The Drama of Preaching

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Course Description:

In recent years, with the contributions of N.T. Wright, Kevin Vanhoozer, Richard Heyduck, and others, biblical theology has taken a dramatic turn. Each of these theologians have argued that a natural way of doing theology, and of relating the Bible to the practice of the church, is by viewing the text through the lens of drama. For Vanhoozer, theological doctrine becomes “direction for fitting participation in the drama of redemption.” This emphasis inserts temporal movement into the theological endeavor while highlighting practice as the goal of theology. While an increasing number of books and articles are devoted to this approach, less has been written in terms of what this concept for theology might mean for the practice of preaching in the church.

This course will have two interrelated emphases. First, through readings of the primary authors in this field, we will critically explore the dramatic paradigm for theology. This will be done with special attention to what the dramatic paradigm might mean for the church’s practical theology. Second, the course will explore the practical import of this dramatic paradigm for the preaching of the church. What might it mean for our preaching to extend from a dramatic view of Scripture? How would this theology have us approach, and proclaim, God’s Word? How can we take one moment of God’s Drama in the past and proclaim it faithfully and usefully in this moment?

These aims will be accomplished through lecture, discussion of course readings, critical discussion, sermon viewing and evaluation, and film screenings.

Course Objectives:

1) Students will obtain knowledge of the dramatic paradigm for conceptualizing theology and theological practice, especially as outlined by Vanhoozer, Wright, and Heyduck.

2) Students will enter into critical engagement with this system on both theological and practical grounds through engagement with readings, and with study of homiletical texts and sermons preached within this tradition.

3) Students will be challenged to think through the practical implications of a dramatic theological paradigm for homiletical practice in the church.

4) Students will develop a sense of how a dramatic paradigm for theology and for preaching challenges them in their move from text to sermon (the hermeneutical question).
5) Students will develop a matrix of hermeneutical and homiletical thought as the
dramatic paradigm for theology and preaching is set alongside and critically interacts
with more established homiletics.

6) Students will come to a greater understanding of their own hermeneutical practice of
moving from text to sermon, how this effects their choice of sermon form, goals, and
handling of the biblical text, and the strengths and weaknesses of this activity for the
practice of preaching.

Evaluation:

1) Final project: 40%

A plan for a 4-week sermon series that is constructed according to the narrative
theology and homiletic presented in class.

This will consist of completing a series planning sheet (to be distributed in class) that
includes a central idea, purpose statement, and outline for the series. Further, a sermon
plan and outline for each of the four sermons in the series will be included. One of the
texts chosen will be developed into a sermon manuscript. This should be done with the
potential for preaching this series in your church.

Due: Last day for work to be turned in for the January Term.

2) Homiletical Outline – 20%

Texts will be assigned on Monday, and throughout the week students will begin to
work through the text in a narrative mode. These texts will be worked with each day for
practical benefit, and by Friday, students will present their own homiletical outline.
This text will be separate from texts chosen for the Major assignment. Instructions will
be given the first day of class.

Due: Friday of class.

3) Essay: 20%

8-10 pages on a topic that engages with the course readings, and is approved by the
instructor. Topics may include, but are not limited to:

A critical engagement with the dramatic paradigm with attention paid to the practice of the
church/preaching.

A critical exploration of the historical development of the dramatic paradigm, especially in terms
of historical preaching and historical sermons.

Discuss the place of eschatology in the dramatic approach, and how this influences our
preaching.
Due: Last day for work to be turned in for January Term.

3) Sermon Responses – 10%

Write 2 responses for the sermons read/viewed in class. These should be critical engagements in terms of drama and preaching – 4 pages each.

Due: Last day for work to be turned in for January Term.

4) Course Reading and Class Participation – 10%

Due: Reading report to be signed and due on the last day for work to be turned in for January term. Required readings marked in bold below are due for the first day of class.

Course Schedule

Monday

Course Overview

Assignment of texts for the week

A dramatic overview: Dramatic theology in Vanhoozer, Wright
  → What does it mean for theology to be dramatic?
  → Defining a dramatic theology
  → Defining a dramatic homiletic
  → Red Curtain Storytelling

Why drama? – For Theology and Preaching
  → A shift in culture: Modern to Postmodern
  → A shift in authority: popular media
  → Drama as biblical paradigm: for theology and preaching
  → Drama in historical theological practice: ministry and preaching
  → Drama as practical theology
  → Dramatic movement from text to sermon

Film: William Shakespeare’s Romeo + Juliet

Tuesday

Homiletical Outline Work: Biblical context

Dramatic theology
  → Gospel as “theo-drama”
    God as director
    Text as script
    Church practice as performance
→ Bible in the drama – Bible in the pulpit
→ Spirit in the drama – canonical practices
→ Time in the drama – time in the pulpit

Homiletical practice: Paul’s pulpit in the drama – 1 Corinthians 10 text and sermon

Film: Signs

Wednesday

Homiletical Outline Work: Theological Context and Exegetical Idea

A Dramatic Homiletic: preaching for performance

→ Performing the gospel in the church’s pulpit
   Situating ourselves: time in the drama
   History
   Eschatology
   Caught between: performing our moment in the drama

Historical preaching and the drama
→ Medieval preaching
   Sermon: St. Bernard
   Sermon: Horace Bushnell

Film: TBD

Thursday

Homiletical Outline Work: Drama, Hermeneutics, Homiletical Idea

A dramatic homiletic: preaching for performance, cont…

Contemporary preaching and the drama
→ Temporal movement – the sermon’s goal
   Drawing on our history – threaded through the drama
   Metaphor with movement – homiletical theology for achieving the goal
   Bringing times together – a homiletic geared for dramatic performance

Homiletical practice: Sermon – Barton: Jesus Retells Our Stories In Him

Contemporary preaching and drama, cont…
→ Lost in spatial terminology
   Pulpit in contemporary culture

Friday

A dramatic homiletic: preaching for performance, cont…
→ Strengths and weaknesses of a dramatic homiletic
→ Situating a dramatic homiletic in the homiletical spectrum: Where does this practice stand alongside others?
→ Strengths and weaknesses of some contemporary homiletical models
→ Practical benefits of a temporal connection rather than a spatial bridge

Homiletical Practice: Student sermon outlines

Course Conclusion

Required Reading

Barton, Casey C. “Preaching in a Media-Narrated World: The “Christ-Figure” in Popular Film and Suggested Implications for Homiletics.” Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society 7.2 (September, 2007): 34-57.


Recommended Reading:


