

*In Search of a Baptist Homiletic: The Legacy of John A. Broadus*

*"But we must retrieve and recover the Great Tradition  
so that we can remember who we really are."*

– Scott H. Moore

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## INTRODUCTION

In his opening remarks delivered to the 2010 Baptist Heritage Council during CBF/GA's Fall General Assembly, Walter B. Shurden declares,

The future of Baptists will be brighter if we affirm the centrality of preaching. We have made remarkable progress with our liturgy and the celebration of the Christian Year. Our churches, the clergy, and our seminaries would now help us all by refocusing on the centrality of the pulpit. . . . Biblical preaching skillfully applied to human hurt is *almost a sacrament* for our Baptist people.<sup>1</sup>

Almost a sacrament! These are strong words considering the ambivalent (at best) relationship between Baptists and sacramentology. And yet, it is an extraordinary historical curiosity that Baptists have not left a deeper imprint upon the homiletical landscape. Given the centrality of the preached Word – especially in light of the other facets of our liturgy that have historically taken a backseat to the Word read and proclaimed – one would expect troves of homiletical insights from Baptists. Sadly, this is not the case. One very notable exception defies the trend: John A. Broadus. This paper presents a response in the direction of Shurden's charge, employing the life and work of John A. Broadus to help the next generation of homileticians begin to imagine a homiletic worthy of the name "Baptist."

To set the context for this paper, I first offer a brief historical treatment of Broadus's life, with particular attention directed to his education and call to preach. Next, I engage in a close reading of Broadus's *Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* as well as his *Lectures on the History of Preaching* in order to tease-out his theology of preaching. In presenting both, I highlight

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<sup>1</sup> Walter B. Shurden, "The Future of Baptists," in *Visions* (Feb/Mar 2011), 12. Interestingly, the writers of the so-called *Baptist Manifesto* present a sacramental view of preaching. Along with the Lord's Supper and baptism, preaching is deemed to be a "*visible sign* of the new creation. . . . The Spirit who proceeds from the Father through the Son makes the performance of these practices effectual so as to *seal* and nourish the faith and freedom of believers." See "Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 304. Emphasis added.

Broadus's most enduring contributions to the field of homiletics, focusing in particular on his teachings related to biblical interpretation (i.e., hermeneutics), his employment of (classical) rhetoric for preaching, his treatment on sermonic style, and his defense of extemporaneous delivery. This is not a comprehensive treatment of Broadus's life or scholarly contributions, and others have already offered as much.<sup>2</sup> Rather, bearing in mind Shurden's charge, I conclude my paper by lifting up the homiletical fecundity of Broadus's teaching to enrich our understanding of what is at stake in the contemporary Baptist pulpit as we move beyond modernity.

To a narrower extent, this project mirrors the work of Bill J. Leonard, who "examines elements of the Baptist past as a way of informing current ecclesial dilemmas and future prospects for a Baptist future."<sup>3</sup> Put stronger, Leonard writes,

The study of church history suggests that there really is no generic Christianity without specificity or particular identity. Sooner or later Christians are compelled to choose a *place to stand*, a way of acting and believing that relates to church polity, sacraments, preaching, spirituality, Christian education, doctrine, and other powerful dynamics. They claim a particular historical or contemporary approach that defines broadly or narrowly their kind of Christianity. Church history helps persons who seek Christian identity know where they fit in *the great ebb and flow of classic belief and practice* and how specific identities have evolved over the centuries.<sup>4</sup>

This paper locates such a "place to stand" in the life and work of one of the greatest preachers, and *the* greatest Baptist homiletician, to ever live. By focusing on Broadus's ministerial and scholarly contributions, we can chart (and challenge) the trajectory of a Baptist homiletic that proceeds from

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<sup>2</sup> By this I have in mind, among others, David S. Dockery, "The Broadus-Robertson Tradition," in *Theologians of the Baptist Tradition*, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2001), 90-114; Paul Huber, "A Study of the Rhetorical Theories of John A. Broadus" (PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1956); and Roger D. Duke, "John A. Broadus, Rhetoric, and *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*," in *John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy*, ed. David S. Dockery and Roger D. Duke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Bill J. Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist: Owning a Scandalous Past and an Uncertain Future* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 3.

<sup>4</sup> Bill J. Leonard, "Why Study Church History? Listening to Saints and Sinners," in *Theology in the Service of the Church: Essays Presented to Fisher H. Humphreys*, ed. Timothy George and Eric F. Mason (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 72. Emphasis added.

“the great ebb and flow of classic belief and practice” as we grapple with the current cultural and ecclesial realities besetting the next generation of Baptist preachers. At bottom, this paper takes up Shurden’s charge by culling the theological pith from this prominent Baptist homiletician from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to trace the contours of a Baptist homiletic befitting the 21<sup>st</sup>.

### JOHN A. BROADUS: AN HISTORICAL SKETCH

John A. Broadus (b. 1827) hails from a Virginia farming family that was “Baptist to the core.”<sup>5</sup> He was the youngest son of Major Edmund Broadus and Nancy Sims Broadus. As a child, Broadus outstripped his classmates, and his intellectual ability refined by hard work would abide with him throughout his distinguished career. As was common in those days, Broadus became a schoolmaster in order to save the money necessary to attend university, where he planned to peruse a career in medicine. However, just before matriculation Broadus heard a sermon by the celebrated southern preacher A. M. Poindexter on Jesus’ Parable of the Talents and thereafter committed himself to the Gospel ministry. Broadus describes his experience thusly: “[Poindexter] seemed to clear up all difficulties pertaining to the subject; he swept away all the disguises of self-delusion, all the excuses of a fancied humility . . . . For the decision of that hour [I am] directly indebted, under God, to A. M. Poindexter; and amid a thousand imperfections and short-comings, that work of the ministry has been the joy of [my] life.”<sup>6</sup>

Broadus entered the University of Virginia with a determination to overcome his spotty education up to that point in his life through diligent, disciplined study. As his biographer notes, “With what relish this brilliant student absorbed everything in the University! . . . He was

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<sup>5</sup> Archibald Thomas Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1910), 3. Much of the historical documentation in this section is indebted to the careful work of Broadus’s junior colleague at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and son-in-law, A.T. Robertson.

<sup>6</sup> John A. Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses* (Richmond: B.F. Johnson and Company, 1887), 399.

drinking deep at this pure spring. No man ever quaffed here who drew more refreshment and inspiration.”<sup>7</sup> In addition, young Broadus seized opportunities to better himself as a speaker, of which he held serious reservations. To the contrary, Robertson, commenting upon Broadus’s first speech, which was written at the request of the Berryville Total Abstinence Society in the summer of 1846, notes, “The address shows that the youth of nineteen years had the power to seize strong arguments and put them into striking speech.”<sup>8</sup> Broadus’s powers of persuasion and elocution broadened when he joined the prestigious Jefferson Society, where he soon became the top debater. One of Broadus’s colleagues offers the following reminiscence of Broadus’s student life:

He cultivated a great power of application and grew to have a great ability to work, and was not ashamed that others should know it. The wonderful result of his steady, methodical industry was that in after years he could do unheard-of things in the briefest time. His disciplined faculties were so under his will that the result, while natural, was surprising . . . He demanded of himself the best he could do in all that he did. The resulting clearness and correctness of his thinking begat that limpid, lucid, crystalline purity of expression which marked his writing and speaking.<sup>9</sup>

Many years later, in 1858 while serving as the pastor of Charlottesville Baptist Church, Broadus was invited to join the founding faculty at the new Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, SC. Broadus at first declined, as he was loath to detach himself from his vocation as a pastor.<sup>10</sup> Broadus eventually acquiesced and he easily adjusted to his new calling.<sup>11</sup> The Civil War left the fledgling seminary in dire straits and after the seminary reopened in 1865, Broadus found himself lecturing on homiletics to a lone blind student. After teaching homiletics

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<sup>7</sup> Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus*, 65.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>9</sup> Prof. F.H. Smith, “Seminary Magazine,” (April, 1895) reprinted in Robertson, 66.

<sup>10</sup> Vernon Latrelle Stanfield, “Introduction: John Albert Broadus: Preacher Extraordinary,” in *Favorite Sermons of John A. Broadus* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959), 4.

<sup>11</sup> Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus*, 158 ff. See also John A. Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce, D.D., LL.D.: Late President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY* (New York: A. C. Armstrong and Son, 1893), 155 ff. and the illuminating essay by Craig C. Christina, “Broadus and the Establishment of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary,” in *John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy*, ed. David S. Dockery and Roger D. Duke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 122-55.

at the seminary for over a decade, Broadus began to transition to administration at the seminary and thus he saw the need for a more comprehensive textbook for his predecessor. The result was his *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*. Broadus followed this trajectory throughout his ministry, lecturing, teaching and preaching throughout the world. In 1889, he became president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, which had relocated to Louisville, KY, and subsequently gave the renowned Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale University.<sup>12</sup> On March 16<sup>th</sup>, 1895, the *Evening Post* printed these words: “Doctor Broadus, the first citizen of Louisville, is passing away. . . . The whole community mourns his approaching departure, and pays tribute to character and conduct which pomp and power can never command.”<sup>13</sup>

### BROADUS’S THEOLOGY OF PREACHING

Broadus never offers us a *systematic* theology of preaching.<sup>14</sup> Frequently, however, he offers succinct statements concerning the purpose of preaching (viz., persuasion to the point of conversion), wherein sermons are to provide a “reason for believing” that kindles a kind of existential awareness of the Gospel’s truthfulness.<sup>15</sup> Broadus writes that “the primary conception of preaching is to bring forth the teachings of some passage of Scripture” (87) and “[o]ur main duty is to tell the people what to believe, and why they should believe it” (146). In other words, Broadus conceives the purpose of preaching as the communication of the Truth found in the

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<sup>12</sup> For the only available record of Broadus’s Yale lectures see Mark M. Overstreet, “Now I Am Found: The Recovery of the ‘Lost’ Yale Lectures and Broadus’s Legacy of Engaging Exposition,” in *John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy*, ed. David S. Dockery and Roger D. Duke (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 156-75.

<sup>13</sup> Robertson, *Life and Letters of John Albert Broadus*, 431. The *Courier-Journal* also wrote, “There is no man in the United States whose death would cause more widespread sorrow than the death of Doctor Broadus” (431).

<sup>14</sup> Dockery, “The Broadus-Robertson Tradition,” 111, referring to both Broadus and Robertson, writes, “They upheld the authority of Scripture, but both were cautious at best in developing a systematic approach to theology. This approach advanced biblical theology but failed to advance a coherent Baptist theology.”

<sup>15</sup> John A. Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Philadelphia: Smith, English & Co., 1870), 200, 184. Remaining references to this work will be parenthetical.

Bible (204) and thus the *telos* of preaching is found in the persuasion of the congregant of the truthfulness of the preacher's claim (146, 230). Broadus writes,

When a man who is apt in teaching, whose soul is on fire with the truth which he trusts has saved him and hopes will save others, speaks to his fellow-men, face to face, eye to eye, and electric sympathies flash to and fro between him and his hearers, till they lift each other up, higher and higher, into the intensest thought, and the most impassioned emotion – higher and yet higher, till they are borne as on chariots of fire above the world – there is a power to move men, to influence character, life, destiny . . . (18)<sup>16</sup>

This statement synthesizes many hundreds of pages in Broadus's text and, while it offers a panoramic treatment of what Broadus envisions in the preaching event, it does not sufficiently render Broadus's *theology* of preaching. Instead, a theology of preaching will need to be teased-out of Broadus's *Treatise* and *Lectures*. To this task we now turn.

### *Hermeneutics*

Broadus begins his section on Text interpretation with the following declaration: "To interpret and apply his text in accordance with its *real meaning* is one of the preacher's most sacred duties" (51, emphasis added). A few lines later, Broadus claims that the preacher is "bound to represent the text as meaning precisely what it does mean" (51).<sup>17</sup> This, of course, assumes that the preacher has epistemological access to the "real meaning" of the biblical text. What Broadus means here goes beyond the *sensus literalis* defended by (some of) the Church Fathers. For Broadus, the "real meaning" is inextricable from the intention of the original author: "If we take the passage in a sense entirely foreign to *what the sacred writer designed*, as indicated by his

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<sup>16</sup> N.B. Broadus, along with the vast majority of his contemporaries, envisions only men as preachers. As such, his discourse employs exclusively masculine pronouns to designate the preacher. In this paper I retain Broadus's exact wording to ease explication of his central points. Such grammatical acquiescence on my part is by no means indicative of my own thinking in this matter.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. John A. Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1876), 33 ff. where he argues against a literal interpretation of Jesus' more troubling parables on account of their "hyperbolic" nature.

connection, then, as we use it, the phrase is no longer a passage of Scripture at all” (52, emphasis added).<sup>18</sup> With Schleiermacher, Broadus connected hermeneutics with *understanding* and understanding was in turn linked to a grammatical and psychological interpretative approach that Broadus does not fully explicate, but presupposes.<sup>19</sup> Knowledge of the original languages is crucial for Broadus because it serves to dispel “presuppositions and prejudices” (53) while concurrently providing the preacher a “sympathetic comprehension of Scripture ways of thinking and peculiarities of expression” (56).

Context is the key to authorial intention for Broadus’s hermeneutic. He writes, “[T]he preacher who wishes to deal fairly with his own mind and with God’s Word, must determine that he will never interpret a text without careful regard to its connection” (63).<sup>20</sup> The context of a pericope is crucial for ascertaining the “real meaning” of the Text.<sup>21</sup> However, this does not mean that Broadus advocates a mere re-contextualization of God’s Word in the sermon; preachers do more than simply retell the biblical story. The sermon is a dialectical encounter between contexts: that of the biblical writer and that of the congregation. The preacher functions as a conduit for this exchange and as such the preacher is free to *extend* or *advance* the meaning of the Text, “carrying the idea farther in the same direction” (64). He writes,

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<sup>18</sup> In this regard, Broadus certainly practiced what he preached. Consider the painstaking attempts to uncover what Paul really meant by justification in his sermon on Romans 5:1 in Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses*, 87-8.

<sup>19</sup> Consider: “Such a man is verily guilty before God if he does not honestly strive to understand that which he interprets, and give forth its real meaning and no other” (52). Though Broadus never cites Schleiermacher directly, he does refer to him on two occasions, though not in the context of interpretation (see pp. 298, 408).

<sup>20</sup> He takes this principle so seriously that he urges preachers to avoid Texts that admit multiple interpretations, i.e., Texts that are “too ambiguous.” Moreover, preachers are never to present in a sermon multiple interpretations that might equally be rendered from the Text (65).

<sup>21</sup> Later in this section, Broadus writes, “[T]here is also much to be learned by taking account of the opinions and state of mind of the persons addressed in a text” (81). He never explicitly states how the interpreter is to get *behind* the Text, as it were, to understand the original context, but I would infer from his *Treatise* an approbation of historical-critical tools for uncovering these contexts, to the extent that they bolster Scripture’s historical veracity rather than counter it.



It thus appears that one may preach from a text on any matter which it presents to the mind, whether directly or indirectly, by statement, presupposition or inference, provided that in some way it *really does mean* what is claimed; and where this is something only indirectly presented, it will be best to point out, in some simple way, that such is the case, so as not to encourage the people in loose notions on the subject of interpretation. (64-5)

Another important hermeneutical principle that Broadus defends is the radical bias against allegorization, or the *sensus spiritualis*. He connects allegorical interpretation with the “present perversions and distortions” of Scripture and the far-flung “doctrine of correspondences” that he finds in Swedenborg *et al.* (65-6). Broadus brings his critique closer to home when he declaims, “Most of the great [Church] Fathers, who have ever since exerted so powerful an influence, are grievously infected with this evil [of allegorization]” (67). Indeed, Broadus declares, “[Augustine] is unsafe as an interpreter – a good many of the great theologians have been rather too independent in their exegesis – and wild with allegorizing, like every other great preacher of the age except Chrysostom.”<sup>22</sup> Broadus argues passionately that “spiritual” preaching – namely, preaching backed by anything other than the “real meaning” of a pericope – is guilty of “only building castles in the air” (68). Broadus urges his students to refrain from any interpretation other than the literal, or plain, sense of the Text.<sup>23</sup> His mantra for interpretation is thus, “[T]he general meaning is plain enough, and that is all” (69).

### *Rhetoric*

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<sup>22</sup> Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 82-3. See also Rule 5 of his *Treatise*. In this section entitled “Rules for interpreting a text,” Broadus begins with the easily misunderstood advice, “Interpret allegorically, where that is clearly proper” (83). Here the restricting clause resonates above the main clause, for allegorical interpretation is only proper for Broadus when it is “precisely similar to matters so used in the New Testament” (83).

<sup>23</sup> C.f., Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, 72: “[N]o theory of biblical interpretation is adequate to make (in the words of the Second London Confession) ‘all things in Scripture’ ‘plain in themselves’ or ‘clear to all.’ Theories about the text cannot protect Baptists (or anyone else) from the power and unpredictability of the text itself.”

As a student of Greek and Latin at University, Broadus became acquainted with the classical masters of rhetoric; Quintilian, Aristotle, Cicero, and Demosthenes are frequent conversation partners throughout his *Treatise*. They offered him a “scientific” mode of advancing arguments; and preaching, at bottom, is about argument for Broadus. It naturally follows that Broadus would devote sufficient space to enlighten his readers as to the formal qualities of powerful rhetoric. He writes, “[P]reaching and all public speaking ought to be largely composed of argument, for even the most ignorant people constantly practice it themselves, and always feel its force when properly presented . . .” (iv-v).<sup>24</sup> This statement, found in the *Treatise’s* preface, connotes a certain anthropological confidence. By extension, we may deduce that what separates “preaching” from “all public speaking” is the *content* of its discourse.<sup>25</sup> We must also pay close attention to the logic of Broadus’s words: Broadus wants preachers to employ sound modes of argument (i.e., rhetoric) in their preaching not because Jesus models such discourse, nor because the early Church leaders argued thusly, but because our hearers “feel the force” of our words. It is not on account of anything God does therein, but because it works in and of itself.<sup>26</sup>

And yet, we go too far if we here infer total appropriation of a kind of Schleiermachiian (i.e., anthropocentric) project in Broadus’s implicit theology of preaching. Preaching receives its power, is “made mighty” by God’s empowering and abiding Spirit (19). Broadus writes, “A just rhetoric, if there were no higher consideration, would require that a preacher shall preach the

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<sup>24</sup> As Quintilian wrote, “We must take care, not that it shall be possible for [the listener] to understand, but that it shall be impossible for him not to understand,” quoted in Duke, “John A. Broadus, *Rhetoric, and A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*,” 81.

<sup>25</sup> C.f., “Thinking more of the form than the matter. Rhetoric has to do with the use we make of material, the choice, adaptation, arrangement, expression. But after all, the material itself is more important” (26). Moreover, cf., “Now the things which ought *most* to be thought of by the preacher, are piety and knowledge, and the blessing of God. Skill, however valuable, is far less important than these; and there is danger that rhetorical studies will cause men to forget that such is the case” (27).

<sup>26</sup> C.f., Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 22-36 where he lays out Jesus’ method of preaching.

gospel – shall hold on to the old truths, and labor to clothe them with new interest and power” (22). In balance, in his *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, Broadus argues for preachers to employ the best in modern methods to shed light on the Gospel. He writes, “In speaking, our Lord and the prophets and the apostles have left us noble and highly instructive examples, from which we ought lovingly to learn. But they employed the *methods* common in their time . . . . And we are really following their example, in the spirit of it, if we employ the methods best suited . . . to modern thought and modern feeling.”<sup>27</sup>

Preaching, at bottom, is about argument for Broadus and his own sermons mark a fidelity to the instruction he offers in his *Treatise* and *Lectures*.<sup>28</sup> The operating assumption is that the content of preaching, the Gospel of Jesus Christ, is freely available to all who hear the good news. However, preachers need to marshal the greatest resources at their disposal to convince men and women to receive this free gift of grace. Broadus finds in the masters of classical rhetoric, and in their modern appropriation by Vinet and other homileticians, the most effective means by which people might be convinced of the efficaciousness of the Gospel unto salvation.<sup>29</sup>

### *Style*

Broadus dedicates an entire section of his *Treatise* to the topic of style and at every opportunity in his *Lectures* he lifts up perspicuity of style as the hallmark of the great preachers of history. Strong rhetoric combined with an engaging and lucid style of delivery formed the *summum bonum* for preaching: namely, eloquence. His definition of eloquence is semantically pregnant: “Eloquence is so speaking as not merely to convince the judgment, kindle the imagination, and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>28</sup> For one example among many, see his sermon, “The Habit of Thankfulness” in Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses*, 45-56.

<sup>29</sup> See Alexandre Vinet, *Homiletics: or, The Theory of Preaching* (New York: Ivison & Phinney, 1854).

move the feelings, but to give a powerful impulse to the will” (20). Even as he is lavish in his praise of the rhetorical prowess of the Greek and Latin Fathers, Broadus criticizes their style for being “overwrought” to the extent that it “offends our tastes.”<sup>30</sup> However, with Augustine, Broadus is wary of the powers of persuasion devoid of Truth. He quotes Augustine, “*Veritas pateat, veritas placeat, veritas moveat*” (“Make the truth plain, make it pleasing, make it moving”) (20-1). Yet in proffering eloquence as the highest ideal to be achieved in preaching, he offers the following caveat: “[T]he preacher who kindles the fancy of his hearers merely for their delectation, who stirs their passions merely to give them the luxury of emotion, is not eloquent” (21).

Style, for Broadus, is more than ornament to the preacher’s thoughts; it is inextricable from his “whole mental character” (321). By this Broadus synthesizes the teaching of classical works on style, wherein “the idea that expression or style is invariably the result of the learning, experiences, and interests of a given individual.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, style is not the mere *dress* of the preacher’s thoughts, but its very *incarnation*. He writes, “Style is the glitter and polish of the warrior’s sword, but is also its keen edge” (322). Broadus believes, however, that even if style is inextricable from the character of the preacher, it could be improved upon, purified, through diligent practice, reading, and education. He lifts up the English as the models *par excellence* of style and he laments his own context in which he finds an “extreme negligence and looseness of style.” He continues, “[T]he great American fault, in speaking and writing, is an excessive vehemence, a constant effort to be striking. Our style, as well as our delivery, too often lacks the calmness of conscious strength, the repose of simple sincerity, the quiet earnestness which only

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<sup>30</sup> Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 91.

<sup>31</sup> Huber, “A Study of the Rhetorical Theories of John A. Broadus,” 78.

now and then becomes impassioned” (323).<sup>32</sup>

The best display of style in preaching was the kind that facilitated the clear articulation of the preacher’s argument for the Gospel message. In other words, perspicuity was his golden rule of style.<sup>33</sup> Broadus writes, “The best style attracts least attention to itself, and none but the critical observer is apt to appreciate its excellence, most men giving credit solely to the matter, and having no idea how much the manner has contributed to attract and impress them. The thought is certainly the main thing; but the style is also important” (324). Indeed, as Roger D. Duke aptly notes, “For Broadus, nothing was more important than to bring clarity and plainness to the pulpit. If a congregation could not understand what was declared, what then was the point?”<sup>34</sup> In Broadus’s teaching on style we find a profound respect – love, even – for both the content of the sermon and the audience for whom the Gospel is proclaimed.<sup>35</sup> Due to his love of the Gospel and for his hearers, Broadus pleads for homiletical clarity so that people might understand the Truth of the Gospel contained in the sermon and thus respond.<sup>36</sup> The thesis of Broadus’s treatment of style may be summarized as follows: “Pretentious obscurity may excite a poor admiration, unmeaning prettiness may give a certain pleasure, mere vociferation . . . may affect some people's nerves, but only truth, and truth that is understood, can bring real benefit” (341).

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<sup>32</sup> Here he follows Cicero’s famous adage (*Orator* 29): “He will be an eloquent man who shall be able to speak of small matters in lowly phrase, of ordinary topics temperately, of great subjects with passion and power,” Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 323.

<sup>33</sup> Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 339: “[T]he most important property of style is perspicuity. Style is excellent when, like the atmosphere, it shows the thought, but itself is not seen.”

<sup>34</sup> Duke, “John A. Broadus, Rhetoric, and *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*,” 81.

<sup>35</sup> Broadus writes, “Let him closely observe his hearers, and learn to perceive when they understand and are impressed. He will thus become able to judge when to be diffuse, and when rapid, and will acquire the directness of address, the power of constant movement towards a fixed point, the passionate energy and unstudied grace, the flexibility and variety which characterize the speaking style.” Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, 338.

<sup>36</sup> As Quintilian contends, “We must take care, not that it shall be possible for him [the hearer] to understand, but that it shall be utterly impossible for him not to understand,” cited in *Ibid.*, 341.

### *Delivery*

In Part IV of his *Treatise*, Broadus devotes sustained attention to the topic of sermon delivery. He offers pros and cons for three modes of delivery – reading from a manuscript, recitation, and extemporaneous speaking – but it is the latter that he lifts up as the best method for delivering a sermon. Extemporaneous preaching had come under criticism in Broadus’s day for seeming slothful, and thus his commendation of it bears an apologetic tone. He writes, “He who prepares without writing, may, and as a rule ought to, follow out all the developments and expansions of his thoughts as far as the discourse is to carry them” (409). Broadus operates under the conviction that preaching ought to be “living speech,” which he juxtaposes to “splendid reading” (414). In an essay written in 1854, Broadus maintains that “a sermon becomes such only in the act of delivery. Whatever mode of preparing be adopted, it is not strictly a sermon, but only preparation until it is delivered.”<sup>37</sup> Good delivery, in sum, is the practice of *studied extemporaneity*.

Broadus defends extemporaneous delivery above all others because, for him, a crucial dimension of effective preaching was establishing a “sympathetic” connection with the congregation through eye contact. Broadus writes, “[E]very man has felt it – the marvelous, magical, at times almost super-human power of an orator’s eye” (415).<sup>38</sup> Because preaching, at base, is about stirring the will of the hearer to respond to the claim of the Gospel upon her, establishing a sympathetic connection through the gaze in delivery is crucial. Broadus declares, “Everybody who can speak effectively knows that the power of speaking depends very largely upon the way it is heard, upon the sympathy which one succeeds in gaining from those he addresses. If I

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<sup>37</sup> John A. Broadus, “On the Best Mode of Preparing and Delivering Sermons,” *Religious Herald* (Dec. 1854): 193, cited in Stanfield, “Preacher Extraordinary,” 11.

<sup>38</sup> Broadus continues, “Now in reading, this wonderful expressiveness of the eye is interrupted, grievously diminished in power, reduced to be nothing better than occasional sunbeams, breaking out for a moment among wintry clouds” (415).

were asked what is the first thing in effective preaching, I should say, sympathy; and what is the second thing, I should say, sympathy; and what is the third thing, sympathy.”<sup>39</sup>

The most frequently mentioned aspect of Broadus’s own preaching was not the profundity of his exegesis or the force of his logic; rather, it was his seemingly uncanny ability to speak directly to individuals when he delivered his sermons. As Stanfield notes, “Freedom from a manuscript allowed him to look directly at his audience and establish excellent eye contact. He assiduously cultivated this habit and developed the ability to make each person in the audience feel that he was talking directly to him.”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as one observer noted of Broadus posthumously, “No matter how far away from him you might be, he always seemed near. Somehow he always seemed to be speaking to me, and the others were there simply to hear what he had to say, so great was his power of individualizing an audience.”<sup>41</sup> Broadus’s conversational tone, authentic use of gesture and affect, and ever-penetrating gaze made his sermons come to life for his hearers.

The defense of extemporaneous preaching, though effective in its own right when properly executed, arises from a strong *theological* conviction for Broadus. He writes,

What of dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and prayer for his help in preaching? How can a man pray that God will guide him through a forest, when he has already blazed the entire path, and committed himself to follow it? . . . But how much more natural is such prayer, how much more real the dependence upon Divine assistance, how much freer the opening for the Spirit really to help, if the sermon is not already cast in moulds, but the material which has been gathered, is now molten in the mind, and the ultimate process remains to be performed. (429-30)

The preaching event, at bottom, was for Broadus about “bringing forth the living offspring of the mind” (445), and thus extemporaneous delivery was the necessary path to this end.

#### **ASSESSMENT: BROADUS’S HOMILETICAL *DISCRIMEN***

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<sup>39</sup> Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses*, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Stanfield, “Preacher Extraordinary,” 12.

<sup>41</sup> T. M. Hawes, “Memories of John A. Broadus,” *Seminary Magazine* (March 1903): 225, cited in *Ibid.*

From what we have witnessed so far, how might we best construe Broadus's theology of preaching? As a helpful heuristic for getting our mind's around Broadus's theology of preaching, I shall appropriate David H. Kelsey's work on the uses of Scripture in modern theology to synthesize Broadus's homiletical *discrimen*.<sup>42</sup> A *discrimen*, as I will be using it below, is the criteria by which theological judgments are made, involving 1) how Scripture functions in a preacher's sermon to authorize his or her claims and 2) how God's mode of presence is construed in the preparation and delivery of sermons.

### 1) *Broadus's Use of Scripture for Preaching*

It is clear that Broadus views Scripture as the *terminus a quo* for the preparation and delivery of sermons; i.e., it's theological content functions as *authority* and *guide* for the preacher. Without equivocation, he writes, "There is a great authority, the Word of God, whose plain utterances upon any question must be held by the preacher as decisive and final" (161). Broadus takes the task of preaching very seriously and this stems from a "profound personal belief in the divine inspiration and authority of the Bible . . . His reverence for the word of God was one of the deepest feelings of his nature."<sup>43</sup> Put simply, Broadus sees preaching as the communication of the truth of the Bible. In a sermon on 1 John 1:7, Broadus proclaims, "The greatest privilege of earthly life is to give some fellow creature the blessed word of God, and then try by loving speech and example, to bring home to the heart of conscience . . . the truth it contains."<sup>44</sup> By "truth"

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<sup>42</sup> David H. Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine: The Uses of Scripture in Modern Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press Int'l, 1999). For Kelsey, *discrimen* signifies a theologian's use of Scripture and the rendering of the presence of God therein. I have tweaked his use of this helpful criterion to attend to what I am labeling Broadus's *homiletical discrimen*.

<sup>43</sup> Edwin Charles Dargan, "John Albert Broadus – Scholar and Preacher," *The Crozier Quarterly* (April 1925): 171-2, cited in Stanfield, "Preacher Extraordinary," 5.

<sup>44</sup> John A. Broadus, "Necessity of Atonement," in *Favorite Sermons of John A. Broadus*, ed. Vernon Latrelle Stanfield (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1959), 91-7.



Broadus means the propositional content of Scripture and the reason he puts such strong emphasis on discerning the “real meaning” of the Text is a direct result of this *discrimen*.

In a sermon on Romans 9:3, Broadus prefaces his remarks on what he takes to be an enigmatic Text to offer the following instruction for his congregants: “Be willing to let the Scripture mean what it wants to mean” and “Take good account of the connection.”<sup>45</sup> This reveals a prejudice in favor of the Text, a kind of radical dispossession of the interpreter’s assumptions and predilections. It is as if the truth were right there in the open for all to see and yet preachers fail to treat the Text in what he elsewhere labels a “common-sense way.”<sup>46</sup> Broadus exhibits a thin hermeneutic, in fact, one which is nearly transparent. Like his colleague, Boyce, Broadus viewed hermeneutics as more science than art and his treatment on hermeneutics reveals a strong concern that the propositional truth be allowed to ring true in spite of the preacher’s words.

Broadus’s homiletical *discrimen* is not commensurate with Hodge’s or Warfield’s so-called “plenary verbal” doctrine, however.<sup>47</sup> Broadus certainly maintained a view of Scripture as inspired by God, but his homiletical instruction as well as his own preaching exhibit a preference for the major *themes* of Scripture and their connection to minor Texts. Stanfield notes that from 1857 to 1893, Broadus preached four hundred and sixty sermons. Of these, 344 were on single verses, 110 were on two or more verses, and six were on multiple texts.<sup>48</sup> This reveals Broadus’s reliance on

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<sup>45</sup> Broadus, *Sermons and Addresses*, 110 ff.

<sup>46</sup> J. D. Robertson, “Quotations from the Class Room of Dr. Broadus,” in *Seminary Magazine* (April 1895): 428, cited in Stanfield, “Preacher Extraordinary,” 6.

<sup>47</sup> For a treatment of Warfield’s *discrimen*, see Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 16-34. In his *Treatise*, Broadus clearly states that parts of Scripture are *not* inspired, writing, “Let all sayings of uninspired men be scrutinized, in the light of their connection and of Scripture in general, before they are used as texts,” 48-9. I find it interesting that Broadus makes no mention of conflicting interpretations in his section on hermeneutics since his publication of the *Treatise* came just one year after the controversial resignation of Broadus’s friend and colleague at Southern Seminary, Crawford Howell Toy. See Broadus, *Memoir of James Petigru Boyce*, 262, where Broadus comments on Toy’s “dominion of destructive theories” that were deemed “quite out of the question” to the Seminary administration.”

<sup>48</sup> Stanfield, “Preacher Extraordinary,” 6.

the propositional content of Scripture to bear its own weight. Stanfield's assessment is consistent with my own reading:

In his own preaching, Dr. Broadus made excellent use of Scripture. He used a text for every sermon; and the text was more than a springboard; it had a vital relation to the sermon. Sometimes the text would provide the outline of the sermon, sometimes only a portion of the outline, sometimes the subject of the discourse, or again the introduction. He used, never abused, the Scripture.<sup>49</sup>

For Broadus, the function of Scripture for preaching is “to impart the teaching of God in his Word” (40). And yet, Broadus emphasizes that every individual Text bears a connection to the whole “web of discourse” contained in the Bible (38). The task of preaching from a particular Text is to connect this Text with the “characteristic modes of thought and forms of expression” found throughout Scripture (54). Thus, “by throwing himself upon the current of the general connection of his text” with the major concepts of Scripture – concepts that adjure men and women to a saving knowledge of God in Jesus Christ – the preacher authorizes Scripture as the source of his (or her) discourse (54).

## 2) *Broadus's Rendering of God's Presence*

The key task of the preacher is to communicate the propositional truth of the Gospel in fresh ways so that men and women may be led to respond to its claim upon their lives.<sup>50</sup> She is to show through sound logic the truthfulness of this propositional truth, *and* to help the congregants apply this truth to their lives. Like Warfield, Broadus construes God's presence in the “ideational

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Broadus writes, “It is not enough to convince men of truth, nor enough to make them see how it applies to themselves, and how it may be practicable for them to act it out – but we must ‘persuade men’” (232). And “so mighty is the opposition which the gospel encounters in human nature, so averse is the natural heart to the obedience of faith, so powerful are the temptations of life, that we must arouse men to intense earnestness . . . (235).

mode.”<sup>51</sup> What this means is that God is present to the congregants in the preaching event through the *ideas* presented in the sermon. Broadus writes, “The primary idea is that the discourse is a development of the text, and explanation, illustration, application of its teachings. Our business is to teach God’s word” (39). Broadus’s homiletical *discrimen* undergirds his constant admonition to his students that preaching should be comprised of cogent arguments (i.e., rhetoric) and a straight-forward, common-sense style that he will label *perspicuity*: “The most important property of style is perspicuity” (339).

Broadus’s use of the classical *Canons* of rhetoric for the task of preparing and delivering sermons betrays a bias shared by many 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century theologians concerning the powers of rational thought. The underlying assumption is that if one can arrange one’s discourse in conformity with the standards of logic, then persuasion (i.e., conversion) ought to follow.<sup>52</sup> Thus, his homiletical *discrimen* seems to suggest a strong reliance on the human element in preaching. The power of the orator is, after all, “the power of making the primitive chords of the soul (its purely human elements) vibrate within us” (22). Note the parentheses!

What about the divine element in preaching? It is impossible to discern with precision the degree to which the so-called “Princeton Theology” of Charles Hodge influenced Broadus’s homiletic because he makes no reference of him in his *Treatise*.<sup>53</sup> But what is evident from Broadus’s *Treatise* and *Lectures* is that Scripture forms the data of sermons. God is present in the

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<sup>51</sup> Kelsey, *Proving Doctrine*, 161.

<sup>52</sup> As B. B. Warfield writes, “[Christianity] has been placed in the world to *reason* its way to the dominion of the world. And it is by reasoning its way that it has come to its kingship. By reasoning it will gather to itself all its own. And by reasoning it will put its enemies under its feet.” “Review of Herman Bavinck’s *Der Zekerheid des Gelofs*,” *Princeton Theological Review* 1 (1903): 138-43, cited in Curtis W. Freeman, “Can Baptist Theology Be Revisited?” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 278.

<sup>53</sup> Cf., Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859-2009* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 97.”

sermon in ideational form, i.e., through the content that is transmitted from the biblical Text in the preacher's sermon. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, which was written 16 years after his *Treatise*, Broadus argues for a paradoxical relationship between God's activity and human agency, writing,

Many are called to share the Messianic benefits, but few are selected actually to attain them; a large portion of the called utterly refusing to accept . . . This selection of the actually saved may be looked at from two sides. From the divine side, we see that the scriptures teach an eternal election of men to eternal life, simply out of God's good pleasure. From the human side, we see that those persons attain the blessings of salvation through Christ who accept the Gospel invitation and obey the Gospel commandments. It is doubtful whether our minds can combine both sides in a single view, but we must not for that reason deny either of them to be true.<sup>54</sup>

Broadus stresses perspicuity and this suggests that he takes God's presence to be *a priori* to the sermonic event. God has spoken through the biblical writers and this Word is also a Word for future contexts. When the preacher's style is too cluttered, the preacher interferes with the conveyance of God's Word and the ideas get lost in the transmission. Indeed, as Broadus notes, "Style is excellent when, like the atmosphere, it shows the thought, but itself is not seen" (339).

Yet perspicuity of style is tempered with an extemporaneous, impassioned delivery and thus what Broadus removes with one hand, he replaces with the other. He writes,

Some offensively obtrude themselves, and push the gospel into the background. Others think the ideal is to put the gospel alone before the mind, and let the preacher be entirely forgotten. . . . What is the use of a *living* preacher, if he is to be really *hidden*, even by the cross? The true ideal surely is, that the preacher shall come frankly forward, in full personality, modest through true humility and yet bold with personal conviction and fervid zeal and ardent love — presenting the gospel as a reality of his own experience, and attracting men to it by the power of a

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<sup>54</sup> John A. Broadus, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1886), 449-50. Nearly two decades earlier, Broadus had posed this very question to his uncle Andrew Broaddus. His uncle, a veteran minister, replied, "I can not fathom the mystery connected with God's sovereignty and man's accountability," Andrew Broaddus to John A. Broadus, 3 Mar. 1857), cited in Wills, 95.

living and present human sympathy – and yet all the while preaching not himself, but Christ Jesus the Lord.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, Broadus deems God’s empowerment a pre-requisite for “persuasion.” He writes,

[A] genuine fervor cannot be produced to order by an effort of the will. We must cultivate religious sensibilities, must keep our souls habitually in contact with gospel truth, and maintain, by the union of abundant prayer and self-denying activity, that ardent love to God and that tender love to man which will give us, without an effort, true pathos and passion. (237)

The stress Broadus places upon eloquence in the introduction to his *Treatise* seems to be the key to discerning his view on the mode of God’s presence in preaching. Eloquence in preaching bears a hybrid quality for Broadus. In other words, there is an aspect of preaching that is decidedly human, hence the preacher employs the best she has to offer concerning rhetoric and style so that the ideational content of Scripture may bear itself upon the hearts and minds of her congregants. At the same time, there is an aspect of preaching that is mysteriously divine and this is why he defends a hermeneutical extraction of the “real meaning” of Scripture and why he wants to leave room for God’s presence in the delivery of the sermon. Broadus writes, “[T]he thing needed will not be oratorical display but genuine eloquence, the eloquence which springs from vigorous thinking, strong convictions, fervid imagination and passionate earnestness; and true spiritual success will be attained only in proportion as you gain, in humble prayer, the blessing of the Holy Spirit.<sup>56</sup> Thus we find in Broadus’s work a balanced take on the divine-human relationship in preaching. Just as Broadus himself approached his studies from his earliest days – with an admixture of diligent effort complimented by God-given talent – so too did he approach the art of preaching, wherein both God’s and the preacher’s agency are simultaneously at play.

#### HOW BAPTIST ARE BROADUS’S DISTINCTIVES?

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<sup>55</sup> Broadus, *Lectures on the History of Preaching*, 124-5.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

Bearing in mind Leonard's words regarding the "great ebb and flow" of classic belief and practice, I offer in this section of my paper a treatment of Broadus's key theological contributions highlighted above vis-à-vis the slippery notion of "Baptist distinctives," which receives a great deal of attention in contemporary scholarly discourse.<sup>57</sup> The hope is to move us closer to, using Leonard's words, a hermeneutical "place to stand" and such a place is typically connected with a guiding principle or metaphor that subsumes the other elements of Baptist theology and practice. With Shurden, I maintain that just such a place to stand is found in the spirit of "freedom" that is focused on the individual and grounded in God's freedom in Christ.<sup>58</sup>

In the last decade, much ink has been spilled arguing for a nuanced understanding of Baptist freedom vis-à-vis historical and theological sources. By the most broad and encompassing understanding of Baptistic freedom, Broadus is somewhat of a liminal figure.<sup>59</sup> On the one hand, Broadus's hermeneutical suggestions to his preaching students radically minimizes interpretative freedom in favor of the "real meaning" of the Text. On the other hand, Broadus's arguments

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<sup>57</sup> As Freeman astutely observes, "The underlying assumption that there is a clear and unchanging set of principles that have existed from the origins of Baptist life . . . begs to be challenged." Freeman, "Can Baptist Theology Be Revised?" 274. Cf. Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1973), 15 ff.

<sup>58</sup> N.B., Shurden's reminder that "such integrative approaches have been more of an effort to construct a door of entrance to understanding the Baptist identity than a crusade to define dogmatically the denominational identity in any single or exclusive way" in Walter B. Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2005), 26. Nevertheless, he writes, "So if there is a single, recurring, and almost monotonous theme in these BWA documents, it is that of *freedom*." *The Life of Baptists in the Life of the World: 80 Years of the Baptist World Alliance* (Nashville: Baptist Sunday School Board, 1985), 255. In *The Baptist Identity*, Shurden offers an important caveat: "This is not, however, spiritual lone rangerism. While the individual is central, the individual is always an 'individual in community'" (34).

<sup>59</sup> See "Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America," vol. 24; Walter B. Shurden, "The Baptist Identity and The Baptist Manifesto," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 25, no. 4 (Wint 1998): 321-340; Shurden, *The Baptist Identity*; Paul S. Fiddes, "Time for Vision and Revision," in *On Being the Church: Revisioning Baptist Identity*, ed. Brian Haymes, Ruth Gouldbourne, and Anthony R. Cross, vol. 21, *Studies in Baptist History and Thought* (Milton Keynes, Colorado Springs, and Hyderabad: Paternoster Press, 2008); James Dunn and Grady C. Cothen, *Soul Freedom: Baptist Battle Cry* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000); Curtis W. Freeman, "A New Perspective on Baptist Identity," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spr 1999): 59-65.

against manuscript preaching and in favor of extemporaneous preaching suggest a radical hospitality for the preacher to exercise his or her freedom in delivery.

Moreover, the freedom Broadus allows in the preparation and delivery of sermons muddles the line between the human and divine elements in preaching, confusing an anthropologically grounded freedom with a theological grounded freedom. Regarding interpretation, Broadus seems woefully indebted to a certain “conception of freedom . . . deeply entrenched in the North American Baptist tradition by the mid-eighteen century.”<sup>60</sup> This is, of course, no freedom at all; in fact, it is indicative of the “mistaken path” passionately demurred by the writers of the *Baptist Manifesto*, one which “would shackle God’s freedom to a narrow biblical interpretation.”<sup>61</sup> And yet, the kind of stylistic freedom Broadus defends bears a definitively *theological* warrant: “And let it here be asked, What of dependence upon the Holy Spirit, and prayer for [the Spirit’s] help in preaching? How can a man pray that God will guide him through a forest, when he has already blazed the entire path, and committed himself to follow it?” (429).

Nevertheless, Broadus advises, “It is unwise to set up at the outset some standard of excellence, and aim to conform to that” (29). In spite of the troves of stylistic wisdom that he lavishes upon his readers, what remains of primary importance for Broadus is the freedom to be oneself before God (*viz.*, authenticity). He writes, “Let the young cedar grow as a cedar and the young oak as an oak, but straighten, prune, improve each of them into the best possible tree of its kind. And so as to speaking, be always yourself, your actual, natural self, but yourself developed, corrected, improved into the very best you are by nature capable of becoming” (30). It is clear that

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<sup>60</sup> “Re-Envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America,” 303.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* The *Baptist Manifesto* writers oppose any notion of freedom that define[s] freedom as a property of human nature apart from the freedom of God in Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.” Cf. Broadus’s defense of context and authorial intention (pp. 78 ff.) with particular attention to his warrants, which are drawn not from Scripture, or even Church History, but from the hermeneutical fashion of his day (*i.e.* apart from God in Jesus Christ).

Broadus advances a notion of homiletical *vis-à-vis* sermonic style that flows from the converging streams of the God-given personality of the preacher and the congregational context.<sup>62</sup>

Even as Broadus defends freedom, he is reticent to let that word go without qualification, however. He writes against a kind of freedom that strays too far from the “real meaning” of the text: “When they are strongly impelled to wish it so, as by appetite, interest, or prejudice, and thus some powerful feeling combines with indolence, it is not wonderful, however deplorable, that a ‘hasty induction’ is the result” (186). And he does not wish to abrogate the canons of sound logic in the process: “In order to a safe induction, one must not merely aggregate a number of instances; he must analyze and compare them, so as to eliminate what is merely incidental, and ascertain the ‘material circumstances’ in each case” (188). Here Broadus betrays a causal bias that was presupposed during the time of his writing; however, it also opens the doorway to another line of discourse: namely, the backing of the community of faith. Here I have in mind the local church, each with its own interpretative idiosyncrasies and prejudices *as well as* the Church catholic.<sup>63</sup>

### CONCLUSION: TOWARD A BAPTIST HOMILETIC

In a recent informal survey of Baptist homiletics professors, I gleaned some surprising insights into the current state of Baptist education, a state dangerously close to the “cut and paste theology” challenged by Leonard.<sup>64</sup> In my survey I posed a simple query: “Which textbook(s) do you employ for your introductory preaching course and why?” I received nine responses, representing both sides of the Baptist schism between “moderates” and “conservatives.” All of the

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<sup>62</sup> In defense of the latter see I.III, §5 on “Occasional Sermons” and the 10<sup>th</sup> argument in favor of extemporaneous preaching in IV.1, §3 in Broadus’s *Treatise* (111 ff. and 425 ff.).

<sup>63</sup> This seems to be commensurate with the “thick ecumenism” advocated by Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006) as well as the “creative Baptist localism” suggested by Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey*, 301-2.

<sup>64</sup> Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, 12.



Baptist homiletics professors preaching at “moderate” seminaries use non-Baptist homiletics texts to teach their students how to preach.<sup>65</sup> In sharp contradistinction, all of the homileticians serving at Southern Baptist seminaries use as their *primary* textbook a book written by a Baptist.<sup>66</sup> In addition, many of the Southern Baptist preaching professors use other texts written by Baptists to supplement their primary texts. The majority of the “moderate” Baptist scholars defended their textbook selection with words like “concise,” “practical,” and “best orientation to the preaching task.” The Southern Baptist homileticians explained their text selections with words like “good pastoral insights,” “text-based,” and “expository.” None of the “moderate” respondents appealed to theology in general or even Baptist distinctives to bolster their textbook selection (of course, this does not necessarily mean that the “moderate” professors whom I surveyed fail to supplement their homiletics texts with Baptist history and theology as it relates to the teaching of preaching).<sup>67</sup>

Nevertheless, this prompts an important question: where might “moderate” Baptists turn – following Shurden’s charge – to garner a homiletic that is *both* sufficient to the rich history of Baptist theology and practice *and* attentive to our 21<sup>st</sup> century realities? The Southern Baptists who

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<sup>65</sup> In order of preference, these scholars employed Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005); Fred B Craddock, *Preaching*, 25th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010); and Barbara Brown Taylor, *The Preaching Life* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 1993). Respectively, they hail from the Presbyterian Church USA, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), and the Episcopal Church.

<sup>66</sup> Again, based on numerical frequency, these scholars preferred Bert Decker and Hershael W. York, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Books, 2003); Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001); Jerry Vines and James Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1999); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994). N.B., Chapell is not a Baptist, but as a leader in the Presbyterian Church in America he presents a conservative, reformed perspective that is growing in the Southern Baptist Convention. None of the respondents employ Chapell as their primary text, however.

<sup>67</sup> The recent writings of Douglas V. Henry are illuminating in this regard: “Baptist education at its best performs an essential, propaedeutic function for realizing a responsible freedom under God that is constrained by love.” In “Can Baptist Theology Sustain the Life of the Mind? The Quest for a Vital Baptist Academy,” in *The Scholarly Vocation and the Baptist Academy: Essays on the Future of Baptist Higher Education*, ed. Roger Ward and David P. Gushee (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 219.

responded to my survey seem to be maintaining what David P. Gushee has labeled the “parochialism” of Baptist life.<sup>68</sup> Granted, such a stance is faithful to a certain interpretation of Baptist life; however it fails, in my mind, to sufficiently engage with our “modern-becoming-postmodern world.”<sup>69</sup> Where might “moderates” turn to find a homiletic capable of shedding new light on our present ecclesial and global realities that does not abrogate that which is distinctively Baptist in the process?<sup>70</sup>

I am convinced that such a homiletical quest must proceed backward before it can move forward: “It is important to ask how to get beyond modernity in a way that is faithful to the Baptist heritage, responsive to present issues, and prepared for future developments.”<sup>71</sup> As a homiletician, my concern for the future of Baptist preaching is that we will lose that essential quality of freedom, that “curious Baptist idiosyncrasy,” that fuels our passion for God’s Word, God’s Church, and God’s world.<sup>72</sup> Preaching does not exist apart from all three and we must press forward to articulate a new Baptist homiletic “for the sake of a dangerous and death-defying gospel.”<sup>73</sup>

What the next generation of Baptist preachers need is “a reassessment of the theological

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<sup>68</sup> David P. Gushee, “Church, Culture, and Baptist Higher Education,” in *The Scholarly Vocation and the Baptist Academy: Essays on the Future of Baptist Higher Education*, eds. Roger Ward and David P. Gushee (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 229. With Gushee, I view this parochialism as a lamentable facet of an insular posture that runs simultaneously contrary to the ecumenical life of the Church and the intellectual life of the Academy.

<sup>69</sup> Freeman, “A New Perspective on Baptist Identity,” 65.

<sup>70</sup> By “present ecclesial and global realities” I draw upon the work of Leonard I. Sweet, *AquaChurch* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub., 1999); Pete Ward, *Liquid Church* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2002); Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalization?*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press ; Malden, MA, 2000); Zygmunt Bauman, *The Individualized Society* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2001); Ulrich Beck, *The Cosmopolitan Vision*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2006); Daniel Bell, *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (New York: Basic Books, 1973); and Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Times: Living in an Age of Uncertainty* (Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007).

<sup>71</sup> Freeman, “A New Perspective on Baptist Identity,” 65. In another article, Freeman writes, “Now that the canons of reason engendered by modernity no longer hold sway, Christian theologians must grasp anew both the terror and the freedom of what it means to have no other foundation than Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 3:11) who is known and made known in the gospel story.” Freeman, “Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?” 293.

<sup>72</sup> R. Wayne Stacy, *A Baptist's Theology* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Publishing, 2000), vi.

<sup>73</sup> Leonard, *The Challenge of Being Baptist*, 101.

*accounts* and *warrants* that are necessary for these [preaching] practices to flourish into the next millennium.<sup>74</sup> To this end, I have (re)introduced the homiletic of John A. Broadus, for we cannot *reassess* unless we have something to *assess* in the first place. Bearing this in mind, I conclude with several marks of a Baptist homiletic. These marks, I believe, can guide us forward.

- 1) A Baptist homiletic ought to resist any one-size-fits-all approach to preaching. Broadus was clear about this (p. 30) and we should take him seriously. Any homiletic worthy of the name *Baptist* will unleash and enable the creative freedom at work in the preacher.
- 2) A Baptist homiletic ought to advocate for freedom *all the way down* — hermeneutics, style, delivery, etc. This is a freedom grounded in Christ for the sake of the community that is, in Fiddes's words, "not just *drawing* together, but *being drawn* together" to bless the world.<sup>75</sup>
- 3) A Baptist homiletic ought to exhibit a hermeneutic of radical hospitality, allowing the insights and convictions of all communities and faith traditions to color our sermons.
- 4) A Baptist homiletic ought to emerge from a fervent love for God, God's people, and God's world. This love should mark every aspect of the preparation and delivery of sermons.
- 5) A Baptist homiletic ought to lead to intelligent, passionate sermons that call individuals in community to respond to the truth of God in faith. Our people should know that our love for them follows God's love by the way we engage them: "face-to-face" and "eye-to-eye."
- 6) A Baptist homiletic ought to engage the "methods best suited to [post]modern thought and [post]modern feeling" (p. 10). However, this extends beyond Broadus's use of classical rhetoric; indeed, it applies to all facets of the preparation and delivery of sermons.

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<sup>74</sup> Freeman, "Can Baptist Theology Be Revisioned?" 302. See also Bill J. Leonard, "An Audacious Witness: Charting the Baptist Future One More Time," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36, no. 4 (Winter 2009): 489.

<sup>75</sup> Paul S. Fiddes, *Tracks and Traces: Baptist Identity in Church and Theology* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 77-8.