

# The Academy of Homiletics:

## The Formative Years

by

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*Nassau Inn*  
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# THE ACADEMY OF HOMILETICS: THE FORMATIVE YEARS

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## I. The Academy's History

The year 1990 is the 25th anniversary of the Academy of Homiletics, an organization that may seem small and insignificant to the church worldwide. Its members, however, see their task as seminary professors of preaching as both huge and extremely significant. They bear the responsibility to channel into the Sunday sermon the best of students' insights drawn from their work in the biblical, theological, historical and pastoral disciplines. The story of the Academy of Homiletics is the story of how these professors have worked together to get that task done.

The aim of this brief paper is to tell the story of the formative years of the Academy's history. It is a story that must be told if those who lead the Academy are to move into the next quarter century with a clear vision that only historical perspective can provide.

The story seems to begin in 1965 when a handful of seminary homiletics professors met at Princeton on June 11 to form the Protestant Homiletics Society. It was not quite that simple.

Every significant movement grows out of a context of events that precede it. The people who bring a movement or an organization to life bring their experiences to it and the cultural setting that puts into motion forces that welcome it or throw barriers in its way. The Academy did not begin in a vacuum.

### **Antecedent Organizations**

The explosion of seminary enrollment after World War II triggered many changes in theological curricula. One national organization that involved homiletics professors emerged in 1948 to share information, enjoy fellowship and lobby for a higher place at the theological table, the Association of Seminary Professors in the Practical Field. Its meetings provided a place for homileticians to gather as well as other special interest groups such as professors of pastoral counseling, religious education and church administration.

The mid-1950's brought a burst of energy and a plethora of organizations, publications and conferences to the fields of homiletics and religious speech. In 1955 Charles McGlon of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary organized a Speech for Religious Workers interest group within the Speech Association of America that drew members from both the homiletical and the speech disciplines. It became the Religious Speech Communication Association in 1974 and continues to meet annually with the renamed Speech Communication Association.

The earliest meetings of this special interest group drew a number of Roman Catholic priests who had been assigned to teach homiletics in seminaries. Many of them chose graduate study in speech to combine with their biblical and theological studies as the basis for teaching homiletics. During the speech convention at Chicago in December of 1956, twelve priests met to discuss their mutual interests and concerns. Under the leadership of Joseph Connors, SVD, they formed the Catholic Homiletic Society. By 1964 the organization had attracted 385 members, then broadened to include parish priests, directors of mission bands and retreat houses, seminarians and interested lay people. At its height, the society enrolled 333 Seminarian Associates in nine seminaries. Proceedings of the meetings were published annually until 1965 when a more popular journal, "Preaching," came into being, its title changed in 1971 to "Preaching Today." In 1968 the organization had become the Christian Preaching Conference, a name designed to reflect the many Protestant members welcomed in the glow of the post-Vatican II era. Financial problems precipitated morale problems, and the organization dissolved in 1972.

In 1959 a group of seminary homiletics professors on the west coast began meeting biannually under the leadership of Harland Hogue of the Pacific School of Religion, with papers read and informal discussions held. The group's meetings alternated between northern and southern California.

### **Beginnings of the Academy**

A number of events and meetings in 1964 laid the groundwork for the founding of the Academy. In March William Thompson of Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary attended the convention of the Catholic Homiletic Society in Los Angeles where he was elected Assistant Editor for Protestant Studies for the society's new journal. On May 29 he met with his friend, Donald Macleod, reporting on that meeting and hearing Macleod's concern for the sorry state of the teaching of homiletics in Protestant seminaries and his dream for an organization parallel to that of the Roman Catholics. In June Thompson travelled to Fort Worth, Texas, for the meeting of the Association of Seminary Professors in the Practical Field. There he met David Randolph of the Drew University School of Theology who expressed his concern about the distinctiveness of homiletics as a theological discipline, a factor lost in the generalized discussions of the

association. They talked about the relatively low place of homiletics in the priorities of theological faculties, a common concern among homileticians. They also discussed the remarkable growth of the Catholic Homiletic Society and Donald Macleod's dream of forming a similar group.

Macleod and Thompson met again at lunch in the Nassau Inn in Princeton on August 19 where they discussed once again the possibility of forming an organization of Protestant homiletics professors and the concern shown at Fort Worth by Randolph. The action to form the organization came soon afterward with an invitation by Macleod. He invited both Randolph and Thompson to a meeting on February 19, 1965 to make the final decision to begin the organization, to set a date, to gather a mailing list and to set up a program. On that date the Academy actually began its life.

On March 28 letters of invitation were sent for an "organizational meeting to form a Protestant Homiletics Society" at Princeton seminary. The invitation read as follows: "The first and organizational meeting of a Protestant Homiletics Society will meet on the campus of Princeton Theological Seminary on June 11, 1965, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The program, which is in the process of being arranged, will consist of a paper on "Empirical Research in Preaching," open discussion, and organizational plans. The meeting will be held in the School for Continuing Education (12 Library Place). Any persons requiring overnight accommodation may be housed in the same building (\$1.50 per night). Registration cards will be mailed out in May." It was signed by Macleod, Thompson and Randolph. Added to the announced program was a paper by David Randolph, "Preaching and the New Hermeneutic" and worship led by Robert Duke of Lancaster Theological Seminary.

Both papers broke new ground, a foretaste of what the Academy would do in the next quarter-century as it added significantly to the store of homiletical knowledge. Thompson's paper described and evaluated a number of recent and current field studies, such as measuring congregational responses to preaching, rare and somewhat primitive studies in those pre-D.Min. days. He called for careful empirical research to help counter the often impressionistic and anecdotal approach common in homiletical literature until then. Randolph sought to open up a new possibility for preaching as a full partner in the theological community's revolutionary struggle for civil rights. His homiletical manifesto called for a New Homiletic which "in league with all the theological disciplines would launch an offensive to establish, clarify and advance the truth which has once again come to light in our time." When this paper appeared in revised form in his 1969 book *The Renewal of Preaching*, the Foreword contained the first reference in a book to the Academy: "My colleagues in the American Academy of Homiletics heard the basis of this approach in lecture form and offered helpful comment and criticism which I appreciate."

While 14 persons attended that first meeting, 30 professors from 21 seminaries were counted as charter members.

The gathering was an immense success; the papers generated considerable discussion and the warmth of fellowship was almost palpable. Everyone present affirmed the need for the organization and the first steps it had taken. The founding troika was asked to form a committee to plan for a meeting in 1966. By consensus Robert Duke, Edmund Steimle of Union Theological Seminary (NY) and John Skoglund of Colgate Rochester Divinity School rounded out the ad hoc planning committee.

They met briefly immediately after the June gathering and again at Princeton on December 18. Their first decision was to adopt a name, "The American Academy of Homiletics," both to avoid the exclusivity of the Protestant label and to place the organization on a par with the learned academies of other theological disciplines. For the 1966 meeting, September 9-10, they assigned Robert Duke a paper that would face a primary concern of the profession, "The Integrity of Homiletics at the Theological Table." John Skoglund was to bring insights on *aggornamento*, the New Theology and homiletics, a topic growing out of his recent sabbatical in Europe. Robert Luccock of Boston University School of Theology was to lead the worship. In addition, sessions were scheduled for critiquing tapes of contemporary preaching and for shop talk on methodology. The organizational shape of the academy was also decided at that meeting: chairman, vice-chairman, each for one-year terms, and secretary-treasurer for a three-year term. Inflation took the price of overnight lodging to \$2.00.

The sessions on critiquing tapes and shop talk did not occur, but the papers drew applause from the considerably larger number of attendees than the year before. The professors carried on their own shop talk in the corridors and into late night sessions at the Nassau Inn, and elected their first officers: Donald Macleod, president (changed from chairman); David Randolph, vice-president; and William Thompson, secretary-treasurer.

### **The Early Years**

News accounts of this growing group reached the religious press, and word-of-mouth promotion helped to bring it to the attention of the church at large and theological community in particular. Its most significant outreach was the inclusion of its papers in the Princeton Seminary Bulletin whose editor was, not surprisingly, Donald Macleod. It was in 1967 that the first papers from Academy programs appeared in print and they continued in subsequent years.

The third meeting in 1967 had been moved to December 15-16 to avoid the schedule conflicts around the opening of the academic year. Robert Luccock read the first paper, "Preaching and the Contemporary Culture," and Richard Caemmerer of Concordia Theological Seminary the second, "Theology of Preaching." The group discussed but left open the question of geographical bounds of membership and the inclusion of

Roman Catholics. Another unresolved issue was the inclusion of professors of speech, some of whom were also teaching homiletics or participating in team-taught homiletics classes.

David Randolph was elected president and Robert Luccock vice-president. The Academy determined to take responsibility for mailing and other expenses personally borne to this point by Donald Macleod, and set up dues of \$5.00.

Seward Hiltner of Princeton and John Ward of Boston University School of Theology were chosen to present the papers for the 1968 gathering, held December 13-14. Hiltner spoke on "The Image of Preaching" and Ward on "Proclamation as Response." The Friday evening meeting was led by Donald Macleod around the theme, "The Teaching of Homiletics." Edmund Steimle was elected president.

The Academy attendance had grown to about 30 by the fourth meeting on December 5-6, 1969. The program grew to three papers—by Daniel Migliore of the Princeton theological faculty, Daniel Wessler of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary and W. Robert Martin of the Fund for Theological Education.

The scope of membership became the subject of considerable discussion. The Academy adopted a motion of Ronald Sleeth of the Perkins School of Theology that membership be opened to Roman Catholic homileticians and that invitations to membership be sent to eligible persons in the western half of the country. A registration fee of \$5.25 covered lodging and the Friday evening dinner. A change in the by-laws separated the office of secretary-treasurer into two. William Thompson was elected to a second three-year term as treasurer and Donald Macleod to a three-year term as secretary, an office he held for thirteen years. Of Macleod's contribution to the early years of the Academy's life, Randolph writes, "His sense of the integrity of preaching, his dedication to the discipline of homiletics and his gracious hospitality were indispensable."

The 1970 meeting, December 4-5, drew 34 members to a program that featured Morris Niedenthal of the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago and Charles Rice of Drew. The Academy elected Robert Duke as president.

### **The Breaking of New Ground**

The Academy's first Roman Catholic member joined in 1971, Fidelis C. Goodman of Maryknoll Seminary in New York. That year's program would place the first Roman Catholic speaker on the Academy's program, Frank E. X. Dance, a former seminarian and Professor of Communication at the University of Denver.

Other new ground was broken in 1971 with a paper on black preaching by John A. Blackwell, Instructor in Black Studies at Lancaster Theological Seminary.

It was also in 1971 that the Academy determined to sponsor an International Congress on Preaching. Members unanimously adopted the proposal by David Randolph who had left Drew to become Assistant General Secretary of the Board of Evangelism of the United Methodist Church: "Be it resolved that the Academy expand one of its annual sessions into a Consultation of Homiletics and related disciplines. The Consultation should be international in its concerns, major in the stature of its leadership, and open in at least some sessions to parish ministers and theological students."

A committee of Randolph, Donald Macleod, Ronald Sleeth and Thor Hall of the Divinity School at Duke University was appointed to explore the possibility of funding such a gathering. Initial meetings suggested that the consultation might be held in 1973, but the major denominations were sponsoring a nationwide evangelism effort that year, Key 73, and the committee began to focus on 1974.

The 1972 meeting, December 1-2, was planned by President Ronald Sleeth, with a discussion beginning on Thursday evening on the implications for homiletics of the new Doctor of Ministry degree being offered by a few seminaries. Fred Craddock of Phillips University was that year's sole presenter, speaking on the hermeneutical and homiletical problems in New Testament studies.

The Friday evening business meeting gave way in 1972 to an audio-visual program presented by John Ward and John Geaney, a Paulist father from St. Paul's College in Baltimore. William Thompson was elected president.

The year 1973 was a year of attempting to raise funds for the international consultation. The goal was \$15,000. A date had been set for June of 1975 and an elaborate program laid out. The vision was to have not only some of America's outstanding preachers but also those from Canada and England as well. Donald Macleod took the fundraising lead and received pledges from both Princeton seminary and the United Methodist Board of Evangelism. The foundation goal of \$10,000 was thought to be realistic, but the proposal was turned down by one foundation after another.

The 1973 gathering enjoyed an outstanding set of lectures by Dr. Harrell Beck, popular Professor of Old Testament at Boston University School of Theology. Donald Chatfield of Garrett Theological Seminary was elected president.

The consultation committee continued its work throughout the year 1974 with a great deal of correspondence circulating among its members and with extensive input by Olin Ivey of Evangelical Theological Seminary, who would be elected president for 1974-75. Decisions were made to include German scholars in the program and to make a priority of issuing a book based on the papers read at the consultation. A firm decision was taken at the committee session that followed the 1974 Academy meeting to postpone the consultation to 1976 and to call it the 1976 "Bicentennial Consultation on Christian Preaching."

The 1974 meeting, chaired by President Donald Chatfield, was graced by the presence of two prominent New York preachers, David H. C. Read of the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church and Ernest Campbell of the Riverside Church. Chatfield's presidential address reported an extensive survey of Academy members as to their educational preparation, teaching methods, textbooks used and other matters pertinent to the status of the homiletical profession.

The year 1975 marked the 10th anniversary of the Academy. At the request of the consultation committee the program was designed to be a prelude to the 1976 consultation. Therefore, a number of parish pastors were invited, along with representatives of major religious publishing firms. Princeton President James I. McCord keynoted the 1975 meeting with his address, "The Theologian in the Pulpit," and responded to papers presented by three members. Dr. Erik Routley, English hymnologist who was teaching at the Westminster Choir College, inaugurated a new tradition of somewhat lighter Friday evening programs with a delightful presentation on hymns and hymn singing.

The year 1975 brought to the meeting Barry Evans of the College of Preachers in Washington, D.C., a continuing education center of the Episcopal Church. He came with the proposal that the Academy help sponsor and fund a new publication, "Homiletic," an annual review of books, articles and dissertations on homiletics and related disciplines. The Religious Speech Communication Association was to be the third sponsor. The Academy voted to participate in the venture and appointed William Thompson to be its representative on the publication's governing board.

By 1976 it had become apparent that the consultation would not be held. Every possible source of funding had been approached, but with no success.

The 1976 meeting had its special moments, however, for the 43 professors, 15 student observers and guest pastors who attended. Clyde Fant, a Southern Baptist pastor, former seminary homiletics professor and author of several books on preaching, brought two addresses and responded to papers presented to members. William Brower of the Princeton seminary speech faculty followed the Friday evening banquet with an entertaining and inspirational program of poetry. A new constitution was presented to reflect the inevitable changes that come with a growing and maturing organization, including its renaming without the limiting word, "American."

President Donald Wardlaw, professor at McCormick Theological Seminary, brought a "State of the Academy" address, reviewing the Academy's first ten years and setting some directions for the future. He called it "A Vision of Our Second Decade Together." The first ten years, he said, found the homiletical community defending itself against charges of the irrelevancy of the pulpit. His message was that the time has come for the profession to be more clear about what homiletics is, to develop more respectability within seminary faculties and to begin working on

models for continuing education in preaching that presupposes a career-long process.

The 1977 meeting represented a considerable change in format. Don Chatfield and Don Wardlaw took responsibility for the first meeting led entirely by Academy members, with no "name" speaker on the program. Four sessions on the teaching of preaching were set up, with two or three members contributing brief papers to each--a total of 11 papers. The papers were sent to members in advance, with the expectation that they would be discussed in small groups. The papers were then bound and published as Issues in the Teaching of Preaching. That project was the occasion for the first female participation in the Academy's life, with a paper written by Ardith Hayes of McCormick Theological Seminary. James Cox of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary served as president for the 1976-77 term.

### **The Second Half of the Academy's Life**

That shift in program format was one of the two changing factors that set the tone for the Academy's meetings from that year forward. Each year brought to the Academy's meetings fresh and stimulating papers, many of which would find their way into books and articles. All of them enriched in various ways the lectures, critiques and conversations that went on in seminary classes and coffee shops.

The other factor was the growing concern that routinely holding the meetings at Princeton was inhibiting the growth of and impact of the Academy by keeping away professors with a great distance to travel and a modest or non-existent travel allowance. Also, many members wanted to broaden their experience by visiting seminaries in other locations and traditions. When the executive committee began receiving invitations from several members to hold meetings in their cities or at their seminaries, the die was cast.

The breakaway from Princeton came in 1979 with the meeting scheduled for the Chicago area, at the Cabrini Contact Center near O'Hare Airport. The intent of the planners was to return every other year to Princeton, and so the 1980 meeting returned there. But the Princeton tradition had been broken, and the meetings began to range all over the country, including a joint meeting with the North American Academy of Liturgy in Atlanta in January, 1982 (replacing the meeting that would ordinarily have met in November or December, 1981). The Academy returned to Princeton in 1982 with Frederick Buechner as preacher and reader of his work, with several pedagogical discussion sessions and with a testimonial dinner in honor of Donald Macleod who was retiring from Princeton seminary. The Academy reconvened at Princeton in 1984, but not again until its silver anniversary in 1990.

About the silver anniversary, David Randolph writes, "I remember well the struggle to hold the international consultation on preaching. But I am

struck by the way in which the 25th anniversary program with its emphasis on globalization and its broad cross-section of speakers in some ways fulfills that earlier vision. The need to develop homiletics globally, to become more inclusive as a community while becoming more incisive as a discipline, to find a more productive interface between the Academy and the parish, to unleash the revolutionary power of preaching in the world: these are not merely items from the past but concerns for our continuing agenda."

The programs and papers of the second half of the Academy's life are a matter of record, with copies of the papers in theological seminary and members' libraries throughout the country. Included in the following pages is a list of the Academy's presidents and of the programs from 1977 onward, reproduced here to round out the record of the Academy's 25 years. Princeton's Speer Library will house this brief history in its new archives section, along with correspondence, the annual collection of papers and other documents that may help future historians to understand what all of us did in our generation to enrich and forward the preaching of the Word of God.

(Many thanks to Donald Macleod whose files yielded much of the information in this paper and to William H. Levering whose 1986 Ph.D. dissertation at Temple University, "The Development of the Field of Homiletics in America from 1960-1983," filled in the gaps in my memory.)

## II. The Academy's Presidents

1965-66	Donald Macleod, chairman; Randolph, Thompson
1966-67	Donald Macleod
1967-68	David J. Randolph
1968-69	Robert Luccock
1969-70	Edmund Steimle (deceased)
1970-71	Robert W. Duke
1971-72	Ronald E. Sleeth (deceased)
1972-73	William D. Thompson
1973-74	Donald Chatfield
1974-75	Olin Ivey
1975-76	Don Wardlaw
1976-77	James W. Cox
1977-78	Morris Niedenthal
1978-79	LeRoy Kennel
1979-80	Wade Huie
1980-81	Charles Rice
1981-82	Richard Thulin
1982-83	Hunter Beckelhymer
1983-84	Deane Kemper
1984-85	Gwyn Walters
1985-86	Arthur Van Seters
1986-87	Thomas B. Troeger
1987-88	Joan Delaplane
1988-89	Thomas Long
1989-90	Wayne Shaw
1990-91	Edwina Hunter

The following served multiple terms:

Secretary/Treasurer: William D. Thompson (7 years)

Treasurer: Wayne Shaw (9 years)

Secretary: Donald Macleod (13 years)

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## IV. The Academy's Hymn

### *THE ROCKS WOULD SHOUT IF WE KEPT STILL*

*The rocks would shout if we kept still  
and failed to preach the word.  
It is the Lord's insistent will  
the truth be told and heard.*

*We're called to speak disturbing things  
though wealth and power conspire  
to hush the messenger who brings  
God's purifying fire.*

*The rocks would shout . . .*

*We're called to bear with grace the scorn  
of hearts so often bruised  
that when we tell of hope reborn  
they fear to trust the news.*

*The rocks would shout . . .*

*We're called to preach by Jesus Christ  
who with the Spirit's breath  
will make our fragile words suffice  
to raise new life from death.*

*The rocks would shout . . .*

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C. M. with a refrain in C. M.

The Academy owes a debt of gratitude to Thomas Troeger and Carol Doran for their many years of leading worship for us. The words and music to the hymn, "The Rocks Would Shout If We Kept Still," were written by them at my request for the 25th anniversary. Thank you for a beautiful and memorable contribution to our celebration.

Wayne E. Shaw