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WHAT HAS BEEN WRITTEN: QUANTITATIVE STUDIES ON HOMILETICAL TEXTBOOKS USED IN SEMINARY CLASSROOMS

CHRIS RAPPAZINI
Moody Bible Institute
Moody Theological Seminary

ABSTRACT

In this paper, the author identifies some of the most historically significant homiletical books used in English speaking seminaries, in particular Broadus's *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* and Davis's *Design for Preaching*. He then gathers and summarizes the six quantitative studies conducted over the past 50 years that survey which preaching books have been influential to the teaching of preaching. Collecting and summarizing the survey's data will enable researchers and future homileticians easy access to identify trends and homiletical movements that may impact the future of the teaching of preaching.

INTRODUCTION

Accessible publication and a growing number of seminaries triggered many people in the field of homiletics to begin publishing works specifically on preaching. Books on preaching assisted seminary professors in their teaching of preaching and helped active pastors hone their skills in the pulpit. Therefore, it is significant to identify some of the most influential and widely used preaching books, which may help to pinpoint homiletical

trends throughout recent history, as well as guide future publications on preaching for the twenty-first century.

SIGNIFICANT TEXTBOOKS USED IN SEMINARY CLASSROOMS

According to Levy,[1] a couple of the earliest English authored preaching texts to receive popular acceptance in both England and the colonies were Perkins' *The Art of Prophecy*[2] and Bernard's *The Faithful Shepherd*.[3] Perkins' book focused on the calling of the minister and consideration of the congregation in the preparation of the sermon, while Bernard's book gives special attention to sermon construction. One of the early American textbooks for ministerial education was Mather's *Dr. Cotton Mather's Student and Preacher*.[4] Another early colonial textbook was Willard's *Brief Directions to a Young Scholar Designing the Ministry for the Study of Divinity*.[5] After Willard's book, very few homiletical textbooks were widely produced or shared for nearly 100 years. Sermon manuscripts and other theological works circulated from place to place, but the formation of the United States of America, war, shift from Puritan living, and other national and global events overshadowed the publication of preaching books.

In the 1800s, a growing number of professors of homiletics began publishing their lectures and notes on preaching. Some of the more popular homiletical textbooks published were Ware Jr.'s *Hints on Extemporaneous Preaching*,[6] Porter's *Lectures on Homiletics and Preaching*,[7] Ripley and Ware's *Sacred Rhetoric*,[8] Kidder's *Treatise on Homiletics*,[9] Alexander's *Thoughts on Preaching*,[10] and Shedd's *Homiletics and Practical Theology*.[11] However, despite the growing number of preaching books produced, it is challenging to determine which ones were the most widely used in seminaries prior to 1869.[12]

According to homiletical historian, R. L. Kelly some of the earliest, widespread preaching textbooks that were used in seminaries after 1869 were:[13] Broadus' *Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*,[14] Brooks' *Lectures on Preaching*,[15] Phelps' *The Theory of Preaching*,[16] Greer's *Present-Day Preaching*,[17] Kennard's *Psychic*

Power of Preaching,[18] Pattison's *The Making of a Sermon*,[19] and Slattery's *The Preacher and His Place*.[20] Hundreds of preaching books were written throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries demonstrating the growth, importance, and legitimacy of the field of homiletics.

Even though hundreds of homiletical books were published from 1869 to the early 1970s, there appears to be two texts that dominated the landscape of homiletics in seminary classrooms during this time: John A. Broadus' *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*[21] and H. Grady Davis' *Design for Preaching*.[22] Rose summarizes twentieth century homiletical theory by stating, "The story of homiletics claims that for roughly three quarters of the twentieth century there was general agreement about correct homiletical theory. Broadus represents the earlier state of the art and Davis the later."[23] Both of these books were widely used by preachers and teachers of preaching and served key roles in the advancement of homiletics.

John A. Broadus: On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons

The American Baptist preacher, professor, and former President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, John A. Broadus, has been termed "The Prince of Expositors."[24] Rose studied the major homiletic theorists of the past 150 years and states that Broadus' textbook, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, has stood the test of time and, "defined preaching for the first half of the twentieth century."[25] Its fourth edition is still used in seminary classrooms today. Even with differing opinions on the veracity of the editions, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* has been a dominant homiletical textbook in American Bible colleges and seminaries since its inception largely in part to its combination of scholarship and common sense.[26]

H. Grady Davis: Design for Preaching

H. Grady Davis was the Professor of Functional Theology at the Chicago Lutheran Theological Seminary and worked in Lutheran

ministries from 1913-1927. *Design for Preaching* quickly became widely used by many who taught preaching. Rose asserts, "Between 1958 and 1974 the earlier consensus that had looked to Broadus to define the task of preaching had dissolved and a new consensus had formed around Davis."[27] Davis' new ideas helped revolutionize sermon preparation.

Throughout his book, Davis uses the running theme of a sermon being like a tree with a goal to represent how a sermon is to be rooted in its foundation, the Bible. He asserts that a tree can only produce that which comes from its roots and a sermon ought to have parts that only come from its foundation.[28] Davis contends that the sermon, like a tree, must be a living organism that grows naturally as opposed to planned or organized. He advocates for the sermon to grow out of the Scriptures as opposed to using a sermonic mold for the construction of the sermon.

This novel way of preparing a sermon gave evangelical and mainline denominational homileticians an alternative to Broadus and the traditional approach to preaching. It appears Davis paved a way for the beginning of new homiletical paradigms.[29] Lake claims, "Davis anticipated and charted the course for many contemporary discussions on issues related to preaching, such as narrative, poetic language, creative form, movement of thought, and particularly inductive preaching."[30] Long notes that *Design for Preaching*, "was a bridge spanning the gap between the traditional approach to form and those developments yet to come."[31]

However, beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, more homiletics books were published and it seems homiletics professors began to differ on which preaching book to use in their classrooms. Rose writes, "The 1980s became an era in which homiletical scholarship tried at times to reclaim an earlier consensus and at other times to articulate a new position around which to rally a new consensus."[32] The data from quantitative studies confirms Rose's assertion, but it also demonstrates that some books remained consistently in use by homiletics professors.

QUANTITATIVE STUDIES ON PREACHING BOOKS

Quantitative surveys can be helpful in accurately determining which textbooks homiletics professors favor. This article relies on six surveys conducted between 1974 and 2019 to decipher which homiletical textbooks seminary professors have most often used over the last 45 years.

Chatfield's 1974 Survey

In 1974, Donald Chatfield, Professor of Preaching and Worship at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois, conducted a research study to discover which homiletical textbooks teachers of preaching who were associated with the Academy of Homiletics used in their classrooms. The results of Chatfield's survey were never publically published, but in a later publication, Chatfield eludes to his early survey and cites that in 1974, "over half of the respondents named H. Grady Davis's *Design for Preaching* as their textbook of choice."[33]

Hughes' 1983 Survey [34]

In his 1983 doctoral dissertation, Kent Hughes surveyed 137 members of the American Association of Theological Seminaries seeking to find the most-used homiletical texts. The following (*Table 1*) is a list of the author, title, and number of responses from those who completed the survey giving us one of the earliest comprehensive quantitative studies ever publically published.

Author, Title	Mentions
Davis, H. G. (1958) *Design for Preaching*	76
Broadus, J. (1979) *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (4th ed.)	38
Blackwood, A. (1948) *The Preparation of Sermons*	37
Jones, I. (1956) *Principles and Practices of Preaching*	35
Miller, D. (1957) *The Way to Biblical Preaching*	31

Abbey, M. (1963) *Preaching to the Contemporary Mind*	30
Robinson, H. (1980) *Biblical Preaching*	27
Sangster, W. (1952) *The Approach to Preaching*	26
Stott, J. (1982) *Between Two Worlds*	25
Baumann, J. D. (1972) *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching*	21
Killinger, J. (1969) *The Centrality of Preaching in the Total Task of the Ministry*	19
Haselden, K. (1963) *The Urgency of Preaching*	18
Bartlett, G. (1962) *The Audacity of Preaching*	15
Koller, C. (1962) *Expository Preaching Without Notes*	15
Lenski, R. C. H. (1968) *The Sermon, Its Homiletical Construction*	15

Table 1. Quantitative study of preaching textbooks according to Kent Hughes.

Hughes' survey confirms Chatfield's 1974 findings and helps to affirm that Davis' *Design for Preaching* and Broadus' *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* were two of the most widely used textbooks in seminary classrooms. However, the consensus around homiletical textbooks would soon dissipate, as Chatfield's second survey in 1984 would discover.

Chatfield's 1984 Survey

In 1984, Chatfield mailed a similar questionnaire as the one from 1974 to the 131 names on the Academy of Homiletics' mailing list, which consisted of various Protestant denominations (mainline and "conservative") as well as a Roman Catholic school. The two questions asked were, "What basic textbooks do you use, if any (rank in order of usage)?" and "What kind of book[s]—basic or advanced—would you most like to see published now?"[35] The results yielded that 46/61 respondents (67%) answered the first question (15 listed 4 books, 10 listed 3 books, 13 listed 2 books, and 8 listed 1 book) resulting in a final count of 115 different

books.[36] The following (*Table 2*) is a chart of all the authors and books mentioned more than twice, from most to the least amount of mentions:

Author, Book	Mentions
Fant, C. (1977) *Preaching for Today*	7
Robinson, H. (1980) *Biblical Preaching*	7
Stott, J. (1982) *Between Two Worlds*	7
Sweazey, G. (1976) *Preaching the Good News*	7
Buechner, F. (1977) *Telling the Truth*	6
Wardlaw, D. ed. (1983) *Preaching Biblically*	6
Lowry, E. (1980) *The Homiletical Plot*	6
Davis, H. G. (1958) *Design for Preaching*	5
Craddock, F. (1979) *As One Without Authority*	5
Crum, M. (1977) *Manual on Preaching*	4
Keck, L. (1978) *The Bible in the Pulpit*	4
Steimle, E., Morris J. Niedenthal, and Charles L. Rice (1980) *Preaching the Story*	4
Lischer, R. (1981) *A Theology of Preaching*	3
Cox, J. W. (1983) *Biblical Preaching: An Expositor's Treasury*	3

Table 2. Quantitative study of preaching textbooks according to Donald Chatfield.

Admittedly, Chatfield was surprised to find that no one book received more than seven mentions and, while Sweazey's book received six first mentions and one second mention, no book emerged as an overwhelming favorite. It appears the homiletical field desired alternative voices other than those of Broadus and Davis and wanted different books to fulfill their educational and practical needs.

Chatfield attested this dramatic shift to three significant reasons based on further information he gathered from the respondents. First, Chatfield attributed this change to a difference in theological stances among educational institutions. Chatfield admitted that seminaries that are more conservative

are closer to a consensus by using books by Robinson, Stott, and Sweazy but teachers of preaching from other persuasions were still searching for a core book. Second, he recognized various teaching styles, methods, and approaches to teaching among homiletics professors. Finally, Chatfield suggested the lack of consensus may be because there was no book that existed which fulfilled the agreed-upon pedagogical needs. He reached this conclusion based on the response to the second question, which inquired what type of book teachers of preaching would like. A variety of responses were given, but the two most frequent answers revolved around the need for a basic textbook for students in beginning courses and a book on biblical preaching. Chatfield mentioned that Robinson's book, *Biblical Preaching*, as well as similar books, "do not strike the right note" for some in the Academy.[37] Chatfield does not clarify what he means by "right note" but perhaps he is speaking to the view one holds on the interpretation and authority of the Bible and how the Scriptures are to be viewed and handled when preaching?

Preaching Magazine's 2010 Survey [38]

Over the next 26 years, writers published a variety of homiletical texts. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate any survey occurring during this span which surveys homiletical textbooks used in classrooms. However, in 2010, during their 25th year of publishing, *Preaching* magazine announced the 25 most influential preaching books since the magazine's inception. In their quest to find books that, "have shaped the thinking and teaching about preaching," the compilers of the magazine surveyed readers, preaching professors and influencers.[39] This ranking helps to identify some of the more recent and major texts in preaching, however, it does not survey books used specifically in classrooms by seminary professors. Here are the top ten results in order:

Author, Book
1. **Robinson, H. (1980)** *Biblical Preaching*

2. **Buttick D. (1986)** *Homiletic*
3. **Stott, J. (1982)** *Between Two Worlds*
4. **Craddock, F. (1985)** *Preaching*
5. **Greidanus, S. (1988)** *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*
6. **Chapell, B. (1994)** *Christ-Centered Preaching*
7. **Lowry, E. (2001)** *The Homiletical Plot*
8. **Piper, J. (1990)** *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*
9. **Thomas Long (1989)** *The Witness of Preaching*
10. **MacArthur J. & Masters Seminary Faculty (1992)** *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*

Table 3. Quantitative study of preaching textbooks according to *Preaching* magazine.

There are several questions that remain unanswered regarding how the survey was conducted. For instance, the magazine does not explain the number of compilers of the survey, how they were chosen, whom they represent, or votes cast for each book. Nonetheless, the significance of this survey is that even though it comes 26 years after Chatfield's survey, it demonstrates that Stott's *Between Two* Worlds and Robinson's *Biblical* Preaching were a couple of the top preaching books that were also influential in Chatfield's 1984 survey. The results also confirms the reduced use of books by Broadus and Davis. Editor of *Preaching* magazine, Michael Duduit (2010), writes:

> [Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*] stands apart from all the others in terms of recognition by those who study preaching—by far it received the most nominations from pastors and professors. The book was originally published in 1980, 30 years ago, but has dominated the classrooms of evangelical colleges and seminaries in the past 25 years…Robinson's emphasis on "Big Idea" preaching has shaped the thinking of thousands of expository preachers and been the major influence on many of those who teach preaching in today's classrooms. More than any other book of the past quarter century, *Biblical Preaching* has

profoundly influenced a generation of evangelical preachers.[40]

Borst's 2015 Survey [41]

As a doctoral student, Troy Borst sought to study the preparation process of clergy across denominations and Christian traditions. He randomly selected 32 seminaries and higher educational institutions across three major Christian traditions as well as schools from 12 different American Christian denominations. He received 27 responses using phone interviews, emails, online information, and reviewing syllabi and found 96 different texts were used to educate students in the area of preaching. To narrow his list down to 20 books, Borst decided a book had to cover two criteria. First, multiple theological institutions must use the book. Second, multiple denominations must use the book; however, exceptions were made for two books in the Orthodox Church because of their high frequency within that tradition.

Borst listed the top 20 books in alphabetical order, briefly describing each one, and gave random notes on where and how often each book was used. To rank them for this article, I listed the texts by frequency of responses and included some of Borst's brief notes (*Table 4*):

Author, Book	#	Notes from Borst
Long, T. (1989) *The Witness of Preaching*	8	Used across denominations as well as in the Orthodox Church
Chapell, B. (1994) *Christ-Centered Preaching*	7	
Lowry, E. (2001) *The Homiletical Plot*	6	
Taylor, B. B. (1993) *The Preaching Life*	5	Used across denominations as well as in the Roman Catholic School

Arthurs, J. (2007) *Preaching with Variety*	4	Four institutions in four denominations
Behr, J. (1997) *On the Apostolic Preaching*	3	Only used in Orthodox Church institutions
Buechner, F. (1977) *Telling the Truth*	3	Three institutions in three denominations
Craddock, F. (1979) *As One Without Authority*	3	
Craddock, F. (1985) *Preaching*	3	Used across denominations as well as in the Roman Catholic School
Dabovich, S. (2008) *Preaching in the Orthodox Church*	3	Only used in Orthodox Church institutions
Robinson, H. (1980) *Biblical Preaching*	3	Used at Liberty, Dallas Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Stott, J. (1982) *Between Two Worlds*	3	
Florence, A. C. (2007) *Preaching as Testimony*	2-3	Only book from a feminist point of view
Greidanus, S. (1988) *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*	2-3	
Long, T. (1989) *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*	2-3	
Long, T. and C. Plantinga. ed. (1994) *A Chorus of Witnesses*	2-3	
Piper, J. (1990) *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*	2-3	
Robinson, H. and C. B. Larson. ed. (2005) *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*	2-3	
Vines, J. and J. Shaddix. (1999) *Power in the Pulpit*	2-3	

Wilson, P. S. (1999) *The Four* *Pages of the Sermon*	2-3	

Table 4. Quantitative study of preaching textbooks according to Troy Borst.

Borst concluded that schools use one to three basic types of textbooks when teaching students about preaching: practical, theoretical, and anthological.[42] He suggested that preaching professors ought to cover all three types when educating their students and concludes that preaching is a practice in Christendom, which can be a point of unity amongst clergy.

However, it should be noted there appears to be flaws or unclear practices in Borst's study. For instance, what was the process used for choosing the schools at random, and from what pool were the schools drawn? Borst also does not specify which courses used the books and whether or not those courses were required for all students. There may have also been more than one preaching class at an institution, which may have swayed the data. One other major flaw is Borst records that Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary was not one of the seminaries that used Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*. However, the preaching faculty at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary has confirmed with me that the book was required for their introductory preaching class at the time.

Kato's 2107 Survey [43]

One of the most comprehensive and thorough quantitative studies conducted regarding homiletical textbooks used in seminaries was presented at the 2017 annual conference of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Alex Kato sought to identify which preaching books professors at theological institutions within the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) assigned in their introductory preaching classes. Kato collected preaching course syllabi in two stages. First, he searched school websites and located freely available and current preaching syllabi from 83 theological institutions. Second, he contacted the preaching

faculty at the remaining schools, requesting a copy of their preaching course syllabus and received an additional 40 more. From these 123 schools (of 278 total ATS institutions), he analyzed the syllabi for both (a) the required preaching course to earn a Masters of Divinity and (b) the introductory preaching course at institutions that do not require students to take preaching courses. Here is a summary of his findings regarding the top ten books generated by his data collection:

Author, Book	Schools	FTE	Primary Tradition
Long, T. (1989) *The Witness of Preaching*	30	6245	Mainline
Robinson, H. (1980) *Biblical Preaching*	18	6169	Evangelical
Taylor, B. B. (1992) *The Preaching Life*	15	3846	Mainline
Chapell, B. (1994) *Christ-Centered Preaching*	10	2564	Evangelical
Brown, T. F. (2008) *Delivering the Sermon*	10	1556	Mainline
Lowry, E. (2001) *The Homiletical Plot*	8	3760	Evangelical
Allen, O. W. (2009) *Determining the Form*	8	1678	Mainline
Allen, R. (1998) *Patterns of Preaching*	8	1201	Mainline
Thomas, F. (1997) *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God*	7	1183	Mainline
Stanley, A and Jones, L. (2008) *Communicating for a Change*	7	1064	Evangelical

Table 5. Quantitative study of preaching textbooks according to Alex Kato.

The data revealed that roughly 25% of the ATS schools surveyed use Long's *The Witness of Preaching*[44] and 15% are using Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*.[45] However, Kato also calculated the

Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) enrollment of students at each school and determined that some books, like Long's *Witness of Preaching* and Taylor's *The Preaching Life*,[46] happened to be assigned at several schools, but were not assigned to as many students as those in evangelical schools. Kato concluded that Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* is assigned to almost the same number of students as Long's *The Witness of Preaching* because of the larger average size of the evangelical schools. Kato's survey is significant because it was the first to consider the scope of the school and FTE enrollment of students in his findings.

OBSERVATIONS

These six surveys permit a few general observations:

1. There seemed to be a consensus amongst homiletic professors around using H. Grady Davis' *Design for Preaching* to teach preaching during the 1970s and early 1980s.

2. There does not appear to be the same unanimity amongst various Christian traditions and denominations regarding the use of another homiletical textbook since that time, although several books frequently appeared on the surveys conducted. For instance, books written by evangelical authors that appear regularly and on almost every survey since their own respective publication are: Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, Stott's *Between Two Worlds*, and Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Top books by mainline authors that occur regularly on the surveys are: Long's *The Witness of Preaching* and Lowry's *The Homiletical Plot*.

3. Robinson's, *Biblical Preaching*, appears on every survey and seems to be one of the most used books on preaching spanning nearly four decades. Since its inception, *Biblical Preaching* has sold "well over 300,000 copies" and, according to the Vice President of Baker Academic, "shows no signs of letting up."[47] From its outset, reviews applauded Robinson's

Biblical Preaching.[48] Further study reveals that his book was successful due to the plain manner in which it was written and the timing of its publication came when professors were looking for an andragogical textbook to be used in a classroom. In addition, more evangelical professors desired a book that affirmed their view on Biblical inerrancy. *Biblical Preaching* was also marketed well because of Robinson's reputation and ability to preach.[49]

4. Quantitative data and analysis has not been used often in the homiletical field. This method may be helpful for future preaching professors to understand the needs and trends occurring within homiletical education. However, if this aspect of the field is to be studied, it is necessary for those conducting the research to have a firm grasp on how to conduct exemplary research. Researchers must be sure that studies are accomplished by using objective measurements and careful analysis of the statistical, mathematical, or numerical data.

5. Few minority and female authors appear on the quantitative surveys. These results raise several questions: Have there been few minority and female authors writing books on preaching? Have minority and female voices been quieted due to an overwhelmingly white-male field? Do most of the individuals being surveyed come from the majority culture and therefore, perhaps unknowingly, choose books from authors who they more closely identify with? What are the bias of those conducting the surveys, do they come from the majority culture, and how does this affect their research? How would surveys be piloted and what would the results be if done in another country? As churches and seminary's students become more diverse, will books that speak to multicultural environments be on the rise?

CONCLUSION

Quantitative data research and analysis can be a useful guide for homileticians to improve their preaching, writing, and teaching abilities. The need for more surveys, like the ones mentioned in this article, are important for advancing homiletical literature. Additional surveys will help to identify other trends and possible needs within the field of homiletics. As churches, culture, literacy rates, and educational practices evolve and change so will the use of homiletical textbooks. It is important for those who influence the field of homiletics to be aware of these changes and adapt accordingly. Using analyzed data from quantitate research is one way to sharpen the field and enhance people's ability to become better preachers in the twenty-first century.

NOTES

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4. Cotton Mather & Hugh Walford, *Dr. Cotton Mather's Student and Preacher*. London: R. Hindmarsh, 1789).
5. Samuel Willard, *Brief Directions to a Young Scholar Designing the Ministry for the Study of Divinity* (Boston: T. Hancock, 1735).
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24. Nolan Howington, "Expository Preaching," *Review & Expositor* 56:1 (1959): 56-65.

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