RHETORIC AND RELIGION:
REDISCOVERING HOMILETICS AS A SITE OF INVENTIONAL ACTIVITY

by

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For Dan, Simeon, and Eliana.
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INTRODUCTION AND DEFINITIONS

“Progress in philosophical inquiry shouldn’t (and maybe couldn’t) happen through ‘the steady weeding out of mistaken world views,’ no matter how confident the investigator was in the superiority of new knowledge over old knowledge.”

–Stephen North qtd. in Pender The Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives 66

In “Philosophies of Invention Twenty Years After The Making of Knowledge in Composition,” Kelly Pender makes the argument that invention scholarship has been hindered by a philosophical stalemate between the neoclassicists, who were interested in making invention quantifiable (and therefore a legitimate field of scholarship), and the postmodernists, whose theories of language and commitment to subjectivity problematized the certain and definable work of the neoclassicists (66-67). She admits that to study such sweeping philosophical history inevitably leads to overgeneralization but writes, “even in a book devoted entirely to [the narrative of invention scholarship], the impasse between neoclassicist and postmodernist approaches to invention would be obvious” (73). According to Pender, this impasse hinders the emerging study of invention because it interrupts the philosophical dialectic that encourages the discussion about new and changing concepts. When there is a continuous stream of related philosophical conversations, the study of invention grows and changes as one thinker challenges another. She writes, “philosophical debate never ends...it never ‘breaks through to some Truth.’ Yet this is exactly what happened to debates about invention; each side had the truth so there was nothing to talk about” (73-4). The last five or six years have brought change to invention scholarship; scholars have begun to synthesize these opposing philosophies or find new places of compromise to move the dialectic forward (73-83). Pender analyzes this new scholarship and remarks that, “in each case there’s an acknowledgement-occasionally explicit, more often
implicit—that while each side may have some truth about invention, neither had the truth” (74). Another interesting feature of this new, synthetic scholarship is that it is written by rhetorical scholars who often use other areas of study to argue their invention claims. Pender writes that “[the rhetoricians] have all foraged in new domains, looking for the premises they need to articulate new ways of understanding invention in rhetoric and composition today” (74).

I begin with Pender because I, too, approach invention from without, from the area of study known as homiletics. The domain of homiletics offers a number of invention ideas relevant to rhetoric and composition, and I will spend most of my time exploring these ideas. I also begin with Pender’s work to explain my methodology. Because my work involves philosophical inquiry, it is committed to and dependent on Pender’s and North’s observations about dialectic. It is essential to my argument to emphasize that new knowledge is not superior to old knowledge and that the ‘steady weeding out of mistaken world views’ is opposed to philosophical inquiry and renders it impossible (66). Therefore, I will engage neoclassicist, fundamentalist, and postmodernist views. I will argue for the synthesis of these views, which is not to say that I will not admit to their differences but is to say I will show how homiletics allows for both to collaborate in the dialectic of rhetorical inquiry.

My work on invention begins with the parallel histories of religion and rhetoric and explains how I define invention. Rhetoric and homiletics were once closely related and are now, at best, estranged. I will explore their complex history and argue that this separation is detrimental. I will then engage invention theory and focus on two binaries that run through invention scholarship: heuristic vs. hermeneutic and creation vs. discovery. Within each binary I will consider the homiletic concerns and implications as well as rhetorical ones. Throughout this
work, I will argue that homiletics is a useful and interesting site in which invention theory and practice are present in a unique, synthetic way. To conclude, I will explore some homiletic textbooks and analyze the heuristics they use, taking into consideration the invention theory and definitions I have discussed.

Defining Invention

“rhetorical invention is a broad and complex term that will require this entire volume to clarify”
– Janice M. Lauer, *Invention in Rhetoric and Composition* 1

Invention is one of the five canons of rhetoric, and as such, upheld as an important part of rhetorical practice and theory. Though there was a period in history during which invention was regarded as only interpretive and dropped from study (the time of Peter Ramus and Francis Bacon), this period does not represent the bulk of rhetorical history. Invention scholarship has been spotty at times, as I will discuss later. However, whether acknowledged or ignored, studied or taught, included or omitted, invention has always been a part of human history. To create, to discover, to build and imagine happens in every time and place. Invention now enjoys a prized place in rhetorical scholarship and conversation.

Scholars may all agree that invention is important, but they fiercely disagree about what invention is and what it does. If Janice Lauer requires an “entire volume” to clarify that which encompasses rhetorical invention, I have little hope of doing it justice here. Invention is an action that most recognize and few easily put into words. Those who want to put it into words in a way that acknowledges invention’s vast history and many disagreements require the length of a book. From invention’s range of viewpoints, I will state a few differing definitions from key theorists and situate my definition in their work.
Rhetorical invention includes a number of definitions that represent historical and theoretical divides. Aristotle called rhetoric the art of observing the available means of persuasion (Atwill xi). This definition relates invention to observation; it is finding or creating that which will persuade the audience. Aristotle’s definition implies the thought processes and logic needed to trace an argument in order to persuade. Just as much, the definition roots rhetoric in the product. Who is persuaded? The audience, of course, and so, for Aristotle, rhetoric leads to something public and presentable; it does not remain thought. Atwill observes in her introduction to Perspectives on Rhetorical Invention, “[Aristotle] placed [the art of rhetoric] in a peculiar place between theory and practice, subjectivism and empiricism, the aesthetic and the utilitarian. These binary oppositions have never served invention well” (xi). Indeed, the arguments over how to define invention largely stem from disagreements about whether invention is more an art or a science, if it is the discovery of something that already exists or if it is the creation of something new, and if the process is more important or the product is more important.

In the fourth century, invention was re-defined by Augustine, who was less concerned with production and more sympathetic to interpretation. Lauer summarizes Augustine’s view of invention as interpretation:

For Augustine, invention was an art of exegesis that guided the discovery of meaning in the Scriptures. He also examined some inquiry purposes. In Book II of De Doctrina, he considered the science of disputation useful for understanding and solving scriptural questions and noted that ambiguity required faith to unravel. (Lauer 30-31)

Here, the word discovery connotes a meaning of invention that is less active, less creative, and more interpretive than that of Aristotle. Like Aristotle, Augustine considers rhetoric—
invention—an art, but one that centers on exegesis and understanding problems and questions in Scripture rather than persuasion or argument in the political sphere.

Later theorists increased this divide between invention and creation. Peter Ramus takes Augustine’s views decidedly farther and is credited with reducing rhetoric to style and delivery. Helen Foster summarizes his rhetorical beliefs, which circumscribed the domain of rhetoric:

In the Renaissance, Peter Ramus developed a positivist approach, arguing that epistemology was an issue of scientific logic, not rhetoric. Thus, he argued that invention was not properly a function of rhetoric at all but was instead the sole province of dialectic (3).

Francis Bacon, during the Scientific Revolution, agrees with Ramus:

...the use of this invention is no other but, out of the knowledge whereof our mind is already possessed, to draw forth or call before us that which may be pertinent to the purpose which we take into our consideration. So as to speak truly it is no invention, but a remembrance or suggestion... (Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* 58)

Bacon does not leave traces of inquiry in his discussion of invention, as Augustine does. Many scholars of rhetoric today oppose his statement that invention is purely discovery, recovering something that we already know, “a remembrance or suggestion.” Janice Lauer describes Bacon as dealing the “final blow to invention by proclaiming that rhetorical invention dealt only with retrieving the known, while science created new knowledge through an inductive investigation” (38). Yameng Liu writes, “Bacon dismisses ‘rhetorical invention’ as a misnomer” (55), and Lisa Jardine explains that Bacon views “dialectic and rhetoric as second-class studies, because he is so deeply preoccupied with discovery” (qtd. in Liu 55). It is not hard to gather from these scholars a sense of how the definition of invention varies in the field. For Bacon, invention represents a kind of knowledge already present but forgotten, waiting to be called forth. For Lauer, Liu, and Jardine, Bacon’s view limits the activity of invention to the
extent that it is destroyed, “dismissed,” and “second-class.” Their views are only stated in the negative here, yet their frustration underscores their emphasis on creativity, production, and originality—beliefs that are central to how invention is viewed by many rhetoricians today.

Janice Lauer opens her book, *Invention in Rhetoric & Composition* with a simple, effective definition of invention:

> All writers face the problem of finding subjects to write about and of developing these subjects. Invention provides guidance in how to begin writing, to explore for ideas and arguments, to frame insights, and to examine the writing situation. (Lauer 1)

Lauer’s beliefs about invention are inquiry-based. Invention is active and analytical. Invention produces content, but more important than content are the thinking processes that guide the inventor. Her definition is infused with active verbs: *find, develop, provide guidance, explore, frame, examine*. Lauer begins her definition by explaining that invention is born out of various problems: what to write about, how to develop subjects, how to begin writing, etc. Invention helps writers explore various solutions to these problems.

Another contemporary rhetorician, Arabella Lyon, illustrates the current trend of valuing an active definition of invention. Lyon’s work has a narrower focus than Lauer’s. Lauer outlines the full breadth of history and work on invention in order to give scope and clarity to inventional study. Lyon explores the way inventional definitions change from rhetoric to hermeneutics. She contrasts rhetorical invention with interpretive invention:

> Rhetorical action, while dependent on the entire canon of rhetoric, begins with invention; the possibility of action, rather than simple motion, is dependent on the invention of an act, whether through topics, chances, achieving identity, or assessing landscapes. Rhetorical invention initiates and constantly intervenes in rhetorical production. As I will demonstrate, at the other extreme, interpretation, and so interpretive invention, consists of mediating between a reader...and an
extant text. Rhetoric and interpretation involve different inventional strategies.

(37)

Lyon’s understanding of invention is compatible with Lauer’s in that invention is active; invention *initiates* and *constantly intervenes*. Rhetorical activity begins with a *possibility of action* rather than a *problem*. Lyon’s word choice is less inquisitive and more divisive; she wants to clarify that rhetorical invention is *not* interpretative invention. Lauer makes no such claims.

Lyon is more focused on the outcome of invention; rhetorical invention is intervening and initiating in rhetorical *production*. Here, the inclusion of the productive end of rhetorical invention emphasizes its importance and helps Lyon distinguish rhetorical invention from interpretive invention, which she points out involves “mediating between a reader...and an extant text” (37). Lyon’s definition is narrowed and more specific because her goal is to show what rhetorical invention is not, while Lauer provides a comprehensive view of invention.

Rhetoricians also disagree about whether invention is more heuristic or more hermeneutic. Heuristic deals with types of inquiry in which there are no certain outcomes, where thinking strategies are central. They are originally located within cognitive psychology and believe meaning is constructed not discovered. Hermeneutics is located within philosophy and deals with interpreting something that already exists, usually a text. Meaning is found or discovered as the text is interpreted. The *Encyclopedia of Religion* begins by referencing the original Greek meaning of hermeneutics: “to interpret.” Hermeneutics, the Encyclopedia article

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1 The definition, scope, activity, and effectiveness of heuristic is contested by inventional scholars. When I define heuristic using cognitive psychology and Janice Lauer, I ignore these conversations and give heuristic a global and traditional definition. While conversations and debates about heuristics are extremely important, my aim is simply to discuss the point at which they oppose hermeneutics in order to explore homiletic invention. I focus on distinctions between the binary opposites I discuss, while also comparing them. For this reason, my definition of heuristic is based on creation and production rather than on the disagreements and conversations of rhetoricians today.
begins, “refers to the intellectual discipline concerned with the nature and presuppositions of the interpretation of human expressions” (3930). My purpose is to show how hermeneutics is related to homiletical inquiry, and so I confine my hermeneutical discussion to that place where hermeneutics and Christianity meet: exegesis.

I observed earlier that invention has always been present in human history. While this is true, it is also true that rhetorical invention has not often enjoyed the same level of scholarship as other canons, such as style and delivery. Atwill and Lauer begin *Perspectives on Rhetorical Invention* by noting that there is “a neglect of the rhetorical cannon of invention” (Atwill xi). Lauer finds that work on rhetorical invention is present in academia but has migrated to disciplines outside of rhetoric and composition. She cites education, cultural studies, studies of gender, race, and cultural difference, theories of technology, and hermeneutics as sites of work on invention (2-10). Atwill, pondering this phenomenon asks, “Is there something in the character of invention that makes it prone to migrate? Is there something in the institution that makes invention ill at ease?” (xi). I would add, is there something about invention that makes it slippery to define? Where there is fragmented work, there are fragmented definitions. Invention serves many disciplines, and thus, its definitions are as diverse as the sites within which it is found. Further, within the discipline of rhetoric, definitions of invention have always varied. Inventional theorists debate about whether invention is learned or inherent, creative or interpretive, productive or discovery-based, concerned with finding or making.

In the tradition of invention’s many theorists and practitioners, I will define invention to suit my purposes. Rhetorical invention is active. It is creative and interpretive, heuristic and hermeneutic. It guides arguments, entertains the new, and interprets and contextualizes anew that which is known or written. It questions the assumed and involves both process and product.
Although this definition does not rest on exegesis, it is inclusive of interpretation. Therefore, my definition incorporates opposing binaries that Atwill aptly remarks “have never served invention well” (xi). I will show that the binaries creation vs. discovery, hermeneutic vs. heuristic can exist in the same inventive activity, that they can be allied with one another. Thus, my definition challenges those of Bacon and Lyon, and takes on the same peculiar position Aristotle achieves when he defines rhetoric as an art that observes the available means of persuasion.
Rhetoric and Homiletics From the Ancient Era to the Enlightenment

Today’s emphasis on the sophistic beginnings of rhetoric may make homiletics and rhetoric seem an absurd couple. Yet not many disciplines are so naturally compatible. Their mutual concerns regarding style, organization, ideas, speaking, audience, and concern with public opinion and discussion are just a few overlapping foci homiletics and rhetoric share. For centuries the two were inseparable. Fred Craddock, a preacher, professor, and homiletician known for his interest in rhetoric, finds it hard to escape using relational metaphors (such as marriage) when describing rhetoric and homiletics. Craddock writes that, “It was Augustine who officiated at the wedding joining the rhetorical principles of Cicero to the growing and changing ministry of preaching” (66). I begin the discussion of the relational history of homiletics and rhetoric by asking what Augustinian intervention achieved, how it functioned, and what it was and was not.

Augustine’s Book IV of On Christian Doctrine is a good place to find these answers. Augustine laments rhetoric’s affiliation with secular sources. He writes that rhetoric is mostly used for false purposes (those Christianity would not consider right or true), explaining that those who use rhetorical strategies “tell their falsehoods, briefly, clearly, and plausibly, while [Christian teachers] shall tell the truth in such a way that it is tedious to listen to, hard to understand, and...not easy [to believe]?...Who is such a fool to think that is wisdom?” (IV.2). Augustine sets out to persuade Christian teachers to use contemporary rhetorical practices, specifically citing Cicero in chapter twelve, and arguing that, “an eloquent man must speak so as
to teach, to delight, and to persuade”. Augustine is always careful to define Christian rhetorical practice as unique, separate from that of the Sophists. The Christian teacher, for example, must always consider wisdom more important than eloquence (IV.5), and teaching more important than style (IV.12). Yet he spends chapters seventeen through twenty-five discussing matters of style and providing examples of style used in Holy Scripture and by well known Christian teachers. Further, Augustine stresses the importance of persuasion, which he calls “moving the hearer.” He writes, “For if a man be not moved by the force of truth, though it is demonstrated to his own confession, and clothed in beauty of style, nothing remains but to subdue him by the power of eloquence” (IV.13). In other words, Christian rhetoric should use all the tools of secular rhetoric while upholding Christian principles such as honesty and truth in order not only to convince the hearer of the truth of Christianity, but also to convince the hearer to change, to practice this Christian truth. Augustine walks a fine line; he forwards rhetorical principles dismissed as heretical by many in the church while simultaneously upholding Christian principles. He reinforces the relationship between rhetoric and homiletics by combining Christian doctrine and rhetorical principles.

Augustine’s synthesis of rhetoric and religion eventually became integrated into rhetorical and homiletical teaching in Western education. In British universities, whose pedagogies informed the early American educational system, Protestant clergymen were the early professors. Augustine’s methods, as well as those of other rhetoricians such as Cicero, were applied and passed down through the education system. Hugh Blair exemplifies the clergy-professor overlap and the homiletic and rhetorical concerns of such teachers. After his appointment to the highest Christian office in Scotland he was also, almost simultaneously, given
the role of professor of a course in composition and rhetoric at the University of Edinburgh.

Blair taught upper class students destined to be either lawyers or clergy.

In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, Blair emphasizes the need for his students to cultivate taste in order to be good composers (110-113). He believed that if students could inculcate taste and learn to recognize and appreciate beauty, they would naturally produce tasteful, beautiful compositions. Further, they would become people of taste who intrinsically cherish and uphold the proper things. Blair firmly asserts that taste must come in a certain form, with certain teaching:

Let [the author’s] descriptions be ever so rich, or his figures ever so elegant, yet, if they are out of place, if they are not proper parts of that whole, if they suit not the main design, they lose all their Beauty; nay, from Beauties they are converted into Deformities. Such power has our sense of fitness and congruity, to produce a total transformation of an object whose appearance otherwise would have been Beautiful. (112-13)

Blair’s concern with the breadth of beauty and taste is such that his attempts to cultivate these things in his students involve a number of points—he writes about appreciating the sublime lines of a river, architecture, furniture design, and flowers. Still, as the passage above hints, Blair was more concerned with composition; taste was honed mostly for the purpose of arranging language in such a way as to make it beautiful, clear, and accessible. He was the first teacher credited with tracing the history of language in the Western world, and he also taught the strategies of ancient rhetoricians. For example, he uses Quintilian to define *style* and Aristotle to explain how a composer communicates one, clear thought, which is Blair’s definition of a sentence (246, 258-59). With people like Blair instructing future clergy in ancient rhetoric and guiding the pedagogy of his day, rhetoric and preaching could scarcely be separated from one another. What could divide two such intertwined disciplines? Nothing short of a complete overhaul of the
educational system—indeed, nothing short of a complete overhaul of how people viewed
themselves and the world around them.

The Enlightenment to Postmodernism

The Enlightenment was the overhaul that changed the educational system, as well as the
views people held of themselves and the world around them. It provided an ideal environment
for sweeping social and educational change. The burst of scientific discovery gave birth to
skepticism and an increased appetite for scientific training in higher education. Education in
Europe, and then the United States responded accordingly. The liberal arts model of education–
in which reason and judgement were taught to provide a general education–was replaced with the
German model which taught skills needed for a specific profession. No longer were clergy
considered appropriate college teachers (Brereton 3-4). Educational goals shifted from an
emphasis on the character of the learner (making a student into a gentleman) to the acquisition of
knowledge, and specialization in college programs began to appear. University students
participated in departments in which they could choose from elective courses to gain their
desired training in a particular field. John Brereton explains the way this change occurred within
American Colleges:

American ingenuity...produced a stream of wonderful inventions, while
universities were producing theoretical advances at an astounding rate in biology,
geology, physics and chemistry. Specialized training in these fields required
specialized knowledge, and the nineteenth century saw a protracted struggle
between the proponents of a classical education...and those who favored the new
science-based learning. (6)

The struggle between classical education and specialized, science-based learning led to
staggering changes in education. The student body broadened from wealthy, Caucasian men to
gradually include women, the middle class, racial and ethnic minorities, and former soldiers. As
science became a more central focus of education, rhetoric and religion were ousted from required curriculum.

The Enlightenment brought religion and rhetoric under new scrutiny. Augustinian rhetoric was still faithfully taught in America into the twentieth century; it was no longer a core requirement, but was taught in religion departments and seminaries (Craddock 67). John Broadus, author of *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, the most popular preaching textbook during the late nineteenth through mid twentieth century, adheres closely to Augustinian rhetoric. Broadus begins his textbook section entitled “Relation of Homiletics to Rhetoric” by explaining, “The Greek word *homilia* signifies conversation, mutual talk, and so familiar discourse. The Latin word *sermo* (from which we get *sermon*) has the same sense” (15). Broadus roots preaching in this dialogue, or conversation. He calls homiletics “a branch of rhetoric, or a kindred art” (16). Broadus devotes the first section of chapter five to invention. He also writes an entire chapter about argument in which he uses an Augustinian appeal: “Argument, as to the truth and value and claims of the gospel...is one of the means by which we must strive to bring [those who do not believe]...into some real, some operative belief” (169). In other words, the preacher must be intentional, organized, and persuasive. These goals of preaching are accomplished by utilizing the guidance of rhetorical strategies. The organization of Broadus’ book, which moves from subject, to argument, to arrangement, to style, and then delivery, recalls ancient rhetoricians focus on these essential rhetorical elements.

The notion of preaching as an art as well as a branch of rhetoric would not last, and although this relationship was about to fizzle, religion still had a solid place within education. Of the two, rhetoric certainly had the harder lot. Religious study moved from the broader
curriculum into religion departments and seminaries, its study centered on the content of church history, theology, and scripture. Rhetoric did not have as obvious a content. Its instruction rested on communication tools rather than on one text or tradition; it became housed in religion, philosophy, English, psychology, history, and art departments (Jost and Olmsted 2). The diverse migrational sites of rhetoric diminished its chances for further scholarship and growth because each migrational site had a separate interest to drive theory and practice, scholarship and research. While English, for example, was interested in rhetoric, its primary focus was on literature. Rhetoric became known as a secondary interest in many fields instead of a primary interest with its own department and faculty.

Sharon Crowley analyzes the displacement of rhetoric within education. She hones in on one key factor that ousted rhetoric from curriculum: the pedagogical goal of developing student taste (34). The kind of taste to which Crowley refers is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as: “The sense of what is appropriate, harmonious, or beautiful, especially [what is beautiful] in nature or art...the faculty of perceiving and enjoying what is excellent in art, literature, and the like.” It is the same taste to which Hugh Blair devoted his entire introduction of Belles Lettres in which he expounds upon flowers and rivers. Crowley writes about that fascination with taste:

When students and teachers became more interested in accruing the cultural and social capital associated with the cultivation of an educated taste than they were in preparing for the pulpit or for politics, the doctrines and principles of rhetoric-classical and modern-began to disappear from the American college curriculum. (34)

When colleges prepared their students for the pulpit or politics they were necessarily concerned with ethics, public presence, inter-class relations, and social organization. A focus on taste meant
that students had no specific public interest but were meant to become refined in order to enter their proper social sphere. Rhetoric, with its long tradition of political concerns and orality, was not essential to cultivating taste. Other composition theorists and scholars have noted the struggle rhetoric and composition went through during this period. These scholars tend to focus on how writing in the university changed as it was assimilated into English and subverted to the study of literature. Some argue that writing (or composition) was considered less worthy than rhetoric in the academic sphere. Yet rhetoric was discarded too, and perhaps nowhere more poignantly than in homiletics.

Postmodernism and the Divorce of Homiletics and Rhetoric

Rhetoric and religion had both been displaced from the center of higher education, which was enough to render their relationship rocky. For years it remained tenuous. The commitment to teaching Augustine in religion departments and seminaries slowly dwindled. People began to joke that sermons were “three points and a poem.” Such comments themselves suggest that the ancient rhetorical pattern which was supposed to inform the three points had been traded for a simple formula, and that sermons were no longer persuasive. By the 1960s, rhetoric and religion were poised for divorce if not already separated.

Fred Craddock traces the gradual decline of rhetoric in homiletics. He cites a number of social and cultural variations that can all be traced back to the philosophical change brought about by the steady increase of postmodern thought in America. Craddock argues these variations are responsible for homiletics’ disassociation with rhetoric. He notes that, “the pulpit of the 1960s faced a barrage of questions...questions concerning authority and the right to

\(^2\) See the work of Brereton, Halloran, Perelman, and Ong.
persuade others to [the preacher’s] position rather than facilitating a conversation between the community and its Scriptures” (67). Postmodernism challenged the Augustinian three point form, which was now applied rather unfaithfully to the principles of rhetoric which underpinned it. Rhetoric’s grip on homiletics collapsed under the challenge of authority, the supposition that persuasion and coercion were synonymous, the desire for a more active audience involvement, and the frustration with a three point form that seemed thoughtless and rigid (Craddock 67-8). Perhaps the lack of a department of rhetoric and composition also contributed. Such a space could have fueled further conversation between homiletics and rhetoric or provided a place in which to adapt as philosophy and culture changed.

Homiletics and theology that make use of postmodern principles did emerge and are now included in much religious study and practice. Ancient rhetorical practice, which had already slowly declined, did not adapt. As postmodern concerns became more widely regarded and included in homiletic study, rhetorical ones were quietly dismissed. David Buttrick writes about this transition: “Rhetoric was rejected as a kind of works righteousness, a striving to make God’s word palatable. No, preaching was to speak with no other resource than the Bible’s revealed truth” (77). Buttrick’s analysis, paired with Craddock’s summary of postmodern change, suggests that homileticians traded rhetoric for one of two reasons: Either they felt rhetoric conflicted with emerging postmodern concerns that they were eager to incorporate into theology and practice, or they felt rhetoric was at odds with their fundamental, “bible only” method of teaching. In either case, rhetoric was no longer welcome in homiletic study.

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3 See Brian D. Ingrafia and Jeffery Francis Bullock to begin exploring the realm of postmodern theology and practice.
Thomas Sloane describes a similar phenomenon that took place in composition studies. In particular, he outlines the discussion of a 1970 meeting of the leading professors of rhetoric and composition of the day. He explains their conclusions: “rhetoric was to be situated not simply as an educational but also as a research speciality, rhetoricians were to boldly go where no one, certainly not Aristotle, had gone before” (463). In other words, rhetoricians, like homileticians, encouraged each other to depart from old, obsolete, and outdated practices that they believed limited the growth of their discipline. The problem with this eagerness for change was that it did not argue for adaptation, but complete divergence. Sloane puts it this way: “in our new enterprise we would welcome aboard only those things that were dynamic enough to have survived the treacheries and the irrelevancies of the past” (464). Perhaps postmodernism’s biggest problem is that it contributes to historic arrogance. The practitioner stands enlightened above history, able to reject other movements because they are draconian. Ancient rhetorical texts were weeded out and labeled mistaken world views rather than dialogued with or adapted to suit changing cultural needs. To assume that Cicero or Aristotle were to be completely discarded because they were not from a culture that accepted postmodern assumptions was arrogant at best. Of course, this view does not represent the only way in which to incorporate postmodern principles in historical analysis. Rhetorical scholars and fundamental homileticians both embraced a time during which ancient rhetoric was rejected. Their mutual distrust did not unite them, but widened their dialectical gap because each chose to privilege a different, and opposing, ideology.

The divide between homiletics and rhetoric, then, can be traced to the changes brought about by the Enlightenment—whose rhetorical ideologies persisted well into the twentieth
century—and then Postmodernism. These two great movements resulted in sweeping educational and social change for rhetoric and homiletics. Homiletics changed from a key part of classical education to a specialized field and it failed to respond in a convincing manner to questions about persuasion, about audience response, and about the role of preacher. Therefore, it left its ancient roots and became less and less interested in teaching or practicing rhetorical principles.

**Implications: What Homiletics and Rhetoric Have to Offer Each Other**

How are we to interpret these changes? Is the split between homiletics and rhetoric valid? Is it beneficial to either discipline? Interestingly, both rhetoric and homiletics have departed from the practice of isolating history from current practice. Rhetoricians have returned, rather sweepingly, to ancient patterns of persuasion and problematized those that sought to leave them (Sloane 463-73). Homileticians remain extraordinarily divided about whether to accept or reject certain postmodern assumptions. Yet there has been a resurgence of embracing church history. Embarrassment over the crusades and the clear connection between religion and such horrific policies as slavery, Western Imperialism, and colonization has given way to work on the church’s historical inclusion of women, liberation policies, missional outreach to victims of the plague, the radical acceptance of outcasts, and more.4 This ability—to welcome history, to allow it to inform current practice and theory—opens new possibilities for religion and rhetoric.

If rhetoric’s separation from religion was largely grounded in the rejection of history and the incompatibility of philosophies which predate postmodernism, then there is great current potential for religion and rhetoric to engage each other again. Without accepting the religious ideologies in which much of rhetoric was previously rooted, rhetoricians may consider that

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homiletics remains a significant example of orality in our culture. In a culture in which sound-bytes abound and speakers are told an audience will not and cannot attend to an oral presentation longer than ten minutes, sermons remain intriguingly long and complex. They remain face-to-face at a time when politician’s speeches and any other wide array of public speeches occur via digital media. Sermons continue to gain wide audience in America. Between forty and fifty percent of people in most states attend a weekly religious service according to a recent Pew Research Center study (“How Religious is Your State?” The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life).

If individualism (as opposed to the communal societies of the ancient rhetoricians) represents a key change in the relationship between author and reader or teacher and student, preaching is one example of how complex this relationship can be. In preaching, there is an individual (the preacher), yet there is also a present audience. The recent trend is for preachers to increase the potential for audience engagement, response, and participation by including opportunities for questions via cell phone text messages as well as the alteration of preaching style. In some ways, preaching has begun to return to a format which more closely resembles the ancient Greek orators (not to mention a social example of the continued importance of adages–preachers use ancient texts which represent communal and divine wisdom as the ancient rhetors did). By engaging homiletics, rhetoricians might analyze, explore, and theorize about ancient patterns in a modern context.

I have highlighted ways in which religion offers new scholarly avenues for rhetoricians, yet religion scholars also have much to gain from pursuing rhetorical scholarship. A number of homiletic texts continue to define the same rhetorical concepts using different terms, an unhelpful reinventing of the wheel that could be easily remedied if they agreed to re-engage
rhetoric. Further, many authors of homiletic texts are not conversant in the discoveries and research of contemporary rhetoricians that directly apply to considerations of audience and speaker, or persuasion. This results in embarrassingly outdated teaching.

Some authors of preaching texts openly admit they have neglected to actively question and define rhetoric and have allowed others to do this work for them. Many acknowledge that preaching is in need of massive revision. Bullock describes how preaching is in crisis. He writes, “A growing cadre of homileticians are speculating that...it may be necessary to turn away from the more traditional disciplines of biblical and theological studies and to contemporary rhetoric and hermeneutical theory” (2). Buttrick echoes this, saying, “[homiletics] will have to return and be renewed by conversations with contemporary rhetoricians...we need to think out the rhetorical ways and means appropriate to contemporary consciousness...” (112). Finally, Craddock asks (rhetorically), “Who could say, after all the centuries, that reading Aristotle’s Rhetoric and Poetics or Augustine’s instructions on preaching is no longer of benefit to the preacher?” Preachers could become more persuasive, more aware of their audience/rhetor relationship simply from dialoging with contemporary rhetoricians.

The scholars caught in the middle, such as those authors included in Rhetorical Invention & Religious Inquiry, aim to prove that rhetorical theory is able to encompass both religion and rhetoric but do not delve into practice. Similarly, the homileticians who address the crisis of preaching begin a re-acquaintance with rhetoric by means of theory. These preaching texts may offer strategies or practical examples and advice to the preacher, but often do not use commonly understood rhetorical vocabulary or ideas. They often address preaching broadly and so cannot
focus much attention on applicable current conversations of rhetoricians (despite their recognition that this is important).

My work fits into all of these considerations and represents a starting place for rhetoricians and homileticians alike. I will analyze the relationship of homiletics and rhetorical invention in order to show how each has something of value to offer the other. Homiletics is a site of theory that is intrinsically tied to practice and so is rhetorical invention. Both homiletics and rhetorical invention have a broad and diverse body of scholarship that creates an ideal environment for comparison and synthesis. Lauer writes about the many unlikely places rhetoric, and more specifically invention, can be found today. She says “work on invention today is implicit, fragmented, located within many rhetoric and composition places of inquiry” (2). Although she lists a number of these implicit inventional sites in her survey, she does not mention homiletics. My goal is to put homiletics back on that map of unlikely—or even likely—places in which rhetoric should be studied.
CHAPTER TWO: THE THEORETICAL DIVIDE BETWEEN RHETORICAL AND HOMILETIC INVENTION

“rhetoricians with religious interests seem to be a rare breed, if not an endangered species”
–Jost and Olmsted, *Rhetorical Invention and Religious Inquiry: New Perspectives*

At the end of Chapter One I quoted homileticians, all of whom agree there is a need for homiletics to incorporate contemporary rhetorical theory and practice. While some homileticians, such as Buttrick and Bullock, point to rhetoric as a potential answer to the current crisis of preaching, few homileticians follow their own advice and actually engage with contemporary rhetoric in their published work. Indeed, just as rhetoricians with religious interest are a rare breed, homileticians seem unwavering in their commitment to avoid contemporary rhetoric. They readily use hermeneutics and linguistics, but it seems that no preaching texts incorporate the work of a contemporary (as in post-Augustine) rhetoricians work.

The over-arching goal of this thesis is to address the problems that keep rhetoricians and homileticians isolated from one another, to open a new space for dialogue between the two disciplines. Chapter Two accomplishes this by focusing on theoretical issues. I will trace two binaries that run through invention scholarship: heuristic vs. hermeneutic and creation vs. discovery. Then I will show how homiletical invention defies these traditional binaries, making it unique and synthetic. My conclusion is that this defiance of binaries—or rather synthesis of them—makes homiletical invention a useful and interesting space for study, one that can overcome the impasse that has hindered inventionary conversation in the past. Chapter One argues that postmodernism presented challenges to the conversation of homiletics and rhetoric that resulted in a total breach. Chapter Two will conclude by arguing that postmodernism, ironically, provides a solution to this breach.
Inventional Binaries

Kelly Pender finds that conversations in inventional theory were brought to a halt when disagreements between neoclassicist and postmodern theorists led each to reject the other:

Whereas [neoclassicists] sought to reinstate invention as the intellectual core of rhetoric by studying its processes and making them teachable, the [postmodernists] rejected those goals by rejecting the theories of language, knowledge, and subjectivity on which they rested. (66-7)

Pender’s description highlights the opposite assumptions upon which neoclassicists and postmodernists rest their beliefs. Teachability, for example, implies an objectivity and measurability that neoclassicists assume rhetoric possesses, whereas subjectivity resists and acts as an irreconcilable opposite that allows postmodernists to critique the assumption rhetoric can be taught and measured. One way to help two polarized and oppositional groups dialogue is to identify and analyze the binaries each group privileges. Binaries are oppositional elements that demonstrate a struggle for power; they are located within Marxist tradition, sometimes acceptable to postmodernists and sometimes critiqued. Marxist goals involve finding the traditionally powerless binary and elevating it over its opposer or oppressor. Another way to characterize the relationship between neoclassicists and postmodernists (or even between postmodernists and everyone else) is to say each privileges a different and oppositional binary.

For example, Francis Bacon values discovery while Yangmen Liu values creation; Janice Lauer values heuristic while Augustine values hermeneutic, and so on. Inventional theory typically defines invention as one binary or another, but seldom allows for a mode of invention that synthesizes binaries in order to facilitate conversation between those with opposing ideologies. In this section I will look at how heuristic opposes hermeneutic and creation opposes discovery,
trace their importance in inventional theory, and show how homiletical invention resists these binaries.

**Heuristic vs. Hermeneutic**

Heuristic and hermeneutics present a challenge to compare because they both involve different methodological procedures. Heuristics are *research methods* and hermeneutical inquiry is a *scholarly method*. Heuristics are *experimental* and hermeneutical inquiry is *philosophical*. Heuristics are themselves procedures, whereas hermeneutics represents an entire discipline. In order to discern how homiletical invention interacts with each, I will define each pole of the heuristic/hermeneutic binary.

Homileticians often use the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer for exegetical guidance. Gadamer is called by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, “the decisive figure in the development of twentieth century hermeneutics—almost certainly eclipsing, in terms of influence and reputation, the other leading figures.” Gadamer’s hermeneutics are complex, but one of his central interests was the redefining of prejudice, *pre-judgment*, as he called it. The *Stanford Encyclopedia* entry provides a picture of what Gadamerian prejudice entails: “All interpretation, even of the past, is necessarily ‘prejudgmental’ in the sense that it is always oriented to present concerns and interests, and it is those present concerns and interests that allow us to enter into the dialogue with the matter at issue.” This discussion of prejudice highlights how hermeneutic definition informs homiletical invention. Homileticians are interpreters of the Scripture, yet as Gadamer notes, they place their interpretations in a new, contemporary context, orienting them to “present concerns and interests.” For example, Gadamer’s prejudice guides the
homiletician to consider how a biblical story informs the life of someone living today, how cultural considerations of the past change the meaning of a given story for the present audience.

Gadamer’s reference to dialogue is important as well. The homiletician invents a sermon, which may enter into dialogue with the philosophy, texts, theology, and current events informing it. Gadamer believed that true dialogical interpretation is a matter not only of responding to a given text conversationally but also using the form of that text to draft the response. In other words, the person using dialogue is able interpret better by engaging another speaker’s ideas and using another speaker’s oral or written form. Gadamer applied his ideas of prejudice and dialogue to Plato and Aristotle, homileticians sometimes apply it to the Bible or other texts they use. This hermeneutic approach demonstrates a key paradox in homiletic invention: one gets new ideas by placing one’s own assumptions aside and conversing (in a way that truly attempts understanding) with another. New ideas come when readers allow old ideas to shape them. Interpretation involves allowing the text—both ideas and form—to guide the interpreter, which is another paradox in Gadamer’s hermeneutic inquiry: the text has power over the interpreter, but the interpreter cannot help but bring her own prejudice into the interpretation. This kind of interpretation results in new ideas and the location of meaning. In dialogue a tension or juxtaposition of interests allows for discovery.

Many homileticians accept Gadamerian strategies because of their ideological commitment to absolute truth. There is less concern about granting the text power over the interpreter if the text is considered true. Understandably, contemporary rhetoricians often reject these strategies because of their ideological commitment to subjectivity: if there is no truth, it is potentially very problematic to allow the text to guide the interpreter instead of vice versa.
Further, hermeneutic inquiry is potentially less creative because meaning is driven by something made in the past rather than created in the present.

Arabella Lyon, a rhetorical theorist, views hermeneutical invention and rhetorical invention as oppositional forces that are irreconcilable. Her work is insightful both because she is concerned with investigating hermeneutics and rhetoric (or we could say a heuristic approach) and because I believe she represents a view that many rhetoricians would applaud. In her essay, “Rhetoric and Hermeneutics: Division through the Concept of Invention,” Lyon says, “By turning toward interpretation and away from production and making, rhetoricians have diminished the place of rhetoric as an action in the world” (36). She suggests hermeneutic invention emphasizes mediation between the reader and text (48). Rhetorical invention, according to Lyon, differs because it emphasizes production by the reader (49). Another way to articulate her analysis is to deem hermeneutic invention more concerned with discovery and rhetorical invention more concerned with creation. Lyon problematizes the definition of invention within hermeneutics, that of prizing interpretation above making. When a definition centered on interpretation becomes the more known and acceptable, it changes the potential activity for invention (50). Lyon rejects the hermeneutic definition of invention and devalues it, favoring a more heuristic view of rhetoric:

Rhetoric’s increasing affiliation with textual reception, specifically Gadamer’s hermeneutics, while increasing concern with discourse and text, potentially diminishes many aspects of textual production and of rhetoric: the invention of a speech act, interactions and negotiations of meaning and intentions between rhetors and audiences, cultural processes of deliberation and the resulting productions, formal aspects of the text, the contingency and immediacy of the rhetorical situation, the instrumental and subversive qualities of discourse, and the (ethical and unethical) power dynamics in any rhetorical interaction. (50; italics in original)
Here, Lyon lists a number of specific rhetorical spaces potentially effected by Gadamerian invention. Her concerns all suggest that interpretation opposes and diminishes the creation, production, and conflict essential to rhetorical invention.

For Lyon, rhetorical invention is more independent than hermeneutical invention with an emphasis on originality, production, and resistance. Hermeneutic invention is more passive, allowing the interpretive text to question the interpreter: “[the hermeneut] probably can go so far as exegesis or explanation without entertaining novelty and rhetoric” (48). The rhetor, exemplified as a resisting reader, “reads critically, suspicious of the text, full of her own intentions, reads with resistance, and produces a meaning that allows her to take action” (49). Lyon’s insights provide a description of the range of activities that interpretation and invention entail:

Invention within the act of interpretation is defined by two poles: by the interpreter’s prejudices, privileged in rhetorical invention and diminished in hermeneutical invention, and by the interpreter’s prejudices, risked in hermeneutical invention and accepted in rhetorical invention. (50)

This argument is intriguing when juxtaposed with Gadamer’s point about prejudice from above. Lyon finds that prejudices are diminished by hermeneutical invention, or risked (certainly Lyon’s understanding of prejudice is more aggressive than Gadamer’s). Yet when we consider Gadamerian prejudice as a central hermeneutical practice and also consider than Lyon has chosen to specifically organize her conclusions with regard to Gadamerian hermeneutics, it is puzzling she does not mention his special interest in prejudice. One potential issue with this work, then, is the notion of prejudice and how it is, to an extent, prized in hermeneutics. However, Lyon’s point remains valid that invention plays a unique role with different emphases within hermeneutical invention and rhetorical invention.
When Lyon illustrates the distinctions between rhetorical invention, hermeneutical invention, and rhetorical reading, she finds an imagined spectrum on which we can place various inventional actions. Yet homiletic interpretation both resists and demonstrates the polarization Lyon imagines. On one end of this spectrum, Lyon places paraphrase, exegesis, mediation, and explanation (48). On the other end is resistance, critique, prejudice, creation, and production (49). She locates hermeneutical invention on the former end of the spectrum and rhetorical invention on the latter. Homiletics is closely allied with interpretation (hermeneutics) because it always involves an extant text: the Bible. Exegesis is a central activity of homiletics, guiding (whether through agreement or resistance) the conclusions of the homiletician, but the interpretative activity of homiletics is less related to paraphrase and explanation than Lyon’s spectrum suggests. This is evidenced by the extent to which theologians disagree about how to interpret Scripture. Such disagreement moves exegesis more toward Lyon’s resisting reader (rhetorical invention) than to the mediation of her hermeneut (hermeneutical interpretation). For example, gay theologians have resisted and challenged passages in Scripture involving homosexuality, feminist theologians have argued for new interpretations of passages, not just involving the roles and perceptions of women, but involving the idea and imagery of God, and Egyptian theologians have probed passages involving Pharaoh in Scripture.

Lyon’s goal is to increase an awareness of how invention is different within different disciplines. Her work is useful because it allows us to understand invention’s migrational qualities and history without necessarily accepting every inventional characteristic found within a different discipline. Hermeneutics is understandably different than rhetoric and has a different kind of invention at work within it. Yet for all this, I find Lyon’s conclusions problematic, and
not just because of their failure to address Gadamer’s prejudice. Her conclusions are grounded in that impasse between differing world views that Pender finds troubling. Lyon adamantly rejects hermeneutic invention because she believes it diminishes rhetoric. That view sounds startlingly like North’s “weeding out of mistaken world views” (qtd. in Pender 66). Though Lyon does not suggest eliminating hermeneutical invention from hermeneutics, she is weeding it out from rhetoric. Her statements about hermeneutical interpretation diminishing rhetoric make clear that rhetorical invention is better if it is entirely separated from hermeneutics; Lyon converses with hermeneutics in order to cut off the conversation between it and rhetoric, not promote it. If the dialogue between hermeneutics and rhetoric is one in which one side argues the other is flawed beyond repair, it is difficult to imagine how this dialogue would lead to growth and understanding—to the type of back and forth momentum that signals dialogue. Of course, my particular interest is that of homiletic invention, and homiletic invention will never be free of interpretation or production. Homiletic invention’s growth, the ability of it to dialogue with hermeneutics or rhetoric, is dependent upon the relationship these two entertain.

Lyon’s conclusions are ultimately not true of homiletic invention. She asserts rhetorical invention involves reading in such a way as to produce a meaning that “allows [the reader] to take action,” which implies hermeneutic invention (or in our more specific case, homiletic invention) does not produce a meaning that allows the reader (or listener) to take action (49). Yet the very definitions of homiletics I have forwarded suggests that action is at the very heart of homiletics. Augustine, Blair, and Broadus all encourage the preacher to exhort the hearer in such a way as to change his or her actions. In going about the work of homiletics, it is assumed or implied that the preacher will be changed. Change, often referenced in conjunction with
repentance or salvation in Christianity, is a central concern of the ideology in which homiletics is rooted. Lyon maintains production is diminished with hermeneutic invention—that interpretation lessens the role of production. In homiletic invention interpretation and production are symbiotic. The homiletician interprets in order to produce a sermon, and produces sermons in order to interpret Scripture for a congregation. Homiletic invention is necessarily active and yet, this action is not synonymous with the sort of suspicion or resistance that Lyon identifies as necessary for a rhetorically inventive reading because it does allow the Gadamerian dialogue that allows a text to shape or change the view of the one reading it.

Although her conclusions are troubling for homiletic invention, Lyon openly acknowledges that she addresses only one part of invention. She argues that there is a gray area which synthesizes the hermeneutic and rhetorical poles of invention, citing Clayton Koelb who describes the rhetorical reading of a text as “an aggressive form of interpretation imposing on innocent texts a reading that is ‘invented’ in the sense of being made up out of the critic’s head with no thought given to what the texts themselves intend” (qtd. in Lyon 49). My point is not to write a critique of Lyon’s work; it is to drive home her statement that, “The invention of discourse then has many modes” (50). But although Lyon characterizes rhetorical invention in a way that is compatible with heuristics, she does not specifically address heuristic invention. In order to understand how homiletics functions as another mode of inventional discourse, I will now address the other side of the hermeneutic/heuristic binary: heuristics.

Heuristics were defined in the sixties and, like invention, are not relegated to rhetoric and composition only. Their very definition is contested by rhetorical theorists. They are often,
and were first, the concern of cognitive psychologists. The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, within its entry on *cognitive psychology*, defines heuristics:

Cognitive psychologists are interested in how people understand, diagnose, and solve problems, concerning themselves with the mental processes which mediate between stimulus and response. Cognitive theory contends that solutions to problems take the form of algorithms—rules that are not necessarily understood but promise a solution, or heuristics—rules that are understood but that do not always guarantee solutions.

Heuristics, here, have defined boundaries with a number of potential solutions, none of which are guaranteed. Janice Lauer illustrates what heuristics are and what they do within rhetoric and composition:

Heuristic procedures are series of questions, operations, and perspectives used to guide inquiry. Neither algorithmic (rule governed) nor completely aleatory (random), they prompt investigators to take multiple perspectives on the questions they are pursuing, to break out of conceptual ruts, and to forge new associations in order to trigger possible new understanding. Heuristic procedures are thought to engage memory and imagination and are able to be taught and transferred from one situation to another. (*Invention in Rhetoric & Composition* 8-9)

It is not difficult to see how engaging multiple perspectives and breaking out of conceptual ruts is of interest to rhetoricians. The Sophists, after all, prided themselves on their ability to argue two sides of an issue. Heuristics stress the importance of dialogue because they explore multiple perspectives. They are concerned with argument, tracing ideas from a question without necessarily knowing what the answer (if there is one) will be. Heuristics are essential to the inquiry-based definition of invention that Lauer posits. They are equally opposed to notions of invention held by Bacon, Remus, or even Augustine, whose focus on interpretation, and finding that which is present but hidden, does not allow for the truly open-ended possibilities of heuristic practice.
That heuristics are concerned with production does not mean that they are postmodern while hermeneutics are neoclassicist. Heuristics were developed by neoclassicist teachers of composition who “hoped heuristics could help students discover the kind of original insight capable of giving their writing a purpose beyond completing an assignment” (Pender 71). Heuristics help students to control their writing by using various thinking processes to reach (ideally) new and better insights. It was this characteristic of control that postmodern theorists opposed. Pender summarizes the work of postmodern rhetorician, Victor Vitanza who, “took issue with this attempt to control chance, arguing that heuristics...represented a ‘conceptually closed’ approach to invention” (72). She goes on to explain how a problem only has a certain number of solutions, so characterizing invention in such a way limits invention’s possibilities (73). Vitanza suggested aleatory procedures and the potential for a ‘third way’ as a way to escape heuristic problems. It is worth noting that Vitanza also opposed binary logic, so locating postmodernism in binary tradition—as I do here—would be unacceptable to him. Vitanza’s work is helpful because it allows us to see potential problems with heuristics as well as new possibilities for inventional practice (aleatory procedures). It is also interesting because it represents a place outside the binary poles of heuristic and hermeneutic. In the context of my work, binaries are helpful in articulating the polarization present in inventional scholarship, and heuristics represent an important part of that scholarship.

Heuristics, considered in light of the binaries I will address, relate more to creation and production, while hermeneutics relate more to discovery and interpretation. Each binary has points of connection and overlapping concern with the others, and each has points of distinction. Heuristic utilization of both memory and imagination make it distinct from creation, a binary
that is usually depicted as concerned with only the new (in other words, opposed to memory).

Heuristics are different from production as well. While production emphasizes the end (that which is made, the product) of invention, heuristics concern the beginning, the “questions, operations, and perspectives used to guide inquiry” (Lauer 8). The problem may be left unresolved.

Composition scholar Helen Foster’s work provides a clarifying example of how heuristics function. In her article, “Kairos and Stasis Revisited: Heuristics for the Critically Informed Composition Classroom,” Foster uses the terms kairos and stasis to suggest a heuristic model to guide student assignments (1-12). She considers current pedagogy: teachers ask students to begin with a thesis (which Foster defines as a pre-formed opinion) and then find support for that thesis. Notice how this pedagogical model is anti-heuristic according to the definitions above. Heuristics do not always result in solutions (Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia 6th Ed.). By asking students to assume a certain solution, Foster argues that teachers work against an inquiry-based process of learning.

Foster further problematizes current pedagogy. She writes, “research is approached as primarily a process by which to identify and accumulate material to match the pre-determined position” (1). The student makes note of opposing research or ideas, but not in a way that seriously engages those ideas or allows for a different outcome in belief. Foster explains that “In this scenario, there is no genuine dialogic engagement and the activity of argument, thus narrowly conceived, is reduced to a formal contest among what must necessarily be winners and losers” (1). This results in “canned” papers, according to Foster. Heuristic values dialogue; it values the kind of argument that Foster implies (argument that is not narrowly conceived but full
of opposition), and it values open-ended possibilities. Heuristic opposition is the kind Lyon emphasizes in her statements about what makes rhetorical invention unique.

Foster’s emphasis on dialogue links her notions of heuristics to Gadamer’s beliefs about hermeneutics. True conversation is central to both, even as rhetoricians encourage opposition to the text and homiletics and hermeneuts encourage submission to the text. Here the tension between hermeneutics and heuristics lies in what parts of dialogue are most valuable. Listening is key for the hermeneut, while questioning or rebuttal is key for the rhetorician. Homiletic invention comes from conversing with texts in a way that involves listening and questioning, which makes it heuristic and hermeneutic. While homiletic invention centers on interpretation, it also involves opposition—the homiletician scrutinizes previous interpretations and argues for new ones. Homiletic history encompasses vast and extreme disagreements over very critical and central components of religious belief. As this history informs current practice, it allows for any new reading or question to be communally discussed. The chance of any reading being “new” lessens as debates broaden and deepen. This continual change and argument ensure that conversation, true dialogue, will continue. Homiletic invention dialogues by accepting and rejecting, interpreting and questioning and so it is both heuristic and hermeneutic.

Creation vs. Discovery

In the 1980s, one focus of inventional scholarship was on the relationship between thinking and learning (Lauer 103). The creation/discovery binary is rooted in the conversation about how thinking and learning take place. How does creativity occur? From where does it spring? How can teachers help students become more creative? Those like Foster, who

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emphasize *creation*, claim creativity begins with the creator and with heuristic questions. Those who emphasize *discovery* claim that creativity begins with a pre-existing “other,” such as an interpretation, juxtaposed texts, or conflicting ideas that lead the thinker to discover new insight—or hermeneutics. The juxtaposition of texts, or an analysis reliant on conflicting ideas, may sound startlingly like a heuristic; indeed, discovery and creation are difficult to separate. In much rhetorical scholarship the two are conflated. Both involve inquiry and strive for originality. Both are concerned with how invention occurs and where it begins, though both have subtly different answers to those questions. Homiletic invention defies and synthesizes creation and discovery into one practice in which creative questions lead to new discoveries and discoveries result in the creation of sermons.

While the 1980s mark a time of explicit interest in inventional scholarship and conversations about thinking and learning, they do not represent the beginning of the creation/discovery binary. The debate about whether invention is more discovery-based or creative is one as old as rhetoric itself. As such, the discovery/creation binary can be traced through all of rhetorical history. I will not attempt an accurate retelling of this history, but will touch on a few highlights. One obvious example is Francis Bacon’s assertion that invention is a discovery or remembrance, which I discussed earlier. His view highlights the period in which invention was viewed entirely as discovery with no place for rhetorical production outside interpretation.

Early Greek and Sophist rhetoricians exemplify the other side of the binary: creation. For Aristotle, Quintilian, and Isocrates, there is no rhetoric without production. Creation is at the heart of rhetorical practice and definition with almost no notion of discovery beyond the belief that argument should be responsive (that is dialogical and thus interpretive in relation to the other
speaker). Most of the creation/discovery binary, then, is implicit and often less clearly
differentiated than the two examples I just highlighted.

In his 1968 article, “A Paradigm for Discovery” E.M. Jennings uses linguistics to argue
that “dissolving the preconceptions imposed on us by vocabulary and familiarity can lead to
tentative ‘discoveries’ worth exploring” (192). His interest is pedagogical, and he explains, “I
want [the student] to avoid basing his writing on ‘the first thing that comes to mind,’ and instead
to cast about deliberately for second and third and fourth thoughts” (192). This kind of
sentiment echoes Foster’s frustrations with canned papers. It also implies heuristic practice.
Jennings wants students to be deliberate in their refusal to accept the first thought that comes to
mind when they write; he wants them to reject the familiar in order to invent better writing.
Jennings conflates discovery and creation. Creativity (or creation) for him lies in an act of
discovery, but also in conflict or difference. He observes that “the concepts of merging, of
confrontation, of juxtaposition permeate discussions of creativity” (192). Jennings cites
Aristotle, who taught that “intuitive perception of similarity in dissimilars” leads to metaphor.
He uses this idea of Aristotle to promote the pedagogy of comparing two unlike things and
finding their commonality in order to invent (192). In other words, Jennings wants students to
identify dissimilars and find the similarity between them in order to discover and then create.

The conflation of creation and discovery, the assumption that one leads to another, has
been questioned by postmodern theorists such as Yameng Liu. Liu analyzes the relationship
among discovery, creation, and invention. Like Lyon, he defines creation as that which suggests
originality and discovery as that which suggests finding something which already exists
Liu, however, does not relate rhetorical invention to creation and separate it from discovery as Lyon does. Rather, he asserts that both terms should be recognized for their difference and should be subverted to invention, or to the characteristic of inventiveness. Liu’s emphasis is on the limitations which occur when we define invention as either creative or discovery-based. His conclusions are that,

With inventiveness as a rhetorical value, rhetoric no longer has to feel apologetic for failing to measure up to the standard of originality that is central to the concept of discovery or creation. Instead, creation and discovery may be seen as two analytical aspects of invention, definable only in reference to the latter. In other words, rather than conceiving of invention as a defective, diluted, version of either creation or discovery, creation and discovery each signify only one of the two mechanisms indispensable to discourse production. (60)

Rather than elevating one binary over the other, Liu makes both terms descriptors of what he calls inventiveness, which is then free to be either, both, or (perhaps) something entirely different. Further, Liu chooses to name inventiveness “a rhetorical value” instead of using invention, a noun, which implies something more concrete. The word homiletics could easily be substituted for rhetoric. Following Liu’s suggestion, homiletics is no longer apologetic or sub-standard for not living up to the notions of creativity or discovery that Lyon describes because it

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6 It is potentially problematic for Liu to affirm the validity of discovery because he so heavily accepts postmodern assumptions, which would critique the assumption that there is something to be discovered. Liu acknowledges this at the beginning of his article. He writes, “Traditional terms in which we used to talk about invention have been rendered inadequate...it is no longer tenable to regard an ‘argument’...as something ‘out there’ waiting to be ‘discovered’”(53). Despite this concession, Liu emphasizes the validity of clarifying the difference between discovery and creation and does not find discovery to be an unacceptable mechanism within invention. Since I am only partially utilizing postmodern definitions (and, therefore, partially rejecting them), I will not consider this problematic and will endorse the notion of there being things (truth, meaning, etc.) to discover.
is the practice these rhetorical values serve. Liu provides homiletic interpretation a new option. He allows us to ask: why must invention be either discovery or creation? 

When invention is *analyzed* using discovery and creation rather than *defined* by them, we see that homiletics utilizes both discovery and creation alongside one another. They are, as Liu writes, “indispensable to discourse production.” The homiletician begins with a text or two. She allows the text(s) to guide her inquiry. However, another homiletician may begin with himself as a creator, may begin with questions and begin producing various writing before consulting a text or pre-existing work. Both processes may be appropriate and helpful at different points in the inventive process, and both may be used almost simultaneously. As Liu states, these are mechanisms that serve invention, not standards by which to judge invention. Inventiveness uses various mechanisms; it has many modes. Discovery and creation need not exist in isolation in homiletic invention. They may both act as agents which aid homiletic inventiveness. Accepting Liu’s premise transforms Lyon’s spectrum (that ranges from hermeneutic to heuristic) from a one-dimensional line where different modes of invention are located at one point on the line, to a two (or maybe three) dimensional field in which activity can occur on some kind of grid. Such a grid allows for homiletic invention that may include aggressive interpretation, passive readings of historic texts, Gadamerian interpretation, discovery, creation, and many other possibilities.

Many musicians and scientists argue for a synthetic approach to discovery and creation, one that could help inform a synthesis between homiletics and rhetoric. As in rhetoric, comparisons between creation and discovery in science and music became popular in the 1980s.

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7 Liu himself does not actually pose this question or insinuate it, his article allows these two binaries to exist as they typically have, and does not work to challenge their modern definitions, only their relationship to invention. Still, because he is playing with this relationship, I believe his work enables us to ask questions such as the one I pose.
and continue today. I am interested in these conversations because science and music themselves represent what I will call academic binaries. Within academia these two fields are often pitted against one another with regard to funding and even purpose (Science often focuses on conducting studies and disseminating the resulting evidence or conclusions, and music often focuses on the creative process, composition, and performance.). They are also comparable to rhetoric and religion because their historical relationship is vexed. Yet they have begun a dialogue about invention despite their problematic past.

The relationship between scientific and musical invention demonstrates the potential for engagement between rhetoric and homiletics; it is useful in two ways. The first is that it argues about how to define discovery and creation. The second is that it represents a synthesis between fields, one that could help guide homiletics and rhetoric. Paul C. L. Tang in “On the Similarities between Scientific Discovery and Musical Creativity: A Philosophy” finds that music has a rule-governed dimension that relates it to scientific procedure and that science has a subjective dimension that relates it to musical creativity (261). In other words, each field incorporates a certain degree of the binary it traditionally opposes. Though science is often connoted with rules, it has great subjectivity; though music is a creative process, it is also highly governed by rules. Tang observes that science and music use both creation and discovery as procedures. His reliance on observation and procedure (rather than ideology) informs my argument here that an emphasis on the activities of rhetoric and homiletics can help shift focus away from a philosophical impasse.

Definitional issues of creation and discovery are also the primary concern of Donald Walhout. Walhout’s work considers definitional problems in his 1989 article “Discovery and
Creation in Music.” He writes, “a composer produces something which existed in no way whatsoever prior to its occurrence in the temporal order...this meaning identifies the point at issue: the creationist defies, and the discoverist affirms, a prior status of some kind” (193). While this essentially aligns with the difference Lyon uses, it is also unique because both creation and discovery involve production. Walhout approaches the tension between discovery and creation from an existential perspective, he concludes the temporal process should be distinct from questions of ontological existence:

Regarding the temporal process, perhaps we should say that the composer both discovers and creates...he both discovers the qualities and relations needed for the work, and creates the work itself. Regarding ontological existence, perhaps we should say that the composer neither discovers nor creates possible states of affairs but simply actualizes, projects, poses, articulates, manifests, or enacts them. (195)

Here, the chief value to rhetoric is Walhout’s imagined ontological response (rhetoric has moved significantly beyond the initial questions of temporal process Walhout mentions). Rhetoric, for example, could consider what it might mean to actualize, project, pose, articulate, manifest, and enact in relation to the activity of invention. Such terms beg a postmodern linguistic analysis through the frame of invention. This example illuminates the reality that when disciplines and definitional tensions collide, creativity and invention (yes, invention about invention) is born out of the collision. Just as music and science have served each other this way, so can homiletics and rhetoric. By colliding with each other, homiletics and rhetoric can find new invention about invention. They can stretch previous definitions in order to expand current inventive practice.

A Postmodern Solution

Walter Jost and Wendy Olmsted observe in *Rhetorical Invention & Religious Inquiry* that “rhetoricians with religious interests seem to be a rare breed, if not an endangered species” (3).
My particular interest narrows their observation: Rhetoricians interested in using homiletics to explore rhetoric, and more specifically invention, seem to be nonexistent. Jost and Olmsted explain the absence of rhetoricians interested in religion by noting that “the postmodern view of language holds that rhetoric precludes religious truth” and by pointing to the “prevalent claim that religious belief defies the rhetorical commitment to human finitude and contingency” (3). Essentially, Jost and Olmsted ally with the conclusions of Craddock and those I have briefly articulated: that postmodern philosophy is at the root of rhetoric’s disassociation with religion.

Postmodern philosophy may have caused the breach, but it also offers rhetoric and religion the solution for reconciliation. Postmodern rhetoricians value rather than dismiss history. The past informs current practice. History must be scrutinized, but old teachings viewed through a new philosophical lens (that of postmodernism) may yield new discoveries. Rhetoricians today revive, analyze, and adapt ancient Greek and Roman concepts. They also show some interest in preaching as a rhetorical space for minorities during certain historical periods. For example, Patricia Bizzell writes about how nineteenth century women (specifically Frances Willard and Phoebe Palmer) used preaching to further their feminist goals and persuade their audiences: “Methodism was the largest religious denomination in nineteenth-century America...therefore, Methodism offered women activists a powerful rhetorical weapon” (378-79). Homiletics, with its use of ancient texts and concern about communicating an ever-lengthening church history, is also sympathetic to historical considerations. As theological shifts take place, there is an ever-present reminder of certain historical events and beliefs, including the Protestant Reformation, the birth of Christ, and the crucifixion. Many of these events are honored as holidays and are, therefore, taught and remembered throughout the
calendar year. As homileticians and rhetoricians study and analyze their shared past, they may
find value in re-engaging one another. Both rhetoricians and homileticians are expressly
interested in public address and study the old methods of this address, old methods which may
overlap, such as Augustine’s teachings. Neither rhetoricians nor homileticians feel themselves
above history. Though they may reject the beliefs or practices of a certain time, they value
reviving, remembering, and analyzing anew those old practices of invention, and this positions
homiletic invention for new conversation as religion and rhetoric remember one another.

There is another way postmodernism functions to return rhetoric and religion to an
amicable place, and that is its emphasis on practice. Contemporary rhetoricians and
homileticians are more and more involved in the research and analysis of their practices. They
want to find what actually works, and they strive to take a more pragmatic approach. Each
admits to prior periods of weakness in this area. Rhetoricians acknowledge a period in time
when composition amounted to little more than reading English literature and writing papers
about it, and when papers were graded and returned to students based on only their grammatical
errors, with no emphasis on content. They think of how composition fell farther and farther from
its place of addressing real, public concerns and attempt to make it more socially active.
Similarly, homileticians, particularly those who lead churches, have become more reliant upon
the feedback of their parishioners; many study how to better connect with audiences today.
Some churches have become so interested in using a pragmatic approach they are critiqued for
being formulaic or unoriginal. An emphasis on practice means there is more potential for both
rhetoricians and homileticians to put aside ideological differences in order to learn from one
another. Rhetoricians might admit that their concern for public address and more orality leads
them to value the environment and study of homiletic invention. Homileticians might admit their need for rhetorical training and study leads them to value the environment and study of rhetorical invention. In all these cases, homiletics offers a place for postmodern inventional scholars such as Liu and Lyon to converse with homileticians. Not only does it synthesize the hermeneutic/heuristic and creation/discovery binaries but it can also move away from theory and focus on practice, on shared history, and on the observation of current inventional activity offers these two opposing parties another way to engage one another. Doing so allows rhetoric and homiletics to dialogue despite radical ideological disagreements.
CHAPTER THREE: HOMILETIC INVENTION: INVENTIONAL DEFINITIONS AND BINARIES IN HOMILETIC TEXTS

Introduction

Homiletic inventional beliefs are extraordinarily implicit within homiletic texts. Such beliefs must be siphoned out from the other rhetorical and theological concerns with which they are mixed. Homileticians do not typically organize their work according to rhetorical cannons, though it is clear many authors are students of rhetoric (ancient if not contemporary). Not one homiletic text I have reviewed, for example, has a section overtly devoted to invention, nor do homileticians use the word invention to describe their inventional practices. I will use the work of contemporary homileticians to show the way invention manifests itself in their writing.

Homiletical invention is implicit, but there is an undercurrent of conversation within it that is ready and waiting for guidance and expertise rhetorical theory can offer. In Chapter Two, I showed how homiletics resists binaries because of its global concerns and the nature of its practices. Here, I will show how homiletic texts resist binaries using hermeneutic vs. heuristic and creative vs. discovery. Homiletic texts typically fall into two categories: those that are postmodern and those that are not. This divide is a significant one, and each side approaches invention differently. However, as Lyon finds with hermeneutic and rhetorical invention, there is a range of belief and inventional theory in homiletics that often does not fit neatly into one category or the other. Some texts synthesize the binaries so fully it is almost impossible to categorize them. I use the terms fundamental and postmodern to organize the homiletic texts, mostly because homileticians themselves are sensitive to and cognizant of this divide. I label each homiletic text in reference to that sensitivity while also explaining the points of synthesis. I
will explore the binaries in postmodern texts first and then analyze fundamental texts. Finding each text’s definitional views of invention will clarify the earlier claim I make that homiletic invention is another inventive mode, a gray area that represents a unique invention site. I want to make sure the gray area or mode of homiletic invention is not a hazy suggestion; I will give it scope and clarity here.

Postmodern Homiletical Invention

Jeffrey Francis Bullock, in his book *Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern Wor(l)d*, explains the difference between fundamental preaching and postmodern preaching. Fundamental preaching (Bullock and a number of other homileticians call it *Old Homiletic*) is “characterized by objective language; it displays a world that can be mastered and known” (12). Postmodern preaching (or *New Homiletic*) “foregrounds the fluid aspects of humankind’s existence, those elements of being in the world that cannot be objectified or epistemologically subdued” (12). Postmodern preaching seeks to immerse the hearer in an experience rather than argue a point. It seeks to create meaning, rather than explain truth. In terms of the creation/discovery and heuristic/hermeneutic binaries, postmodern preaching is creative, resisting the hermeneutic tendencies to re-discover, or re-create a part of Scripture and emphasizing the need for sermons to span time in order to allow the listener to produce meaning in the present. Because postmodern preaching allows a

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8 I choose not to use the terms *Old Homiletic* and *New Homiletic* because I believe the adjectives *old* and *new* are problematic. *Old*, for example, may carry with it the conception of something outdated, or something that has been replaced, when many homileticians continue to perceive the world according to its boundaries. Similarly, *New Homiletic* carries with it the notion that all its beliefs are recent, when, in reality, there have always been certain groups who have resisted the certainty or philosophical commitments of Old Homiletic.
much greater degree of subjectivity and skepticism, what kind of meaning should be made is flexible (Bullock 50-56). Bullock walks a fine line between subjectivity and objectivity:

I believe in Truth with a capital ‘T,’ but I also recognize that such Truth is rarely seen, comprehended, or understood by humanity as a whole and, perhaps more distressing is often defined by the individual or group that has the most weapons and has won the most recent proverbial war. (36)

Postmodern homiletics recognizes Christianity as truth, and so it still relies on interpreting Scripture, but creation is privileged over discovery and an irrational world is more likely than a rational one. Personal experience is privileged and truth subverted (though, as I mentioned, truth, especially communal truth, is accepted).

In *Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, David Buttrick, a key postmodern homiletician, asks whether a “rational, objective method can cope with biblical language which is often figural, poetic, or narrative in form” (132). The idea that truth is present in Scripture is not so much disputed as is homiletic form. However, when form is restructured subjectivity increases. Poems, after all, do not have the same kind of singular meaning that lectures do. By valuing poetic or narrative form, Buttrick values a subjective approach. To understand this approach, postmodern homileticians sometimes turn to ancient rhetorical debates.

Bullock’s work, more than almost any other, engages rhetorical theory. Bullock uses ancient rhetoric, which he divides into two opposing world views, to articulate the differences between fundamental and postmodern preaching:

A rhetoric of actuality (*energeia*) assumes a rational universe, one whose causes and structures human beings need to know and understand. This rhetoric attempts to instruct by presenting the *what* and explaining the *why* of the world. It is persuasion by explanation and its purpose is to affect decisions. A rhetoric of the possibility (*dunamis*) assumes an incomplete universe. Persuasion is its central goal, but, instead of arguments, it favors persuasion facilitated by figurative language (12; italics in original).
I include Bullock’s definitions to frame the differences between fundamentalism and postmodernism in homiletics, using an homiletician’s own words. I also include it to provide an understanding of what Bullock’s homiletic invention entails. These definitions of New and Old Homiletic provide the basis of Bullock’s goal: to provide New Homiletic (postmodern preaching) a thorough history with which to identify and a more detailed theory with which to engage in order to improve practice. In order to improve practice, there must be at least some hints about what invention in a postmodern homiletic environment looks like. Bullock’s homiletic does not assume a rational universe and does not need to present the what or explain the why, as he puts it (12). For him, invention is free from many of the constraints of fundamental preaching, such as a strong commitment to expositional interpretive practices. Bullock’s homiletical approach is a persuasive endeavor, but one that exchanges argument for figurative language. Invention that is free from binding ties to exegesis and hermeneutics (in order to discover truth) is a more creative and productive endeavor. As Bullock states, postmodern homiletics uses figurative language. The imagination, then, is more important for invention, needed to produce the kind of story and imagery that will guide the listener to experience some event.

Postmodern homiletics is unique from many other postmodern philosophical frameworks, as Bullock and Buttrick demonstrate. It does not accept total subjectivity, but truth is difficult to identify and logical argumentation is too coercive and objective to be a desirable sermon technique. Bullock summarizes the preaching philosophy of Henry Mitchell, a widely read homiletician: “Mitchell argues that the totality of human beings is best engaged by offering vicarious encounters with experiences of biblical narrative in which the preacher attempts to
reach the intuitive consciousness of the hearers (Bullock 52). The use of narrative and the emphasis on “vicarious encounters” shies away from any attempt to force the listeners to assume one point or meaning. The audience is free to (mostly) take away from the message what each member of it will and the homilectician tries his best to craft the sermon so that it does not force points upon the audience. The distrust of control and experiential goal makes postmodern homiletics a place where production and creativity are more valued than in fundamental homiletics. The homilectician is encouraged to present an experience that need not emphasize meaning at all. This conception of invention differs from Lyon’s notion of rhetorical invention. Lyon wants new meaning, she wants argument—the kind of disputes that spark debate and opposition. The homilectician strives for peace and unity. These homiletic goals make invention potentially more passive. Though creativity is valued and opposition may occur, it will not be an opposition that is likely to offend the audience or provoke hearers; rather, it will be the kind of gentle questioning that moves each person toward self-reflection and enlightenment.

Persuasion is different in postmodern homiletics—it means something closer to engagement rather than agreement or conviction. Bullock’s explanation of how Craddock’s work differs from Buttrick’s demonstrates how persuasion functions in postmodern homiletics:

“Craddock’s perspective may be the most explicitly dialogical, but Buttrick is equally concerned about viewing preaching as an event where meaning must be co-constructed” (51). My point

Interestingly, New Homiletics themselves do not use the techniques they view as most persuasive in order to discuss theory (for example spatial organization or a narrative structure). Their use of logic and argument is much more thorough (in their academic writing, not their preaching) than many advocates of expository preaching. Also, their carefully structured arguments in favor of an irrational world betray a kind of commitment to logic and rationality as a way of knowing what is true in the world that seems ironically certain. In other words, it may be philosophically problematic that postmodern homiletics refuse to commit to total subjectivity: if truth is still “out there” it is difficult to move from discovery to creation, from hermeneutic to heuristic. While the synthesis of binaries is interesting, even admirable, it is difficult to articulate how this is possible.
here is not to undertake to explain how Craddock and Buttrick differ from one another, but to emphasize how postmodern homiletic values dialogue. It is not the homiletician’s job to make meaning; meaning is made when both speaker and audience construct it *together* through dialogue. The hope is that the audience will participate in and effect the invention process, even though the text of the sermon is already written. The text is left open-ended, suggestive, experiential, so that its meaning is invented. Rather than hearing an argument with which an audience agrees or disagrees to various extents, the audience experiences an event where each member is able to determine what the message means.

Thomas H. Troeger is one postmodern homiletician who is less inclined to allow meaning to be co-constructed during the sermon. In *Preaching on the Brink*, Troeger examines the role of imagination in homiletic invention, entitling his chapter, “Can You Imagine This: The Future Role of Imagination in Preaching.” Troeger roots homiletic invention in the crisis of the world, which he identifies as injustice and oppression (135). He allows for more intentional persuasion of the truths he believes are knowable—such as the evil of injustice and oppression that Troeger identifies as the world’s crisis. The homiletician invents a narrative which acts as a counter to that crisis:

> The work of homiletical imagination is rooted in and intertwined with the imagination of the community. Understood from this perspective, imagination is more than the act of ‘forming a mental concept of what is not actually present to the senses.’ Imagination is the visionary work of a culture that creates a universe of stories, images, and rituals to sustain its life by giving hope and meaning to people. (136)

Troeger provides examples of how imagination has functioned to drive preaching in order to help a community revision itself (such as how African-American homileticians preaching to slaves addressed their audiences in a way that would affirm the value they were denied by the
surrounding culture of injustice and oppression). He also clarifies what he means by imagination:

To be an imaginative preacher does not mean waiting for a cloud to appear in the sky of your mind. Instead, you graft your creativity to the richly rooted, thickly branched tree that has been cultivated by the entire community, that tree that is its heritage, its tradition of song and prayer, praise and proclamation, survival and resistance. (136)

Invention is not an individual act that occurs in isolation. It is driven by an individual, the preacher, whose job it is to take the imaginative impulses of the audience and communicate them using a variety of forms, such as song or prayer. It is interesting to note that survival and resistance are among those places in which this imagination takes place. Invention is linked to the kind of social action and resistance described by many contemporary rhetoricians such as Karen Burke-Lefevre and Patricia Bizzell because Troeger is willing to argue for or against certain beliefs. Bizzell, using Mary Louise Pratt’s definition of the term contact zones, argues that history should be categorized not by time period but by conflict: “I use [contact zones] to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt qtd. by Bizzell 462). By making oppression and injustice the central concern of sermons, Troeger too frames the world by using contact zones. His point of difference concerns how and why contact zones should be taught. Rather than use contact zones to undermine the (often incomplete) narrative of Western education, Troeger applies a religious framework to conflict for the purpose of bringing a message of grace and hope to his hearers. Burke-Lefevre is similarly interested in rhetoric and culture. She argues for a socially collaborative method of invention. Burke-Lefevre summarizes
her critique of Platonic invention: “[A Platonic view of rhetorical invention] limits our understanding of invention in several important ways; it leads us to study the individual inventor apart from socio-cultural contexts” (32). Troeger’s invention exchanges the Platonic invention critiqued here for a socio-cultural one in which context and communal imagination are emphasized. Creativity and messages are “cultivated by the entire community...its heritage, its tradition of song and prayer, praise and proclamation, survival and resistance” (Troeger 136).

Troeger continues to clarify the homiletician’s role, using various lines of African-American spirituals.10

Here, then, is a practical, theological, spiritual way to develop one’s homiletical imagination: name the trouble you see, the cruel wrong...Let the juxtaposition of trouble and Hallelujah be what Paul Scott Wilson compares to the spark gap between two charged wires, the place where imagination leaps to find connections of grace and meaning that otherwise would never occur.” (141)

Invention takes place through opposition and juxtaposition. It is found when the homiletician identifies the tension between “Hallelujah” (praise, joy, God’s kingdom) and “trouble” (tragedy, injustice, oppression). Troeger’s description of “the spark gap between two charged wires” describes an inventional event, a kind of new thought that results in production (141).

Opposition creates new connections, ones that Troeger links both to meaning and grace, ideas he is willing to label true. His homiletical invention is creative because it is born out of juxtaposition and discovery-based because it is linked to discovering a community’s heritage.

10 I reference only Troeger’s main points that are relevant to invention and whose argument is cohesive, and therefore omit several main passages. For example, at one point Troeger says the homiletician should liberate the listeners, defining liberty as “an expression of relief” that occurs during preaching (142). He simultaneously discusses the value of “bread” which he defines as both the word of God and the act of taking communion. He says that “breaking bread on our knees” (the lyric which he uses to frame the entire section) implies the preacher’s self examination or re-imagining of self, but with the help and guidance of the community (141-42). I have no idea how to discuss this because each of these ideas (that of liberty, the multi-faceted metaphor of bread, and the self-view of the preacher) seems to merit its own discussion. I think the use of song lyrics to guide the argument obscures the clarity of the message. Perhaps, too, this is a summarization of Troeger’s larger work which addresses each separately and is confined to one chapter here.
These inventive actions result in connections of grace. In other words, the new idea that is identified when opposing elements are compared results in an old meaning, a traditional message: the message of grace that Troeger suggests is the gospel (135-37).

In postmodern homiletics, invention encompasses a number of processes. The preacher’s inventive process is the thoughtful undertaking of how to provide an experience that is not coercive for the audience. The invention process continues during the delivery of the sermon when the audience contributes to constructing meaning. Postmodern homiletics emphasizes the latter of these inventions and gives almost no guidance to the former. Because truth is highly subjective and difficult to know—and because each community is so distinct and each message so free of argument—the inventive implications are simply to employ narration, imagination, and creativity. Invention does not include much opposition; instead, there is an emphasis on making meaning through the least disturbance because to challenge and disturb may be to coerce. Imagination is invoked but not explained, and heuristics are not employed. Examples of sermons are sometimes provided in postmodern homiletic texts in order to provide for a common understanding of what such a sermon might sound like, but overt inventional advice is mostly avoided.

**Fundamental Homiletic Invention**

Fundamental homiletic texts are more common than postmodern ones, mostly because they have been written over a much larger historical period and because more Christian denominations in the United States agree with their philosophical and theological assumptions. Because argument is valued and persuasion is more explicit, it is easier to find traces of invention in these texts.
Calvin Miller’s book, *Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition*, suggests certain inventional beliefs in the title alone. The rhetorical practice of preaching, Miller suggests, is an art, one that is made up of story (narrative) and assumes an expository form. Invention is tied to the act of exposition, which is essentially an interpretive act in which one carefully considers the full background, language translation, etc. of the biblical verses in order to construct a sermon. Invention also involves narration, telling a story, which hints that invention may also synthesize some creativity or production as a narrative is constructed, even if it is re-constructed through interpretive acts. Of course, to base Miller’s entire view of invention on his title greatly risks misrepresentation. He explains his view of what preaching should be in this way:

As America has moved further away from the revivalistic zeal that endowed the sermon with passion, sermons seemed to grow more congenial but also more sluggish. Thanks to advancements in psychology there is no longer any real sin lurking about, and, therefore, no sinners to reform. Since sin and eternity have been discarded in the ash can of postmodernity there seems to be little serious work for the sermon to do. (12)

Aside from being sarcastic, his historical and philosophical analysis tells something of his ideas regarding homiletical invention. Miller frames the crisis of preaching as a problem brought about by postmodern philosophy as well as psychology. Because postmodern beliefs question the definition and prior cultural acceptance of *sin*, Miller believes sermons have less “serious work.” Sermons should be a call to reform, a chance to repent of sin, and, therefore, invention begins with sin, or brokenness, which motivates the homiletician to exhort his or her audience to reformation. The language is theological, but the implications for rhetorical practice are clear. Miller advocates for one aim (reformation) which, supposedly, every sermon, or at least a great many, should utilize. The homiletician’s job is not to invent a topic about which to speak, it is to speak a message, the main thrust of which is already set. For Miller, invention is more discovery
than creation. The message is already discovered and the homiletician’s job is to stylize it for her particular audience.

Sidney Greidanus, another reputed fundamental homiletician, puts it this way in *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature*: “The purpose of the sermon...must be in harmony with the original purpose of the preaching-text...the extension of purpose to our day naturally brings with it an element of uncertainty and the subtle temptation to impose one’s own purpose on the text” (130). As with Miller, there is an active attempt to resist the kind of creativity and production that most rhetoricians value; both want the sermon to be as close as possible to the original intent. Greidanus fears the “temptation to impose one’s own purpose on the text” that is an accepted inventional element for postmodern homileticians (130). He understands how difficult it is to make a sermon span time in order to relate to an audience today. His emphasis is on achieving relevance while trying as hard as possible to retain the original meaning. For Greidanus, invention is rooted in interpretation, in hermeneutics. He writes, “Every text says something about something. When it is properly interpreted, its many elements, ideas, phrases, and clauses are seen to be interrelated in such a fashion as to express a particular primary affirmation” (132). Invention is a matter of synthesizing “[Scripture’s] many elements, ideas, phrases, and clauses” in order to capture the primary truth contained in each (132). Inventive activity occurs through synthesis rather than opposition. Scripture’s interrelated ideas provide the basis for inventional activity. Proper interpretation ensures that the interrelated ideas are understood in their original context before they are fashioned into a sermon for a present-day audience. Greidanus locates Scripture’s original intent as a key inventional approach, which places him at the discovery pole of the
creation/discovery binary. His inventional procedure involves the synthesis of several scriptural passages. Greidanus makes interpretation a comparative act in which the homiletician identifies the relevance of Scripture, “every text says something about something,” and also grapples with the complexity of, “[the text’s] many elements, ideas, phrases, and clauses” (132). Invention, for Greidanus, lies where relevance overlaps with the textually interrelated meanings. Discovery remains central because both the relevance and the textually interrelated meanings come from the text itself, rather than from an outside source.

Haddon Robinson is another fundamental homiletician primarily concerned with interpretation, yet his work provides a useful contrast to that of Greidanus. For Robinson, homiletical invention is a matter of identifying a single idea from which the homiletician generates his sermon (37-8). He and Greidanus are both interested in inventional synthesis: “The ability to abstract and synthesize, that is, to think in ideas, develops with maturity...[an idea] abstracts out of the particulars of life what they have in common and relates them to each other” (Robinson 38). Synthesis is the generating principle that guides inventional activity for Robinson, but the notion of thinking in ideas hints at his nuanced approach to interpretation.

Robinson wants the homiletician to use a specific process to find the idea present in the text while Greidanus leaves synthesis an open-ended process so long as it is grounded in the text (41). Robinson explains his process: “Since each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea, an exegete does not understand a passage until he can state its subject and complement exactly” (41). For Robinson, exposition is invention. Invention (or exposition) is the sermon. Invention and production are grounded on scriptural exegesis. Robinson outlines
how to select Scripture passages, how to study the passages, and how to stylize the collected ideas from these procedures into a good sermon:

Because the homiletical idea emerges after an intensive study of a passage and extensive analysis of the audience, getting that idea and stating it creatively is the most difficult step in sermon preparation. When the idea rises in the preacher’s mind “clear as a cloudless moon,” he has the message to be preached. (99)

Robinson’s invention is slightly more creative than Greidanus’. Although both emphasize the importance of communicating the message from the text, Robinson encourages creativity, while for Greidanus, “a preaching-text provides the basis for keeping a sermon on track so that textual preaching is indeed the word of God” (123). Greidanus’ invention must be an act of discovery and only discovery at the risk of becoming heretical, while Robinson hopes the central idea will be creatively used to develop a message. When Robinson says, “getting that idea and stating it creatively is the most difficult step in sermon preparation,” he directly references invention and appreciates its importance in the composing process (99). The homiletician’s invention is rooted in the “intensive study of a passage” making it a discovery-based activity (99). However, invention is equally rooted in the “extensive analysis of the audience” (99). The study of the text and analysis of the audience is where homiletic invention begins–homiletic invention begins, for Robinson, in an implied dialogue between the text and audience.

Miller, though just as fundamental as Robinson, advocates a different inventional beginning. As I noted above, Miller believes the church has various contemporary problems, such as postmodern philosophy, sin, and psychology. Invention grows out of these problems: the crisis of the church and the crisis of humankind–the crisis of human beings’ broken relationship with God, sin. Invention that begins with sin begins in a kind of opposition; the eternal divine contrasted with the current broken state of humankind. Miller’s homiletician does not employ
opposition to produce *any* message but to communicate *one, specific* message, that of sin as carefully exegeted from a certain biblical passage. Opposition, a creative process, is used for discovery-based inventional practices. The homiletician identifies oppositional tension and writes a message out of it in order to both explain it and offer a solution or action to the audience—that of redemption.

Miller’s writing employs other inventional beliefs, such as dialogue: “Great preaching has always been dialogical, but to the indiscriminate layperson, it has been seen as a monologue” (18). Invention, in light of dialogue, should involve more voices than the text (the Bible) or the preacher’s voice articulating the topic (repentance, according to the earlier advice). Because dialogue involves the audience, Miller begins to move from a place in which the preacher is the authority, only articulating one message that is to be derived closely from an expounded text, to a place of dialogue. He clarifies what this dialogue means:

Great preaching is not a busy mouth, spewing forth answers. Great preaching is an ear. But real listening begins not so much in the ear as in the epidermis. The noblest of prophets should feel before they advise. Preachers, however eloquent they are, are rarely heard as readily as pastors. (61)

Invention begins when preachers listen to the audience, and this listening is depicted not as literal listening, but as empathy. What to say is rooted in empathy with the audience. It is in this empathy that Miller’s beliefs become potentially problematic. He continually suggests that homileticians have authority. They must choose, for example, not to simply spew forth answers, which implies they have the answers, but to empathize. Yet empathy also suggests empowering another, in this case the audience. Miller does not specifically address how the authority of the preacher might change as the voice and feelings of the audience are addressed. The homiletician invents by listening to her audience and to God (through the interpretation of scripture, prayer,
through being the sort of pastor who knows the concerns of her congregants, etc.). In this
listening a dialogue is formed, a topic selected, and a response drafted. Inventional activity is
dialogical, and listening a feeling-based art that can be learned and honed.

Further, empathy and listening are portrayed as communal. Miller suggests the
homiletician is able to listen to an entire community, not necessarily to one individual, and then
draft a response that is a sort of communal answer, a belief many world views easily
problematize. This view rejects individualism for an invention that works much closer to the
Greek conceptions of oral address. If empathy is involved, the response will be one of feeling.
The thrust of Miller’s sentence deals with persuasion, yet also suggests invention
 Dialogue in rhetorical invention is often a way of including opposition, seeing two sides or more
of an issue. Here, it charts the inventive course for how to discuss the opposition between
redemption and sin. Listening for Miller differs from rhetorical dialogue. It is less
argumentative while remaining concerned with persuasion. Dialogue is the audience giving the
homiletician guidance about how best to approach the topic at hand, or what part of that topic to
address. Relevance, given Miller’s notion of the current state of the world, can only happen if
the homiletician listens to the audience and allows audience belief to inform the invention
process. I argued earlier that Gadamer’s conception of dialogue can, to a certain extent, be
considered heuristic. Miller, however, does not go far enough into dialogical discussion to reach
this point. His views are wholeheartedly interpretive, and therefore hermeneutic. Even dialogue,
pictured here as listening, becomes an act of pure discovery, uncovering the emotions of those to
whom the homiletician listens. Empathy is at the root of fundamental dialogue while
postmodern dialogue is less defined because it happens during the sermon as the audience helps construct meaning.

There is one homiletician who represents the alternative mode or gray area homiletic invention potentially allows: Craddock. Often credited as the originator of New Homiletic, Craddock, more than any other homiletician, represents a synthesis of the binaries I call *fundamental* and *postmodern*. He nearly seamlessly incorporates both into a single practice. Craddock’s book entitled *Preaching* was first published in the eighties and is considered by homileticians today both relevant and foundational. It is typical for writers of more recently published homiletic textbooks, both fundamental and postmodern, to quote Craddock at least once, or reference their project in relation to the scope of his book.11

In the second chapter of *Preaching*, “Preaching: Having Something to Say,” Craddock explores inventional practices, asking how homileticians gather ideas, experiences, and study to spark invention. He begins by writing, “The principle of procedure fundamental to the task of sermon preparation is this: the process of arriving at something to say is to be distinguished from the process of determining how to say it” (84). It is interesting that Craddock must argue for the validity of invention as its own process. He wisely identifies a major stumbling point of homiletical teaching: many preaching texts to not distinguish invention as its own activity with unique processes. Of course, there are a number of texts that assume exposition *is* invention; such texts do not recognize inventional activity outside exposition or interpretation, while Craddock investigates and encourages inventional possibilities outside one specific format. He places himself in an inventional gray area, a homiletical mode that defies rhetorical binaries. He

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11 For example, Miller writes in his introduction, “I want to do something like Fred Craddock did in *Preaching* and write this book a littler freer of footnotes than I usually do...I don’t pretend to imitate Craddock’s excellence, only his style of argument regarding external academic authority” (10).
writes: “preaching is...making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God. Here revelation is used not in the sense of content, although content is certainly there, but in the sense of mode.” (51). Craddock suggests that if the mode of revelation –communicating with God–is in place; invention follows and sermons are produced (51). Invention is a process of communication, but not limited to discovery or creation, hermeneutic or heuristic. Craddock takes his global notion of homiletical invention as revelation and explores the specific invention processes of homiletics. He writes, “One begins, then, with study in order to have something to say” (85). A life of study favors interpretation and discovery. The homiletician commits to value new ideas and arguments, both religious and secular, in order to stimulate ideas and generate sermons.

Craddock insists that study should be combined with other invention methods, such as cultivating an empathetic imagination. “Empathetic imagination is the capacity to achieve a large measure of understanding of another person without having had that person’s experiences,” Craddock explains (95). Unlike Troeger’s imaginative work, Craddock’s moves away from a communal understanding of empathy. The empathetic imagination is inventive because it places the speaker close to the emotions of someone in the audience, bringing new revelation to what may be an old topic or text. While productive, this empathy has limits because a person cannot truly know what it is like to be someone else: “The extent to which one cannot understand due to lack of similar experience has its compensation in the fact of one’s distance from that experience” (95). This type of invention process is creative and heuristic. Craddock provides an invention heuristic in this section to help homileticians engage in empathetic imagination.\textsuperscript{12}

\textsuperscript{12} For more about this heuristic, see Chapter Four.
The practice of empathy can be used alongside the discovery-based inventional method of a life of study. When these two are both incorporated, creativity, sensitivity, inquiry, and interpretation coexist.

Craddock reminds his reader several times that “In our discussion we are not yet to the point of preparing a sermon. Rather we are in the process of having something to say” (99). He intends that the reader not mistake invention for writing itself. This may be a point of potential conflict with the rhetorical understanding of invention, in which invention can occur during the writing process, but I interpret it as Craddock’s way of emphasizing the difference between invention and content—a point homiletics so often confuse.

Although study may seem to be an inventional practice close to interpretation, Craddock addresses interpretation separately. He sees study as an act of discovery, a habit to cultivate, while he defines interpretation as listening:

The purpose of this chapter is to sketch a procedure for listening to a text, or stated more actively, for interpreting a text. The phrase “a procedure” is used deliberately because there is no one right way of interpreting texts....It is vital that one’s procedure lead smoothly into and through a text and that it be simple enough to be followed almost unconsciously. This is to say, one should come to a point of investigating a text without being aware of the process as so many steps to be taken. A method will be most fruitful when it has become a habit as comfortable as an old sweater. Habit, universally criticized, remains a great liberator of the talents and faculties of busy and creative people. It will be appropriate, now and then, to raise one’s procedure to the conscious level in order to evaluate it in the light of new research and scholarship - but not too frequently. (99)

The emphasis here is that “there is no one right way of interpreting texts,” which sets Craddock apart from expositional homileticians. Miller’s interpretation involves a rigorous and specific formula, that of exposition; Troeger’s interpretation involves holding up a text in light of community struggles and oppression in order to imagine the hope and message of liberation
properly. Craddock refuses either road or, rather, embraces both. While he names interpretation,
listening to a text, which hints at a Gadamerian definition, he refuses to define one method,
going so far as to emphasize that this is “a procedure” (as opposed to the procedure). In doing
so, Craddock allows interpretive practice the full range of creative interrogation, what Lyon
would call rhetorical reading. At the same time, he allows for the most passive Baconian
recollection to be valid invention practice. Craddock is most defiant of binaries. He reinforces
his own argument that interpretation (or revelation) is a mode by emphasizing a variety of
procedures, urging homileticians to develop and cultivate their own practices and procedures.
Yet he also recommends raising the chosen procedure to “the conscious level” only “now and
then,” which suggests that although invention research and scholarship exist, they should
seldom be used.

Craddock, as I have shown, is deeply committed to dialogue and experiential preaching,
which makes him postmodern and a promoter of creativity. He also comes the closest to using
true heuristics of any homiletician I have read.13 Yet for all this, Craddock remains steadfastly
committed to exegesis, a practice that contradicts postmodern homileticians such as Buttrick,
Mitchell, Troeger, and Bullock. Perhaps his most striking disagreement with postmodern
homiletics is his refusal to see persuasion in the kind of experiential light Bullock does.
Craddock addresses his postmodern contemporaries in Preaching on the Brink, a book dedicated
to Henry Mitchell and filled with articles written by the most formative postmodern
homileticians. In an article entitled, “Is There Still Room For Rhetoric?” Craddock writes to his
fellow postmodern homileticians: “sermons may be designed to say absolutely nothing that

13 For more on this read Chapter Four.
might make a difference, or to be so boring that apathy is virtually guaranteed...[this] is not uncommon give the rhetorical timidity of those who question their right to persuade” (69). Craddock worries about the postmodern homileticians’ intentional rejection of persuasion. Though grounded in creativity and production, postmodern homiletics is prone to “rhetorical timidity” (69). Because postmodern preachers “question their right to persuade,” their narrative style, potentially a source of liveliness or entertainment, fails to engage the audience. Craddock hints that their sermons may be apathetic and boring due to the refusal to put forth an argument (69). Craddock himself employs both. He is faithful to both argument and narrative, creativity and discovery, and, most of all, fully committed to persuasion. Craddock illustrates the homiletic gray area by balancing binaries: he stubbornly refuses to spurn exegesis and persuasion, yet also promotes creative invention methods and narration. Within this range of homiletic invention belief, definition, and practice there lies a ripe conversation, waiting for rhetorical engagement and guidance. Rhetoricians could easily help the most staunch homiletical hermeneut to employ heuristics to breathe new creativity into interpretive practice. Similarly, rhetoricians could guide postmodern homileticians toward more engaging sermons by lessening their fear of persuasion and argument. Not all argument must be predictive and interpretive. Not all story must be passively acceptable to each audience member. Rhetoricians’ zealous endorsement of dialogue rich in conflict could also aid postmodern homiletical invention by allowing it to understand the benefits opposition offers.

Conclusion

“To assume that the sheer weight of the authority of the sacred texts, the faithful commitment of a regular audience, and the inspiration of a worship setting will sustain the pulpit without the preacher’s own wrestling with the question of what it is we are doing is in error.”

—Craddock, Preaching 51
The question of “what it is we are doing” is both theological and rhetorical. If homileticians are serious about wrestling with the public, oral, rhetorical task before them— that of preaching—they must begin with a willingness to wrestle. Rhetoric can and does challenge many of the assumptions these homileticians make. It is not hard to link the repeated remarks about the crisis of preaching with the similar remarks teachers of composition and rhetoric make about their frustration with canned papers because the need for unique and riveting ideas is common to both rhetoric and homiletics. It is a need whose solution is identified more and more with invention training and practice. If, as Craddock suggests, the pulpit is ready to be truly sustained, a deep and thorough grappling with what homiletical invention is and should be is in order.

In 2004, Martin Medhurst, spurred by his interest in the religious rhetoric used in the previous presidential election, contacted some well known rhetoricians and asked them to undertake an unusual assignment for *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*. He wanted these professors to personally reflect on the way their religious tradition influenced their rhetorical invention. Medhurst provided a heuristic, a list of questions to serve as prompts. The result was twelve essays, most of which reflected on the Christian tradition and rhetorical invention. Medhurst said, “If we really want to understand the functioning of religion as a source of public communication, we must first start by trying to understand how it structures and informs our own individual communication practices” (447). Michael Casey was one of Medhurst’s chosen respondents, and he analyzed his scholarship and personal history with the Churches of Christ. He writes about his homiletic experience:

As I recall those early sermons where I first learned to listen, then to argue, and finally to discuss ideas, I realize that church was where I first learned to love rhetoric, learning, and a liberal arts education. I was a scholar-teacher in training. Reasonable, optimistic, pragmatic, and restoring (trying to correct and improve
from mistakes made in the past): those are not bad qualities even as starting points for rhetoric. (Casey 495)

Casey illustrates the potential benefit of homiletics for rhetoricians on a personal level: homiletics invited him to observe and participate in listening, arguing, and discussing. Sermons shaped the way he invents and thinks. Beyond the level of personal experience, Casey highlights the potentially fruitful relationship between rhetoric and homiletics. Encounters with rhetoric in sermons taught him to be “reasonable, optimistic, pragmatic, and restoring” (495). Rhetoric’s love of conflict could sometimes use these unifying and gentler techniques. Homiletical invention defies binaries, but it is also woefully neglected, often mingled with content concerns or issues of persuasion, and never openly named invention. Rhetoricians stand to gain new theoretical options for the synthesis of binaries as well as a unique research site in homiletical invention. Meanwhile, rhetoricians are poised to offer homiletics the research, theory, and even the term invention, that could help shape and guide homiletical invention.
I have argued that homiletics is a potentially fertile site for rhetorical scholarship, and that in homiletics there is another mode of invention at work, one that presents an unusual synthesis of traditional rhetorical binaries such as creativity vs. discovery and hermeneutic vs. heuristic. This chapter will examine a small sample of inventional models used in preaching texts to guide the construction of sermons. I survey the inventional models in fundamental texts and then address postmodern texts separately because postmodern texts do not employ models. I use the term *inventional models* rather than heuristics because most are not open-ended and inquiry-based enough to qualify as rhetorical heuristics, though their aim is similar: to initiate invention, to help the speaker/writer produce something good, and to gain control over the inventional process.14 Homiletic inventional models include various forms, outlines, and suggestions intended to guide the writing and revising of sermons. As I explore the range of inventional action present in these models, I will show how the models themselves are sites of exploration for rhetoricians; they offer rhetorical guidance and stand to benefit from rhetorical guidance.

**Fundamental Heuristics**

Fundamental homileticians often include practical applications for their readers, perhaps because their inventional beliefs are rooted in interpretation, and interpretation is a practice that

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14 Janice Lauer’s definition of heuristics is helpful in understanding why homiletic inventional models are not heuristics: “Heuristic procedures are series of questions, operations, and perspectives used to guide inquiry...they prompt investigators to take multiple perspectives on the questions they are pursuing, to break out of conceptual ruts, and to forge new associations in order to trigger possible new understanding (8). Homiletic processes involve questions, operations, and perspectives that guide sermon revision and construction, but their goal is not to break out of conceptual ruts or to forge new understanding so much as it is to protect truth and keep incorrect assumptions (about the audience, Scripture, and the goals of preaching) out of the sermon.
must be applied to actual texts. Interpretation involves the homiletician actively picking up books, paging through them, closely reading their passages, and applying various methods in order to understand them: it is a process that daily takes the homiletician away from theory and into a physical element of study. In order to aid the practice in interpretation, fundamental homiletic texts provide forms, questions, and other strategies to help homileticians interpret and construct sermons.

While these are rhetorical goals, they are not heuristics for several reasons. Several homiletic inventional operations limit their aim to grammar exercises or are framed according to such exercises. For example, Haddon Robinson asks homileticians to identify the subject and complement of a number of sentences in order to practice finding a main idea in a text (101-104). The idea is that if the homiletician knows how to locate the main idea in scriptural interpretation, he can use that as the main idea for his sermon. “Some very nuts-and-bolts questions must be asked and answered to discover how the exegetical idea and its outline can expand into a sermon,” Robinson explains (79). Robinson accompanies the subject/complement exercises with inventional questions: “Does [the main idea] grab hold of a listener’s mind? Can I remember it easily? Is it worth remembering? Does the language communicate effectively to modern men and women?” (99). These questions are inquisitive and rhetorical. They are concerned with some of Lauer’s heuristic goals of “breaking out of conceptual ruts” and forging “new associations” (8). However, the grammatical exercise remains the central part of the inventional exercise Robinson forwards, while these questions are listed warily as asides. He includes a note alongside the questions: “While personal tastes enter in at this point, these questions are worth asking” (99). Robinson feels he must convince his readers that such questions are worthwhile,
which makes him seem uncomfortable with their inclusion. I will not include other homiletic sources that display this kind if hesitancy because it is a lengthy project to express the sentiment of each text. Robinson is not alone in feeling he must justify the more heuristic of his questions. It is this justification and hesitancy to make such questions the primary activity of invention that leads me to conclude homiletic inventional models should not be labeled heuristics. If homileticians re-engage rhetoric, they might find themselves more at ease with heuristic questions and employ such questions more freely and boldly.

Robinson includes numerous exercises for his readers throughout *Biblical Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition*, many of which are more open-ended and reflective than the subject/complement example above. At the end the chapter, “The Road from Text to Sermon,” he poses three developmental questions:

1. What does this mean? Explores explanation.
2. Is it true? Do I believe it? Explores validity

Unlike rhetorical heuristics, these questions are not completely open ended; they are not written as heuristics are, with the intention of exploring many answers. Rather, the questions are narrow, each accompanied by a phrase of purpose so that the homiletician is certain of the point of the question. For example, the question “Is it true?” is followed by the phrase, “Explores validity,” so that the homiletician understands her aim is to ensure that her ideas are valid by asking herself whether her sermon is true (Robinson 100). These questions are generating prompts, intended to produce potential unease as the homiletician asks herself questions such as “So what?” in order to critique her work. If any question cannot be satisfactorily answered, the sermon (or the interpretation of a text) should be discarded or revised.
Robinson’s questions function as gate-keepers that ensure no untrue or faulty message makes its way to the pulpit. As gate-keepers, the questions fail to spark the kind of creativity rhetorical heuristics value; they do not embrace the potential for copia for which rhetorical heuristics are known. Robinson is interested in either right or wrong answers with a deep concern for protecting that which is true and omitting that which is not. The evaluative nature of the questions may keep them from being heuristics, but these questions are similar to many questions used throughout rhetorical tradition; consider their scope when compared with a summary of the Augustine’s work: “Augustine taught the church how to teach so as to be persuasive: appeal to the mind (What is the message?), the heart (How does it affect my life?), and the will (What am I to do?)” (Craddock 66). Placed alongside Craddock’s summary of Augustine, Robinson’s questions are re-statements of similar ideas, ideas long used to guide rhetorical invention. The questions do not provide invention material as the topoi do, but they do direct the invention possibilities that occur during revision. As the preacher re-imagines a sermon, these prompts may help her work through obstacles and trigger new ideas for further improvements.

Robinson also includes a sermon evaluation form in his appendices. Most of the questions in this form are yes-or-no questions, geared toward helping the homiletician identify whether a sermon was the right length, if there was a specific purpose, and so on (appendix 3). The form notably excludes invention, instead including sections dealing with organization, content, style, and delivery. Despite the evaluative and narrow scope of many questions in this form, some questions beg to be expanded; an additional question paired with the initial one, or a change of wording, could result in a heuristic-like guide to help homileticians invent sermons.
For example, in the section addressing delivery, there is a question posed to the audience, “Does the delivery sound like lively conversation?” (Robinson appendix 3). If this question were followed by “Why?” or “Why not?” or even, “What makes this sermon conversational?” it might become the dialogical kind of prompt that could help the homiletician imagine new potential for his sermon. In re-defining the sermon as conversation, homileticians may consider new interpretive passages in the Scripture passages they choose or they may choose different words that reflect a conversational tone.

Another potentially inventive question in Robinson’s sermon evaluation form asks about connections among ideas: “Is there a logical or psychological link between the points? As the homiletician analyzes what links one point to the next (or one story to the next), she considers how her sermon is constructed, what makes it flow, and how each section makes its own point. A slight expansion of this question could easily increase its heuristic potential. Such change might sound something like this: “What if, instead of logical transitions, you used psychological ones? How might this affect your overall message? In what ways would the meaning expand or contract?” The imaginative nature of these expanded questions could guide the homiletician to generate new material in order to enhance the points and transitions, or identify weak areas that need to be re-constructed or re-imagined. Analyzing the transitions may result in fresh creativity as the transitions themselves become oppositional elements used to understand each point and the overall flow of the sermon. This example illustrates the sort of help rhetorical theory can offer homiletics. If homileticians applied the rhetorical values of imagination and heuristics to their work, their inventional possibilities would broaden. As they are, Robinson’s questions are
still creative in that they achieve a kind of tension, one in which the preconceptions in the text are scrutinized in light of one factor or another: logic or psychology.

Calvin Miller’s work provides an interesting comparison to Robinson. Like Robinson, Miller includes frequent forms filled with questions throughout Preaching: The Art of Narrative Exposition, and his questions represent a variety of characteristics including heuristic and hermeneutic, creation and discovery. Miller frames some questions so as to include advice, such as, “What acts of spiritual formation have I engaged in this week that I must never mention but that give me a secret walk of faith that allows me to be heard by those who attend my sermons?” (39). I include this example to demonstrate how many of Miller’s questions lack heuristic potential. This question is buried in advice and merely prompts the homiletician to list some of the spiritual acts she engaged in during the week. Like many homiletical questions, it hints at more rhetorically worthwhile questions, such as, “What gives a speaker the right to be heard by an audience?” Rather than spend time critiquing questions such as this one, I will discuss elements of Miller’s work with more heuristic potential to provide rhetorical insight and analysis.

Miller suggests the homiletician regularly use a set of questions he names the “Audience Analysis Inventory” (51). The inventory is a form with general headings such as, “How are we alike?” and “How are we different?” The initial headings are generative; they prompt the homiletician to create lists that can result in topoi. However, the headings are not meant to be used alone; they are each divided into further specifics like, “From what part of the country does the audience come?” or “What great common doctrines do we share?” Under these sub-headings are various adjectives such as gender, marital status, educational background, vocation and
calling, and spiritual and economic need (51). The inventory illustrates why rhetoricians value open-ended heuristics and why heuristics are more generative because Miller begins with an excellent rhetorical listing exercise, but in narrowing it he confines the responses to such an extent that the generative potential is diminished. Miller’s list of differences are confined to the adjectives he includes, one obvious limitation that may prevent the homiletician from imagining the audience on her own. Further, his section involving audience/speaker similarities is limited to matters of religion and geographic region. Though this list might cultivate some conversation with the audience during the invention of the sermon, it is difficult to see how it would help generate empathy or imagination. The latter part of the inventory includes questions with greater heuristic potential, such as, “In what ways do I need to alter what I have written down to say in order to tailor my remarks to this audience?” (Miller 52). This question has better inventional potential because it is open-ended, probing each homiletician to consider his message in relation to the audience. The audience is granted power in which it may potentially oppose the sermon and influence or change the text. This juxtaposition of audience and speaker generates feedback that disrupts the homiletician’s assumptions about her text.

Miller’s “Sermon Focus Inventory #1” has inventional potential as well. In it he prompts the homiletician to consider the sermon’s relationship to Christ, asking, “What did Jesus have to say about this theme? Is there any one of his parables that focus on this? Where did Jesus act on this?” (64-65). This heuristic is a discovery-based one in which the homiletician uses scriptural analysis and juxtaposition to inform sermon revision. Miller admits that there will be some times when “the teachings of Christ do not relate at all either to the text or the theme of the sermon” (64). These questions constitute a good heuristic because the homiletician must
consider the relationship between his topic and Christ. The potential comparison of, for example, a related parable of Christ could increase inventive potential for the theme already chosen. It invites the imagined Christ (supported by textual evidence) to comment on the sermon. If a similar idea extended to more general, rhetorical heuristics, the writer would hold up his argument and compare it to any other person’s ideas or writing about his topic. Writers do this with sources all the time, but not always in a way that is heuristic. Miller suggests how the quoted person becomes capable of changing the entire argument at hand. Rather than simply finding a source that supports the argument already underway, the rhetorician would grant a source the power to shape ideas or take the argument in a new direction.

In different sermon planning sheets, Miller asks, “How can I ‘narrativize’ this sermon?” (171). This question is open-ended. Miller wants the homiletician to consider how to add elements of image and parallel stories to enhance the sermon, which forces story (narrative) into a place where it may not readily be found (the sermon) in order to spark new ideas as the homiletician wonders how story itself relates to the message. While Miller’s emphasis is on adding stories to the sermon, story becomes an inventional method in which the message is compared to stories. The inclusion of one story influences the meaning of the entire sermon. In Chapter Three I explained that postmodern homileticians value story as a sermon form because story resists one, obvious meaning. Each hearer of a story may remember and draw her own meaning from it whereas in argument the hearer either agrees or disagrees to various extents. By narrativizing a sermon, homileticians may find themselves entertaining new and creative ideas as they engage with the multiple meanings in any given story. As the homiletician chooses which
meaning to emphasize or how to incorporate story, new ideas and points may become apparent and influence the direction of the sermon.

Robinson and Miller illustrate the value of homileticians asking themselves questions about their work. Many of their examples center on reflection in order to help the homiletician revise so that the product will be thoughtful and focused. While revision is valuable and does represent a key part of invention, most of the questions fail to provide a starting place for invention—they are only useful only when the homiletician has a sermon draft. Because rhetoricians study invention and promote heuristics, they offer the possibility for sermon texts to include inventionary aid at the beginning of invention, when topics or ideas are imagined. Rhetoricians are also interested in cognitive processes and delving deeper into the practice of inquiry, which positions them to be able to offer guidance about the kinds of questions that would help homileticians and the questions that hinder inventive goals.

Postmodern Heuristics

Most postmodern preaching texts intentionally exclude heuristics because they do not wish to gain control or confine hermeneutic invention to deliberate methods. Postmodernists object to using deliberate methods because many of these methods potentially limit the possible outcomes. For example, a question only has a given number of answers and so Vitanza calls heuristics “conceptually closed” approaches to invention (qtd. in Pender 72). Some postmodern homileticians provide examples or illustrations to reinforce their teachings, but they avoid inventionary forms and questions. For example, at the end of Bullock’s text, *Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans-Georg Gadamer’s Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern Wor(l)d*, he includes the full text of two sermons. Beside these transcripts, Bullock writes an analysis of how
each part of the sermon exemplifies and relates to the various ideas found in his book (129–171). His goal is to provide a picture of what postmodern preaching entails without attempting the kind of control heuristics or homiletic models provide. In *Book Title*, David Buttrick critiques homiletic heuristics and models:

> Much preaching can be glib, full of homiletic strategies which congregations have heard all too often. What may make preaching profound is a willingness to search deeply the actualities of consciousness...So fine preachers will brood. Preachers will reach into consciousness and depict [the topic about which they are speaking] (33).

Rather than attempt to provide “homiletic strategies which congregations have heard all too often,” Buttrick emphasizes narration, where “Preachers will reach into consciousness and *depict*” (33; emphasis mine). Narration and phenomenology represent that which will allow the homiletician to preach effectively to a postmodern world, and so Buttrick is content to simply advise the preacher to brood.

Buttrick’s purpose is to help pastors think about how group consciousness functions in order to effectively use language to convey ideas. In *Homiletic Moves and Structures*, he explains how a speaker should move from one concept to the next in order to allow a group to understand and attend to a sermon. The closest Buttrick comes to referencing invention is when he defines a *move*:

> Between an opening statement and a closure, a move is developed. Beginning with a simple sentence...preachers will think through theological meanings, cultural and religious oppositions, forms of lived experience, as well as optional strategies. From such initial thinking through, ideas of development will come. (344)

Buttrick acknowledges that thinking involves opposition, lived experience, and other “optional strategies” (344). However, his project does not involve providing thinking strategies or posing
questions to help spark initial ideas, but explaining what to do with those “ideas of development” once they come. Once the homiletician can accurately understand how group consciousness functions, she can take her ideas and craft them into moves so that her sermon will be easy to attend and highly experiential. Each sermon point should be one move and so moves serve as an oppositional element with which the homiletician critiques his work. Rhetoric provides the homiletician with the tools he needs in order to make each move clear and experiential. Group consciousness serves as an inventional aid because it represents a concern for the audience, but instead of allowing the audience’s voice to inform sermon construction, group consciousness grants phenomenology that task. A phenomenological understanding of how audiences listen and perceive information is the tool used to evaluate how to write or change a sermon. Like Bullock, Buttrick does not use forms or guiding questions, but reinforces his ideas with numerous examples sprinkled throughout his text. Such examples help demonstrate the text’s ideas well but do not overtly aid invention.

The lack of inventional guidance in postmodern homiletic texts goes beyond the rejection of control or fear of limitations that some postmodern rhetoricians voice. Postmodern homiletic texts are so pointedly theoretical they do not have the space for practical considerations such as inventional guidance. Postmodern homiletic theory is still in stages of infancy when compared to fundamental homiletical theory, which has enjoyed a much longer history and wider reception. Buttrick and Bullock use rhetorical examples like the Sophists in order to bolster support for the theories they argue. Their interest in rhetoric does not extend to heuristics for sermon preparation. If conversation between postmodern homileticians and rhetoricians expands,
postmodern texts could benefit from practical invention considerations that help preachers create sermon topics and ask open-ended questions during sermon production.

A Gray Mode of Homiletic Heuristics

In contrast to Robinson’s and Miller’s frequent, but not necessarily generative, questions, Fred Craddock asks few questions. Craddock includes four invention models in Preaching, interspersed with advice and theology. His first invention model involves the cultivation of a life of study. Craddock encourages the homiletician to read and learn about subjects outside the realm of religion and theology in order to aid invention. He notes that when a sermon idea comes to mind during this study, the homiletician should immediately ask, “Will the insight stand the test of context and theological consistency?” (80). This question, like Robinson’s, demands a yes or no answer. Also like Robinson’s, it is a question of some depth, one that could lead to further analysis or insight. It is not an heuristic because it does not result in new inquiry or production, but it has some heuristic-like qualities that could be expanded if the question were re-phrased or accompanied by more questions, such as, “How do context and theology inform this insight from study?” Craddock’s question immediately juxtaposes the insight from study with the idea of context and theological consistency. His goal is to put the insight up to a kind of test. Like Robinson, this question is a gate-keeper designed to uphold truth. Analysis and opposition make the question a potentially inventive one, but the lack of open-ended possibilities do not allow it to be heuristic.

Craddock does include heuristics, and his second invention model is not a question but an exercise. In order to better understand an audience, he suggests itemizing what can be assumed about the listeners:
Sit down to prepare a sermon and say, “The audience for this sermon next Sunday will be men, women, young people, and children whom I do not know. Their lives and experiences are totally unrelated to who I am and what I do.” Having said that, take a sheet of paper and itemize what can be assumed about these listeners. (87)

Listing is sometimes used in rhetorical heuristics as well. This imaginative listing activity has no definite outcome and will vary as churches change and as the lister changes—as he becomes more aware of his audience. Further, the point is not to actually get a “right answer” but to become considerate of the relevance of each sermon for a particular group of people. At the same time, the initial advice to consider that the audience is “totally unrelated to who I am and what I do” also reminds the homiletician of his distance from the audience—it checks the potential arrogance of assuming the audience is known and understood. This heuristic functions as a tool in which the homiletician can look over a list of topics or ideas and identify the ones that are best given her audience. Craddock highlights how awareness of audience that may lead to more dialogue between the speaker and the audience. When the homiletician practices this exercise, “The listeners are ceasing to be strangers to the minister...perhaps looking at their lives, their marriages, their studies, their jobs, their world through the lens of Scripture and theology, a fresh perspective can be found” (Craddock 89). This fresh perspective comes when invention occurs, the kind of invention that is helped along by heuristics whose open-ended nature results in imaginative and dynamic answers.

Craddock’s third inventional model involves a free-association exercise with great heuristic value. The exercise is framed so that it can be adapted to each homiletician’s personal habits or schedule:

Assume that a minister has on the desk a loose-leaf notebook in which are pages, each containing a date, a text or texts, and perhaps a general statement of subject.
These cover the occasions for preaching for the next three, six, or twelve months...From time to time, these pages, or at least the next several upcoming, are reviewed. The biblical texts are read and immediate responses in terms of questions, ideas, feelings, and recollections are recorded. (102)

There are other details Craddock adds to this scenario. He clarifies that no heavy study of scriptural texts be done during this phase. He also notes that these ideas should be set aside frequently as the homiletician watches television, converses, and “is otherwise engaged” (102).

The homiletician only occasionally returns to embellish the notations on a given page as she thinks of new ideas. Then, when she sits down to construct her sermon, an entire sheet of jotted ideas and notes and stories and other related items sits in front of her. This set of notes, collected over time, allows the homiletician a starting place for invention activity. As she looks over the list, she has immediate associations and recollections and maybe new synthesis or juxtaposition of ideas that guides his invention.

Making a list helps bring an imagined audience into focus and more voices into the sermon’s ideas and construction. Craddock wants even more from his homiletician reader. He suggests another listing exercise, one whose aim is more blatantly empathetic and individualistic. He describes the heuristic this way:

It is an effort of the imagination to bring to a specific human condition all that a person has heard, seen, read, felt, and experienced about that condition. The procedure is this: take a blank sheet of paper and write at the top, “What’s It Like to Be?” Beneath that heading write a phrase descriptive of one concrete facet of human experience. Examples might be: “facing surgery,” “living alone,” “suddenly wealthy,” “rejected by a sorority,” “arrested for burglary,” “going into the military,” “fired from one’s position,” “graduating,”.... (97)

The list of possible phrases goes on and each phrase is notably unique. Craddock’s goal is for the homiletician to consistently cultivate imaginative empathy with the audience. The notion of imagining the audience has been discussed in rhetorical theory, and Walter Ong argues that every
audience is imagined. Yet empathizing with a given audience is not a typical inventive strategy in rhetoric and composition, a scholarly community not expected or required to provide care for their audience as a minister is—and one more prone to conflict and appreciative of opposition. Empathy might be considered a new and potentially generative heuristic for rhetorical use because it allows other texts and voices to inform production in a way that is different from opposition and argument.

Conclusion

I have argued that contemporary rhetoricians may benefit from empathetic heuristics. Craddock’s empathetic exercise gives clarity and specificity to that suggestion. Empathetic listening grants an audience power over the homiletician—it changes invention. Homiletic interpretation is a similar idea because it involves empathetic reading, granting a text that same kind of power. The listener need not sacrifice autonomy or the prerogative to disagree in either case, but the way in which he constructs his argument or narrative will change when empathy is integrated into invention—the ideas and argument will be put forth with a different voice and with alternate considerations in mind. Homiletics can inform way listening results in invention. In homiletics, listening is able to remain dialogical and pluralistic. Homiletics demonstrates that invention is not only born from opposition and that empathy is not synonymous with passiveness.
I have argued that homiletics and rhetoric have inventionally practices that are of value to each other and that they share many interests that make them potentially helpful to one another. Both value history and possess a shared history with each other, both involve binaries and are interested in synthesizing those binaries, and both engage operations and forms with heuristic potential to aid inventionally production. Each stands to inform the practice of the other.

Homileticians believe that Scripture challenges the way things are by comparing them to the divine. Sermons are invitations to dialogue and converse about how things might be. They imagine new and hopeful reform and point out the trouble in the world. Because sermons are rooted in the crisis of the world their inventionally practices are uniquely interested in audience empathy—their concern is to effect deep and lasting change in the audience. Rhetoricians could use homiletics as a space for inventionally scholarship in which to explore these unique rhetorical attributes. They also offer generative potential by emphasizing unique inventionally methods, such as empathetic listening.

Rhetoricians are positioned to offer homiletics bold and deeper questions that will aid inventionally practice. They can offer the kind of questioning and opposition that allow for the development of heuristics in homiletic practice. By engaging rhetoric again, homiletics can also use the carefully developed terminology that aids inventionally dialectic.

The activity of homiletics overlaps with that of rhetoric. Wendy Olmsted finds the point of interaction between religion and rhetoric in “Invention, Emotion, and Conversion in Augustine’s Confessions.” Her evaluation clarifies the rhetorical nature of homiletics:
insofar as conversion implies a change of life and not just a shift in ideas, it involves human beings in deliberate activities. In these they compare the text with their own lives and are changed by the rhetorical arguments and emotions that emerge in this activity. These arguments are in accordance with a divine will that is fully expressed neither in the text alone nor in the reader but rather in the sparks thrown out from their interaction. (Olmsted 82-3)

The project of homiletics is so take the sparks thrown out from the interaction between Scripture and themselves, between theology and rhetorical theory, between creation and discovery and to make those sparks into a sermon. James Kinneavy describes the writing process of finding a topic and then revising it and concludes that, “This is the process of invention, part of which is thoughtful writing, part of which is thinking” (18). Invention, as both Olmsted and Kinneavy illustrate, exists in the interaction between parallel processes such as thinking and writing, or the interaction between rhetorical argument and deliberate activities, such as life change. The key to invention lies in those sparks, which are thrown out from interaction. In the interaction between homiletics and rhetoric there lies a vast potential for invention. What I have done is to simply allow rhetoric and homiletics a space in which to dialogue with the hope that the resulting sparks will illuminate their unique rhetorical spheres.
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