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5

Interpreting Texts: Iowa City, 1951-1954

The DeKalb experience was an influential one and I grew in many ways. In June of 1951, Dorothy and I were married. I also had decided to attend the University of Iowa in order to take a masters degree in speech. Sometime in my first year at Northern, I finally decided to forgo an agricultural major at Missouri. My interest in science lingered, however. I had worked for DeKalb Agricultural Association, which grew hybrid corn and hybrid chickens. Genetics, my speciality, was involved. The company employed a man with a Ph.D. in genetics. I talked with some of the men on the construction crew who knew him. They suggested that I talk with him, which I did, two or three times. He encouraged me to study genetics, but I finally decided on a new life goal.

I did not put aside the prospect that I might be a career preacher, but several of my close friends discouraged me. They said I could not really preach consistently good sermons, and I tended to agree with them. One of these was my roommate from

Northern, Franklin Schmidt. For him, James Warren was the ideal preacher, even though Franklin was far more theologically conservative than Warren. I decided that our future demanded better-trained preachers than those of my generation, and perhaps I could make a greater contribution by training preachers than by preaching. The Christian colleges were developing graduate programs in Bible at that time: Pepperdine led the way, launching a program in 1944. Harding and Abilene Christian entered the discussion stages and, within two years, each had commenced such a program. Since I had majored in speech I decided that I wanted to teach homiletics or preaching in one of the schools, preferably Harding. Somewhere I either heard or read that W. B. West, Jr.—then of Pepperdine, but who was to head the Harding program—stated that the person he would like to employ to teach homiletics would possess a B.D. and a Ph.D. in speech. As I anticipated what to do upon graduation from Northern, I decided that I either wanted to start work on a B.D. at McCormick, or begin a masters program in speech. Since I was getting married, I looked for a preacher's job, both for the experience and income.

Warren kept checking for me in the Chicago area, but no opening appeared. Some, including James Willeford, questioned whether I should go to McCormick. I discovered that the church in Iowa City was looking for a preacher, but they didn't want to pay anything on his salary, since they were saving for a church building. Willeford said he would help me raise money. I went to Iowa City to look over the situation, preach, and talk to the speech department at the University of Iowa. It seemed that it would work out. Iowa was appealing because Margaret Wood had taken her doctorate there and my first

speech teacher at Harding, Bill Skillman, received an Iowa Master of Fine Arts. Also I knew that Fred Barton and Rex Kyker, who taught at Abilene Christian, went there. Iowa was reported to be one of the top speech schools in the nation. The interviews went well. I agreed that we would move there in late August. James Willeford managed to raise a salary of thirty dollars per week from three members of the church in Haleyville, Alabama. That was not much, but Dorothy planned to work. I could continue to seek employment in summers, if need be.

We arrived in Iowa City in late August 1951. It seemed like a great opportunity to study speech in a premier graduate program and preach for a body of believers in a university community. I had certain long-range goals in mind, but scant actual agenda as how to prepare for teaching preachers to preach, other than obtaining a B.D. (now an M.Div.) and a Ph.D. in speech. Since I planned to preach during my graduate studies, it seemed preferable to obtain the B.D. first. It didn't end up that way. We weren't too concerned, since in our view, if the Lord wanted me to train preachers he would open up appropriate doors. The activities of these years did little to evoke new patterns of biblical interpretation, but in many ways they widened and deepened patterns already established, and laid foundations for developments to come. The focus of my education made it more and more clear to me that documents must be understood in the light of their contexts.

The Church in Iowa City

The Church of Christ was launched in Iowa City in the late 1930s through the efforts of graduate

182 Interpreting Texts: Iowa City, 1951-1954

students—mostly those in speech, theatre, and history. It flourished, especially after World War II, because of returning veterans, and usually averaged forty to fifty members. What was most remarkable, however, was not so much the number, but the percentage of them who were committed, outstanding leaders. These included such persons as Fred Barton, later dean of the Graduate School at Abilene Christian University, Elton Abernathy, longtime chair of the Speech Department at Southwest Texas State in San Marcos, Thomas Rouse of the history faculty at Texas Tech in Lubbock, and Olin Petty, professor of education at Duke University. All of these men were married with families, except Petty. The membership did not include anyone employed at the university. In addition, there were six or seven families who were permanent residents of Iowa City. None of these last contributed much to the public leadership of the congregation, but they functioned in other ways. An older woman whose husband was not a member served as the treasurer. The family which provided the long-range stability was the Doyle O'Rear family. When we first arrived, Doyle drove for Watkins Trucking, then later started his own trucking firm. This meant that he was not always there on Sunday. Still, his wife Marie and their children were regular attendees, as was also her sister Lucille, when she was not at work as a waitress. Doyle's brother's family attended. This extended family had moved to Iowa City from near Kansas City, Missouri. Ethel Williams, originally from Indiana, who had twin daughters, attended faithfully, but her husband was not a member. When we arrived, the congregation was in something of a down time because there were not many graduate students, but it soon started to pick up again. The

congregation in Iowa City was much more diverse in education, employment and income than that in DeKalb.

In September 1951, the Iowa City congregation met for classes and a worship service only on Sunday morning, in a relatively small room in the Iowa Memorial Union. We paid a nominal fee to cover janitorial services. It was clean and light, and was adequately located for university students without being inconvenient for others, since parking was available. After a few weeks I encouraged the congregation to hold night services. Some members thought it was a good idea and some didn't. It required considerable negotiating with the Memorial Union administrator to secure night privileges. We had to agree that if another university organization required the room we would relinquish it for that specific night.

Hermeneutics: an Inventory

It may be helpful here to sum up my perspectives on hermeneutics in the fall of 1951. My outlooks admittedly were eclectic, with certain incongruities, but held together by the variety of materials found in the Scriptures. Most ingrained was that from my earliest experiences: I still believed that the Bible was basically a book of factual insights on God and his expectations for humans, and that its interpretation was best secured by detailed analysis of discrete—separate, self-contained—entities. At this stage I thought little about the narrative or story features of the Scriptures. I agreed that Christians are nurtured best by the New Testament rather than the Old, because they live under the authority of the New Testament. Because

of the influence of Andy Ritchie, I had enlarged my vision to include the whole New Testament canon. In theory, this embraced even the book of Revelation, but not in practice (I have always been schizophrenic about studying Revelation in the church and have never taught it there, though I have covered it as one of various books in a graduate course in New Testament theology). My emphasis on the Gospels was new. I considered that commands, examples, and necessary inferences were helpful in determining specific actions of the church but I did not preach many sermons in which I referred specifically to the triad. I had increased the topics for discussion in the churches from those having to do with puzzles and controversies, the plan of salvation, the first principles, and the identity of the church to include commitment of the heart, personal evangelism, devotion, prayer time, and concern for orphans and the needy. This meant that in some measure, the Psalms and prophets had entered my hermeneutic parameters. I justified including these Old Testament materials on the grounds that they were all contained in Scriptures and we must cover more of the message in Scripture, not less. I therefore held to a hermeneutic which encompassed understanding, application, and inner commitment. To understand Scripture, I increasingly came to believe, required knowing as much as possible about the languages, historical backgrounds, and literary features—in that order—of the books of the Bible. But I had also become more and more convinced that the personality, image, and adaptability of the proclaimer contributed immeasurably to biblical interpretation or hermeneutics.

I experienced the most growth in regard to grammatico-historical-literary interpretation and the

image of the proclaimer while in Iowa City. An appreciation of the former requires an in-depth look at my graduate education at the University of Iowa. I will therefore take that up later, after some comments on the significance of the image of the proclaimer.

The Image of the Preacher

In a large sense, hermeneutics constitutes a theory about how one person explains or communicates a text to another. Much hermeneutical theory has focused on the text and the preunderstanding of the person doing the explicating. But the preunderstanding of the hearer may be as important or more so than that of the proclaimer.

Through my studies in speech I became convinced that optimal communication occurs when a mutual bond of understanding forms between the speaker and the audience. At Northern Illinois, my debate colleague and I discovered early on that winning debates had as much to do with knowing the qualities expected by the judge and adapting to them as it did with actual forensic skill and knowledge. In most tournaments, we knew after having received the schedule who our judges would be. If a prospective judge had critiqued us before, we tried to take into account her evaluations. If we did not know anything about a specific judge we asked around among the debaters about his preferences. We were not always capable of adapting enough to please each judge, but the attempt improved our ratings and, in some cases, won the debate.

Through my preaching and debating experience I was quite convinced that to be a dynamic interpreter of God's word required analysis of and adaptation to those with whom I communicated. That meant that I had to get to know them, to become a part of their lives. The initiative for this process, in my opinion, was on my shoulders. I knew if I chose to preach in upper midwest regions to better educated and more cosmopolitan persons than those with whom I grew up, that certain changes were required. A critical component of communication is the role, image, or personal characteristics of the speaker as perceived by the auditors. Ancient rhetoricians, such as Aristotle, discussed the speaker's image under the category of *ethos*, or character. *Ethos* constituted one of the three forms of proof, along with *logos* and *pathos*.

I was therefore determined to learn as much as feasible about the members of the congregation in Iowa City in order to advance the prospect that my explanations of Scripture could be understood, appropriated, and incorporated into their lives. It was also important, in my opinion, that my approaches be compatible with their outlooks and preferences, and these could best be learned through personal interaction. I also thought it important that they get to know Dorothy and me, to make it clear that we had our problems too, so that my exhortations would not come off as holier-than-thou. We also hoped, through personal contacts, that people would come to believe that we liked them personally even though we might differ with some of their actions and decisions.

I concluded early on that preaching in Iowa City would be more demanding than in DeKalb, both because of the diversity in the congregation,

and the higher expectations for content. In DeKalb I could essentially be a rural Missourian and please most of the congregation. My roommate and fellow DeKalb member Franklin Schmidt, who grew up in Chicago and enjoyed a degree of sophistication, took me on as a special project, dedicating himself to eradicating my country ways and Ozark forms of expression. He did this in an acceptable, often witty manner. After Dorothy and I were married, she carried on the personal improvement project by pointing out southern Missourianisms which might not make sense in Iowa. But she, too, was a rural person, having spent most of her life on dairy farms in southern Wisconsin.

We had two ways to get to know people. First, we visited in their homes. I had done that in DeKalb, but not altogether systematically. I usually went if someone said, "come see us." That expression is typical in rural communities of the border states. It didn't mean that people really expected you to visit, but if you were so inclined, you were welcomed. The invitation was unconditional; no day or time was specified. So, in DeKalb, I would often drop by a week or two after the informal invitation was offered. At that time I was unmarried and not in a position to make reciprocal invitations, except to single males, since seven of us shared three sleeping rooms. But now I was married to a wife who liked to cook and invite others over to eat.

My first thinking about a ministry of personal, private contacts came through purchasing a book about Richard Baxter, a sixteenth-century English Puritan minister. I think I may have read the book before moving to Iowa City, but not carefully. Now I read it meticulously, with great interest. I had no model for a ministry of systematic visitation. Our

preachers in southern Missouri spent their time evangelizing during meetings, or launching new congregations by preaching on Sunday afternoon or earlier Sunday morning while the class(es) were going on at the home congregation. They did little visiting among the members, though they went to a home if invited for a meal. To visit members was presumed to be a pastoral duty, and we wanted to separate the role of a preacher from that of a pastor. The pastor was the same as an elder, so if anyone was expected to visit members in their home it was the elders. But the elders did little visiting. We indeed were not involved in the "pastor system" whoever the pastor(s) might be!

Pastoral visits in homes has a long history in American Christianity, but in the twentieth century has become something of a lost art. Based on the model provided by Baxter and other Puritans, early American Puritan preachers, such as Cotton Mather, as recorded in his autobiography, made periodic visits at each member's home. The visit was far from a social one. Its specific purpose was to investigate the spiritual climate of the home and the fervor of each member. Encouragement was offered, but far more often the outcome was a reprimand and a charge to devote more time to prayer and Scripture reading, or whatever was needed. Often, matters of non-attendance, drunkenness, mistreatment of animals, or complaints from the neighbors entered the conversations. It would seem that the visits were an occasion to be dreaded rather than cherished. I wanted to avoid the harshness of the Puritan visits, but I wasn't interested in a purely social call, either. The first visit was mostly to get to know the members and let them ask any questions they might have. In subsequent visits I raised certain matters which

pertained to the life of the congregation, such as the biblical materials studied, the sermon topics, classes for children, night services, and whether, in their opinion, it was feasible to buy lots for a building. In this manner I got to know the outlooks of the members and when I applied points in the sermon or called for involvement, I could speak in specifics, though in such a manner as to avoid embarrassment. Though I still fell short in certain communication skills, such as standard vocal intonations and dynamic delivery, I achieved a measure of success in attaining a credible image with the members. They became increasingly open to whatever recommendations I made. My hermeneutic principle—interpreting the Word through concrete insight into the lives of members—apparently achieved its ends. As to teaching and preaching responsibilities, I had it easy, compared with DeKalb, since one of the members, Olin Petty, an education professor at Duke who was finishing his doctorate at Iowa, taught the Sunday morning class for a time. Further, we did not have night services then. Graduate student members continued to teach the class most of the time I was there. When we started night services I occasionally was able to persuade one of the graduate students to preach.

My own approach followed much the same pattern as in DeKalb: topical sermons in the morning and expository sermons at night. I don't recall that I improved much on the quality of the commentaries I consulted. The University of Iowa had a school of religion which was founded in 1924, one of the first schools of religion in a state university. At that time it was totally funded by private gifts. The curriculum was in transition because of the appointment of a new director, Robert Michaelson. During my time,

no graduate courses were offered in Scripture. The university library possessed a fairly good religious collection, compared with Northern Illinois. Some commentaries were available, but I don't recall checking many out. I did not know much about biblical scholars and their contributions, so I had little background for evaluating commentaries. I did know about the International Critical Commentaries and used them some.

The Iowa City congregation had saved money to buy lots for a building. There was not enough to buy near the University, at least in an area where a church would be permitted to build. Toward spring I noticed an advertisement in the Iowa City paper for two lots on the east side of town. They could be purchased for the amount of money the church had saved, with some left over. The major drawback was that the train tracks were at the rear of the property, but this was also a blessing, since that made them less desirable for residential purposes. Before we purchased the lots we checked with the city to see whether we would be permitted to build a church building. Some of the neighbors had qualms, but the city decided we could go ahead, and we purchased the lots. I proposed that we start with the basement. Encouraged by James Willeford and Abe Lincoln, who had worked with James Walter Nichols in Cedar Rapids, I told the congregation that I would make a trip to Tennessee, Alabama, Arkansas, Texas, and Oklahoma, in order to raise funds. I was not eminently successful at fundraising, but I secured enough so that we could proceed with the basement. The members did the work, along with a few persons from the congregation in Cedar Rapids who were professional home builders. Albert Gee and a member from Toddville essentially donated the

equipment and expertise to excavate and landscape. In late fall, 1953, we met in our own building, which was quite adequate in size. We typically had forty to fifty in attendance, having grown from about twenty when we arrived because of new graduate student families as well as a few residential members who had moved into the area.

The University of Iowa

Graduate studies at the university contributed to my growing insights into the interpretation of documents, but not so much specifically of the Scriptures. I learned about Christendom—its history and the contemporary theological scene. All of these contributed directly and indirectly to my preaching and teaching. The work on my dissertation, "A Rhetorical Analysis of Representative Homilies of Basil the Great" and the courses I took contributing to it, raised a number of crucial issues regarding hermeneutics. Basil was a representative of the Antiochian school of interpretation, as contrasted with that of Origen.

The first semester, I took ten hours at the University, which kept me busy. I had made it at Northern without in-depth study, though I put in many hours on writing projects and keeping a log. We called it "busy work." Now, though, I was determined to learn as much as I could. My courses were "The History and Criticism of American Oratory," with A. Craig Baird, the grand old man of Iowa speech studies whose students occupied most of the major positions in state universities, "The History of Rhetorical Theory" under Orville Hitchcock, and "Experimental Phonetics" with James Curtis.

Graduate work in speech began in America in the early part of this century. Masters of Arts in Public Speaking were granted at the University of Iowa in 1902, 1903, and 1904, but most of the graduate degrees were given after 1920.¹ The University of Wisconsin speech department granted its first M.A. in 1920 and the first Ph.D. in speech in 1922. The first speech Ph.D. granted at Cornell University was in 1926. The first Ph.D.'s at Iowa were granted in 1930.

The method of A. Craig Baird is worthy of special attention. A. Craig Baird was one of the founders of the modern American speech studies which were launched at the turn of the century. Some of the professors were mostly interested in delivery—"elocution" as some called it. Baird, however, was interested in ideas, arguments, and invention. He considered persons only interested in performance and execution as neo-sophists.² Baird insisted that the speech critic focus as much on historical and social settings as on form and argument. Speech criticism began with the authentication of the text, which meant an exploration of all the channels available which might provide insight into the history of the specific document under consideration. The major undertaking of the critic, however, was to leave no stone unturned in the effort to reconstruct the social, political, and theological context in which the speech took place. This meant that the critic had to be, if possible, a better historian in regard to this specific speech than the historians themselves. Baird's book, co-authored with Lester Thonssen, was the bible of American speech criticism for almost three decades.³

Rhetorical criticism is today a rapidly-accelerating form of biblical criticism, but little

interest in it existed in those days, either among speech or biblical scholars. biblical scholars, under the influence of various forms of historical and literary criticism, were dedicated to the same reconstruction that Baird proposed, though they tended to be little concerned with rhetorical proofs and arrangement. At various times in history, however, rhetorical analysis, hermeneutics, and biblical criticism have been overlapping, if not identical, disciplines. As representative historical samples, one may mention Philip Melancthon (1497-1560) who published *Institutiones rhetoricae* (1521) and *Elementa rhetorices* (1531)⁴, and J. C. G. Ernesti, especially his *Initia rhetorica*, and his lexica of technical rhetorical terms, in both Greek and Latin.⁵ Some of the studies at the turn of this century were by Johannes Weiss, E. W. Bullinger, Eduard König, Rudolf Bultmann, and Eduard Norden.⁶ Now, at the end of the twentieth century, another surge of interest in rhetoric by biblical critics has emerged.

The next year, Dr. Baird was away from Iowa City as a visiting professor at Southern Illinois University. I therefore approached Dr. Hitchcock about doing a thesis involving questionnaires and interviews, seeking to discover how churchmen in Iowa City and Cedar Rapids prepared sermons. In the end, thirty-seven ministers were interviewed. The results were somewhat predictable, though different religious traditions approached the matter differently. Presbyterian ministers, for example, usually wrote their sermons in full, while ministers of the free church traditions only prepared outlines. Most ministers did considerable reading for preparation, especially in commentaries. My thesis was completed in three months and I was awarded the M.A. in June 1953.

The question at stake, once it was clear that the M.A. was forthcoming, was where to attend seminary. I had learned from Dr. Baird that Princeton Theological probably had the best program in homiletics, so I set out to determine if it was possible to work on a B.D. there. I thought perhaps I could teach speech in a high school near Princeton and attend the seminary part-time. The seminary informed me, however, that it would not be possible to work on a B.D. part-time. I read in the *Christian Chronicle* about a new congregation being planted in the first major suburban planned community, Levittown, Pennsylvania. At spring break, Dorothy and I decided to make a quick trip to the Princeton area to see if we could find a church situation in which I could work. We had hoped to be part of a team for the new congregation in Levittown, but the minister made clear that he was not interested in a team. We returned to Iowa City without any hopes of a position which would enable us to go to Princeton.

When we arrived back in Iowa City with the news that it didn't work out at Princeton, Dr. Hitchcock soon informed me that if I was interested I would be offered a graduate assistantship teaching "Communication Skills." We didn't have to think it over too long: the congregation was glad for us to preach for another year, the income from teaching and preaching was at least adequate for our growing family, and in another year and a summer I could complete most of the course work for the Ph.D., since I had taken extra courses in working for the masters. The Communication Skills course was somewhat unique at the University of Iowa.⁷ Writing, or English composition, and speech were combined into one course, which the student took for a full

year. The teachers were either from Speech or English, both full-time and graduate assistants. While I was not thrilled to teach writing, I saw this as an exciting opportunity, since there were weekly meetings of the staff to discuss and prepare upcoming tasks for the course. This was a premier program and much energy was put into it. By this time I had already taught my first university class. In the fall of 1952, one section of Public Speaking did not have a teacher. The public speaking course was taught for transfer students who had taken English composition elsewhere without the speech component. Dr. Hitchcock asked if I would teach it and I readily agreed, since the experience and extra income would both be helpful. The failure to work out something in Princeton was the second time seminary training was postponed. I was disappointed, but everything fell in place so quickly in Iowa City that little time existed for regrets. Who knew, at that stage, what God had in mind? I had trusted him to date, and the outcome had been auspicious, demonstrating to me that "God moves in a mysterious way, his wonders to perform."

Once the decision was made to stay in Iowa City, the question became what topic to propose for my Ph.D. dissertation. This was important because it would help determine what courses I should take to complete my program. Still anticipating seminary, I started taking Greek in 1952. Iowa had an excellent classics program. I took beginning Greek from the departmental chairman, Gerald Else, who had taken his doctorate at Harvard. Else, who published a major work on Aristotle's poetics, went on from Iowa to chair the department at the University of Michigan. Most of my Greek was classical, but I took one course in which we read the New Testament.

The study of Greek began to influence my interpretation of the New Testament and enabled me to understand new aspects of the commentaries. But I was careful not to drop Greek words and phrases into my sermons simply to try to make an impression, as I had heard debaters and some of my peers do. I had good teachers, and I was well aware that simply knowing Greek words and grammar did not resolve all the difficulties in translating or interpreting a text.

My earliest formal introduction to a critical approach to Scripture occurred in a course on philosophy in literature. The professor who taught philosophy in literature had theological training and was fairly knowledgeable about biblical criticism—more so than I. I remember reading Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things*, Augustine's *Confessions*, and Job. I think we read additional documents but I don't recall now what they were. I was greatly interested in Lucretius because of his view of the atomic nature of reality. I didn't agree with him at a number of points, especially in his concepts of the gods and the afterlife, but I could identify with his vision of reality because of my scientific training. I had a difficult time with the *Confessions*. This was my first foray into Platonic philosophy. It ran counter to all my background, both theologically and scientifically. I was impressed by the devotional aspects, and it was mostly this I retained and appreciated.

In some odd ways it was the study of Job which gave me the greatest cause for alarm. Professor Turnbaugh offered standard critical conclusions on certain passages which challenged my preconceived interpretations. These were passages on which I had developed some great sermons, in my view, with the help of Moody,

McCartney or Spurgeon. If Turnbaugh was correct, these were improper texts for the sermon at hand. I had a difficult time thinking he was right. I wrote him off as a far-out liberal. Still, I discussed some of the passages with him. The one I remember particularly was Job 19:25, 26: "For I know that my redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God." Turnbaugh explained that though this passage has been given a Christological interpretation in the history of Christianity—even by Handel in *The Messiah*—the author of Job probably had in mind a human who was to arrive within his lifetime as his vindicator. I could not accept this. For me, the text obviously implied a Christological interpretation and that was, therefore, the only one possible. Turnbaugh was patient to explain why the passage was viewed in this way. He did not, however, address the larger issue of whether the proper interpretation of an Old Testament text must be Christological. Isaiah 7:14, for example, is certainly employed that way by Matthew (1:23). But is double, triple or a different sort of fulfillment possible? I didn't have the framework of preunderstanding at that time which permitted admitting the possibility of multiple fulfillment which, in fact, might possibly be the biblical way to interpret certain texts. I disagreed with Turnbaugh, in person and on the exams. Turnbaugh wrote comments and gave me an acceptable grade.

While I had to work hard and put in long hours, everything was falling in place, perhaps even better than I could have hoped. I desired, like most of my fellow graduate students, to complete my course work, then secure a teaching position, so our

family would be out from under the financial pressures. The outlook at Iowa about writing dissertations was that while it might be more convenient to stay in Iowa City and get everything completed quickly, full-time teaching experience and a longer time span contributed to the maturity of the dissertation.

Early in the fall of 1953, Dr. Hitchcock and I conferred over the dissertation. I had decided that I should write on an early Greek preacher because of my interest in the history of homiletics and my course work in Greek. The field was wide open since few speech persons took Greek. Only one or two speech dissertations had been written on the early Greek fathers. Hitchcock didn't know much about the Greek fathers. An obvious person to write on was Chrysostom, but a dissertation had already been written on him. Somewhere Hitchcock had read that the most influential Greek father was Athanasius. I toyed for some time with the pros and cons of centering in on Athanasius. I thought it best to write on a father whose upbringing was well-documented. I was still intrigued with the idea of discovering the factors in a person's life and education which contributed to his ability as a speaker. After examining the fathers and their writings, I decided that Basil the Great would be the best. First, he was a man of affairs: a bishop, not simply a theologian, which always appealed to speech persons. Second, because of the letters and sermons of his brother Gregory and of his good friend Gregory Nazianzus, much could be learned about his early life and education. Third, he was rhetorically trained—which was standard—but had taught rhetoric before committing his life to the church. Various studies had been completed on Basil, but none of the sort I

envisioned. Hitchcock agreed, after consulting with Baird, that I should write on Basil. We agreed that I select the number of sermons I thought feasible to master and translate from the Greek. I finally settled on seventeen homilies. Nine of the sermons were a series on the Hexamera—Lenten sermons on Genesis. These had been translated into English. The other eight sermons were not translated into English.

Because of the Iowan conviction, which had become my own, that as much as possible needed to be learned about the context of the sermons, Dr. Hitchcock and I set out to design a course of study. First, I needed to see everything in the larger perspective, so I took Greek history and then Roman history from James Osmund, a relatively new professor who had received his doctorate at Yale. Osmund was not the most exciting lecturer, but on better days he was at least lucid. He seemed to have mastered the original documents and the secondary literature. I asked questions in class and afterward. He was not particularly outgoing, but welcomed questions. I wrote papers in both classes which provided backdrop for Basil and the fourth century A.D. These classes not only supplied insight into the world of Basil, but also to the world of the Old and New Testaments. I drew upon these backgrounds in my teaching and preaching.

Next, for an understanding of the fathers of the church, I arranged for a class in the Greek fathers—the patristics—with Professor Walsh. His approach was that I read and write. I did mostly survey, which was his suggestion. I read in two or three patrologies, then perused specific materials on certain persons such as Origen, Chrysostom, Basil, and Athanasius. This was a good exercise, but I was essentially self-educated since Walsh made few

remarks. What I knew I knew, but I was not apprised of the gaps in my knowledge, nor did I have the benefit of batting around ideas with an expert. This is what I missed the most.

In fact, all of the people with whom I worked confessed knowing little about Basil or the fourth century. To have some assistance with the Greek I took two semesters of guided study under Else in which we read Basil. He thought that only classical Greek was up to the standard, and he expressly despised the Greek of the church fathers: he thought it was bastardized. Else was an Episcopalian, which should have whetted his appetite for the fathers, but he had almost no interest in them. While we worked he was completing his book on *The Poetics*. I think that work demanded all his extra time and energy, because he was not much interested in Basil's vocabulary and did almost no checking on his own. He spent most of his time faulting my inability to identify all the grammatical forms. That was in some measure helpful, but it meant that we focused on grammar rather than what Basil meant. Else made it clear to me that I would have to struggle alone with what Basil meant; it was of little interest to him.

I also took other courses in the school of religion which helped with the theological insights. Although unavailable to me, a course in Greek philosophy would have been very helpful. It is possible that one was not taught during that year, but even if it had been I suspect it would have been off-limits, as far as Hitchcock was concerned. I therefore had to learn whatever I knew of Greek philosophy on my own. It was clear to me after reading in Basil that he drew many of his concepts from the philosophers, both by way of agreement and disagreement. I took a course in the Renaissance

and Reformation, taught by George Burkhart, a scholar of some note. His focus was on the social and political backgrounds. He was not theologically uninformed but he did not spend much time on the theological factors.

I took a course in John Calvin and Jonathan Edwards from Robert Michaelson who had just come that year from Yale to be director of the school of religion. There were two of us in class, the first two graduate students Michaelson had at Iowa. Michaelson ended his career in the same capacity at The University of California, Santa Barbara. This course certainly enhanced my understanding of Calvinistic theology, but contributed little to my work on Basil. I also took a course with Pangborn on contemporary theology. It was not that challenging for someone with suitable background, but since, as a restorationist, I knew very little about theology—contemporary or otherwise—it was an eye-opener and a good course. It was also helpful for its focus on how contemporary theologians came out on traditional topics and conclusions. This meant that many of the topics I would address in Basil were discussed. Because of the Iowa approach to rhetoric, it would be necessary for me to assess the effectiveness of Basil's ideas. One of the ways to do so—which, I decided later, was greatly flawed—was to ask how his ideas had stood the test of time. The contemporary theology course provided insight on such questions.

In 1953 and '54, several of us who had got to know each other through classes and teaching Communication Skills started meeting every morning at a coffee shop across from the speech offices. There were five: Ted Johnson who taught theatre at Western Colorado in Gunnison, Mal Sillars

who ended his career at the University of Utah as dean and sometimes chair of speech, Bob Jeffrey who, after a few years, ended up as chair of speech at the University of Texas and then dean of the school of communication, and John Ostendorf, who had been around Iowa, both as an undergraduate and graduate student. He had worked under A. Craig Baird for some years as debate coach. He went to Wisconsin State at Black River Falls, but died not long after of a heart attack. I was the odd man out, since they were all interested in politics and writing dissertations on contemporary political campaigns. Still, they had been turned on by Reinhold Niebuhr's political analysis, so they welcomed whatever insights I could offer which would help them understand Niebuhr. This meant that I had to start reading *Christian Century* and *Christianity and Crisis*. All of these colleagues were active church persons at that time. Ted was a Methodist, Jeffrey a Presbyterian, Sillars a Baptist, and Ostendorf a Roman Catholic.

We had some great conversations. That was a time of significant spiritual renewal among intellectuals. On the university campus this translated into an interest in theology. The news magazines were doing regular features on neo-orthodox theology: theologians such as Niebuhr, Tillich and Barth made the covers. Rather than being part of a persecuted minority, those interested in religion were the "in" group—as long as we could intellectualize about it. My little enclave was a great support group for one who had been an outsider during his earlier college years. I learned much from them about the current political scene which contributed to my work as a debate coach for the next five years. Because of these experiences and my

accepted expertise I approached preaching with greater confidence. A preacher with confidence in God and in himself is always a greater blessing when the word is being interpreted. These discussions also added certain content features to my preaching, but I was careful not to mix preaching with politics. In my view, I had heard that done more than I cared to at Harding.

The consequence of the Iowa experience was coming to grips with our western heritage, which is also the backdrop of Christianity. I finally obtained a classical, liberal arts education, but in graduate school. It is difficult to interpret Christianity or the Scriptures without such an education. That is not to say that Scripture speaks only to persons with this education: in its inspiration and call to obedience it speaks to every person. But it is difficult to see how some can set themselves up as official interpreters without the broad exposure to historical and literary contexts provided by such an education. It is even more difficult to understand how such persons can claim, "Pay attention to me. I have the correct understanding. Dismiss everyone else!" Such would-be authority figures have many preunderstandings of which they are likely not aware. They probably have few of the necessary tools for scrutinizing their own presuppositions and critically comparing and aligning them with biblical presuppositions. Jesus has a term for such persons: "blind guides!" They should decline the role "guide" until they acquire the needed tools. It is one thing to do the best one can with the training and light God has provided in order to answer to God for oneself. It is another to display the shingle of "God's Official Interpreter" without proper training and tools. A question put by Job needs to continually haunt all

of us: "Will you speak falsely for God, and speak deceitfully for him," (Job 13:7)?

In 1954, when I began thinking of a teaching position, I didn't cast my net wide. I wasn't being forced to move in order to survive, since I could stay on in Iowa City, preaching and teaching Communication Skills. The two salaries were not that much, but enough to get by. And since my parents now lived in Searcy, I kept up with developments at Harding. When I heard that a faculty couple, both of whom taught speech, were leaving to work on a doctorate, I wrote Evan Ulrey, the chairman, and received a letter in reply saying they would be making a decision in a month or so. I didn't really know Evan, since he was working on his doctorate at LSU when I was a student.

My parents had started talking of moving to Searcy when my sister went to Harding. Since there were four of us, they thought they might as well move to Searcy so we could attend Harding and live at home. My sister went summers and graduated in 1949, the year I moved to DeKalb. They put off the move, however, because Glenn and Owen were very active in sports at Thayer High School. Owen was an especially good basketball player, so the pressure was on to stay. His senior year, the team went to the state tournament and won two or three games before being eliminated. Finally in 1950, when Owen was a Harding freshman, they moved. We visited them once or twice a year.

Sometime after writing Ulrey, I noticed a story in the *Des Moines Register* which voiced opposition to farm subsidies. I wrote Dr. George Benson, president of Harding, sent him the article and expressed my approval. Dr. Benson was strongly opposed to large federal government aid

programs of all sorts. I had likewise grown up among people who opposed all government supports and welfare programs. We opposed Roosevelt's WPA, PWA and similar programs, because we felt they were a waste of money. Despite that, most of my relatives kept voting for Roosevelt. My insight into the Iowa farm situation led me to oppose this specific program. By this time I had come to believe, contrary to Dr. Benson's views, that the prophetic call for justice showed that some welfare programs, if administrated properly, were needed. I did not go into all my views in the letter to Benson, just those on the farm subsidy. I was not opposed to helping farmers, but this bill seemed to assist the larger farmers the most, and they were, in my assessment, the ones who least needed subsidies. Furthermore, the support system would increase consumer prices, and negatively impact markets and small farmers in third-world countries. Writing Dr. Benson helped me secure a position, but resulted in expectations on his part I didn't anticipate nor intend.

In the letter I also mentioned my interest in teaching at Harding. As a student I had talked with Benson on various occasions, and in later years had run into him when visiting Searcy. But he was not known for remembering people unless he had a specific interest in them, so there was no reason for him to remember me, though his secretary Margaret O'Bannion, who by this time was quite influential with Dr. Benson, did. A few weeks later I received a letter from Dean L. C. Sears, offering me a position with a respectable salary. I was to learn later that neither Ulrey nor Richard Walker, the other speech professor, wished to employ me, because they had someone else in mind. The offer was Benson's idea.

In late August 1954, I borrowed a small truck from Uncle Cleo for moving what little furniture and other items we possessed. Owen drove the truck from Alton, Missouri, to Iowa City. I preached my last sermon at the church. We said our goodbyes with a degree of sadness, both at church and to friends and professors at the University. We loaded our two girls in the car. Suzanne was almost two years old by this time, and Eloise, three months. We stopped in Thayer and visited grandparents and other relatives, then made our way to Searcy. We had arranged to buy a fairly new, two-bedroom house, just north of the College Church of Christ building. It cost the frightening sum of eight thousand dollars. My father was mainly responsible for our buying the house: he did not believe in paying rent if it could be avoided. He rented when he first went to Searcy, but built a new house as fast as he could. He loaned us the thousand-dollar down payment. As far as I was concerned the situation looked very good, but Dorothy was not so sure. In Iowa City we had been one hundred-fifty miles from her relatives. They visited often and we visited them. Her sister, Cleone Kiel, was a junior at Harding, which helped. But she was not sure she liked Searcy, especially the way the Harding wives dressed, and, in her opinion, the airs they put on; much too formal for her. So, she had a great deal of apprehension. It wasn't the last time her intuitions would prove well-founded.

¹ H. Clay Harshbarger, *Some Highlights of the Department of Speech & Dramatic Art* (Iowa City: The University of Iowa, 1976) 17, 18.

² Baird was a 1907 graduate of Wabash College in Indiana, a private liberal arts college of some note. From there he entered Union Theological Seminary in New York, receiving the B.D. in 1910. He studied under such scholars as Arthur Cushman McGiffert (1861-1933), who, as the result of studies in Germany, especially with Adolf Harnack (1851-1930), embraced the scientific historiography which came to the forefront both in Europe and America.

³ Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird, *Speech Criticism: The Development of Standards for Rhetorical Appraisal* (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1948).

⁴ C. J. Classen, "Paulus und die Antike Rhetorik," *ZNW*, 82 (1991) 1-32.

⁵ J. C. G. Ernesti, *Initia rhetorica* (Lipsiae: C. Fritsch, 1784), *Lexicon technologiae Graecorum rhetoricae* (Lipsiae: C. Fritsch, 1795) and *Lexicon technologiae Latinorum rhetoricae* (Lipsiae: C. Fritsch, 1797).

⁶ See Duane F. Watson, "Rhetorical Criticism," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988) 4:181, 182. Also Watson's *Invention, Arrangement and Style Rhetorical Criticism of Jude and 2 Peter*, 1-8. Johannes Weiss, "Beiträge zur Paulinischen Rhetorik," in *Theologische Studien Bernhard Weiss dargebracht* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1897) 165-247; E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898); Eduard König, *Stilistik, Rhetorik, und Poetik in Bezug auf die biblische Literatur* (Leipzig: Theodor Weicher, 1900); Rudolf Bultmann, *Der Stil der paulinischen Predigt und die kynisch-stoische Diatribe* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1910); Eduard Norden *Agnostos Theos* (Leipzig and Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1913).

⁷ Robert J. Conners, Lisa S. Ede, and Andrea A. Lunsford, *Essays on Classical Rhetoric*, 8. "The communications movement in American education began in 1944, when the first communications courses were taught at the State University of Iowa and at Michigan State University." 8.

