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The Homiletic Window: A model for reflective preaching praxis

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It may be true that the death of the sermon has been greatly exaggerated, but there is significant ongoing debate concerning the priority of preaching for the church, and in particular about the function, form and foundation of preaching.[1] Although some contend that preaching has diminishing relevance to our contemporary lifestyles, others argue that it is not only biblical but uniquely effective across time and culture as a communication tool.[2]

This paper presents a simple model, called the Homiletic Window, designed to facilitate reflective practice among preachers and to aid their training.

The model synthesises several of the key dimensions of preaching to create an intuitive visual tool. It gives preachers a simple descriptive vocabulary to help them develop greater confidence and intentionality about why and how they preach.

Small-scale tests of this tool in England and Malawi have demonstrated its potential, indicated where further work would be beneficial, and provided useful preliminary insight into the practical perspectives of evangelical preachers in two very different cultures.

I Components of the Model

The model synthesises three key dimensions of analysis within its framework.

1. Foundation

A clear understanding of the theological foundation and scope of preaching is of critical importance for preachers. Alec Motyer provides a sound starting point for evangelicals, asserting

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1 Kenton C. Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 30.
2 Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority: Fourth Edition Revised and with New Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 5–11; John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 15–91; Christopher Ash, *The Priority of Preaching* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications; London: Proclamation Trust Media, 2009), 27–28.

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that 'the *content* of preaching is the Bible' and 'the *objective* of preaching is application'.[3]

Certainly, most evangelical commentators see strong biblical support for the foundational definition of preaching as bringing 'out of Scripture what is there' so lives might be changed.[4] The Homiletic Window therefore presupposes the foundation of preaching as (a) exposition of biblical truth so that (b) lives might see 'gospel transformation'.[5]

Nevertheless, the ongoing debate over such matters as the validity of 'new homiletics' shows that this foundational definition is, in itself, an insufficient basis for an analytical model of preaching.[6]

2. Function

One notable area of debate among homiletic scholars concerns whether the function of preaching is predominantly to proclaim eternal truth or to care for the congregation.[7] Thomas G. Long recognises these two options in his first two 'master' metaphors for preaching: 'Herald' and 'Pastor'.[8] (For the benefit of alliteration, the Homiletic Window uses 'Proclaimer' instead of 'Herald'.)

The Proclaimer metaphor for preaching, arguably championed by Barth, was dominant in the first half of the twentieth century. Motyer sees a strong biblical basis for this function, pointing for example to the dominant use of 'declarative' verbs when describing the nature of preaching.[9]

Commentators value also this metaphor's emphasis on the 'transcendental' message contained in preaching.[10] However, others voice concern that this metaphor has simply 'accommodated itself to cultural norms' and lacks sufficient focus on the audience, leading to a risk that the preacher will fail to answer the questions in the audience's heart.[11]

The Pastor metaphor can be seen as the other end of the spectrum regarding the function of preaching. This perspective, though not new, appears to have gained traction in the mid-twentieth century. While still recognising the centrality of scripture, the Pastor 'focusses on the listener' and on the opportunity for a 'beneficial change in the

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3 J. A. Motyer, *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching* (Fearn: Christian Focus Publications, 2013), 89; Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 19–29; W. E. Sangster, *The Craft of Sermon Construction* (Basingstoke: Pickering and Inglis, 1985), 31.

4 William Corus, ed., *Memoirs of the Life of the Rev. Charles Simeon, Late Senior Fellow of King's College and Minister of Trinity Church, Cambridge: With a Selection from His Writings and Correspondence* (London: Hatchard and Son, 1848), 494.

5 Tim Hawkins, *Messages That Move: How to Give Bible Talks That Challenge and Inspire* (Epsom: The Good Book Company, 2013), 24; Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 57.

6 Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, 'New Hermeneutic, New Homiletic, and New Directions: An U.S.-North American Perspective', *Homiletic*, 35/1 (2010), 19–20.

7 Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 47, 69.

8 Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd edn (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 19.

9 Motyer, *Preaching?* 103.

10 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 23–24.

11 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 21–27.

hearer'.[12] Again, a biblical basis can be argued for this model, as the apostles were clearly sensitive to their audience (e.g. tailoring their message to either Jews or Gentiles, as shown in Acts 17) and maintaining a strong focus on the listener's change of heart (e.g. Acts 17:30).

However, this metaphor also carries risks, as too heavily highlighting this aspect of preaching and love for the audience can result in distorted or weak theology, anthropomorphic utilitarianism, and an overemphasis on the preacher.[13] Taken to an extreme, this approach could become 'preaching as counselling'.[14]

3. Form

The third component of preaching handled by the Homiletic Window tackles 'the hot topic in homiletic literature for the last several decades': what form a sermon should take,[15] or, more specifically, which of man's two basic thought patterns, inductive or deductive logic, should be considered the norm for true expository preaching.[16] In view of this debate, it is useful that Long extends his list of metaphors of preaching to include 'storyteller/poet' and 'philosopher'.[17]

Long's Poet is seen as practising an inductive form of preaching that 'moves from the particular of experience … to a general truth or conclusion'.[18] Again, this approach is not uniquely modern, as even some of the early church fathers rejected the deductive 'rhetorical forms' of their day.[19] However, it returned to prominence in the 1970s in the 'paradigmatic shift' championed by Fred Craddock and others.[20]

A major perceived strength of this form of preaching is its ability to serve the Proclaimer function by enabling faithfulness to both the message of a passage and the 'rhetorical form in which it is found', while also allowing the Pastor to create a 'common world of experience' for his community.[21] However, though this form of sermon can 'create interest', it also risks leaving people confused about the message, underplaying the 'nonnarrative dimensions of scripture', and emphasising 'religious experience' over truth.[22]

In contrast to the Poet, the Philosopher form is rooted in Greek rhetoric and emphasises deductive 'clarity and rationality'. Clearly suitable to 'communicate a central thesis or idea', this 'traditional homiletic form' is seen as

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12 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 28.
13 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 35, 33, 34.
14 Edmund Holt Linn, *Preaching as Counselling: The Unique Method of Harry Emerson Fosdick* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1966).
15 Dennis M. Cahill, *The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 18.
16 Ralph L. Lewis and Gregg Lewis, *Inductive Preaching: Helping People Listen* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1983), 35.
17 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 36.

18 Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 47.
19 Lucy Hogan, 'Creation of Form', in Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 137.
20 Eugene L. Lowry, 'The Revolution of Sermonic Shape', in *Listening to the Word* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 95; Cahill, *Shape of Preaching*, 18; Craddock, *As One without Authority*.
21 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 42–43.
22 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 44–45.

championed by those who would contend that preaching 'ceases to be biblical if it is nondirective'.[23]

Many see a scriptural basis for the deductive form in the tight logic of Paul's letters, the way in which he 'reasoned' with Jew and Gentile (*dialogomai*, see Acts 17–18), and his emphasis on 'rightly dividing the word of truth' (2 Tim 2:15, AV). However, it is difficult to find clear examples of this sermon form in Scripture.

The enduring popularity of this form is due, at least partly, to the way in which it creates a 'content-driven sermon' that is clearly able to 'communicate the doctrines of the church' and handle logic-dominated passages such as Paul's epistles.[24] Nevertheless, this form also risks failing to 'connect with the text itself' or with the listener, and it can slip from preaching (an 'appeal to people's will') into mere teaching of facts.[25]

II Synthesis of the Model

Reflection on these three key aspects of preaching (foundation, function and form) suggests that all three can be recognised as distinct, independent dimensions of analysis. Although evangelicals who recognise the priority of preaching might overwhelmingly agree that the foundation of preaching is ex-

position, they may also take different positions on the appropriate function of the preacher as Proclaimer or Pastor. Similarly, both Proclaimers and Pastors might, at least in principle, favour either the Poet or Philosopher form as best suited for their preaching.

All four metaphors have plausible biblical support and practical strengths as well as weaknesses. We can conclude that each metaphor has much to commend it and, if correctly handled, is not inconsistent with the expositional foundation of preaching.

1. Mission

Indeed, in an attempt to resolve this question of the meaning of preaching, Long argued that the definitive 'image' or metaphor of preaching should be the 'witness' which 'encompasses' all the others and 'holds … in creative tension' the various elements we have looked at so far.[26] Among the biblical support for this image, we could cite Paul's call to 'testify to the good news of God's grace' (Acts 20:24). The verb is *diamarturomai*, to testify or give witness.

The Witness can therefore be seen as having the authority of the Proclaimer, not based on a (potentially dangerous) personal authority, but rather on the 'borrowed authority' of what the Witness has seen in Scripture.[27] The Witness displays also the 'sensitivity to human need' of the Pastor while recognising the need to witness to truth; moreover, he or she pays attention to the inductive art of the Poet 'without

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23 Cahill, *Shape of Preaching*, 20, 21; Derek J. Prime and Alistair Begg, *On Being a Pastor: Understanding Our Calling and Work* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2004), 118.

24 Simon Vibert, *Excellence in Preaching: Learning from the Best* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 58; Cahill, *Shape of Preaching*, 27.

25 Cahill, *Shape of Preaching*, 27; Prime and Begg, *On Being a Pastor*, 119.

26 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 45.

27 Ash, *Priority of Preaching*, 43.

allowing form to control content'.[28]

Indeed, this witness metaphor can be seen as encapsulating the independent dimensions of function and form and presenting a useful, overarching mission for preaching.

2. Balanced homiletics

The analysis so far suggests the model of the Homiletic Window shown in Figure 1.
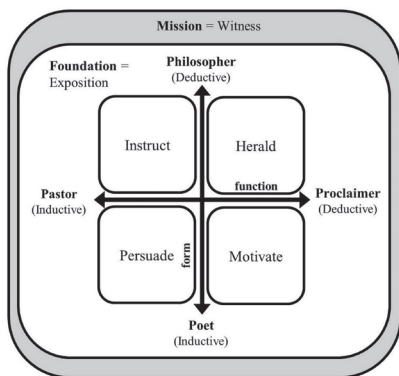

Figure 1

Here, function and form are depicted as two independent and orthogonal dimensions of analysis, each lying between two cardinal points. In addition, each quadrant of function and form can now clearly be visualised as consistent with the foundation of exposition and the mission of bearing witness.

The model allows for the fact that, although some may consider their particular position among these four quadrants normative or 'the only viable approach to faithful preaching', most preachers would 'resist being tagged'

with any of the labels and prefer 'to see [themselves] as a creative blend of them all'.[29]

The Homiletic Window thus has clear parallels with personality profiling models such as Myers-Briggs' or Kolb's learning styles. Each model recognises that individuals might feel most comfortable with certain personality types, learning methods or preaching styles, but that a mature practitioner will recognise the benefits of situational flexibility and incorporate aspects of all styles.[30]

Thus the term, 'balanced homiletic', might be usefully coined to reflect such a well-rounded approach, according to which the preacher selects, for each sermon, the particular combination of function and form that best suits the preacher's gifts and personality, the audience and the message.

In agreement with many prominent expository preachers who recognise the need for gospel-centred balance in these matters,[31] the Homiletic Window usefully visualises the need for a balanced homiletic practised by a balanced witness.

3. Integrative homiletics

From a different starting point, in 2006 Kenton Anderson derived a similar

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28 Wilbert M. Van Dyk, 'The Witness of Preaching', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 25/2 (1990), 290.

29 Long, *Witness of Preaching*, 42, 45.

30 Isabel Briggs Myers and Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Mountain View: CPP, 1995); David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1984).

31 Robert A. Allen, 'Preaching Inductively as One with Authority', *Preaching.com*, 1 September 2000, www.preaching.com/resources/articles/11565702/.

model to the Homiletic Window, with the added insight that each of the function-form quadrants can be seen as mapping onto Kolb's learning cycle as follows:

> The Proclaimer-Philosopher maps onto Kolb's 'assimilator' and aims to *herald* the message by 'making an argument' through a 'declarative sermon' which explains 'the need of the listener to submit to the person and will of God'.[32]

> The Proclaimer-Poet maps onto Kolb's 'diverger' and aims to *motivate* by 'painting a picture' through a 'visionary sermon' that creates 'an experience that inspires the listener to a resolution of his or her felt needs'.[33]

> The Pastor-Poet maps onto Kolb's 'accommodator' and aims to *persuade* by 'telling a story' through a 'narrative sermon' to 'bring the listener to submission'.[34]

> The Pastor-Philosopher maps onto Kolb's 'converger' and aims to *instruct* by solving practical problems through a 'pragmatic sermon' that makes possible 'an enhanced life situation'.[35]

Anderson also pointed out that a preacher's preferred style will not be aligned with the learning preferences of all members of a congregation. Hence, those preachers who 'want to speak powerfully' to all their listeners should strive for a balanced homiletics, such that over a period of time a given congregation hears sermons preached from different quadrants of the Homiletic Window.[36] However, crucially, Anderson further argues for the challenging model of an 'integrative sermon' in which the preacher moves through all the homiletic quadrants within a single message.[37]

III First Case Study: England

The Homiletic Window was tested in a small-scale case study to determine: (a) if there is a relationship between a preacher's view of the function of the sermon and the preferred form of the sermon, (b) whether the model adequately described preachers' actual practice, and (c) the feasibility of using a simple quantitative questionnaire to help preachers characterise their preferred preaching style.

The participants in this case study were four preachers from a single fellowship of pastors in the UK. All four were theologically evangelical but came from a wide variety of church traditions and could have been expected to exhibit a variety of attitudes to the function and form of preaching.

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32 Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 133; Kenton Anderson, 'Mapping the Landscape of Preaching Today', *Preaching.org*, 4 March 2011, www.preaching.org/mapping-the-landscape-of-preaching-today/.

33 Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 211; Anderson, 'Mapping the Landscape of Preaching Today'.

34 Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 185; Anderson, 'Mapping the Landscape of Preaching Today'.

35 Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 161; Anderson, 'Mapping the Landscape of Preaching Today'.

36 Anderson, 'Mapping the Landscape of Preaching Today'.

37 Anderson, *Choosing to Preach*, 235.

1. Method

The chosen methodology allowed for triangulation between three distinct sets of data:

(a) Qualitative information gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews with the preachers, after which the interview transcripts were analysed using thick description and a simple coding model.

(b) Quantitative data captured from the preachers through written questions, using both a matrix question format and a semantic differential scale format to test construct validity.

(c) Qualitative deductions by the researcher based on the review of three sets of sermon notes provided by each preacher.

The semi-structured interview included open questions concerning what the preacher considered the key foundational principle on which preaching is built; how the preacher understood the term, 'expository preaching'; what was the main function or objective of a sermon; and the ideal form or structure that a sermon should take.

The interview then moved on to the questionnaire, which started by asking the preacher to respond on a four-point rating scale (from strongly agree to strongly disagree) to the statement that the foundation of preaching is: 'exposition' of biblical truth so that lives might be changed.

The questionnaire then proceeded to evaluate the preacher's perspective on the function of preaching. First, five-point semantic differential questions were posed, using four pairs of opposing phrases to differentiate between Pastor and Proclaimer characteristics. An example of these questions was, 'As you prepare and write your sermon, how much consideration do you give to "addressing people's needs" versus "speaking the message clearly"?'

These same eight phrases were then used to create eight questions in a five-point matrix question format, i.e., 'On a scale of one to five, as you prepare and write your sermon, how much consideration do you give to addressing people's needs?'

Next, a similar set of semantic differential and matrix questions was used to identify the preacher's perspective regarding the desirable form of a sermon. For example: 'As you think about the structure and language how much consideration do you give to "God experienced" versus "God understood"?' Another question asked how much the preacher considers appealing to the listeners' 'feeling' versus 'thinking'.

2. Results

The structured interviews and the sermon notes produced a rich, nuanced set of qualitative data that was well suited to the document analysis techniques. The data produced an assessment of each preacher's position in the Homiletic Window. The quantitative data were appropriately aggregated and normalised to produce the separate quantitative coordinates shown in Figure 2, which represent the data for the four participants expressed as standardised Cartesian coordinates within the Homiletic Window.

Metric	Preacher							
	A		B		C		D	
	X	Y	X	Y	X	Y	X	Y
Quant 1 (Matrix)	0.25	0.60	0.20	0.15	0.45	0.40	0.35	0.30
Quant 2 (Semantic)	0.92	0.40	0.08	0.27	1.00	0.87	0.75	0.60
Quant Average (1)	0.58	0.50	0.14	0.21	0.73	0.63	0.55	0.45
Qual Average (2)	0.80	0.80	0.80	0.65	0.40	0.15	0.70	-0.20

Figure 2

Graphic techniques were used to facilitate comparison and analysis. Figure 3 compares the results for quantitative measure 1 (matrix questions) and quantitative measure 2 (semantic differential questions) for each of the four preachers.
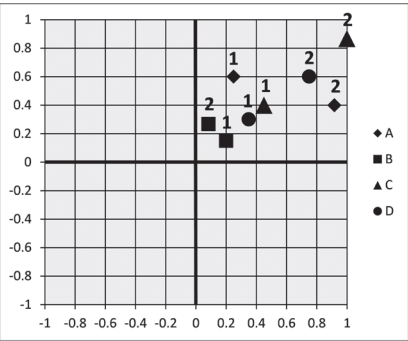

Figure 4

Figure 3

Similarly, Figure 4 compares the average of the two quantitative measures with my judgement of the preacher's position on the Homiletic Window, based on all the qualitative data.
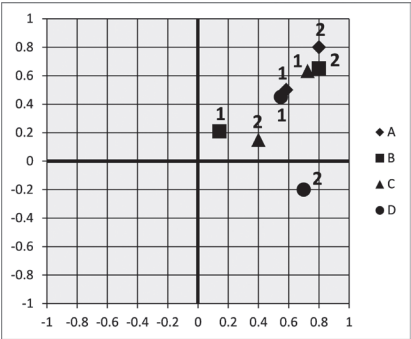
3. Evaluation

The qualitative data showed universally strong support for the proposition that the foundation of preaching was exposition. Indeed, unprompted qualitative input supported a narrower definition of preaching as expounding a particular passage rather than just 'biblical truth'. For example, Preacher B stated that the foundation of preaching is the 'declaration and teaching and application of God's Word', and 'the exposition of the text'. Qualitative data also showed a strong emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the listener's

transformation. Preacher D provided a typical comment: 'It is not my issue whether God is experienced, it is the Holy Spirit's'.

Based on this feedback, it could be argued that a more useful foundational definition of preaching is (a) expositing the original message of a biblical text and (b) communicating that message to today's audience so that (c) the Holy Spirit might change lives.

We will now consider the implications of these data for the three research questions listed above.

a) Relationship between function and form

The wide scattering of data points from this very small-scale project (see Figure 3) makes it impossible to reach any definitive conclusions on the exact relationship between a preacher's perspective on the function and on the form of sermons. However, broadly speaking, the preachers are clearly clustered in the Herald (Proclaimer-Philosopher) quadrant (see Figure 4). These results might suggest that those who view preaching as primarily about the exposition of a specific Bible passage will also have a propensity to take a Herald approach to preaching.

There was certainly a broad trend in the group towards the deductive Philosopher approach to the form of a sermon. Preacher A was perhaps the most outspoken, declaring that 'God can't be experienced unless he is understood' and that, with regard to the storytelling capacity of a Poet, he 'couldn't give a tuppence'.

Interestingly, while the preachers studied saw 'potential danger' (Preacher B's phrase) in taking too strong a Pastor perspective on the

function of preaching, the quantitative and qualitative data did show that each preacher had some Pastor characteristics. However, this tendency appears to have been more associated with the preacher's recognition of the importance of understanding the audience so as to effectively communicate and apply a Bible-based message to the congregation, rather than with any intent to derive the message from the audience's perceived needs.

Further work would be required to properly investigate this research question, first with additional preachers from a much wider range of theological and denominational backgrounds so as to test the model's effectiveness in identifying preachers in other quadrants, and second with a variety of researchers so as to test the reliability of assessments using this model.

b) Adequacy of the conceptual model

The preachers expressed clear enthusiasm about the Homiletic Window during the semi-structured interviews, and their readiness to use the model to articulate their own homiletic practice suggested that it authentically captures many of the key aspects of their conceptual framework. Preacher D, for instance, described the model as encouraging intentional reflection ('This is really useful. It makes me think') and supporting improvement ('If you practice golf on your own, you are only practicing your own mistakes').

However, there was no clear evidence that preachers implement any form of 'balanced homiletic', let alone the 'integrative' model proposed by Anderson. Most preachers appeared to vary their sermon form over a relative-

ly narrow range; recognised that they had a natural 'comfort zone' based on personality, training and experience; and saw time pressure as limiting their creativity. Preacher A said, 'I am more comfortable [preaching like] Paul. That is my natural inclination and personality'; Preacher D observed that 'when you have three sermons to give each week you … don't have the luxury of thinking all this through'.

All four preachers also stressed that the form of the passage strongly influenced the form of the sermon. However, this emphasis, which would be commended by the literature, did not seem particularly evident in the pastors' sample sermons.[38]

Although generalisation from such a small number of participants is not possible, the case study indicates that the Homiletic Window has considerable value and promise beyond the particular situation being examined, including as a framework for reflection on and more intentional analysis of homiletic matters.

c) The questionnaire as an analytical tool

The significant variation in the results for the same participant on different question formats (see Figure 3) raises serious questions concerning the reliability of the quantitative questionnaire. The instruments would need significant further work involving multiple researchers to evaluate such concerns as test-retest reliability and inter-rater reliability.

Additionally, the significant variance between the average of the quantitative measures and my own assessment of their qualitative data (see Figure 4) further indicates that this early version of the questionnaire has questionable instrument validity.

Nevertheless, given the constraints of such a small-scale project, the fact that the different measures of a particular pastor's preferences sit in the same quadrant of the Homiletic Window suggests that the quantitative instruments do have promise. To gain further confidence in their reliability, further studies would need to use additional evaluators to gain better baseline data, followed by multivariate testing of the quantitative questions to tune the instrument.

IV Second Case Study: Malawi

A second case study used a group of Malawian preachers as subjects. From the limited literature on sub-Saharan preaching styles and related work on learning styles, one might expect preachers in this geographic area—especially those who are less educated and from a more rural environment—to exhibit a higher tendency towards the Persuade preaching style than the UK preachers.[39] This expectation is due to the predominantly oral communication traditions of the region and the reported cultural tendency towards 'field-dependent' and 'concrete' learning styles.[40]

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38 See for example Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988).

39 Bishop Eben Kanukayi Nhiwatiwa, *Preaching in the African Context: How We Preach* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources International, 2012), 31.

40 Pat Guild, 'The Culture/Learning Style

This case study therefore aimed to use the Homiletic Window model to (a) systematically evaluate the preferred preaching styles of a group of sub-Saharan preachers and (b) compare preferences between the Malawian and the British preachers.

1. Method

The evaluation group for this second case study consisted of 81 preachers from the largest explicitly evangelical denomination in Malawi. Questionnaires were administered at three different local presbytery-like meetings in different parts of Malawi. Some 60% of the group were church elders, and the remaining 40% were ordained pastors; more than 80% of the participants were from rural settings.

In the sub-Saharan context, church elders reportedly preach over 80% of all sermons.[41] Within the present sample, some 30% of church elders had no more than a period of primary-level formal education and 55% had no more than a period of secondary education. On the other hand, most pastors in the group had some form of undergraduate

certificate or diploma in biblical studies. Nevertheless, only 7% held a relevant qualification at the degree level or above.

To evaluate individuals' preferred preaching style, after a brief introduction to the topic, each member of the group was asked to complete the semantic differential version of the quantitative questions described above. These questions formed part of a larger survey which had previously been carefully translated into the national language, Chichewa, by a local pastor-theologian.

2. Results

Many of those attending the meetings failed to complete the survey, so data for only 51 preachers (72% of the original sample) were available for further analysis. The results for this study group are summarised in Figure 5 below.
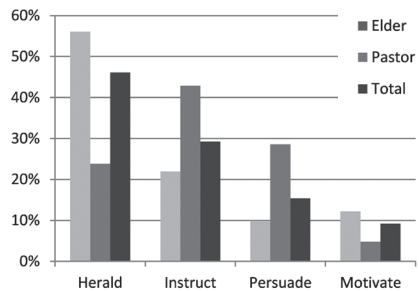

Figure 5

3. Evaluation

Like the results in the UK, these results from Malawi must be considered preliminary given the provisional nature of the quantitative tool used, the relatively small size of the case study

Connection', *Educating for Diversity*, 51/8 (1994), 16–21; James A. Anderson, 'Cognative Styles and Multicultural Populations', *Journal of Teacher Education*, 39/1 (1988), 6–7.

41 Davidson Kamayaya Chifungo, 'An Oral Hermeneutics within the Lay Preaching Context of the Nkhoma Synod of the Church of Central Africa Presbyterian (CCAP): A Critical Evaluation' (PhD Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2013), 51; Keith B. Anderson, 'Meeting Community Needs through Theological Education by Extension', in *Ministry by the People: Theological Education by Extension*, ed. by F. Ross Kinsler (Geneva: WCC Publications, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1983), 149.

group, and the group members' association with a single denomination in a single sub-Saharan country. Nevertheless, some useful insights can be derived regarding the two key research questions posed in this second case study.

Figure 5 shows that, whereas all four British pastors preferred the Herald preaching style, all preaching styles in the Homiletic Window were represented in the preferences of the group of Malawian preachers.

More extensive study with a larger sample and a wider range of church traditions would be required to reach any definitive conclusions as to whether this apparent cross-cultural difference indeed exists and, if so, what is driving it. Nevertheless, it could be tentatively proposed that, even among self-identifying evangelicals, socio-cultural influences in general and the underlying orality of the Malawian culture in particular make Malawian preachers more open to the congregation's theological needs (the sermon function of Pastor) and learning styles (the sermon form of Poet). These results would, at least partially, confirm the expectations in the literature.

At the same time, however, Figure 5 also displays the significant propensity, especially among elders, towards the Herald preaching style. This propensity is far greater than might be expected from the literature.

Again, no definitive conclusions can be obtained, but the strong conservative and evangelical culture of the denomination studied might predispose its leaders towards a Philosopher approach to preaching, even if the typical congregational member might typically have an 'accommodator' learning pref-

erence and hence be more receptive to the Poet style of communication. Perhaps, even sub-consciously, this denomination's culture might also be conforming to the historical preaching styles of its founding western missionaries, who established the church in Malawi during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Educational culture might be another factor. Although undereducated by western standards, these elders and pastors are better educated than the vast majority of Malawians, and they have been educated in a relatively traditional system that would reward those who have an 'assimilator' learning style. It might be expected, therefore, that these more educated elders and pastors would reflect their preferred learning style in their preaching style.

However, Figure 5 shows also clear differences between the preferences of the pastors and the elders, with the less educated elders having a significantly greater propensity to prefer a Herald style and the better-educated Pastors having a greater propensity towards an Instruct or even a Persuade preaching style. This result would seem contrary to expectations. It could be that the ministerial studies of Pastors encourage them to give more consideration to the perceived needs of the congregation (i.e. the Pastor view of sermon function) and the orality of their congregation (i.e. the Poet view of sermon form).

V Conclusions and Recommendations

Preaching remains a significant part of the life of the church globally and

occupies a major part of church leaders' responsibilities. Although further work would be required to refine and validate the quantitative instruments presented, this initial study suggests that the Homiletic Window captures many aspects of the conceptual framework used by evangelical preachers. The model might therefore be usefully considered for inclusion within formal homiletics training to encourage greater intentionality in preaching style. Further field research with a larger number of UK preachers would also be highly beneficial.

The qualitative results from the UK point towards refining the definition of preaching as 'exposing the original message of a biblical text and communicating that message to today's audience so that the Holy Spirit might change lives'. This definition might benefit from further scholarly analysis.

The very small-scale UK study found all four participants preferring a Herald preaching style, and the qualitative data indicated a preference for a narrow comfort zone based on personality, training and experience. This comfort zone is likely to be mismatched with the varied learning styles expected among any western group of listeners. Although this group may not be representative of all evangelical preachers in the UK, training of preachers could benefit from using the Homiletic Window to sensitise preachers to their own preferred preaching style, help them understand the probable varied learning styles of their listeners, and encourage a more intentionally balanced approach in their preaching series and even in the construction of each sermon.

Although the Malawian preachers displayed various preaching styles, the Herald style remained predominant. Whatever the cause of this trend, in a sub-Saharan context this preaching preference will probably be significantly mismatched to the needs of rural congregations, which are likely to have a preponderance of members with 'accommodator' learning styles. It might therefore be even more pressing in Africa than in the UK for Bible colleges to consider using the Homiletic Window to train preachers in a more balanced homiletics.

Furthermore, elders might gain the greatest benefit from such training, since they have the higher preference for the Herald preaching style. Since the vast majority of sermons are delivered by elders, placing a greater priority on training elders in preaching could be a fruitful investment. It is unfortunate that most of the elders reported having received no training in preaching whatsoever, or at most a short session many years earlier. It would appear critical for the church in sub-Saharan Africa to continue its long search for a truly contextual, scalable and sustainable approach to training grass-roots preachers right where they live, work and serve.

In the context of the training of preachers, these results would appear to reinforce the statement a decade ago by Paul Bowers that 'Theological education matters, for God's good purpose in Africa. To my mind in this day, in this hour, on this continent, there is really no higher calling.'[42]

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42 Paul Bowers, 'Theological Education in Africa: Why Does It Matter?' (presented at the Theological Education Consultation, Honeydew, South Africa, 2007), 7.