‘Behold and See!’: The Retrieval of Jonathan Edwards’ Homiletical Use of Imagination

Preliminary Research Proposal

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1. **Provisional Title:** ‘Behold and See!’: The Retrieval of Jonathan Edwards’ Homiletical Use of Imagination
2. **Brief Description of the Issue**

Reaching the hearts and minds of believers and unbelievers alike is the aim of every Reformed preacher. Past methods of preaching and apologetics have often emphasized rational structure and persuasive logic. Yet, what appeals today is increased patterns of sensory, imaginative information and less rationalistic information.[[1]](#footnote-1)

While some may reject calls to accommodate preaching to appeal to patterns of sensory information, the use of imagination can still be retrieved to helpful effect. Martyn Lloyd-Jones and Tim Keller, as expository preachers, have both encouraged the use of imagination within homiletics.[[2]](#footnote-2) And yet, little is taught about imagination, and little is written on imagination from within the Reformed, expository tradition.[[3]](#footnote-3)

It is interesting that both Lloyd-Jones and Keller encourage preachers to use imagination carefully, and they also encourage preachers to study the example of Jonathan Edwards for help in preaching.[[4]](#footnote-4) Thomas Troeger wonders if Edwards represents an “early instance of homiletics as the discipline of imaginative theology.”[[5]](#footnote-5) If therefore a use of imagination is encouraged, and a study of Jonathan Edwards is also encouraged, is there material within the corpus of Jonathan Edwards that would help on this issue? Some work has already been completed on Jonathan Edwards’ thoughts on imagination, as well as on the creative language within Jonathan Edwards’ homiletics.[[6]](#footnote-6) However, rather than approaching Jonathan Edwards’ sermons from a linguistic, historical or sociological perspective, this study aims to look at Edward’s use of imagination in select sermons from a homiletical, sermon construction perspective.

1. **Motivation and Significance**

This study seeks to do research for the *Homiletics* concentration of the Doctor of Theology program at Forge Theological Seminary. While the discipline of homiletics can be studied by examining the descriptive, interpretive, normative, and pragmatic tasks, this study of the homiletical imagination within Jonathan Edwards’ sermons seeks to provide normative guidance by displaying “a model of good practice from the past… with which to reform a [preacher’s] present actions.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

While the theology and philosophy of Jonathan Edwards has been well studied, his homiletics remains one of the areas least studied.[[8]](#footnote-8) While some academic work has been done on analyzing Edwards’ sermons,[[9]](#footnote-9) this proposal seeks to build on the recent work of Rachel Wheeler and Michael Keller who have described Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons as unique, creative and rhetorically important.[[10]](#footnote-10) Wheeler, in an article on Edwards’ *Original Sin,* makes the passing comment that the Stockbridge sermons “yield evidence of Edwards’s effort to tailor their form and content to suit what he perceived to be the needs of his audience.”[[11]](#footnote-11) And yet, Wheeler makes little analysis other than to describe some relatively positive sermons to the natives, and some relatively negative sermons to the townspeople. While Wheeler and Keller prove that the Stockbridge sermons were unique, this study will seek to answer the more practical how question.

As Edward’s later sermons changed in style and structure, this study should expand the field of discussion concerning Puritan and expository preaching. The research will thus serve the academy, those teaching homiletics, as well as current preachers. It will contribute to the discussion in practical theology about the use of imagination in homiletics. It may also encourage further study into the homiletics of other post-puritan preachers.

1. **Main Research Question**

“In what ways is a homiletical use of imagination evident in Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons (1752-1758)?”

Subsidiary research questions:

1. In what ways is a homiletical use of imagination evident in the structure of Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons?
2. In what ways is a homiletical use of imagination evident in the purpose of Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons?
3. In what ways is a homiletical use of imagination evident in the rhetoric of Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons?
4. In what ways is a homiletical use of imagination evident in the application of Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons?
5. **Methodology**

This project is not a complete study of the theology of the imagination. It will limit itself to the homiletical use of imagination by Jonathan Edwards. Nor is this project a complete study of Jonathan Edwards’ homiletics. It will limit itself to Edwards’ homiletical use of imagination within select Stockbridge sermons. The sermons selected for study are those based on Old Testament texts from the wisdom books and the prophets that Edwards preached to other audiences, but then also in alternative form, to the natives of Stockbridge.[[12]](#footnote-12)

This project will require significant literature review. The literature review will focus on the recent trajectories of the homiletical use of imagination, and will receive only brief evaluation.

The bulk of the study will be a retrieval study, drawing on an analysis and synthesis of select Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons and manuscripts from between 1752-1758.[[13]](#footnote-13) Primary sources will be evaluated for similarities and dissimilarities with the current understanding of Edwards’ homiletic.

Conclusions will be drawn from Edwards that could help Reformed expository preachers today.

1. **Provisional Table of Contents**
2. Introduction: Rationale for studying the imagination
3. A Description of the Recent Homiletical Use of Imagination
   1. In Structure and Format
   2. In Purpose and Aim
   3. In Rhetoric
   4. In Applications
4. The Place of Imagination in the Structure of Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons
5. The Place of Imagination in the Purpose of Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons
6. The Place of Imagination in the Rhetoric within Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons
7. The Place of Imagination in the Applications within Jonathan Edwards’ Stockbridge sermons
8. Conclusions and Discussion
9. **Brief Descriptions of Chapters**

The first chapter will outline the rationale for the study by summarizing a brief history of the religious use of imagination, as well as the necessity of continuing to study the proper use of imagination. It will include a definition of the imagination. The second chapter will describe how the imagination has been promoted within homiletics in recent years. Since various authors have various emphases and methods for use of imagination, it is understood that various trajectories will appear –along the lines of structure, purpose, rhetoric, and applications.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The following four chapters will analyze if, and possibly how, Edwards’ used imagination in his sermons. The chapters will be divided along the trajectories discovered in chapter two. Upon synthesizing the information from the sermons, some comparative analysis will happen within each topic, using other primary and secondary sources regarding Edwards’ homiletics.

The final chapter will be conclusions and insights that will answer the research question in summary.

1. **Fee Schedule**

The fees for this program are $100 monthly subscription and a $65 graduation fee. I, Gregory R. Moore, understand and consent to this fee schedule. I understand that I am responsible to maintain my monthly subscription for the entirety of my program.

1. **Time Commitment**

I am able to currently commit to 10 hours of study per week throughout the year. In addition to this, there will be blocks of weeks within a year in which I am able to focus mainly on the research study.

1. **Curriculum Vitae**

Born:

August 18, 1978 in Cleveland, Ohio, United States.

Education:

Bachelor of Arts in Bible from Grove City College (2000);

Master of Arts in Ministry from the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (2003);

Master of Arts in Systematic Theology from Liberty Theological Seminary (2005);

Master of Theology in Puritan Studies from Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary (2014).

Work:

Christian school teacher and administrator (2000-2010);

Pastoral Intern at Heritage Reformed Congregation of Grand Rapids, Michigan (2014-2017);

Pastor at Grace Free Reformed Congregation of Cleveland, Ohio (2017-present).

Assistant Editor, “Banner of Sovereign Grace Truth” (2015-2017);

Secretary, Interdenominational Psalter Revision Committee (2014-present);

Member, Ethics Committee and Inter-Church Relations Committee (2017-present).

Publications Include:

G. R. Moore. “Sinclair Ferguson: A Plain Preacher.” *Puritan Reformed Journal,* 10, no. 1 (January 2018).

G. R. Moore. “’Not Just a Rabbit’: Aspects and Implications of Martin Luther’s Response to Islam.” *Puritan Reformed Journal,* 7, no. 2 (July 2015).

G. R. Moore. “The Full Brightness and Diffused Beams of Glory: Jonathan Edwards’s Concept of Beauty and Its Relevance for Apologetics.” *Puritan Reformed Journal,* 6, no. 1 (January 2014).

1. **Provisional Bibliography**

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Guiliano, Zachary and Partridge, Cameron E. *Preaching and the Theological Imagination.* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

Henry, Peter J.M. “Shared imaginings: the understanding and role of imagination in contemporary homiletics.” Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 2009.

Kim, Barnabas Youn Soo. “The use of imagination for expository hermeneutics and homiletics.” Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014.

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On Jonathan Edwards’ Homiletic:

Cho, Jaeyoung. “A critical examination of Jonathan Edwards’s theology of preaching.” Ph.D. dissertation, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013.

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: a reader.* Edited by Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999).

Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. 26 volumes. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2006).

Hannah, John D. “The Homiletical Skill of Jonathan Edwards.” *Bibliotheca sacra,* 159 (Jan-Mar 2002): 96-107.

Howard, Leon. *The Mind of Jonathan Edwards: a reconstructed text.* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1963).

Keller, Michael Stephen. *Experiencing God in Words: Rhetoric, Logic, Imaginative Language, and Emotion in Jonathan Edwards’ Sermons. A Computational Analysis.* Ph.D. dissertation, Free University, 2018.

Kimnach, Wilson H. “General Introduction to the Sermons: Jonathan Edwards’ Art of Prophesying.” In Kimnath, Wilson H. ed., *Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723,* The Works of Jonathan Edwards, volume 10. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992): 1-258.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_. “The Brazen Trumpet: Jonathan Edwards’s Conception of the Sermon.” In *Jonathan Edwards: His life and influence,* ed. Charles Angoff. (Rutherford, NJ: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1975): 29-44.

Lee, Sang Hyun. *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

Simonson, Harold P. “Jonathan Edwards and the Imagination.” In *Andover Newton Quarterly,* 16 no 2, (Nov. 1975): 109-118.

Sweeney, Douglas A. *Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word: a model of faith and thought.* (Downer’s Grove: IVP Academic, 2009).

Westra, Helen Petter. *The Minister’s Task and Calling in the Sermons of Jonathan Edwards.* (Lewiston, ME: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986).

Wheeler, Rachel. *Living Upon Hope: Mahicans and missionaries, 1730-1760.* Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1999.

Zakai, Avihu. “Theocracy in Massachusetts: The Puritan universe of sacred imagination.” In *Studies in Literary Imagination,* 27 no 1, (Spring 1994): 23-31.

1. See as examples Craig A. Loscalzo, “Apologizing for God: apologetic preaching to a postmodern world,” in *Review & Expositor,* 93 no. 3 (Summer 1996): 405-418; Alister McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers & Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012): 27-40, 90-93; Holly Ordway, *Apologetics and the Christian Imagination: an integrated approach to defending the faith* (Steubenville, OH: Emmaus Road, 2017): 1-20; Thomas H. Troeger, “Imaginative Theology: the shape of post-modern homiletics,” in *Homiletic,* 13 no. 1 (1988): 28-32; Paul Scott Wilson, “Postmodernity and Preaching,” in *Touchstone,* 32 no. 1, (February 2014): 12-20. McGrath’s method is particularly interesting in light of Graham Green’s understanding of imagination as the integrative function that apprehends patterns of meaning. See Graham Green, *Imagining God: Theology and Religious Imagination* (New York: Harper & Row, 1989): 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972): 235-237; Timothy Keller, *Preaching: Communicating Faith in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Viking, 2015): 169-175, 287. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For examples of homiletical literature within the expository tradition that do not mention or highlight imagination see Joel Beeke, *Reformed Preaching* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2018); John Carrick, *The Imperative of Preaching: a theology of sacred rhetoric* (London: Banner of Truth, 2002); Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: redeeming the expository sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005); Herman Hoeksema, *Homiletics* (Grandville, MI: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, 1993).

   For exceptions to the above, see J.A. Broadus, *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, Inc, 1971), 156-159; Sinclair Ferguson, *Some Pastors and Teachers: reflecting a biblical vision of what every minister is called to be* (London: Banner of Truth, 2017); Barnabas Youn Soo Kim, “The use of imagination for expository hermeneutics and homiletics,” Ph.D. dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014.

   For examples of literature outside the expository tradition that do encourage imagination see Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1980); Kathrine Sarah Bruce, “The vital importance of the imagination in the contemporary preaching event,” Ph.D. dissertation, Durham University, 2013; Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination: preaching an emancipated word* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012); Linda Clader, *Voicing the Vision: imagination and prophetic preaching* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishers, 2004); Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985); Richard L. Eslinger, *Narrative and Imagination: preaching the worlds that shape us* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995); Zachary Guiliano and Cameron E. Partridge, *Preaching and the Theological Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015); Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Minneapolis: 1517 Media, 2016); Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: dancing the edge of mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997); Warren Wiersbe, *Preaching and Teaching with Imagination* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1994).  [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Lloyd-Jones, *Preachers and Preaching,* 176; Keller, *Preaching,* 169-170; John Carrick, *The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Banner of Truth, 2008): ix. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Thomas Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. For examples see Charles L. Geschiere, “’Taste and See that the Lord is Good:’” the aesthetic-affectional preaching of Jonathan Edwards.” Th.M. thesis, Calvin Theological Seminary, 2008; Lee, Sang Hyun. *The Philosophical Theology of Jonathan Edwards.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Harold P. Simonson, “Jonathan Edwards and the Imagination,” *Andover Newton Quarterly,* 16 no 2, (Nov. 1975). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: an introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4; Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 152. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See Kenneth P. Minkema, “Jonathan Edwards in the Twentieth Century,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* 47 no. 4, (December 2004): 659-87; John Carrick, *The* *Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Banner of Truth, 2008): 18-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. For example, John Carrick, *The* *Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (London: Banner of Truth, 2008); John D. Hannah, “The homiletical skill of Jonathan Edwards,” *Bibliotheca sacra,* 159 no 633 (Jan-March 2002): 96-107; Wilson H. Kimnach, ed. *Volume 10: Sermons and Discourses 1720-1723,* in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992); *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: a reader* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); Helen Westra, *The Minister’s Task and Calling in the Sermons of Jonathan Edwards* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Michael Keller, “Experiencing God in Words: Rhetoric, Logic, Imaginative Language, and Emotion in Jonathan Edwards’ Sermons, a computational analysis,” Ph.D. dissertation, Vrije Universiteit, 2018; Rachel Wheeler *Living Upon Hope: Mahicans and missionaries, 1730-1760.* Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1999. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Rachel Wheeler, “Lessons from Stockbridge: Jonathan Edwards and the Stockbridge Indians,” *Jonathan Edwards at 300: essays on the tercentenary of his birth,* ed. Harry S. Stout et al. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America 2005), 132-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Based on my current research within the online resources of the Yale University Jonathan Edwards Study Centre, there are 15 Scriptural texts that meet this criteria. The Scriptural texts are listed below. The numbers in parentheses following the texts are the manuscript numbers - with the Stockbridge Indian sermon listed first: Psalm 14:1 (1059, 145), 27:4 (1175, 601, 1031), 39:5 (1071, 289), 119:60-61 (1113, 32, 1004); Proverbs 5:11-13 (1027, 100, 640, 990), 19:8 (1756, 930); Ecclesiastes 8:8 (1134, 878), 8:11 (1078, 900); Isaiah 6:3 (1065, 872), 53:3 (1085, 93, 414), 53:7 (1154, 1039, 1107, 312), 55:1-3 (1138, 777, 834), 55:7-9 (1056, 765); Ezekiel 22:14 (1079, 606); and Habakkuk 1:13 (1040, 64). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For support of retrieval studies, see Gavin Ortlund, *Theological Retrieval for Evangelicals: why we need our past to have a future* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. These trajectories appear in various forms in homiletic material. For example, see Jay E. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose: the urgent task of homiletics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982); Samuel T. Logan, Jr, ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: reviving the art* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1986): 224-261; John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: the challenge of preaching today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982): 228-258. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)