CHAPTER 3

ROBINSON'S VIEW OF SCRIPTURE

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate Robinson's view of Scripture in its larger evangelical context. Robinson states that his homiletical genre, expository preaching, emerges "as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration."[1] What is this "high view" of Scripture and how does it influence his homiletical method? Answering this question will help to provide the evangelical perspective necessary for evaluating his expository approach to homiletics.

3.2 Robinson's View of Scripture

Robinson's view of Scripture is best understood in light of the evangelical context from which it emerges: the classical evangelical prolegomena. This prolegomena generally involves four theological concepts: revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority,[2] and

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[1]Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 1984, 803.

[2]Illumination is sometimes considered a part of this prolegomena. The organization is not always this defined, but these four concepts are generally discussed, sometimes with different terminology, sometimes in a different sequence. See, for example, the treatment of the doctrine of Scripture by evangelical scholarship in the following systematic theologies: Henry C. Thiessen, *Lectures in Systematic Theology,* rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979); G. C. Berkouwer, *Studies in Dogmatics: Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*; Charles W. Carter, ed., *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology: Biblical, Systematic, and Practical*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983); James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, rev. ed. (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1986); Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1986); Paul Enns, *The Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1989); Gordon R. Lewis and Bruce A. Demarest, *Integrative Theology,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987); Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Narrative Interpretation of Basic Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); idem., *The Christian Story: A Pastoral Systematics*, vol. 2, *Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987); James Leo Garret, Jr., *Systematic Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Evangelical,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988-1992); Paul K. Jewett, *God, Creation, & Revelation: A Neo-Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991); J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology: A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale, 1993); Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration, & Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity 1994); Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*; Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Nashville, Tenn.:

these four concepts will provide the four main divisions of this chapter. Under each concept,

the views of evangelical scholarship will be summarized in order to provide the theological

context. Then Robinson's particular view will be investigated.

It should be noted that Robinson never formally discusses the doctrine of Scripture

in his homiletical writings. On a few occasions he makes a reference to aspects of the

evangelical prolegomena, but his focus is primarily on the construction of expository

sermons. Even so, his view of revelation, inspiration, inerrancy, and authority form the basis

of his homiletical method. Note also that the researcher questioned Robinson on these four

concepts recently during an interview which will be referenced throughout this chapter and

the rest of this study.[3]

3.2.1 Revelation

3.2.1.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Revelation

Several issues that evangelicals have addressed concerning the concept of revelation

can be set forth as questions. Are the words of Scripture ontologically revelation and thus,

the "Word of God?" Or, rather, is there a distinction between revelation and the words of

Broadman and Holman, 1994); John Stott, *Authentic Christianity* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1995); Richard Rice, *The Reign of God: An Introduction to Christian Theology from a Seventh-day Adventist Perspective,* 2d. ed. (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1997); Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology,* ed., Raoul Dederen (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2000), 22-57; Norman Gulley, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, *Prolegomena*, unpublished manuscript, Southern Adventist University; and Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology,* 2d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), who discusses these four concepts in the above sequence; see his table of contents, 7.

[3]Haddon Robinson, interview by author, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001. Hereafter cited as Interview.

Scripture?[4] Is revelation personal or propositional?[5]   Evangelical historian Mark Noll

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[4]This distinction between the words of the Bible and revelation was articulated in neo-orthodoxy, also called "dialectical theology" or "theology of crisis" (see James M. Robinson, ed., *The Beginnings of Dialectical Theology*, trans. Keith R. Crim and Louis De Grazia [Richmond, Va.: John Knox Press, 1968]). Neo-orthodoxy is sometimes called Barthianism because of its fountainhead, Karl Barth. Barth distinguished the Bible from revelation in his *Church Dogmatics,* 13 vols., ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969); see, for example, I/1, 88-120 and I/2, 463, where he declares that the Bible was "not itself revelation," but only a witness to the revelation, which is Jesus Christ.

For studies on Barth and Scripture, see, for example, Klaas Runia, *Karl Barth's Doctrine of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962); Gordon H. Clark, *Barth's Theological Method* (Philadelphia: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1963); Arnold B. Come, *An Introduction to Barth's Dogmatics for Preachers* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1963), 168-198; David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 39-50; Thomas Edward Provence, "The Hermeneutics of Karl Barth" (Ph.D. dissertation, Fuller Theological Seminary, 1980); Paul Charles McGlasson, "Karl Barth and the Scriptures: A Study of the Biblical Exegesis in *Church Dogmatics* I and II" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1986); Christina A. Baxter, "The Nature and Place of Scripture in the Church Dogmatics," in *Theology Beyond Christendom: Essays on the Centenary of the Birth of Karl Barth May 10, 1886*, ed. John Thompson (Allison Park, Penn.: Pickwick Publications, 1986), 33-62; idem., "Barth—a Truly Biblical Theologian?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 38 (1987): 3-27; David L. Mueller, "The Contributions and Weaknesses of Karl Barth's View of the Bible," in *The Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Inerrancy 1987* (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1987), 423-447; Werner G. Jeanrond, "Karl Barth's Hermeneutics," in *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth*, ed., Nigel Biggar (London: Mowbray, 1988), 80-97; Geoffrey W. Bromiley, "The Authority of Scripture in Karl Barth," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, EDS., D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Baker 1986, 1995), 271-294.

After interacting with Barth and carefully investigating the Biblical material, Runia comes to a conclusion about the biblical writers that many evangelicals would be comfortable with: "There is, therefore, but one conclusion possible: These witnesses are *revelatory witnesses*. They are not only witnesses to revelation, in a limiting and distinct way, but they themselves *belong to the revelation*. Their speaking and writing *is* revelation" (35; italics his). Henry, who agrees with the above statement by Runia, repeatedly critiques Barth's views in his six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority* (1:188-192; 2:127-128, 143-148, 157-160; 3:224-228, 284-290, 466-469; 4:196-200, 256-271, 419-425, 427-430; 5:129, 316-319; 6:90-105). Some evangelical attitudes toward Barth, however, "have slowly moved away from outright suspicion . . . toward a more appreciative awareness of Barth's dissatisfaction with liberalism and its intellectual moorings in the Enlightenment" (J. P. Callahan, "Karl Barth," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 142); notice, for example, the note below on Bernard Ramm.

[5]This issue has been a major debate among Protestant theologians of the middle and latter twentieth century. Advocates of propositional revelation, such as Carl Henry (3:248-487), defend revelation as mental, cognitive, meaningful, and propositional or sentential (sentence). Advocates of personal revelation, such as Barth (I/1, 124-135, 141-212; I/2, 457-537) and Emil Brunner (*Revelation and Reason,* trans. Olive Wyon [Philadelphia: Westminister, 1946], 20-42; and *Truth as Encounter,* trans. Amandus Loos and David Cairns [Philadelphia: Westminister, 1964]), argue that revelation is a personal disclosure of God to the inner consciousness of the prophet devoid of information. For critique of non-propositional revelation, see Paul Helm, *The Divine Revelation* (Westchester, Ill.: Crossway, 1982), 21ff; Ronald H. Nash, *The Word of God and The Mind of Man* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1982), 43-54. For discussion and evaluation of Brunner's concept of revelation and authority, see Paul King Jewett, *Emil Brunner's Concept of Revelation* (London: James Clarke, 1954); idem, "Emil Brunner's Doctrine of Scripture," in *Inspiration and Interpretation*, ed. John W. Walvoord (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1957), 210-238; and James L. Leavenworth, "The Use of the Scriptures in the Works of Emil Brunner" (Ph.D. dissertation, Yale

identifies the position of traditional evangelical scholarship on these issues in *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*: "When examining the evangelical study of Scripture, everything hinges upon a recognition that the evangelical community considers the Bible the very Word of God." He asserts further that most evangelicals emphasize the Bible as the Word of God "in a cognitive, propositional, factual sense." Thus, although they "typically give some attention to the human character of the Bible, they believe that Scripture itself teaches that where the Bible speaks, God speaks." To forget this central conviction is "fatal in a study of evangelical biblical scholarship."[6] On those espousing this view names such as B. B. Warfield,[7] Gordon H. Clark,[8] Cornelius Van

University, 1950). See also Henry's critique of Brunner (3:48-49, 261-262, 298-299, 406-407, 430-431, 434, 436, 472).

Erickson believes that revelation "is not *either* personal *or* propositional; it is *both/and*. What God primarily does is to reveal himself, but he does so at least in part by telling us something *about* himself" (*Christian Theology*, 221). See also Garrett, who sees truth in "both sides" and feels "these truths need to be correlated" (*Systematic Theology*, 101).

[6]Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 6. The view expressed by Noll is the view taken by this researcher.

[7]On Warfield, see Mark A. Noll, "B. B. Warfield," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians,* ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 26-39; and idem., "Benjamin B. Warfield," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1257-1258; see especially Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1970), where he argues, among other things, that Scripture is "itself part of the redemptive revelation of God" (161).

[8]On Clark, see Ronald H. Nash, "Gordon H. Clark," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 182-192; and W. A. Elwell, "Gordon Haddon Clark," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 270-271; see, for example, Clark's *Religion, Reason and Revelation* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1961), for his defense of propositional revelation through human language.

Til,[9] Francis Schaeffer,[10] Carl F. H. Henry,[11] James I. Packer,[12] and Millard Erickson[13] come to mind. These scholars represent the more conservative or traditional side of evangelical scholarship concerning the nature of revelation and Scripture. This is the theological tradition Robinson personally espouses.[14]

In *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology*,

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[9]On Van Til, see John M. Frame, "Cornelius Van Til," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 156-167; and W. A. Elwell, "Cornelius Van Til," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1237; see, for example, Van Til's introduction to B. B. Warfield's *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 3-68, where he critiques Brunner and sets Warfield's view of Scripture as the Protestant orthodox view; for analysis and critique of Van Til's concept of truth, see White, 36-61.

[10]On Schaeffer, see Colin Duriez, "Francis Schaeffer," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 245-259; and W. A. Elwell, "Francis Schaeffer," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1060-1061; see, for example, his *He is There and He is Not Silent* in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer,* vol. 1: *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture* (Westchester: Crossway, 1982), for his discussion of propositional revelation, among other things; see also *Complete Works*, vol 2: *A Christian View of the Bible As Truth*; for analysis and critique of Schaeffer's concept of truth, see White, 62-84.

[11]On Henry, see Richard A. Purdy, "Carl F. H. Henry," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 269-275; and W. A. Elwell, "Carl Ferdinand Howard Henry," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 550. Henry is considered by Grenz and Olson in *20th Century Theology*, to be the "most prominent evangelical theologian of the second half of the twentieth century (288). Bob E. Patterson in *Makers of the Modern Theological Mind: Carl F. H. Henry* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), hails Henry as "the prime interpreter of evangelical theology, one of its leading theoreticians, and . . . the unofficial spokesman for the entire tradition" (9). Henry champions propositional revelation in his magnum opus, the six-volume *God, Revelation, and Authority*; see especially volume 3, where Henry states and expounds his tenth thesis: "God's revelation is rational communication conveyed in intelligible ideas and meaningful words, that is, in conceptual-verbal form" (3:248ff). For analysis and critique of Henry's concept of truth, see White, 85-111.

[12]On Packer, see Roger Nicole, "J. I. Packer," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 379-387; J. Mitchell, Jr., "James Innell Packer," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 881; and Alister McGrath, *J. I. Packer: A Biography* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997). Packer argues that the words of Scripture are revelation and revelation is both propositional and personal; see his *"Fundamentalism" and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1958); and *God Has Spoken: Revelation and The Bible,* 3d. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). For a substantial study on Packer's view of Scripture and illumination, see Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Interpretation: A Study in the Writings of James I. Packer" (Ph.D. dissertation, Andrews University, 1998).

[13]On Erickson, see L. Arnold Hustad, "Millard J. Erickson," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 412-426; and W. A. Elwell, "Millard J. Erickson," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 384-385. Erickson argues, like Packer, that the words of Scripture are equal to revelation and revelation is both propositional and personal; see his magnum opus, *Christian Theology*, 200-223; for analysis and critique of Erickson's concept of truth, see White, 112-139.

[14]Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001.

Millard Erickson identifies a group of evangelical scholars he terms "postconservative

evangelicals," who take issue with the traditional evangelical view of Scripture.[15] Erickson

discusses names such as Bernard Ramm,[16] Clark Pinnock,[17] Donald Bloesch,[18] and Stanley

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[15]Erickson, *The Evangelical Left: Encountering Postconservative Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 30, 61-86. R. V. Pierard and W. A. Elwell also discuss this group, variously called "postconservative," "reformist," "progressive," "the evangelical left,"or even "liberal evangelicalism." They write: "This is not a particularly large group, but they are articulate, highly placed academics whose word carries significant weight, men such as Roger Olsen, Clark Pinnock, and Stanley Grenz. They are counterbalanced by defenders of a more traditional evangelicalism, such as David Wells, Millard Erickson, and Timothy George. At the present moment the vast majority of evangelicals are more traditionally inclined and are alarmed at what they perceive to be a defection from the faith. In some instances they are justified in their concern; in others they act as alarmists" ("Evangelicalism," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 409). See also the following dissertations: Robert McNair Price, "The Crisis of Biblical Authority: The Setting and Range of the Current Evangelical Crisis" (Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1981); Richard Albert Mohler, Jr., "Evangelical Theology and Karl Barth: Representative Models or Response" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

[16]On Ramm, see Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Bernard Ramm," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 290-306, who states that Ramm "must be considered one of the foremost American evangelical theologians of the twentieth century. Only Carl F. H. Henry's works are comparable in quantity and quality" (ibid., 292); see also W. A. Elwell, "Bernard Ramm," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 980-981. Ramm is known for his trilogy of books: *The Pattern of Religious Authority*, where he criticized Barth's encounter theology, 96-98; *The Witness of the Spirit: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of the Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959); and *Special Revelation and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), where he expressed the more traditional evangelical view of revelation. Over the years as Ramm studied Barth, he embraced more aspects of his theology (Vanhoozer, 303). In the publication of *After Fundamentalism: The Future of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), Ramm is found recommending Barth to Evangelicals. While Ramm has not completely capitulated to Barth's position, his view of Scripture, according to Erickson, represents a "shift toward a more ambiguous relationship between revelation and the words of Scripture" (Erickson, 78).

[17]On Pinnock, see Robert K. Johnston, "Clark H. Pinnock," *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 427-444 and J. R. Lincoln, "Clark H. Pinnock," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 926-927. In his *Biblical Revelation: The Foundation of Christian Theology* (Chicago: Moody, 1971), Pinnock taught that Scripture was the "capstone of God's revealing activity" (20-21). Years later in *The Scripture Principle* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), he was not as unequivocal on the words of Scripture being identical with revelation. For discussion on the "celebrated" change of Pinnock's views, see White, 170; and especially, Roennfeldt, Ray C. W., *Clark H. Pinnock on Biblical Authority: An Evolving Position*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 16 (Berrien Springs Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1993); note also Edwin E. Scott, "The Nature and Use of Scripture in the Writings of Clark H. Pinnock and James Barr," (Th.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1989).

[18]On Bloesch, see Donald K. McKim, "Donald G. Bloesch," in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, 388-400; and J. P. Callahan, "Donald G. Bloesch," in *Evangelical Dictionary*, 175. Bloesch is best known for his two-volume set: *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1, *God, Authority, and Salvation* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978); and vol. 2, *Life, Ministry, and Hope* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978). In *Holy Scripture*, the second volume in a projected seven-volume systematic theology, Bloesch emphasizes that the Bible "is not in and of itself the revelation of God but the divinely appointed means and channel of this

Grenz.[19] These scholars represent the more "progressive" evangelical scholarship regarding

the nature of revelation and Scripture.[20]

3.2.1.2 Robinson and Revelation

In a recent interview with the researcher, Robinson placed himself on the

conservative side of evangelical scholarship concerning revelation and the Bible. When

asked about his view of Scripture, he stated unequivocally: "I believe that the Bible is

indeed the Word of God. . . . Augustine said that when the Bible speaks God speaks." In this

sense, " the Bible is God's word written."[21]

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revelation" (57). In his thinking, Scripture "is one step removed from revelation" (ibid., 68). For a thorough study and evaluation of Bloesch's view of Scripture, see Frank Hasel, *Scripture in the Theologies of W. Pannenberg and D. G. Bloesch: An Investigation and Assessment of its Origin, Nature and Use* (European University Studies—23 Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1996), 159-262; for analysis and critique of Bloesch's concept of truth, see White, 140-163; see also the recent *Evangelical Theology in Transition: Theologians in Dialogue with Donald Bloesch* ed., Elmer M. Colyer (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999), where various theologians, including Erickson, interact with aspects of Bloesch's theology and he responds.

[19]Stanley Grenz believes linking Scripture with revelation as evangelicals have traditionally done, and linking revelation with personal encounter as neo-orthodoxy theologians have done, is unsatisfying. Instead, he proposes revelation as "an event that has occurred in the community within which the believing individual stands" (*Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21ˢᵗ Century* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1993], 76). Our Bible, according to Grenz, is, therefore, "the product of the community of faith that cradled it," rather than a direct revelation of God (ibid., 121). In his systematic theology, *Theology for the Community of God*, he specifically states: "We cannot simply equate the revelation of God with the Bible" (ibid., 514). Grenz affirms Ramm for "raising Barth's banner within evangelicalism" (ibid., 511, note 37), and offers a threefold "connection between Scripture and revelation" using Barthian terms. First, the Bible is "derivative revelation," in the sense of being a witness. Second, it is "functional revelation," in that it facilitates an encounter with God. Third, the Bible is "mediate revelation," in the sense of mediating an understanding of God's essence. Thus, in this threefold sense the Bible is "God's word to us," says Grenz (ibid., 516-517). But it is not "ontologically revelation" (see David Allen's critique of Grenz on this point, "A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Society* 43/3 [September 2000]: 494). For evangelical critique of Grenz's view of Scripture, see R. Albert Mohler, Jr., "The Integrity of the Evangelical Tradition and the Challenge of the Postmodern Paradigm," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 78-81; D. A. Carson remarks, after an analysis of Grenz's position on Scripture: "With the best will in the world, I cannot see how Grenz's approach to Scripture can be called 'evangelical' in any useful sense" (*The Gagging of God*, 481).

[20]See Pierard and Elwell, 409.

[21]Robinson, Interview; Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001; see also, idem., "The Heresy of Application," *Leadership* (Fall 1997): 21, where he again cites Augustine as saying: "What the Bible says, God says"; Robinson does not provide the reference for this statement; it is, however, found in Augustine's

These statements ("I believe the Bible is. . .") and the ones he makes below about inspiration (3.2.2.2), inerrancy (3.2.3.2), and authority (3.2.4.2), fall into the category of non-scientific faith statements. That is, they are Robinson's confessional statements which are not based on empirical evidence nor philosophical reasoning. Accordingly, he does not attempt to explain the theological theory behind these statements.[22] The evangelical theological theory behind his statements, however, is discussed in the sections preceding his statements (3.2.1.1, 3.2.2.1, 3.2.3.1, 3.2.4.1) in this study. The view here is that Robinson's text, *Biblical Preaching*, would have been stronger had he incorporated more discussion of this theological methodology.[23]

The above statements contain three conservative evangelical presuppositions which have significant implications for Robinson's homiletical method: the words of Scripture as revelation, revelation as propositional and personal, and human language conveying truth about God. In the following sections, each of these will be discussed.

3.2.1.2.1 The Words of Scripture As Revelation

Robinson's statements from the above-mentioned interview are essentially identical with the more conservative/traditional evangelical view described by Noll that the Bible is

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Confessions, xiii, 29, trans. Edward Bouverie Pusey, Great Books of the Western World, vol. 18 (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), 122, where he puts into God's mouth the words: "O man, that which My Scripture saith, I say." Thus, Robinson is paraphrasing Augustine; J. I. Packer refers to this statement by Augustine as the "historic Christian understanding of the nature of Scripture" (*God Has Spoken*, 27).

[22]For an evangelical systematic theology that reflects a more philosophical approach to theology, see Erickson's *Christian Theology*.

[23]As will be shown below, however, he does assume much of it.

"the very Word of God," and that "where the Bible speaks, God speaks."[24] Avery Dulles, in

his noted work, *Models of Revelation*, calls this view "Revelation As Doctrine" and

describes one of its distinguishing features as equating revelation with the words of the

Bible.[25] Thus, because they believe the words of the Scripture text offer a revelatory

disclosure of God's truth, conservative evangelicals consider them the Word of God—"God

speaking."[26]

It is from this understanding that Robinson makes the above statements and writes

in *Biblical Preaching*: "God speaks through the Bible. It is the major tool of communication
by

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[24]Noll, 6; see above discussion, 51. Benjamin B. Warfield, whose views, according to Noll, still continue to influence evangelical convictions about the Bible, argues in his article, "It Says: Scripture Says: God Says," in *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 299-348, that there are two sets of biblical passages: "In one of these classes of passages the Scriptures are spoken of as if they were God; in the other, God is spoken of as if He were the Scriptures: in the two together, God and the Scriptures are brought into such conjunction as to show that in point of directness of authority no distinction was made between them" (299).

[25]Dulles, 39. Dulles' study provides a typology of five different models of revelation in contemporary theology with their representative theologians: revelation as doctrine (i.e., Carl Henry, James Packer), revelation as history (i.e., Wolfhart Pannenberg, Oscar Cullmann), revelation as inner experience (i.e., Wilhelm Herrmann, Auguste Sabatier, Evelyn Underhill), revelation as dialectical presence (i.e., Karl Barth, Emil Brunner, Rudolf Bultmann) and revelation as new awareness (i.e., Paul Tillich, Karl Rahner). He summarizes these five positions as follows: "Each of these five typical positions situates the crucial moment of revelation at a different point. For the doctrinal type, the pivotal moment is the formulation of teaching in clear conceptual form. For the historical type, the decisive point is the occurrence of a historical event through which God signifies his intentions. For the experiential type (i.e., the type emphasizing inner experience), the crux is an immediate, interior perception of the divine presence. For the dialectical type, the key element is God's utterance of a word charged with divine power. For the awareness type, the decisive moment is the stimulation of the human imagination to restructure experience in a new framework" (28). Hence, the meaning of Robinson's statement, "the Bible is the Word of God," carries different meanings depending on ones theological and philosophical orientation. Dulles also provides succinct summaries of the merits and demerits of each model. For other studies on different views of revelation and Scripture, see, for example, David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*; and Donald K. McKim, *The Bible in Theology and Preaching: How Preachers Use Scripture* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994).

[26]For a classic example of conservative evangelical argument on this point, see Warfield; and Henry's explanation of his tenth thesis in *God, Revelation, and Authority* (3:248-487).

which He addresses individuals today."[27] In the context of this statement,[28] Robinson

explains that since the Bible itself is the foremost means or tool through which God

addresses people today, preaching the biblical text becomes a secondary means through

which God "encounters men and women to bring them to salvation and to richness and

ripeness of Christian character."[29] Hence, the text of Scripture—its words—are the locus of

revelation[30] for Robinson. Which is why a careful exposition of the text is so important to

him.

This view of revelation is, therefore, motivated by a desire to take the text of

Scripture with utmost seriousness as the Word of God.[31] For Robinson, this translates into

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[27]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

[28]While Robinson does not address it, behind this statement is the evangelical understanding of the distinction between general revelation and special revelation. In general revelation, God in principle makes Himself known through nature, "so that one may speak in a certain sense of natural (or 'general' revelation), available always and everywhere. But because of the transcendence of God and the devastating effects of original sin, human beings do not in fact succeed in attaining a sure and saving knowledge of God by natural revelation or natural theology" (Dulles, 37). In special revelation God revealed himself "to particular persons at definite times and places, enabling those persons to enter into a redemptive relationship with him," and these encounters and events were recorded which eventuated in the Bible" (Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 201ff). Hence, Robinson can call the special revelation in the Bible the major tool of God's communication and general revelation would be understood as a lesser tool of his communication.

[29]Robinson, 20.

[30]Because Robinson does not attempt to explain the theology behind this conservative evangelical understanding himself, we will cite Dulles who provides a concise explanation of this evangelical understanding: "We today no longer receive revelation through the prophets, through Jesus Christ, or through the apostles as living mediators, but we are not left without revelation. The prophetic and apostolic teaching has been gathered up for us in the Scripture." Drawing from Warfield, he says the Bible "contains the whole of revelation and is itself the final revelation of God" (Dulles, 38). This is the understanding of conservative evangelicals toward revelation and the Bible, of which Robinson is a part. For further explanation of this issue by evangelical theologians, see Warfield, 71-101; Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 200-223.

[31]Paul J. Achtemeier emphasizes this point in his critique of the "conservative view" (*The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals* [Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1980], 57-58). Donald Bloesch, who is a "progressive" evangelical, affirms that the Bible is the "written Word of God." But his meaning is different from Robinson. For Bloesch, the text of Scripture is "one step removed from revelation." Thus, the pages of Scripture are not "to be identified with the very word of God." But, he says, Scripture embodies this Word. The Word of God is through and under the words of the Bible. It "is the inspired witness to revelation," and

expository preaching: "If we regard the Bible as God's tool of communication through which

He addresses people in history," he writes, "then it follows that preaching must be based on

it."[32] Thus, for Robinson and those in the evangelical expository homiletic,[33] expository

preachers approach the text of Scripture as a direct word from God and consequently build

the sermon upon it.

Critics have advanced several challenges to this view of revelation and the Bible.

First, too much emphasis on the words of Scripture being equal to revelation could lead to

elevating the text above God, thus rendering the charge of "bibliolatry" justified.[34] Like most

conservative evangelicals, Robinson would deny the charge of worshiping a book instead

of God.[35] The Bible in Robinson's approach is "a book about God" which leads to God.[36]

Thus, when the expositor studies the Bible the focus should not be merely on the text, but

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in that sense "the written word of God" (*Holy Scripture*, 70-71). This view is rejected by conservative evangelicals who, according to Bloesch, "restrict the Word of God to the Bible" (72).

[32]Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803.

[33]See above, 43, note 111.

[34]Steve Lemke, "The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2d. ed., eds. Bruce Corley, Steve W. Lemke, and Grant I. Lovejoy (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 179; for summary of Bloesch's concern on this issue, see White, 153. Conservative evangelicals in general reject "bibliolatry" and seek to approach the text of Scripture with scholarship and care (on this, see the discussion in Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 142-161). They also seek to avoid extremes such as the "dictation theory" (Erickson, 233).

[35]Evangelical Ronald Nash, for example, writes: "The orthodox view does not lead to 'bibliolatry'—the veneration of the Bible with a reverence appropriate only to God. It is difficult to see how even the most crude, unimaginative theory of mechanical dictation would justify the charge of bibliolatry. Perhaps the critic means to suggest that because Evangelicals regard the Bible as the Word of God, they are in danger of diverting from God the reverence and honor due to Him. . . . True revelation of God's nature, character, and will enables us to know the difference between worshiping Almighty God and worshiping a book" (*The Word of God and the Mind of Man*, 50-51).

[36]*Biblical Preaching*, 94; see also *Trusting the Shepherd: Insights from Psalm 23*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2002), 11-12, where he explains that the 23rd Psalm "reveals a personal God who relates to us as individuals."

on what the text says about God.[37]

Second, too much focus on the words of the Bible lessens the finality of revelation–defined as the appearance of Jesus Christ. The significance of that divine epiphany transcends the words of the biblical text. Jesus Christ, as Barth insisted, Himself is "the revelation of God."[38] Conservative evangelicals have consistently responded to this challenge by saying that while Christ is the pinnacle of God's revelation, His life, acts, and words have been recorded in Scripture, and thus this record is the complete revelation of Christ to the world for all time.[39]

Robinson does not respond to this challenge in his homiletical writings. More importantly, he does not discuss the relationship of Christ to expository preaching in *Biblical Preaching*. At the end of chapter one in the section, "For Further Reading and Reflection," he does write, however, that the expositor will "sometime or other" have to respond to the question, "How does the centrality of Jesus Christ affect the way that I handle the biblical text?" Robinson's only reply to this question is to refer the reader to two homiletic texts by fellow evangelical scholars: Sidney Greidanus and Graeme Goldsworthy.[40] But Robinson himself does not address the issue of preparing expository sermons that are consistently

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[37]Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 89-92.

[38]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 4/3, 97; see also Dulles, 85-87, and McKim, 83, for concise descriptions of this position.

[39]For more discussion on this issue by evangelicals, see Henry, 3:75-98; and Erickson, 215-223.

[40]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 32; see Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament*; and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*.

Christ-centered.[41] In fact, in reading through his textbook, *Biblical Preaching*, one will not find any discussion on incorporating Christ into the sermon. He assumes that expositors will incorporate Christ into the sermon,[42] and even provides examples of Christ-centered sermons to illustrate various sermon structures,[43] but that is essentially all he says about Christ and the expository sermon.

Traditional evangelical theology champions the intimate connection between the Bible and Christ.[44] To leave out a discussion on the centrality of Christ in a preaching method claiming to carefully expound the text, then, is no small inconsistency. Robinson's method would be greatly strengthened if specifics on how to preach Christ from Scripture were integrated into the ten stages.[45]

The third objection comes in the form of a question. How does one know if his or her interpretation of the text is the Word of God? Robinson's response to this issue is his hermeneutical procedure which will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapter.[46]

Fourth, because each word in the text is considered to be the Word of God, the

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[41]Greidanus, for example, describes Christ-centered preaching or preaching Christ as "preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament" (*Preaching Christ From the Old Testament*, 10).

[42]See Robinson's popular exposition of Jesus' sermon on the mount, *What Jesus Said About Successful Living: Principles from the Sermon on the Mount for Today* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1991).

[43]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 118-122.

[44]Henry, 3:9-163; from a homiletical perspective, see Chapell, 263-310.

[45]Chapell and Goldsworthy provide methodology and a method on preparing expository sermons that reflect a Christ-centered approach.

[46]See below,4.2.3.2.2.

advocate of this view must explain all "Bible difficulties," including cosmology, parallel accounts, and inconsistencies.[47] This issue has been addressed by evangelicals more in the context of discussions on errancy. Robinson responds indirectly to this issue when he counsels expositors to wrestle with listeners' questions such as, "Is that true?" and "Can I really believe that?" In light of this generation's skepticism, he writes:

> We do well, therefore, to adopt the attitude that a statement is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true. The fact that an assertion is in the pages of a leather-covered book does not necessarily make it valid. Instead, the Bible states reality as it exists in the universe, as God has made it and as He governs it. We would expect, therefore, the affirmation of Scripture to be demonstrated in the world around us. That is not to say that we establish biblical truth by studying sociology, astronomy, or archaeology, but the valid data from these sciences second the truth taught in Scripture.[48]

He fails to deal with the issue of scientific data which seems to contradict the truth in Scripture.

Fifth, this view can lead an interpreter to place too much emphasis on individual words instead of on textual units. Robinson does respond to this fifth challenge and suggests that expositors carefully study the literary context of a word because "words and phrases should never become ends in themselves." He then says that words "are stupid things until linked with other words to covey meaning."[49] This is a curious statement. If the words of the Bible are revelation and thus God's words, how can they be stupid, even in isolation from other words? This inconsistency will be discussed in greater detail below under Robinson's

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[47]Lemke,181.

[48]Robinson, 82.

[49]Ibid., 23.

view of inspiration.[50]

3.2.1.2.2 Revelation as Propositional and Personal

For conservative evangelicals, of which Robinson is a part, revelation is equated with the Bible and "taken as a set of propositional statements, each expressing a divine affirmation, valid always and everywhere."[51] Henry describes propositional revelation thus: "God supernaturally communicated his revelation to chosen spokesman in the express form of cognitive truths, and . . . the inspired prophetic-apostolic proclamation reliably articulates these truths in sentences that are not internally contradictory."[52]

Robinson expresses his understanding of propositional revelation through the use of the term, "idea." He believes that "each paragraph, section, or subsection of Scripture contains an idea," which is the basis of his "big idea" approach to preaching.[53] Thus he writes: "Ideally each sermon is the explanation, interpretation, or application of a single dominant idea supported by other ideas, all drawn from one passage or several passages of Scripture."[54] Homiletic scholar Keith Willhite, a former student of Robinson's, calls this ideational approach, "propositional preaching."[55] Thus, Robinson's two diagnostic questions, "What precisely is the author talking about?"(the text's subject) and "What is the author

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[50]See below, 82.

[51]Dulles, 39.

[52]As Henry defines it, 3:457.

[53]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 42.

[54]Ibid., 35.The issue of how a text contains a single idea or multiple ideas will be discussed in the next chapter which deals with Robinson's hermeneutical approach.

[55]Willhite, "A Bullet versus Buckshot," in *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching*, 1998, 16.

saying about what he is talking about?"(the text's complements),[56] result in extracting

complete ideas or propositions from the Bible.[57]

Eugene Lowry, writing in his *Doing Time in the Pulpit: The Relationship Between Narrative and Preaching*, strongly urges preachers not to preach with propositions because he believes the biblical revelation is "largely nonpropositional."[58] Lowry emphasizes that only a small portion of the Bible is propositional in form and states that "Christian revelation . . . simply cannot be contained in propositional form."[59] Robinson recognizes that the Bible is polymorphous in its revelation (narratives, parables, poetry, prayers, etc.), but he insists that these different literary genres still yield ideas. "To find the idea an any of them, we must be aware of the kind of literature we are reading and the conventions unique to it."[60] For Robinson, then, ideas or propositions are a vital dimension of God's revelation in the Bible and the foundation of expository preaching.[61]

While Robinson does not respond to the many critics of propositional revelation,[62]

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[56]Robinson, 42-43.

[57]For discussion on the centrality of these two diagnostic questions to Robinson's homiletical paradigm, see idem, 33-50; and below.

[58]Lowry, 79.

[59]Ibid.

[60]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 68-70.

[61]Ibid., 23-24, 33-46.

[62]For a concise summary of criticisms of the evangelical view of propositional revelation, see White, *What is Truth?*, 177-179; and Dulles, 48-52. Paul Tillich, for example, declared there are "no revealed doctrines." He contended: "Propositions about a past revelation give theoretical information; they have no revelatory power" (*Systematic Theology*, vol. 1, [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951], 125, 127.

evangelical scholars have devoted considerable efforts to defending it.[63] Robinson's focus

is more on propositional preaching rather than propositional revelation itself.

Concerning the issue of personal versus propositional revelation,[64] Richard J.

Coleman contends that a major tenet of evangelical theology is the interrelationship between

the two.[65] Robinson reflects this interrelationship in his homiletical approach. While he

emphasizes finding ideas in Scripture, he also believes that "God reveals Himself in the

Scriptures."[66] In a book written for the general Christian audience, *Trusting the Shepherd:*

Insights from Psalm 23, Robinson reflects his understanding of the personal aspect of God's

revelation in Scripture when he writes:

> The Twenty-third Psalm affirms a profound personal faith in God; David's faith was
> that kind. It demonstrates theology at work in the life of someone like me, someone

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[63]See, for example, Henry's lengthy defense, 3: 248-487; Nash, 35-54; and Helm, *The Divine Revelation*.

[64]See above, 50, note 5.

[65]Coleman explains: "Revelation is personal insofar as God reveals himself through a direct and personal relationship. Revelation is propositional insofar as God reveals objective truths about himself. The Christian faith receives its necessary balance only when revelation is both objective and direct, personal and propositional. If the nature of God's revelation did not include the personal aspect, faith would become mere assent to a set of cold, impersonal facts. On the other hand, if it did not include the conceptual, faith would become merely an unverifiable, subjective experience. The objective norms which form the content of faith make it possible to distinguish a valid encounter with God from an encounter with the devil or with one's inner self. So the validity of our experience of Christ's is dependent upon our objective knowledge of God, and our personal relationship with Christ. The two are inseparable" (*Issues of Theological Warfare: Evangelicals and Liberals* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972], 78-79). Bernard Ramm argued in *Special Revelation and the Word of God*: "Real encounter in life between persons is always within the context of mutual knowledge. This mutual knowledge is not opposed to the encounter, but it is its indispensable instrument. The richness of love between a happily married couple cannot be exhaustively reduced to a set of propositions; but that such a rich love could come into being independently of mutual knowledge is absolutely impossible. Therefore to speak of revelation of a Person and not of truths is to speak—at least from the analogy of human encounter—nonsense. God is given in revelation as a Person, but along with truths of God. Encounter with God is meaningful because it is not ineffable; by virtue of the conceptual element of special revelation it is also a knowledge of God. Revelation is event and interpretation, encounter and truth, a Person and knowledge" (159-160). Such is the traditional evangelical understanding of personal and propositional revelation.

[66]Robinson, 94.

like you. And it reveals a personal God who relates to us as individuals.[67]

Thus, Robinson affirms the evangelical understanding of the interrelationship between personal and propositional revelation in the Bible.

His homiletical emphasis, however, is more on ideas or propositions drawn from the Bible about God. These ideas are the basis of his preaching paradigm. This is what distinguishes Robinson's approach from the Kerygmatic approach.[68] Kerygmatic preaching focuses more on bringing the congregation into an encounter with God[69] whereas Robinson's approach focuses more on bringing the congregation into an understanding of truth about God.[70] This approach, Robinson believes, will facilitate an encounter with God in his Word.[71]

3.2.1.2.3 Human Language Conveys Truth About God

The view of propositional revelation carries with it the assumption that human language is an adequate vehicle to convey truth about God. Noll explains in his study of evangelical biblical scholarship that a presupposition evangelicals carry concerning the truthfulness of the Bible is "belief in the reliability of language." He states: "Although few evangelicals spend much time considering the question directly, they assume that language

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[67]*Trusting the Shepherd*,11-12.

[68]See above, 2.2.2.2.

[69]The Kerygmatic approach does utilize propositions, but stresses the dynamic presence-of-God aspect of the preaching experience (Rose, 81-83).

[70]Robinson, 23-24. As noted in 2.2.2.1, Robinson is part of the traditional homiletical paradigm which emphasizes preaching the divine truth in the Bible (Rose, 31).

[71]Robinson, 20.

is a fit vehicle for communicating real information about real states of affairs."[72] Several

evangelical scholars, such as John Frame,[73] James Packer,[74] Jack Barentsen,[75] and Carl

Henry,[76] have recently addressed this issue directly. Robinson, like most evangelicals

referred to by Noll, does not spend time considering this issue because he simply assumes

it. Two evangelical assumptions concerning language thus emerge in his homiletical

writings: human language is capable of conveying divine truth; and because words

correspond with objective reality, the language of preaching must be clear and precise.

3.2.1.2.3.1 First assumption: Human language is capable of conveying divine truth.

Robinson never questions whether or not the language of the Bible can convey

theological truth about God. He simply assumes that it does and focuses on the mechanics

of expository sermon preparation. For example, in numerous places throughout *Biblical*

Preaching, he admonishes the expositor to study the language of the text. Expositors, he

says, "search for the objective meaning[77] of a passage through their understanding of the

language, backgrounds, and setting of the text."[78] Moreover, they should study the text in the

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[72]Noll, 148.

[73]John M. Frame, "God and Biblical Language: Transcendence and Immanence," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture,* ed. John Warwick Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1974), 159-177.

[74]James. I. Packer, "The Adequacy of Human Language," in *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman L. Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980), 197-226.

[75]Jack Barentsen, "The Validity of Human Language: A Vehicle for Divine Truth," *Grace Theological Journal* 9/1 (1988): 21-43.

[76]Henry, 3: 248-487; 4:103-128.

[77]The issues surrounding this term will be discussed below in the next chapter.

[78]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24.

various English translations[79] (for those who speak English) as well as in the original

Hebrew and Greek texts.[80] He thus encourages expositors to gain a working knowledge of

the biblical languages. "Accuracy, as well as integrity," he writes, "demands that we develop

every possible skill to keep us from declaring in the name of God what the Holy Spirit never

intended to convey."[81] Robinson therefore believes that by studying English translations and

the original languages of the Bible, and by utilizing the "available linguistic tools,"[82] the

expositor can come to an accurate understanding of what the Holy Spirit intended to convey

in the biblical text.

Two major objections to this view have been presented. The first objection, a

theological one, originates with Karl Barth. Barth argued that "the words with which we can

define" God are "themselves unfitted to this object and thus inappropriate to express and

affirm the knowledge of Him."[83] Barth's argument runs thus: Because God is transcendent

and the creator, redeemer, and Lord of all, How can any human language ever be fit to

convey his word? Human language, like everything human and finite, can only be a servant,

confessing its own unfitness, its own inadequacy. Thus, the Bible cannot be revelation, but

only serve revelation. "To claim anything more for human language, for the Bible, is to

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[79]Ibid., 59-60.

[80]Ibid., 61-62.

[81]Ibid., 62.

[82]See ibid., 62-65, where he lists study tools such as lexicons, concordances, grammars, word-study books, Bible dictionaries, commentaries, and CD-ROM Bible study programs.

[83]Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 2/1, "The Doctrine of God," 188. Paul D. Feinberg points out that for Barth the inadequacy of human language is related to his view of God's radical transcendence ("A Response to Adequacy of Language and Accommodation," in *Hermeneutic, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 385-386).

dishonor God, to elevate something finite and human to divine status."[84] Donald Bloesch,

who follows Barth, also stresses that the language of the Bible "is not exempt from the crisis

of the limitation of all human language in conveying real knowledge of God."[85] Thus, the

language of the Bible, like all human language, is inadequate to convey true knowledge

about God.

Although Robinson does not address this theological objection directly as fellow

evangelicals Frame,[86] Barentsen,[87] Packer,[88] and Henry have done,[89] he does insist that if the

expository preacher seeks through proper exegetical study to understand the language of the

text in its literary context, then he or she can understand its divine truth or message.[90]

Consequently, "God speaks through the Bible."[91]

The second objection is more philosophical: Language in general is incapable of

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[84]Frame, 164-165.

[85]Bloesch, *Theology of Word and Spirit: Authority and Method in Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1992), 69. Here Bloesch is following, although not completely, his "theological mentor" Karl Barth (Hasel, 220, note 2; see White, 159, on Bloesch's "Barthian theological orientation").

[86]See Frame's engagement with Barth, 164-165, 173-175.

[87]See Barentsen's engagement with Barth, 25-27, 29-43.

[88]See Packer's discussion of Barth and his reflection of Kant's thought, 214-216.

[89]See Henry's engagement with Barth, 1:188-192; 2:127-128, 143-148, 157-160; 3:224-228, 284-290, 466-469; 4:196-200, 256-271, 419-425, 427-430; 5:129, 316-319; 6:90-105; he also engages five arguments against the ability of theological language to tell the truth about God: 1) human language "is anthropomorphic, it is said, and hence incapable of providing information about God as he is in himself"; 2) "all language and knowledge are culturally conditioned and are therefore relative"; 3) "finite language is too limited to depict the Infinite"; 4) champions of analogical knowledge" also object to the possibility of literal truth about God; 5) some "neo-Protestant writers reject the literal truth of Scripture on the ground that religious language is by nature metaphorical or figurative" (Henry, 4:110-128).

[90]Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001.

[91]Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

talking about non-physical entities, especially the infinite.[92] Again, Robinson doesn't address

this objection directly,[93] but instead assumes that the language of the Bible can convey literal

truth about non-physical, spiritual concepts, especially God. For example, he counsels

expositors in *Biblical Preaching* to look for the different ways God is revealed in the Bible:

> God is always there. Look for Him. At different times He is the Creator, a good
> Father, the Redeemer, a rejected Lover, a Husband, a King, a Savior, a Warrior, a
> Judge, a Reaper, a vineyard Keeper, a banquet Host, a Fire, a Hen protecting her
> chicks, and so on.[94]

These pictures of God in the Bible, he writes, are "always in the specific words" of the text.[95]

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[92]This view is affirmed in the philosophy of logical positivism. See for example, Antony Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre, *New Essays in Philosophical Theology* (London: SCM, 1955); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic* (New York: Dover, 1946); idem, *Logical Positivism* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1959); for evangelical engagement with logical positivism on the issue of language and God, see Frame, 166-175; Henry, 3: 347-361, 367-368; and Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 143-153. See also the linguistic philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, trans., C. K. Ogden (London: Kegan Paul, 1922); for evangelical engagement with Wittgenstein and a creative application of his approach to biblical studies, see Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, 357-427.

[93]Linguist scholar Robert E. Longacre provides a response to this view by arguing that "language is tooled to express more than the here and now." He writes: "We can discourse effortlessly of events or persons far removed in time and space. We talk not only of the physical but of the psychical, i.e., of the interior life. We use verbs of motion and locomotion to express movement not only though physical space but also through logical space. Even in its central and primary usages, language is a flexible tool for expressing many non-physical concerns. . . . Language is set up, therefore, to discuss both the physical and the non-physical and has built-in resources of paraphrase, simile, and exemplification to further facilitate discourse. The literatures of the world are eloquent witness to these resources." Thus, according to Longacre, language can discuss non-physical entities such as "God," "love," "holiness," "goodness," and "justice." He acknowledges, however, that much of God's "being—His infinity, eternity, omnipotence, exhaustive knowledge of the past, and control of the future—ultimately eludes us and outruns our conception and expression" (idem., *The Grammar of Discourse* [New York: Plenum, 1983], 353). Evangelicals thus acknowledge that while language should be put forth as a reliable and sufficient vehicle for conveying truth about God, language cannot be exhaustive about him. According to James E. White, "What Evangelical propositionalists maintain is that there is ontological faithfulness, not ontological exhaustiveness" (190; see also Frame, 160).

[94]Ibid., 94. Bernard Ramm describes images such as these as part of the "anthropic character" of special revelation in Scripture. He writes: "By anthropic we mean that it is marked by human characteristics throughout. It speaks of the supersensible world (II Cor. 4:18) in the terms and analogies of our sensible world. The knowledge of God is framed in the language, concepts, metaphors, and analogies of men." These "pictures," he says, "are not man's struggle to imagine deity, but they are one of the means whereby God 'pictures' himself to man" (*Special Revelation and the Word of God*, 36-37, 38). Robinson shares this same understanding (*Biblical Preaching*, 94).

[95]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 94.

Thus, Robinson assumes the evangelical position that truth and understanding about God are conveyed in the biblical text.[96]

3.2.1.2.3.2. Second assumption: Because words correspond with objective reality, the language of preaching must be clear and precise.

Robinson connects his view of Scripture with the language used in the pulpit. "An expository preacher professing a high view of inspiration should respect the power of words." He contends: "To affirm that the individual words of Scripture must be God-breathed, but then to ignore our own choice of language smacks of gross inconsistency."[97] Because he thus relates his view of Scripture to his view of pulpit language, a discussion on the language of preaching is appropriate at this juncture.

Lucy Rose has pointed out that the traditional homiletic's "understanding of the purpose and content of preaching are inextricably linked with presuppositions about language."[98] She thus argues that the traditional homiletic[99] presupposes a "bond between

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[96]Noll, 148. Besides the studies of Frame, Packer, Barentsen, and Henry, see the following studies which also seek to defend the ability of language to convey divine truth: Vern S. Poythress, "Adequacy of Language and Accommodation," in *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, 351-376; Feinberg, "A Response to Adequacy of Language and Accommodation," in ibid., 379-390; Kurt E. Marquart, "A Response to Adequacy of Language and Accommodation," in ibid., 393-405; Millard Erickson, "Language: Human Vehicle for Divine Truth," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction to Interpreting Scripture*, 2d. ed., eds. Bruce Corley, Steve Lemke, and Grant Lovejoy (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman and Holman, 2002), 208-216; idem., *Christian Theology*, 135-157; William J. Larkin, Jr., *Culture and Biblical Hermeneutics: Interpreting and Applying and Authoritative Word in a Relativistic Age* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 242-251; Dan McCartney and Charles Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand: A Guide to Interpreting and Applying the Bible,* 2d. ed. (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 2002), 19-32; and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

[97]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 184.

[98]Rose, 31.

[99]On the traditional homiletic, see above, 2.2.2.1.

language and objective reality," that "words grasp and convey reality."[100] This translates into an attitude of confidence: "confidence that preachers can choose words so that 'the expression and the idea exactly correspond,' confidence that words can convey truth, and confidence that the communication process is trustworthy if language is clear."[101] This view of language is shared by homiletics scholars in the evangelical expository homiletic,[102] which is part of the traditional homiletic. As Noll pointed out, a fundamental conviction of evangelical scholarship is "that language is a fit vehicle for communicating information about real states of affairs."[103]

Robinson, who belongs to the evangelical expository hermeneutic, espouses the evangelical view that words correspond with objective reality, and consequently the language of preaching must be clear and precise to portray this reality. For instance, in

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[100]Ibid., 66, 67. Rose explains how each of the four homiletic paradigms view language. Summarizing the Kerygmatic homiletic's view of language, she says: "Whereas in traditional homiletical theory the assumption is that all words are capable of conveying the reality to which they point, in kerygmatic homiletical theory words convey divine reality because of the activity of God's word in the kerygma" (87). Concerning the New homiletic's view of language, she writes that language under the transformational umbrella tends "to focus not on the unchanging reality behind the words," but "on the change in the human situation created by the words." Four convictions are present in this view, she says. One, language can bring about "changes in perception, values, or world views." Second, words are events which can "both say things and do things" as in speech act theory and the new hermeneutic. Third, poetic language is important because it demands language which is "imaginative, evocative, even ambiguous." Fourth, the relationship between language, sermonic experience, and human experience is important (140). Her own paradigm of conversational preaching "recognizes that language is inevitably confessional, both constructing and expressing the life experiences of communities and individuals. And conversational preaching values language capable of generating a variety of meanings in the congregation" (215-216). Her critique of the traditional homiletic, kerygmatic homiletic, and new homiletic and their views of language is found in 66-67, 116-118, 173-179, 207-216.

[101]Ibid., 34. She cites as representative, Broadus and Weatherspoon, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*; and Cox, *Preaching*.

[102]See above, 2.3.

[103]Noll, 148.

chapter nine, "The Dress of Thought,"[104] he presents his view of pulpit language and asserts

that "ideas and words cannot be separated," that "concepts assume the mold of the words

into which they are poured," and that "words capture and color the preacher's thought."[105]

In an earlier chapter, while discussing the importance of "explanation" in the sermon, he

writes:

> You must not assume that your listeners immediately understand what you are talking about. You owe them a clear explanation of exactly what you mean. It is obvious that we should not use jargon or language that is unnecessarily abstract. If you must use theological language, you should define every important term in language the audience understands. Certainly it is better to define too many terms than too few. In explaining the relationships and implications of ideas, you should know the explanation yourself so clearly that no vagueness exists in your mind. Then you should work through the steps of the explanation so that they come in logical or psychological order. A mist in the pulpit can easily become a fog in the pew.[106]

Thus, for Robinson, precision and clarity in language is very important. He even goes as far

as to assert in chapter nine: "For preachers, clarity is a moral matter." It is "not merely a

question of rhetoric, but a matter of life and death." He explains:

> Imagine a physician who prescribes a drug but fails to give clear instruction as to how and when the drug is to be used. The physician puts the patient's life at risk. It is a moral matter for a doctor to be clear. So, too, when we proclaim God's truth, we must be clear. If we believe that what we preach either draws people to God or keeps them away from Him, then for God's sake and the people's sake, we must be clear.[107]

Rose points out that this heavy emphasis on the sermon's words being clear is a

dominant feature of the traditional homiletic.[108] Robinson, for example, discusses the

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[104]Robinson, 183-199; this chapter comes after the presentation of the ten stages.

[105]Ibid., 184.

[106]Ibid., 143.

[107]Ibid., 188.

[108]Rose, 32-34.

importance of "clear transitions for clear communication."[109] He says a "clear style" will include "short sentences," "simple sentence structure," and "simple words."[110] Thus for him, clarity in preaching is of utmost importance.

Robinson also discusses vividness as a characteristic of effective style in preaching, which Rose also identifies as a feature of the traditional homiletic.[111] He says this vividness involves carefully crafting sentences with nouns and verbs that carry the meaning. He counsels expositors to use precise verbs, which "wake up the imagination." Vividness also increases when metaphors and similes are employed to "produce sensations in listeners and cause them to recall images of past experiences."[112] Yet, while imagination in the use of words is important for Robinson, clarity of expression is the most important.

A number of homiletic scholars do not share Robinson's confidence that language conveys truth, clarity, and reality in the sermon. Robert E. C. Brown believes the "statements made by a minister of the Word are . . . ambiguous," that "all his doctrinal statements are approximate and untidy descriptions of reality."[113] Joseph Settler goes further and questions the possibility of correspondence between language and reality."[114] Thor Hall concludes that theological language expresses more the convictions of religious communities than the

[109]Robinson, 186-187.

[110]Ibid., 187-192; he provides discussion on each of these elements.

[111]Rose, 32-33.

[112]Robinson, 193-195.

[113]Robert E. C. Brown, *The Ministry of the Word*, 70.

[114]Joseph Sittler, *The Anguish of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 48, 51.

actuality of God.[115] Lucy Rose follows Brown and "embraces the conviction that language is a construct that always ambiguously reflects that to which it points and always unavoidably reflects the limitations and sinful distortions of its users."[116]

Robinson does not respond to any of these challenges[117] for two reasons. First, the purpose of all his homiletical writings is to explicate the mechanics of expository preaching, not discuss theological or philosophical issues related to preaching. Second, the reliability of language in the Bible and preaching is not the issue for him like it is for the above homileticians. He writes for the evangelical reader and thus assumes, like his colleagues in the evangelical expository homiletic,[118] that the language of the Bible and the language of the pulpit can point to realities.

One language issue should have been addressed by Robinson yet was not—the metaphysical limitations of language. Evangelical scholar James E. White states that while "language should be put forth as a reliable and sufficient vehicle for the communication of information about reality," this view should be "clearly distanced" from "the assertion that language exhausts what it attempts to convey, especially in the area of metaphysics."[119]

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[115]Thor Hall, *The Future Shape of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 86-87.

[116]Rose, 214. See her discussion on Brown, Sittler, Hall, and others on language and preaching, 175-179, 207-214.

[117]See above, 72, note 96, for evangelicals who do respond to these challenges of language reliability.

[118]These homileticians like Robinson do not attempt to address the problems of language in preaching (see 43, note 111, for a list of the texts in the evangelical expository homiletic). See, for example, the discussions on clarity and style in Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 325-326; Olford and Olford, *Anointed Expository Preaching*, 170-171; Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons*, 132-133; and Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 229-246. These discussions are very similar to Robinson's.

[119]White, 190.

Language, therefore, cannot provide absolute comprehensiveness in explaining God. This is a language issue of which evangelical preachers should be aware. James Packer suggests that evangelical preachers and theologians deal with this issue by learning to shape their own speech in a way that reproduces the substance of biblical teaching.[120]

In concluding his discussion on style in preaching, Robinson provides three steps for the expositor to improve his or her use of language in the pulpit. First: "Pay attention to your own use of language," which helps the preacher to improve personal style outside of the pulpit. Second: "Study how others use language,"which involves learning from effective models. And third: "Read aloud," which will increase the preacher's vocabulary and etch new patterns of speech and creative wording into his or her mind.[121] Thus for Robinson, the preacher should work diligently towards clarity and vividness in preaching.

In sum, according to Robinson, the words of Scripture are "the Word of God written," and convey cognitive truth about God. And because the expository preacher seeks to accurately communicate the message of the text during the sermon, his or her words must be clear, exact, and vivid.[122] Such is the influence of the traditional evangelical view of revelation on Robinson's approach to the Bible and preaching.

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[120]Packer, 224.

[121]Robinson, 197-198.

[122]Ibid., 185, 193.

3.2.2 Inspiration[123]

3.2.2.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Inspiration

In recent years evangelical theologians have endeavored to classify the different theories of inspiration.[124]   Millard Erickson, for example, describes five theories of inspiration in his *Christian Theology*: the intuition theory, the illumination theory, the dynamic theory, the verbal theory, and the dictation theory.[125] Of these five theories of inspiration, the verbal theory is the one generally espoused by evangelicals.[126] I. S. Rennie suggests, however, that with the recent rise of liberal evangelicalism, this "consensus is being questioned and newer, more open theories of inspiration are being broached within the

[123]Explaining the relationship between revelation and inspiration is important to evangelicals. Note, for example, Erickson, who writes: "While revelation is the communication of truth from God to humans, inspiration relates more to the relaying of that truth from the first recipient(s) of it to other persons, whether then or later. Thus, revelation might be thought of as a vertical action, and inspiration as a horizontal matter" (*Christian Theology*, 226). Bernard Rams writes: "Inspiration derives its life and substance from revelation. . . . While it is the function of revelation to bring the sinner a soteric knowledge of God, it is the function of inspiration to preserve that revelation in the form of tradition and then in the form of a *graphe*. That is to say, the specific function of inspiration is *to preserve revelation in a trustworthy and sufficient form*" (Ramm, *Special Revelation and the Word of God*, 175-176; italics his).

[124]See, for example, David S. Dockery, who in *Christian Scripture: An Evangelical Perspective on Inspiration, Authority and Interpretation* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), employs the following terms in his classification: the "Dictation View," "Illumination View," "Encounter View," "Dynamic View," and "Plenary View" (50-55); Gerhard Maier in *Biblical Hermeneutics,* trans. Robert W.Yarbrough (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 1994), uses the following terms: "Personal Inspiration," "Inspiration of Ideas," "Verbal Inspiration," and "Entire Inspiration," (108-124); Garrett uses the following classification: "Verbal Inspiration with Inerrancy," "Dynamic or Limited Verbal Inspiration View," "Different Levels or Degrees of Inspiration," "Partial Inspiration," and "Universal Christian Inspiration," (116-119); see also Rene Pache, *The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture*, trans. Helen I. Needham (Salem, Wisc.: Sheffield Publishing Company, 1992), 57-70; Lewis and Demarest, 132-138; Thiessen, 63-65; Enns, 160-162; and Lemke,177-184.

[125]Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 231-233.

[126]It should be pointed out that a number of evangelical theologians favor instead the dynamic theory of inspiration, sometimes called limited inspiration, which puts the focus on the thoughts and concepts of the biblical writer rather than his words (Erickson, 232). See, for example, G. C. Berkouwer, *Holy Scripture*; Paul J. Achtemeier, *The Inspiration of Scripture: Problems and Proposals*); and the contributors in *The Authoritative Word: Essays on the Nature of Scripture*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983).

broadly evangelical camp, causing disturbances within the Evangelical Theological Society

and the Institute for Biblical Research."[127]

The verbal theory, often called "verbal inspiration," "insists that the Holy Spirit's

influence extends beyond the direction of thoughts to the selection of words used to convey

the message."[128] This view is usually expressed by the terms "verbal" and "plenary." The

term "verbal" places the focus of inspiration on the text of Scripture with all the words and

all the verbal relationships.[129] The adjective plenary, from the Latin term meaning full,

emphasizes that all portions of Scripture, text as well as authors, are inspired.[130] Some

evangelicals hold this view to be in contrast to "partial inspiration."[131]

Evangelical advocates of verbal inspiration are careful in pointing out that it is not

the same as dictation inspiration. The dictation theory, in the past called the "typewriter

theory," is described as the suspension of the mental activity of the biblical writers "for the

mechanical transcription of words supernaturally introduced into their consciousness."[132]

Evangelicals endeavor to distance themselves from this theory by emphasizing the

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[127]I. S. Rennie, "Verbal Inspiration," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 1244.

[128]Erickson, 232.

[129]Rennie, 1242. Evangelicals advocating verbal inspiration would endorse the following statement by John Barton: "So long as we are talking about the inspiration of scripture, it is hard to see how we can avoid calling the inspiration verbal, since the Bible, being a book or collection of books, is composed of words. There is considerable paradox in saying that a book is divinely inspired while denying that the inspiration extends to the words which comprise it" ("Verbal Inspiration," *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, ed. R. J. Coggins and J. L. Houlden [London: SCM Press, 1990], 721).

[130]Dockery, 55, 243; see also I. S. Rennie, "Plenary Inspiration," *Evangelical Dictionary*, 929; Pache combines the terms, verbal and plenary, to describe inspiration (71-79).

[131]See, for example, John Jefferson Davis, *Foundations of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 175.

[132]J. I. Packer, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God* (London: InterVarsity, 1958), 78-79.

"concursive theory."[133] B. B. Warfield provides the classic explanation of this theory:

> The Spirit is not to be conceived as standing outside of the human powers employed for the effect in view, ready to supplement any inadequacies they may show and to supply any defects they may manifest, but as working confluently in, with and by them, elevating them, directing them, controlling them, energizing them, so that, as His instruments, they rise above themselves and under His inspiration to do His work and reach His aim.[134]

Thus, for Warfield, there is no suspension of mental activity because the divine and human aspects "are inseparable and coextensive, so that the Bible is completely divine and human at the same time."[135] Hence, any association with the dictation theory is avoided.

Louis Igou Hodges critiques eight proposed evangelical definitions of inspiration and then proposes his own definition which he believes best captures the evangelical concursive view of inspiration. His definition reads:

> Graphic (written) inspiration is the activity by which that portion intended by God of his special revelation was put into permanent, authoritative, written form by the supernatural agency of the Holy Spirit, who normally worked concurrently and confluently through the spontaneous thought processes, literary styles, and personalities of certain divinely-selected men in such a way that the product of their special labors (in its entirety) is the very Word of God (both the ideas and the specific vocabulary), complete, infallible, and inerrant in the original manuscripts.[136]

In sum, according to David Dockery, the evangelical view of inspiration recognizes

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[133]"It is safe to say," writes D. A. Carson, "that the central line of evangelical thought on the truthfulness of the Scriptures has entailed the adoption of the concursive theory" ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 45).

[134]B. B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*, 95; see also Packer, *God Has Spoken*, 94-95, for further conservative evangelical description of how this process works.

[135]Peter Maarten van Bemmelen, *Issues in Biblical Inspiration: Sunday and Warfield*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series, vol. 13 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1988), 361ff.

[136]Louis Igou Hodges, "Evangelical Definitions of Inspiration: Critiques and A Suggested Definition," *Journal of The Evangelical Theological Society* 37/1 (March 1994): 109; see entire article for various evangelical definitions of inspiration, 99-114.

the human authorship as well as the divine character of Scripture. It never "divorces God's deeds from his words" or "creates dichotomies between thoughts and words, processes and product, writers and written word, God's initiating impulse and His complete superintending work."[137] Biblical inspiration,[138] for the conservative evangelical, is thus inclusive, comprehensive, and total.[139]

3.2.2.2 Robinson's View of Inspiration

When asked in the interview to explain his view of inspiration, Robinson replied: "I

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[137]Dockery, 68.

[138]James Barr, in his significant critique of Fundamentalism/Evangelicalism (he views the two as overlapping *(Fundamentalism*, 2d. ed. [London: SCM Press, 1981], 6), challenges the "conservative arguments" that the Bible itself "claims" to be divinely inspired. "All this is nonsense," he declares, "there is no 'the Bible' claims to be divinely inspired, there is no 'it' that has a 'view of itself.' There is only this or that source, like II Timothy or II Peter, which make statements about certain other writings, these rather undefined. There is no such thing as 'the Bible's view of itself' from which a fully authoritative answer to these questions can be obtained. This whole side of the traditional conservative apologetic, though loudly vociferated, just does not exist; there is no case to answer" (78; see also idem., *Beyond Fundamentalism* [Philadelphia: The Westminister Press, 1984], 124ff). For evangelical responses to this challenge see Henry, 4:134ff; and Dockery, "A People of the Book and the Crisis of Biblical Authority," in *Beyond the Impasse? Scripture, Interpretation & Theology in Baptist Life*, ed. Robinson B. James and David S. Dockery (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 19ff. See also the evangelical studies on Scripture's self-testimony: John Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself," in *God's Inerrant Word: An International Symposium on the Trustworthiness of Scripture*, 178-200; Sinclair B. Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, ed. Harvie M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 47-66; and Wayne A. Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 19-59. For a more general evangelical critique of Barr's views on the Bible see Paul Ronald Wells, *James Barr and the Bible: Critique of the New Liberalism* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1980).

[139]The verbal theory in the context of concursus is similar to the view espoused by the writer of this thesis. Instead of the term verbal, however, we prefer the term suggested by Gerhard Maier in his *Biblical Hermeneutics*: "entire inspiration" (120). Maier gives four reasons why he prefers this term over the other. First, the term "entire inspiration is taken directly from the Bible-2 Timothy 3:16. Second, applying "an overtly biblical term like *entire inspiration* is preferable to resorting to some other conceptual formation" such as thought inspiration or verbal inspiration. Third, this term reflects influential traditions of history. Fourth, this term avoids the "misunderstandings and blunders associated with the traditional doctrine of 'verbal inspiration.' " Maier is quick to point out, however, that he shares "one aspect of the hotly disputed doctrine of verbal inspiration"; that "God's Spirit brought forth and permeates absolutely no less or other than the *entire* Scripture (120-121, italics his). The writer concurs.

believe in the full inspiration of the Bible and I believe it is inspired to its words." When

questioned if he meant verbal inspiration, Robinson indicated to the researcher that his

personal view was verbal, plenary inspiration.[140] Thus, Robinson espouses the verbal theory

in Erickson's classification of inspiration theories referred to above. Robinson writes:

> God speaks through the Scriptures to all men in all time. The Bible is not merely "the old, old story" of what God did in some other time and place, nor is it only a statement of ideas about God-inspired and inerrant. The Bible is God's tool of communication through which He addresses men today.[141]

Thus, verbal inspiration is the "high view of inspiration,"[142] Robinson espouses.

In the interview as well as in his homiletical writings, Robinson is more concerned

with how verbal inspiration is used in preaching than the doctrine itself. For example, he

sounds a warning about applying verbal inspiration—the inspiration of individual words—to

the interpretation of Scripture too strictly. He writes:

> In the battle for the inspiration of individual words of Scripture we sometimes forget that words are merely "semantic markers for a field of meaning." Particular statements must be understood within the broader thought of which they are a part or what we teach may not be God's Word at all.[143]

He goes on to say that "an emphasis on verbal inspiration sometimes lures a preacher

into eisegesis and error."[144] His concern is that a preacher might focus so much on the

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[140]Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001.

[141]Robinson, "What is Expository Preaching?" *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 131/521 (January-March, 1974), 57.

[142]Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803. It should be noted that Robinson accepts the evangelical "concursive theory" of inspiration over the mechanical dictation theory (idem., Interview); see above, 3.2.2.1, on the difference.

[143]Robinson, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 805.

[144]Ibid.

meaning of an individual word, because he believes it is verbally inspired, that the word's context might be ignored and distorted.[145] In explaining this concern to the researcher, he warned:

> The tendency is for people to believe if every word is guarded by God then every word has a significance all by itself. And I don't believe that. I think the Bible was written in language, and then grammar, and that words are simply a semantic marker for a field of meaning and a word written really doesn't mean anything until it is put into its context. So the danger of that doctrine (verbal inspiration) when it comes to preaching is that people go through the text verse by verse, word by word. At that point, the doctrine gets in the way of what the Bible really is–literature.[146]

Words and phrases thus "should never become ends in themselves," he emphasizes. "Words are stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning." He explains:

> In our approach to the Bible, therefore, we are primarily concerned not with what individual words mean, but with what the biblical writers mean through their use of words. Putting this another way, we do not understand the concepts of a passage merely by analyzing its separate words. A word-by-word grammatical analysis can be as pointless and boring as reading a dictionary. If we desire to understand the Bible in order to communicate its message, we must grapple with it on the level of ideas.[147]

So, in Robinson's thinking, while the verbal theory is his preferred view of Scriptural inspiration, too much emphasis on it during the process of sermon study could be harmful.

Robinson's statement about words being "stupid things until linked with other words to convey meaning,"[148] suggests an inconsistency with the verbal theory of inspiration. If he believes in verbal, plenary inspiration, which emphasizes the authority of every word, then

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[145]See ibid., 805-806, where he provides examples of how preachers ignore biblical context. Robinson also sounds the same warning in *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

[146]Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001.

[147]Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 23.

[148]Ibid, 23; see also 63.

how can he view a single word as stupid? Do not words make up sentences and paragraphs which "convey meaning?" Robinson affirms that words do convey meaning by asserting "that ideas and words cannot be separated."[149] If this is the case, and words are "stupid things," then will they not produce stupid ideas? Robinson would deny this by contending that his point, as noted above, is to emphasize the importance of studying words in their context. But calling words in the biblical text "stupid things" while at the same time espousing verbal inspiration is methodologically inconsistent.[150]

The implication of Robinson's view of verbal inspiration for his approach to expository preaching is noteworthy. He writes that expository preaching "emerges not merely as a type of sermon–one among many–but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration." It thus "reflects a preacher's honest effort to submit his thought to the Bible rather than to submit the Bible to his thought."[151] Thus, the "high view" of verbal inspiration which Robinson espouses produces preaching that "finds its source in the Bible."[152] His approach to study for this type of preaching manifests itself in a detailed attention to the text during sermon preparation.[153]

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[149]Ibid., 184.

[150]A better way to express his point would be: "A word, unless it constitutes a sentence by itself, does not say anything; it is only a building block used to construct a sentence that says something. Words by themselves simply imply potential fields of concepts, which are made specific by the sentences in which they occur" (McCartney and Clayton, *Let the Reader Understand*, 122).

[151]Idem., "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803. For further discussion on this statement, see below, 4.3.1.

[152]Ibid.

[153]See Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 59-60.

3.2.3 Inerrancy[154]

3.2.3.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Inerrancy

Like the classification for inspiration theories, evangelicals have endeavored to classify the different views of inerrancy.[155] Erickson proposes a seven-fold classification: absolute inerrancy, full inerrancy, limited inerrancy, inerrancy of purpose, accommodated revelation, nonpropositional revelation, and irrelevance of inerrancy.[156]

After discussing the theological, historical, and epistemological importance of inerrancy[157] and its relationship to biblical phenomena,[158] Erickson provides his own

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[154]Donald Carson has pointed out that "until fairly recently [1975], the infallibility or inerrancy of Scripture was one of the self-identifying flags of Evangelicalism, recognized by friend and foe alike" ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 10; see also Ellingsen, *The Evangelical Movement*, 207). According to Donald Bloesch, however, the issue of inerrancy has been incorrectly identified as the distinctive characteristic of Evangelicalism (*The Future of Evangelical Christianity: A Call for Unity Amid Diversity* [Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1988], 11, 13).

[155]See for example, Robert Johnston, who uses the following terms: "Detailed Inerrancy," "Partial Infallibility," "Irenic Inerrancy," and "Complete Infallibility" (*Evangelicals at an Impasse: Biblical Authority in Practice* [Atlanta John Knox Press, 1979], 19-35); and Steve Lemke, who employs the following terms: "Propositional Inerrancy," "Pietistic Inerrancy"(or "Simple Biblicism," this is the only non-scholarly view, according to Lemke, 185), "Nuanced Inerrancy," "Critical Inerrancy," and "Functional Inerrancy" ("The Inspiration and Authority of Scripture," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 176-193); Gabriel Fackre has classified the views into three major types with sub-types: first, the "Oracular View" with no sub-types; second, the "Inerrancy View," in which he distinguishes "Transmissive Inerrancy," "Trajectory Inerrancy," and "Intentional Inerrancy"; and third, the "Infallibilist View," in which he distinguishes "Unitive Infallibility," "Essentialist Infallibility," and "Christocentric Infallibility" (*Authority: Scripture in the Church for the World*, 62-73; see also idem., "Evangelical Hermeneutics: Commonality and Diversity," *Interpretation* 43/2 [April 1989]: 120-127).

[156]Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 248-250. The last three views reject the term.

[157]Ibid., 250-254.

[158]Ibid., 255-259. Here Erickson provides an overview of the different ways phenomena is handled by scholars. It should be noted that several evangelicals have written substantial, scholarly books dealing with biblical phenomena such as apparent discrepancies, chronological problems, and other difficulties. See, for example, Norman Geisler and Thomas Howe, *When Critics Ask: A Popular Handbook on Bible Difficulties* (Wheaton, Ill.:Victor Books, 1992); Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Edwin Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977); John W. Halley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977); David R. Hall, *The Seven Pillories of Wisdom* (Macon, Ga.:Mercer University Press, 1990); Eta Linnemann, *Is There A Synoptic Problem? Rethinking the Literary Dependence of the First Three Gospels*, trans., Robert W. Yarbrough (Grand Rapids:

definition of inerrancy: "The Bible, when correctly interpreted in light of the level to which

culture and the means of communication has developed at the time it was written, and in

view of the purposes for which it was given, is fully truthful in all that if affirms." He says

that "this definition reflects the position earlier termed full inerrancy."[159] Paul D. Feinberg,

in his article on the meaning of inerrancy, also provides a definition highly valued by

conservative evangelicals: "Inerrancy means that when all facts are known, the Scriptures

in their original autographs and properly interpreted will be shown to be wholly true in

everything that they affirm, whether that has to do with doctrine or morality or with the

social, physical, or life sciences."[160]

These understandings of inerrancy are different from the view of "limited

inerrrancy," an understanding held by a number of evangelicals. "Limited inerrancy"

Baker, 1992). Some evangelicals believe that these kinds of polemical works have a tendency towards "forced harmonization in light of an allegiance to biblical inerrancy" (White, 191). For an important evangelical discussion of harmonization, see Craig L. Blomberg, "The Legitimacy and Limits of Harmonization," in *Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon*, 139-174.

[159]Erickson, 259. Erickson's view of inerrancy is not without its evangelical critics. James E. White provides a summary of evangelical concerns about Erickson's view of inerrancy and truth (133-135); see also ibid., 179, for a concise summary of non-evangelical critiques of full or absolute inerrancy. One of the most persistent critics of the evangelical view of inerrancy has been James Barr; see, for example, Barr's *Fundamentalism*; *Beyond Fundamentalism*; *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Westminister, 1983); and *The Scope and Authority of the Bible* (London: SCM, 1980); for a concise summary of evangelical responses to the many arguments advanced against inerrancy, see White, 191-192.

[160]"The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy*, 294. See the entire article, 267-304, for a thorough discussion of inerrancy. D. A. Carson suggests that "it would be a great help to clarity of thought if no one would comment on the appropriateness or otherwise of the term 'inerrancy' without reading" this essay by Feineberg ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 7); see also Henry's lengthy discussion of inerrancy and infallibility, 3: 162-255. It should be noted that not all evangelicals concur with Feineberg's view of inerrancy on historical and scientific matters in the Bible. For a discussion of two different groups of evangelical scholars on these matters, see Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 155-160. The first group, he terms "critical anti-critics" who believe "that the infallibility, or inerrancy, of the Bible is the epistemological keystone of Christianity itself" (156f). The other group he terms "believing criticism" who "affirm that historical, textual, literary, and other forms of research (if they are not predicated on the denial of the supernatural) may legitimately produce conclusions that overturn traditional evangelical beliefs about the Bible" (ibid., 158f).

regards the Bible as inerrant in its salvific doctrinal references, but fallible in some of its

scientific and historical references. The existing errors are considered no great consequence

since the Bible only purports to teach on matters of salvation, not science and history.[161] As

can be seen, evangelicals do not all hold the same views on inerrancy.[162]

3.2.3.2 Robinson's View of Inerrancy

When asked which view of inerrancy he espoused, whether absolute, full, or limited,

Robinson told the researcher his view was "full inerrancy" as Erickson articulated it.[163]

 Moreover, Robinson participated in Summit II of the ICBI in 1982, in which Norman

Geisler stated that all of the participants "are in agreement with the ICBI stand on

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[161]Erickson, 248-249.

[162]See the discussion in Noll, 155-160. Conservative evangelical leader John Stott expresses discomfort with the term "inerrancy." He believes that "God's self-revelation in Scripture is so rich–both in content and form–that it cannot be reduced to a string of propositions which invite the label 'truth' or 'error.'" Furthermore, he feels the word "inerrancy" is a "double negative," and "sends out the wrong signals and develops the wrong attitudes." He also believes that "it is unwise and unfair to use 'inerrancy' as a shibboleth by which to identify who is evangelical and who is not." Submission to the teaching of the Bible is more important than subscription to "an impeccable formula about the Bible." Finally, Stott believes "it is impossible to prove that the Bible contains no errors. When faced with an apparent discrepancy, the most Christian response is neither to make a premature negative judgement nor to resort to a contrived harmonization, but rather to suspend judgement, waiting patiently for further light to be given us. Many former problems have been solved this way." Thus, instead of the term "inerrancy," he prefers "true and trustworthy" (*Evangelical Truth: A Personal Plea for Unity, Integrity & Faithfulness* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1999], 61-62). This researcher also prefers the terms "true and trustworthy" over inerrancy to describe the nature of Scripture.

[163]Erickson explains the view of "full inerrancy" by comparing and contrasting it with the view of "absolute inerrancy" which "holds that the Bible, which includes a rather detailed treatment of matters both scientific and historical, is fully true." Thus, "apparent discrepancies" in scientific and historical data "can and must be explained." Full inerrancy, Erickson writes, "also holds that the Bible is completely true. While the Bible does not primarily aim to give scientific and historical data, such scientific and historical assertions as it does make are fully true. There is no essential difference between this position and absolute inerrancy in terms of their view of the religious/theological/spiritual message. The understanding of the scientific and historical references is quite different, however. Full inerrancy regards these references as phenomenal; that is, they are reported the way they appear to the human eye. The are not necessarily exact; rather, they are popular descriptions, often involving general references or approximations. Yet they are correct. What they teach is essentially correct in the way they teach it" (248).

inerrancy."[164] Robinson openly acknowledges that he agrees with the entire Summit I

document, "Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," which embraces the full view of

inerrancy.[165]

In explaining his view of full inerrancy to the researcher, Robinson said:

I believe the Bible is without error in all that it affirms. I think when we talk about error, we also need to talk about accuracy. And we often want to impose upon the biblical writers norms and standards which are true of the twenty-first century, but are not necessarily true of the people in the ancient world. I don't think you can hold the biblical writers to our same standards of historical and scientific accuracy. We have no right to make up the standards for anybody else. So you have got to take them on their own terms. And in that sense, I believe the Bible is inerrant.[166]

Thus, as in revelation and inspiration, Robinson espouses the traditional, more conservative

evangelical view of inerrancy.

In his paper presented at Summit II of the ICBI, *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*,[167]

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[164]See Geisler, "General Editor's Introduction," *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*, x. The ICBI council produced the two statements: "The Chicago Statement on Inerrancy" in 1978—Summit I, and "The Chicago Statement on Hermeneutics" in 1982—Summit II. Robinson contributed to Summit II the paper entitled, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics" (ibid., 803-837). For more on the work of the ICBI see above, 13, note 55.

[165]Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001. It should be noted that D. A. Carson thinks the ICBI is somewhat unrepresentative of evangelicalism because "many Evangelicals in America and abroad have contributed" to the debate on inerrancy "without any organizational connection to ICBI" ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture, 7); Gerald Bray remarks: "To what extent can the two Chicago declarations be regarded as representative of current evangelical thinking about biblical interpretation? Many evangelical biblical scholars, and probably almost all those outside the USA, would hesitate to accept them *in toto*, either because they disagree with specific points, or because they do not believe that statements of this kind are necessary or even helpful" (*Biblical Interpretation: Past & Present* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996], 560).

[166]Robinson, Interview; here Robinson is essentially expressing the view of "full inerrancy" as articulated by Erickson, see above, 87, note 163.

[167]This paper is printed in the volume, *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy, and the Bible*, edited by Radmacher and Preus, 803-815, which is a "record of the ICBI Summit II proceedings" (vii). Each presenter contributed a paper and two respondents presented their reaction (see "Contents," v-vi). Robinson's two respondents were John F. MacArthur, Jr., *A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, in ibid., 819-830; and Erwin W. Lutzer, *A Response to Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, in ibid., 833-837.

Robinson was originally assigned the topic, "The Relationship of Inerrancy To Preaching."[168] Instead, he chose to deal "with the related issues of hermeneutics and homiletics."[169] In his response paper, John F. MacArthur, Jr., points out that Robinson "only assumes matters which link inerrancy to expository preaching and does not adequately define any of these terms." Furthermore, MacArthur maintains that Robinson does not "show the relationship of the interpretive process to exegetical theology and to expositional preaching." He says that Robinson only "assumes rather than presents the subject assigned for this paper, i.e., the relationship between inerrancy, exegesis and exposition."[170]

As noted in the above discussions on revelation and inspiration, Robinson is consistent in only assuming his view of Scripture in his homiletic writings. He leaves the exposition of the evangelical prolegomena of Scripture to theologians and, instead, addresses the practical issue of constructing expository sermons. He explained the reason for this practical focus while discussing the second edition of *Biblical Preaching* with the researcher:

> The thing I had to guard against in redoing my book was adding material. It has been valuable to people just starting out, to those who did not have a grasp of homiletics and gave them a way of pursuing it. I have watched people who teach homiletics. One of the difficulties is they, I think, try to cover too much. And in covering too much, in covering everything, they cover nothing. Jerry Vine just finished a book. As a basic text, it is worthless. They cover everything! Anything and everything! But if you think you are going to give that to a first-year preaching student, you are going to throw him. A basic text in homiletics should be one that us usable and clear. So I found myself on several occasions putting too much in the second edition of *Biblical Preaching*. The temptation in writing a book like this is to write it for the

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[168]So said MacArthur in his *Response*, 819.

[169]Ibid.

[170]Ibid.

professor rather than the fellow out there who doesn't have a lot of time.[171]

It is noteworthy that the book Robinson refers to by Vine spends several pages discussing the evangelical prolegomena and its relationship to expository preaching.[172] Robinson, therefore, focuses his homiletical teaching on the practical mechanics of preparing expository sermons and only makes a few references to the "orthodox" view of inspiration and inerrancy.[173] Thus MacArthur is correct when he says Robinson only "assumes" the link of inerrancy to expository preaching. Robinson's purpose in this paper was specifically to "show that the work of exegesis, hermeneutics, and homiletics are linked together as supporting disciplines."[174]

In his response to Robinson, MacArthur proceeds to present "some precise thinking on the originally assigned subject"[175] of inerrancy's relationship to expository preaching. Reflecting on the "assigned subject" in the context of all the papers presented at Summit II of the ICBI, he asserts that "it is the link between affirming truth and confirming people in truth through proclamation" and "is in a real sense the confluence of all previous papers and the capstone to the careful handling of God's Word."[176] He argues that expository preaching "is the declarative genre in which inerrancy finds its logical expression and the church its

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[171]Robinson, Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001.

[172]Vine and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit*, 48-56.

[173]Robinson *Biblical Preaching*, 23; "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 805.

[174]According to Gibson, who edited *Making A Difference in Preaching*, which contains this paper by Robinson, 14.

[175]MacArthur, 819.

[176]Ibid.

life and power."[177] Thus, "inerrancy demands exposition as the only method of preaching which preserves the purity of God's Word and accomplishes the purpose for which God gave it."[178]

The core of MacArthur's view is summed up in the following propositions he invites the reader to consider:

1. God gave his true Word to be communicated *entirely* as He gave it, that is, the whole counsel of God is to be preached (Matt. 28:20; Acts 5:20, 20:27). Correspondingly, every portion of the Word of God needs to be considered in the light of its whole.
2. God gave His true Word to be communicated *exactly* as He gave it. It is to be dispensed precisely as it was delivered without the message being altered.
3. Only the exegetical process which yields expository proclamation will accomplish propositions 1 and 2 (italics his).[179]

Because Robinson also affirms inerrancy and argues along the same lines as MacArthur that expository preaching is the best method for inerrant Scripture,[180] he is close to MacArthur's "precise thinking." The difference between the two is that Robinson does not think it necessary to focus so much on the doctrine of inerrancy in order to make the point that expository preaching is the best way to preach the Bible.[181]

3.2.4 Authority

3.2.4.1 The Evangelical Context of Robinson's View of Authority

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[177]Ibid., 820-821.

[178]Ibid., 821.

[179]Ibid.

[180]Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 805, 809, 815.

[181]One recent evangelical study affirms MacArthur's view that inerrancy cannot be separated from the discussion of expository preaching: Jerry Vinson Welch, "The Homiletical Implications of Inerrancy: A Case for Expository Preaching," (Ph.D. dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999).

While evangelicals may quibble about the nature of revelation, inspiration, and inerrancy, they are in basic agreement on the idea that the Bible is authoritative for Christian life and theology. "The most characteristic feature of evangelicalism," writes Derek Tidball, "is the place it gives to the Bible." The Bible, he goes on to say, is for evangelicals the "supreme authority for all matters concerning life and faith; what they are to believe and how they are to behave."[182] Kenneth Kantzer declares that evangelical theology seeks to construct theology "on the teaching of the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible;[183] and this formative principle represents a basic unifying factor throughout the whole of contemporary evangelicalism."[184]

The authority of Scripture[185] for evangelicals has been expressed in the fourth

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[182]Derek Tidball, *Who Are the Evangelicals?* 80.

[183]A number of Evangelicals, who favor the "Wesleyan Quadrilateral," prefer *prima scriptura* rather than *sola Scriptura* (see Woodrow W. Whidden, "*Sola Scriptura*, Inerrantist Fundamentalism, and the Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Is 'No Creed but the Bible' a Workable Solution?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 35/2 [Autumn 1997]: 211-226). The Wesleyan Quadrilateral is a fourfold complex of authorities which John Wesley used as the authorities to guide him: Holy Scripture, tradition, reason, and experience. On this, see, for example, the following studies: *The Future of the Methodist Theological Traditions,* ed. M. Douglas Meeks (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1985); Donald A. D. Thorsen, *The Wesleyan Quadrilateral: Scripture, Tradition, Reason, & Experience as a Model of Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); and Thomas C. Oden, *John Wesley's Scriptural Christianity: A Plain Exposition of His Teaching on Christian Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 55-99.

[184]Kenneth S. Kantzer, "Unity and Diversity in Evangelical Faith," in Wells and Woodbridge, 52. See also Mark A. Noll, *Between Faith and Criticism*, 6-7.

[185]According to the Gerhard F. Hasel, the authority of the Bible is in a crisis ("The Crisis of the Authority of the Bible as the Word of God," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1/1 [Spring 1990]: 16-38). Alister McGrath, however, thinks that to speak of a modern "crisis in biblical authority" is "misleading" (*A Passion for Truth*, 57). He suggest "the number of Christians who regard Scripture as authoritative is increasing; those who, in sympathy with more liberal trends, have moved away from biblically centered forms of Christianity are in decline." Several evangelical scholars tend to agree more with Hasel that the authority of Scripture is in crisis, such as David Dockery (*Christian Scripture*, 1-13), Donald Carson ("Recent Developments in the Doctrine of Scripture," 5-48), and Mark A. Noll ("Evangelicals and the Study of the Bible," in Marsden, *Evangelicalism and Modern America*, 103-121, especially 198, note 39). For coverage of various issues relating to Scripture and authority, see Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story: A Pastoral Systematics,* vol. 2, *Authority*.

affirmation of the consultation on "Evangelical Affirmations," which met on the campus of

Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in May of 1989. The first two paragraphs of

affirmation 4, "Holy Scripture," read:

> We affirm the complete truthfulness and the full and final authority of the Old and New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God written. The appropriate response to it is humble assent and obedience.
> The Word of God becomes effective by the power of the Holy Spirit working in and through it. Through the Scriptures the Holy Spirit[186] creates faith and provides a sufficient doctrinal and moral guide for the church. Just as God's self-giving love to us in the gospel provides the supreme motive for the Christian life, so the teaching of Holy Scripture informs us of what are truly acts of love.[187]

3.2.4.2 Robinson's View of Authority

Reflecting the above "Evangelical Affirmation," Robinson states in *Biblical*

Preaching, "Ultimately, the authority behind preaching resides not in the preacher, but in the

biblical text."[188] In saying this, he is not denying the personal authority the preacher must

have in the pulpit. He believes the preacher must present the message in such a way as to

command the attention of the audience. But his point in this statement is that "in expository

preaching," the "authority of the message lies in the authority of the Word of God."[189] He

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[186]In his discussion on authority, Erickson writes about the objective word in Scripture and the subjective word in the inner illumination and conviction of the Holy Spirit, which together, constitute the authority for the Christian (*Christian Theology*, 273-279). For a comprehensive study on illumination, see Koranteng-Pipim's dissertation.

[187]Kantzer and Henry, 32-33. For further discussions on the authority of Scripture by evangelicals, see, for example, Henry, 4: 7-128; James D. G. Dunn, who differs with Henry in several areas, "The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture," *Churchman* 95/2 (1982): 104-122; idem., "The Authority of Scripture According to Scripture Continued," *Churchman*, 95/3 (1982): 201-225; and R. L. Hatchett, "The Authority of the Bible," in *Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Introduction*, 194-207.

[188]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24.

[189]Idem., Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May , 2001.

clarifies the relationship between biblical authority and personal authority:

> The effectiveness of our sermons depends on two factors: what we say and how we say it. Both are important. Apart from life-related, biblical content, we have nothing worth communicating; but without skillful delivery, we will not get that content across to a congregation. In order of significance, the ingredients making up the sermon are thought, arrangement, language, voice, and gesture. In priority of impressions, however, the order is reversed. Gestures and voice emerge as the most obvious and determinative part of preaching. Every empirical study of delivery and its effect on the outcome of a speech or sermon arrives at an identical conclusion: your delivery matters a great deal.[190]

He also emphasizes that a preacher's character or lifestyle can strengthen or weaken

the authority of the expository sermon. The preacher, therefore, "cannot be separated from

the message." He explains:

> Who has not heard some devout brother or sister pray in anticipation of a sermon, "Hide our pastor behind the cross so that we may see not him but Jesus only"? We commend the spirit of such a prayer. . . . Yet no place exists where a preacher may hide. Even a large pulpit cannot conceal us from view. Phillips Brooks was on to something when he described preaching as "truth through personality." We affect our message. We may be mouthing a scriptural idea, yet we can remain as impersonal as a telephone recording, as superficial as a radio commercial, or as manipulative as a con man. The audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a person—they hear you.[191]

Thus, sermon delivery and the preacher's character are, for Robinson, important

elements of personal authority in expository preaching.[192] But he insists the message of the

biblical text is the fundamental element of authority for the expositor.

Even in a discussion of sermon form, Robinson teaches that the message of the

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[190]Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 201-202.

[191]Ibid., 25-26; cf. Chapell's discussion on the same issue in *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 25-30.

[192]See also Robinson, "What Authority do We Have Anymore?" *Leadership* 13/2 (Spring 1992): 24-29; reprinted in Gibson, 29-39, where he suggest six guidelines to help the preacher regain and maintain legitimate authority. These guidelines involve relating to the listeners as well as the Bible during the sermon and beyond the sermon.

biblical passage takes precedence over sermon form. "Expository sermons," he says, "are not identified by the form they take, whether it is a 'verse by verse' analysis of a text, a didactic explanation of a doctrine, or a key word that holds the points together. Any form that communicates the message of a passage clearly so that the listeners understand it, accept it, and know what to do about it is adequate."[193] Thus, there is no "glass slipper" form which fits all sermons. "An expository preacher is free to work the biblical material in any manner that will tellingly communicate the message of a text to the listener." The key issue is whether a particular sermon form "opens up the text to reflect the meaning and emphasis of a biblical author."[194] Hence, Robinson reflects his high view of biblical authority in discussing sermon form.

The essential way to express Scriptural authority in the pulpit, then, is through expository preaching, which "is derived from and transmitted through a study of a passage (or passages) in context."[195] This approach, Robinson believes, "best carries the force of divine authority."[196] When preachers "fail to preach the Scriptures, they abandon their authority."[197] Accordingly, expository preaching approaches the Bible in a spirit of humility and yields to its ultimate authority," he asserts.[198] A high view of Scriptural authority,

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[193]Robinson, *Biblical Sermons*, 194; cf. idem, *Biblical Preaching*, 131.

[194]Idem., *Biblical Sermons*, 193, 257.

[195]Idem., "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 804.

[196]Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 20.

[197]Ibid.

[198]Ibid., 21-22; idem., *Homiletics and Hermeneutics*, 803. For other evangelical homileticians, who agree with Robinson on the importance of biblical authority in preaching, see, for example, J. I. Packer, "Introduction: Why Preach?" in *The Preacher and Preaching*, 11-14; Chapell, 18-25; David L. Larsen, *The*

therefore, is an important presupposition in Robinson's philosophy of expository preaching.

Homiletic scholar David Buttrick takes issue with Robinson on the authority of the Bible for preaching.[199] He argues that preaching should not be focused on a book, the Bible, but on the gospel.[200] Furthermore, he says, "people will no longer think in bookish/rational patterns of thought, but rather will think in ways that are formed by the electronic devices that they use and that use them." Thus, "it will be almost impossible to retain a book-authority mentality in the forthcoming twenty-first century." Hence, the Protestant understanding of the phrase, "Word of God," will have to be "revised in an oral direction."[201]

Anatomy of Preaching, 34; R. Albert Mohler, "A Theology of Preaching," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching*, ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press, 1992), 14-16; Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 12-15. The typical view of authority in the evangelical expository homiletic is expressed by Wayne Gruden: "Throughout the history of the church the greatest preachers have been those who have recognized that they have no authority in themselves and have seen their task as being to explain the words of Scripture and apply them clearly to the lives of their hearers. Their preaching has drawn its power not from the proclamation of their own Christian experiences or the experiences of others, nor from their own opinions, creative ideas, or rhetorical skills, but from God's powerful words. Essentially they stood in the pulpit, pointed to the biblical text, and said in effect to the congregation, 'This is what this verse means. Do you see that meaning here as well? Then you must believe it and obey it with all your heart, for God himself, your Creator and your Lord, is saying this to you today!' Only the written words of Scripture can give this kind of authority to preaching" (Grudem, 82; cf. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20-21). Grudem adds a footnote to this statement: "I am not denying that good speaking ability or creativity or telling of personal experiences have a place in preaching, for good preaching will include all of these. I am saying that the power to change lives must come form the Word itself, and it will be evident to the hearers when a preacher really believes this" (82, note 12).

[199]In his latest book, *Speaking Parables: A Homiletic Guide*, Buttrick elaborates on Scripture as "gift" and suggest that this is a much better term than "authority." He writes: "While I delight in scripture and enjoy studying and restudying the Bible, and while I read scripture with excitement, finding more and more insight into the mystery of God, I do not bother with the notion of 'authority.' We revere the Bible because it brings us good news of God and not because it is super perfect. The Bible is *not* an inerrant 'Word of God.' The idea is silly" (xii; italics his). His view of the non-authority of the Bible is translated into the way he approaches the parables. For example, he suggest that Matthew has misinterpreted several of Jesus' parables. He goes as far as to say that "Matthew has handed us dreadful theology. . . . Do I suspect that the Gospel writers sometimes have misunderstood the parables of Jesus? Yes I do" (ix). He does concede, however, that his criticism of Matthew is "as prone to error as anyone" (xii). See also, idem., "The Use of the Bible in Preaching," 188-199.

[200]Idem., "The Use of the Bible in Preaching," 190.

[201]Idem., *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, 31.

The "oral direction" Buttrick has in mind is elevating preaching as "Word of God" above the evangelical understanding of the Bible as the Word of God.[202]

In response to the possibility of preaching itself being elevated above the written Word of God in the Bible, Robinson would respond that when the Scriptures are not preached or expounded, the preacher abandons his or her authority. "God is not in it," he contends. Only when the Scriptures themselves are preached does something happen in the lives of the listeners.[203]

Thus, Robinson and Buttrick differ on the level of presuppositions. On one hand, Buttrick completely discards the notion of Biblical authority.[204] On the other hand, Robinson embraces the Bible as verbally inspired and inerrant, and therefore, the ultimate authority for Christian life and preaching.

3.3 Conclusion

Based on the above discussion, we conclude that Haddon Robinson takes the traditional evangelical view towards Scripture. As a result, he espouses the following: Scripture as God's written revelation, verbal-plenary inspiration, full inerrancy, and the

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[202]Donald L. Hamilton, responds to Buttrick's view of books in the twenty-first century: "It is interesting to note that many Christians of the first century were 'bicultural' in terms of communicating skills. Greco-Roman culture was very much oriented toward reasoned thinking, while Jewish culture was oriented toward the visual and emotional. Yet, Christians were able to function in both 'worlds.' Paul, of course, is the prime example in this regard. Likewise, even if our present age is geared toward more visual aspects of communication . . . this does not mean that persons today are incapable of critical thinking or linear logic. Human beings are wonderfully complex creatures whose thinking abilities should not be underestimated" (102-103, note 2).

[203]Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 20; for further discussion, see below, 4.3.1.

[204]Buttrick stated in an interview with Harold Nathan Cothen "I throw out the whole notion that scripture has authority of any kind" (see Cothen's study, "An Examination of Recent Homiletical Criticisms of Deductive Methodology According to Selected Inductive, Narrative, and Phenomenological Homileticians," [Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1990], 105, note 79).

complete authority of Scripture for Christian life, theology, and preaching.

Two issues emerge concerning this view of Scripture. First, this understanding of Scripture is foundational to evangelical methodology in general and to Robinson's evangelical expository methodology and procedure in particular. James Packer explains: "When you encounter the evangelical view of Holy Scripture, you are encountering the source, criterion, and control of all evangelical theology and religion." He contends that evangelical theology is characterized methodologically by its insistence "that Scripture is both clear and sufficient; that the God-given Scriptures are the self-interpreting, self-contained rule of Christian faith and life in every age" and "that the proper task of the teaching and preaching office that God has set in the church is to explain and apply the Scriptures." This "rigorous biblical methodology" is what, he believes, distinctively characterizes the evangelical position on Scripture.[205] As such, Robinson's view of Scripture is the source, criterion, and control of his homiletical approach.

Thus, Duane Litfin, in his study of evangelical theological presuppositions and preaching concludes that "the expository method is a natural and logical deductive outgrowth or 'aftereffect' of the evangelical's high view of Scripture."[206] Robinson himself

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[205]James I. Packer, "Encountering Present-day Views of Scripture," in *The Foundation of Biblical Authority*, ed. James Montgomery Boice (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 63-65.

[206]Litfin, "Theological Presuppositions and Preaching: An Evangelical Perspective," (Ph.D. dissertation, Purdue University, 1973), 106f. Thus, Peter Adam observed that there is "often a direct link between a theology of Scripture and a theology of preaching" (*Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Expository Preaching* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1996], 92). Put differently, one's view of Scripture shapes and forms ones approach to homiletics, as David Buttrick has indicated. "Thus, for example, if Scripture is viewed as an inerrant Word of God, sermons are apt to come tumbling down from high pulpits like tablets of stone from Sinai. If, in a Barthian scheme, Scripture is understood as a God-ordained witness to the Word of God, Jesus Christ, then preaching is regarded as a witness to the witness of Scripture, and a reiteration of the Word of God. On the other hand, if preaching is vested in an episcopate within the being-saved community, preaching will be defined as an extension of the preaching of bishops. In Pietist communities, preaching may be viewed as an expression of the awareness of being saved undergirded by the authority of primal religious

similarly states that expository preaching "emerges not merely as a type of sermon—one among many—but as the theological outgrowth of a high view of inspiration."[207] Thus, consistent with the evangelical biblical methodology, Robinson's chosen genre of preaching— expository—treats the text of Scripture as a revelation from God: inspired, inerrant, and fully authoritative for the evangelical Christian preacher.

The second issue concerning this view of Scripture is the specific ways it influences Robinson's homiletical method. The most distinctive way in which this view manifests its influence is in the text-centered focus of his method. Accordingly, the first three stages of his ten-stage method focus the expositor on the text and emphasize careful principles of biblical interpretation.[208] Of utmost importance is discerning the message of the text by discovering its idea and development.[209] "If God superintended the writing of Scripture and protected its details, then biblical preaching must reflect God's thought both in theme and development."[210] The sermon should be centered, therefore, on the biblical text because it is "God's Word written" and thus "God's tool of communication through which he

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experience" (Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 249). Elizabeth Achtemeier also affirms that behind "every sermon lies an understanding of the nature of the Bible, of what kind of literature it is, of how it came into being, of how it can be understood and appropriated by a modern congregation" ("The Artful Dialogue: Some Thoughts on the Relation of Biblical Studies and Homiletics," *Interpretation* 35/1 [January 1981]: 20).

[207]Robinson, "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803. To Buttrick's view of evangelical preaching as "tumbling down from high pulpits" (see previous note), Robinson would respond that evangelical preachers seek to preach to people on their level and avoid speaking "*ex cathedra*" (Robinson, *Biblical Preaching*, 24).

[208]Ibid., 53-96; see also chapter 5 below.

[209]Ibid., 66-70.

[210]Idem., "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 808.

addressed people in history."[211]

Robinson's view of Scripture also manifests itself in helping the expositor maintain a focus on the audience in sermon preparation. Stages four through ten deal with principles of how to effectively communicate the biblical message to a contemporary audience. From structuring the sermon according to the pattern of the text to finding the right illustration for the main idea of the text, and from understanding the contemporary audience to applying the message to them, the focus of these stages is to help the audience understand and receive the message from the text.[212] The burden is thus to effectively communicate the message of the text to the audience of today.

As such, Robinson's view of Scripture has influenced him to help expositors construct sermons that are both text-centered and audience-focused, that honor the biblical message and make it relevant for today's audience.[213] Thus, Robinson's high view of Scripture undergirds and influences the ten stages. Just how well the ten stages do this will be the subject of chapter 5.

Another way that Robinson's view of Scripture affects his approach to expository preaching is in his teaching on "style," or a preacher's "choice of words."[214] With the message of the inspired text being a message from God, a "power comes through the

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[211]Idem., Interview, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, 15 May, 2001; idem., "Homiletics and Hermeneutics," 803.

[212]Idem., *Biblical Preaching*, 103-182.

[213]Ibid., 245.

[214]Ibid., 185.

preached word" during delivery, according to Robinson.[215] Thus, he discusses three

components of style: clarity, direct and personal address, and vividness. Clarity involves a

clear outline, short sentences, simple sentence structure, and simple words because the words

point to realities and must be communicated clearly. Direct and personal address involves

use of the personal pronoun "you," and "speech appropriate in lively conversation," which

helps the audience better receive the biblical message. Vividness, the final characteristic of

effective style, focuses on carefully crafted nouns, verbs, metaphors, and similes to enhance

the impact of the message on the audience.[216] Hence, because Robinson believes that the

biblical text is inspired and carries a message from God, and that the preachers words can

point to realities, sermon delivery must have an effective style that is clear, direct, personal,

and vivid.[217]

Another way that Robinson's view of Scripture reveals its influence is in his

discussion on desires and delivery. He writes:

> In the preacher, technical knowledge and training in the art of public address cannot take the place of conviction and responsibility. Having something to say to a congregation that you want them to understand and live by provides an essential stimulus for effective delivery. It produces the emotional "set" for speaking. We are not merely reciting a script. We are communicating ideas that matter to us.[218]

When the preacher thus has an idea from the Bible, according to Robinson, and desires to

help listeners understand and accept it, "strong delivery comes naturally." Dynamic

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[215]Ibid., 19.

[216]Ibid., 187-197.

[217]See discussion above, 3.2.1.2.3.2.

[218]Ibid., 204.

delivery, therefore, comes not from "slavishly following a set of rules"[219] but from "sincerity, enthusiasm, and deep earnestness" over delivering a message weighted with the authority of the sacred, inspired text.[220] Thus, Robinson's view of Scripture also affects his approach to delivery.

On the whole, this chapter has provided the evangelical theological perspective for Robinson's entire approach to preaching. As noted above, his ten-stage method, style of preaching, and sermon delivery are influenced by his devotion to the Bible as the inspired Word of God. This "high view of Scripture" is, therefore, the methodological framework for his definition of expository preaching, hermeneutical approach, and the ten stages. The next chapter will devote itself to investigating Robinson's definition of expository preaching and hermeneutical approach, which forms an important platform for his homiletical method.

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[219]Ibid.

[220]Ibid., 204-205.