

Exploring Precursors to and Benefits of Abe Kuruvilla's "Pericopal Theology"

Abraham Kuruvilla defines pericopal theology as, "The theology specific to a particular pericope, representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God and his relationship to his people, and which, bearing a transhistorical intention, functions as the crucial intermediary in the homiletical move from text to praxis that respects both the authority of the text and the circumstances of the hearer" (Kuruvilla, 2013, 111). This paper attempts to explore the role of interdisciplinary theories in developing homiletical theory by reviewing my own implementation of communication theory into the homiletical process, by identifying some who have contributed to our understanding of the role of theology in that process, and finally, by examining how Kuruvilla's pericopal theology incorporates linguistic theory into the homiletic process in what I consider a step in the right direction.

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For at least a century fundamentalist and evangelical preachers have, in general, undervalued the distinctive theological message embedded in their discrete and particular preaching unit, preferring instead to concentrate either on the text's faithful recounting of the historical events behind the text that grounded their faith (Greidanus, 1989, 196), or on systematic doctrines detected in the text and verified by proof-texting (see, e.g., Zuck, 1991, 1994). The move from ancient text to contemporary congregation has been more a matter of apologetics—"trust the Christ who's life you find accurately recounted in the Bible," or of systemization, "See how the doctrine of Jesus' deity is proven by the miracle of the loaves," than of true exposition. The major missing link in the preparation and delivery of the sermon has been the theological message the biblical author's text proffered in order to impel his readers toward conformity to Christ. Teaching and defending the historicity of the events of the Bible or proof-texting the fundamental doctrines of Christianity—admittedly in response to the liberal influences of the early twentieth century—often outweighed the exposition of the biblical worldview that the preaching unit projected. Defending truth too often overshadowed forming the believer into the image of Christ.

One of the responsibilities of any scholarly academy is to advance theories that explain its field of interest. While homileticians should pass along existing models and methods of preaching, more is required. We must always pursue better means of analyzing, critiquing, and developing our field of study. We must clarify and justify how both hermeneutics and homiletics contributes to more faithful and relevant exposition of the Scriptures. We undertake this task not simply for the joy of inquiry, or in order to retain some professional standing, but for the benefit of the Body of Christ. Our goal is not to guarantee the perfect sermon, but to improve the integrity and efficacy of the sermons that weekly issue from our pulpits.

It was with the goal of practical, responsible scholarship in mind that Paul Scott Wilson challenged his fellow members of the Academy of Homiletics.

Homiletics is not as pastoral or academic a discipline as it needs to be. By pastoral I mean – among other things – practical. Homileticians at times are too interested in devising new paradigms and not interested enough in how effective or helpful they are, or how faithful they are to the call to preach the gospel of Christ. . . . Homileticians try to import categories to homiletics without doing careful spadework to determine how those categories might translate into sermons (Wilson, 2004, 20-21).

Wilson's critique of not being practical enough was directed primarily at the Academy, and rightly so, for the more liberal Academy has produced the vast majority of homiletic theory over the last half century, though much of it has lacked practical application in growing a mature church. Wilson's critique of not being academic enough needs to be taken to heart by the Evangelical Homiletics Society, for while conservatives have written preaching texts, few have proposed or developed scholarly models of preaching that have advanced our homiletic theory. Theories of preaching, through a kind of reverse engineering, describe what happens when preachers expound the Scriptures faithfully and beneficially, so that they may then prescribe processes and practices that help future preachers accomplish that goal. We must borrow, adapt, and reshape metaphors, paradigms, and models from other fields of study and discern whether they apply to our own theories as we seek to represent and explain how a sermon does what it does. Some theories seek to map the entire process while others seek to address a smaller portion of the process. Both are helpful.

Homileticians have seemed slow to develop a substantive theory in one area in particular: the unique theological contribution of the individual preaching unit. A more fully developed theoretical model of the expositional preaching process that explicitly incorporates the theological message of the preaching text is essential. If that task does not fall upon members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, upon whom will it fall?

One who has advanced our understanding of that essential element of the preaching process is Abraham Kuruvilla in his *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*. Kuruvilla argues that what the biblical authors are doing, "is projecting a *world in front of the text*" bearing a "transhistorical intention," that transcends the specific circumstances of the author and the writing; i.e., "the text is given a future orientation, enabling valid application by readers at locations and times far removed from those of the event of inscription" (Kuruvilla, 2013, 27). This projected world with future intention is the crucial intermediary between ancient text and contemporary listener, that is, the theology of a pericope, the weekly preaching unit within the context of the church. Adapting insights from language philosophers, Kuruvilla reiterates the legitimacy and the necessity of a theological link between the biblical text and the sermon's listeners. The notion that theology is the substance of the bridge between the text and the audience has been proposed, as will be explored later in this paper. It is the nature of this *pericopal theology*, as differentiated from biblical, canonical, and systematic theology that is original with Kuruvilla and amplifies our homiletical theory. To illustrate the practicality of his theory Kuruvilla keys in on the Old Testament Law, which still must be applied via

theology to the contemporary Christian and what he terms a “christiconic interpretation that sees each pericope of Scripture portraying a facet of the canonical image of Christ” (ibid., 29).

While Kuruvilla has surfaced many ideas that invite further deliberation and discussion, this essay will focus on his conception of pericopal theology. This new category of theological classification seems to be the major concern of his text. Though it is only a single element of a complex expositional process, his notion of pericopal theology promises to deepen and clarify our understanding of that crucial element. *Privilege the Text!* advances our homiletical theory incrementally though significantly. Kuruvilla’s concept is evolutionary rather than revolutionary in that it stands on the shoulders, as does all theory, of work that has preceded it. My goal in the following portion of this piece is to demonstrate, if only selectively, some of the antecedent expressions of the theological bridge as it relates to our current preaching theory. In so doing I hope to exemplify how homiletical theory develops and challenges our Society to do more of the same. I begin with my own search for the link between the text and the sermon.

Developing a Model

I entered Dallas Theological Seminary with no model of the preaching process. I had no method with which to approach the task. Haddon Robinson was chair of the Practical Theology Department and was in the process of developing his approach to exposition as published, three years after I had graduated, in *Biblical Preaching*. My first two preaching courses were taught, by Robinson’s design, in tandem with New Testament, epistolary, exegetical courses with the result that the exegetical to homiletical (E-H) progression became my model of exposition. This model was confirmed by *Biblical Preaching* in which the, “Stages in the Development of Expository Messages,” proceeded from, “4. Analyzing the Exegetical Idea,” to “5. Formulating the Homiletical Idea” (Robinson, 1980, 76). It should be noted that in his discussion of the analysis of the exegetical idea Robinson invested several pages (91-96) to suggest ways of discovering “the text’s theological intention,” though the reader was never informed as to the species of theology (Biblical? Canonical? Systematic?) he should be looking for. Unfortunately that theological concept was missing from his E-H model.

I was perfectly content with the E-H model, however, because it was readily applicable to any New Testament church and because Robinson’s process was far better than historical models that moved rather arbitrarily through verse-by-verse explanation with (perhaps?) an “application” or two tagged on at the end of the message. I figured I could preach for years out of the Epistles using the E-H model, and I did for a couple of years to a congregation that seemed content with such exposition.

Then I decided to take a crack at narrative. I soon realized that the E-H model was not sufficient. I stumbled my way through a lot of, “Jesus is the Messiah and worthy of our trust and obedience,” alongside a good dose of imitation exhortation resembling, “Jesus resisted Satan’s temptation by knowing and quoting Scripture and so can you.” My congregation had never heard narratives preached any other way, so they were pleased.

But I had a growing and very troubling sense that something was missing. For one thing, I knew that unpacking the meaning of a narrative was a lot more difficult than unpacking a didactic paragraph from an epistle written to New Testament believers. For another, I sensed that the real message of Matthew was somewhere between the lines of historical biography and systematic apology.

Two major developments encouraged my quest for a more comprehensive preaching model. The first was John R. W. Stott's *Between Two Worlds*. The second was that my doctoral studies at Ohio State were exposing me to communication theory.

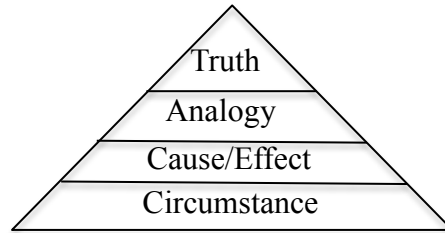
In 1982 Stott articulated the problem of the gap between the world of the ancient text and the world of the immediate audience, and then proposed a model that linked the two.

It is because preaching is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message to living people who need to hear it, that I am going to develop a . . . metaphor to illustrate the essential nature of preaching . . . that of bridge-building (Stott, 1982, 137).

We should be praying that God will raise up a new generation of Christian communicators who are determined to bridge the chasm; . . . who refuse to sacrifice truth to relevance or relevance to truth; but who resolve instead in equal measure to be faithful to Scripture and pertinent to today (ibid., 144).

Stott's gap and bridge-building metaphor made sense. Still, Stott fell short in describing how this linking of the two worlds was to be accomplished. Was the preacher, by means of the sermon, the bridge spanning the two worlds? Doubtless the preacher stood between the two, but did he alone possess sufficient authority to bring them together? Though the question of what from the text was carried over the gap with authority to the contemporary listener remained, the concept of something authoritative bridging the gap made sense and provided the framework of a new model, one that went beyond E-H.

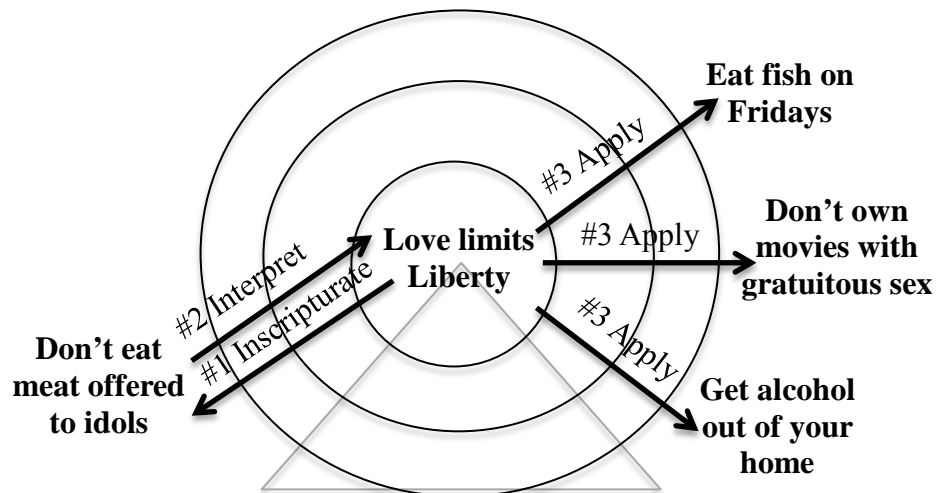
The works of Richard M. Weaver and Ernest Bormann, communication theorists, also began to stimulate my theory-building imagination. Weaver proposed a "Hierarchy of Realities," that would allow a speaker to determine the weight of authority and obligation his arguments might carry. Weaver identified the highest level of the hierarchy as "ideal truth" (Weaver, 1970, 213). Collaborative insight came from the work of Karl Wallace who implied the same when he wrote, "A good reason is a statement offered in support of an *ought* proposition . . . or of a value-judgment" (Wallace, 1963, 247). I agreed that a sermon should consist of value-laden language that makes a moral demand upon those who hear it. Weaver identified weaker arguments, lesser manifestations of reality, in descending order as analogy, cause-effect, and circumstance (Weaver, 209-215).



Finding insight in *Language is Sermonic*, I looked for more of Weaver's writings on the same subject and discovered his 1948 volume *Ideas Have Consequences*. In it, Weaver used "Center" to refer to the highest level of argument and "Periphery" to refer to circumstance. Weaver lamented that culture was becoming fragmented because of its obsession with the peripheral, with facts and science, and not ultimate realities. Yet, "The return which the idealists propose is not a voyage backward through time but a return to center, which must be conceived metaphysically or theologically" (Weaver, 1948, 52).

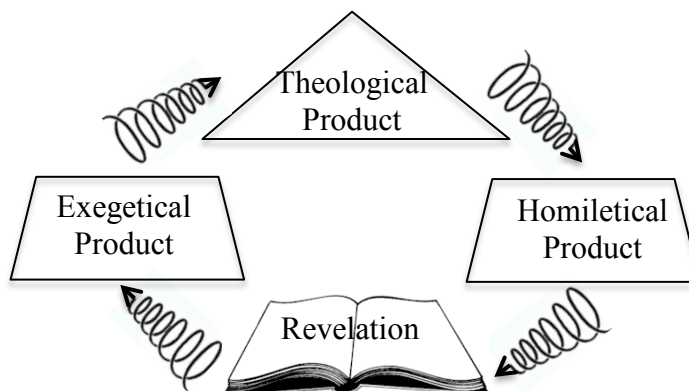
It occurred to me that what Weaver referred to as truth or center was a higher level theological generalization that served as the source of the biblical author's specific message as delivered to a particular group of people in a given context. Shortly after adapting Weaver's concepts into the beginnings of a homiletical model, it occurred to me that his truth/center concept was similar to Ernest Bormann's "Rhetorical Vision," and that both were, in their essence, the substance of the bridge that spanned the gap between the biblical text and the contemporary listener. When Bormann wrote of a rhetorical vision catching up the listener, transporting him, "to a world which seems somehow even more real than the everyday world," (Bormann, 1972, 399), he was associating rhetorical vision with Weaver's center/truth, that ideal, transcendent world into which the listener would enter and participate in order to realize the vision in the here and now.

For example, Paul drew from an ideal truth ("Love limits liberty") applying it with specificity to the context in Corinth ("Don't eat meat offered to idols if it stumbles a weaker brother into sinning against his conscience.") His Inscripturation of 1 Corinthians 8-10 (see below #1) rested on the ideal truth/theological proposition that, "Love for a brother in Christ limits one's expression of Christian liberty." The preacher seeks an Interpretation (#2) of that theological truth. Then, and only then can the preacher consider how that theological truth Applies (#3) in a contemporary preaching context. The application(s) may be multiple depending on the most pressing concern related to the congregation, but consistent with the core theological principle. While I may be free to eat beef on Fridays, own a movie with a sex scene in it, and keep alcohol in my home, I will not do so at the risk of causing my Catholic brother to eat against his conscience or my teen-aged son to lust or my daughter to abuse alcohol.



Communication theory was providing me with concepts in support of a homiletical theory. I began to realize how these concepts might be adapted to a map of the expositional process. It was as these concepts began to play out into a preaching model in my mind that I revisited one of my seminary textbooks, Robert A. Traina's *Methodical Bible Study: A New Approach to Hermeneutics*. Traina's concluded that contemporary applications of the Bible must rest on "the universal elements of a passage . . . the universal truths . . . the timeless principles," not the "peripheral," but what was "central and essential in nature" (Traina, 1952, 215). It seemed that Traina had read *Ideas Have Consequences*. His hermeneutical concept of "Principle" (ibid., 1952, 184, 206, 214, 217) fit well with Weaver's, Wallace's, and Bormann's theories. I was certain the concept of "timeless principles," by whatever designation, was the authoritative bridge between text and listener, but I was not certain how to detect them in any given text.

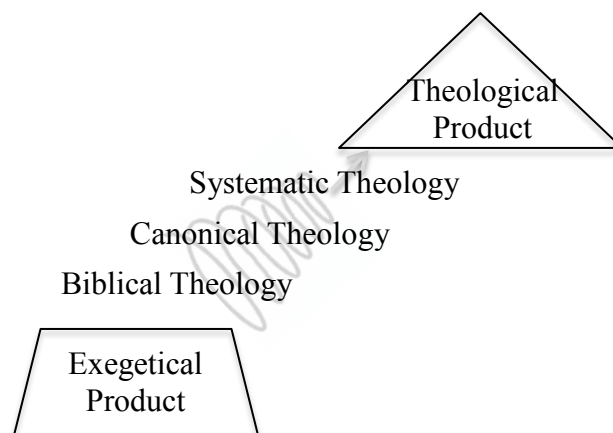
These ideas were still taking shape when I returned to my alma mater to teach homiletics in 1984. While the model the Pastoral Ministries Department was offering students still followed the E-H method, a new paradigm had taken shape in my mind. I would apply the concepts of the rhetorical and hermeneutical theorists to a homiletical model. I first presented the idea of a four-step "expositional process" to my fellow faculty members during the 1984-1985 school year. I suggested that we include a specific step between the exegetical and homiletical. Later in an article entitled, "A Paradigm for Preaching," I proposed the following model (Warren, 1991).



The new paradigm (model, map) of the expositional process sought to include the theological process and product as intentional elements. The exegetical, theological, and homiletical idea statements would be distinguished. The exegetical process would result in an exegetical product, the outline and proposition, and would be stated in terms of the original author and readers. The theological process would lead to a theological outline and proposition that would be stated in terms of a universal principle with the “ideal” reader/hearer in mind. This theological statement would not be, “a reading into the text of theological doctrines and theories, but a reading from the text of the fullness of meaning required by God’s complete revelation” (ibid., 111). The homiletical process would lead to the sermon itself as delivered to specific listeners. A post-sermonic, revelational process would involve both the preacher and the listeners in thinking, feeling, and/or acting more in line with God’s revealed will, having heard the Word expounded.

The place where I sensed the most uncertainty with my model was in identifying the nature of the theological product and determining how to discover it. I suggested that the preacher/ theologian would first focus on “biblical theology,” by which I meant the theological worldview and message of the biblical author. Then, as a final theological consideration, the preacher/theologian would pass the proposed theological proposition through the grid of his systematic theology to insure that what he was proposing was within the scope of orthodoxy. As a result, my final theological product often tended to be quite abstract and overly general as in, “God loves sinners.” After all, I had heard my homiletics professor suggest that there were only a few general principles in all of Scripture. They were just restated in different ways in different texts. Kuruvilla sees the same suggestion in Carson who, “reduces preaching to painting these big pictures every week – the same twenty-odd [biblical-theological] vistas” (Kuruvilla, 2013, 240).

In a later development of the theological process I suggested a three-stage process including biblical, canonical, and systematic considerations (Warren, 1999). Doing biblical theology constitutes the first move of the theological process.



Biblical theology seeks, by multiple readings through the text, to identify and interpret the author’s world view by noting the author’s use of God, Creation, God in relation to Creation, and Creation as it relates to other aspects of Creation along with any theological

terms, allusions, motifs, themes expressed in a unit of meaning as they relate to the other units of a text (paragraph, section, book and/or author) within their own historical/authorial context (See Carson, 2000, 100).

Canonical theology seeks to discover the interconnections between previous manifestations of biblical theology and their counterparts as developed through the progress of revelation. It examines theological terms, allusions, motifs, themes and emerging patterns in terms of the entire and completed canon.

I saw a final move in the theological process testing and qualifying the theological message in a specific text against a system of theology as expressed in doctrines or dogma.

The preacher would undertake the three-stage theological process not so that all the passages on a particular theological theme might be included comprehensively in the sermon, but so that the various theological approaches might help the preacher conceptualize, shape, and express a text's theological proposition. The goal was not to take the listeners through the theological process, but to discover and test the truth statement, the timeless, transcultural theological proposition, before preaching it with its particular implications and applications in a specific time and place.

My primary goal in offering this clarification of the theological process was to encourage preachers to come to a legitimate theological ground from where they could move to a relevant sermon. I hoped that my students would not seek to find their authority simply in the events recorded in the text, but in the theological principle expressed in the text.

I wanted to express the theological message of the text in a statement that was universal, yet not so abstract as to become disconnected from the passage that expressed them. Thus the too abstract, "Faith forgives," could better be stated, "Faith in God's sovereign position and power evokes forgiveness" (Gen. 50:15-21). The more specific statement incorporates the object and the content of Joseph's faith; concepts Moses would not want the reader to overlook.

When the theological proposition becomes too abstract two results follow: there is much repetition of the same concepts and the specific theological message of each preaching unit is lost. My colleagues, Tim Ralston, Ramesh Richard, and later Abe Kuruvilla, criticized my model because it so easily climaxed in theological abstractions that were too distant from the text. I was allowing abstract, systematic theology to dominate my theological proposition and disconnecting from the distinctive message of my preaching text.

As I continued to reflect on the role of theology in bridging the gap between the ancient text and the contemporary audience I found others who were writing along the same lines. In this next section I overview some of the works that most influenced my thinking. Although I found all of these discussions helpful, I noted the lack of theoretical grounding in most.

Confirming the Concept

Over the next several years I discovered many authors who also identified a theological intermediary between the text and the sermon. Several of these are mentioned in the “Reference List” below. I refer here to a few who had particular influence on my thinking and, I believe, contributed significantly to the scholarly advance of the hermeneutical-homiletical process.

Walter Kaiser was explicit about the necessity of following the text to its theological claim. “Even in the text’s historical particularity, it also carried in its very bosom an enduring plan of the everlasting God,” so that, “If this informing theology was what made the text timeless and full of abiding values for the people in that day . . . then could not this same diachronic accumulation of theology provide the same heart of the message for all peoples in all times?” (Kaiser, 1981, 162).

I had noted the same sentiment in Allen Ross, who began with the presupposition that biblical narratives, “are highly developed and complex narratives that form theological treatises” (Ross, 1988, 13). He warned that, “The substance of the exposition must be clearly derived from the text so that the central idea unfolds in the analysis of the passage and so that all the parts of the passage may be interpreted to show their contribution to the theological idea” (ibid., 47). “Once the expositor demonstrates that the message is from the text, then the exposition [theology] will carry the authority it must have to be effective” (ibid., 23-24).

Bryan Chapell stated that, “Each preachable unit of the Bible disclosures a Fallen Condition Focus, *The mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage*” (Chapell, 1994, 4. See also, 2nd edition, 2005, 14, 304, 309 and Chapell, 2013, xvii). For our every fallen condition instance there is a corresponding solution that is a “divine solution” (Chapell, 1994, 296, 299; Chapell, 2005, 14, 304, 309).

I have concluded that Chapell’s “theme,” or better, “universal truth” (Chapell, 1994, 140) statement—which is different from both the FCF and the DS statements, though both are theological concepts—serves as the theological bridge between text and congregation. Note that he describes the sermon proposition as, “*The wedding of a universal truth based on the text* [the theological proposition based on the one’s exegetical conclusions] *with an application* [homiletical proposition] *based on the universal truth,*” and that, “A universal truth is the biblical principle derived from the sermon’s dominant text” (ibid.).

Haddon Robinson continued to wrestle with how the gap between text and sermon is managed. His solution was to move from the particulars of the text to some level of generalization before journeying over to specific application for the contemporary listener. “I picture a ‘ladder of abstraction’ that comes up from the biblical world and crosses over and down to the modern setting” (Robinson, 1997, 23). Indeed, Robinson suggests that the preacher may, “Climb the ladder of abstraction a couple of levels until

you reach the principle” (ibid.). A definition of “principle” would be helpful at this point, but the closest we get to it is, “Sometimes, as I work with a text, I have to climb the abstraction ladder until I reach the text’s intent” (ibid.). Robinson implied that the text’s intent is something to be discovered by “abstracting up to God” or up to “the depravity factor” (ibid., 24) in order to get to “a universal experience” (ibid., 27).

It seems to me that Robinson intuitively understands that the journey up the abstraction ladder is somehow theological. Yet, he has not fully expressed the significance of the role theology plays in the expositional process. His E-H model may imply a theological move in the form of a journey up and down the ladder of abstraction, but he has not identified it as an explicitly theological move. Additionally, Robinson’s generalizations do not necessarily reach the level of Weaver’s truth or center concepts. Rather, he seems to be seeking a practical means of moving to relevance while remaining within the realm of general orthodoxy. His thinking is helpful, but does not delve deeply into the kind of theology that aids the preaching in making that move.

Don Sunukjian’s *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* offers a Passage-Truth-Sermon movement (Sunukjian, 2007, 27-28). Unfortunately Sunukjian’s strategy for moving from the “passage” statements and outline to the “truth” statements and outline errs toward the minimalist. That transitional move consists of two adaptations: “Turn the historical statements into timeless, universal ones” (ibid., 51), by which he means abstracting from the specifics of the text to generalizations, and, “Put the outline concepts in the author’s original thought order” (ibid., 56). Doubtless these two changes are necessary, but the theological move is actually more complex and demanding.

Fresh Direction

In a telling insight Paul Scott Wilson noted, “It may be significant that after a long hiatus, exegesis once again is a subject in textbooks in homiletics,” then observed, “For some reason this is not the case in key homiletics books that are firmly in the evangelical camp” (Wilson, 2004, 28-29). Evangelical homileticians have added little to the development of the preacher’s hermeneutical understanding and skill. For the most part we have been content to repackage what has been said before rather than engage in advancing new theory.

That is why a contribution like Kuruvilla’s *Privilege the Text!* is such a welcome addition to our homiletics libraries. He has grounded his development of “pericopal theology” in the academic arena of language theory. Such grounding helps to legitimize our homiletical theory and provides deeper, clarifying insights into what faithful preaching is and does. The rest of this piece will highlight several significant and theoretically grounded contributions of *Privilege the Text!*

What Texts Do

Kuruvilla’s goal is to allow the biblical text to do what it was intended to do. The Scriptures not only say, they do. In its portrayal of an ideal spiritual reality, the Bible

invites, even compels, its readers to enter into and participate in that ideal realm, as in Bormann's rhetorical vision. "The text is not an end in itself, but the means thereto, an instrument of the author's action of employing language to project a transcending vision – what Ricoeur called the *world in front of the text*" (Kuruvilla, 2013, 39).

Drawing primarily on the writings of Paul Ricoeur and E. D. Hirsch, Kuruvilla first addresses

. . . a crucial facet of *general* hermeneutics that renders a text capable of exerting its influence into the future. The pragmatic operation of language – what authors *do* with what they *say* – is particularly important for this capacity of texts to impact future readers. What authors are doing is projecting a *world in front of the text* bearing an intention that is transhistorical, transcending the specific circumstances of the author and the writing; i.e., the text is given a future orientation, enabling valid application by readers at locations and times far removed from those of the event of inscription (ibid., 27).

The Bible is a "fixed" (permanent) speech act. In the writing of their texts the biblical authors were not only saying things (speech), they were also doing things (acts) that demanded a response from their readers. In its written form the Scripture continues both to say and to do. Kuruvilla draws from the insights of pragmatics and speech act theory – the study of how oral and written communication performs (saying, doing, affecting) – to demonstrate that although the Scripture has been "frozen" (preserved) and has become "emancipated" (distanced) from its authors, it still has the effect of compelling a response.

A simple example reveals the legitimacy of this conception of how language works. When my wife says, "The trash is full," she is both saying something and doing something. She is stating a fact about the level of trash in the can, but she is also instructing me to take the trash out to the dumpster. Similarly, when the Bible says that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, including mankind in His image, it is compelling its readers to inhabit, in Ricoeur's conception, an ideal *world in front of the text* in which God rules over His creation and where everything proceeds as God desires, and to align themselves with that world's priorities, precepts, and practices (ibid., 56). "The text becomes an advocate for that world, recommending adoption by the reader" (ibid., 43).

Because of the nature of this *world in front of the text* – its projection of an ideal reality – it communicates (says *and* does), "something universally relevant across the passage of time" (ibid., 43), so that, following Hirsch, "it is by a text's projection of a world that bears a *transhistorical intention* that it achieves this futurity" (ibid., 44). Until the preacher grasps the pragmatic (doing) in addition to the semantic (saying) aspect of the text, he has no authoritative basis for moving to application. It is the future directed transhistorical intention expressed in the world in front of the text that carries authority for application. "As far as interpretation for preaching is concerned, the 'point' or thrust of a text is what the author was *doing* with what he was *saying* (the pragmatics of the

utterance, or as we have seen the *world in front of the text* [WiFotT]). In response, the people of God derive valid application from grasping that author's *doing*" (ibid., 51). Based on these concepts drawn from Hirsch's theory, Kuruvilla proposes the following model.

Facets of Meaning			
Original Text Sense	Trans-Historical Intention: Author's Doing (WiFotT)	Exemplification (Valid Application)	Signification (Not Valid, but Appropriate Application)
"No drunkenness with wine"	"No drunkenness with alcohol"	"No drunkenness with vodka"	"Cancel subscription to <i>Wine Spectator</i> "
Facets of Application			

When Kuruvilla speaks of a text's meaning he includes 1) the text's original sense or the semantic (saying) meaning, as well as 2) the world in front of the text (Ricoeur) or the transhistorical intention (Hirsch) or the pragmatic (doing) meaning, and, in addition, 3) the exemplification or valid application. Exemplification is considered part of the text's meaning because classics allow for a plurality of potential exemplifications, that is, valid applications that recontextualize the futuristic intentions residing in the world in front of the text. It is the "pragmatic 'surplus' of meaning that generates potential application" (ibid., 53) out of the "richness of the ideal meaning" (ibid., 56). Because the text is doing as well as saying, it demands a response. A plurality of exemplifications inherently reside within the text's doing. Valid applications carry authority because they are part of the text's meaning.

When Kuruvilla speaks of the application of a text he includes, following Hirsch, 1) exemplification (valid application) and 2) significance (not valid, but "appropriate" application). The world in front of the text, the transhistorical intention, carries forward into the future the challenge to respond to its portrayal of the ideal (theological) world. "The discernment of this projected world is therefore an essential task of the interpreter, for from this intermediary alone many valid applications may be derived" (ibid., 44). Exemplifications are considered valid applications because, "they fall within the boundaries of the text's transhistorical intention" (ibid., 45), that "unchanging conceptual component of the text that creates a virtually infinite potential of exemplifications that may be realized in a myriad of future reading contexts" (ibid., 64). Significances, on the other hand, do not pass the test of validity because they, "are not part of textual meaning" (ibid., 62), though they may be "appropriate" since they advocate "*means of accomplishing* the exemplification" (ibid.). Exemplifications reside within the meaning of the text, while significances lie outside of meaning, but are nonetheless useful for preachers who, "suggest significances for application that move one toward accomplishment of the exemplification demanded by the text" (ibid. 63).

While texts on hermeneutics and homiletics have alluded to “what texts do,” the concept generally lacks a scholarly defense. Kevin Vanhoozer and Thomas Long provide a couple of happy exceptions. Vanhoozer, for example, has instructed, “Theological interpreters should ask not ‘What actually happened?’ but rather ‘What is the author saying/doing with these words?’” because, “The theological interpreter describes what God, the divine author is doing in and through the works of the human authors” (Vanhoozer, 2002, 299).

Thomas Long’s *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* also wades into how biblical texts work, immersing the reader in language theory. He asks, “Precisely what relationship does literary form have to what is typically called ‘meaning’ in biblical texts? When and how, in the process...should the literary dynamics of a text be taken into account? What is the connection between [such a process] and the more traditional approaches to biblical exegesis?” and then proposes, “To answer these questions, we must first examine the basic role form plays in human communication” (Long, 1989, 13). The real issue is, “How may the sermon, in a new setting, say and do what the text says and does in its setting?” (ibid., 24). Both Vanhoozer and Long have engaged the theological and language theory literature, bringing their insights into our understanding of the expositional process.

While some homileticians have made passing reference to what texts do (Adams, Craddock, Greidanus), they have not validated how it is that text’s do. Kuruvilla, in contrast, has given a substantive theoretical basis for our seeking a text’s theological message, a message that obligates the reader/hearer to respond to what the text is doing. This theory of how language works, how it both says and does, demonstrates that the Bible carries in its very nature as a classic—with a theological component—the imperative of application. It projects an ideal world and compels the reader/listener to live/act in that world. It is in the preacher’s appeal to this theological, ideal world projected in the text that he finds the authority for his sermon application(s).

Pericopal Theology

Kuruvilla has wrestled with what to call this theology which bridges between text and sermon. Systematic, biblical, and canonical theologies develop theological concepts that reach beyond the parameters of a single preaching text and often supersede the text’s meaning. For lack of a better term Kuruvilla has chosen “pericopal” to categorize the nature of the theology that captures a particular text’s world in front of the text or transhistorical intention.

Pericopal theology by definition is the theology specific to a particular pericope, representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God and his relationship to his people, and which, bearing a transhistorical intention, functions as the crucial intermediary in the homiletical move from text to praxis that respects both the authority of the text and the circumstances of the hearer (Kuruvilla, 2013, 111).

Whether consisting of a paragraph from an epistle or an entire psalm or a single proverb or a distinct narrative, Kuruvilla classifies all coherent units of thought that comprise a preaching text as pericopes. His focus is on that portion of text that the preacher expounds upon during the gathering of a group of believers for worship and edification. He presumes that each preaching text, if it is wisely chosen, contains a theological message that contributes to the more comprehensive canonical theology projected in the entirety of the Bible. It is through the preaching of these texts that portray the fullness of the Bible's theological worldview that God's people are challenged to commit themselves anew to at least a portion of that plenary world in front of the text. "Thus, sermon by sermon, pericope by pericope, the various aspects of Christian life, individual and corporate, are effectively brought into alignment with the will of God" (ibid., 91).

Because each pericope seeks to project a unique segment of the plenary world in front of the text, that segment must be privileged (ibid., 105, 109). Every biblical writer had a theological agenda. The theological message of each writer was distinct and each, pericope by pericope, contributed in its own way to a fully developed canonical world. For example, Mark and Peter viewed the cross as an act of submissive obedience to the call to discipleship, while John and Paul emphasized its atoning merit. While a comprehensive understanding of the cross requires a system of theology that incorporates all biblical perspectives, the preaching of a pericope demands that we privilege the theological message of that text, not transposing or transporting, for example, John's theology back onto Mark's.

Kuruvilla's challenge to "Privilege the Text!"—to honor the theologically unique message of every pericope—helps the preacher identify the level of theological generalization he must choose in order to cross over to contemporary application legitimately. Although biblical, canonical, and systematic theology should be considered in the process of interpreting a pericope, none of these kinds of theological statements are adequate to faithfully represent the theological message of a distinct pericope. Biblical, canonical, and systematic theology can help refine the specific theological contribution of a pericope and help keep one's conclusions within the boundaries of orthodoxy, but they cannot serve as the bridge between the text and the sermon. Only the theology unique to that pericope can serve that role. The theological idea/proposition/focus statement must represent that portion of the world in front of the text that any given text is addressing.

It is by means of this pericopal theology expressed in the privileged preaching text that the preacher bridges between text and sermon. "In biblical interpretation, it is the pericopal theology (transhistorical intention) that in its generalization encompasses every conceivable option of exemplification . . . and governs what may be considered valid and what may not, what is faithful to the original and what is not" (ibid., 144). It is Kuruvilla's notion of pericopal theology that defines the nature of and limits the applicability of the bridging theology. This theology is discovered only through a theological exegesis that employs a close reading of the text to discover the textual clues that point to the theology of the pericope. Kuruvilla's example from 2 Samuel 11 and 12 attends closely to David's sending, lying, seeing, and punishment to glean the pericope's theological focus (ibid., 119-127).

The Christiconic Goal

Once Kuruvilla established his theory of pericopal theology, grounding it in the world in front of the text with its transhistorical intention, he was able to address the question, “Where is Christ in this text?” in a new and more helpful way. It is through a proper understanding of what the text is doing that the interpreter/preacher can preach Christ without mutating every text into an evangelistic message.

The question is legitimate because of Luke’s account in chapter 24, verses 27 and 44: “Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them the things written about himself in all the scriptures,” and, “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled’.” Evangelical scholars do not debate whether Jesus was portrayed and prophesied as Christ in the Old Testament or even in all the major divisions of the Old Testament. The controversy is over whether every book, chapter, paragraph, or verse makes reference to Christ.

In answering that question some have tried to find Christ in every preaching unit. In fact, for some, if Christ is not in a particular portion, it is not worth preaching. For them, every Christian sermon *will* have Christ in it. This method is the christocentric approach. For example, Graeme Goldsworthy states, “I know it will not always be a simple matter to show how every text in the Bible speaks of the Christ, but that does not alter the fact that he says it does” (Goldsworthy, 2000, 23). He then answers his own question, “Is it possible to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?” with, “Why would you even want to try to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?” (ibid., 115). This leads others to conclude that, “The Bible mandates preaching Christ in every sermon from every text” (<http://www.biblestudytools.com/blogs/founders-ministries-blog/should-we-preach-christ-in-every-sermon.html> - accessed August 5, 2014).

Kuruvilla takes a different view of how the Bible presents Christ, concluding that, “The plenary text of Scripture projects an image (εἰκών) of Christ, with each pericope portraying a facet of this image: what it means to be Christlike” (Kuruvilla, 212). This contrasts with the christocentric approach that seeks some connection to the life of Christ (his birth, death, resurrection, etc.) in every sermon. Kuruvilla rejects the necessity asking the question, “How does this passage proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ?” He names Greidanus, Poythress, Clowney, Carson, Goldsworthy, and Mohler as modern proponents of, “Such biblical-theological transactions,” in which, “the specifics of the pericope being preached—the miniatures [of pericopal theology]—tend to get swallowed up in the capacious canvas of RH interpretation” (Kuruvilla, 2013, 239, 240). Not every passage in the law, the prophets, and the psalms points to the redemptive-historical work of God in the person of Christ. But, Kuruvilla claims, all preaching texts do portray an attribute of the image of Christ.

“One may say that each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a facet of Christlikeness, a segment of the image of Christ: what it means to fulfill the particular

divine demand in that pericope after the manner of Christ. . . . and the Bible as a whole, the plenary collection of all its pericopes, canonically portrays the perfect humanity exemplified by Jesus Christ, God incarnate. So much so, the *world in front of the text* may even be considered to be an “image” (εἰκών, *eikōn*) of Christ” (ibid, 260).

Kuruvilla’s proposal allows any text to stand on its own without forcing upon it some reference to Christ. His theory asserts that what the biblical authors are doing in each and every pericope is projecting some aspect of Christlikeness and inviting their readers/hearers to embrace that aspect of his image into their character.

A Final Challenge

Kuruvilla’s contributions have been a long time coming and have come on the shoulders of others. That, of course, is what good scholarship does. It builds off what is known to describe and prescribe what has not yet been articulated. As members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society we can restate and even repackage what has been said before in many ways. I fear that is what most homiletics texts do. There is some benefit in that because every generation needs to hear the basic principles of expository preaching. Yet, we miss an opportunity if we do not also look more broadly and dig more deeply into the theory that grounds our field of study. Kuruvilla’s texts are dense, technical, scholarly, and sometimes difficult. They employ the language of the academy. Yet we need to become capable of engaging this level of theory making to avoid becoming anti-intellectual, to grant credibility to our theory, to better comprehend the concepts of homiletics, and to translate theory into practice. This kind of work is significant and necessary. We are busy, but also distracted, unfocused, and perhaps lazy. It takes energy to engage and dialogue. It takes courage to set our precious new theories before a critical academy. It takes discipline to read and research in other fields of study to seek insights into what we are about. But we must. Kuruvilla’s work should challenge every member of the Society to engage that practical and academic undertaking.

We must also engage our brothers and sisters who labor in the biblical and theological disciplines. We can remind them that the goal of their endeavors is not realized in the knowledge that is passed along in the classroom or through the bookstore. The goal of their endeavors is realized when the pastor speaks the words of God to the community of believers gathered for renewal and conformation. We must convince our colleagues that their studies, too, must be practical and pastoral as well as soundly academic. We must keep climbing on each other’s shoulders in order to prepare the preachers of today and tomorrow to invite God’s people to Christlike maturity.

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