote the achievements of church affairs or as therapeutic psychologists to grant sympathy to believers and share their sentiments, but they are regarded less as faithful stewards,
valorous heralds, and respectful servants to announce the gospel entrusted to them. This a-literate, populist culture not only disintegrates the image of the preacher and distorts the genuine meaning of clerical leadership but also alters the sensorium of preachers and thus make them less able to read, write, and preach in an appropriate manner, to which the focus of the next section will address.

3.2 Why Johnny Can’t Preach

T. David Gordon’s book *Why Johnny Can’t Preach: The Media Have Shaped the Messengers* unveils circumstantial evidence to explain the incompetence of the modern pulpit. He mainly argues that “the profound shifts in dominant media in the last half of the twentieth century have profoundly misshaped the sensibilities of the typical American, and that this, in turn, has led to a profound decline in preaching” (10). Contemporary churches do not fall into being moribund and dull because of “doing the wrong things, but because they are doing them incompetently”; likewise, they fail to convince, convert, and comfort sinners “because the preaching is poorly done . . . the church’s employing the right means incompetently” (32–33). And this incompetency, to a large extent, grows out of the alteration of human sensibilities shaped by the social, cultural, and media environment. Gordon defines human sensibilities as “one’s capacities to know, understand, experience, or appreciate certain realities,” sensibilities which lead to effective preaching (36–38). Preaching is an oral-auditory activity, and the preacher’s ability to speak well relies heavily on becoming accustomed to read and write well regularly, and consequently “this compositional sensibility spills over into their spoken use of the language” with spontaneity (40). However, preachers become incompetent in reading, writing, and preaching because their sensibilities have unconsciously undergone the shifting of media and thereby have been corrupted.
That preachers cannot read does not mean they do not read; rather, they do not read the text in its entirety. They only read for its information, or content narrated, but neglect its aesthetic, skillful composition, which Gordon names “the subtler semi-miracle of language well employed” (46). Ciceronian rhetoric stresses the inseparability of content and form so that orators can speak well, yet Gordon argues this inseparability should apply to reading as well. When preachers neglect the way authors constructed the biblical texts, they suffer from an incapacity to discover the subtle variations of intention from passage to passage, but instead merely preach each of the passages in a virtually general way. For instance, Gordon elucidates, the subjects of both John 3:16 and Romans 5:8 indicate the topic of the love of God, but each predicates a distinct orientation to that love. Lacking literary sensibility also tends to lead to misreading of the text. One may misconstrue the royal nature of the twenty-third psalm as an agricultural psalm, or bypass the reading of God’s grace extended to Gentiles in addition to Jews while blundering into labor relations topics when interpreting the parable of the laborers in the vineyard. Preachers still read, but they read without literary sensibility, and thus can never enter the world of the biblical author and grasp truth through that author’s vantage point (Gordon 46–49).

This does not mean, however, that preachers should prioritize the reading of the scriptural form over that of its content. We need to distinguish between “looking at” and “looking along,” and to undertake them together (Lewis 213). The modern type of thought coerces us to think that “looking at” things from outside is more accurate than “looking along” from inside. Lewis illustrates this common misconception in the following:

[I]f you want the true account of religion you must go, not to religious people, but to anthropologists; that if you want the true account of sexual love you must go, not to lovers, but to psychologists; that if you want to understand some “ideology” (such as
medieval chivalry or the nineteenth-century idea of a “gentleman”), you must listen not to those who lived inside it, but to sociologists. (213)

Similarly, preachers whose literary sensibilities have declined due to the influence of shifting media merely look at the surface content of the text without looking along its true intention through pondering its construction. Nevertheless, form and content are inseparable foci in the activity of reading. We start with no prejudice for or against either one. A sound interpretation and preaching require both.

Unfortunately, the prevalence of electronic media has damaged the literary sensibilities of preachers. The pace of modern lives is accelerated, and people “become acclimated to distraction, to multitasking, to giving part of our attention to many things at once, while almost never devoting the entire attention of the entire soul to anything” (Gordon 50). Thus, the close reading of texts becomes impossible because it is time-consuming, not as efficient as scanning information. What matters to sound preaching, however, is digesting rather than scanning. Only the “intensely active” reading can internalize the whole scope of the Scripture—meaning, intention, and affection—and assimilate them into one’s own (Adler and Doren 19). The superficial and impassive scanning distracts the preacher from “what is significant about life” (Gordon 51). Rather than developing the sensibility for significance, what modern electronic media can provide us is triviality, superficiality, and impatience, because its images are kinetic, rapidly moving and passing in and out. Preachers immersed in this kind of media environment suffer from constant distraction “by sounds and images of inconsequential trivialities, and out of touch with what is weighty,” and their sermons become “trifling, thoughtless, uninspiring, and mundane” (Gordon 59). Significance is less relative to quick motion, since it “takes place between the ears, as we make sense of life, of our place in it, and of our failures and successes, our joys, our sorrows, our fears, our loves.” Consequently, Gordon asserts: “This world of the
mind and soul is essentially a linguistic world, a nonkinetic world; a different world from the
world of rapidly changing moving images” (53). Discovering significance, thus, happens in a
relatively patient, steady, and intentional reading, which cultivates the habits of reflection and
contemplation. What makes preachers incompetent to preach is their lack of a sensibility that
tracks significance through concentrated reading, and this flaw is a result of becoming
accustomed to trivial, impatient media.

The decline of reading is not the only consequence of the shifting media culture, but so is
the incapability to write. Writing is a process of composition, and good writing requires well-
organized composition. The ancient orator had noticed the value of writing in speaking well
since it is “the best and most eminent author and teacher of eloquence” (Cicero, De Oratore
1.33.150). Constant practice in writing can cultivate brilliant thoughts and expressions, which
will then produce effective arrangement of words. When well-organized thoughts become
habitual, oral expression will naturally flow in a decent, significant manner. Even when
preaching extemporaneously, the speech can still maintain noble style “under the impulse given
by the similarity and energy of the written word” (Cicero, De Oratore 1.33.151–53). For the
ancient rhetoricians, writing, or the written document, was a supplement to speaking, since the
latter was still the major means of transmitting ideas and maintaining all social orders: “Word
spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs
of words spoken” (Aristotle 1.16a4-6). Entering the Middle Ages, ars dictaminis, the art of
letter-writing, became one of the three main rhetorical genres, standing as a connection between
writing and oral rhetoric. Imitating Ciceronian division, the medieval rhetoricians attempt to
cultivate well-organized compositions to fulfill legal, commercial, and personal interests by letter
writing. Albeit the shift from oral speech to written compilation, medieval treatises of ars
dictaminis still dealt primarily with rhetorical ornament (Kennedy, Classical 185). One example
would be Alberic of Monte Cassino, the father of the medieval *ars dictaminis*, whose *Dictaminum radii* (or *Flores rhetorici*) instructed his students in the matters of arrangement and the components of style, which is inherited from Ciceronian parts of speech (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 203–07). This tradition of writing and composing with rhetorical wisdom, however, has been challenged by the emerging communication media since the late nineteenth century.

The advance of communication technologies—from telegraph, to telephone, to cell phone, to email, to instant messaging, to image-based online-chat services—has its advantages. These communication media provide instant assistance for emergencies, allow people to talk to and even to see each other across geographical distance, and accelerate efficiency in academic, commercial, industrial, and scientific tasks. People start to experience how place and time can be transcended. However, disadvantages also emerge along with this technological advancement. Traditional letter-writing requires one to think about the letter’s content and form together. One needs to arrange the materials in a logical sequence, correlating the ideas with one another, one after another. One also has to make wise selection between significant and trivial things in compiling the document. These habits of composition, however, have become less demanding during the instantaneous conversations, whether oral or literal, on modern communication media. Conversation on the phone or online-chat service often lacks unity and order. Even when one calls for a specific purpose, sudden interruptions or mindless wanders off the topic hinder the progress of linear compositional thoughts. Telephone conversation and online chatting easily fall into instant, instinctive exchanges without deliberate, intentional expressions. What is significant is diluted with triviality in “a culture of telephone babblers” (Gordon 67). Furthermore, instant messaging tools obscure thoughtful composition by privileging short, prompt expression. The adoption of acronym, abbreviation, and ellipsis has its grammatical purpose in composition. The overflow of shortened forms that enhance rapid, instant information exchange actually alters the
composition’s original function and creates a grammatical and syntactical disaster. People are deprived of the elementary ability to write with correct grammar and sound syntax. Efficacy of composition is surrendered to efficiency of communication. The fallout is that most people, including preachers, “become accustomed to noncomposed thought and speech, and unaccustomed to composed thought and speech,” and sermons “rarely have unity, order, or movement” but “reflect the babbling, rambling quality of a typical telephone conversation” (Gordon 65–66). Preachers who are talking on the telephone or writing through instant messaging tools more than composing private correspondences or literary works tend to preach in an unstructured, unskilled, and thus, finally, insignificant manner.

Each era faces its own homiletic dilemma. The core of the current two drawbacks aroused by the New Homiletic and the changing media context lies in the imbalanced practice of form and content. This criticism does not blot out their contributions to homiletical method, but it intends to indicate what an authentic Christian proclamation requires. Working from the perspective of the orthodox Christianity, this project expects the revitalization of sermonic form not only to meet the post-Christian world and the techno-modernized culture but also to purvey biblically-derived content that reveres the revelatory authority and historical authenticity of the Scripture. Without a lively, fluent form, the proclamation cannot resonate with the modern ear and mind; meanwhile, without genuine, biblical content, the preacher fails to faithfully spread the Word of God. A restoration of ancient rhetorical art, particularly of Ciceronian rhetoric, would help modern preachers enlighten and reemphasize the form-content criterion.

Furthermore, an Augustinian hermeneutic and homiletic not only revives Ciceronian wisdom but also reminds us that the gateway to understand and proclaim the Scriptures opens to those who approach the biblical texts in charity as demonstrated through the Incarnation. Finally, Ong’s scholarship of orality and literacy gives us insights on dealing with the threats of transforming
media. When a preacher’s image and oral ability suffer from the influence of media context, Ong’s research can help such modern preachers build a kind of oral homiletic that reflects biblical authenticity and engages audience’s attentiveness.
Chapter 3
Augustinian Rhetoric and Philosophy of Communication

The previous chapter has identified two significant challenges to contemporary Christian preaching: the fallacy of the New Homiletic induced by the injurious presuppositions of the New Hermeneutic and the distortion of preachers’ self-image and orality influenced by the prevailing media environment. The remedy calls for sound theories of hermeneutics and homiletics subordinate to divine revelation and biblical authority. In view of this, modern practitioners should find Augustine’s rhetorical theory cogent and pertinent.

Usually, *On Christian Doctrine* (*OCD* hereafter) is not the first work one encounters when beginning Augustinian scholarship. His autobiography, the *Confessions*, always strikes home with readers instantaneously. Or, one may quickly turn to *The Trinity* for its substantial doctrines. Needless to say, the *City of God* has also blazed in the history of Western thought. *OCD* is far less complex than Augustine’s commentaries on Genesis, Psalms, and the Gospel of John as well as his theological disputations against Manicheanism, Donatism, and Pelagianism. Nonetheless, *OCD* assumes the role of a quintessential guide through which we can delve into all Augustine’s more “complex” texts because “the hermeneutical and rhetorical theory on the relationship of theology and culture in [OCD] is often a central clue for reading other Augustinian texts” (Tracy 269).

Moreover, reading *OCD* and the *Confessions* side by side will even more clearly illuminate Augustine’s rhetoric and philosophy of communication at large. Several reasons approve this parallel reading. First, the contemporaneity of both projects features structural affinities out of the same authorial urge to lay down “certain principles of discourse which are important in their own right” (Kannengiesser, *Handbook* 1155; Murphy, *Rhetoric* 61, see note

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Next, OCD sheds light on the composition of the Confessions and vice versa (Forman 102–103). Finally, both literatures, with different orientations, express the same interest in transforming secular rhetoric to Christian ends. Kenneth Burke pinpoints their compatibility and dissimilarity:

In a way, the fourth part of his De Doctrina Christiana marks the same crossing, or conversion, as the Confessions. It, too, concerns the development from the selling of words to the preaching of the Word. But in the work on Christian rhetoric, he is partly asking how to adapt for ecclesiastical purposes the verbal skill of the pagans, and partly attempting to show that Christianity already had an eloquent body of letters, whereas the autobiography places the emphasis upon the break rather than the bridge between the two realms. (49)

Although Augustine vehemently rejects the deceptive practices of the Second Sophistic in the Confessions, we need not read this autobiography as “teaching by contrast,” but rather we need identify the “positive tenets that coincide neatly with De doctrina Christiana, although sometimes through negative illustrations” (Troup, Temporality 28).

By means of collateral reading of OCD and the Confessions, thus, this chapter attempts to chart the association between Augustine and Cicero in the first place. Beyond simple imitation and incorporation, Augustine has reoriented Ciceronian rhetoric to a new Christian scheme. Next, this chapter will examine the drive and subject of OCD. The duty of twofold tractatio scripturatum requires a distinctive Christian cultural ideal transformed from, yet superior to, doctrina gentilium. In so doing the Church is to respond to changing social milieus with a fresh integration of sacred and secular truths. Lastly, modern practitioners can discover the pertinence of Augustinian rhetoric and avail themselves of his constructive hermeneutic and homiletic situated within Christian virtues and within a Christian model of rhetorical equipment.
1. Augustine’s Adaptation of Ciceronian Rhetoric

Augustine was a sophisticated and well-educated rhetor before his conversion to Christianity. He was equipped to become an applauded pagan orator through whom people “found delight in his lively manner and feeling in disputation and with his language, which was so appropriate and arose so easily to clothe his thoughts” (Augustine, Confessions 5.6.11). His oration was embellished “to express himself . . . and to make others weep” (P. Brown, Augustine 25). The pedagogical system Augustine received, which inherited the sophistic tradition from Greek rhetoricians, had pervaded the whole Roman world and had permeated him from his early learning at Thagaste, then at Carthage, and finally in his rhetorical professorship, first at Rome, then Milan.

However, sophistic rhetoric is not the only narrative at Roman schools. In fact, the rhetorical curricula since the days of Cicero remained unchanged. Quintilian’s Institutio Oratoria, a treatise reminiscent of Cicero’s concept, was still one of the most popular textbooks for pupils (Gwynn 186). Oratorical theories and practices were taught according to Cicero’s rhetorical compositions (Hagendahl 479). The only thing that had changed was the manner of speaking (Murphy, “Christianization” 25). The misconduct of eloquence induced by the Second Sophistic had trapped Augustine, who laments, “In those years I taught the art of rhetoric, and being vanquished by greed, I sold a skill at speech designed for victories in court” (Confessions 4.2.2). Augustine may be labeled as a pagan sophist tempted to pursue “fleeting concerns, worldly rewards, and meaningless victories” before his conversion (J. Farrell 268).

Augustine’s life journey began anew when he encountered Cicero’s fusion of rhetoric and philosophy. On Ciceronian works, Augustine appeared well informed, but only utilized them to satisfy intellectual curiosity until his reading of Cicero’s Hortensius, which fundamentally reoriented his aspirations and affections for true wisdom at the age of eighteen, not by Cicero’s
way of speaking but by his “exhortation to philosophy” (Confessions 3.4.7). Augustine became a “Ciceronianus” not in the sense of its previous literary and stylistic way but in the sense of a deep and “ardent love of philosophy” (Hagendahl 488). Augustine’s lifelong devotion to ecclesiastical rhetoric and philosophy was engraved with this eventful alteration. Nonetheless, Augustine did not completely submit himself to the Savior at this time, partly because of his initial reading of the Scriptures, which seemed, due to “its humble style,” inferior to “the nobility of Cicero’s writings” (Confessions 3.5.9). This pride unfortunately misguided him, leading him to the Manichean sect where his soul still found no resting place until meeting Ambrose at Milan (Hagendahl 487).

This delayed conversion, however, did not eclipse his harmonization of rhetoric and philosophy after Cicero’s fashion in OCD. In fact, Augustine admired Cicero for his achievements, crediting the Roman as being “one of the most learned and eloquent of all men” (City of God 22.6), and more than half of the fourth book of OCD is devoted to Augustine’s discussion of the interrelation between oratorical styles and ecclesiastical duties. A parallel reading of OCD and Orator highlights coincidental and interesting facts (Primmer 68). The similarity between these two rhetorical figures, however, has created a never-ending and unresolved debate in Augustinian scholarship. Does Augustine merely pour the new wine of the gospel into a Ciceronian cask (Fortin 221), or does he make something new? Or does he transform the Ciceronian tradition into a different scheme? Or, if he reshapes classical rhetoric to a Christian base, in what ways does this Christian rhetoric reflect the Ciceronian essences?

Instead of ambitiously settling this controversial issue, this chapter aims to explore Augustine’s association with Ciceronian rhetoric in OCD. Despite the conceptual likeness, Augustine actually moves beyond Cicero’s ideal orator and reorients classical rhetoric to new Christian ends. Even though Cicero stimulates and inspires Augustine’s rhetorical vision, what determines
Augustinian rhetoric “rests not in the details of [Cicero’s] rhetorical theory, but in the fundamentals of his thought for Augustine” (Troup, Temporality 16). In spite of their intellectual association, Augustine still constructs his rhetoric and philosophy “on his own initiative” (19) and ends with “a program of his own” (Fleteren, “St. Augustine” 23).

1.1 Associations

In AD 426, Augustine resumed the unfinished OCD, stating that this book “was at the beginning divided into two parts,” namely “a way of discovering those things which are to be understood, and a way of teaching what we have learned” (1.1.1, 4.1.1). The former is handled in Books I-III while the latter in Book IV. This bipartite design is presumed comparable with either dialectic and rhetoric in Aristotelian theories (Kennedy, Classical 158) or hermeneutics and homiletics in religious studies (Settle 51). This comparison appears plausible at the outset, yet unfortunately masks OCD’s rhetorical merit and framework in its own right. Meanwhile, modern Neo-Aristotelian readings misrepresent the plan of the work, saying that Book IV oversimplifies rhetoric to largely a matter of style (Kennedy, Classical 158). Without subordinating logical reasoning and argumentation to expression, Augustine equates invention and style (Tracy 268). In fact, the twofold tractatio scripturatum inclusively fuses classical inventio and elocutio, inviting us to “consider the whole work in rhetorical categories” (Foster 461).

Cicero’s five canons is probably his most remembered contribution to rhetorical theory (De Inventione 1.7.9). A medieval verse finely wraps up their ideas:

The first of rhetoric’s parts is the wise choice of matter,
And clearly the second is proper arrangement of thoughts;
The third, a difficult task, demands the use of appropriate language;
Memory’s fourth–be master of what you would say.
Then, fifth, be eloquent; this makes the system perfect. (Strabo 128)
The structural comparison between five canons and OCD demonstrates that Books I-III correspond to invention and the fourth book consists of the remaining four compressed together, which “makes the traditional five-fold division two-fold” (Baldwin 31). This reduction into invention and style actually echoes the emphasis of the rhetorical works of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian (T. Sullivan, “Latin Text” 34) and successfully grants rhetorical means to perform hermeneutic and homiletical tasks. Augustine’s endeavor thus set a new milestone in the Christian reorientation of secular rhetoric. OCD not only revitalized “the ancient idea of moving men to truth” but also granted “the vital counsels of Cicero a new emphasis” for Christian proclamation (Baldwin 26). The adaptation of Ciceronian rhetoric yielded such good fruit to medieval clerical education that “in the next twelve hundred years after Christ and Paul,” OCD served as the “only one major preceptive treatise on preaching” (Murphy, Rhetoric 284).

Besides its structural similarity, OCD models itself after Cicero’s theme of the integration of philosophy and rhetoric. Rhetoric had dropped the authentic art of eloquence and become a bundle of precepts and rules since Socrates “separated the science of wise thinking from that of elegant speaking” (Cicero, De Oratore 3.16.60). In reaction to this, Cicero’s rhetorical theory reverted to the harmony of philosophy and rhetoric, represented best in the great orators of the past. Following Cicero’s lead, Augustine presents OCD as an educational scheme to the Christian Church in two ways (Troup, Temporality 17).

First, wisdom and eloquence are inseparable. Genuine eloquence begins with “the best of reasons,” while “a mute and voiceless wisdom” does nothing to change men’s attitudes (Cicero, De Inventione 1.1.1-2.3). Observing this principle, preachers should integrate their subject matter with apt evidences in order to teach the good or suppress evil and exercise “greater powers of speaking” in moving the audiences (Augustine, OCD 4.4.6). When one cannot proclaim with both wisdom and eloquence, however, a wise yet inarticulate teaching is more beneficent than an
eloquent but foolish talk. A realistic remedy for stylist defect is to diligently memorize the verses, frequently quoting them in the pulpit.

Preachers who strive to preach wisely and eloquently should read and imitate the premier blend of wisdom and eloquence in the Scriptures, within which even the obscure passages themselves are a kind of eloquence in their own right. Scriptural eloquence is superior than the secular kind because of its inherent flow from wise expression and divine inspiration exclusively appropriate to the biblical authors. Wisdom and eloquence always go hand in hand in the Scriptures, not manipulated by rhetorical rules but stimulated by heavenly power. In this manner, God is “the master rhetorician whose eloquent word had the power to persuade, instruct, delight, and move beyond the power of anyone using the instrument of language” (Froehlich 5). In short, Christian preaching requires a fusion of wisdom and eloquence rather than the achievement of the latter at the expense of the former.

Second, the ideal orator must be trained in rhetoric and philosophy, including “a broad knowledge of all the liberal arts” (Troup, Temporality 17). This attainment of all essential subjects and arts helps the oratory to “derive its beauty and fullness,” lest it become “something empty and almost childish in the utterance” (Cicero, De Oratore 1.6.20). This philosophical training along with all sorts of liberal arts provide sufficiently analytical tools by means of which we can discern, define, divide, or distinguish subjects. In a word, “no one can discuss great and varied subjects in a copious and eloquent style without philosophy” (Cicero, Orator 3.14).

Likewise, Augustine esteems the broad spectrum of subjects for clerical training and upholds “the vitality of classical scholarship within a Christian framework” (Forman 101). Augustine initiated OCD shortly after he was elected to the bishopric, as he anticipated diverse, some educated but mostly illiterate, audiences in his diocese. To effectively fulfill his clerical duties, scriptural interpretation and proclamation, “the pre-Christian past” would successfully
meet this need (Forman 107). We should keep in mind, however, that Augustine does not absorb the whole pagan institution of rhetoric without deliberation, even though *omnis doctrina* indeed include pagan cultural ideals by which he proposes a rhetorically Christian culture (Press, “*Doctrina*” 99). In his rhetorical exchange concerning the diverse meanings of “*doctrina,*” Augustine envisages *doctrina christiana* to be worthier than *doctrina gentilium,* since Christianity prepares the way for true happiness while pagan culture leads to nowhere. *OCD,* as an integration of rhetoric and philosophy, thus refutes useless pagan institutions and reorients the pagan ideal to become a part of the clerical equipment.

1.2 Distinctions

Despite the rhetorical association with Cicero, Augustine’s *OCD* is distinctive in many ways. For example, the “cognitive status” of Christian preachers differ from that of Ciceronian orators (Fortin 226). The essence of wisdom is not identical between two camps, “as Augustine would have his orator grounded in Scripture and rhetoric, so would Cicero have his equipped correspondingly in philosophy and rhetoric” (Eskridge 56). Beyond liberal arts, Christian preachers appeal to the Scriptures as the source of true wisdom and their expression “derives not from their study of the art of rhetoric but from their knowledge of divine truth” (McNew 12).

Moreover, the highest duty of teaching makes Christian eloquence “more just, and more practically distinct than Cicero’s own” (Baldwin 30). The focal point of Christian rhetoric is to instruct the assembly, and all “the three typical styles are but three ways of achieving a single end”—guiding men to truth (44). Thus, Christian preachers should capitalize on this variety of styles to express the scriptural truths with clarity, charm, and persuasion. We no longer restrict “*munus docendi*” to the plain style and vice versa (Fortin 226). In initiating this, Augustine has spiritually converted the three rhetorical faculties and styles in *OCD,* because “it is not enough to seek to move men’s minds, merely for the sake of power; instead, the power to move (*flectere*) is
to be used to lead men to Truth (*verum*). The ultimate end of discourse for the Christian must be different from that of the pagan Cicero” (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 62).

Furthermore, Augustine rejects the criterion of plausibility in pagan rhetoric. In political or judicial cases, the function of teaching (*docere*) is to provide sufficient information before the assembly or the judges in order to win and persuade. The rational argument, seeking truth, was seen as practically inferior to the rhetorical oration that was “*plausible* to the hearer,” and thus “the orator is of necessity less concerned with the truth than with its appearance. A *plausible* falsehood is infinitely more valuable to him than an unlikely truth” (Fortin 223, italics added). The rhetorical system “was bound up with dishonesty” (Clarke 150). This specious matter actually disturbs Cicero and creates a cleavage in his “fusion between Greek philosophy and Roman virtue” (Fortin 225). Orators are urged to show something superficially plausible to the listeners, yet also perceived by them as truthful. Working in this circumstance, it is unsurprising that Cicero chooses *docere*, which neutrally refers to any kind of knowledge, rather than *doctrina*, which specifically designates a focus on philosophical inquiry, to represent the substance of oratorical address. However, *doctrina* in Augustine’s mind mainly hinges on the sound doctrines within the Scriptures. Instead of “the object of the subtle depreciation” (Fortin 226), the duty of Christian teachers is to expound “the knowledge of divine and salutary truths” (Augustine, *OCD* 4.21.45). Absolute truthfulness becomes “the moral principle which Augustine defended with greater vehemence and on which he was least willing to compromise” (Fortin 231).

Related to the above divergence is the target of Christian rhetoric. Ciceronian orators design their public addresses for forensic, deliberative, or epideictic settings, while the Augustinian genre leads only to “the spiritual salvation of his auditors” (Leff 241). Augustine declares that “everything we say . . . must be referred, not to the temporal welfare of man, but to
his eternal welfare and to the avoidance of eternal punishment” (*OCD* 4.18.35). Christian preachers, though benefitting from Ciceronian art, should draw their substance from the Scriptures and redirect the people of the pew to the pursuit of heavenly happiness.

*OCD*’s assimilation of Ciceronian rhetoric seems contradictory to the negation of rhetoric in the *Confessions*. However, Augustine does not “attack on everything educational and intellectual,” but “merely means dispensing with one particular conception,” namely, the misuse of rhetorical art in the sophistic circle (Troup, *Temporality* 16). Though Augustine once received the sophistic rhetoric and practiced it, eventually he rebuked and rejected its “applause-seeking artificiality” (Schaeffer 295). He does not reject rhetorical prowess as evil but conforms, instead, to a more faithful fusion of wisdom and eloquence, undergirding rhetorical practice with a moral basis which restores the canon of invention, lapsed in the realm of the sophists, and redeems genuine persuasion with the nexus of form and content (Baldwin 31, 34). In short, Augustine rejects the distortion of the Second Sophistic, retains the basis of Ciceronian art, and “significantly deepens the foundations of rhetorical theory and gives it a wholly Christian basis” (Foster 494).

Augustinian rhetoric is not “a Christian pendant to Cicero’s masterpiece” (Hagendahl 558), nor an easy “Christianization” of pagan rhetoric (Troup, *Temporality* 26). Instead, Augustine radically reshapes Ciceronian rhetoric from a Christian moral basis and positively reorients classical scholarship to new Christian ends. His adaptation shifts the orator from the city of man to the City of God (Leff 241). Although a synthesis of form and content remains constant, the substance of preachers’ speech draws not from pagan ideals but from scriptural wisdom. Augustine thus associates with Cicero through a distinctively independent intelligence and presents a Christian ideal within which the preacher benefits in treating the Scriptures “not only for himself, but also for others” (*OCD* 4.31.64).
2. The Controlling Issues of *On Christian Doctrine*

Augustine initiated the composition of *OCD* shortly after his consecration as the bishop of Hippo, AD 396, and before the date of Ambrose’s death, April 4, 397 (T. Sullivan, “Original” 328). Abruptly, he ceased the writing at 3.25.35 and left it unfinished until AD 427, when he was in the midst of composing *Retractions* (P. Brown, *Augustine* 261). This interval of thirty years has complicated the issue of treating *OCD* as a “whole” (Tracy 269). Augustine was a prolific theologian, producing about 117 books (P. Brown, *Religion and Society* 25). The concurrence of multiple works is a normal pattern for Augustine, even at the time of writing *OCD* (P. Brown, *Augustine* 178). Thus, the idea that Augustine stopped composition because he was overloaded or distracted by other projects becomes an unconvincing argument. A more credible viewpoint for the interruption may count on Augustine’s perplexity about Tyconius’s *Book of Rules*. When addressing figurative locution in 3.25.35, Augustine feels the need to discuss Tyconius’s categories, yet he was not ready to do so. Only after three decades did Augustine succeed in incorporating into *OCD* Tyconius’s rules, which were once “a stumbling block” but became an admirable work for him (Kannengiesser, “Interrupted” 7–9). Another scholar suggests an alternative resolution to the reason behind the delay: that Augustine wanted to obtain more experience in preaching in order to qualify himself better for the instruction of preachers (Sanlon 52).

2.1 A Coherent Whole

Despite its uncertain cause, the discontinuity should not imply disunity in *OCD*’s composition. Many blame *ODC* for dispensing with invention from the rhetorical tradition and sliding into mere concern with style. In fact, Augustine constitutes a new kind of rhetorical discovery (*inventio*), which is theological-philosophical, allowing all Christians to understand the revealed truth in the signs of the Scriptures (Tracy 274–79). His repeated assertions of the
twofold *tractatio scripturatum* indispensably represent the rhetorical parts of *inventio* and the rest of the four canons, even though *elocutio* stands out. He employs *inventio* to discover what the Scriptures mean and *elocutio* to deliver what we have learned from the Scriptures. The treatment of the Scriptures cannot stop at the stage of discovery without moving on to teach, speak, and proclaim (Press, “The Subject” 115–16). Strictly speaking, discovery and delivery constitute two inseparable facets of one act of *tractatio scripturatum* (Andrews 9). In this sense, *OCD* “constitutes an authentic whole” despite the abrupt intermission (Tracy 272).

Having dealt with the coherence of *OCD*, the next inquiries would be what *OCD* is all about and what motivated Augustine to produce this treatise and what goals Augustine aimed to achieve. These inquiries have occasioned no less debate than Augustine’s association with Ciceronian scholarship. Some regard *OCD* as a Christian manual of exegesis and preaching (Jordan 177), while others label it as essentially rhetoric (Kennedy, *Classical* 154) or the Christian assimilation of pagan rhetoric (T. Sullivan, “Original” 329). Still another perspective treats *OCD* as “a program of education for the new People of God” (Kevane 161). The diverse and unsettled opinions about the treatise’s subject consequently obscure its intended audience (Schäublin 47). For instance, does “every student of the Divine Scriptures” (*omnis divinarum scripturarum studiosus*) refer exclusively to clergy or does it mean all Christians (Augustine, *OCD* Prologue 1, 2.7.10, 2.41.62)?

After his forced consecration as the Bishop of Hippo, Augustine’s rhetorical wit very likely reminds us that he now, as a bishop facing a diverse congregation, needs a new framework to fulfill his clerical task. This transition from rhetorical to ecclesiastical setting led to the emergence of *OCD* (Tracy 270). My argument is that Augustine was attempting to propose a new model of the Christian cultural ideal by adapting and incorporating the pagan cultural ideal while keeping itself distinct from and superior to that pagan culture. This *doctrina christiana*
assists the Church to study and share the revelatory truths in the Scriptures through the available means of contemporary institutions, whether human-established or divinely ordained, since all truths are Lord’s (Augustine, OCD 2.18.28). In so doing, Augustine not only paves a new avenue for understanding and proclaiming the Scriptures, but also preserves a helpful tool from the hostility to pagan culture.

2.2 A Proposal of the Christian Cultural Ideal

The meaning of doctrina varies throughout OCD. The broad spectrum of its meaning ranges from culture in the most general sense to exposition in the least, and has in-between denotations such as teaching, instruction, education, and doctrine. Although the conclusion on what OCD is all about cannot depend on the diverse meanings of doctrina, these possible meanings still shed light on discerning the purpose of OCD as a whole, which is to “refute the pagan ideal and construct a Christian version of it” (Press, “The Subject” 101–107, “Doctrina” 99).

Semantically, doctrina, which is derived from the verb docere, means “to teach” in the classical Latin world (Press, “Doctrina” 101). It can denote the act of teaching or the substance of teaching interchangeably. Sometimes the Latin ancients applied the word doctrina either to the content of an art or to the art itself. Moreover, doctrina can include previous meanings and represent “their subjective results or effects: education, learning, or knowledge” (101–102). In this manner, doctrina describes what the Greeks means by paideia (Kevane 155). These logically interrelated connotations demonstrate its inconsistent usage in ancient Latin civilization. Its complexity increased further as doctrina was introduced from pagan to Christian circles.

When using doctrina to translate the Greek words didache and didaskalia, the translators of the Bible inevitably added religious values to its Greco-Roman meanings. This addition turns out to be a replacement, however, as Christianity grew out of the pagan world and eventually
dominated it in late antiquity. The employment of *doctrina* became mainly religious, theological, and spiritual in tone. What originally referred to a general cultural ideal was gradually reoriented to a specific kind of learning or teaching related to Christianity (Press, “Doctrina” 104–05). It is likely for Augustine, who had been first well-educated in the artful use of language and later had been converted to Christianity and assigned to the priestly duty, to deliberately deploy the available meanings of *doctrina* in *OCD* “from different cultural standpoints to argue simultaneously for his side and speak to both sides of the dispute between Christianity and ‘pagan’ culture” (Press, “Doctrina” 108).

What, then, is this disputation about? On discussing this, we will find the Christian cultural ideal proposed by Augustine that is imitative of but distinctive from a pagan one. Basically, rather than totally rejecting, refuting, and repudiating the pagan culture, Augustine portrays a Christian kind of cultural ideal that incorporates, with discernment, the valuable aspects of the secular arts for the discovery and delivery of the Scriptures. The *doctrina christiana* is superior to *doctrinae gentilium* in its sound journey to true happiness, the enjoyment on the Trinity (*OCD* 1.5.5). *Doctrina christiana* thus becomes the remedy to our fallen condition and brings us home, while *doctrinae gentilium* takes us nowhere (Press, “Doctrina” 111).

Augustine suggests that interpreters decipher unknown figurative signs partly through “a knowledge of languages” and partly through “a knowledge of things” in order to uncover the metaphorical and analogical significance hidden in names, animals, numbers, and music (*OCD* 2.16.23–26). Then, he warns of indiscriminate or excessive usage of two kinds of secular *doctrina*. One kind is instituted by humans, while another is firmly established or divinely ordained and then investigated by men (2.19.29). Human institutions have two subdivisions, depending on whether they are superstitious or not. The superstitious practices that entail the
worship of idols or agreement with demons should be shunned by Christian because these pagan

*doctrina* do not enhance the two-fold commandment of charity but instead “debauch the hearts of
the wretched through their love for temporal things” (2.23.36). Non-superstitious mores
instituted by human agreement should be selectively examined in order to keep and observe
those necessary to human life, but to discard those that are superfluous (2.25.38-26.40). There
are also two subcategories regarding the pagan *doctrina* discovered by humans, pertaining either
to corporal senses or to reason (2.27.41). One critical attitude toward pagan *doctrina* with
reference to corporal senses is not “to know how to perform these arts but only how to judge
them in such a way that we are not ignorant of what the Scripture implies when it employs
figurative locutions based on them” (2.30.47). It is the pagan arts related to reason that are
valuable to the understanding and transmitting of the Scriptures. Augustine admires the sciences
of logic, dialectic, and rhetoric, and he appraises their values highly in “solving all sorts of
questions that appear in sacred literature” (2.31.48) and in “expressing those things which are
understood” (2.37.55).

Having treated the above secular arts, sciences, and mores, Augustine explains his
concluding attitude toward pagan *doctrina*. We should discard pagan institutions pertaining to
superstition and value those helpful to manage human society, but remember “nothing in excess”
(2.39.58). Augustine acknowledges the established works on names, locations, animals, and
numbers by other Christian scholars, but he thinks logic is more applicable to ambiguous signs
than these unknown ones (2.39.59). After enumerating those useful institutions to scriptural
understanding, Augustine recommends proper attitudes toward pagan cultures. First, we should
convert those pagan doctrines to Christian use as long as they are accommodated to our faith.
This principle can be exemplified in the events of Exodus and in the Egyptian education that
Moses received (2.40.60-61). Second, we should not pride ourselves on acquiring pagan
doctrines but humble ourselves before God, since “knowledge puffs up, but charity deifies” (2.41.62). Finally, the most useful subjects in pagan culture, Augustine says, are still inferior to what we can derive from the Scriptures (2.42.63). This epoch-making principle summarizes and guides how to employ *doctrinae gentilium* for ecclesiastical purpose: “we should not avoid . . . if we can find anything in it useful for understanding the Holy Scriptures . . . Rather, every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord’s” (2.18.28).

In contrast to the selective view with pagan *doctrina*, Augustine sincerely praises *doctrina christiana* for its soundness. He commends “the sanity of Christian doctrine” for restraining our tongues from redundancy (4.14.31), recognizes “sound doctrine” (4.27.59) as the source for higher ecclesiastical authority, and indicates that his discussions target the sort of man “who seeks to labor in sound doctrine” (4.31.64). In his trading on *doctrina’s* meanings, Augustine innovatively distinguishes *doctrina christiana* from *doctrinae gentilium*. A Christian kind of cultural ideal builds on realities or the signs of those realities, which is in contrast to a pagan kind of unreality, or merely learning about signs (Press, “Doctrina” 111–12). Augustine does not reject the pagan cultural ideal in its totality, but shuns those of superstitious practices, recommends those of useful knowledge, and employs those of valuable instruments to treat more precisely the Scriptures. In his mind, “all knowledge was ultimately one, as, rightly used, it led to God” (Kelly 63). His adaptation constructs a sound version of the Christian cultural ideal that is more just and rhetorical than its classical predecessor and that infuses its influence into the coming medieval culture. The christian church is thus given an escape from the trap of an anti-intellectual spirit that regards pagan culture as evil and can, instead, find a justified way to interact and incorporate those *doctrina* on its way back to the true happiness.
2.3 A Rhetorical Treatment of the Scriptures

Christianity is a religion whose construction and expansion occur mainly through the understanding and spreading of the sacred book. A distinctively Christian ideal must thus root itself in revelatory reality, which needs to be expounded and expressed. OCD provides a rhetorical approach to interpreting and proclaiming the articles of the Christian faith in its ancient tradition, yet with new aims.

His enthusiasm for wisdom, which was induced by Cicero, eventually made Augustine a diligent student of the Scriptures after his conversion to Christianity. After assuming his ecclesiastical duties, he even asks for “a leave of absence in order to complete his private study of Sacred Scripture” (Kannengiesser, “Interrupted” 3). His endeavor not only gives him a reputation as a fine expositor, but also stimulates his production of OCD to train qualified Christian teachers and preachers. Thus, at the outset of OCD, he purposefully asserts, “There are certain precepts for treating the Scriptures which I think may not inconveniently be transmitted to students, so that they may profit not only from reading the work of expositors but also in their own explanations of the sacred writings to others” (Prologue 1). This statement decisively sets the tone for this treatise: its subject is “treating the Scriptures” and its goal is teaching other students of the Scriptures how to do so. He repeats the subject and goal when reacting against the second type of objectors, who “have sought to treat the Sacred Scriptures” but fail to do so (Prologue 2), and also when criticizing the third group of objectors, who boast about “being able to understand and to treat the sacred books without precepts” (Prologue 4). Then, he divides this subject into two parts at the beginning of Book I, which is reiterated in Book IV: “There are two things necessary to the treatment of the Scriptures: a way of discovering those things which are to be understood, and a way of teaching what we have learned” (1.1.1, 4.1.1). As
aforementioned, this division genuinely mirrors the rhetorical parts of the classical tradition and proves that OCD as a whole is essentially rhetorical.

However, Augustine does not merely duplicate a rhetorical treatment when composing OCD. His usage of the cognate tracto-tractatio is not a simple adoption of classical rhetoric. Although Augustine extensively employs terms borrowed from the ancient tradition, the verbal likeness does not signify that both camps are identical. Augustine and those ancient rhetors use the same words from different philosophical and social stances. The classical rhetorical tradition practices tracto-tractatio through the principles of analysis, interpretation, organization, or exposition, its target could be any document, and its concern is more that of judicial debate, legislative disputation, and political action. For Augustine, the sole object of tracto-tractatio is the sacred text, working entirely in a religious context. The rhetorical function has a new concern for the divine truth of the Scriptures, a new audience of the ecclesiastical assembly, and a new purpose of constructing Christian cultural ideal (Press, “The Subject” 118–22). McNew rightly comments:

Augustine emerges not simply as one who, with good judgement, sought to follow Cicero instead of the schools of sophistic, but as one who, by virtue of a great intellectual capacity, was able to absorb the best of his rhetorical study into the vast scheme of his Christian philosophy and to adapt those rhetorical definitions, terms, and devices to the new ends to which his embracing of Christianity turned him. (6)

Augustine writes OCD according to the old school of rhetorical wisdom but redirects it to new Christian ends. He suggests that Christian clergy study the Scriptures from a distinctively rhetorical approach, but one endorsed with religious soul. His proposal of an innovative doctrina christiana, which welcomes useful doctrinae gentilium in the task of treating sacred literature, not only “begins rhetoric anew” (Baldwin 26) but also soothes the anti-intellectual spirit in his
own time. Rhetoric, for Augustine, had become “a vehicle for transmitting the truths revealed by faith” (Leff 245).

**2.4 A Resolution to the Cultural Dilemma**

Augustine wrote *OCD* in the era when the Second Sophistic exerted its highest influence (Murphy, “Christianization” 26). Its popularity and dominance in Roman schools and society caused anxiety among the Church Fathers due to its tainted practice which could lead the people of God astray (Murphy, “Debate” 403). Their concern comes from the distinction between *Verbum* (Word of God) and *verbum* (word of man), since the Apostle Paul admits his speech and message “were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2.3–4). Most of the Church Fathers were trained by and gave lectures in rhetorical education (Clarke 150). Nonetheless, they consciously composed plain *homiliae* without high rhetorical styles (Murphy, “Christianization” 26). Therefore, “the fourth century marks a high point of popularity for the simple ‘homily’ style of preaching,” to the extent that “rhetorical forms might be dispensed with altogether” (Murphy, “Debate” 406, 403). Their antipathy, moreover, extends beyond rhetorical art to whole intellectual vehicles of the pagan world, seen as corrupted and immoral, expressing “human sinfulness, idolatry and alienation from the One True God” (Kevane 157). In response to this “anti-paideia” spirit, Augustine initiates “the task of adapting rhetoric to Christian purposes. His goal was a work which would give the preacher both the substance and form for his sermons” (Murphy, “Christianization” 27).

Augustine admits that the rhetorical art could potentially be used for either good or evil. The intention to avoid rhetoric’s potential for lying and deceit, however, should not boycott its beneficent possibilities for the construction of Christian culture. Augustine argues against ignorant rejection of rhetoric, which could make genuine and faithful Christian teachers unarmed and unable to counter those who practice the expressive and fallacious kind of rhetoric. Since the
art itself is indifferent, the Church should ordain it as a consecrated tool in the service of proclaiming and defending truth (OCD 4.2.3). In fact, Augustine enumerates several scriptural examples using eloquence skills to prove their practicality. Augustine’s absorption extends to efficacious secular cultures, which stands out in his advice to the students of the Word: “they should soberly and diligently weigh them . . . But they should not neglect those human institutions helpful to social intercourse in the necessary pursuits of life” (OCD 2.39.58). In this manner, Augustine encourages Christian teachers to use dialectic, rhetoric, and other beneficial institutions wisely. We treat those principles as utilities in the service of truth and in the defense against illusion.

This explains Augustine’s inclusion of three rhetorical faculties: to teach, to please, and to move, and three corresponding oratorical styles: modest, middle, and grand, in Book IV of OCD. His appeal to these rhetorical precepts reveals that the plain style of homily fails to ensure effective communication. The goal of instruction (docere) cannot sustain the audience’s attention without the faculty “to hold the interest (delectare) of the listener.” Moreover, Christian preachers should go on to “move (fectere, movere) the minds of men to act righteously” so that the instruction may arrive at its end (Murphy, “Christianization” 29). Augustine recognizes the necessity to incorporate all the arts and tenets of secular oratory in Christian preaching and teaching. Although those pagan precepts might seem a matter of trivial importance to Augustine, actually “to him nothing was small where there was question of the service of God” (T. Sullivan, “Original” 329). That is to say, we should see rhetoric as neither an end in itself nor a precondition to truth but as “an inseparable servant” spontaneously following wisdom (OCD 4.6.10). Employing languages with rhetorical sophistication thus becomes preachers’ responsibility, divinely endorsed, in assisting men to know God (Murphy, “Metarhetorics” 208). Christian clergy are obligated to preserve and teach this transformed Christian literacy, which is
the means to true happiness for the faith community. If we concur with both Cicero and Augustine that “wisdom is philosophy expressed with eloquence—an intensely practical, rhetorical pursuit” (Troup, Temporality 27), then we can celebrate his contribution in OCD, which “rebuts those who would deprive the Church of a useful tool in the work of winning souls, and thereby establishes a clearly prescriptive tradition for the Christian community” (Murphy, Rhetoric 61). Through conservation and transformation of classical culture, Augustine preserves for future clergy a path to enter into the mystery of the scriptural signs.

3. The Contemporary Pertinence of Augustinian Rhetoric

Attempting neither to establish a Christian education system nor to reform the Roman school from within (Clarke 154), Augustine’s new Christian cultural ideal proposed a kind of “metarhetoric” for fulfilling the treatment of the Scripture. Metarhetoric, as Murphy defines it, “investigates what a rhetorician needs to know in order to be a rhetorician” (“Metarhetorics” 202). Contemporary preachers will discover pertinent implications in Augustinian metarhetoric, which implies what the preachers need to know in order to fulfill the task of tractatio scripturatum. The discussions to follow attempt to highlight Augustine’s presuppositions and principles for conducting genuine Christian hermeneutics after a brief clarification of some modern misunderstandings of Augustinian interpretation.

A rivalry between literal and allegorical exegesis has been active since patristic periods, and more recently, the rational-scientific mindset of the Enlightenment further intensifies the deprecation of nonliteral reading, thereby regarding Augustinian allegorical interpretation as of little use to the contemporary interpreter (Bartholomew 144). Meanwhile, Augustine’s concept of the multiplicity of meanings contradicts the assumption of historical-critical methodologies that “scriptural texts have one, true, and stable meaning,” reflecting “what a (human) author intended and how the ‘original’ readers/hearers understood it” (Toom, “Augustine’s Case” 183).
Accordingly, his hermeneutical and homiletical works are deemed irrelevant to mainstream Christian preachers.

However, historical-critical exegetes misread Augustine. In fact, Augustine outgrew the allegorical methodology and vindicated the literal sense of the Scripture at the same time (Froehlich 6). Even his practice of allegorical interpretation was controlled by “his overarching theological schema,” meshed with “his framework of redemptive history,” and grounded in the theoretical armature of OCD (Sanlon 56–57). Meanwhile, he admired obscurity as “an intellectual value” in both literal and figurative manners (Tracy 273). Moreover, his multiplicity of meanings proves to be in accordance with “the cardinal Christian virtues of hope, faith, and charity” (Settle 58).

3.1 Believing Leads to Understanding

Augustine was once conversing with Adeodatus, his son, on the subject of signs. Their exchange not only implies that genuine understanding comes from the Inner Teacher—the Christ (Augustine, Concerning X-XI)—but also kindles a critical concept: sign is the “revelatory activity of God” (Jordan 184). The very act of Christian instruction, as a result, is veritably “a sensitive use of signs” (Murphy, “Metarhetorics” 208), treating Scripture as classic signs laden with “the theological value of obscurity and ambiguity” (Tracy 283). The inherent uncertainty of textual meaning had to raise the question: how can we be assured of a true interpretation of God’s Word?

To answer this question, Augustine, in Book I of OCD, proposes a new form of Christian *inventio*, one which contrasts with secular epistemological presuppositions, as a means to uncover the scriptural signs. The obstacle to genuine understanding of the Scriptures, according to the Christian *inventio*, lies in the fallen nature of human beings, which drives us into the disordered handling of things (*res*). Only the grace given from God can free us from this
bondage and redirect our misled desires (*eros*) back to the enjoyment of true happiness. This revelatory grace via incarnation has been named the doctrine of charity (*caritas*). Without this faith, human beings fail to treat the Scriptures correctly, thereby going astray on the way back to the Trinity.

The opening statement of *OCD* contends that sincere exposition and appropriate proclamation constitute the entire treatment of the Scripture. Then, Augustine asserts: “All doctrine concerns either things or signs, but things are learned by signs” (*OCD* 1.2.2), thereby highlighting two allied entities for apprehending the Scriptures: things (*res*) and signs (*signa*). A surface reading of “things are learned by signs” naturally makes one regard “a learning of signs only as a means to the learning of realities” (Press, “*Doctrina*” 111). However, this is a misperception. Augustine would argue that “in order to understand signs at all, we must first understand things” (Tracy 275). And things refer to all articles of Christian faith. Thus, Augustine presents a critical prerequisite of Christian *inventio*: believe in order to understand.

Augustine argues for this precondition. Among three kinds of things determined by the question of *frui-uti*—things to be enjoyed, things to be used, and things to be both used and enjoyed—human beings belong to the third kind, approaching the first by means of the second. The sole thing to be enjoyed is the triune divinity (*frui*), who alone is invisible and immutable, but is comprehensible through the corporeal and temporal things to be used toward that end (*uti*). And any improper use of things Augustine called abuse, which happens regularly in a fallen world.

This real human condition has revealed that the distorted and defiled desires (*eros*) indulge us with enjoyment of things to be merely used, thereby impeding our way to the true happiness. We are called to enjoy the thing that ought to be enjoyed, yet are trapped in seeking things to be used. What we are supposed to achieve is destined to fail due to our impotence. This
defect explains our incapability of comprehending the revelatory signs in the Scriptures and thus our need of sanctification.

However, cleansing occurs not from within but from above human beings. Only the Incarnation—the thing to be enjoyed—qualifies to purify the carnal nature and to become the “way” to our homeland. Incarnation and other dogmas are appointed as “a set of precepts or beliefs through which we are to attain the enjoyment of the only proper object of enjoyment” (Press, “The Content” 171; Augustine, OCD 1.11.11-21.19). The urgent action we should take is to put our faith in God: we must believe. Other than this belief, we have no way to approach God, and thus no way to understand His Word. Therefore, OCD is presumably written for those who are already in some sense “converted” but are still searching for “the ways to understand the supreme reality who converted them and thereby allowed them to find new principles of inventio (“Believe in order to understand”)” (Tracy 276). Faith comes before understanding; this is a must-have prerequisite of Christian invention.

Historical, grammatical, and critical methodologies can provide cultural and semantic benefits. However, we can never grasp the salvific meaning of the Scriptures without the norm of faith, which yields “a test for resolving ambiguities . . . foreknows in part what is to be communicated” (Jordan 185). Through faith, we are situated within the assembly of God and enlightened with things past, present, and future. Moreover, this faith induced by the Scriptures nourishes the most important Christian virtue—caritas—which is the second prerequisite of Christian inventio.

3.2 Caritas: A Christian Virtue for Invention

Having treated human corruption and its remedy, Augustine reiterates the frui-uti distinction (OCD 1.22.20) and introduces caritas as both precondition and aftermath of treating the Scriptures correctly. The inquiry into the frui-uti distinction has developed substantially in
twentieth-century scholarship (Nygren; O'Donovan 383–90; Baer 50–63). It is Augustine, however, who apparently connects this distinction to human loves and desires, concluding that “it is to be understood that the plenitude and the end of the Law and of all the sacred Scriptures is the love of a Being which is to be enjoyed and of a being that can share that enjoyment with us, since there is no need for a precept that anyone should love himself” (OCD 1.35.39).

In light of this, Augustine boldly asserts, “Whoever, therefore, thinks that he understands the divine Scriptures or any part of them so that it does not build the double love of God and of our neighbor does not understand it at all” (OCD 1.36.40). He then forcefully restates, “Scripture teaches nothing but charity” (3.10.15). Mark D. Jordan echoes this: “The learning of love is learning God’s nature; it is learning about what is spoken in the Scriptures” (183). \textit{Caritas} energizes \textit{tractatio scripturatum} and vice versa. \textit{Caritas} is both the precondition and the consequence of reading and spreading the Word of God.

By means of love alone, it is true, we cannot fulfill the interpretation of the Scripture. Without love, however, we cannot “approach the treatment of these books with security” (OCD 1.40.44). The double commandment of charity serves as a sharp criterion to discern between literal and figurative locutions. We take figuratively a scriptural saying whose literal interpretation cannot accommodate to the goals of double love and of faith (3.10.14). Charity, to which all articles of Christian faith refer, enables us “to distinguish between literal and figurative meanings” (Toom, \textit{Thought} 215). Genuine hermeneutics accords with the standard of \textit{caritas} (OCD 3.12.20, 3.15.23).

The temporality of human language and the depravity of human nature have uncovered a most sensational element of Augustinian interpretative principle: genuine interpretation generates multiple veracious meanings in harmony with one another. Augustine makes substantial references to 1 Corinthians 13.12. He indicates, “although the light of the Trinity
begins to appear more certainly” in the sixth stage of ascending to God, “it is still said to appear ‘through a glass in a dark manner’ for ‘we walk more by faith than by sight’ when we make our pilgrimage in this world” (OCD 2.7.11). The temporal humanity can only see the celestial Word “under the dark figure of the clouds and in the mirror of the heavens” (Confessions 13.15.18). The captivity of human conscience by debt symbolizes that “‘we see now through a glass in a dark manner,’ and not yet ‘face to face’” (10.5.7). Not until our arrival at the homeland can we gain an “intellect to know all at once, not in part, not in a dark manner, not through glass, but as a whole, in plain sight, face to face . . . it knows all at once, without any passage of time” (12.13.16). Augustine’s repeated references to this Pauline statement demonstrates that human knowledge of God in this life, through faith not by sight, is partial and obscure, but in next life will be face to face and unclouded. The partiality of mortal knowledge has acknowledged the impossibility of “a terminal vision of God” (Fleteren, “Per Speculum” 81, 83, 90), and “the inherent indeterminacy” of textual meaning (Troup, “Rhetorical” 56), thereby approving of multiple true interpretations.

Whoever, moreover, declares “authorized interpretation” is in violation of charity and community (Troup, “Rhetorical” 52). There were exegetes claiming the biblical author “meant what we say” (Augustine, Confessions 12.17.24). Augustine finds no profit but subversion in quarrelling with them. But he clearly indicates the legitimacy of multiple interpretations by two criteria. A man should lawfully apply the Word whose end fulfills charity. When one can approach the Scripture with “a pure heart, and a good conscience, and an unfeigned faith,” Augustine asserts, “what harm comes to me, if various meanings may be found in these words, all of which are true?” (Confessions 12.18.27). Creatures have been confined by temporality and partiality, thereby manifesting multiple true meanings in accord with each other and in the interests of caritas.
Nevertheless, multiple true meanings do not presume that all interpretations are necessarily true. Augustine has guided the interpreters, when confronting ambiguity and uncertainty, to consult the rule of faith “found in the more open places of the Scriptures and in the authority of the Church” (OCD 3.2.2). We penetrate the obscurity by means of the clarity since the Scripture is not self-contradictory. The permeation of faith, hope, and charity presents the text as a coherent whole, thereby prescribing an interpretive measurement: “any interpretation given of a certain portion of a text can be accepted if it is confirmed and must be rejected if it is challenged by another portion of the same text” (Eco 59).

Book I of OCD and authoritative, legitimate Creeds have displayed before us the rules of faith (B. Smith 222–23), moreover, pinpointing to the double commandment of charity (Andrews 136). Thus, Augustine assigns caritas as the determination of true interpretation:

Amid this diversity of true opinions, let truth itself beget concord . . . so that we may lawfully use the law, according to the end of the commandment, in pure charity. By this, if a man requests of me which of these interpretations Moses, your servant, meant . . . ‘I do not know.’ Yet I know that these opinions are true, with the exception of the carnal ones, concerning which I have stated the judgement that I passed . . . But all of us whom I affirm to discern and to speak the truths found in those words, let us love one another and let us likewise love you, our God. (Confessions 12.30.41)

The twofold commandment of charity permeates Augustine’s interpretive praxis. We admit multiple true meanings because of charity by means of which, at the same time, we expel the carnal exegesis based on erotic self-fulfillment. Every cultural prejudice, theoretical presupposition, and personal drive must be subordinated to the inherent authority of the Scripture. The uncontrollable impetus of interpretation must be controlled under the “internal
textual coherence” (Eco 59). For Augustine, “any interpretation harmonious with charity is true” (Troup, “Rhetorical” 54).

Augustine has not stayed at assimilating and incorporating, but reorienting and transforming Ciceronian rhetoric to new Christian ends. He provides the ecclesiastical practitioners an alternative other than pagan ideal to perform the ministry of the Word. By shunning the potential evil and observing the promising good, this fresh Christian cultural ideal equips preachers to treat the Scripture by the rhetorical apparatus.

A genuine interpretation must begin with faith in God to which no other interpretive methodology is superior, then arrive at charity for Him and His community by which the end of laws is fulfilled. Modern rational and logical treatment of the Scripture can merely make good in partial outcome, only true belief can lead to full comprehension of the salvific message. The authentic application of the Word cannot come true without the standard of charity by means of which we discern possible true meanings for our situations. Believing brings forth understanding, and real understanding means loving from pure heart and conscientious faith.
Chapter 4

Ciceronian Coordinates

Rhetoric deserves fresh attention in the modern church. The church’s deficiency in the oratorical art arises from a distrust of sermons constructed “for overembellishment of style, for display, and for inappropriate pulpit devices of delivery” (Caplan, “A Late” 61). The origin of this distrust can be traced back to the Socratic censure of it in Plato’s *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, which, in turn, sparked the similar judgment of it in 1642 that rhetoric is the mother of lies (Dixon 64). Christian preachers, however, are deluded, even deprived of oratorical acumen, by this deep antipathy to rhetoric. This chapter thus aims to rediscover the pertinence of Ciceronian rhetoric to contemporary homiletical praxis.

Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 B.C.) portrays the ideal orator as the combination of philosopher, statesman, and orator. The first role designates the education and requirement of the orator, the second expresses the orator’s responsibility for the public welfare, while the last is manifest in the orator’s eloquence to fulfill his duty. This perfect orator is modeled after the ancient Greek ideal, which upheld the orator who can teach, please, and move the audience with coherent content and form. Such speakers are competent to discover effective arguments and to deliver persuasive orations by means of the five rhetorical canons. In other words, the ideal orator must acquire comprehensive knowledge and rhetorical dexterity (*De Oratore* 1.5.17-18).

The discovery of these Ciceronian coordinates cannot bypass this question: what drives Cicero to the pursuit of the ideal orator? This chapter will investigate the three causes behind his aspiration at the outset. Next, a brief sketch of Cicero’s rhetorical corpora can give us the essential rudiments of his rhetorical theory. Finally, we will see how his rhetorical tenets still shed light on contemporary homiletical praxis.
1. Impetus for the Creation of Ciceronian Rhetoric

Two critical issues stimulated Cicero’s rhetoric: the quarrel between rhetoricians and philosophers and the controversy between Asianism and Atticism. The former resumed the Platonic debate from the second century B.C., while the latter revealed the contentious definition of sound style in the mid-first century B.C. Both factors are substantially bound up with the Ciceronian scheme of the ideal orator. Moreover, Cicero cannot adequately respond to these challenges without absorbing the essentials of his contemporary educational system. The core of his rhetorical corpora reveals his indebtedness to and adaptation of the Greek-Hellenistic paideia.

1.1 The Conflict between Philosophy and Rhetoric

The antipathy to rhetoric hits its apex in Plato’s works, obviously rumbled about in Gorgias whereas relatively nuanced in Phaedrus (Ijsseling 7). There, rhetoric is impeached for giving incredible opinions rather than certain knowledge. Probability and illusion disqualify it for being a true art or science. Plato fervently criticizes sophistic oratory for its lack of certitude, whereas he adores the real art of rhetoric, which can advance the truth and uplift the soul by means of philosopher’s lofty knowledge in dialectic form (Kennedy, The Art 75, 78). His preference for philosophy over rhetoric consolidates the contrast between knowledge and opinion, certainty and uncertainty, and truth and probability, and it has exerted considerable influence in his successors.

As the Roman regime collided with Greek culture, the seemingly abated quarrel flared up again (Grube 142). When Greek rhetoricians strove to promote their discipline in the Roman education system and claimed to incorporate philosophical knowledge into general questions, they were accused of encroaching on the philosophers’ province. This attempt provoked counterattacks from the philosophical schools.
Cicero reports that this disputation occurred at Athens, then appeared at Rome (De Oratore 1.11.45, 1.18.80-21.95, 2.37.155). The major voices of the counterforce come from three philosophical camps: the Academics, the Stoics, and the Peripatetics. Their judgment is reminiscent of the Platonic denunciation of rhetoric, which promotes probable opinion rather than solid truth. Genuine rhetoric should position itself on the foundation of the philosophic endeavor and thus be an exclusive virtue of the philosopher. Consequently, they demean the study of traditional rhetoric and deny its claim to be a systematic art (Kennedy, The Art 322–24).

Therefore, Scaevola casts doubt on orators’ contributions to the establishing of social communities and their acquisition of wide-ranging subjects (Cicero, De Oratore 1.9.35-10.44).

In short, Roman philosophical schools reject rhetoric as an art, criticize it for immorality, and ridicule its lack of philosophical knowledge (May and Wisse 23).

Cicero’s resolution to the dispute depends on Isocrates, who gives us the prototype of the fusion of philosophy and rhetoric in such a way that philosophy is akin or subordinated to rhetoric (Hubbell xii). Isocrates treats rhetoric as “the artificer of persuasion” (Kennedy, The Art 72); thus, it qualifies as an art in its own right and an end itself (Marrou 84). Since truth is elusive and knowledge unattainable, the best a cultivated man can achieve is, Isocrates argues, “by opinion (doxa) to hit upon what is for the most part the best course of action” (Conley 18). Therefore, men aim rhetoric at practical life, particularly political life, for their own advancement. In contrast to the sophists, who are responsible for rhetoric’s bad reputation, Isocrates’s abstract of rhetoric is grounded in good thinking, noble theme, lofty style, and favorable morality, all of which demand the well-being of an orator trained with philosophy for his mind and gymnastics for his body (Katula and Murphy 52). Isocrates may answer the Platonic critique in this way: “[r]hetoric as a system is presumably neither good nor bad; only men are good and bad” (Kennedy, Classical 33). Centuries later, Cicero and Quintilian
strengthen this concept that only a good man can speak well (Quintilian, The Orator’s 2.15.33-35).

On the issue of whether rhetoric is an art itself, Cicero conforms to neither philosophical camps nor rhetorical schools (De Oratore 1.24.110). If art is defined as a systematically scrutinized knowledge that is directed at a completely certain end, then rhetoric is not an art since it mainly concerns opinion and changeable matter. However, if the procedure of public speaking has been carefully defined, clarified, and classified by skilled and experienced men, then rhetoric is capable of being called an art or something akin to art (Cicero, De Oratore 1.20.92, 1.23.108-109, 2.8.32-33). In this sense, an art of oratory does exist so long as it “is situationally oriented and founded upon probability” (Meador 9). Rhetoric is an art for real life situations.

Cicero’s discretion is novel. In so defining rhetoric, he turns our attention to the necessity of oratorical art and the authentic qualifications for eloquence. The best kind of rhetoric hinges not on rigid precepts but on men whose duties and virtues are to aid the society by eloquence (Meador 2, 6–7). The formation of the ideal orator deserves more attention than the redundancy of rhetorical rules.

The qualification of men’s knowledge epitomizes the fusion of philosophy and rhetoric. If the ideal orator is the master of all communication, his attainment of expansive knowledge becomes essential. Cicero appeals to the ancient ideals, following rhetors of old who actually possessed all kind of learning, and laments the perennial quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric incurred by Socrates (De Oratore 3.15.56-35.143). This conflict should not still be occuring since both fields were unified in ancient Greece. Eloquence itself is one of the supreme virtues. The faculty of speaking well, which includes attainment and expression of thought, characterizes wisdom. Thus, the knowledge of forming wise opinions and that of speaking with distinction
should first and foremost coexist in perfect harmony (3.14.55-16.60). In fact, the illustrious philosopher who makes fun of orators is himself “the consummate orator” (1.11.47). That is to say, “even the most real ‘philosophical’ texts are still steeped in a concealed and often quite subtle rhetoric” (Ijselling 36).

Cicero regards philosophy as the seedbed of his eloquence and frequently cites philosophic maxims in his orations (McKeon 14). He not only steadily appeals to Greek ancients for energizing the stagnation of academic rhetoric but also constantly draws on philosophical resources to augment rhetorical practices (De Inventione 1.23.33, 1.34.57, 1.41.77). Meanwhile, Cicero recommends that the orator holds “his philosophic lore in his own right and not as a loan from the philosophers” (Clarke 55). Philosophy is one of the, but not the only, indispensable subjects in constructing an ideal orator, whose knowledge should encompass universal culture (Cicero, De Oratore 1.6.20).

The conflict between philosophy and rhetoric has been a prolonged one. As always happens in the dialectical tension, it ends up with both sides “taking a good deal of colour from each other” (Marrou 210–11). Cicero’s ideal orator has indeed contributed to this fusion of philosophy and rhetoric that demands the attainment of a full range of knowledge and the synthesis of form and content. Next, we will look into another impetus behind his rhetorical theory: the stylistic debate between Atticism and Asianism.

1.2 The Stylistic Controversy

The controversy between Atticism and Asianism arose from competitive renderings of “good style in oratory and prose literature” (Atkins 16). Asianism was a natural development in early Hellenistic rhetoric, with lavish ornamentation and glaring artifice in stylistic design (Kennedy, The Art 302). Cicero identifies two types of Asiatic style. One is “sententious and studied, less characterized by weight of thought than by the charm of balance and symmetry,”
while another is notable for “swiftness and impetuosity” with ornate words (Brutus 94.325). Hortensius was the leading exponent of the Asianism.

Locating the precise moment when the other style, Atticism, emerged seems difficult. However, there may be three factors that stimulated this movement. First, the grammarians were determined to pursue the purity of diction in prose literature. Moreover, the philosophers leaned toward simplicity of utterance. For example, the Stoic and Epicurean teachers recommended a matter-of-fact expression (Atkins 34). The Peripatetic philosophers substantially accommodated their writings to the spare, classical mode of style. Finally, there was an emerging trend of rediscovering Platonic, Aristotelian, and Isocratean rhetoric, which intrinsically alluded to the imitation of the archaic style of the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. (Kennedy, The Art 331). Therefore, Atticism was a movement inextricably interwoven with classicism, demanding a return to language, rhythms, and style of the past orators, such as Lysias and Thucydides.

Consequently, the Attic advocates, who admired the simple, precise, and unadorned style of the classical periods, fervently despised the supremacy of Asianism and condemned its flamboyance, arguing that its exuberance and verbosity would dilute communication (Leeman 142). Cicero’s description of the ideal orator in De Oratore, who is “amplified in content, rich in style, open to ethical and pathetical appeals,” inevitably became controversial in the eyes of Atticists (Kennedy, A New History 151). Cicero’s later writings, therefore, are his defense against this attack and his delineation of the best oratorical style.

Simply speaking, Cicero reprehended both alike, but on different grounds (Atkins 35). He criticizes three kinds of Asiatic stylistic fallacies. One just fills out the rhythm of a passage as a slave without discernment or wisdom, another viciously cuts and breaks up the rhythms into tasteless style, while a dearth of variety characterizes the third kind, which finishes nearly every sentence in the same way (Orator 69.230–31). The major mistake of Atticism, to Cicero, is that
it too parochially defines the nature of Attic style as one who speaks in a restrained and unadorned manner. In fact, there were many Attic orators who spoke in ornate and vehement language, like Aeschines and Demosthenes. The Atticists misconceived their models (*Orator* 9.28-32).

Nonetheless, Cicero also approves the two sides’ strengths, respectively. His rhetorical composition is a commentary on the Asiatic style, aiming to “win back oratory from false Hellenistic standards to the saner traditions and methods of classical Greece” (Atkins 35). Meanwhile, he acclaims the best kind of oratory as “speaking in the Attic fashion” (*De Optimo* 4.13). The diligent learner should follow the style of Attic orators, but “they might imitate not its bones only, but its flesh and blood as well” (*Brutus* 17.68). Demosthenes exemplifies the rich variety of Attic style, and “no one has ever excelled him either in the powerful, the adroit or the tempered style” (*Orator* 7.23). Cicero’s oratorical style inclines to neither the Asiatic nor the Attic view. He assays the pros and cons of their attributes and responds to the challenge with his own wise discretion.

**1.3 Paideia: The Essence of Hellenistic Education and Culture**

Hellenistic civilization models herself after the spirit of the ancient Greeks—the construction of the ideal man. The perfect human specimen must present himself as “both a speaker of words and a doer of deeds” (Jaeger 8). This Greek-Hellenistic paradigm—*paideia*—aims to produce a liberated, self-conscious, and autonomous personality (Marrou 98). The actualization of this humanistic ideal depends on education by which the human character is molded in accordance with an ideal, and only this kind of education “deserves the name of culture” (Jaeger xxii). Inasmuch as man is the center of Greek thought, the Greeks fervently stick to the formation of nobility via the educational procedure, which fashions children and
adolescents into the humanistic ideal. *Paideia*, thus, describes the educational process that characterized Greek culture and, eventually, featured Hellenistic civilization.

Any attempt to simplify *paideia* will mistake its meaning. To start, *paideia* can denote education and culture (Kevane 156). But further, it can encompass modern coinages like culture, civilization, humanity, education, tradition, and literature, yet none of them can fully represent *paideia* by itself (Jaeger v). Cicero adopts the Latin word *humanitas* to represent the idea of true Greek *paideia*.

The Hellenistic culture can be labeled as the civilization of *paideia*, a civilization which was intensely revered, even personified as “a new form of deity” (Gwynn 51; Marrou 99–100). Thereafter, the educational institutions of Hellenism and the Roman Republic, whether primary, secondary, or higher stages, endeavored to render to every new generation the intellectual, moral, and practical capabilities of paideia. The popular gymnasium, which was transformed from its chiefly athletic purpose into also an institution for education, significantly contributed to the development of *paideia* (Walbank 71, 182).

The spirit of *paideia* nurtured Cicero’s aspiration for the ideal orator. He testifies to the benefit of his own immersion in the Greek-Hellenistic ideal, particularly the highest training available in philosophy and rhetoric (*Brutus* 89.306-91.316). Two distinctive features of *paideia* contribute to Ciceronian rhetoric: holistic and moral training.

Pupils would begin their education at the age of seven and go on until they were about twenty. They would pick up reading, writing, and counting in their primary education, then run through advanced literary studies, such as textual criticism, expressive reading, exposition, moral judgment, grammar, and composition, in addition to geometry, arithmetic, music, astronomy, and physical and artistic studies in their secondary education, and, finally, engage with philosophy and rhetoric in their higher education (Marrou 116–216). Through the holistic curriculum,
children were immersed into a comprehensive collection of liberal arts. More than that, the design of the Hellenistic *paideia* aimed to turn a child into a kind of man with holistic maturation, physically, intellectually, and morally. Rather than becoming a particular specialist, the ideal Ciceronian man actually yearns to be a whole humanist.

Second, the education of an ideal man was considered insufficient without moral training. Every noble child, from his neonatal period throughout his school age, was entrusted to a servant-pedagogue who not only took charge of his safety but also introduced him into social life, gave him moral instruction, and molded his character and conduct, on top of the technical knowledge imparted by the schoolmaster (Marrou 142–44). The emphasis on moral education, meanwhile, also preoccupied the exposition of classical literature and the recitation of great oratory. The moral impact also came from the philosophers whose teaching was imbibed “in the common life that he shared with his disciples: more important than his words was the example he set, his inspiring virtues and living wisdom . . . it was in philosophic circles that the great archaic tradition of the educative *eros*, the source of all virtue, survived longest” (Marrou 209).

2. Ciceronian Coordinates

Cicero was a prolific writer. Of his extensive works, a substantial number are allotted to rhetoric “toward which all his other studies were made to contribute” (Petersson 366). Being “the most preeminent literate rhetorician of the Roman Republic” (Enos 102), Cicero reverberates the Isocratean “set speech”—conjoining speaking and writing—by means of which “the thinker could put his ideas into circulation and act through them upon his contemporaries” (Marrou 80). His theoretical essays have inspired his practical counterparts, and vice versa.

2.1 A Sketch of Rhetorical Works

The main subject of Cicero’s youthful work, *De Inventione*—which demonstrates directly the outcome of his early education and his speculative eclecticism of materials from Isocrates,
Aristotle, and, admittedly, most of the rhetorical precepts of the Hellenistic periods—does not get beyond the first division of rhetoric, *inventio* (Cicero, *De Inventione* 2.1.1-2.5). His systematic and comprehensive discussion was the most widely cited, translated, and interpreted of his works throughout the Middle Ages and until the rediscovery of *De Oratore* in the Renaissance (Murphy, “Cicero’s” 335–39). Only by tasting the immature and ramrod manner of Cicero’s earlier treatise can we feel his keen criticism in the later treatise toward the “hackneyed pedantic rules” of scholastic rhetoric (Atkins 24) and appreciate the artistry and perspicacity of his golden *De Oratore*, which had originally appeared in 55 B.C. (Cicero, *De Oratore* 1.2.5; Ochs 159).

Cicero’s *De Oratore*, along with his *Brutus* and the *Orator*, mark his mature and masterful cerebration of the subject of rhetoric, and his originality and superiority over his contemporary rhetorical training. The assemblage of Rome’s preeminent orators assumes “organs of his own sentiments” (Newman 276), portraying an ideal mixture of philosopher-statesman-orator. This treatise comprehensively expounds the nature and range of oratory, depicts the training and qualifications of an ideal orator, and demonstrates the apparatuses of the five canons. *De Oratore* aims not to be a rhetorical manual; instead, it claims to be a philosophical justification on the necessity and urgency of equipping ideal orators for the public sphere—to wit, “the importance of studying rhetoric as a humanistic discipline” in a society dominated by oral argumentation (Enos 107). The ambition to construct an ideal orator, therefore, makes *De Oratore* an indispensable classic.

Cicero penned *Brutus*, *De Optimo Genere Oratorum*, and the *Orator* sequentially in the same year of 46 B.C. *De Optimo Genere Oratorum* was supposed to be a brief preface to an intended translation of the polemic orations of Demosthenes and Aeschines, in which Demosthenes is praised as the greatest orator, proficient in all three styles and worthy of
emulation (Ochs 179). This work provides a pleasant reading on the style of Atticism and Asianism (Petersson 372; Atkins 21).

*Brutus* and the *Orator* deserve ardent attention since they justify Cicero’s oratorical style with different formats in response to Attic-Asiatic conflict. Cicero, in *Brutus*, depicts a history of Roman oratory in dialogue form. Through chronologically evaluating individual orators according to the criteria of *De Oratore*, the historical development of oratory bears witness to Cicero’s ideal (Petersson 372). The *Orator* is a letter to Brutus, responding to his inquiry about this stylistic debate. The portrayal of the ideal orator justifies Cicero’s oratorical style, which not only unifies the principles of oral discourse but also joins “an aesthetic dimension to oratory” (Ochs 188).

We need not deprecate *De Partitione Oratoria* for its undetermined date of publication, whether 54, 52, or 46 B.C. (Gilleland 29, 32). This book receives the title as “catechism of rhetoric” due to its educational tone to his son, Marcus, who is a fervent learner of rhetoric (Taylor 330). With its elementary nature and clear style, this book may be read as a companion to *De Inventione* (330), but both suffer from “an assertive finality as though little else can be said on the subject” (Ochs 193).

Cicero wrote the *Topica*, the last of his rhetorical literature, in 44 B.C. out of a response to Trebatius’s perplexity on reading Aristotle’s *Topica*. Cicero’s exposition represents various lists of topics of his contemporaries rather than resembling much the theory in Aristotle’s treatise (Petersson 370, 378). Aristotelian topics were intended to construct dialectic arguments whereas Cicero reorients them to rhetorical invention. By doing so, Cicero stressed the fusion of philosophy and rhetoric since both disciplines have a “common inventional methodology” (Ochs 195).
Cicero wrote his pieces, except *De Inventione*, after his political and juridical careers, adorning them with a mixture of theoretical sophistication and practical excellence (Enos 103). Meanwhile, these treatises make Ciceronian rhetoric distinctive and innovative. Scholars have suggested that his concept of the ideal orator mirrors the characteristics of the New Academy, since he evidently references Aristotle, Isocrates, Theophrastus, and other Greek writers, and he openly confesses his reliance upon “the spacious grounds of the Academy” (Cicero, *Orator* 3.12; Gwynn 114; Clarke 51). However, Cicero sticks not to old ways. Instead, he refines the learned rhetorical ideas through speculative studies and oratorical experiences (Taylor 328). His eclectic method makes *De Oratore* actually far more expansive than the rhetoric taught in the New Academy, from which his philosophy is also distinct. Cicero appears “never so entirely a disciple of the New Academy as to neglect the claims of morality and the laws” because he loudly protests that “truth is the great object of his search,” comments John Henry Newman (271–72). Moreover, Cicero’s works have expanded the scope of rhetoric. His elegant paraphrases in *De Oratore* substitute for and outgrow immature, technical terms in *De Inventione*, which resembles the pedantic rules of school rhetoric (Clarke 52). Composing in dialogue form not only excites interest and novelty but also infuses perspicuity and vigor (Newman 276). Rhetorical embellishment gains positive feedback through his political and juridical practices. Meanwhile, Cicero eagerly defends against the restricted terrain of rhetoric, attempting to make it more of “a system of general culture” than of “a mere scholastic study” on argumentation or style (Atkins 23).

2.2 The Fusion of Form and Content

The unison of philosopher-statesman-orator refers to the speaker’s competence, aspiration, and medium being consolidated by the inseparability of content and form, matter and language, wisdom and eloquence. The adhesion of wisdom and eloquence has fueled the
progress of human civilization and the gains in public welfare. Without eloquence, mere wisdom can do little good, while fervent eloquence will lead to disaster if unaccompanied by wisdom. Rather than shunning the study of oratory because of its potential misuse for evil ends, the virtuous ought to pursue the genuine eloquence that arises from honorable wisdom (*De Inventione* 1.1.1-4.5). Beyond mere reason, moreover, wisdom means the unison of right conduct and fine speech. Sound wisdom simultaneously engages the strategies of attaining the idea, the faculty of speaking well, and the way of living virtuously Cicero’s perfect orator accords with the ancient ideal whose twofold wisdom in action and speech prospers (*De Oratore* 3.15.56-16.59).

The acquisition of philosophical knowledge and moral conduct undergirds the ideal orator, inasmuch as the development of his orations must begin with lofty content. The issue of topics and the theory of disputation can assist the orator to define the concept, to explain what is obscure, to determine the fact, to judge between truth and falsity, to compare the degree, to recognize consequences, and to divide the issue into parts. These vehicles of analyzing subjects into various topics proceed to the development of eloquent style (*Orator* 4.14-16, 32.113-33.117).

Moreover, the beauty of oration calls for wide-ranging knowledge (*De Oratore* 1.6.20). No matter what kind of circumstance laid before them or what type of oratory they will give, orators’ task cannot be fulfilled without knowledge of law, history, philosophy, virtue, religion, politics, and other substantial themes in regard to human characters, emotions, and affairs. All stylistic refinement and embellishment will lose its efficacy and practicality unless orators have comprehended “the matter he speaks about” and investigated “the whole of the contents of the life of mankind” (*De Oratore* 1.11.48, 3.14.54). After all, it is the treatment of the subject “that makes the speech admirable” (*Orator* 35.122).
The orator’s familiarity with knowledge and subject matter alone cannot ensure the composition of a magnificent speech. Consider the essence of the oration. Every speech is composed of subject and language. A series of words or phrases cannot make sense without genuine content, while the matter unaccompanied by proper arrangement and ornate style cannot be perceived clearly (De Oratore 3.5.19). Good oration, though it begins with content, never stops at the stage of acquiring ideas. Cicero insists that “it is impossible to achieve an ornate style without first procuring ideas and putting them into shape, and at the same time that no idea can possess distinction without lucidity of style” (De Oratore 3.6.24). He laments the separation of wisdom and eloquence, which leads to the deprivation of mutual advantage between philosophers and orators. Only through the reunion of content and form can the ideal orator begin to take shape. The ideal orator’s speech will obtain sufficient cogency and leverage by means of the vitality of public speaking and demonstrate profound elegance and erudition with the aid of the breadth of culture (De Oratore 3.21.80).

The addition of eloquence to matter also distinguishes the genuine style from those of either philosophers or sophists. Philosophers may talk in a gentle and academic tone to soothe rather than to arouse the audience. Their insensitivity to rhythm and feelings disable the speech from promoting public affairs. Meanwhile, the sophists exert excessive flamboyance to delight rather than to persuade the congregation. Their verbalization displays a dearth of reasonable arguments or ideas but a wealth of implausible stories or metaphors. The ideal orator, on the contrary, adorns the sound subject compelling to the public life with vigor, magnificence, and sincerity (Orator 19.61-20.66; De Oratore 1.12.54). Therefore, Cicero, by means of fusing wisdom and eloquence, justifies the value of oratory in serving, promoting, and protecting public welfare and thereby revitalizes the virtue of rhetoric enthroned by Isocrates centuries ago.
2.3 Five Rhetorical Canons

Cicero, though he does not innovate, definitely aggrandizes the five canons. The principles of invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery guide orators to compose their speeches while putting matter and language into consideration (De Partitione 1.3). This quintet can also thus be seen as five stages of composing oration. The ideal orator is the supreme master of the five canons (De Optimo 2.6).

The activity of invention means to discover “valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible”—that is, to find out what is the subject matter at issue in a speech (De Inventione 1.7.9). The discovery of appropriate arguments will not only produce convictions but also arouse the emotions of the audiences (De Partitione 2.5). The subject matter involves a question called issue (constitutio), which has four subcategories: conjectural, definitional, qualitative, and translatative. The conjectural issue concerns the fact, the definitional relates to the dispute about definition, the qualitative evaluates the nature or value of the act according to diverse possibilities, and the translatative involves objection to legal procedure (De Inventione 1.8.10). The place or region from which to derive the argument is called the topic or commonplace, which is further classified as intrinsic or extrinsic by its nature. The comprehensive treatment of their definitions, analyses, and examples is found in 2.8–20.78 of the Topica, whereas a shorter version can be found in 2.27.116–17 and 2.39.162–40.173 of De Oratore. The canon of invention is thus a matter of discovering right issues and determining valuable topics from relevant categories as numerated in the rhetorical handbooks.

The variation between De Inventione and De Oratore demonstrates Cicero’s maturation in his engaging of invention. Cicero turns from the technicality of scholastic rhetoric to the discernment of suitable proofs with “native intuition” or “ordinary talent” (De Oratore 2.30.132, 2.41.175). Cicero does not shun fixed arguments, since those categories and subcategories are
good for guidelines after all. He simply observes the division of stasis theory (*De Oratore* 2.25.105–26.113) yet purposefully avoids the tedious numeration of subcategories that he does in *De Inventione* and the *Topica*. Potentially, the dullness of the rhetorical textbooks constricts the orator’s flexibility in dealing with each case on its own merits and fails to acknowledge that any debate can be related to the essential nature of a general category (*De Oratore* 2.27.117, 2.31.133). When orators do not hinge the issue on the occasions or the individuals but on the general category to which the subject-matter at hand belongs, the commonplaces will fall under few general heads of inquiry and become easily handled and memorized (*De Oratore* 2.39.162–51.175).

The orator’s wise discernment with native intuition and ordinary talent comes from masterful acquaintance with all sorts of topics or commonplaces by means of study and practice. This statement involves three elements of invention: intellectual ability, theory, and diligence. Among them, diligence plays the most critical role since even natural talent would become inert without this virtue. Cicero repeatedly calls forth the attention to practice (*De Oratore* 2.27.118, 2.30.131, 2.34.147). The dexterity of exercising commonplaces naturally emerges by grasping them through diligent practice in reading, listening, and writing. Theory can only point out the locality of argument, but the attainment of argument depends on diligence (*De Oratore* 2.35.148–50).

Finding the appropriate argument is only the first means of persuasion. The fullness of invention, according to Cicero, involves winning over the goodwill and arousing the emotions of the audiences, known as ethos and pathos in Aristotelian rhetoric (*De Oratore* 2.27.115, 2.29.128–29). These two means are far more decisive in affecting the mental decision than rational judgment (*De Oratore* 2.42.178). Ethos and pathos are closely associated. The former
gains the favor of the audience toward the orator, while the latter accords the emotions of the audience with the interest of the orator. Both add persuasiveness to rational argument.

The orator earns the favor from two aspects: first, personal character, prestige, and deeds, and second, his gentle tone of voice, facial expression, and decent attitude. When personality and delivery are handled agreeably, an attractive image of the orator will bear more influence than the case itself (*De Oratore* 2.43.182–84). The key of pathos is that the orator must feel the emotions which he is seeking to excite through the appearance of his words, voice, face, and state of mind. The audience cannot perceive these feelings if the orator performs with indifference (*De Oratore* 2.45.189–46.92). The orator should evaluate the case through guarded eyes in order not to apply oratorical sensation to trifles (2.51.205). The success of ethos and pathos must involve conscious design of style and delivery. Eloquence can only be achieved through a balanced consideration of what to say and how to say it (2.53.212–216).

Once the subject matter is located, we proceed to consider “the distribution of arguments thus discovered in the proper order” (*De Inventione* 1.7.9). Arrangement means to put the materials together in an intelligible sequence in conformity with two prime criteria. First, the allotment of materials is prescribed by the nature of the case to meet various aims (*De Oratore* 2.76.307). The epideictic speech demands the orator to give pleasure with the technique of embellishment. When standing before the deliberative party, the design of each section aims to inspire hope or alarm in order to persuade. In judicial settings, the camp of the prosecutor would vehemently make the judges angry, while that of the defendant eagerly seeks to secure the goodwill and compassion of the judges. Arrangement seeks to provide conviction and arouse emotion from beginning to the end (*De Partitione* 3.9–5.15).

Second, a successful arrangement requires the wit of the orator. The effect of the oration is determined by the discrimination between valuable and negligible arguments. Meanwhile, the
appropriate arrangement will put ethos and pathos into consideration since both means appeal to the goodwill and emotion of the audience. By weaving arguments and digressions within the parts of the oration, the emotions can be successfully excited. The design of arrangement, thus, connects invention with style and delivery. Moreover, the orator should always present the point at the outset, display the strongest argument in the first place, and reserve the outstanding material for the end—while collecting moderate material in the middle—in order to meet the anticipation of the audience as soon as possible (De Oratore 2.76.308–77.314).

Whether the structure of an oration consists of four or six parts (De Partitione 8.27; De Inventione 1.14.19), the difference does not influence the particular function of each section and overall purpose of the whole speech. The design of each part should always observe the two aforementioned criteria while keeping the distinction in their own right.

The third canon, style, means to discover how to fit “proper language to the invented matter” (De Inventione 1.7.9), which forms the counterpart of invention. Detaching the matter from the expression mirrors amputating body from mind—both are disasters (De Oratore 3.6.24). One who excels in the use of language will reach the highest eloquence since style is eminent among the canons (Orator 19.61). Whereas the appearance of eloquence varies, Cicero hinges his ideal style upon four principles: correct diction, clarity, ornament, and appropriateness. Accuracy comes from elementary education and continuous study of literature (De Oratore 3.10.38-39). Besides this, skill in grammar and syntax makes the statement intelligible to audiences (3.13.49).

The core of sound eloquence, thirdly, resides in ornate language, adding colors and flavors throughout the speech to arouse emotions and to direct attention. The embellishment of oratory cannot highlight the point and sustain the interest without distinction and variety. The highest ornament consists in amplification, which can effectively intensify the argument, excite
the emotions, and win reputation for the orator (De Oratore 3.25.96–27.105). Inasmuch as that oration is an assemblage of words, the ornament of language considers three factors: the employment of rare, new, and metaphorical words (3.37.149–43.170), the arrangement of words with juxtaposition, rhythm, and periodic structure (3.43.171–48.186), and the adoption of figures of thought and of speech (3.52.200–54.208). The first tactic gives brilliance by applying distinguished words, the second pleasure by speaking to the ears, and the third impressiveness by varying the decoration of expressions—and all embellish the subject matter. These strategies have been carried further in the second half of Orator (36.125-71.236). Among them, rhythm contributes substantially since it “gratified a deep and permanent instinct in man, gave fresh grace of movement, and added a new music to words artistically arranged” (Atkins 33).

Finally, sound eloquence requires appropriateness, in that the ideal orator masters all styles and adapts each to certain circumstances (Orator 35.123–36.125). Three kinds of style—plain, middle, and grand—are distinguished in the degree of ornate language, featuring wit, charm, and vigor respectively. The ideal orator should skillfully engage these three styles to prove, to please, and to persuade, respectively. The quality of determining what is appropriate at any point is called propriety (Orator 21.69–28.99). The efficacy of propriety must put subject, speaker, audience, and occasion into consideration (De Oratore 3.60.211–12). Thus, the competence of engaging accurate, lucid, ornate, and appropriate language bolsters true eloquence.

The treatment of memory is less in proportion to, but not inferior to, other canons. This rhetorical activity indicates “the firm mental grasp of matter and words” (De Inventione 1.7.9), without which orators will miss the track of the speech (De Oratore 2.87.355). Whether one has an innate ability for keen memory or not, everyone can benefit from the memory system created by Simonides of Ceos. This science of mnemonics mainly involves localities and images. The
images represent the facts, and the order of localities designates the order of facts. The positioning of images in orderly localities assists orators to grasp facts by images and to recall the order of facts according to their localities. Not only can the visual sense promote the perception of abstract thought but the clear locality can also make the subject more conceivable (De Oratore 2.86.351–88.359). In short, the operation of memory begins with the visualization of subject matters, then arranges them in a neat sequence of visualized localities. Giving oration is thus akin to ambling along the planned route, sharing ideas one after another according to the itinerary.

The last but not the least canon is delivery. Demosthenes treated it as the utmost activity of oratory, and Cicero twice asserts that by delivery, the quality of eloquence will ultimately be determined. The art of delivery consists of three major features: voice, facial expressions, and gestures (De Oratore 3.56.213–14; Orator 17.55–56). To reach his highest efficacy of delivery, the orator must modify his tone of voice, his glances, and his body language “in correspondence with the variations of his matter and also of his language” (De Partitione 7.25). Thus, Cicero defines delivery as “the control of voice and body in a manner suitable to the dignity of the subject matter and the style” (De Inventione 1.7.9). Since every emotion has its own tone of voice, facial expression, and gesture, the aim of delivery is not only to accord them with the content and the style but also to strike the audience in the same way, through delivery, that the orator is himself struck. Inasmuch as the art of delivery exerts direct influence on the innate emotions, moreover, its effect is more easily felt by audiences than the clever content and the ornate language (De Oratore 3.59.223).

The artistry of the Ciceronian canons provides ample tactics for fusing matter and language. One always begins with the discovery of authentic subjects by means of invention, then putting the parts of that subject into logical order through arrangement. Style and delivery
represent the manner of speech, and all of these are stored in memory. That Cicero, at times, accentuates one canon among others has no implication for us to show a preference. Instead, we ought to keep in mind that only the all-inclusive and harmonious dexterity of five canons can genuinely reflect the inseparability of form and content—the authentic feature of the ideal orator.

3. Christian Implication

Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* has imprinted the pith of Ciceronian rhetoric on Christian preaching. Via Ciceronian invention, subsequently, Boethius initiated medieval logic, guiding preachers to discover “right argument communicable to the right audience in the right circumstances” (McKeon 4; Murphy, “Cicero’s” 335; Caplan, “Classical” 86). Because of Ciceronian rhetoric, the medieval *ars praedicandi* blossomed. Within the projects of Rabanus Maurus in the ninth century, Alain de Lille in the twelfth century, Alexander of Ashby and Thomas of Salisbury in the thirteenth century, Robert of Basevorn in the fourteenth century, and an anonymous Dominican author in the fifteenth century, Cicero’s voice still resonates (Murphy, *Rhetoric* 300–53). Whether early or late, simple or complex, short or long, these compositions conform to Ciceronian format, structure, arrangement, and, most of all, eloquence at large (Conley 97).

The Renaissance, initiated by Petrarch’s rediscovery of classical manuscripts, a quest for classics joined by other humanists, marked a revival of Ciceronian spirit, which led to the phenomenon of Ciceronianism, signaling the promotion of classical Latin prose as taught and exemplified by Cicero. Some radical Ciceronian humanists even insisted on reading nothing but Cicero and adopting only a word or sentence utilized by him. Erasmus argued against this extreme in his witty dialogue *Ciceronianus*, indicating that the best way to imitate Cicero “lies not in mere words nor in the outer layer of verbal expression but in substance and sentiments, in intellectual ability, in right judgment” (qtd. in Springer 44). He held Cicero to be the master of
Latinity, helping to ensure that Ciceronian Latin prose style could be a role model for reformers of the church. Moreover, the spirit of the Renaissance encouraged not only the interest in classical literature but also the study of the Bible in its original languages, which aided the subsequent effort of Bible translations. The spread of humanism and translation of Ciceronian literature made the vernaculars equally effective forms of expression, inspired scientific curiosity in contrast to the rude scholastics of the Middle Ages, and thus paved the way to the Reformation (Rolfe 142–45).

Many of the reformers, like their Renaissance predecessors, embraced poetry, rhetoric, art, and philosophical concepts associated with the classics, employed Ciceronian Latin prose style, and shaped their theological disputation according to Cicero’s rhetorical principles (Springer 45–47). For example, the first five chapters of John Calvin’s *Institutes of Christian Religion*, though grounded in a different argumentative method, borrows insights, examples, and linguistic devices from Cicero (Leithart 6). Credited as the most conspicuous spokesman for the Reformation, Martin Luther largely relied upon, frequently referred to, and substantially cited Cicero in his commentary, debate, pamphlet, letter, and preaching (Springer 55–68). Philip Melanchthon’s biblical hermeneutic has deep impact on educational theory and practice. That he encouraged the reader to begin the interpretation by locating the *status* of the discourse and to consider the *oikonomia*, the principle of arrangement, in the literary analysis reflects the imprint of Ciceronian strategies (Eden 82–84).

Contemporary preachers can dig up treasures from Ciceronian rhetoric. The chief advantages of his acumen apply to two aspects of the ministry of the Word: preachers’ scholarship and their craftsmanship. Cicero’s sincere advice for ancient orators still resounds effectively today.
3.1 The Primacy of Preacher’s Scholarship

Phillips Brooks’s definition of preaching has become a frequently quoted maxim highlighting the preacher’s ethos. “Preaching,” claims Brooks, “is the communication of truth by man to men . . . is the bringing of truth through personality” (5). He then stresses the dignity of preacher by this amplified description: “The truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God’s will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth” (5). His extolment of the preacher resounds as the legacy of Ciceronian rhetoric: “[F]or a good sermon there must be a man who can speak well, whose nature stands in right relations to those to whom he speaks, who has brought his life close to theirs with sympathy” (Brooks 74). The supremacy of God’s Word calls for the credibility of His herald.

Hardly noticed and discussed, however, is Brooks’s demand for preachers’ scholarship and its contribution to preachers’ ethos. “The Christian ministry is the largest field for the growth of a human soul that this world offers,” Brooks professes, “In it he who is faithful must go on learning more and more forever. His growth in learning is all bound up with his growth in character. Nowhere else do the moral and intellectual so sympathize, and lose or gain together” (70). As beneficial as spiritual devotion and moral discipline to preachers’ personalities is their continuous study. Christian preachers must grow intellectually as well as morally. During this approximate period of time, Austin Phelps echoed the magnitude of preacher’s scholarship. He incisively contends, “A thoroughly trained preacher is first a man, at home among men; he is then a scholar, at home in libraries. No other profession equals that of the pulpit in its power to absorb and appropriate to its own uses the world of real life in the present and the world of the past as it lives in books” (iii). A fine preacher is in urgent need of sound scholarship.

Nevertheless, some hindrances appear nowadays. First, the majority of the people in each congregation seem unmindful of a preacher’s scholarship. Modern homiletic textbooks,
ecclesiastical educations, and continuing training tend to focus more on the how-to methods and immediate helps. This propensity reflects a pressing need for quick outcome but forgets that the enrichment that expansive study brings to homiletical praxis “require[s] more substantive reflection and offer[s] less immediate gratification” (Reber 42). More than that, it catalyzes a highly risky and unconsciously functionalist view of preaching ministry. The primacy of preachers’ scholarship should be prioritized ahead of their technique. Only after acknowledging the nature and essence of communicating the whole counsel of God can preachers succeed in craftsmanship with authenticity.

Second, some anti-intellectualistic believers deprecate scholarship since they misconceive the Pauline saying that “knowledge puffs up” (1 Cor. 8.1). They laud the Scripture as the sole source of preaching materials. The use of plentiful knowledge and learning certainly prove vain, in their eyes, as a display on the stage to impress the pew. However, the confusion between the simplistic accumulation and the deliberate adaptation of knowledge shows the poverty of discernment among Christians. A storehouse of knowledge may not necessarily lead to ignorant arrogance as long as preachers’ pious wisdom can spring from lively application. Human intellect is not granted “to be deprecated, or depreciated, but to be developed for Him” (Gibbs 73). St. Francis de Sales even elevates the knowledge of the priest to “the eighth sacrament of the Church” (Brooks 45). Since preachers’ wisdom is entrusted to them for God’s glory, their study should be placed at His disposal (Boice 104). On the other hand, anti-intellectualism generates potential dangers. “In many respects an ignorant clergy, however pious it may be, is worse than none at all,” Brooks warns, “The more the empty head glows and burns, the more hollow and thin and dry it grows” (45). Nothing can replace the reading of the Scriptures, yet the substance yielded by manifold study benevolently contributes to the safety and wisdom of the sermon.
Finally, busy preachers may excuse themselves for having no time to study, regardless of its value and weightiness. The assumption behind their pretext, however, fails to realize the image of the Church, the understanding that none of churches is pastored by a single shepherd but by a team (Stott, *Between* 207). Pastors should prioritize the ministry of the Word, then partner with gifted lay leaders in other pastoral obligations. In a harsher manner, Phelps exhorts:

[I]f it is given you to see that the pulpit is your throne, give yourself to it and to the scholarly life which is essential to it. Ally your study with it, and make your home there. Leave executive bishoprics of the church universal to other hands. There are men enough who can do that service, whose tastes develop genially towards it, and whose success shows that they were created for it . . . Then make a straight path between your pulpit and your study, on which the grass shall never grow. Build your clerical influence up between those two abutments. (319–20)

Some may debate about its practicality, but everyone must admit that the actualization of the Body of Christ will enable its preachers to devote themselves exclusively to the pastoral ministry, and specifically to the ministry of the Word. This exhortation does not suggest that preachers always sit alone in the den, paying no attention to the life-situations of their dioceses. The Christian pulpit cannot achieve its optimum impact without the coefficients of both laborious study and pastoral care.

This ministry demands the very best that is within preachers’ ability, energy, and power. There is no higher task deserving their assiduous study, painstaking preparation, and the earnest presentation of His Gospel. As the title of Oswald Chambers’ devotional proclaims, “My Utmost for His Highest!” Today, the popularity of literary education has produced a higher rate of literate audiences than that of a century ago. After being bombarded by all kinds of talks on various media during the week, moreover, churchgoers will surely expect the competent pulpit to
complement those talks with its own noble language and evocative speech on Sunday. Unless preachers are educable and self-educating, their sermonic ministry will soon become repetitious and boring, having run out of fresh materials (Boice 95). The fulfillment and advancement of the preaching ministry ask for a lifelong, disciplined learner.

The preaching ministry, moreover, will ascend to higher quality through laborious study. Preaching is the confluence of biblical and modern worlds, requiring the comprehensive knowledge of both arenas. Augustine produced fruitful interpretations of scriptural realities by means of broad knowledges (OCD 2.16.23–40.61). Modern practitioners also concur that theoretical learning and practical knowledge will indispensably bring fresh insight into scriptural exegesis and expand their apprehension of the book of books (Stewart 106; Gibbs 338; Burghardt 56). Meanwhile, a successful communication of truth by man to men asks preachers to bear the modern world and their listeners in mind. By reading the most attentive people in the world, preachers will effectively build their capacity of attentiveness and “enlarge [their] sympathies for people and situations [they] had previously known nothing about” (Plantinga, Reading 6). A reading program can make preachers more conversant on scriptural knowledge and attentive to current situations.

Reading also brings the sermon to life and connects abstract dogma with the human condition. Preachers ought to dig up biblical ideas from the Bible itself. However, the Scripture does not detail everything about its topics. Thus, preachers may harvest from fine literature abounding in “incidents, characters, images, and observations that illumine everything under the sun” (Plantinga, Reading 74). Great writers, such as storytellers, journalists, poets, and biographers, pierce human hearts and know how to move them with might and wonder. The conversation with the genius will be of great use in “illustrating and driving home the points [the preacher] wishes to make” (Gibbs 74). The fruitful ministry of William Mackergo Taylor has
proved that the mind of reading preachers resembles a storehouse from which they can draw
lavishly from “an enormous field of the world’s sorrows and joys” to light up the scriptural idea
(Jones 19). The touching moment “springs naturally from a background of sound reading”
(Hutton 151).

Moreover, a programmed reading will enhance preaching style and enrich literary
perception. The sermonic composition essentially involves language. “Good reading,” says
Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “can tune the preacher’s ear for language, which is her first tool”
(Reading x). The immersion in best literatures will stimulate preachers’ intellect, arouse their
sensibilities, and excite their imagination, and thereby mellow their faculties of literary taste.
Preachers possess sound thoughts and effective expressions when being possessed by them.

Preachers can assimilate, imitate, and distill literary charm by digesting the genius of the
premier authors so that one day their own style will reach that higher class in expression. After
all, originality derives from imitation and transfusion. Reading is a journey of literary
enrichment, as Phelps brilliantly indicates, “Your own enthusiasm awakened by good models
may disclose to you susceptibilities and powers which you never conjectured as existing within
you” (123).

A communicable message demands lucid expressions. Reading the loftiest of literature
will equip preachers with conceptual coherence, precise diction, evocative words, and clear
movement, thereby begetting sermonic clarity naturally. However, preachers ought not to be
trapped by the power of language. What preachers learn from reading is not ends, but means, and
what they hope for preaching should not be literary craft, but faithful proclamation. Preachers are
obliged to study diligently, but let the burst of sermonic power be the work of the Holy Spirit
(Plantinga, Reading 44–64).
Having discussed the necessities, the obstacles, and the benefits of preachers’ scholarship, the next inquiry will be what and how the pastoral study should be. The decision is crucial, as Wilbur M. Smith contends that “much that will happen in the pastor’s study will be determined by what he brings into the study as he commences his ministry” (20–21). In his momentous lecture, H. Robinson introduces four worlds of the preacher: the Bible, the modern world, the world of the listeners, and the preacher’s personal world (“The Worlds” 1–14). An effective reading program may encompass all four worlds.

First of all, preachers should be keen to delve into the Scriptures. Nothing can substitute for it. Every bit of rhetorical acumen will lose its might unless it can claim it biblically. All loftiest of literature, whether religious or secular, classical or contemporary, intellectual or sensational, can serve only as the backdrop of God’s Word, as stars giving prominence to the moon in the night. Even the productions of the best theologians and all ecclesiastical traditions are merely “words about God; only the Bible is the word of God” (R. Brown 18). The preacher’s first loyalty is to the Scripture, and none can supplant this in any way.

Reading and rereading the Scriptures will immerse the preacher’s very being in the Word, making the scriptural power burst forth from the heart. Whoever is called to preach must have a decent personality tuned to the will of God. Thus, their thoughts, words, acts, and ethos ought to be sculptured by the study of God’s Word so that they can absorb and apply the biblical truth to their inner life before they apply to the hearers (H. Robinson, Biblical 21). Bible reading benefits more than sermonic preparation; it enriches the “life-shaping effect” on preachers’ ethos (Gibson, “The Preacher’s” 63). The Scripture itself is not only the key to open the biblical mysteries but also the benchmark according to which preachers can interpret themselves and harmonize their very being with the image of the King’s herald.
Great ecclesiastical literatures, furthermore, bring healthy supplement to the study of God’s Word. There are tremendous theologians who think hard about God and the world, record the fruit of their study, and invite us to utilize their valuable legacy of discovery. The sublime works of the early patriarchs, the Reformers, other Christian saints, and some contemporary geniuses have provided nourishment from which preachers can take every advantage (Gibbs 76–77; Plantinga, Reading viii). Their superb insights will inspire the masses to penetrate and appreciate scriptural obscurities, doctrinal complexities, and the intricacy of humanity.

Besides the Scripture and Christian literatures, preachers should get “conversant with life discerned spiritually as life is discerned spiritually in history and philosophy and art including poetry” (Hutton 149). Secular classics can widen preachers’ horizons, sharpen judgment, refine taste, and elevate expression. The long-lasting publication has proved its value through the ultimate test of time. History deserves no little attention because, whether ancient or modern, general or topical, it portrays a good account of God’s dealings with the world and a sound annotation of the Scriptures. Poetry provides fine resources for linguistic enrichment. Nobody devotes themselves to diction, rhythm, and euphony more than the poets, and preachers have much to gain by reading and reciting poetry. Fiction, story, and drama work largely on the design of evocative movement, from which preachers can improve their introduction, tension, resolution, and conclusion. “A writer need not be a Christian to enlighten a Christian preacher,” according to Calvin’s idea of common grace, “the Holy Spirit sows truth promiscuously, and the searching preacher is likely to find it in some unlikely places” (Plantinga, Reading ix). Preachers can always dig up treasures in the fine field of liberal arts.

The vault of publication is vast but the life short; thus preachers need a deliberate reading plan. First of all, they may want to pick up the best. “It is not the reading of many books which is necessary to make a man wise or good; but the well reading of a few, could he be sure to have
the best,” as Puritan theologian Richard Baxter contends: “[A] wise man must be sure to lay hold on that which is most useful and necessary” (731). In like manner, Phelps advises, “If we can read but one volume in a year, let that one be worthy of a scholar’s ideal of good reading” (135). Perusing a grand work carefully profits more than skimming numerous average works cursorily.

Especially beneficial are first-ranked writers who function as controlling forces in literature, history, and human society. Preachers can feel the poetic power in Homer’s *Iliad*, the dramatic tension in Shakespeare’s plays, the intellectual wit in Bacon’s philosophical works, and the ideological influence in many other royal names among the first class of authorship. And their genius will become preachers’ own mental character by transfusion.

Second, preachers can extend their reading according to their interests. Whether history, fiction, poetry, or philosophy, they can nurture the reading habit as their reading interests expand. Then, preacher can move on to subjects they may not like as the reading procedure matures. And finally, they should read the great themes they *ought* to like in order to enlarge their intellectual dimension (Hutton 153).

Third, preachers’ reading succeeds through a practical plan. It may be unrealistic for a busy pastor to read a great novel or a philosophical masterpiece every week, or even one sublime treatise a month. However, reading one grand book, or four to five short ones, a year, while pondering the themes carefully and taking some notes thoughtfully, can yield treasure. A few years later, that preacher will bring significant substance to the ministry of the Word (Plantinga, *Reading* 41–42). Slow yet steady reading will bear fruits.

There is no single plan suitable for everyone. The principles of quality, progression, and practicality may provide some guidelines for making an applicable scheme. Ultimately, the best plan is always to begin it now.
3.2 The Elevation of Preacher’s Craftsmanship

As crucial as preachers’ scholarship to effective preaching is their craftsmanship. The discovery and delivery of the Scriptures require their dedicated study; decent sermonic construction demands a dexterity in the rhetorical arts. Most important of all, the union of form and content features preachers’ craftsmanship.

Many pulpits today are parroting either philosophical or sophistc inadequacy (Cicero, Orator 19.62–65). The first flaw breeds factuality-centered sermons, but overlooks that genuine preaching is truth spoken for ears and centered on life. Preachers simplistically bring “lecture-room methods” onto the stage without stylistic refinement (Broadus, A Treatise 263). Their laborious study may succeed in achieving doctrinal excellence but fail to engage the affections through the sermon. The second defect, on the other hand, disguises the objective of preaching with overly flowery language. The overemphasis on sound, tone, rhythm, and gesture can hold the preacher back from presenting genuine truths with warmth and sincerity. Immoderate embellishment is as tedious as needless references. Both homiletical faults disengage substance from form.

Davis has illuminated the ideal fusion of form and content with a vivid description: “Life appears in the union of substance and form. These are the elementals. To be without form is the void of matter, and it is the void of thought” (1). Everything comes with form; therefore so does the idea. People inevitably impart a kind of form to a stated thought, whether careful or careless. Every form has its effect: a chaotic form gives confusion whereas a deliberate form creates distinction. The same thought clothed with distinct forms will generate different utterances. Whereas listeners may feel the form out of intuition, preachers should display the right form with deliberation. Not until a proper form is given can the thought be received as a sound idea. Therefore, it would be naïve and foolish to separate what to say from how to say it. “When the
form is right,” Davis emphasizes, “form and thought become one” (4). Or, using Wordsworth’s metaphor, word is the incarnation of thought (Broadus, *On the Preparation* 201).

An unformed thought is like a photograph out of focus. Its meaning is sensed vaguely but not grasped. The trivialization of form results from “the failure to understand its inseparable connection with the thought conveyed and the dependence of truth upon the clarity of the manner in which it is expressed” (Broadus, *On the Preparation* 203). Preaching can never be done well without the union of form and matter.

Preaching means more than an intellectual battle. We can never win souls back to the gospel with only rational arguments and detailed expositions. There are spiritual and moral truths whose illumination by logical language alone would be inapt, and “only under conditions of form” could they be implanted in the audiences (Kligerman 52). There is no fixed form for every sermon. An eloquent preacher will match a matter—whether it is small, ordinary, or grand—with harmonious form and style. “The right form derives from the substance of the message itself, is inseparable from the content, becomes one with the content, and gives a feeling of finality to the sermon” (Davis 9). Only the message clothed with clarity, beauty, and might will make an immediate difference.

To achieve the fusion of form and content, preachers will find the implementation of the five canons helpful. After conducting a careful exegesis, preachers need to determine the means through which to present each matter according to its purpose. The exposition clarifies unknown or misunderstood concepts, the description or narration arouses the imagination or sensation, while the argument wins favor and consent. Then, preachers can choose from the tactics of Ciceronian invention such as definition, classification, division, comparison, contrast, and many others to make operative the exposition, description, narration, and argument. Following the criteria of arrangement helps in the presenting of the materials with logical order and practical
intention. Every paragraph will be integrated into a coherent unit of thought perceivable to listeners. The addition of stylistic embellishment is a harmonious admixture. Without the consideration of correct diction and fine rhythm, the sermon seems and sounds dry, powerless, and ineffective. And only after the execution of memory and delivery on the stage can the fusion of form and content become a reality. The preaching ministry will demonstrate its full might to teach, please, and persuade only through the application of the five canons.

The confluence of content and form demands effort and devotion. First, preachers need to identify the condition of good style. Every outstanding preacher has her own style, but none of their styles goes beyond the boundary of stylistic rules. Whether amateur or experienced, preachers should revisit the science of language, which is the base of good form. A thought can only be rightly perceived when it is said in accord with grammatical rules.

Second, the study of good literature improves the combination of substance and style. John A. Broadus encourages preachers to bathe their minds in choice literature and to nourish themselves with good learning to such an extent that correct principles of style would saturate their inner beings, refine their oratorical taste, and sharpen their stylistic discernment, which “is a process surpassingly profitable in its results and in itself delightful” (A Treatise 330). The preacher’s scholarship and craftsmanship are closely interrelated.

Finally, some exceptional preachers marry form and content out of intuition, but the majority require diligent practice, which is the best way to learn. Careful practice in writing and speaking will sharpen our taste and skill. But Broadus indicates that “mere practice will never bring the highest skill; it must be heedful, thoughtful practice, with close observation of others and sharp watching of ourselves, and controlled by good sense and good taste” (A Treatise 25). Therefore, a mindful practice accompanied with imitation of fine examples will generate the best treasure for the preaching ministry.
Cicero’s rhetoric and philosophy of communication has not only enriched the oratorical art in the history of rhetorical theory but has also made a beneficent contribution to modern homiletical praxis. His rhetorical coordinates integrate the preacher’s scholarship and craftmanship. The lifelong study, diligent practice, and sound application of his rhetorical tenets make the ministry of the Word fruitful. Only the perfect match of substance and form, after all, can enlighten the minds, arouse the favor, and win the beliefs of the congregation. This highest task of proclaiming the Gospel merits the preacher’s best.
Chapter 5
Recovery of Orality through Ong

Preaching, by its nature, is an oral event featuring the interplay of the divine Word, the human word, and the assembly. The once spoken Word of God, recorded and fixed in written forms, has now been revived in, wrapped by, and transmitted through the spoken word of man toward an existential community. Human verbalization stimulates “man’s sense of his own presence to himself and to other men and to his sense of God’s presence” (Ong, The Presence 15). This confluent presence symbolizes “a mysterious connection” between the human word and the divine and exhibits “God’s view of reality in human language” (Ong, The Presence 13; Shields 85).

However, the victory of image over sound has severely downgraded the power of preaching and dramatically blurred the boundaries between genuine worship and idolatrous superstition (Ellul, The Humiliation 184). The incorporation of electronic media devices in religious practices has entered the mainstream of contemporary churches. The adoption of visual media devices, striking and efficient though they can be, brings forth a religious conflict between sight and language, idols and the word, and reality and truth (Ellul, The Humiliation 191).

This religious rupture has made another appearance in the formation of virtual churches. Individuals show up before the electronic screen, partaking in ceremonies in the absence of physical contact with fellow believers. Technology has altered the way people sense the presence of the word. Even though some electronic media have revitalized the use of sound, its psychological and social effects differ from the person-to-person engagement in the circumstance of human vocalization (Ong, The Presence 290). The improvisational inter-reaction between the preacher and the congregation disappears in the electronic wires. This disintegration
of impromptu union arrived at the dawn of literary culture and further intensified with the aid of electronic equipment (McLuhan, *Understanding* 79).

High literacy and manuscript reprints encourage today’s preacher to prepare the sermon for the eye rather than the ear. When they don’t keep “the essential orality of language” in mind, preachers apply linguistic and literary devices to verbal performances heedless of the incompatibility between spoken and written styles (Graham 9). The following short section comparatively juxtaposes the contrasting operations and experiences of reading and hearing:

> A reader has time to ponder, reread, and even look up words if necessary; a hearer must understand the message as it comes or not at all. A reader may proceed at his own pace; a listener goes at the pace of the speaker. If writing does not proceed in linear style, a reader gets bored; but if a speaker avoids repetition, his listener gets lost if concentration is broken even for a moment. (Fant 115)

The manuscript sermons prepared in accordance with the rules of writing, as a result, do not fit the occasion of sacred proclamation; even though delivered orally, they are intended for reading.

Walter J. Ong deftly approaches the interrelationship between orality and literacy from a religious perspective. He contends that “the state of theological thinking and the modes of communication in a given culture at a given time are perhaps somehow correlatives” (Ong, “Communications” 462; Soukup, “Contexts” 175). His cultural studies disclose the dynamics between human sensoria and communications media that result in transformations of the word. The first section explores the triumph of written over spoken words and the partiality people have toward sight and away from sound in the course of three successive cultures. Then, the next two parts appeal to the partnership of orality and literacy from opposite directions. On the one hand, the specialization of the word has imposed at least five negative consequences upon Christian theology and homiletics, which the orality-literacy collaboration can mend. On the
other hand, the scriptural and historical evidences have shown the fine blend of orality and literacy in the residually oral culture. Even after the arrival of print, moreover, the highly literate, electronically immersed people still eagerly respond to oral patterns. Both perspectives call forth an oral homiletic to rediscover the patterns of oral memory hinged on the psychodynamics of orality, which leads to the final section of the current chapter. Thematic movement, narrative structure, and intelligible verbalization feature an oral performance that would realize and regain the power of the spoken word and reinforce an effectively homiletic praxis. The capability of primitive remembrance would shed fresh light on oral preparation and presentation as modern consciousness has grown accustomed to literary conceptualization.

1. Communications Media, Human Sensoria, and Transformations of the Word

Ong informatively christens three sequential cultures that map onto the progressive succession of communications media: oral-aural, alphabetic-typographic, and electronic. The operations of script, print, and computer technologize the word, externalize the interior, pulverize the memory, immobilize responsiveness, still the dialogue, and move human rationality from contextualization to decontextualization (Ong, *Orality* 78–79; Denny 77–81). The shifting organization of the human sensorium has determined the variances of the three cultures; reciprocally, the cultural variations have also made the operational complex of sensoria prioritize some types of perception over others, “relatively neglecting other ones” (Ong, *The Presence* 6). Communications media are not neutral; they “not only reflect culture but also influence it fundamentally” (Botha, “Mute” 35).

One prominently cultural consequence of technological progression and sensorial alteration shows up in the transformations of the word. The cognitions of the word vary according to the three cultures. The orality-literacy shift, in turn, denominates three cultural stages: primary orality, residual orality, and secondary orality. These denominations explain how
the perception of the word has changed from viewing word as pure sound, through spatializing
the word in fixed space, to reviving oral-aural phenomena in the company of electronic devices.
The proceedings explicate the characteristics of each stage and their implications for
Christianity.

1.1 Oral-Aural Culture

A purely oral-aural culture perceives word, fact, and relationship exclusively by means of
acoustics, though supplemented by other sensory apparatus (Havelock, Muse 65). Word as sound
has no concrete substance to be viewed, touched, or examined, but features itself as something
on-going, an event happening in the moment to associate the life-world to the human mind.
Verbal exchanges operating in the “process of direct semantic ratification” and the “totality of
symbol-referent relationships” deeply socialized the ancients in their primary oral societies
(Goody and Watt 29). Moreover, since sound resides in time, a pre-literate man has no modern
concept of past, present, and future. “The past is indeed present . . . is present in the speech”
when it resounds verbally (Ong, The Presence 23).

Without written aids to retain the past, the ancients transmitted social habits, custom-law,
and cultural conventions to future generations via a sophisticated mnemonic apparatus
(Havelock, Muse 58). The constitution of primitive civilization thus emerged from “the
homeostatic organization of the cultural tradition” (Goody and Watt 30). One distinct feature of
pre-literate remembrance or retelling worked not by rote but through thematic sequences
enclosed within prefabricated metrical formulas. Storytellers, though handling different styles,
would produce diverse wordings yet keep the story on the same track. The conservation of
tradition through an orally transmissible form gave birth to “ritualized utterance” conforming to
“acoustic laws of memorization” (Havelock, Muse 70, 73). The Scripture, in like manner,
includes a substantial amount of poetry, songs, and maxims for “recounting salvation history in
memorable sequence” (McClellan, *Preaching* 69). As a result, the oral-aural culture nurtured a mnemonic heritage hardly comprehensible in a literate culture accustomed to verbatim memory. Yet, mnemonic devices recede as visual aids penetrate the society, thus memory gives way to texts (Graham 15).

The capacity of memory in primary oral cultures challenges today’s preaching. Christian preachers who recite manuscripts often overly stress identical phraseology, fearing the loss of the exact meaning. However, verbatim repetition does not guarantee precise communication. On the contrary, Ong indicates that “all our interpretation of the most exact verbal records of the past is dependent not on writing but on vocal exchange in the present,” which is to say that true meaning resides in “the continuous recurrence of the word as event” (*The Presence* 32–33). Preaching ought to shun verbatim verbalization because this literary proclivity sometimes sounds “too polished and too poised” (Fant 117). The scriptural evidences of mnemonically fabricated styles prove that deliberately crystallized thoughts easily touch the souls and arouse the “amens” of the hearers. Preachers would anticipate the congregation experiencing truth-proclamation as an on-going event that had already happened in the biblical scene. A carefully prepared and orally designed speech naturally promotes sincere contact with reality and truth that verbatim recitation hardly provides. The patterns of oral memory and their significance to homiletical praxis will be explored more in the fourth section.

1.2 Alphabetic-Typographic Culture

Unlike the pre-literate men in oral cultures who experience word as sound in time, the arrival of the alphabet injects a new sense of space into the human race. Word as sound resides in time, and like time, features irreversibility. When sound comes into existence, it evanesces in the same moment. Word as sound does not correlate with space, but alphabetical characters do. Alphabetical operations assemble, dissect, reassemble, arrange, and reverse the letters in a spatial
field that operates in a different dimension than the oral-aural word. Treating words spatially differentiates literary culture from the oral-aural one. First, literate men spatialize time into sequential sections, in contrast to the oral-aural sense of time in terms of its constant “getting later” (Ong, *The Presence* 44). Second, sound becomes a spatial entity to be analyzed and measured according to mathematical and physical diagrams. However, sound as a psychological actuality can never be represented in a fixed pattern or diagrammatic wave. Third, the alphabet imposes a sense of order and control upon language, arranging words according to the visual sensorium in a spatial field. The fixity and quiescence of the alphabet delude people into believing that literal meaning is plain, neat, and definite. On the contrary, Ong contends, “a complex and polysemous utterance is no clearer when it is written down, nor is its meaning any simpler” (*The Presence* 46–47).

The invention of the alphabet, moreover, does not neutralize oral practices immediately. Although Marshall McLuhan proclaims the closure of the human voice at the advent of Gutenberg typography (*The Gutenberg* 250) and Stephen H. Webb marks the Enlightenment as the turning point of orality-literacy transition (40), the continuity and overlapping between orality and literacy still show up, even in recent times (Ong, *Orality* 113–14). The effects and functions of residual orality symbolize the gradual dominance of sight over sound until the revival of verbal communication via electronics (Ong, *The Presence* 53–87; “Oral Residue” 313–29).

The composition of the Scriptures exemplifies the orality-literacy interplay of a residually oral culture. The identification of “a category of concealed oralism” and “a stratum of oral composition” validates the birth of literary texts out of their original oral materials that had afterward dispersed. “Genuine echoes from a primary orality long forgotten have been retained intermittently in a text otherwise devoted to revising them, epitomizing them, and incorporating
them in a theological framework devised by a written tradition,” as Havelock says, brilliantly depicting the orality-literacy collaboration in the process of scriptural formulation (Muse 47).

The arrival of movable typography accelerates the diminution of residual orality. McLuhan has noted, “if a new technology extends one or more of our senses outside us into the social world, then new ratios among all of our senses will occur in that particular culture” (The Gutenberg 41). To illustrate this, the link between the visual sensorium and verbalization intensified with the inauguration of the printing press, which exerts the full force of the alphabet on the spatialization of sound, the transformation of the word, and the decline of an orally organized sensorium. The post-Gutenberg age has witnessed the nativity of the “exactly repeatable visual statement” (Ong, The Presence 53). This unchanged reproduction encourages self-learning through reading alphabetic-typographic products, whether accompanied by verbal expositions or not. Communication occurs less and less via oral-aural sensorium, but inevitably involves and gradually increases its association with the use of the visual-spatial faculty. Textualization has forced the word to be detached visually from the speaker; this distance, consequently, breeds a preference for literacy over orality, the fixation of language, and the rise of individualism (Havelock, Muse 113).

“Once a new technology comes into a social milieu it cannot cease to permeate that milieu until every institution is saturated,” so, undoubtedly, the expansion of the printing press bears a substantial influence on medieval preaching (McLuhan, Understanding 177). On the one hand, pedantic homiletic handbooks, popularized by movable type, kill off “flexible medieval Latin speech”; on the other hand, gifted men convert from preachers to publicists out of an ambition, via printed sermons, to talk to the whole world (Eisenstein 316–17). Meanwhile, local priests can discover beneficial sermons applicable to the recurrent life-situations of their
parishioners. This demand encourages the circulation of written, published, and printed sermons and intensifies the inclination toward literacy (Ong, *The Presence* 61).

**1.3 Electronic Culture**

The electronic stage revives verbal communication by the exercise of electronics. The transformation of the word in electronic culture is manifest in several features. First, electronic devices not only have seen the revitalization of sound but also have given a new quality, recuperability, to sound. Second, the succession and accumulation of communications media differentiates secondary orality in the global village from primary orality in the tribal village. The interactions between the human sensorium and reality through electronic devices have become more complicated, indirect, and bewildering than those through oral-aural communication. The electronically processed sound and image connect men to a quasi-actuality. Third, men in the oral-aural and in the electronic cultures experience the sense of simultaneity differently. The contemporary sense of simultaneity has been supercharged by a massive accumulation of written, printed, and electronic documentation and has been refashioned in a sequential way concealed by the electronic speedup of succession. Word, in the electronic culture, can break through the impermanence and inaccuracy of its orally transmitted circumstances; however, it loses its purest and holiest form as sound (Ong, *The Presence* 87–92). The electronic media do not and cannot return modern men to primary orality. The acoustic message has undergone the written, printed, and computerized influences, revealing “a forced marriage, or remarriage, between the resources of the written word and of the spoken, a marriage of a sort which has reinforced the latent energies of both parties” (Havelock, *Muse* 33).

Contemporary worship has assimilated the concurrence of oral performance and visual demonstration via electronic devices. An electronic visual display up front has gradually replaced the Bible and hymnbooks. Audial-visual presentation provides supplements to the
preaching, and supplants it at times. “In 2005,” as David Wells reports, “over 1,000 churches in the United States were using DVDs each week, flashing up a message originally delivered somewhere else, at another time, and before a different audience,” and he warns, “technology will soon make most pastors redundant” (The Courage 27–28). His critique does not suggest the suspension of electronic devices in the context of the sermon, but reflectively reminds us that the lively and mysterious presence of the divine mustered by the spoken word of man may undergo a potential loss in the unreflective mixing of man and machine.

The three successive stages characterized by the sequences of communications media represent transformations of the word that correlate to the alteration of the human sensorium. The entrance into the world of electronics, on the one hand, privileges contemporary men to be able to observe the transition of the word from evanescent sound to word as spatialized entity, such as written, printed, and digital character; on the other hand, this entrance deprives them of experiencing the mysterious presence of God through the power of the word as sound and event residing in time (Hartley 27–29). Transformations of the word have imposed several negative consequences upon Christianity, theology, and preaching. These negative consequences alarmingly express the need for a finer blend of orality and literacy in Christian preaching.

2. The Perils of Spatializing the Word

The introduction of new technology causally reconfigures the human sensorium and mentality and consequently breaks the originally harmonious interplay of human senses. McLuhan keenly contends that “any sense when stepped up to high intensity can act as an anesthetic for other senses” (The Gutenberg 24). The anesthetized acoustic sensorium, in view of visual dominance, has changed its mental association with the word as the human race has migrated from the oral-aural culture, to early script culture, to alphabetic-typographic culture, to the present trans-typographic, electronic culture. Transformations of the word, furthermore,
explicitly force the human relationship with God, mediated by that word, into a divergence.

Ong’s scholarship reveals at least five formidable adversaries to spiritual intimacy with God: the displacement of God’s image, the debasement of revelatory presence, the disengagement from religious community, the hindrance to oral fluidity, and the eclipse of truth-moment. The following discussion intends to raise awareness of the current dominance of sight over sound, of its potential threats to the sacred communication, and of the need to rediscover the nature of the spoken word in primary orality.

2.1 The Alteration of God’s Image

Pre-literate men learned the past, responded to the living moment, and related to their surroundings through verbal exchanges. They still used sight for daily activities, such as hunting, collecting, and painting. The substantial reliance on vocalization, however, ensured close association with their fellow community members. Sound bonded men together. The spatialization of sound has changed it, however. When the visual sensorium anesthetizes acoustic syntheses, human contact with the universe shifts from preoccupation with hearing to seeing. Before this, man, as a participator, experienced the world via sound; now he, performing his visual faculty, becomes an observer, a spectator, and a kind of stranger. The detachment of men from their surroundings inevitably leads to individualism as the socializing effects inherent in sound have diminished (Ong, *The Presence* 72). The individualistic orientation reduces the sensorium to the sense of sight and views the outer world as a silent universe.

Consequently, the imbalanced emphasis of sight over sound alters the human perception of God. The Scriptures repeatedly depict God as a communicator who talks regularly. He is a shepherd calling the sheep (John 10.27), a king pronouncing his judgment (Matt. 25.34–45), and a husband declaring forgiveness to his betraying wife (Hos. 2.16). God teaches, exhorts, and, most important of all, connects to His people in the presence of spoken words. The presence of
God does not correspond to something luminous that attracts the human gaze, but, instead, “spans the apparent distance from us in the activity of speaking” (S. Webb 47).

Eighteenth-century deists debased the idea that God speaks as the dominance of the visual sensorium came into existence. They no longer thought of God as an active communicator but as a silent architect (Ong, *The Presence* 73). Similarly, the watchmaker analogy made famous by William Paley, an English clergyman, in his *Natural Theology* published in 1802, intensified the impression that God is a cold, distant, intelligent existence. When the human sensorium has adjusted to the silent universe, man treats his surroundings, his fellow human beings, and the invisible God with indifference. In his misconception that God is silent, man grows deaf. Next, the presence of God fades as the word is spatialized.

### 2.2 Debasement of Revelatory Presence

God is invisible, incapable of being perceived by sight. The interactions between man and God in the Scriptures occur in the presence of spoken words, such as the divine revelation from above and the personal cry from within. Man can only see God through the Word made into flesh, and through Whom, when being spoken, God created the world. Specifically speaking, word as sound validates the scene where man witnesses the presence of God (Ong, *The Presence* 182–83). The emphasis on the spoken word does not devalue the divine revelation in scribal form that help men preserve and instruct others with the knowledge about God. Nevertheless, the physical acquisition of information does not equal a personal encounter with God’s revelatory presence, revelatory events that happened mostly in the scene of oral-auditory synthesis. The Reformer Martin Luther asserts that “what Christ has said about heaven and the life to come is grasped only by hearing . . . the ears alone are the organs of a Christian man” (S. Webb 143–44). In like manner, Ong’s auditory emphasis on Christian mission quotes the Apostle Paul that “faith comes through hearing” (*The Presence* 14).
Moreover, the revelatory presence appearing in the word as sound creates a dynamic condition. Word in its primary, purest state of existence signals a force, power, and energy. Ong’s famous and often-quoted example indicates that when a hunter “hears an elephant trumpeting or merely shuffling his feet, he had better watch out. Something is going on. Force is operating” (*The Presence* 112). S. Webb similarly contends that “when we hear thunder, we know to take cover. Sounds have a way of penetrating us, staying with us, and moving us to an action” (51). Before the word is spatialized, the poem, literature, and play closely associate with rhetoric, expressing their force to move the human conscience (Ong, “Voice” 261). Vision, on the contrary, cannot register this kind of dynamic force; thus it demeans the revelatory presence.

Next, word as sound actualizes the revelatory presence because it “is indicative of here-and-now activity . . . [it] establishes here-and-now personal presence” (Ong, *The Presence* 113). Unlike the fixation of the word in script and print, ready to be reread over and over again, sound is evanescent, featuring itself as a here-and-now existence. Humans can experience God’s presence through sound because it “conveys presence as nothing else does” (Ong, *The Presence* 114). The intimate quality of sound relates man to man through verbal exchanges (S. Webb 46). The spatialization of the word has forced the sensory medium of sound into subordination, transformed sacral man in oral-aural space into profane man in visual space, and therefore debased the event quality of revelatory presence (McLuhan, *The Gutenberg* 69–71). Men can only regain God’s presence “in a newly arranged constellation of sensory apprehensions,” namely, in a fine interplay of orality and literacy (Ong, *The Presence* 288).

### 2.3 Disengagement of Religious Community

Communication occurs when interiors encounter one another. None of the sensorial apparatuses can bring about such an eminent effect, binding one interior to another, as oral-aural faculties can do, because sound moves reciprocally from interior to interior, preserving true
encounters between man and man (Ong, *The Presence* 124–26). This does not mean that sound dominates “the synthesis of all data in the sensory mix,” instead, it highlights a distinctive sense of communal bonding: “Sound unites groups of living beings as nothing else can” (T. Farrell, “Overview” 32–33). Naming, in this sense, becomes critical in a primary oral society because “without a knowledge of names one has no knowledge at all” (Soukup, “Communicative” 57). In order to effectively name and remember, members of oral society tend to think pragmatically within specific situation, look at particulars, link themselves to specific roles in the society, and thus produce communal consciousness (Soukup, “Communicative” 58). Naming exerts the socializing power of communication to frame the community.

Private reading or writing deprives a community of this social aspect of communication because the informational exchange works in a merely unidirectional way. Spatializing the word exteriorizes rational thought, alienates the self from its fellows, and distances human beings from one another by interposing texts between them. The domination of visual synthesis produces totally reorganized societies characterized by individualization (Gronbeck 15). Literacy itself invokes the individualizing power of the alphabet, treats all real values as private, personal, and individual, and thus decollectivizes men from the social dimension of their contexts (McLuhan, *The Gutenberg* 157–58). The community takes shape with sound communication but fades away in the loss of sound.

Religious communities demand regular gatherings in the presence of spoken words. God’s people unite in one spirit, gain a shared awareness, and maintain spiritual fellowship through hearing the scriptural proclamation (Augustine, *OD Prologue* 6). Moreover, verbal reciprocity, such as the vocalization of prayers, comforts, and encouragements exchanged between man and man, can consolidate the encounter of interiors and strengthen the relationships of church members far beyond personal reading of the Scripture can do. However, with the
spatialization of the word and the decline in verbal exchange, what has arisen is the phenomenon of alienation.

2.4 Hindrance to Oral Fluidity

Before the spatialization of the word, first initiated by the alphabet, then intensified by print, its vocalization in its primitive, oral-aural habitat would flow without restriction. The interdependence between oral speech and interior thought paves the pathway through which humans verbally externalize their inwardness in a free, impromptu manner. Therefore, Ong contends that “when our thought is fully developed, it manifests itself as verbalized” (The Presence 145). Even the inscription of human utterance originally aimed at repeating the content vocally. The biblical term “miqra,” which best corresponds to “reading” in English, signifies to read aloud, in most scriptural instances. God summons Moses and the prophets to inscribe His words so that future generations can read aloud in public (Deut. 31.11; Jer. 36.2–3). Paul reminds the churches at Asia Minor to exchange and read his letters in the congregational meetings (Col. 4.16). Reading in biblical culture represents “a public, oral, and illocutionary speech-act” (Boyarin 15). Likewise, from antiquity to the later Middle Ages, even after the birth of movable type, reading in the secular world generally referred to reading aloud (McLuhan, The Gutenberg 82–84).

However, the spatializing power of chirographic-typographic culture forces literate men to “keep order in an artificial spatial world of speech, not only far removed from the real habitat of speech but at root not entirely compatible with it” (Ong, The Presence 138). Literary words must conform to certain kinds of linguistic rules with exactness, inflexibility, and inertness. If an oral performance stiffly adheres to the literary orders without favoring auditory habits, the oral fluidity freezes at once. Ong laments this literary hindrance to oral aliveness: “How strange is this typographical world of compression and visually inspected, locked-up chunks of metal and
wood when compared with the world of speech in its original, oral-aural habitat, where words ‘flow’ and indeed must flow without constraint” (*The Presence* 97).

### 2.5 Eclipse of Truth-Moment

Human thought, even in its unspoken and interior condition, is united with sound. Learning to think, to conceptualize, and to categorize cannot escape the medium of linguistic articulation (Ong, *Orality* 7). And when the relationship between thought and sound is considered with respect to time, the question of the truth-moment comes to the fore. Both sound and thought register in time. The Ongian moment of truth happens when the inner judgment or statement is vocalized externally, from the speaker to the hearers, in a certain span of time.

Discovering and holding on to truth requires testing through conceptualization and verbalization. Ong contends that “this is the point at which we form a judgment, at which we predicate something of something, join a subject and a predicate. We may know truth in various ways, but only in predication can truth and falsity be formally tested” (*The Presence* 151). Conceptualization effects the connection of subject and predicate in the interior consciousness. Truth must consist in the union of subject and predicate. On its own, the subject is nothing but a “thing,” whether abstract or concrete, and the question of truth or falsehood cannot apply to it. Only the juncture of subject and predicate forms a meaningful idea.

Furthermore, the conjoint subject and predicate demands verbalization for genuine knowledge to be fully acquired. “Only when I ‘say’ a truth to myself can I be sure that I really know it,” even if this speaking of a truth only resounds inwardly in my mind (Ong, *The Presence* 153). The inward repetition revives the judgment, inscribing it in the consciousness for instantaneous retrieval at any occasion. The possession of truth does not merely happen here and now, therefore, but continues through time. People can recall the necessary ideas whenever they need them because they have spoken those ideas to themselves.
The possession of truth turns into the moment of truth when it is vocalized and received between the speaker and the hearer. Ong explains the transformation in this way:

What we have called the taste of truth appears to have no real duration. I possess the truth, savor it, test it, know it as truth and not falsity, in the judgment “This is an overcoat,” not simply when the concepts represented by these words pass through my consciousness but more properly at the instant, the “moment of truth,” when I experience the juncture of subject and predicate, and the moment when . . . I actually taste its meaning, when the statement comes alive and flashes into consciousness so that I sense that it signifies, that it says something, so that I can “tell” it is true or false. This moment of truth is hard to pin down exactly. It is after I say “This” and probably before I quite finish “overcoat.” (The Presence 154)

For Ong, the moment of truth manifests as oral, vocal, instant, and improvisational between the speaker and audiences, because addressing to no one present is “an artificial, contrived, fictionalized arrangement” (Ong, Interfaces 279). It can only happen in time and can be experienced in the instant of verbalization. When truth registers in time vocally, people can sense its liveness, freshness, and vividness. “Our sense of presence,” Ong claims, “is grounded fundamentally in the presence of person to person, in the presence you have to me and I have to you” (Ong, Kleine, and Gale, “Elusive” 82). Preaching represents the instant moment when the pulpit and the pew together savor the truth before the presence of the Word. The nature of sound, spoken word, makes the truth-moment alive over and over again.

The imbalance of the dominance of sight over sound has eclipsed this truth-moment. The pervasion of visualization hinders our understanding of the nature of the spoken word. When literary men think of word, they perceive it in written form. Modern men have been deeply imprinted: seeing is believing. The auditory process functions less, therefore, to authenticate
truth as that authoritative position has been taken by the written word. The degeneration of the spoken word overlooks the nature of the Bible “with its massive oral underpinnings” (Ong, *The Presence* 21). The proclivity to visual witness, consequently, pushes actual preaching to the shadows and depreciates the preacher as one without authority (Craddock 9–10). The power of truth attaches more to the eye than to the ear, more to inert fixity than prompt moment.

3. The Interplay between Orality and Literacy

The urgency of the aforementioned fallacies reveals the spiritual bewilderment induced by the progression of communications media and the subsequent partiality to visuality in high-literate culture. The succession of three cultural stages has treated the word as merely its visual characters, detached the intimacy between man and God, created a new type of personality structure, changed the human perception of God, and subordinated affective reverence to cold incredulity out of observational, scientific inclination. The ancients call, sing, pray, and cry out to God from inside out, but modern men study, ponder, examine, and approach God as a remote being.

Ong’s findings neither demand that we expropriate literacy nor demand that we return to primary orality, however (T. Farrell, *Walter* 132–33). Instead, they appeal to the awareness of the current sensorial imbalance caused by the invention, advancement, and convenience of communications media and the rediscovery of oral-aural potential, a potential that enables the confluent presence of man and God through the significance of the spoken word. The revival of orality will release preachers from the constraints of a merely literary environment and assist them to proclaim the good news through a collaboration of orality and literacy.

Three factors plead for the cooperation of orality and literacy. First, the Scripture contains beautiful orality-literacy blends. The literary value of the Bible manifests “in terms of its continuity and interaction with the oral world” (Niditch 1). Highly literate men tend to neglect
the fact that the sacred texts were first spoken before being written down, and that people still kept transmitting them orally even after they were transcribed (Goody and Watt 40). Second, scriptural proclamation from the early church to the arrival of movable typography continuously reflected the interplay between literacy and orality. The elites of the Greco-Roman world, though they wrote habitually, still “retained a strong element of orality in their lives” (Harris 36). The geographic obstacles, linguistic barriers, and scarce manuscripts constrained the transmission of the Scripture to mostly oral-aural form (McClellan, Preaching 59–60). Not until the augmentation of typography could the rate of literacy increase to a sufficient degree and the ownership of personal copies of the Bible be sufficiently realized that silent reading could become formalized. Third and finally, modern people, though immersed in a high-literate spirit, still respond to oral patterns eagerly. Fine stories, beautiful aphorisms, and affective speeches still effectively produce pleasure, increase attention, and create sympathy for high-literate man.

3.1 Scriptural Evidences

Since Milman Parry’s initiation and Albert Lord’s continuation of the study of oral traditions, the biblical scholars drawing on their oral formulaic theory have attempted to discover the clues of oral traditions in the Old Testament. Their studies have identified the formulas and themes repeatedly appearing in the Hebrew poems and narratives. Susan Niditch, for instance, examines a variety of oral registers—repetition, formula, and epithet—suggesting that Hebrew literature can be described as “writing in the oral mode” (55). The oral and the literary overlap in the composition of biblical narratives. The coexistence of inconsistent records proves not only the written variants of the same story but also the oral elaboration of ancient storytellers in determining “whichever version was most appropriate to the audience, the mood, or the time available” (A. Campbell 82). The transmission of divine messages did not rely solely on the formation and circulation of scriptural scrolls. The interplay between orality and literacy
continues as “written texts circulated in spoken form by recitation long after they were committed to writing” (R. Miller 54). The scriptural evidence itself gives evidence of the blend of oral and written words. In Deuteronomy 6.4–9, Moses summons the Israelites to hear, to remember, to reiterate, and to write the Word of God (McClellan, *Preaching* 66). This aural-internal-oral-literary process determined the construction and continuation of their faith-community. The fixation of verbal disposition into visible artifact, Havelock claims, “is the necessary instrument for supporting the tradition of the society we live in, a literary society whose continuity and character is stated and restated in a thousand documented supporting materials” (*Muse* 70). God has granted humans the literary ability to preserve revelatory truths because written production obtains a higher accuracy than oral performance in the process of transmitting knowledge. In light of this oral-literary collaboration, the Holy Scripture serves “a repository of oral communication” (Shields 33).

The same phenomenon appears in the circumstances of first-century Christians as they shared the good news and produced the New Testament in the context where “writing and speech are culturally embedded phenomena” (Botha, “Mute” 45). The search for and discovery of oral tradition in the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and Paul have flourished in biblical scholarship. Based on the findings of Havelock and Ong, Joanna Dewey argues that Markan narrative conforms to the limitations of *doxa* and to the modes of oral composition; thus it was composed for listening, rather than reading, audiences (34–42). An examination of terminology also illustrates the partnership of oral and written communication in the formation of Christianity. The New Testament writers distinctively use various wordings—teaching, preaching, exhorting, or evangelizing—as oral communication of the sacred message for different manners, contents, and audiences (Dodd 7–8). In addition to the modes of oral communication, first-century Christians also shared the good news in written form. A variety of
literary compositions—*epistle, logioi, biblos, diegesin, and apokalupsis*—display the pith of Christian faith and sayings and miracles of Jesus in manifold and appropriate ways (Shields 30). Both oral and literary media collaborated in the spread of divine message in the Greco-Roman world. During the composition of Pauline letters, “[O]rality was part and parcel of the whole process.” Meanwhile, reading his letters aloud in the worship time “meant hearing both a message conveyed on behalf of the sender and a written document” (Botha, “Letter” 21, 24). These oral dimensions of written texts explain why the faith community should regard Scriptures not only as artifacts “to be calligraphed and illuminated, preserved and revered, paraded and displayed, but also as texts to be memorized, sung and chanted, read aloud, recited, retold, and woven into the texture of their language, thought, and being as auditory facts” (Graham 7).

The awareness of the fine blend of orality and literacy in the Scripture has waned in the modern mindset, though, having difficulty distinguishing between speech and writing when referring to language. Christians raised with a visual bias tend to forget that the human relationship to God began long before the invention of script. The spoken words of God create the substance and signify the reliance of that substance on Him. The verbal confrontation between God and the patriarchs portrays the divine-human relationship in scenes that we can hear. In the mouths of the prophets, “Thus says the Lord” refers to not lifeless scripts but lively sounds, active events, and personal encounters. In the New Testament, the Word that spoke and was spoken has been made flesh and dwelt among us, in Whose name men can cry out, through words, to the Father. The commission to spread the Good News, furthermore, connects the Word to the spoken word of man. Living after the invention of the alphabet, print, and electronic devices, our inability to conceive meaningfully of the oral-literal interplay in the Scripture “has interfered with our understanding of the nature of the Bible, with its massive oral underpinnings, and of the very nature of language itself” (Ong, *The Presence* 21).
3.2 Oral Performance in Residual Orality

The phenomenon of residual orality continued with the invention of typographical technology; however, before the dominance of print, it loomed large in even literate culture, which was still marked by the inclination to heed the “living voice” of orality because “the written medium [was] subsumed in the oral context” (Maxey 117–18). Oral performances still animate us even when the personal ownership of written materials becomes available. William A. Graham asserts that “despite the spread of book culture and the development of libraries and academics in Hellenistic and antique time . . . oral treatment and transmission of texts continued to be basic” (35). Meanwhile, ancient historians not only wrote but also read, or invited someone else to read, their historical works in public. As a result, from classical antiquity to the fourth century A.D. “public readings either preceded or accompanied the diffusion of individual historical works in manuscript copies” (Momigliano 195). Under the circumstances, Havelock contends, “later antiquity never wholly discarded oral habit . . . Even the solitary reader read aloud to himself, and writers still sought audiences” (The Literate 29)

Reading aloud to oneself has biblical and ancient precedents. The fact that Philip heard an Ethiopian eunuch reading the book of Isaiah in the chariot proves that the official did not read silently, even to himself (Acts 8.26–30). Moreover, in the Confessions, Augustine records his question about Ambrose’s silent reading even in the presence of others (6.3.3). This scenario “indicates how unusual silent reading must have been” in late antiquity (Confessions 385, see Chapter 3 note 1). Augustine’s intentional description implies that ordinary reading at that time “would have been audible to any others present” because “written characters became significant only as they were reanimated by the voice and reached the mind through the medium of sound” (Hendrickson 186, 188). “Books were meant for ears as much as or more than for eyes, and authors wrote them with that explicitly or implicitly in mind” (Graham 38).
Reading aloud in private or in public is only one aspect of oral performance. The use of Scripture in Judeo-Christian worship also shows the interplay of orality and literacy before the arrival of typographical technology. Bruce E. Shields indicates that “much of the Hebrew Bible was meant to be recited and thus was composed for the voice and the ear”; for example, “Psalm 119 is composed as an acrostic... an intricate piece of literature with built-in mnemonic devices to encourage its oral use in the life and worship of Israel” (21). Luke repeatedly describes the public readings of the Hebrew Scriptures by Jesus and Paul in the synagogues (Luke 4.16–21; Acts 13.15). Reading Pauline letters had become a custom in early Christian worship (Col. 4.16). The Jewish patterns of reading, interpreting, and exhorting were echoed in Christian ceremonial practice, as Justin Martyr reports, “[O]n the day called Sunday . . . the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read . . . Then when the reader has finished, the Ruler in a discourse instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things” (71). Furthermore, even the dogmatical controversies in the two early Christian creeds “arose within the context of composing credal statements in accord with the dictates of the primary oral mentality” (T. Farrell, “Early” 133).

William V. Harris accounts for the evolving interplay between orality and literacy in late antiquity from the perspective of changes in the written medium. The victory of the codex over the book-roll results from its economic advantage and efficient operation, and it thus reduced the barrier for ordinary Christian to read the holy writings (Harris 296). As Christianity was on the rise, the written words increasingly gained importance. The sacred texts themselves received more authority, while Christian authors published more new pious literature (Harris 300). The laity, however, felt no need for personal reading, apparently, due to their inability to read for themselves. The ecclesiastical leaders realized that “if Christian writings were to have much effect on the masses they would have to be transmitted orally” (305). In an age of a high rate of
illiteracy and of low proportion of copyists, the written records of God still needed to spread through sound. “The authority of the written text was conveyed by a living voice, which gave the text an effect far beyond what silent reading affords” (Schaeffer 295).

Literary composition and academic education throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance served its peculiar oral-aural dynamic in profound ways. The fervency of scholars’ theological disputations instilled the oral, polemical quality into scholasticism, which “directly related to the oral traditions of aphoristic learning” (McLuhan, The Gutenberg 102). The pedagogical technique of scholastic masters transferred knowledge to students in dialectical and argumentative fashion (S. Webb 126). The spirit of dialectical exchange molded Summa Theologica into “a kind of inside-out debate” in which Thomas Aquinas structures his thought “by giving, first, objections to his proposed solution, then the solution itself, and finally answers to the objections” (Ong, The Presence 59–60).

Although taking advantage of typography, the Reformers still relied on the vigor of the spoken word, such as urgent, personal, and transformative tones, in their published pamphlets and sermons (S. Webb 116–18). The printing press, in its inaugural stage, actually accords with the spoken word. The easy accessibility to scriptural manuscripts augmented by print elevated the awareness of the power of God’s Word over the practice of visual cults. As Ong contends: “The typographically conditioned Protestant assertion of the power of the word reinforces oral-aural attitudes in the Bible” (The Presence 282). Instead of abating the value of sound, the invention of typography actually “reinforced the Protestant insistence that truth comes in the forms of a voice.” With the assistance of the printing industry, the Reformers still deeply admitted that “the Word of God is the subject of a speech act that culminates in the act of hearing” (S. Webb 118).
“As the Gutenberg typography filled the world the human voice closed down. People began to read silently and passively as consumers” (McLuhan, The Gutenberg 250). Although Ong would suggest the total commitment of sound to space happened in the eighteenth century—as Descartes’s logic of personal inquiry and silent cerebration ousted dialectic, an art involving vocal exchange—the silence of the human voice was initiated and has intensified along with the development of written and print techniques (The Presence 63). Thus, the concurrent practice of orality and literary before the prevalence of print calls for our contemporary attention.

3.3 Proclivity to Oral Pattern

The classical oration aims to teach, please, and move. Man cannot feel the pleasure of it unless the understanding happens. And the decision to take action comes after the occurrence of this agreement and its related affection. Three teleological elements determine the process of preparing fine oratory and the narrative forms that appear most functionally helpful in primary oral cultures. Pre-literate peoples lack the assistance of a written medium to promote abstract thinking. They practice a different kind of logic than that of modern sense. They normally perceive knowledge and discourse by means of everyday experiences embedded in the flow of time. A story line, thus, provides a route through which they can sense, imagine, and even visualize a series of ideas, even the abstract ones, during the audial experience. In short, orations imitating narrative plots best reflect oral patterns in primitive societies. “In a sense,” Ong critically indicates, “narrative is paramount among all verbal art forms because of the way it underlies so many other art forms, often even the most abstract” (Orality 137)

After the orality-literacy shift, technological and literate people do not totally lose their auditory sensorium and emotional connection to well-done stories. On the contrary, electronically immersed people crave stories. The overwhelming majority of television, movies, talk shows, and YouTubers all sell stories, indicating the arrival of “a story-saturated society” (J.
Edwards 14). Moreover, what actually happens in almost every Sunday morning’s message is that the people sit up and reattend to the pulpit when a story begins. Human ears cling to the ideological and aesthetic elements of stories. In this sense, biblical narratives provide satisfaction for the human need to perceive and be moved by God’s purpose in history, which explains their dominant role in the Scriptures and their evocative inspiration to the congregation. Stories intrinsically touch human pathos (Kuhn 26–27).

Preaching in the oral pattern akin to the story line does not mean filling the sermon with a series of anecdotes, tales, or illustrations; instead, it refers to designing the speech in a way that creates movements, plots, tensions, ambiguities, and resolutions in the hearers’ consciousness like fiction or movies do. As the movements or plots of the sermon unfold, the auditory event resembles tourists partaking in “a traveling action” (Buttrick, Homiletic 321), or viewers engaging with episodic television (Lowry 23), which creates an immediate impression. A sermon, just like a story, is an “event-in-time” (Lowry 26), inviting the congregation, along with the preacher, to “re-create imaginatively the movement” and to arrive at the communal conclusion (Craddock 57).

The electronic culture has revitalized the oral-aural sensorium and provided a new context for the interplay between orality and literacy. This secondary orality obtains features that are distinct from the primary one yet still retains the similar proclivity toward oral patterns. The scriptural, historical, and contemporary examples demand that preachers develop a kind of oral homiletic that adorns the sermon with the psychodynamics of orality in order to speak to the listeners’ hearts.

4. Features of Oral Homiletic

One of the homiletical debates today concerns the employment of a manuscript on the stage. The strength of delivery without visual aids appears in ancient orators, contemporary
witnesses, experienced preachers, and psychological studies (Koller 35–40). Anxiety about forgetfulness, however, is not automatically mitigated in the presence of these advantages. Hence arises a crucial question: how do pre-literate people present and preserve their cultural heritages without the outer storages of script and print? The answer, simply speaking, lies in the patterns of oral memory. Before the arrival of written technology, the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation could only succeed through verbal recitation. Without repeated oral performances of epics, the ancient Greek knowledge would have disappeared. Therefore, a well-functioning design for speech aims not only to fit the auditory apparatus but also to aid memory. Ong explicates the operation of oral memory before the invention of alphabet:

How could you ever call back to mind what you had so laboriously worked out? The only answer is: Think memorable thoughts. In a primary oral culture, to solve effectively the problem of retaining and retrieving carefully articulated thought, you have to do your thinking in mnemonic patterns, shaped for ready oral recurrence. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero’s ‘helper’, and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form. (Orality 34)

These patterns of oral memory may seem strange to literate people, who share and store knowledge in a different fashion in virtue of their altered consciousness, especially after the ascendance of typographic implements and electronic devices. Inevitably, the literate paradigm registers in modern minds as “the concept of a text as controlling the narrative and thereby [it] interferes with the oral composing processes” (Ong, Orality 59). Besides, orally based thought
has its peculiar force beyond the inert letters. In fact, certain oral performances may lose their power and pertinency if expressed in written form (Ong, The Presence 21). Contemporary consciousness accustomed to literate culture in some ways becomes a hindrance to the appreciation of the oral patterns of primitive cultures.

Ong’s insightful observation, however, can remedy this impediment to oral performance for contemporary preachers through rediscovering the psychodynamics of orality. The ancients utilized the characteristics of primary orality for keeping, retrieving, and transmitting knowledge in the absence of written records. The incorporation of verbal memory skills, in our current day, would return the crucial fuel to effective preaching. To proclaim the gospel with verbal distinction, preachers need to design the sermon in a memorable way. This requirement of mnemonically-organized discourse makes more sense when one considers the Ciceronian canons. Due to the scarceness of recordable media in Cicero’s day, four of the rhetorical acts— invention, arrangement, style, and delivery—had to proceed within the tunnel of memory (Shepherd 30).

The ancients operate the function of memory in a way that goes beyond the habit and imagination of literary minds. Their apparatus of oral memory tends to promote the accessibility and intelligibility of verbalization, and thus benefits the storage and transmission of civilization. The conditions of a memorable message, for both preachers and audiences, are engagement and familiarity (Wilder Smith 87). Engagement creates attention and impression, while familiarity facilitates reminiscence and association. Several features, in light of the ancient psychodynamics of orality, would reflect the qualifications of engagement and familiarity, and would characterize an oral homiletic that can help preachers to speak with spontaneity.
4.1 Thematic Movement

Communication, if it is intended to succeed, must engage with understanding. A sentence suggests its meaning in accordance with syntactic rules. The import of bunches of sentences emerges with certain kinds of inherent logic. In like manner, a sermon must be fashioned out of a series of conceptual ideas chained by logical movement. Each single subject matter develops into a “rhetorical move,” as Buttrick terms it (Homiletic 24). Preachers, then, logically weave these moves into an intelligible sequence. The arrangement of structural design, as a road map, leads the congregational consciousness to move from one thought to another (McClellan, Preaching 132–33). The thematic movement provides the indispensable element for an effectively oral homiletic. A sermon must first contain a unity of theme, or message, or mood, and then “start somewhere and go somewhere” (Fant 135–36). The sequence of thought-blocks indeed characterizes the power of memory in the primitive culture.

The ancients needed to internalize the story that they had heard before they could repeat it. They assimilated the materials, visualized them, and arranged these internally pictured concepts in the sequence of places. During the reiteration, their minds recalled the ideas, one after another, as they mentally patrolled those places in order. This pairing of image and place served the ancients in memorizing and delivering their speeches as Cicero and Quintilian had taught. The same set of sequential places can even be used repeatedly for remembering different materials (Yates 7). In view of circumstance of widespread illiteracy, the oral memory does not function in a verbatim way but in thematic movements constructed by formulaic phrases to keep hold of multiple ideas. The same theme would recur, but the wordings would differ in various renditions, depending on occasional factors (Ong, Orality 59–60).

Living in the still predominantly oral culture, Augustine’s extemporaneous preaching reflects the pattern of oral memory. “Augustine himself tells us that he usually thought over his
subject beforehand, and then adapted his delivery of the sermon to the reaction produced on the congregation by his words” (Deferrari 218). A nineteenth-century preacher also recommends preachers “to attempt no memorizing of sentences or words whatever. Let the mind be entirely concentrated on the ideas to be developed, and the end to be accomplished by the sermon” because “ideas that have been properly meditated can be expressed, with at least as much facility before the audience, as they previously were in the study” (Wilder Smith 99). Preachers who attend to the thematic movement dedicate their memory to “a progression of thought rather than words” and free their verbalization from the constraints of a particular phraseology (Koller 86). Their sermon would naturally generate “freedom of creation and spontaneity of response” in the preaching event (Fant 124). The sermonic preparation should only influence, but not determine, the thought and wording of the preaching event (H. Robinson, Biblical 137).

Moreover, an oral homiletic, reflecting the psychodynamics of ancient orality, would stress the selectiveness of topics. The characteristic of homeostatic in oral culture stands for a selective view of knowledge with respect to its immediate relevance to current exigencies. The value system of primitive societies highly stresses the present. The ancients would evaluate the practicality of each item of information by the degree of its contemporary relevance rather than historical accuracy (Ong, Orality 46–47). The composition of the Scriptures exemplifies this selectiveness of oral culture. The writer of 1 and 2 Kings repeatedly closes the narration of each king with the formulaic saying that the rest of the acts of so-and-so are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel or Judah. The gist of the sovereign God in human history, as a result, is manifested in that the biblical author has filtered the source materials with a particular preference. The Apostle John, who had witnessed many of Jesus’ miraculous acts, intended to prove one single point, through deliberate selection: that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God (John 20.31).
On the other hand, the stress on contemporary relevance that comes through this homeostatic tendency does not marginalize the “already-held and shared beliefs” of the Christian tradition (McClellan, *Preaching* 93). Preaching arises from the interplay between the Scriptures and the faith-community. Presuppositions of theological and denominational traditions not only predispose preachers’ hermeneutical task but also evoke the communal and conventional heritages from which they derive “familiar and memorable springboards” to sermonic preparation (Shepherd 45–46). An oral homiletic allows improvisation on these themes without disregarding orthodox values and traditions. As a result, Christian preachers must repeatedly proclaim the old rugged cross that undergirds the revelatory faith. This focus of the Apostle Paul set the tone for not only him, the paragon of Christian evangelists (1 Cor. 2.2) but also all such through the ages. Being faithful to the salvific message, however, does not mean speaking as if ignorant of different audiences with their unique contexts, conditions, and needs. An oral homiletic demands application for and response from the congregation. Preachers, at unique *kairos*, deliver the same message in a unique way to a unique circumstance. As Ong testifies, the novelties of religious practices in oral culture “are presented as fitting the traditions of the ancestors” (*Orality* 42). The addition, subtraction, adjustment, or adaptation will not change the essence of the Christian gospel but rather provide an advantage for the moment of truth.

Therefore, a sound message comes from careful discernment in a preachers’ choice of sermonic ideas. Not every concept discovered through exegesis of a text must be included in one preaching event. Preaching has a unique purpose to a unique congregation in a unique context. Therefore, preachers should try to know their audiences, fathom their potential needs, and make the message as relevant to them as possible (Osborne 410). A voluminous medley of poorly considered ideas can never create connection and consonance between the pulpit and the pew.
The Scripture often frames theological themes in personal or collective struggles, sufferings, and conflicts. This verbal combat appears often in biblical scenes. Overtaken on the way of his flight, Jacob angrily berated Laban for his iniquitous behaviors (Gen. 31.36–42). Catching the outrageous idolatry before the golden calf, Moses harshly reproaches Aaron for misguiding the assembly into evil and declares a severe punishment (Exod. 32.21, 27). Both the oral contests between Jephthah and the Ammonite king (Judg. 11.12–33) and between David and Goliath (1 Sam. 17.43–47) even lead to dreadfully physical violence, which represent the continuous struggles between the Israelites and the surrounding tribes. These agonistically verbal exchanges represent “the highly polarized, agonistic, oral world of good and evil, virtue and vice, and villains and heroes,” Ong indicates (Orality 45).

The agonistic tone also correlates with the affective, emotional aspect of orality. The outbursts of anger, fear, exultation, or hatred in public speech is less directly felt in the literary expression. Preachers, while crafting the sermon, should stand with their congregation, keep the audience in mind, and engage their potential struggles and sufferings in daily life. The announcement of the gospel is like “a report from the front lines of the battle, a combination of pep rally and challenge” (McClellan, Preaching 94). An oral homiletic can address the human predicament with agonistic force, the pulpit joining forces orally with the pew.

4.2 Narrative Structure

The oral homiletic welcomes the forms of fiction, story, fable, anecdote, plot, or tale—the narrative form. From the perspective of literary composition, a considerable amount of biblical literature is composed in narrative prose. The design of biblical narrative reflects “a logical outgrowth of the interaction between the artistic freedom of the biblical writers and their theological world view” (Long, Preaching 67). The enchantment of fable instills instruction in human minds in an unobtrusive yet potent way. “Story brings practice to principles, action to
experiences. Stories beckon the senses. Commands and principles merely state the facts. But showing the application in story shows application in life” (Willhite 98). Psychologically, the narrative format invites a higher level of attention “because narrative is for most people the most pleasurable form that language, spoken or written, takes” (Havelock, *Muse* 75). An observation of the common reaction from the pew on the average Sunday demonstrates the human craving for stories that “appeal to the senses and involve the audience” (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 192). The inclination toward storytelling could make the advocate of narrative preaching ask rhetorically, “Why not conceive *every* sermon as narrative?” (Lowry 13). Preaching solely narrative form, however, causes the two major pitfalls as discussed in Chapter One. Nonetheless, an oral homiletic demands the unfolding of sermonic ideas in the way plots of a story are laid out, a sense of plot that holds the preacher’s memory and the audience’s attention.

Several features of oral patterns would assist preachers to craft their sermons narratively. First and foremost, an oral homiletic situates speculative concepts in the human lifeworld. Conceptualization is itself an abstract exercise difficult for people who do not have analytical literacy. The ancients needed to verbalize knowledge with reference to human actions or personal relations, “assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings” (Ong, *Orality* 42). Abstract instruction clothed with lively examples would bring pleasure and enhance memorization, as well as display warning and institute regulation through the recounting of negative instances (Havelock, *Muse* 77). An oral homiletic embedded in concrete things and real people increases the degrees of recognition and identification possible, creating points of contact with the congregation. A sermon that does not regard the people’s need for recognition and identification raises “mere abstract presentations of timeless truths, accurate enough but not life-changing” (Shepherd 100).
The reference to the human world naturally induces the second quality of preaching narratively: the empathetic effects among the narrator, the narration, and the hearer. Since “the root of communication is commune,” Christian preaching must occur in a communal setting, “communicating with the souls” (Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety* 19–20). Karl Allen Kuhn’s brilliant analysis demonstrates the admirable ways biblical writers invite men and women into their narrations, creating a context through story that hearers can apply together and create communal identification. For instance, preachers can evoke the imagination and pathos from the pew through deciphering the plots, the characters, the dilemma, and its resolution. As emotional connections or aversions arise, listeners may empathetically identify themselves with, or show disdain for, the biblical figures, and thus they are drawn into the stories (Kuhn 32–55). In light of this, illustrations from the shared experience of preachers and audiences would create greater audience connections (Willhite 118). A successful transmission of knowledge, via verbal exchanges, requires the participation of mind, soul, and body, and it, meanwhile, incurs an empathetic association among the preacher, the message, and the congregation (Ong, *Orality* 45–46). Preaching fastens the faith community together.

Next, preaching with the story form in mind will help hearers perceive the biblical truth by situational thinking. The oral-aural arena, without the aid of the visual medium to recall, recheck, and reform the concepts, usually tends to inhibit the pull toward pure abstraction. As a result, a better way to conceptualization in the oral setting verbalizes ideas in “situational, operational frames of reference” connected to the real human lifeworld (Ong, *Orality* 49). The less abstraction preachers talk, the more comprehension audiences acquire. This does not suggest that intelligent abstraction is always futile in the preaching event, but it does recommend the alternative of identifying abstract concepts by means of concrete objects and practical situations in their contexts, without relying on abstract written texts. In fact, situational thinking still
assigns a way of logical thinking to the oral-aural apparatus, while appearing dissimilar to “purely logical forms” (Havelock, *Muse* 39). The religious education for childhood would clothe biblical and theological truths in various stories, fables, and tales. The metaphorical device exerts its power through narrativizing all subject matters in terms of the lifeworld of “agents who do things, whether actual persons or other forces which are personified” (Havelock, *Muse* 76). In like manner, Jesus often taught the kingdom of heaven in parables portraying his audience’s daily livelihood, such as sowing, fishing, and trading. And the book of Ruth best demonstrates the theological concept *ḥesed* surrounded by the actions, conversations, and interplay among the three protagonists. People, even whose thought processes still operate in highly abstract and analytical ways, still show strong interest in drama and fiction conveying universal applications. Furthermore, preaching with situational conditions and concrete actions benefits the oral memory. Preachers should prioritize the sermonic materials that are easily memorable and worth remembering because examples and illustrations from real life seem to be readily accessible to human memorization (Shepherd 40–41).

**4.3 Intelligible Verbalization**

An oral homiletic maintains the equilibrium of content and form. H. Robinson aptly describes the danger of indiscretion: “To affirm that the individual words of Scripture must be God-breathed but then to ignore our own choice of language smacks of gross inconsistency” (*Biblical* 135). Preachers should speak with accuracy, lucidity, ornament, and appropriateness (Cicero, *De Oratore* 3.10.37). The consideration of the psychodynamics of orality will produce a preaching event that is both intelligible and stylistically apt.

In the first place, intelligible speech requires short sentences connected in the form of parataxis (Havelock, *Muse* 76). This additive structure simply joins continual sentences with multiple “ands” because normal verbal exchanges always happen in ongoing contexts where
conversers are no strangers to circumstantial sequence and causality. The characteristic of additive patterns becomes natural and habitual to the ears (Ong, *Orality* 37–38). This additive structure also applies to the conjunction of a series of episodes. “Of the thirteen pericope introductions in Mark 1–2, eleven begin with *kai*” (Dewey 37). Moreover, the elaborate grammar of written discourse would make the listeners wade through compound sentences or subordinate clauses before they could have access to the full meaning. Using short sentences and additive style enhances clarity and aids memory. As a result, preachers should break long, convoluted sentences into their component parts to facilitate the accessibility of content (Shepherd 104).

To increase the intelligibility of a speech, the preacher should adopt formulary expressions skillfully. The clusters of parallel or antithetical phrases may seem redundant in written discourse but actually vocalize “phonological patterns engrained in speech that the mind expects to hear” (McClellan, *Preaching* 91). The biblical literature and liturgical traditions have revealed “a persistent echo sounded in the recurring formulaic epithets attached to proper names” (Havelock, *Muse* 51). The theological, scriptural commonplaces, such as “prodigal son,” “eternal life,” and “Our Father which art in heaven,” readily resonate, create impressions, enable memorization, and therefore benefit perception. When preachers use formulaic epithets in a deliberate way, the hearers feel kinship with the language, conceiving their attached idea with no resistance.

The dexterity of formulary epithets should put two related factors into consideration: rhythmic pattern and vivid diction. Acoustic rhythm creates a balance of notions, opposites, and narrative episodes, since it represents “a component of the reflexes of the central nervous system, a biological force of prime importance to orality” (Havelock, *Muse* 72). These crystalized formulas usually obtain “acoustically identical sound patterns,” making them repeatable, memorable, and impressive for ceremonial verbalization (Havelock, *Muse* 71). The poetic
rhythm, furthermore, produces pleasure, one of the three rhetorical aims, in the hearing experience. Pleasure underpins memorization. The intensified affection welcomes the lesson behind the symmetrical instruction. “Truth often shines more brightly when clad in verse” (Koller 101). The acoustic proclivity expects that something new, such as metrical beat, thematic resemblance, or conceptual opposition, “must occur as a partial echo of something already said” (Havelock, *Muse* 73). Vividness appeals to human senses. Preachers stimulate the congregation to see, hear, taste, smell, and touch by means of vivid verbs and concrete nouns (Shepherd 107). H. Robinson recommends that preachers “let nouns and verbs carry [their] meaning . . . Strong nouns and verbs stand alone” (*Biblical* 144–45). Precise verbs and concrete nouns strike the mind and evoke the imagination. “A deer scampers” creates a living image far beyond what “a deer runs” can do. The warmth felt by “a parka” outdoes “an overcoat.” “A single, concrete image,” Willhite comments, “has the power to unify, clarify, and give precision to the sermon” (Willhite 46).

Finally, an oral homiletic demands dexterous repetition to augment intelligibility. Repetition has two major purposes: to make the idea clear and to reinforce the idea. Spoken words fade way as soon as they resound in the air. Listeners, unlike readers, cannot go back to recheck a missed or confused concept; thus repetition gives them a second, or third, chance to get it. An intelligible speech expects preachers to “say the same thing, or equivalently the same thing, two or three times” (Ong, *Orality* 40). The equivalent thing, moreover, can function as a restatement used to strengthen the already conveyed idea in different words. Restatement, as an alternative to repetition, seeks to imprint the concept on the human consciousness. This repetitive feature is normally used to harmonize the pace of preachers andhearers and to ensure the apprehensibility of the idea. The homiletic aims encourage preachers to repeat or reinforce as needed until arriving at a sense of shared understanding (McClellan, *Preaching* 92).
One particular use of repetition crucial to oral homiletics is the transition. Having no outline in view, audiences can only hear the content; thus the transitional statements undertake the task to “orient listeners to the whole of the message, thus unifying the parts into the whole” (Willhite 77). Effective transitions review what has been said, relate it to the main idea, identify what will be articulated, and sustain the interest of the hearers (H. Robinson, *Biblical* 94). Repetition or restatement play a critical role in helping the listeners “make mental adjustment to the new thought” (Shepherd 102).
Chapter 6

Proposing an Oral Homiletic Praxis

Modern preachers, by means of technological aids—viz. alphabet, typography, and electronics—overlook the role that the art of memory plays in the preparation and delivery of Christian preaching. Visual aids such as manuscripts and projected images may serve in some way, but unfortunately hinder the meeting of human and human between the pew and the pulpit. Since the moment of truth denotes the confluence of the Word of God with the whole beings of both the preacher and the congregation through human verbalization, the once-spoken truth fixed in print must be first internalized by preachers, then applied to their characters, and finally, imparted through their Holy Spirit-infused words to the people of the congregation (H. Robinson, *Biblical 5*). Truth through preachers’ personalities—not merely through their intelligence and vocalizations but also their character, affection, and moral being—defines sound preaching (Brooks 8). The key to real preaching begins with eating, absorbing, and internalizing the revealed truth, converting it into one’s own, and then proclaiming it with sincerity.

This project aims to propose a working model of an oral homiletic that proceeds in the fashion of comprehension-internalization-proclamation. This procedure of homiletical praxis can help preachers react to the two challenges raised by the New Homiletic and the media environment by means of the integration of an Augustinian hermeneutic and homiletic, Ciceronian canons, and an Ongian perspective on orality and literacy. The oral homiletic fulfills Augustine’s two-sided scheme of treating the Holy Scriptures, performs Cicero’s five rhetorical arts, and presents the message in a memorable, extemporaneous, spontaneous, and eventful way like the speakers of primary oral cultures do. Their delivery, as Ong suggests, carries force from the heart, breaks through the barrier of literacy, and connects the listeners together in an
empathetic way. Throughout the whole process of sermonic preparation and publicization, the
interplay between the skills of biblical interpretation and the practice of primary orality leads us
to the picture of a literate, textual message first taken in and then spoken out orally by the
preacher.

1. The Praxis of Internalization

   The practicability of memory diminishes as the dominance of technology expands.
People rely more on the external equipment than on their internal ability (Ong, Orality 78). The
art of memory, however, was revered as the most ingenious faculty and the “mark of superior
moral character as well as intellect” during ancient and medieval eras (Carruthers 1). Preachers
should never underestimate how memory can determine the vigorousness of extemporaneous
speaking. Memory works in tandem with the rest of Cicero’s rhetorical arts as the critical nexus
on which the full process of sermonic preparation and delivery hinges. The intensity of scriptural
perception, the lucidity of sermonic composition, and the vitality of oral communication cannot
come to full realization unless the four canons are “co-ordinated by the animating principle of
memory” (Quintilian, The Institutio 11.2.1). “Without memory,” Shepherd indicates, “sermon
study is merely academic, sermon composition an essay exercise, and delivery a needlessly
painful experience”; however, with memory, the rest of the canons can flow together as one (30).
In short, memory undergirds the whole process of comprehension-internalization-proclamation,
driving preachers’ hermeneutical inspiration to homiletical completion.

   Preaching with spontaneity deals with thematic premeditation rather than rote
memorization. Thematic memory, according to Rhetorica ad Herennium, means to distribute
“memorial cues by means of a composite scene of mental images associated with various key-
words and subjects” (Carruthers 110). While it may be an advantage to learn by rote in
childhood, such an approach merely turns lively preaching into inert recitation and proves
inefficient for the pastoral ministry (Garvie 462). Remembering themes by heart, on the other hand, revitalizes a keen attentiveness to the oral performance at that very moment. Instead of being tied down to the constraint of the exact phrase, preachers should focus on the interaction between themselves, the congregation present before them, and their internalized sermon. Their intuition and creativity can then form the sermon to the specific occasion and the specific audience (Ong, *Orality* 142–43).

Cicero connects two tightly related elements of effective memory: allotting mental images into orderly localities (*De Oratore* 2.86.354). Orators should fashion abstract concepts into vivid images, then arrange them into a lucid chain of places, whether real or imaginary. Based on this rule, Quintilian advocates that we internalize the ideas through interior premeditation because that approach not only secures the proper order of subjects and words but also fixes people’s thoughts in their minds more than writing does. Effective internalization cannot attain the entirety of the speech at once, but it can begin with mentally rehearsing a few details, at first, before gradually advancing toward a complete and accurate reproduction (*The Institutio* 10.6.2-3). Here, Quintilian points out the most powerful aid to effective internalization. When studying a text or speech of a certain length, one should learn it piecemeal by division and composition. When approaching a scriptural passage, division assists preachers in grasping the structure of the author’s thoughts and composition, which can then put the preachers’ ideas in a proper order. Thus, when delivering the sermon, correct division and composition guard preachers against error in the order of their speech (*The Institutio* 11.2.36–37). One modern study testifies to the partnership between division, organization, and memory: “The material is first organized into parts which, once they cohere, can be replaced by other symbols . . . and eventually the whole scope of the argument is translated into a few symbols which can all be grasped at one time” (G. Miller 45). In his dialogical form of rhetorical treatise, Consultus
Fortunatianus comments, “What assists the memory most? Division and composition: for order preserves memory powerfully” (Carruthers and Ziolkowski 296).

The purpose of internalization goes beyond merely remembering thoughts to assimilate them into one’s own so that one can verbalize them from inside out with confidence and fluency. An extemporaneous style of speaking demands that preachers consider ahead of time what they are going to say while saying something at the same time. Only by “the safe-keeping of memory” can the simultaneity of speaking and thinking succeed in presenting orderly thoughts and in providing proper wordings (Quintilian, *The Institutio* 11.2.2, 7–8). This faculty of internalization brings the art of memory to perfection through division, composition, and premeditation. It facilitates both discovery and delivery of the Scriptures by the concentration and meditation of mind. It deserves the keen aspiration of preachers. After all, memory improves by cultivating this mindful attentiveness since it is “the necessary attitude of meditation” (Carruthers 109). The preceding discussion has attempted to apply the concept of internalization throughout the process of preparation and delivery of Christian preaching, from the commencement of scriptural study to the sermon’s culmination in the extemporaneous pulpit.

2. Internalizing the Scripture

The full treatment of the Scriptures begins with the genuine perception of textual meaning and culminates in the effective moment of truth. Without sound comprehension, proclamation finds no basis and leads nowhere. The preacher, commissioned by God, is a living witness. He engages the people as a witness whose speech and action testify to His claim about human life from the biblical point of view (Ricoeur 131). Preachers thus sent by the congregation on their behalf to grasp the meaning of the Bible should approach the sacred texts with an attitude of faithful listening, expecting the encounter with the divine through the words, which in turn give preachers confidence, authority, and trustworthiness in the pulpit (Long, *The Witness*
The moment of truth occurs when the congregation ensures preachers’ authoritative stance, an authority engendered by the preachers’ submission to the Scriptures with which they have interacted creatively and imaginatively. The persuasive tone comes from keen internalization and assimilation of sacred texts, and the art of memory assures this deep impregnation with God’s Word by means of active meditation.

2.1 Two Phases of Reading

Modern biblical interpretation has developed scientific and critical methods to discover the scriptural meaning. Those exegetical and hermeneutical rules suggest irreplaceable values. Interpreters can shun the fallacy of eisegesis by considering the Scripture in its literary, historical, and theological contexts and by comparing personal research with wider scholarly discussion (Virkler and Ayayo 18–20). This so-called historical-grammatical exegesis respects biblical authority and scriptural integrity, yet interpreters tend to treat the Scripture objectively, for its own sake.

Instead of denying the contributions of and rejecting the adoptions of objective methods, an oral homiletic accompanies them with a subjective, active approach to internalize God’s Word. After all, preachers who speak extemporaneously do not verbalize the revealed truth as something outside themselves because God’s Word “must become internal so that it can become naturally external” (McClellan, Preaching 125). In numerous scriptural evidences, God expects His spokespeople to eat the scroll as the Word of God (Ezek. 2.8–3.3; Rev. 10.9–10). The biblical authors also describe the taking of God’s Word as edible food (Ps. 119.103; Jer. 15.16). The spoken words of God constitute the living essence of human beings (Matt. 4.4). God’s people must not only keep the divine messages on their lips, but also let them dwell in their hearts (Josh. 1.8; Col. 3.16). If an effective oral homiletic means “to rhapsodize on a topic, drawing from a copia informed by reading of Scripture,” then, Schaeffer suggests, “the Scripture
and its wisdom are obviously not outside the speaker but interiorized” (300). Only the internalization of God’s Word can succeed in the naturally extemporaneous recitation of biblical passages in the preaching event.

Medieval monastic reading can nurture the internalization of God’s Word by exercising muscular, visual, and aural memory concurrently. Unlike the scholastic lectio of the Scriptures, which achieves science and knowledge through questioning and disputation, the monastic lectio orients interpreters toward meditation, an addressing of the text that produces wisdom and appreciation (Leclercq 89). Both scholastic and monastic readings begin with grammar and philology, but the former arrives at objective intelligence whereas the latter spiritual prudence. The difference lies in the physical, visual, and audial functions that monastic reading enables, in addition to the intellectual analysis of normal study. The monk would murmur the words, hearing the texts at the same time that his eyes would be seeing them. The mental contemplation works as the monk digests, ruminates, and murmurs the texts “like a cow chewing her cud, or like a bee making honey from the nectar of flowers” (Carruthers 205). This subvocal action inscribes God’s Word in the soul and body by exerting a subconscious force on the human psyche, guiding the brain to gradually internalize the scripture. “To meditate is to attach oneself closely to the sentence being recited and weigh all its words in order to sound the depths of their full meaning. It means assimilating the content of a text by means of a kind of mastication which releases its full flavor” (Leclercq 90). Seeking for savor rather than mere understanding characterizes monastic reading, through which alone can preachers contemplate the truths, integrate the ideas, and penetrate their profundity.

Monastic meditation would connect the reader’s interior to the sacred text from a different orientation since it sometimes appears in the form of prayer. Augustine composed his teaching and preaching by means of the meditative prayer. Not only do his confessional prayers
contemplate abundant theological themes through this mastication but Augustine also advises preachers to pray for the divine endorsement of good speech during the oral composition (OCD 4.30.63). Schaeffer comments on Augustine’s preparation, saying that “praying starts the associative process that brings to mind scriptural passages related to the sermon topic . . . prayer may induce the sadness, joy, grief, or anger appropriate to the oratorical performance to be given” (303). The unification of reading, meditation, and prayer impacts human religious psychology enormously and contributes greatly to human memory. Only when preachers’ whole beings deeply engage with the divine words can they extemporaneously catalyze the “phenomenon of reminiscence whereby the vocal echoes so excite the memory that a mere allusion will spontaneously evoke whole quotations and, in turn, a scriptural phrase will suggest quite naturally allusions elsewhere in the sacred books” (Leclercq 91). Monastic meditation infuses the Scriptures into preachers’ intelligence, psyche, and affections, which induces a spontaneous, inspirational, and fluent flow of revealed truths.

Besides strengthening preachers’ remembrance of and their relationship to the sacred texts, meditative prayers also vitalize scriptural details through imagination. Without seeing paintings, pictures, or moving images as modern men do, the imaginative function of medieval people became alive, active, and vigorous, which permitted them to mentally visualize the objects, actions, and environments described by the texts. With the imagination shaped and the memory nurtured by the Bible, human verbalization can move fluently through biblical vocabulary with all its poetic and suggestive powers (Leclercq 93–94). Unlike the modern idiom “one picture is worth a thousand words,” preachers filled with a biblical imagination would speak the word that is worth a thousand pictures, as the title of Gregory Edward Reynolds’s homiletic treatise indicates. Slow rumination and reminiscence give the sacred texts colorfulness
and vividness in the mental imagination, which, in turn, makes preachers quote biblical languages with more profundity than mere precision.

A subjective, active reading interrelates the preacher and the passage in a transformative way so that an authentic preaching of that reading can communicate the inspired truth through the personality of the preachers (Brooks 5). Nonetheless, faithful preachers still approach the Bible by means of interpretive methods that allow them to grasp the objective, factual meaning as fully as they can. An oral homiletic expects to treat the Scriptures with justice, though there is no interpretation without presuppositions, and to let the ideas come directly from the texts instead of exerting their own ideas upon them. Respectfully listening to the author’s intent goes hand in hand with subjective reading here. The mutuality of subjective and objective reading helps preachers handle the textual meaning with creativity and authenticity.

Objective reading identifies scriptural meaning via multiple layers of context. Since divine inspiration communicates through human language, the grammar and syntax can be seen as the first and foremost tool to uncover the authentic intention of the Scripture. The meaning of each word, phrase, and sentence contributes to and emerges from the overall literary unit (Köstenberger and Patterson 575–76). Preachers base both subjective and objective readings upon linguistic rules in their initially literary investigation.

Further, the consideration of literary context cannot escape the sensibility imbued by diverse genres. The Bible contains laws, parables, proverbs, psalms, narratives, prophecies, epistles, and apocalyptic literature, and each literary form calls for different interpretive senses besides the general principles of biblical exegesis. In order to identify the fine nuances communicated by the various genres, preachers should learn the particular rule for that particular literary form (Long, Preaching 13).
A second layer of context preachers should keep in mind deals with the historical-cultural background. “The cultural aspects presupposed in the passage help interpreters get behind the words to the underlying message, understood by the original readers but hidden to the modern reader” (Osborne 166). Neglecting the contextual gap between the biblical and contemporary worlds can easily distort or dim God’s original intention to the first-hand reader/listener. Secondary resources such as archaeological, historical, cultural, and background literature can help preachers bridge this gap to a certain degree and guard them against misinterpreting and misapplying the scriptural meaning to modern lives. Moreover, the discovery of historical-cultural settings highlights the fact that the divine revelation happened in a real time and location to real people, a real event-in-time. “Without a historical and critical understanding of the Scripture, the sermon invariably degenerates into a mere subjective discourse on whatever the preacher himself particularly wants to say” (Fant 158). The relevancy between the ancient text and the contemporary reality comes not from personal conjecture but from the reading of scripture in light of its historical-cultural context.

Besides examining the scriptures in its literary and historical contexts, preachers should also conduct biblical exegesis at the macro level of theological context. No interpreter can approach the scriptures without presuppositions; however, not all presuppositions are necessarily problematic. The theological presuppositions in reading the Bible, for example, include the trustworthy self-attestation of the scriptures, biblical inerrancy in its originally inspired form, the incarnation of Christ via the virgin, as well as His death, resurrection, ascension, and Parousia (Köstenberger and Patterson 695). Instead of assuming the interpretive task in isolation from the orthodox tradition, preachers “connect the narrative or poetic or historical content of a text with the ways of thinking the Christian tradition has used to make sense of itself” (Nichols 126–27). The observation of theological presuppositions also implies that the interpretation and
application of each section of text must be situated within the context of gospel intent. “A
textually accurate discussion of biblical commands does not guarantee Christian orthodoxy”
unless listeners understand the full meaning through the whole picture of God’s salvific history
(Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 274). The progress of revelation has been indicated by the continuous
and related nature of doctrinal matters in scriptural history; thus, scholarship in biblical theology
also sheds light on the interpretive work of the Scripture.

Both subjective and objective readings deal with scriptural perception in a meaningful
way. They help preachers not only identify concrete meaning of biblical texts but also internalize
the passages in their minds and apply the truth to their lives. Preachers can handle both phases of
reading in a flexible sequence or intertwine them interchangeably.

Whether doing subjective or objective reading, the interplay between orality and literacy
plays an important role. Preachers rely on vocal or subvocal rumination to interiorize the
intention, affection, and composition of the sacred text, while relying on contextual studies to
achieve lucid perception. Meanwhile, literary records assume the task of storing exegetical
findings which will provide materials for oral composition of the sermon in the later stage or for
future use. The limitations of human memory and their ability to forget motivates humans to put
important concepts in literary forms. The written or typed insights of interpretative labor can
become fuel for the proclaimed truth.

### 2.2 Forming the Textual and Homiletical Idea

The familiarization of the scriptures and the analysis of its linguistic meaning must lead
to an exegetical destination. After the deliberatively subjective and objective reading, preachers,
at this point, should obtain a clear flow of the scriptural author’s thought in the chosen passage.
The preacher should confidently answer two interrelated structural questions: what is the biblical
author talking about? And what is he saying about what he is talking about? (Davis 24–25). The
combination of the two answers serves as the major theme of this passage in the subject-predicate form. The combination of subject and predicate forms the central idea of the text, which will evolve into the gist of the sermon. The preparation of the sermon involves the process of generalization and development. Preachers need to generalize, condense the expositional notes into a complete, subject-predicate-oriented idea. Preachers need to discern the trunk from the branches. Out of those exegetical notes, preachers are to discover the major subject and predicate that precisely addresses the theme of a certain text. Then, this idea drives the sermon forward. From the beginning to the end, the development of the whole sermon should embody and expound this idea to its full actualization. Once preachers decide the single, main idea, “[e]verything in the sermon adds up to this, centers in this thought. This is the idea, stripped of all particularity and reduced to a single generalization. The whole sermon as it stands is an embodiment, a development of this idea, plus some practical conclusions resulting from it” (Davis 32).

There may be one or more predicates in developing the sermon. No matter how numerous they may be, the sermon needs to achieve the effect of unity. Unity does not come simply from singleness but is extracted and abstracted out of plurality and diversity. Preachers ought to connect and relate all predicates to the single subject so as to create focus and unity because “an idea begins in the mind when things ordinarily separated come together to form a unity that either did not exist before or was not recognized previously” (H. Robinson, Biblical 20). “The desire for unity is a law of the listener’s mind” (Davis 36). If preachers do not provide a central idea, then listeners will construct theirs from whatever fragments they hear, an idea hardly identical to the preacher’s. When unity is achieved, listeners can feel that all of the ramifications become the organic development of a single idea; otherwise, they will “leave with a basketful of fragments but no adequate sense of the whole” (H. Robinson, Biblical 16). Preachers may
communicate a cluster of sub-ideas to explain, prove, or illustrate the major theme, yet fail to mold them into a coherent whole.

With the conclusion of this main idea in hand, preachers can begin to fashion the body of the sermon. The development of the sermon unfolds this central idea by means of enforcing, proving, explaining, or illuminating it in its deep significance. The route of a sermonic composition is thus determined by the “embodiment and extension” of this major theme “of which the first element is a clearly defined subject and the second element is one or more significant things said, predicates, structural assertions concerning the subject” (Davis 29).

To develop the exegetical idea, preachers can ask three functional or developmental questions: What does this mean? Is it true? What difference does this make? (H. Robinson, Biblical 50–66). Preachers address these questions not only to the major idea but also to the supporting ideas. By asking these questions, preachers aim to relate the sermonic ideas in several ways: the preacher “explains them, supports them, traces their significance, shares their values with his hearers” (Davis 29). Thus, the expansion of an idea deals with its meaning, veracity, and consequence. By pondering these questions, preachers will find the materials that work to communicate the textual message, discover the general direction the sermon will go, and identify the issues that may concern the congregation. Preachers are sent by the congregation to the text; thus their meditation on the potential discrepancies between the audiences and the sermon ideas can help them identify the rhetorical stasis concerning the subject matter at issue. Their knowledge of audience analysis and their rhetorical acumen assist them to locate the necessary stasis, to decide the suitable line of argument, and to select the specific supporting materials to explain the unclear or unknown idea, to prove its truthfulness, and to apply it with relevance.

Preachers cannot simply conduct technical exegesis during the act of invention. The finding of the pith of a passage cannot, alone, sustain a fruitful oral sermon unless the
internalization of the idea is achieved. Preachers should contemplate the passage and the
scriptural ideas with status questions. The ancient rhetors developed status theory to locate the
argument, and those issues can help us to dissect and contemplate the idea before hasting into
sermonic composition. McClellan points out that meditation on these questions can deeply
internalize the message in order to, later, naturally externalize them:

Asking questions creates tension, which nudges us forward on our quest for seeking to
better understand. The goal is to gain a devotional curiosity about the subject that is
connected to our own lives and the lives of others. Curiosity is a kind of appetite or desire
to learn, and such desires drive everything we do. So as we become curious and more
interested in the text, we start to see the central issue of the passage show up in life . . .
this kind of deep understanding will fuel a kind of grounded speaking that can sustain a
live connection between mind and mouth, demonstrate credible ethos, and adapt to the
moment. (*Preaching* 127)

When given a new story to sing, the ancient bards needed few days to think over the topic and its
scheme so as to assimilate it thoroughly before they could stand up to recite it. “You know what
you can recall,” Ong comments (*Orality* 33). In the same way, preachers need to digest the
passage and its related questions, letting the sermon come forth as the overflow of a saturated
life, which is the foundation of an oral homiletic. As McClellan says:

Scripture must rise off the silent page, into our hearts and minds and out of our mouths. It
must become internal so that it can become naturally external . . . when Scripture is
internalized (whether in exact wording or just in clear meaning), God can use that
resource in a sermon, perhaps even in ways we can’t and shouldn’t plan. (*Preaching* 125)

The hermeneutical task should, naturally, eventually culminate in pinpointing the purpose
or function of the sermon by framing a simple, memorable sentence, which is the homiletical
idea. Preaching goes beyond presenting biblical ideas; it must go on to the expectation of a congregational response. Whether teaching, pleasing, or persuading, every biblical truth must anticipate providing life-changing decisions on the part of the congregants. Sound truth joins human life. A well-composed homiletical idea “speaks beyond the ancient page and into the contemporary context, addressing the hearers with good news of God, news that calls for a change of mind, of heart, and of action—or a combination of these” (Long, The Witness 112).

Every sermon must have a subject “about something, some significant truth bearing upon religious life—a doctrine or ethical principle, some moral problem, personal or social, some human need such as the need to be saved, encouraged, or guided in religious living” (Broadus, On the Preparation 37). Locating the sermonic purpose connects abstract ideas with congregational needs here and now.

The design of the homiletical idea contributes to an effective oral sermon in several ways. First, a purposeful idea serves as a kind of magnet to keep preachers on the main track, giving a clear destination directing the paths the sermon should go (Broadus, On the Preparation 47). The target determines the supporting materials and the ways preachers compose them to uphold the main idea and to assure the application of truth to life. Besides highlighting the sermonic goal, a clear and crystallized idea next helps the preacher compose a coherent speech. In other words, this idea can ensure “the quality of unity: the sermon says one and only one thing” (Shepherd 91). Third, the design of the homiletical idea serves as the nexus of two treatments of the Scripture. Thus, in light of form-content synthesis, the purpose—whether increasing the audiences’ knowledge, giving them insight, redirecting their attitudes, or encouraging their actions—will not only govern the content but also decide the tone, plan, style, and delivery of the sermon. Fourth, a simple sentence aids the memories of both the preacher and the congregation. An idea consisting of concrete and vital language will speak for the ear and arouse immediate
responses (Davis 269). Fifth and finally, an orally proclaimed idea with sincere appeal and contemporary tone talks to listeners conjointly about the truth and about themselves. Preaching aims not to lecture to people about the Bible but rather to talk to people “about themselves from the Bible” (H. Robinson, Biblical 69).

3. Composing the Sermon

The exegetical and hermeneutical task has born its fruit in what to say. Preachers have gathered the main idea and its supporting ideas from the passage, have meditated on these ideas’ connections to broader theological contexts and to human life, and have designed a homiletical idea focusing on the hearers’ response. Thus, the next stage would be to determine how to say it. Two crucial acts should be considered as preachers compose the sermon: arrangement and style. The former attends to the structural form, while the latter the linguistic form. The structural form decides the ordering of ideas, whereas the linguistic form deals with the choices of wording and sentence. Both rhetorical acts consider the sermonic composition from two formal aspects: macrocosm and microcosm (Shepherd 90). Moreover, both of them have mutual impacts with memory and delivery.

On the one hand, the maturity and completeness of a sermon arrives at the point of delivery as sustained by the aid of memory. Thus, preachers should keep the how of the future proclamation in mind as they prepare the sermon. Their design of sermonic order and language should reflect their understanding and analysis of the audience; thus, arrangement and style are determined by memory and delivery. On the other hand, the composition aims to provide a memorable sermon favorable for intelligible delivery. A smooth idea structure and fine language choices become memorable aids in the preaching event; thus, arrangement and style benefit memory and delivery. Therefore, the sermonic composition demands the operation of arrangement and style on account of memory and delivery.
3.1 Clear Structure and Internalization

Homileticians have repeatedly proclaimed the crucial role a clear and compact structure can play in the spontaneity of oral preaching (Koller 41–43). One of the most critical advantages a well-designed structure can grant the preacher is credibility. Listeners’ perceptions count on hearing a clear order previewed and presented by the preacher. A disorganized sermon presents a preacher who appears “either intellectually incapable of ordering thought or cares too little about them to bother” (Chapell, Christ-Centered 134). When the preacher's ethos drops, the listeners’ interest for listening fades.

Good arrangement benefits not only preachers’ character but their composition and delivery. After distilling major and minor ideas from the passage, preachers attempt to put these ideas in an orderly fashion as a coherent whole. A desultory organization bespeaks their incomplete study and unsuccessful invention. Regardless of the actual quality of invention, the content appears incoherent and erratic because of its underdeveloped form. Moreover, the ability to preach in an extemporaneous manner depends on memorable organization. A well-organized sermon stimulates preachers’ minds to recall ideas according to their proper sequence. Consequently, a spontaneous proclamation can naturally and freely express preachers’ feelings in accordance with its conscious order. A well-considered structure serves as a favorable aid to invention, memory, and emotion (Broadus, On the Preparation 79).

The congregation needs good arrangement as well. Adequate structure makes the discourse intelligible. A proper order presents thoughts with clarity and satisfaction, keeps the congregational attention and interest, and carries listeners along with the sermon’s course. Furthermore, an orderly sermon convincingly presents motives and entreats feelings. Disorganization can never persuade the mind and excite the emotion. Finally, a discourse that conforms to a rational pattern induces remembrance. Congregations can not only engage the
ideas in the sanctuary but take them back to their daily life because these ideas are presented memorably. A well-arranged sermon favors the listeners with its intelligibility, pleasure, persuasiveness, and memorability (Broadus, *On the Preparation* 80–81).

Preachers can decide the sermonic structure in three ways. They can either follow the textual course, adopt a prefabricated format, or design their own. Each type has its own advantage and goal, and no one form can fit all circumstances. Preachers should make choices with flexibility according to the textual genre, sermonic purpose, and audience analysis.

Conforming the sermonic structure to the biblical form is the most natural approach. Also, preaching according to the scriptural form pays respects to the authoritative nature of the Bible. “The preachers’ task, clearly, is to orally animate a text that is not their own. There is only one authority. The oral sermon is more likely to follow the flow of thought actually in the passage and not to construct separate outlines,” McClellan insists, “The sermon’s structure has to respect the flow of thought in the source text instead of inventing an entirely new structure” (*Preaching* 113). Beside following the scripture’s authority, following the textual flow of thought has another advantage. “When we studied the biblical text, we took a special look at the structural form, and we summed up the formal attributes when we asked what the text does. It may well be that our sermon can do in the same way—the how of the text may tell us the how of the sermon” (Shepherd 95). In this way, the sermonic intention, purpose, and function fully accord with the scriptural ones.

Preachers can gain insights about existing forms from homiletical textbooks or other literatures about public speaking. For instance, H. Robinson, in his seminal monograph, delineates three major forms: deductive, semi-inductive, and inductive arrangements (*Biblical* 78–91). Besides these patterns, Davis suggests stringing together a series of ideas with either logical, chronological, or dramatic continuity (177–82). Chapell classifies the distinction among
topical, textual, and expository outlines, demonstrates several examples of the crafting of major points and subpoints, and evaluates the advantages and disadvantages between Traditional Expository and Mass Communication Models (Christ-Centered 129–72). Shepherd enumerates around forty kinds of sermon form (95–97). Over the last few decades, the New Homiletic movement has focused on the inquiry of form that attends to the dynamics of the human audial process. The advocates propose that the sermonic form should match “the process by which the listeners actually hear the gospel and achieve creative and faithful insights” (Long, The Witness 144). Some examples include Craddock’s inductive movement (51–158), Lowry’s five stages of the homiletical plot (27–87), Wilson’s four-pages movement (The Four Pages 33–232), and Buttrick’s phenomenological moves (Homiletic 23–82, 285–448). None of them can satisfy every kind of preaching event, yet they provide an abundance of exemplars to which preachers can refer.

On occasion, preachers decide to invent their own sermonic forms. The basic procedure begins with the destination. By choosing first the one that is to come last, preachers set the target the sermon will achieve. Normally, this would be the goal, purpose, and function—the homiletical idea of the sermon. Next, preachers may decide the starting point relevant to the congregational situation. The fixation of the beginning and ending reminds preachers of the limits of the entire movement, determines the sermon’s direction, and guides the congregation from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Then, preachers should consider the appropriate amount of intervening moves and arrange them in an orderly fashion. The arrangement resembles a movement in time: starting at a given moment, arriving at another given moment, and moving through the intermediate period, one moment after another (Davis 163, 172–73; Shepherd 97–98).
Treating the sermonic structure as continuous events in time best reflects the characteristic of oral pattern. Ong particularly identifies the process of human conceptualization, whether mental or verbal, with the story line:

In a sense narrative is paramount among all verbal art forms because of the way it underlies so many other art forms, often even the most abstract. Human knowledge comes out of time. Behind even the abstractions of science, there lies narrative of the observations on the basis of which the abstractions have been formulated . . . Behind proverbs and aphorisms and philosophical speculation and religious ritual lies the memory of human experience strung out in time and subject to narrative treatment. Lyric poetry implies a series of events in which the voice in the lyric is embedded or to which it is related. All of this is to say that knowledge and discourse come out of human experience and that the elemental way to process human experience verbally is to give an account of it more or less as it really comes into being and exists, embedded in the flow of time. Developing a story line is a way of dealing with this flow. (Orality 137)

Preachers design the sermon as a story to be told and orient the congregation along the journey from the beginning to the end. Every conceptual move in between should meet the focus and purpose of the sermon. Each move relates to the previous one and advances the movement of thought toward the destination. There may be more than one proper way to arrange the sequence of conceptual moves. However, a coherent and intelligible design will adhere to a logically conscious sequence tied to an audience analysis. Preachers should ask themselves whether this sequence of conceptual moves can talk to the listeners’ ears and touch their minds, hearts, and souls. Fine judgement grows out of experience and practice.

The last crucial yet often neglected factor in continuity is the transition. Listeners’ perception relies solely upon their ears; thus, the undesirable transition will result in an awkward
gap between two interrelated ideas. Well-crafted transitions are to orally spontaneous sermons “what joints are to the bones of the body” (Broadus, *On the Preparation* 120). Transitions serve as linguistic bridges by which preachers close the previous idea, indicate the upcoming section, keep the congregation’s attention, and, sometimes, guide the congregation to what posture they should take toward the sermon (Long, *The Witness* 214–17). Transitions can be as simple as a word—*next*—or a conjunctive phrase—*not only . . . but also*—or a rhetorical question, or even a brief paragraph connecting two adjacent ideas (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 262–63). Preachers should deliberately allot proper transitions to enhance the clarity and continuity of the sermon. In so doing, they can also better remember the sermon with the aid of these connected ideas.

3.2 Extemporaneous Speaking with Embellished Style

After structuring the conceptual moves into a logical and coherent order, preachers need to consider the linguistic aspect of form. An oral sermon pays attention not only to its intelligible organization but also to its language favorable for the ear. The communication of subject matter must go through linguistic elements, but the same idea will create distinctive outcomes under different verbal styles. The preacher’s oral competence in delivering an eloquent sermon can benefit from the dexterity of diction and metaphor.

Cicero has defined the first quality of eloquent style as correct diction, which means the choice of right words. The choice here does not mean to write down each word during the sermonic composition. Instead, preachers should practice fine writing and judge proper phraseology in other occasions. These normal routines would fuel their spontaneous and extemporaneous choice of right words during their preparation and even in the right moment of delivery.

One basic criterion to judge rightness, applicable in daily practice, deals with two kinds of distinctions: concrete-abstract and specific-general. For example, cap, beanie, beret, and
boater are specific words while hat is general, because the previous words pinpoint specific items in a class of objects, while the general title of those objects is “hat.” The distinction between abstract and concrete concerns the treatment of quality. The boater contains the qualities of a certain shape, a certain texture, and a certain material. And these qualities—round, stiff, straw material—must be embodied in a concrete object so as to be called a boater. But these qualities can be isolated from a concrete boater and referred to as a set of abstract concepts in themselves. Thus, words that specify ideas, qualities, and characteristics are usually abstract, words that denote classes of objects and actions are usually general, and those that name particular objects and actions are usually concrete and specific (Brooks and Warren 374–75).

Normally, the concrete and specific words can give the speech the richest and most colorful input, whereas the abstract and general ones appear neutral and colorless. The vividness, clarity, and interest of an oral expression increases as preachers use active verbs and specific nouns (H. Robinson, Biblical 144; Broadus, On the Preparation 214). Using concrete nouns and vivid verbs will show, but not simply tell. Let the words create the reality described. Nevertheless, preachers should not totally avoid abstract and general words. The appropriateness of a word depends on considering the particular effect preachers plan to secure. “Description and narration, for example, thrive on the concrete and the specific . . . Exposition and argument, on the other hand, by their very nature, call for a diction in which general and abstract words are important” (Brooks and Warren 377–78). Preachers cannot fully shun theological abstractions, but they need to give those doctrinal terms sound explanation and illustration in order to maintain the lucidity of the sermon.

Another feature to give force and freshness in verbal expression is metaphor. Good sermons must talk to the feelings and attitudes of the congregation, and metaphor tends to speak to these congregational needs. However, metaphor can accomplish more than embellishment. A
good figure of speech can serve as an illustration, a statement, or an exposition, adding clarity, liveliness, and persuasiveness to the expression of ideas. The metaphor can achieve these rhetorical qualities by transporting the hearers’ thoughts from the familiar to the unfamiliar. “Image and figures of speech give more life and force to speech because they join experience to fact” (H. Robinson, Biblical 42). Cicero emphasizes that “when something that can scarcely be conveyed by the proper term is expressed metaphorically, the meaning we desire to convey is made clear by the resemblance of the thing that we have expressed by the word that does not belong” (De Oratore 3.38.155). In fact, metaphor so permeates human life that it becomes “an indispensable instrument for interpreting experience . . . For by means of metaphor we grasp not only the object as an entity, but its ‘meaning,’ its value to us as well” (Brooks and Warren 419, 422).

Furthermore, figures of speech relate to the subject matter so closely that they may assist preachers in lending credibility to the arguments, exciting the emotions, and winning approval for a preacher’s character as a pleader (Corbett and Connors 377–78). These rhetorical impacts suggest that human orality privileges orally-delivered imagery over abstraction because it closely mirrors primary human experience and resides in the listener’s memory and imagination directly. By virtue of metaphor, preachers can communicate thoughts with concreteness and vividness, carry the truth alive into listeners’ hearts with affection and passion, and be deemed trustworthy by the congregation because of the sermon’s eloquence and interest.

Eloquent style, of course, involves more than choosing adequate words and vivid metaphors, more than can be covered in this project. An effective oral sermon, however, enjoys the benefit of these two fundamental qualities. Preachers can establish ample vocabulary and lively figurative expressions from expansive reading. The best kinds of literature present the first class of rhetorical style in various ways. Preachers can learn how to judge precise phraseology
and invent fresh metaphor by assimilating those outstanding manners. Besides, preachers can get
a basic idea of crafting ornate style from rhetorical textbooks. Cicero’s *De Oratore* Book III
systematically discusses the elements of stylistic expression. His central focus on the synthesis of
form and content is exemplified throughout the entire work in his display of oratorical rules.
Modern versions of ancient stylistic qualities appear in several rhetorical monographs. Edward P.
J. Corbett and Robert J. Connors, for example, include a complete and applicable list of
figurative usages that preachers may find helpful if they want to build understanding and skill in
such style (377–411).

Another resource to improve oral expression for the ear lies in great talks that have
already done so. Listening to excellent addresses of those public men and women who struck
multitudes of people in the past is a method of finding models for today. Still remembered and
circulated today are the noble scripts of expert playwrights, such as Shakespeare, whose words
were intended not to be read but rather heard in the theater. Next, constant practice, necessary for
every rhetorical act, also cultivates preachers’ taste for fine style. With the help of strong words
and sensuous metaphors, listeners can acquire lucid thought with genuine responses in the forms
of imagination and feeling (Davis 273).

Besides reading and listening, preachers can also cultivate their taste by means of
practicing writing. Cicero’s success in his oratorical career benefitted from his writing skills. He
recommends writing as a preparation to good orators and says, “The pen is the best and most
eminent author and teacher of eloquence” (*De Oratore* 1.33.150). Cicero does not suggest that
orators write out full manuscript for strict reading or verbatim reciting. He mainly encourages
them to regularly practice writing on any worthy subjects with care and diligence. The ardent
efforts will repay. Their verbal expressions will carry the force of their preparatory, deliberate
writing. Furthermore, their extemporaneous speech will maintain the written style “under the
impulse given by the similarity and energy of the written word” *(De Oratore* 1.33.153). Writing can help preachers internalize fine styles and discipline their minds. “Writing,” Garvie says, “gives time for subsidiary thinking around the primary thought, accuracy in expression, variety in language” (443). Therefore, the inseparable interrelation of reading, writing, and speaking will contribute to effective vocalization, “for our speech will never become forcible and energetic unless it acquires strength from great practice in writing; and the labor of writing, if left destitute of models from reading, passes away without effect” (Murphy, *Quintilian* 125).

4. Internalizing the Sermon

The emphasis on sermonic form, including arrangement and style, may raise the question concerning the compositional and presentational methods that relate to the next stage of oral homiletics. The disciplines of homiletics and public speaking have presented four different methods of proclamation: impromptu, manuscript, memorized, and extemporaneous. Scholars have endeavored to expound their definitions, occasions, benefits, and disadvantages (Garvie 462–65; McDill 132–48; Neff and Turcott 5–29; Wilder Smith 3–15; J. Webb 19–33). Admittedly, each method plays its role in certain situations. For example, one may be called upon to give an impromptu response in a church gathering; the need for a manuscript speech may arise when the setting requires limited time or precise wording; or the memorization of brief poems, hymns, or statistic data may be needed to make the speech credible. However, impromptu preaching tends to suffer from vagueness, the manuscript dullness, and the memorized stiffness.

In fact, experienced preachers, in ancient and modern times, have applauded and practiced the extemporaneous method of sacred communication. For instance, enthusiasm, sincerity, spontaneity, and vigor characterized the extemporaneous manner of Augustine’s preaching (Deferrari 193). The highly applauded preacher Chrysostom extemporaneously
proclaimed with simplicity and naturalness, interweaving into his sermon thoughts inspired by events at the moment of delivery, and thus his speech habitually “poured from his lips like a full overflowing stream” (Paniel 618, 625). Speaking with a slow, measured, and scholarly manner, John Calvin, who proved a “determined champion of extempore preaching,” convincingly asserted that “the power of God could pour itself forth in extempore speech” (Horne 181). Broadus, the first authoritative voice appealing to the connection between homiletics and rhetoric in the nineteenth century, praised extemporaneous preaching as a “popular method” welcomed by laymen, and he acknowledged its striking force: “Any man who possessed the fervid oratorical nature, even in a humble degree, will find that after careful preparation some of the best and most inspiring thoughts he ever has will come while he is speaking” (On the Preparation 271, 270). In like manner, Henry Ware, in his address to seminarians at Harvard University, commended the extemporaneous preachers for their “free, flowing, animated utterance, which seems to come from the impulse of the subject . . . in whom the countenance reflects the emotions of the soul, and the tone of voice is tuned to the feelings of the heart, rising and falling with the subject” (15). The distinctive advantage of extemporaneous preaching refers to the spontaneous delivery of the internalized ideas from the heart in the moment of truth, a delivery that can engage the listeners instantaneously and forcefully, while shunning the coldness of reading the manuscript, the artificiality of reciting the memorized, and the disorganization of speaking the impromptu.

Therefore, an oral homiletic has to do with the extemporaneous manner enabled by careful preparation and conscientious practice, and expecting the emergence of natural and spontaneous speech in the truth-moment. Early in ancient times, Cicero argued for the inherent continuity and inseparability of content and style, “for a full supply of facts begets a full supply of words, and if the subjects discussed are themselves of an elevated character this produces a
spontaneous brilliance in the language” (*De Oratore* 3.31.125). Similarly, Garvie says that “if a man is full of his subject, he will speak more readily and easily,” and with the help of an intellectual organism, “the ideas will follow one another, not by an effort of memory, but rather by the inevitable progress of the thought” (465–67). Broadus also describes the soundness of an oral homiletic in like manner: “[I]f a preacher has gathered material, has organized it into a sermon, has then thought through it, he will reproduce much of it verbatim. But he is not to do this consciously; he is not concentrating on words, but on the sharing of thoughts and ideas” (*On the Preparation* 273). The liveliness of an oral homiletic relies on the full knowledge of the truths. The familiarity of subjects and the readiness of vocabulary lead to the natural display of stylistic orality.

In light of this, an oral homiletic demands spontaneous expression free from the bondage of a written manuscript read or recited. The internalized ideas spread through the power of extempore language. One particular fear in the practice of an oral homiletic is the possible loss of words or phrases when preaching without manuscripts. However, effective preaching relies on an instant choice of wording, one that is more complex than the written language itself. No preacher “whose mind soever is fully possessed with a fervent desire to know good things, and with the dearest charity to infuse the knowledge of them into others” is at a loss of words; instead, “his words, like so many nimble and airy servitors, trip about him at command and in well ordered files, as he would wish, fall aptly into their own places,” says Milton (Ware 49). When the truth stirs preachers’ souls and excites their love for the sheep, God’s powerful word naturally flows from their personality to the multitude.

Preachers need not laboriously strive for eloquence. “Scripture teaches nothing but charity . . . and in this way shapes the minds of men,” Augustine continues. “[W]hat charity does to the charitable person is called ‘utility’; what it does to benefit one’s neighbor is called
'beneficence.' And here utility occurs first, for no one may benefit another with that which he does not have himself" (OCD 3.10.15–16). A preacher cannot say something profiting the listeners that does not profit himself or herself first. Eloquence begins with preachers’ ownership of and affection for the truth, and eloquence arrives at the application and distribution of it, naturally and effortlessly (McClellan, Preaching 15). The essential requisite to an effective oral homiletic is a devoted heart. “A strong religious sentiment, leading to a fervent zeal for the good of other men, is better than all rules of art; it will give him courage . . . and open his lips boldly . . . aiming at the heart, and reaching the heart . . . to accomplish the great purpose” (Ware 53). A good sermon comes from a good preacher.

Besides the clarity of ideas, the affection for truth, the passion for sheep, and the possession of sufficient vocabulary, a confident memory plays a critical role in conquering the anxiety about losing words or direction in a sermon. Actually, from the beginning of exegesis through the distillation of theme, and from the arrangement of ideas to the delivery of truths, memory matters (Shepherd 30). A relevant sermon contains memorable subjects, words, and schemes. On the other hand, the preparatory process discussed up to now contributes to effective memory. The linkage of study, structure, and style has a mutual effect with memory, contributing to a sound, effective delivery.

The invention of written letters, as Plato had foreseen, causes people to trust external aids rather than internal abilities, to reduce the demand for exercising their memories, and thus to drink themselves into oblivion (Plato, Phaedrus 275). The convenient duplication of media by technology further intensifies human forgetfulness. The unaided power of memory atrophies. The practice of an oral homiletic anticipates the recovery of this inherent ability as possessed by the primitives.
Preachers who seek to perfect their memory and to deliver eventfully must first cultivate the habit to concentrate at will on the ideas. Distraction has become a routine for preachers in modern times. Without particular attention to the subjects they attempt to remember, the exact recollection will fail. In the act of memory, preachers must keep themselves away from any possible intervention except the single sermon to be remembered. “Every great thinker in any line of thought has this mastery of concentration, by which alone he is able to employ all the powers within his brain for conquest over the subject to which he has set himself” (Dana 24). Concentration on the ideas develops familiarity. Preachers should dwell on each one of them to make them theirs. The habit of concentration assists preachers not only to possess ideas thoroughly but also to recall them afresh at the right moment in the pulpit.

Next, preachers need to visualize the ideas they intend to share. The story of Simonides of Ceos has proved the vital role played by mental images of the facts (Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.86.351–54). The formation of mental images helps preachers make concrete the abstractions. Since sight is the keenest sense, preachers must become good observers in order to enhance their ability to visualize. They observe nature, life, and human relation. They read unchanging literature and changeful humanity. They habitually associate the subjects distilled from the Scripture with the everyday experience happening around them. Keen observation produces clear mental images, and thus brings forth excellent memory. Thus, preachers attempt to transform an idea into a key word or phrase, a visual icon, a life experience, or an illustrative anecdote. The biblical narratives, dramatized scenes, personal testimonies, or stories from church history can visualize the truth with sentiment, imagination, and sympathy (Arthurs, *Preaching as Reminding* 93–102).

Visualization alone cannot achieve effective memory since isolated ideas hardly ever present themselves in human consciousness “unless [they] bring along with [them] a train of
associated idea[s]” (Dana 69). Oral memory proceeds through “both the individual pieces of evidence and the relationship they bear to each other” (Blankenship 153). The relationship among a group of ideas, meanwhile, needs visualization, too. The chain of ideas will get imprinted in the human mind as long as they are fixed in certain places, “inasmuch as a material object without a locality is inconceivable.” Thus, Cicero teaches, “one must employ a large number of localities which must be clear and defined and at moderate intervals apart, and images that are effective and sharply outlined and distinctive, with the capacity of encountering and speedily penetrating the mind” (Cicero, *De Oratore* 2.87.358). The vivid images located in separated yet connected places resemble a road map guiding a traveler to see each object one after another according to an already-grasped sequence (McClellan, *Preaching* 132–33). This relationship, or association, of ideas, as said earlier, appeals to a sound arrangement that preachers design either from the biblical, the prefabricated, or the self-invented form. Particularly, the inherent pertinence behind the narrative episodic structures reminds preacher where to go next.

Concentration stimulates intense engagement with ideas that become concrete lines of thought by visualization and association. These provide well-prepared contexts within which practice operates. One calls this act repetition (J. Webb 84), another rehearsal (Shepherd 124), and still another premeditation (McClellan, *Preaching* 136). No matter how it is named, the fundamental scheme of practice seeks to assimilate the content as one’s own in order for that content to flow naturally from one’s inner being. As meditation on scriptural texts and ideas, preachers at this stage chew and digest the homiletical ideas one by one, bit by bit, move by move, episode by episode, that they may possess them fervently. Practice resembles a process of learning by heart through which preachers re-experience the sermon and internalize it so completely that a congruence between the message and preachers’ whole being can be
established. Preachers do not merely think over it; they feel it (Shepherd 128–29). Beginning from a small portion to the full sermon, preachers produce the oral liveliness, improvisation, and perfection that can only be maintained by practicing premeditation (Quintilian, *The Institutio* 10.7.18)

One thing needs particular attention here: the oral style of speaking shuns rote memorization. Preachers do not laboriously remember and recite the rehearsed words in a verbatim manner. The words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs practiced each time may vary naturally, but the underlying themes are fixed. The linguistic alternation does no violence to the absorption of the overall sequence of ideas. The goal of the practice is to visualize a global outlook or itinerary that clearly indicates the flow of conceptual moves. Moreover, practical reason proves that a succession of ideas is easier to retain than specific wordings; thus, preachers should “attempt no memorizing of sentences or words whatever. Let the mind be entirely concentrated on the ideas to be developed, and the end to be accomplished by the sermon” (Wilder Smith 92, 99). Thus, oral memory works best in fastening upon the natural movement of ideas rather than rote remembrance of words. A clear flow of thought, instead of rigid phraseology, proves cohesive and spontaneous to the ears.

5. Proclaiming the Truth

After assiduous study and preparation, preachers arrive at the stage of delivery: finally, the truth-moment has come. The responsibility bestowed by God calls for their unreserved participation in verbalizing the truth from inside out with spontaneity and force. On top of the other canons, the salutary moment of truth demands dexterity in the art of delivery.

Effective preaching does not merely concern words; these words must be accompanied by preachers’ voices, glances, and gestures, which represent critical factors of successful delivery. Diligent study and preparation signal only the halfway mark of a great speech, while
delivery completes it. “A sermon ineptly delivered arrives stillborn,” H. Robison remarks (
locutional 149). A well-considered delivery will elevate the performance of the moderate
preacher, whereas the best speaker seems trifling in the absence of it (Cicero, De Oratore
3.56.213). Potent delivery makes the preacher credible to and intimate with the pew, thus moving
them more easily. The congregation tends to perceive the thought, to enjoy the speech, and to
approve the exhortation when the sermon comes with a penetrating delivery. In the occasions
when words and ideas languish, all factors of delivery—tone of voice, eye contact, and body
movement—still exert emotional influence by their place in human nature (Cicero, De Oratore
3.59.223)

The voice is most closely and directly related to words, of course; thus it occupies the
most effective position in great delivery. The best manner of delivery proves conversational. One
should not confuse conversational tone with informal appearance. The former initiates a sincere
dialogue whereas the latter trivializes the truth-event. Preachers speaking in a dialogic manner
show respect to the holy moment with a serious manner. However, audiences may feel offended
while listening to sloppy impropriety. The conversational tone actually appears ceremonious and
noble. “The tone of dignified conversation furnishes the staple method for effective delivery,”
speaking to human hearts the words of eternal life far better than any other style of speech (C.
Brown, 168). By means of conversational tone, preachers can best show their credibility to and
intimacy with the listeners. In a conversation, people share their thoughts and at the same time
observe, listen to the responses, and adjust their expressions accordingly. This attentiveness in
the dialogue creates a relational bond between talkers and hearers that is anticipated in the
preaching event. Meanwhile, preaching in a manner as if engaging in conversation with the
hearers appears natural, personal, and thus pleasing to the ears (McDill 119). In this way, an oral
sermon increases the level of warmth and intimacy by talking with listeners rather than at them
or to them (Fant 174). Preachers and listeners coexist in the same time and place, hearing the word of God and sharing mutual interests.

Moreover, a conversational tone naturally contributes to the audience’s feelings in the hearing experience, which are affected not only through preachers’ body movements and eye contact but also through the variation of pitch, volume, and speed as their emotions are roused or calmed. The preacher’s passion and conviction invites the congregation into an engaging conversation instead of an alienated indoctrination. The preacher’s diverse tones sustain an agreeable delivery pleasing to the ears (Cicero, De Oratore 3.60.225).

The conversational tone also testifies to the preacher’s sincere, earnest desire to communicate. Preaching, though it might seem monologic, attempts to get ideas effectually into the people’s minds, ideas that matter to the preachers themselves. This genuine emotion in a sermon, like that in dialogic conversations, can save preachers from speaking of “things real as though they were imagery” (Wilder Smith 125). George Macdonald’s pulpit work, for example, exemplified a preacher’s ordination signified not by his attire but by his life. “His heart was in his work, and his delivery was effective because it rested back upon the genuine beauty of his own inner life” (C. Brown 170). Thus conversational delivery reaches the hearts. “Sincerity, enthusiasm, and deep earnestness,” says H. Robinson, “tear down barriers that allow the real person to break free” (Biblical 152).

Preachers must master all of the materials before they can accomplish this conversational delivery. Only when they have assimilated what to say can they speak in a natural, confident, and extemporaneous way. Therefore, conversational speaking is undergirded by the diligent and careful preparation of preachers. “When they have treated, to the best of their ability, of everything that they had proposed to themselves,” Quintilian assures, “they will be sensible that they have come to a termination” (Murphy, Quintilian 155). This termination, apparently, is “the
The familiarity of the sermon journey “allows expressions, gestures, inflections to proceed naturally” in accordance with the subjects vocalized (Fant 173).

Verbal expression alone cannot establish effective delivery. An oral homiletic pays equal attention to nonverbal performance, to eye contact particularly. Eyes speak. Studies have proved that “one of the most significant ingredients in high credibility accorded to a public speaker is the consistency and intensity of the speaker’s eye contact” (J. Webb 102). Without consistent eye contact, preachers appear “unfriendly, uninformed, inexperienced, and even dishonest” (McDill 101). H. Robinson, thus, frankly protests that “men and women mistrust someone who avoids eye contact, and as a result, they undervalue what that person says” (Biblical 158). Besides engendering trustworthiness, eyes also display more sentiments than mere countenances and gestures can do. Eyes, says Cicero, are “the only part of the body capable of producing as many indications and variations as there are emotions, and there is nobody who can produce the same effect with the eyes shut” (De Oratore 3.59.221). Therefore, maintaining constant eye contact with the congregation advances the oral style of preaching via emotional connection.

Reading a manuscript, reciting it by rote, or explicating subjects impromptu in the pulpit undoubtedly lessen the degree and effect of sustained eye contact. An oral homiletic enacted in an extemporaneous manner benefits preachers not only in winning credibility and sharing feelings but also in focusing themselves on the moment of truth. Eye contact allows preachers to assess and address the listeners’ situations and expectations, which is called kairos in the rhetorical tradition. Its actual meaning varied in ancient rhetoric, but normally it denotes an “ability to say the fitting thing at the opportune moment” (D. Sullivan 318). The awareness of appropriate adjustment at the right time proves beneficial to extemporaneous expression on two levels: conceptual and linguistic.
In the beginning of the preaching event, eye contact opens communication and establishes rapport with the audiences. As the sermon goes on, eye contact serves as a means by which preachers verify the audience reactions to the truth-moment. Preaching extemporaneously frees preachers from the constraints set by frequently checking the notes, allowing them to identify whether someone is pleased, perplexed, distracted, or bored. In each occasion, preachers may decide to continue the original plan, to insert an illustration, to add extra explanation, or even to skip to the next argument. In this way, eye contact suggests an empathetic and participatory condition in verbal communication similar to primary orality (Ong, *Orality* 45).

Preachers attempt to sustain communal identification between the truth and the congregation by sensitively attending to the verbal environment and audience feedback. Whenever emergencies or necessities manifest, preachers’ regular study, careful preparation, and keen memory enable them to rearrange subjects quickly, potently, and appropriately.

Eye contact also allows preachers to speak with propriety, prompting the right words for the moment (McClellan, *Preaching* 150). Preachers’ consistent education would have stored an abundant vocabulary in their memories and refined their syntactical and stylistic arts. Their sermon preparation would have produced proper subjects sorted in orderly fashion and internalized in their minds. In the moment of truth, therefore, they can have confidence in their mental ability to interpret the congregational needs and to suggest appropriate words for them. Heeding Cicero’s appeal to broad education, from general topics to rhetorical arts, would prepare an aspiring preacher to secure fluency and faculty of extemporaneous speech without being anxious about lacking proper words in the moment (Cicero, *De Oratore* 1.31.137–34.159). Furthermore, phraseological adaptation to the truth-moment would avoid the risk of bending the discourse to suit specific words memorized by rote and would keep higher audience interest, by fresh eye contact, than manuscript preaching would.
One more issue concerning eye contact relates to the media environment. The prevalence of electronic media has invaded the church service. Preachers depend more upon electronic aids, such as PowerPoint presentations, video clips, and audio recordings, expecting they would revamp the clarity and vitality of mere verbalization. Further, many preachers broadcast on the Internet so that people sitting in satellite church campuses can watch them simultaneously as high-quality projected images without physical presence. The introduction of visual aids diminishes the effect and frequency of eye contact through which preachers would normally present their ethos and emotions. Animated images and immersive sounds cannot replace the sincerity, earnestness, and love expressed by eye contact. Technologies take focus away from voice, eye contact, and body movement—the whole person of the preacher—and thus reduce the trustworthiness and break the congruity between the messenger, the message, and the way it is spoken (Chapell, *Christ-Centered* 171). Moreover, technology may advance the communication of information but it tends to miss the goal of persuasiveness. Since Christian messages aim to inspire the faith, motivate the change, and call people to action, empirical research suggests that PowerPoint presentations seem less effectual in helping people recall and retain the message, and thus are less effectual in helping people respond to it accordingly (Buchko et al. 160). Another pitfall of adopting screens is that it leads to a disconnected community. “Putting a lot of text up on the screen further separates the preacher from the content and suggests that the sermon lives somewhere external” (McClellan, *Preaching* 154). Likewise, the critique about ambient technology suits the situation here: watching preachers in the projected image, no matter how vivid they could be, still situates sheep in a displaced and homeless condition (Alcántara and Arthurs 53–54). Broadcasting preaching merely fakes a Christian gathering; it cannot replace the true koinonia. Preachers should use technology after evaluating its strengths and weaknesses. The basic criterion of incorporating visual aids is to use them as supplements rather than
replacements. “Material projected on a screen works best when it simply appears at the right moment, supporting what the preacher is saying” (Long, *The Witness* 276). Let the spoken word propel the image, and not the other way around. A well-prepared oral homiletic actually creates more promising audience attention then technological media can do.

6. Conclusion

This project presents not the decisively best model of Christian preaching but argues that the fusion of form and content characterizes the oral homiletic, which is oriented to both biblical authority and audience experience. The balanced congruence of wisdom and eloquence empowers the harmonious treatment of scriptural authenticity and contemporary eventfulness. An oral homiletic pays equal attention to both biblical and modern worlds and presents the moment of truth on which the Word of God, human words, and the congregation can converge.

The contribution and convenience arising from the New Homiletic and the media environment merit appreciation. However, preachers cannot disregard the predicaments they bring to homiletics theory and practice. The over-emphasis on the hearing experience in the preaching event, though focusing on audience participation, unfortunately bends scriptural intentions to listeners’ felt needs. The practitioners of the New Homiletic immoderately subscribe to the design of the sermonic form and prioritize the existential experience at the expense of scriptural authority and lucid truth. Meanwhile, the transformations of human mentality and sensibilities in the wake of the progression of communications media and image-based technology have enervated preachers’ verbal competence, literary senses, and mental recollection. The incompetence to read and write well leads to a failure to appreciate the significance of the Scriptures, and leads thus to the trivialization of the homiletical performance.

Every authentic Christian sermon must be grounded upon genuine understanding of the Scriptures. Augustine approached this meaningful task by commenting the incapacity of fallen
humanity. Human perception has been blinded by distorted or disordered loves toward earthly things. Only the Inner Teacher, who is incarnate from above, can cleanse and revive human nature to the enjoyment and love of God. Augustine’s hermeneutic and homiletic method begins with the idea that faith preconditions understanding. Faith in Christ and the whole counsel of God’s revelatory truth becomes a Christian *inventio* to uncover textual meanings. This recognition of human depravity in temporality also acknowledges the reality of complex and obscure signs. The interior meaning of the Scriptures, which is hidden behind the literal sense, springs from the figurative reading. The criterion of whether to treat a text literally or allegorically lies in its application to the double commandment of love, which, in turn, becomes both the precondition and purpose of reading the Scripture. The pursuit of love further protects the Christian community against uncharitable “authorized” interpretations. In the light of human depravity and temporal linguistic ambiguity, Augustine reminds the biblical exegetes that genuine interpretation generates multiple veracious meanings in congruence with one another. However, no true, validated interpretation would violate the principle of love and the catholic faith of the Church.

Augustine’s assumptions about interpretation present a Christian mindset that centralizes Christ in the human understanding of both temporal and eternal truth, the creation and the Bible. His hermeneutic and homiletic works, meanwhile, legitimize the Christian use of Ciceronian rhetoric in ecclesiastical settings. He does not simply baptize Cicero’s rhetorical theory; instead, he reshapes the presupposition, principle, and purpose of Cicero’s oratorical scholarship, reorienting them to a new Christian end. Through Augustine’s lens, the church can discover the essential disciplines necessary to prepare and compose an effective speech. Preachers can learn to prepare an effective sermon through the operation of five rhetorical activities, which, in turn, advance the fusion of form and content. The profundity of Ciceronian coordinates goes beyond
mere rules, demanding the formation of the ideal orator by instilling a full range of liberal arts into rhetorical sensibilities. Preachers should first become diligent learners of a wide range of subject matter before they can serve the church effectively. Their craftsmanship cannot exert its entire force without being grounded in their scholarship.

Joining Augustine and Cicero as coordinates for this thesis, Ong’s literature reminds preachers that preaching is essentially an oral event. The mysterious presence of both the divine and the human appears in verbalized language. Therefore, an oral homiletic would best characterize this eventful confluence. Preachers can learn to be free from the bondage of reading manuscripts and deferring to electronic media on the stage and, instead, create more intensive audience contact by revitalizing the oral nature of the verbal communication known by ancient cultures. The Old and New Testaments, church tradition, and the ineradicable human appetite for oral pattern, even today, all symbolize the necessity to preach orally in the modern pulpit. Ong’s deft description of the characteristics of primary orality has opened the avenue to effective oral preaching.

This project has proposed internalization as the major metaphor to drive the praxis of an oral homiletic. The action of internalization should permeate the preparation and delivery of Christian preaching, penetrating the whole process from beginning to end. The rumination on the sacred text would enable preachers to digest it, making it an interior resource and igniting their understanding of the Scripture. Genuine perception begins with turning the materials into one’s own and transforming the inner being into a better man conforming to the revelatory truth. Internalization assimilates not only the intent and structure of the Scriptures but also the entire subject matter and organization of the sermon in order to create an extemporaneous style of speaking. Such oral preaching speaks to the mind and heart of the congregation with a power of spontaneity and affection that naturally flow from the personality of the preacher. A deliberate
internalization promises an outflow, in the preaching event, of preachers’ characters from the heart, full of sincerity and sentiment.
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