

A STUDY IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY ON THE COMPOSITION OF  
APPLICATION FOR THE EXPOSITORY SERMON IN A SAMPLE OF  
REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN PREACHERS IN NORTHERN  
IRELAND.

Submitted in accordance with the requirements  
of the Degree of Doctor of Ministry.

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## **Declaration**

The material being presented for examination is my own work and has not been submitted for an award of this or another HEI except in minor particulars which are explicitly noted in the body of the thesis. Where research pertaining to the thesis was undertaken collaboratively, the nature and extent of my individual contribution has been made explicit.

Signed

David Sutherland

Date

## **Abstract**

A STUDY IN PRACTICAL THEOLOGY ON THE COMPOSITION OF APPLICATION FOR THE EXPOSITORY SERMON IN A SAMPLE OF REFORMED PRESBYTERIAN PREACHERS IN NORTHERN IRELAND.

BY DAVID SUTHERLAND

Composing sermon application is a problem for many expository preachers. Some consider it the most challenging element of their sermon preparation process. Consequently, application is often a weak element in their sermons. This qualitative study addresses that homiletic problem by exploring the significance of the expository approach, defined particularly by Doriani and Capill, for composing application in the expository sermon. A sample of nine Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland preachers participated in semi-structured interviews. Four themes emerged from the data collected: importance of application, significance of the defined expository method, difficulty of composing application, and inadequacy of the defined expository method. The findings showed that, while the participants considered sermon application important and the defined expository method was significant in their experience, the process of composing application remained difficult for them. The findings also showed that other elements beyond the defined method were significant in their experience. Those elements were identified as: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, corporate worship, congregant input, and godly character. These beyond method elements are then reflected on theologically using church tradition and Christian Scriptures.

# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 The Research Problem

This study explores a problem in the homiletic practice of expository preachers. The word 'problem' is used here in the conventional sense of 'a matter involving doubt, uncertainty or difficulty' (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.76). For most expository preachers, there is no 'doubt' or 'uncertainty' about the necessity of application. However, there is 'doubt, uncertainty or difficulty' among many expository preachers regarding the composition of application. This problem is recognised and some of its causes identified.

### A. Recognition of the Problem

Homileticians, survey, and lived experience recognise the homiletic problem of composing application for the expository sermon. One homiletician writes, 'Sermon application frightens me...No other aspect of the preaching process leaves me shaking with such intensity in my homiletical boots' (Overdorf, 2009, p.13). He further claims, 'even the most seasoned homileticians balk at sermon application'. Capill (2014, p.17) and Chapell (2018, p.207) boldly assert composing application is the element of pulpit preparation with which expository preachers struggle most. Carter et al. encounter this problem among theological students. They write:

Through years of teaching homiletics, we have discovered that students of preaching struggle with the application stage more than with any other area. They work through the exegesis process and find all kinds of information to share. They find reasonably good stories (mostly personal) to illustrate the ideas of the sermon. But they struggle with helping people put the truth into action (2018, p.117).

A survey of 581 American preachers confirms the opinion of these homileticians. The survey discovered that while 43% of participants considered sermon preparation to be their most important ministerial task, 55% identified composing sermon application as their most challenging task (Carell, 2000, p.114-119). Though all participants in the survey are American, this study will indicate that expository preachers in the UK also experience difficulties in composing application.

Lived experience supports the claim of homileticians and survey. In discussions with ministerial colleagues, I discovered that they also experienced struggles in composing application. Some admitted to using only a few lines of application in their sermons. Some had never thought through the process of composing application but relied on instinct, in composing and delivering applications. Other colleagues were concerned with the banality and predictability of their applications but had no method for addressing the issue.

During twenty years of preparing expository sermons, I have found the composition of application difficult. Determining the location, type, and language of application, among other aspects, has been, and remains, a challenge for me. In September 2013, I began pastoring a new congregation. While reworking previous sermons, I noticed the repetitiveness, predictability, and banality of my applications and began to reflect on this weakness in my preaching.

I observed that I had used a homiletical method for composing expository sermons which I had been taught in theological college and was utilised by prominent expository preachers. I also observed that I had amassed considerable knowledge of my congregants through regular pastoral visitation over fourteen years and had maintained familiarity with developments in ethics, social issues and current events. I

noted that I had also tried to read widely and had sought to know my own heart. However, despite such familiarity with method, congregants and self, the applicatory element of my sermons was weak. I therefore decided to research this aspect of sermon composition.

In my initial reading I discovered an emphasis on congregant feedback. Consequently, I considered a qualitative study of congregant perspectives on sermon application. However, I concluded there were already numerous qualitative studies on this issue, and that I already received considerable feedback from my congregants after my sermons and during my pastoral visits. I therefore determined to pursue preacher-focused research to discover the methods of homileticians and practitioners.

In my initial reading I also encountered the New Homiletic approach (discussed in chapter 2). This approach advocates the removal of application from sermons to allow congregants to make their own application. Though the expository sermon was the style used in my home congregation, taught to me in theological education and was my preferred choice, I experimented with the New Homiletic approach. However, having received negative feedback from my congregants and leadership team, who desired application to their lives in sermons, I reverted to including application in my expository sermons but with the intention of exploring this issue further. These experiences led me to this preacher-focused qualitative study of composing application for the expository sermon.

Thus, homileticians acknowledge, survey confirms, and lived experience supports the presence of this homiletic problem among expository preachers.

## B. Causes of the Problem

Causes of this problem in sermon composition have been considered. Lack of adequate training in homiletic techniques is one cause suggested (Adams, 1990, p.36-38). Weakness in the discipline of self-application is another factor identified. Carter et al. claim, 'You must constantly be about the business of applying God's Word to your own life, if you are to lead others in applying it to theirs' (2018, p.117). Sedulity is another reason given. The formation of pertinent, gripping, and incisive sermon applications, week after week, for the same congregation is a demanding task, which some preachers struggle to fulfil (Capill, 2014, p.19). Certain hearers consider directive application offensive, causing some preachers to agonise over the inclusion of applications clearly demanded by the text (Fabarez, 2005, p.130-133; Chapell, 2018, p.207).

Having established the research problem and noted some possible causes for it, consideration is now given to the research question addressed in this study.

### **1.2 The Research Question**

The research question emerges from the homiletic problem just described. The question to be explored in this study is:

- to what extent is the expository method significant in the composition of application for the expository sermon?

Subsidiary questions are:

- what is the nature of the expository method for composing application?
- how significant is the defined expository method for composing application in the experience of expository preachers?

- are there other significant factors which influence the process of composing application for the expository sermon?

The research question directs the researcher to explore the expository approach for composing sermon application. The study will then attempt to ascertain the extent to which that defined expository method is significant in the experience of a sample of expository preachers. The findings will suggest that the defined expository method is significant in the experience of participants in terms of sourcing, developing, and integrating application. However, the findings will also demonstrate that there are elements beyond the defined method which are also significant in their process. Those elements are: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, corporate worship, congregant input and godly character.

In selecting this research question, other important questions on sermon application are not explored. One question is: how does composed application differ from delivered application? (Capill, 2014, p.247-249; Martin, 2018, p.115). The focus of this study is composed application. Another question concerns the congregants' view of application (Day, 2012, p.2). While this study discusses the audience as a source of application, it does not give extensive attention to 'feedback' (Hargie, 2017, p.38,39) on the sermon. The influence of gender on composing sermon application (Durber, 2007; Shercliff, 2019) is another important question not extensively addressed in this research. While these questions are not explored in this study, they are not considered unimportant. Rather, it is concluded that these questions raise issues of such magnitude and significance that each one merits separate study. In determining the research question for this study, an attempt has been made to avoid a project that is 'too large, unfocused, diffuse, general or too difficult to have justice done to it in the

time and resources available' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.162). Key terms in the research question are now defined.

### **1.3 Key Terms**

Key terms in the research question, which will be discussed in the next chapter, are 'expository sermon', 'application', and 'composition'. 'Expository sermon' is defined as, *the communication of the fixed meaning and application of a passage of Scripture, in a structured form, by a preacher, to an audience*. The definition of 'application', adopted from Daniel Overdorf, is application which *'preserves biblical integrity, while pursuing contemporary relevance'* (2009, p.19). 'Composition' is defined as, *the formation, construction and putting together of the applicatory element of the expository sermon*. The defined expository method will be shown to consist of *sourcing, developing, and integrating* application.

### **1.4 Aims of the Study**

The *general* aim of this study is faithful conformity to the mission of God in Jesus (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.23). This approach to practical theology recognises that practice within the Christian church emerges from reflection on, interpretation of, and conformity to the practices of God in history, particularly in the life of Jesus. The study, therefore, has the general aim of determining how the church practice of composing application should conform to 'the communicative practice of Jesus' (Forrester, 2000, p.9).

The *specific* aim of the study is the exploration of the expository approach for composing sermon application, as defined particularly by Doriani (2001) and Capill (2014). From the relevant literature, the defined expository method will be shown to consist of sourcing, developing, and integrating application. Acknowledging the critical

nature of practical theology, the homiletic practice of nine expository preachers will be analysed to discover 'commonalities, differences and similarities' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.647) with the defined method. By this approach, the significance of the method in the experience of a sample of expository preachers will be determined.

## **1.5 Importance of the Study**

The topic of this study has some importance (Howie, 1989, p.20) in academic research, by exploring a prominent church ministry, a current trend in preaching, and contributing to the body of knowledge.

### **A. Prominent Ministry**

The topic explores a prominent ministry in the Christian church. Edwards recognises the prominence of preaching in the Christian church when he writes:

There is no activity more characteristic of the church than preaching. Along with the sacraments, most Christian bodies consider the proclamation of the Word of God to be the constitutive act of the church (2004, p.3).

Johnson describes the primary purpose of this prominent ministry:

The purpose of preaching is not only to inform or even to elicit assent to its truths. Preaching God's word produces change in those who hear it, and the change is not merely intellectual or academic (2007, p.65).

As sermon application is an important factor in the preaching goal of transformation, the importance of this study is indicated.

### **B. Current Trend**

One current trend in preaching is the revival of the expository style (Old, 2007, p.952; Capill, 2014, p.12). Though heavily criticised by the New Homiletic in the mid-1900s

(Keller, 2015, p.45), expository preaching has become popular in recent decades. However, it is recognised by homileticians that the applicatory element of this sermon style is often weak (Capill, 2014; Helm, 2014; Robinson, 2014; Green, 2015; Keller, 2015; Kim, 2015). Therefore, in exploring this element of the expository sermon, the study has some importance.

### C. Body of Knowledge

Despite the recent revival of interest in expository preaching in the UK, few qualitative studies have been conducted on UK expository preachers. Despite the size and influence of evangelicalism in Ulster, it also has attracted few qualitative studies. No empirical study has been conducted on the preaching of 'Other Presbyterians' (Boal et al., 1997) in Ulster. Further, important factors in composing application beyond the defined expository method have not been explored in homiletic literature on expository preaching. This qualitative study of nine 'Other Presbyterian' expository preachers in Ulster, therefore, has some importance by contributing to the body of knowledge in these areas.

## 1.6 Model

A broad spectrum of methodology and method is employed within practical theology (Ward, 2017, p.69-93). Consequently, there is 'no single standardized way of doing' it (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.xi). This study uses the practical theology model of Swinton and Mowat (2016, p.89-92) which develops the pastoral cycle into the following four stages:

- *current praxis*: considers the church practice to be complexified
- *cultural analysis*: uses social sciences to gain insight into the praxis

- *theological reflection*: engages church tradition and Christian Scripture in conversation with qualitative research
- *new praxis*: reports *kairos* moments and indicates new praxis to be adopted.

While the four stages of the model were not followed consecutively in the research process, for clarity in presenting the findings, the four stages are reported chronologically in this thesis, as shown in the following outline.

## **1.7 Outline of the Thesis**

### **Stage 1: Current Praxis**

#### Chapter One

This chapter has identified the problem addressed in this study to be the composition of application for the expository sermon and has specified the research question.

#### Chapter Two

This chapter reviews the relevant literature to define three key terms: expository sermon, application, and composition. From the literature, an expository method for composing application is then generated. The chapter ends by indicating the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge.

#### Chapter Three

This chapter discusses the methodology and methods adopted in this study. The methodology is qualitative phenomenology and theological reflection. The methods adopted are the pastoral cycle and semi-structured interviews.

### **Stage 2: Cultural/contextual Analysis**

#### Chapter Four

This chapter introduces the situation of the nine participants in this qualitative study. Their political, religious, denominational, and personal situation is considered.

#### Chapter Five

This chapter presents the first and second themes from the data collected. The first theme is introductory and considers the importance of sermon application. The second theme demonstrates where practice confirms, informs, or challenges the defined expository method, thereby indicating the extent to which the method is significant in the experience of the participants.

#### Chapter Six

The first part of this chapter presents the third and fourth themes. The third theme examines the persistence of difficulty in composing application. The fourth theme reports factors beyond the defined expository method which participants consider significant in the composition of application.

#### **Stage 3: Theological Reflection**

The second part of chapter six engages church tradition and Christian Scripture in critical conversation with the fourth theme, thereby evaluating and informing the theme.

#### **Stage 4: Revised forms of Practice**

#### Chapter Seven

This final chapter indicates the potential benefit of the study, outlines areas for further research, describes a *kairos* moment, and suggests new praxis.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Having identified the research problem as the composition of application for the expository sermon and specified the research question as, to what extent is the expository method significant in the composition of application for the expository sermon? the relevant literature will now be considered.

The purpose of this literature review is to establish a theoretical framework for the research by defining key terms and reporting key themes used in the literature on the topic of this study. The use of the literature, in this way, attempts to provide credibility, validity, topicality, and significance to this research (Cohen et al., 2018, p.181). While the gap in the literature will be indicated at the end of this chapter, the purpose of this review is not merely to show the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge. Rather, the literature reviewed will be used throughout the thesis as a 'tool of description, clarification and analysis' (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.52).

### **2.1 Key Terms Defined**

Three key terms in the research question are now defined, to provide clarity of meaning in their use in this study: 'expository sermon', 'application' and 'composition'.

#### **2.1.1 Definition of 'Expository Sermon'**

In developing a definition of 'expository sermon', numerous factors contribute to the difficulty of this task. The complex nature of preaching is one. Ross observes that, 'Preaching by its very nature is difficult to define' (2006, p.173). Another is the variety of forms of expository sermons. Edwards states, 'A look through history reveals expository sermons with many different outlines' (2004, p.835). He cites the allegorical style of Origen, the literal exegesis of Chrysostom, and the three-step method of the

Puritans as examples. A third is the variety of definitions (Erickson & Heflin, 1997, p.167-182). Dever and Gilbert claim 'the term 'expository sermon' has probably been defined in more ways than are actually helpful' (2012, p.36). Such variety causes Robinson to regret that 'the Bureau of Weights and Measures does not have a standard expository sermon encased in glass against which to compare other messages' (2014, p.4). Consequently, Meyer asks, 'Who gets to decide how to define expository preaching so that, in turn, one can determine who fits the description of an expository preacher?' (2013, p.237). However, despite these difficulties in defining the expository sermon, an historical overview of this sermon style indicates some prominent elements which also appear in definitions offered.

#### A. Historical Overview of the Expository Sermon

This historical overview considers the origin, development, and revival of the expository sermon.

##### *1. Origin of the Expository Sermon*

Stitzinger (1992, p.5) claims the origin of the expository sermon can be traced to the early church period. Edwards agrees and identifies the emergence of the Christian homily as the commencement of the expository style. He claims homily is 'a technical term, which refers to verse-by-verse interpretation and application of a biblical passage' and suggests 'a homily is what would be called expository preaching today' (2004, p.47). In equating homily with expository style, Edwards understands 'expository' in the narrow sense of *lectio continua* (reading continuously), one form of expository preaching considered by Old to be 'its purest form' (1998, p.10).

Though Old claims the Christian homily was modelled on the 'synagogue sermon' (1998, p.349), Edwards (2004, p.27,28) considers 'secondary education' in antiquity,

which taught the exegesis and application of a text, to be its true source. While Wilson (1992, p.23-25) suggests the homily had various forms, Edwards identifies two common elements: 'interpretation and application' (2004, p.41). Edwards' analysis seems to be confirmed by Justin Martyr's description of second century preaching. He writes that, after the reading and explanation of Scripture, 'the president in a discourse, urges and invites to the imitation of these noble things' (in Kerr, 1990, p.23,24).

The homily remained the basic shape of Christian preaching until the high middle-ages (Edwards, 2004, p.31). Two factors contributed to its dominance. First, the edict of the Trullo council (692). This edict directed preachers to copy the style of John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nazianzus, and Basil the Great; all considered good models of the homily style (Chadwick, 1967, p.191). Second, the only two homiletic textbooks published in the period promoted the homily style. Augustine wrote the first textbook, *De Doctrina Christiana* (426), considered by Wilson to be 'the most influential homiletical textbook in Christian history' (1992, p.60). Following classical rhetoric, Augustine claimed the purpose of preaching was to teach, to delight, and to persuade (2008, p.17-24). His definition of preaching indicates interpretation (to teach) and application (to persuade), marked his homiletic. Guibert of Nogent (1055-1124) wrote the second textbook, *A Book about the Way a Sermon Ought to be Given* (1084), published as a preface to his commentary on Genesis. His homiletic method depended heavily on Augustine's approach (Edwards, 2004, p.176).

## *2. Development of the Expository Sermon*

In considering the development of the expository sermon, the two elements of the homily, interpretation and application, are discernible, as well as a third element, structure. Firstly, the development of interpretation. Two approaches to the sermon

element of interpretation emerged in the early church period. Representing the Alexandrian school of interpretation, Origen developed the influential *quadriga* hermeneutic in the third century. His method included two senses of interpretation (literal, allegorical) and two senses of application (moral, mystical). This approach helped secure the church's move in the direction of allegorical interpretation for the next thousand years (Wilson, 1992, p.38). However, the literal sense identified by Old as the 'grammatical-historical method' (1998, p.168), was preserved by the school of Antioch. This approach was evidenced in the preaching and writings of John Chrysostom (347-407) (Edwards, 2004, p.79; Needham, 2019, p.253,254) and in followers of his approach, such as Theophylact of Orchid (1050-1109) and Euthymius Zigabenus (1081-1118) (Old, 2002, p.1; Needham, 2017, p.389,390).

Ross (2006, p.183) claims Reformation preaching moved away from allegorical interpretation to the literal sense. Dargan agrees, claiming Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli adopted the literal sense approach (1905, p.380-382). Old identifies Zwingli as the chief influence in persuading Reformation preachers to 'turn from the allegorical exegesis of the Alexandrian school' (2002, p.2). He specifies Zwingli's publication of Chrysostom's sermons on Genesis in 1523 as particularly influential in effecting this shift. Popular texts commending the literal sense subsequently appeared (Wilson, 1992, p.70-72). Two of those influential textbooks were: *The Arte of Prophecyng* by William Perkins, first published in Latin (1592), and *A Treaty on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* by J A Broadus (1870).

Secondly, the development of application. Perkins' textbook, translated into English in 1606, was 'the first major English book on preaching' (Patterson, 2018, p.114). His method was 'remarkably simple and modest' (Patterson, 2018, p.128), described as the 'plain style' (Ferguson, 2018, p.744) or 'three-step' model. It consisted of

exposition, doctrine, and application (Patterson, 2018, p.148). Perkins' contribution to the development of the expository sermon was discriminatory application (Ferguson, 2018, p.745). To facilitate the third step of his model, Perkins proposed seven categories of hearers (ignorant/unteachable, ignorant/teachable, knowledge/not humbled, humbled, believers, backsliders, mixed group) and suggested using mental and practical applications for each category ((1606) 2016, p.54-65). Though Perkins was not the only significant writer in his era on the theory of preaching (Morrissey, 2000, p.687), and although Haigh claims his style was 'morally demanding and greatly resented' (in Patterson, 2018, p.114), his writings remained 'a best-selling commodity for half a century' after his death (Collinson, 2002, p.395).

Thirdly, the development of structure. A significant contribution to the development of the element of structure in the expository sermon was provided by J A Broadus (1870). Structure, 'usually into three points' (Wilson, 1992, p.71), was a feature of the scholastic model in the later middle-ages. Wilson (1992, p.71) discerns a shift in homiletic method in that era, from the classical rhetoric canon of invention to the canons of arrangement and style. This practice, which began with Antony of Padua (Ross, 2006, p.182), was considered by some homileticians to contain excessive subdivisions (Edwards, 2004, p.178). While the approach was largely ignored in Reformation preaching (Wilson, 1992, p.102; Beeke, 2018, p.114), Broadus revived it (1897, p.126-155). Influenced by the scholastic model (1897, p.120), Broadus asserted 'an expository sermon may have, and must have, both unity and an orderly structure' (1897, p.121). After discussing the merits of two and four sermon divisions, Broadus concludes, 'the number most frequently occurring will be three' (1897, p.107). He considers this number to provide 'goodly variety, without distracting attention, or burdening the memory' (1897, p.106). Rose (1997, p.7) claims his textbook dominated

homiletics until 1958, a claim Chatfield's empirical research of seminary textbooks confirms (1984, p.2). Such was the influence of Broadus, he is considered the 'father of the modern expository sermon' (Chapell, 2018, p.69).

### *3. Revival of the Expository Sermon*

A shift in homiletics away from expository preaching occurred in the mid-twentieth century. Edwards (2004, p.665-669) and Green (2015, p.63-66) attribute this shift to the influential homiletician, Harry Fosdick. He rejected the expository style and developed a 'homiletic based in pastoral counselling' (Wilson, 1992, p.156). His method started with the 'real problems of people' (Fosdick, 1956, p.92). Keller (2015, p.45), among others, attributes the shift to the emergence of the New Homiletic, popularised by Fred Craddock (1971). However, in the closing decades of the twentieth century, there was a revival of expository preaching (Old, 2010, p. xvii). Capill cites as evidence of this 'renewed interest' in the expository style an increase in the number of: seminaries offering courses on expository preaching, congregations demanding this style, and pastors adopting this method (2014, p.13).

This historical overview, while indicating the antiquity and endurance of the expository style in the Christian church, also identifies three prominent elements in it: interpretation, application, and structure. These elements also appear in definitions of the expository sermon.

#### **B. Definitions of the Expository Sermon**

While there is no single, correct definition of 'expository sermon', the variety of definitions offered allows for an appreciation of a range of prominent elements in this sermon type. The three elements emerging from the historical overview appear in definitions.

One prominent element in definitions is *interpretation*. The term *interpretation* in definitions of the expository sermon refers to the faithful conveyance of the 'fixed meaning' of the text of Scripture. The expository approach adheres to the position that there is a fixed, stable and determinable meaning in a text, which the author conveyed, and readers can discover. This position, which Vanhoozer (2009) espouses, differs from post-modern thinking on text meaning. According to Vanhoozer, post-modernism advocates that meaning in a text is determined, not discovered, by the reader. Derrida (1976), for example, challenges the claim that it is possible to arrive at a fixed view of things. Similarly, Fish (1980) argues that meaning is not prior to, but a product of, the reader's activity, maintaining there is no fixed meaning in the text outside of the reader. Likewise, Margolis (1995) claims there is no abiding truth in a text to which the readers' interpretation might correspond, 'everything is an interpretation'.

However, the expository approach insists there is a determinable, fixed, stable meaning in a text. It asserts that preachers can and should discover the fixed meaning of a text of Scripture and convey it to congregants in the sermon. Vanhoozer, for example, defining a text as 'a communicative act of a communicative agent, fixed by writing' (2009, p.225), argues that an author communicates meaning in a written text which readers can ascertain. He claims written texts, the product of human action, should be considered on a par with other historical human actions. He reasons that, other human actions, set in a distinctive historical context, have a fixed meaning prior to the investigative and interpretive work of historians, otherwise no past reality would be recognised. He therefore concludes that the human action of writing, expressed in text, has a stable meaning and historical context, independent of and prior to, an exegete's investigation. However, the proponents of the expository approach also acknowledge that ascertaining stable meaning in a text is often a difficult and fallible

exercise to be attempted with humility and total dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Vanhoozer, 2009, p.183, 224).

Some definitions of the expository sermon emphasise the conveyance of the fixed meaning of the text in discussing interpretation. Stott describes the element of interpretation as the conveyance of the fixed meaning of the text 'clearly, plainly, accurately, relevantly' (1982, p.6). Therefore, he defines expository preaching as:

To bring out of the text what is there and expose it to view. The expositor opens what appears to be closed, makes plain what is obscure, unravels what is knotted, and unfolds what is tightly packed (1982, p.7).

Robinson's popular definition includes the phrase, 'the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context' (2014, p.12). Similarly, Willhite asserts, 'Expository preaching seeks to communicate biblical concepts derived from the historical, grammatical, and literary exegesis of scriptural passages' (2003, p.19).

This understanding of the element of interpretation in the expository sermon complies with the original meaning of the word expository. The English word 'expository', traceable to the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Bryson, 1995, p.22), comes from the Latin word '*expositionem*' meaning 'a setting or shewing forth' (etymonline.com). Thus, 'expository' in the term 'expository sermon' means setting forth the fixed meaning of the text of Scripture in the sermon. Mayhue makes this point when he claims that an expository preacher 'explains the Scripture by laying open the text to public view, in order to set forth its meaning' (in MacArthur, 1992, p.11). The expository preacher therefore in the sermon element of interpretation does not convey a meaning imposed onto the text but attempts to expose the stable meaning resident in the text.

Ferguson (2017, p.651) claims faithful conveyance of the fixed meaning of the text is 'the dominant feature' of the expository sermon. He asserts, contrary to MacArthur (1992, p.2) and Edwards (2004, p.47), but in agreement with Martin (2018, p.53), that the distinctive attribute of the expository sermon is not *lectio continua*, but 'the explanation of Scripture'. Sunukjian (2007, p.13) shows a similar understanding of 'expository' by arguing that old distinctions between 'textual, topical and expository' sermons are unhelpful. He claims all three types should be expository.

A second prominent element in definitions is *structure*. While Stott (1982, p.7) argues that 'expository' refers to content, rather than style, the element of structure does appear in many definitions (Vines & Shaddix, 2017, p.45; Richard, 2004, p.95-128; Sunukjian, 2007, p.142-160). For example, Chapell writes:

The technical definition of an expository sermon requires that it expound Scripture by deriving from a specific text main points and subpoints that disclose the thought of the author, cover the scope of the passage, and are applied to the lives of listeners (2018, p.118).

Similarly, Carter et al. write, 'Every sermon needs a central idea (the sermon thesis statement) supported by main points that develop this central idea' (2018, p.103). Robinson maintains structure distinguishes a sermon from a running commentary on the preaching portion (2014, p.16). Ferguson agrees with Robinson, and writes, 'in expository preaching the material of the text is not only examined, it is also restructured in order to become a sermon' (2017, p.663).

Dever and Gilbert (2012, p.88) discuss exegetical structures and sermon structures, concluding they often differ. Kim (2015, p.44) distinguishes textual structures from topical structures, claiming textual structures follow the flow of the passage, while

topical structures are shaped by its' main topic. Some benefits of sermon structure are also mentioned. Richard (2004, p.96) claims sermon structure facilitates the 'unity, order and progress' of the sermon. Carter et al. (2018, p.29) assert sermon structure helps congregants 'follow, grasp and respond to' the message. Such benefits prompt Martin to write, 'We must not stand in our pulpits and dump raw, formless chunks of truth on the minds of our people' (2018, p.52).

Thus, while sermon structure was not a prominent element in the early Christian homily or Reformation era, and has weaknesses when preaching narrative passages (Quicke, 2007, p.112; Capill, 2014, p.194), it appears in many definitions. Recent debate in homiletic studies has centred on sermon form (Long, 2005, p.122). Long assesses challenges to the traditional sermon structure approach and argues for a range of sermon forms to connect with the 'diverse set of listening styles' (2005, p.170) among congregants.

A third element included in many definitions is *application*. In numerous definitions there is an insistence that the expository sermon is more than an explanation of the text (Robinson, 2014, p.12; Chapell, 2018, p.118; Strain, 2021, p.130). For example, Fabarez asserts:

Much preaching passes for expository preaching because its content is truly derived from the Bible and its material accurately explains what God is saying in the Bible. But if it stops there-if it fails to boldly call people to respond to the Bible-it is not true expository preaching (2005, p.19).

Ferguson expresses a similar sentiment by claiming the expository sermon does more than impart information. He writes:

The function of the exegetical sermon is not limited to furnishing information. Rather, it is dominated by a message, and is intended to produce action as well as impart instruction (2017, p.652).

Strong assertions are made in support of the element of application. Carter et al. maintain 'the application portion of a sermon is critical to its effectiveness' (2018, p.116). Packer boldly claims 'preaching is essentially teaching plus application. Where the plus is lacking, something less than preaching takes place' (1999, p.277). Miller is equally as forthright by asserting, 'Without application, there is no sermon' (2006, p.2006). Ralston goes as far as to argue that preachers who fail to apply the text have 'failed in the ministry of the Word' (in Bock & Fanning, 2006, p.293). Richard warns about the consequences of omitting the element of application:

Biblical exposition without application leads to spiritual constipation. There is no point in being academically accurate if the information does not transform your hearers (2004, p.113).

Despite the inclusion of application in many definitions, challenges have been raised to this element of the expository sermon and weaknesses have been acknowledged.

### *1. Challenges to the element of Application*

Three important challenges have been made to the element of application in the expository sermon. One challenge claims the audience is responsible for determining the application of the text, and not the preacher. Another challenge claims the Holy Spirit makes the application, while a third promotes an alternative to persuasion.

#### *a. Application is the role of the Audience*

The New Homiletic claims it is the role of congregants and not of preachers to apply the text (Craddock, 1971, p.32; Day, 2012, p.2). Heacock summarises its position

when he writes 'audiences must be allowed to finish the process, thereby allowing them to own the various applications for themselves they have worked out, whether individually or in a community context' (2010, p.95). Fred Craddock popularised this homiletic (Long, 2005, p.105) in his landmark book, *As One Without Authority* (1971). He criticises the explanatory and deductive style of expository preaching as overly authoritarian and advocates an inductive style, which begins with the 'concrete needs' of the audience, allowing them to discover the relevance of the text (2001, p.47). He rejects the linear and monologue style of expository preaching as too removed from the audience and advocates a dialogue style between preacher and audience (2001, p.26). Craddock wants listeners to be 'active participants in preaching, whether vocal or silent in that participation' (1971, p.25). His homiletic attempts to elevate 'the role of the listener by involving him/her in the inductive process of discovery' (Heacock, 2010, p.15), and to change the status of the audience from the 'preached to' into 'the preached with' (Burkett, 2009, p.10). Parkes (2016) develops the position of Craddock by proposing the replacement of the homiletic term 'application' with 'appropriation', thereby allowing listeners to decide the outworking of the message. Some critics of the New Homiletic identify areas of weakness in it, while others defend the expository style.

Gibson is critical of the shift in emphasis in the New Homiletic from the Biblical text to the audience. He claims the preacher is moved from being a 'teacher of truth to a director of happenings' (in Robinson & Larson, 2005, p.480). Rose maintains the New Homiletic retains the gap between pulpit and pew by adopting the inductive style (1997, p. 83). Eslinger agrees with Rose and argues that the New Homiletic is essentially still conceptual, so that in the end there remains little difference between the Old and New Homiletic (1987, p.124). Long adds to these criticisms by claiming

the New Homiletic expects too much from the audience in requiring participative creative effort (2005, p.129).

Other critics defend the inclusion of application in the expository sermon. Chapell asserts application 'fulfils, justifies, focuses and gives ultimate meaning to' exposition (2018, p.188-193). Fabarez appeals to the nature of Scripture claiming, 'every passage seeks a response from the audience' (2005, p.20), therefore expository sermons should indicate the required response. Carrick (2002, p.82-97) and Richard (2004, p.113) argue for application from the use of imperatives in the New Testament epistles. Besides these arguments, congregant support for sermon application appears in two empirical studies. One survey of 14,000 UK and Ireland congregants discovered that the majority eagerly desired sermon application (ERC, 2005, p.18-22, 27,28). The survey concluded, 'People pleaded for churches to give clear teaching about God's moral nature and the implications this has for personal behaviour' (2005, p.22). The Spiritual Life Survey of 80,000 congregants, also found most participants desired sermons which challenge them 'to grow as a Christian and take the next steps' (2009, p.74). Thus, while the New Homiletic makes some important criticisms of the expository style, its arguments for abandoning sermon application have not been accepted by all homileticians or congregants.

#### b. Application is the role of the Holy Spirit

A second challenge to the inclusion of application is that it is the role of the Holy Spirit to apply the text. Johnson writes, 'the burden 'to make it happen' does not belong to the preacher. The responsibility does not belong to the hearer. The responsibility belongs to the text, to the God of the text' (2009, p.171). He argues that the Word is self-authenticating and self-applying through the Spirit. Sermon application is

therefore humanistic and turns gospel into law (2009, p.166). Woodhouse concurs with this view and argues Word and Spirit are inseparable. Whenever the Word is read or faithfully expounded, the Spirit is always at work applying the Word to the hearer, so that 'it is God who is speaking when the Word of God is heard' (in Green & Jackman, 2003, p. 44). Similarly, Cunnington (2015, p.117) claims Word and Spirit are distinct, but inseparable, in the preaching of the Word, so that the Spirit always applies the Word in preaching, whether in judgement or in blessing. Strivens (2008, p.71) disagrees with this claim of inevitability and argues for the independence of the Spirit from the Word to apply or not apply. Eveson supports Strivens in rejecting the indissoluble bond between Word and Spirit. He appeals to the case of congregants hearing faithful exposition yet remaining 'dry, dull and dead' (2006, p.27). While the importance of the work of the Spirit in preaching and hearing the Word is also recognised by homileticians who defend sermon application, application by the preacher is still considered necessary by many homileticians as a means used by the Spirit.

### c. Invitational Rhetoric

Invitational rhetoric offers a partial challenge to the element of application. Foss and Griffin explain this form of verbal communication:

Invitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and to see it as the rhetor does. In presenting a particular perspective, the invitational rhetor does not judge or denigrate others' perspectives but is open to and tries to appreciate and validate those perspectives, even if they differ dramatically from the rhetor's own (in Porrovecchio & Condit, 2016, p.79).

Foss and Griffin acknowledge persuasion is often necessary in verbal communication, and therefore do not attempt to remove the traditional form of rhetoric completely.

Rather, they propose invitational rhetoric as an additional form of verbal communication. Their position, therefore, differs from the New Homiletic, which advocates the removal of sermon application.

While Foss and Griffin offer an alternative to persuasion in verbal communication, Hargie stresses the link between persuasion and effectiveness. When discussing communication skills in public speech, he addresses the issue of 'whether a speaker should have a clear and explicit conclusion at the end of an argument or leave this implicit and allow the audience to draw it out for themselves' (2017, p.379). He claims, 'The evidence here is clear: 'messages with explicit conclusions are more persuasive than those with implicit conclusions' (O'Keefe, 2006, p.334)'. Hargie's position, therefore, offers some support for including application in the sermon.

## *2. Weakness of the Element of Application*

Despite defending the element of application, proponents admit it is often a weak element in the expository sermon (Capill, 2014, p.17). For example, Keller considers 'neglecting persuasion' to be one of the key dangers of expository preaching today. He claims current expository sermons are 'too cognitive, rationalistic, dry and authoritarian' (2015, p. 254). Similarly, Adam (in Dodson, 2014, p.30) laments the banality of applications in current expository preaching. Other homileticians observe that the expository sermons of young preachers often contain weak applications (Helm, 2014, p.58-61; Green, 2015, p.13; Kim, 2015, p.159).

Two surveys of congregants confirm such weakness in the applicatory element of sermons. A survey of Willow Creek (2008, p.38) members discovered 87% of Participants claimed sermon application was important. However, only 32% of Participants reported hearing applicatory sermons. Carrell (2013, p.54) concludes her

extensive empirical study of preaching with the observation that there is a current lack of transformative sermon communication. She discovered that where application does occur in sermons, it is often unimaginative. Thus, while sermon application is defended by homiletics and desired by congregants, it is often a weak element in the sermon.

### *3. Definition of the Expository Sermon*

Reaching a definition of 'expository sermon', therefore, requires consideration of the three prominent elements which emerge from the history of this style and appear in definitions: interpretation, structure and application. For the purposes of this research, an expository sermon will be understood as, *the communication of the fixed meaning and application of a passage of Scripture, in a structured form, by a preacher, to an audience*. Having defined 'expository sermon' the second key term is now considered.

#### **2.1.2 Definition of 'Application'**

In defining 'application' the definition of Daniel Overdorf (2009) is considered, its confirmation by other homiletics noted, and some examples of it given.

##### A. Daniel Overdorf

In his book, *Applying the Sermon* (2009), Overdorf claims application 'preserves biblical integrity while pursuing contemporary relevance' (2009, p.34). He argues that application emerges from faithful exegesis of the text of Scripture to ascertain the fixed meaning of the text, and addresses 'the questions, struggles, and needs of contemporary listeners' (2009, p.31). He explains the element of application as, 'It makes a difference. It changes hearts. It influences decisions. It equips servants. It spurs obedience' (2009, p.20).

Overdorf argues that preserving biblical integrity is essential to application because it gives application authority. He claims application grows from, builds on, and submits to the Word of God (2009, p.27). While listeners may ignore the preacher's personal opinions, and in some instances should ignore them, they cannot ignore scripturally conditioned applications (2009, p.28). He, therefore, concludes sermon application should make a legitimate connection between biblical truth and the real-life struggles of the audience. For Overdorf, 'contemporary relevance' is also essential. He describes it as 'nuzzling up to listeners' inmost attitudes and decisions and actions...We dare to meddle, to pry and to nudge' (2009, p.14). Thus 'relevance' means relating the fixed meaning of the text to the whole life of the hearer. Overdorf qualifies his definition by claiming application requires the working of the Holy Spirit in the hearer to be effective (2009, p.47).

#### B. Other Homileticians

Overdorf's definition of the term 'application' complies with Robinson's and Capill's understanding of application. Robinson describes 'application' as being rooted in faithful exegesis to determine the stable meaning of the text, connects with the 'hurts, cries and fears' of congregants and requires the work of the Holy Spirit to be effective (2014, p.10). Capill also recognises the necessity of the three elements highlighted by Overdorf. He asserts application is based on 'thorough exegesis' which ascertains the stable meaning of the text, drills the meaning down into the life of the audience with 'rich, varied, penetrating application' (2014, p.20), and is delivered with 'enormous Spirit dependence' (2014, p.27).

This study uses the term 'application' in the sense given to it by Overdorf.

### C. Examples

To illustrate this definition of the term 'application', examples from two homileticians committed to the expository approach are now given. One example is supplied by Overdorf in a sample sermon based on Daniel chapter three (2009, p.152-156). This chapter describes the refusal of three captive Jews to worship an image of the king of Babylon. Overdorf identifies the sermon purpose as being: 'listeners should find the courage to remain faithful to God, despite the potential consequences because they trust in God's sovereignty' (2009, p.152). He provides three suggestions of what application could look like in an expository sermon on this chapter (2009, p.155, 156).

#### Listener 1:

A Christian in his early twenties agreed to serve as the best man in his friend's wedding. He is the only Christian involved. The best man traditionally plans a bachelor party. The other young men pressure him to hire an exotic dancer. He trusts that if he graciously refuses, the sovereign God will protect him from ridicule and anger and bring some good out of the situation. Though ridicule does come, his insistence on moral purity opens the door for spiritual conversations with his friends a week later.

#### Listener 2:

A woman in her late forties meets a friend for coffee before work twice a week. Over coffee the friend excitedly reveals her marital infidelity: 'This week I will leave my husband and move in with my soul mate!'. The conversation disturbs the woman. Should she confront her friend or simply be supportive? She decides to obey what she believes God has called her to do and leave the results to him. 'We have to talk,' she begins.

Listener 3:

An engineer nearing retirement receives a memo from his boss telling him to scale back on his latest drawings for budgeting purposes. The engineer knows that scaling back will require putting construction workers in physical danger. 'Doesn't matter,' the boss says, 'just cut those corners; we can't lose this account'. To refuse would cost the engineer his job. To give in would cost him his integrity. He keeps his integrity, loses his job, and prays to his sovereign God.

Sunukjian (2007, p.315-341) also provides examples of sermon application using the expository method. In his sample sermon on Exodus 13.17-22, a passage about God leading Israel to the promised land by an indirect route, Sunukjian applies the passage to four life circumstances: career, company, marriage and ministry. He summarises the four applications as follows:

The reason God sometimes takes us on a zigzag path is because some obstacle along the direct route would prevent us from ever reaching the goal. 1. Our career advancement might be delayed until a difficult person is removed, or necessary skills are learned. 2. Our company might not grow until we are past the danger of becoming a workaholic or materially focused. 3. Marriage might be put off until past issues no longer threaten a stable and long-lasting relationship. 4. Ministry opportunities might wait until pride is less of a danger (2007, p.317).

These examples confirm and illustrate the definition of 'application' in the expository sermon and adopted in this study. Application in the expository sermon combines faithful conveyance of the fixed meaning of the text of Scripture, with relevance to the lives of congregants.

### 2.1.3 Definition of 'Composition'

'Composition' is defined by the Oxford dictionary as 'the act of putting together, formation or construction' (1995, p.272). In this study, the construction, formation, and putting together of the applicatory element of the expository sermon is explored.

In classical rhetoric, 'composition' formed the third stage of the preparation of a public speech, after the stages of invention (subject matter) and disposition (outline), and prior to the stages of memorisation and delivery (Edwards, 2004, p.12). The third stage overlapped the previous stages and advanced them. Edwards describes the third stage, when he states 'The combination of words was called *composition* and involved figures of sound, figures of thought, and groupings of phrases' (2004, p.14). The centrality of composition in the stages of public speech preparation in classical rhetoric, therefore, confirms the importance of this element in sermon preparation. While this study does not explore all elements of the third stage of classical composition, it will explore some and overlap previous stages.

Academic discussion on the relationship between rhetoric and composition has continued, and now forms a distinct and burgeoning discipline (Porrovecchio & Condit, 2016). Of relevance to the composition of application is the theory of social constructionism, which explores the influence of culture on composition (Bizzell, 1993; Porter, 1992). However, as the composition of a sermon differs significantly from the composition of an article or book (Willhite, 2001, p.121), and as preaching is a unique form of public speech, this study explores the composition of sermon application mainly within the field of homiletics.

Having defined the three key terms in the research question, attention is now given to three key themes in the literature.

## 2.2 Key Themes on the Expository Method

This part of the literature review focuses on literature on expository preaching, post 1990, when more attention began to be given to the composition of application for the expository sermon. In 1980 Robinson claimed:

Homileticians have not given application the attention it deserves. No book has been published devoted exclusively, or even primarily to the knotty problems raised by application (p.89).

A decade later, Adams observed the gap in the literature on composing sermon application remained. He introduced his book by writing, 'It is my purpose, therefore, to attempt to fill this void as adequately as I can' (1990, p.9). Not many books on application in the expository sermon followed Adams, prompting the comment of Green, that 'there is still only a handful of books on the issue of application' (2015, p.9). Capill (2014, p.20,21) identifies the few books as: Adams (1990); Doriani (2001); Carrick (2002); Fabarez (2005); Johnson (2007) and Overdorf (2009). Green's book appeared in 2015. This lack of attention to the applicatory element of the expository sermon may indicate the difficulty of this homiletic practice. It also supports the importance of this qualitative study on approaches to composing application for the expository sermon.

Upon analysing these key texts, I concluded no one book provided a comprehensive homiletic method for composing application for the expository sermon. Therefore, from these eight books, principally Doriani (2001) and Capill (2014), qualitative research studies, journals, and the wider body of homiletic literature on expository preaching since 1990, a comprehensive homiletic method for composing application for the

expository sermon will be generated in this review. This defined expository method will form the theoretical framework for the research question.

This literature review, therefore, advances beyond analysis and synthesis of literature, to the provision of theoretical perspectives, a key purpose of the literature review in a research study (Trafford & Lesham, 2012, p.78). The theoretical perspectives generated influenced my decisions on research methods (Cohen et al., 2018, p.162), though not unnecessarily constraining those decisions (Maxwell, 2005, p.55). The defined expository method generated in this review consists of sourcing, developing, and integrating application.

### **2.2.1 THEME 1: Sourcing Sermon Application**

One key theme emerging from the literature on expository preaching is sources of sermon application. 'Source' is used here in the sense of 'a person or book, etc., that provides information' (Geddes & Grosset, 2002, p.399). In this case, the literature source is the Biblical text, the person source is the preacher, and the people source is the audience. Doriani (2001, p.59-98) prefers the term 'elements' and identifies them as text, interpreter, and audience. Capill (2014, p.240), building on Doriani's analysis, uses the term 'sources' and identifies four: purposes of the living Word, life reservoir of the preacher, faculties of the listener's heart and spiritual conditions of congregants. As source three and four in Capill's model are two aspects of audience, his categories correspond to Doriani's three 'elements'. The other key texts on composing application also recognise these sources, as this review will demonstrate. The significance of these sources is indicated by their relation to theories of communication and composition.

Chapell (2018, p.12,13) relates the three sources to the elements of classical theory of persuasive speech: logos, ethos and pathos. He connects logos to text, ethos to preacher, and pathos to audience. Capill (2014, p.54) relates the sources to basic linear communication theory: message (the text), sender (the preacher), receiver (the audience). While these communication theories focus on the communication event, and not on the composition of a public speech, the overlap of categories does indicate the importance of the three sources.

Connections can also be made between the sources and theories of composition. Flower (1994), for example, discusses the tension between social context, writer's knowledge and goals, and the demands of the discourse in her Negotiated Theory. She proposes a 'generative theory of conflict' which discovers meaning through these tensions. Parallels between her theory and homiletic theory can be drawn between social context and congregants, and author and preacher. Inner Directed Theory (Flower, 1994) indicates the importance of the preacher, by recognising the author's influence on composition. Outer Directed Theory (Bizzell, 1993; Porter, 1992) indicates the importance of the audience, by discussing community influence on composition. These connections establish the significance of the three sources. Consideration is now given to the first source of application - the text.

#### A. The Text

Homileticians promoting the expository approach maintain sermon application must be derived from the fixed meaning of the text (Jackman, 2019, p.8; Naselli, 2017, p.309). Dever and Gilbert (2012, p.80,92) use the metaphors of an engine misfiring, and a joiner attempting to hammer a nail at an angle, to illustrate a preacher attempting application without understanding the fixed meaning of the text. Ralston (in Bock &

Fanning, 2006, p.300) identifies three stages in the derivation of the fixed meaning: exegesis, theology, and significance. Kim (2015, p.39-48) confirms these stages, and this sequence is followed here.

### *1. Exegesis*

Exegesis analyses the text to ascertain the meaning intended by the author (Naselli, 2017, p.1). In discussing the fixed meaning of the text, semanticists have suggested twenty-five possible types of meaning (Bock & Fanning, 2006, p.139). Consequently, Bock argues that scholars who limit meaning to the category of grammatical meaning 'limit the array of possible meanings' (2006, p.140). Similarly, Searle (1979) emphasises that attaining stable text meaning involves more than explaining the signs and symbols of words and letters in a sentence. He claims 'the sentence is more than the sum of its parts'. Vanhoozer (2009, p.204) agrees and argues that the sentence 'introduces a level of complexity and uniqueness which cannot be described by semantics alone'. A sentence does things to us and is intended to affect us. It is not 'an impersonal static property, but a dynamic personal act fixed by writing' (Vanhoozer, 2009, p.232). However, as words are central to the communication process, grammatical meaning, consisting primarily in word study, is considered essential to discerning fixed meaning, in the expository approach (Blomberg & Markley, 2010, p.118).

Nevertheless, other categories of meaning are not to be ignored. Bock (2006, p.139,140) offers a manageable categorisation by suggesting six types:

- entailment meaning - a conclusion or implication not explicit in the context
- emotive meaning – a term carrying emotional force
- significance meaning - a term has new meaning in a different context

- encyclopedic meaning - all possible meanings of a term
- grammatical meaning - grammatical role of the term
- figurative meaning - use of a term because of the association it makes.

Some homileticians offer practical steps for ascertaining the fixed meaning of the text. For example, Naselli (2017, p.3) provides an eight-step model for discerning fixed meaning which includes: genre, textual criticism, translations, grammar, argument diagram, historical-cultural context, literary context, and word studies. A similar approach is suggested by Bock and Fanning (2006), Blomberg and Markley (2010), and Kim (2015).

## *2. Theology*

Some homileticians promoting the expository approach restrict the process of ascertaining fixed meaning in the text to exegesis. However, other homileticians include theological interpretation in the process (Greidanus, 1996, p.102-120; Bock & Fanning 2006, p.277-292; Jackman, 2019, p.9; Naselli, 2017, p.231). Blomberg and Markley claim theological interpretation is 'vast and diverse', and question if 'theological' is the 'best umbrella descriptor to attach to it' (2010, p.227). Developing the model of Goldsworthy (1991, p.34-38), Naselli (2017, p.3) offers a comprehensive model of theological interpretation utilising biblical, historical, systematic, and practical theology. However, Fanning (2006, p.281-286) argues that theological interpretation should be restricted to biblical theology, the foundational theological discipline.

Despite an increased interest in theological interpretation among scholars (Volf, 2010, p.14; Ward, 2017, p.122,123), some homileticians recognise complexities in the exegesis/theology relationship. Blomberg and Markley (2010, p.224, 225) discuss the twin dangers of theology ignoring textual features and exegesis overemphasising the

diversity of the text. This complex relationship has produced the Christocentric hermeneutic debate (Gibson & Kim, 2018), a debate which surfaces in the eight key texts on application. Adams (1990), Carrick (2002), and Fabarez (2005) promote the *telos* (original intent) approach and reject the hermeneutic which imports Jesus into the sermon when he is not directly mentioned in the text. Doriani (2001) and Johnson (2007) defend the Christocentric approach, claiming it creates a framework of grace for application. They consider the *telos* approach to be tainted by legalism. Overdorf (2009), Capill (2014), and Green (2015) attempt to synthesise these two positions. Thus, there is no uniform position among homileticians promoting the expository approach on the role of biblical theology in the process of determining the fixed meaning of the text. The findings will show, however, that all participants in this study include biblical theology in their method.

### 3. *Significance*

Significance is considered by some homileticians to be a third element in the process of interpretation. Its inclusion is based on the general assertion that 'understanding always includes application' (Gadamer, 1989, p.307-311). Doriani (2001, p.22-27) applies this principle to the sermon by insisting that a proper understanding of the fixed meaning of the text of Scripture includes knowing how to apply it. While Adams (1990, p.49,50) maintains meaning is the significance, other homileticians distinguish the two concepts. Fabarez writes:

Meaning is discovered as I rightly understand the truth presented in a passage of Scripture; significance is discovered as I rightly determine the impact that truth is intended to make on my congregation (2005, p.37).

Helm (2014, p.18-36) cautions against an overemphasis on significance, claiming it can result in erroneous preaching styles. He mentions *impressionistic* preaching (culture drives the sermon), *inebriated* preaching (addiction to practicality trumps submission to the text), and *'inspired'* preaching (driven by the desire for something fresh displacing exposition). Consequently, Helm promotes a balanced partnership between 'getting it right and getting it across'.

Homiletics discuss the complex move from the original significance of the text to contemporary significance (Overdorf, 2009, p.74-99). Differences in readership, culture, and time present challenges in ascertaining the contemporary significance of the text. Stott (1990, p.137-150) famously used the image of a bridge to describe the movement from the original world of the Bible to the contemporary world of the listener. Carter et al. adopt this image and call it a 'principalizing bridge'. Having determined the differences between the Biblical context and the contemporary audience, the preacher traverses

...the river of differences by crossing the principalizing bridge, determining what universal, timeless, theological principles were in the text - principles relevant to all audiences, in all places and in all times (2018, p.118).

Richard (2004) and Ralston (in Bock & Fanning, 2006), discuss the bridging process in terms of propositions. Richard (2004, p.79) distinguishes between the central proposition of the text (CPT), and the central proposition of the sermon (CPS). The CPT should contain the original thrust and theme of the text, arising from the fixed meaning. The CPS is based on the CPT but aims at addressing contemporary congregant needs. Richard summarises the role of each proposition: 'What? is linked to the CPT. So what? and, Now what? is related to the CPS' (2004, p.80).

Green (2015, p.107-120), however, critiques the bridging model. He argues that there is not always a gap between the Bible world and contemporary culture. He further claims bridging principles and propositions can be marred by subjectivity. Kim, Ferguson, Helm, and Jackman also seem to differ from Stott, Richard, and Ralston by arguing that contemporary application should conform to the original application of the text. Kim writes, 'While many applications are possible from the text, prioritize what's emphasized in the text (i.e., the author's intentions)' (2015, p.169). Ferguson, likewise, argues 'we are to aim to do with the text what the original writer was doing with the text'. The reason he gives for such alignment is 'the hearer will the more clearly sense the weight, thrust and light of *God's* word' (2017, p.666). Helm agrees with Ferguson by arguing that the original significance of the passage is to be the sermon application. He writes:

Biblical expositors are not pining away in their studies searching for ways to bring relevancy to their message. They don't need to. The bible is relevant. Rather, they draw out the implications and applications that are already there in the text, in ways that make sense for the culture the church is imbedded in (2014, p.100).

Similarly, Jackman claims it is important to submit to the 'intention' of the selected passage, not just the 'content' of the passage. He maintains the original 'application and tone' of the text should supply 'applications which the writer would have recognised as conforming to his own original purpose' (in Dodson, 2014, p.137). Therefore, Kim, Ferguson, Helm, and Jackman differ from Stott, Richard, and Ralston, by identifying the preacher's task as discerning, and then contextualizing the original application of the passage, rather than extracting principles from it.

#### *4. Qualifications*

Some qualifications relating to the text as a source of application are mentioned. Meyer (2013, p.258) argues that the preacher must 'show his working' so congregants can assess the legitimacy of the application. He argues that, if a preacher makes application from a principle, all parties must be convinced of the legitimacy of the principle. However, Capill cautions against showing too much working. He says, 'People want to see the house that has been built...but they don't want a blow-by-blow account of where the timber was purchased' (2014, p.244).

Meyer also warns against ignoring elements of the preaching portion that do not directly support the main point of the passage. He writes:

We want to avoid an approach to preaching that ignores whatever in a passage does not directly contain our main point. We cannot ignore the rest of the passage, because the main point of the passage does not exist in isolation from the rest of the passage (2013, p.260).

However, he offers no practical suggestions for achieving such inclusiveness, whilst retaining the unity of the sermon. Meyer's position could leave the sermon overly cluttered, miss the main point, or reduce the applicatory content (Keller, 2015). Capill and Keller's position is more persuasive when they argue that an expository approach does not require all exegeted material to be included in the sermon. Rather they maintain that sermon structure often demands some parts of the preaching portion be omitted, so that a sermon is preached rather than a running commentary given.

Some homileticians promoting the expository approach commend the practice of determining significance concurrently with the stages of exegesis and theology. Moody claims, 'if I am not asking application questions when I am preparing to preach, then I

am not preparing to preach, I am preparing to lecture' (in Dodson, 2014, p.193). Doriani (2001, p.74) argues for a permeable barrier between ascertaining meaning and determining significance. He supports his argument by appealing to Schleiermacher's hermeneutical spiral, which claims people gain knowledge, gradually. Applying it to the process of sermon preparation, as Fanning (2006, p.286) also does, he claims the spiral describes the altercation between exegesis and application. Capill (2014, p.58) advances Doriani's position by arguing that application should dominate homiletic method. He claims that, because transformation is the purpose of Scripture, preachers should prioritise application in the process. Kim (2015, p.40) agrees with Capill, and advocates the inclusion of application in any preliminary sermon proposition. Overdorf (2009, p.64) rejects this application-driven approach, and follows the method of Greidanus (1998), which determines the fixed meaning of the text, first, to ensure legitimate application. However, Doriani (2001, p.20) claims such an approach breaks down in practice.

## Summary

Homileticians, therefore, consider the process of determining the fixed meaning of the text to involve numerous stages and challenges. Differences in approach have been observed regarding types of meaning, inclusion of theology, original and contemporary significance, and the amount of exegeted material to be included in the sermon. Such differences indicate that within the expository method there is a range of legitimate approaches when utilising this source of application. Notwithstanding these differences, there is agreement among homileticians promoting the expository method that determining the fixed meaning of the text is foundational to determining its significance. Having considered the first and principal source of application, consideration is now given to the second source - the preacher.

## B. The Preacher

In homiletic literature on expository preaching another source of application is the preacher. Capill (2014, p.81,82) uses the image of a reservoir to illustrate the 'heart and life' of a preacher as a source of application. He defines this source as 'all the preacher has read, learned, thought about, observed, suffered, processed, and experienced'. Capill describes the function of this source in the process of composing application. He writes:

When we see a biblical truth, possibilities will start to buzz. We make connections to people, books, events, doctrines, experiences, life. We have, quite spontaneously, illustrative material and applicatory possibilities (2014, p.83).

Homileticians promoting the expository approach to composing application discuss the culture, gender, and knowledge of the preacher, as aspects of this source.

### 1. Culture

Dorani maintains 'interpreters are more than conduits for data. They are embedded in their own culture' (2001, p.59). While Keller (2015, p.129-156) offers a detailed analysis of culture in terms of five narratives, (technology, history, freedom, morality, identity), Quicke provides a succinct definition of the preacher's culture as, 'the total context in which we live, work, play, and preach' (2007, p.66).

Four aspects of the preacher's culture discussed in the literature on expository preaching are: traits, rhetoric, research, and technology. First, *traits*. Mitchell (1990) claims cultural traits affect sermons. His claim is substantiated by Cooper (2005, p.198,199) who demonstrates that five cultural traits of the Black tradition are reflected in Black preaching: prophetic utterance, empathy with people's pain, dispensing hope, passion, and expert storytelling. Wilson (1992, p.172,173) claims emotion is a

prominent trait in Black culture and is evident in sermon application in Black preaching. Second, *rhetoric*. Edwards (2004, p.11) claims evidence of Greco-Roman rhetoric shaping early Christian preaching is found in sermon application paralleling the pathos element of rhetoric. Galli and Larson (1994) encourage preachers to study the rhetoric of journalists to improve connectivity with audiences. As already noted, the discipline of Rhetoric/Composition overlaps homiletics in some areas. Third, *research*. DeVille (2012) argues that adult learning methods and communication theory inform homiletics. One example is the 'skill of persuasion' (Hargie, 2017, p.349-402). Fourth, *technology*. The use of technology in the sermon is discussed in the literature. Boyd-Macmillan (2009, p.245-256) promotes the use of images over text, only when images can do what words cannot. However, Heywood, while not opposing the use of film clips or power point, considers verbal images superior to media images. He writes:

An image described in words asks the hearer to co-operate with the preacher. It provides an outline and leaves the hearer to fill in the details herself. And in filling in those details, she makes connections with other areas of her life experience (2014, p.98).

Heywood (2014, p.135) also warns of the detrimental impact on listeners of a poor use of technology. In discussing culture, Quicke (2007, p.67) highlights two dangers encountered by preachers: one is neglecting cultural advances and so appearing irrelevant. The other is compromising with the philosophy and morals of contemporary culture, and, thereby, losing credibility.

## 2. Gender

The influence of the preacher's gender on sermon composition is discussed in the literature, though no agreement is reached. Some homileticians recognise gender

specific influence on preaching. For example, Quicke claims there are 'significant differences' between male and female preachers. He asserts women 'identify with the least powerful and focus on relationship issues' (2007, p.88). Sanders, suggests, 'women tend to emphasize the personal and men the prophetic' (in Day, 2012, p.221), while Gould-Champ (2000, p.110) argues that women have a didactic preaching style and emphasise healing and ministry, men focus on mission and church issues. Recognition of gender-specific influence, leads Sanders to promote intergender teaching. She writes:

Women's sermons can teach men to temper social criticism with compassion. At the same time, women can learn from men how to sharpen their testimonies and calls for Christian commitment with the cutting edge of prophetic indignation (in Day et al., 2012, p.222).

Some homileticians discuss female gender influence on preaching. Dever (2012, p.94), a strong complementarian, appreciates the applicatory insights of women in his pre-sermon dialogue group. Shercliff (2019, p.21-24) claims female gender has a tendency towards narrative preaching, the discovery of Scriptural material hidden from male readers, and the mention of feminine failures. Consequently, Durber encourages female preachers to 'speak with our distinctive voices', and desires 'it be said many times in our churches that she preached 'like a woman'' (2007, p.9, 186). She claims achieving such a 'distinctive voice' requires thinking 'carefully about how your own response to the text and the words you say might offer something different' (2007, p.185). Shercliff maintains female preachers should preach with their 'different voice' for the sake of a 'holistically incarnated gospel' (2019, p.19, 24).

Other homileticians detect no evidence of gender influence on sermons (Flake & Stanley, 2007). Dainton and Zelle, who maintain biological sex accounts for little in

the way of communication differences, write, 'many differences in people's communication are socially constructed, not biologically determined' (2011, p.202). After discussing various theories, they conclude that the influence of biological sex on communication is 'still up for debate and in need of a comprehensive theory' (2011, p.194). So, the issue is ongoing, and theories continue to be developed.

### *3. Knowledge*

The preacher's academic and experiential knowledge is also identified as an element of this source of application. Homileticians emphasise the necessity of preachers developing academic knowledge, post-ordination, to provide fresh applicatory material. Reading is the main method suggested for achieving this. Keller (in Capill, 2014, p.92) suggests five areas of essential reading: Bible, theology, church history, devotional and apologetic. Boyd-MacMillan (2009, p.264) includes the classics and history in his list. The importance of a balanced reading programme is stressed by Capill (2014, p.92) who claims an imbalanced programme results in imbalanced application, lessening impact on some congregants. Gordon (2009) suggests reading for personal development. Drawing on the research of David Denby (1996), he claims the media has shaped modern minds adversely and argues reading corrects this influence. He suggests reading dense texts to develop reasoning, recognised literary works to develop style, and poetry to develop an appreciation of what is significant.

Fiske and Taylor (2014) use the term 'schema' to describe the process of attaining, organising, and retaining experiential knowledge. They identify knowledge of self, others, and events, as a type of schema. Capill connects true knowledge of self with knowing God which includes 'knowing his discipline and admonition, his grace and favour, his typical ways of dealing with us, his power, patience, gentleness, and

sternness' (2014, p.85,86). He further argues that by knowing oneself, preachers know others. Davis also makes this connection when he writes, 'If a preacher has a lively sense of his own depravity, he won't have much trouble applying Scripture' (2006, p.93). Knowledge of events includes knowing appropriate conduct within certain norms and parameters (Hargie, 2017, p.35). It can be attained by personal experience of the event, or observation of the experiences of others. Knowledge of events allows application to be drawn into the realities of people's lives, a key factor in skilled interpersonal communication (Hargie, 2017, p.34) and therefore preaching.

### Summary

Within the expository method the preacher is considered a source of application. The culture, gender, and knowledge of the preacher are considered important feeders into the reservoir of the preacher's life, from which application is drawn. Differences of opinion have been noted on the use of technology and the influence of gender on verbal communication. While these differences do not affect the overall argument that the expository method utilises the preacher as a source of application, they impact the composition of application. In composing application preachers who recognise gender influence will be alert to the strengths and weaknesses of their gender traits and will consciously express or counter those traits. The use or non-use of technology will affect the language of application and the use of applicatory illustrations in the sermon. However, given the uniqueness of every life, and the richness of experiential knowledge, the diligent use of this source should provide unique, varied, relevant, and abundant sermon application for preachers.

## C. The Audience

The expository method also considers the audience to be an important source of application (Day, 2012, p.2). Martin claims the preacher's use of this source in sermon composition should be evident to congregants. He writes, 'your people should come to know that when you stand in that pulpit, you are carrying them with you because they have been with you in your study' (2018, p.111). Hargie (2017, p.24-29) argues that effective communicators are familiar with the culture, personality, age, attitudes, and gender of listeners. Homiletic literature on expository preaching mentions similar aspects of the audience in discussing this source of application.

### *1. Culture*

One benefit of a continuum of culture such as Hofstede's (2001) influential inductive theory of culture (individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, power distance, masculinity-femininity, long-term and short-term orientation) is that it allows communicators to locate the culture of their listeners. Hargie (2017, p.8) claims knowing audience culture reduces 'noise' in the communication process. While Lose (2013) identifies three current cultural movements, secularism, pluralism and postmodernism, most homileticians discuss postmodernism (McQuilkin, 2005, p.174; Keller, 2015, p.129). Standing (in Stevenson, 2010, p.11-17) mentions five neutral traits of postmodernism: entertainment, narrative, consumerism, ethos and atmosphere, virtual relationships, and celebrity. Adam (1996, p.167, 168) considers postmodernism in negative terms; dominated by visual communication, suspicion of authority, scepticism about history, and uncertainty about the authenticity of Scripture. Quicke identifies postmodernism in terms of personal desires for:

experience; authenticity; genuine relationships; holism in worship and life; mystery, wonder and awe in personal spirituality; and local stories that help make sense of their own stories (2007, p.73).

Mohler (2008, p.116-123) incorporates many of these aspects in his comprehensive definition: deconstruction of truth, death of the metanarrative, demise of the text, dominion of therapy, decline of authority, displacement of morality.

Having defined postmodernism, homileticians discuss its impact on the composition of the expository sermon. Bradshaw makes the general observation that, while the Christian message remains unchanged, 'preaching style and content cannot be separated from the culture of the people' (in Stevenson, 2010, p.47). Johnston (2001, p.149-172) is more specific by suggesting preachers use dialogue, an inductive style, storytelling, audio visuals, drama, and art in their communication. Jackman, however, warns against a pre-occupation with audience culture and promotes the importance of 'hearing the voice of God in Scripture' (in Dodson, 2014, p.130). Arthurs appeals for a balanced pastoral approach by asserting, 'Personal knowledge of the flock is just as important as knowledge of philosophical trends' (2004, p.179). Similarly, Ash, while acknowledging that engagement with culture in preaching, 'will press home on people that reality is on our side' argues that a preacher does not have 'to become a great cultural expert' (2010, p.51, 56). He claims pastoral care gives insight into congregant culture. Quicke advocates a nuanced approach to culture by making a distinction between 'the local culture of congregants, and the popular culture of the age' (2007, p.66).

## *2. Categories*

Categorising listeners is another element of this source of application (Carter et al., 2018, p.125). Fiedler and Bless (2001, p.123) define category as a 'grouping of two or more distinguishable objects that are treated in a similar way'. Thus, categories help structure information about others (Hargie, 2017, p.35).

Phillips (in Dodson, 2014, p.239) suggests there are normally three basic categories of congregants: believers, downcast and unbelievers. Martin (2018, p.108,109) suggests four basic categories: believer, unbeliever, situational differences, and occupational differences. Keller's (2015, p.290-293) much fuller categorisation overlaps some of these categories: conscious unbeliever, non-churched nominal Christian, awakened, apostate, new believer, doubtful, mature/growing, afflicted, tempted, immature, depressed, and backslid. Richard (2004, p.117) complexifies categorisation by listing variables in each category: personal, home, work/study, church, community, attitudes, knowledge, behaviour, relationships, motives, values, priorities, and character. Ash (2010, p.54,55) encourages preachers to use audience categories to anticipate possible objections to implementing sermon application, a practice he calls 'silent dialogue'. Capill stresses the importance of categorisation by relating it to effectiveness. He writes, 'The point of thinking in such categories is to help us deliver applications that are truly useful to people' (2014, p.135).

However, one danger of categorisation is stereotyping individuals or groups (Hargie, 2017, p.35). Some homileticians, therefore, promote corporate applications. Adam bases his appeal for corporate application on the corporate identity of the audience as the body of Jesus. He writes:

Rather than looking for individual application we should work for corporate application because of the union of believers to the body of Christ. Application should be made to the shared values, godliness, sins, blind spots, weaknesses and strengths of congregations (in Dodson, 2014, p.28).

Green (2015, p.231-234) maintains the frequent use of 'one another', (used 54 times in the writings of the Apostles), requires corporate applications. Similarly, Overdorf (2009, p.37) expresses concern that the plural in the Biblical text is not always conveyed in sermon applications. However, to accommodate the uniqueness of congregations, Adam (in Dodson, 2014, p.26) insists on the necessity of 'pastoral intelligence' in composing corporate applications. No sermon is 'perfectly portable': as audiences change, so too must sermon applications (Doriani, 2001, p.38).

### *3. Attitudes*

Hargie uses the traditional analyses of attitudes, 'A, B, C, Affect, Behavioural and Cognitive' (2017, p.25) when discussing their function in communication. He argues that long-term changes in behavioural attitudes are usually dependent on changes in affect and cognitive attitudes (2017, p.362). Some homileticians adopt the same approach when discussing 'heart idols' (Tripp, 2002; Johnson, 2007; Capill, 2014; Keller, 2015; Powlison, 2018). Tripp defines 'heart idols' as, 'anything that rules me other than God' (2002, p.66). This approach considers the cognitive and affect attitudes of congregants to be foundational to the behavioural attitude and therefore the primary target for sermon application. Keller (2015, p.160) and Meyer (2013, p.251) maintain only the glory of Jesus, discerned by cognitive and affect attitudes, can affect this removal. For Keller, such transformation commonly occurs during the sermon, as "heart idols' are exposed, and Jesus is shown to be supreme' (2015, p.165).

The Elaboration Likelihood communication model, (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), contributes to this discussion, by arguing that persuasion is primarily a cognitive event. The model distinguishes two routes to persuading listeners: one is the peripheral route, which addresses the affect attitude of listeners, but produces short-term changes, if any. The other is the central route, which addresses the cognitive attitude, by information, argument, and supporting evidence, and produces long-term changes. In the expository sermon the element of interpretation principally addresses the cognitive attitude and the element of application the behavioural attitude.

#### *4. Gender*

While demonstrating awareness of gender debate, Matthews advocates gender specific applications. One female gender trait she specifies is, emphasising moral values in relationships. She therefore argues that sermon application should address this trait in female congregants (2004, p.30-34). Matthews claims the gender composition of typical Christian congregations makes this issue important. She reckons, 'at least two out of every three adults listening to the sermon are women' (2004, p.147).

Arthurs (2005, p.184) and Heath (2011, p.115) agree with such gender specific applications, claiming they are more effective. However, Flake and Stanley (2007, p.14) emphasise variation within gender categories, and therefore maintain the impossibility of gender specific applications. Similarly, Hargie insists on gender differences not being overstated in communication, because it cannot 'be assumed that they apply to each and every individual' (2017, p.27).

## Summary

Audience culture, categories, attitudes and gender, comprise elements of this third source of application. Tensions within each of these areas were noted: listening to culture or scripture, composing specific or corporate applications, addressing cognitive or affect attitudes of congregants and the possibility of gender specific applications. Such tensions illustrate the complexity and difficulty of composing application, and indicate there is a measure of variety within the expository approach.

Dorani claims this third source helps avoid sameness in applications. He considers the first crime of a preacher is to utter heresy. The second crime is to, 'make the faith seem boring' (2001, p.97). By the diligent use of this source, he believes preachers will escape the ruts of favoured themes and their applications will increase in depth and variety (2001, p.98). The appearance of culture in the sources of preacher and audience parallels Berlo's (1960) communication model and indicates the importance of culture in communication.

## Conclusion

The first theme of the expository method discusses three sources of composing application in the expository method: text, preacher, and audience. Differences within the sources have been noted concerning: Biblical theology, original significance, and gender. The three sources potentially provide an abundance of material for application, so the quandary for the expository preacher should be selecting the best applications (Dorani, 2001, p.96). However, many expository preachers struggle to compose application. In this study, participants rate the composition of application difficult.

Robinson discusses prioritising text or audience in sermon composition. He illustrates this quandary faced by preachers, from the experience of seeker sensitive preachers:

They want to be biblical, of course, but they also want to help their listeners to live more productive lives. People attend church because they want help in practical living. They are looking for something that will get them through the week. Preachers want to speak to those felt needs, and those needs in turn drive their sermons (2014, p.80).

The expository method for composing application for the expository sermon seems to prioritise the text, whilst also recognising the audience to be a rich source of application. The second theme in the literature, developing application, is now considered.

### **2.2.2 THEME 2: Developing sermon Application**

A second theme discussed in the literature on expository preaching, which addresses the composition of application, is developing application. The term 'developing' is used to describe the process of complexifying the sourced application (Capill, 2014, p.259). This theme discusses tools which dissect and expand sourced application. The main homiletic tools utilised in developing application include questions, grammatical moods, grids, and discussion with congregants.

#### **A. Questions**

The homiletic tool of questions mainly utilises two sources of application: text and audience. MacArthur (1992, p.217,218) commends the practice of asking questions of the fixed *meaning* of the text to develop application. His questions are:

- is there an example to follow?
- is there a command to obey?

- is there an error to avoid?
- is there a sin to repent of?
- is there a promise to receive?
- is there a new thought of God to accept?
- is there a principle to adopt?

The seven verbs in these questions (follow, obey, avoid, repent, receive, accept, adopt) are designed to help preachers develop application from the text by identifying specific actions for congregants to perform. MacArthur does not expect every text to answer all the questions but does expect some questions will help develop application. Chapell (2018, p.193-201) suggests questions which mainly develop the *significance* of the text:

- *what* does God now require of me?
- *where* does he require it of me?
- *why* must I do what he requires?
- *how* can I do what God requires?

He explains the role of each question. ‘*What?*’ provides instruction in present actions, attitudes, and beliefs. ‘*Where?*’ provides specific situations in which the application is to be carried out. ‘*Why?*’ provides motivation for obedience. ‘*How?*’ provides information on enablement to fulfil the application.

These two sets of questions are complimentary. MacArthur’s seven questions unpack Chapell’s first question. Chapell’s last three questions encourage preachers to consider aspects of application not mentioned by MacArthur. However, unlike MacArthur, Chapell (2018, p.201) advocates that every preacher should answer all four of his questions in developing application for every sermon. These sets of questions also highlight different approaches to developing application. MacArthur’s

set indicates his conviction of developing general application, while Chapell's set reflects his conviction that sermon application should be specific. Thus, while the expository method includes the element of application, it allows for variety in the form of the developed application, ranging from very specific to very general. Further, MacArthur's promotion of general application to allow the Holy Spirit to make specific applications suggests that there are important elements beyond the expository approach which influence the composition of application, an idea which will be developed in the findings.

Other homileticians promote the practice of asking questions of the third source of application, the audience. Capill (2014, p.262,263) suggests asking objective questions of the spiritual faculties of listeners:

- mind-what are the central truths of the text that people must know and believe?
- conscience-what in the text should convict and challenge us?
- will-what are the key actions and responses this text calls for?
- passions-what are the passions of the text and the passions it should produce?
- heart idols-what heart idols does this text confront and what worship does it call for?

Robinson (2014, p.63) suggests questions which address reasons listeners might fail to fulfil sermon application:

- what ideas, feelings, attitudes and actions of the audience are addressed?
- what obstacles keep the people in my audience from responding as they should?
- what suggestions might help them respond as God wants them to respond

A different approach is suggested by Doriani (2001, p.97). He suggests using questions the audience are likely to be asking. Identifying four moral categories established by ethicists, he formulates four questions: 'What should I do?' (duty); 'Who should I be?' (character); 'To what causes should I devote myself?' (goals), and 'How can I distinguish truth from error?' (discernment).

One benefit of using the tool of questions is that it can help develop balanced and varied applications, covering a wide range of audience needs. Another benefit is that it facilitates the preacher's insider/outsider role. As insider, the preacher addresses questions being asked by the church community: as outsider, the preacher asks and answers questions which should be asked by the community (Doriani, 2001, p.41). However, the use of questions in developing application can encourage multiple micro applications, burdensome to listeners and disruptive to the unity and force of the sermon.

## B. Grammatical Moods

Carrick advocates developing application by using four grammatical moods: indicative, exclamative, interrogative, imperative. He argues this tool is used in Scripture (2002, p.4) and by prominent preachers (2002, p.6), was foundational in classical rhetoric (2002, p.2), and addresses the whole person (2002, p.147,148). He explains how each mood contributes to the development of application:

- *indicative mood* addresses the mind preparatory to application (2002, p.25)
- *exclamative mood* appeals to the emotions - an important factor in congregant responses (2002, p.31)
- *interrogative mood* challenges the conscience (2002, p.57)
- *imperative mood* appeals to the will for change (2002, p.64).

This unique homiletic tool provides for a variety of forms of application throughout the expository sermon and facilitates the development of applications which address various congregant faculties. However, such focus on grammatical moods, encourages didactic and monologue sermons, which can result in an absence of vocal or silent dialogue with listeners.

### C. Grids

Another tool for developing application which homileticians promoting the expository approach discuss, is grids. The vertical axis of grids is commonly related to the text. For example, Naselli (2017, p.318) suggests listing the main points and sub-points of the sermon on this axis. Green (2015, p.230) recommends using the six forms of Biblical address suggested by the Westminster Directory: instruction, refutation, encouragement, challenge, comfort, and self-examination. The horizontal axis is commonly comprised of audience groupings. Green (2015, p.230) suggests adjusting Perkins' categorisation to the following:

Ignorant	Informed	Humbled	Believers
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Shelley (in Dodson, 2014, p.85) suggests eight categories focused on congregant needs:

Relationships	Conflicts	Personal burden	Difficult situation	Character weakness	Lack of resource	Responsibilities	Opportunities
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Dever (2012, p.93) suggests a grid with categories expanding beyond the immediate audience but connected to it:

Salvation history	Non-Christians	Society	Jesus	Christians	Issues-work, family, church
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Dever (2012, p.93) claims the use of grids can prevent preachers ‘falling into the rut’ of addressing only one category of listener. Green (2015, p.231) adds that grids allow preachers with an artistic inclination to express their talent in the process of sermon composition. However, important categories can be omitted from grids, and banal or forced applications can be composed in attempting to cover all categories. A further weakness of this tool is that it can give credence to the myth and naïve assumption that we perceive other people in a ‘correct, factual, unbiased, objective way’ (Hargie, 2017, p.39). Grids assume that there is an ‘immutable reality’ (Wilmot, 1995, p.150) in another person, which we perceive, or can discover.

#### D. Discussion with Congregants

Coggan (1996, p.99) and Allen (2005) defend the involvement of congregants in determining sermon application by claiming it is a practical outworking of membership in the body of Christ and an expression of the priesthood of believers. Audience involvement before and during the sermon is discussed in the literature on expository preaching.

Carrell, building on McClure (1979), promotes pre-sermon dialogue groups. She claims 87% of preachers prepare in isolation, but those engaging with congregants before preaching 'have made significant gains in the transformative quality of their sermons' (2013, p.183). Dever describes his use of a pre-sermon dialogue group. He meets with a few select members of his congregation over lunch on a Saturday. He writes:

Those are sweet times of fellowship, and they're also enormously productive. More times than I can count, the men with whom I'm having lunch have asked a question I hadn't considered, made a point I'd overlooked, or had a pastoral insight that hadn't occurred to me (2012, p.93,94).

On Saturday evenings, after he has written his sermon, he reads it to a few friends in his study and discusses the applications further. Duguid suggests pre-sermon input from individuals. He encourages the practice of submitting a sermon manuscript to a church elder or gifted lay person for discussion, pre-sermon. His own practice is to hand his sermon manuscript to his wife on a Friday to 'suggest possible lines of application' (in Dodson, 2014, p.82). Sigmon (2017) commends weekly Facebook live sessions, where preachers share their thoughts leading up to the sermon and congregants and non-members contribute.

Developing Doug Pagitt's (2011) concept of 'progressional dialogue', Heywood (2014, p.139-141) promotes the tool of 'interactive preaching', in which 'the preacher starts the topic off and then follows where the congregation leads'. He suggests preachers suspend their sermon after explaining the text, to allow the audience to work out the application of the passage among themselves. He claims this approach draws on the strengths of the two parties. The preacher, being expert in discerning the meaning of

the text 'by virtue of her training' is equipped to give the explanation. However, he writes:

In the area of application, it may not be the preacher but rather the congregation who are the experts. They are likely to know much more than the preacher about their own spiritual journey, the demands of their work or daily life situation, the history of their congregation and the character of the local community (2014, p.140).

This approach affirms the spirituality of the congregation and recognises them as active, and not passive, listeners. It acknowledges they are more than a target to be analysed and addressed - they are significant contributors to composing application. However, Ash claims such vocal dialogue is often hi-jacked by some over-talkative person and so becomes a 'monologue about questions nobody wants answered' (2010, p.55).

Collaboration with congregants before and during the preaching event as described above, is promoted by Quicke who maintains it 'brings significant gains' (2007, p.93).

#### E. Other Tools

Other practical methods for developing application are suggested by homileticians promoting the expository method. Some homileticians link special prayer to discerning application (MacArthur, 1992, p.43; Helm, 2014, p.103). Manchester adopts the method of praying over the meaning of the text and claims, 'Application comes more with prayer, I have found. I talk through the passage in prayer and think through why this is wonderful' (in Dodson, 2014, p.157). Gilbert commends peripatetic exegesis. He takes a two-hour 'sermon walk' on Saturday afternoons around his neighbourhood with his sermon outline written in a notebook and asks questions of the text. As he walks, he thinks 'of specific individuals in my congregation and think about why this

text should matter to those people in particular' (2012, p.94). Capill (2014, p.239) also uses this tool and considers the change of environment from study to outdoors, an aid to creative thinking, something necessary for composing application. Manchester commends the practice of thinking about specific congregants while sitting in his study and asking what the passage would mean to them. He also describes looking through his study window at passers-by and considering how he would explain the significance of the text to them (in Dodson, 2014, p.157).

## Conclusion

This second theme has identified tools within the expository approach for developing application. The tools of questions, grammatical moods, grids, and congregant discussion have been considered. The strengths and some weaknesses of these tools in developing application for the expository sermon have been mentioned. Strengths noted include assisting discriminatory application, congregant contribution and a greater range of applications. Weaknesses include excessive number of applications, focus on micro applications and forced applications to complete grids or answer questions.

The area of 'other tools' raises the questions: are there more tools for this stage of the process? and, could an empirical study of a group of expository preachers, never researched before, provide fresh techniques? The empirical element of this study will inform the expository method on this second theme.

### **2.2.3 THEME 3: Integrating Sermon Application**

The third theme discussed in the literature on the expository sermon, is the integration of application. Overdorf defines integration as 'inserting application into a sermon outline or manuscript' (2009, p.159). Integration concerns how application, sourced

and developed, is included in the sermon. Levels, types, illustration, language, and locations of application are discussed.

#### A. Levels of Application

The expository approach discusses a hierarchical structure of applications. Capill claims applications 'must be ranked' (2014, p.255). Fabarez (2005, p.137) mentions certain, probable, and possible applications. Cook (in Capill, 2014, p.255) considers necessary, possible, and impossible applications and explains them as:

- *necessary*: the response the text certainly calls for
- *possible*: the way the text may be applied
- *impossible*: how you must not respond to the text.

Capill (2014, p.254) prefers the terms primary and secondary applications and other implications arising from the text. He argues primary applications deserve 'most air-time' and the greatest intensity. Differentiating the status of applicatory comment, he claims, increases 'buy-in and impact' (2014, p.255) with the audience. Helm agrees and asserts that preachers must be less dogmatic when applying secondary applications. He writes,

On those occasions when I do want to apply my text in multiple ways, I always lead with the primary one. The further away I get, I tell my congregation that what I'm saying is more of a stretch (2014, p.108).

Similarly, Fabarez warns that a preacher who fails to differentiate between primary and secondary applications 'soon gets a reputation for crying wolf' (2005, p.137).

## B. Types of Application

General and specific applications are discussed in the literature on expository preaching. MacArthur promotes the composition of general applications to allow the Holy Spirit room to make specific applications. He explains his method:

Apart from explicit general application in principalizing the main parts in the exposition, the expositor is not compelled to give a set number of points of specific application before a sermon can have applicational impact. That is not to say that he should not make some applications, but if the text is allowed to speak fully, applications will multiply far beyond what he can anticipate as the Spirit of God takes His Word and applies it to each listener. If hundreds even thousands are present, the expositor by proposing his own specific applications may place unnecessary restrictions and run the risk of eliminating many other applications to the lives of his hearers (1992, p.300).

Overdorf shares the concern of MacArthur. He writes, 'Effective sermon application offers possibilities that enhance the work of the Spirit, instead of lists that can interfere with the work of the Spirit' (2009, p.50). However, Capill (2014, p.157), among others, disagrees with MacArthur and Overdorf by arguing that vague generalities in sermon application result in listeners responding in vague generalities.

## C. Applicatory Illustrations

Homileticians distinguish illustrations that demonstrate truth from those which exhibit practice (Martin, 2018, p.124; Chapell, 2018, p.163), though Willhite (2001, p.109-111) mentions validation as a third category. In discussing the effectiveness of applicatory illustrations, homileticians emphasise connectivity with listeners and concreteness.

In discussing connectivity, homileticians mention various aspects of congregants. Capill claims applicatory illustrations are effective through their connection to the *affect*

*attitude* of listeners. He argues applicatory illustrations ‘help people feel truth as well as know it’ (2014, p.159). Kim (2015, p.188) agrees and reasons people often make decisions by how they feel about what they know. Similarly, Hargie (2017, p.380) observes that case studies frequently address the affect attitude of listeners through the emotional part of the narrative. Ricoeur (2007, p.173) claims applicatory illustrations are effective by connecting to the *imagination* of congregants. He defines imagination as the ‘luminous clearing’ in which possible actions are presented to the consciousness of congregants by illustration. In listening to an applicatory illustration, congregants ‘try out different possible courses of action’. In this way, he argues, ‘the story becomes current and unfolds possibilities of action’. Chapell (2018, p.160-173) claims applicatory illustrations connect with the *experience* of congregants. He discusses modern theories of learning which promote ‘understanding through experience’. He argues that applicatory illustrations connect with congregants by relating an experience which listeners can enter, even though they have never experienced it, and thereby learn the action being commended.

To maximise the effect of sermon illustrations on congregants, Richard promotes concreteness. He writes:

Be specific about God’s expectations of your people. It is not enough to tell them that God wants them to be holy. You must give specific examples of holiness that will be relevant to their situation today (2004, p.113).

Similarly, Heywood considers concreteness to be the ‘huge advantage’ of sermon illustrations. He writes, ‘They show us someone acting on the principle we intend to teach, an actual example of someone rising to the challenge’ (2014, p.104). Carter et al. (2018, p.122) claim that while illustrations which are general in nature will meet with congregational approval, they will not effect change. The research of Pinnington

(2001) and the analytical study of Sopory and Dillard (2002, p.413) explore the power of exemplary narrative to persuade. Their research into the use of metaphors, analogies, similes, and personifications concludes they are more effective than literal language. Hargie (2017, p.380) agrees, and mentions the parables of Jesus and 'the medieval exemplum' as examples of effective exemplary narrative. However, Doriani (2001, p.79) reminds preachers that their lives should be the most effective concrete illustration of their message.

#### D. Language of Application

Adams describes language as the preacher's 'stock in trade' (1990, p.115), to be used skilfully. Pronouns and wording are discussed in homiletic literature. Wilson (1992, p.34) argues for effective first-person pronoun application, tracing its usage to NT writings and early church sermons. Edwards (2005) creates a twelve-step process for composing effective first-person application, while Thulin (1989) provides a taxonomy of self-reference in sermons. Parkes (2020, p.4-6) develops Thulin's taxonomy and argues that first-person pronouns emphasise preaching as testimony, achieves identification with congregants and leaves room for the judgement of hearers. Verweij and Pleizier (2020, p.36) claim the preacher's self-disclosure includes implicit self-disclosure, as well as the use of the personal pronoun. Wilson respects the reluctance of some preachers to use the first-person pronoun, as 'they do not want to draw attention away from the Word' (1992, p.66). However, he considers the lack of personal reference to be contrary to Pauline practice and can 'place the preacher above the struggles of the parishioners'. By contrast, Adams (1990, p.27,31) claims the dominant pronoun to be used in the sermon should be the second person, 'you'. He maintains the preacher is not a spectator or recipient, but a herald of God's Word.

Murray (2011, p.114) agrees with Adams but adds that the use of this pronoun by preachers should not exclude self-application.

Capill links the skilful wording of applicatory material to sermon effectiveness. He writes:

The human heart is much less easily penetrated by mundane, complicated, flat speech. And it is never penetrated by incoherent, incomprehensible words (2014, p.164).

Thus, he advocates the practice of writing out the sermon in full to encourage carefully worded application. Stuart (2001, p.28) agrees with Capill and insists on an equal amount of effort being injected into wording the applicatory element, as is given to every other part of the sermon.

#### E. Location of Application

A fifth element of integrating application into the expository sermon is location (Adam, 2014, p.31; Perdue, 2010, p.84; Richard, 2004, p.115). Adams (1990, p.68-75) promotes introductory applications. He suggests speaking out of a relevant event, then bridging the gap to listeners. He argues the event should be strongly emotive to capture audience attention. Overdorf (2009, p.159) suggests using a 'pre-application' introduction which identifies a listener need to be addressed in the sermon. Similarly, Capill (2014, p.243) maintains sermon introductions must build rapport with the audience by showing the relevance of the text to be preached.

Chapell (2018, p.74-76) and Murray (2011, p.111) promote the practice of locating application after each main point. Chapell claims 'congregational needs and cultural realities', demand concurrent application to retain audience attention. Similarly, Kim advises preachers to, 'Embed at least one meaningful application for each main point

of the sermon' (2015, p.169) because listeners need to see the relation of the text to their lives. He likens the contents of each main point to the musical style *crescendo*, arguing that 'each point should climax in an application' (2015, p.170). However, Greidanus (1998, p.32, 188) maintains the concurrent approach produces fragmentary applications which fail to convey the full impact of the passage. Overdorf (2009, p.105) agrees, and argues that all the explanation must precede any application in the sermon to demonstrate the validity of the application.

Duguid (in Dodson, 2014, p.80) promotes greater creativity in integration. He suggests genre variety and retaining audience attention demands versatility. Dever and Gilbert (2012, p.95) suggest multiple locations in a single sermon. They argue that in some locations, application should be long and involved, while in other locations one or two sentence exhortations should be used. Richard (2004, p.115) suggests concurrent application in a deductive sermon, but concentrated application when an inductive style is used. By contrast, Capill, refining the *telic* method (Adams, 1990; Fabarez, 2005; Hollinger, 2007), advocates holistic application. He defines it as 'bringing the message as a whole, to the person as a whole, for life as a whole' (2014, p.25). Rather than tagging application on at the end of the sermon or to each main point, Capill argues that the preacher should think in terms of application 'from the beginning of the sermon preparation process to the end' (2014, p.27). Ralston (in Bock & Fanning, 2006, p.305) argues for the same approach, maintaining that while the sermon should be text-centred, it should be 'audience focused' through every part of it.

Adams (1990, p.122-127) suggests applicatory conclusions and offers various approaches: motivational story, questions, exhortations, implementation. Murray (2011, p.115) and Chapell promote application in the closing minute of the sermon. Chapell writes:

The last sixty seconds are typically the most dynamic moments in excellent sermons. With these final words, a preacher marshals the thought and emotion of an entire message into an exhortation that makes all that has preceded clear and compelling (2005, p.254).

## Conclusion

In this section the third theme from the literature on expository preaching has been discussed. Integrating application into the expository sermon has been shown to involve levels, types, illustration, language and location. Different opinions on general and specific applications, pronoun usage, and the location of application have been noted. Such differences indicate a degree of flexibility in these areas in the expository method. However, Overdorf (2009, p.159) claims the most effective way of integrating application varies from sermon to sermon.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter began by defining three key terms in the research question: 'expository sermon', 'application', and 'composition'. From the body of literature on expository preaching, post-1990, three themes relating to the composition of application for the expository sermon were then identified: sourcing, developing, and integrating. The literature review has indicated that there are nuances and differences among homileticians promoting the expository approach to composing sermon application. The use or non-use of technology, gender influence, location of application, general and specific application, and pronoun usage, are examples of such variations which have been noted and discussed. However, the literature review has established that sourcing, developing and integrating application can be identified as the key elements of composing application in the expository method. As this defined method was not

taken from one homiletician but is an assimilation of the opinions of numerous homileticians, primarily Doriani (2001) and Capill (2014), the approach will be referred to as the 'defined expository method' throughout this study.

In this study, the practice of nine expository preachers will be engaged in conversation with this defined method to determine the extent to which it is significant in their experience. In identifying this area as the field of research, it is important to clarify 'where new ground is being broken in the field' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.162). This study contributes to the body of knowledge in the three areas of: Ulster evangelicalism, empirical research and homiletics. First, *Ulster evangelicalism*. The participants belong to an evangelical group in Ulster, whose preaching has never been researched. In discussing research on distinctive 'cultural, regional, and national' preaching styles, Wilson laments the 'vastness of untapped resources' (1992, p.14). This study explores one of those untapped resources. Second, *empirical research*. There are few qualitative studies on composing application. The one published study by Daniel Overdorf (2009), considers preaching in general, and studies four participants from different traditions, with differing sermon styles. All participants in this study are from one tradition and use the expository style. Recent unpublished qualitative studies on sermon application focus on individuals, usually the author (Peacock, 2015; Sturkie, 2016; White, 2016). This study contains nine participants. Third, *homiletics*. This study contributes to the discipline of homiletics by engaging homiletic method and practice in critical conversation. The findings will demonstrate that the defined expository method is 'confirmed, informed and challenged' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) by practice in the field. Practice will 'confirm' the defined method by showing the considerable overlap between method and practice. Practice will also 'inform' the defined method through fresh insights. The method will also be 'challenged' by practice through the

concept that, composing application involves important elements beyond the defined method in the practice of participants, a concept not explored in the literature on expository preaching. In this area, the research ‘deviates from what has already been done’ (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.91).

In these three ways, therefore, this study ‘relates to – and extends – existing research in the field’ (Cohen et al., 2018, p.181). Dainton and Zelley (2019, p.27,28) use the terms *extension* and *intension* to describe method development. *Extension* adds more concepts and builds on what is already established. *Intension* provides a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the original concepts presented in the method. Both types of growth will be evident in this study.

Having in this chapter defined key terms, identified key themes, and established the contribution of this study to the body of knowledge, the methodology and method of this practical theology study will be considered in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHOD

In the previous chapter the three key terms in this study, 'expository sermon', 'application' and 'composition', were defined. Three key themes in the literature on expository preaching, sourcing, developing and integrating application, were then discussed. Finally, the gap in the literature on composing application for the expository sermon was identified. In this chapter the methodology and method selected for this qualitative study will be explained and defended.

While there is no standardised way of doing practical theology, a common model used in research is the pastoral cycle (Ward, 2017, p.96; O'Neill, 2018, p.xii). The basic pastoral cycle consists of experience, social analysis, theological reflection and pastoral planning (Thompson, 2017, p.23,24). Thompson (2017, p.51) claims this model emerged in the 1960s from liberation theology, was illustrated by liberation theologian Segundo (1982), and developed by Kolb (1984) in his experiential learning cycle. Holland (in O'Neill, 2017, p.23,24), however, traces the historical roots of the cycle to the thirteenth century.

The pastoral cycle is used in this research because it:

- is a recognised model for doing practical theology (Thompson, 2017, p. 51)
- is suited to addressing a problem in church ministry (Ward, 2017, p.102)
- ensures balance in the research project between the areas of theology, social science, and practice (Ward, 2017, p.176,177).

In this study, I use the pastoral cycle as interpreted by Swinton and Mowat (2016, p.89-92), consisting of current praxis, contextual analyses, theological reflection, and revised forms of practice. This model is similar to other models based on the pastoral cycle. For example, Richard Osmer's (2008, p.4-12) model of four tasks: descriptive

(what is going on?), interpretive (why is this going on?), normative (what should be going on?), and pragmatic (how might we respond?). Also, Ballard and Pritchard's (2006, p.85, 86) model consisting of experience, exploration, reflection, and action and the four-source model comprised of tradition, culture, experience and position (O'Neill, 2018). However, I selected the model of Swinton and Mowat as a framework for this study because it:

- describes, discusses, and illustrates the role of qualitative research in a practical theology study
- gives priority to theological reflection in the critical conversation between experience, social sciences, and theology
- acknowledges the multi-layered, richly textured, complex nature of experience in its method of complexifying practice (Ward, 2017, p.103,104).

As this study aims to analyse practice revealing its multivalent nature, engage qualitative research and theological reflection in critical conversation, and give theological reflection a superior weighting to social science, I selected this model to guide my research and structure the presentation of the findings. As semi-structured interviews were used to collect data, I selected this model over the four-source model, which is better suited to group reflection (O'Neill, 2018, p.36,174).

Practitioners stress the advantage of being an insider when using the pastoral cycle (O'Neill, 2018, p.164,165). Luna claims this is particularly important in the first and second stages of the cycle (in Wijsen et al., 2005, p.38). Personal experience of the practice researched provides knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the practice in the first stage, while belonging to the participants' group can assist in collecting data in the second stage. As an expository preacher for over twenty years,

I am familiar with the experience explored in this study, and as an ordained minister in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, I am a colleague of the participants. The selected model is now described in relation to this research project.

### **3.1 Stage 1: Current Praxis**

In the first stage of the model the church praxis to be researched is identified. While church practice is not Divine revelation, it is a place where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted, and lived out, and therefore an important and legitimate object of study (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.6). The aim of this pre-reflective stage is to explore the value-laden situation and identify key issues to be examined. Swinton and Mowat suggest that in this stage the researcher may wish to 'explore the literature that surrounds this area' (2016, p.89).

Chapters one and two of this study examined the current praxis. In chapter one, the practice of composing sermon application for the expository sermon was identified as the topic to be explored. Observation, survey, and lived experience established the difficulty of the practice. In chapter two, the body of literature on expository preaching was reviewed. After defining key terms in the literature, the review explored the expository method for composing application for the expository sermon and identified it as sourcing, developing, and integrating application. The review concluded by indicating gaps in the literature which this study attempts to fill.

### **3.2 Stage 2: Cultural/Contextual Analysis**

In the second stage of the cycle, the selected praxis is analysed using outside sources. The purpose of this stage is to enhance and challenge any initial impressions regarding the practice. Theoretical and practical disciplines are drawn into conversation with the practice, which can help the processes of understanding and

reflection (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, p.90-92). As creative insights often come precisely at those places where disciplines overlap or challenge each other, this stage is important. From the social sciences, I selected qualitative research to facilitate the collection of field data and complexify the practice of composing sermon application (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.16,91). Definition, types, and elements of this research method are now discussed.

#### A. Definition of Qualitative Research

In attempting to define qualitative research, some authors emphasise distinctions between qualitative and quantitative research. For example, Denscombe (2007, p.248) suggests qualitative research utilises words and pictures issuing in holistic findings by inductive study, while quantitative research uses facts and numbers leading to precise findings by deductive study. Other authors delineate the chief characteristics of qualitative research in their definitions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p.15-18) summarise these attempts in four characteristics:

- the method is focused on understanding how people make sense out of their lives
- the primary instrument for data collection and analysis is the researcher
- the method of research and analyses is inductive
- the research issues in a rich description of the social phenomenon studied.

From this summary, this study can be described as qualitative research. It is an inductive study carried out by a researcher through field work and analysis, which aims to understand the meaning of experience, and produce a rich description with theories and explanations. Qualitative, rather than quantitative method is used in this study,

because it aims to explore the practice of a set of preachers, rather than measure the frequency of an event.

## B. Type of Qualitative Research

While qualitative research is the commonly used term for field-based inductive study, there is ‘an embarrassment of choices’ (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p.18) regarding the types of approach. Tesch (1990) suggests forty-five different qualitative approaches. Patton (2002) discusses sixteen ‘theoretical traditions’ within qualitative study, while Creswell (2007) combines categories to produce five types: narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study. Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p.23) develop Creswell’s categorisation by adding the categories of critical qualitative research and basic qualitative research. The seven types are summarised in the following table:

<b>Type</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>1. Basic interpretive study</b>	Aims ‘to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences’ (Merriam, 2009, p.23).
<b>2. Narrative research</b>	Aims to understand the meaning of experience as revealed in story, written or spoken (Patton, 2002, p.114).
<b>3. Phenomenology</b>	Aims to depict the essence or basic structure of experience (Merriam, 2009, p.25).
<b>4. Ethnography</b>	Aims to understand the interaction of individuals with their culture ‘by living in that situation’ (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.157).
<b>5. Grounded theory</b>	Aims to build substantive theory grounded in the collected data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.10).
<b>6. Critical research</b>	Aims not only to ‘study and understand society but rather to critique and change society’ (Patton, 2002, p.34).
<b>7. Case study</b>	The case must have finite data collection either regarding the participants to be interviewed or the time for observation (Cohen et al., 2011, p.294).

As the aim of this study is to ascertain how preachers make sense of their practice, I considered the basic interpretive study to be the most appropriate research type. This type explores how people interpret their experiences and construct their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.24). Meaning is not discovered in the studied phenomenon, rather participants construct meaning as ‘they engage with the world they are interpreting’ (Crotty, 1998, p.43). Chapters five and six of this study contain the voices of participants.

The basic interpretive study can be described as hermeneutic phenomenology (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.105). Phenomenology is concerned with description, ‘because it wants to be attentive to how things appear, it wants to let things speak for themselves’ (Van Manen, 1990, p.181). In this study the phenomenological element is evident in the rich description containing the stories of participants. However, these stories are not merely description; they are a source of knowledge. Hermeneutics interprets the phenomenological data (Seidman, 2006, p.8). Smith et al. (2009, p.109) identify three levels of interpreting data: the participant attempts to interpret her experience, the researcher interprets her interpretation, and the reader interprets the researcher’s hermeneutic. Gadamer (1981, p.272) promotes a fusion of the horizons of participant and researcher to arrive at an understanding of the phenomenological data. In this study, the hermeneutical element appears in the findings, theological reflection, and conclusion, as I attempt to produce explanations, rather than mere description (Mason, 2002, p.7).

While the basic interpretive study is used in this project, overlap with other qualitative types occurs. For example, an element of ethnography is evident in my insider/outsider approach. Nevertheless, I concluded the most appropriate method for gaining information-rich data was interview, not observation. While all participants are from

one group, I did not interview all potential participants from the group, as in a case study.

### C. Elements of Qualitative Research

In using the basic interpretive study type, I made choices regarding the elements of sampling, interviewing, coding, analysing, validity, and ethics.

#### 1. Sampling

Sample is 'the unit of analysis' selected by the researcher out of all possibilities available (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.95). In this project, I used purposive sampling and convenience to select information-rich cases for in-depth study. First, purposive sampling. Patton explains purposive sampling as, 'Information-rich cases from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the inquiry' (2002, p.230). Purposive sampling benefits from criteria to identify suitable participants (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p.70). The criteria I used were:

- uses the expository style
- considers application a necessary element of the sermon
- has a minimum of 10 years preaching experience in a congregation.

This criterion sought to ensure potential participants had considerable experience in and commitment to expository and applicatory preaching. I refined this criterion further by using reputational case sampling (Cohen et al., 2018, p.219). Participants with one or more of the following criteria were identified:

- regular conference speaker
- post ordination theological qualification
- teaching position in a theological College.

This additional criterion aimed to ensure participants had recognised preaching ability by being a regular conference speaker and/or evidenced a reflective approach to ministry through advanced theological study, and/or demonstrated a heightened level of understanding of church ministry by experience of teaching in an academic church context. Using both criteria, I identified ten potential participants. One potential participant was unable to be interviewed due to ill health. Of the nine participants interviewed, seven had post ordination qualifications, six were regular conference speakers, and six had experience of teaching in the context of theological education.

Second, convenience. While Seidman (2006, p.40) claims inconvenience can overcomplicate research, Merriam and Tisdell (2016, p.98) warn that an overemphasis on convenience can produce information-poor data. However, Merriam and Tisdell concede that some dimension of convenience 'almost always figures into sample selection' because of constraints of time, money, location and availability of potential participants. While I considered availability of field data a key issue (Cohen et al., 2018, p.213), I did not allow convenience to determine the sample selection. Rather, meeting the criteria was the determining factor.

All participants in this study were ordained preachers in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). I considered an international sample, an inter-church tradition sample, and an inter-denominational sample. However, initial explorations of these sample types indicated considerable difficulties regarding the availability of potential participants. These difficulties resulted in the sample consisting of preachers in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland.

Convenience raises the issue of the generalisability of a study. Cohen et al. claim the 'generalizability of a study can be negligible, when the element of convenience is in

the sample' (2018, p.218). While convenience is an element of sample selection in this study, I sought to ensure the sample had potential generalizability by including variety in experience, academic ability, ministry setting, and age. Besides this variety, the homiletic problem explored in this study is common among preachers, as chapter one has indicated. Therefore, preachers with different traditions, denominations, cultures, genders, and preaching styles should potentially experience resonance and identification with participants.

There is no agreed answer to sample size. A common suggestion for sample size is an adequate number of participants 'to answer the question posed at the beginning of the study' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.101). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.202) recommend researching until saturation is reached, though Corbin and Strauss (2008, p.148) question if complete saturation is achievable. Saturation did not determine the sample size in this study. Rather, I considered the data collected from nine participants to have answered the research question, therefore no further interviews were conducted (Mason, 2002, p.134). I considered the field data collected contained 'considerable breadth and depth of understanding' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p.149) regarding the studied phenomenon.

Ten potential participants determined by purposive sampling and convenience were sent the following documents (see Appendices):

- letter of welcome
- participant information sheet
- interview guide.

## *2. Interviewing*

The instrument I selected for collecting data in the field was interviewing, described by Burgess as a 'conversation with a purpose' (1984, p.102). I used the common interview format of person-to-person encounter, 'a process in which a researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to a research study' (De Marrias, 2004, p.55). Interviewing, therefore, differs from everyday conversation, which usually occurs naturally and without planning (Dyer, 1995, p.57). Hammersley (2013, p.69-72) claims this disturbance of the natural setting diminishes the genuineness of the data collected. A short-stay, quick-fix activity risks 'betraying the complexity of the social situation that qualitative research seeks to portray and understand, which can only be achieved by sustained research in the field' (Atkinson & Delamont, 2006). However, Patton defends interviewing by claiming some actions are unobservable. He mentions 'feelings, thoughts and intentions' and continues, 'We cannot observe behaviours that took place at some previous point in time, situations that preclude the presence of an observer' (2002, p.340). As the focus of my study was not the observable and audible public delivery of a sermon, or the analysis of recorded sermons, but the unobservable 'feelings, thoughts and intentions' of the preacher in the practice of composing sermon application, I concluded interviews were required. While group interviews may have permitted the involvement of more participants, I decided such a research tool would not facilitate the necessary in-depth analyses of the practice being explored. In the gathering of data for this study, therefore, participants were interviewed individually.

As the structured interview type resembles an oral form of written survey and prevents accessing participants' perspectives on their world, I used semi-structured interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.110). Open-ended, less structured questions allowed

participants to define their world in unique ways. However, as specific pieces of information were required, some structured questions were included. Nevertheless, the bulk of the interview was guided by a list of topics to be explored. This allowed me 'to respond to the situation on hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.110). Thus, the element of semi-structure provided focus on the research question during the interviews, while allowing me flexibility to develop areas in which participants provided information-rich data.

I also used an interview guide (King & Horrocks, 2010, p.35) outlining the topics to be covered in the interview (Appendices). The guide was influenced by Seidman's (2006, p.16) proposal of three interviews covering life history, experience, and reflection. I forwarded the guide to participants prior to their single interview, thereby allowing opportunity to prepare. This approach proved fruitful as all participants attended their interview with extensive notes. Prior to interviewing participants, I conducted two pilot interviews which familiarised me with the technology to be used, and the experience of interviewing.

Interviews took place over several weeks during January to March 2019. They were conducted in the Irish Baptist College, Moira, or a neutral venue. My supervisor was advised in advance of the date and time of the interviews, held in neutral venues, and of their termination. Interviews lasted between 1.5 to 2.5 hours. The interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder, backed up by an iPhone. I also took field notes to capture unusual body language and post-interview remarks. I transcribed each recorded interview immediately and printed off a copy. I read over the transcript numerous times and used the constant comparative coding method to identify

emerging themes. This approach allowed me to explore new themes more fully as the interviews progressed.

### 3. *Coding and Analysis of Data*

The data used in the open coding process consisted of the transcribed interviews and notes made during and after the interviews (Davies, 2007, p.193). Open coding was as expansive as possible and began at the start of data collection. The categories I identified in the data sought to meet the following criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.212,213):

- answer the research question
- be exhaustive
- be mutually exclusive
- be conceptually congruent.

Analytical coding followed open coding. Three of the four key themes which emerged from the data had a not unexpected correlation to key themes in the interview schedule (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.271). As participants were asked about the importance, method and difficulty of application, it is not surprising they form major themes. The fourth theme, however, did surprise me.

I recognise my approach to coding has the obvious danger of attempting to force data into pre-determined categories, rather than categories determined by the researcher, or naturally emerging from the unique data collected. Inductive data analysis, rather than a priori categories, promotes validity in qualitative research. However, Cohen et al. maintain, 'There is no one single or correct way to analyse and present qualitative data: how one does it should abide by *fitness for purpose*' (2018, p.643). As the purpose of this study was to determine the significance of the defined expository

method in the experience of participants, and interviews were based on that method, I considered it appropriate to use 'pre-ordinate categories' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.644, 664) to organise and present the data. However, I have attempted to retain an inductive approach by showing sensitivity to the data and by creating 'responsive categories' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.644) as emerging data required. This approach is evident in the findings, where data informs and challenges method, and especially in the fourth theme which considers factors beyond the homiletic method.

#### *4. Validity*

Despite biases in respondents and researchers (Cohen et al., 2018, p.245), eleven types of validity in research practice (Cohen et al., 2018, p.246) and the term 'valid' being challenged (Maxwell, 1992), validity is considered an important element of empirical study. Internal and external validity was attempted in this research.

Internal validity, which aims at matching the findings to reality by capturing 'what is really there', was attempted by using the following three strategies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.242):

- feedback on findings from some participants
- declaration of the researcher's position, biases, dispositions, and assumptions regarding the research
- examination of the findings by a supervisor, committee, or colleague.

In this study, all participants had the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and the findings chapters. My position and biases are declared throughout the study, and supervisors have examined the presentation of the findings.

External validity addresses the question: are the findings generalisable or transferrable? In qualitative research, a single case or (as in this study), a small, non-

random, purposeful sample is selected precisely because the researcher does not want to find out what is generally true of many but of one case. Thus, it can be argued generalisability is not the concern of the researcher, but of the reader of the research who wishes to apply the findings to another situation (Cohen et al., 2018, p.258). Flick (2015, p.240) adds a further caution, by raising the concern of sacrificing the specific context of the study, which gives it value, in attempting generalisability. However, to facilitate potential transferability, this study provides a thick description of the situation of participants in chapter 4.

## 5. Ethics

The ethics of qualitative research have been extensively discussed (Patton, 2002, p.563; Silverman, 2013, p.161; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 260–266). However, ethical practice comes down to the individual researcher's own values and ethics (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.262). Patton considers the credibility of the researcher to be fundamental, and defines it as 'intellectual rigour, professional integrity and methodological competence' (2002, p.570). In this study, I anticipated ethical dilemmas in the four areas of: collecting data, interviewing, analysing data, and disseminating findings.

### a. Collecting Data

In collecting data, I considered the two issues of informed consent and my relation to participants. The issue of informed consent includes the following four elements (Cohen et al., 2018, p.122):

- *competence*: participants have the capacity to make the right decisions
- *voluntarism*: participants freely choose to participate in the research
- *full information*: participants' consent is fully informed
- *comprehension*: participants fully understand the nature of the research project.

Informed consent was achieved in this study by a letter of welcome and a letter of information (Appendices) being sent to all potential participants in advance of the interview.

The issue of the relationship between researcher and participant considers whether that relation will affect the collection of data. I had a professional relationship with participants, though no issue of rank was involved. As all participants were male, ordained ministers in the RPCI and committed to applicatory and expository preaching, my position as a male, ordained minister in the RPCI, committed to expository and applicatory preaching, located me as an insider researcher regarding gender, denomination and preaching style. However, in other areas I was an outsider. Some participants were in a different age category from myself, ministered in a different setting, had different post ordination qualifications, and all had more, or less experience of preaching ministry and lecturing.

I was conscious of the issue of power in this insider/outsider relationship during the interviews (Seidman, 2013, p101). The insider aspect of the relationship had the potential to make participants reluctant to share with a colleague their personal struggles or major successes. The outsider element of the relationship had the potential to make participants reluctant to share information with me because of differences in age, qualifications and experience. To minimise any adverse impact on participants from the insider/outsider relationship I sought to adopt a stance that was 'non-judgemental, sensitive and respectful of the respondents' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.130). I detected no evidence of my relationship with participants adversely affecting the collection of data. My insider relationship seemed to encourage participants to share experiences and detail difficulties with a researcher whom they knew. My outsider relationship created enough distance from the participants to

enable me to 'ask real questions and to explore, not to share, assumptions' (Seidman, 2013, p.102).

Flick maintains that all qualitative researchers usually fulfil four roles: stranger, visitor, insider and initiate (1998, p.59). As a researcher changes roles throughout a qualitative study, 'role conflict, strain or ambiguity' (Cohen et al, 2018, p.311) can be experienced, and may result in considerable emotional and psychological challenges (Walford, 2001, p.62). Throughout the research process I was conscious of adopting different roles. In arranging the sample, I drew on my insider position (insider, initiate) to identify potential participants and secure informed consent. During the interviews I was conscious of fulfilling an outsider role (stranger, visitor), as I sought to retain objectivity and obtain information from others while not divulging information about myself (Cohen, 2018, p.311). Adopting these different roles involved a degree of emotional and psychological strain for me.

The issue of rapport with participants includes 'trust, intimacy, reciprocity, intrusion, consideration and access' (Cohen, et al, 2018, p.312). While rapport is a key factor in prolonged ethnographic research, it is also an important element in one-off, semi-structured interviews, as information-rich data is sought. While rapport is usually established over time (De Laine, 2000, p83) and changes over time as people and circumstances change (Maxwell, 2005, p.83), I found that as an insider researcher I had already established a measure of rapport with the participants. I sought to use and develop this rapport in my pre-interview communications with participants, and in the interviews.

## b. Interviewing

While risks to participants were minimal in this study, potential risks included: the feeling of an invasion of privacy, embarrassment by certain questions, and the divulgence of details never intended to be revealed (Davies, 2007, p.159). Unanticipated long-term negative effects may be caused through painful debilitating memories surfacing in an interview situation, even if the topic appears routine. However, an interview may also allow participants to gain valuable self-knowledge, a sense that the interview process has been therapeutic, or an increased sense of self-worth as opinions, experiences, and successes are shared.

Consideration of these negative and positive effects of interviewing raises the issue of the role of the interviewer. Patton (2002, p.405) reminds the researcher that the task of the interviewer is 'first and foremost to gather data', not to judge or be a therapist. He recommends the interviewer refers the interviewee to resources for assistance in dealing with any problems that may surface during an interview. No problems surfaced during the interviews in this research. All participants who subsequently discussed their interview experience with me expressed positive effects. The role of the researcher as a gatherer of data and not a judge was emphasised to each participant at the commencement of the interview. No monetary award was offered for participation in the interview (Barbour, 2009, p.80). However, as a token of gratitude for their efforts, I felt it appropriate to offer participants one of three books on preaching after the interview.

## c. Analysing Data

As data is filtered through the researcher's theoretical positions and biases, ethical issues arise. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument for data

collection and analysis, deciding what to collect, how to collect it, and what is or is not important. In this study, I sought to respond with openness and submission to the data. I anticipated the data would discover new techniques for composing sermon application. However, as well as revealing some new techniques, I was surprised to discover the data provided a more comprehensive answer.

#### d. Disseminating Findings

In considering the dissemination of the findings, the ethical issues of confidentiality and anonymity are encountered. As the research will be available for general reading through the Chester repository, total confidentiality is not possible to guarantee. Nonetheless, every effort has been made not to disclose information that might identify any participant (Cohen et al., 2018, p.130). Therefore, codes (P.1 etc) are used instead of names, and place names are omitted, to preserve anonymity. Data from interviews has been stored on a password protected personal computer. The printed transcripts have been placed in binders in a locked drawer.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Chester for this research project (Appendices).

Chapters four, five and six detail the second stage of the cycle. The chapters describe the complexification of the church practice of composing application. In chapter four, the situation of participants is described. In chapters five and six, four themes arising from the analysis of the field data are reported and evaluated.

### 3.3 Stage 3: Theological Reflection

Theological reflection occurs when church tradition and Christian Scripture engage in dialogue with the research topic to determine 'authentic revelation' (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.92). Thompson defines theological reflection as an activity that:

...relates insights and resources from a theological tradition, specifically and carefully, to contemporary situations and vice versa, so that a mutually enlightening appraisal may result (2017, p.8).

Thompson considers theological reflection to be central to practical theology (2017, p.155). She claims it is at this stage in the cycle that theology is utilised 'in a more formal manner'. Similarly, Ballard and Pritchard describe this stage as a 'crucial moment' (2006, p.128). The objection of Ward that the pastoral cycle 'makes theology into one stage in a process' (2017, p.102) is answered by the observation of Cameron et al. (2016, p.51), that theology is present in the opinions of homiletics and participants throughout the cycle. However, debate persists on the proper relationship between qualitative research and theological reflection. Three positions are outlined here.

First, Pattison (2002) promotes the 'mutual critical conversation' model. This model promotes a conversation between experience, situational exploration, and theological reflection, which leads to revised practice. In this approach, the three conversation partners have equal weighting so theology can challenge practice and research can change theology. The advantage of this model is that opportunity is given to challenge interpretations of Scripture and traditional practices that have become distorted, forgotten, or deliberately overlooked (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.78). However, the

weakness in giving equal weighting to all conversation partners is that the social sciences can challenge theology at a fundamental level.

Second, Hunsinger suggests the priority of theology over the social sciences after 'the Chalcedonian pattern' (1995, p.63). She identifies the relation of the two natures of Christ described in the Chalcedonian creed as indissoluble differentiation, inseparable unity, indestructible order, and logical priority (1995, p.68). This relation becomes a pattern for conversation between theology and social science in her approach. She argues that social science has relative independence from theology, but ultimate dependence on it. Swinton and Mowat concur with the logical priority of theology, but claim her model is incomplete. They argue theology should also be subject to critical reflection and challenge by social science, because 'divine revelation is interpreted by human beings who are fallen, contextually bound and have a variety of different personal and denominational agendas' (2016, p.85).

Third, Swinton and Mowat (2016, p.86) suggest bringing together the two partners of social science and theological reflection by hospitality, conversion, and critical faithfulness. They explain the three terms as:

- *hospitality*: theological reflection welcomes qualitative research and takes what it says seriously, but without an *a priori* assumption that theology needs to merge, follow or fully accept the perspective on the world that is being offered
- *conversion to God*: qualitative research is sanctified and used appropriately within the church to challenge Christian practices and ideas
- *critical faithfulness*: while acknowledging the Divine givenness of Scripture and the genuine working of the Spirit in the interpretation of what is given, theological reflection is realistic about the interpretative nature of grasping after

Divine revelation, and recognises truth is at least to an extent emergent and dialectic.

In this study, written from a conservative evangelical position, I recognise the priority of theology in the conversation between the situation, social sciences, and theological reflection. However, I also acknowledge the reality of fallible interpretation and application of Scripture within church tradition. Therefore, my approach in theological reflection aligns with Swinton and Mowat's, which allows social science to challenge the interpretation and application of Scripture and practises within church tradition. In the second part of chapter 6, theological reflection engages in critical conversation with theory and qualitative research.

### **3.4 Stage 4: Formulating revised forms of Practice**

Stage four of the cycle returns to the church practice considered in stage one (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.92). Qualitative research and theological reflection combine with original reflections on the church practice to produce new and challenging praxis, that enable the initial situation to be transformed into ways that are authentic and faithful. Chapter 7 suggests revised forms of practice.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has described the methodology and method adopted in this study. The methodology of phenomenological hermeneutics is adopted, and the method of semi-structured interviews is used. The framework of the study has been shown to be the pastoral cycle as interpreted by Swinton and Mowat (2016). Throughout the research, the selected model was not followed consecutively. Rather, movement back and forth from one stage to another occurred as new insights emerged, and fresh questions arose.

Having described the methodology as qualitative phenomenology and theological reflection and the method as the pastoral cycle and semi-structured interviews, the next chapter begins the second stage of the cycle, by describing the situation of the participants.

## **STAGE 2: CULTURAL/CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS**

### **CHAPTER 4: THE PARTICIPANTS**

The previous chapter identified this study as a qualitative research study utilising semi-structured interviewing to gather data from nine participants. This chapter describes the situation of the participants. All participants in this study are ordained ministers in the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). All serve, or have served, as pastors in the province of Ulster for a minimum of ten years. At the time of interviewing, their average age was 54 years and their average period in ministry was 27 years. All can be identified as confessional evangelicals through their subscription to the Westminster Standards (1647) (Code, 2008, 8.02).

Knowledge of the contextual situation of participants is crucial to interpreting data in a qualitative study. Silverman claims such knowledge facilitates ‘theoretical sensitivity’ (2017, p.83). The contextual situation informs the theories which emerge from a research study. Detailing the situation of participants also helps determine the potential generalisability of a study. Therefore, the twin purposes of this chapter are to provide theoretical sensitivity and to facilitate the generalisability of this study. The political, religious, denominational, and personal situation of participants will be described in this chapter.

#### **4.1 Political Situation of Participants**

The current political situation of Ulster is unique and provides a challenging environment for church ministry. Two prominent characteristics of the current political situation are division and animosity.

## A. Division in Northern Ireland

One political feature of the province in which participants minister, is identified by sociologists as 'a deeply divided society' (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010, p.139). The division is into two distinct communities. One self-identifies as Catholic-nationalist-Irish (41%), the other as Protestant-unionist-British (42%) (NINIS, 2014). While an increasing number of the younger generation self-identify as 'Northern Irish', the term contains a double meaning. For Protestant young people, it means the preservation of union with Britain. For Catholics, it includes a desire for re-unification with the Republic of Ireland. This current political division in the province is evidenced in five ways:

- *residential location*: 66% of the 1.8 million population live in an area where the resident community is either 90% Protestant, or 90% Catholic (NINIS, 2014)
- *ethnic interaction*: 62% of 16-25 year-olds have never had a meaningful conversation with a member of the opposite community (NINIS, 2014)
- *intermarriage*: only 10% of marriages are mixed (NIMMA, 2019)
- landholding*: Protestants occupy the fertile lowlands, leaving higher rocky ground for Catholics (Mulholland, 2003, p.1). While 51% of farmers self-identify as Protestant and 42% as Catholic, 85% of Catholic farmers occupy 'very small farms' compared to 68% of Protestant farmers (DAERA, 2018).
- *Education*: 92% of children attend separate faith schools (NICIE, 2019).

This divided society is also characterised by animosity (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010, p.124).

## B. Animosity in Northern Ireland

Animosity in the province is called by sociologists, 'the Northern Ireland problem'. This 'problem' can only be understood by some knowledge of Irish history over the past millennium (Kee, 1980). The main historical causes of current political grievances among nationalists and Protestants are now outlined.

### *1. Nationalist Grievances*

The main nationalist grievances concern British occupation, discrimination, and violence. First, British occupation. Martin considers the Normans' failure to conquer the whole of Ireland in 1170 the root cause of current grievances. He writes, 'The tragedy of the Norman invasion was not the conquest of Ireland-for that never took place-but its half conquest' (in Moody & Martin, 2011, p.122). Such failure resulted in conflict between the occupying English Irish and the resident Gaelic Irish over land, culture, and language. British occupation of Ireland has taken three forms since then: direct rule (1170-1828), home rule (1829-1921), and rule of Northern Ireland (1922-2021). Such prolonged occupation has been deeply offensive to nationalists (English, 2006, p.376).

Second, British discrimination against Catholics. During the Protestant ascendancy (1691-1828), Penal laws passed by English parliaments restricted trade and land purchases by Catholics in Ireland (Mulholland, 2003, p.5). In the early twentieth century, thirty percent of the population of Belfast was Catholic, but only five percent were in skilled jobs (Mulholland, 2003, p.14). Post-1922 British discrimination against Catholics was evident in the locales of employment, housing, and policing, resulting in Catholic uprisings (Whyte, 2011, p.300). Such historical discrimination is still remembered with bitterness by nationalists (Edwards & McGrattan, 2010. p.144).

Third, cases of British violence towards Catholics. The 'most infamous' siege of Drogheda by Oliver Cromwell in 1649 is one case (Connolly, 2002, p.167). Clarke claims the event 'became indelibly impressed upon the folk memory of the Irish' (in Moody & Martin, 2011, p.173). Mulholland agrees and writes, 'The depredations of Cromwell's soldiers left a lasting and bitter legacy' (2003, p.3). Similarly, English concludes 'Cromwellian violence in Ireland will not and should not be forgotten' (2007, p.63). Another case is 'Bloody Sunday'. On 29th September 1972, the British army killed thirteen unarmed Catholics involved in a civil rights march in Londonderry. Added to these two specific cases is the prolonged violence toward Catholics during the Troubles (1968-1998). Nationalists consider the killing of 245 Catholics by the British army to be 'multiple instances of atrocities inflicted by state forces' (McGrattan, 2010, p.144). Besides these killings, loyalist (Protestant) paramilitaries murdered over 700 Catholics.

These three historical issues continue to impact the attitude of nationalists, and foster animosity towards Protestants within the province.

## *2. Protestant Grievances*

Protestant grievances focus on mistreatment by Catholics in two eras. The Protestant Plantation (1603-1650) onslaught is a minor cause of grievance. In 1603, Ireland was conquered by the British for the first time since occupation in 1170 (Moody & Martin, 2011, p.162). To strengthen this dominance and minimise Catholic revolt, Protestants were relocated from Scotland and England into Ireland. In 1641, Catholics, fearing Puritan rule, supported the English monarchy by revolting against Protestants. The rebellion 'veered into an onslaught against the settlers in Ulster' (Mulholland, 2003, p.3). As Plantation protestants are direct ancestors of some current Ulster Protestants,

this onslaught is still remembered. However, the major source of Protestant grievance is the Troubles. During the Troubles, 1,250 Protestants were murdered by nationalists. This relatively recent experience has left many Protestants with deep hurt and animosity towards Catholics. Most of the participants in this study were ministering to Protestant congregants in predominantly Protestant communities within this divided province.

Grievances on both sides are sustained by differing ideologies and annual celebrations of historic events. The political ideology of the nationalist community is a united Ireland, and the use of the Irish language. The ideology of unionists is retention of union with Britain, and the English language. Division and animosity between the communities is consolidated by the annual marching season from easter to September, celebrating Protestant victories.

Participants in this study are Protestants who minister in this divided community. The division and animosity in Ulster society impacts their sermon applications, examples of which will be discussed in chapter 5.

## **4.2 Religious Situation of Participants**

Considering the unionist community is predominantly Protestant and the nationalist community is predominantly Catholic, it is no surprise religion contributes to the lack of inter-communal unity in the province (Bruce, 1989, p.249). Within the unionist community, evangelicalism, described as 'the subculture of Northern Ireland' (Mitchell & Ganiel, 2011, p.19), is an influential movement. As all participants self-identify as evangelical, discussion of this Christian movement is important.

## A. Evangelicalism

Various theories are suggested regarding the origin of evangelicalism. Noll (2011) claims evangelicalism emerged from Protestantism in the early eighteenth century as a distinct expression of Christianity. Jordan agrees with this claim and writes:

It is also possible to make a distinction between evangelicalism, as a distinct religious and cultural movement that emerged within Protestantism in the eighteenth century, and the historical faith in the evangel which has been confessed by orthodox Christians since the time of the early church (2001, p.18).

However, Packer (1958, p.38) asserts evangelicalism is not synonymous with Protestantism in the sixteenth century, puritanism in the seventeenth century, methodism in the eighteenth century, or revivalism in the nineteenth century, but with apostolic Christianity in the first century. This difference of opinion can be reconciled by appreciating the differing perspectives of the authors. Jordan identifies the origin of the term 'Evangelical', while Packer identifies the origin of the theology of evangelicalism.

Though not without its critics, the most universally accepted definition of evangelicalism is provided by Bebbington (Dochuk, 2015, p.63). His quadrilateral model of evangelicalism consists of four elements: conversionism, biblicism, crucicentrism, and activism (1989, p.14). He asserts that an evangelical believes:

- a person must be converted or 'born again'
- the Bible is the inspired word of God
- Christ's death on the cross was an actual historical event necessary for the salvation of the world
- Christians must exercise their faith through social action and evangelism.

While Warner claims this definition represents ‘less of a theological matrix than a static summation of the essence of the evangelical tradition’, he asserts ‘all evangelicals would give assent to Bebbington’s quadrilateral’ (2007, p.20). McGrath agrees with Warner and applauds its ‘inclusivity of diversity’ (1994, p.51). Others suggest amplifications. Stott (1999) promotes the inclusion of a trinitarian reference, Larsen (2007) a mention of the Holy Spirit, and Dochuk (2015) an eschatological statement. However, Boal et al. (1997, p.99) adopt a reductionist approach. They propose belief in the Bible as God’s Word and the necessity of a conversion experience, as a sufficient definition. Bebbington (1994, p.367) defends his definition by arguing that any amplification would result in the exclusion of some evangelical groups, and any reduction would result in too broad a grouping.

#### B. Evangelicalism in Northern Ireland

Evangelicalism in Northern Ireland is a sizeable, unique, and complex movement. Firstly, sizeable. In 2011, one third of Protestants self-identified as evangelical (Mitchell & Ganiel, 2011, p.28). A survey of Belfast church goers (Boal et al., 1997, p.96) discovered the proportions of evangelicals in Protestant denominations, as shown in the table below.

<b>Denomination</b>	<b>Percentage claiming to be evangelical</b>
Presbyterian	38%
Church of Ireland	27%
Methodist	43%
Congregational	79%
Baptist	83%
Pentecostal	87%
Other Presbyterian; Free, Reformed, Evangelical	94%

Despite evangelicalism being a sizeable movement, Jordan claims 'it is one of the least understood and least engaged sectors of Northern Ireland's society'. He continues 'typical responses to the movement often reflect a mixture of bewilderment, disdain and fear' (2001, p.xi).

Secondly, unique. Just as evangelicalism under Luther, Wesley, and the Fundamentalist movement adapted to differing circumstances, so Ulster evangelicalism has adapted to the unique circumstances of Northern Ireland (Jordan, 2001, p.16). Mitchel identifies Ulster evangelicalism's 'own particular characteristics' (2003, p.114) as attitudes to Rome and the spiritual significance of the land of Ulster. However, Mitchell and Ganiel caution against an overemphasis on uniqueness. They claim Ulster evangelicals adhere to Bebbington's definition and so 'have much in common with Evangelicals across the world' (2011, p.3).

Thirdly, complex. Mitchell and Ganiel assert 'academic research has long established that evangelicals in Northern Ireland are a diverse group' (2011, p.4). Ballie also recognises the complexity of the movement by claiming, 'Evangelicals are not a homogeneous group, there is a spectrum of theological belief' (2002, p.78). Three taxonomies of Ulster evangelicalism attempt to clarify the complexity of the group. Brewer and Higgins (1998) identify two types of Ulster evangelical: *covenantal* and *pharisaic*. *Covenantal* relates the twin Old Testament ideas of land and chosen people to Ulster Protestantism. *Pharisaic* promotes the idea of salvation by faith alone in Jesus, and strongly opposes Rome. These two types have some overlap with the 'particular characteristics' suggested by Mitchel (2003, p.114).

Jordan offers a more nuanced classification, by suggesting six types of evangelical. *Pietists* emphasise a personal and devotional faith, which 'assumes that private

meditation, without the help of a tradition, is the right way to understand the Scriptures' (2001, p.30). *Confessionals* are concerned with preserving the doctrinal content of the evangelical faith and are:

...most likely to describe their understanding of evangelicalism by reference to a set of essential doctrines which are non-negotiable. These have often been encoded into a confession or statement of belief to which these evangelicals would give assent (Jordan, 2001, p.32).

*Oppositionals* are opposed to liberalism and Roman Catholicism. *Inclusivists* seek open engagement with various Christian traditions. *Charismatics* promote the supernatural gifts of the Spirit and adopt a less intellectualised form of evangelicalism. *Culturalists* are 'evangelical by virtue of experience, lifestyle and even mindset, but would not consciously use the term to describe themselves' (2001, p.33). Jordan acknowledges these six categories are not watertight and that most evangelicals 'straddle a number of categories' (2001, p.22). While Jordan's taxonomy mentions attitudes to Rome, it does not include any reference to land.

Mitchell and Ganiel (2011, p.28) opt for four categories:

- *traditional*: covenantal relation of church and state, exclusivity of Jesus as Saviour, political violence a last resort
- *mediating*: separation of church and state, pluralism in religion, non-violence
- *pietistic*: with-drawl from society and politics, non-violence
- *post-evangelicals*: move beyond evangelical labels.

These three attempts at categorising Ulster evangelicalism illustrate the complex nature of this group to which the participants belong. The findings will show that

aspects of Ulster evangelical culture, such as charismaticism, pietism and confessionalism, impact the participants' composition of application.

Some commonalities between these three taxonomies are evident. *Pietistic* appears in two taxonomies. *Post* and *culturalists* are similar. *Pharisaic*, *confessional*, *oppositional* and *traditional* have elements in common. *Inclusivists* and *mediating* also have similarities. One difference in these three taxonomies is that Rome and land, prominent in the first categorisation, do not appear in the last. This suggests these elements are no longer defining factors of Ulster evangelicalism.

From these taxonomies, participants in this study can be described primarily as *confessional* evangelicals because of their adherence to the Westminster standards (1647). Jackman (2019, p.9) traces a strong connection between confessional evangelicals and expository preachers, through their high view of Scripture (WCF, ch.1). Jordan claims application of Scripture to life is a prominent attribute of Ulster confessional evangelicals. He writes, 'For confessional evangelicals it is not enough to give mental assent to a set of doctrines, if there is no effort at applying those doctrines in the context of a changed life' (2001, p.33). Such commitment to expository preaching and application of Scripture makes confessional evangelicals in Ulster suitable candidates for non-probability purposive sample selection to explore the composition of application for the expository sermon.

### 4.3 Denominational Situation of Participants

As previously indicated in this chapter, Boal et al. (1997, p.76) divide the Protestant denominational landscape of Ulster into seven groupings. The largest groups are Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, and Methodist. The smaller groups are Baptist, Charismatic, Congregational and Other Presbyterian. Their taxonomy of 'Other Presbyterian' is Free Presbyterian Church of Ulster (FPCU), Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ireland (EPCI), and Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland (RPCI). While Boal et al. fail to explore the 'Other Presbyterian' grouping, Mitchel and Cooke perceive distinctions in it (Mitchel, 2003, p.117; Cooke, 1996, p.37,111). They claim the FPCU is a localised form of fundamentalist and oppositional evangelicalism, while the RPCI and EPCI belong to the 'new evangelicals'.

The 'new evangelicals' emerged as a group in the 1950's in reaction to fundamentalism. Tidball (1994, p.13) summarises the distinction between these two evangelical parties. Fundamentalists promote a dictation theory of inspiration, exclusive use of the Authorised Version, and literalism in interpretation. 'New evangelicals' promote dynamic inspiration, modern translations, and grammatical-historical interpretation. Barr (1978) considers this distinction overdone. He mentions the shared rationalism of the two parties in accepting the circular argument that the Bible is God's Word, because it claims to be God's Word. Harris (1998, p.7) agrees with Barr, citing the shared conviction of the two groups regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. However, while New Evangelicals agree with fundamentalists that Scripture is the supreme authority, they differ on important issues, as Tidball (1994) has demonstrated. Therefore, Mitchel seems justified in concluding that:

Given the range of issues over which they differ, it is quite defensible to argue that there is a real and identifiable polarity between what are two overlapping but distinct forms of conservative Christianity (2003, p.120).

He accurately concludes his discussion by describing the RPCI as part of the 'smaller and more theologically conservative wing' of evangelicalism in Ulster (2003, p.192).

All participants in this study are ordained ministers in the RPCI. The historical and homiletical aspects of their denomination are now considered.

#### A. Historical

The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland was formed in 1691. It was not a secession from the revolution Church of Scotland, established by King William III in 1690, as some other Scottish denominations were. Rather, as Donnachie claims, Covenanters see 'their church as continuing in an unbroken line from the time of the Reformation in 1560' (2016, p.15). Their formation outside the revolution Church was caused by the established Church's acceptance of patronage and its indifference to the descending obligations of the National Covenant (1638) and Solemn League and Covenant (1643) (Testimony, 1912, p.100-105; Loughridge, 2000, p.8). The covenants, based on the King's Confession (1581), emphasised the headship of Christ over State, Church, Family and Individuals (Thompson, 2012, p.77). Some Plantation Protestants in Ulster sympathised with the convictions of the Scottish covenanters (Loughridge, 2000, p.13). Cooke, in describing the origin of the RPCI writes, 'While the political situation in Ulster was different from Scotland, ministers and congregations in agreement with their principles gradually established themselves in different parts of the province' (1996, p.34).

The first minister of the RPCI, William Martin, was ordained in 1756 and the first Presbytery, at which the church officially acquired its name, met in 1763 (Thompson, 2012, p.63). The first Synod was held in 1811. Membership in the RPCI peaked in 1880 at 4,800 (Loughridge, 2000, p.109) and today is around 2,000, confirming the observation of Mitchell and Ganiel that the RPCI has always been one of 'the smaller denominations' (2011, p.49) in Ulster. The denomination has thirty-five congregations in Northern Ireland, seven congregations in the Republic of Ireland, one congregation in France and a new work in southern Spain. Within the denomination there are currently 35 serving ministers, nine of whom were interviewed in this study.

## B. Homiletical

The Reformed Theological College (RTC), Belfast, was established in 1854 for the purpose of training candidates for pastoral ministry in the RPCI (Leahy, 2004; Code, 2008, 11.03). Its establishment was considered a produce of covenant renewal by the denomination in 1853 (Thompson, 2012, p.78). Currently the RTC promotes expository style preaching. This is evidenced by its:

- students being required to learn Hebrew and Greek (Code, 2008, 11.07)
- current textbook in Homiletics being *Biblical Preaching* by Haddon Robinson (2014)
- curriculum containing modules on expository preaching (Prospectus, 2010).

In promoting expository preaching, the RTC is part of the renewed interest in this preaching style. Connor (2004) traces this revived interest in expository preaching in Ulster to the 1980's and connects it to three UK preachers: William Still (Aberdeen), Martyn Lloyd-Jones (London), and John Stott (London). He claims their influence in

Ulster came via their sermons, publication of their homiletic manuals (Lloyd-Jones, 1971; Stott, 1982), and conference addresses delivered in the province.

This renewed interest in expository preaching has impacted denominations, congregants and preachers. One impact of the revived interest in expository preaching on some denominations in Ulster is the formation of the Northern Ireland Ministry Assembly in 2006, an inter-denominational body established to promote the expository style. One impact on congregants is an increased interest in preaching among young people (Curry, 2014, p.6). One impact of the revival of the expository style on preachers in Ulster has been the shift away from politicised sermons, popular among oppositional evangelicals during the Troubles. Such political preaching was epitomised in the sermons of 'the Protestant extremist' (Abbott, 1973, p.49), Rev. Ian Paisley. Abbott identifies the chief traits of his sermon style as, 'confrontation and political evangelism'. While Abbott traces the source of Paisley's political preaching to right-wing fundamentalists in America, Eugene Scott (1976, p.249-259) argues that his political evangelism was grounded in a distinctly Ulster preaching tradition traceable to the early nineteenth century. Paisley's style was appreciated by his followers, 'Paisleyites', and replicated by preachers in the FPCU and some other denominations (Bruce, 2003). However, the revival of expository preaching has contributed to a move away from such political preaching in Ulster.

#### **4.4 Personal Situation of Participants**

Three important aspects of the personal situation of the nine participants are gender, ministries and influences. First, gender. All participants in this sample self-identify as male. This aspect of the sample is representative of the denominational grouping to which Boal et al. (1997) assign the RPCI. Currently, 'Other Presbyterians' ordain only

males to preaching ministry. Their practice also appears to reflect a common attitude to ordination within Ulster evangelicalism. In 2002, Ballie (p.79) discovered 45% of evangelicals disapproved of female ministers. She predicted 'new scholarship revealing alternative hermeneutics' (2002, p.110) would change their position. However, in 2016 ordained female ministers comprised only five percent of 400 ministers in the PCI, the largest evangelical denomination in Ulster (Wilson, 2016, p.43). What Ballie wrote in 2002 still seems relevant today 'women are still a small minority of Irish clergy...In the smaller denominations and fundamentalist groups there is still a struggle for any kind of recognition' (p.87). Therefore, while this sample has the obvious weakness of omitting a female perspective, it has the strength of highlighting the variety of approaches adopted by males. It also allows for 'contrastive analysis or comparison' (Cohen et al., 2018, p.218) with other groups. Besides, no agreement has yet been reached on gender specific influence on the sermon, as indicated in chapter 2. However, in determining the significance of the defined expository method in the practice of the participants in chapter 5, gender influence on verbal communication will be considered.

Second, ministries. Variety in location and duration of ministry, and a broad age range, contributes to the generalisability of this study. Locations of their preaching ministries include rural setting (1/9) and urban setting (8/9): predominantly Protestant community (7/9) and predominantly Catholic community (2/9). The average duration of their ministry in the RPCI at the time of interviewing was 27 years, ranging from 10 to 40 years. Their average age was 54 years ranging from 40 to 69 years. Most participants were in 'the mid-years' (30-60), which Whitehead & Whitehead claim are marked by 'personal power, care and interiority' (1995, p.111-114). The attribute of 'care' includes a sense of responsibility for others, a major factor in composing application.

Third, influences. Participants mention college training, preachers and an ordination vow as influences on their preaching style.

#### A. College Training

Most participants (P.2, P.3, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7) mention their training in the RTC as an influence on their preaching. P.7 mentions the influence of the college course. He says:

I have been well trained by good homileticians and good preachers at the College, preachers training preachers to teach. In terms of the theory, there is always more to learn, but I think I have been given good training.

P.4 and P.8 mention the impact of the preaching of faculty members. P.4 comments 'they preached from the heart to the heart'. P.8 mentions the 'succinct and pertinent' preaching of one faculty member and the 'direct and piercing' applications of another.

#### B. Preachers and Homileticians

Participants mention the preaching styles of other preachers which have influenced them in general and specific ways. First, generally. P.1 cites the reverent exposition of Martyn Lloyd-Jones, P.2 the consecutive exposition of Alistair Beggs, Sinclair Ferguson, and Derek Thomas, and P.4 the gentle exposition of Michael le Fevre. Second, specifically. Some participants mention preachers who have influenced specific elements of their sermons. Some mention the element of interpretation. P.5 benefited from the redemptive historical preaching of James Boice, Ray Dillard and Palmer Robertson. P.6 attempts to imitate Tim Keller's 'ways of preaching Christ' and Don Carson's 'theological intelligence'. Others mention the element of structure. P.1 admires the clear arrangement in the sermons of Dick Lucas and P.8 the unity and

progress of John Stott's sermons. All participants mention the element of application. Homileticians most influential on their method of composing application are:

- *Albert Martin*: an American homiletician. Participants (P.5, P.7, P.8) mention his influence through the medium of conferences, personal contact, lectures, sermons, and publications. His emphasis on 'addressing the conscience' (P.8) was particularly influential.
- *Stuart Olyott*: a British homiletician. Most participants (P.1, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8) claim Olyott's preaching model of state, illustrate and apply in his book, *Ministering Like the Master* (2002) has influenced their preaching style. P.6 mentions the 'crispness and forthrightness' of his sermon applications, while P.5 cites his use of probing questions.
- *Edward Donnelly*: an Ulster homiletician. Donnelly is emeritus professor of New Testament and lecturer on applicatory preaching in RTC, Belfast and a well-known conference speaker. Participants (P.2, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8, P.9) mention his influence on them through his preaching, lecturing, conference addresses, and personal friendship. They specify his consecutive expository style, applicatory preaching and illustrations, unpredictable applications in location, and content and freshness of applications. P.6 was particularly struck by the 'simplicity and profundity' of his preaching.

This data and the findings in chapter 5 will indicate the participants are influenced by a range of international expository preachers. However, the data also suggests that the local influence of the RTC, and Professor Donnelly, is the strongest influence on them.

Such influence illustrates 'Aspects of influence' and the 'Process of social learning'. Two 'Aspects of influence' identified by Michael Hogg (2010) are *majority* and *leadership* influence. He defines *majority* influence as 'the behaviour of the majority of people in a particular context emitting a powerful indication of what is normative, thereby creating strong pressure to conform to the majority'. This type of influence is evident in the RTC through all departments promoting the expository style, thereby indicating what is normative and so creating a powerful influence on ministerial students to conform. *Leadership* influence is defined by Hogg as 'a leader who acts as the focus of influence for the group, defining its goals and motivating group members to internalise them'. This influence type is apparent in the influence of Professor Donnelly on the participants. Their experience of influence also illustrates the 'Process of social learning'. Hargie claims the major elements of social learning are model behaviour by a significant other, and reinforcement of that behaviour by significant others (2017, p.20,21). In this case Professor Donnelly modelled the expository and applicatory style for participants, and members of the RTC faculty reinforced the style. Thus, the RTC and Professor Donnelly, have exerted the strongest influence on the approach of participants in composing application for the expository sermon.

### C. Ordination Vow

One vow taken by licentiates and ministers at ordination and installation in the RPCI is:

In preaching, **not to** be satisfied with a **general** statement of **doctrine**, **but to** be careful to speak to the conscience, in a direct and searching manner (Code, 2008, 8.14(3)).

This vow echoes the wording of the Westminster Directory on preaching. The preacher

...is **not to** rest in **general doctrine** ...**but to** bring it home to special use, by application to his hearers...he is to endeavour to perform it in such a manner, that his auditors may feel the word of God to be quick and powerful, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart (1973, p.145,146).

By taking this vow, participants not only consider application to be a legitimate element of the sermon, they also promise to include application in their sermons. All participants mention this ordination vow as an influence on their preaching. The view of P.5 is representative of participants: 'The ordination vow compels us to speak to the conscience in a direct and searching manner. I learned that off by heart. It is very, very challenging'. P.7 describes its influence on composing specific applications:

It's easy to talk about false gods in Canaan. What are the real idols our people in the Reformed Presbyterian Church are tempted to worship? Instead of speaking in broad generalities, as we vow, not to give broad statements of doctrine but speak to the conscience.

Perhaps underpinning the strong influence of this ordination vow on participants is the understanding of vows offered by Thomas Aquinas and the traits of effective commitment. Aquinas (2007, p.1578) claimed that the influence of vows on the subject surpassed the influence of oaths because vows involve promising to God to fulfil a duty, while oaths involve promising to humans. The considerable influence of this vow on participants may also be explained by ordination vows possessing the four traits of a 'commitment most likely to be effective' (Hargie, 2017, p.395): active, public, effortful, and uncoerced.

Despite all participants acknowledging the influence of this vow, they all fail to mention two other references to sermon application in their ordination vows. One mention

connects application to the spiritual condition of the preacher: 'To seek to know the power of the Word in your own heart, and that you may be able to expound and apply it from personal experience' (Code, 2008, 8.14(1)). Another mention connects application to the condition of congregants: 'To endeavour to know particularly the condition of the flock committed to your care, that you may the better apply the Word to their cases both in public and private' (Code, 2008, 8.14(5)). While these vows are not mentioned by participants, the findings in chapter 6 will demonstrate they are fulfilled in their practice.

## **4.5 Evaluation**

The situation of participants described in this chapter indicates they are suitable candidates to answer the research question in this study. As confessional evangelicals, graduates from a college promoting the expository style, and bound by ordination vows to include application in their sermons, they are potential information-rich participants. Cohen et al. use the term 'knowledgeable people' for this type of non-probability purposive sample. They explain it as 'those who have in-depth knowledge about particular issues, maybe by virtue of their professional role' (2018, p.219). In purposive sampling

researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality or possession of the particular characteristic(s) being sought. They assemble the sample to meet their specific needs (Cohen et al., 2018, p.218).

Cohen et al. observe that built into non-probability sampling is 'the full knowledge that it does not represent the wider population; it simply represents itself' (2018, p.217). Therefore, purposive sampling does involve a trade-off. On the one hand, it provides

greater depth to a study than probability sampling would, but on the other hand, it provides less breadth (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In researching homiletic method for composing application for the expository sermon, I considered depth of data to be the greater requirement. However, the purposive sample in this study does possess generalisability beyond the RPCI, because the problem of composing sermon application transcends any one denomination, tradition, gender, or preaching style.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, consideration has been given to the situation of participants for the purposes of contextualising the data and determining the generalisability of the findings. The political, religious, denominational, and personal situation of participants has been described. The chapter has demonstrated participants are committed to expository and applicatory preaching, and are, therefore, potentially able to provide information-rich data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with this purposive sample to answer the research question: to what extent is the expository method significant in the composition of application for the expository sermon? Two of the four themes emerging from the data collected in the field will be presented in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 5:**

### **FINDINGS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (1)**

The previous chapter considered the situation of the participants in this study; their political, religious, denominational, and personal situations. It was concluded that participants were suitable candidates to answer the research question in this study, by their training in and commitment to expository and applicatory preaching. This chapter presents two of the four themes emerging from the findings. The first and introductory theme will indicate that participants consider the element of application in the sermon to be important. The second theme attempts to ascertain the significance of the defined method in the practice of participants.

A qualitative approach was selected to answer the research question in this study. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine participants. Software such as CAQDAS (computer assisted qualitative data analysis: Cohen et al., 2018, p.650-656) was not used to determine codes from the 25k word document of the transcribed interviews. Instead, the constant comparison method was followed (Cohen et al., 2018, p.719). This process involved each interview being immediately transcribed and coded prior to conducting subsequent interviews. This procedure allowed detailed categorisation and identification of key themes and any deviation from them, from an early stage.

I considered the two ways of analysing the data and presenting the findings suggested by Cohen et al.:

...individual by individual and then amalgamation of key issues emerging across the individuals or working within a largely predetermined analytical frame of issues that crosses the individuals concerned (2018, p.647).

To facilitate critical interaction with method, in attempting to determine the significance of method in the participants' practice, the second approach of 'working within a largely predetermined analytical frame of issues' was followed. The predetermined framework used was the method defined in the second chapter. Cohen et al. describe this approach: 'the researcher often starts with some codes already decided or in mind and adds to, modifies and adjusts these in response to the data' (2018, p.669). Such interaction with method indicates where the study contributes to the knowledge base of the field, 'by showing how the study's findings extend, modify, or contradict previous work' (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p.92).

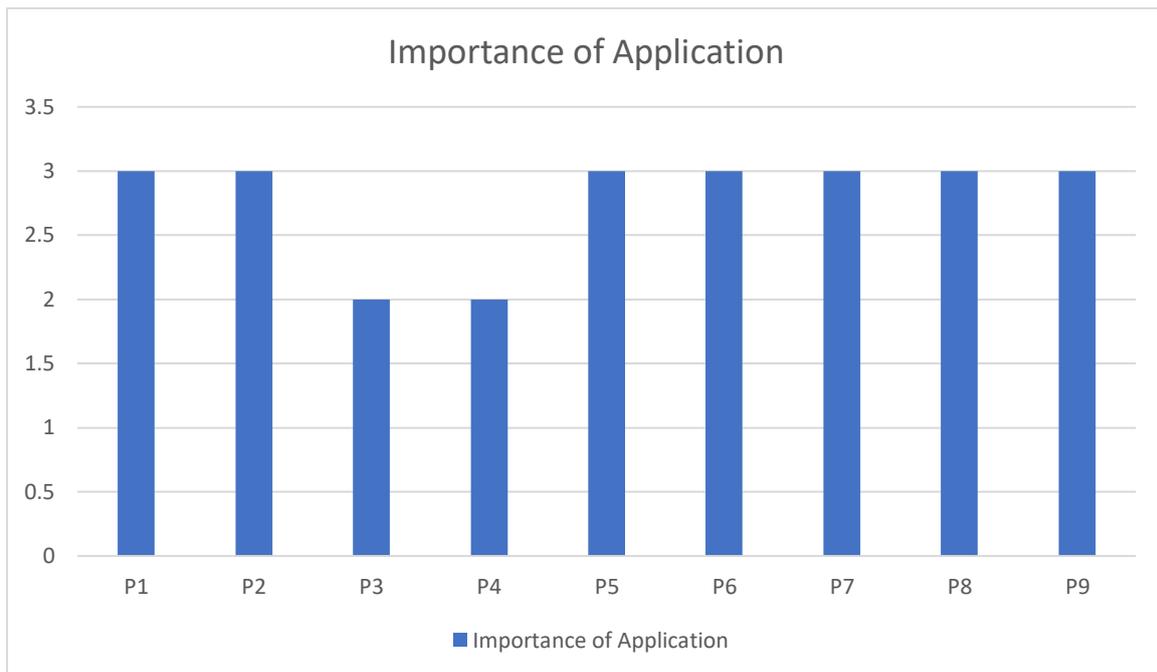
Therefore, rather than ignoring method as in grounded theory research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), method informed the coding process and influences the presentation of the findings (Glaser & Laudel, 2013, p.72). Consequently, conversation with the body of literature occurs throughout the findings in chapters five and six (Trafford & Leshem, 2012, p.73). The coding process produced four themes: importance of sermon application, significance of the defined expository method, difficulty of composing application, and inadequacy of the defined expository method. Two of the themes are presented in this chapter and two in the following chapter.

## **5.1 THEME 1: Importance of Sermon Application**

In this introductory theme, the importance of sermon application is reported. Reporting the findings on this theme is foundational to an exploration of the homiletic method of

the participants. Given that the small, structured part of the interview asked participants about this theme, it is not unexpected.

All participants consider application in the expository sermon to be 'important' or 'very important'. Seven participants rate application 'very important' (3) and two rate it 'important' (2) as the following graph illustrates:



### 5.1.1 'Very Important'

Participants who consider sermon application 'very important' give the following reasons for their rating.

#### A. The Purpose of Divine Revelation

P.1 claims the purpose of divine revelation is relational. He says, 'in his supernatural revelation to mankind, God seeks to establish a covenant relation with his creatures'. This divine/human covenant relationship involves obligations. P.1 argues that sermon application is very important because it emphasises the covenant obligations of congregants. In giving this reason, the participant refers to the bilateral outworking of

God's covenant, and not to the unilateral origin of God's covenant (Ferguson, 2013, p.57).

## B. The Purpose of Scripture

Some participants consider application 'very important', because it complies with the purpose of Scripture. P.7 considers the purpose of Scripture to be transformation. He argues, as Capill (2014, p.62) does, that this purpose is identified in 2 Timothy ch.3.16 as 'profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness'. From this purpose, he concludes sermons should aim to transform listeners and application is key to achieving this aim. P.5 agrees with this reasoning, and illustrates it, using the metaphor of a pot of paint located beside a wall in need of painting. He argues that the purpose of the paint is to be applied to the wall to transform it, just as 'the purpose of Scripture is application to our lives to effect transformation'. Therefore, he concludes, 'sermons should aim to transform listeners'.

This second reason appears in most of the key homiletic texts on application in the expository sermon, from Adams (1990) to Green (2015), to support the sermon element of application. Blomberg contributes to this reason by observing that, just as verbal communication is intended to accomplish something, 'we should expect nothing different from biblical language' (2010, p.247).

## C. The Purpose of Preaching

A common view of the purpose of preaching in homiletic literature is to affect change in listeners. Keller (2015), for example, insists that the proper aim of the expository sermon is transformation, not the communication of information. Johnson agrees and argues that the sermon element of application is an important factor in achieving such transformation (2007, p.64). P.7 expresses this reason when he says:

Application is part of preaching. It's not just a lecture, a transfer of information. It begins with that but doesn't end there. It is meant to move people to action, affect people's will and conscience, it's meant to change people, it's meant to lead to stronger faith, to belief, to repentance, obedience, trust and worship. All that is the work of application built upon explanation. Preaching requires application.

#### D. Examples of NT Preaching

Some participants claim sermon application is 'very important', because New Testament sermons contain it. P.9 appeals to Jesus' sermon on the mount (Matt. ch.5-7) and the sermons of the apostles in the book of Acts, and argues, because their sermons included application, preachers today must include it. P.8 cites the specific example of the apostle Peter, preaching at Pentecost (Acts ch.2), and claims that because 'he made application to listeners, preachers should make application to congregants'. Some scholars refute this reasoning by maintaining the sermons of Jesus and the apostles were heavily edited, therefore, their original content is unknown (Keener, 1999, p.160-163). However, Carson (1982, p.139-149) and Wagner (2004) defend the originality of these sermons, and consequently argue that they do provide patterns for preachers.

#### E. Congregants Self-Applying the Text

Some participants maintain application is very important because congregants will not think out the application of the text for themselves. P.8 uses this argument when he says:

People don't necessarily make the connection between the truth that is explained and the application. You have to do the work for them and apply it in a relevant way, for where they are in the Christian life.

P.2 utilises the metaphor of a hook to describe application. As a hook penetrates and grips an object, he says ‘sermon application hooks the truth of a passage into the lives of congregants’. He maintains applicational hooks should be attached to listeners by the preacher, ‘otherwise the text will remain separate from their lives’. While this reason contradicts the position of the New Homiletic (Craddock, 2001, p.14), some homileticians agree with participants that listeners will not self-apply the text (Chapell, 2018, p.187,188).

### **5.1.2 ‘Important’**

Though this study is driven by the conviction that application in the expository sermon is ‘very important’, and though only two participants rate it ‘important’, this data is included in the findings. Cohen et al. emphasise that, in presenting findings, it is essential to ‘acknowledge variation within an overall pattern’ (2018, p.644). Such variation illustrates the intrigue and importance of field work. Participants who describe application as ‘important’, rather than ‘very important’, give two reasons for their rating: priority of meaning, and the role of the Holy Spirit.

#### **A. Priority of Meaning**

P.3 claims conveying the fixed *meaning* of the passage is the ‘very important’ element in the sermon, whilst *application* is the ‘important’ element. He says, ‘I have thought very carefully about my answer’ and he explains his rating:

I have listened to people over the years who say, ‘What does this passage mean to you?’ and they have that as their primary goal. I, personally, have stood back from that approach to the Bible, and I have tried to wrestle an objective meaning from the passage first of all, so that a person in Hong Kong and Ballycastle will come to the same understanding of the passage in its original context. When you put personal

application before the meaning of the passage, I have reacted to this and maybe reacted badly.

A strong emphasis on the priority of meaning by this participant is one reason for variation from the overall pattern.

## B. Role of the Spirit in Application

P.4 claims application of the text by the Holy Spirit is the 'very important' element in the sermon, while application by the preacher is the 'important' element. He says:

As I get older, I realise that, although I am the preacher ordained by God, there is another preacher at work, and it is not my business to do his job. I am increasingly conscious of that. He is doing the application. I have increasingly come to the view that I am not responsible for pushing the truth into every nook and cranny. There is a danger in that, too, for it could sound that I am not bothering my head to tease out the application. I don't think it is that. I always get this challenging application, 'Who am I to know what God wants to do with his Word?'. And if I am away down some particular rabbit hole, you can't stop God's purposes, but could I actually be a hindrance not being in step with him to lift those things out of Scripture? I am increasingly careful about application, but it is important. Could you say it is a sermon without application? I think, foundationally, that is what God is seeking to do in the lives of his people; he wants the Word to come to bear, to change their lives, and God has ordained the office of minister of the Word to be that vehicle. That is why it is important. I find it difficult to keep that balance. I know what I am called to do, but I know there is one that is doing all the work.

The role of the Spirit is a second reason for variation from the overall pattern of the findings. This variation not only explains the different rating of this participant but also identifies a factor beyond the defined expository method which influences the process

of composition, suggesting the defined method is not sufficient in the experience of participants.

### **5.1.3 Evaluation**

The findings of this first theme establish that all participants consider the inclusion of application in the sermon to be either 'important' or 'very important'. These findings confirm the suitability of the sample for an exploration of homiletic method in the process of composing application. This theme also locates participants in the homiletic field. Participants differ from the New Homiletic by claiming sermon application should be composed by the preacher and not left to congregants.

However, these findings also highlight tensions experienced by expository preachers in the process of composition. One tension is between the elements of interpretation and application. The issue considers whether composing application prior to ascertaining the fixed meaning of the preaching portion results in erroneous applications. P.3 maintains it does. His position agrees with the homiletic method of Greidanus (1996) and Overdorf (2009) who prioritise meaning in the stages of exegesis and sermon composition. They require the discovery of the fixed meaning of the text prior to the composition of application. Other homileticians argue for interaction between meaning and application in both stages (Dorani, 2001; Kim, 2015), while some make application the dominant emphasis in the hermeneutic and homiletic process (Adams, 1990; Capill, 2014).

Thus, there is diversity of opinion among homileticians regarding the time when application should be considered. Subsequent findings will show that while all participants consider the fixed meaning of the text to be foundational to composing application, they differ regarding aspects of the hermeneutical and homiletical

processes. These differences indicate that there are varying opinions on the importance of application within the expository approach.

Another tension in the data is between the role of the preacher and the role of the Holy Spirit, in sermon application. The issue considers whether the composition of specific application by the preacher clashes with specific applications by the Spirit. Although MacArthur (1992) is not cited by P.4, his opinions are echoed here. As seen in chapter 2, MacArthur (like P.4) promotes general sermon application to allow the Spirit freedom to make specific applications to congregants. Capill (2014) rejects this approach claiming general applications produce general responses. The findings will demonstrate that while all participants depend on the Spirit to make application effective, they differ in their view of how the Spirit's role impacts the composition of application.

These tensions indicate the inadequacy of the defined expository method in the experience of participants and suggest other important factors beyond the defined method. Participants who rate the sermon element of application as 'very important' and yet consider application concurrently with interpretation, diverge from the method's emphasis on the priority of ascertaining the fixed meaning of the text. Recognition of the influence of the Holy Spirit on composing application suggests important factors beyond the defined expository method which influence the process of composition. Divergences from the defined expository method in the practice of participants will be evident throughout the second and third themes. Factors beyond the defined method will be explored in the fourth theme.

#### **5.1.4 Conclusion**

In this first theme, the importance of sermon application has been reported and evaluated. Participants consider sermon application 'important' or 'very important', data which locates the participants in the homiletic field and confirms their suitability for exploring sermon application. Some participants described tensions encountered in the process of composition, one between application and meaning, the other between application and the role of the Spirit. These tensions highlight divergences from the defined expository method in the experience of participants, indicating the inadequacy of the method in their experience and suggesting important factors beyond the method. Having established the importance of sermon application to the participants in this introductory theme, the second theme will explore the participants' method for composing application.

#### **5.2 THEME 2: Significance of the Defined Expository Method**

The purpose of this second theme is to determine the significance of the defined expository method for composing application in the expository sermon, for the participants. The approach adopted in determining significance, is to ascertain where field data 'confirms' method (Swinton & Mowat, 2016). Confirmation is understood in terms of participants using method. The findings will therefore indicate areas where data overlaps method and thereby determine the significance of the defined expository method in the experience of participants. Areas where practice 'informs and challenges' (Swinton & Mowat, 2016) method will also be noted. The three elements of the defined expository method, identified in chapter 2, are sourcing, developing, and integrating application.

### **5.2.1 Sourcing Sermon Application**

The sources of sermon application identified in the literature review, are text, preacher, and audience. This theme will demonstrate that all participants confirm the defined expository method by using these sources in composing application. Due to the amount of data on each source, evaluation will occur after the findings of each source, as well as at the end of this second theme.

#### **A. SOURCE 1: The Text**

All participants confirm the defined expository method by using the text as a source of application. Participants consider ascertaining the fixed meaning of the text to be fundamental to the process of composing application. For example, P.1 describes text meaning in terms of driving composition. He says, 'I don't think application drives what I preach; it would be the text that drives what I preach'. P.4 uses the metaphor of opening doors to describe composing application but emphasises the priority of meaning: 'when you have got what the passage is about, then you can start to push. Open the right doors!'. P.6 selects the concept of influence, and claims 'the text is the main influence' on his sermon applications. P.7 uses the idea of supremacy, arguing 'meaning is the determining and controlling source of application. It's supreme because any legitimate application must come from the passage being preached'. Thus, participants consider the fixed meaning of the text to be the primary source of application. In describing their hermeneutical process, participants reflect the defined expository method by discussing the exegesis, theology, and significance of the text.

## 1. Exegesis

In discussing the exegetical process to determine the fixed meaning of the text, participants mention the influences of text genre and ingredients on their composition.

Some participants (P.1, P.3, P.4, P.7) mention text *genre*. P.1 says:

If you are preaching John the same way as you are preaching Paul, you have missed it. The taste of the genre should come through...I try to reflect the genre in my points and sermon.

However, he admits genre influence on his applications, 'still has some way to go'.

Some participants discuss the challenges of composing application from different genres. P.3 claims that in the wisdom genre, 'the application is nearly there', while P.4 considers determining application from narrative and epistle to be easier than other genres. However, P.7 finds that 'parts of the Old Testament laws, the imprecatory Psalms and sections of Revelation take a lot more work to figure out what the application is'. Homiletics has recently given increased attention to the influence of text genre on the sermon. This developing field of study should provide guidance to expository preachers in composing genre sensitive applications.

Two participants mention the *ingredients* of the text. P.4 describes the influence of syntax on his applications:

Sometimes in the structure of a sentence, the whole language of it, repetition, something emphasised, God is highlighting that for us. I find that really helpful in getting the application.

P.5 mentions the influence of grammar on composing application. While using 'the parsing guide', he often notices points of emphasis in the passage, which inform his applications. This emphasis on *genre* and *ingredients* is an attempt by participants to

allow the distinctiveness of the text to mould their applications. These participants claim their aim in exegesis is not only to exhibit faithfulness to the fixed meaning of the text, but to ensure the uniqueness and texture of the passage permeates their composition. P.1 claims discerning the distinctiveness of the text helps 'avoid sameness' and P.4 observes that such text-shaped application prevents 'beating the same old drum'. This approach helps to address a common criticism of expository preaching that it is marked by banal applications.

## 2. *Theology*

There is no agreement among homileticians over the inclusion of theology in the hermeneutical process, or the disciplines to be included in theological interpretation (Naselli, 2017; Bock & Fanning, 2006). Of the four main theological disciplines, participants mention systematic and biblical theology.

Only one participant mentions *systematic theology* in his hermeneutical process. P.1 describes his method:

My aim is to draw out the principles in the text and then to say simply, how do these apply? One of the things I came to early in my ministry, to avoid sameness, is which part of the doctrine is being taught in this particular portion of Scripture. Why did the Holy Spirit give this verse? What is he intending to teach? Nuanced principles.

This participant uses 'principles' in the sense of doctrines, and not applicatory principles, as Richard (2005) and Carter et al. (2018) use the term. P.1 indicates that his goal in using this theological discipline is to 'avoid sameness'.

However, all participants use *biblical theology* in the process of determining meaning. All participants adopt the redemptive historical approach, developed by Vos (1956),

and applied to preaching by Clowney (1970). This approach attempts to discover the redemptive grace of God in every part of Scripture. Azuradia explains it:

All of our preaching, including the preaching and teaching of ethical and moral demands, needs to be vitally connected to Jesus Christ and grounded in the consummate act of redemptive history (2007, p.70).

Participants mention the following proponents of this approach who have influenced their practice: Sydney Greidanus (1999), Graeme Goldsworthy (2012), Tim Keller (2015) and Michael Barrett (2018). In adopting this method, participants align themselves with the hermeneutic of Overdorf (2009), Capill (2014), and Green (2015).

P.4 represents the participants' understanding of redemptive grace when he defines it as, 'Christ covers our sins and gives us strength'. Forgiveness of sin, and enablement to obey, are prominent themes in the redemptive historical method (Johnson, 2007). These themes have significance in discussions on 'listener guilt' (Hargie, 2017, p.390). Dillard and Peck (2001, p.42) maintain inducing guilt in listeners is only a driver to redress failure when failure can be remedied. Where no possibility of remedy exists, listeners are left devastated (Chang, 2014). The approach of participants addresses listener guilt and redress of failure by the dual themes of divine forgiveness and enablement.

Participants consider the inclusion of redemptive grace in every sermon to be 'vital', 'crucial', 'massive', and 'absolutely central'. P.4 says:

If I didn't have the framework of grace, I wouldn't preach another sermon. I couldn't do it. I couldn't bear the weight of it on myself, and I couldn't bear the weight I was putting on the people in front of me.

A considerable amount of data was collected on this aspect of hermeneutics, indicating its importance to participants. They provide reasons for adopting this approach and describe their homiletic method.

a. Reasons

Firstly, *apostolic indicatives*. P.7 argues for the inclusion of grace in sermons, from the apostolic use of the indicative mood to describe redemptive works of God. He considers the apostolic pattern of 'generally using indicatives before imperatives in their Epistles', to have significance for composing application. He explains:

It is easy to fall into that legalistic, morality preaching. The way to avoid this is to ensure that the indicatives always precede the imperatives. Our application concerning duties always flows from a grateful heart, redeemed by God's free grace, never to gain God's favour.

P.6 also regards this apostolic pattern to be important and recounts a *kairos* moment in his ministry when preaching through Ephesians. He recalls 'counting the number of indicatives and imperatives in the book of Ephesians'. To his surprise he discovered 'that there were the same number of indicatives in the first half of the book, as there were imperatives in the second half!'. This argument from the apostolic use of indicatives is also used by some homileticians to support composing application within a framework of grace (Carrick, 2002, p.7-29; Capill, 2014, p.217-224).

Secondly, *avoidance of moralism*. Moralistic preaching emphasises human duty, without mentioning divine grace. P.1 includes grace to avoid moralism. He says, 'You can't just say, 'Go and do thou likewise!' without describing what God in Christ has done'. P.8 considers moralising to be a danger lurking in imperative passages. He says:

I hopefully pepper everything by the grace of God. Grace from first to last. There is a danger in moralistic sermons when concentrating on the commandments.

P.3 indicates he does not 'consciously avoid moralism', but using the redemptive historical approach, claims 'by the time I have finished explaining the text, there is not a lot of room for it!'. Avoiding moralism in preaching is a common argument used by proponents of the redemptive historical approach (Johnson, 2007).

Thirdly, *motivation of grace*. Three participants include grace in the sermon as motivation to duty. P.2 says, 'I seek to show God's grace to the congregation to motivate them to fulfil the commands'. P.4 says, 'I find the greatest motivation is the gospel'. P.6 reflects, 'I often think that is how we should motivate people to obey - with grace'. In using grace as motivation P.4 describes his own experience and cites the example of the apostle Paul:

I find that is what motivates that whole rotten part of me. I guess God's people are all the same. That's where I always want to bring people to. The apostle Paul, when he wanted the people to give more, mentions the grace of Christ. I'm convinced you're wasting your time preaching if you're not going to do that. You're not going to be effective. I do listen to men sometimes who have told of all the duty the people are to do. But why would they want to do that? Even for the non-Christian, it is the gospel that draws people. Not just laying the laws on the line.

P.6 relates a 'lights on moment' in discovering grace as motivation to obedience while driving and listening to a sermon by Tim Keller. He describes the occasion:

Tim Keller asked: What is the motivation in preaching? There is the motivation of the young preacher, 'Am I doing okay?'. Another motivation is information. That is good, but not enough. Then there is transformation. We want people to be changed. Then there is adoration. Then they will be motivated to obey God. For me, that was a 'lights

on moment'. I want people to connect to what Christ has done. That's a big drive for me. People are motivated to obey.

At this point in the interview, my field notes indicate, P.6 stopped consulting his script and became visibly animated. He continued, 'We have to motivate people by the cross, by Christ, by grace, otherwise it can become legalism. People will be saying 'God will be so disappointed in me''. Later in the interview, he returned to his transformational experience. He says:

The 'lights on moment' with Keller was a big change. So, I have tried to bring people to a point of worship in connection with application. I have wanted people to be not only informed and transformed, but to delight in God, or see that God is delightful.

Thus, participants include grace in their sermons to follow the apostolic pattern, to avoid moralism or to motivate congregants.

#### b. Practices

Participants describe specific and general ways in which they include grace in their sermons. Two participants discuss specific ways. P.1 always includes a *separate paragraph* about grace after the main body of his sermon. He says:

In the paragraph on Christ, I am trying to show where Christ is. Whether by Greidanus's seven ways to get to Christ, or it might be Christ in a biblical theological way, wanting people to get to Christ, to seek Christ, to love Christ, and to want to have more of Christ. Union with Christ is key.

P.6 attempts to link grace to *specific duty*. He says:

It's trying to get the grace element specifically linked to the application, so that Jesus died on the cross for our sins, so stop stealing stuff! It's getting right down into the detail. Christ died so you can have a Father in heaven who owns the cattle on a

thousand hills, so when you are nicking something, you are saying, 'God, you don't love me'. You are standing in front of the cross and saying, 'Jesus you didn't do enough'... Because the cross is so rich and our salvation so rich and multi-faceted, we can connect an application to some facet of grace that helps people see a connection between application and grace. It helps lift the eyes of the people to the cross. What I want is for people to be so filled with amazement at their salvation that they will want to obey. Not pulling rabbits out of hats but in a way people will see that's why I am not to steal.

Other participants use a more general approach. P.2 includes grace in all his sermons. He relates the observation of one of his elders on his preaching: 'I have not heard a sermon in which you have not mentioned the grace of God'. P.3 claims his style of emphasising the indicatives in Scripture ensures a framework of grace. He comments, 'Sometimes I could be accused of emphasising the indicative at the expense of the imperative!'. P.4 describes his approach in terms of habitus. He says:

It is so wired in me to connect the passage to Christ. It is my second thought. It gives me hope that if you can get the people to think of Jesus you are on to a winner. It's years of who I listened to, who I read, that my mind has been shaped that way. Even the ten commandments lead to Jesus. My children always used to laugh at me and said, 'there is always a fourth point in Dad's sermon!'. I have said to the folks 'if I finished the sermon here it would not be a gospel sermon. But we are not finished yet. We need to think of a better level'.

This data indicates participants use *biblical theology* in the hermeneutical and homiletical processes not only to gain the full stable meaning of the text but to condition the applicatory element of the sermon. Their approach insists that consideration be given to the full canon of Scripture, especially redemptive themes, in interpreting and applying the preaching portion. This method of mingling grace and application

addresses concerns raised by Adams (1990), Carrick (2002) and Fabarez (2005), that the redemptive historical approach diminishes application. Such inclusion of grace, therefore, indicates the participants' divergence from the expository method as represented by Adams (1990), Carrick (2002) and Fabarez (2005), three of the key texts on composing application for the expository sermon.

### *3. Significance*

In the move from fixed meaning to significance, all participants emphasise the original application of the text (Kim, 2015; Ferguson, 2017). For example, P.1 seeks to understand 'how the text applies itself'. Similarly, P.2 says 'I do always try to find why this was written to them, and then how is that relevant today. That original reason drives a lot of the application'. P.4 maintains the original application is 'the true application', and expresses frustration with commentaries which do not adopt this approach:

What did it mean to the original readers? That is the application. Some devotional commentaries frustrate me. That is not what the passage is about, though it is a good principle they are making.

P.6 uses the term 'punch' to describe the original application, and claims, 'The punch of the passage, generally, has to be the punch of the sermon'.

While Overdorf (2009) claims the results of making the original significance the contemporary significance, are legitimacy and authority of application, two participants discuss consequences of ignoring the original application. P.4 speaks in terms of application losing energy. He says, 'Unless it was what the passage was designed for, it loses its energy'. P.8 detects something sinister. He says:

Applications *not* from the text have no authority. When application emerges from the text, it carries the authority of Christ. Any other application divorced from the text is the preacher trying to get something over on the congregation. That is from the flesh.

This data indicates a uniformity of approach among participants in applying the original significance of the text. However, as indicated in chapter 2, homileticians differ in their approach. Adams (1990) and Fabarez (2005) promote carrying the original purpose of the passage into sermon application. By contrast Robinson (2014) opts for the 'big idea' of the preaching portion, while Richard (2005) advocates applying principles from the passage.

#### *4. Qualifications*

While participants make no comment on the inclusion of all the contents of the preaching portion in the sermon (Meyer, 2013), they do comment on attention to application in their hermeneutical process. Among participants there is divergence of opinion. Seven participants (P.2, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8, P.9) give attention to application concurrently with their exegesis. In describing when they begin to consider application, they use phrases such as 'from day one', 'from the start', and 'from the first moment'. P.2 describes the process as a very 'fluid thing'. He says, 'people's situations are in your mind during exegesis'. However, he maintains application does not determine exegesis but 'you are seeing within your exegesis the pastoral issues'. P.7 describes the commencement of his attention to application as:

Right at the beginning, from the word 'Go', from the very first second that I consciously begin preparing a sermon. Some applications do suggest themselves on the first reading of the text, perhaps because they are obvious, or the Holy Spirit brings them to mind straight away.

Similarly, P.8 explains his method of inter-relating the tasks of exegesis and composing application. He says, 'I begin sermon preparation with exegesis. In that process of exegesis, I start to think of the application. It develops and feeds in my mind'.

By contrast, two participants postpone the consideration of sermon application until after the exegetical task, to avoid invalid application by misunderstanding the fixed meaning. P.1 says, 'I wait until I have done my exegesis, otherwise it is just my thoughts upon the text - eisegesis instead of exegesis'. Similarly, P.3 asserts it is an attempt to find the precise meaning of the passage which causes him to postpone consideration of application until 'fairly late on. The objective meaning is so important!'

This differing practice among participants reflects the homiletic literature. Capill (2014), for example, promotes 'applicatory exegesis', which involves the consideration of application concurrently with the exegetical process. Doriani (2001) agrees and claims movement between interpretation and application is natural and efficient, a utilisation of the hermeneutical spiral. By contrast, Overdorf (2009), following Greidanus (1998), favours completing the exegetical stage, before considering application. Thus, there is diversity among the participants and homileticians, who adopt the expository approach. While all participants and homileticians promoting the expository approach claim the fixed meaning of the text should be the supreme influence on composing application, differences appear in their hermeneutical processes.

##### *5. Evaluation*

This data indicates that all participants confirm the expository approach by using the text as a source of application. Not all participants utilise all elements of this source of application. Only some participants mention text genre and ingredients. However, all

participants use some elements of this source, thereby confirming it as a source of application.

However, the practice of participants diverges from key texts on the expository method in two areas. In considering application concurrently with interpretation participants differ from the position of Overdorf (2009). In utilising the redemptive historical method in their exegesis, they differ from the approach of Adams (1990), Carrick (2001), and Fabarez (2005). Therefore, in claiming participants confirm the defined expository method by using the text as a source of application, it is to be understood in the general sense of utilising this source while appreciating these nuances within their approach.

This emphasis by participants on the text as a source of application and on grace as a framework for application has significance within the religious and political situation in Ulster. First, participants prioritising the fixed meaning of the text in the composition of application has significance within the evangelical community in Ulster. The practice of participants differs from the practice of preachers in some other evangelical groupings. One such group is oppositional evangelicals, who determine meaning, 'without concern for context' (Jordan, 2001). Another group is pietistic evangelicals, who prioritise personal application of Scripture over text meaning (Jordan, 2001).

Second, the emphasis on grace in their approach has significance within their denominational and political situation. In defining their denominational situation Boal et al. lump the RPCI and FPCU together as 'Other Presbyterians'. However, as already indicated, there are significant differences between their preaching styles. FPCU preaching is marked by 'moral legalism' (Mitchel, 2003, p.117), whereas participants avoid moralism by composing application within a framework of grace. This emphasis on grace also has significance in their political situation. In a recent qualitative study

of 120 Protestant victims of the Troubles, three attitudes towards Catholics emerged: hatred, tolerance, and forgiveness (Ganiel & Yohanis, 2019). In their conclusion, the researchers commend the attitude of forgiveness. They write, 'we extend an invitation to everyone on this island to *consider grace*' (2019, p.242). Their conclusion indicates that grace, received and reciprocated, is a key factor in resolving divisions in Ulster society. Therefore, the emphasis on grace in the preaching of participants is significant through its potential contribution to healing political divisions in the province.

## *6. Conclusion*

Findings on the first source of application has described the hermeneutical process of the participants: exegesis, theology, and significance. While noting some variation in their approach the data has demonstrated that all participants confirm the defined expository method by using the text as a source of application. However, the data has also indicated participants diverge from aspects of four of the key texts on the expository method by considering application concurrently with interpretation and by utilising the redemptive historical method. Such divergence suggests the inadequacy of the defined method for participants.

### **B. SOURCE 2: The Preacher**

The second source of application in the defined expository method is the preacher. The method, defined in chapter 2, identified culture, gender, and knowledge, as elements of this source. This section will demonstrate that all participants confirm the method by recognising the preacher's knowledge as a source of application, and two participants will inform the defined method by discussing the influence of personality on application.

## 1. Knowledge

The academic and experimental knowledge of the preacher is considered by all participants to be a source of composing application. In discussing the development of the preacher's academic knowledge through reading, participants mention five types of material:

- *general material*. P.4 commends general reading: 'I am reading a biography of a man who is an addicted gambler. Someone gave it to me, thought I would find it interesting, find some illustrations for my sermons'. While P.4 has not found illustrations for his sermons, he claims the book is useful in giving him insight into human nature.
- *cultural material*. Most participants claim news and cultural trends inform their applications. For example, P.8 subscribes to a weekly news magazine for the purpose of understanding current world events. Occasionally, events affect his congregants and are included in his sermon applications.
- *focused material*. P.6 reads specific books to understand people. He states, 'I read a book on Wilful Blindness, why we don't see what we should see. Another book on Psychosomatic Illnesses'. He claims such books give insight into congregants, and so assist him in composing application.
- *homiletic material*. P.1 reads a homiletic book every summer to develop his ability to compose sermons. P.8 mentions the help he recently experienced in reading *Why Johnny Can't Preach* (Gordon, 2009).
- *oppositional material*. P.3 reads the other side of an argument to answer objections congregants have or encounter, and to strengthen his own convictions. He states, 'Reading the other side of the argument helps present the truth'. His approach compares with Inoculation Theory, developed by

Michael Pfau (1997). Pfau claims, people who are exposed to a weaker form of a contrary argument are less likely to adopt a stronger form of the argument.

This data aligns with the opinions of Capill (2014) and Keller (2015), discussed in chapter 2, who commend a structured reading programme for preachers, post-ordination, as a source of application. An example of the shaping of the preacher's mind by reading, as promoted by Gordon (2009), is given by P.4:

I am reading John Flavel, the separation of body and soul at death, and my mind has been blown by that. It hasn't come out in any of my preaching yet. I find so much in my reading at that level it is just shaping my mind, rounding me a little bit more.

The life experiences of the preacher are also considered by participants to be an important element of the preacher's knowledge. Participants recognise secular, spiritual, and difficult life experiences to be sources of application. P.5 claims his *secular* experience of growing up on a farm helped equip him for composing application in rural ministry. He says, 'I think I understand farmers!'. P.2 maintains his *spiritual* experience of God's grace has a bearing on the applications he composes. He says, 'We preach what we know to be true'. P.3 draws on his experience of questioning Christianity. In addressing doubts some congregants have, he admits 'I know those doubts from my own life'. Some participants mention *difficult* life experiences encountered at different stages in life. P.6 observes, 'I suppose, as you grow older, you become aware of the sins and struggles of various ages and stages, and you start to apply to that'. However, P.5 reflects on the detrimental impact difficult experiences can have on the preacher. He warns, 'You need to beware of taking a complaining attitude into the pulpit from a bad week. You need to clear your mind'.

The importance of using life experiences in composing application is that they allow preachers to connect with their audience. When a preacher uses life experiences,

congregants 'will warm to the preaching as it relates to life as they know it' (Capill, 2014, p.88). Cialdini (2014, p.162) emphasises the 'potency of similarity' in the process of persuasion. Likewise, Hargie (2017, p.374) argues that a speaker who establishes commonalities with listeners increases the likelihood of persuasion.

## *2. Personality*

The relation between the personality of the preacher and composing application has been overlooked in homiletic studies. Two participants discuss this issue, thereby, informing the defined expository method and homiletics generally. P.6 believes 'all preachers bring a certain lens, through which we look at a passage'. However, he indicates the complexity of this area by confessing, 'I don't know what all my lenses are!'. P.4 describes the impact of an imaginative personality on sermon application. Regarding imagination he states:

It may be my personality. I like to visualise things. I would often say in my preaching, 'Now just stand back here and imagine what is happening.' I found those to be avenues of application.

In this instance, P.4 not only uses his own imagination, but encourages congregants to use their imagination. Heywood (2014) claims the use of imagination in the sermon, involves congregants in the exercise of discovering application and aids their memory of it.

P.4 mentions two ways in which his sensitive personality impacts sermon application. He claims his sensitiveness sometimes expresses itself in strong emotion in a sermon and considers that expression of emotion to be an application. He describes such an experience:

I have a soft heart and warm to things. Sometimes I stop in preaching and have to gather my thoughts and compose myself. I think that is an avenue of application. That is saying this should warm your heart. That is my type of application.

This observation concurs with the opinion of Capill (2014) and Chapell (2018) who argue that the affect attitude of congregants should be addressed in application to assist compliance. In this instance P.4 addresses the affect attitude, not in words but through an unplanned display of his own emotion. In his description, P.4 also maintains his sensitive personality provides a gentler form of application. Sometimes this is expressed by a probing question, rather than an imperative. He says:

I hope I have not got a scolding application. I have veered away from that all of my ministry...So I would often use a question in application. Isn't that your heart? I don't think it is cowardice. That is part of my character.

P.6 has an inquisitive personality and likes to know 'what makes people tick'. He explains the connection of this personality trait to composing application: 'I want to understand how we work, so that I can take God's Word and apply it to how we work as people'. From a theological perspective, this data is significant. This participant, who depends on the Holy Spirit to make application effective, also attempts to understand and address the response process of congregants. A similar approach is advocated by Cox (2012), Kim (2015), and Stange (2020) in the field of Neuroscience. They explore brain responses to words and apply their findings to preaching.

### *3. Evaluation*

The findings on this second source confirm that the composition of application involves more than the text and audience; the preacher also impacts the composition of application. From one perspective, this source is the least important of the three. The

text as God's Word, and the audience as God's people, trump the preacher who is merely the servant of both. Doriani (2001, p.59) makes this point. He uses the metaphor of a midwife to illustrate the role of the preacher assisting, when needed, 'people born of God through the Word'. However, as this data indicates, from another perspective, this source has incredible importance. Capill makes this point. He uses the metaphor of a conduit to describe the importance of the preacher. He writes:

If, as a person, the preacher is narrow, warped, twisted, or spiritually malnourished, the truth will get squeezed and distorted as it passes through the conduit. It will be like a blockage in a pipe preventing water from flowing freely (2014, p.82).

The findings on this second source also contribute to an understanding of the influence of the personality of the preacher on composing application by discussing the influence of imaginative, sensitive, and inquisitive personality. These findings, unexplored in the literature, inform the defined expository method.

While there is scant mention of the preacher's culture in the data, there is no mention of the preacher's gender. The silence of participants on gender influence cannot be explained simply by the complementarian position of the RPCI, 'Other Presbyterians', and Ulster evangelicals in general. In 2002 Porter observed a silence in evangelical literature in discussing gender. She wrote, 'In general, evangelical literature (about evangelicalism, evangelical theology, life as an evangelical, contemporary challenges to evangelicalism) is characterised by an absence of gender awareness' (2002, p.4). She suggested evangelicals adopted an issues-based approach to this matter, as instanced in the ordination of female ministers being considered a secondary and troublesome issue (2002, p.5). For this reason, she claims:

Generally, when evangelicalism addresses its own identity, shares its vision, and seeks to be relevant to society, it does not consider the significance of gender, the lived realities of being female and male (2002, p.4).

Perhaps, participants, in not discussing the lived reality of being male, reflect this issues-based approach. However, recent publications by evangelicals do demonstrate gender awareness by addressing gender and church ministry (Sandom, 2014; Yarhouse, 2015; Walker, 2017; De Young, 2021). Despite these publications, participants make no mention of this factor. Perhaps, therefore, their silence is partly explained by the lack of agreement among homileticians on gender specific influence on preaching, as indicated in chapter 2. Or perhaps participants have never considered this influence on verbal communication. The ordination of male only candidates to pastoral ministry within their denomination may have contributed to their silence on this influence. Their silence leaves a gap in the findings, highlighting an area for further research. However, participants do discuss the influence of the preacher's personality on composing application. While there is overlap between personality characteristics and gender traits (Costa et al, 2001, p.330,331), a focus on personality has the advantage of avoiding some of the more complex issues which arise when attempting to define gender specific attributes (Costa et al, 2001, p.330,331). However, by considering the influence of the preacher's personality on composing application and being silent on gender influence, participants diverge from the defined expository method.

#### *4. Conclusion*

While not utilising all elements of this second source of application, this section has shown all participants confirm the defined expository method, and some participants inform the method. Findings on the academic and experiential knowledge of the

preacher confirm the method. Findings on the preachers' personality inform the defined method and add to the research of Leslie J. Francis (2006). By discussing personality influence on composition rather than gender influence, participants demonstrate a further divergence from the defined expository method.

### C. SOURCE 3: The Audience

The third source of application identified by the defined expository method is the audience. Chapter 2 identified culture, categories, attitudes, age, appearance, and gender as elements of this source. This section demonstrates all participants confirm the defined expository method by utilising this source. Participants use audience culture, categories, and attitudes in composing application. Two participants inform the defined method by discussing small congregations.

#### *1. Culture*

The data indicates participants focus solely on the local culture of congregants (Quicke, 2007), mentioning their social, religious, and political culture.

##### a. Social Culture

One third of the population of Ulster is located in the greater Belfast area, while two thirds are scattered throughout the province. Local journalist, Susan McKay (2002), concludes her study of Ulster society by claiming urban and rural peoples have distinctive traits. One social difference, she discovered, was a reluctance to change in rural communities. Two participants confirm her discovery.

Reflecting on their experience of moving from rural to urban ministry and reusing old sermons, two participants (P.7, P.8) describe altering their sermon applications to relate to congregants in a different social culture. Like McKay (2002), these

participants observed a greater openness to embrace change in urban ministry. P.8 says:

Rural people are traditional in their ways...The negative is, they are loathe to change. In the urban setting, people are more open to change, because they are in a changing environment. They are much more willing to take on the challenges of the Word. That's just my perception.

However, P.7 insists the changes made did not affect the point of the application. He says:

When you strip away those superficial things, the point of the application is the same. The circumstances in which it may be given change, but the main point doesn't change.

Giles and Coupland (1991) advocate caution in attempting cultural accommodation in communication. They argue that attempts at cultural accommodation are not always effective, because they can be perceived as condescending.

#### b. Religious Culture

The expository style of participants must be understood in the context of the widespread influence of pietistic evangelicalism in Ulster. Jordan claims private devotions, or the 'quiet time' has had 'an enduring impact on evangelicalism' in the province (2001, p.53). He writes:

The use of Bible reading notes risks atomising the Bible into portions of text for personal edification without reference to the context of the text or its original cultural setting (2001, p.53).

One participant (P.3) reflects on the influence of pietistic evangelicalism in Ulster. He claims pietistic evangelicals ask, 'What does the Bible mean to you?' rather than 'What

does the Bible mean?'. He challenges this approach of 'getting a word for the day'. He says,

Unless you get something out of your personal Bible reading, you are not reading it the right way, whereas sometimes it might just be the wonder of being able to communicate the wonder of the gospel more freely.

P.3 reacts to this approach by emphasising the historical, grammatical, and literary context of a text and by including less application in his sermons. After his interview, P.3 related the following experience of pietistic evangelicalism, which I report from my field notes, with his permission. He described a congregant who attended gospel missions in the province where, 'the need to feel one's guilt' was emphasised. The person waited for a 'surge of emotion' conversion experience, but it never came. P.3 discussed with the congregant the analogy of being caught for speeding and asked, 'How would you feel?'. P.3 informed the congregant that whatever his emotions were, he would still be guilty, and explained his parallel situation before God. P.3 said he saw that, accepted it, and told his wife that then, 'Everything just fell into place.'

Jeff Astley calls such pietistic convictions, 'ordinary theology'. He defines it as, 'the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no education of a scholarly academic or systematic kind' (2013, p.1). It is learned in Bible study groups, everyday domestic experiences, and community. Such theology matters to people because it works. He argues church leaders should be familiar with this 'working theology' (2013, p.5), because sometimes, as instanced here, it conflicts with academic theology. This data indicates the expository style of the participants is challenged by evangelical pietism in Ulster.

### c. Political Culture

Participants mention the influence of Catholic and Protestant culture on the composition of application. Although half the population of Ulster self-identifies as Catholic, only two participants (P.3, P.6) serve in predominantly Catholic communities. Both participants have considerable interaction with Catholics. They are not oppositional evangelicals whose 'mark of orthodoxy, in faith as well as in politics, is the attitude to Catholicism' (Jordan, 2001, p.143). Rather, they display one of the characteristics of confessional evangelicals identified by Jordan (2001, p.142), 'friendship towards Catholics'. P.6 describes his approach:

I am trying to reach out to Catholic people, they are the people sitting in front of me. They have been threatened. They perceive God as standing there with a big stick. Grace is a new thing for them.

However, this participant qualifies his approach by claiming he emphasises grace to Catholics, 'no more or less than I would if ministering in a Protestant community'.

Seven participants serve in predominantly Protestant communities. P.7 describes his community as having a 'strong Protestant work ethic'. While in his taxonomy of culture Hofstede (2001) links strong work ethic to 'long-term orientation', P.7 links it to congregant desire for 'lists of practical things to go away and do'. He describes the influence of this ethic on his method of composing application: 'I place duty within a framework of grace'. However, the empirical research of Gallagher (2019) challenges the idea of a 'Protestant work ethic' by claiming work ethic is as strong among Ulster Catholics. Jordan suggests an alternative reason for the preponderance of legalistic tendencies among Protestant congregants. He claims, 'pietists have a disposition

towards legalism' (2001, p.23). Such legalism is often expressed in sermon applications.

Some participants (P.1, P.5, P.8, P.9) mention 'the Troubles' as an aspect of the political culture of Ulster influencing their composition of application. These participants encountered difficult pastoral situations during that period. P.9 is representative of these participants when he describes his experience of bringing comforting applications to congregants 'serving in the security forces, living in troubled areas in the province, or working in Belfast'. Other participants composed applications for congregants bereaved by the Troubles (P.5, P.8). As chapter 4 indicated, political tensions remain in the province since the Good Friday agreement (1998). Such ongoing tensions influence the sermon applications of participants on such themes as, 'forgiveness and loving your neighbour' (P.1).

The qualitative study of McLernon and Cairns (2004) explores forgiveness in the experience of 340 Catholic females, averaging 17.36 years of age, bereaved or abused as a result of the Troubles. The study concludes that participants 'showed a great reluctance to forgive' and that their forgiveness levels 'were low in comparison with previous studies of interpersonal forgiveness' in other countries, but typical of victims of the Troubles (2004, p.587). McLernon and Cairns assert their study 'provides an illustration of how slow any progress toward reconciliation between the two groups in Northern Ireland is likely to be' (2004, p.596). Biggar adds to this research by demonstrating the issue of forgiveness in Ulster culture is compounded by the range of opinions within the province on the related matters of; vengeance, retaliation, repentance, and grace (2008, p.562). Such reluctance to forgive and the varying opinions on forgiveness, present considerable local cultural challenges to participants in the process of composing application.

## 2. Categories

In discussing categories of congregants, participants (P.2, P.4, P.6 P.7) describe the influence of variety in present circumstances, past experiences, and temperaments on their composition of application. Firstly, variety of *present circumstances*. P.2 mentions variety of audience age groups and seeks to make relevant application to each. P.6 considers variety of spiritual conditions. For example, he composes application for the 'biblically illiterate'. P.7 claims variety of congregant situations influences his applications:

The people I am speaking to are certainly a source of application. I need to use empathy, pastoral experience, imagination, to think how the text might apply to particular people in front of me. I need to take account of knowledge, age, background, what kind of preaching they are used to hearing. If they are not used to discriminatory, searching application, it's going to be a shock to the system to just blast them with that. If they are used to it, you can go a lot further and be more probing in application. The kinds of battles they are facing, any unusual circumstances in general that week that are going on.

Secondly, variety of *past experiences*. P.4 mentions the usefulness of knowing someone's past when composing application:

I find knowing someone's past is very helpful in application. Because you could have people with brokenness, an awful mess behind them, converted when older. It is an application of bringing comfort. He has dealt with all your sins and faults of youth. A generalised application, yet Jim gets it.

Thirdly, variety of *temperaments*. P.6 attempts to compose application for congregants with different temperaments to himself. He says:

I also apply it to my wife. I think of her because she is very different, temperamentally, from me. I need to take people into account at the different end of the temperament spectrum from me.

The practice of participants illustrates the argument of Richard (2004), that variety in congregants is a rich source of application, helping avoid sameness.

Participants (P.1, P.2, P.4, P.5, P.9) also discuss the influence of 'shared needs' (Adam, in Dodson, 2014) on the choice of sermon series and application. Some participants select *sermon series* to meet the shared need of congregants. P.4 mentions preaching a series on leadership and mission to meet shared need. However, he acknowledges shared need is not always the determinant for him. He says, 'sometimes it's selfishness. Just at this moment, what I find it a little easier to preach on'. P.9 admits shared need was the determinant earlier in his ministry. However, during a prolonged ministry in one congregation, his criterion changed to 'what hasn't been preached on'. P.1 chooses the sermon series, usually a book of the Bible, by shared need, but does not select 'the weekly preaching portion' to meet need. Participants also relate the impact of shared need on *sermon application*. P.2 claims collective need influences his applications. He says, 'being in a congregation shapes your applications'. Similarly, P.4 claims, 'The needs of a group determine the application'. He gives the example of shared bereavement through the death of a church leader, and the sudden death of a church member. P.5 describes visiting a bereaved congregant who eagerly enquired about the after-life. Subsequently, he addressed the individual need of the congregant in a sermon series because he believed it was also a shared need. Within homiletic literature, there is a polarisation of opinions on shared need. On the one hand, the seeker sensitive approach allows need to determine sermon selection and application. On the other hand, the *lectio*

*continua* approach ignores shared need in the selection of the preaching portion. Participants attempt to combine the expository style with an awareness of congregant need.

### 3. Attitudes

Some participants (P.1, P.3, P.6) address various attitudes of congregants. P.3 considers the bulk of his sermon to target the cognitive attitude. He says:

There is often an apologetic thing going on in the back of my mind. I want people to understand the objective meaning, to communicate it to the world around them. To show them the truth and objective nature of Christianity. It is probably underlying a lot of things, so that they can say to their neighbour, 'These words mean this, and it is not foolish to believe this'.

However, he considers his cognitive focus to be also 'addressing doubts on the emotional level'.

Some participants claim the affect attitude of congregants influences their sermon application. P.1 cites the negative attitude of resentment. He describes the experience of not preaching on a section of Scripture due to 'an anticipated adverse reaction'. He says:

I have, on one occasion, not preached on a passage, not because I was afraid to preach it, or didn't want to preach it, but because there were some in the congregation at the time who would feel it was loaded.

He reflects on his experience and claims, 'Timeliness sometimes determines the preaching of a passage'. P.3 mentions an anti-authoritarian attitude towards a familiar preacher. He says, 'The closer you are ministering to where you have grown up, people do not like to be told what to do by you'. He admits this negative affect attitude

causes him to avoid some applications. This data indicates that, in the practice of these participants, the congregant attitude of affect is a source of application.

P.6 attempts a holistic approach to congregant attitudes. In composing application, he considers what the passage 'should make people feel, think and do'. However, he admits his primary focus is the affect attitude. He says, 'I am wanting to target the heart, not the head or the will'. He explains his approach by claiming obedience should be driven by heart worship:

Worship breaks the power of sin. We have to preach to the head: we cannot bypass it. We must tell the will what to do. But the way that is going to drive both of those actions is when we come to the heart. Not emotional appeal, but to worship: when the heart is moved to thrill and delight in God.

Borg (2013, p.6) supports the approach of P.6. He claims the most effective (behavioural) communication addresses the subconsciousness (affect) of listeners, with supporting reasoning addressing the consciousness (cognitive). However, the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) challenges the long-term impact of targeting affect attitudes. ELM proposes two routes of influence: the central route which involves information, arguments and supporting evidence addressing the mind of the receiver, and the peripheral route which addresses the receiver's emotions. ELM claims the central route leads to long-term change, while the peripheral route leads to short-term results, if any. The bulk of the data in this qualitative study demonstrates participants emphasise the affect attitude, while the Elaboration Likelihood Model emphasises the cognitive attitude.

#### 4. Number

Audience numbers receive little attention in the literature. For example, in his extensive model of communication theory, Hargie (2017) doesn't mention this factor. Ash reflects on the challenge of delivering application to large congregations:

...engagement comes only from week-by-week time with people. This has implications for the size of churches. It places a question mark over the ambition of church leaders to see their churches grow and grow and suggests that planting new churches or reinvigorating smaller existing churches may reap relational dividends in terms of how well those with pastoral oversight can know their people (2010, p.57).

P.4 agrees with this observation and mentions 'the wonderful anonymity' which can exist in a large congregation. However, participants (P.1, P.4, P.6, P.8) mainly discuss composing application for small congregations. These findings are explained by the average size of their congregations being 62 congregants at the time of this study, and 6/9 of their congregations having an average weekly attendance of less than 40 people. The main challenge faced by participants in small congregations is composing specific applications. P.1 claims that 'in a very small congregation it can be hard to be pointed'.

P.4 provides a nuanced approach to sermon application in small congregations. He maintains comforting applications can be specific, but rebukes should be general. However, he claims, 'application can address a specific need, even in general terms'. He explains:

You don't have to be pointed. You can make a general statement that lays it flat against them, and that is broad in its parameters, and the Spirit of God can take that into the person's life.

P.8 claims close proximity to congregants is sometimes an issue associated with small numbers, which increases the challenge of delivering specific applications. He observes that this factor can result in small congregations missing out on direct applications. He says:

It is much easier to apply the truth when you have a larger congregation. It's much more difficult when it is a small group. You are almost hitting people personally when you have a handful. It's got to be more balanced, carefully constructed, and yet not missing the point. There is a danger, in small congregations, of missing out on application and not being as precise as we ought to be. But we have also got to recognise the context. Toned down, but a fatherly way of applying it. Not missing it out but showing love and care for the man standing a few feet from you.

P.6 uses specific applications when comforting congregants, but also when lessons have already been learned by them. He says:

I think that having a small congregation influences how I preach the application. At times I will be less specific than if I were in a larger church, because if I talk about marriage difficulties, for example, it may be very obvious whom I am referring to. At other times, I will be very specific if I am dealing with comfort from Scripture, or lessons I know people have learned in their own lives.

P.4 mentions the need for sensitivity in making specific applications to non-Christians in small congregations. He says, 'You need to be careful in the group of twenty-seven. I am not going to nail the one non-Christian up to the wall. I will show him the loveliness of Christ'.

Thus, the issues of congregant proximity, lessons learned, application type and congregant categories, influence the participants' composition of application for small congregations.

## *5. Evaluation*

The extensive data on this source indicates its importance to participants. This reflects the prominence given to the audience in recent homiletic literature. While all participants maintain the text is the foundational source in their method of composing application, most of the data concerns the audience. This emphasis on congregants as a source of application suggests that, while there is no audible dialogue during the sermon, the method of 'silent dialogue' is being used by participants. The emphasis also fulfils an ordination vow taken by participants, though not mentioned by them: 'To endeavour to know particularly the condition of the flock committed to your care, that you may the better apply the Word to their cases both in public and private' (Code, 2008, 8.14(5)). However, such emphasis on the audience is a divergence from the defined method, which promotes the text as a source of application. Participants omitting some applications clearly demanded by the text, in small congregation settings because of close physical proximity to listeners, and specific failures in congregant lives, is another divergence. Such divergences suggest the inadequacy of the defined method for the participants.

There is little data on the popular culture of the audience, an omission which illustrates the gap that can exist between theoreticians and practitioners even in the field of practical theology (Orisi, 2005). The absence of any mention of modern technology in the sermon, perhaps, reflects the argument of Heywood (2014), that verbal images are superior to visual images. However, it is the brevity of data on the Troubles and the silence of participants on audience gender, which is most surprising.

First, the Troubles. Considering the momentousness of the Troubles, and the continued division and animosity in the province, brevity of data on them is surprising.

One explanation for this brevity is confidentiality. While the ministry of two participants was deeply affected by the Troubles, commitment to confidentiality prevents disclosure of details. Cohen et al. (2018, p.603) discuss the challenge of releasing sensitive data. They write, 'a researcher might gain access to a wealth of sensitive information and appropriate people, but there might be a restriction on the release of the data collected'. In this instance, restriction on information is imposed by the ethical commitments of the research. Another reason for minimalism in this area is the limited political involvement of participants during the Troubles. A key factor which contributed to such limited involvement, is the stance of the RPCI on the Orange Order. This Order, founded in 1795 and based in Northern Ireland, is strongly unionist, publicly promotes unionism throughout the marching season, and has only Protestant members. However, the RPCI refuses church membership to Orange Order members because it is a secret society and ignores the descending obligations of the Covenants (1638, 1643), (Testimony, 1998, p.92,93). This ecclesiastical position contributed to the minimal political involvement of the RPCI during the Troubles.

Second, audience gender. The silence of participants on congregant gender is also striking. One reason for the absence of data was my not raising the subject in the interviews. I regret not asking participants about the influence of congregants as embodied listeners on the composition of application. In the interview process I wrestled with the tension between prompting participants and suggesting answers to them (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016). Also, the developing nature of gender theory within homiletics and communication theory influenced my not raising this issue. By omitting this element, the composed applications of participants are less nuanced for embodied listeners. Their omission is also another divergence from the defined method.

## *6. Conclusion*

This section has shown that all participants consider the audience to be a source of application by using the culture, categories, and attitudes of congregants in the composition of application. The section has also indicated that data informs the defined expository method on composing application for small congregations. However, participants also demonstrate divergences from the defined expository method. The bulk of data being on the audience, little mention of the local culture of congregants, no mention of technology or audience gender, and aspects of small audiences influencing composition, are divergences from the defined method. These divergences suggest the inadequacy of the defined method for participants.

### Conclusion

This section has demonstrated that all participants confirm the defined expository method by using the three sources of application: text, preacher, and audience. While making no mention of audience gender or technology and providing minimal data on the Troubles, it has been shown in this section that there is considerable overlap between the defined expository method and the practice of the participants. This section has also shown some participants inform the defined method on the issues of the personality of the preacher and application to small audiences. However, divergences from the defined method are also discernible. Their congregant focus, no mention of technology or gender and adjusting application to respect small audience sensitivities are divergences from the defined expository method in the practice of participants.

## 5.2.2 Developing Sermon Application

Developing sourced application was identified as the second stage of the defined expository method in chapter 2. The literature mentions practical methods for developing application such as grammatical moods, pre-sermon dialogue groups, questions and grids. Some participants (P.3, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7) mention grammatical moods, but no participant mentions pre-sermon dialogue groups. However, this section will demonstrate that all participants confirm the defined expository method by using questions and/or grids, and some participants inform the method by disclosing unique practices.

### A. Questions and Grids

Some participants (P.1, P.4, P.6, P.7) use questions to develop application. These participants reflect the approach of MacArthur (1992) by asking questions of the text. For example, P.7 says, 'I think of the passage; Is there a promise to claim, a duty to obey, a failure to repent of, a truth to be understood or to believe and worship God for?'.

All participants use mental grids to develop application. P.1 uses grids based on the text, doctrines and categories of congregants. He describes his process:

Once I get my doctrines from the text, then I put my grid on it...I have picked up a few grids down the years, from basic to complex. From a truth to believe, a sin to confess, an error to avoid, a command to obey, that kind of simple thing. Then I would ask, 'What does this teach me about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the world, the flesh the Devil, the church, and society?'... And then there are certain things like law and gospel, or flesh and Spirit, which can be applied to all ranges. It gives the application teeth. And then, and I am not so good at this, that Baxter thing when you look at the different

classes: the weak, the strong, the arrogant, the depressed, the complacent, all kinds of pastoral states of the sheep. I am becoming more conscious of the spiritual state of the sheep, where they are wounded and weak, and applying the right application.

In his description, P.1 claims using grids 'gives the application teeth'. In this metaphor, he likens general applications to gums, but developed application to gums with teeth, providing bite and incisiveness. However, despite the utilisation of numerous grids, P.1 finds the process challenging and admits, 'I am not very good at this!'. P.2 uses a grid of audience age groups to develop application. After writing his sermon, he mentally checks 'if the various age groupings have been addressed'. While P.2 does not describe the distinctive traits of differing age groupings, empirical research such as Twenge and Campbell's (2008) study of 1.4 million college students, identifies generational traits. Their study, therefore, highlights the legitimacy and importance of utilising age profile grids in the composition of sermon application.

P.6 claims the use of grids optimises the relevance of his applications by addressing specific groupings. He claims, 'Not one size fits all'. He uses a grid containing categories of people likely to be present, but also people who will be absent. He describes his process:

I am thinking round the people who are sitting there. Thinking of the categories of unconverted people as well...I am thinking of people who are not there, who I want to be there. I want people to feel they could bring someone.

P.7 uses a mental grid of categories of congregants and variety within categories. He says:

I try to think of categories within the congregation. Young mums, singles, married couples: unbelievers, young people, elderly, careless, conscientious, random visitors that have walked in off the street.

Thus, participants confirm the second stage of the defined expository method by using the tools of questions and grids to develop application.

## B. Other Methods

Participants also use other practical tools to develop application before, during, and after the exegetical process which are not explored in literature on the expository method.

### *1. Before the exegetical Process*

Practical methods used by participants (P.2, P.3, P.6, P.7) to develop application before exegesis include preaching programme, personal devotions, and membership list. One participant includes a specific applicatory sermon series in his annual *preaching programme*. P.3 includes a series of sermons focused on life issues in his preaching schedule each year. In this sermon series, he begins with congregant or social needs, and then relates the text to those needs. He says:

There are times in my preaching calendar when I will speak about life issues and I will start the other way around – ‘How do you live your life?’ - and I will pull in verses as the basis for living.

This forward planning allows the participant to consider and develop application in advance of the exegetical process.

Some participants adopt the practice of considering the text in their *personal devotions*, prior to exegesis. P.2 adopts this practice and claims it provides suggestions for composing sermon application. He says:

When commencing a series, I will have generally read through, as a devotional, what I am going to be preaching on. I will already have been applying this to myself. So, when I come to prepare sermons, I have already had thoughts of application.

P.6 adopts a similar approach. He mentions that the practice allows him to consider objections to the application of the passage. He says:

Another thing is studying through something in my devotions and then making notes of how it is applied to me, and then when I come to preach it, I have a chunk of application there. First, I apply it to me. I make my excuses and wriggle, trying to get out of the application. Then I counter that.

Another participant uses the *membership roll* as a prayer list. P.7 endeavours to pray for all the members in his congregation each week so that, when composing application, the needs of members are already in his mind. He explains his practice:

I use the list of members to pray for all of them, each week ideally, so that their faces and circumstances are in my mind and on my heart when I compose application.

Ward discusses the connection between intercessory prayer and an intercessor's view of the world. He claims prayer for others 'becomes a way of noticing suffering and hardship' (2017, p.17) and 'develops habits of seeing' (2017, p.18). He claims 'noticing' through prayer, leads to action. In the case of P.7, prayer for church members leads to the action of composing application.

## *2. During the exegetical Process*

Participants describe two methods adopted during the process of exegesis to develop application: self-application and jotting ideas. Most participants (P.1, P.2, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8, P.9) self-apply the preaching portion, prior to composing application. Participants identify various links between self-application and the composition of

sermon application. P.4 identifies common Christian experiences as the link between self-application and his sermon applications. He explains:

A lot of my application comes out as God is dealing with me. That is the springboard for my applications. What is God saying to me in this passage? I consider myself a very ordinary Christian in many ways. And if that is what God is saying to me from this passage, that is what God is wanting to say to his people...It will not all transfer, for sometimes God is speaking to me about being a minister of the gospel, a father, a husband, but out of that there will be avenues of application to the people.

P.7 identifies human nature as the common factor between his self-applications and the composition of sermon applications. He says:

I preach the text to myself first. I don't know anybody else's heart. The only heart I have access to is my own heart. So, I preach it to myself and think how it challenges me, encourages me, rebukes me, corrects and teaches me. This is limited in its usefulness, because I can't enter into everyone's experience. But given the common humanity, the common sinful condition, there are many shared experiences with our hearers. It makes sense to draw on those common experiences. My heart is not so very different from others: 'no temptation has seized you except what is common to man'. So that gives me reason to think that the struggles that I have are not just me. They might be present in my life in a particular way, we're all put together differently, but at the end of the day there is commonality about our experience, which makes it legitimate to draw upon ourselves and our own hearts as a source of application. If this helps me, there is a good chance that it will help others as well. Looking into myself, my experiences, my feelings, and using that as a way of gaining insight into other people's hearts.

P.8 identifies basic human needs as the link between self-application and sermon application. He says:

I will have sought to apply this to my own heart, and so I know their needs, as I recognise how it applies to me. So, this would suggest a line of application, for they are human beings as well as I am. Therefore, it will help me how I construct the application and how I press it home.

Thus, these participants link self-applications to sermon application by commonalities between preacher's and congregants' Christian experience, human nature and human needs.

P.4 discerns a further link between self-applications and sermon applications. He observes that applications which challenge him most, tend to be 'most productive' among congregants. He says:

There will be little things God has spoken to me about and I just get down on my knees. That is the best sermon application, when I have to get down on my knees, and go to God about something he has said in his Word. That is the most productive application, when I have felt the application in my heart.

In this development tool, the sources of text and preacher are prominent. Application is composed for the audience, but not before application has been developed for the preacher. In this case the preacher acts as mediator through whom application passes. Such self-application by participants fulfils one of their ordination vows: 'To seek to know the power of the Word in your own heart, and that you may be able to expound and apply it from personal experience' (Code, 2008, 8.14(1)).

Carter et al. (2018) adds to these findings by maintaining that self-application develops the preachers' ability to compose application. A similar connection is made by Dainton and Zelle (2011, p.150) when discussing the five qualities of emotional intelligence (EQ). They argue that the three EQ qualities of self-awareness, self-regulation, and motivation are the basis for the two EQ qualities of empathy and social skill. Hargie

likewise connects self-monitoring to effective communication. He claims 'lax self-monitoring is likely to diminish one's communicative effectiveness' (2017, p.40). These aspects of communication theory, therefore, support the data on the influence of self-application in the composition of sermon application.

Some participants (P.4, P.5, P.7) describe the practice of jotting down applicatory possibilities during the exegetical task. P.4 scribbles on a notepad, applications suggested to him during the process of exegesis. P.5 and P.7 use an 'A4 page' to write down ideas for application during the process, though P.7 insists those initial ideas 'may be modified as I complete the exegetical task'. Jansen discusses the 'encoding effect' of note taking. He explains 'encoding effect' as the 'deeper processing of information' (2017, p.223). Thus, these participants, in jotting down applicatory possibilities rather than just thinking them, allow potential applications to penetrate deeper into their person, resulting in greater clarity of expression and stronger tincturing by their personality.

### *3. After the exegetical Process*

One participant provides full sermon notes for congregants. P.3 says the notes regularly contain a closing section entitled, 'For Us', in which application is stated. The discipline of committing to print helps this participant develop application after the exegetical task.

### Evaluation

One striking feature of the data on this second stage is the divergence from the defined expository method by some participants in considering application prior to exegesis. While participants insist on text-driven application, some consider application prior to

the exegetical process. This suggests that, while exegesis is supreme in determining their applications, application is driving the approach of these participants.

This observation also highlights an inconsistency in their practice. As theme 4 will demonstrate participants do not use pre-sermon dialogue groups to determine application, so that the fixed meaning of the text is conveyed to congregants in the sermon before further application is considered in post-sermon dialogue groups. However, this data indicates some participants consider application prior to determining meaning.

## Conclusion

This theme has shown all participants confirm the defined expository method by using the tools of grids and questions to develop application. The findings also indicate participants inform method, by utilising some tools not explored in the literature. These include using the membership roll as a prayer list and sermon notes with a 'For Us' section. The findings also indicate divergence from the defined expository method, by considering application prior to exegesis.

### **5.2.3 Integrating Sermon Application**

The third theme of homiletic method mentioned in chapter 2 is integrating application. Levels, types, illustrations, language, and location were identified as elements of integration. All these elements are utilised by participants, thereby confirming the defined expository method.

#### A. Levels, Types and Illustrations of Application

Some participants (P.5, P.6, P.7) discuss *levels* of application. P.5 recognises that numerous levels of application 'can legitimately be made from a text'. However, P.7

insists all levels must arise from the preaching portion if the sermon is to be described as expository. He says:

There may be a hierarchy of applications - primary, secondary and tertiary - but they must be rooted in this passage. There may be true applications of other parts of Scripture, but if not coming from the text being preached, they shouldn't be included in this sermon on this passage. It seems to me that's not expository preaching.

P.6 claims a secondary level application can legitimately become the main application in the sermon. He argues that audience composition should influence sermon application, not just application level. He says, 'There's no point in preaching an application that doesn't apply to the people who are there'. This claim differs from the position of Capill (2014) who argues that most 'air-time' should be given to the primary application. However, P.6 does not discuss the 'weakened degree of dogmatism' which Helm (2014) argues should mark secondary applications.

Two participants (P.1, P.4) caution against overly specific *types* of applications. As already noted in the first theme of the findings, P.4 claims specific applications may conflict with the applications which the Spirit intends for congregants. P.1 maintains overly specific applications exclude some groups. He says, 'sometimes you can be so particular in your application, that you are too particular, you are narrowing it down to somebody. You rule others out by being too focused on one thing'. Robinson (2014) responds to this argument by claiming specific applications often affect a wider audience than the target group.

Most participants (P.2, P.3, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.9) use *illustrations* to illuminate truth. However, some participants (P.4, P.8) recognise the usefulness of applicatory illustrations. Commenting on their usefulness in the sermon, P.8 claims, 'people need

as much help as they can get, in living out the truth'. In discussing illustrations, participants do not discuss the property of concreteness (Fabarez, 2005) or explore the role of emotion in illustration (Kim, 2015). This lack of discussion is largely explained by their predominant use of explanatory illustrations.

## B. Language of Application

In considering the language of composed application, the homiletic method discusses the use of pronouns and the careful wording of applications. Participants discuss both factors.

### *1. Pronouns*

P.4 occasionally uses the first-person pronoun, as Edwards (2005) suggests. He says, 'At times I have put myself right in there'. However, some participants use 'you' predominantly while others use 'we' more frequently in composing application. P.4 and P.8 defend the use of the second person pronoun in most of their applications, by appealing to their sense of divine call. While advocating sensitivity in the use of 'you', P.4 reveals 'I use 'you' more than 'we'. That is part of my understanding of preaching: the herald of the great king'. Similarly, P.8 says, 'I predominantly use 'you' as Christ's ambassador'. The same argument is used by Adams (1990, p.25,26), who claims the preacher is not a spectator of the message, or a recipient, but a herald. However, P.8 adds that greater experience of pastoral ministry was also a factor in his use of 'you'. He says, 'When younger, I was less direct as I ought to have been'. The predominant usage of 'you' by these participants reflects the views of Capill (2014) and Murray (2011) but falls short of the position of Adams (1990), who advocates that 'you' is to be used in all applications.

In contrast to these participants, P.2 uses the pronoun 'we' more than 'you'. He describes his method:

I would, at times, say 'you', and most of the time say 'we'. If directed to a group I use 'you'. If it is a point I feel the congregation needs challenged on, I use 'you'. If it is to do with weaknesses and the need to be more Christ-like, I will say 'we'. If it is something comforting quite often it will be 'you'.

In this statement, P.2 claims he allows the content of the message and the nature of the audience to determine his pronoun usage. P.1 agrees with P.2 that 'what you are applying' should determine pronoun usage and adds two other determining factors. One is 'your own spiritual condition'. P.2 admits 'there are times when I have used 'you' when I should have used 'we''. Another factor he suggests is popular culture. P.2 claims the trend in popular culture is to use 'we', creating societal pressure on preachers to 'draw back from 'you''.

From this data, it is evident there is no uniformity of practice among participants on pronoun usage. Various aspects of the text, preacher, and audience determine their pronoun selection:

- text - nature of the message
- preacher - degree of experience in ministry, sense of divine call, level of spirituality
- audience - culture and need for sensitivity.

Dainton and Zelle (2011, p.60) add to this discussion by suggesting three further factors which can determine strategy selection: the other has more/less prestige, the communicator has power over the other, and the risks of hurting the other.

## 2. *Wording*

Capill (2014) considers banal and predictable applications to be 'flat speech' and argues for memorable and effective words to be used in application. Some participants recognise the importance of words and adopt various practices to improve the wording of their composed application. The weekly sermon notes provided by P.3, containing a section on application, compels him to give careful attention to language. P.6 claims his practice of preparing a full sermon manuscript, forces him 'to think out the words and pay attention to them'.

P.7 asserts banality in the wording of application results in inattention among congregants. He says:

I need to avoid using the same language and phrases in application that can become cliched and tired. There is always the temptation for hearers to switch off when it comes to application.

This point challenges the claim of some homileticians, that congregants are most attentive to the sermon element of application. Kim (2015) and Chapell (2018) claim congregants struggle to concentrate on the explanatory element of the sermon. Therefore, they argue, concurrent application should be used to retain their attention. However, this data indicates preachers face the challenge of retaining the attention of congregants during the applicatory element, as well. Therefore, the language of application, and not merely the element of application, is crucial to retaining congregant attention.

Wording in the end of the sermon is also discussed in the literature. Chapell (2005) advocates that the language of the last 60 seconds should be 'clear and compelling'.

Some participants (P.4, P.6, P.7) recognise the importance of sermon endings and adopt various approaches. P.7 makes it applicatory. He says:

I know that the last thing that you say, what you leave ringing in people's ears is obviously, like the first sentence really important, and it should be. It is an opportunity to press home the application.

P.6 aims for a striking last sentence on occasions. He says, 'Sometimes I give careful attention to the last sentence, to finish crisply'. P.4 opts for a Christocentric ending. He says, 'I have at times given consideration to the final sentence. And I would want that sentence to be about Jesus Christ'. Alternatively, he suggests closing with a question. He says, 'I have sometimes used an illustration right at the end, that sometimes ends in a one sentence application, 'Will your life be like that?'. This data therefore indicates variety among participants in utilising the concluding sentences of the sermon. Only three participants consider closing sentences important, indicating divergence from the defined expository method by six participants, suggesting the inadequacy of the defined method for them.

### C. Location of Application

The defined expository method discusses the location of application in the sermon (Adam, 2014). Participants consider application in the introduction, main body, and conclusion of the sermon. Some participants (P.4, P.6) include application in their sermon *introduction*. Their aim is to establish at the outset the relevance of the passage for listeners. P.4 comments, 'I occasionally include application in the introduction, showing how the passage applies to the hearer'. In attempting connectivity with listeners, P.6 always writes his sermon introduction first, 'to clarify to himself and to the congregation, what the relevance of the passage is to their lives'.

Noar et al. (2009, p.113) claim establishing connectivity at the outset promotes greater attention and ultimately persuasion. However, Benoit (1998, p.146) maintains 'forewarning' an audience of the application makes the message less persuasive. Hargie agrees with Benoit and concludes that, 'when targets are forewarned, they adopt a less receptive frame of mind and become more resistant to the perceived 'interference'' (2017, p.356). A further weakness of applicatory introductions is that it does not carry the authority of prior exposition.

Eight participants (P.1, P.2, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8, P.9) locate application in the *main body* of the sermon, usually after each main point. P.9 would consider himself a failure 'if he could not discover an application for one of his main headings'. Four participants (P.1, P.5, P.7, P.8) follow the homiletic model of Olyott - state, illustrate, apply - for each main point in the sermon. P.1 occasionally adds a fourth element - 'prove'. He also sometimes uses 'asides of application throughout the sermon, not necessarily in a structured way'. Benefits of concurrent application are mentioned by participants:

- it answers the question, 'So what?'. P.2 maintains concurrent application prevents congregants wondering how the explanation applies to them during the sermon.
- it capitalises on an opportune moment. P.8 emphasises the importance of showing the relevance of the text while congregants are considering the meaning. He appeals to the proverb, 'strike while the iron is hot'.
- it comes with the authority of the expounded text. P.7 uses this argument and explains that his sermon application usually comes:

...at the end of each main point so that, it is coming on the basis of explaining truth, and not simply to call people to obey, without authority or context. So, the

people see the link, and it comes with the authority of God's Word, and not with my personality or anything like that.

One disadvantage of concurrent application is recognised by P.8 when he concedes it 'interrupts the flow of the sermon'. Petty and Cacioppo (1986), emphasise the importance of strong arguments to accomplish long-term change in attitudes. They maintain interruptions diminish the effectiveness of arguments. Adams agrees with this point and claims all parts of the sermon should feed into one strong application (1990, p.41). However, P.8 argues that the benefits of concurrent application outweigh disadvantages, as Murray (2011), Kim (2015) and Chapell (2018) also claim.

Most participants (P.1, P.3, P.4, P.6, P.7) include application in the *conclusion* of the sermon always, occasionally, or additionally. P.3 **always** locates sermon application only in the conclusion. He argues that the meaning of the text is foundational, not only in the exegetical task, but also in sermon composition. He aims, as Greidanus (1998) advocates, to complete the explanation of the whole passage first, and then make the main application of the passage. P.7 **occasionally** includes application only in the conclusion, 'when the passage requires a lot of explanation'. This method ensures congregants are not over-burdened with multiple applications and the main application is evident and memorable. Some participants include **additional** application in the conclusion and give reasons for this. P.1 uses the conclusion to recap the main points of the sermon and apply them in the form of questions. While this method can aid memory, it lacks the element of surprise. P.6 uses the conclusion for recapitulation with minimal application. P.7 avoids recapitulation and uses the conclusion to apply the main point of the sermon. He describes the purpose of his conclusion as being to:

Concentrate the people on the one main point of the sermon, rather than recapitulating the three headings. It is more to drive home the one main point of the sermon.

However, he admits occasionally deviating from this practice and using the conclusion to deliver a spontaneous application. He says, 'Sometimes, if something has gripped me, I might finish with an extemporaneous conclusion'. P.4 often uses the conclusion of the sermon to make discriminatory applications to Christians and non-Christians.

Hargie (2017, p.305,306) stresses the importance of motivational closure to address cognitive dissonance and secure maximum commitment. Cooper (2007) claims decisions made during a speech are subject to doubts and anxiety, and motivational closure addresses such cognitive dissonance. Similarly, Hettema et al. (2005) stress the importance of strengthening commitment to action in the conclusion of a message. However, P.4 admits struggling in this area. He says, 'My conclusions are rubbish in sermons. I find them really difficult'. P.6 also considers his conclusions to be 'rather weak'.

The variety of locations for application in the sermon adopted by participants reflects the literature. The data indicates participants are influenced by text genre, congregant culture, and audience variety in determining best location for application.

## Conclusion

The third theme has shown participants use levels, types, illustrations, language, and location of application in the process of integrating application. These findings demonstrate that participants confirm the defined expository method for the third stage of composing application. However, the data also includes divergences from the defined method. Some participants argue a secondary level application can, on occasion, be the main application in the sermon, while others don't recognise the significance of the closing sentences of the sermon.

## 5.2.4 Evaluation

The findings of the second theme suggest an answer to the research question of this study can now be given. The research question is: to what extent is the expository method significant in the composition of application for the expository sermon? The answer which this second theme indicates is: **the defined expository method is significant in the experience of this sample of expository preachers.** This conclusion is evident by the considerable overlap between the defined expository method and the practice of participants in the key areas of sourcing, developing, and integrating application. While there are divergences from the defined expository method in the practice of participants, as this second theme has demonstrated and the table on page 184 illustrates, there is also considerable overlap with the method which confirms the significance of the defined method in their practice.

Out of the 20 categories identified, all participants utilise 7 categories, at least 4 participants utilise 13 categories, at least 2 participants utilise 17 categories, while 0 participant makes no mention of 3 categories. All participants utilise the 3 sources of application and all participants utilise elements of developing and integrating application. In concluding that the defined expository method is significant in the practice of participants, the following four issues arise.

One issue concerns the causes for this considerable overlap. Two causes are identifiable in the data: influence and experience. In the previous chapter, it was argued majority and leadership influence are the strongest influences on the practice of the participants. However, both these influences have been influenced by the expository approach. This is evident in the textbooks and reading lists used by the RTC and in the works cited by Professor Donnelly in his lectures on 'Applicatory

Preaching' ([www.sermonaudio.com](http://www.sermonaudio.com)). Thus, the defined expository method for composing application has come to participants predominantly via majority and leadership influence. Supplementing these influences are the influences of homiletic literature and sermons by expository preachers, as discussed in chapter 4. A second cause for the overlap is experience. One example of this cause appears in their practice of including biblical theology in their hermeneutic. Participants offer an empirical defence of their practice by claiming, they need grace. These two causes for the overlap, influence and experience, are illustrated in one participant. P.8 claims that in his theological training, 'there was not as much discussion on relevant application. I learned more on the job, and by observing others'. Dainton and Zelley (2011, p.5) classify this combination of influence and experience as 'common-sense theory or theory-in-use'. They contrast it with 'working theory', which describes the best techniques for doing something, and 'scholarly theory', which has undergone systematic research.

A second issue is that the practice of participants does not confirm the defined expository method in all areas. While participants confirm key areas of the approach, some elements are absent from their method. For example, technology, preacher and audience gender, and pre-sermon dialogue groups are not explored by participants. Only two participants mention applicatory illustrations and only three participants mention levels of application. One implication of participants' omission of or weakness in these categories is, there is room for development in the practice of these preachers. Aspects of the defined homiletic method not adopted by participants, and with which they may not yet be familiar, could improve their practice.

A third issue is the demonstration in these findings, that practice informs the defined expository method in some areas. Practice has informed the defined expository

method, in such areas as the personality of the preacher and small congregations. This demonstration illustrates the benefit of field work in developing method. Doriani claims preachers rarely get the opportunity to disclose their methods. He describes the importance of such opportunities: 'Given that the knowledge of the masters may be unvoiced and semi-conscious, we owe it to the church, and even the masters themselves, to distil their secrets and bring them to awareness' (2001, p.31). While participants would not claim to be 'masters', this theme indicates that they have contributed to method. For the first time the voice of these participants has been heard.

A fourth issue is counter examples, where the practice of participants diverges from the defined expository method. Numerous instances of counter examples have been noted throughout this theme. Reading the text through the 'lens of grace' (p.129) is one example. This approach, while defended by all participants, is not an essential element of the defined expository method and is rejected by three key texts promoting the expository approach. The influence of personality (p.135) on composing application is another divergence from the defined method. The method includes preacher and audience gender as sources of application. Participants, however, are silent on gender influence, but discuss the influence of personality. Most of the data being on the audience as a source (p.148) is a divergence in emphasis from the defined expository method which promotes the text. The practice of some participants in determining application before exegesis (p.157) and the use of a secondary application as the primary sermon application (p.164), are also divergences from the defined expository method. Sermon application being omitted or adjusted out of fear of congregants, sensitivity to congregant failures, close physical proximity to congregants in small congregation settings and inexperience in ministry, are further

instances of divergence from the defined expository method (p.161,173) which insists on the composition and delivery of application demanded by the text.

Such counter examples indicate, that, while participants demonstrate commitment to the defined expository method, they do not conform to that method completely. The data shows that the participants are not as aligned to the defined expository method as they might claim or imagine themselves to be. They have modified the defined method to form a unique homiletic method suited to their convictions, personalities, and pastoral situations. Such divergences and modifications suggest the inadequacy of the defined expository method in their practice. The next chapter will explore important elements beyond the defined expository method which are significant in the practice of participants.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

In this chapter, findings on the introductory theme of the importance of sermon application have been presented. This theme has indicated that participants consider the composition of application 'important' or 'very important'. The second theme, has shown there is considerable overlap between the practice of participants and the defined expository method in the key areas of sourcing, developing, and integrating application, thereby demonstrating that the defined method is significant in their experience. The findings have also indicated numerous divergences from the defined expository method suggesting the inadequacy of the method in their practice. In the next chapter the third and fourth themes will be presented.

## Data overlap with Defined Expository Method

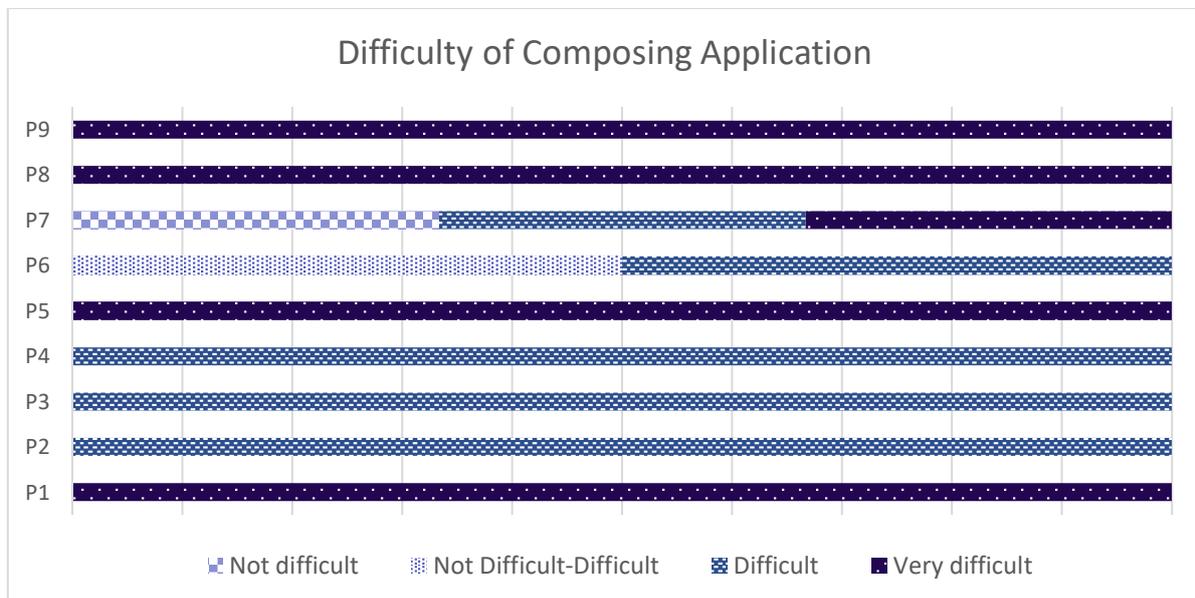
			All	Some	None
1. Sourcing	A. Text	Exegesis	√		
		Theology	√		
		Significance	√		
	B. Preacher	Knowledge	√		
		Culture		(P. 1, 6, 7)	
		Gender			√
	C. Audience	Culture		(P. 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9)	
		Categories		(P. 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9)	
		Attitudes		(P. 1, 3, 4, 6)	
		Gender			√
2. Developing	Grids	√			
	Questions		(P. 1, 4, 6, 7)		
	Grammatical moods		(P. 3, 4, 5, 6, 7)		
	Congregant discussion			√	
	Other	√			
3. Integrating	Levels		(P. 5, 6, 7)		
	Types		(P. 1, 4)		
	Illustrations		(P. 4, 8)		
	Language		(P. 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8)		
	Location	√			

## CHAPTER 6: FINDINGS OF QUALITATIVE RESEARCH (2) AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

The previous chapter reported that all participants consider application ‘important’ or ‘very important’. It also established that the defined expository method is significant in the experience of participants, by demonstrating considerable overlap between their practice and the defined method. However, several counter examples in the data suggested the inadequacy of the defined method for participants. In this chapter themes 3 and 4 will be presented. Theme 3 will demonstrate that despite the considerable overlap between method and practice established in theme 2, participants consider the composition of application to be ‘very difficult’ or ‘difficult’. Theme 4 reports elements beyond the defined expository method which are important to participants in composing application.

### 6.1 THEME 3: Difficulty of Composing Application

The ratings of participants regarding the difficulty of composing application are illustrated in the diagram below.



The rating of 'very difficult' by four participants (44%) compares with Carrell's survey of preachers. In her empirical study of over 500 preachers, 37% identified the composition of application their biggest sermon preparation challenge. The most common reason given by them for their rating was the difficulty of bridging the gap between the Bible world and contemporary culture. They said, 'The relevancy is not always apparent in the text. How can I translate the meaning of some Biblical passages to today's culture?' (2000, p.115). Reasons the participants give for their ratings are now considered.

### **6.1.1 'Very Difficult'**

The four participants (P.1, P.5, P.8, P.9) who consider the composition of application 'very difficult' give the following reasons. One participant connects the difficulty of composing application to *personality type*. He says, 'maybe it is my natural disposition which is more analytical. I am good at taking things apart, but not so good at putting them back together again' (P.1). Some participants claim that, after completing the exegetical task, they are in a state of *mental exhaustion*. P.5 comments, 'sometimes I am exhausted after the exegetical work, which causes me to neglect the composition of application'. P.1 describes a similar experience. He says:

Sermon preparation is very demanding. It would be good to start application earlier in the process, but the problem with that is how can you apply when you do not know the principles in the text? So, it is at the far end of the climb up Kilimanjaro of sermon preparation, when you are tired. I find sermon preparation a very demanding process. And then you have to apply the application, apply specifically, and I struggle with that and have done all my life.

One participant cites *time constraint* as a reason for difficulty in composing application. He says, 'Often there is little time for prolonged consideration of application. You state, illustrate and then application comes right at the end of the process' (P.1). Some participants mention a *lack of instruction* on composing application in their theological training as a reason for their struggle. P.8 states, 'No homiletic method for composing the applicatory element in the sermon was taught to me in college. Rather, the sermon was just expected to include application'. P.1 had a similar experience, and describes the impact of that deficiency on his homiletic process:

Part of the difficulty is also from a lack of training in college. And so, because I have gleaned from various quarters, maybe when the pressure comes on there is a lack of confidence in your method. That's not a big thing, but I'm sure it is there in the background.

One participant describes experiencing a *spiritual battle* when attempting to compose application. He says:

Sermon preparation is a spiritual thing, and I am conscious of satanic resistance in preparing sermons. Not like Luther firing ink pots, but things crowd in, the pastoral workload or difficulties, and you are left exhausted, or your head is spinning. Sometimes God doesn't give clarity to me until close to the end of the process. I find it a humbling process, preparing sermons (P.1).

Personality type, mental exhaustion, time constraint, lack of instruction, and spiritual battle are reasons given by these participants for considering the composition of application 'very difficult'.

### 6.1.2 Less Difficult

Participants who rate the composition of application 'difficult' (P.2, P.3, P.4, P.7), 'not difficult-difficult' (P.6), or sometimes 'not difficult' (P.7), give the following reasons. *More years in a congregation* is one reason given. P.2 claims the longer a preacher is in a congregation, the more knowledge the preacher has of congregant needs. Consequently, this greater knowledge 'provides more material from which to compose application'. Similarly, Bass and Dykstra (2008, p.50,51) claim the many and varied experiences of a pastor produce a 'unique type of wisdom'. They describe it as 'seeing in-depth and creating new realities' and claim it conditions sermon applications. *Life experiences* is another reason given. P.4 claims life experiences provide him with such an abundance of applicatory material that, regarding composing application, he asserts, 'I don't find it a major difficulty'. He says:

Years in the ministry, understanding my own heart and people's hearts, I don't find it a major difficulty...It gets a little easier as you get older, in that you have walked a good bit of life and people see that.

Some participants (P.2, P.4, P.6, P.7) claim certain *passage types* are 'less difficult' to apply. P.2 maintains, as Green (2015) does, that where there is similarity between text context and current situation, 'the application is already there, it is easy'. P.7 quotes the text, 'Whoever looks on a woman to lust after her, has committed adultery with her in his heart' (Matt. ch.5.35) as an example of parallel contexts. He comments, 'You don't have to think too hard what the application is going to be. Obviously, you will have to tease out how you will press that home on the conscience'. P.6 claims *personality type* makes the composition of application easier for him. He says:

I am a very practically orientated person. I need to know why, and what's this here for? I need to know what a thing is for. So, when it comes to writing a sermon, I can't write the sermon until I have the introduction written. I have my outline, a thin outline, the main points, but I can't actually write my sermon until I have my introduction. And I can't write my introduction until I have understood what the passage is meant to be doing. What is the drive behind this passage? What is the Spirit seeking to do here? Once I get that, then I can write my introduction. And because I am starting from a so what? moment, what is the impact of this passage? then, once I get that, everything seems to flow out of that for application. So, I'm not sitting at the end scratching my head, asking what are my applications? It is more so scratching my head at the start, asking, 'What's this here for?'. In the introduction, I usually set up the scenario of, 'Why do people have to listen to this?'. I am not a theoretician. I want to know what this is here for.

More years in a congregation, life experiences, passage type, and personality type are the reasons given by these participants for rating the composition of application 'less difficult'.

### **6.1.3 Evaluation**

This theme indicates that, though the defined expository method is significant in the practice of participants, the process of composing application remains difficult for them. The reasons given by the participants who rate the composition of application 'very difficult' are issues they have no control over: personality, time, exhaustion, training, spiritual conflict. This data, therefore, suggests some preachers will always experience some degree of difficulty in composing application. The defined expository method will not eliminate every difficulty.

A second observation on this theme indicates variance in participant ratings is partly explained by differing perspectives. In the example cited by P.7 (Matt. ch.5.35), there is no difficulty in discerning the general application, because there is no cultural gap. However, there is difficulty in 'teasing out' the application for different congregant groups, as P.7 recognises. Therefore, from one perspective, application is not difficult, but from another perspective it is. This difference in rating, caused by perspective, highlights one weakness of interviewing as a research tool. The data is collected during a contrived, non-natural event and, therefore, contains elements of subjectivity and perspective (Cohen et al., 2018, p.321).

A third observation on this theme is that *personality type* makes application 'less difficult' for one participant but 'very difficult' for another participant. An analytical personality type finds the composition of application 'very difficult', while a practical personality type finds it 'less difficult'. This finding indicates nature, and not merely nurture, has an influence on the task of composing application. This data supplements the research of Leslie J. Francis (2006), who uses the Myers Briggs Type Indicator to explore the influence of personality on reading and interpreting Scripture.

A fourth observation is that the difficulty of composing application could be reduced by participants utilising more elements from the defined expository method. Theme 2 identified numerous omissions from the defined method by participants. One such omission is gender influence. While participants mention the influence of the preacher's personality on composition, they make no mention of gender influence by preacher or congregant. Such silence on this source of application, suggesting neglect of it in their practice, contributes to their rating of difficulty. Unawareness of the strengths, weaknesses, biases, and traits, of a preacher's gender, is likely to produce

applications that are banal, predictable and biased. Failure to compose gender specific applications for embodied listeners, will result in less nuanced sermon applications.

Besides the specific difficulties mentioned by participants in composing application, there is the general difficulty of the unique political setting of Northern Ireland. In chapter 4, political division and animosity were identified as prominent traits of Ulster culture. One expression of such division and animosity in rural settings, discussed in chapter 4, is the ill-divided size and quality of farmland owned by Catholic and Protestant farmers. This feature of rural culture in Ulster brings a unique challenge to participants composing application for rural congregations. Segregation among young people in schooling and social interaction, also discussed in chapter 4, contributes to the difficulty of composing application in an urban setting. Participants, therefore, in composing sermon applications on such themes as grace, peace, love and forgiveness, face unique and additional difficulties from these prominent political traits in the local culture of their congregants.

#### **6.1.4 Conclusion**

The third theme has considered the difficulty of composing application. Despite the significance of the defined expository method in their practice, participants continue to find the process of composing application difficult. Therefore, this theme suggests that some expository preachers will always experience a degree of difficulty in fulfilling this homiletic practice. Besides the personal difficulties mentioned, unused elements of the defined method, and the unique political culture of Northern Ireland, contribute to the difficulty of the process of composing application in their experience. The next and final theme will identify elements beyond the defined expository method, which participants consider crucial to the process of composing application.

## **6.2 THEME 4: Inadequacy of the defined expository method**

Having considered the importance of sermon application, reported findings which confirm the defined expository method, and recognised the persistent difficulty of composing application in the experience of participants, the fourth theme challenges 'that which we thought we knew' (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.91). This theme claims the composition of application involves important elements beyond the defined expository method, in the experience of the participants. As these elements are either not included, or not developed in the literature on the expository method, this theme grows method by extension (Kaplan, 1964). It does not aim to dismantle method, but to 'add more concepts and build upon what was already established' (Dainton & Zelle, 2019, p.27).

This beyond method concept appears in Quicke's (2007, p.28) homiletic approach. He describes Stott's influential bridge-building expository method (Scripture, preacher, hearer) as a 180 degrees arc that is 'static and partial'. He then proposes a 360 degrees model, which includes elements beyond Stott's method. His model consists of: 'Scripture, words (combined with images), God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), the person of the preacher, the listener, and the worship context' (2007, p.48). In his model Quicke adds, 'Words, God, Worship context', to the expository method of Stott. Similarly, Azurdia (2007, p.13) promotes the beyond method concept by arguing that the Holy Spirit is a neglected factor in the expository approach. Pentecostal homiletics also includes factors which are beyond the expository method of Doriani (2001) or Capill (2014). Charles Crabtree, for example, while emphasising the importance of diligent pulpit preparation and precise homiletic method (2003, p.9), promotes the work of the Holy Spirit in the character of the preacher, the process of preparation, the delivery of sermons, and the response of congregants (2003, p.27-31). Janice

Claypool emphasises the importance of an altar call to supplement and develop sermon applications. She maintains the Pentecostal altar call, which follows the sermon, is a place of remembrance, cleansing, intercession, thanksgiving, praise and consecration (2013, p.181-184). McAfee (2020, p.128-140) suggests the factor of supernatural gifts, claiming the presence of Pentecostal gifts in worship should be normative. Such gifts, he argues, confirms, advances, and personalizes sermon applications. These Pentecostal homileticians, therefore, suggest elements beyond the expository method which affect sermon applications, namely: the Holy Spirit, altar call and supernatural gifts.

Overdorf (2009, p.159) and Doriani (2001, p.30) apply this beyond homiletic method concept to the expository approach by distinguishing 'art' from 'method' in their description of the process. Doriani explains, 'Application embraces both method and art, with both technical and creative moments'. He considers 'art' in the composition of application to consist of three qualities in the preacher: giftedness, delight in God and his Word, and knowledge of ways to captivate an audience. However, the beyond method theme in relation to composing application for the expository sermon is not developed or explored in literature on the expository approach, and no qualitative study has been conducted on it. The second theme included counter examples of participants diverging from the defined expository method, suggesting the inadequacy of the defined method in their approach. The fourth theme contains five factors beyond the defined expository method which influence the composition of application in the practice of the participants.

My initial focus in data collection was on the expository method, as I attempted to answer the research question. However, as I used constant comparison coding on the data, it became evident to me that participants recognised elements beyond the

defined expository method which affected their homiletic process. This fourth theme will therefore demonstrate that, while the defined expository method is significant in the experience of the participants, they do not consider it to be sufficient in the process of composing application. The beyond method elements are: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, corporate worship, congregant input and godly character.

### **6.2.1 Role of the Holy Spirit**

Ferguson (1998, p.277) observes that little attention has been given to the Holy Spirit and preaching by homileticians. Azurdia (2007, p.12) agrees and claims only a 'token consideration' is given to the Spirit in contemporary homiletic literature. Capill (2014, p.257), among others, mentions the role of the Spirit in congregants responding to sermon application. Other homileticians discuss the Spirit's role in the preacher during the preaching event. For example, Adams (1990, p.62) maintains the Spirit provides the preacher with 'the right thing to say (what), in the right words (how), in the right way (wisdom), at the right time (when)'. Richard (2004, p.145-147) briefly mentions the role of the Spirit in sermon preparation. He claims the Spirit provides the 'dynamics of preparation', and consequently details four aims for a preacher in relation to the Spirit: position yourself to be controlled by the Spirit, cut out anything that would grieve the Holy Spirit, fan the flame of the Holy Spirit's enthusiasm for your spiritual vitality, and keep in step with the Spirit. The controlling Spirit then helps the preacher by illumination of the text, excitement with the truth, assurances of help, and leading in the selection of the preaching portion.

All participants mention the role of the Spirit in the composition of application, as the following findings demonstrate. Four roles which the Spirit fulfils are identifiable in the data: guidance, insight, suggestion, and effectiveness.

## A. Guidance

Some participants (P.5, P.8, P.9) mention the Holy Spirit's guidance in the selection of a sermon series to meet congregant need. For example, P.8 uses the *modus ponens* (method of affirming) form of argument in defending his claim that the Spirit can lead in this matter. He cites the example of, 'the dependence of text preachers on the guidance of the Spirit to select a suitable text'. He then reasons, 'the Spirit can also guide preachers to the selection of a sermon series that meets the current needs of congregants'. This participant, therefore, indicates that more is involved in sermon selection than the preacher's preference or congregant need. He claims the Holy Spirit also has a crucial role in the process.

## B. Insight

Some participants (P.1, P.6, P.7) discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to understanding the meaning of the text and discerning the application. These participants demonstrate their dependence on the Spirit for these roles through prayer. Each one prays at a different stage in the process of composing application. P.7 expresses dependence on the Spirit for insight by praying throughout the hermeneutical process:

As I prepare, I am praying through the process for understanding of the text. Then, with specific prayer for help to determine the application for the various groups in the congregation. And then praying, too, that the Holy Spirit will take the application and write it on the hearts of the people, so that they follow through on that. Conscious, when you're preaching evangelistically, that the Spirit will open blind eyes through the preaching, and he will take it and apply it to the conscience. Also, people beaten down or careless, that this will still their conscience. Praying for light in finding the application, and power in applying it.

Consequently, this participant describes the experience of determining applications in terms of, 'the Holy Spirit brings them to mind'.

P.1 prays after the exegetical task, but prior to composing application. Using an acronym based on the word ACTS, he prays for the help of the Spirit to discern applications. P.1 describes his practice:

I would find this really helpful and probably get my effective applications from this, when I pray and just pray in, using ACTS. What in the text leads me to adore, confess, thank and supplicate? On my knees I get lots of help. I always feel I wish I had done this an hour earlier or two days earlier.

P.6 prays after the composition of his sermon but before rehearsing it. Occasionally he discerns further applications at that moment. He says:

One of the things I have been thinking about recently is how much prayer I need in preaching. One of the things I try to do on a Sunday morning is pray around the various people that will be sitting in front of me. This is in my devotions before I go into the study to preach over the sermon. I am thinking more and more 'What is it that I want them to take away?'. Now that the sermon has been fermenting a while, I will be going into the study and jotting down a few more applications. I find that there are things come to me in prayer as I am just praying for that person on Sunday morning.

This data indicates that for these participants more is involved in the composition of application, than the defined method. Beyond the sources of text, preacher, and audience is a fourth source of application - the Holy Spirit. Participants depend on the Spirit for understanding the text and discerning the application, and claim the Spirit provides these for them.

### C. Suggestion

One participant describes the work of the Holy Spirit during the delivery of the sermon. He claims that on occasions the Spirit provides extemporaneous applications which he had not composed. P.4 connects these suggestions to prayer for the Spirit's help in the process of composition and 'during the ten-minute walk I make to the church building'. He says:

Sometimes application comes to me on my feet. I hope it is not slovenly preparation. I hope it is what I asked God to do. When I am preparing, I am asking God, not only to help me understand the passage, but to give me illustration and application. I am praying that at every stage of the preparation, when I am doing my exegesis during the week, when I am writing out my full manuscript for the first time, when I am editing my manuscript on a Friday morning, I am still praying, 'Help me to get the words right, here'. And when, on a Saturday night, when I go back to the study to make notes from my manuscript to preach, I am praying, 'Lord give me illustration and application', and when I go to preach, 'Lord help me to preach today'. I find that, when on my feet, there is an application that comes to mind. I am trying to be very careful when I come to say it. I don't want to stumble into foolish words, but I find that they are some of the most emotive applications, because, all of a sudden, it has gripped my heart and I want to impress that on God's people.

This data informs the discussion of Richard, who calls this experience the 'unction of the Spirit' and explains it in this way:

You intuitively know that you are being carried by his power throughout the presentation. He gives you the confidence and the demeanour that creates a powerful contagion between preacher and audience. The preacher remembers what he has prepared by the Spirit but yields to the Spirit's movements in spontaneously going

beyond his preparation for what the Spirit additionally wants to say to the church (2004, p.149).

The experience of P.4 illustrates this fourth theme. While the process of composing application involves diligently sourcing, developing, and integrating application, this participant indicates there should also be an openness and expectation in preachers to the Holy Spirit enlarging composed application, and even suggesting new applications.

#### D. Effectiveness

Participants (P.2, P.4, P.6, P.7, P.8, P.9) also mention the role of the Spirit in making composed application effective in the lives of congregants. They insist, as Overdorf (2009), Robinson (2014) and Capill (2014) insist, that only the Spirit can make sermon application effective. As participants compose application, they do so in the awareness of, and hope for, the working of the Spirit in congregants. Thus, there is a recognition by participants that sermon application, which is carefully sourced, developed, and integrated by refined homiletic method and even by the Spirit's guidance, may be ineffective without the working of the Spirit. Such recognition nourishes in participants a humble (P.5) and prayerful attitude (P.9), in the process of composition.

This emphasis on the Holy Spirit by the participants is significant in defining this group within Ulster evangelicalism. Mitchell and Ganiel (2011, p.23) claim types of evangelicals in Ulster are distinguished by their view of the Spirit. While not advocating 'the visible role of the Holy Spirit' (Jordan, 2001, p.38) as charismatic evangelicals do, participants promote an 'experience' of the Spirit in the homiletic process of composing application. This finding confirms and illustrates the claim of Jordan, that confessional evangelicals in Ulster 'have charismatic dimensions to them' (2001, p.38). However,

he also observes this area of common ground does not dilute the separatist attitude confessional evangelicals have towards charismatics (2001, p. 158).

These findings are also significant in relation to homiletic literature. The obvious observation that popular texts on communication theory (Hargie, 2017; Dainton & Zelle, 2019) contain no mention of the Holy Spirit in their discussion of persuasive speech becomes significant in the near silence of homiletic literature on the subject. Homiletic literature devotes attention almost exclusively to exploring and refining technique, Pentecostal homiletics being an exception to this current trend (Crabtree, 2003; Claypool, 2013; McAfee, 2020). This situation raises the question of the degree to which homiletics has been influenced by social sciences in this area.

### **6.2.2 Pastoral Visitation**

The data indicates composed application is conditioned and supplemented by other pastoral opportunities for application. Overdorf recognises such opportunities when he claims, 'application often occurs beyond the confines of the formal sermon' (2009, p.175). He mentions casual conversations with congregants after the sermon, in which application is developed. Similarly, Fabarez (2005, p.193) acknowledges that occasional pastoral visitation of congregants provides further opportunity to develop applications. However, neither author discusses annual pastoral visitation.

All participants consider *annual* pastoral visitation and some participants (P.4, P.6) consider *occasional* pastoral visitation to be important opportunities to convey supplementary application. The RPCI code requires all ministers to conduct *annual* pastoral visitation of all members of their congregation and defines its purpose:

The minister, accompanied if possible by an elder, should visit, at least once a year, the families of the congregation under his care. The main object of pastoral visitation

is to ascertain the spiritual state and to promote the spiritual growth of the members of the congregation (2008, 3.30).

All participants comply with this requirement and mention three connections to composed application. First, to develop application. Some participants encourage dialogue during annual pastoral visitation by announcing a theme for discussion, based on their recent sermons. For example, P.8 describes his experience of this practice: 'At the annual pastoral visitation, we take a topic I have preached on and discuss it in the home. It allows further applications of the text to be pursued'. Second, provides feedback. P.7 claims, 'conversations in annual pastoral visitation provide feedback'. While P.7 does not develop his claim, communication theorists recognise feedback as a crucial element in verbal communication. For example, Shannon and Weaver (1949) in their influential communication model claim feedback reduces 'noise' in verbal communication, and therefore 'minimises misinterpretation by receivers in the decoding process'. Third, measures effectiveness. P.8, reflecting on his experience of annual pastoral visitation, says, 'It is informative to me how deep the sermons have sunk in'. Similarly, P.7 claims annual pastoral visitation 'gives insight into the effectiveness of the sermon'. He mentions the instance of an engaged couple delaying their wedding, as a consequence of one of his sermon applications! Capill also recognises the role of such pastoral conversations in measuring the effectiveness of sermons. He maintains attendance numbers, or verbal responses after the sermon by flatterers or complainers, are no accurate gauge of the effectiveness of a sermon. He claims the only accurate gauge of sermon effectiveness is 'to engage hearers of the Word in conversations that allow some assessment of the impact the preaching is making on their lives' (2014, p.251).

Other participants mention *occasional* pastoral visitation as an opportunity for specific application. P.4 occasionally visits congregants to deliver more personalised application than was considered appropriate in corporate worship. He says, 'I would talk to someone individually if something needed talked about'. Likewise, P.6 maintains 'there are occasions when direct application needs to be made in the home of a congregant, rather than in a congregational setting, to avoid embarrassing a congregant'.

Thus, the findings indicate that *annual* and *occasional* pastoral visitation connect to the composition of application in four ways. First, visitation facilitates the clarification and development of sermon application. Second, feedback received from congregants during visitation conditions and informs subsequent sermon applications. Third, pastoral visitation facilitates the discovery of sermon effectiveness. Fourth, pastoral visitation allows some specific and potentially embarrassing applications to be omitted from the sermon and communicated to a congregant in a private setting.

The importance of this beyond the defined expository method element is highlighted by a survey of congregants. One of the five causes for decline in church attendance identified by 76% of 14,000 respondents in the ERC Survey of UK and Ireland Christian congregations was a lack of pastoral visitation (2005, p.36-39). Respondents regarded the reduction in pastoral visitation to be a 'significant factor in reducing church attendance'. For them a 'ministry of presence' was a crucial aspect of the pastoral care of congregants. Respondents identified 'other duties' the pastor had to fulfil, consisting mainly of administrative matters, to be the chief cause of the reduction in visitation.

### 6.2.3 Corporate Worship

Participants use other elements of corporate worship besides the sermon, to supplement, develop and appropriate sermon application. Two components of the worship service used by participants as conduits of application are prayer after sermon and closing praise.

#### A. Prayer after Sermon

Ward describes the dynamic world of prayer as, 'the heartland for practical theology' (2017, p.171) in a natural and intuitive way. He claims the work of God, theological concepts, and life experience are interconnected in a 'lived theology' (2017, p.171) in prayer.

Participants (P.4, P.6, P.7) give insight into 'the heartland of practical theology', by indicating that prayer after sermon fulfils three functions in relation to sermon application: climaxing, appropriating, and clarifying. Firstly, *climaxing* application. Prayer after sermon forms the climax of sermon application. P.4 says, 'In praying after the sermon, there can be an application that comes across in the prayer'. As P.4 recounts a conversation with a congregant, in his interview, he perceives that this prayer is climactic in nature:

One member of the congregation said to me recently, 'It was that prayer today that really cut through my heart'... A moment, in praying after the sermon as you respond to the sermon in which the Spirit is running up and down in people's lives. Sometimes it is a prayer of confession. Maybe, on reflection, that is where some of my application comes. It is in the prayer. I felt the Word and I want to confess my sin. And I am sure that is what God's people want to do. And then I want to go immediately to Jesus Christ. That is what I think the Word should always be doing - making us fall down and

look up at him. I hadn't really thought of that before, but maybe there is a climax of application in the prayer.

Secondly, *appropriating* application. Prayer after sermon allows congregants to appropriate sermon application. P.6 uses the closing prayer to pray in the application. He says, 'Very often I will be taking the key truths and praying them into the lives of the people who are there, in the closing prayer'. He considers this use of the closing prayer to be also providing a pattern for congregants, how they should 'pray in the response to the truth when they go home'. He considers his prayer after sermon to be, 'Modelling for the people how they can go home and pray those truths'.

Thirdly, *clarifying* application. Prayer after sermon sometimes communicates clarified application. P.7 admits that the main application of the text is sometimes crystalized in his mind during the preaching event. What was not clear during the composition of application in his study, occasionally becomes clear in the delivery of the sermon. That clarified application is then impressed on congregants in his closing prayer. He says, 'In the closing prayer, the truths have crystalized in my mind, and so that prayer is an opportunity to pray in the truths'. Such a use of the closing prayer, however, must surely be very occasional, otherwise deficiency in the process of composing application would be encouraged.

This data illustrates that the defined expository method does not supply all of the application. There are important elements beyond the defined method which are also conduits of application, such as prayer after sermon.

## B. Closing Praise

Congregational singing after the sermon is considered by all participants to be a response to the message of the sermon. Participants carefully select the closing song

to capture and respond to the key sermon application. P.8 is representative of the participants in describing the importance and function of the closing praise. He says, 'I see the Psalm at the end of the sermon as the people's response to the preaching, and so I would take great care in selecting that Psalm'.

This understanding of the role of singing in worship aligns with the view of Ward. He writes, 'Something physical happens as we sing. We draw the words into ourselves, and we form them with our own bodies' (2017, p.15). He continues, 'Songs create a theological world. In the world of the song, connections are made between life and God...We write ourselves into the song as we are singing' (2017, p.171). The closing praise, containing congregant response to the sermon, is thus considered by participants to be a critical opportunity for congregants to write themselves into a song that captures the sermon application.

Communication theories supply some confirmation that this element of corporate worship is an effective conduit of application. Cognitive Dissonance Theory, claims predicting future behaviour in public, influences the probability of a person performing the target action. Hargie explains,

Our public espousal of a predicted behaviour creates inner pressure for us to achieve our self-prediction and so maintain a positive self-view, and causes cognitive discomfort, or dissonance, if we fail to meet our predicted goal (2017, p.399).

Similarly, the theory of Planned Behaviour claims self-prophecy increases the probability of the prophecy being realised (Rutter & Quinne, 2002, p.11). Further, Miller and Rollnick claim, 'Commitment language signals the likelihood of action' (2013, p.161). Therefore, utilising the closing song as a congregant response to the sermon,

increases the likelihood of application being implemented, by virtue of it being public, self-prophecy and commitment.

These two elements of worship, prayer after sermon and closing praise, fulfil steps in the process of persuasion. Hargie (2017, p.361) identifies five steps of successful persuasion as: attention, comprehension, yielding, retention, and action. By relating closing prayer and praise to sermon application, congregants are helped to fulfil the steps of yielding and retention.

The sacrament of the Lord's Supper is mentioned by Overdorf (2009, p.171-174) as an element of worship which can supplement and develop sermon application. He claims the grace associated with this sacrament compliments the sermon. However, no participant mentions this element of worship. This omission may be explained by the infrequency of the observance of the Lord's Supper in the RPCI. On average, this sacrament is observed only four times annually in the congregations of participants. Therefore, this element of worship may be considered by participants to provide an infrequent opportunity for supplemental application.

This element of the fourth theme indicates participants do not restrict application to what they have composed in the sermon. Rather, other elements of corporate worship (prayer after sermon and closing praise) are utilised by them for climaxing, appropriating and even clarifying composed application, as they pursue the effectiveness of their sermon applications.

#### **6.2.4 Congregant Input**

Another element of this fourth theme mentioned by participants is the occasional and regular input of congregants into sermon application.

#### A. Occasional Input: suggestion

Most participants (P.1, P.2, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8) describe the occasional input of congregants into the composition of application. Church elders, members, and family make contribution to the process of composition by identifying needs or providing feedback. Some participants (P.2, P.7, P.8) mention the contribution of *elders* to composition by identifying corporate need in the congregation. P.7 says, 'When I am thinking of a new series, I will ask the elders what would be good to do, what are the needs of the congregation at this time'. P.2 recalls an instance of his elders suggesting a series of sermons on church membership 'because of the situation within the congregation at that time'. P.8's elders suggested a series on the family because of 'the age profile of the congregation'. P.8 explains their input as, 'They have an ownership over the preaching and want to see that the flock is fed appropriately'. One participant indicates that church *members* contribute to composition by identifying individual needs. P.7 cites the instance of an elderly member asking him for more teaching on the Lord's Prayer to help her in the discipline of praying. He says, 'and so I did a four-week series on the Lord's Prayer'. In planning a new sermon series P.7 asks his elders, 'Has anyone in the congregation suggested anything?'. Some Participants (P.1, P.4, P.5, P.6) mention input after the sermon from *family* members who are congregants. Their families provide critical feedback, 'usually at the dinner table' (P.1) and especially 'on the relevance of the sermon to their lives' (P.5).

#### B. Regular Input: Development

In the literature on expository preaching, little mention is made of post-sermon dialogue groups to develop the sermon application. Fabarez describes such groups:

I am not referring to the kind of small group that gathers people in a circle to ask what a passage of Scripture *means*. I am talking about a group of Christians that gathers around the passage expounded the previous Sunday, to decide how they will specifically *apply* it. Most small groups desire more Bible knowledge. What most Christians need is more biblical application of what they already know! (2005, p.184).

Fabarez recommends that all congregations form groups, 'that seek to apply what has already been preached' (2005, p.185). Such groups differ from 'Pre-sermon Dialogue Groups' (Carrell, 2013), which determine application before the sermon.

All participants consider post-sermon dialogue groups an important vehicle for developing sermon application. Most participants (P.2, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.8, P.9) use such groups occasionally throughout the church year, preferring a variety of mid-week meeting formats. Two participants (P.3, P.7) always use post-sermon dialogue groups. One participant (P.1) stopped using this format out of pastoral concerns, though he recognises its value.

P.3 describes his group: '40% of the congregation attend, but I do not provide questions for discussion'. Rather, he continues, 'our mid-week is simply discussing the sermon. Very, very often the questions relate not just to the interpretation, but the application, and so we talk about the sermon'. P.3 comments that corporate discussion by congregants to determine the application is his preferred method. He says, 'Ideally it is the congregation applying what has been taught. I think that is essential'. However, he insists it is done only after 'the explanation has been given in the sermon'. However, other participants (P.2, P.3, P.5, P.7, P.8) do provide questions for their group to help develop the sermon application.

Two effects of these post-sermon dialogue groups on the composition of application can be identified in the data. One is the composition of less application. P.3 claims the

influence of his post-sermon dialogue group on sermon composition is ‘the inclusion of less application and more explanation’. In prioritising interpretation, one weakness of this approach is that 60% of his congregants are deprived of developed application. Another effect is the composition of general applications. P.7 describes this effect:

In the mid-week we discuss the sermon. I prepare questions on the sermon to discuss in our home groups each week. The main reason for that, its driven by application. In preaching, you are limited in the application you can make. You can’t apply it to everyone every week. You can make primary and secondary applications, but there all kinds of applications that you can’t deal with in the pulpit. So, the mid-weeks are an opportunity for all of us to instruct one another. It is not so much to work out the meaning of the text, that has been presented in the sermon and the main lines of application have been opened up. This is an opportunity to take those further and develop them, share each other’s experience, and tease out how this truth might apply to our individual lives and as a congregation.

In advocating post-sermon dialogue groups to ‘tease out’ applications, P.7 suggests a different agent from P.4. As noted above, P.4 advocates general sermon applications to allow the Holy Spirit to make specific applications. However, P.7, who is also reliant on the Spirit to achieve sermon effectiveness, promotes the development of specific applications by congregants. Thus, he considers the roles of these agents of application to be necessary and complimentary, not oppositional.

The ERC survey revealed that many ‘mid-week house groups’ are formed to supplement ‘weak pulpit ministry’ (2005, p.15,27). By contrast, the purpose of the groups, described by participants, is to develop ‘the main lines of application which have been opened up’ (P.7) in the sermon.

## 6.2.5 Godly Character

Some homileticians discuss the preacher's character in relation to the whole process of composing and delivering sermons (Stott, 1990, p.262-338; Quicke, 2007, p.92; Vines & Shaddix, 2017, p.95-135). However, Miller claims this is generally a neglected element in homiletic literature. He writes:

Not too much is said in most current books on preaching about the pastor's life in Christ. Still, the spiritual life of the pastor far supersedes sermon know-how (1995, p.7).

In this statement, Miller also claims godly character is not only important, but also 'far supersedes' method. Fabarez discerns a neglect of this factor among preachers. He writes:

While many of those interested in effective preaching enthusiastically and rigorously hone their doctrine and theology, considerably less attention seems to be paid to the personal holiness of the preacher's life (2005, p.25).

This neglect is reflected in the data. Only four participants mention godly character supporting sermon application and two of the four mention the influence of character on application.

### A. Supporting Application

Some participants (P.1, P.7, P.8, P.9) discuss the character of the preacher supporting application. P.8 says, 'There is a close correlation between the pastor and the preaching. Our life should commend the message'. P.1 agrees and considers it 'vital' for the preacher's character to support the sermon. Bass (1985) confirms this emphasis by listing 'idealized influence, a leader modelling behaviour' as the first factor in transformational leadership. Reflecting on character supporting application, P.7 appeals to the function of *ethos*, the third element of an effective speech identified

by Aristotle. P.7 says, 'The *ethos* of the preacher reinforces his preaching'. He explains *ethos* in this context as, 'the character of the preacher, which includes godliness, a conscience void of offence, no hypocrisy, a life that is open to be seen, and evaluated by others'.

However, despite this emphasis on character supporting application, preachers often encounter a conflict when composing application. The conflict is between the demands of the text and the character of the preacher delivering those demands. Schein (1992) discusses a similar conflict within organisational culture. He maintains leaders frequently provide values for a group. However, he observes 'championed values are not always authentic values because expressed ideals do not always match behaviour'.

P.1 and P.9 maintain composed application should not be toned down because of character failings. P.1 comments:

It's a good warning to avoid hypocrisy, but not to tone the text down because you are not up to the mark. I am consoled that Paul charges Timothy, that he makes progress.

Capill (2014, p.247-249) addresses this tension and suggests three circumstances in which a preacher can preach with a clear conscience. One, preaching with a repentant heart. Two, where there is integrity in the preacher's life as a whole; the failing is not the norm. Three, the preacher immediately follows up the sermon by implementing the necessary changes. Capill maintains these circumstances will allow preachers to avoid delivering 'blunt applications so as not to damn ourselves, or strike hard against particular sins, as a kind of vicarious dealing with them in our own life'.

This element beyond the defined method has significance in the church and culture. The empirical study of church leaders by Wilson (2016) documents incidents of the

detrimental fall-out from the moral collapse of some prominent church leaders in Ulster. Arthurs, however, discusses the positive impact of godly character in postmodern culture. He claims listeners in a culture marked by scepticism about certainty, 'will receive even an authoritative word if they know, respect, and like the communicator' (2004, p.180). Borg agrees with Arthurs and claims a shift in the order of the elements of classical communication has occurred. He writes, 'For Aristotle, Logos was the primary element, with ethos and pathos secondary. In the present day, there are good reasons for voting ethos as the number one, followed by pathos and logos' (2014, p.6).

#### B. Influencing Application

Participants (P.1, P.7) mention four ways by which godly character influence the composition of application. Firstly, strength of applications. P.1 observes that the absence of godly character produces weakened applications. He says, 'weak sermon applications often reflect my spiritual drift, though I am not conscious of it at the time'. Secondly, difficulty in composing application. P.7 argues, without developing the point, that godly character eases the difficulty of composing application. He says, 'So much depends on your own holiness. The ease or the difficulty of it, does relate to your own walk with Christ'. Thirdly, manner of applying. In describing the challenge of controlling his natural tendency to bluntness, P.1 highlights the influence of godly character on the manner - language, tone - of composed application. He says:

There are ways of being pointed and I think I am learning because subtilty would not have been a natural trait. The manner matters in application.

The importance of manner in persuasion is highlighted by Dainton and Zelle (2019, p.6). They claim communication competence includes 'appropriateness', as well as

'effectiveness', and define it as 'fulfilling social expectations for a particular situation'. Fourthly, content of application. P.7 observes that defective tendencies in character adversely influence the content of application. He admits that his own tendency of being overly critical produces negative applications. He therefore desires the development of good character to produce encouraging applications. He says,

I find it easier to challenge and rebuke sin than to build up. I don't want to discourage the weak or those with tender consciences. It is always hard to get a balance between comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable. I think we need to know our tendency and I know I need to work at being deliberately and intentionally more encouraging.

These findings demonstrate that godly character is a factor beyond the defined expository method which influences the strength, difficulty, manner, and contents of application. While there is some mention in homiletic literature on the expository approach of godly character supporting sermon application, there is little mention of the influence of character on composing application. Not all participants have considered this point. P.2 admits, 'We are not always the best lens to see ourselves in a positive light. I haven't thought of myself as an influence on application'.

### **6.2.6 Evaluation**

In evaluating this fourth theme, the issue of its importance arises. Some subjects are unexplored because they are unimportant in academic research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Is this theme therefore, unexplored in the literature on the expository approach, of little consequence? The importance of the five elements of this theme seems to be indicated by:

- most homileticians who promote the expository approach mentioning the role of the Spirit in sermon composition, though they do not develop the idea
- a survey of congregants (ERC, 2005) and the role of feedback in verbal communication confirming the importance of pastoral visitation
- theories of communication confirming the important function of closing prayer and song
- the significance of congregant input emphasised in current homiletic literature (Day, 2012)
- the importance of good character in the post-modern era (Borg, 2019).

Further, support for this fourth theme is found in the empirical research of Christian Scharen (2004). In his study, Scharen challenges the common assertion that church worship forms the morals of congregants. He questions the accepted linear relation between worship and congregant ethics. Scharen concludes that, for most congregants, the effect of worship is not transformation but 'reinforcement and reminder of what is important in life' (2004, p.221). Therefore, he concludes, corporate worship in Christian communities is only one influence on the formation of congregant character: other factors are also necessary to effect transformation. While Scharen considers the impact of all elements of public worship on congregants, and not just sermon application, his conclusion does provide some support for this final theme, by emphasising the role of extra-worship factors in effecting congregant transformation. These considerations indicate that there is considerable evidence to support the importance of this fourth theme.

## 6.2.7 Conclusion

This section has demonstrated that the fourth theme challenges the defined expository method to recognise and utilise the following five elements beyond the method in the composition of application:

- the roles of the Spirit; guidance, instruction, suggestion, and effectiveness
- pastoral visitation to develop sermon application, measure effectiveness and receive feedback
- prayer after sermon and closing praise in corporate worship as vehicles of application
- congregant input by occasional suggestion, or regular development in post-sermon dialogue groups
- godly character supporting and influencing composed application.

The findings of this theme therefore promote the adoption of a model of composing application which is 'open and untidy' (Quicke, 2007, p.93). Having presented the final theme, theological reflection on that theme will now be engaged in.

## **STAGE 3: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION**

As the fourth theme is the main contribution of this qualitative study to the body of knowledge, this part of the chapter, the third stage of the research, engages in theological reflection on that theme. The purpose of this reflection is to contextualise, enrich, and develop the theme. Swinton and Mowat emphasise the importance of this stage in a practical theology study, by arguing that ‘*God* and the revelation that God has given to human beings in Christ is the true starting point of Practical Theology’ (2016, p.11). While recent studies in practical theology have tended to ignore theological reflection, allowing social sciences to dominate the discipline (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.7; Ward, 2017, p.83), this study acknowledges the authority and importance of theological reflection, by including this stage. Therefore, church tradition and Christian Scripture, main components of Christian theological reflection (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.90), are now engaged in conversation with the findings of qualitative research on the fourth theme.

### **6.3 Church Tradition**

The first aspect of theological reflection shows respect for the centuries of church tradition and reflection that have gone into establishing the church’s understanding of divine revelation (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.91). Church tradition is understood here in the sense given to it by McGrath, as the ‘active process of reflection by which theological or spiritual insights are valued, assessed, and transmitted from one generation to another’ (1994, p.188). In this section theological and spiritual insights relating to the five elements of the fourth theme are reflected on.

Kolb and Kolb (2005) emphasise the importance of church tradition for understanding personal experience. They claim consideration of experience alone misses ‘the degree

to which our religious tradition can expand our experience and correct distortions in our perception of it' (2005, p.13). Similarly, Ballard and Pritchard emphasise the superiority of the collective wisdom of the church over an individual's wisdom. They therefore claim that practical theology is to be done within the community of faith, so there is no monopoly of wisdom by any one person, generation, or denomination (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, p.41). Thus, this element of church tradition is important in providing a broader perspective to the findings which contain the experience of nine participants from one denomination.

Church tradition should therefore include voices from the past, as well as the present. Indeed, Blomberg and Markley emphasise the value of past voices and warn against only listening to current scholarship. They write, 'The academic guild regularly suffers from the evolutionary assumption that the more recent an idea is, the more likely it is true' (2010, p.227). Thomas Oden makes a similar appeal for pre-modern texts to be consulted in theological reflection, claiming they contain a wealth of insight (1984, p.27). Ward likens past voices in church tradition to 'a treasure trove to be rediscovered and made use of in the present' (2017, p.37). Thus, this part of the research attempts to examine some of those 'treasures' to gain insight into the beyond method theme.

While recognising the presence of preaching in Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions, Wilson (1992, p.15) claims it has been Protestants who have placed most emphasis on preaching, by making it the centre of their worship. From the numerous Protestant traditions, the Reformed tradition is selected for theological reflection in this study on preaching. This tradition, which 'traces its roots back to the Swiss Reformation as represented by Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin' (Kapic and Lugt, 2013, p.97), is chosen because:

- it is the tradition of participants, thereby facilitating contrast and comparison (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.19)
- it is dominated by expository style preaching (Capill, 2014, p.27)
- it contains reflection on sermon application by homileticians, preachers and church assemblies.

While the Reformed tradition is used for reflection here, there is overlap with Anglican, Baptist, Charismatic and Independent traditions in the 'voices' selected.

### **6.3.1 'Joy Unspeakable'**

Though the Reformed tradition has given considerable attention to pneumatology (Owen 1687; Buchanan 1843; Smeaton 1882; Vaughan 1894; Kuyper 1904; Ferguson 1998), it has not given much attention to the Spirit and the preacher (Ferguson, 1998, p.277). One significant debate within the tradition, however, has discussed this issue. The debate began with the publication of *Joy Unspeakable* (1962) by Martyn Lloyd-Jones. In his book, Lloyd-Jones argues for a transformational experience of the Spirit, subsequent to a Christian conversion experience (1984, p.32). He calls the transforming experience 'Spirit-baptism', and claims it results in direct and special revelation by the Spirit to the subject (1984, p.93). In a subsequent book, *Preachers and Preaching* (1971), Lloyd-Jones applies his views to the preacher.

Four roles of the Spirit in relation to the composition of sermon application can be identified in his book on preaching. First, the Spirit enables the preacher to discern the significance of the text. Lloyd-Jones acknowledges the difficulties encountered in the hermeneutical and homiletical processes and insists that the help of the Spirit is essential to discerning the interpretation and applications of the text (1982, p.201). Second, the Spirit creates sudden impulses in the preacher to pray for help in sermon

composition. Lloyd-Jones argues that, during the hermeneutical and homiletical processes, the preacher can experience a sudden urge to pray. He writes, 'Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit' (1982, p.171). He insists such urges should always be obeyed. Third, the Spirit provides the preacher with unexpected messages. Lloyd-Jones describes the experience of a preacher's attention being suddenly gripped by the message of a random text. He believes such impressions are from the Spirit and encourages preachers to record those messages for future use (1982, p.173). Fourth, the Spirit suggests further applications. Lloyd-Jones believes the Spirit continues to suggest applications after the composition of the sermon, primarily during preaching. Lloyd-Jones encourages preachers to desire this experience (1982, p.325). Consequently, he rejects reading or memorising the sermon. Instead, he recommends preaching from skeleton sermon notes, to be 'free to the influences of the Spirit' (1982, p.229). Lloyd-Jones, therefore, considers the Spirit to fulfil the roles of discernment, urging, impression, and suggestion, in the preacher. In his view, the role of the Spirit in composing sermon application, is essential to the process of composition but also extends beyond it.

Donald Macleod responds to Lloyd-Jones' understanding of the role of the Spirit in the preacher, in his book, *The Spirit of Promise* (1988). He rejects 'new revelations of the Spirit' (WCF, 1.6) because of the sufficiency and finality of Scripture (1988, p.76). He considers the impulses, urges, and suggestions mentioned by Lloyd-Jones to be examples of 'new revelations'. In discussing preachers claims to be led by the Spirit to a text or series to preach on, he writes:

All we have is our own decision, in which we may be more or less confident, but which is always fallible and always liable to be falsified by events. I can never get beyond, 'This is what I think is right. So help me God' (1988, p.67).

In adopting this position, Macleod follows the view of John Murray, who argues that, while we may have 'feelings, impressions, convictions, urges, inhibitions, impulses, burdens, resolutions' (1982, p.188), we cannot interpret any of these as direct intimations of the Spirit. Murray limits the roles of the Spirit in the preacher to discerning the meaning and application of Scripture and giving the desire and strength to obey it (1982, p.189).

The participants, who also subscribe to the WCF, recognise the role of the Spirit to be more than what Macleod and Murray allow. Their position is closer to the view of Lloyd-Jones in claiming experience of the roles of the Spirit, even though their *Testimony* explicitly rejects his understanding of 'Spirit-baptism' (1998, p.82). In addition to the findings, the history of the RPCI contains cases of preachers who seemed to be the recipients of direct revelation by the Spirit. For example, the Covenanter preacher Alexander Peden (1626-1686) was widely known as 'the prophet', because he accurately predicted numerous future events (Howie, 1974, p.509-515). Thus, the experience of participants and Peden creates a tension with the WCF as interpreted by Macleod and Murray. Macleod mentions an instance of this very tension in his own denomination, The Free Church of Scotland. He considers elements of the account of confessional preachers in the Scottish Highlands in the book, *Days of the Father's in Ross-shire* by John Kennedy, to be at odds with the confessional position (1988, p.76).

A possible solution to the tension Macleod perceives between the WCF and the participants' experience is the adoption of an alternative interpretation of the WCF. The phrase 'no new revelations' could refer to the role of the Spirit in inspiring Scripture, and not to the roles of the Spirit as described by Lloyd-Jones and the participants. In support of this proposed solution is the general recognition within the Reformed tradition of the leading of the Spirit in other areas. For example, the tradition

acknowledges the Spirit's involvement in the call to the ministry. Spurgeon describes it in terms of being 'moved by the Holy Ghost to give oneself up wholly to the proclamation of the gospel' (1990, p.20). Another example is in the preaching event. From Calvin (Parker, 1975, p.92) to Martin (2018, p.206), a minimal sermon manuscript is encouraged by the Reformed tradition to promote dependence on the Spirit in preaching. Therefore, because there is some recognition within the tradition of the leading of the Spirit in these cases, and personal consciousness of it, recognition of the Spirit's role in composing application should also be acknowledged.

The two positions are close but different. Macleod and Murray desire the Spirit to direct and empower preachers, Lloyd-Jones and the participants claim certain feelings, impressions, or suggestions are the work of the Spirit. This debate within the Reformed tradition supports the importance of this element beyond the defined expository method in composing application, as both parties recognise the important role of the Spirit in the process. The discussion also enriches the findings, by suggesting two additional functions of the Spirit: urging and impressing. However, the debate also indicates the possibility that preachers within the Reformed tradition will hold a variety of opinions concerning the experience of the Spirit in composing application.

### **6.3.2 'Baxter's Model of Pastoral Visitation'**

The requirement of the RPCI Code (2008, 3.30) for annual pastoral visitation reflects the model created by Richard Baxter during his pastorate in Kidderminster (1640-1655). With two assistants, Baxter devoted Monday and Tuesday afternoons and evenings each week to the visitation of families in Kidderminster parish (Ferguson, 2008, p.36). By this model, all congregants were visited once per year and the parish of Kidderminster was transformed (Packer, 1997, p.400). During these pastoral visits

he claims the preaching portion 'was more easily applied than in public preaching and seemed to do much more upon them' (Baxter, 1998, p.51).

Baxter discloses his reason for adopting this practise. He claims it was the discovery that his sermon applications were ineffective. He writes:

I frequently meet with those that have been my hearers eight or ten years, who know not whether Christ be God or man, and wonder when I tell them the history of his birth and life and death, as if they had never heard it before. And of those who know the history of the gospel, how few are there who know the nature of that faith, repentance, and holiness which it requireth or, at least, who know their own hearts...I have found by experience, that some ignorant persons, who have been so long unprofitable hearers, have got more knowledge and remorse of conscience in half an hour's discourse, than they did from ten year's public preaching (1829, p.196).

In commending this practice to fellow ministers, Baxter lists twenty benefits of pastoral visitation. The third claims visitation is essential for an effective preaching ministry:

It will make our public preaching to be better understood and regarded...without this you may lose the most of your labour...As you would not, therefore, lose your public labour, see that you be faithful in this private work (1860, p.349).

Though Baxter is regarded as a powerful applicatory preacher (Capill, 2003), he used and promoted the practice of pastoral visitation to supplement preaching. In his influential book, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656), Baxter surprisingly does not explore application in preaching as a means of transforming congregants; instead he promotes pastoral visitation. Adam notes this surprising emphasis when he writes, 'We might have expected *The Reformed Pastor* to defend the preaching office. In fact, Baxter promotes a rather different model of pastoral ministry' (1996, p.67). Packer considers

Baxter's model of pastoral visitation to be his most significant contribution to the Reformed tradition. He writes:

To upgrade the practice of personal catechising from a preliminary discipline for children to a permanent ingredient in evangelism and pastoral care for all ages was Baxter's main contribution to the development of Puritan ideals for the ministry (1997, p.400,401).

His practice of organised annual pastoral visitation has been commended by subsequent homileticians in the Reformed tradition (Shedd, 1965, p.352-355; Dabney, 1979, p.267). For example, Capill writes:

Preaching needs a pastoral ministry to undergird it, inform it, shape it and complement it. Preaching cannot do everything in the life of the church. Although it is central, and although it is granted under God's hand the greatest blessing and the highest place, it is unrealistic to expect that preaching alone can grow a church and transform a people. It must go hand in hand with effective pastoring (2003, p.65).

Similarly, Ferguson, in discussing Baxter's ministry model, concludes, 'Something of the same order, however contemporary its garb, is surely needed today' (2008, p.37). Although Baxter is the stand-out practitioner of pastoral visitation in the Reformed tradition, he is not unique. Reformers and Puritans also combined preaching with pastoral visitation. Ferguson writes,

Neither the Reformers nor the Puritans thought of their task as the public exposition of Scripture without finding ways of anchoring what was heard in the minds and memories of their hearers (2008, p.34).

However, despite such commendations of Baxter's model and the comprehensive approach to ministry adopted by the Reformers and Puritans, the participants minister in an era in the Reformed tradition characterised by an almost exclusive emphasis on

preaching as the vehicle for transforming congregants (Piper, 2018; Ross, 2006, p.45-53). This emphasis in the tradition is illustrated by a recent debate on pastoral visitation ([www.banneroftruth.org](http://www.banneroftruth.org), 2016). Thom Rainer claims pastors should visit congregants infrequently to prevent giving the impression that preachers are mere counsellors. Andrew Roycroft responds to Rainer, by appealing to the example of Baxter, and listing 15 benefits of pastoral visitation. Among the benefits he suggests are, 'it develops sensitive application and produces specific application by personal knowledge of the condition of congregants'. Thus, the model of pastoral visitation used by Baxter and the participants challenges its omission from some current ministry models.

P.8 provides balance to this model of pastoral care initiated by pastors, by claiming pastoral counsel beyond the sermon can also be initiated by congregants. He mentions the regular experience of being approached by congregants for further pastoral advice on applying the sermon. He says, 'People come to me pastorally and want further help and guidance'.

### **6.3.3 'The Directory for Public Worship'**

In the Reformed tradition the elements of corporate worship are considered in *The Directory for the Public Worship of God* (1645). The *Directory* was drafted by nine members of the Westminster Assembly, who drew largely on the Book of Common Order (1562) produced by John Knox when he was in Geneva (Dale, 1988, p.vii). The *Directory* was adopted by English and Scottish Parliaments in 1647 (Beeke, 2018, p.191). Its aim was uniform practice in worship, covering such areas as behaviour of congregants in worship, administration of the sacraments, burials, and marriages

(Dever & Ferguson, 2007, p.26). In a section on the elements of Public Worship, the *Directory* includes 'Prayer after Sermon' and 'Closing Praise' (1973, p.148,149).

Though much briefer than the section on 'Public Prayer before the Sermon', the *Directory* lists numerous topics for 'Prayer after Sermon'. One topic suggested for prayer is the effectiveness of the sermon in the life of congregants. It directs preachers:

to turn the chief and most useful heads of the sermon into some few petitions; and to pray that it may abide in the heart, and bring forth fruit (1973, p.148).

In these instructions, the *Directory* encourages preachers to connect the closing prayer to the sermon. The final three stages of persuasion identified by Hargie (2017) are discernible in these suggestions. The third stage of 'yield' is fulfilled by the direction to offer 'some few petitions' based on the sermon headings. The fourth stage of 'retention' is contained in the phrase, 'may abide in the heart'. The final stage of 'action' is included in the term, 'bring forth fruit'. The *Book of Common Prayer* (68) supplies a closing prayer for 'After Worship', which parallels the suggestions of the *Directory*:

Grant, we beseech thee, Almighty God, that the words which we have heard this day with our outward ears, may, through thy grace, be so grafted inwardly in our hearts, that they may bring forth in us the fruit of good living, to the honour and praise of thy Name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer includes the stages of 'yield' in the words 'be so grafted in our hearts', and 'action' in the petition 'bring forth in us the fruit of good living', but not the stage of 'retention'. However, it does emphasise the necessity of divine 'grace' to properly respond to the sermon.

The instructions of the *Directory* concerning the 'Closing Praise' are much briefer. In mentioning the element of song after sermon, it adds 'if with conveniency it may be

done' (1973, p.149). The 'conveniency' refers to the availability of a precentor, the amount of time taken up by the sermon, or the literacy of congregants (Muller & Ward, 2007, p.125). Besides treating the closing praise as optional, no mention is made of the role of this element of worship in relation to sermon application, as practised by Participants. However, the *Reformed Book of Common Order*, which is an update of the *Directory*, does link the sermon with closing praise. It suggests that praise after the sermon 'may continue the theme of the sermon or be one of dedication' (Dale, 1988, p.10).

As no participant mentions the *Directory* or *Book of Common Prayer* or *Order*, it is unclear whether their practice of connecting the closing prayer and praise to the sermon is derived from a book, the example of others, or simply from pastoral intuition.

#### **6.3.4 'The Fellowship Meeting'**

All participants consider a post-sermon dialogue group important in facilitating the development of sermon application. This element beyond the defined expository method is rooted in the history of their denomination. Thomas Houston, an ordained minister in the RPCI, provides guidelines for this congregational meeting in his book, *The Fellowship Meeting* (1856). He notes no guidelines were given regarding it in *The Directory for Public Worship*, or in subsequent literature (1856, p.23). Thus, his book is an attempt to fill a gap in the literature, within the Reformed tradition.

Houston defines the Fellowship Meeting as, 'an association of Christian brethren for joint religious worship and mutual edification, by means of spiritual converse and united prayer' (1856, p.32). The aim of the meeting is to, 'promote Christian edification and godliness' (Houston, 1856. p.155). Houston finds biblical warrant for the meeting in Malachi ch.3.16, and theological warrant for it in the doctrine of the Communion of

saints (1856, p.9,21). He traces its history to the early church period, the Waldensians, and the Reformed Church (1856, p.67ff). He notes that, though the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1641 (fearing the promotion of heresy) limited Fellowship Meetings to households, the meeting has always been used in the RPCI (1856, p.84). The guidelines given by Houston for the meeting require all church members to attend, participate, and lead (1856, p.155).

A major difference between the meeting described by Houston and the mid-week meeting of the participants, is that in Houston's model the sermon is not discussed. Houston suggests subjects which will be profitable for discussion, including the work of the Holy Spirit, and the spiritual experiences of Christians (1856, p.97-118). He also suggests texts for discussion, such as Scripture, RPCI Testimony, and WCF (1856, p.154). However, he does not suggest discussing the sermon. In his opinion the Fellowship Meeting prepares congregants for hearing the next sermon, rather than developing the previous sermon (1856, p.155). While all participants retain many of the guidelines of Houston in their mid-week meetings, most follow the Puritan practice of developing the previous sermon (P.2, P.3, P.4, P.5, P.6, P.7, P.8).

Congregational, family and private worship were important to the Puritans. Smith claims Puritans related religious worship to the principal activity of believers in heaven. He writes, 'Thus the principal activity that they envisioned occurring in heaven - worship, was an extension of their earthly passion' (2011, p.16). The contexts of family and mid-week congregational worship provided opportunities to develop the application of the sermon. Ryken claims the sermon was developed during family worship on Sundays. Each Sunday, the Puritan family attended church, then 'assembled after dinner and/or in the evening to repeat the key points of the sermons' (1990, p.24). Sermon application was also developed at mid-week congregational

meetings. For example, in Richard Baxter's congregation, members met in his home on Thursday evenings to develop the application of the previous sermon (Baxter, 1998, p.42). On Saturday evenings, congregants met in members' homes to reflect on the previous sermon and prepare for the next day (Baxter, 1998, p.43). Baxter describes the benefit of these mid-week gatherings:

Our private meetings were a marvellous help to the propagating of godliness among them; for thereby truths that slipped away were recalled, and the seriousness of the people's minds renewed, and good desires cherished...And here I had opportunity to know their case (1998, p.49).

While this format of developing the previous sermon addresses some of the fears raised by the 1641 Scottish Church Assembly, problems can still be experienced. P.1 relates his experience:

For 3-4 years we discussed the application of the sermon in a mid-week discussion group, but sadly we couldn't continue that practice, because it became a case for difficulties and people pushing their own agendas, and it couldn't be brought into line.

Despite such difficulties, Reformed tradition and the participants recognise this element beyond the defined expository method to be a useful vehicle for developing sermon application.

### **6.3.5 'Ethos'**

Participants recognise the importance of character in supporting and influencing application. Within the Reformed tradition, character supporting sermon application has been given lengthy consideration by Richard Baxter (1860, p.164-182) and Charles Bridges (1961, p.103-184), among others. However, not much attention has been given to the influence of character on composing sermon application.

E.M. Bounds makes the general connection between character influence and the sermon when he writes, 'The preacher is more than the sermon. All the preacher says is tintured, impregnated by what the preacher is...The sermon cannot rise in its life-giving forces above the man' (1907, p.8,9). Gardener Spring makes a specific connection between character and application when he considers the detrimental effect of bad character. He argues the absence of godly character removes 'boldness and tenderness' in sermon applications, through shame for lacking the duty exhorted or through unfamiliarity with the difficulties involved in performing the duty (1986, p.153). However, it is Robert Dabney who explores more fully the influence of godly character on the composition of application. He discusses the godly character of the preacher in the context of the distinction between the persuasive appeal (Plato) and the projected appeal (Aristotle) of the speaker. While Aristotle allows a perceived moral goodness in the speaker - projected appeal, even though essential goodness is lacking, Plato demands sincere moral goodness - persuasive appeal. Following Plato, Quintilian claims, 'no man, unless he be good, can ever be an orator' (2015, p.638). He argues evil is a distraction to the mind of the orator in the process of composition and asks:

Is not temperance necessary to enable us to sustain the toil of study? What expectations are to be formed, then, from him who is abandoned to licentiousness and luxury? (2015, p.638).

Dabney applies Quintilian's argument to the preacher, by maintaining godly character is essential to and influential on, the composition of application. Drawing on Aristotle's definition of *ethos*, Dabney (1979, p.264-267) defines the godly character of an effective preacher as competence, probity, and good will. He explains 'competence' as the preacher's mastery of the subject of the sermon. He claims 'probity' should

increase to 'sanctity' in the preacher in all transactions and relations. 'Good will' is expressed by the preacher towards congregants in a deep desire for their spiritual good. He concludes, though without developing his conclusion, that these character traits clothe 'instructions with a weight and sweetness which no talent or learning can give' (1979, p.266). Dabney, therefore, argues that the godly character of the preacher, especially 'probity and good will', conditions sermon applications ('instructions') by infusing them with a 'weight and sweetness' which nature or nurture cannot provide.

### **6.3.6 Evaluation**

Ward (2017, p.35) uses the three dynamics of culture identified by Berger (1969) to examine the relation between church tradition and Christian experience. The three relations are: external, internalising, and refining. These three dynamics are now used to evaluate the relation of participants to their tradition.

First, tradition is external to participants. Every generation of Christians inherits tradition. This communal deposit of faith 'guards against any tendency to put theological reflection in a historical vacuum' (Ward, 2017, p.35). This section, which has connected the five elements of the fourth theme to voices in the past, has demonstrated this assertion. Though little has been written on the five elements, they have been considered. This connection indicates participants are not operating in an historical vacuum and are, therefore, not creators of new practice. However, it is unclear how aware participants are of their connection to past voices in their tradition. For example, no participant mentions the Directory, Houston, or Dabney. Second, tradition is internalised by participants. Ward (2017, p.36) claims every Christian community and each individual Christian has been shaped by tradition. Rowan

Williams uses the term 'in the middle of things' (2000, p. xii) to make the same point. This is evident in the findings. Dependence on the Spirit, systematic pastoral visitation, mid-week fellowship meetings, and elements of worship, are all elements from tradition which participants have internalised. However, not every voice from the past has been equally influential on their practice. For example, their emphasis on the role of the Spirit has been shaped more by Lloyd-Jones than by Macleod. Their post-sermon dialogue group has been influenced partly by Houston and partly by the Puritans. Third, tradition is refined by participants. Contributions are made to tradition as new challenges emerge and new opportunities are responded to. This refinement is evident in the participants' use of the closing praise in worship. The Directory makes this element of worship optional, but participants consider it an important medium of application. Thus, participants relate to their tradition by means of these three dynamics: external, internalising, and refining.

## **6.4 Christian Scriptures**

In using Christian Scripture in theological reflection, inter-illumination is sought between the situation researched and the sacred text (Thompson, 2017, p.75). From the various methods of Scriptural reflection suggested by Graham et al. (2019), the canonical narrative theological method (CNTM) is selected for reflection in this study. This method regards the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Jesus as, 'the central reality of existence' (Graham et al., 2019, p.87). Consequently, it attempts to 'embody the way of Christ to the fullest possible extent' (Graham et al., 2019, p.93) and 'inhabit the stories of Jesus to discern God's will and purpose' (Graham et al., 2019, p.96) for the church today. The task for the Christian church, it claims, is to 'identify forms of practice that are coherent with the narrative of Jesus' (Graham et al., 2019, p.87).

The CNTM has similarities with other reflective models which relate current church practice to the way of Christ. For example, the Gospel Orientation approach proposed by Ward ‘continually returns to Jesus Christ as he is seen in the Scriptures to regulate and revise how we are speaking and thinking’ (2017, p.53). Another similar approach is the Scriptural Cycle Model, proposed by Helen Collins (2020), consisting of Scripture, Testimony, Discernment, Encounter, and Participation (2020, p.155-168). In Collins’ model, ‘Encounter’ is the critical stage of the reflective process. Drawing on the work of Ray Anderson (2001), she explains ‘Encounter’ as, ‘congruence between the Christ of scripture and the Christ of ministry’ (2020, p.164). While the models of Ward and Collins emphasise the ministry of Jesus as the benchmark for current church practice, the CNTM is used in this reflection for two reasons.

First, the CNTM narrows the Scriptural focus to the Gospels, thereby allowing detailed analysis of the part of Scripture containing the supreme revelation of God. Second, it provides a nuanced approach. In citing the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Jesus as the ‘central reality of existence’, a macro approach is suggested. In this macro approach church ministry retells the story of Jesus through these three major events. However, the CNTM also suggests a micro approach by claiming the stories of Jesus provide concrete examples to ‘model our lives on Christ in very direct ways’ (Graham et al., 2019, p.88). Graham et al. (2019, p.96-98) claim *Spiritual Exercises* by Ignatius exemplifies a macro approach, while the Anabaptists who attempted ‘to live as Christ lived’ embody the micro approach. In the macro approach, the ‘Story of Jesus’ is retold; in the micro approach the ‘Stories of Jesus’ are indwelt. In this reflection both approaches are utilised.

This use of the CNTM fulfils the general aim of this study, which is conformity of practice ‘to the mission of God in Jesus’ (Swinton & Mowat, 2016, p.7). By retelling the

story of the incarnation, passion, and resurrection of Jesus, and indwelling the stories of Jesus, conformity to Jesus is sought in the situation researched.

### **6.4.1 Incarnation**

Incarnation is a key element in the story of Jesus. Indeed, Sam Wells (2015, p.11) considers the word 'with' to be the most important word in theology. Incarnation is intentional and purposeful. The incarnated person not only comes among others but comes among others with a mission. Incarnation involves entering and remaining in the world of others, with a view to helping and transforming them. One possible way in which the incarnational abiding of Jesus can be retold and symbolised by the church is pastoral visitation. In such ministry, the preacher enters and abides in the world of congregants with a view to listening, sharing and transforming. Pastoral visitation could be considered 'a symbol of God's being with us' (Graham et al., 2019, p.111).

This concept of pastoral visitation as an incarnational abiding is discernible in the stories of Jesus. On numerous occasions Jesus developed sermon application in private settings (Peabody, 1987; Dever and Ferguson, 2008, p.37). His public preaching was often followed by further applications in private homes (Matt. ch.13.10; Luke ch.10.38-42). His practice reflected the first century rabbinic practice of public teaching in the temple and synagogue being followed by further private applications in rabbinical schools (Old, 1998, p.105-110). This pattern in the ministry of Jesus is most discernible in the stories of Jesus recorded in the gospels of John and Mark.

The gospel of John is commonly divided into two parts: ch.1-12 the Book of Signs, and ch.13-21 the Book of Glory (Kruse, 2008, p.51). The term 'his own' (ch.1.10; ch.13.1) occurs in the opening verses of the two sections, highlighting and contrasting the groups addressed by Jesus in these two major sections. Privately teaching 'his own'

apostles, comes after publicly teaching 'his own' Jewish people. The ministry pattern of public preaching, followed by further application in private, is therefore indicated in the structure of the gospel of John (Morris, 1992, p.610,611).

A similar pattern of ministry is evident in the gospel of Mark. Mark records a collage of 'house meetings' when 'public teaching becomes private instruction of disciples: 4.1-2,10; 7.14,17; 9.14,28,33; 10.1,10' (Edwards, 2012, p.281). Lane notes the specific and supplemental nature of these private teaching sessions when he comments that, 'on each occasion these conversations provide supplementary teaching reserved for the disciples alone' (1974, p.335). Similarly, Gundry claims, 'Mark writes repeatedly about Jesus going into a house with the disciples for private dialogue' (1993, p.500). He extends the list of references to private dialogue identified by Edwards, to include '1.16-20; 29-31; 35-38; 3.13-19; 4.34, 35-41; 6.6-11, 45-52; 8.14-21' (1993, p.501). It therefore appears that, in the preaching ministry of Jesus, a pattern of public teaching to many was supplemented by subsequent private instructions to a few. In answering the questions of the few and giving further applications to them in such private settings, Jesus entered more fully into their world.

Boyd-MacMillan confirms this analysis of Jesus' ministry and applies the pattern to current ministry. He divides the preaching of Jesus into monologues to large crowds, dialogues to small crowds, and apprentice-teaching 'with his intimate circle of the twelve and the women who followed him' (2006, p.232). He claims this pattern is crucial for current ministry when he writes, 'If I am to influence my congregation or target group, I must do more than talk to them in larger groups' (2006, p.233).

This incarnational ministry pattern of Jesus was followed by his apostles. In describing apostolic ministry, Old writes, 'There was more to the ministry of the Word than just

preaching; there were the daily study sessions like those held in the rabbinical schools' (1998, p.165). In the book of Acts, the phrase 'house to house' (ch.2.46; 5.42; 8.3; 20.20) occurs four times. It does not appear to refer to door-to-door visitation but rather to 'private assemblies' (Hackett, 1992, p.238) or 'household groups' (Bruce, 1990, p.74) instructed by the apostles. Private group instruction, therefore, supplemented their public preaching in the temple (Acts ch.5.42), synagogue, or rented school (Acts ch.19.8,9). Pastoral visitation addressing individual circumstances, as Baxter and the participants have attempted, is one way of retelling the incarnation in current ministry.

### **6.4.2 Passion**

The gospels indicate a clear connection between passion in the story of Jesus and godly character. Retelling the story of Jesus passion is the gateway to such character. The heart of the story of Jesus' passion is the cross. Therefore, retelling the story of Jesus' passion means retelling the story of the cross. Indeed, Jesus promotes such a retelling of his passion when he exhorts every potential disciple 'to take up his cross' (Mark ch.8.34). Thus, Jesus demanded more from his disciples than the adoption of his teaching. Marshall observes that while Greek philosophers and Jewish rabbis in the first century were surrounded by pupils who adopted their distinctive teaching, Jesus insisted on 'personal allegiance to him, expressed in following him and giving him an exclusive loyalty' (1990, p.285). Carson et al. (1992, p.101,107) observe that Jesus' teaching about discipleship reaches a climax in the dual themes of the suffering of Jesus and the suffering of his disciples expressed in Mark ch.8.34: 'If anyone will come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me'. The literary positioning of Mark ch.8.34 develops these dual themes.

Located at the beginning of the second half of Mark's gospel, ch.8.34 belongs to a section (ch.8.31-10.34) in which Jesus begins to tell his disciples about the cross. In the section Jesus predicts his crucifixion three times (ch.8.31; 9;31; 10.32-34), which Bayer compares to 'a pregnant woman's repeated contractions prior to giving birth' (2012, p.101). Each prediction is followed by instruction on discipleship (8.32-38; 9.33-37; 10.35-45). Commenting on this literary feature, Bayer says:

The very structure of this section in Mark tells us that there is an interconnection between what befalls Jesus and what happens to his disciples. He imprints his patterns on them and us (2012, p.101).

Thus, retelling the passion of Jesus, involves cross-bearing discipleship.

The phrase 'take up his cross' (Mark ch.8.34) was common in first century society. Bayer supplies the historical background to this metaphor of discipleship used by Jesus:

In preparation for crucifixion the vertical beam of the cross was often lowered into the ground beforehand. After a person had been convicted and condemned by a Roman court, he was to carry the *patibulum*, the horizontal bar of the cross through the streets in shame, to the public place of execution...Most likely then Jesus calls his disciples to carry figuratively speaking their own *patibulum* thereby causing them to realize that their lives are no longer their own (2012, p.181,182).

However, the meaning of this metaphor is debated. Cranfield claims it means being 'ready to face martyrdom' (Cranfield, 1997, p.282). Similarly, Marshall (1990) suggests it refers to a willingness to endure persecution for the Christian faith. Edwards offers a broader interpretation when he defines it as, 'a total claim on the disciple's allegiance and the total relinquishment of his resources to Jesus' (2012, p.256), which echoes the language of Bonhoeffer: 'exclusive allegiance to Jesus Christ' (2019, p.43).

Similarly, Bayer suggests 'surrender of self-determination' that is 'our illegitimate, God-defying control over ourselves' and complete submission to Jesus (2012, p.184,185). However, he maintains, such surrender does not include self-deprecation as Bonhoeffer promotes in his phrase 'become completely oblivious of self' (Bonhoeffer, 2019, p.43). Rather, cross-bearing discipleship retains self-love, as people made in the image of God (Bayer, 2012, p.185).

This call to retell the story of Jesus passion, couched in negative terms, is followed by the positive injunction, 'follow me' (Mark ch.8.34). Edwards (2012, p.257) suggests the phrases are parallel and both explain the preceding injunction, 'come after me'. Thus, retelling the story of Jesus passion, 'take up his cross', is the gateway to producing godly character, 'follow me'.

In the stories of Jesus, the significance of godly character in the preacher is demonstrated by positive correlation between character and message. A general example of such perfect positive correlation in Jesus is evident in his famous appeal, 'learn from me' (Matt. ch.11.29). In this phrase Jesus illustrates discipleship-learning by the metaphor of an agricultural yoke being placed on two animals to pull heavy loads (Carson, 1984, p.78). A yoke was a common metaphor for moral teaching in the first century (Hagner, 1993, p.324). However, Jesus equates the object of learning with 'me', the one who is 'meek and lowly' in character (France, 1994, p.201). This assimilation of message and character indicates their correlation in Jesus and emphasises the significance of godly character in the preacher.

A specific example of this positive correlation in the stories of Jesus is the announcement of the new commandment, 'love one another' (John ch.13.34). The degree and manner of love required in this command is specified in the words, 'as I

have loved you'. Wescott claims the phrase, 'as I have', is better understood of the ground of the command, rather than the behaviour of Jesus (1886, p.198). He argues the appended phrase is a motive to obedience, rather than a model of loving. However, the action of Jesus as a model of loving cannot be ruled out. The immediate context is Jesus' exemplary love in washing the disciples' feet and the general context is the cross (Morris, 1992, p.614). Thus, the character of Jesus has perfect correlation with his imperative to love.

The apostles recognised this perfect positive correlation between character and message in the stories of Jesus by appealing to the character of Jesus as an example of Christian teaching (Eph. ch.4.20; Phil. ch.2.5; 1 John ch.2.6). The apostle Peter even coins a Greek word, (*upogrammos*; 1 Pet. ch.2.21), to describe this correlation. Thayer explains the word as, 'a writing-copy, including all the letters of the alphabet, given to beginners as an aid in learning to draw them' (1981, p.642). To follow Jesus, therefore, is to follow his message. Consequently, the apostles exhort preachers to exhibit positive correlation between their message and character (1 Tim. ch.4.12: Titus ch.2.7).

Thus, for disciples of Jesus, and especially for preachers, retelling the story of Jesus' passion involves cross-bearing. Such cross-bearing produces godly character. Such character supports the message proclaimed and as the fourth theme has demonstrated, influences the composition of application. P.8 insists on such positive correlation in the preacher when he says, 'There must be a correlation between the preacher and the message'.

### 6.4.3 Resurrection

Resurrection contains the twin ideas of new beginning and continuity. Therefore, retelling the story of Jesus' resurrection, involves these elements. These two elements seem to be retold in the coming of the Holy Spirit and the great commission.

#### A. 'In the power of the Spirit'

One aspect of resurrection is new beginning. One expression of new beginning in the story of Jesus' resurrection is the donation of the Holy Spirit on the church to empower ministry. This aspect of resurrection is evident in a post-resurrection story of Jesus recorded in John's gospel (ch.20.19-23). In this story, Jesus breathed on his disciples and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (ch.20.22). This unusual action of Jesus suggests a new beginning for the church. Kostenberger comments on the action of Jesus:

The theological antecedent plainly is Gen.2:7, where the exact same verb form is used. There, God breathes his Spirit into Adam at creation, which constitutes him as a 'living being'. Here, at the occasion of the commissioning of the disciples, Jesus constitutes them as the new messianic community in anticipation of the outpouring of the Spirit subsequent to his ascension (2004, p.575).

Such Spirit-empowered ministry, an expression of the element of new beginning in the story of Jesus' resurrection, was a feature of the stories of Jesus. Therefore, retelling the story of his resurrection and inhabiting the stories of Jesus, involves consideration of the role of the Holy Spirit in church ministry. The gospels of Luke and John emphasise the role of the Spirit in the stories of Jesus.

The gospel of Luke contains most references to the Holy Spirit, in the synoptic gospels (Guthrie, 1990, p.105). Indeed, Carson et al. (1992, p.131) claim the gospel of Luke

mentions the Spirit more times than Matthew and Mark combined. They identify references to the Spirit in the life of Jesus in Luke, as: ch.1.35; 3.16; 3.22; 4.1;4.14, 18; 10.21; 11.13; 12.12; 24.49 (1992, p.131). Ferguson (1998, p.58) analyses these references and suggests three stages of the relation of Jesus to the ministry of the Spirit:

- stage one: the conception of Jesus by the Spirit
- stage two: the public ministry of Jesus, conducted in the power of the Spirit
- stage three: Jesus sending the Spirit on the church at Pentecost to empower the ministry of the church.

This reflection focuses on stages two and three.

Stage two begins with the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism (ch.3.16). The significance of this event seems to be, enablement for preaching and healing ministries (ch.3.22). Ferguson (1998, p.51) argues this interpretation is supported by references to the Spirit leading (ch.4.1), empowering (ch.4.14), and equipping Jesus (ch.4.18). The Spirit also appears to fulfil the role of teacher. Commenting on the words of Jesus to his disciples, 'for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say' (ch.12.12), Morris says, 'it is not easy to think that they would have the Spirit and Jesus not' (1974, p.45). Thus, the Spirit fulfils the roles of guiding, empowering, equipping, and teaching in the ministry of Jesus. The dependence of Jesus on the Spirit is evidenced by his praying (ch.3.21; 5.16; 6.12; 9.18,29; 11.1; 22.45).

Morris claims there is a clear 'bond of continuity' in the Lucan writings between stage two (the role of the Spirit in Jesus) and stage three (the role of the Spirit in the apostles) (1974, p.46). France (in Ladd, 1984, p.243) concurs with this observation and argues

Luke depicts the preaching of the apostles as dependent on the Spirit (Acts ch.4.8, 31; 5.32; 6.10; 7.55). Such is the centrality of the Spirit in the Lucan account of the Early Church that France claims, 'without the Spirit there would be no mission, no story for Luke to relate' (in Ladd, 1994, p.244).

Out of the four gospels, the gospel of John contains most references to the Spirit (Carson, Moo & Morris, 1992, p.174, 175). Ladd detects an indication of stage two in the statement, 'he gives the Spirit without measure' (ch.3.34). While acknowledging the difficulty of interpreting this verse, he claims the following verse (ch.3.35) indicates the meaning is 'the Father gives the Son a full measure of the Spirit' for his preaching ministry (1984, p.324). He also detects Jesus' reliance on the Spirit in ministry when he bestowed on the apostles (ch.20.22-33) the same Spirit that empowered him (1994, p.324,325).

Most references to stage three in John's gospel occur in the Upper Room discourse (ch.14-16). In it the Spirit is described as the paraclete, a prosecuting advocate to the world, but an instructor of disciples (Ladd, 1994, p.330). Jesus predicts the Spirit will fulfil the roles of empowering (ch.14.14; 16.7) and teaching the apostles (ch.14.17). Ladd considers it 'noteworthy that John attributes nothing of the ecstatic or marvellous to the coming of the Spirit' (1994, p.333). Thus, the Spirit is to fulfil in the apostles two of the same roles he fulfilled in Jesus: teaching and empowering.

While not addressing the composition of application directly, the stories of Jesus emphasise the role of the Spirit in the preacher and contain promises of the Spirit's advent on the church. Thus, inhabiting the stories of Jesus and retelling the new beginning element of the story of Jesus' resurrection, involves a recognition of the role of the Spirit in preaching.

All participants mention prayer for the help of the Holy Spirit throughout the process of composition. P.4 is representative of the participants when he says:

When I am preparing, I am asking God not only to help me understand the passage, but to give me illustration and application. I am praying that at every stage of the preparation, when I am doing my exegesis during the week, when I am writing out my full manuscript for the first time, when I am editing my manuscript on a Friday morning, I am still praying, 'Help me to get the words right here'.

However, this participant admits reliance on the Spirit is challenging. He acknowledges self-reliance comes easily to him and describes its impact on his mood. He says, 'I find Sunday night the most depressing situation. I am melancholic and tired. In bed by 9.30. The truths come again to you on Tuesday...It's too much about me'.

B. 'Didasko'

Continuity is another feature of resurrection. While resurrection is a new beginning it is not a new creation. Resurrection implies links with what was. Thus, in retelling the story of Jesus resurrection, the factor of continuity with the stories of Jesus is to be included. The Great Commission, recorded most fully in the first gospel, is a symbol of such resurrection continuity. Matthew's Gospel contains large, concentrated blocks of the teaching of Jesus (Carson et al., 1992, p.84). However, the gospel ends, not with a block of teaching, but with Jesus commissioning his disciples to pass on his teaching to future disciples (ch.28.18-20). France (1994, p.415) and Carson (1984, p.599) explain Jesus' commission as the church taking over his role of teaching in the world, 'to the end of the age'.

Carson discusses the important question: who is to teach in the absence of Jesus? He argues the command to 'disciple' is given to all church members. He claims the

term 'my brothers' (Matt. ch.28.10) suggests a larger group than the apostles. He also suggests the apostles are commissioned as representatives of all disciples of Jesus. Therefore, he concludes, 'Either way it is binding on *all* Jesus' disciples to make others what they themselves are - disciples of Jesus Christ' (1984, p.596). Thus, it appears Jesus envisages all congregants to supplement preaching by teaching fellow congregants, which is a retelling of resurrection continuity. A mid-week meeting, such as participants have described, is one suitable context for retelling this aspect of the resurrection story. P.3 considers the development of application by congregants to be a superior way of composing application to preachers isolated in a study. He says, 'Our mid-week is simply discussing the sermon. I think that is essential. Application is to be done within the community of faith'.

However, it appears the Early Church also expressed the element of continuity in another way. The word 'teaching' (*didasko*) used in the Great Commission, is also used to describe the effect of congregant singing in corporate worship: 'Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching (*didasko*) and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God' (Col. ch.3.16). Thayer claims the word '*didasko*' is 'used of those who enjoin upon others to observe some ordinance, to embrace some opinion, or to obey some precept' (1981, p.144). The author of Colossians used the term 'teaching and admonishing' of preachers in ch.1.28. In ch.3.16 it is applied to all congregants when singing. Bruce observes the punctuation of the sentence is difficult, and therefore the interpretation is disputed (1984, p.158). A key discussion concerns whether 'teaching and admonishing' should be related to 'wisdom', or to 'singing'. Bruce makes a strong case for relating teaching to congregational singing, by appealing to the parallel passage in Ephesians ch.5.19, 'addressing one another'. Bruce concludes his

discussion by claiming congregational singing is, 'a means of mutual edification, as well as a vehicle of praise to God' (1984, p.158).

Ward also mentions this function of song lyrics when discussing public worship. He claims that 'a deliberately communicative kind of theologizing designed to convict and convince' (2017, p.15) occurs when songs are sung in corporate worship. He attempts to detail the beneficial impact of congregational singing:

Songs and singing build communities in mysterious ways. Community itself exists as a cohabitation with those in the church, but we are also indwelt by the presence of God...As the community sings, it remembers, and as it remembers, Jesus becomes present by the power of the Spirit (2017, p.15).

There is, therefore, a case for the partial fulfilment of 'teaching', commanded in the Great Commission, to be fulfilled through song lyrics in corporate worship.

Other voices in the worship service, therefore, besides the voice of the preacher, fulfil the injunction of the Great Commission 'teaching them to do' (Matt. ch.28.19). Songs, appropriate to the sermon, will not only enforce, expand, and internalise the application for individual congregants, but will also teach other congregants the application. One implication of this symbol of resurrection continuity for preachers and worship leaders therefore is that care should be taken in the selection of songs for corporate worship. Participants have described their care in selecting the final song in corporate worship to be a fitting response to the sermon by congregants. This section suggests similar care in song selection could be extended to all songs in the worship service, to fully utilise the mutual teaching aspect of singing in corporate worship.

The story of Jesus' resurrection includes the elements of new beginning and continuity. Retelling the story of his resurrection seems to include Spirit empowered preaching, post sermon dialogue groups, and congregational singing.

#### **6.4.4 Evaluation**

One concern in using the canonical narrative theological method (CNTM) approach is, 'who decides how the story of Jesus is told today?' (Graham et al., 2019, p.87). Therefore, the question arises: are the five elements of the fourth theme in this study a faithful retelling of the story of Jesus and an honest indwelling of the stories of Jesus? as this theological reflection has argued. The move from the story of Jesus to current church ministry involves numerous challenges. Newbigin (1988, p.5) identifies contextualisation as one of those challenges, in his discussion of the gospel and culture. He claims there is a danger of losing the story of Jesus when attempting to create a local theology. This issue of contextualisation is important in considering the legitimacy of the final theme as a retelling of the story of Jesus. Is this beyond the defined expository method theme a faithful indwelling of the stories of Jesus and an honest retelling of the story of Jesus for today, and therefore, widely applicable? Or has the final theme been contextualised by Ulster evangelicalism, the expository style, or male gender? Support for the fourth theme being an honest indwelling and retelling of the stories and story of Jesus by the church today seems to be found in the appearance of the five elements in both apostolic ministry and church tradition, as this theological reflection has shown.

However, the main aim of the CNTM is to provide a habitus for ministry rather than establish a set of rules. Graham et al. write:

This method does not establish abstract rules or principles...Rather it invites the Christian to develop a habitus or way of life, through which the story of Jesus continues to be told in the life of the story-shaped community of the Church (2019, p.87).

In this theological reflection on the fourth theme, a habitus of Jesus concerning the church practice of composing application rather than a set of 'abstract rules or principles' seems to have emerged. The habitus involves dependence on the Holy Spirit for ministry, occasional and annual pastoral visitation, post-sermon dialogue groups, elements of corporate worship, and godly character. These elements, especially Spirit dependence and godly character, suggest that the composition of application involves more than a study-desk, multiple Bible commentaries, and a refined homiletic method. It involves the life of the preacher, conditioned by the story of Jesus, beyond study walls. The adoption of such a habitus will ensure the preacher not only retells the story of Jesus in sermons, but retells the story of his incarnation, passion, and resurrection in a 'story-shaped' life and ministry. This habitus will confirm, exemplify, and condition the message proclaimed.

## **6.5 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the findings of the third and fourth themes have been presented. The third theme indicated that, despite the significance of the defined expository method in the practice of participants demonstrated in chapter 5, the process of composing application remained difficult for them. In the fourth theme, five elements beyond the defined expository method were identified which were important to the participants in the process of composing application. The elements were: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, congregant input, corporate worship, and godly character. Some references in church tradition to these elements were examined and using the canonical narrative

theological method, indications of their presence in the story and stories of Jesus were explored.

## STAGE 4: FORMULATING REVISED FORMS OF PRACTICE

### CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

It has been argued in this study that the expository sermon consists of the elements of faithful conveyance of fixed meaning, structure, and application. The focus of this study has been the element of application. This element of the sermon has been understood in this thesis in the sense given to it by Daniel Overdorf (2009), as application which 'preserves biblical integrity, while pursuing contemporary relevance'.

The aim of the thesis has been to explore the expository method, defined in chapter 2 as sourcing, developing and integrating application. The research question which guided the study was: **to what extent is the expository method significant in the composition of application for the expository sermon?** A qualitative research approach was adopted in addressing this question. The empirical tool of semi-structured interviewing was used to gather data from nine expository preachers, selected by purposive sampling. The transcripts of the interviews were subjected to open and analytical coding, producing four major themes: importance of sermon application, significance of the defined expository method, difficulty of composition, and inadequacy of the defined expository method.

The findings established that all participants consider sermon application to be important. The findings also showed that the defined expository method is significant in the experience of the participants in the process of composing application through the considerable overlap between the method and the practice of the participants in the key areas of sourcing, developing, and integrating application. However, the data also indicated that participants continue to experience difficulties in composing

application. Finally, the findings uncovered five important factors beyond the defined expository method which are significant in the process of composing application: the Holy Spirit, pastoral visitation, corporate worship, congregant input and godly character. Theological reflection on this final theme followed. The research has led to the conclusion that, while the defined expository method is significant in the process of composing application in the experience of the participants, it does not tell the whole story. Other important factors beyond the defined method are also utilised in the process of composition in the experience of the participants. Benefits and implications of this study, contribution to knowledge, areas for further research, *kairos* moment, and new praxis are now considered.

## **7.1 Benefits of the Study**

The data collected from experienced expository preachers has provided a thick description of the process of composing application. This data has the potential to provide Christian preachers with valuable information for reflecting on their own homiletic practice. The study has the potential to benefit various groups of preachers. Firstly, preachers in the RPCI. A copy of this study will be placed in the RTC, Belfast library and, therefore, available to all RPCI ministers. Opportunity will also be given to share the findings of the study with RPCI ministers at their conference and with theological students through the RPCI mentoring scheme. By these means, the study has the potential to benefit preachers and students within this denomination. Secondly, experienced preachers. The study suggested there will always be an element of difficulty in composing application. Therefore, experienced preachers may gain benefit from this study by confirmation of their method or discovery of new methods. Some participants commented that their interview experience clarified and developed their homiletic approach. Thirdly, younger preachers. It has been noted in the study that

weak application in the expository sermons of some younger preachers, was caused by a lack of training (Helm, 2014; Green, 2015). Some participants lamented the absence of homiletic teaching on application in their own theological education. This study, therefore, could provide help and encouragement in this area for younger preachers. Thus, RPCI, experienced, and younger preachers could benefit from this study.

## **7.2 Implications of the Study**

A prominent emphasis in the research has been the insufficiency of the defined expository method in the process of composition. While the study has recognised the importance of the defined expository method for composing application, the research has concluded that elements beyond the method should not be neglected. This emphasis has obvious implications for those involved in teaching the expository approach. While expository preachers are to be equipped with good homiletic method, they are also to be informed of important factors beyond the method.

Another implication arising from this study concerns the role of mentoring. While participants acknowledged the persistent difficulty of composing application, they also mentioned help gained from experienced preachers. In some cases, mentoring occurred remotely and broadly by listening to the sermons of other preachers online. In other instances, mentoring occurred formally during the three years of college training or through the module on applicatory preaching. Some mentoring occurred informally by personal friendships with experienced preachers. These findings suggest experienced applicatory preachers should be encouraged to mentor younger preachers, and those struggling with this practice.

### **7.3 Contribution of the Study**

The study makes some contribution to Ulster studies, empirical research, and homiletics. As all participants are ministers in the RPCI, the study gives some insight into *Ulster studies*. In particular, the study gives insight into one of the smaller denominations within Northern Ireland. While the RPCI history (Loughridge, 1993), college (Leahy, 2004), congregations (2010), prominent ministers (2016) and relation to the state (Donnachie, 2016) have been explored, no study has been conducted on preaching in the RPCI. This study therefore allows the voice of this group on preaching to be heard for the first time. While recent *empirical studies* on sermon application have focused on the method of one participant, this study considers the homiletic practice of nine participants. This approach facilitates a fuller understanding of the difficulties encountered in the process and captures a wider range of empirical methods adopted. The findings of this study inform the defined expository method in *homiletics* on the personality of the preacher, small congregations, and some practical methods for developing application. They also challenge the method to use a secondary application as the main application on occasions and to utilise factors beyond the defined expository method.

### **7.4 Further Study**

This study has concentrated on experienced preachers in the RPCI. Further study could be conducted on young preachers or experienced preachers in other denominations and traditions, to ascertain the influence, if any, of inexperience, denominational structures, or theological convictions on the composition of application.

Since the research focused on the preacher's experience and opinion of application, further study could be conducted on the opinions and experiences of congregants on this topic. Such focus would allow comparison and contrast with this study.

Some work has already been done on the influence of gender on sermon composition. As observed in this study, theory is still being developed. Exploration of gender influence on composing sermon application could help develop and clarify this subject.

Another area for further research is spiritual abuse. Recent studies have explored the practice of 'heavy shepherding' (Oakley, 2018) in pastoral care. Research on spiritual abuse in sermon application could prove to be an important area of study.

Recent developments in the growing discipline of neuroscience suggest it could be an insightful conversation partner on this topic. Some work has already been done on the relation of neuroscience to preaching (Cox, 2012; Kim, 2015; Stange, 2020). Cox outlines some areas for further research when he writes:

If properly prepared, the preacher is capable of helping hearers become listeners and assisting them in turning on the right switches for the best immediate action, delayed action, cognitive storage and integration for decision making (2012, p.34).

## **7.5 Kairos Experience**

This study has provided me with insight into the practices of experienced preachers. The whole research experience has been humbling, enriching, and enlightening as I have listened to preachers sharing their difficulties, mistakes, and encouragements. Their experience has also given insight into evangelicalism in Ulster over recent decades.

The research provided me with a *kairos* moment. The moment occurred on 24th December 2019, as noted in my journal, while standing in my living room discussing the research findings with my brother. While sharing with him the progress of my study, the 'beyond method' concept emerged. That moment marked my breaking with preconceived ideas about composing application. Until then, I thought the process of composing application for the expository sermon consisted only of the expository method and therefore the answer to my research problem would be found in exploring that method. I anticipated new techniques would be uncovered by empirical research, which would help solve my homiletic difficulties. However, the research provided few new techniques. Instead, I discovered that the composition of application involves important elements beyond the defined method. This discovery has changed my ministry, and I hope that what I have learned in this study will also benefit other preachers.

## **7.6 New Praxis**

In exploring the significance of the expository method, this study provides for the refining and developing of current praxis by practitioners. However, new praxis is also suggested by the final theme of this study. The new praxis is:

- expository preachers should give consideration to elements beyond the defined expository method in the process of composing application.

The study has suggested this new praxis may involve some or all of the following practices: noting random texts that leave a deep impression, responding positively to urges to pray during the process of composition, providing opportunities for congregants to develop sermon application in mid-week meetings, adopting greater openness to suggestions for sermon topics by congregants, showing professionalism

in pastoral visitation by addressing the needs of congregants, using the closing prayer and praise in corporate worship as a medium for congregant response to the sermon, and intentionally developing personal godliness to facilitate insight, tone and exemplification of sermon application.

## **7.7 Conclusion**

Despite the areas for further research suggested above, this study has shown that the defined homiletic method has a significant role in the composition of application in terms of sourcing, developing, and integrating sermon application, in the experience of the participants. However, the research has also shown that the use of the defined expository method should not be considered sufficient to achieve the composition of application. Rather, the method should be supplemented by Holy Spirit reliance, pastoral visitation, other elements of corporate worship, congregant input, and godly character.

# Appendices

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## **1. Participant Information Sheet**

### A Study in Homiletic Methods of Composing Effective Application for the Expository Sermon

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before accepting the invitation, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

#### **What is the purpose of the study?**

The purpose of the study is to explore one aspect of homiletical method – namely the composition of ‘effective application’ for the expository sermon. The term ‘effective application’ is used by various authors on preaching (Robinson 2014, Capill 2014, Overdorf 2009). In this study the definition of ‘effective application’ as given by Daniel Overdorf in his book *Applying the Sermon* will be used. He defines the term as ‘application that preserves biblical integrity while pursuing contemporary relevance’ (2009, p.34). Such application emerges from faithful exegesis of the text of scripture and connects with the questions, needs and struggles of contemporary listeners. This type of application, he claims, is most likely under God to effect transformation in the thoughts and lives of congregants.

This study considers how such application is composed by the preacher. The homiletic method of up to fifteen senior ministers in the RPCI will be considered. A written report containing the findings of this study will be produced at the end of this project.

#### **Why have I been chosen?**

All of the participants are preachers committed to the expository style of sermon and have at least 10 years of experience preaching in a congregational context within the RPCI.

#### **Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. Even after you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason, up until the time the researcher has processed the data.

#### **What will happen if I take part?**

If you decide to take part, and sign the consent form, you will be interviewed at a time which is suitable for you. The interview will take place at the Irish Baptist College, Moira or at an agreed neutral venue. The interview will be face to face and is expected to last about 45 minutes. The interview will explore the three areas of:

1. Your preaching experience generally;
2. Your method of composing sermon application;
3. Reflection on sermon application.

Participants will be provided with suggestions for guided reflection on their homiletic method in advance of the interview and permission will be requested to record the interview to assist in subsequent transcribing and analysis. A review copy of the interview will be sent to the interviewee to ensure there is no misrepresentation. A copy of the completed dissertation will also be available.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

It is unlikely that participation in this research will carry any risks. Any discomfort experienced will be dealt with in a sensitive and non-judgemental manner.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

It is hoped that you will experience personal benefit by reflecting on your homiletic method. Your participation could also benefit others, for example younger preachers, by contributing to the body of knowledge on composing application for the sermon.

### **What if something goes wrong?**

If you wish to make a complaint or have any concerns about any aspect of the way you have been approached or treated during the course of this study, please contact

Professor Wayne Morris  
Director School of Humanities  
University of Chester  
Parkgate Road  
Chester  
CH1 4BJ  
[w.morris@chester.ac.uk](mailto:w.morris@chester.ac.uk)

### **Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

All of the information which is collected from you during the course of the research will be strictly confidential, so that only the researcher carrying out the research will have access to such information.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of the research study will form part of my doctoral dissertation.

### **Who may I contact for further information?**

If you would like more information about the research before you decide whether or not you would be willing to take part, please contact:

Mr David Sutherland c/o Irish Baptist College, 19 Hillsborough Road, Moira, County Down. BT67 0HG

Thank you for your interest in this research.

## 2. Letter of Welcome

Name

Address

Dear

Further to our conversation regarding this issue, I am writing to express my thanks to you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research project on the composition of application for the expository sermon.

Your participation in the project will remain voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time without obligation to explain your reasons.

I give you assurance that the data collected in the interview will remain confidential and that your personal identity will remain anonymous in the findings.

If you have substantive concerns at any time about the way in which the project is being carried out, you may contact the University of Chester as follows:

Professor Wayne Morris  
Director School of Humanities  
University of Chester  
Parkgate Road  
Chester  
CH1 4BG

Attached are several documents that require your attention.

- 1 A copy of the information sheet (which you have already seen)
- 2 Two copies of the consent form which you should sign and date; one copy is for your own records and the other one should be returned to me.
- 3 A document for reflection on composing application to help prepare you for your interview.

Please contact me if you have any queries regarding this. Once I have your consent form I will contact you to arrange your interview.

Sincerely

David Sutherland  
c/o Irish Baptist College  
19 Hillsborough Road,  
Moira BT67 0HG

### 3. Consent Form

**Title of the Project:** The Composition of Effective Application for the Expository Sermon.

**Name of Researcher:** David Sutherland

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understood the participant information sheet, dated ....., for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without my care or legal rights affected.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher D Sutherland

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 4. Interview Guide

**Part 1** – An outline of your preaching experience which forms the context of your homiletic method.

1. What is your name and age?
2. Describe the duration and locations of your preaching ministry?
3. How would you describe your preaching style?
4. Who have been the major influences on your preaching and how have they influenced you?

**Part 2** – An exploration of your homiletic method in composing application for the sermon.

1. On a scale of 1-3 how would you rate the importance of application in the sermon? (3 very important, 2 important, 1 unimportant)
2. On a scale of 1-3 how would you rate the difficulty of composing application for the expository sermon? (3 very difficult, 2 difficult, 1 not difficult)
3. Can you explain your reasons for your answer to Q1?  
Can you explain your reasons for your answer to Q2?
4. At what point in the sermon preparation process do you begin to consider the element of application?
5. In what ways, if any, do the following sources influence your composition of sermon application?
  - a. The text of Scripture (e.g. genre, exegesis)
  - b. The preacher (e.g. character, resources)
  - c. The audience (e.g. input, composition, needs)
5. Are there any practical methods that you employ to determine application? (e.g. questions, grids, prayer)
6. How does application appear in your sermon? (e.g. location, language, levels, percentage)

**Part 3** - Reflection on your homiletic method.

1. What changes, if any, have you made to your method of composing application throughout your ministry?
2. How would you evaluate the effectiveness of your sermon application in the lives of your congregants?
3. Is there any way that you need to develop this aspect of your sermon preparation?
4. What role does the grace of God have in your sermon application? (e.g. indicative/imperative)

## 5. Ethical Approval Letter

Mr David Sutherland  
82 Curragh Road  
Coleraine  
BT51 4BS

10 December 2018

Dear David,

Thank you for your resubmission to the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Committee, which was considered on 5 December 2018. The Committee is conscious of the work involved in the preparation of such research proposals and is grateful for your attention to this

The Committee decided that your proposal should be approved. You are therefore now free to pursue the project in the knowledge that it has been approved by the University.

If you have any queries about this letter or your next steps please get in touch.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Wayne Morris  
Chair of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities Research Ethics Committee

cc: Dr Peter Firth, Dr David Luke

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