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The Preacher as 'First Listener'

'Calling' as a Source of Authority
within the Flemish Evangelical Preaching Tradition

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Abstract

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Although the recent shift to a more audience-centred approach in homiletical studies suggests an increased sensitivity towards the meaning-making process on the part of the listener, this research shows that the consequences for the preacher have not been approached with the same kind of empirical rigour. Rather than searching for ways to attribute meaning to the preacher's own self-understanding and spiritual practices, homiletical research, in general, has focused on generating recommendations for better preaching. However, the reality of the weekly sermonising process and the sheer number of sermons produced on a yearly basis highlights the need for a more critical and complex account of homiletical practices. Accordingly, this inquiry into homiletical practices aims to critically evaluate the preacher's discernment and listening process in preparing, receiving, and delivering the sermon within the context of Flemish Evangelical preaching. To explore these issues in depth, I interviewed eight preachers within the Flemish Evangelical context.

Intentionally descriptive in nature, this research highlights a lack of methodological clarity within the field of homiletical spirituality. Through the lens of sources of authority, I argue that preachers may be unaware of the sources of authority that operationalise their discernment process. Some sources authorise their words, while others remain under the surface. I discuss candidates for sources of authority, including the notion of *calling*. This notion of *calling*, as it is triangulated through thick descriptions of the contours of the Evangelical movement and the interview data, offers a notable example of a more focused attending to a reflective homiletical endeavour.

Given the many voices potentially competing in regulating and operationalising attentiveness, this research concludes that a renewed practical theological endeavour is needed within the field of homiletical spirituality, one that empirically engages the preacher's self-understanding.

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Statement of Copyright

Style Guide

I have made use of the MHRA Style Guide, Modern Humanities Research Association, *MHRA Style Guide,* 3rd edn (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 2013).

Abbreviations

ARPEE	Administratieve Raad van de Protestants-Evangelische Eredienst
BEZ	Belgische Evangelische Zending (Belgian Evangelical Mission)
ECV	Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen (Evangelical Christian Churches)
EAV	Evangelische Alliantie Vlaanderen (Evangelical Alliance Flanders)
FEM	Flemish Evangelical Movement
FS	Federale Synode (Federal Synod)
VEG	Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten (Free Evangelical Churches)

List of Respondents

Name	Denomination	Years in Preaching Ministry	Nationality	Gender
Andrew	BEZ	27	German	Male
Brandon	BEZ	40	Dutch	Male
Frank	VEG	31	Dutch	Male
Ian	VEG	25	Dutch	Male
Isaac	VEG	32	Dutch	Male
Jeremy	BEZ	21	Belgian	Male
Lance	BEZ	21	German	Male
Victor	VEG	36	Dutch	Male

Part 1: Methodological Prolegomena

1   Chapter 1: Homiletical Vagueness

1.1   Introduction

As a long-time preacher in an Evangelical context, I have found that the obstacle recurring most often for me in preparing sermons has been a kind of lack of methodological clarity. How am I to support my *listening* process – the process of *hearing* what God is trying to say to me through prayer, reading Scripture, or other revelatory means? Instead, I have encountered deficiencies or even lack of models to support my *listening* process, resulting in what I call a homiletical vagueness.[1] Observing that this vagueness might seem to be characteristic of Evangelical spirituality in general, I embarked on an academic journey to research these homiletical practices in hopes of developing a better understanding of this methodological clarity and to offer insights into aspects of Evangelical spirituality as a whole. This inquiry into homiletical practices aims to critically evaluate the preacher's discernment and listening process in preparing, receiving, and delivering the sermon within the context of Flemish Evangelical preaching. Let me unpack this.

I offer a practical theological engagement focusing on the realities of a Christian practice in the field of homiletical spirituality. Driven by ethnographic reflectiveness, this investigation results in a clearer understanding of the perceived contours of Evangelical homiletical spirituality.[2] The ethnographic context is one of the preacher in the Flemish Evangelical movement (FEM)[3]; the specific practices belonging to the field of homiletical spirituality are the practices of meditative nature

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[1] Vagueness is not necessarily a bad characteristic; however, if the *listening* process is not supported by existing homiletical models of spirituality, one could argue that vagueness is an unhelpful result of such lack of support.

[2] For a distinction between *reflexive* and *reflective*, see Heather Walton, *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection* (London: SCM Press, 2014), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 501. For the purposes of this research, I will use (derivatives of) the term *reflective*, i.e. 'characterized by acute observation and analysis of roles and context'. Ibid., Location 501.

[3] Unless I am referring to the specific research context of the Flemish Evangelical Movement in which there are no women preachers, I will not use exclusively male pronouns.

that are part of the sermonic process or the lived experiences of the preacher in general. The samples of data are drawn from interviews with eight preachers in the FEM, who are active in the following Flemish Evangelical denominations: the Belgian Evangelical Mission (BEZ) and the Free Evangelical Churches (VEG).[4]

The goal is to offer insights into how the preacher *listens* (discerns). How does the preacher adopt and regulate the explicit and implicit sources of authority that are in play as he or she discerns?[5] In exploring this question, this descriptive project may result in a deeper understanding and interpretation of these practices and, if possible, foster homiletical habits and spiritual practices in which the preacher's lived experience connects with his own Evangelical tradition.[6]

In this first introductory chapter, I present my story and the argument for sharing my own story as an exercise in 'controlled introspection', a phrase used by scholar of spirituality Sandra M. Schneiders, I.H.M.[7] Schneiders's hermeneutical methodology, to which I will return in the chapters on theory and method, provides the theoretical approach for my research in homiletical spirituality. A disclaimer is warranted here. Controlled introspection assumes the presence, nature, and inescapability of the researcher's self-implication. The researcher cares about his or her research, but also realises the potential pitfalls of 'methodological narcissism'.[8] According to Schneiders, private and anecdotal data alone do not constitute

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[4] Given the sensitive nature of the research and the current active role of the respondents, I assigned pseudonyms in order to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents.

[5] For a more recent popular publication on homiletics and sources used by the preacher, see also Doug Gay, *God Be in My Mouth: 40 Ways to Grow as a Preacher* (Edinburgh, UK: Saint Andrew Press, 2018), p. 9. Gay list among these sources: a lecture, book or article, theological or non-theological sources, and own practice.

[6] This research in practical theology resembles in many ways the recent interdisciplinary and empirical study of clergy spirituality in Norway. Tone Stangeland Kaufman, *A New Old Spirituality? A Qualitative Study of Clergy Spirituality in the Nordic Context*, Church Of Sweden Research Series, 15 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2017), p. 2.

[7] Sandra M. Schneiders, 'A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality', in *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Elizabeth Dreyer and Mark S. Burrows (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), p. 58.

[8] Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline', in Dreyer and Burrows, p. 18.

evidence. While introspection can be 'an indispensable source of understanding', it must be in relation to other research methods.[9]

As an exercise in controlled introspection in the form of a short 'auto/theobiography', I will highlight some material from my own background as a preacher (sections 1.2 and 1.3).[10] My story gives the impetus and sets the scene for a more detailed and theoretical engagement with the research question and its origins (Chapter 2).

1.2   Auto-ethnographical Exercise

In *Writing Methods in Theological Reflection*, Heather Walton argues for the warranting and contextualising of a research question through the means of writing an academic piece, such as a dissertation, which is grounded in the writer's commitments.[11] In other words, grounding the piece in one's own commitments provides justification and contextualisation for the research question. The life of the researcher can offer a valid and fertile ground for theological reflectiveness. This reflectiveness can reveal itself in the process of 'writing a question' as a form of 'life writing',[12] which becomes the driving force that flows directly from the researcher's agenda. 'Auto/theobiography' demonstrates how ministerial experiences in combination with theological influences can 'generate both a life story and a theological quest'.[13] Furthermore, it shares ethnography's overall commitment that personal (theological) reflection and cultural context or expression are foundational

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[9] Schneiders, 'A Hermeneutical Approach to the Study of Christian Spirituality', p. 58. Schneiders distinguishes between different levels of studying *spirituality*. It can be studied as part of a practical Master's programme, which would be formative in nature, or it can be studied in the context of a research programme, such as a doctorate (which aims to expand the knowledge in the field).

[10] For more on the phrase 'auto/theobiography', see Pete Ward, *Participation and Mediation: A Practical Theology for the Liquid Church* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2008), p. 4.

[11] Walton, Location 2237.

[12] Walton, Location 2178. Other forms of life writing mentioned by Walton are 'writing a calling', 'writing a journey', and 'writing as care'.

[13] Walton, Location 2248. This form of reflexive writing can act as an autoethnographical instrument contributing to the overall multimethod research approach used in this particular research as an added layer of perspective.

for the method.[14] What follows is my quest for a greater understanding of the sermonic process.

This introduction narrates my experiences as a preacher in the context of the Evangelical movement in Flanders for the last 22 years (at the time of writing). The eight respondents and I share the same culture, i.e. ecclesial space in the FEM. Therefore, this 'auto/theobiography' will form part of the broader ethnographical story developed in this dissertation, as I systematically describe and analyse some of the spiritual and homiletical aspects of the FEM, and the shared but also personal experiences of preachers in the FEM. Through the narratives of the respondents, I hope to gain a clearer understanding of the sermonic practices related to the discerning aspect of these practices. I establish a trajectory that I hope will not only prove fruitful for the desired outcome of this dissertation but also, in a wider context, stimulate reflection on the praxis of discernment in homiletics.

Equally inspiring for this approach, and similar to Heather Walton's 'life writing', is Lutheran theologian Andrew Root's use of 'a theobiographical starting point'. Root illustrates, through reflective narrative, the aforementioned idea of combining one's own life experiences with theological influences. As Root argues, 'If practical theology is to be practical (attending to concrete experience) but yet theological, then it must make central the encounter of divine and human action.'[15]

Schneiders, Ward, Walton, and Root are four examples of reflective theological writers who encourage or offer a particular form of autoethnography.[16] Of particular interest for my research is Walton's use of 'autoethnographic techniques to explore the nature of preaching and in particular the *understanding of*

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[14] For the duality in this method, see Ward, *Participation and Mediation*, p. 6; Nigel P. Short, Lydia Turner, and Alec Grant, *Contemporary British Autoethnography* (Rotterdam, NL: Sense Publishers, 2013), p. 2. For a general introduction on autoethnography, see also Tony E. Adams, Stacy Linn Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 1.

[15] Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 208, 312.

[16] Walton, Location 1075; Root, Location 208.

preaching as a vocational act' [italics added].[17] Sure enough, six of the eight

respondents interviewed as part of this research mentioned the reality and importance

of a *calling* or *being called* to the vocation of pastor or preacher. I will return to this

in a later chapter, but for now it suffices to illustrate the vocational act of preaching

through Victor's explanation:

> I find it a…a… […] weakness in the Evangelical world…um… where we have brought preaching…um… down to the level of 'people, you have a go at preaching, that way you'll learn how to do it.',… know what I mean? When it should be clear that the question of calling is at the front of it. [...] so I'm a called one...I cannot stop...it's interwoven with my life. […] but preaching is an instrument of which God clearly states in Scripture that He wants to use it… that we not just use it the way we want it to use. There really has [...] to be a calling.[18]

In a similar vein, I will explore how my personal journey has furnished me with the

proper context for researching what it means to be a preacher as *first listener*. At the

very least, I suggest that, the exercise in controlled introspection performed here

shows that personal involvement may be more constitutive to the research at hand

than initially expected.

1.3   My Story: A Wounded Lover

'This book is an epistle from a wounded lover.'[19] Without wanting to sound overly

dramatic, these opening words by Evangelical scholar Mark A. Noll, from his *The*

Scandal of the Evangelical Mind, give a clue for understanding my story. Reflecting

on Noll's rather confessional introduction, Keith Harper expresses it to the point:

> Both Frank and Noll wrote as 'wounded lovers,' […] lamenting the state of their own beloved subculture but remaining within the community of faith as caring critics. […]

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[17] Walton, Location 656. By respondents, I mean eight preachers active in the context of the FEM. See also Chapter 5 on data collection.

[18] Victor, interviewed by Filip De Cavel, February 2016, transcript.

[19] Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. ix.

the evidence seems to indicate that scholars who stay as well as those who leave never quite shake the desire to better understand evangelicalism.[20]

I stayed, and continue to stay wholeheartedly. But to keep it that way, I needed to develop a better understanding of Evangelicalism.

1.3.1   Conversion

I became an Evangelical Christian at 17 (1988). At that time, I was in training to become a non-commissioned officer in the Belgian army. As this was a boarding school type of context, a lot of time was spent with fellow students. One of these students became a good friend and we shared a common interest in music. At one point, he introduced me to the English heavy metal band Iron Maiden and to their controversial signature song at that time *The Number of the Beast* (Harvest ST-12202; 1982). The song opens with a quote from the Book of Revelation 13:18 in which the wise person must calculate the number of the beast: 666. This song got me hooked to learn more on the subject, so we started reading the Bible together, discussing it, and exploring the Christian faith in general.

And then there was Bob Dylan's landmark album *Slow Train Coming* (Columbia 36120; 1979) with its iconic song *Gotta Serve Somebody*: 'It may be the devil or it may be the Lord / But you're gonna have to serve somebody.'[21] At this point, my friend and I were about ready to choose whom to serve. He preceded me in going to an Evangelical church with his mother; I followed some months later. My

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[20] *American Denominational History: Perspectives on the Past, Prospects for the Future*, ed. by Keith Harper, Religion and American Culture (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), p. 215.

[21] This was the first album of Dylan's so-called 'Christian trilogy', along with the subsequent albums *Saved* (Columbia 36553; 1980) and *Shot of Love* (Columbia 37496; 1981). For the apocalyptic and conversionist tone in Dylan's trilogy, see also *The End All around Us: Apocalyptic Texts and Popular Culture*, ed. by John Walliss and Kenneth G. C. Newport, Millennialism and Society (London, UK: Equinox, 2009), p. 14.

interest was piqued by this new world of Scriptural knowledge I had never heard of before.

In the early 1970s in Flanders, to be baptised a Roman Catholic was the rule rather than the exception. So, for me to visit an Evangelical church did raise some eyebrows in my parental home, even though it was by this time the late 1980s. But, they let me have a go at it, and so there I sat in an Evangelical church on a Sunday morning, sometime in the summer of 1988. It was there that I prayed the sinner's prayer after hearing the sermon.[22] Convinced in my heart of the need to accept Jesus's loving sacrifice for my sins, I talked to the preacher and he prayed with me the well-known passage from the Gospel of John 3:16, substituting my name for the word 'world': 'For God so loved *Filip* that he gave his one and only Son, so that *Filip* believing in him shall not perish but have eternal life.'[23] This personalisation of the Gospel to the level of substituting words with the individual's name is, in my opinion, an Evangelical practice that has many variations. To give another example, in becoming an Evangelical Christian, I emphasised to my friends that I had a *personal* relationship with God, that I believed in a *personal* God. This emphasis on it being real *for me* was steeped in the pietistic tradition that made an appeal to the emotions and the personal experience. At the same time, the newly heartfelt experience of becoming a child of God was matched by a quite heady approach to reading the Bible. There was gold to be found, but you had to dig deep and long to find it.

This first church my friend and I attended was influenced by the music and writings of Dutch preacher Johannes de Heer (1866–1961). Johannes de Heer was 'of great importance to the Evangelical Movement in the Netherlands in the

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[22] For more on the topic of *sinner's prayer*, also known as the Prayer of Salvation, see also Randall Herbert Balmer, *The Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. 629.

[23] I have not been able to trace the origins of this substituting practice, but it is sufficient to say at this point that this particular preacher was not the only one to use this practice.

Twentieth Century, partly because of Het Zoeklicht, a dispensationalist periodical he

started which focuses heavily on the signs of the times that will precede the return of

Jesus Christ'.[24] I could not have come to a better place to continue this search for a

greater understanding of the last days we were in. In fact, the character of our early

journey involved a militant approach to evangelism because the end was near. We

bought and distributed Chick Cartoon Gospel Tracts (the Dutch translated

versions).[25] These 'Evangelical noir' brochures were known for their methods of

instilling fear in people.[26] Obscure or not, Chick reinforced in us that it was fine to be

'rabidly anti-Catholic' and fundamentalist Evangelicals.[27]

As I entered into Evangelicalism through one of its dispensational portals (not

that I knew what *dispensational* meant at the time), I bought my first Bible with

saved birthday money. It was a black annotated Scofield Bible — a product of the

early Brethren movement.[28] I was ready for some Bible study. Sunday gatherings

were only one part of the initiation into the Christian faith as Evangelicals practised

it. It was equally important to attend Bible studies. The first Bible study I attended

was located in a Brethren church.

The second (non-Brethren) Evangelical church I attended became my home

church. Although not dispensational in nature or according to the church's

confessional documents, there were associated themes. I think this was the case since

this church was pastored by Arie Kleijne from 1969 to 1977. Kleijne was a

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[24] Aaldert Prins, 'The History of the Belgian Gospel Mission from 1918 to 1962' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven, 2015), p. 209fn302.

[25] See <http://www.chick.com> [accessed 26 July 2017].

[26] For an introduction and analysis of Jack T. Chick's tracts, see Todd M. Brenneman, *Homespun Gospel: The Triumph of Sentimentality in Contemporary American Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 127–29.

[27] See also Balmer, p. 152.

[28] On the influence of the Scofield Reference Bible on dispensationalism, see also Ben Witherington III, *The Problem with Evangelical Theology: Testing the Exegetical Foundations of Calvinism, Dispensationalism, and Wesleyanism* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2005), pp. 95–96. See also Michael Pollock, 'The Influence of Premillennial Eschatology on Evangelical Missionary Theory and Praxis from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 33.3 (July 2009), 131.

Dutchman who published a book at that time on the return of Jesus Christ, based on his commentary on the Revelation of John.[29] Although Pastor Kleijne had left the church ten years earlier, at the end of 1980s there was still a lot of preaching and Bible study on the subject of the end times.

Certainly, there is a much more nuanced account of my conversion. But for the purposes of what follows, that is the gist. Our conversion, surely the beginning of something new in the spiritual and life-altering sense, was coloured by this context: My friend and I, born and raised Roman Catholic, made the conscious decision to leave that Christian tradition behind and become part of a new movement with its own social identity, rituals, and discourses. We were no longer just Christians, we were *Evangelical* Christians: *certainly-not-Roman-Catholic*, apologetic, and radical. I threw away all my CDs, including the Iron Maiden one. But not the Dylan ones of course.

1.3.2   Reading

'Bible study is *the* discipline of evangelical Protestantism.'[30] I loved it and I still do. The deeply personal nature of the conversion was met by the emphasis on communal and solitary reading and understanding the Bible together with other Christians. In effect, several rituals of reading were readily at my disposal: I memorised Bible verses (even put them to song), used reading plans to help me read through the Bible in one year, and went through a yearly stash of booklets with short introductions to Scripture that fostered spiritual growth. It was a lot of reading.

Some reading was done in the context of prayer and meditation; it was called having 'quiet time'. In my understanding, it was a time slot during the day,

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[29] Johannes A. Kleijne, *Jezus komt! Verklaring van de Openbaring aan Johannes* (Aksent, 1989).

[30] Evan Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', in *Four Views on Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Bradley Nassif and Bruce A. Demarest (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 3128.

preferably in the morning, when you would seek God. It was not to be called

contemplative, or so I gathered from people around me. That was a Roman Catholic

concept. Even the word 'meditation' was not part of the Flemish Evangelical jargon.

In practice, it meant that I often sat down with my Bible and took notes or scribbled

in the margins of my Bible. Then I prayed and tried to stay focused.

Fairly early on in my walk as a Christian disciple, I was encouraged by church

leaders to undertake a six-year training at the Bible School at the Belgian Bible

Institute at Heverlee (Leuven). That was 1990. The reason? I had become a youth

leader in our church and every other week I was expected to share something from

the Bible. My formal theological journey began then and there and continues to this

day. Suddenly, there were these two parallel tracks: a more academic and theological

one, which was fueled by nuance vis-à-vis the other one in a non-academic and

ecclesial setting, which was often marked by obscurantism. In the first track, I

encountered the writings of Francis A. Schaeffer, Haddon Robinson, Anthony

Thiselton, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and many more.

So, there *was* another Evangelical world out there and that — in the pre-

Internet era — was an eye-opener. Those two worlds collided once in a while.

Calling myself a 'wounded lover' can be traced back to those moments where the

reality of those colliding worlds seemed to be unavoidable. Studying theology in a

fragmented Evangelical context seemed quite the challenge.

This fragmentation was not to be expected; it was not even hinted at. Daniel

Treier's assessment of how Evangelicals understand themselves seems to confirm

this. Treier frames the contours of Evangelicalism succinctly when he opens his

chapter 'Scripture and Hermeneutics' with 'Evangelicals understand themselves as

confessionally orthodox Protestants oriented to piety that is personal'.[31] According to

Treier, these are the main ingredients: confessional, orthodox, pietistic, and personal.

In hindsight, however, studying in an Evangelical context would unavoidably result

in a challenge, since those ingredients do not provide a coherent theology on their

own, let alone a coherent movement. As we will see later in the chapter on the

contours of spirituality in the FEM, these ingredients have existed in tension within

Evangelicalism, at least in my context. Treier and Kevin Vanhoozer explicate this

succinctly in a more recent publication, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A

Mere Evangelical Account*: '"Piety" is a uniter and a divider.'[32] If I believed in a

personal God, so did everyone else; we were all united in our individual encounter

with this personal God.

So, as a student of theology, while experiencing a theological emancipation, I

could never shrug off the often-implicit signal that 'what happens in Bible class,

stays in Bible class' — especially on things that concerned spirituality. If there was,

as Evan Howard suggests, an Evangelical ecumenicity rooted in an intuitive

spirituality, I did not sense it.[33] In fact, the opposite was true: I was often not allowed

to be too intuitive in my spirituality. I remember reading some of Quaker Richard

Foster's books on spirituality and the spiritual disciplines, especially his *Celebration

of Discipline* and *Prayer, Finding the Heart's True Home*.[34] Foster's books opened a

window to a less stressful approach to spiritual methods that would encourage,

sustain, and develop my encounter with God. One Evangelical church leader urged

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[31] Daniel J. Treier, 'Scripture and Hermeneutics', in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology*, ed. by Timothy Larsen, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 35.

[32] Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Daniel J. Treier, *Theology and the Mirror of Scripture: A Mere Evangelical Account*, Studies in Christian Doctrine and Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), p. 20.

[33] Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', Locations 3057–58.

[34] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th anniversary ed., 3rd edn, rev. edn (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998); Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992). The latter, I remember, was required reading at the Belgian Bible Institute, Leuven in the mid-1990s.

me not to use those books, since Foster's writings were considered to be heretical.

Tom Schwanda, a scholar of Evangelical spirituality, encapsulates my sentiments

when he states that:

> A typical pattern for many Protestants who become interested in the practice and study of Christian spirituality is to bemoan the lack of models and resources within their own heritage. It is not uncommon to find Reformed and Evangelical Christians searching the lives and writings of the spiritual giants of the Roman Catholic tradition because of its rich spiritual reservoir of resources.[35]

This is exactly the way I experienced this lack of necessary models for

Evangelical spirituality. And it begs the question: Did and do the respondents of this

research experience the same kind of lack? If not, to what model(s) do they adhere?

The interview data from the eight respondents will be introduced fully in Chapter 5,

but at first glance, the data seem to answer this question. Although these preachers

each had their own personal practices or resources when preparing spiritually, no

clear models of Evangelical spirituality were in place. A call for testing Treier and

Vanhoozer's assessment of piety as a uniter and a divider through a particular

homiletical context seemed warranted: How did these ingredients of Evangelicalism,

i.e. the confessional, orthodox, pietistic, and personal, play out in the sermonic

processes of my respondents? Are these ingredients helpful as markers through

which to evaluate homiletical and spiritual practices? Or are they too broadly defined

to be of any use when analysing and interpreting the data?

1.3.3   Encountering

'The hegemonic status of the historical grammatical hermeneutic in evangelical

circles leads to a *deficiency* over personal formation, practical application and divine

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[35] Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), p. 244.

encounter' [italics added].[36] As I read this assessment of Evangelical hermeneutics, especially this word 'deficiency', it hit home. Homiletician Kate Bruce argues that the functional focus of Evangelical hermeneutics, which is a cognitive focus, fails to provide a remedy for this deficiency. This claim is a most interesting one in light of my story and this research. Was it the case that I chose the right food, but ate it the wrong way? Was it not sufficient to grow in my spiritual relationship with God through my particular understanding of and approach to (reading) the Bible?

Reflecting on these questions, I am only now able to formulate this long-held frustration with intelligible counter-questions on, for example, Evangelicalism's defensive stance towards methods such as *lectio divina*. Why this Evangelical distrust of *lectio divina*, especially since this distrust stands in such stark contrast to Evangelicalism's own devotional ethos, conversion focus[37], and epistemology? Why was I not able to develop a particular kind of spirituality, grounded in the Word of God, with appropriate methods or tools that connected better with the Evangelical ethos, piety, or epistemology? These questions became even more pressing as I was about to become a preacher myself.

1.3.4 Preaching

On 9 June 1996, I was asked to preach my first sermon in an Evangelical church.[38] The self-chosen subject was gentleness, which is part of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatian 5:22, New International Version). While I still have the text, I cannot recall

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[36] Kathrine S. Bruce, 'The Vital Importance of the Imagination in the Contemporary Preaching Event' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Durham, 2013), p. 108. Bruce did publish her dissertation as a book, but the quote did not appear in it. See also Kathrine S. Bruce, *Igniting the Heart: Preaching and Imagination*, (London, UK: SCM Press, 2015). See also Glen G. Scorgie, 'Hermeneutics and the Meditative Use of the Scripture: The Case for a Baptised Imagination', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* 44 (June 2001), 273–76.

[37] I here make use of the term 'conversion focus' instead of the more theologically phrased 'convertive piety' that will be introduced in section 9.4.

[38] My personal sermon library dates the first sermon I preached to 9 June 1996 at an Evangelical church in Deinze (a city in the Belgian province of East Flanders) on the topic of *meekness* (Galatians 5:22). However, I preached at Evangelical youth events prior to 1996.

much of the context or my particular feelings surrounding that sermonic process. Re-reading that sermon, I did seem to focus on two things in particular: ensuring a clear three-part structure, and employing a particular canonical and Christocentric approach. Being influenced by Haddon Robinson's *Biblical Preaching*, I was aware of the importance of presenting a sermon with a clear structure in which the driving 'Big Idea' emerged from the reading of the Bible passage.[39] Second, my approach was canonical and Christocentric, as I wanted to relate this particular fruit of the Spirit to the life moments of the *gentle* Jesus that we learn about in the Gospels. But, also in a thematic sense of the word, I sought to work on aspects of the fruit of the Spirit, while not detaching the subject of gentleness from its direct context. Since then, I have been preaching on and off in churches all over Flanders.

But more relevant to the research at hand, I have never really learned how to establish a clear method for the homiletical practice of spirituality. What methods were available to ensure a healthy approach to meditative tools in order for me to prayerfully engage with Scripture? If Bruce is correct, how could I 'eat' the right way? Only much later did I encounter Eugene Peterson's *Eat This Book*, which offers a biblical and devotional account of cultivating a particular kind of reading of Holy Scriptures that seems to deal with the aforementioned deficiency.[40] In a sense, this dissertation marks for me a completion of a particular journey in my life as a Christian and as a preacher. Therefore, as I conclude this controlled introspection, it is my intention to deal with the (Evangelical) vagueness of my own practical theological musings on that part of preparing the sermon that requires the integration of meditative practices and/or methods. Yet, despite the personal need for me to understand how *listening* works for the preacher, the specific output of this

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[39] Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980), pp. 31–48.

[40] Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), p. 3.

dissertation is church-oriented: to offer suggestions for dealing with the aforementioned so-called vagueness, deficiency, or even lack of models to support the preacher's listening process.

1.4 Conclusion

In this introductory chapter, I addressed the question of why *I* approach these preachers. What follows is a four-part research journey. Part 1, which includes this chapter, deals with the methodological prolegomena. Chapter 2 opens with a theoretically oriented explanation of the origins and rationale behind this research. In short, Chapter 2 asks: Why do *we* need to approach these preachers?[41] Chapter 3 focuses on the question: *How* do we approach these preachers? As such, it offers the methodological framework through which this research will be conducted. Chapter 4 asks: *What* is being studied as we approach these preachers? I untangle the multifaceted angles related to the discipline of spirituality and introduce the concept of sources of authority as an important lens through which to analyse the data that will be described in Part 2 (Chapters 5 and 6).

Part 3 is descriptive in nature and critical in its intention. It offers a mix of thick descriptions and critical analysis of the phenomenon under investigation. As such, these chapters serve as a preamble to the interpretation of the nature of the sermonic process as it is encountered in the Flemish Evangelical tradition. I will explore the Evangelical state of the land (Chapter 7), the empirical angles of homiletical theology (Chapter 8), and the contours of an Evangelical and homiletical spirituality (Chapter 9).

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[41] This line of questioning is inspired by Philip Sheldrake, 'Spirituality and its Critical Methodology', in *Exploring Christian Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Sandra M. Schneiders*, ed. by Bruce H. Lescher, and Elizabeth Liebert (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 338.

Finally, Part 4 highlights the results of the critical analysis and interpretation of the qualitative data (Chapter 10), and emphasises the contributions of this research to cultivating homiletical and spiritual self-awareness and thus helping the preacher to connect with his or her own Evangelical tradition (Chapter 11).

2 Chapter 2: Theoretical Beginnings

2.1 Introduction

How long does it take to prepare a sermon? This question, although often asked, is difficult to answer. The difficulty, I find, hinges on the verb 'prepare'. Certainly, the length would be quantifiable if I were to focus on the mere number of hours it takes to conduct the exegetical and sermonic groundwork. However, if I qualify that 'preparation' in terms of the time it takes to discern *what* to say, to *hear* what God wants me to preach, or to integrate 'quiet time' or other meditative practices into my work flow, it is a whole different matter.

To help me to qualify, theologically or at least homiletically, this kind of meditative listening, I revisited the undergraduate course I took on homiletics in Bible seminary in the mid-1990s. This course was taught by well-known preacher Johan Lukasse, who at that time was director of one of Flanders's larger Evangelical organisations (BEZ). The course was designed to offer some insights into this topic to Flemish and Dutch students preparing for pastoral ministry. Lukasse suggested that, after the work of the 'mind' was done, i.e. the intellectual preparation, it was time for a 'meditative review' and the 'ripening process'.[1] Lukasse described this process as 'listening to God's voice', 'being attuned to the Lord', and 'meditat[ing] on the sayings that He had written down for us'.

Dutch respondent Frank, who has been in ministry for 31 years, offered a clear example of this. Frank is a pastor of an Evangelical church with predominantly elderly people. However, he also has a full-time job outside of the church. There was an eye-opening moment during the interview, for him as much as for me. It was the fact that he missed the specific spiritual disciplines or methodical practices that had been part of his previous job as a Religious Education teacher in high school. This

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[1] Johan Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord: Cursus Homiletiek', *Bijbelinstituut België*, November 1994, 38–40.

type of preparation had provided important inspiration for his preaching that was now somehow lacking. Reflecting on the incubation period needed for the Bible narratives to slowly mature in his thought processes, Frank noticed that the opportunity to teach during the week had provided him with the 'quiet time' needed to prepare for his Sunday sermon.[2]

For Lukasse, preparation time was 'difficult to calculate'. Moreover, he felt that one should take enough time to prepare lest it threaten the process of 'deepening' the sermon.[3] This deepening could occur as the preacher was 'on his way', literally — in the car, on a train, in moments of waiting. According to Lukasse, however, it should also happen in the moment of a conscious and intentional meeting with God who is truth. The kind of listening required in such a moment of deepening is akin to the prophet Samuel's 'Speak, for your servant is listening'.[4] For Lukasse, the essence of the meditative process was that, through this time of reflection, the preacher comes to ask God 'if this sermon could become His sermon?'[5] The entire process is accompanied by prayer, before, during, and at the end of the sermon. Prayer facilitates the deepening process, although Lukasse differentiated between prayer and the meditative process. Prayer, for Lukasse, was a practice that accompanied the entire preparation for the sermon, including those moments 'on the way'; prayer was essential for the preacher to apprehend the depths of the Scripture.

This short autobiographical reflection on the meditative process of preparing for the sermon — both in terms of its quantity and quality — motivated me to develop a better understanding of what is happening during this time of *listening*.[6] In its most basic form, the initial question underlying this research is about just that:

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[2] See John Stott on Leslie J. Tizard's concept of 'subconscious incubation' in John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), p. 221.

[3] Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord', p. 39.

[4] 1 Samuel 3.10, New International Version (NIV)

[5] Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord', p. 40.

[6] See section 4.2.3.1 for a more extensive disclaimer on the use of a highly suggestive title for this dissertation. *Listening* is a mode of a particular sense (auditive/hearing).

How do you discern what to say as a preacher, being the *first listener*? Was my experience of an apparent lack of models and resources within my Evangelical heritage shared by preachers ministering in the same context as myself?

In the following sections, I offer introductory remarks on how this research emerged, what instigated it, and how it evolved into this empirical research on homiletical spirituality. In doing so, I identify the need to further analyse the nature of homiletical spirituality and its particular corresponding practices through a methodological approach that is able to address the topics at hand. These methodological groundings will be further explored in Chapter 3.

2.2   Homiletical Self-Image

A research project focusing on the *first listener* is first and foremost a *preacher-oriented* project. First of all, it is important to note that my theological interest in the *listening* preacher is not in itself original, although it is has been the subject of little empirical research in an Evangelical context. In a more recent homiletical contribution exploring the self-image of the preacher, Marinus Beute offers a constructive and theoretical account of how the self-image of the preacher is being (re)sourced.[7] According to Beute, the self-image of the preacher is a meaningful factor during the sermonic process. Beute's historical account of theoretical and empirical research on the preacher provides a welcome interpretation of twentieth-century homiletics and how it can be divided into three phases: the normative-deductive, the empirical-inductive, and the critical-constructive.

In the first phase, attention is placed on the preacher, but only to make sure that he is not an obstacle to the sermon. In the second phase, the preacher's self-image

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[7] Marinus Beute, *Wie ben ik als ik preek?: bronnen en herbronning van het homiletisch zelfbeeld* (Zoetermeer, NL: Boekencentrum Academic, 2016). For an English summary, see Beute, pp. 209–15. English title: *Who Am I as a Preacher? Sources and Revitalisation of the Homiletic Self-Image*.

becomes more explicit as a reaction to the dogmatic approach of the first phase. Homiletical empirical research, which started as early as the 1960s, made the praxis of preachers explicit in order to understand what was really happening. Interdisciplinary research entered with its theoretical endeavours. This resulted, however, in an almost exclusive focus on the preacher. In the third phase of modern homiletics, 'The preacher is allowed to see himself as a hearer among the hearers, who, through subjective interpretation and the staging of the text enables the subjectivity of the hearers.'[8]

Beute continues then to provide a biblical theology of the self-image of the preacher based on a reading and understanding of the apostle Paul's self-image. A biblical theology is Beute's way of addressing the need for a practical theology to be hermeneutically responsible. My contribution could be conceived of as an empirical mirror to Beute's *Who Am I as a Preacher?* Beute, albeit providing theoretical reflections on the preacher as a *listener*, or as a *hearer among hearers,* presents a theoretical and historical reflection — not an empirical approach — claiming that he does not invest empirically in 'the self-image of a single preacher'.[9] Furthermore, although Beute's aim to understand the preacher's self-image overlaps with my aim to understand the preacher's homiletical practices embedded in his or her spiritual preparations, both research projects are distinct.

First, Beute's theological contribution proves at the very least that neither theoretical nor empirical research is new or original within the field of practical theology. However, my research taps into a similar vein of homiletical studies with precisely an empirical interest, studying the 'single' preacher, represented by eight respondents in this particular case. Second, Beute's research is to be understood within homiletical and/or ecclesial contexts that are Continental in origin. Beute is

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[8] Beute, p. 212.
[9] Beute, p. 56. This author's English translation. For Beute's historical overview of the 'I' of the preacher, see also Beute, pp. 82–85. See also section 8.6 of this dissertation.

well-versed in the Protestant tradition as developed in Holland and Germany. My research is focused exclusively on the Flemish Evangelical context, which means that homiletics from a North American context, or at least the Anglo-Saxon context, dominate the input for my research. Finally, because of Beute's Protestant context, the element of offices (*ambten*) plays an important role in the way a preacher becomes a source of authority for himself.[10] In an Evangelical, lay-movement context, offices (albeit biblical in origin) developed differently and do not hold the same connotation as in the Protestant tradition.

What Beute's contribution and mine share is the need to develop a deeper conceptualisation of the preacher's self-understanding, be it through a reflection on the preacher's *self-image* (Beute) or through the self-understanding of the preacher's own spiritual (re)sources. In fact, assuming that the complex notion of self-image encapsulates the preacher as *first listener*, my contribution could potentially enrich this complex reality based on the empirical context I provide.[11]

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[10] The term 'offices' (ambten) tradionally refers to the roles of pastor, teacher, elder, and deacon.

[11] For a sense of the multi-layered approach to the notion of *self-image*, see also Beute, p. 31. Beute mentions *social self-image, cogntive self-image, emotional self-image, physical self-image, spiritual self-image,* and *professional self-image*.

2.3   Genesis of the Research

I have often speculated about how preachers, especially those from an Evangelical,

Pentecostal, or Reformed heritage, actually prepare their sermons — not how they

are perceived or espoused to do so, but how the realities of pastoral ministry, and for

that matter the pastor's all-of-life, interfere with the weekly appointment with the

pulpit and the listener before it. To put it more succinctly, was there a way to validate

the preacher's discernment and listening process, and, if so, how?

Beyond the *how* of the preparation is the sobering thought that, on a weekly

basis, about 210 pastors, teachers, and laypersons in Evangelical, Pentecostal, and

Reformed churches all over Flanders offer Dutch-spoken sermons. That adds up to

nearly 11,000 sermons a year.[12] Assuming an average of ten hours preparation per

sermon, that means about 110,000 hours of sermonic groundwork each year, not

counting the actual time of the sermon being given.[13]

Although somewhat speculative, there are three arguments informing my

calculation of a 'ten-hour preparation' average: (1) based on my own theological

training in the early 1990s at the Evangelical Theological Faculty, Leuven

(Belgium). I mention once again Lukasse's homiletics course in which he suggested

that a reasonable time for preparing a sermon was ten hours; (2) data from my

ethnographical research (i.e. my interviews with eight preachers in Evangelical

Flanders), which suggest an average of between five and ten hours per week; (3)

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[12] This research is focused on the Flemish Dutch-speaking part of Belgium (Flanders, Vlaanderen). Although it is nearly impossible to offer an accurate number of Dutch-speaking churches at any given time, this number (210) is based on two streams of information: (1) a count of the Dutch-speaking churches that are part of the Evangelical/Pentecostal 'wing' (vleugel) of the Federal Synod. For more information on the Federal Synod, see section 7.2. See also <http://arpee.be/adressen/kerken/> and <http://alliantie.org/adressengids/kerken/> [accessed 13 December 2016]. (2) This author's count based on Dutch-speaking churches belonging to existing networks outside of the ARPEE, i.e. Vineyard Network (1), Churches of Christ (11), Messianic Congregations (±7), Brethren Congregations (±10), House churches (±90).

[13] Johan Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord', p. 34: 'How much time does preparation of a sermon take? 12 hours? Sometimes 18 hours, if one is not yet that experienced' [This author's English translation]; See also Bert de Leede and Ciska Stark, *Ontvouwen: Protestantse Prediking in de Praktijk* (Zoetermeer, NL: Boekencentrum, 2017), p. 13. In this most recent Dutch handbook on preaching, these authors arrive at an average of eight to fourteen hours of preparation per week based on their findings.

according to the information given to me by the representatives of the five major denominations that offer Dutch-speaking services, about 40 of the Flemish-speaking Evangelical and Pentecostal churches would have a full-time or part-time (teaching) pastor. So, the majority of the about 210 churches have no full-time (teaching) pastor, hence my modest but calculated estimation.

What happens as these pastors, teachers, and laypersons prepare for their weekly engagement with their congregation? How do they cope spiritually and practically with the frequency of their preaching interventions, which is typically high in the context of Evangelicalism in general?[14] How does the need to *produce* a constant flow of sermons conflict with the need to explore meditative aspects in the sermonic process and the interior life of the preacher?

Highly productive in his own lifetime, the Victorian 'Prince of Preachers' Charles H. Spurgeon (1834–1892) hints at a particular direction in one of his sermons: The Bible is a book that 'talks to you as you are, not only as you should be, or as others have been, but with you, with you personally, about your present condition'.[15] Spurgeon's belief that the Bible is a kind of 'talking book' implies that there is an initial listener, a first hearer. It follows that there is a continuous ebb and flow of dialogue between God, Scripture, and the listener. Spurgeon's example serves to introduce the homiletical nature of the research that follows, as it seeks to uncover the unseen or hard-to-describe parts of *discernment* and *listening*.

According to Protestant theologian Wim Dekker, there is a conversation with the Bible text: 'When, in these texts, the whole range of events in the relationship between God and human being are addressed, which of these are for myself, the *first*

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[14] I return to the subject of homiletics within the Evangelical movement in Chapter 7.

[15] Charles H. Spurgeon, 'The Talking Book' in *Great Preaching on the Bible*, ed. Shelton L. Smith (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 2004), p. 115.

hearer, points of recognition and alienation?' [italics added].[16] This attitude of receptivity is precisely how Dekker characterises Spurgeon's Reformational emphasis on the living power of Scripture in conversation with its reader.[17] Although this attitude might have seemed elusive at the onset of this research, I wanted to qualify the nature of that receptivity through practical theological research and ethnographic reflection. The sheer number of sermons and the hours spent preparing them on a yearly basis does at the very least justify a research project that can help shed light on what is happening during that preparation.

2.4 Ethnographical Audit

At this point, I offer a second autobiographical note pertaining to the theoretical beginnings of this research project.[18] My master's thesis offered a theoretical overview and analysis of the writings of philosopher James K.A. Smith from the perspective of systematic theology and philosophical theology. Smith proposes a liturgical anthropology as the basic lens through which to analyse human praxis, in general, and human formation and education, in particular. However, for me, the question remained of how Smith's queries and proposals could be appropriated in a practical theological sense. Tucked away in a footnote, Smith asks a question that lingered in my mind, i.e. how to validate this call for an ethnographical audit given that this work orbits around the anthropological dimensions of liturgy.[19] Smith's call for an ethnographical audit grows out of a dialogue with the work of French theorist

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[16] Wim Dekker, *Marginaal en Missionair: Kleine Theologie voor een Krimpende Kerk*, 2. druk (Zoetermeer, NL: Boekencentrum, 2011), p. 119. 'Wanneer het in de teksten gaat om het hele scala aan gebeurtenissen in de relatie tussen God en mens, waar liggen dan voor mijzelf als *eerste hoorder* de punten van herkenning en vervreemding?' [italics added].

[17] Dekker, p. 117. I am aware that I offer no systematic theological treatise on the role of Scripture and the understandings of it by e.g. Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and Karl Barth, through which we can understand Spurgeon and Dekker.

[18] The first note being the undergraduate context in which I took a course on homiletics.

[19] For this call for an audit by Smith, see James K.A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1629.

Pierre Bourdieu, in which Smith uncovers a call to attend to the logic of 'a practice that is unarticulated but nonetheless has a coherent "sense"'.[20]

Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* (a trilogy) is, in essence, his own constructive proposal for a pedagogy based on an alternative philosophical anthropology, i.e. a liturgical anthropology.[21] Smith realises that robust attention must be paid to empirical realities, despite the fact that his point of departure is theological and theoretical in nature. Accordingly, he draws on a theologically informed ethnography.[22] This results in Smith's aforementioned call for an ethnographical audit, stating that he:

> […] can think of a congregation gathering week in and week out for historic, intentional Christian worship that includes all the elements discussed here; and yet, from the perspective of shalom, some of its parishioners are unapologetic and public participants in some of the most egregious systemic injustices. Does that falsify my claims here? I don't think so, at least not necessarily. Rather, we will need a more *nuanced account* of how some liturgies trump others. [italics added][23]

Smith does not ignore this potential critique of his *Cultural Liturgies* project and tackles this realisation in his most recent instalment of the trilogy, *Awaiting the King*.

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[20] Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, Location 3566. For another critical appropriation of Bourdieu within the context of spirituality, see also Mathew Guest, 'In Search of Spiritual Capital: The Spiritual as a Cultural Resource', in *A Sociology of Spirituality*, ed. by Kieran Flanagan and Peter C. Jupp, Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective Series in Association with the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), p. 189. Although Guest's (and Douglas Davies's) research project looks into a different area altogether (tracing the lives and influence of senior Anglican clergy and their children from 1940 to 2000), it explores 'spirituality' in that it addresses 'the age-old Weberian tension between the originating experiences of religion and its later institutions', and also 'engage[s] with the problem in reverse'. These observations might help to clarify the relationship between the experiences of the listening preacher and his institution and tradition.

[21] See also the three instalments of the trilogy: James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation*, Cultural Liturgies, 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009); Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*; James K.A. Smith, *Awaiting the King: Reforming Public Theology*, Cultural Liturgies, 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017).

[22] Smith himself contributed to the 'The Ecclesiology and Ethnography Network' founded in 2011. See also Mark T. Mulder and James K.A. Smith, 'Understanding Religion Takes Practice: Anti-Urban Bias, Geographical Habits, and Theological Influences', in *Explorations in Ecclesiology and Ethnography*, ed. by Christian B. Scharen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), pp. 93–113 (pp. 94–98). See also James K.A. Smith, 'Worldview, Sphere Sovereignty, and DTK: A Guide for (Perplexed) Reformed Folk', (paper presented at the Association of Reformed Institutions of Higher Education Symposium, Ancaster, ON, Canada, November 5, 2010).

[23] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 214fn115.

In it, Smith is open to being questioned by some disturbing case studies (slavery, Rwanda's genocide). He grapples with 'ecclesial failure' and the inadequacy of liturgy.[24] For the purposes of my research, it is sufficient to appreciate Smith's desire to add complexity to the problematic nature of his thesis. In this sense, for Smith, it might be the '[l]iberation from the myths of "purity"' as the 'beginning of wisdom for grappling with questions of deformation and sanctification'.[25] In sum, the call for an audit Smith expresses in his earlier work is a call to appreciate the complexity of being the church, a call in which the theologian and ethnographer alike become sensitised to 'an antireductionism vis-à-vis sociology, an antignosticism vis-à-vis theology'.[26]

Reading this, I wondered, was it possible to produce a more complex and nuanced account of the recurring liturgical practice of preaching — in particular that part of the sermonic process that deals with the *listening of the preacher*?[27] My intention then, per Smith, would be to 'identify the functional theologies that trump the official theologies of our churches and congregations. In other words, […] be able to detect (performative) heresies that theologians would miss.'[28] In order to make that identification, this qualitative research might serve precisely as the kind of 'ethnographical audit' Smith is calling for.

But is it possible to even research such a topic as the sermonic process, especially when such a process is seldom defined or outlined in a clear way?[29]

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[24] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, p. 188. It falls outside the scope of this dissertation to enter into a full explanation of and conversation with Smith's analysis and the arguments related to this critique of his view of liturgical formation.

[25] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, p. 188.

[26] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, p. 190.

[27] For a similar call for adding complexity, see also Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), p. 160–61. Ward draws upon the work of John Swinton and Harriet Mowat to express the need for a kind of research that 'intends to get beneath the surface of things and to not accept uncritically what at first appears to be the case'.

[28] Smith, *Awaiting the King*, p. 192.

[29] For a definition of the phrase 'sermonic process' see Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1991), p. 339. 'The sermonic process is a continual bridging enterprise in which the preacher

Aubrey Spears dares to question the presence of a prayerful element during that process.[30] In effect, it was Smith's call for a 'nuanced account' that instigated this research in practical theology. I sought to discover whether a nuanced account of the *listening preacher* could agree with or falsify Smith's claims, i.e. that the elements of Christian liturgical worship are transformative in nature.[31] Even though preachers spend more focused time preparing the sermon, they should not be excluded from this observation. Indeed, taking an honest look at my own life as a preacher, the question remains: Am I so different from my neighbour or fellow church member? Have all these hours of preparation transformed me, or am I far too often a participant 'in some of the most egregious systemic injustices'?[32]

2.5   The Postliberal Preacher

Before I move on to a third and final autobiographical note on the theoretical origins of this research, it is worth introducing Lance Pape, who offers arguably a more focused account of a homiletical appropriation of Smith's call for an audit, in particular at the level of the preacher.

Pape's account is a Postliberal take — not unlike Smith's — on the preacher's encounter with the text. Pape offers a Ricoeurian approach according to which the preacher becomes part of a 'hermeneutical encounter'. This 'encounter' obliges him or her to accept the mandate offered on behalf of a community 'whose identity is

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helps the audience to relive the drama and spiritual power of the text for its original audience and then to understand how that original message relates to similar situations in their own lives.'

[30] For the critical observation that prayer as a constitutive part of the sermonic process is often neglected in the Protestant context, see Aubrey Spears, 'Preaching the Old Testament', in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. by Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 4691.

[31] For this, see his more recent search for a 'thick' ethnography: James K.A. Smith, *Who's Afraid of Relativism: Community, Contingency, and Creaturehood, The Church and Postmodern Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), p. 81. Albeit with a more theoretically oriented approach, Smith himself seems to have taken up the gauntlet in search of an epistemology for a philosophical ethnography.

[32] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, p. 214fn115.

constituted in part by a pledge to submit to the authority of this text'.[33] The image

Pape envisages is that of the preacher as a music conductor, standing with his or her

back to the audience. In this view, the role of the preacher is not minimised. After all,

it is through the preacher's 'unusual self-awareness' that he/she can be more

intentional, more accountable, and more responsible.[34] However, as we will see later

in other works on the preacher as *first listener*, Pape's theoretical exploration of the

hermeneutical process involved deserves an empirical reflection to qualify and/or

validate the internal process at the level of the preacher.[35]

     In *Under the Oak Tree*, John McClure takes a more critical approach to the

Postliberal position.[36] Here, McClure reacts to the aforementioned 'conflict of

liturgies' approach of which Smith can be considered a proponent.[37] According to

McClure, the 'conflict of liturgies' discourse is built on the narrative theological

method of the so-called Yale School.[38] This method assumes at its core a 'language

game' approach[39] in which 'languages', 'cultures', or 'narratives' are in conflict.

Amidst such conflict, one could question whether this language game requires (or

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[33] Lance B. Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say: Ricoeur and the Possibility of Postliberal Preaching* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 3097.

[34] Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say*, Location 3097.

[35] That being said, it is fair to point out that Pape seeks a dialogue with Barth's kerygmatic model and Barth's attempt to find the 'third thing' — the 'third thing' being 'thinking more about how scriptural language and sermonic language participate in God's free act of self- communication'. Although there is still a strong evaluative approach present in Pape's threefold use of Ricoeur's concept of *mimesis*, more weight is given to the 'preacher's surrogate hermeneutical engagement during the sermon preparation process'. Lance B. Pape, 'Coming to Terms with Barth's "Third Thing": Hans Frei, Paul Ricoeur, and the Possibility of Postliberal Homiletics', *Homiletic*, 38.1 (2013), 18–27 (p. 26).

[36] John S. McClure, 'The Minister as Conversation Partner', in *Under the Oak Tree: The Church as Community of Conversation in a Conflicted and Pluralistic World*, ed. by Ronald J. Allen, John S. McClure, and O. Wesley Allen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 678.

[37] Although Smith's call for an ethnographical audit is laudable, one should take his Postliberal approach into account. See also Christian B. Scharen and Aana Marie Vigen, *Ethnography as Christian Theology and Ethics* (London, UK: Continuum, 2011), pp. 34–35.

[38] For a critical introduction and engagement of the New Yale theology, see also Mark I. Wallace, *The Second Naiveté: Barth, Ricoeur, and the New Yale Theology*, Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics, 6 (Macon, GA: Mercer, 1990), pp. 86–88.

[39] For the influence of Wittgenstein on Yale's approach to language-games, see Wallace, p. 89. For an introduction to Postliberal theology, see Ronald T. Michener, *Postliberal Theology: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), p. 53.

imposes) a confessional attachment to one metanarrative that thus 'trumps' (see Smith) all other metanarratives.[40] Can we be hopeful about a preacher's ability to construct an audience, or at the very least his ability to construct an alternative (Christian) language for an alternative (Christian) culture? Can, as Pape suggests, the preacher be responsible enough to be a mediator of the text for the community?

As observed earlier, Smith is not denying that some trumping of liturgies occurs. People are still going to church, worshipping, and listening to sermons; at least for those people, there seems to be a process of spiritual discernment taking place at all times across these 'competing' liturgies. In this vein, McClure opts for a 'radical pluralist' view in which we should be open to 'the permeability of the boundaries' of different worldviews.[41] For McClure, the preacher as *first listener* thus becomes a listener among listeners and initiates a conversation within the liturgical context.[42] I would assume that, for Smith, it remains to be seen whether the complexity of these competing liturgies will help to identify the functional liturgies that trump the official liturgies of our churches and congregations and of our secular context. Or, to rephrase this in terms of my homiletical inquiry, will this research identify the functional practices of the preacher in preparing the sermon, and if so, do those practices trump the 'official', i.e. normative, homiletical presuppositions that have something to say on the sermonic process?

2.6   Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons

My third and final autobiographical note of a more theoretical nature traces the inspiration for the present research back to Theo Pleizier's *Religious Involvement in*

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[40] McClure, 'The Minister as Conversation Partner', Location 647. For examples of other homiletical works in a Postliberal vein, see e.g. William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010); Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997).

[41] McClure, 'The Minister as Conversation Partner', Location 694.

[42] Ibid., Location 1821.

Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics.
Pleizier's work is an example of a new vein of homiletical research that focuses on
the listener and what he or she does with the sermon. In fact, Pleizier's attempt to
harmonise the anthropological and the theological-conceptual might be the kind of
nuanced account Smith is calling for.

Pleizier utilises a qualitative Grounded Theory methodology to conduct
empirical analyses. In doing so, he conceptualises the 'socio-religious process of
getting religiously involved […] in three stages, opening up, dwelling in the sermon,
and *actualizing faith*' [italics added].[43] Interestingly, the 'locus of control' of
meaning, according to Pleizier, can be attributed to the sermon and/or to the listener.
The role of the preacher should not be obscured here, and neither does Pleizier hint at
that. Pleizier's focus is not, for that matter, on the preacher but on the listener of the
sermon. But at this point I would suggest introducing the preacher explicitly as an
additional 'locus of control' of meaning (i.e. in addition to either the sermon or the
listener). Furthermore, even a superficial reading of existing qualitative or
quantitative research reveals the predominantly normative advice being offered to the
preacher.[44] Indeed, an abundance of research describes what the preacher *should do*
in order to address gaps in the listener's sermon-listening experience. Homiletical

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[43] Theo J. Pleizier, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons: A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics* (Delft, NL: Eburon, 2010), p. 151, 229. Pleizier explains that 'in actualising faith involvement is particularly religiously specified: in listening faith in God is actualised according to two modes, an illuminative or momentary and an anamnetic or sequential mode, each having two dimensions: a dialectical orientation and a divine-human encounter' p. 229. Pleizier has not been the only researcher using qualitative research methods in the homiletical field. See also André Verweij, *Positioning Jesus' Suffering: A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes* (Delft, NL: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2014); Hendrik J. C. Pieterse, 'Grounded Theory Approach in Sermon Analysis of Sermons on Poverty and Directed at the Poor as Listeners', *Acta Theologica*, 30 (2010), 113–129; Hendrik J. C. Pieterse, 'An Emerging Grounded Theory for Preaching on Poverty in South Africa with Matthew 25: 31-46 as Sermon Text', *Acta Theologica*, 33 (2013), 175–195. Gerald Lincoln's Grounded Theory study assesses 'the information literacy skills of pastoral graduates from Bible colleges and seminaries who are engaged in preaching ministries'. Lincoln's qualitative research, however, highlights the need for a skills-driven approach more typical of the Evangelical preaching tradition. Gerald E., Lincoln, 'The Information Literacy Competences of Evangelical Pastors: A Study of Sermon Preparation' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 2013), p. 8.
[44] Ronald J. Allen and Mary Alice Mulligan, 'Listening to Listeners: Five Years Later', *Homiletic,* 34 (2009), 9.

schools, their attitudes towards the Bible, their theological methods, and their

purposes for preaching arguably set the agenda for the preacher. While I am not

arguing against evaluation, any evaluative element should be merely an initial

reflection on the outcome of this empirical research, i.e. is there a clear

understanding of the perceived contours of Evangelical homiletical spirituality? If

there is no clear understanding of these contours grounded in empirical research,

then it follows that the prescriptive or normative agenda for the preacher is at the

least not grounded in the analysis of the empirical data.

Pleizier's research is focused on the listener of the sermon and describes four

different modes of faith actualisation accordingly. These four modes are: celebrative

insight, comforting insight, paranetic insight, converting insight.[45] A line of

questioning could be developed towards the faith actualisation at the level of the

preacher.[46] If such a faith actualisation does not occur, does a sermon, as offered by a

particular preacher in a particular liturgical context, offer what Pleizier calls a 'new

world'?[47] Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* claims as much. Drawing upon the work of

phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty and social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, Smith

would argue that the sermon as part of the liturgy creates a new world. Such a

theoretical perspective seems to demand a nuanced account. So, in this sense,

Pleizier offers a most recent example of how research on *listening* can be conducted,

as he qualifies and categorises different types of listening in a way that seems true to

the ethnographical audit called for by Smith.

The above example on researching the listener of the sermon, then, begs the

question: In what way can the researcher categorise and validate the preacher's

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[45] Pleizier, pp. 269–71.
[46] Pleizier, p. 150.
[47] Ibid., p. 286. Although Pleizier sets it in italics, the origins of his use of the seemingly
Barthian phrase '[strange] new world' are not clear. However, earlier in his text, Pleizier refers to
Walter Brueggemann, for whom preaching is a 'daring speech in which a *new world* is voiced' [italics
added] (p. 75).

discernment and listening process? Could Smith's approach to liturgy be operationalised and applied to the field of homiletical spirituality? Is it possible to explicate the kind of faith actualisation present in the life of the preacher as he or she listens continuously and frequently? Can research identify the practices of the preacher in preparing the sermon, and do those practices trump the normative homiletical presuppositions that have something to say on the sermonic process? And, finally, will homiletical vagueness disappear as we grow in our understanding of what happens during the sermonic process?

2.7 Conclusion

Having situated the project's origins and relevance by means of auto/theobiography (Chapter 1), supplemented by situating my story within the context of contemporary literature (present chapter), let me reflect on the research question in a more focused way. This is a practical theological engagement. It focuses on the realities of a Christian practice in the field of homiletical spirituality. Driven by a reflective ethnography, this investigation will draw out a clearer understanding of the perceived contours of Evangelical homiletical spirituality. The ethnographic context is demarcated as the one of the preacher in the FEM; the practices that will be looked into belong to the field of homiletical spirituality. With this in mind, I repeat here the more cohesive expression of my research:

> This inquiry into homiletical practices aims to critically evaluate the preacher's discernment and listening process in preparing, receiving, and delivering the sermon within the context of Flemish Evangelical preaching.

In doing so, I hope to gain a clearer understanding of what is really happening in this process. Few homileticians would deny the reality of a preacher's discernment and listening process, yet only a handful propose a theology of listening, and even

fewer offer an empirical account of the homiletical practices that are part of the preacher's spiritual toolbox. A notable example of a theology on *listening* can be found in Jos Douma's *Veni Creator Spiritus: De meditatie en het Preekproces*.[48] For Douma, reception is a key word in a process of personal reflection and meditation. In this process, invention and concentration mark the way in which Scripture becomes '[t]ext für mich', i.e. 'addressed to me'.[49] Another example is Wolfgang J. Bittner's *Hören in der Stille: Praxis meditativer Gottesdienste*, in which he offers an anthropological rationale for the possibility of *spiritual listening*, i.e. 'Man is capable of *hearing*' [italics added].[50] A final example will suffice at the moment. In their *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching*, Neil Richardson and George Lovell suggest that the 'preacher's own journey with God is a vital resource' in which the spirituality of the preacher comes to the fore. [51]

What these homileticians have in common is a preacher-centred approach with a specific focus on the preacher and the practice of *listening*. Nevertheless, this preacher-centred approach could benefit from accessing the realities of the preacher's practice as he or she prepares for the weekly appointment with the listener in front of the pulpit. In the following chapter, I will introduce the hermeneutical methodology put forward by Sandra Schneiders as the academic and methodological lens through which to tackle these questions.

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[48] Jos Douma, *Veni Creator Spiritus: De meditatie en het Preekproces* (Kampen, NL: Kok-Kampen, 2000), p. 173. See also Douma's summary in English translation: *Veni Creator Spiritus, Meditation and the Homiletic Process*, pp. 173, 315.

[49] Douma, p. 176.

[50] Wolfgang J. Bittner, *Hören in der Stille: Praxis meditativer Gottesdienste* (Göttingen, DE: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), p. 31. Translation mine.

[51] George Lovell and Neil Richardson, *Sustaining Preachers and Preaching: A Practical Guide* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2011), pp. 30–31.

3 Chapter 3: Methodological Groundings

3.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I introduced the nature and general direction of this research and explicated its theoretical origins. I also made a case for researching the preacher's meditative practices. My own controlled introspection on a perceived homiletical vagueness or hermeneutical ambiguity (Chapter 1) and recent calls for or examples of ethnographic approaches (Chapter 2) express the need for a 'thick' description that honours the complexity of being the church.[1] To rephrase this once again more succinctly, in the first chapter, I addressed the question: Why do *I* approach these preachers? Chapter 2 asked a more academic and inclusive question: Why do *we* need to approach these preachers?[2] This chapter will focus on the methodological question: *How* do we approach these preachers? What happens when we approach this material in these ways and for these reasons? Therefore, I argue for the kind of 'knowing' Sandra Schneiders proposes for entering into research on spirituality: a knowing that is 'primarily personal and arrived at through the multidisciplinary analysis of thick description of the individual that remains concrete and specific even as it gives rise to constructive results that have, ideally, broad implications'.[3]

In this chapter, I describe and offer a rationale for the methodology employed, arguing that it will help to reveal the implicit or explicit models for the actual discernment practices of preachers active within the FEM.

In order to test my autobiographical observations, this research employs one methodological approach that consists of a number of components. Sandra

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[1] For the notion of 'thick description' as developed by Clifford Geertz, see 'Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture', in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, ed. by Clifford Geertz (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2008), pp. 9–10.

[2] Sheldrake, Location 338.

[3] Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology', in Lescher and Liebert, Location 3611.

Schneiders's hermeneutical approach forms the interpretative framework for this particular study of homiletical spirituality.[4] The components or 'movements' of this framework will be at the forefront of the research. These consist of a thick description of the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation, a critical analysis, and finally, a constructive interpretation in order to come to a greater understanding of the phenomenon at hand.[5]

3.2 Homiletical Agendas

My focus on Schneiders's hermeneutical approach is warranted since it deals with a research intention mentioned earlier, i.e. to identify functional (homiletical) theologies that trump official (homiletical) theologies. Schneiders's procedure, as I will explain, does not foster primarily 'the development of a strictly theological approach' with a formation agenda.

A researcher should be aware of the different homiletical traditions and the particular kinds of (theological) assumptions embedded in those traditions when studying and espousing the role, personality, style, and impact of the preacher in light of the basic homiletical concerns within different theological families.[6] Homiletical schools have tended to set the agenda for the preacher based on a range of theological and anthropological assumptions, seldom taking into account empirical research on what is actually happening during the sermonising process.

This is no different for the Evangelical tradition of which I am a part. Ben

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[4] I will return to Schneiders's approach in section 3.3.1.

[5] See also Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality', p. 6. Especially the third phase, i.e. constructive interpretation, is influenced by philosopher Paul Ricoeur's use of the term 'appropriation'. See also Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Spirituality in the Academy', *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), 695. On the appropriation of Ricoeur in Schneiders's method, see also John R. Donahue, 'The Quest for Biblical Spirituality', in Lescher and Liebert, Locations 1416–93.

[6] A helpful overview of these traditions or theological families (e.g. Liberal, Mutual Critical Correlation, Process, Evangelical, Neoorthodox, Postliberal, Confessional, Radical Orthodox, Otherness, Liberation, Ethnic) is offered in Ronald J. Allen, *Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian*, Elements of Preaching (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 1083.

Witherington III is clear on this: 'For an Evangelical there is an ultimate litmus test for good preaching and teaching: is it well grounded in and illuminating the biblical text and teaching?'[7] Here, Witherington echoes the theological assumptions behind this 'ultimate litmus test', and I could not agree more. However, on an operational level, it has yet to be seen whether my respondents have understood good preaching and teaching in this way. Certainly, some respondents' perceptions of good preaching seem to correspond to Witherington's assertion:

> Well...what you have learned has to do, in the first place, with a thorough preparation. I love the exegetical sermon, expository preaching. And actually, that was not at all the case here. You did not hear much news either. It was like, 'I have read this in my "quiet time" and yes, then I thought about it'. There was actually not much depth. (Isaac)

> I... I…I say it again, I enjoy immensely a well thought-out exegetical sermon. And then I think 'wow', then I often pray to God, 'if I would be able to do that'. But then the Lord God says, 'you are not able to do that, you are on a different level'. (Victor)

Isaac was clear on what kind of preaching he was aiming for in his practice. Based on a combination of his theological training, his own preferences, and his local context, Isaac strove for a clear illumination of the biblical text. Although Victor was reluctant to consider himself a good exegetical preacher, he nevertheless expressed the importance of the 'well thought-out exegetical sermon'.

It would seem that the (Flemish) Evangelical tradition's emphasis on the edifying purpose of preaching has obscured other domains of homiletical practice and hindered the development of a greater awareness and integration of different homiletical paradigms in the Flemish practical theological context. Importantly, this emphasis may have neglected the realities of the preacher's lived experience, which is more complex than these two respondents seem to espouse. Therefore, this

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[7] Witherington III, p. ix.

research seeks to achieve some balance and shed light on these top-down agendas — whether implicit or explicit — in homiletical thinking in the Flemish Evangelical context.

In light of the aforementioned analyses, what assumptions and agendas shape the Evangelical preacher's discernment process, and how does the preacher experience them?

3.3   Methodological Perspectives

Further questions can direct our thinking in an even more focused way. At this point, therefore, I synthesise what has been stated so far and pose some summary statements and questions related to the rationale for this research:

(1) A common critique of theology (see also Smith) from the perspective of the social sciences is warranted, in that, 'the claims regarding formation made by theologians are empirically unverified (and likely unverifiable)'.[8] How can we offer a more nuanced and thick description of the sermonising process into which the preacher steps?[9]

(2) Can we explicate the preacher's discernment and listening process, and, if so, how? What constitutes *listening*? Acknowledging that the preacher enters into this process as a situated subject, is there a way to interpret the reality of the preacher's ecclesial, historical, cultural, and social embeddedness as he/she encounters God and the text as the *first listener*?

(3) More specifically, can we constitute the preacher as *first listener* within the context of *the Flemish Evangelical tradition*, and, if so, how? To what kind of homiletical approach does the Evangelical preaching tradition adhere? Can we extract and explicate this approach from the preacher's own understanding of the

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[8] Smith, *Desiring the* Kingdom, p. 74fn37.
[9] On the ecclesial self-awareness of the preacher, see also Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say,* Location 3097.

practice of discernment and listening?

(4) Can we establish what is happening as the preacher enters into this sermonising process, not to offer the preacher practical tools, not to introduce a formational and/or denominational agenda, but to make the reality of preparing the sermon explicit through the description of the phenomena that are part of the listening and discernment process — and in this way to eliminate the perceived vagueness within homiletical spirituality?

3.3.1 Hermeneutical Approach

As mentioned before, Sandra M. Schneiders's hermeneutical approach offers an appropriate framework for addressing the statements and questions raised in the above thread. Schneiders specialises in the academic study of spirituality, having assembled a body of seminal articles and chapters through which she offers a comprehensive view of this fairly new academic discipline.[10]

Schneiders's most succinct definition of spirituality, i.e. 'the *lived experience* of Christian faith', has been shaped and reshaped over the course of her career. In a more recent formulation, she specifies spirituality as 'the actualization of the basic human capacity for transcendence in and through the experience of conscious involvement in the project of life-integration through self-transcendence toward the horizon of ultimate value one perceives'.[11]

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[10] See e.g. Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Theology and Spirituality: Strangers, Rivals, or Partners?', *Horizons*, 13.2 (1986), 253–74. Schneiders, 'Spirituality in the Academy', pp. 676–79. Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality'.

[11] Sandra M. Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality: Text and Transformation', in *The Bible and Spirituality: Exploratory Essays in Reading Scripture Spiritually*, ed. by Andrew T. Lincoln, J. G. McConville, and Lloyd Pietersen (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013), pp. 128–29. For a more philosophical and equally positive phenomenological approach, see also Patrick Masterson, *Approaching God: Between Phenomenology and Theology* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), p. 30.

Of course, as Schneiders herself would argue, we can only research the actualisation of the experience through its expression in 'texts'. Of these texts, Schneiders explains that these can be:

> written documents such as biographies, autobiographies, poetry, journals, and histories; literary, plastic, and musical artistic creations; conversations and other oral presentations; accounts of dreams and visions and prayers; works, movements, and whatever else serves to make personal experience inter-subjectively available: that is, to exteriorize it into the public forum. But the texts of interest to scholars of spirituality are texts that mediate the particular as particular rather than the texts that thematise and formulate, however tentatively, the tradition.[12]

Schneiders does not suggest that we should evade theology's search for formulation or thematisation. For Schneiders, a healthy Christian spirituality is indeed characterised by important themes such as 'trinitarian, incarnational, biblical, liturgical, communitarian, moral, ministerial' formulations that are part of the Body of Christ, the church.[13] However, in view of the perceived vagueness in Evangelical homiletical spirituality and the reality of top-down homiletical agendas, Schneiders's emphasis on personal experience is helpful.

As hinted at earlier in this chapter, Schneiders's primary focus is not on fostering 'the development of a strictly theological approach' with a formation agenda; rather, any research approach should welcome an 'inter-disciplinary hermeneutical approach that entertains a certain tensive openness toward the praxis issue'.[14]

Schneiders's methodology engages three 'movements' — descriptive, analytical, and constructive — with the understanding of the religious experience as

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[12] Schneiders, 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality and Catholic Theology', Locations 3539–47.
[13] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', pp. 129–30.
[14] Schneiders, 'A Hermeneutical Approach', pp. 49–50.

the goal in order to gain 'the fullest possible understanding of the phenomenon'.[15] It is useful to situate these three movements in the context of the four areas of questioning presented at the beginning of section 3.3. In relation to a call for an ethnographical audit and a thick description (points 1 and 3), Schneiders aims for a descriptive-critical approach that is interdisciplinary in nature and not solely or primarily a prescriptive and isolated exercise. In fact, commitment to interdisciplinary approaches characterises Schneiders's hermeneutical approach. As Philip Sheldrake comments, 'the role of interdisciplinary study has become a central methodological principle of spirituality and one of Sandra Schneiders's important legacies'.[16] Judith A. Burling lists the many times that Schneiders explains the role of interdisciplinary study as a central methodological principle, on the basis of which Berling makes a strong claim that the research of spirituality is 'intrinsically interdisciplinary'.[17]

Although Schneiders has argued, as we have seen, for a modest role of theology as a norming tool for (homiletical) agendas, she does, as Burling asserts, claim 'that biblical studies and the history of Christianity provide the resources, norms, and hermeneutical context of Christian spirituality'.[18] The question, then, becomes how to operationalise the integration between these constitutive disciplines and other so-called problematic disciplines?[19] Berling explains helpfully that:

> [t]he problematic disciplines are used instrumentally (to serve the ends of
> understanding religious experience) rather than 'synoptically' (to claim that all study

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[15] See also Judith A. Burling, 'Christian Spirituality Intrinsically Interdisciplinary', in Lescher and Liebert, Location 615.

[16] Sheldrake, Locations 322–23.

[17] Burling, Location 622.

[18] Ibid., Location 856. Undoubtedly, while Schneiders's Roman Catholic framework offers a particular lens on the role of normative theology, it does not negate the idea that other normative theologies based on Christian confessions have an influence on the uses of resources, norms, and hermeneutical contexts.

[19] On 'constitutive' and 'problematic' disciplines, see also Sandra M. Schneiders, 'The Study of Christian Spirituality: Contours and Dynamics of a Discipline', *Christian Spirituality Bulletin*, 6.1 (1998), 1–12.

of religious experience must include a theological, literary, or psychological dimension; that the discipline is incomplete or insufficient without those additions). Christian spirituality research uses these other disciplines as an aid to understand religious experience.[20]

In relation to the validation and qualification of the preacher's discernment process (point 2), I argue that Schneiders's 'critical analysis' can help to engage the data at hand from different points of view. Again, this movement is interdisciplinary in nature, which is crucial for exploring my research topic. For example, in what way can psychological insights into creative processes help us to understand how preachers deal with sources of authority? Finally, a constructive element is necessary to not simply describe, explain, or decipher the phenomena, but foremost to understand what is happening in the fullest sense (point 4).[21]

3.3.2   Practical Theological Perspectives

Although I approach this research as a study in spirituality, it is situated within practical theology. One challenge of practical theology, as Leslie J. Francis reminds us, is that it 'shares with other branches of theology the fundamental problem of determining the methodological perspectives which provide appropriate and legitimate tools for theological enquiry'.[22] Equally, this research, if it is to be practical theological, should be equipped with tools that legitimise this particular research.

Homiletician Theo Pleizier deals with this problem by drawing on Johannes van der Ven's model of intradisciplinary research.[23] According to Pleizier, van der Ven 'relies foremost on the testability of theological concepts on the basis of

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[20] Burling, Location 807.

[21] See also Schneiders, 'A Hermeneutical Approach', pp. 56–57.

[22] Leslie J. Francis, 'Personality Theory, Empirical Theology and Normativity', in *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*, ed. by J. A. van der Ven and Michael Scherer-Rath, Empirical Studies in Theology, v. 10 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2004), p. 137.

[23] For a reminder of Pleizier's Grounded Theory research, see section 2.5.

empirical measurements'.[24] In Pleizier's research on the religious involvement of the listener of the sermon, this approach results in the use of a qualitative research method of Grounded Theory to test the theological concepts of sermonic listening during the Divine–human interaction.[25] Reflecting on the sensitivities between theological inquiry and empirical research, Andrew Village advises that our approach should insist 'that whatever is done theologically with the evidence, that evidence itself must be gathered with the tools and integrity of empirical science'.[26]

For this particular empirical research, data were collected through several waves of interviews and the transcribed text was coded into software for qualitative data analysis, i.e. NVivo 11 (the Mac version).[27] In doing so, I secured the possibility of a critical analysis as will be shown in Chapters 5 and 6.[28]

To apply the methodological structure provided by Schneiders, Grounded Theory is not the only method that can be used in practical theological research such as Pleizier's.[29] According to Jo Moran-Ellis and colleagues, '"knowing more" about a phenomenon' is possible 'through the use of different research methods in one

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[24] Pleizier, p. 24. This approach is associated with the so-called Nijmegen School.

[25] To my knowledge, the phrase 'Divine–human' was coined by Theo Pleizier, who attaches it to the concepts of 'dynamics', 'encounter', 'relationship', 'interaction', and 'communication'. See e.g. Plezier, pp. 57–81. See also Pleizier, pp. 16–21; 85–103.

[26] Andrew Village, *The Bible and Lay People: An Empirical Approach to Ordinary Hermeneutics*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), p. 6. Village makes a distinction between Francis's approach and that of the Nijmegen school (p. 6fn3). See also Leslie J. Francis, 'Personality Theory and Empirical Theology', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 15.1 (2002), 37–53 (p. 40). In common with Van der Ven's perspective, Francis wishes to see the methodologies of the social sciences fully integrated within the discipline of practical theology.

[27] At the time of conducting the interviews, my intention was to use the qualitative research method of Grounded Theory as my point of departure. However, as time progressed, I deviated, albeit unintentionally, from the necessary methodological sequences, i.e. the strict procedures of various cycles of sampling and coding that are part of Grounded Theory.

[28] For more on the collection, process, and questions of ethics surrounding the qualitative data, see Chapter 5.

[29] For different examples (Grounded Theory, Congregational Studies, Participatory Action Research, etc.), see *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Practical Theology*, ed. by Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, The Wiley Blackwell Companions to Religion (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), pp. 137–39, 512–13, 239, 237–40. Apart from the practical theological outcome, there are other methods available. Wertz et al. list other notable qualitative methods, comparing their philosophical underpinnings, theoretical assumptions, and procedural and methodological approaches: *Five Ways of Doing Qualitative Analysis: Phenomenological Psychology, Grounded Theory, Discourse Analysis, Narrative Research, and Intuitive Inquiry*, ed. by Frederick J. Wertz (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2011). The five ways described are a 'Phenomenological Psychological Approach', 'Constructivist Grounded Theory', 'Discursive Analysis', 'Narrative Research', and 'Intuitive Inquiry'.

empirical investigation'.[30] While there are other reasons to use a plurality of methods to explore the preacher as *first listener*, such methods 'admit and use the analytical power of the constant interplay between induction (in which they are never tabula rasa) and abduction during the whole research process'.[31]

This dissertation started, for example, with an autoethnographical account of how I perceive the research question by way of offering an *auto/theobiography* (see also section 1.3). This allowed me to present relevant fragments of my personal narrative in order to frame the practical theological questions at hand. But the abductive process is not limited to the above example. Section 5.2.3.1, for example, highlights the use of two general categories to differentiate between the codes obtained from the interviews: *homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents*. Employing these categories helped me to be sensitive to the particularities of the questions driving this research. Representative of abductive approaches, these two general categories provided the inspiration for discovering patterns in the data, which enabled me to better understand the phenomena under investigation. Here, I take my cue from Tone Stangeland Kaufman's research, which describes the abductive process as a process with 'a constant alternation between theory and data, by which both are successively reinterpreted in light of each other'.[32]

Concluding, let me argue from the above that Schneiders's hermeneutical approach offers an appropriate intradisciplinary and qualitative framework for an empirical research project in practical theology such as this one.

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[30] Jo Moran-Ellis and others, 'Triangulation and Integration: Processes Claims and Implications', *Qualitative Research*, 6.1 (2006), 45–59 (p. 45).

[31] *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*, ed. by Uwe Flick (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2014), p. 162. For a brief description of the term *abduction* and its relation to inductive and deductive research, see also Kaufman, p. 82.

[32] Kaufman, Location 2437.

3.3.3 Espoused Theology

At this point I do well to repeat my aforementioned objective: How do preachers actually prepare — not how it is espoused that they do so by the potential normative theologies or hidden ecclesiologies? Schneiders's hermeneutical methodology, as we have observed, addresses the theological approaches and their formational agendas. The introduction of the notion *espoused* in previous sections is not unintentional, as it opens up a needed exploration of the practical theological perspectives that accompany a practical theological research project such as this one.

The term *espoused* is part of theologian Helen Cameron's vocabulary for theological reflection called the 'Theology in Four Voices'. Cameron describes the term as 'what people say about what they do'.[33] Although I do not fully adopt Cameron's methodology, it offers a useful introductory and insightful gateway into my research.[34] It is my contention that Cameron's interdisciplinary methodology offers an appropriate addition to Schneiders's hermeneutical framework, providing an approach to handling the complex questions that arise in the intersection between theoretical discourse, traditional theological sources, ecclesiological traditions, and descriptive accounts of church practices. With Schneiders's methodology in mind, Cameron's methodology allows me to frame my research from a descriptive point of view, rather than from mainly a prescriptive or normative one.

In her 'Theology in Four Voices', Cameron discerns (1) an Espoused Theology: what we say we believe / what motivates our intention-driven practices; (2) an Operant Theology: what the practices themselves actually disclose as our lived-out theology; (3) a Normative Theology: the theology of our tradition / church - e.g. scripture, doctrine; and (4) a Formal Theology: the theology of the

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[33] Helen Cameron and Catherine Duce, *Researching Practice in Ministry and Mission: A Companion* (London, UK: SCM press, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 346.

[34] 'Theology in Four Voices' is an ingredient of a particular methodology in her practical theology, i.e. Theological Action Research (TAR), of which one can find a full account particularly in Chapter 4 of Helen Cameron and others, *Talking About God in Practice* (London: SCM Press, 2011).

'professional' theologian. What is of particular interest is how these 'four voices' interact and inform each other, as a tension arises between what people think they should do or embrace as their own (Espoused), what they actually do (Operant), what they 'ought' to do (Normative), and how professional theologians enter this convergence and contribute from their point of view (Formal). To reframe my research question within the context of this tension arising from these 'four voices', do the listening and discernment practices of the preacher within the Flemish Evangelical church (Operant theology) reflect certain expectations offered by homiletical theologies or practices (Espoused theology)?[35] Or alternatively, what are they doing (Operant theology) as they prepare? What 'should' preachers do (Normative theology), and how can professional/academic theologians make use of the social sciences as they enter this convergence from their point of view (Formal theology)?

In later chapters, I will clarify and discuss what preachers actually *do* (i.e. the *Operant*) as I explore the results of the data collection and subsequent analysis. In terms of *espoused* theology, I will map out the ways in which the Evangelical tradition, in particular in Flanders, has understood the need for *listening* and the extent to which it has developed the practices needed to discern what to include in the sermon and how as a result of that attentive listening.

The need for a *formal* theological approach has been exemplified by Newman-scholar Frederick Aquino, who features an epistemological trajectory of sorts. Aquino draws our attention to the intersection of spiritual formation, authority, and discernment, positioning himself within a long line of critical thinkers from various disciplines who have highlighted the importance of this intersection for 'providing

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[35] For critical engagements with Cameron's methodology, see Pete Ward, 'Helen Cameron, "Life in all its Fullness" Engagement and Critique: Good News for Society (a Response)', *Practical Theology*, 5.1 (2012), 28–29. Ward's main critique of Cameron's methodology is that the absence of an explicit theology in the *operant* voices seems to miss an important avenue for an interpretative integration with the *formal* and *normative* voices.

robust accounts of spirituality'.[36] As such, my aim is for this particular research to function as that formal voice in allowing other interdisciplinary voices to be heard.

As for Cameron's *normative* voice, i.e. what one 'ought' to do, the following section on the concept of *blueprint homiletics* will shed light on some of the issues with Cameron's methodology and offer a more robust exploration of the questions surrounding the normative and descriptive nature of Schneiders's hermeneutical approach. Schneiders is reluctant to apply too theological an approach, i.e. a normative or dogmatic approach, to the study of spirituality. She finds such an approach too restrictive with a strong tendency to apply normative criteria of acceptability. For example, while one could study the experience of conversion 'in order to better understand the theology of conversion or to directly contribute to the theology of conversion (although both of these might occur)'[37], Schneiders aims for a deeper understanding of what a particular conversion experience might mean for a particular Christian person, movement, or tradition.

Even while these aims resonate with my research, one cannot dismiss the theological voice too quickly. Certainly, a more robust exploration of the tension between the different theological voices at work is required, as is a critical evaluation of Schneiders's and Cameron's approach to the normative character of theology and the relationship between normative theology and practical theology. Highlighting the critical tension between 'pure' and 'applied' theology, Sheldrake aptly summarises:

> I worry about separating 'pure' and 'applied' disciplines within theology. An assumption exists, for example, that doctrinal theology is a 'pure' discipline with its own integrity. The danger here is a reductionist view of theology as abstract and definitive. 'Applied' disciplines (for example, liturgy, pastoral studies, ethics, spirituality) are then supposed to touch areas that 'pure' theology cannot or does not wish to reach — the level of 'felt experience' or 'lived practice'. The danger,

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[36] Frederick D. Aquino, 'Spiritual Formation, Authority, and Discernment', in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, ed. by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, Oxford Handbooks in Religion (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), p. 158.

[37] Schneiders, 'The Discipline of Christian Spirituality', Location 3577.

however, is that this approach marginalizes the 'applied' out of harm's way where it can do no significant damage to 'pure' theology.[38]

In the following sections, I conduct a more robust exploration of these tensions between the different theological voices at work. I argue that the 'felt experience' and the 'pure discipline' should be able to interact in dialogical fashion without the need to discard one for the other.

3.3.4   Blueprint Homiletics

The qualifier *blueprint* has been in vogue in recent theological literature, at least since Nicholas Healy's *Church, World and the Christian Life*[39] in which Healy uses this term to qualify a particular kind of *ecclesiology* that has become idealised in the postmodern context.[40] The term has recently been introduced into discussions on the relationship between normative theological voices and other voices surrounding the study of the church and its practices.

Healy uses the phrase 'blueprint ecclesiology' to describe a shift in the late twentieth century 'in approaches to the theology and doctrine of the church'[41], as noted by David Lonsdale. Lonsdale evaluates the particular kind of normative theology that emerged as prescriptive, 'in that it starts from an ideal and moves from there to what the church ought to be'.[42] In fostering a dissatisfaction 'in terms of both

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[38] Sheldrake, Locations 435–7.

[39] Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World, and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology*, Cambridge Studies in Christian Doctrine (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[40] See also *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 23. Vanhoozer categorises Healy's approach as a form of postmodern theology. For a similar evaluation of the transition from modernist notions of theology to postmodern attempts 'to transcend the divide between experience and doctrine', see Pete Ward, 'The Hermeneutical and Epistemological Significance of Our Students: A Response to Bonnie Miller-McLemore', *International Journal of Practical Theology*, 16.1 (2012), 59fn13.

[41] David Lonsdale, 'The Church as Context for Christian Spirituality', in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Arthur G. Holder, Blackwell Companions to Religion (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005), p. 243.

[42] Ibid., p. 243. For a similar assessement of *blueprint* thinking, see also Beute, p. 19.

method and content', this kind of approach has led 'to calls for the theology of the church to focus on the actual historical reality of the church as the starting-point for theological reflection'.[43] Although I seek to define the broader field of homiletics later in this dissertation, at this point, it is enough to say that the theological discipline of homiletics is part of the actual reality of the church.

As an alternative to this 'blueprint ecclesiology', Healy offers a 'theodramatic ecclesiology' that 'is not governed by the blueprint criteria of completeness, normativity, universal application and systematic coherence'.[44] Such a theodramatic approach signals a move 'from "idealized" to "concrete" ecclesiology', or in sociologist Christian Scharen's words, seeks to 'integrate ethnography and theology' in a way that moves us from studying '"the Church" to studying "churches"'.[45]

As far as I know, Healy's 'theodramatic ecclesiology' has not been appropriated within the theological discipline of homiletics, especially within the specific subdomain that deals with the spirituality of the preacher commonly associated with the sermonising ministry of the preacher.[46] Therefore, it remains to be seen how this appropriation will translate in particular domains of ecclesiology such as homiletical spirituality. In this sense, this research might offer a fruitful

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[43] Lonsdale, p. 243.

[44] See also Healy, Location 990.

[45] Scharen and Vigen, p. 35. Healy is not the only scholar arguing for 'an ecclesiological ethnography' within a postmodern frame of reference. Healy, Location 335. See also the label 'new ethnography' in Delwin Brown, 'Refashioning Self and Other: Theology, Academy and the New Ethnography', in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. by Delwin Brown and others, The American Academy of Religion Reflection and Theory in the Study of Religion Series (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 44–45. Brown argues that 'the new ethnography might also be seen as the incorporation of postmodern philosophical hermeneutics into the empirical study of human cultures'. Healy's 'blueprint ecclesiology' is paralleled by Brown's evaluation of an ethnography in the hands of classic theology as 'theography'. Brown, p. 51.

[46] We shall return to the different approaches to exploring the spirituality of the preacher within Evangelicalism, but on the self-actualisation of the preacher, see e.g. Hans van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit: The Impact of Personality in Preaching*, 1st English edn (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981); see on Evangelical spirituality, Ian M. Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005); Alan Rathe, *Evangelicals, Worship, and Participation: Taking a Twenty-First Century Reading*, Liturgy, Worship, and Society (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), p. 164. Here, Rathe elaborates on the meaning and palpability of God's presence in and surrounding 'preaching that is empowered by the Holy Spirit from preparation to presentation'.

contribution insofar as it uncovers such a thing as a 'blueprint spirituality' within the Evangelical tradition, theology, and especially homiletical spirituality.

3.3.5   Perilous Faithfulness

Practical theologian Pete Ward enters this particular discussion by acknowledging the reality of 'blueprint theology' and how classical theology resorted 'to an ideal in the face of the ambiguities and inconsistencies of the social and the historical'.[47] Although Ward does not explore the different ecclesiological categories, he does identify *right preaching* as one such category. Ward uses the term 'perilous faithfulness' to denote the type of integration identified by Scharen and offered by Healy's 'theodramatic ecclesiology'.

'Perilous faithfulness' is a term that points to the essence of this research, i.e. a conversation between ecclesiology and ethnography, or, more precisely, between 'blueprint ecclesiologies' and the 'concrete church'. It is, as Ward explains, the observation that 'theological normativity appears to have a complex and entwined relationship with the lived'.[48] Ward does what Schneiders and Cameron seem to leave untouched, i.e. in setting (or should I say 'settling'?) the ecclesiological and ethnographical agenda without giving up the normativity of theology or marginalising the lived experience of the particular. In fact, Ward argues that, '[w]hen the 'lived' is explored through qualitative research and theology, issues of normativity remain central'.[49] This engagement with empirical data and methods should indeed look into the Evangelical preaching customs, presumed homiletical blueprints, and 'flow of tradition in relationship to the practices of communities'.[50] At the same time, there is a balance to be kept between what *ought to be* and what *is*.

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[47] Pete Ward, 'Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived: Normativity as a Perilous Faithfulness', *Ecclesial Practices*, 2.1 (2015), 74.

[48] Ward, 'Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived', p. 75.

[49] Ward, 'Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived', p. 87.

[50] Ward, 'Blueprint Ecclesiology and the Lived', p. 88.

How are the diverse expressions of Evangelical homiletical spirituality embodied in the life and preparation of the preacher? Per Schneiders's hermeneutical approach, this qualitative research should not solely be driven by theological (and homiletical) schools, but by the attention to the lived reality of the preacher.

It should be noted that apart from definitions of preaching, which can also be considered blueprints in a way, homileticians are by nature seekers of organising frameworks that could be considered types of implicit agendas. Thomas Long offers a brief historiography of such frameworks, listing among them 'the personality of the preacher, the encounter with the Bible, the form of the sermon, the inner capacities of the preaching student, and the inner life of the listener' as categories on which preaching can be centred.[51] Long, himself, opts for the categorising framework of the practice of preaching. In doing so, he clearly focuses on what *is* rather than what *ought to be*. For Long, therefore, the question '[w]hat should preaching be?' should be preceded by the question 'How are things done here?'[52] This is precisely the purpose of this research: to determine *how* this listening is taking place.

Other homileticians, like George Lovell and Neil Richardson, underscore the complexities of the preaching life, especially in light of the interior life of the preacher, which 'is common to all phases and to private and public activities'.[53] Lovell and Richardson discuss the dynamics of the preaching life, from the private to the public, from the vocational to the professional, from the perspective of long-term study and preparation to the different phases a preacher goes through. Within the context of these dynamics, the seemingly innocent question posed at the outset, 'How long does it take to prepare a sermon?', takes on a great complexity. Lovell and Richardson respond that:

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[51] Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 158.
[52] Long and Tisdale, Location 221.
[53] Lovell and Richardson, p. 44.

> The undulations of the private contour quite deliberately do not follow those of the public one, indicating that the length of time it takes to prepare a sermon defies prediction; *it is not an exact science*! Some sermons come in a moment of inspiration; others take enormous amounts of time, energy and periods of heart-breaking depression and despair. And, to complicate life further, it is simply not always possible to discern in advance within which of these categories the preparation of a sermon is going to fall. [italics added][54]

It is my intention with this research to further interrogate this statement that preparing the sermon is indeed not an exact science that can be prescribed by a normative voice. On their part, Lovell and Richardson offer a bold conclusion that '[t]he quality of the public preaching ministry is closely related to the quality of the input from *the interior life* of the preacher' [italics added].[55]

3.4   Conclusion

Keeping implicit or explicit homiletical agendas in mind, this chapter suggests being conscious of a methodology that honours 'the study of "felt experience" and "lived practice" in ways that, while not detached from theological tradition' help us to carefully observe the preacher's practices of listening.[56]

The reviewed practical theological perspectives help us to appreciate the complexity of the preacher's lived experience, while not shying away from norming outcomes. Schneiders's hermeneutical approach is attentive to the interpretative horizons at play. Her three methodological movements (description, analysis, and interpretation) leave room for robust attention to the homiletical spirituality and its practices in an inductive or abductive way.

I repeat here what I wrote at the start of this chapter: In the first chapter, I addressed the question: Why do *I* approach these preachers? Chapter 2 asked: Why

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[54] Lovell and Richardson, p. 43.
[55] Lovell and Richardson, p. 46.
[56] Sheldrake, Location 247.

do *we* need to approach these preachers?[57] This chapter focused on the question: *How* do we approach these preachers?

In the following chapter (Chapter 4), I untangle the multifaceted angles related to the discipline of spirituality and introduce the concept of sources of authority as an important lens through which to analyse the data (Chapters 5 and 6). Or, to end with a similar line of questioning: '*What* is being studied as we approach these preachers?'

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[57] Sheldrake, Location 338.

4 Chapter 4: Sources of Authority

4.1 Introduction

Schneiders not only offers a methodology (a hermeneutical approach) with its movements (description, analysis, interpretation), she further clarifies the substantive area to be studied in two particular ways. First, Schneiders emphasises that one could study a plethora of spiritualities, each marked by its own subdivisions.[1] Specifically, for my research project, these subdivisions have been introduced in previous chapters: the homiletical spirituality in the Flemish Evangelical context. Second, Schneiders offers three entrances into biblical spirituality: 1) the spirituality that produced the biblical text, 2) the spirituality in the biblical text, and 3) the spirituality the biblical text 'produces in readers by their contact/interaction with it'.[2]

For me, it is the third point of departure that is of interest given the nature of Evangelical homiletics with its emphasis on edification and proclamation (see also section 3.2). This 'entrance' captures the intention of the hermeneutical engagement of the preacher with the biblical text. For Schneiders, the preacher's engagement does not so much produce the appropriation or aim for an application of knowledge as it does seek a transformational experience. If the preacher active in the FEM has no, or only vague, models of homiletical spirituality at his disposal; and if this preacher, as suggested in Chapter 1, struggles with the effects of a historical grammatical hermeneutic that leads to a deficiency over personal formation and divine encounter, how, then, would this preacher benefit from an encounter with the biblical text that produces a particular kind of spirituality?

Part three of this research, 'Contours of the FEM', will hone in on these questions of critical analysis to offer a thicker description of the contours of homiletical spirituality within the FEM. In this chapter, however, I explore the

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[1] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 129.
[2] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 132.

substantive area to be studied, which testifies to a multifaceted reality. While this reality has been subjected to plenty of angles and genealogies, this chapter will conclude with an overview of two important lenses through which one can evaluate the nature of homiletical spirituality, i.e. *authority* and *discernment*.

As *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* asserts, *authority* and *discernment* had become closely related issues by the time of the Reformation. The obedient response to the ecclesial authority was replaced with the existential response to the Word of God, leading to a debate in the wake of the Reformation over *what* or *who* had the authority to decide what sources of discernment the believer could navigate: Reason (Socian, Anglican, Anabaptist), Spirit (Quaker, Puritan, Anabaptist), Scripture (Anglican, Puritan, Methodist, Anabaptist, Reformed), Tradition (Catholic, Anglican, Methodist), Local Community (Anabaptist), or Experience (Methodist).[3] Before I hone in on the notion of sources of authority and/or discernment and on the crucial question of how they are related, in the subsequent sections, I highlight different angles for conceiving the ways in which believers are capable of perception related to the 'Divine–human' encounter.

4.2   Angles for Research

Since this research intentionally looks at the *listening* preacher from multiple angles, it should open up different avenues for describing and interpreting the reality of the Divine–human encounter as it is experienced by the listening preacher. My particular research question thus acknowledges that more than a mere theological reflection is needed; rather, as highlighted in Chapter 3, an interdisciplinary approach to the concept of the *listening* preacher is warranted, especially since one could easily

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[3] Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, pp. 379–80.

extrapolate subquestions that relate to different categories, both theological and non-theological.

Indeed, investigating the preacher as *first listener* deals with general questions related to (Evangelical) homiletics and all its different angles[4]; the theory of the spiritual senses[5]; the interior life and history of Evangelical spirituality and experiences[6], or Christian spirituality in general for that matter[7]; an anthropology of reading[8] and listening[9]; a Biblical theology of hearing[10]; and the relationship between listening and biblical interpretation.[11] Such an investigation could also diverge into the hermeneutics surrounding the 'Virtue of Receptivity', as explored by Richard Briggs.[12] Looking at the *listening* preacher also ushers in questions of an epistemological nature[13], connecting to developments in social epistemology and virtue epistemology. Frederick D. Aquino explains convincingly how this epistemological attention is related to the areas of spiritual formation, discernment, authority, and Calvin's *sensus divinitatis* or testimony of the Holy Spirit as it is understood within the Reformed tradition.[14] Finally, and not unrelated to these

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[4] Ronald Allen explores e.g. the basic homiletical concerns of the Evangelical family, its attitude towards the Bible, its basic theological method and the purpose of preaching. Allen, *Thinking Theologically*, Location 1083. As mentioned before, Thomas Long offers a brief historiography of categorising frameworks in the field of homiletics. See section 3.3.5.

[5] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 136.

[6] Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918–1939* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999). *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield*, ed. by Tom Schwanda, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2016).

[7] Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*. Especially Chapter 11 on Christian Discernment is worth mentioning here (pp. 371–400).

[8] See also Vincent Crapanzano, *Serving the Word: Literalism in America from the Pulpit to the Bench* (New York, NY: New Press, 2000).

[9] Tanya M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical Relationship with God*, 1st edn (New York, NY: Knopf, 2012).

[10] Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), pp. 94–103.

[11] Craig G. Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015).

[12] Richard Briggs, *The Virtuous Reader: Old Testament Narrative and Interpretive Virtue*, Studies in Theological Interpretation (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), p. 167.

[13] Abraham. Especially Chapter 10 by Aquino is worth mentioning here.

[14] For a more thorough review of Calvin's *sensus divinitatis*, see Alvin Plantinga, *Warranted Christian Belief* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 146–55. See also Daniel Hill, 'Warrant', in *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer and others (Grand Rapids, MI: SPCK; Baker Academic, 2005), pp. 840–41. '[…] Plantinga claims that we

epistemological questions, if the *listening* preachers and the Evangelical community they serve are listening subjects, to whom or what are they listening? These are questions that turn our attention to the sources of authority that I discuss in a later section.

4.2.1   A Multifaceted Reality

The above sketch tracing the multifaceted nature of my research question finds a comprehensive description in Anna Strhan's reflection on the conservative Evangelical as the listening subject. At the end of her ethnographic fieldwork at St John's, an Anglican Evangelical church, she claims that a 'complex picture of evangelical subjectivity emerges from these practices of internalising sacred language, rational listening, and desire for intimate relationship with God'.[15] Strhan also hints at a methodological toolkit needed to navigate this complex picture, appropriating Robert Orsi's epistemic reflexivity that 'enables richer understanding of the interrelationship of the worlds we study and our own places'.[16] In effect, as part of her methodological toolkit, Strhan uses 'an autobiographical method that can help her move beyond moralizing judgements […] through helping us objectify our subjective relations to our objects of study and thereby interrogate what is at stake'.[17]

Given the multifaceted nature of the aforementioned points of entry and their related questions, any methodological toolbox drawn from the social sciences and theology needs to reflect the complex nature of potential interpretative frameworks. Aquino, for example, explains the multifaceted practices of the spiritual life,

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have a 'God module' or, as he calls it (following John Calvin), a sensus divinitatis. This is a cognitive faculty that is designed by God to produce beliefs in him.'

[15] Anna Strhan, 'Listening Subjects, Rationality and Modernity', in *Sociological Theory and the Question of Religion*, Theology and Religion in Interdisciplinary Perspective Series in Association with the BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), p. 215. See Strhan's extensive development of this in Anna Strhan, *Aliens & Strangers?: The Struggle for Coherence in the Everyday Lives of Evangelicals* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

[16] Strhan, *Aliens & Strangers*, p. 24.

[17] Ibid., p. 24.

including the practice of discernment, stating that 'each indicator alone is not sufficient for determining whether a person is a reliable means of spiritual direction'.[18] It is the combination of various indicators that helps the researcher to analyse the various pieces of information. Again, a key benefit of Schneiders's hermeneutical methodology is that it combines methodological tools that are sensitive to the need for complexity.

Keeping the scope of this research in mind, there is one further disclaimer before we proceed: It would be wise to explain what my research is *not* about — or not supposed to be about.

4.2.2   What Is Not Being Researched

This research investigates listening within the ecclesiological and homiletical context of the preacher. This focused avenue of research leads to the following questions: Can we explicate the preacher's discernment and listening process, and, if so, how? What constitutes *listening* in the preacher's context? However, since this research is about *listening*, one could ask some even more obvious questions: What constitutes *listening*? Who is the subject that listens and in what context does he/she listen? The answers to these questions should not presume that different avenues of research into the practice of listening are mutually exclusive. Certainly, there will be overlap, but maintaining focus necessarily excludes certain paths of inquiry.

I will not, for example, venture down the phenomenological path of *inner hearing*, which is, according to Russell T. Hurlburt, Christopher L. Heavey, and Jason M. Kelsey 'the experience of hearing something that does not exist in the external environment'.[19] Although an overlap is acknowledged, apart from the phenomenon of *inner hearing*, Hurlburt et al.'s research is foremost an exploration of

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[18] Aquino, p. 168.

[19] Russell T. Hurlburt, Christopher L. Heavey and Jason M. Kelsey, 'Toward a Phenomenology of Inner Speaking', *Consciousness and Cognition,* 22.4 (2013), 1477–94 (p. 1485).

inner speaking as a phenomenon of an inner experience.[20] Phenomenological studies

of inner listening or hearing are usually centred around psychiatric or psychological

rather than religious research,[21] and I will not venture into a scientific approach to

human spirituality.[22]

At the same time, there are other avenues related to the themes of listening,

discernment, receptivity, and so on that are closer to religious experiences and more

connected to Christian (Evangelical) spirituality. Therefore, these could be examined

as points of departure. The anthropological description in Tanya Luhrmann's account

of the Vineyard Church's understanding of prayer offers a most recent case in point.

In *When God Talks Back: Understanding the American Evangelical*, Luhrmann talks

about listening to a God who talks, and presents a cognitive approach that

presupposes the same psychological world inhabited by believers and non-believers.

Luhrmann also tries to answer the same question, what constitutes listening?,

in a different context, i.e. a charismatic tribe within Evangelical Christianity.

Luhrmann observes that '[t]hey talk about listening. And they say that the listening

happens in prayer. "Prayer" is the act of talking with God. In this evangelical world,

prayer is treated as a skill.'[23] Although Luhrmann's anthropological study reveals

fascinating insights into to the mindset of a particular branch of Evangelical

spirituality, it is not her intention to touch on the more specific homiletical angles of

the subject matter. Along with Timothy Jenkins, I appreciate the variety of materials

she uses (historiography, ethnography, psychology of religious experiences), but

concur that Luhrmann adopts a particular kind of social psychology that is akin to

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[20] Hurlburt and others, pp. 1477–94.

[21] See also G. Sedman, 'Inner Voices: Phenomenological and Clinical Aspects', *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 112.486 (1966), 485–90. In this paper, various forms of auditory imagery like 'inner voices', 'loud' or 'audible thoughts', and similar experiences are described. Sedman's research 'attempts to show that various forms of auditory imagery, often experienced in an obsessive-compulsive way, may closely resemble the schizophrenic experience of "thoughts becoming aloud"'.

[22] Matthew Alper, *The 'God' Part of the Brain* (Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks, 2009).

[23] Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back,* p. 62.

liberal Protestantism, i.e. quasi-naturalistic in her account of 'the consciously articulated categories of the group she is studying'.[24]

The theological study of the Divine–human relationship, with its accompanying experiences and reciprocal responses, will undoubtedly offer numerous avenues of academic and practical theological research.[25]

4.2.3   Genealogies of Listening

To appreciate the specific spirituality that has produced the Evangelical state of the land in Flanders and the complex nature of what *listening* could entail, one needs to take a step back and look at the preacher and the related points of departure from different angles. As Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley rightly observe, 'the claim to have a special form of perception that makes direct human contact with God possible is both epistemologically and metaphysically problematic'.[26] For one, how can we verify, through reason or the senses, that a Divine–human encounter is even possible, let alone interpret or describe such an encounter? These potential interpretations will not provide an exhaustive overview of the different genealogies of how this claim has been fleshed out over the last two thousand years of Christian history. Nevertheless, one needs to appreciate the relevant Christian vocabulary to even begin to understand the complex nature of the listening and discerning part of the preacher's sermonic process.

Explorations of the biblical language on *listening* and on religious experiences will provide some of the background vocabulary in which homiletical spirituality, espoused by Evangelicalism, is embedded. Triangulating the interpreted data with

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[24] Timothy Jenkins, '"Religious Experience" and the Contribution of Theology in Tanya Luhrmann's
When God Talks Back', *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 3.3 (2013), 369–73 (p. 370).
[25] For an extensive discussion, see e.g. the chapter on the Divine–Human Relationship in Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, pp. 195–227.
[26] Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 1.

some of these overviews might prove fruitful, while other more unexpected trajectories might come to the fore. In Part 3, 'Contours of the FEM', I will trace a more extensive genealogy of Evangelical homiletical theology and spirituality in order to hone in on how Evangelicalism, its theology, movement, and practices provide a more specific frame of reference for interpreting the Evangelical preacher in his Flemish context.

4.2.3.1 Biblical Language of Hearing

I will limit this brief overview to the ways in which Scripture hints at the intersections of the one who speaks/teaches the Word of God and the way God speaks to that teacher. As such, I will not venture into a comprehensive overview of a biblical theology on preaching itself.[27]

However, I need to stress that a biblical framework and a hermeneutical appropriation of that framework is of great importance in a practical theological work. Not to attend to this is to ignore the resources, norms, and hermeneutical context of Christian spirituality — a point made earlier by Schneiders. It is easy to assume that Evangelicalism stresses the importance of reading the Scriptures hermeneutically well during the sermonic preparation. Does the same happen fully when we reflect upon the biblical contexts of attentiveness to the God that speaks during the preparation? Beute reminds us that 'the question of the role of Scripture in

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[27] The following (general or specific) introductions or handbooks deal with the questions of biblical preaching and homiletics and the way preaching is grounded in the Bible. *The New Interpreter's Handbook of Preaching*, ed. by Paul Scott Wilson (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008). Stephen I. Wright, *Alive to the Word: A Practical Theology of Preaching for the Whole Church* (London: SCM Press, 2010), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 2361–3001. Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 413–929. For the distinction between *kerygma* and *didaché*, see also James I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache: The Articulation and Structure of the Earliest Christian Message*, Monograph Series - Society for New Testament Studies, 37, 1st pbk. edn (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

homiletical reflection is hardly discussed.'[28] An overview of biblical language on listening is therefore of importance.

A second disclaimer offers a kind of qualification for the highly suggestive title of this dissertation. The reference to a 'First Listener' points to a mode of a particular sense (auditive/hearing).[29] I originally chose this noun almost intuitively as a consequence of Theo Pleizier's aforementioned research on the religious involvement of the congregational listener or hearer. If the congregation listens, so does the preacher, I presumed, albeit in a different way. Added to this was the almost folksy way of explicating a theology of discernment in my own theological 'mother tongue'.[30] Does a preacher not *listen* as they are having their 'quiet time'? To set apart a time to explicitly be quiet implies setting a specific time when one is not talking but listening.

In his *As One Without Authority*, Fred Craddock reflects on a passage from Isaiah 50:4, 5, stressing the need for the preacher to be a listener. It is worth citing the passage here: 'The Lord God has given me the tongue of a teacher, that I may know how to sustain the weary with a word. Morning by morning he wakens — wakens my ear to listen as those who are taught' (New Revised Standard). God speaks and the teacher listens — and this hermeneutical insight is of the utmost importance for Craddock. Linking the passage with Romans 10:17, he continues to explain that 'faith comes from what is heard'.[31] In effect, before there can be expression (through sermon), there must be impression (by wakening the ear). In a

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[28] Beute, p. 18.

[29] For an extensive study on the use of sensory perception in the Hebrew Bible, see also Yael Avrahami, *The Senses of Scripture: Sensory Perception in the Hebrew Bible* (New York, NY: T&T Clark International, 2012).

[30] See Anthony Lees-Smith, 'Ordinary Theology as "Mother Tongue"', in *Exploring Ordinary Theology: Everyday Christian Believing and the Church*, ed. by Jeff Astley and Leslie J. Francis, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2013), p. 26. Ordinary Theology deals with theological categories in a language that is, according to Lees-Smith 'an attempt to make meaning out of a universal experience of life and the divine within the parameters of a particular tradition […]'. For the notion of 'quiet time' in Evangelicalism, see section 9.5.1.

[31] Fred B. Craddock, *The Collected Sermons of Fred B. Craddock* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), p. 36.

sermon on the same text, Craddock offers even more insight into this passage from Isaiah.[32] Although the audience of the sermon is now the congregational listener, Craddock qualifies the listening as something 'difficult' for different reasons. For one, it is an act of God and it is God that opens the ear, which can be a painful process.[33] Craddock quickly moves to Jesus's parable of the sower through which Craddock flips the metaphor from listening to being deaf.[34] God opens the ear because there is a human deafness to deal with. Of course, these Bible passages describe an oral quality, a phenomenon of listening through the modality of hearing (cf. other modalities like sight, smell, touch, or taste), and by no means do they qualify or mirror in a straightforward way the type of *listening* the preacher does during the sermonic process. What Isaiah does reveal is the ethical and humble point of departure of the listening teacher. The realisation that the human listener *is* deaf and that God *needs* to act so that the teacher can listen is an important lesson to take away from this passage.

Deafness can also surface, even with ears wide open. An example of this lack of receptivity is found in the Old Testament prophets, exemplified by another text from Isaiah (42:20): 'your ears are open, but you do not listen' (New International Version).[35] Here, we begin to notice the difficulty of the interrelated categories whereby the metaphorical uses of the sensory hearing refer to the hermeneutical category of understanding the text. Receptivity (hearing), or the lack thereof (deafness), is closely linked to the way the listener answers God's summon. The link to a potential *experience* as such, however, is not completely abandoned. Schultz

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[32] Craddock, *The Collected Sermons*, pp. 43–46.

[33] In Isaiah 50:5, the writer uses the word פָּתַח־ (pā·taḥ-), which can mean 'to carve out'. For the notion of God digging out (כָּרִיתָ, kā·rî'·tā) the ear (אֹזֶן, o'-zen) of the listener, see also Psalm 40:6.

[34] See also the synoptic Gospels: Matthew 13:1-9; Mark 4:1-9; Luke 8:4-8.

[35] Richard Schultz, 'Foundational Issues: "My Ears You Have Opened" (Psalm 40:6, TNIV)', in *Hearing the Old Testament: Listening for God's Address*, ed. by Craig G. Bartholomew and David J. H. Beldman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 3920–4168.

draws on Richard Briggs's take on Isaiah 6 as a 'paradigmatic text illustrating the "virtue of receptivity" to "the summoning presence" of God, a virtue that should be cultivated by modern readers of Scripture'.[36] Modern readers of Isaiah 6 are invited to still come to a similar 'appreciation (if not an *experience*) of the holiness of God' [italics added].[37]

A final reference to a biblical notion of hearing and listening comes from Klyne Snodgrass. Snodgrass takes the image of deafness even further when he states that '[t]he biggest complaint in Scripture is that people do not listen to God. Theirs is a freely chosen deafness.'[38] For Snodgrass, there is an appeal of Scripture to a biblical hermeneutic of hearing. He goes on to explain how *hearing* is manifested in the Old and New Testaments (the Hebrew verb שָׁמַע occurs 1128 times, the Greek verb ἀκούω occurs 428 times). The various uses and meanings of *hearing* are diverse, ranging from the literal use, as Adam and Eve *hear* the voice of God walking in the Garden (Gen 3:8), to metaphorical uses like *understanding* (1 Ki 3:9; 2 Ki 18:26), *recognising* (John 10:3, 27), *discerning* (2 Sam 14:17), *paying attention* (Ex 15:26; Isa 36:16), *agreeing* ('affirmative hearing', Gen 23:8-16), and *obeying* (Ex 5:20; Gen 26:5). To Snodgrass, all of this implies that the multi-layered meanings of *hearing* in Scripture invite the reader to multiple hermeneutics of hearing that include a hermeneutics of *action* (i.e. texts are intended to produce action), a hermeneutics of *openness* to what is written ('without openness, hearing is impossible'), a hermeneutics of *attention* ('hearing is a choice'), a hermeneutics of

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[36] Schultz, Location 3993.

[37] Ibid., Location 3993. See also Briggs, p. 182.

[38] Klyne Snodgrass, 'Reading to Hear: A Hermeneutics of Hearing', *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, 24 (2002), 1–32 (p. 11). Snodgrass takes his cue for a biblical hermeneutic of hearing from Oscar Cullmann's *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments*: '[…] keine andere "Einstellung" zum Text als die der gehorsamen Bereitschaft, auf ihn zu *hören* […]' [italics added]. Oscar Cullmann, *Die Christologie des Neuen Testaments*, 5. Aufl., unveränd. Nachdr. d. 3., durchges. Aufl (Tübingen, DE: Mohr, 1975), p. IX. Snodgrass's ideas have been further popularised by McKnight, pp. 98–99.

faithfulness ('hearing is not passive'), a hermeneutics that *continues learning*, and finally a hermeneutics of *obedience*.[39]

Snodgrass readily admits that, although his biblical perspective on a hermeneutics of hearing provides an 'overarching approach that can embrace various other aspects of hermeneutics, any hermeneutical theory is complex and yet capable of being deconstructed because of what it leaves out'.[40] In this way, Snodgrass's biblical perspective on a hermeneutic of hearing lends itself to my methodological reflection, with help from Ben Meyer, who hints at a trajectory instigated by a critical realism that resonates strongly with the subject of this research.[41] It is worth citing the broader reference here:

> Sense-knowledge yields neither 'reality' nor 'appearance,' only 'data'. The salient trait of wonder [...] is the boundless openness whereby the wonderer/questioner enters into relation not just to data but to reality and, in principle, to the whole world of reality. […] The differentiation between elementary and fully human knowing implies no gap between the two, for it is data that give rise to wonder; wonder is objectified in questions; questions call forth answers; answers solicit reflection; reflection culminates in judgement that a given answer is certainly or probably true or false.[42]

It is safe to state that if there ever was or is a kind of methodological deficiency within broader Evangelical theology, it is not because of a lack of biblical language that pertains to the *listening* (or deafness) of the preacher.

Finally, considering all the above reflections, Schneiders succinctly summarises the relationship between the biblical allusions to the corporeal senses

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[39] Snodgrass, 'Reading to Hear', pp. 30-31. In a follow-up article, and later a book, Snodgrass refers to this multi-layered manner of attentive and obedient listening as 'depth-listening'. See also Klyne Snodgrass, 'A Hermeneutics of Hearing Informed by the Parables with Special Reference to Mark 4', *Bulletin for Biblical Research*, 14.1 (2004), 59–79 (p. 63). Klyne Snodgrass, *Stories with Intent: A Comprehensive Guide to the Parables of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), p. 170.

[40] Snodgrass, 'Reading to Hear', p. 11.

[41] Ibid., p. 11, 21fn55, 23, 27.

[42] Ben F. Meyer, *Critical Realism and the New Testament*, Princeton Theological Monograph Series, 17 (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1989), pp. 85–86. For Meyer's broader relevant discussion, see pp. 17–94.

(like *hearing*) and the reality to which these allusions (through metaphors, analogies, or symbols) refer:

> […] no matter how one understands the nature and/or functioning of the spiritual senses there seems to be a wide consensus that humans are capable of perception that is not reducible to sense knowledge but also not pure infused knowledge or the immediate, direct knowledge usually referred to as mystical experience. *It is mediated in some way*. In other words, we are susceptible to the kind of revelation of which the incarnation of the Word in Jesus is the paradigm. [italics added][43]

4.2.3.2 Religious Experience of Hearing

A second appropriate approach to *listening* to flesh out is that of *religious experience*. A biblical theology accepts the reality of God speaking; *that* God speaks is something that is empirically unverifiable. The Divine–human encounter has, however, also been studied from the perspective of religious experiences, which are arguably easier to research empirically.

Belgian theologian of spirituality Hans Geybels offers such a perspective, presenting a historical overview of ideas on *religious experience* from church father Augustine to the phenomenological approach of William James, in search of the epistemological nature of the religious experience.[44] The aspect that is relevant to my research relates to the element of an increasing subjectivity. Geybels's evaluation of religious experience since Luther and the subsequent Reformational movements is an important one for my context of the Evangelical preacher.[45] To situate Geybels's evaluation, i.e. theologically, I should emphasise that the basic question of religious experience has always been about the relationship between the revelation of God (the God who speaks) and our understanding of that. For Luther, experience does not

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[43] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 137.
[44] Hans Geybels, *Het Goddelijk Gevoel: Een Geschiedenis van de Religieuze Ervaring*, Mens En Tijd (Kapellen, BE: Pelckmans, 2005), pp. 123, 225.
[45] Geybels, p. 131.

produce new knowledge of God.[46] The Bible, according to Geybels, has been the

source of our religious experiences, although they have needed to be contextualised

again and again.[47] However, after Luther, this increasing subjectivity grew into a

kind of fanaticism that favoured sentimentality and emotionalism in a way that

differed from the views of Augustine, Clairvaux, and Luther on religious

experiences. Although Geybels's language on the Protestant fall-out (strongly

emphasising splinter movements, leaving the Roman Catholic church, and so on)

betrays a certain bias, he draws our attention to some important observations that are

in fact warning shots for my further investigation of Evangelicalism.

For one, the result of the Reformation was that the known mediating channels

were abandoned. Between the transcendental God and the sinful 'I', there was only

'Christ for me'. This resulted in subjective and emotional *religious experiences*.

Combined with the fragmented reality of movements characterised by 'speculative'

and experiential theologies, an inextricable knot of post-Reformational streams

emerged, of which the pietistic and the puritan are the most relevant to our

assessment. For the puritan, the link with Scripture and tradition was not lost but

ethically linked to the *personal* life; for the pietistic stream, the emphasis was placed

on the *devoutness* of the believer.[48]

4.2.4   Is There S/someone Talking?

What these brief insights reveal is that there are different ways of approaching the

perceived Divine–human encounter. At the very least, these overviews suggest that

one has to, in the words of philosopher William Alston, come to grips with 'the

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[46] Geybels, p. 138.
[47] An insight we also find in Pleizier's homiletical understanding of the Divine–human encounter: 'The Scriptures guide this search and helps us to look for God's presence in the world because the narratives in the Bible provide us with normative patterns to understand the divine-human encounter in the present.' Pleizier, p. 65.
[48] Geybels, pp. 131, 134.

status of sensory phenomenal qualities. What is their ontological status?'[49] In a similar vein, philosopher John Cottingham reiterates:

> If religious belief is to be established as a viable option, the philosopher will not just have to be satisfied of the philosophical coherence of the idea of God but will also have to give some account of our *supposed awareness* of God – of the putative modes of access to the divine, and of their status and cognitive credentials. [italics added][50]

These two philosophers of religion and religious experience do not exclude a theistic worldview. However, in order to claim they are correct, one would have to give 'some indication of the relevant modes of access to the transcendent reality we call God'.[51] Although philosophical sensitivities are needed to conduct this present research, this is by no means a philosophical treatise. Still, to focus on the religious experience of the *listening preacher* necessitates an inquiry into how our human experience could possibly give us the basis for a belief in a transcendent source of S/someone talking. These overviews have shown that, from a biblical and a religious point of view, attempts have been made to provide the necessary vocabulary on the Divine–human encounter that is relevant for the specific Evangelical context.[52]

As we have seen, Sandra Schneiders claims that we should start with a theological axiom, namely, the consensus that humans are capable of perception in which the Divine–human encounter is mediated in some way, with the incarnation of the Word in Jesus as the important paradigm. To be baptised as a Christian believer is to accept that, according to the *sensus fidei*, there is 'a whole new receptive

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[49] William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience*, 1. paperback print (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 50.

[50] John Cottingham, *Philosophy of Religion: Towards a More Humane Approach*, Cambridge Studies in Religion, Philosophy, and Society (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 56.

[51] Cottingham, p. 57. For the philosophical tensions that arise as one tries to reconcile the 'mechanical picture' of Divine–human listening and speaking with the intepretations of these biblical discourses, see also Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 37–57.

[52] For a more recent homiletical perspective on the role of sacramentality and the preacher's imagination, see Bruce, *Igniting the Heart*. For Bruce's genealogy of the role of imagination in the sermonic process, see 'The Vital Importance of the Imagination', pp. 37–86.

capacity for participation in revelation through perception'.[53] In the relationship between the lived experience and the *sensus fidei*, the believer is endowed with both imagination and corporeality.

Imagination, Schneiders argues, provides the believer with a horizon of meaning against which he/she develops a kind of 'personal catechism', holistically integrating all the aspects of the religious experiences.[54] What is the content or structure of the 'personal catechism' of the preacher active in the FEM?

Through our engagement with the biblical text(s), these two categories, imagination and corporeality, activate the *sensus fidei*. Schneiders seems to make an important distinction here between two ways of approaching the text. This distinction is important for this study as it pertains to the Evangelical, or broader, Reformational tradition.

First, Schneiders suggests that more word-oriented traditions seem to sacramentally meet the Risen Christ in preaching.[55] Schneiders discards this approach as a 'relative non-functioning' way of experiencing the Resurrected Jesus in one's life because it is based on a 'faith conviction' rather than based on a non-vicarious experience; she calls these forms of sacramental presence 'intensified instances of memory and theology'.[56] Second, Schneiders sees the aesthetic dimension of the text — 'theopoetics' — as that dimension that seems to shape the human experience of God and less so as the rational discourse that is 'primarily analytic, logical and linear, moving from data to conclusions'.[57] As argued before, the latter, i.e. the rational discourse, is more typical of the espoused Evangelical homiletical approach. With Schneiders's transformative approach in which the reader (or preacher) does not 'primarily know more' but 'is more', Schneiders offers a

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[53] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 137.
[54] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 138.
[55] For a similar observation, see also Rathe, p. 80.
[56] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 134.
[57] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 146.

theological thesis in which the reader is grounded in a relationship with the Resurrected Jesus, rather than in a set of exegetical, philosophical, historical, or other kinds of questions one has in mind when approaching the biblical text.

In hindsight, the content of my 'personal catechism' as preacher hints at an approach that favours the rational discourse of moving from data to conclusions. It does not, however, present itself as a spiritual model for discernment.

This short exploration of how Schneiders understands (theologically) the Resurrection in which the spirituality of the Bible reader is grounded sets the stage for two final themes: *sources of discernment* and *sources of authority.* I will now turn to these themes before looking at the collected data in Chapter 5. In explaining the Resurrection as the 'conditio sine qua non for his [i.e. Christ] real contemporary presence', Schneiders opposes the mere 'influence' of the Resurrection through memory, idealisation, etc.[58] I would argue that, for Schneiders, the source of discernment and authority is Scripture, whose purpose is 'revelation, the salvific interaction between God and the believer in Jesus Christ through the power of the Spirit'.[59]

One of the questions this research pursues is one of validating and qualifying the preacher's discernment and listening process. One might say, how is the preacher *influenced*? What is the focus of his/her discernment, and what is the source of his/her discernment? Acknowledging that the preacher enters into this process as a situated subject, is there a way to distinguish *authorities* at play in the preacher's ecclesial, historical, cultural, and social embeddedness as he/she encounters God and the text as the *first listener*? One could ask, who/what decides how to discern? Or, how does one discern who/what decides?

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[58] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 142.
[59] Schneiders, 'Biblical Spirituality', p. 149.

4.3 Sources of Discernment

The aforementioned overviews of listening and discernment offer a systematic classification of insights, revealing that there are different ways to approach the perceived Divine–human encounter. However, a question remains on the scope of the sources that provide or mediate the 'right' context for this discernment. Returning to *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, the text lists thirteen sources of discernment.[60] All these sources offer the believer *impressions* under the assumption that the Spirit of God is present and active in the process of discernment itself, indicating whether or not God himself is active and/or guiding through these sources.

Of course, this *Brazos* list does not reflect the approaches to discernment used by all of the Christian traditions. Tim Challies in *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* describes a distinct Reformed approach in which discernment is 'the skill of understanding and applying God's Word with the purpose of separating truth from error and right from wrong. It is a task in which we attempt to see things as God sees them.'[61] One can see here, once again, the relationship between the ultimate litmus test for good preaching, i.e. is the sermon well-grounded in and illuminating the biblical text so that God's truth can be preached? Or, in too simple terms, if Scripture is one's source of authority, discernment is just a matter of time and method. Contrary to Challies's pinned down definition of *discernment*, others assume an opposite conclusion. Frank Houdek, for example, states as much in his *Guided by the Spirit*: 'Both the long tradition of teaching about discernment and my

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[60] Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality,* pp. 390–91. Sources of discernment mentioned include (but are not limited to): Scripture, experience, community, nature, reason, circumstances, angelic visitations, dreams, our own life trajectories, vision and hopes, media, a felt sense of direction. Apart from *sources of discernment*, the writers signal also other aspects of discernment: focus, criteria, meaning, goal, and particular kinds of discernment.

[61] Tim Challies, *The Discipline of Spiritual Discernment* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2007), p. 71.

own personal experience tell me that there is no "canonized" way to conduct spiritual discernment.'[62]

To what sources of discernment do these preachers in the FEM adhere? Do they realise that they are making use of certain sources? In what way are particular sources neglected, emphasised, or looked at with favour or disapproval? Some examples will suffice to frame this question against the background of my research. When asked 'how would you describe how God speaks to you?', respondent Brandon suggested that an emotive process of discernment was at play:

> For me, that is that I am touched. It speaks to me, it sticks to me, something that does something to me, it touches me. So, I experience that as God's Spirit then bringing something to my attention or whatever.

Andrew used language emphasising the heart as an important location into which God speaks, referring to discernment as being 'touched':

> That is more a case of feeling, which I have learned to distinguish it as such […]. But usually I go with a …, over a longer period of time at work with ideas to get started, things that I have read in a book and that have myself deeply touched.

Andrew, reflecting on reading his words out loud, affirmed: 'Those words must come fresh from my heart somewhere, then it has the most emotion.' These examples highlight the reality of God speaking in a way that is discerned through an emotive entrance. This language of the heart as a potential source of authority should, however, come with a hamartiological disclaimer. Is the heart not deceitful above all things? What of *the heart* in terms of how biased readings of Scripture and self-affirmation determine whether God has actually spoken? To rephrase it rather

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[62] Francis Joseph Houdek, *Guided by the Spirit: A Jesuit Perspective on Spiritual Direction* (Chicago, IL: Loyola University Press, 1996), p. 115.

suggestively: the further removed the message is from the preacher's own theological and doctrinal convictions, the greater the chance that God has actually spoken. [63]

4.4   Sources of Authority

As I have mentioned, sources of discernment and authority became two closely related issues in the wake of the Reformation. Besides sources of discernment, sources of authority provide equally important angles for homiletical practices of *listening* related to the Evangelical movement. Intuitively, I could nominate some candidates for sources of authority or discernment: theological orthodoxy, organisational loyalty, ideological purity, and so on. In a more recent reflection on Evangelicals and (new) sources of authority, Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas, and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman (eds.) reflect on the relationship between traditional sources of authority (the Bible, the tradition, spiritual leaders) and the Evangelical movement.

Klaver, Paas, and Staalduine-Sulman make an observation that is significant for my research, stating that 'believers can be unaware of their sources of authority. They may appeal to sources that do not actually authorize their words or deeds, while the sources that do so remain under the surface.'[64] It goes without saying that, as a believer, the preacher's discernment process should be critically evaluated accordingly. Were my respondents unaware of their sources of authority? Did these preachers appeal to sources that do not actually authorise their words? Did other sources that do so remain under the surface? Critical engagement with ethnographic

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[63] See also Jeremiah 17:9. I would like to thank Dr. Josh de Keijzer (Ph.D., Systematic Theology) for this helpful insight.

[64] Miranda Klaver, Stefan Paas, and Eveline van Staalduine-Sulman, *Evangelicals and Sources of Authority: Essays under the Auspices of the Center of Evangelical and Reformation Theology (CERT)*, (Amsterdam, NL: VU University Press, 2016) p. 3.

data and thick descriptions are needed in order to help reveal those sources that are less visible to the eye.

In their evaluation of traditional sources of authority (e.g. Wesley's Quadrilateral) and late modern sources, Klaver, Paas, and Staalduine-Sulman first point to new sources that are in tension with the traditional ones, based on the research of particular phenomena in ecclesial practices, e.g. the development of new media technologies that support the shifting of authority from the institution to the 'personalized charismatic leadership'.[65] In another example, the authors revert to James K.A. Smith's aforementioned 'pre-reflective secular liturgies' as a case in point of how users of social media are affectively misdirected away from their prescribed theologies.[66] As I will highlight in Chapter 5, for my interviewees, books as carriers of consultation represent another source of authority. Ian, for example, was inspired by the content other authors provided leading up to the sermonising process. He stated:

> There are also certain books and certain writers who inspire me ... If I have something like: 'that is a very strong thought, well-founded', then I will work it out for myself and then dare to do that as a sermon.

However, there is not only the issue of traditional sources versus new sources of authority, but also the order and interrelationships among the traditional sources of authority. Foreshadowing my discussion in Chapter 9, Klaver, Paas, and Staalduine-Sulman aptly observe within the Evangelical movement tensions between Scripture and experience on the one hand, and between reason and tradition on the other. Aside from the editors' own suggestions, how do the eight respondents navigate between old and new sources of authority during the process of discernment? Moreover, in

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[65] Klaver and others, p. 8.
[66] Klaver and others, p. 8. For Smith's theory, see also section 2.4.

light of the discussion in Chapter 3 on resolving the tensions inherent in a practical theology that honours both normativity and the lived experience, it is worth further exploring the suggestion that preachers (as believers) may be unaware of their sources of authority. If the preacher does appeal to sources that do not actually authorise his words, how can that be established through a normative approach? Likewise, how can we validate the lived experience in which the sources of authority that do indeed authorise the preacher's words remain under the surface?

4.4.1   Creativity and Attentiveness

There is a broad expanse between the Jesuit Houdek's observation that there is no 'canonised' way to discern and the Reformed Tim Challies's opinion that there is a straightforward path to discernment. Despite their divergence, both approaches could benefit from the type of interdisciplinary engagement promoted by Schneiders. This engagement will feed into my discussion of sources of authority through the two dimensions of *creativity* and *attentiveness*. The theoretical research of Dutch homiletician Jos Douma and the empirical research of Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi will provide the frame for this engagement.

First, I introduce the work of Hungarian psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in order to shed light on the psychological dimensions related to the lived experience of the preacher, particularly as the experiences pertain to sources of authority and discernment. As mentioned before, Schneiders's hermeneutical methodology assumes the important input of interdisciplinary approaches, a point expressed also by Beute: 'The Human sciences have to be taken serious in a reflection of the self-image of the preacher.'[67]

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[67] Beute, p. 53.

Csikszentmihalyi is best known for his conceptualisation of the creative experience he refers to as 'flow', 'a kind of elevated stream of consciousness and activity in which creative people feel they participate'.[68] More important for the purposes of this research is his extensive empirical research on creativity.[69]

I would argue at this point that, in establishing the nature of the preparatory process of the sermon in a phenomenological sense of the word, it is fair to assume that the sermon itself is the end result of a creative process. In other words, preparing the sermon can be considered a creative process, while the sermon itself can be seen as a creative product. Dutch homiletician Jos Douma argues that the sermon is indeed a creative product, since every sermon is something new in and of itself and hopes to offer something new to the listener.[70] According to Douma, the sermon is the result of a complex interaction between different creative aspects: *product*, *person*, *context*, and *process*.[71]

Csikszentmihalyi's empirical research on creativity offers a welcome interdisciplinary addition to Douma's emphasis on the creativity of the preacher. Csikszentmihalyi's work on the different stages of the creative process can therefore further help to qualify this preparatory and creative process. After providing a short historical account of how theorists have dealt with the different stages of the creative process, Csikszentmihalyi arrives at the following overview:

> The first stage, *preparation*, which is stimulated by external pressures or by intrinsic motivation, involves focused conscious work, such as studying or analyzing data. These rational thought processes provide the raw material on which the subconscious can begin working. The second stage, which can last a very short time or go on for

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[68] *Present-Day Spiritualities: Contrasts and Overlaps*, ed. by Elisabeth Hense, Studies in Theology and Religion (STAR), volume 18 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2014), p. 207. See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Applications of Flow in Human Development and Education* (Dordrecht, NL: Springer, 2014).

[69] See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity* (New York, NY: Springer, 2014).

[70] Douma, pp. 261–62. Douma does warn here against a too one-sided approach of the sermon as only a creative product. A sermon is also creative by virtue of the way it is communicated.

[71] Douma, p. 130.

years, is the stage of *incubation*. […] The third stage, *insight*, occurs when the subconscious combines or selects an idea which, for reasons that remain poorly understood, emerges into consciousness, resulting in an 'Aha!' experience. This insight will be useless unless it is *evaluated* by the conscious mind and *elaborated* for presentation to others.[72]

Intuitively, these stages — preparation, incubation, insight, evaluation, and communication — seem to be consistent with the respondents' and my own experience of how the process of a sermon unfolds. As such, Csikszentmihalyi's findings offer a promising interdisciplinary context for qualifying further what happens during the preparatory processes of the respondents.[73] Notably, Csikszentmihalyi observes that *insight* occurs for reasons that remain poorly understood. He also argues that the 'Aha!' moment of creative insight (third stage) has a particularly strong social dimension, despite its solitary context.[74] But what is the nature of that social dimension, and how can we shed light on this observation from a theologically informed point of view?

The preacher's weekly assignment is brutally repetitive: fill the blank page by Sunday, at least twice a month in the case of my respondents. Where, during this process, does creativity surface, and where is it hindered? Douma's research into the meditative aspects of the sermonising process adds complexity to this question, as he distinguishes different levels of meditative nature: 1) meditation as a *lifestyle* in which a homiletical *preacher* is a meditative *person*, 2) meditation as a *dimension* in which the homiletical *procedure* is embedded in a meditating *process*, and 3)

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[72] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 76. Like Douma, Csikszentmihalyi sees the communication (i.e. *elaboration*) of the creative product as part of the creative process.

[73] Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Keith Sawyer, 'Creative Insight: The Social Dimension of a Solitary Moment', in *The Systems Model of Creativity*, pp. 73–98. Although this research is not set up as a case study, it is worth noting that the way this research has been conducted, it could offer possibilities for analysing the data as such. My interviews reflect upon the creative processes of particular preachers who 'produce' sermons. Annabel J. Cohen argues that 'concepts of creativity can be applied to both the extraordinary genius and the ordinary person, the distinction referred to by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as big C creativity versus little c creativity'. It is not up to me to make the distinction of so-called *big C* and *little c* creativity, i.e. who is a genius or not among the respondents; however, case study research would be justified in either case. *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, ed. by Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2010), p. 83.

[74] Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 73.

meditation as a *phase* in which homiletical *preparation* includes a certain kind(s) of meditation *practice(s)*.[75] This threefold coinage is my personal synthesis of some of Douma's explorations of meditation during the sermonising process. Based on my literature review, I have added *lifestyle* to the list. This short overview of where the creative dimension of producing the sermon could be located, serves as a precaution to not locate creativity or, more specifically the 'Aha!' moment, in one particular phase (of which the third phase, i.e. insight, would seem the most logical). If the 'Aha!' moment seems to be important, and the data confirm this with some of the respondents, then it begs the question: Where does the 'Aha!' moment take place, or *why*, or because of *what*?

Framing the 'Aha!' moment not exclusively as *a moment* but as an insight that could be shaped by each of the three levels in which the meditative elements come to the fore will prevent us from excluding the impact of particular sources of authority. In other words, the 'Aha!' moment could be experienced during the meditation phase of the homiletical preparation; however, it could also be the result of an incubation period sometime during the homiletical procedure.

Two examples of how this might work may shed light on these processes of influence. First, there is the particular influence of the preacher's spouse. Csikszentmihalyi argues that 'spouses play a significant role in helping creative achievement during adulthood'.[76] The spouse's significance 'lies in part in her ability to help facilitate the achievement of his dream'.[77] This notion of *dream* is very much in line with the way my respondents talked about their calling (see section 1.2). In three instances, my respondents were very clear on the important role their spouse played in the post-sermonic context. For these preachers, it was part of their *lifestyle*

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[75] It is worth mentioning here that Csikszentmihalyi does not neglect the impact of *time* on the creative process, which suggests that at the very least an 'Aha!' moment could be explained from a life-long context of preaching. See also Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 54.

[76] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 145.

[77] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 145.

and *procedure* to gain the appropriate type of feedback through a close relationship with their spouse. Furthermore, in terms of the homiletical *practices* of preparation and in anticipation of the 'Aha!' moment, Victor offered an example of how he intentionally involved his spouse. In a sermon on the Holy Spirit, which was the seventh sermon in a series on this topic, Victor decided to couple the theme of the Holy Spirit with the theme of *sanctification.* As he woke up, Victor was drawn to part of a verse in Psalm 93:5: 'Holiness adorns your house (New International Version).' Touched by the image of an *adornment*, Victor, in a second movement, decided to explore this image via a study of similar texts. He stated: 'I'm very happy I received this image in my mind.' It was a kind of an 'Aha!' moment. In a third movement that same day, Victor decided to ask his spouse why a woman would wear an adornment. He did so explicitly so as to not introduce his own presuppositions in his interpretation. Victor's spouse drew his attention to the fact that an adornment can accentuate the woman in such a way that her true identity may be noticed. In Victor's written preparation and in the transcribed version of the actual sermon, it is clear how this idea found its way into the sermon. In his written preparation, Victor expresses: 'The main reason that people are wearing adornments is to make themselves more beautiful. […] In addition it is a way to show yourself, to say something about your identity and personality.'[78] In the actual sermon, Victor explains that 'one wears adornments to make yourself pretty, to clarify your identity'.[79] Extrapolating this idea, Victor then calls the listener to become an adornment that reflects God's identity. Therefore, an important practical and spiritual application (be a reflection of God) originated from Victor's spouse's answer to his initial and intentional question.

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[78] Victor, 'Heilige Geest 7: Galaten 5:13-16', Written Sermon Preparation, p. 1.
[79] Victor, sermon preached in April 2016, transcribed version, p. 2.

If Evangelicalism appreciates a clear understanding of its sources of authority, and I would argue that it does, how does that appreciation filter down to the level of the preacher as he *listens*, albeit in solitary, to the different V/voices that are part of that social dimension? A tentative scan of the memos I wrote after the interviews reveals a range of sources of authority to which I will return in Chapter 6. A few examples here will suffice. In relation to the counsel found in books as sources of authority, Victor claimed that 'it would be the worst if you took away my books', implying that it would be dangerous if it were just him and the Bible — dangerous because he wrongly thought he knew the Bible well. However, as Victor confessed, sometimes you can be wrong in interpreting it. In Brandon's life, books were not only food for thought in terms of sermon preparation; they had an impact on his (thought) life.

These above examples highlight the reality of sources of authority through which the *new* word can enter the life and thoughts of the preacher. It is important here to emphasise the creative latitude the preacher allows himself/herself. It is here that Douma's focus on creativity reaches the most crucial crux of the matter via the notion of *attentiveness*.[80] Attentiveness allows the preacher to think creatively and is subject to five dimensions: *thoughts*, *objects*, *feelings*, *observations*, and *patterns of movement*.[81] Douma argues, then, that attentiveness plays a fundamental role in the sermonic process, not least of all in the reception phase.[82]

When the historical-theological and the phenomenological are put in close proximity, it is not hard to see the need for criteria of filters that preachers make use of to examine the content, the spirit, and the fruit of the experiences or impressions

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[80] Douma, p. 138.

[81] Douma, p. 139. Douma is borrowing here from Karl-Heinz Brodbeck's research on creativity as a situated process, which is also presumed in Csikszentmihalyi's work. Karl-Heinz Brodbeck, *Entscheidung zur Kreativität*, 2., um ein Vorw. erg. Aufl (Darmstadt, DE: Wiss. Buchges, 1999), p. 1.

[82] Douma, p. 267.

of the Divine they receive during their preparation.[83] Do the preachers allow themselves to be attentive or receptive to the point that creativity can surface? What compels them to be attentive to some sources of authority? Or to rephrase it more colloquially, what hinders or helps them to think outside of the box? These questions justify the integration of Douma's and Csikszentmihalyi's attention to creativity and attentiveness as an interdisciplinary tool for the critical analysis of traditional, new, or contested sources of discernment and authority. In this way, my research represents an empirical expansion of Douma's focus on attentiveness and likewise an exploration of Csikszentmihalyi's fundamental research on the location of creativity in this particular homiletical context. Does the preacher allow himself/herself to be attentive as a *first listener*?

4.4.2 Gatekeepers

Let me summarise what has been said on creativity and attentiveness by way of the following observations. First, sources of authority are important within Evangelicalism, whether they are recognised as such or remain under the surface. Second, the interviewed preachers testified to the reality of sources of authority as integrated elements of their lifestyle or as part of the sermonic process. Third, the preacher's attentiveness as a creative faculty is an important gateway into my main research question.

These observations and the focus on creativity and attentiveness reorient the question from 'Is the preacher listening, i.e. attentive during the creative process' to 'to *whom* or *what* is the preacher listening (or *not listening* for that matter)?' To address this reorientation, I will introduce one final concept: that of the gatekeeper.

Since preachers could in a sense be considered gatekeepers of a particular

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[83] See also Howard, *Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality,* p. 392.

Evangelical identity, tradition, theology, and/or practice, it stands to reason that they are operating within a framework marked by sources of authority — be they either themselves or other sources external to them — even if the idea of an Evangelical identity is contested by some.[84] Especially when one investigates the more experiential aspects of the Evangelical movement, one needs to be aware of the role being played by sources of authority.[85]

In light of this observation, it was important for me to consider how to evaluate or integrate the rather hazy concept of the Evangelical *gatekeeper*[86], especially in terms of sample selection. I call this concept 'hazy' not because it is undefined in the context of fieldwork or the social sciences in general, but because, to cite Satirenjit Kaur Johl and Sumathi Renganathan, 'many researchers do not even describe their access to the research field in their research reports'.[87] In my case, the qualifier *Evangelical* demanded an even closer review, given that the notion of the *Evangelical* gatekeeper has not, to my knowledge, been the topic of qualitative research, certainly not in the context of the FEM.[88]

As Robert K. Yin asserts in his *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish*, 'the

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[84] D. G. Hart, *Deconstructing Evangelicalism: Conservative Protestantism in the Age of Billy Graham* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), p. 193.

[85] Klaver and others, p. 5.

[86] For a concise but clear overview of the nature and role of the gatekeeper in social science research, see Shenuka Singh and Douglas R. Wassenaar, 'Contextualising the Role of the Gatekeeper in Social Science Research', *South African Journal of Bioethics and Law*, 9.1 (2016). Alongside *gatekeepers*, other similar types of people or organisations granting access can be distinguished, e.g. the *mediator*, *tastemaker*, *group representative*, *influencer*, *buyer*, and *decider*. See also Arch G. Woodside, *Case Study Research: Theory, Methods and Practice*, 1st edn (Bingley, UK: Emerald, 2010), p. 323. Other forms of befriending or accessing the field are through informants, sponsors, and mentors. See Sarah J. Tracy, *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), p. 80.

[87] Satirenjit Kaur Johl and Sumathi Renganathan, 'Strategies for Gaining Access in Doing Fieldwork: Reflection of Two Researchers', *The Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 8.1 (2010), 42–50 (p. 42).

[88] Arguably, two research projects could be considered qualitative in nature, set within the Evangelical Flemish context, and likely to have needed gatekeepers. See Jelle Creemers, 'Loyalty to God, Trust in the State: Adaptation and Transformation in Discourse on Financial Support in Belgian Faith Mission Churches', XXI International Association for the History of Religions World Congress (Erfurt, 29 August 2015). Creemers interviews selected leaders of a particular Flemish Evangelical denomination, but there is no mention of asking for or being granted access via gatekeepers. For a second qualitative research project (an exploratory study), see Sophie Van Houtryve, 'Rome Is Where the Heart Is? Exploratory Study on Flemish Evangelicals Turning to the Catholic Church' (research paper, All Nations Christian College, 2006).

process can influence the substance of a study'[89], and this was especially true for a social science research project of this nature in which ecclesiological and denominational realities had to be taken into account. Therefore, it was important to further define my approach and pay closer attention to the issue of how I obtained access to the research field, particularly since this research project enters an area of practical theology that deals with voices or sources of authority; thus, the realities of ecclesiological and denominational sources of authority (i.e. realities that I come to understand as *gatekeepers*) beg the question: Whose authority? Theological orthodoxy? Organisational loyalty? Ideological purity?

For argument's sake, it should be noted that the absence of the phrase 'Evangelical gatekeeper' does not mean that the notion has been absent from scholarship in this field; it only shows that the gatekeeper mechanisms have been either less researched or worded in different, more general terms. One notable example of such a gatekeeper can be found in Grant Wacker's *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation*. In a broad stroke, Wacker positions the authority of two well-known institutions of Evangelicalism when he states that '[s]ocial orthodoxy was one thing but theological orthodoxy quite another. [Billy] Graham and *Christianity Today* soon came to serve as the *gatekeeper* for the doctrinal norms of the evangelical movement'.[90] The rationale, therefore, for exploring the notion of an Evangelical gatekeeper within the context of a qualitative research project in the domain of homiletics was linked to the observation that there seemed to be no definition of the concept, be it sociological, anthropological, or

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[89] Robert K. Yin, *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2011), p. 115. On the subject of ethics related to the role of gatekeepers, see also Rose Wiles, *What Are Qualitative Research Ethics?*, 'What Is?' Research Methods Series (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2013), p. 30.

[90] Grant Wacker, *America's Pastor: Billy Graham and the Shaping of a Nation* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2014), p. 167.

theological.[91]

4.4.3 Systems Model of Creativity

In this context, Csikszentmihalyi's following question on sources of authority in relation to creativity becomes relevant: 'Who is entitled to decide what is creative?'[92] In Csikszentmihalyi's answer, the reference to the notion of *gatekeepers* is to the point: 'In the systems model, the gatekeepers who have the right to add memes to a domain are collectively designated as the field.'[93]

I first offer a brief description of Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity before picking up this thread of the gatekeeper and this *field*. Csikszentmihalyi argues that creativity is found in the interaction among the individual, the domain, and the field. This interaction, or system, results in creative work (as represented in Figure 1 below).[94]

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[91] The only author to my knowledge to mention 'evangelical gatekeeper' is Hart, p. 70.
[92] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 178.
[93] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 110.
[94] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 166.

Figure 1: Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity

According to Csikszentmihalyi, a creative product is the result of what happens as it is conceived in the context of the interactions among the domain, the field, and the person. But what do these components represent if we apply this model to our situated preacher working on a creative product?

I was not able to find a passage in which Csikszentmihalyi reflects specifically on preachers. However, his argument signals that there is an important role to be played in this whole process by the gatekeepers of the field and domain in which the creative individual (our preacher) operates. Moreover, this role does seem to influence multiple stages of the creative process. Intuitively, I might assume that the 'Aha!' emerges in that solitary 'quiet time' moment so typical of the Evangelical practice. Simplistically, one might conclude that 'hearing God's voice' is confined to the exclusive relationship of God speaking to the preacher; indeed, we too often neglect other sources of authority that remain under the surface, assuming it is just a

matter of God and the individual. But Csikszentmihalyi's research points us in another direction.

I repeat that, although Csikszentmihalyi does not explicitly have the preacher in view, he does list a number of subjects of creativity, among them the more generic *clergyman*. Here, Csikszentmihalyi explains the context of the individual's creativity in relation to the *domain*:

> Original thought does not exist in a vacuum. It must operate on a set of rules, of representations, of notations. One can be a creative carpenter, cook, composer, chemist, or *clergyman* because the domains of woodworking, gastronomy, music, chemistry, and *religion* exist and one can evaluate performance by reference to their traditions. Without rules there cannot be exceptions, and without tradition there cannot be novelty. [italics added][95]

Csikszentmihalyi perceives an environment in which the individual interacts with two other aspects: 'A cultural, or symbolic aspect which here is called the domain; and a social aspect called the field.'[96] To designate the clergyperson as part of the domain *religion* entails that he/she is part of a larger system that includes rules, symbols, skills, values, and practices. Csikszentmihalyi does not, however, define the field as he does with the environments of the *individual* (clergyman) and *domain* (religion), nor does any other homiletician who appropriates Csikszentmihalyi, as far as I have been able to determine. At the same time, Csikszentmihalyi does explain that the field provides the context for activity in the domain and that 'the domain itself, comprised of the structured or organized body of knowledge, exists independently of people and serves to transmit information to individuals'.[97] Csikszentmihalyi explains that a field is:

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[95] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 103.
[96] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 103.
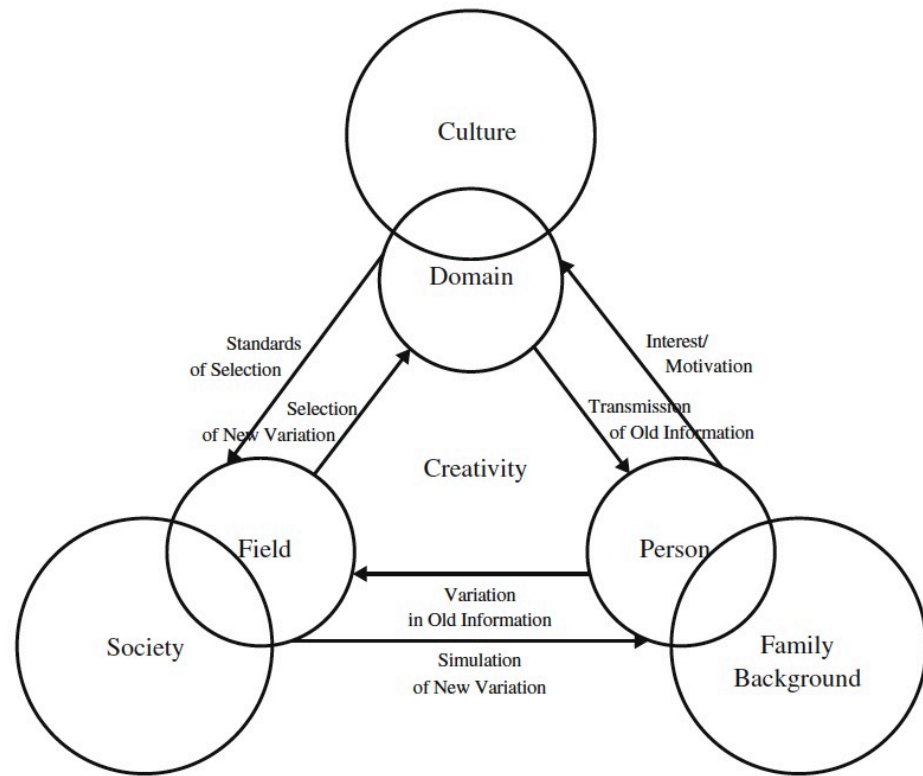[97] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 128.

a group of experts entitled through their own accomplishments or position to decide what should or should not be included in the domain. The field is the social organization of the domain. It consists of gatekeepers — teachers, critics, editors, museum curators, agency directors, and foundation officers — whose role is to decide what should and should not be added to the existing set of knowledge and passed on to subsequent generations.[98]

It is fairly logical to reflect upon the Evangelical preacher as the *individual* or *person* interacting with the field and the domain. I would suggest that *religion* as a particular domain can be narrowed down in our discussion to an Evangelical expression of religion. In relation to the field, it is often used 'to designate an entire discipline or kind of endeavour'.[99]

I would then suggest that the field of experts, also known as the gatekeeper (not necessarily personified), represents the organising environment of the theological discipline of homiletics (see Figure 2).
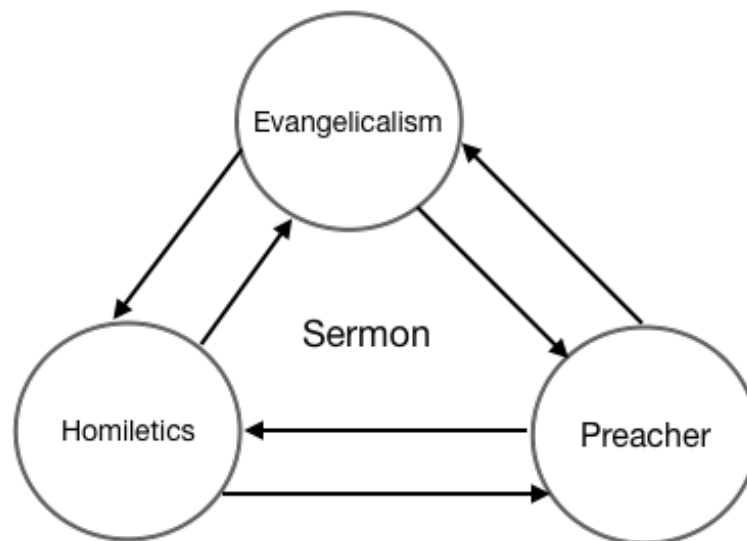
Figure 2: Adaptation of the systems model

The critical analysis of the data (Chapters 5 and 6) in relation to a thick description of the Evangelical state of the land (Chapter 7), the homiletical empirical angles (Chapter 8), and the espoused and operant homiletical spirituality (Chapter 9) will be

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[98] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 211.
[99] Csikszentmihalyi, *The Systems Model of Creativity*, p. 103.

framed by these three environments, with a particular interest in the *field* that is the theological discipline of homiletics.

4.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sketched the breadth of the discipline of spirituality in order to introduce the vocabulary, different angles for research, overviews of listening, and more importantly two parts (authority and discernment) of the homiletical process that are crucial for the critical analysis that follows.

My earlier remark on the perceived vagueness of homiletical spirituality is being met by the realisation that this vagueness does not mean that sources of authority are not at work within the Evangelical movement. On the contrary, the theoretical work of homiletician Douma and the empirical research of Csikszentmihalyi suggest that the creative individual (i.e. the preacher) who labours on a creative product is being influenced by his or her situatedness at different times during the preparatory process, including the life-long context of preaching. The meditative dimensions or practices may seem solitary in nature or person-centred; they are, however, embedded in a social and situated context.

I argue therefore that for the preacher to discern, a nuanced view of sources of authority are important to the Evangelical — a claim that justifies a more critical analysis of what happens during the preparation. Such an analysis will help to reorient the notion of the preacher as *first listener* in such a way that the 'first' in first listener can be explained as 'who got there first?' or 'where did his creativity come from?' or 'who or what did the preacher allow himself to use as a source of authority or discernment?' The following chapter will offer an overview of how these creative individuals, these preachers who are active in the FEM, were approached.

Part 2: Empirical Inquiry

5   Chapter 5: Collecting Data

5.1   Introduction

In the previous chapters, I argued for a methodology that appreciates the complexity of the multifaceted reality surrounding the questions of the preacher as *first listener*. Olena Hankivsky and Daniel Grace remind us that, in order to achieve the goals of qualitative research (i.e. the generalisability and transferability of the analysis), such a methodology 'typically focuses on purposeful samples aimed at generating "thick descriptions" of a particular phenomenon'.[1] Since the end goal of this research project was to offer practical support to the church in general, the social science method used needed to be appropriate to the task. Furthermore, the complexity of the research question (i.e. to qualify the phenomena surrounding the *listening preacher*) demanded a method that could mirror and embrace the multiperspectival nuances embedded in these questions. From a practical theological point of view, complexity should not be seen as a threat, but rather a call for an interdisciplinary approach that finds a consensus in key components that reflect the need for multiple disciplines.[2] Indeed, Hankivsky and Grace warn of the 'shortcomings of pursuing unitary and one-dimensional examinations of human needs and experiences', reminding us that, in the intersection of qualitative methods, the important question is not '*who* you study but, *how* you study'.[3] This qualitative research recognises these complexities and offers the promise of a critical-reflective-phenomenological approach. With these considerations in mind, we venture into this chapter in which the collection of the data will be explained in detail.

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[1] Olena Hankivsky and Daniel Grace, 'Understanding and Emphasizing Difference and Intersectionality in Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research', in *The Oxford Handbook of Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry*, ed. by Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber and Burke Johnson, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 117.

[2] For definitions and explanations of the nuances between disciplinary approaches, i.e. interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and multidisciplinarity, see Rick Szostak, 'Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research', in Hesse-Biber and Johnson, pp. 129–30.

[3] Hankivsky and Grace, p. 123.

Let me start with a line of questioning similar to the previous chapters: Why do I approach *these preachers*? This chapter explains the content of the qualitative research and offers insight into the sample selection (section 5.2), including its ethical issues and access to the respondents. I then continue on to explain the procedural approaches for the waves of interviews (section 5.2.3).

5.2   Sample Selection

Given that I am a coordinator of one particular denomination (ECV; *Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen*), it was important to distance myself from potential conflicts of interest.[4] In practice, this meant that I opted to include four respondents who preach at a church that is part of the *Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten* (VEG; Free Evangelical Churches) and four whose church is part of the *Belgische Evangelische Zending* (BEZ; Belgian Evangelical Mission). I interviewed one preacher from each denomination twice as part of a selective coding sample. As I explain later, there were several waves of sampling as I progressed from open coding to selective coding.[5]

Specific criteria guided my selection of respondents for data collection. In terms of gender, I had to opt for male preachers, since there are no female preachers in the churches of the Flemish Evangelical denominations.[6] I also wanted preachers with twenty or more years of preaching experience so as to maximise their potential

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[4] For historical research on the denomination I am a part of, see Thomas J. Marinello, *New Brethren in Flanders: The Origins and Development of the Evangelische Christengemeenten Vlaanderen, 1971–2008* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013).

[5] In addition to the ten interviews I conducted with the eight respondents of the VEG and BEZ, I conducted semi-structured interviews with one respondent from the *Gereformeerd Overleg Vlaanderen* (GOV; Reformed Council of Flanders) and one from the *Verbond van Vlaamse Pinkstergemeenten* (VVP; Union of Flemish Pentecostal Churches). These two interviews have been coded but have not been included in the critical analysis as such. I conducted these interviews with a view to potential future research.

[6] There are in total six Dutch-speaking Evangelical families in Flanders, split up into denominations (VEG, BEZ, ECV) or umbrella organisations (OAEG, GOV, VVP). At the time of this research, there are, to my knowledge, no female ministers or preachers in the ECV, BEZ, BEZ, GOV, or OAEG, and only two in the Pentecostal fellowships of the VVP.

self-reflexivity. Lovell and Richardson remind us that '[p]reachers aware of the private and public vocational cycle involved in preaching […] will be more self-aware and reflective in ways which can only enrich their ministry'.[7] The preachers in the sample with the fewest number of years of preaching ministry were Jeremy and Lance (twenty-one years); the person with the longest tenure as a preacher was Brandon (forty years). Interviewing preachers with sufficient experience enabled me to interpret data from an evaluative point of view: Did their preaching ministry evolve, or at least start from, a particular theological of homiletical frame of reference? Did they have enough years of ministry to reflect upon the complexities of the preaching life, and life in general for that matter?

In addition to considering gender and duration of preaching ministry, I opted for preachers who came from my own Evangelical tradition. Although Evangelicalism in general has been studied extensively, the particular version (or versions) of it that has developed in Flanders has garnered less attention. Therefore, this research is intended as a contribution to the burgeoning body of research on the FEM and its history.

One further criterion used to select respondents was the frequency with which they preached in their own church: at least twice a month. It is typical for the ecclesial tradition of Evangelical denominations to have a teaching pastor preaching more than once a month. Since every (other) week there is this appointment with the pulpit and the listener in front of it, the preacher is engaged in an ongoing process of listening and discerning.[8]

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[7] Lovell and Richardson, p. 215.

[8] Two observations need to be made at this point: (1) The ecclesial reality of my denomination (ECV) is one of a tradition that works with itinerant preachers. No elder or church member preaches more than once a month, with the odd exception. This is in line with the Brethren tradition from which the ECV evolved. See Marinello, pp. 40, 171. Although the need for well-prepared preaching has grown over the years and teaching still accompanies the celebration of the Lord's Supper, a small survey (e-mail to the current elders of the ECV) highlights that only one of the 26 ECV churches has a teaching-elder who preaches more than twice a month (e-mail by author, 30 December 2016). Although it is an interesting question for a follow-up research project, qualifying the *listening* of an

5.2.1 Ethical Issues

As with any research involving human volunteers, there was a formal process of ethics approval. The question, then, becomes what kinds of ethical issues are likely to arise in this empirical research on the preacher as *first listener*? I will mention the more obvious issues: the ownership of data, confidentiality and disclosure, and the ownership of interpretative authority.[9]

Since this research is religious in nature and focuses on the experience of the preacher, I had to handle narratives of religious experience. At the beginning of the data collection phase, I established a mutual starting point with the participants, identified some principles, and mapped out procedures. These steps took high priority, as the participants were high-profile members of the local faith community and key figures within the regional, and in some cases national, Evangelical community. Since it would be relatively easy for the informed reader to identify certain respondents, questions of anonymity and privacy were always at the forefront, especially due to the unique nature of this research project. One participant expressed great interest in participating, since it would enlighten his ministerial practice of preaching. However, he realised that not just anyone could do this kind of research. There was the need to have basic trust that the information would be handled in a constructive and appropriate way.

5.2.2 Evangelical Gatekeepers

Even if the analysed data do not offer sufficient evidence or explanation regarding the question of to whom or what the preacher is listening, in the pre-entry phase, choices of who to contact and how were of the utmost importance, precisely because the perceived reality of the Evangelical gatekeeper could not be neglected. To

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itinerant preacher will not be investigated here. (2) On the subsequent topic, i.e. the reality and form of the *gatekeeper* within the ECV, see Marinello, p. 52.

[9] Wiles, p. 29.

successfully gain access to the gatekeepers, my predominant approach was a personal access framework, although I also incorporated elements of formalised access.[10] I employed an informal mode of communication to contact two key figures (Victor and Jeremy) of the two Evangelical denominations, VEG and BEZ, to explain the rationale and benefits of this research. Since both of them were respected leaders and preachers in their own right, I asked them to be respondents themselves, to which they consented.

It is important to note that, regardless of how the notion of *gatekeeper* is understood in a Flemish Evangelical context, my role, ministry, and connections in the FEM could lead fellow colleagues to consider me (as I considered them) a gatekeeper of sorts. By virtue of our mutual involvement in a pre/during- and post-research capacity, these interviews could influence my own ministry and potentially also the preaching ministries of the respondents. Adding to this delicate dynamic, most of my respondents exhibited the kind of hesitation and timidity, almost false modesty, that is put poignantly into words by Sarah J. Tracy when she states that '[g]atekeepers may be more willing to open their doors to a young student who pleads "I have to do a class assignment" than to a high-level expert who makes them feel nervous about official research'.[11]

To be clear, I am not a high-level expert; however, I was the first person to contact them for such a (doctoral) project. In fact, all of the respondents confirmed that this interview was the first time they had ever been challenged to think deeply about their preaching ministry. My first contact, Victor, was intrigued, cautious, and happy at the same time. Intrigued, since this was clearly a research project that was close to his heart considering his lifelong preaching context. Cautious, since the Evangelical movement has not always been given the benefit of the doubt; albeit

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[10] Johl and Renganathan, p. 48.
[11] Tracy, p. 70.

respectful, judgments are made, often leading to caricature.[12] Finally, he was happy

that I was an FEM insider and there was mutual trust between us. This mutual trust

helped to grant me formal and personal access in the pre-entry phase of the

fieldwork.[13]

The fact that I was a trusted fellow worker within the FEM, however, did not

negate the sense I got from most of these preachers that they needed to be reassured

that their sermonic practices were worth listening to. In truth, and on a more personal

note, they outranked me in experience and I held them in the highest regard.

Repeatedly, I had to answer questions about how to prepare for the interview, as

respondents anticipated questions of a more technical nature. My answer was the

same to all: they should not prepare whatsoever. My task, on the other hand, was to

heed Johl and Renganathan's warning to be aware of 'the gatekeepers' hidden

agendas, ideologies and cultures which may require the researcher to change how the

research is talked about'.[14]

5.2.3 Respondents

Between January and May 2016, I collected the data through a combination of ten

open to semi-structured interviews with eight respondents. As part of the data

collection, ethical standards were taken into account, i.e. informed consent of

participants; privacy protections and confidentiality; use of pseudonyms; data

protection.[15] There were three waves of interviews: two waves of four interviews

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[12] Guy Liagre, Co-President of the Administrative Council of the Protestant and Evangelical Religion, and arguably a gatekeeper once himself of the liberal mainstream Protestant churches, offers such an assessment of the Flemish Evangelical movement in Liagre, p. 27.

[13] For the distinction between *Formal Access* and *Personal Access* during the pre-entry phase and other phases ('during fieldwork', 'after fieldwork', and 'getting back'), see the basic framework provided by Johl and Renganathan, p. 47, figure 1.

[14] Johl and Renganathan, p. 42.

[15] Judith Preissle, Rebecca M. Glover-Kudon, Elizabeth A. Rohan, Jennifer E. Boehm, and Amy DeGroff, 'Putting Ethics on the Mixed Methods Map', in *The Oxford Handbook of Multimethod and Mixed Methods Research Inquiry*, in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by

each with two respondents per denomination (BEZ/VEG), and a third wave in which

I interviewed Brandon (BEZ) and Victor (VEG) for a second time. The idea of a

second interview with Brandon and Victor grew out of a conversation with

homiletician Theo Pleizier. During a joint coding session of some of the interviews,

the idea of interviewing two respondents based on a cycle of the sermonic process

seemed to be a logical and useful extra step for acquiring an even thicker description

of the sermonising process that these preachers step into.

The interview design for the second interviews was more heavily structured.

The focus was on the sermon Brandon (BEZ) and Victor (VEG) preached before the

second interview took place. Included in the material they sent me were their written

preparations, the audio of the sermon (later transcribed), the PowerPoint presentation

they used, notes they took during the worship time leading up to the sermon, and

finally the journal entries they made as they prepared their sermon.[16]

The use of a journal is a reflexive strategy used to facilitate self-reflection and

heighten the preacher's awareness.[17] In these cases, the journaling took the form of a

learning journal. As Heather Walton explains in *Writing Methods in Theological

Reflection*, this form of journal might seem counterintuitive compared to other more

obvious forms like creative journals or spiritual journals.[18] However, as the journal's

aim was to capture 'experiences for future consideration', this seemed to be the more

logical form for the preachers' journaling.[19] Certainly, the form of spiritual

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Sharlene Hesse-Biber and R. Burke Johnson, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 154.

[16]For an extensive exploration on the uses of a *journal* or *life writing* in an autoethnographical context, see also Walton, Location 471.

[17] Kathleen M. T. Collins, 'Validity in Multimethod and Mixed Research' in Hesse-Biber and Johnson, p. 247.

[18] Walton, Locations 1405, 1433.

[19] For the connection of *hearing God* with journaling, see Tanya Luhrmann, 'The Art of Hearing God: Absorption, Dissociation, and Contemporary American Spirituality', in *Spiritus*, 5.2 (2005), 133–157 (p. 142). 'Dialogue with God makes it clear that quiet concentration (an absorption practice) enhances the likelihood of hearing God.' For the use of a journal in a more general Christian spiritual context, see also *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Gordon S. Wakefield (London, UK: SCM Press, 1986), pp. 234–35. Journaling in this context is to be distinguished from the type of reflexive journaling used by the researcher himself. See e.g. *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative*

journaling could have offered precisely what this research was aiming for, i.e. in the words of Walton:

> […] to foster skills of patient, deep attentiveness. The discipline of receptivity and the painful, slow work of intensifying perception are what are sought through writing that attempts to put into words the brief flash of an epiphany or the almost inaudible prompting of a still small voice.[20]

However, since at this point in the research I was not able to qualify the nature of concepts such as *attentiveness*, *receptivity*, and *epiphany* of the '*still small voice*', these outcomes would have been too suggestive in nature and thus unhelpful. The use of the journal as a more utilitarian learning tool avoided this pitfall, as it was more directed towards helping the preacher to 'clarify their thoughts', capture 'experiences for future consideration' and allow 'depth of thought to develop from surface impressions'.[21]

In practice, achieving these aims meant that I gave them minimal guidelines. As they started the sermonising process, they were to write down their thoughts, digitally or on paper, specifying the location, hour, and date of when the thoughts occurred.[22] I should add that neither of the two respondents had ever kept a journal, at least not for these purposes. All the data I received were transcribed and imported into software for qualitative data analysis, i.e. NVivo 11 (the Mac version).[23]

Research, ed. by Patricia Leavy, Oxford Library of Psychology (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 229.

[20] Walton, Location 1447.

[21] Walton, Location 1349.

[22] This approach is based on collecting thoughts, as described in Jennifer Moon's '"daybook" that supports professional activity and learning'. See Jennifer A. Moon, *Learning Journals: A Handbook for Academics, Students and Professional Development* (London, UK: Kogan Page, 1999), p. 135. Moon describes *thoughts* as 'the reflective learning part of the daybook. It is the ongoing reflection, the capture of stray ideas that as yet have no home, the place for thinking through concepts, the playing with ideas which may then be lifted into a more permanent place outside the daybook or within. […] It is a section to wander through on occasions – on the bus or the train, keeping what is in there "alive"' (p. 136).

[23] For an extensive overview of the uses of NVivo, see also Patricia Bazeley and Kristi Jackson, *Qualitative Data Analysis with NVivo* (London, UK: Sage, 2014).

5.2.3.1 First-Wave Interviews

The goal of the first wave of four interviews was to collect the data and write analytic memos based on the open-ended interviews and a first cycle of coding.[24] Even in a first coding cycle, there are many different coding strategies the researcher can employ.[25] As a procedural first step in the coding process, I used *initial coding* to break down 'qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examining them, and comparing them for similarities and differences'.[26] In effect, this approach offered me 'analytic leads for further exploration' and 'to see the direction in which to take [this] study'.[27]

Since the intention of this research was to qualify the nature of listening before, during, and after the sermonic process, I used two general categories to differentiate between the codes: *homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents*.[28] These categories were indicated in either the left or right margin of the interview transcripts. I considered *homiletical incidents* to be pieces of descriptive data that referred to expressions, convictions, or practices commonly associated with the production or communication of the sermon.

Example codes for homiletical incidents:
- writing out the sermon

- on preparing a sermon

Example incidents:
- '[…] I write all my sermons, and if necessary, I revise.' (Victor)

- 'I very much prefer to prepare an exegetical sermon, an expository message.' (Isaac)

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[24] On the use of memos and annotations in NVivo, see also *Encyclopedia of Case Study Research*, ed. by Albert J. Mills, Gabrielle Durepos, and Elden Wiebe (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2010), p. 192-93. On the importance of memos as 'theoretical and methodological notes on your notes and your notes on your activities while collecting data', see W. Paul Vogt, *Selecting the Right Analyses for Your Data: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Methods* (New York, NY: The Guilford Press, 2014), p. 394. Memos provide an 'audit trail […] to help you reconstruct what you've done'.

[25] For a comprehensive list, see Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2009), p. 46.

[26] Ibid., p. 81.

[27] Ibid., p. 81.

[28] I thank homiletician Dr. Theo Pleizier for this helpful suggestion.

- importance of message

- 'So, the message is more important than the messenger.' (Brandon)

I considered *listening incidents* to be pieces of descriptive data that referred to expressions, convictions, or practices commonly associated with the reception, invention, or meditation of the sermon.

Example codes for listening incidents:
- heart

- 'Luther'-experience

Example incidents:
- '[…] if God put something on my heart, I cannot deny that' (Andrew)
- '[…] so, ok Lord, here I stand, I can do it, the sermon is prepared, and You have to use it. So, here I stand.' (Brandon)

Although preliminary, these categories functioned as container concepts that offered me an easy way to process the interviews and code them accordingly. Based then on my literature study, I was able to designate particular codes in the appropriate margin, i.e. under the appropriate category. Although this step did not mean that the codes could not be later switched to the other margin or even appear in both, it did help me to integrate that data, albeit partially, through other forms, namely, *evaluation coding* and *provisional coding*.

According to Saldaña, *evaluation coding* can 'emerge from the evaluative perspective of the researcher or from the qualitative commentary provided by participants'.[29] The evaluative element in this particular case was not designed to be held up against or appropriated into a concrete policy or educational evaluation; rather, using the two categories (*homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents*) offered a general way to conduct an overall assessment of the implicit or explicit Evangelical

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[29] Saldaña, p. 98.

homiletical blueprints or agendas, insofar as they exist in the FEM, which was my intention in the first place.

The application of these two general categories can also be viewed as an exploratory method called *provisional coding*.[30] Saldaña explains that 'the provisional list is generated from such preparatory investigative matters as: literature reviews related to the study, the study's conceptual framework'.[31] Due caution needs to be taken, as preconceptions of 'what to expect in the field may distort your objective and even interpretive observations of what is "really" happening there'.[32] These categories helped me to scan the data through these broad filters. In light of the research question, the category *listening incidents* was the most interesting when designating codes in this *initial coding* phase.

In terms of the type of interview, I wanted to remain open to the impact of the biographical-narrative importance of the story as told by the respondent. Reminded of the complexities of the preaching life underscored by homileticians George Lovell and Neil Richardson, I needed to listen without devising questions that were too structured.[33]

Sven Brinkmann reiterates this focus of the narrative and unstructured interview as he explains, 'These need not concern the life story as a whole, but may address other, more specific storied aspects of human lives.'[34] In the first half of the interview, therefore, I used questions that elicited the biographical and narrative depth of the respondent's life and ministry story. However, the second part of the interview evolved towards a semi-structured interview in order to generate knowledge about the way the respondent *listened* and *discerned*.

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[30] Ibid., p. 118.
[31] Ibid., p. 120.
[32] Saldaña, p. 122.
[33] Lovell and Richardson, p. 44.
[34] Svend Brinkmann, 'Unstructured and Semi-Structured Interviewing', in Leavy, p. 286. See also Svend Brinkmann, *Qualitative Interviewing*, Series in Understanding Measurement (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013).

In terms of interviewing techniques, Ruthellen Josselson's call for 'the empathic attitude of listening' was very helpful, as this attitude acknowledged our shared identity as fellow preachers.[35] This empathic attitude did not stand in the way of the unstructured interview style; in fact, it helped the interview to progress when needed, as I was able to relate or react in a personal way to the stories told by the respondents.

Table 1 describes the background characteristics of the first four respondents in the initial coding cycle: Ian, Victor, Andrew, and Brandon.

Name	Denomination	Years in Preaching Ministry	Nationality	Gender
Ian	VEG	25	Dutch	Male
Victor	VEG	36	Dutch	Male
Andrew	BEZ	27	German	Male
Brandon	BEZ	40	Dutch	Male

Table 1. Background characteristics of the respondents in the first cycle of initial coding

The variables shown in Table 1 reflect some givens that appear again in Table 2. First, all of the respondents are male.[36] Second, since this research is

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[35] Ruthellen Josselson, *Interviewing for Qualitative Inquiry: A Relational Approach* (New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2013), pp. 80–101.

[36] For my earlier comment on the absence of female preachers, see also section 5.2. Interestingly, the only publication of weight on the role of women in a Belgian/Flemish Evangelical context that originated from within the FEM, albeit by a non-Belgian, is a book by one of the most notable post-World War II gatekeepers within Belgian Evangelicalism, George Winston. See George Murray Winston and Dora Winston, *Recovering Biblical Ministry by Women: An Exegetical Response to Traditionalism and Feminism* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2003), pp. 234–75. Winston concluded, based on a survey of 33 biblical texts, that the teaching by women in a church context should not be forbidden or restricted. For the role of George Winston, in particular in the VEG and BEZ, see Prins, 'The History of the Belgian Gospel Mission', pp. 9, 390. The Belgian Gospel Mission (BGM) was a faith mission that, after a name change, became the BEZ. George Winston was also the director of the Bijbelinstituut België (BIB) from 1965 until 1985. See also Marinello, p. 84. Notably, Prins reflects upon the impact of George Winston: 'He started in the seventies of the previous century

focused on the Evangelical movement, the respondents were chosen from a pool of preachers that are part of two representative denominations in the FEM. As mentioned in section 5.2, six families can be distinguished within the broader FEM, with three of those families clustered in three denominations: ECV, VEG, and BEZ.[37] Unlike the VEG and BEZ, the ECV does not work with full-time pastors.[38] Furthermore, as a coordinator of the ECV, I wanted to avoid conflicts of interest and safeguard relationships with my colleagues.[39]

Since the BEZ and the VEG are historically connected, it seemed logical to cluster them and approach preachers who were part of these two denominations.[40] Added to this historical connection, the BEZ and the VEG work together on a regular basis and attend each other's meetings and weekends for leaders. Although these two denominations may seem similar in nature to the casual observer, they have distinguishable mission and vision statements.[41]

Third, a comment should also be made about the nationality of the respondents. Tables 1 and 2 list seven of the respondents of a non-Belgian nationality: two were German and five were Dutch. One could ask: Why did I not choose Flemish

a widening operation that reverberates to this day.' (This author's English translation) Aaldert Prins, 'Drie Korte Historische Terugblikken", Lezing EAV-Symposiumdag, 1 June 2013 <http://www.evadoc.be/images/downloads/drie_korte_terugblikken.pdf> [accessed 28 February 2017] (p. 2). The impact noticed by Prins was, however, not reflected in the interviews with my respondents, in the sense that only two respondents (Victor and Brandon) mentioned Winston's name as someone who had fostered a preaching or teaching foundation in their lives. Nor did this particular publication have a significant impact on the ratio of male to female preachers in the years following publication.

[37] According to Jelle Creemers, 'It is virtually impossible to provide the exact contours of this ecclesial family', i.e. the Evangelical Free Churches in Belgium. Consequently, Creemers uses the definition of British historian David Bebbington to provide some contours to the ecclesial families that resemble those characteristics. See Jelle Creemers, 'Evangelical Free Churches and State Support in Belgium: Praxis and Discourse From 1987 to Today', *Trajecta*, 24 (2015), 177–204 (p. 179).

[38] Some ECV churches (six at the time of conducting the interviews), however, have a full-time paid staff member. These full-time workers are not pastors, but rather elders or part of the elder team without holding the title of being an elder.

[39] For the research relationship from the side of the researcher and the much more emotion-laden approach to qualitative research, see also Josselson, pp. 112–13.

[40] For the connection between these two denominations, see Creemers, 'Evangelical Free Churches and State Support in Belgium', p. 184. See also Aaldert Prins, *Onze wortels: de Vrije Evangelische Gemeenten in het perspectief van de Belgische kerkgeschiedenis* (VEG, 2001).

[41] The VEG is a denomination that houses Evangelical churches with the intention to assist and advise. The BEZ is a mission organisation that develops church planting strategies and contemporary tools for sharing the Gospel.

preachers? The simple answer is because there are very few serving as full-time

and/or teaching pastors. Describing the historical reality of foreign influences in

Belgium since its independence in 1830, Colin Godwin enumerates that '[t]he

Baptists in Belgium originated as part of a French work, the Reformed Church

originated with an expatriate Dutch population left in Belgium after its

independence, the work of the Salvation Army was sponsored from Britain, and the

Belgian Gospel Mission was financed and staffed by English and American

Christians'.[42] Ignace Demaerel offers a similar assessment as he explains the foreign

branches of the Pentecostal family tree in Belgium.[43] Missionaries were not

exclusively Dutch of course: The ECV originated through the church planting

ministries of Canadian missionaries.[44] Pieter Boersema adds anthropological insights

to the historical and cultural realities shaping the context of Dutch missionaries' call

to a Flemish context.[45] All of these examples serve to underscore, on the one hand,

the foreign missionary forces at work within the FEM and, on the other hand, the

decrease of 'the cultural religious dominance of foreigners in the congregations. […]

This process of "emancipation" gives a new cultural meaning to the religious

behaviour of the E.M. [Evangelical Movement] in Flanders.'[46]

The BEZ is also in essence a church planting organisation that has

predominantly worked with foreign missionaries. This historical feature has led to a

high ratio of non-Belgian pastors. In the BEZ, of the eight Flemish churches, only

seven have a full-time pastor; only one of them is a Flemish-speaking Belgian, and

he has not been a pastor for long. Therefore, he did not meet my criterion of having

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[42] Colin Godwin, 'The Recent Growth of Pentecostalism in Belgium', in *International Bulletin for Missionary Research*, 37.2 (2013), 90–94 (pp. 90–91).

[43] See e.g. *branches* no. 3 (Scandinavian), 6 (American) and 7 (South-African) in Demaerel, pp. 103, 243, 265.

[44] See also the aforementioned Marinello, *New Brethren in Flanders*.

[45] Pieter Boersema, 'De Evangelische Beweging in de Samenleving: Een Antropologisch Onderzoek naar Religieuze Veranderingen in de Evangelische Beweging in Vlaanderen en Nederland Gedurende de Periode 1972-2002 (Proefschrift Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2004), pp. 207–27.

[46] Ibid., p. 310.

at least twenty years in ministry. In the VEG, there is a more nuanced reality in terms of the nationality of their full-time preachers. Of the thirteen full-time pastors, eight of them were of a different nationality at the time of conducting these interviews. Yet, it was these seven non-Belgian preachers who comprised the pool of respondents from which I could draw, based on their number of active years as a preacher.

In effect, the non-Belgian make-up of the respondents continues to reflect the aftermath of an FEM that has been steeped in foreign influence. One could argue, however, that the particular make-up of preachers active in the FEM is fairly homogeneous: male, non-Belgian, full-time preachers with a strong missionary entrance into Flemish culture. Insofar as I needed to examine the assumptions and practices of preachers within the FEM, this pool of respondents, arguably, offered a representative sample that reflected and respected the historical, ecclesial, and theological realities of the FEM.

5.2.3.2   Second-Wave Interviews

Before the second wave of interviews, I engaged in a first round of initial coding that was accompanied by writing reflective memos and adding annotations to parts of the interviews. This first round of coding generated 197 codes that were initially grouped under the two aforementioned categories: *homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents*.

As this research aimed to qualify the nature of discernment in the FEM, it was important to conceptualise the assumptions present in blueprint approaches to homiletical theology and theory. For example, as underscored in section 4.2, there are assumptions embedded in the literature on Evangelical homiletical theory and the appropriated spiritual practices of the Evangelical preacher during the sermonising

process. These assumptions need to be evaluated. Therefore, I extended the scope of

the two categories by adding more categories based on the initial *evaluation coding*

and *provisional coding*. This way, I could designate codes to multiple categories. So,

for example, under the heading of typical container categories *evangelical*,

homiletical, *listening*, *liturgical*, *pastoral*, *theological*, *sermonising*, *traditional*, and

historical, I coupled conceptualised items such as *ideal*, *conviction*, *incident*, *method*,

motivation, *obstacle*, *practices*, *process*, *evolution*, *critique*, *examples*, *experiences*,

feedback, and *formation*. I ended up with a long list of categories (99) that had a

similar structure, e.g. *homiletical* conviction, *homiletical* experience, *homiletical*

theology, *homiletical* obstacle, and so on; *evangelical* conviction, *evangelical*

experience, *evangelical* theology, *evangelical* obstacle, and so on. As not all 197

codes could be neatly categorised in this way, single categories were added if

necessary so as not to exclude possible avenues of inquiry. Not all categories were,

for that matter, filled with a code.[47]

This form of constant comparison was a helpful way to break down the data

further, from *homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents* into subcategories

(conceptualise). This constant comparison is, according to Pleizier, 'the most

important procedure to keep the process of conceptualisation going. Essentially it is

an inductive procedure.'[48] The process yielded several conceptual candidates for

sources of authority to which I will return shortly.

As with the first wave, there was still the need for a particular type of interview

that would guarantee insight into the biographical-narrative nature of these

preachers. The reason for this approach was the respondents' recurring conviction

that a *calling* was at the origin of their preaching ministry. All four respondents in

the first wave of interviews used this specific word when asked about *how* and *when*

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[47] Examples of these single categories: Flemish context; discernment incident; reading practice; … Examples of categories that did not get a code: liturgical conviction; liturgical ideal; …

[48] Pleizier, p. 97.

they had decided to become a minister. They highlighted the sense of a calling as an important aspect of being a preacher. Given the growing interest in this aspect of the preacher's self-image, it felt appropriate to not close off this particular avenue of inquiry.

In addition to using an unstructured approach to explore the issue of a calling, I incorporated a semi-structured design into the second-wave interviews in order to hone in on some questions arising from the initial coding. Rather than asking *if* there were homiletical theories, homileticians, books, and so on that had influenced them, I asked *which* of these had made an impact on their thinking. Rather than asking them to explain how they sensed God was talking to them, I pursued a line of questioning that focused on those conditions they thought were important for listening and those conditions they felt interfered with listening.

All respondents in the first-wave interviews had experienced crises during their preaching ministries to the extent that they could identify differences in how their ministry evolved. This was a line of questioning that I wanted to explore further in the second wave of interviews. Rather than asking if there had been positive or negative experiences during their preaching ministry that could account for changes in the way they entered the sermonising process, I asked them which experiences had influenced them.

Table 2 shows the background characteristics of the respondents in the second wave of interviews. For reasons explained earlier, the particular realities of the gender/nationality characteristics closely resemble the characteristics in Table 1. Table 2 describes the background characteristics of the second four respondents in this second cycle of initial coding: Isaac, Frank, Lance, and Jeremy.

Name	Denomination	Years in Preaching Ministry	Nationality	Gender
Isaac	VEG	32	Dutch	Male
Frank	VEG	31	Dutch	Male
Lance	BEZ	21	German	Male
Jeremy	BEZ	21	Belgian (Flemish)	Male

Table 1. Background characteristics of the respondents in the second cycle of initial coding

5.3 Conclusion

Chapter 5 delivered an overview of the qualitative data, procedural choices, and specific context of the respondents in order for me to delve further into the observations on creativity and attentiveness that reorient the question from 'Is the preacher listening, i.e. attentive during the creative process?' to 'To *whom* or *what* is the preacher listening?' Based on the concepts of *listening incidents*, I argue in the following chapter for a nuanced approach to the preacher as a *person* through a critical realist account. This leads me to propose possible candidates for sources of authority that will be evaluated in light of the contours of the homiletical spirituality in the FEM (Part 3, Chapters 7–9).

6   Chapter 6: Conceptualising Categories

6.1   Conceptualising Listening Incidents

6.1.1   Listening Incidents

In the previous chapter, the provisional and evaluation coding helped me to focus on the appropriate category, i.e. the listening incidents. The *homiletical incident* codes reflected the procedural and exegetical development of the sermon, and so fell outside the focus of this research. Instead, I focused on the *listening incident* codes.

As I revisited the final list of codes and memos from the interviews, I made a list of candidates for sources of authority or discernment. A guiding question (see also section 4.7) in this process was: Is this a phenomenon that represents the 'who' or 'what' that the preacher allows/rejects as a source of authority or discernment?

At the risk of stating the obvious, in terms of their actual practices, all of the respondents used a diverse toolbox of known methods: reading their Bible, walking in nature, installing an area in their office where they could kneel and pray, reflecting on the way[1], listening to music, becoming silent by turning off sources of noise, and so on. These practices, though in themselves helpful for understanding what the respondents actually do, did not illuminate the meaning the preacher attributed to the question: Is this a phenomenon that represents the 'who' or 'what' that I allow/reject as a source of authority or discernment?'

The following concepts became containers for possible candidates for sources of authority and, in a sense, conceptualisations of Csikszentmihalyi's 'gatekeeper'. In other words, they illuminate the self-understanding of the preachers in relation to their personal, social, and ecclesial context; they are the 'who' or 'what' the preachers are listening to first, the concepts that have an impact on their listening. The candidates are: the *calling* of the preacher, the *crisis* of the preacher, the *church*

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[1] See also Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord' in section 2.1. 'In the car, on a train, in moments of waiting.'

of the preacher, and the *consultation* of the preacher. I will return to these candidates, but let me briefly explain them here. The *calling* refers to the preacher's initial calling to a missional ministry in Belgium. The *crisis* of the preacher could refer to a burnout, a conflict in church, or a health issue that has impacted the preacher. The *church* is a candidate insofar as this is the location or group of believers directly related to the preacher. Finally, *consultation* can encompass anything that the preacher consults: books, peers, other preachers, etc.

A couple of disclaimers are warranted here. First, this list is tentative in nature — an interpretation based on the *listening incident* codes. It is not an exhaustive list of candidates, and indeed more sources could be identified and researched. As such, the theoretical origins and methodological groundings of this research deliver a promising foundation on which to build similar social science research projects in the future. Second, although the choices for possible candidates for sources of authority are based on their appearance in multiple interviews, it does not follow that all suggested candidates were observable in every respondent's narrative or self-understanding. Third, as this research is bound by specific goals (the specific output of this dissertation is church-oriented), its parameters are defined by these goals. Consequently, although I offer four candidates for sources of authority, I only investigate one candidate more thoroughly, namely, the *calling* of the preacher. However, I argue that the aim of this research is as much to instigate further research into the spirituality of the preacher as it is to offer results based on the present research. Therefore, the other candidates distilled from the same data might invite further reflection, just as I will reflect on the one candidate.

In the following section, I will explain a final and fourth disclaimer that deserves a longer treatise as it pertains to the lived experiences of the preacher. These suggested candidates illuminate experiences that assume a complex web of

personal, ministerial, and/or spiritual elements that deserve to be addressed in a correspondingly respectful and nuanced way.

6.1.2   Critical Realist Personalism

In Chapter 1, Sandra Schneiders reminded us that private and anecdotal data alone do not constitute evidence. At the same time, Schneiders advocates a form of introspection that can offer an indispensable source of understanding. This tension needs to be acknowledged and dealt with.

Acknowledging that the preacher enters into this process as a situated subject, or as a *person*, is there a way to interpret the reality of the preacher's ecclesial, historical, cultural, and social embeddedness as he/she encounters the aforementioned possible candidates for sources of authority? For me to research the preacher and the way he/she listens is to acknowledge that the preacher and I (as a researcher) are researching a part of reality. What are the philosophical presuppositions and consequences that are important for this particular practical theological research based on a social science approach?

Just as practical theological perspectives shape our understanding of the reality we encounter, theoretical perspectives shape in a similar way how we interpret reality. To that end I will look, albeit briefly, into the critical realist personalism as put forward by sociologist Christian Smith.

Christian Smith is a sociologist with a longstanding interest in Evangelicalism.[2] Smith explains repeatedly the nature and especially the complexity of reality, with

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[2] See for example, Christian Smith, *The Bible Made Impossible: Why Biblicism Is Not a Truly Evangelical Reading of Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2011). Christian Smith, *Christian America?: What Evangelicals Really Want* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000). Christian Smith and Michael Emerson, *American Evangelicalism: Embattled and Thriving* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998). D. G. Hart's *Deconstructing Evangelicalism*, a book published in 2004, explains the awkward relationship Evangelicalism has had with the social sciences. Hart maps the ways in which American Evangelicalism started to show up on the radar screen of the social scientists. Hart, pp. 64–65.

stark and succinct observations. For example, 'Reality is also complex, not simple.'[3]

Qualifying this complexity, Smith elaborates by explaining that parts of reality are

causally subject to potential influences by many other parts.[4]

Valuing Smith's thinking on the complexity of reality, social science

explanations on the kinds of phenomena I need to qualify 'will usually […] tend

toward greater complexity rather than parsimonious simplicity […] because reality is

complex, and any adequate explanation about some part of it must recognize and

represent that complexness'.[5]

Therefore, in pursuit of an adequate explanation of a reality, which in this

particular case is arguably not even observable in an empirical sense — a notion

Smith is willingly taking into account — how can we best observe and understand

it?[6]

Understanding the reality of the preacher's discerning and listening is the

primary focus of this research. But how does one observe *listening*? How does one

account for a religious experience? Furthermore, how does one interpret a religious

experience? If we look into a phenomenological approach, even if it is on a more

general level, James M. Nelson suggests that 'religious experience involves the

attribution of religious meaning to an event'.[7]

Using, for example, the four types of religious experience put forward by the

sociologist Rodney Stark, Nelson lists how the *confirming*, *responsive*, *ecstatic*, and

revelational are four examples of general characteristics.[8]

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[3] Christian Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods, Motivations, Failure, and Evil* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2015), p. 33.

[4] Christian Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct*, p. 33.

[5] Ibid., p. 272.

[6] Ibid., p. 273.

[7] James M. Nelson, *Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), p. 108.

[8] Ibid., pp. 105–06. Confirming: a feeling of sacredness or a sense of presence; responsive: an experience of having been seen or helped; ecstatic: a confirming and responsive feeling of connectedness; revelational: having received special knowledge from the Divine.

Smith's appropriation of Nelson's warning against a too reductionist stance will help in valuing the 'multidimensional, multileveled, and highly complex— from being flattened and oversimplified by a heavy-handed conceptual outlook'.[9] One needs a theory as a conceptual tool 'to model the structures and causal mechanisms present in reality at different levels, whether directly observable *or not*.'[10]

For Smith, this theory is *critical realist personalism*, which is a theory on human personhood as he presents it in *What is a Person* and *To Flourish or Destruct*. Against three background theoretical perspectives, i.e. critical realism, personalist theory, and an antinaturalistic phenomenological epistemology, Smith explains the complex context of the socially interactive nature of human constitution.[11] Some of Smith's motivations to develop his theory resonate with the previous elaborations on the practical theological perspectives. If we are to capture the 'deep subjective experience' of the preacher as a listening person, a robust theory of humanhood should represent them in a best possible way. Critical realism, Smith asserts, 'ask[s] us to discover our best account of what is true about reality'.[12]

That best account, according to Christian Smith, 'believes in ontological realism, epistemic perspectivalism, and judgmental rationality, all held together'.[13] Smith goes on to explain why these and not alternative accounts of theoretical resources (ontological antirealism, epistemological foundationalism, and judgmental relativism) will keep (social) science on track. Critical realism wants 'to understand the ontological character of what exists in reality and how it works causally to produce the facts and events we experience'.[14]

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[9] Nelson, p. 40.

[10] Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up*, 6. print (Chicago, IL.: University of Chicago Press, 2011), p. 11.

[11] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, p. 16.

[12] Smith, *What Is a Person?*, p. 12. I should point out that there is disagreement on the question if 'critical realism' is the answer to a question that should not be asked, as philosopher James K.A. Smith points out in *Who's Afraid of Relativism?*, pp. 24–26.

[13] Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct*, p. 13.

[14] Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct*, p. 13.

Although critical realism offers interesting implications for the way we can conduct empirical research, there will be no 'immediate empirical payoff'.[15] But, as Theo Pleizier referring to the work John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, asserts, '[t]his commitment to realism ultimately grounds the ethics of research: rather than entertaining their "sacred" constructions scholars have a duty to do justice to the real world. Practical-theology has its own theological reasons to affirm that "reality is both real and, in principle, accessible."'[16] And that move towards a more nuanced account of shared truth and what is real can take time. What Smith offers to the social sciences to improve its practices is a personalist model of human personhood. This model explains the theoretical underpinnings of 'our human ontology, condition, and experience'.[17] The payoff may not be immediate, but that does not mean that drawing from a critical realist personalism will not offer a good explanation and new understanding of what is researched. Good explanations will be expressed in a *realist* mode, will be inherently *causal,* and all the while 'human beliefs, meanings, motivations, and other subjective realities are accorded causal status, along with many other kinds of real causes'.[18]

This overview of Smith's account sets the scene for the four possible candidates that could be qualified as sources of authority, thereby providing the context for the preacher's listening process. It furthermore helps us to appreciate the complex picture that surfaces from the interviews. The preacher is never bound by a one- or two-dimensional picture, and the preacher's spirituality is never reduced to the sum of the meditative practices employed.

In fact, as mentioned, accepting this complex reality warrants further and similar research into the preacher's spiritual practices, as this area is

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[15] Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct*, p. 21.
[16] Pleizier, p. 4.
[17] Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct*, p. 266.
[18] Smith, *To Flourish or Destruct*, p. 271.

underrepresented within homiletical research. The following candidates for sources

of authority are, therefore, the result of my attempt to attribute religious meaning to

the homiletical event, realising that there may not necessarily be an immediate

empirical payoff. The attempt to attribute meaning begins in the descriptive sections

that follow. But, these candidates will evoke further practical theological reflection

in the context of subsequent chapters on the contours of the FEM, keeping in mind

that these contours offer my best account of their ministerial reality.

6.2   Candidates for Sources of Authority

6.2.1   The Preacher and Calling

A strong candidate for a source of authority is the preacher's experience of *calling*.

Without exception, all respondents started out in their ministry with a strong sense of

missional calling. This seems to connect with the context of the FEM. Flanders was

considered to be a missionary field and home of several missionary or evangelistic

organisations like the BEZ, OM, and YWAM.[19] As mentioned in section 5.2.3.1, this

historical reality has led to a high proportion of non-Belgian preachers. As such, it is

not peculiar that the notion of a *calling* is an important theme. As a potential source

of authority, it could regulate the self-image of the *called* preacher; it could have an

impact on his/her creativity or attentiveness as the experience of being called, and

serve as a gatekeeper in the preacher's overall ministry narrative.

6.2.1.1   The Respondents and Calling

Ian (VEG) and his wife had 'experienced a calling to come to Belgium' after

answering Floyd McClung's call ('Who's prepared to go?') to visit Belgium at the

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[19] OM stands for Operation Mobilisation (see also section 6.2.4). YWAM stands for Youth with a Mission.

invitation of Johan Lukasse, the former director of the BEZ. Andrew (BEZ) had grown up as a missionary kid in Papua New Guinea and so was familiar with the concept of a calling. Interestingly enough, the concept of a calling had emerged in the tension between the conviction of God giving a call and the danger of harbouring too much false pride in this call or too strong a sense of responsibility to fulfil this call. To detect and reflect upon this tension had helped Andrew to make certain decisions after experiencing a burnout during his ministry. In terms of *listening*, he allowed other young leaders to come to the foreground and preach. He no longer felt that he *had* to be the preacher in order to be true to his calling.

When Brandon (BEZ) became a Christian at 22, he hungered for more knowledge of God and prayed for guidance. After reading a chapter on *calling* in Charles Spurgeon's book on preaching, Brandon had wrestled with this notion and became convinced that God had guided him to come to Brussels (Belgium) to follow a ministry course at a Bible school.[20]

Victor (VEG) was the respondent most emphatic about the importance of a *calling* and the danger of it being missed in the FEM. Victor referred to himself as a *called one*, which meant that he *could* not stop. By contrast, Victor too often observed a shallow or opportunistic approach to preaching in the Evangelical community. He lamented the ease with which some were encouraged to start preaching: 'Go ahead, you try to preach once, that way you'll learn as well.' Instead, Victor claimed, 'There has to be a calling for that.' Victor's validation of preaching being reserved for those with a *calling* makes an interesting counterpoint to the realisation that laypeople hold an important position in Evangelicalism. Evan

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[20] Brandon could not recall the title of Spurgeon's book, but for the importance of the *sacred calling* in Spurgeon's thinking see C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1980), p. 22; see also Spurgeon's address on the importance of the *sacred calling*. Charles C. H. Spurgeon, 'The Sword and the Trowel', in *The Preacher's Power, and the Conditions of Obtaining It*, an Address by C. H. Spurgeon, at the Annual Conference of the Pastor's College, June 1889 <http://www.tracts.ukgo.com/spurgeon_preachers_power.pdf> [accessed 16 June 2018] (p. 15).

Howard argues, 'evangelicalism is characteristically a lay movement', a sentiment actually repeated by Victor.[21] Answering a question on the link between the Evangelical movement and being *called*, Victor stated that '[t]he Evangelical movement is of course a lay movement, right?' Part of this is a reflection on the modern individualism in which Evangelicalism emerged. I argue that (see also section 4.2.3.2) sources of authority in post-Reformational traditions like Evangelicalism are closely linked to subjective and emotional religious experiences. For Victor, this did not mean that the link with Scripture and tradition was lost; however, Victor implicitly criticised the emphasis placed on the devoutness of the believer. As such, Victor's warning against the layperson *feeling* called to preach stands in sharp contrast with the post-Reformational notion that the layperson has become a source of authority him or herself. Based on Victor's assessment and experiences, one could argue that, within a lay movement characterised by a strong theological notion of being part of a 'priesthood of all believers', other sources of authority need to be in place, for example, the notion of *being/feeling called*.[22]

A second and unexpected insight into the importance of a *calling* emerged in elements of Victor's autobiographical narrative that hinted at the notion of calling mixed with egotistical motives. For him, preaching had been an integral part of his healing process, giving his calling a double meaning. One part of Victor was happy that God allowed him to preach, whereas another part of him recognised that being called to somewhere meant also being called away from somewhere. In his case, becoming a preacher had meant becoming part of a new culture and saying goodbye

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[21] Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', Location 1102. For the notion of the Evangelical movement as a lay movement in Evangelical Flanders, see also Patrick Nullens, 'In Heaven We Speak English, not Latin: Het Mondiale Kader van de Evangelische Beweging', Lezing EVADOC, April 2010 <http://evadoc.be/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/evadoc100424_pnullens_mondiaal_karakter_van_evangelische_beweging.pdf> [accessed 8 April 2015] (p. 6).

[22] For the link between Protestantism and calling, see also David W. Miller and Timothy Ewest, 'Faith at Work (Religious Perspectives): Protestant Accents in Faith and Work', in *Handbook of Faith and Spirituality in the Workplace: Emerging Research and Practice*, ed. by Judi Neal (New York, NY: Springer, 2013), p. 72.

to another culture he associated with crises of depression in his family and his own life. Victor could not imagine himself *not* preaching; it was as much a calling for him as it was a healing process.

The second-wave respondents were less explicit in terms of the actual concept of *calling*. However, their answers clearly hinted at a sense of calling. Lance's (BEZ) calling was linked to his evaluation of the Belgian spiritual context. In what is not an uncommon assessment, Lance reflected: 'Especially the spiritual need in Belgium back then had an enormous impact on us. And then we started praying and asking and looking around, "would Belgium be the place for us?"'

The interview with Jeremy (BEZ) revealed that he had a strong self-reflective nature, in terms of both his life and ministry in general. When asked what drove him as a preacher, Jeremy offered a one-word summary: 'Hope!' For him, preaching was offering the listener hope in a world bereft of hope. This hope, Jeremy explained, was grounded in his conviction that God had *chosen* him to be His mouthpiece. The following extract is a clear example of how Jeremy reflected on God choosing him as a source of authority:

> Just the realisation that God wants to speak through His Word and through people and that you yourself may realise that you are a bit of a mouthpiece in that, I think that is very special. One of the texts that always touched me is John 15, 'and not you have Me, but I have called you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit'. And there's such a desire to do that, but I've also been able to experience that anointing… that God said 'Jeremy, I've chosen you, I want that.' And every time in a sermon it is also an exciting process because you realise, I do not bring here what I want to bring, but I can be a piece of mouthpiece of God here.

It was clear from this structured and coherent reply to my first question that Jeremy had prepared some thoughts in anticipation of this interview. It was remarkable the way he interpreted his own ministry of preaching as a source of authority based on a biblical mandate to bear fruit. The way this mandate played out in Jeremy's

preaching ministry illustrates the deepening effect in his spiritual assumptions and preparations. Authenticity and transparency with respect to his own life were important attitudes for Jeremy, as he exclaimed that one of his core values in preaching was to withhold nothing, even when talking about sin in his own life.

Discipleship was another, less analytical lens through which Jeremy saw his preaching, although he appreciated a number of inspirational preachers with strong analytical approaches. Even more to the point is that Jeremy was self-conscious about the particular church he would be speaking at. Without altering the basic content of the sermon, he would assess the kind of church and tailor the sermon accordingly:

> And then I will not stick to my framework. And sometimes, that's a bit mischievous of me. I really try to find a balance, especially as I listen to God's voice, […], I'm here in a typical evangelical church now and I'm going to have a Pentecostal influence there thrown in, consciously, provoke them. I know, they are not going to agree with this, oh this will make them jumpy.

Jeremy is an example of how the broader homiletical context of the preacher in the FEM cannot be understood without looking at how the respondents deal with their own homiletical self-understanding. In the example above, one could argue that Jeremy's calling to preach authentically as a disciple translates into an adjusted performance of the sermon. His source of authority, i.e. his religious experience of being chosen to preach, becomes the source of discernment for Jeremy. In this approach, one could argue that the metaphor of herald, prophet, or witness is more suitable than the metaphor of teacher.[23]

In another telling example, Jeremy explained how he wrestled during *lectio divina* with a piece of Scripture. Preparing himself to preach in a church that counted

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[23] For an overview of different metaphors of the preacher, see also Thomas G Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 436–1117. I would like to thank Dr. Wouter Biesbrouck (Ph.D., Systematic Theology) for this helpful insight.

biblical scholars among its members, Jeremy consulted them beforehand, respecting them as gatekeepers as it were. Jeremy consulted them because he had drawn some exegetical conclusions that were not to be found in any commentary. Yet, he was convinced that, although it deviated from his typical theological framework, his approach to the text was what God had told him to say. After the sermon, many listeners encouraged him, telling him that it had been a very good sermon. In preparing for the sermon, Jeremy showed a sensitivity towards two different sources of authority that could potentially be at odds with each other: theological orthodoxy *and* his conviction to be authentic to his calling to preach what he wrestled with in the text.

With mixed feelings, Jeremy remembered as a young teenager listening to sermons that were often based on hobbyhorse themes (e.g. end-time theories). At the same time, Jeremy had appreciated the robust culture of preaching and made it his own, evolving his sermons structurally thanks to the homiletical input of Johan Lukasse. In a later phase, Jeremy's approach to preaching had changed again. Due to a longstanding conflict in his church, during which Jeremy was an involved party, Jeremy had realised that he needed to change his attitude as a preacher. Before and during this conflict, he had preached with a sense of separation from the listener: It was a case of *them* versus *me*. After the conflict, through soul-searching reflection, he had realised that a sermon was always about *us*. During the interview, it became clear that Jeremy had a high view of Scripture as a source of authority, but approached that source as a given and not merely as a teaching instrument or for teaching purposes. In that sense, he had moved away from his earlier context as a young believer and appreciated the more complex nature of the FEM in which he performed his ministry.

6.2.1.2 Initial Reflections and Calling

Again, we may assume that there is a praxis that is to be interpreted against one's own theological or historical context. Framed against Csikszentmihalyi's three environments (field, individual, domain), the Evangelical preacher can be seen as the *individual* interacting with the field (homiletics) and the domain (Evangelicalism). For Csikszentmihalyi, the domain (Evangelicalism) is a larger (belief) system that includes rules, symbols, skills, values, and practices. The FEM represents a domain in which a strong sense of (missionary) calling could be considered a symbol for authentic preaching (see also Victor, Jeremy). As such, this religious experience of feeling called or being chosen becomes a source of authority through which discernment can be moderated. In other words, and related to Jeremy's example, the discernment of *how* and *what* to preach is based on the particular setting of the ecclesial context. Jeremy made the intentional choice, albeit within the boundaries of the sermon text and biblical orthodoxy, to stay true to his calling as a preacher and offer a sermon that dared to provoke.

Dutch-Swiss practical theologian Hans Van der Geest offers an ideal image of the preacher, comprised of seven characteristics.[24] The first one is: 'The preacher himself has been addressed. He must be aware of his mission […]. When he alienates from himself, the *vocatio interna* is lacking and that inevitably leads to dead orthodoxy.'[25]

The pietist and Puritan origins of Evangelicalism considered convertive piety and biblical orthodoxy as hallmarks of a living faith over and against a 'dead orthodoxy'. The way the respondents reflected upon their (ministerial) lives exemplifies this notion. Faith in their own lives and the expression of that faith was

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[24] Hans van der Geest, *Du Hast Mich Angesprochen: Die Wirkung von Gottesdienst und Predigt*, 2. Aufl (Zürich, CH: Theol. Verl, 1983), pp. 175–83. See also Beute, p. 79.
[25] Ibid., pp. 175–83.

something to be cherished, to be developed, to be authenticated through their lives. My respondents were not only aware of their mission, but their ministerial origins were also interpreted against the background of a calling.

Although the notion of calling is not new in theology, practical theologian Aura Nortomaa points out that the notion of calling has garnered interest in secular contexts (e.g. in work psychology).[26] In theology, however, there is an old distinction between *vocatio interna* and *vocatio externa*.[27] 'Theologically', Nortooma reasserts, 'a pastor is expected to have *vocatio interna*, an inner calling to become a pastor, and *vocatio externa*, a parish calling them to work as their pastor'.[28] Of interest here is the idea that the *calling*, whether understood theologically or in a secular sense, comes from a source external to the person that holds the vocation, i.e. a preacher in my research. The construct of the *calling* has been defined by others as 'a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation'.[29] But how is this construct of *calling* being operationalised or defined as a source of authority? If there is a driving external S/source motivating the preacher's inner thoughts and conversations, how does that regulate the more traditional theological sources of authority like Scripture or tradition, or newer ones like the aforementioned theological orthodoxy, organisational loyalty, or ideological purity?

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[26] Aura Nortomaa, 'Predicting Ordination, Early-Career Mobility, and Career Adaptation from Ministerial Applicants' Psychological Assessment Results' in *Review of Religious Research*, 58.4 (2016), 543–69 (pp. 549–50).

[27] See also Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2010), p. 142.

[28] Aura Nortomaa, 'A Test to Pass or a Tool for Growth? Evaluating the Usefulness of the Psychological Assessment of Ministerial Aspirants' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Faculty of Theology, Helsinki, 2016), p. 14.

[29] Nortooma, 'Predicting Ordination', p. 550.

6.2.2   Other Candidates

6.2.2.1   The Preacher and Crisis

A second possible candidate for a source of authority is the preacher's experience of *a crisis* — a crisis of faith or a crisis in his/her sense of calling, or a crisis that manifested itself in the form of a burnout. Another form of crisis occurs when the preacher just does not know what to preach about, even after going through the sermonic process. Data from the interviews with respondents Andrew, Brandon, Ian, Victor, and Isaac highlighted the reality of crisis and how they integrated that crisis into their approach to the sermonic process or their ministry as a whole.

As with many of my respondents, Brandon (BEZ) espoused as a given that exegesis of the text and biblical groundedness are elements of the sermonic process. However, I got the impression that, in terms of choosing themes and deciding on what to say, the *heart* seemed to take priority. More than twenty-five times, Brandon used idioms in which the heart took a central place, for example 'when God put something on my *heart*', or on the effect of his preaching, it should be 'practical enough to touch the *hearts*'. When discussing what to preach, Brandon stated that it 'has to come fresh from my *heart* somewhere, then it has the most emotion'. In Brandon's experience, the heart was clearly an important source of authority or rather discernment, as it was the heart that gave him guidance.

Brandon had suddenly experienced a burnout four years prior to the time of the interview. At the end of his recovery, Brandon had made a decision:

> Then and there, I have made the decision to preach what God puts to my heart. What that is, is not always easy to discern myself. Therefore, I have become more a listener, and less of 'that has appealed to me in God's Word' […] but is it what God wants to say? And that crisis has certainly left a mark since I am a responsible person, anyway, with a heavy sense of responsibility…I think that the burnout has led me there ad absurdum in the sense of, 'you can try to steer things, to do good for the church', and actually, in the words of Ecclesiastes, 'you destroy yourself and what is the benefit?'

Brandon repeated this sentiment twice during our interview. In relation to himself as a source of authority, he added:

> But I have also been praying for the last few months, actually the last five years, since my burnout, very consciously, every Sunday morning that people would be allowed to be addressed by my sermon, but also despite of my sermon, so that God speaks directly to them, through a church service, a moment of rest, where they come to experience rest, where they may experience God's love in the church community, and maybe take nothing away from my sermon or maybe hear one word, which I did not mean at all, but that God goes to work in their lives and that God preaches to them. For me it should not even depend on my sermon that He uses, but for me it is most important that God reveals himself to people on that Sunday morning in any way possible.

The impact of going through a burnout cannot be underestimated in terms of listening incidents in Brandon's sermonic processes. As with Victor, Brandon considered his calling as a preacher to be a serious responsibility. The needs of the church he served were high on his list of priorities; the exegetical methods related to the sermonic process he had learned at Bible school were in place. In this sense, orthodoxy and calling were the guiding sources of authority that mitigated Brandon's creativity. After his burnout experience, Brandon's priorities changed. He relativised his authority. Others could come to the fore and preach. He was happy with the way God spoke directly to the listener through the Holy Spirit, or even through other younger members who were offered room to preach. The sermon was no longer a means to an end.

A similar reflection was offered by Isaac (VEG). Isaac pastors an Evangelical church that started in the 1980s but has only been part of the VEG for a few years. Fairly early on in the interview, Isaac had a strong recollection of something his homiletics teacher had said: 'Have something to say, say it and then, shut up.' This memory typified Isaac's approach to preaching. It needed to be based on *something*.

This adagio seemed his counter practice for the way he entered this particular church planting context. When Isaac had arrived at what was then a small group that organised Bible studies, he had become frustrated with the non-scholarly devotionalism that was, in his opinion, typical of the Brethren-style meetings at that time[30]: 'Nobody had prepared. They got together, and someone said, "yes, I have read this piece [of Scripture] and then that piece [of Scripture]".' This approach clashed with his training at the Bible Institute Belgium in Heverlee, Leuven, which had been more focused on exegetical skills and expository preaching. Although Isaac was relaxed during the interview, he was very focused due to his illness. Isaac grows tired very quickly, so we had to complete the interview in one hour.

This illness was related to a burnout Isaac experienced. He never really recovered fully from this burnout. Isaac recalled it to be a difficult time, with an added problematic situation of conflict in the church he served — a conflict that aimed criticism at him. In hindsight, Isaac acknowledged the influence that had had on him. He considered himself to have become a much less dominant leader than before, and he now preaches less. On his pastoral ministry, Isaac stated also that:

> […] the disease and everything I have experienced has made me milder. I used to do a lot of pastoral care and let me say from a source of personal strength. […] If I do a sermon now, I might do so more from the place of experience I had myself.

Let me recall here the way Treier frames a part of Evangelicalism's contours: '[E]vangelicals are oriented to piety that is personal.'[31] In the wake of the Reformation, the Scripture as a source of authority was matched by the idea that one could 'hear and read the Bible for application and guidance not just doctrine, at home

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[30] Isaac's remarks resonate with Marinello's account presented in section 7.2.1.
[31] Treier, p. 36.

as well as in church – expecting to encounter the living God when doing so.'[32] As with *calling*, the FEM has proven to be truly Evangelical in the sense that the inspiration and interpretation of Scripture and a commitment to Scripture's inerrancy are givens. Neither before nor after a crisis did the respondents question those commitments. However, the *crisis* could be considered an integral component of authentic preaching and the inner V/voice(s) of authority. The post-crisis preacher developed a different attitude towards himself as a source of authority. In other words, as Brandon and Isaac illustrated, the discernment of *how* and *what* to preach became based on the particular and personal feelings and self-understanding of the preacher. The pietistic nature of this candidate does not trump Scripture as such; however, it betrays a more relaxed approach to preparation and to the ministerial life in general.

6.2.2.2   The Preacher and Church

A third possible candidate for a source of authority is the preacher's experience of *his/her relationship to the church in which he/she ministers*. It stands to reason that a preacher has ministerial responsibilities that are closely connected to a particular church. My respondents pastored one or more churches during their years of ministry, not only with teaching responsibilities, but also with managerial, pastoral, or other duties.

Andrew (BEZ), a German missionary working in Flanders for the last twenty-three years, became pastor in a fairly small Flemish Evangelical church. Under his ministry, it has become one of the larger Dutch-speaking Evangelical churches in Flanders. A missionary kid himself, Andrew grew up in a German pietistic context in which he visited a Protestant church on Sunday morning and a Brethren church in the

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[32] Treier, p. 36.

evening. A recurring sentiment was his focus on the *practical use* of the Bible's message: How does the sermon help the believer and the local church? More than any other respondent, Andrew reflected on his preaching ministry from the perspective of a church builder. The ideas and writings of Christian Schwarz, in this respect, were an important point of reference.[33] Schwarz uses a colour code in which red (Evangelical), blue (Charismatic/Pentecostal), and green (Liberal) provide the reader with the strengths and limitations of each colour. Schwarz's approach hints at a sensitivity to the generous orthodoxy present in other traditions born of the Reformation. Although Andrew's essential point of departure was the Evangelical confession (colour red), it was important for him to find a healthy balance between Evangelical, Pentecostal, and more liberal traditions. The focus for Andrew was, however, on the church represented by its individual believers. For Andrew, it was an open and shut case: 'Is the sermon I'm preparing, practical enough? Will they be able to do something with it?'

Frank (VEG) is a pastor of a church with predominantly elderly people. Frank could be considered a theological gatekeeper, writing brochures for the denominations on doctrinal matters. During the interview, I noticed that Frank was quite soft spoken, betraying a thoughtful mind. At the same time, I also sensed an authoritative voice. He took time to find the right words with which to share his deep convictions.

There was at least one eye-opener during the interview, for him as much as for me. It was the fact that, in an almost laconic observation, Frank noted that he had never been a listener of sermons himself. On the occasions he did not preach in his church on a Sunday morning, he would preach at the church of the guest speaker who was visiting his church. Moreover, on the rare occasion that Frank did listen to a

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[33] Christian A. Schwarz, *Color Your World with Natural Church Development: Experiencing All That God Has Designed You to Be* (St. Charles, IL: ChurchSmart Resources, 2005), pp. 60–65.

sermon by another preacher in his church, he admitted to listening through the ears of the other church members, rather than listening for his own benefit. Frank's observation highlights the need for the preacher to be a listener of sermons, but not necessarily or exclusively to become a better preacher by virtue of learning from other preachers. Doug Gay suggests that it is also good for 'other people to see us "in the pews", listening, weighing what is said and opening our lives to the word'.[34]

Another interesting insight was Lance's (BEZ) conscious decision regarding what personal information to dispense through preaching. Although he acknowledged that there was room for sharing anecdotes or his struggles with certain issues, he felt it was important that personal details never be shared to the degree that church members get to know him as if he were only a church member and not the pastor.

It must be pointed out, however, that other respondents did disclose personal stories or intimate details to the hearers, motivated by their wish to be real and authentic. Both approaches have the relationship between the preacher and his/her church in mind. Therefore, it could be argued that the church and the intended relationship with the church serve as gatekeepers, fostering or hindering the possibilities for creativity.

6.2.2.3   The Preacher and Consultation

A fourth and final candidate for sources of authority or discernment is consultation — consultation that finds it way to the preacher through books, spouses, mentors, other preachers and teachers, and colleagues. The first thing that struck me as I entered the offices of the respondents was their library of books, not an uncommon sight at all when entering a preacher's study. That did not mean that all of them had

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[34] Doug Gay, p. 133.

strong reading habits. Some of the respondents were upfront and honest, admitting that they did not read enough or as much as they would like. A recurring theme was the reading shelf of books to be read, comprised of books that the preacher had bought or peers had recommended and that he was either planning to read in the coming period or was reading at the time of the interview. The reading life is shorthand for the codes drawn from interview samples in which the respondent talked about reading, books, and authors. In practice, these books were carriers of inspiration, insights, and knowledge that the preacher encountered as he ministered in church.

Lance, a German pastor of a church in an average-sized town, had evolved from being a 'black and white' preacher, i.e. not so nuanced, to being a more pastoral-oriented preacher with a strong focus on the practicality of the message. Therefore, Lance's reading habits took a more functional approach: Which books can help me to help the church? He made no secret of the many tensions inherent in his ministry owing to the busy nature of his life.

More than any other preacher, Lance's reflections offered a welcome example of *espoused theology*.[35] When talking about the discipline needed for a preacher to hold regular 'quiet time', Lance remarked that the reality was not what it seemed to others: 'People think, yeah, you [i.e. Lance] are always busy with the Word of God, or something like that.' Despite realising the necessity of having 'quiet time', Lance's workload during some months of the year prevented him from doing so. Books, then, offered Lance themes with which to work and helped him to write sermons:

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[35] See section 3.3.3 on espoused theology.

[…] especially what I'm doing myself in my 'quiet time'; for example which book I am currently reading, so in effect, what I'm interested in myself… that inspires me […].

When asked how this worked, Lance answered:

So concretely, […] let me say I read a book. Recently I have read… 'If God is silent', on the silence of unanswered prayer. So then you read that book, then I'm working on that, that's what appeals to me. And then, on the basis of this book, I am now preparing a sermon. […] So my point of departure is this actual book or theme, and then of course you are going to look, where are there examples in the Bible where God, for example, has not answered prayer? How should we deal with suffering, that is a bit about the context of this book. And then, the starting point was that book that touched me, but then you will of course look, what is in the Bible about that and then you will read commentaries.

When asked how he got the book, Lance answered, 'through a befriended pastor who thought that this book would be a good book to read for me'. When choosing texts to preach on, neither Lance nor the church he served used methods like *lectio divina*, *lectio continua,* or *lectio selecta*.[36] Lance's approach to choosing a sermon theme is an illustration of the personal-choice method in which it is up to the preacher to choose the text or theme on a week-to-week basis.[37] Although it seemed that Lance's sources of authority could be located in the counsel he received through books provided by his peers or chosen of his own accord, according to Lance, the discernment was based on the church's context. What did the church need at that moment? Never was the authority of Scripture questioned or minimalised; however, for Lance, the exegetical preparation seemed to play a secondary role in the sequential approach from choosing a theme to choosing the biblical text(s) to accompany that theme.

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[36] For the concept of *lectio divina*, see section 8.4.1. *Lectio continua* is the methodical preaching through Bible books. *Lectio selecta* is the liturgical use of the (ecumenical) lectionary.

[37] For an introduction on these concepts, see also Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Location 1507.

Victor provided a second telling example. Victor is one of the major Evangelical gatekeepers in Flanders. He is well-versed in the Bible and has a keen pastoral acumen. These characteristics combined with his thirty-six years of ministry experience make him somewhat of an authority in Evangelical Flanders. Maybe the best way to describe him would be as a pastor's pastor or a preacher's preacher — gatekeeper in his own right, formal and informal. Victor holds the Bible in high regard and emphasises the canonical approach to reading the Bible.

Victor repeatedly highlighted his respect, but also uneasiness, around people who were seemingly brighter or more eloquent than him. Although he claimed several times that he was not an academic or as intelligent as his preacher colleagues, he was assertive and put forth strong convictions, especially when evaluating his own preaching life. Of all the respondents, Victor was the only one who explained his preaching in strong metaphorical language. 'Preaching is like a birth' or 'preaching is like painting a picture' were just two telling examples.

Victor was interviewed twice. In the second interview, Victor's reflection on his first interview helped me to understand the impact of reading other inspirational and Evangelical gatekeepers. Victor was convinced that he did not want to hide his life from his listener. In fact, this conviction grew out of the formational first beginnings of his ministry. It was fostered by Victor's early days in Operation Mobilisation and the books written by OM's founding father, George Verwer.[38] In particular, Verwer's book *The Revolution of Love* left a deep impact in terms of adopting a preaching life that was based on the authentic practice of the preacher's

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[38] Operation Mobilisation is a non-denominational missionary society that, since its origins in 1962, focused in particular on the training and deployment of young people for short-term evangelistic ventures. See also David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, UK: Routledge, 1993), p. 256.

life, rather than on the more theoretical façade of the sermon itself.[39] In an attempt to categorise George Verwer in terms of ascetical theology, Walter A. Elwell positions Verwer in 'the holiness tradition, beginning with John Wesley'.[40] Reading Verwer's own words, it is not hard to understand why Elwell positions Verwer in this branch of theology that deals with the ordinary means of Christian perfection. Verwer states that '[t]eaching cannot be separated from practical living. I cannot see Jesus Christ as some sort of split personality, partly doctrinal and partly moral, trying to bring two separate realms of truth into our minds.'[41]

It was this approach and striving for an authentic life, including its brokenness, that Victor seemed to appreciate as 'this is my *life*' [italics added]. Victor was not *just* a mere preacher. His ordinary life offered an integral commentary on how and what he preached. Victor's approach to the preaching life all started with what he had read and learned from George Verwer. This shaped his guiding attitude while preparing the sermon.

A further example related to Victor and his *reading life* can best be illustrated in his own words:

> The worst that could happen is that my books would be taken away. Because, I know the Bible, but that's dangerous to say, 'I know the Bible', because it always surprises me that you're wrong about it. But books are essential for organising your thought world. […] The Holy Spirit has given us these people and I am very limited, I am not academically educated. I have not learned Greek and Hebrew. So I need reliable exegetes who are reliable to get me fed. So that stimulates me. I always have about five books that I am reading in. I do not always read them systematically.

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[39] See also respondent Lance who would, if offered the choice to be part of a church with a particular preacher, choose for a church with George Verwer as a preacher for the same reasons as Victor: the emphasis on the practical Christian living and not so much because of the deep theology.

[40] *Evangelical Commentary on the Bible*, ed. by Walter A. Elwell, Baker Reference Library, 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1989), p. 88.

[41] George Verwer and others, *The George Verwer Collection* (Carlisle, UK: OM Publishing, 1998), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 99. An even more telling and passionate plea by Verwer explains why a leader such as Victor might by persuaded by this call for earnest: 'You cannot separate the word "believe" in its biblical context from the word love. Don't try! How many men are there in our churches, leader some of them, who speak to a congregation from the word of God, but in their homes know nothing more about loving their wives than the man in the next house who cannot stand his!' (Location 226).

If it happened that Victor was reaching a dead-end in his preparation, he would get in front of his bookshelves, browse, and try not to panic. He would take out a couple of books and skim through them for ideas. In the middle of the night, he would often wake up and it would come to him like 'something of a birth'.

A final example illustrates the impact of books on the preacher. Brandon, not unlike most of the respondents, was slightly nervous, as the academic nature of my research had him off-guard at first. After I explained more about the down-to-earth approach, however, he was more relaxed as the interview progressed. Brandon described his approach to his preaching ministry as very pietistic in nature. Phrases like 'deep', 'walking with God', and 'authenticity', to name of few, were plenty, highlighting the fact that for Brandon to preach was *to be* or, in his words, 'you only can preach who you are'.

The second interview with Brandon provided, interestingly enough, similar feedback as in Victor's interview. While Victor referred to the impact of George Verwer and his books in terms of his striving for an authentic life, Brandon drew my attention to the books of the conservative Baptist Henry Blackaby, in particular *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*.[42] Brandon explained that 'through Blackaby I have experienced an enormous change'. Although it is not always possible to describe this change in terms of one's preaching life, according to the way Brandon interpreted Blackaby, for him, it came down to 'move where God

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[42] Blackaby was mentioned by Brandon in both interviews, but not mentioned at all by the other respondents. Henry T. Blackaby and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, Rev. & expanded (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2008). Brandon referred to the Dutch translation of this book, *Een God van Nabij*. Henry T Blackaby, Claude V King, and Maps de Weeger, *Een God van nabij: hoe te leven in de dichte nabijheid van God door Zijn wil te kennen en te doen* (Den Haag, NL: Gazon, 1999). For the particular emphasis on *encountering God* in the Blackaby family's trademark spirituality, see also the introduction to their Blackaby Study Bible. Richard Blackaby and Henry T Blackaby, *The Blackaby Study Bible: Personal Encounters with God through His Word* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Bibles, 2006), p. ix.

moves'. Brandon was living out the notion that God is there all the time, and you can discover His will.[43]

Brandon (BEZ) offered another example of how counsel from other preachers steered his future methods in preparing a sermon. Brandon remembers visiting a Hillsong conference where a particular speaker, Bishop Jakes, had left a lasting impression on him.[44] Brandon was aware of the perception of Bishop Jakes as being doctrinally questionable, but nevertheless felt touched by a *rhema* word — a hermeneutical process of revelation connected to the Pentecostal community, as Jacqueline Grey explains. Contrary to the *logos* word, which is a general or distant word, *rhema* is a personal word: the 'Aha!' moment of revelation.[45] Brandon explained that he consequently became much more attuned to these *rhema* words in his preparation in order to be able to preach with the necessary authenticity and authority.

As mentioned before, since this research deals with questions related to voices of authority, it begs the question, 'whose authority?' The importance of these *counselors* or *consultations* to the respondents raises the question: What is the role of these counselors in the discernment processes of these preachers, and are other sources of authority needed besides the aforementioned sources (i.e. theological orthodoxy; organisational loyalty; ideological purity) that serve as gatekeepers?

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[43] For a comparison of the spirituality of Blackaby with that of other Evangelical writers, see also Larry S. McDonald, *The Merging of Theology and Spirituality: An Examination of the Life and Work of Alister E. McGrath* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2006), pp. 88–89.

[44] For an introduction to the Hillsong Network and on the fostering of a personality cult of preachers within Hillsong, see also Miranda Klaver, 'Media Technology Creating "Sermonic Events"', *Crosscurrents*, 65.4 (2015), 422–33 (p. 432).

[45] For a more thorough exploration and critical engagement of the *rhema* word as a 'Pentecostal conceptual system', see Jacqueline Grey, *Three's a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), pp. 116–17.

6.3   Conclusion

I repeat here what I set out to accomplish. The aim of this research was to qualify the nature of listening before, during, and after the sermonising process. As such, there were two general categories I used during the initial coding — *homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents* — that offered me an easy way to process the first-wave interviews and the subsequent coding accordingly. The particular intention behind the coding helped me to integrate the codes, albeit partially, through *evaluation coding* and *provisional coding*.

Offering reflections on the respondents' interviews opened up the data for the first time, and *evaluation coding* provided a further avenue into the data from the evaluative perspective of the researcher, as well as based on the qualitative commentary provided by participants. Again, the evaluative element in this particular case was not aimed at generating a concrete policy or educational evaluation. Rather, the two categories facilitated an overall assessment of the implicit or explicit Evangelical *gatekeepers*, insofar as they exist in the FEM.

The two general categories (*homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents*) also helped me in an exploratory way to add *provisional coding*. My provisional list was generated from preparatory investigative matters that emerged in the literature reviews related to the study. Was what is 'really' happening congruent with the espoused or normative 'blueprint' spiritualities at work during the sermonising processes in the life of the preacher within the FEM? These categories helped me to scan the data through broad filters and to localise sources of authority that seemed to have an impact on the preacher's discernment during the sermonic process. These sources provided concepts that could arguably be candidates for sources of authority or discernment. This list is tentative in nature and could be explored further in light of other localised versions of Evangelicalism. My intention here was to attempt to

attribute meaning to the religious experiences of these respondents.

So, the obvious questions as I venture into Part 3 (the Contours of Homiletical Spirituality) are: Do these concepts illuminate the lived experience of the preacher? Are these concepts congruent with the situatedness of the Evangelical history, theology, and/or tradition within the FEM? Finally, how do these concepts function as candidates for gatekeepers within the field of homiletics that stimulate or block creativity or 'Aha!' moments?

I will advance an important question: If Evangelicalism is a kaleidoscopic movement by nature, what about Evangelical spirituality and its practices, especially as its practices are part of the homiletical toolbox of the preacher? Is there a kind of homiletical blueprint or espoused spirituality of listening to observe? We will turn our attention to these questions in Part 3.

Part 3: Contours of the Flemish Evangelical Movement

7 Chapter 7: Evangelical Contours

7.1 Introduction

In Parts 1 and 2 (Chapters 1–6), I offered the rationale and methodology, an overview of the data, and conceptual categories for a research project that is related to the lived practice of the preacher in the FEM, exploring at the same time the tensions that come with a perceived detachment from a theological (homiletical) tradition. Although preliminary in nature, Part 1 argued for a need to rethink how we approach the preacher. I argued that implicit or explicit homiletical agendas in mind, we need to be conscious of the lived practice in ways that, while not detached from Evangelicalism's theological tradition, help us to carefully observe the preacher's practices of discerning (*listening*).

Furthermore, I argued that a perceived vagueness of homiletical spirituality is being met by the realisation that this vagueness does not mean that typical or not-so-typical sources of authority are not at work within the FEM. With attention to sources of authority (like *gatekeepers*), I argue that the preacher, as a creative individual, is being influenced by his situatedness. In other words, the meditative, personal, or private practices may seem solitary in nature or person-centred; they are, however, embedded in a social and situated context. The preacher is listening, but by what or W/whom is this listening mediated? This contention could arguably contribute to more research in the broader homiletical field, especially aimed at the lived experience of the preacher. In other words, the plethora of homiletical agendas and their espoused spiritualities, each marked by its own subdivisions, could benefit from the methodological groundings described in Chapters 1–6. For instance, I have drawn attention to the notions of *calling, crisis, church,* and *consultation* as sources of authority, offering a theological reflection on the first one, *calling* — a reflection that will continue in the following chapters.

Part 3 is descriptive and abductive in nature. Chapters 7–9 serve as a preamble to the interpretation of the nature of the respondents' situated tradition. The following three chapters offer that needed bigger picture. As such, I parse the following phrase: *The Evangelical preachers in Flanders and their homiletical spiritualities*. In line with Sandra Schneiders's movements, I continue to offer a mix of thick descriptions and critical analysis of the components 'Flanders' (Chapter 7), 'preacher' (Chapter 8), and 'homiletical spiritualities' (Chapter 9) in relation to the Evangelical tradition within which these components operate.

To assess the involvement of the preacher, one needs to situate the preacher within his or her context — in this case, a Flemish Evangelical context (section 7.2) — and assess the extent to which the preacher understands his or her activity as Evangelical preaching (section 7.3). Finally, this chapter highlights and discusses the notion of *calling* as a candidate for a source of authority that emerges from the interview data (section 7.4).

7.2   Flemish Hermeneutical Horizon

If we want to understand the nature of a preacher's listening in a Flemish Evangelical context, it is important to frame theological and historical concepts from a particular perspective — in effect, which *Evangelicalism*? which *spirituality*? So, although the methodology of this research is descriptive in nature, it is important to interpret the preacher's background and context, and whether or not this context is normative in terms of how an Evangelical preacher understands him or herself. In this way, the research becomes both descriptive and evaluative in nature in uncovering the proverbial lie of the Flemish Evangelical land.

To my knowledge, there has been no research of any kind conducted in the area of homiletics or preaching in the broader Flemish Evangelical context.

However, in recent years, there have been some historical and anthropological studies of the FEM to which I now turn my attention.[1] Placing these within the broader context of an Evangelical spirituality (see Chapter 9) will contribute to the evaluative purpose of this project. How do Evangelical scholars operating for and within Flanders frame the Flemish Evangelical tradition? Here, I briefly highlight the findings of recent research projects that represent exploratory but substantial steps in Evangelical historiography. These findings help to elucidate the particular context within which the Evangelical preacher operates.

Offering a more general account, Patrick Nullens argues that, in order to correctly interpret the Flemish hermeneutical horizon, one needs to acknowledge the influence of key Anglo-Saxon figures on Flemish Evangelical opinion-makers.[2] The data reflect the same trend, pointing to Anglo-Saxon preachers who have influenced the respondents. Victor credited George Verwer and Martin Lloyd Jones as two preachers who have had profound influence on his thinking and preaching practices. Brandon's personal spirituality was connected to the writings of the Baptist Henry Blackaby. Frank and Lance were both inspired by Charles H. Spurgeon. In addition, Lance pointed to contemporary preachers like Rick Warren and Bill Hybels. Jeremy listed several names that were of influence in his ministry — all of them part of the Anglo-Saxon Evangelical or Reformed context: Billy Graham, Martin Lloyd Jones, Warren Wiersbe, Bill Hybels, Craig Groeschel, and Tim Keller. Overall, references

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[1] The interpretation of American Evangelical history among and by Evangelical scholars, however, has been more developed over the last three decades. See Nathan A. Finn, 'Evangelical History after George Marsden: A Review Essay', *Themelios*, 40.1 (2015), 63–77 (p. 63).

[2] Patrick Nullens, rector at the Evangelical Theological Faculty (ETF), Leuven: 'My contention is that the global nature of the opinion leaders of the Flemish Evangelical Christians was directly or indirectly determined by key figures in the Anglo-Saxon world. Understanding this hermeneutical horizon is the necessary condition for a correct interpretation of the Evangelical heritage in Flanders'. (This author's English translation). Nullens, 'In Heaven We Speak English', p. 1. The following historical research has brought more nuance to Nullens's thesis: Ignace Demaerel, 'Tachtig jaar pinksterbeweging in Vlaanderen (1909–1989), Een historisch onderzoek met korte theologische en sociologische analyse' (Licentiaat Thesis, Universitaire Faculteit voor Protestantse Godgeleerdheid, Brussel, 1990), p. 227. Demaerel's conclusion points to a collection of influences that are not exclusively Anglo-Saxon. Demaerel, however, focuses primarily on the Pentecostal movement as part of the broader Evangelical movement.

to older or contemporary Flemish opinion-makers or role models were negligible in terms of numbers compared to their Anglo-Saxon counterparts.

Only recently, scholars have begun filling the vacuum of research into the sociological, theological, and historical make-up of Evangelical Flanders. More nuanced interpretations of Nullens's thesis are not abundant. Such recent work includes Jelle Creemers's typological and historical overview of the Evangelical Free Churches in Flanders. In his research papers, Creemers agrees with the general consensus that, although complex and fragmented in nature, Flemish Evangelicalism is characterised by the quadrilateral of Evangelicalism, as identified by British historian David Bebbington: *conversionism*, *Biblicism*, *crucicentrism*, and *activism*.[3] Although Bebbington saw these characteristics as 'deposits for faith' expressed in doctrine, piety, opinion, and practice, for Creemers, these four aspects mark an 'Evangelical' spirituality.[4]

At this point, a nuanced critique regarding the appropriateness of using the 'Bebbington quadrilateral' goes beyond the scope of this dissertation. What is, however, typical of Flemish Evangelicalism is the process of structural unification undergone by most of the Evangelical churches in Belgium. According to Creemers, this process took place from 1985 to 1998 and aimed for an official representation of the Evangelical/Pentecostal movement in Belgium. As such, this process led to the establishment of the Federal Synod (FS). The FS is part of the Administrative Council of the Protestant and Evangelical Religion (ACPER).[5] The ACPER started functioning on 1 January 2003, as the official representative body of Protestant

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[3] Creemers, 'Evangelical Free Churches and State Support in Belgium', pp. 178–79.

[4] Jelle Creemers, 'We are (kind of) Protestants too! Self-Categorization Strategies of Free Church Evangelicals in Communications with the Belgian Authorities (1992-1997)', *Journal of Church and State*, 25 (2018), 4. See also Bebbington, pp. 3, 269. For a different sociological quadrilateral, see Boersema, pp. 18–20. Boersema distinguishes the Evangelical movement as a *reactionary movement* ('reactiebeweging'), a *revitalising movement* ('revitaliseringsbeweging'), a *conversionist movement* ('bekeringsbeweging'**)**, and a *care movement* ('zorg beweging'). For Boersema's short history of Evangelical churches in Flanders, see Boersema, pp. 32–33.

[5] The Administratieve Raad voor Protestantse en Evangelische Eredienst in België (ARPEE).

churches in relation to the Belgian state. The Evangelical/Pentecostal 'wing' is represented by the FS, and the Protestant (and affiliated denominations) 'wing' by 'the United Protestant Church in Belgium' (UPCB). Both wings have Co-Presidents in place to represent the officially recognised Protestant minority in Belgium to the Belgian government. These Co-Presidents serve and mediate as single-headed representatives of the recognised religions, like the Evangelical churches that are part of the FS.

As documented in one of Creemers's theses, there was a 'battle for orthodoxy' that 'offered opportunities for evangelization' for the FS.[6] It is fair to argue that this so-called battle was not only the result of this particular process. In fact, as I illustrate in the following paragraphs, a cumulative sensibility present in all Evangelical denominations provided the context in which Evangelicalism can be seen as activistic in its conversionism at best, proselyting at worst.

Protestants interpreted this 'battle for orthodoxy' as a sign of fundamentalism. Creemers states that '[i]n the 20th century, Protestants with a pluralistic and ecumenical profile critically observed the growing Evangelical/Pentecostal movement in Belgium with its Fundamentalist aura'.[7] Illustrative of this, in 2006, Guy Liagre (then Co-President of the Administrative Council of the Protestant and Evangelical Religion) offered his assessment of the Evangelical movement in Belgium. Reflecting on the reasons as to why some denominations with a longer history were not keen on joining the Evangelical representatives of the FS, Liagre suggested a theological explanation: 'They wanted after an internal emancipation of several decades […] no relapse in a particular kind of evangelicalism aimed on

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[6] Jelle Creemers, 'All Together in One Synod? The Process of Structural Unification of Evangelical Free Churches in Belgium (1985-1998)', Annual Meeting of the *American Academy of Religion* in Atlanta (Georgia), 24 November 2015, p. 2.
[7] Creemers, 'All Together in One Synod?', 6.

proselytism.'[8] Noteworthy is Liagre's theological qualification of the Evangelical movement as a movement focused on conversion as an inner attitude that testifies of an encounter with Christ, supported by a particular normative approach to the Bible that takes the form of biblicism, i.e. 'The Bible not only testifies of the Word of God, it *is* the Word of God' [italics added].[9]

7.2.1   Brethren influences

When looking more closely at the particular influences shaping the development of the Evangelical movement in Flanders, it is important to note the research of Thomas Marinello. Nearly forty years after Canadian missionaries planted the first church, Marinello chose to study the birth and development of this denomination of Flemish Open Brethren (ECV) for his historical research project.[10] For these missionaries, the celebration of the Lord's Supper was considered their identifying mark,[11] and thus the importance of preaching in these denominational circles was subordinated to that of the Lord's Supper. At the same time, liturgical practices implicitly evolved towards a more preaching-oriented setting.[12] Marinello attributes this shift to one of the founders, who was so keen on 'exercising this gift of evangelism that he preached the Gospel at every opportunity such as to gathered Brethren missionaries

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[8] Guy Liagre, 'Van pluraliteit naar pluralisme. De opkomst van de evangelische beweging in Vlaanderen', *Areopaag*, 6.3 (2006), 21–27 (p. 23). Original quote in Dutch: 'men wenste na een interne emancipatie van meerdere tientallen jaren […] geen terugval in een vooral op proselitisme gericht evangelicalisme'.

[9] Liagre, 'Van pluraliteit naar pluralisme', p. 25.

[10] Currently, twenty-six churches are part of the ECV.

[11] Marinello, p. 38.

[12] Some observations support the idea of an evolution: (1) I conducted a modest ethnographical research study at twenty-five ECV churches (visited in 2012). This included observing the frequency of celebrating the Lord's Supper, the setting of the chairs, and the structural place of the Lord's Supper in the Sunday service as a whole. In twelve of the churches, the pulpit replaced the traditional u-shaped form. In the middle of the u-shaped form stood a table with the elements of the Lord's Supper, suggesting the central spatial location of the Lord's Supper. (2) A second observation was that the once 'common challenge' to opt for 'well prepared, longer preaching after the end of the Lord's Supper' has been met. A new generation of theologically educated teachers has come to the fore in the ministry of preaching. See also Marinello, pp. 246–48. Even back in 1994, Krol and Kunst warned of a lack of well-reasoned arguments in Evangelical preaching (compared to the preaching in Reformed circles). See Bram A. J. Krol and Theo J. W. Kunst, *(S)Preken, Hoe Doe Je Dat?* (Hoornaar, NL: Uitgeverij Gideon, 1994), p. 71.

at their celebration of the Lord's Supper as well as conferences of church planters'.[13]

This approach resonates with a historical context characterised by greater secularism in the early post-Vatican II era. Even though Belgium, especially Flanders, was predominantly Roman Catholic, Evangelical churches sprang up all over Flanders rather than revitalising the Roman Catholic church.[14] At that time, preaching in Evangelical Flanders was primarily evangelistic in nature.

7.2.2 Belgian Gospel Mission

A final example of historical research that provides context for my research is Aaldert Prins's voluminous historiography tracing the development of the Belgian Gospel Mission (BGM) from 1919 to 1962.[15] Again, while homiletics as such is not the subject of Prins's research, the background story he details is useful for assessing the nature of preaching in Flanders. Of particular interest is the fact that one of the founding fathers of the FEM, Ralph Norton, parted ways with the mainline Protestant churches in Belgium because of his modernist ideas.[16] Furthermore, Prins presents an overall conclusion that concurs with Nullens's thesis: 'Our research has shown that the BGM acted as a significant channel through which North American Evangelical ideas and viewpoints made their way to Belgium.'[17]

Although specific homiletical angles are absent in most of the aforementioned studies, the research by Prins, Nullens, Marinello, and Creemers offers enough contextual information to situate the preacher in a Flemish Evangelical environment.

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[13] Marinello, p. 161.
[14] Nullens, pp. 3–5.
[15] Prins, 'The History of the Belgian Gospel Mission'.
[16] Ibid., p. 94. A strong reaction against Norton's mission exemplifies the mutual distrust between the 'mainline' Protestants and Evangelicals that has existed until today, and reinforces Boersema's overall assessment of the Evangelical Movement in Flanders and The Netherlands. See Boersema, pp. 18, 21.
[17] Prins, 'The History of the Belgian Gospel Mission', p. 360, especially in terms of the eschatological and soteriological lenses as they converge in dispensational pre-millennialism. On Evangelicalism as an apocalyptic movement, see also Nathan A. Finn, 'Evangelical History after George Marsden: A Review Essay', *Themelios* 40.1 (2015), 63–77 (p. 69).

This historical review is framed by secularisation (Boersema), Anglo-Saxon influences (Prins, Marinello, Nullens), and the underdog position of the Free Church ecclesiology with its conversionist soteriology (Prins, Creemers). All of these tendencies serve to situate the eight respondents interviewed for my research.

These above observations are consistent with the conclusions drawn in Gottlieb Blokland's 2016 publication, *Geloof Alleen!* ('Faith Alone!').[18] Blokland's historical overview reinforces a particular set of characteristics of the Evangelical Movement, including, or rather especially, the Flemish one. These include the concerns surrounding the secularisation of society, the government's preoccupation with certain and allegedly Evangelical sects, and the subsequent development of a state-funded religion in which the Evangelical church reaps some benefits.

Whether or not one qualifies the FEM as fundamentalist, it is my estimation that during the 1980s and 1990s the FEM was at the very least a self-conscious Evangelicalism that was able to renew its *proclamation* mission. One of the Flemish gatekeepers at the time, BEZ director and well-known itinerant preacher Johan Lukasse, wrote a book on church planting in a post-Christendom Europe. In it, Lukasse emphasises the importance of the story of Ezekiel 37, in which Ezekiel has a vision of a valley of dry bones. Lukasse sees a parallel with today's challenges that the church faces in a 'spiritually dead Europe',[19] leading him to conclude that two things are missing from today's church: proclamation and a fresh wind of the Spirit. He also articulates the belief that the church is the instrument through which God's plan of salvation will become known again.

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[18] Gottlieb Jan Blokland, *Geloof Alleen!: Protestanten in België: Een Verhaal van 500 jaar* (Antwerpen, BE: Garant, 2016). Blokland is one of the three inspector-advisors in Protestant-Evangelical Education in Flanders. For the particular role and importance of an inspector-advisor (abbreviated, 'a.-i.') in a Belgian education context, see Creemers, 'All Together in One Synod?', p. 5. ±450 R.E. teachers fall under the mandate of an inspector-advisor. Blokland's *Faith Alone!: Protestants in Belgium: A Story of 500 years* (This author's English translation) voices the history of people who are connected with the Reformation in Belgium.

[19] Johan Lukasse, *God is bij Machte, Gemeenteopbouw in na-Christelijk Europa* (Hoornaar, NL: Gideon, 1989), pp. 15, 16. Quoted by Blokland, p. 266.

Blokland's comprehensive quote of Lukasse highlights the almost 30 years

between their writings, during which time, as a minority, the FEM via the

Evangelical Alliance of Flanders (EAV) positioned itself as a partner alongside

mainstream Protestantism. In effect, once a minority religion in a country dominated

by Roman Catholic pillarisation and often disrespected by the mainstream

Protestantism, Evangelicalism has become recognised 'not as a separate religion but

as the majority of Belgian Protestantism'.[20] At the same time, Creemers closely links

the development of the FEM to the defence of biblical orthodoxy, offering a strong

case and relevant conclusion for my research:

> The founding statutes of the EAV in 1987 state specifically that the association
> considered it its task 'to represent its members […] in order to make use of all legal
> facilities that are offered by the official instances in view of the accomplishment of its
> […] aims, e.g., on the terrain of written press and broadcasting by radio and television,
> the organization of religious education in the official educational institutes, the
> provision of chaplaincies for the sick, the military and prisoners.[21]

This quote serves as an example of a confident movement that did not water

down its quest for the robust positioning of its tasks and aims within the Flemish

context. The preachers I interviewed started their ministry within the context of the

FEM between 1969 and 1995 — a formational period in which it was still a

movement striving for biblical orthodoxy, was weary of ecumenism, and was

characterised by Gospel proclamation, be it through preaching or evangelisation.

It is noteworthy and consistent with the above historical overview that Johan

Lukasse was the person most referred to by the respondents as being an influential

preacher and/or teacher. Three of my interviewees referred to Lukasse's exemplary

role as a preacher, overall Evangelical leader, and even the mediator through which

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[20] Creemers, 'All Together in One Synod?', p. 9. Pillarisation is a term used in the context of
Belgium and Holland and refers to a form of 'cultural self-government'. See Raf Vanderstraeten and
Kaat Louckx, *Sociology in Belgium: A Sociological History* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan,
2018), pp. 29, 73.
[21] Creemers, 'All Together in One Synod?', p. 23fn36.

their calling was received. Given the evangelistic nature of the FEM between 1969 and 1995, this influence seems consistent with the historical overview above. Lukasse, by virtue of his preaching example, his ministry (church planting), and his teaching on homiletics, embodied the self-consciously proclamating Evangelical of the time.

The FEM, however, did change after 1995 in some respects, and it remains to be seen how these changes can be described and interpreted in terms of this research into its own homiletical history. According to Blokland, the FEM changed predominantly in that it became more aware of its outward role in a pluralistic society, while not losing its identity. Creemers conducted research on 'the implications of changing financial structures, including State subsidization, on discourse and identity construction in a Belgian Evangelical free church denomination founded by "faith missionaries"', constituting another example of research tracing the development of the identity and practices of a Flemish Evangelical denomination operating in a secularised context.[22] In any case, the historical trajectories and influences discussed in this stream of research can help us to appreciate the respondents' context and the ways in which their biographical narratives might add extra colour to this historical context.

7.2.3   Global Evangelicalism

But how does this succinct interpretation of the FEM hold up against the analysis of Evangelicalism globally? The theological and historical interpretation of Evangelicalism is open for debate. Indeed, some may question whether the use of the qualifier 'Evangelical' has become too generic. This is an important question in light of my research, given that the respondents may have implicit or explicit convictions

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[22] Creemers, 'Loyalty to God, Trust in the State', p. 1.

drawn from a particular Evangelicalism or Evangelicalisms. The plural

Evangelicalisms is not simply a clever attempt to avoid dealing with the variation

within the Evangelical movement, as if it is impossible to say anything definitive

about the movement.[23] To complicate things even further, some scholars hint at or

concur with sociologist Alan Wolfe's analysis that it is particularly difficult to define

Evangelicalism due to the ways in which it has permeated other American

religions.[24]

I have already referred to Bebbington's quadrilateral, but his is far from the

only characterisation of the Evangelical movement. Many historians and theologians

have tried to sketch the contours of Evangelical theology, spirituality, hermeneutics,

and so on. In *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism,* Andrew Naselli

synthesises John Stackhouse's and Roger Olson's 'tweaks' of Bebbington's

characteristics; while Stackhouse expands them with (1) George Marsden's

transdenominationalism[25] and (2) the combination of *orthodoxy*, *orthopathy*, and

orthopraxy,[26] Olson adds respect for 'what some have called "generous

orthodoxy"'.[27] From an autobiographical perspective, having been an itinerant

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[23] For the notion of or argumentation for the plural *Evangelicalisms*, see *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. by Donald W. Dayton and Robert K. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1991), p. 2. For *Evangelicalisms* 'which are themselves expressions of modernity', see Mark Vasey-Saunders, *The Scandal of Evangelicals and Homosexuality: English Evangelical Texts, 1960–2010* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015), p. 40. Kenneth J. Stewart advocates 'that we be more prepared than formerly to speak about Evangelicalisms i.e. varying expressions or manifestations of the evangelical faith in different centuries or eras as well as in diverse cultures'. See Kenneth J. Stewart, 'Did Evangelicalism Predate the Eighteenth Century? An Examination of David Bebbington's Thesis', *Evangelical Quarterly*, 77.2 (2005), 135–53 (p. 152).

[24] See e.g. Alan Wolfe, *The Transformation of American Religion: How We Actually Live Our Faith* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 36. Melanie C. Ross, *Evangelical versus Liturgical?: Defying a Dichotomy*, Calvin Institute of Christian Worship Liturgical Studies Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), p. 129. *American Denominational History: Perspectives on the Past, Prospects for the Future*, ed. by Keith Harper, Religion and American Culture (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2008), p. 202.

[25] John G. Stackhouse Jr., 'Generic Evangelicalism', in *Four Views on the Spectrum of Evangelicalism*, ed. by Kevin T. Bauder, Andrew David Naselli, and Collin Hansen, Counterpoints. Bible & Theology (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 2056–526, Location 2141.

[26] Stackhouse Jr., Location 2199.

[27] Roger Olson, 'Postconservative Evangelicalism', in Bauder and others, Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 3211–3382, Location 3208. For more on Hans Frei's phrase of 'generous orthodoxy', see also Jason A. Spring, *Toward a Generous Orthodoxy: Prospects for Hans Frei's*

preacher in Flanders for the last twenty years, I concur that Marsden's

transdenominationalism is reflected in the exchange of preachers among the various

Evangelical denominations in Flanders and the ease with which those denominations

work together on educational projects.[28] I doubt, however, that 'generous orthodoxy'

is a characteristic of the FEM. This statement might be a contentious claim.

However, fruits of recent transdenominational collaboration do not equal the view

that there is a generous stance towards other Evangelical, Reformational, or

Traditional branches of Christianity. As a case in point, I draw attention to the four

joint statements that have been issued since 1994, declaring mutual and affirmative

forms of togetherness between the Evangelicals and Roman Catholics.[29] Criticised

by the Evangelical right for its betrayal of the Reformation, the left has been equally

unimpressed with its "Constantine agenda" for the church.[30] The FEM's

historiography does highlight a strong adherence to biblical orthodoxy in the context

of a not-so-open soteriology, hence my claim that a generous orthodoxy might not be

so characteristic of the FEM.

Evangelicalism is not as unified a movement as one would presume. Scholars

on Evangelicalism have tried to characterise the seemingly fragmented nature of this

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Postliberal Theology (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 16, 17. See also George Hunsinger, 'Postliberal Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. by Kevin J. Vanhoozer, Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 56, 57. For Hunsinger, a 'generous orthodoxy' reflects a high Christology with an open soteriology.

[28] For an example of a recent transdenominational collaboration, see the educational portal: http://indekerk.be. For an observation on the 'generous orthodoxy', see the evolution of the Emerging Church dialogue from the fringes of the Evangelical subculture towards the centre. For my involvement in new expressions within the FEM, i.e. Emerging Church et al., see Nico-Dirk Van Loo, 'New Expressions of Church in the Low Countries', in *The Gospel after Christendom: New Voices, New Cultures, New Expressions*, ed. by Ryan K. Bolger (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 1941–2202, Location 2019.

[29] Charles W. Colson, 'Evangelicals & Catholics Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium', *First Things*, 43 (1994), pp. 15–22. Its consecutive publications are II (1998), III (2002) and IV (2003).

[30] Robert Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2002), p. 112. Webber explains the so-called 'leftish' reaction within the framework of younger vs. older Evangelicals.

movement as kaleidoscopic[31], mosaic[32], polyphonic[33], or beyond description. As Donald Dayton suggests, 'The category "evangelical" has lost whatever usefulness it once might have had and […] we can very well do without it.'[34] Dayton's critique of Reformed historiographies does not negate the fact that Evangelicals have a particular self-understanding of Evangelicals. But does the self-understanding of the preacher in the FEM have an impact on the way he adheres to a particular sermonic process?

7.3   Preaching and Evangelical Theology

Although this foregoing historical overview provides some of the context for a homiletical endeavour in the FEM, some additional observations should be made regarding the qualifier 'Evangelical' and its relationship to the theology of preaching. What then can be said about preaching and Evangelical theology in general? As mentioned before (section 3.2), for Ben Witherington III, it is grounded in illuminating the biblical text and teaching[35] Ronald J. Allen, in his *Thinking Theologically*, devotes a chapter to the nature of preaching in Evangelicalism, bringing the apologetic nature of fundamentalism and Evangelicalism into view.[36]

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[31] Timothy George, 'Evangelical Theology in North American Contexts' in Larsen, p. 278. See also Timothy L. Smith, 'The Evangelical Kaleidoscope and the Call to Christian Unity', *Christian Scholar's Review*, 15 (1986), 125–40 (p. 128).

[32] Rathe, p. 241.

[33] Rathe, p. 240. Rathe interprets these metaphors based on his own research: 'Are the differing traditions/emphases […], *kaleidoscopically* colorful in their variety? Or do they perhaps interact, more like the tiles in a *mosaic*, making up together a whole that is somehow greater than the sum of its parts?' [italics added]. Of the five 'emphasis-groups' of Evangelicals that Rathe identifies, he argues that it is the mix of these five that results in 'the many-voiced singing of evangelicals', i.e. polyphony. Rathe, p. 3.

[34] Donald Dayton, 'Some Doubts about the Usefulness of the Category "Evangelical"', in Dayton and Johnston, p. 245. According to Alan Rathe, Dayton 'has been one of the sharpest, most vocal critics of Reformed-leaning historiographies, which he sees not only as tunnel-visioned, but as sadly representing "the dominant self-understanding of most self-identified evangelicals"'. Rathe, p. 14. For an assessment of Evangelicalism similar to Dayton's, see also Stephen R. Holmes, 'British (and European) Evangelical Theologies', in Larsen, pp. 255–56. Holmes, after dissecting Bebbington's 'quadrilateral' concludes that these four marks are not as observable as one usually states: 'There is no British, still less any European, evangelical theology, if by that is meant an identifiable commonly held and distinctive position.'

[35] Witherington III, p. ix.

[36] Allen, *Thinking Theologically,* Location 543.

According to Allen, in Evangelicalism and fundamentalism, 'sermons have two widely accepted purposes. The first is conversion of sinners while the second is building up the body of Christ for witness.'[37] Besides these two purposes of sermons, a main characteristic seems to be expository preaching.[38] In fact, in his *History of Preaching*, Otis Edwards explains that expository preaching is in effect *teaching* that became 'normative among converted'.[39]

Although this view is historically accurate, Evangelicalism and fundamentalism should be seen as more nuanced phenomena. It is true, according to Roger Olson, that '[h]istorically, evangelical revivals and renewals have begun by rediscovering and powerfully preaching the gospel of Christ's atoning death on the cross'.[40] But, Olson (representing post-conservative Evangelicalism) also argues for a more nuanced interpretation of Evangelicalism, namely that one should discriminate between the sociological, the religious-spiritual-theological, and the historical. Sociologically, Olson identifies Evangelicalism 'as a religious-spiritual-theological network' characterised by persons and organisations like Billy Graham and Christianity Today. Historically, Olson positions Evangelicalism within a religious-spiritual-theological pietistic/Puritan tradition vis-à-vis the liberal theology in the 'mainline' Protestant denominations.[41] The insights Olson puts forward are consistent with the ways in which the FEM has evolved amidst the aforementioned

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[37] Allen, *Thinking Theologically*, Location 566. See also Allen's comparative table with key motifs representing different theological families, i.e. Liberal, Mutual Critical Correlation, Process, Evangelical, Neo-orthodoxy, Postliberal, Confessional, Radical Orthodoxy, Otherness, Liberation, and Ethnic. Location 1803.

[38] It is beyond the scope of this literature review to offer a complete historical overview of Evangelicalism and how it relates to the sermon, preaching, and the preacher, but the following works are noteworthy: Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon*, 2nd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005); Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 3rd edn (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014); John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982). The latter two served as the main inspiration for the Dutch how-to book '(S)Preken, Hoe Doe Je Dat?', which was part of Leuven's Evangelical Theological Faculty's curriculum in the mid-nineties. Krol and Kunst, p. 180.

[39] Edwards, Location 17597.

[40] Olson, 'Postconservative Evangelicalism', Location 3149.

[41] Olson, 'Postconservative Evangelicalism', Location 3304.

polarised context of the BEZ (see also section 7.2.2).[42]

This limited examination of Evangelicalism and the preacher's context in the FEM does not entirely do justice to the complex religious, ecclesial, and anthropological realities involved, especially when honing in on the homiletical aspects. Indeed, there is much more to be discussed and researched on these topics. However, this survey offers an interpretative framework through which to examine the Evangelical preacher behind the Flemish pulpit. Furthermore, this overview might explain the lack of recent historiographical or theological research integrating homiletical perspectives, since the nature and context of Evangelical preaching in Flanders has not evolved, at least not as much as it has in the Netherlands.[43]

If we compare the FEM to other similar contexts, this lack of homiletical theologising should come as no surprise. Sune Fahlgren, reflecting on his research of six non-creedal churches in Sweden, makes a similar observation and subsequent evaluation:

> Non-creedal churches have strong oral traditions, and they focus more on actions and commitment than on formulating their beliefs and self-understanding in creeds and canons. Maybe these circumstances can explain why very little 'theologizing' has been done about their ecclesiology. But this explanation cannot hide the neglect; instead it displays the underlying incorrect assumption that there is no theology in

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[42] For a similar overview and findings, but in a different geographical context, see Enoh Šeba, 'Exploration of Contemporary "Dialogical Preaching": An Attempt at Evaluation from the Perspective of Croatian Baptists' Homiletical Practice' (unpublished master dissertation, International Baptist Theological Seminary, Prague, 2011), p. 10.

[43] In contrast to the Flemish homiletical-theoretical output (or lack thereof), the Dutch context differs in that it has provided original homiletical work in recent years. See e.g. Ciska Stark, *Proeven van de Preek. Een Praktisch-Theologisch Onderzoek naar de Preek als Woord van God* (2005), Theo Pleizier (2010), Jos Douma (2010), Kees de Ruyter, *Horen naar de Stem van God: Theologie en Methode van de Preek* (2013), René van der Rijst, *De Uitzaaiing van het Woord: Homiletiek in het Spoor van Derrida* (2015), and Arjan Berensen, *Predikant in de Praktijk: Voorgangers over Preken en Preekvoorbereiding* (2016). A provisional scan suggests that there is a greater awareness and integration of different homiletical paradigms in the Dutch context, including an interdisciplinary approach and the use of practical theological models. For a similar observation in another context, see Sune Fahlgren, 'Preaching and Preachership as Fundamental Expressions of Being Church', *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church*, 6.2 (July 2006), 180–99 (p. 182). Since 2003, 'homiletics seems to be a fashionable discipline in Sweden'. For a more extensive overview of doctoral theses that have been published since the turn of the century in the Low Countries, see also Theo Pleizier, 'Homiletic Transitions in The Netherlands: The Spirit, Human Language and Real Preaching', *The International Journal of Homiletics*, 2 (2017), 47-64.

praxis and pragmatism or that praxis is theologically irrelevant. How, then, is it possible to create ecclesiological knowledge about the Free Churches?[44]

Is preaching within the FEM still understood first and foremost as a way of edifying the congregants who are deprived of the Gospel in a post-Christendom country? How does the operant theology and practices of the respondents shed light on this question? And do their answers confirm that a lack of theological and homiletical developments on preaching betray similar assumptions that there is no theology operant in praxis or that the praxis of listening is theologically irrelevant? We will start looking for answers to these questions in sections 7.4, 8.6, and 9.4, where I analyse *calling* as a source of authority.

7.4   Calling as a Source of Authority

What can we take away from the above survey that is important for our critical analysis? First, although the FEM found its origins and experienced its growth against the background of a missiological context in which it was featured as an underdog, the FEM became a more diverse movement. Preaching and pastoring in general was part of a larger story in which the FEM was seemingly unified in its battle for orthodoxy and evangelisation. This view is congruent with David Bebbington's quadrilateral, i.e. *conversionism*, *Biblicism*, *crucicentrism*, and *activism*.

However, Treier's four ingredients, i.e. *confessional*, *orthodox*, *pietistic*, and *personal*, are helpful in offering a more nuanced account for what the data reveal. The interviews expose sources of authority in the FEM that are more in tune with the *pietistic* and the *personal* of Evangelicalism. The impact of *calling*, and for that

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[44] *Ecclesiology in the Trenches: Theory and Method under Construction*, ed. by Sune Fahlgren, Jonas Ideström, and Gerard Mannion, Church of Sweden Research Series, 10 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2015), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 91–2.

matter also *crisis*, *church*, and *consultation*, on the way the respondents allowed themselves to authorise their inner thoughts suggests at the very least a greater focus on the *pietistic* and *personal* interpretation of their spiritual practices.

Furthermore, the data show that the once unified movement is no longer as unified as one would presume. By virtue of the kaleidoscopic nature of the FEM, the candidates for sources of authority are plural and diverse. Ruth Perrin's qualitative study offers an interesting parallel to this conclusion, as it reflects upon the way young Evangelicals read and understand the Bible.[45] Unlike my research, Perrin focuses prominently on the generational, ecclesial, and theological make-up of three Evangelical churches. However, their conclusion aligns with my own: 'Overall then, even among these three churches, the continually developing kaleidoscope of evangelical spirituality is evident.' In effect, the FEM has grown more diverse not only as a movement, but also in its spirituality. The empirical research presented in my research supports the reality of a more diverse spirituality in the FEM.

In line with Fahlgren's aforementioned assessment of the Swedish non-creedal churches, I argue that the present Evangelical state of the FEM betrays a lack of homiletical theologising. The fact that some respondents gave proof of espoused convictions, or gave proof of particular operant practices (or absence of these practices), does not equate to either the existence of a solid homiletical tradition or the presence of a homiletical agenda. We cannot, however, draw from that observation the incorrect conclusion based on the anecdotal evidence: that there is an operant homiletical praxis at work that is theologically irrelevant. The opposite is true: that these operant practices are theologically relevant and deserve rightful attention so as to foster a stronger homiletical tradition within the FEM.

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[45] Ruth H. Perrin, *The Bible Reading of Young Evangelicals: An Exploration of the Ordinary Hermeneutics and Faith of Generation Y* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 828. However, in exploring my research question, I have not, as such, integrated a full interpretation of the particular churches of which my respondents were or are a part.

We have seen that one such operant or operationalised notion of a theologically relevant source of authority is the *calling* of the preacher. Is the original *calling* sufficient as a driving or regulatory force? Is the development of FEM churches dependent on motivations based on callings that were once part of a particular state of the land? The above sketch of the current Evangelical state of the land argues that the context of the FEM has changed. But what does that mean for the preacher who still preaches with a strong sense of calling based on the context in which he/she arrived? What if the domain (Evangelicalism) has changed to the point that creativity and/or attentiveness are being blocked by an outdated *vocatio externa*? *Vocatio externa* should in this case not be understood exclusively as the calling from a parish, but as a calling to a particular region or land. Andrew stated, for example, that he and his wife had not only felt a calling to the German-speaking part of Belgium (East Cantons), but to the whole of Belgium. The same applied to Lance (BEZ), Ian (VEG), Victor (VEG), and Jeremy (BEZ). Although the sense of ministerial responsibility for their particular church was high, one could wonder whether there was a growing mismatch between the *vocatio externa* and *vocatio interna*? What if the inner calling was more related to a level that transcended the church, for example, through a particular confession, tradition, movement, or more specifically for my respondents, mission? In a Protestant tradition in which vocational offices are regulated by a sensitivity to a *vocatio externa* and *vocatio interna*, sources of authority become part of that regulation. But, what of the typical lay-movement context of the FEM? Indeed, respondents like Victor saw the dangers of a FEM in which there would be no such regulation.

7.5   Conclusion

Qualifying the homiletical spirituality or sources of authority within the FEM could

be considered an important step towards fostering a stronger homiletical tradition within the FEM. Fahlgren's question, therefore, is relevant here, albeit worded according to my research: How, then, is it possible to create homiletical knowledge about the Free Churches in the FEM?

The above historical overview and critical dialogue between that history and the notion of *calling* as a source of authority suggest that, although Evangelicalism in Flanders developed in a particular Roman Catholic and later secular context as a homogeneous movement of an apologetic nature, a more nuanced evaluation is warranted if we wish to understand the nature of the spiritual practices tied to the sermonic process. Evangelicalism is no longer as homogeneous as it was at the time these respondents started their preaching ministries; it has become a more complex phenomenon even if the respondents were, and still are, active since and during arguably two decades of a particular kind of Evangelicalism characterised by this activistic approach towards conversionism.

I repeat that the (self-)understanding of the preacher's context is important, especially in light of the development of a historical or theological narrative. If we want to understand the nature of a preacher's listening in a Flemish Evangelical context, it is important to frame theological and historical concepts from a particular perspective — in effect, which *Evangelicalism*, which *spirituality*?

The description of the Evangelical state of the land helps us to interpret the respondents' background and context and how the respondents understand themselves. A first claim suggests that the preacher allows himself to use sources of authority that are *pietistic* and *personal* in nature. Neither Scriptural orthodoxy nor the confessional tradition is sidelined. However, the data clearly show that these foundations are considered givens without a strong homiletical theological reflection as such.

The impact of *piety* and/or the *personal lived experience* of the preacher on creativity is underestimated, and therefore undervalued and obscured from sight. Creativity does not happen in an isolated context, but happens in relation to a *calling* that is part of the preacher's biographical narrative in which others have a role to play. Van der Geest asserts that the preacher must be aware of his mission and that, when he becomes alienated from himself, the *vocatio interna* will be lacking, inevitably leading to dead orthodoxy. This assessment might be proven true if the preacher becomes alienated from the missional calling that got him/her started in the first place.

Besides the Evangelical state of the land, it is important to consider two more aspects of the research context: What are the dominant homiletical paradigms and perspectives in general, and do they have something to say about the preacher as the *first listener* (Chapter 8)? Second, what are the contours of Evangelical and homiletical spiritualities (Chapter 9). Exploring these paradigms will help to further demarcate the area in which to look for insights offered by the data.

8 Chapter 8: Homiletical Contours

8.1 Introduction

In order to effectively position and interpret the operant theology and practices of the eight respondents active in the FEM (see Chapter 7), it is equally useful to take a closer look at the dominant homiletical paradigms and perspectives, and the results of their approaches to the preacher as *first listener* (section 8.2). Whereas the previous chapter looked at the homiletical endeavour in the context of the FEM, this chapter's focus is on homiletics as a theological discipline, with a particular emphasis on the preacher who is part of the homiletical triangle. The following empirical-homiletical perspectives inform the qualitative and quantitative research conducted in the field of homiletics.[1] Generally referred to as the *turn to the listener*, these perspectives help us to appreciate the research focusing on the turn to *the preacher as first listener* (section 8.3).

The following descriptive overview, however, critically evaluates the homiletical angles resulting in *what* is arguably missing in homiletical research. I argue that the view of the preacher's role has been obscured by the need for effectiveness, resulting in the need for a reorientation toward the preacher as *first listener*.

The homiletical perspective to which I now turn is a more nuanced genealogy (see section 4.2.3). Although homiletics is part of the broader domain of theology, this practical theological field encompasses the sermonic process of the preacher. As such, a dedicated discussion of homiletics is warranted in order to narrow the focus to the particularities of the listening preacher. This will help to integrate the categories of *homiletical incidents* and *listening incidents* that came to the fore in the

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[1] For a recent overview, see Pleizier, pp. 7–13.

chapter on data collection (Chapter 5) and the subsequent conceptual categories

(Chapter 6).

8.2   Turn to the Listener

Over the past twenty years, there has been an empirical *turn to the listener* within

Protestant and Evangelical homiletical studies.[2] Marking a shift from the

aforementioned Old to the New Homiletic, scholars have developed an interest in

what *listeners do* with sermons, rather than what *sermons do* — or, more

normatively — what sermons *should do* to listeners, be it in the kerygmatic,

ontological, sacramental, or general religious sense of the word. In other words, the

focus has shifted to how listeners perceive and receive sermons, doing away with the

assumption that a sermon is necessarily *doing* something. This 'turn', however, is far

from complete, as seen in a recent exploration of how dialogical preaching evolved

from 'New Homiletics' to 'Other-wise Homiletics'.[3]

David Rietveld, in his extensive survey, delineates the themes, convergences,

differences, tensions, and gaps present in the *turn to the listener* field.[4] Rietveld

helpfully situates this turn between:

> Dutch/German practical theological research, highlighting how sermon themes, life
> situation, the preacher's connectedness to the congregation, or how listeners'
> personality type affect engagement with the sermon. Conversely there arose American
> liberal arts driven homiletics, utilizing communication or rhetorical frameworks to

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[2] See e.g. Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, *Dialogical Preaching: Bakhtin, Otherness and Homiletics*, Arbeiten Zur Pastoraltheologie, Liturgik Und Hymnologie, Band 074, 1. (Göttingen, DE: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), pp. 68–94.

[3] See e.g. John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), pp. 97–131.

[4] David Rietveld, 'A Survey of the Phenomenological Research of Listening to Preaching', *Homiletic* 38.2 (2013). Also noteworthy are the four books — and subsequent reviews, articles, and book chapters — that resulted from the 'Listening to Listeners' empirical study. See John S. McClure, *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004); Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2004); *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons*, ed. by Mary Alice Mulligan (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005); Mary Alice Mulligan, *Make the Word Come Alive: Lessons from Laity*, Channels of Listening (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005).

understand what listeners are doing.[5]

Indeed, this new vein of homiletical research focuses on the listener and what he or she 'does' with the sermon. For Pleizier, for example, the socio-religious process of getting religiously involved is conceptualised in three stages: opening up, dwelling in the sermon, and *actualising faith*.[6]

As mentioned earlier (see section 2.5), Pleizier's research-driven account is focused on how the listener is involved and the preacher as such is viewed from the audience's perspective.[7] Although Pleizier's intention was not to interview the preacher as *first listener* in the sermonising process, he follows Augustine in acknowledging that 'the act of speaking is incomplete without the act of understanding', thereby implying that the preacher understands before he/she speaks.[8] Furthermore, on the topic of understanding, Pleizier asserts that '[e]ither the listener causes the sermon to have meaning (audience research) or the sermon influences the listener (effects-research)'.[9] In his overall project, Pleizier proposes a formal practical theological theory that 'may entail that in other practices of faith participants become religiously involved'. In this sense, this project might be seen as an attempt to broaden Pleizier's research by focusing on the preacher as he or she also participates in an act of understanding — the understanding of one's own sources of authority that inform the spiritual preparation. As such, Pleizier opens up a possible avenue of research: 'So when preacher and audience meet in the event of preaching both have their own part in the creation of this unique conversation.'[10]

If the sermon can be conceptualised as a phenomenon consisting of multiple

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[5] Rietveld, p. 30.

[6] See also Pleizier, pp. 1, 27, 282.

[7] Although Pleizier's approach offers more then just a practical theological reflection, the structure of his research invites us to look at the research subject from three angles usually associated with practical theological research. See also Pleizier, p. 291.

[8] Ibid., p. 38.

[9] Ibid., p. 13.

[10] Ibid., p. 48. Helpfully, Pleizier lists the codes generated as they pertain to the preacher ('p'): p against listener, p assumes knowledge, etc. (p. 302).

parts, where and how does the preacher fit, especially considering that the descriptive and empirical orientation has been predominantly focused on the listener and the reception of the sermon? Indeed, in this kind of research, the 'preacher' element has primarily been viewed as the site of interaction with the audience rather than as a subject of its own.

8.3 Homiletical Triangle

Definitions of homiletics rarely integrate an element of homiletical spirituality on the part of the preacher.[11] One notable exception is Stanley Grenz et al.'s explanation of homiletics that integrates the aspect of *spirituality* into its definition, hinting at an attitude of receptivity:

> Homiletics. The theological discipline that seeks to understand the purpose and process of preparing and delivering sermons. Homiletics seeks to integrate an understanding of the place of the preacher, the sermon and the audience. *Homiletics also seeks to help preachers to prepare themselves spiritually for preaching*, to develop sermons that are faithful to Scripture and to present the sermon in culturally relevant ways. [italics added][12]

Grenz et al.'s definition highlights the spiritual element that is an integral part of the homiletical endeavour. Moreover, a definition like this is normative in nature and admits that homiletical theology should value this preparatory process, even seek to advance it. This task demands the proper evaluation of the preacher.

The assessments that follow highlight homiletical developments in theology, especially in terms of the so-called *turn to the listener*. Through this discussion, I

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[11] A note on definitions of preaching: These are more often than not a reflection of a singular orientation. See also Jonathan Schirmer, *Postmodern Predigen Eine praktisch-theologische Reflexion Einer am Postmodernen Rezipienten Orientierten Predigt unter Berücksichtungung von Neutestamentlichen und Historischen Gesichtspunkten* (Munich, DE: GRIN, 2012), p. 4. Schirmer evaluates Nembach's nineteen definitions of preaching as proof of two tendencies: 'Orientierung am Wort des Evangeliums und die Orientierung am Menschen'. This author's English translation: Orientation towards the word of the gospel and orientation towards people.

[12] Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki, and Cherith Fee Nordling, *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), p. 60.

argue that the *turn to the listener* has involved, first and foremost, a *return* to the preacher, but mostly one that *prescribes* the ways in which preachers *should* deal with the research findings or theoretical reflections. As such, this stream of research betrays a more top-down approach, in light of which the preacher's role, importance, and impact should be re-evaluated. The question that has not garnered as much attention revolves around the nature of the practices that accompany the preacher's sermonic process in terms of a Divine–human encounter. If this is to be an ethnographical audit, it is this particular practice or these practices that I want to understand.

To frame the argument on how the preacher has been perceived, I situate my research question in the context of the Evangelical state of the land discussed in Chapter 7. Or, in the words of practical theologian Sune Fahlgren, I ask, what are the 'dominant theoretical trends in homiletics' in Flanders?[13] So besides the overviews I wish to offer, what follows is also a general historical contextualisation of the FEM with a special focus on homiletical aspects. I provide not only a kind of survey of theoretical trends, but also a historiography of sorts that situates the preacher in the FEM within his broader homiletical context.[14] This background will facilitate the triangulation and interpretation of possible candidates for sources of authority.

8.3.1   The Listening Preacher

The 'homiletical triangle' is usually understood as the interaction between message, speaker, and audience. This triangle can also be understood, after Gerhard von Rad, as 'the concentrated methodical work on the *texts,* in the receptively attentive attitude of the listening *interpreter,* and in the surprising and simultaneously ever-new

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[13] Sune Fahlgren, 'Preaching and Preachership', p. 181.
[14] See Fahlgren for an identification of a permanent mechanism that is related to preaching: preachership with its four aspects of sermon, listener, preacher, and situation. Fahlgren, 'Preaching and Preachership', p. 180.

fashion in which the actuality of the word of God imposes a specifically *ad hominem* dimension'.[15] In this conceptualisation, von Rad seems to bring together the preacher and listener under the umbrella of the 'listening interpreter'. As such, the preacher as *first listener* comes into view.

As Van der Rijst attests, 'The exact relation between the Word of God and human words, […], is subject of much debate in recent homiletics.'[16] Within the context of this debate, the angle of the preacher raises questions, such as '[w]hat is his role in the process of preaching: is the view of the preacher a possibility, or an impediment?'[17] Of the latter view, Ruthanna Hooke exclaims, 'They didn't come here to see you.' With this statement, she offers an extreme, almost Barthian outcry that downplays the role of the preacher as a counterintuitive reaction to the view that the preacher's role is of importance.[18] In doing so, Hooke reinforces a common, yet arguably incorrect and recently contested, interpretation of Karl Barth's critical stance on the role of the preacher: 'Karl Barth famously argued that, because the sermon is an event in which God speaks, the personal element in preaching should be

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[15] See Martin Hauger, 'But We Were in the Wilderness, and There God Speaks Quite Differently: On the Significance of Preaching in the Theology and Work of Gerhard von Rad', *Interpretation,* 62.3 (2008), 278–92 (p. 282). The homiletical triangle is not the only way of conceptualising these homiletical elements. David Day sees four main foci of inquiry: Scripture, the sermon, the preacher, and the hearers. David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis, *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), p. 2. Richard Lischer's historical and theological sampling in *Theories of Preaching* unifies eight categories around the 'eternal triangle of message, speaker and audience'. See *Theories of Preaching: Selected Readings in the Homiletical Tradition*, ed. by Richard Lischer (Durham, NC: Labyrinth Press, 1987), p. 2.

[16] René Hendrik van der Rijst, *De uitzaaiing van het woord: homiletiek in het spoor van Derrida* (Zoetermeer, NL: Boekencentrum Academic, 2015), p. 236.

[17] René van der Rijst, p. 236. See also N.T. Wright's use of the polarity between the traditional categories 'ex opere operato' (focus on the event) and 'ex opere operantis' (focus on the preacher). Tom N. Wright, 'Foreword', in *A Reader on Preaching, Making Connections: Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology*, ed. by David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2005), p. ix. For Karl Barth's view on the question of the unity of the divine and the human, see Angela Dienhart Hancock, 'Preaching "As If Nothing Has Happened": Karl Barth's Emergency Homiletic, 1932–33' (doctoral dissertation, Princeton, 2011), p. 212.

[18] Ruthanna B. Hooke, 'The Personal and Its Others in the Performance of Preaching', in *Preaching and the Personal*, ed. by J. Dwayne Howell and Society of Biblical Literature (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 482, 507, 559, 566. For a more nuanced rendering of Barth's view on the preacher as a 'serious listener', see e.g. Hancock, p. 480.

minimized as much as possible.'[19] While Barth does indeed ask for a humble and flexible stance from the preacher, Barth also elevates the life of the preacher in a positive way when he concludes that the *event* of preaching is linked to the preacher being 'summoned to a life history with the Bible in which something constantly takes place between them and God's Word'.[20] So for Barth, the nature of this Divine–human encounter leading up to the event of preaching is one of a lifelong relationship with Scripture.

However, as stated earlier, this view is counterintuitive, since the congregation comes 'to see the preacher', i.e. to hear God *through the preacher*.[21] At the same time, the preacher has been given the ecclesial and liturgical mandate to bridge a gap of understanding between the text and the listener. In light of this, is a third option even possible? Rather than as a possibility or as an impediment, could the preacher be seen as a given or a necessity or…?

8.3.2   The Listening Interpreter

At the risk of oversimplifying the history of homiletical theory, one could make a division between the so-called Old Homiletic, which prioritises the (world of) Scripture, and the New Homiletic, which focuses on the world of the listener. As one scans the field as it relates to the preacher and his or her role, it becomes clear how both the Old and New Homiletic deal with the specificities of the preacher.[22]

Reading Lischer's *Theories of Preaching*, one could at the very least conclude that the preacher is rather an object; for example, preachers and their preaching are

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[19] Hooke, Location 526.
[20] Karl Barth, *Homiletics*, 1st edn (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), p. 78.
[21] Hooke, Location 553.
[22] See Lischer, pp. 41–80. I will return to a general observation regarding the status of the preacher from both perspectives, but for now, suffice it to say that Lischer's historical overview and theological reading of Chrysostom, Herbert, Baxter, Spener, Palmer, Forsyth, and van der Geest indicates an approach that transcends the oversimplification of the view of the preacher in terms of an Old versus New Homiletic dichotomy. For a more general historical overview of homiletical theory, see Edwards.

dependent upon the quality of their own piety (Spener)[23], the 'authority of the inward objective, living saving God' (Forsyth)[24], or the relationship between their personality and the listener (van der Geest).[25] However, from a historical and theological perspective, a recurring notion contradicts the pervasiveness of the 'they-didn't-come-here-to-see-you' attitude, namely that the preacher does indeed have a mandate to be heard and seen.

In Christian liturgical traditions, the preacher or priest wears a robe to emphasise the office of the pastor and to de-emphasise the personality of the person behind the pulpit. In this sense, there is a clear mandate that the preacher should be seen, but it is *God* who is speaking. The question is: How does the preacher deal with this mandate? Is the preacher destined to efface himself/herself before the text and/or audience?[26] Can the preacher offer understanding if he himself/herself does not understand, i.e. how can the preacher give when he or she has not received? How should the preacher strike a balance between a misguided embodiment of the authoritative Word and a humble exposition that draws the listener into religious involvement? What happens with the preacher in the interval between receiving the sermon as the *first listener* and the post-sermon time, when he has translated his encounter with God and the text for an audience? If the preacher, after von Rad, is the *listening interpreter*, how does the preacher listen and interpret? These questions, I argue, are closely linked to the idea of sources of authority, especially since my respondents not only need to relate to traditional authorities (Scripture, tradition, and/or particular confessions), but are themselves contested sources of authorities in a postmodern age, or at the very least in a (post-)secular context.

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[23] Lischer, p. 60.

[24] Ibid., p. 70.

[25] Ibid., p. 80.

[26] One can detect a similar observation in Jacob Myers' *Preaching Must Die!*: 'Homiletical theologies tend to bifurcate along the fault line of the preacher. Either the preacher is supposed to radically absent herself from the preaching event (as Barth and Bonhoeffer argue), or the preacher is to exert herself as a crucial element in preaching.' Jacob D. Myers, *Preaching Must Die! Troubling Homiletical Theology* (Baltimore, MD: Project Muse, 2018), p. 56.

8.4   The Preacher in a (Post-)Secular Context

An empirical-homiletical perspective should take the (post-)secular context into account — a context that is familiar to most of Western society, including (Evangelical) Flanders. Pleizier states that 'the sermon creates a home for the listener between the secular world in which the believer lives as well as his own fragmented identity. The preacher's role is to guide the listener in the house of faith that is created out of an interaction between biblical, ecclesial, and everyday narratives.'[27] Pleizier's research highlights the empirical-homiletical perspective in terms of balancing anthropological and theological approaches in one conceptual model. He asserts that religious beliefs are highly weakened in a secular age and, therefore, 'it is tempting to reconstruct real life in mere anthropological categories'.[28]

Introducing Charles C. Taylor to a wider audience, James K.A. Smith also notes the reality of fragmented identities lived out in a secular world. While Taylor comments that our 'world is ideologically fragmented, and the range of positions are growing as the nova effect is multiplied by expressive individualism'[29], Smith adds that if we move away from the 'overwhelming homogeneity of our lives in modernity' towards a characterisation of the secular age as one of 'fragmentation and pluralization', how does that herald a need for a new kind of preaching or preacher?[30] How can we, in other words, talk of God, speak of hope, or answer secularism's alternative confessions? Some allies seem to align themselves with Smith, but they do not necessarily solve the problem of the homelessness of the believer in a secular age. Although David Lose mourns this loss of confidence in 'a transcendent reality', Lose suggests that preachers are successful insofar as they can

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[27] Pleizier, p. 287.
[28] Pleizier, p. 4.
[29] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 727.
[30] James K.A. Smith, *How (Not) to Be Secular* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014), p. 61.

accommodate the listener in various ways.[31] But does the preacher feel at home as he or she stands behind the pulpit, speaking out as a source of authority to the post-secular listener?

8.5   The Preacher as First Listener

At this point, it is important to note that, although the shift to an audience-centred approach indicates a sensitivity to the meaning-making process on the part of the listener, it does not necessarily imply that the consequences for the preacher have been approached with a similar kind of empirical logic. I would suggest that, even in empirical studies, the research has tended to focus on generating recommendations for the preacher's subsequent behaviour, rather than searching for ways to attribute meaning to the preacher's own self-understanding and spiritual practices.[32] Indeed, John McClure, co-author of some of the post-research 'Listening-to-Listeners' books, lists no less than eight implications for preaching,[33] while Michael Pasquarello III asks if we need a 'more relevant method, technique, or way of preaching?'[34]

I argue that a more logical approach should also investigate the preacher as one who is as homeless in a secular world as the listener.[35] Why correct the preacher, but not the listener? At the very least, should there not be some form of faith actualisation at the level of the preacher?[36] The classic homiletical work of Hans van

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[31] David J. Lose, *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World and Our Preaching Is Changing* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2013), pp. 65–77.

[32] For a notable example see e.g. Joseph R. Jeter and Ronald J. Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2002). Robert Stephen Reid and Lucy Lind Hogan, *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching: Becoming Responsible for the Faith We Proclaim* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2012).

[33] Alban, 'The Practice of Sermon Listening', *Alban at Duke Divinity School*, 2006 <https://alban.org/archive/the-practice-of-sermon-listening/> (accessed 19 April 2015).

[34] Michael Pasquarello III, *We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken: A Grammar of the Preaching Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), p. 3.

[35] Pleizier, p. 279.

[36] Pleizier, p. 150.

der Geest expresses a similar call for faith actualisation.[37] Van der Geest, Troeger asserts, is 'performing an invaluable service to homiletics by getting us to look at the exposed nerve of preaching, the sermon as it is *actualized through the preacher* and the response of the congregation' [italics added].[38] This approach should resonate with a critical stance towards the preacher's inner life — one that suggests that this life might be dualistic in nature. But even here, Susan Durber, almost in utilitarian fashion, promotes the experiences of the preacher to the level of an effect-oriented approach. Instead of a causal link between authority and effectiveness, Durber draws a link between an auto-theo-biographical authenticity and effectiveness. Again, the view of the preacher's role has been obscured by the need for effectiveness.[39] I argue, however, that to understand what is going on in the preacher's sermonic process, attention needs to be given to the preacher's self-understanding lest this research become but another tool for providing recommendations.

8.5.1   Theological Insights

To designate the preacher as the *first listener* is not a new notion. Dutch homiletician Kees de Ruijter opens his passage on the preacher in a matter-of-fact way: 'Who preaches is the first hearer.'[40] Fred Craddock's *As One Without Authority*, considered to be the origin of the New Homiletic movement and inductive preaching, makes the argument that the preacher is the *first listener*.[41] Dale Andrews also assumes this

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[37] Hans van der Geest, *Presence in the Pulpit: The Impact of Personality in Preaching* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1981).

[38] Thomas H. Troeger, 'Emerging New Standards in the Evaluation of Effective Preaching', in Day, Astley, and Francis, p. 122.

[39] Susan Durber, 'The Preacher's Inner Life', in *The Future of Preaching*, ed. by Geoffrey Stevenson (London, UK: SCM Press, 2010), p. 188.

[40] Kees De Ruijter, *Horen Naar de Stem van God: Theologie an Methode van de Preek* (Zoetermeer, NL: Boekencentrum, 2013), p. 167.

[41] Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, Rev. and with new sermons (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), pp. 31, 35. For more on Craddock as instigator of the New Homiletics and inductive preaching, see e.g. Lorensen, p. 74; David J. Lose, 'Preaching as Conversation', in Allen and others, Location 1554. Stephen I. Wright, Location 4833. William H. Willimon, *Conversations with Barth on Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), pp. 154–58.

'listening ear' as an experiential element in his pedagogy of 'pre-encounter' and 're-encounter' in African-American preaching. In Andrews's view, the community's encounter with the sermon is actually, for the preacher, a re-encounter.[42] On mastering the meaning-making process, 'the student learns to move from the heuristic experience of discernment to the sermon construction and communication of God's revealed Word'.[43] Despite these assertions, however, these experiential encounters have not been verified or qualified through research.

In *Preaching and the Personal*, Dwayne Howell reflects on the need for the preacher to be personal, so that over time he/she can be transformed. In Postliberal fashion, Howell concludes that the preacher's personal transformation in turn fuels the community's transformation.[44]

Robin Meyers, aware of the shift from message-centred to listener-centred sensitivities, acknowledges the balancing act the preacher must perform in order to live up to the listener's expectations. The preacher, however, is first and foremost honest in his or her sermons, which are 'the product of a human being overhearing Scripture from a particular vantage point'.[45] Seemingly focused on the effect of the sermon or preacher on the listener, Meyers is attentive to the self-persuading process through which the preacher learns to be personal rather than autobiographical. Nevertheless, the focus on self-disclosure should not to be confused as being merely confessional, but rather should be a lived example of how the preacher has poured him or herself into the text.[46]

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[42] Dale P. Andrews, 'Teaching Black Preaching: Encounter and Re-encounter', *The African American Pulpit,* 9.4 (2006), 8–12.

[43] Andrews, p. 10.

[44] Hooke, Location 747.

[45] Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear: Preaching as Self-Persuasion* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1993), p. 69.

[46] Ibid., p. 70. De Ruijter distinguishes these three aspects in the preacher as first hearer as a part of appropriating the Word of God. See also De Ruijter, pp. 169–70.

8.5.2   The Use of 'I'

The preacher is arguably part of two triangles: the homiletical triangle (the focus of this chapter) and the systems model triangle (the focus of Chapter 4). Csikszentmihalyi's empirical research highlights the context of the interactions among domain, field, and the individual. Whereas the previous chapter looked at the *homiletical domain*, this chapter values the *individual* component, represented by the situated preacher working on a creative product. While the notion of the preacher as part of the homiletical triangle has garnished attention to a certain degree, in terms of understanding the nature of the self-disclosure, self-understanding, and the self-actualisation, the preacher as a *first listener* has received underwhelming attention.

André Verweij's *Positioning Jesus' Suffering, A Grounded Theory of Lenten Preaching in Local Parishes* is an exception to the rule. Verweij utilises qualitative data to investigate the self-disclosure of the pastor.[47] Although Verweij draws from the preacher's written sermon, rather than from interviews, these sermon texts highlight that self-disclosure is a resource used strategically by the preacher to help the listener relate to Jesus's suffering. This disclosure can be as broad as the preacher's personality and style (e.g. body language, inflection, tone), and the conscious or unconscious use of the 'I' when behind the pulpit. These uses of 'I' Verweij refers to are based on Manfred Josuttis's phenomenological framework in *Der Prediger in der Predigt*.[48]

Josuttis offers six possible uses of the 'I'[49]: (a) The *verificational* 'I'. This use illustrates how the preacher *verifies* the textual testimony with the confession of his own pious experience. Divine providence is, by virtue of his own testimony, proven

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[47] Verweij, p. 63.

[48] Manfred Josuttis, *Praxis des Evangeliums zwischen Politik und Religion: Grundprobleme der Praktischen theologie* (Munich, DE: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1974), pp. 91–93. For a recent and more general classification of Josuttis's use of the 'I', see also Leede and Stark, pp. 198–99.

[49] Josuttis, pp. 189–90. Verweij, for example, concludes that, in his research on the preacher's self-disclosure, the 'I' takes a *biographical* (Josuttis's third type) or *confessional* (Josuttis's second type) form.

to be true and reliable. Josuttis, in Barthian manner, warns that '[t]he authenticity of the testimony can not be proved by the experience of the witness'.[50] It is a kind of use, according to Verweij, that is 'typical of a more pietistic preaching tradition'.[51] (b) The *confessional* 'I'. Here, the preacher employs the 'I' not in order to affirm the truth of the text with the reality of his life, but to highlight the fundamental difference between his frail existence and God's superiority. The preacher *confesses* a reality, instead of proving a reality by means of his own experiences. (c) The *biographical* 'I'. This use does not so much legitimise the truth of the text as it does demonstrate that the text relates to the deeper dimensions of our existence. Scripture's testimony on e.g. dying, love, and so on is being interpreted from the lived experience of the preacher. (d) The *representative* 'I'. The preacher's use of the 'I' could be autobiographical in form, while the intention of that function is not. This use of the 'I' does not represent the preacher as an individual, but invites the hearer to be *represented* by the preacher. Josuttis claims that 'it is not intended to explain the text from his personal point of view, but rather to question the text in a simultaneously personal and generally valid way'.[52] (e) The *exemplary* 'I'. Here, the preacher discloses himself as the *first hearer*: The preacher preaches to himself or herself. In other words, 'The gospel message is related to the life of the pastor in an *exemplary* way. The Bible text addresses the person of the pastor first.'[53] Finally, (f) the *fictitious* 'I'. This 'I' is a literary device in which the preacher takes on an imaginary persona.

Pleizier, aware of Josuttis's typology of uses of the 'I', claims that 'using "I" in the pulpit has a great value in the process of identification', i.e. the hearer of the

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[50] Josuttis, p. 91.
[51] Verweij, p. 189.
[52] Josuttis, p. 92.
[53] Verweij, p. 190.

sermon's identification with the preacher.[54] I argue, similarly, that Josuttis's typology can be helpful as a critical analytical tool with which to understand the preacher's use of the 'I' during sermon preparation. Verweij illustrates the utility of Josuttis's typology, albeit arguing on the basis of the preacher's written sermon rather than interviews, but adds a seventh 'I' to Josuttis's list: the ministerial 'I'.[55] The personal and the ministerial (or pastoral) blend into one the moment the preacher steps into his or her liturgical role. However, as Verweij points out, 'Self-disclosure is related more to the "ministerial self" than to the "personal self".'[56] Therefore, according to Verweij, the *ministerial* 'I' functions as a self-disclosure from the perspective of functioning as a minister.

Whether conscious or unconscious, whether strategic or incidental, the candidates for sources of authority can illuminate the use of the 'I' based on how the preachers view their approach to the sermonic process. Josuttis, for example, criticises the pietistic use of the verificational 'I', as if the Bible is in need of the preacher's authentication. But is that how my respondents viewed themselves? Did they, as they prepared spiritually, consider themselves verificational gatekeepers of sorts? Nothing in the data seemed to suggest that.

8.6   Calling as a Source of Authority

Although 'preaching' is often short for teaching or edifying, to reduce Evangelicalism to only a message-centred tradition would be to overstate the case. There is a growing sensitivity to be as much audience-centred or preacher-centred as message-centred. However, this does not mean that the preacher has been offered enough attention or the needed support within Evangelical theology or homiletics from an empirical point of view to understand how preachers themselves see the use

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[54] Pleizier, p. 246.
[55] Verweij, p. 190.
[56] Verweij, p. 189.

of the 'I', or are even aware of its uses. What does the above survey contribute to our critical analysis of the ways in which the notion of *calling* is operationalised within the context of the preacher's use of the 'I'? Is it possible to draw a connection or define *calling* in terms of the uses of the 'I'?

I recall here Andrew's (BEZ) reflection. The concept of a *calling*, here, emerged in the tension between the conviction of God giving Andrew a call and the danger of harbouring too much false pride in this call or too strong a sense of responsibility to fulfil it. After experiencing a burnout during his ministry, Andrew reinterpreted his calling. In fact, Andrew did not think he would ever preach again. The frailty of life had got to him and Andrew could not even leave his couch, let alone pick up the phone. In terms of the 'I', this was the *confessional* 'I' that exclaimed that the only thing that mattered from then on was God's love for Andrew. Andrew had reflected upon his Evangelical heritage with strong emphasis on the missional activism: 'What else can I do for God? How could we use our gifts? How could the church grow?' Again, the context of the FEM did not leave room to foster space for silence or self-reflection.

In terms of *listening*, after his burnout, Andrew began to allow other young leaders to come to the foreground to preach. He no longer felt that he *had* to be the preacher in order to be true to his calling. In terms of preaching, Andrew was more interested in preaching on and from the idea of discipleship as the overarching theme. Again, the confessional 'I' comes to the fore, as discipleship is less about *knowing* than it is about *being*.

A second reflection is connected to Lance's (BEZ) conscious decision to withhold personal information to dispense through preaching. This observation points to the issue of a tension between the *perceived* and the *real* preacher. André Resner devotes his *Preacher and Cross* to the concepts of the *real preacher* ('who is

known ultimately to God') and the *perceived preacher* ('that social construct that is based on information available to hearers about the preacher').[57] Resner suggests that, from a perspective rooted in a theology of the cross, the preacher offers himself as a witness. These instances of witnessing, 'usefully labelled "temporal instantiations" of the gospel', can be *polemic* or *apologetic* in nature.[58] The former approach denies the self-disclosure of the preacher to the hearer, since such self-disclosure could become a stumbling block for the hearer. The latter approach is testimonial in nature, since it shows 'God's redemptive activity' in the life of the preacher. The choice for the preacher to not disclose the self in the pulpit does not mean that the hearer will not perceive him/her in a particular way. In other words, according to Resner, the preacher cannot hide himself/herself behind the pulpit, even if he/she hides certain biographical elements.[59]

Respondent Lance's approach to self-disclosure hints at a *polemic* approach. Lance holds a position, i.e. pastor. That is his calling, and with that comes a certain distance from the listener. Based on that view, Lance operationalises the use of 'I' behind the pulpit. In fact, Lance is the constructor of his own image. In practice, Lance offers anecdotal evidence of how God has touched him, but he regulates it in such a way that no one, apart from a very small group of befriended people, will be able to know who he really is. It is not hard to imagine that, when Lance initiates a new sermonic process, his source of authority, i.e. being called as pastor, will limit or at the least regulate the attentiveness or creativity during that process. The question presents itself: How would a conscious use of 'I' during the preparation help the preacher to regulate his or her own *listening*?

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[57] André Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 7.

[58] Resner, p. 184.

[59] For a more nuanced reflection on the relational identification between the preacher and the hearer and on how the *perceived* preacher cannot solely be based on the homiletical interaction, see also Pleizier, pp. 243–43.

8.7 Conclusion

The description of homiletical angles, with a specific look at the preacher as *first listener*, helps us to appreciate the respondents' awareness of their role as *first listener*. I claim that the preacher in the FEM lacks tools with which to foster habits of self-understanding, self-disclosure, or self-reflexiveness to inform his self-image and use of the 'I'.

As in the previous chapter, neither Scriptural orthodoxy nor the confessional tradition is lost and the missional context remains a relevant part of the respondents' biographical narratives. The notion of *calling* represents a promising entry for further reflection, as it is closely connected to how the preachers perceive themselves and thus how they present themselves, i.e. how they use the 'I'. Before we can methodically engage in research that investigates the uses of the 'I', we would do well to inform the preacher of the possible uses and their relation to the particular calling they experienced at the beginning of their ministry. Evangelical piety emphasises a strong authentic approach in which the preacher does not so much support Scripture with verification, but rather his piety assumes an authenticity that is needed by the preacher to be true to his or her calling.

The question that remains now is whether the Evangelical preacher in the FEM orients himself towards a more pietistic strand of Evangelicalism, or a Puritan one for that matter. Since both strands have dominated critical reflection, I turn my attention to this question in the following chapter, as I present a third and final building block defining the contours of an Evangelical and homiletical spirituality.

9 Chapter 9: Spiritual Contours

9.1 Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have sketched the contours of the Evangelical state of the land (Chapter 7) and explored the empirical-homiletical research on the preacher as *first listener* (Chapter 8). These are much-needed lenses through which to evaluate the sermonic practices that are part of the preacher's theological toolbox.

There is one more assessment of descriptive nature to be made that deals with the religious experience of the preacher: Evangelical spirituality (or *spiritualities*) and, more specifically, homiletical spirituality. How are these espoused within the FEM? An extensive library has been written on the topic of Christian spirituality and Evangelical spirituality in particular, including how to approach it from within the Evangelical academic and non-academic community. However, the same cannot be said of homiletical spirituality. Therefore, in this chapter, I hone in on this observation and continue to provide a more focused framework for my research. It is against this background of alleged normative and operant theologies of homiletical spirituality that I will evaluate the ethnographic data drawn from the respondents. In other words, how do respondents espouse the practices that are part of the way they see homiletical spirituality? Within the confines of this research, it is neither possible nor necessary to offer an exhaustive introduction to Christian and Evangelical spirituality. I will nevertheless highlight interpretations of the most important themes that characterise Christian and Evangelical spirituality in relation to the research question.[1]

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[1] For broader introductions to Christian and/or Evangelical spirituality, see also Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*; *The Emergence of Evangelical Spirituality: The Age of Edwards, Newton, and Whitefield,* ed. by Tom Schwanda (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2016); *A Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Gordon S. Wakefield (London, UK: SCM Press, 1986); *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. by Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010); *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, ed. by Glen G. Scorgie and others (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

One of these themes is, in fact, the interpretation of Evangelical spirituality. In what way does the preacher in an Evangelical Flemish context understand his own spiritual tradition? From which interpretative framework does the preacher pastor? How do the respondents integrate homiletical theology into their practices of listening and discerning? Do manuals or courses on homiletics, born of the Flemish context, shed light on how the preacher should adopt a particular spirituality of listening and discernment? A word of caution is needed. Carvalhaes reminds us that spirituality is hard to measure and that the vocabulary of spiritual perception leaves room for vagueness.[2] The sections on the overviews of listening have proven as much (see also section 4.2). However, it is important to introduce a vocabulary and description of an Evangelical and homiletical spirituality.

The fact that there is difficulty in trying to measure *spirituality* (be it qualitative or quantitative) should not stop us from trying to have a clearer view of its contours. The following arguments should warrant such an endeavour. First, I have argued that preachers have been at the mercy of a variety of (norming) theological and anthropological stakeholders (see also section 3.2). Therefore, it follows that espoused methods that correlate with particular views of spirituality are in place. But how does the preacher himself/herself interpret his reality? What are the spiritual practices and patterns visible when he/she intentionally attunes himself/herself during the sermonic process? If normative approaches (or lack thereof) do not mirror the reality brought to the surface by ethnographic research, then how do we interact with normative and/or espoused presuppositions? What can be said of the operationalisation of the notion of calling in relation to the homiletical spiritualities in the FEM?

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[2] Carvalhaes, p. 110.

Second, homiletical definitions, although normative in nature, have not managed to integrate a solid view of the nature of spiritual preparation, or take into account new or operant sources of authority at work in the spiritual preparation. Homiletical handbooks are generally silent on the nature of the Divine–human encounter during the sermonic process. In other words, it is difficult to distil a theological or normative view of homiletical spirituality.[3] But that does not mean that an espoused or operant theology is absent.

Since the mid-1970s, there has been a global resurgence of Evangelical spirituality; but has this resurgence and subsequent attention to spiritual practices been welcomed by (Flemish) Evangelical preachers, and, if so, how? This observation warrants at the very least an attempt to define the contours and content of alleged Evangelical and homiletical spiritualities if I am to interpret and evaluate the candidates for sources of authority.

9.2   Contours of Evangelical Spiritualities

It is not without reason that this section is entitled Evangelical *spiritualities* (plural). For Evan Howard, 'it is simply impossible to speak of "the evangelical" approach to ecclesial spirituality' because the evangelical is 'associated with a wide diversity of liturgical and institutional forms and divergent ecclesiologies'.[4] In the *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, another writer adds to this complexity the reality of the modern–postmodern divide: 'Present-day evangelicals are diverse. It is more

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[3] To my knowledge, the only homiletical publication that devotes a chapter to the idea of 'homiletical spirituality' is David J. Schlafer, *Your Way with God's Word: Discovering Your Distinctive Preaching Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1995), p. xv, 131. For Schlafer, homiletical spirituality is first and foremost a question of attitude, rather than a field that deals with spiritual encounters of a Divine–human nature.

[4] Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', Location 3081.

accurate to speak of evangelical spiritualities than a single postmodern

evangelicalism.'[5]

Adding to this complexity of different *spiritualities* is the fact that the

interpretations of Evangelicalism in general are also diverse. Indeed, Evangelicalism

can be interpreted in terms of theological, historical, and sociological categories,

each offering a distinct account of the same phenomenon.

Christopher Zito's *Doctrine and Experience: Caught in the Crossfire of*

Evangelical Spiritualities presents a recent account of these contours — perhaps the

most promising in terms of offering a clear demarcation in its assessment. Zito's title

hints at the difficulty of demarcating Evangelicalism in general and sifting through

the liminal space where two conceptions of spirituality collide:

> […] one grounded in doctrine and the other in experience as explanations for the
> primary means of progressively uniting us to God's life. […] to clean up this chaotic
> crossroads within the greater evangelical metropolis, so that we might see our way
> clear to an evangelical spirituality that embraces the stories of both interested parties.[6]

What the above interpretations of Howard and Wakefield have in common is their

observation of what Zito calls the two conceptions of spirituality. Through historical

research, critical reflection, and observation of contemporary phenomena, Zito

arrives at *doctrinalism* and *experientialism* to describe two approaches to Evangelical

spirituality that constitute how one deals with doctrine and experience.[7] Evangelicals,

heirs of the Protestant Reformation, are on the one hand grounded in Scripture; on

the other hand, according to Howard, theirs is 'above all a *form of spirituality*'.[8] In

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[5] Charles J. Conniry Jr., 'Postmodernity', *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, p. 1261.
[6] Christopher C. Zito, *Doctrine and Experience: Caught in the Crossfire of Evangelical Spiritualities* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 141.
[7] Zito, Location 187.
[8] Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', Location 2894. See also Bruce Hindmarsh, 'Contours of Evangelical Spirituality', in Scorgie and others, p. 147.

light of the potential candidates for sources of authority, these two approaches can shed light on how the *listening* of the preacher can be qualified.

Zito's evaluation of Evangelical spirituality is not an uncommon one. The Puritan side assesses orthodoxy and right doctrine as the essence of Evangelical Christianity, while the pietistic sees conversion and a personal relationship with Jesus as its hallmark. Zito's critical and historical account of doctrinally based spirituality and experientially based spirituality is mirrored by Roger Olson in *Modern Theology*. After offering his historical account of Evangelicalism, Olson concludes that:

> two types of evangelical Protestantism widened and deepened […]. Two very different mindsets have evolved out of the old division. An Anglo-Saxon case in point will suffice: Theologian and ethicist, Stanley Grenz represents the pietist-Wesleyan side while Reformed Evangelical theologian and professor of the New Testament, D. A. Carson represents the puritan-Reformed side.[9]

In light of my research question and the practices that accompany the Divine–human encounter as a religious experience, it is worth exploring two particular expressions of Evangelical spirituality as examples of the above divide: the *experiential* and the *biblicist* approach.

9.2.1 Experientalism

One example of an *experientially* based spirituality is the *Spiritual Formation Movement*. Jeffrey P. Greenman explores the map of this movement and traces its origins back to Richard Foster's 1978 landmark book, *The Celebration of Discipline*.[10] Others have followed in Foster's wake, among them philosopher Dallas

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[9] Roger E. Olson, *The Journey of Modern Theology: From Reconstruction to Deconstruction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2013), p. 648.

[10] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*. Interestingly, Foster, himself a Quaker, never mentions *Evangelical* as a qualifier. Foster's *Celebration* is primarily an ecumenical approach to the disciplines of spiritual formation.

Willard, and writer and pastor Eugene Peterson. These writers, according to

Greenman, helped to shift 'the focus of mainstream evangelical conversation from

the traditional (but narrower) category of discipleship to the newer (and broader)

category of spiritual formation'.[11] Other Evangelical theologians, such as J. I. Packer,

Robert Webber, and Alister McGrath, have also been part of that same global

conversation, trying to articulate an Evangelical spirituality that could provide a

'deeper biblical foundation, a stronger theological rationale and a wider historical

awareness'.[12]

Greenman continues to draw our attention to a parallel development with the

appearance of another new phrase in Evangelicalism, i.e. 'spiritual theology'.

Drawing on a definition from Roman Catholic author Jordan Aumann, Greenman

suggests that spiritual theology studies:

> the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons,
> defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and
> development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of
> the spiritual life to its full perfection.[13]

Greenman does not offer concrete directives, nor does he explain the process of

spiritual advancement. Nevertheless, he shows that the goals of the Spiritual

Formation Movement and spiritual theology in general were to foster experiential

'practices aimed at helping us draw closer to God experientially'.[14]

On a personal and anecdotal note, although the Spiritual Formation Movement

is recognised by many writers as a corrective within Evangelicalism's approach to

spirituality, it seems that it never took off in Evangelical Flanders. Even though one

could find Richard Foster's *Prayer* on the reading list during my bachelor's training

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[11] Jeffey P. Greenman, 'Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges', in Greenman and Kalantzis, p. 23.
[12] Ibid., p. 23
[13] Greenman, p. 32.
[14] Zito, Location 1604.

at the former Bible Institute Belgium, I have no knowledge of it being widely read. Most recently, Steven Porter evaluated the status of the Spiritual Formation Movement: Is it dead? Has it accomplished changing effects in the Evangelical movement for the positive? Porter does not answer these questions as such, but highlights the need for a continued and mature theological reflection on and contextualisation of the Spiritual Formation Movement's agenda. While making this point, Porter offers a warning that should be heeded by any movement that pushes a corrective agenda: 'If the spiritual formation movement pushes its agenda too hard for too long it is liable to push too far and thereby neglect other emphases that are important to integrate.'[15] I am not sure whether this agenda was ever pushed in the FEM. However, looking back at the interpretative framework for examining the Evangelical preacher behind the Flemish pulpit, one could argue that this stream of North American Evangelical spirituality is one example of the limited influence of key Anglo-Saxon figures on Flemish Evangelical opinion-makers.

9.2.2   Biblicism

I would argue that biblicism, and its more extreme version *bibliolatry*, has a stronger pedigree within the FEM. As noted earlier, in their assessment of the FEM, Prins and Creemers refer to Bebbington's quadrilateral in order to express the notion that Flemish Evangelicals adhere to this spirituality marked by biblicism, i.e. having a particular regard for the Bible. Although bibliolatry is not a new term, Zito narrows it down in terms of the spiritual context in which *biblicism* and *experientialism* exist in tension:

> Nevertheless, there is an alarming evangelical bias towards a rationalist — but also a naturalist or scientistic — model of spirituality we can call 'bibliolatry'. I do not use

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[15] Steven Porter, 'Is the Spiritual Formation Movement Dead?', *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*, 8 (2015), 2–7 (p. 6).

this term to refer to those who adhere to narrow or simplistic views of inerrancy, infallibility, or the supremacy of the Bible. This would be the common way of understanding the term 'bibliolatry'. In the present context, that is simply too general to be useful. Rather, I use it to refer to a methodological source for spirituality that sometimes or perhaps often accompanies those who support these doctrines narrowly defined. Specifically, bibliolatry identifies propositional knowledge of the Bible as that knowledge of God that is of itself sufficient for uniting us to God in spiritual relationship.[16]

Zito's assessment sounds similar to Schneiders's evaluation (see also section 4.2.4) in which she discards the approach Zito refers to as 'methodological' as too rational a discourse. Schneiders's transformative approach in which the reader (or preacher) does not 'primarily know more' but 'is more' opposes an approach that is grounded in a set of exegetical, philosophical, historical, or other kinds of questions one has in mind when approaching the biblical text.

9.3   Contours of Homiletical Spiritualities

Homiletical spirituality is a broad and too general term that refers to practices that are part of the preacher's preparation for the weekly time behind the pulpit. Before we look closer at some of the more specific Evangelical homiletical practices that could be associated with Evangelical spirituality in general (e.g. the so-called 'quiet time'), I will categorise and structure the broader repertoire of homiletical spirituality that is important within the Protestant context.

In terms of definition, there is little on homiletical spiritual preparation. Besides the fragment on spiritual preparation in Grenz's definition (see also section 8.3), there is one offered by Theo Pleizier:

In homiletics, meditation usually refers to an activity for preachers: a stage in the preparation of the sermon in which the preacher finds an entrance into the text,

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[16] Zito, Locations 1132–38.

wrestles with it in front of the situation, engages spiritually with the text, and has the text spoken to himself in reading and studying.[17]

De Leede and Stark provide another approach in their *Ontvouwen.* It offers an approach rarely encountered within homiletical literature.[18] Although there is no mention of particular or exclusive Evangelical homiletical spiritual practices or a normative definition, what De Leede and Stark do offer is an overview of the different phases of the homiletical process from three perspectives: culture, theology, and spirituality.[19]

Their rubric of the spiritualities accompanying the different stages of sermonising offers a broad enough perspective with which to paint a normative and espoused picture.[20] This rubric signals the importance of a spirituality for every phase of the sermonic process.

9.3.1   Phases

Interestingly, de Leede and Stark make reference to the preacher as *first listener* in the context of orientation. Listening is part of an 'exercise in receptivity' that fits within the full interaction of the homiletical triangle.[21] This *listening* is quite a literal listening, in that, the text is being read out loud by the preacher or by someone else. In terms of the spirituality that accompanies the first stage of *orientation*, de Leede and Stark ask the preacher to adopt an image of a type of preacher (didaché, homilie,

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[17] Pleizier, p. 189.

[18] A reminder of a previous remark in section 7.3 is valid here: De Leede and Stark's publication offers a most recent and arguably most thorough synthesis of homiletical developments in the Dutch language. They show a great awareness and integration of different homiletical paradigms developed in a (recent) Dutch, German, Anglo-Saxon, or Scandinavian context.

[19] De Leede and Stark, p. 17. Its title, *Ontvouwen*, means literally 'to unfold'. But in a metaphorical sense, it offers a welcome image of a visible action in a tangible place; something is about to be revealed.

[20] Although the classic didactical stages of classical rhetoric offer the necessary background, they are at this point not the focus of this research. I will, however, list here the stages of rhetorical tradition, i.e. the way de Leede and Stark translate them to chapters: Orientation, Zooming in, Translation, Enunciation, Sharing. De Leede and Stark, p. 17.

[21] Ibid., p. 72.

marturia, paraklesis). More importantly, the preacher is expected to perform two kinds of movement: The first is geared towards a kind of listening for himself and a vicarious listening, i.e. listening with the hearer in mind, while the second is being open to what the text says in return, i.e. a 'methodical exercise of the *praxis pietatis*'. This movement adopts a hermeneutic of trust that is embodied in practices such as *lectio divina* and *Disciplina Arcani*. These two methodological instruments foster a kind of trust that is often counterintuitive to the cultural and ideological distrust that creeps into the preacher's approach to Scripture.

In a second stage, 'zooming in', de Leede and Stark warn against watering down the claim the text has on the listener. Does the preacher allow for God's message to be heard? De Leede and Stark plead for a spirituality by which the preacher yields to the claims of the text.[22] As the first one to listen, the preacher will be able to pass on his/her reflection on the text to the hearer.

The third stage, the *translation* phase, fosters a spirituality of *going out*; after the preacher has *gone in*, there is a need to go public and speak out. This spirituality is sensitive to the use of language, and the qualifying element of this speaking is *subtlety*. The (mis)use of language through 'vocabulary, examples, metaphors, and the use of ritual language' will need to reflect a submission to Christ, as He is the one to which the hearer should be oriented.[23]

Spirituality during the fourth stage, the *enunciation* phase, is characterised by authenticity and the ways in which that authenticity is fostered. What can the preacher do to be believable? What will he/she disclose or leave out?

A final section is reserved for the spirituality of the preacher after the sermon, the post-sermonic time, when the preacher is particularly vulnerable to feedback. During this *sharing* phase, this feedback can paradoxically express itself in a kind of

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[22] De Leede and Stark, p. 132.
[23] Reid and Hogan, Locations 565, 1073. Reid and Hogan's *The Six Deadly Sins of Preaching* aptly connects the use and misuse of language to virtues and vices with which the preacher preaches.

existential speechlessness in which neither the listener nor the preacher can be sure about what is said. For the preacher, this vulnerability can be met by a kind of resilience that is found in a spiritual freedom in Christ. It is this kind of spirituality that does not appeal to arrogance, authoritarian behaviour, or spiritual tyranny.[24]

9.3.2   Practices

What is there to be learned from this brief overview of homiletical spirituality? First, whether in the form of a definition (Pleizier), or sequential phases (De Leede and Stark), or much used practices (*lectio divina*, 'quiet time'), these practices model approaches that can hardly be called vague. If these forms produce a deficiency in personal formation, practical application, or a divine encounter (see section 1.3.3), it may be attributed to how the separate parts of this definition or phases are being applied. I argue that this research is a reflection of these parts based on the lived experience of the preacher.

Second, a spirituality of homiletics denotes a holistic process in which every part of that process involves a particular approach to or kind of spirituality. Although de Leede and Stark delineate this process in an orderly and constructive fashion, this is not a new idea. Preaching *is* a spiritual practice. The sermonic process *is* a spiritual process. The life of the preacher *is* a spiritual life — a point brought home by Michael Pasquarello III in his 'Speaking of God: Preaching as a Spiritual Practice', when through Augustine, he states as much: '[…] the pastor is to be transformed by grace into an 'eloquent sermon,' a holy performance that invites the church into truthful, enlivening conversation of self-giving love in communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'[25] Eugene Peterson, an important Evangelical pastor and

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[24] De Leede and Stark, p. 290.
[25] Michael Pasquarello III, 'Speaking of God: Preaching as a Spiritual Practice', *Papers of the Annual Meeting 'Preaching and Spirituality'*, The Academy of Homiletics, 40th Meeting, 1965–2005 (Baptist Theological Seminary at Richmond Union Theological Seminary/Presbyterian School of

writer, similarly speaks of this congruence 'between ends and means in ministry, between whom we are and what we do; what we do and how we do it'.[26] With regard to my initial question, i.e. How long does it take to prepare a sermon? (see also section 2.1), Peterson answers by differentiating between preparation with the purpose of delivering a sermon and preparation through being drenched in Scripture. Respondent Victor contributed a different and most telling image — that of a garden — to Peterson's metaphor:

> With every sermon I feel that I am getting a revelation […]. And that is of course because of being busy with the Bible. So this morning I had it again, then I think 'wow, this is something…' then I am really surprised. Then I am amazed and I say 'wow, I had not yet seen that flower in my garden', I say 'wow, that is beautiful'. What I say had little to do with something that I have produced, you know. While that is true, of course, but it is a combination. […] Then I say wow, this is from God, this surprises me, this does not come from me.

The advice Victor gave was simple: Continue to read the Bible throughout your whole life. That takes discipline. In Victor's case, this disciplined life was cultivated by observing the spiritual practices of praying, reading the Bible, or reading a book between 8 am and 10 am. Why did Victor do this? 'I want to keep sowing the garden, I want to harvest. And of course, there is often weed, too.' Victor's 'weed' was shorthand for sin, and he needed to speak to God about it. This time spent with God Victor called 'the kitchen garden time'. To reflect on how sermons are born, Victor referred to picking a flower: To be able to pick a flower at the right time, one needs to walk in the garden, sow the seed in the garden, wait in the garden, and do this until the flowers bloom and are waiting to be plucked. The language Victor employed was experiential: the birth of a sermon, the plucking of flowers, a painting.

Christian Education, Virginia School of Theology at Virginia Union University Williamsburg, Virginia, 1–3 December 2005), p. 69.
[26] Ibid., p. 73, 73fn13.

Victor's approach is a clear example of how creativity and attentiveness are related to the three levels of meditation, i.e. meditation as a *lifestyle* in which Victor is a meditative *person* (image of walking in a garden), meditation as a *dimension* in which Victor's homiletical *procedure* is embedded in a meditating *process* (looking for flowers to be plucked), and meditation as a *phase* in which Victor's homiletical *preparation* includes a certain kinds of meditation *practice* (reading and praying between 8 am and 10 am).

Victor's sources of authority (books, peers, mentors), albeit experiential in how he expressed his lived experience, ran parallel to his high view of Scripture. He felt that one needed to approach the Scripture as a disciple, i.e. as a student, but also with discipline, and to read it continually. This need to read the Bible continuously was also expressed explicitly by Brandon, Isaac, and Jeremy.

While anyone, with a certain degree of help from scholars, can prepare a sermon with the purpose of delivering it within in a couple of hours, the kind of preaching Peterson adheres to is one that requires an unquantified number of 'reflective hours over the pages of Scripture as well as personal struggles with the meaning of Scripture', and this through a creative act of 'quietness and solitude, concentration and intensity'.[27]

A sketch of the contours of an Evangelical spirituality and its homiletical practices would not be complete without exploring briefly the devotional (reading) practices of *lectio divina* and 'quiet time'.

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[27] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), pp. 20–21.

9.3.2.1   Lectio Divina

De Leede and Stark, and for that matter many other writers who integrate the

spiritual practices of listening attentively to God's words, propose a method that was

already known and used by the early church: *lectio divina*.[28] Evangelical writers also

discovered *lectio divina* as a particular way of devotional reading of the biblical text.

Yet, as sympathy for this approach grew, opposition did too. Evan Howard provides

one of the more recent accounts of how *lectio divina* was popularised as well as

opposed in the Evangelical context. After explaining the history of *lectio divina* and

exploring the overlaps with the Reformational heritage of Evangelicalism, Howard

makes the case that:

> […] we find that evangelicals (Reformers, Puritans, Pietists, revivalists, and so on),
> similar to the classic practice of lectio divina, have regarded the devotional reading of
> Scripture as a recognized practice, and one which is to be accompanied with a variety
> of attitudes: dependency, expectancy, humility, and obedience.[29]

Howard even suggests that it is time 'we acknowledge the *lectio divina evangelica*

that pervades evangelical literature' [italics added].[30] Although the use of the practice

has been researched in its gathered worship context in Rathe's *Evangelicals, Worship*

and Participation, further research is needed to confirm or contradict whether this

practice is well received and applied.[31] As we will see, the respondents' answers and

the study of homiletical manuals in the FEM do not confirm the use or promotion of

this approach.

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[28] For a well-respected introduction to *lectio divina*, see Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998).

[29] Evan Howard, 'Lectio Divina in the Evangelical Tradition', *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care*, 5 (2012), 56–77 (p. 65).

[30] Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', Location 3144.

[31] Rathe treats *lectio divina* and *silent reflection* as synonymous and observes that, apart from one type of Evangelical worship context (the '*All-of-Life*' emphasis), the other ones seem to integrate this practice (the other emphases are 'Gathered Devotion', 'Sacramental Recovery', 'Evangelistic Worship', 'Organically Missional'). However, Rathe does not elaborate in the respective chapters of these emphases. It is therefore difficult to interpret whether these congregations had the term/concept of the *lectio* in mind or *silent reflection*. Rathe, p. 279.

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9.3.2.2 Quiet Time

On more than just a popular and intuitive level, one could argue that the spiritual practice of the 'quiet time' is the quintessential Evangelical practice. In his *Trust and Obey: Explorations in Evangelical Spirituality*, David Gillet calls it 'the heart of evangelical spirituality'.[32] Practical theologian Ian Randall quotes David Parker when he argues that 'the personal quiet time had been the most basic of all spiritual disciplines'.[33] For Simon Chan, it is clear that 'topping the list' of traditional Evangelical beliefs and practices is the personal devotion or 'the Quiet Time consisting of about twenty to thirty minutes […] of spiritual exercises of Bible reading, study of and meditation on a passage, and prayers of praise and intercession'.[34]

Is the practice of the 'quiet time' as a spiritual exercise of listening or discernment still the *heart* of Evangelical spirituality, particularly within the FEM? Does it surface as a method or even as a phrase? Yes and no. Five of eight respondents referred to 'quiet time' as a given or a practice. Only Lance (mentioning it fourteen times) and Brandon (mentioning it six times) used it more often than the others. Respondents saw their 'quiet time' involving prayer, reading Scripture, reading books, going for a walk, or talking to God in general. 'Quiet time' was first and foremost understood as something done 'daily' (Ian, Jeremy) and something 'personal' (Jeremy). Nevertheless, Lance noted that, in his upbringing, 'quiet time' had been reduced to a specific time with specific practices, but he affirmed that it is much more than that: It is a constant reflection with God.

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[32] David Gillett, *Trust and Obey* (London, UK: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993), p. 144.

[33] Ian M. Randall, *Evangelical Experiences: A Study in the Spirituality of English Evangelicalism 1918-1939* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1999), p. 5. See also David Parker, 'Evangelical Spirituality Reviewed', *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 63 (1991), 123–48 (p. 132). Parker would even call it the 'evangelical equivalent of the *lectio divina of classic spirituality*' (p. 132).

[34] Simon Chan, 'Spiritual Practices', in *The Oxford Handbook of Evangelical Theology*, ed. by Gerald R. McDermott (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 247.

9.3.2.3 A Flemish Survey

Here, we are honing in on an important part of this research — the specific context of which is the time when the preacher enters into the meditative phase in which he 'listens to God's voice, is attuned to the Lord, and meditates on the statements that He made us write down'.[35] If the preacher is the *first listener*, in what way does homiletical spirituality as understood in the FEM provide a firm foundation for offering practices that help the preacher to listen and discern?

As mentioned in section 2.1, Johan Lukasse, former director of the BEZ and teacher at the 'Zaterdagbijbelschool', devotes a chapter to the 'reflection process and the maturation process'.[36] For Lukasse, the meditative aspect must incorporate an intentional and prayerful deepening of what is learned intellectually.[37] However, other manuals, handbooks, and pamphlets have been written for a lay-minister's context since the mid-1990s. I will give a brief glimpse of these in order to offer a sense of perspective on what is taught about the meditative aspect of the sermonic process.[38]

One such manual was written by Guido De Kegel, who has been, according to Marinello, a crucial shaper of the ECV (see also section 7.2.1). De Kegel is considered 'almost universally as the best Bible teacher in the ECV'.[39] From an anecdotal point of view, those outside the ECV seem to show the same level of appreciation based on the periodic invitations he receives to preach and teach at conferences and in churches outside his own denomination.[40] His *Het Geven van een*

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[35] Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord', p. 38.
[36] Ibid., pp. 38–40. De Zaterdagbijbelschool (literally: Saturday Bible School; also known as the 'gedecentraliseerde opleiding') was a six-year programme offered by the Bible Institute Belgium to train not exclusively but in particular lay-ministers.
[37] Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord', p. 39.
[38] See Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord'; Guido De Kegel, 'Het Geven van een Boodschap' (Eeklo: ECV, 1996, unpublished); Krol and Kunst; Wout Van Wijngaarden, 'Preken, de hoogste prioriteit', (Herentals: VEG, April 2005, unpublished). I reiterate here that the preachers I interviewed started their ministry within the context of the FEM between 1969 and 1995.
[39] Marinello, p. 97.
[40] Marinello, pp. 97–99.

Boodschap (lit. *Giving a Message*) was written in 1994 as the need for more skilled preachers began to surface. As Marinello describes, '[The Lord's Supper] was an open meeting during which any believer could […] read a passage from Scripture with or without commentary in line with the traditional Brethren customs for conduct during a Lord's Supper service.'[41] Such ecclesial practices typical of brethren churches fostered a kind of non-scholarly devotionalism[42], which presented a challenge for the Open Brethren in the early days of their church planting movement in Flanders: 'others noted that the teaching could be very shallow when the ECV workers were not present.'[43] This challenge inspired De Kegel to write a manual designed to counter this phenomenon.[44] The manual is competence-oriented, with a particular emphasis on performance, i.e. *how* to give a message, providing ample instruction on the use of language, posture, and the structure of the sermon. Because of this particular context, there was no acute need for De Kegel to include passages on exegetical skills or spiritual preparatory practices. However, in one passage, De Kegel does suggest being open during the giving of the message and 'promptings of the Spirit'.[45]

A second manual was written by Wout van Wijngaarden, a well-known preacher and gatekeeper in the FEM. In his non-scholarly manual *Preken, de Hoogste Prioriteit* (lit. *Preaching, the Highest Priority*), van Wijngaarden's main

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[41] Marinello, p. 170.

[42] This kind of *non-scholarly devotionalism* seems more akin to Brendan Pietsch's characterisation of 'the system of Brethren conversational Bible readings' than the kind of *non-scholarly devotionalism* explained by Sandra Schneiders; Schneiders alludes to a practice of reading, whereby the 'text is experienced in its immediacy and transparency'. The former is testimonial in nature, often prepared and used by lay church members, whereas the latter is a call for the meditative and prayerful reading of Scripture by experts, lest the teaching becomes sterile. See also B. M. Pietsch, *Dispensational Modernism* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 96. See also Sandra M. Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture*, 2nd edn (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 3338. For a more recent and similar conclusion on preaching in a dispensational context being 'generally poor', see John G. Stackhouse Jr., 'Generic Evangelicalism' in Bauder and others, Location 2244.

[43] Marinello, p. 171. The full-time ECV workers like De Kegel were the itinerant preachers who shaped the early movement that was later formalised into the denomination now known as the ECV.

[44] Guido De Kegel, personal communication, 19 July 2017.

[45] De Kegel, p. 18.

focus is on the nature and importance of the sermon in an Evangelical gathering. As the title suggests, the sermon takes the highest priority, although not in an exclusive sense of the word. Rather, the sermon is part of a larger gathering, but the preacher, his/her conduct, attitude, and other related elements all serve the higher cause of the sermon, given the importance of the proclamation of the Gospel. Van Wijngaarden's immediate motivation for writing this manual was his observation that the new generation saw other parts of the worship time as most important. Furthermore, van Wijngaarden wants to caution those preachers using the sermon as a vehicle for their frustration, as they display a lack of professionalism and qualification to preach.[46] Finally, the Evangelical movement is a lay movement, which for van Wijngaarden means that the majority of preachers or teachers are non-theologians in the academic sense of the word.[47] This observation implies, for van Wijngaarden, that one needs to emphasise the *calling* to preach as an important part of the mandate to preach with authority, lest anyone with debatable motives get involved in preaching (see also section 6.2.1.1).

Van Wijngaarden refers to Acts 15:7 for a definition of preaching. Based on this word by the apostle Peter, it is God that chooses the preacher. It is a cooperation between God and man to provide the words to be preached, to which listeners can react, and the non-believer can hear and understand the Gospel.[48] Van Wijngaarden's manual clearly offers a *message-oriented* approach in which the role of the preacher is not negligible, but is a delegated mandate. One chapter deals with three aspects needed for the preacher to be effective: study, prayer, and mood. The preacher needs to be a man or woman of prayer and, in order to understand, he/she needs to talk to

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[46] Wout van Wijngaarden, personal communication, 19 July 2017

[47] Although I have not explained in detail all of the characteristics of the Evangelical Movement, interpreting Evangelicalism requires one to appreciate this idea of *lay movement*. See also Howard, 'Evangelical Spirituality', Location 3007. According to Howard, the foundational doctrine of the Protestant Reformation, i.e. the priesthood of all believers, evolved into a lay movement as a 'reflection on the modern individualism in which evangelicalism emerged (and out of which postmodern, nonindividualistic evangelicalisms are developing)'.

[48] van Wijngaarden, pp. 24–25.

God frequently. Van Wijngaarden asserts that 'the most powerful sermon is the one in which God preaches to the preacher'.[49] Quietness and solitude are therefore important practices in the life of the preacher.

A fourth and final example of a homiletical handbook or manual is (*S*)*Preken, hoe doe je dat?* by Bram Krol and Theo Kunst.[50] Unlike Lukasse's, De Kegel's, or van Wijngaarden's manuals, this handbook includes references to external sources. However, the book is similar in nature to the aforementioned manuals by De Kegel and van Wijngaarden, in that, it is primarily focused on the preparation of the sermon in terms of understanding the text (exegetical) and the presentation of the sermon. There is no chapter on the meditative or spiritual preparation of the preacher.

These are some of the few manuals written for or by preachers active in the FEM. However, it is hard, even impossible, to measure the impact of these sources: How many copies were sold or distributed? How many were used as such? Did they leave an imprint on the minds and practices of the respondents? In terms of this research, I would argue that these sources lack a real discussion of more pietistic, experiential, spiritual, or homiletical practices, with the notable exception of Lukasse's emphasis on the need for a 'meditative review' and the 'ripening process'.[51] Furthermore, the concepts of self-understanding, self-disclosure, and/or self-reflexiveness seem largely absent from the homiletical literature available.

9.4   Calling as a Source of Authority

If the notion of *calling* can be considered an added source of authority that operationalises homiletical spirituality, how can we recognise it as such? The previous sections on practices, and literature, especially within the FEM, help us to appreciate the contours of an Evangelical and homiletical spirituality. I suggest,

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[49] van Wijngaarden, p. 28.
[50] Krol and Kunst, *(S)Preken, Hoe Doe Je Dat?*
[51] Lukasse, 'Predik het Woord', p. 39.

however, that the phrase 'convertive piety', a characteristic associated with

Evangelicalism, can help to elucidate the notion of *calling* within this wider

discussion of homiletical spirituality.

Evangelical theologian Stanley Grenz famously introduced the phrase

'convertive piety', coined by Donald Dayton, to a wider audience.[52] For Dayton, it

was an umbrella term used to characterise the Anglo-Saxon 'Evangelical', rooted in

pietism and Puritanism with its 'soteriological reductionism' focused on evangelism,

conversion, and mission.[53] Previous chapters have highlighted a similar reductionism

within the FEM.

Grenz embraced the term as pointing to a 'conscious experience of the grace of

God'.[54] Grenz spends more time on this 'central hallmark of evangelicalism' in his

Renewing the Center. It is a piety that precedes the theology of the Evangelical; it is

'the vision of the faith that proclaims that "true Christian piety" — devotion,

discipleship, sanctification — begins with a distinct conversion experience'.[55]

Although Grenz's characterisation is in essence a theologically informed one, in later

publications, he refines it further by appropriating the phrase 'trinitarian

participation' to establish a theological understanding of 'experience'.[56] Roger Olson

is one theologian who critically engages Grenz's take on 'convertive piety' by

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[52] Jay Smith rightly draws our attention to this key motif and critical element in Grenz's theological project. See also Jay T. Smith, 'A Trinitarian Epistemology: Stanley J. Grenz and the Trajectory of Convertive Piety', *The Pacific Journal of Baptist Research*, 6 (April 2010), 44–64 (pp. 52–57).

[53] Donald Dayton, 'The Limits of Evangelicalism: The Pentecostal Tradition,' in Dayton and Johnston, p. 48.

[54] Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), p. 23.

[55] Stanley J. Grenz, *Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), p. 47.

[56] I say 'theologically informed' in contrast with the more sociological interpretation of *conversionism* as we find in David Bebbington's work. See also Bebbington, p. 2: 'There are the four qualities that have been the special marks of Evangelical religion: *conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed […]' [italics added]. See also Smith, 'A Trinitarian Epistemology', pp. 63, 64.

broadening its scope and renaming it 'conversional piety'.[57] Evangelicalism's 'orthodoxy on fire' was in this way a movement that adhered to doctrinal correctness not just for the sake of it, but for the sake of transformation.

One final exploratory note is needed on the concept of Grenz's *convertive piety*. David Clark rightly directs our attention to the criticism or lukewarm reaction of other Evangelical scholars to Grenz's proposals.[58] The gist of this critique hints at a too Schleiermacherian approach in which experience is seen as the source of theology. Grenz anticipates this critique by acknowledging that it is not easy for Evangelicals to 'retain allegiance to both heartfelt piety and orthodox doctrine'. But, Grenz continues, it is important to remember that '[r]ather than the quest for right doctrine, the commitment to convertive piety must remain the integrative principle of the evangelical ethos'.[59] This has, however, not silenced those who argue that, in order to speak of a convertive piety, there has to first be orthodox doctrine.[60]

Two remarks should be made here. First, we come full circle with Treier and Vanhoozer's view of Evangelical piety that can be a uniter and a divider. No Evangelical would argue that Scripture is not the primary source of authority. However, when it comes to integrating experience as another source of authority into the respondents' spiritual practices and lived experiences, tensions with orthodox doctrine obscure the search for integrative principles that do justice to the *experiential* and the *biblicist* approach. Respondents were 'united' in their orthodox

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[57] Roger E. Olson, *How to Be Evangelical without Being Conservative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), p. 26. See also Roger E. Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition & Reform* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), pp. 486–88, 516–17.

[58] David K. Clark and John S. Feinberg, *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 463. See also Jason S. Sexton, *The Trinitarian Theology of Stanley J. Grenz*, 2015, p. 33fn86.

[59] Stanley Grenz, 'Concerns of a Pietist with a Ph.D.: an Address Presented at an Additional Session of the American Academy of Religion Toronto', 23 November 2002 <http://www.stanleyjgrenz.com/articles/pietist.html> [accessed 17 July 2017]
'Drie Korte Historische Terugblikken', Lezing EAV-Symposiumdag, 1 June 2013 <http://www.evadoc.be/images/downloads/drie_korte_terugblikken.pdf> [accessed 28 February 2017].

[60] See e.g. John S. Hammett, 'Review of Renewing the Center: Evangelical Theology in a Post-Theological Era, by Stanley Grenz', *Faith and Mission*, 19 (2001), 112–14.

or confessional approach to the Bible, whether this was expressed explicitly or assumed implicitly as they reflected on their practices. They were, however, 'divided' in the sense that there was no operational model to guarantee reflection on the experiential.

If the theological notion of *calling* could be considered an added source of authority that operationalises homiletical spirituality, how would they be able to recognise it as such? Grenz's theological project can critically engage the notion of *calling* as a source of authority. It is worth reflecting on *convertive piety* as a theological concept so closely associated with Evangelicalism in Flanders, since evangelism, conversion, and mission have been at the forefront of Evangelical ministries from the beginning of the Belgian Evangelical Mission in 1919.

Second, I observe that the preacher in the FEM has predominantly been exposed to a homiletical culture in which manuals on preaching have been mostly 'how-to' manuals rather than tools with which to prepare spiritually, or with which to foster habits of self-understanding, self-disclosure, and self-reflexiveness to inform the preacher's self-image and use of the 'I'. However, Victor offered a hopeful hint at how *calling* operates: 'The most powerful sermon is the one in which God preaches to the preacher.' This statement is loaded with meaning. It is an experiential evaluation, making use of strong and affective language (*most powerful*); it arguably locates the source of authority with God who preaches, but also at the same time with the preacher who is called to be a preacher. We come full circle here with Craddock's reflection on Isaiah 50:4, 5, stressing the need for the preacher to be a listener.[61] The text emphasises a continuity: 'Morning by morning' (New Revised Standard). Once *called* as a preacher, convertive piety has to be part of the continuous *listening*, lest the espoused or normative source of Scripture become a

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[61] See also section 4.2.3.1.

misguided safety net.

9.5 Conclusion

We have come to the end of sketching the contours of the FEM in which the preacher lives and ministers — a context shaped by particular theological, historical, homiletical, and religious realities. Chapters 7–9 have helped to highlight the complexities of the particular context in which my research explores the spirituality at play within the homiletical practices of the FEM.

The accumulated result of triangulating these descriptions, data, and conceptual categories, in particular the notion of *calling*, has helped me to establish a more focused intervention in favour of a more reflective form of homiletical endeavour. I argue that a similar kind of research is needed, as I note a recurring tension between two broader strands within Evangelicalism, a tension that has been qualified by historian Richard F. Lovelace:

> Neo-evangelicals have developed a better theology of culture, but they generally reflect a rationalistic de-emphasis on spirituality, or even in some cases an active distrust of Christian experience as a source of liberalism. In evangelical parachurch groups and congregations, however, a simplified lay spirituality involving Scripture study and prayer is vigorously promoted.[62]

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[62] Richard F. Lovelace, 'Evangelical Spirituality: A Church Historian's Perspective', *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 31 (1988), 25–35 (p. 33).

Part 4: Outcome

10 Chapter 10: Nature of Calling

10.1 Concise Summary

Let me begin the following summary and conclusion with respondent Victor's aforementioned phrase: 'The most powerful sermon is the one in which God preaches to the preacher.' This statement might serve as a worthy closure to this research, giving credit to Victor's source of authority, which is God Himself. At the same time, it allows for the experiential by which the preacher is to be spoken to, while indicating a kind of *listening* and *knowing* that is hard to measure (qualified as 'most powerful' by Victor). I highlight an authentic 'I' in which the teacher's ears are opened before the teacher teaches. Victor holds Scripture in high esteem, reads it continuously, and would in no way negate that reality in favour of his *listening* that is so closely linked to his being *called* to be a preacher.

I have tried to offer a nuanced account of an element of the homiletical endeavour: the *listening* of the preacher. The questions I continued to ask myself during this process were: Is this the best account of the reality I am investigating? Is this the best way to assess if there is really a shortage of Evangelical models of homiletical spiritualities? My intention was to identify the performative homiletical realities, but also to detect so-called blueprint theologies that trump the operant theologies of our churches and congregations — to detect something that theologians would miss.

Part 1 introduced the methodological prolegomena, initiated with my own story as an exercise in 'controlled introspection'. This served as an illustration of Sandra Schneiders's methodology in which the lived experience of the preacher cannot be underestimated. My story contextualised espoused or folksy interpretations of Evangelicalism in general, more specifically in the FEM. My story then extended into a more theoretically oriented explanation for the rationale behind this research,

arguing that this research is valid in confronting the realities of an important field within the Evangelical liturgical context: homiletics. As a practical-theological research project, my goal was to develop a more complex and nuanced account of the phenomena. The sheer number of sermons delivered in the FEM and the hours spent preparing them each year certainly justifies a research project that can help shed light on what is happening during that preparation.

Homiletical research, including an empirical approach, is not new or unusual. However, I argue that homiletical endeavours have usually originated from top-down homiletical agendas that institute normative theology, invest in formational practices, and, at best, meet the needs of espoused or existing homiletical practices. I argue, however, that it is important to be conscious of a methodology that honours the lived practice in ways that help us to listen carefully to the preacher's practices of listening. At the very least, this kind of study could reveal the functional homiletical theology that prevails over the possible official theologies that are more common in churches of the FEM.

This research assumes that preparing the sermon spiritually is a complex and certainly not an exact science that can be exclusively prescribed by a normative voice. However, that does not mean that we should leave the quality of the public preaching ministry to chance. In order to avoid irresponsible sermonic practices, the quality of the input in the interior life of the preacher remains an important goal of this research. In order to achieve that quality, it is important to listen to the self-understanding of the preacher.

Methodologically, Sandra Schneiders's hermeneutical approach has helped us to be attentive to the interpretative horizons at play. Schneiders's three methodological movements (description, analysis, and interpretation) leave room for a robust attending to homiletical spirituality and its practices in an inductive way.

Schneiders's approach served to hone in on the question: *How* do we approach these preachers? Despite the espoused homiletical theology assumed by the preachers or by the broader homiletical field, the reality of to 'whom' or 'what' the preacher listens first is a complex story. At the very least, this realisation argues for future research that takes this complex reality into account.

I have argued that the concepts of authority and/or discernment are essential to Evangelicalism. As traditional and new sources of authority in the Evangelical movement are extremely important, I needed to have a clear understanding of whom the preacher listens to as he prepares. What is the role of these sources within the overall homiletical process? Csikszentmihalyi's notion of the systems model of creativity, with its corresponding elements of person, field, and domain, offered an interdisciplinary component to explain the need for a critical dialogue with the data at hand.

Data from interviews with eight preachers within the FEM have helped me to understand the ways in which preachers approach their spiritual practices. Using methodological procedures from the social sciences (coding), I arrived at one particular category (*listening incidents*) that helped me in an exploratory way to add *provisional* and *evaluation coding*. This strategy resulted in the formulation of categories: conceptual candidates for sources of authority that were part of the preacher's self-understanding as a *listening* preacher: calling, crisis, church, and consultation.

What is important to stress is that the so-called 'Aha!' moment, as a moment of creative insight, is not exclusively correlated with one particular phase of the sermonic process. Sources of authority are part of a complex web of meditational elements that can be located at the level of the preacher's *lifestyle, even life choices based on a calling*, sermonic *procedures*, and/or spiritual *practices*.

Csikszentmihalyi's research also helps us to understand that the 'Aha!' moment, albeit happening to the solitary preacher, does have a social context in which these moments of insight happen. It follows from these interdisciplinary insights that preachers do listen, but that this listening is positioned within a broader frame in which sources of authority, or gatekeepers as we have called them, provide or block attentiveness or creativity.

I have argued that, for the preacher to discern, a nuanced view of sources of authority is important. It is a claim that justifies a more critical analysis of what happens during the preparation. That analysis was done in Part 3. The themes discussed in these chapters provided the much-needed background against which to understand the data and concepts. I argued that, in order to understand how these candidates for sources of authority play out, we do well to offer a thick description of the necessary context in which the preachers minister. Here again, Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity could add meaning to the preacher's self-understanding. The Evangelical (domain) preachers (person) in Flanders and their homiletical spiritualities (field) comprised the specific background against which we could hold the data provided by the respondents up to the light.

Is preaching within the FEM still understood first and foremost as a way of edifying the congregants who are deprived of the Gospel in a post-Christendom country? The interviews highlighted notions of *calling*, *crisis*, *church*, and *consultation* as possible sources of authority within the FEM that are more in tune with the *pietistic* and the *personal* of Evangelicalism. The notion of *calling* as a religious experience that happened in the past had an implicit yet regulatory impact on the way the preachers understood themselves and how they entered into the sermonic process. *Crises* in the preachers' lives changed the way they saw their own ministry — in effect, being an authentic preacher became more important than being

a popular or interesting preacher. Doing ministry in a particular *church* entails that a

preacher be attuned to the needs of that church. As a potential source of authority,

the particular church can regulate the ways in which attentiveness or creativity

influences the preacher's preparation. Finally, *consultation* is shorthand for the host

of sources preachers draw from to help them during the preparation of the sermon:

peers, books, conferences, mentors, and so on.

The data confirm that, although there is arguably a lack of

theoretical/theological and homiletical developments on preaching in the FEM, the

assumption that there is no theology operant in praxis or that the praxis of listening is

theologically insignificant holds no truth. These alternative sources of authority show

at the very least that there are theologically significant issues at play. I have focused

on one particular candidate, namely the notion of *calling*.

10.2 Calling and the Evangelical Context

The Flemish Evangelical context in which the respondents have been active for over

twenty years is a context in which the Evangelical church, with its evangelistic

activities, was considered to be the instrument through which God's plan for

salvation would become known again (see Lukasse). The make-up of the pool of

respondents mirrors this reality, as they all experienced a strong call, not to

exclusively pastor a church but to be active in a country that was in need of the

gospel.

If one considers that these preachers started their ministry within the context of

the FEM between 1969 and 1995 — a formational period in which the FEM was still

a movement striving for biblical orthodoxy, weary of ecumenism, and apologetic in

nature — it begs the question for self-understanding as a missionary and/or preacher.

Since none of these preachers had ever had the opportunity to reflect deeper on their

ministry, their calling, or their sermonic processes in this way, the research gave them the opportunity to engage with these topics. Did they still feel at 'home', i.e. *called*, as they stood behind the pulpit speaking out as a source of authority to the post-secular listener? Did the unchecked calling of the preacher hinder him in a post-secular context?

At the time of writing this concluding part, it is worth mentioning that the BEZ has gone through a year of revising its mission and vision, a revision process in which I had the privilege of taking part.[1] At the time of interviewing the respondents from the BEZ, this revision process had not yet started. Now, as the BEZ is getting ready to celebrate its centenary, the ministerial reality of most of these preachers is about to change. They will need to recalibrate their calling, adjust to the new context, and foster a deeper self-understanding of their self-image. Rethinking the notion of *calling* as a potential source of authority (a gatekeeper) through which they filter, block, or allow attentiveness or creativity will need to be part of a self-reflective mode.

I do not foresee this to be a problem since, although the FEM as a whole developed within a particular and shared context, and with shared investment in the confessional orthodoxy, preachers have since developed a kaleidoscope of spiritual practices that are as diverse as the preachers interviewed. What binds them together are the *pietistic* and *personal* lenses through which they minister to the church. They never lose sight of orthodox confessions or doctrines, but as Stanley Grenz asserts, 'Evangelicalism is best understood in terms of spirituality and only secondarily as a set of doctrinal distinctives.'[2]

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[1] See also <https://www.b-e-m.org/a-new-vision-for-the-bem/> [accessed 24 July 2018].
[2] Gregory S. Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart Is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 2278–80.

10.3 Calling and the Homiletical Context

I argue, then, that empirical research such as this can help to illuminate that part of the homiletical triangle that is the preacher, i.e. the *personal*. From this perspective, the preacher and his use of the 'I' come to the fore. This research did not focus on the 'I' via the spoken or written sermon, but based on the preacher's self-image and the intentions with which he/she prepares; it highlighted the need to investigate how the preacher sees himself/herself as a source of authority interacting in relation to the field and the domain. Who is the 'I' that prepares? To what does this 'I' allow himself/herself to be attuned, creative, or attentive?

In addition to Josuttis's six uses of the 'I' and Verweij's ministerial 'I', I would argue for an eighth use of the 'I': the *authentic* 'I'. With this I mean that the preachers I interviewed were very aware that what they preached should also apply to them. They revealed a devout and pious 'I' that fit within the pietistic tradition of Evangelicalism. At the risk of stating the obvious, I suspect that no preacher would wish it differently. However, realising that the preachers themselves had experienced a conversion and had a high view of Scripture, it remains important to stress that the edifying of the congregation should first of all be evidenced in the preacher's own life. The preacher is called to be who he/she is, not who he/she is not. In other words, the preacher's life needs to correlate with the message that he/she brings.

This line of thinking warns us against inauthentic preaching in which it is not the original calling being tested by the Word of God, but in which, for example, plagiarism becomes an unauthorised form of self-disclosure.[3] One warning is, however, necessary. Homiletician Ronald Allen refers to a kind of cannibalism, according to which we violate the integrity of a life moment by cataloguing it as a sermon moment. In effect, when a preacher uses his/her life events as merely a

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[3] For more on inauthenticity and the preacher as a pretender, see Reid and Hogan, Kindle Electronic Edition: Locations 445–642.

resource for his sermon, he/she becomes a 'cannibal'.[4] In such circumstances, one could question whether the preacher's own life should be considered a source of authority. I flag this consideration as a warning against making disclosures about one's life simply in order to produce a desired effect on the listener.

10.4 Calling and the Spiritual Context

Finally, one more assessment had to be made dealing with the nature of this research topic: Evangelical spirituality (or *spiritualities*) and, more specifically, homiletical spirituality. I argued that there is a need for a homiletical spirituality. Is this due to a too rationalistic de-emphasis on spirituality, or even in some cases because of an active distrust of Christian experience? Did this result in a simplified lay spirituality involving Scripture study and prayer? In other words, could just anyone preach in the FEM, and if so, what sources of authority would come to the fore in such a lay context?

A homiletical spirituality seeks actively for ways to operationalise traditional and new sources of authority; define explicit and implicit sources of authority; and recognise sources of authority that authorise the preacher's words or sources that remain under the surface. Along with Schneiders, the preacher is reminded that we seek a spirituality that the biblical text produces in the preacher by their interaction with it.

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[4] Ronald Allen, *Interpreting the Gospel: An Introduction to Preaching* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1998), p. 58. See also Jane Ranney Rzepka and Kenneth W. Sawyer, *Thematic Preaching: An Introduction* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), p. 207.

11 Chapter 11: Contributions to the FEM

11.1 Introduction

Although the following contributions span a broad spectrum, the focal point is homiletical spirituality. This spectrum offers contributions or suggestions for further research in practical theology, the (Flemish) Evangelical movement, and homiletical spirituality.

As mentioned, homiletical schools seem to have set the agenda for the preacher. The nature of this research, however, is not anti-prescriptive, and it would not be wise to suggest that the interior life of the preacher should lack in certain qualities. While this research was intentionally descriptive in nature, I do suggest contributions that imply almost an evaluative approach. This is not something I shy away from. Nevertheless, if this research is to result in a new agenda, at the very least, this agenda should be generated on the basis of a critical analysis of the lived experience of the preacher.

11.2 Practical Theology

This research offers a fruitful contribution to practical theology insofar as it uncovered such a thing as a 'blueprint spirituality' within the FEM, its tradition, theology, and/or especially homiletical spirituality. Empirical engagements in homiletics are not new or original. However, Sandra Schneiders's hermeneutical approach requires a renewed appreciation for qualitative research into the homiletical field that is not driven solely by theological (and homiletical) schools, but by the attention to the lived reality of the preacher.

Further explorations are needed, however, as this is but one particular approach in one particular context. We have arguably been confronted by the fact that the preacher appeals to sources of authority that do not necessarily authorise his or her

words. Likewise, I have shown opportunities to validate the sources of authority that remain under the surface. Practical theology can help, in this sense, to offer a view of reality that appreciates the complexities of similar questions or avenues of research.

11.3 The Flemish Evangelical Movement

Although Evangelicalism, including its theological prolegomena, has been studied extensively, the particular study of the FEM has only burgeoned in the last decade. This contribution is intended to be a practical theological contribution to the growing body of research on the FEM, its history, and its practices.

Furthermore, this research has shown that there is an arguable lack of contemporary homiletical reflection in the FEM. At the very least, one can observe that the manuals on how to preach date back to times when the FEM was still a strong apologetic and evangelising movement. In that context, the need for biblical preaching provided the necessary motivation to develop those manuals. Although these manuals established robust guides on how to prepare a sermon, the spiritual component remained underdeveloped. Although there is a stark contrast with the greater awareness and integration of different homiletical paradigms in the context of the Netherlands, the search for qualifying and fostering a spiritual component could benefit from a methodology similar to the one proposed in this research.

Third, the FEM is changing, or rather should be changing, since the environment in which it operates is changing. The BEZ and the VEG, although similar in many ways, are distinct in their missions. The BEZ remains a missionary organisation that is in the process of implementing a renewed vision for the future. New key concepts will become part of its ongoing story: integration, journeying, participation, and community.[1] These values reflect a renewed understanding of the

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[1] See <https://www.b-e-m.org/a-new-vision-for-the-bem/> [accessed 25 July 2018].

Evanglical church's mission in the Flemish context. This research could guide long-serving ministers to understand their previous calling in light of these changes, lest they keep preparing sermons for a context that no longer exists.

11.4 Homiletical Spirituality

One contribution highlights the importance of reflectivity on the part of the preacher. What I found extraordinary was the realisation that none of the respondents had ever been questioned about their preparation practices; for that matter, *I* had never been questioned. Within the Protestant tradition, it is more customary to have sermon evaluations. Two forms of evaluation are in vogue: by the hearer (audience-centred) and by the peers of the church council (preacher-centred). Although this represents a good evaluative tradition, this research argues for at the least a third evaluative approach, one that deepens the understanding of the way a preacher is *listening* during the sermonic processes. Issues that have been discussed here could be operationalised through a diverse evaluative approach incorporating forms, journaling, interviews, and so on. Items on the list to be reviewed would be based on the notions of self-awareness, self-disclosure, self-image, self-understanding, attentiveness, creativity, and the sources of authority that filter, block, or allow the preacher's interaction with the aforementioned concepts. The help of other preachers in the form of mentoring or intercollegial intervision among peers could help to foster the kind of self-understanding needed to recognise the sources of authority at work.

Second, apart from a lack of reflective feedback systems, none of the respondents had ever used journals of any kind, be they learning journals, creative journals, or spiritual journals. If the pietistic or the personal lenses that are so typical of the FEM dominate the preparations, how might the preacher benefit from

reflective tools that question his or her sources of authority? For example, de Leede and Stark's *Ontvouwen* offers proposals for good homiletical practices to foster the appropriate spirituality. I list only those that have bearing on the main question of this research: Orientation Phase: The need for an (auto)biographical reflection, e.g. What preachers exemplify your style? This type of questioning could assess the 'gatekeepers' that influence the preachers' spiritual toolbox; Translation Phase: How to reflect on the uses of the 'I' before the sermon. For this exercise, de Leede and Stark refer also to Josuttis's work (see section 8.6).

Third, in homiletical theory, homiletical spirituality has often been reduced to the study and/or promotion of homiletical practices, e.g. *lectio divina*. Even some Evangelical literature on spirituality or homiletics has promoted the atypical, i.e. for the Evangelical, use of *lectio*. One particular question I asked at the outset of this research was based on this observation: Why is there this Evangelical distrust of *lectio divina*? Why did the promotion of this particular spiritual reading practice not foster a broader appreciation? I argue that changes are not adopted unless they are sanctioned by some group entitled to make decisions as to what should or should not be included in the domain. Csikszentmihalyi's systems model of creativity explained how the creativity or attentiveness of the individual is being moderated by gatekeepers (the field). If the homiletical field, embodied by (Flemish) Evangelical preachers, authors, mentors, and the like, does not sanction this practice, then the distrust is easily understood. This research's contribution highlights the reality of these dynamics that writers of homiletical literature, in particular Evangelical writers, should take into account. It is not enough to explain the need to adopt a particular homiletical practice; one should think about how new practices are introduced, promoted, regulated, and operationalised on the level of the lived experience of the preacher.

11.5 Conclusion

'How long does it take to prepare a sermon?' As I reflect, again, on this question, I am not sure if it is the right question to ask. '*Who* does it take to prepare a sermon?' might be a more suitable conclusion. Certainly, it is the preacher, but not only the preacher, just as the solitary process of writing a sermon is not so solitary. Many voices compete for regulating and operationalising attentiveness. God's voice, we hope and believe, is the ultimate Voice to understand. My hope is that these insights might help to foster healthy and well-understood processes of *listening* in order for God's voice to be heard and understood.

Appendice

First and Second Wave Designs

The first wave was in the form of an open structured interview; with the second wave, semi-structured questions were added (cf. the italic text in the design below).

Introduction and acquiering consent for recording the interview
- Background questions
  - How did you become a minister?
  - Consider the following topics:
    - How would you describe or outline your preaching history?
    - Are there any theories of preaching or rolemodels of preachers you have been influenced by during your life time of preaching?
    - *Which books/authors/theologians have strongly influenced your thinking about a sermon?*
    - Could you describe a typical preparation session leading up to a Sunday preaching?
    - What have been your motives for preaching?
    - Have the themes of 'listening', 'quietness', 'discernement' been part of your preaching biography?
    - *From whom or how did you learn to 'listen', 'to distinguish' what God wants?*
    - *Which theological frameworks play an important role for you in dealing with listening to God?*
    - In what way was your everyday life (family, hobby's,…) integrated in your church life, especially in the ongoing reality of sermon preparation?

Questions related to the preperation of the sermon
- How would you describe your process of preparing a sermon? What is the setting of preparation? When and how does this take place?
- What specific acts comprise this activity?
  - What do you pay attention to when preparing a sermon?
- During your preparation of a sermon, do you experience a sense of awareness that God is talking to you?
  - *What does 'being receptive' mean to you?*
  - Potential Subquestions:
    - If so, could you describe something about those experiences as they relate to time/location/personal situatedness (when/where/how)?
    - Could you further describe that experience i.e. is this a recurring experience (week after week or less frequent)? Are these experiences similar in nature?

- What conditions are/were important under which these experiences emerged. What conditions could mute these experiences?
- *What obstacles do you think prevent you from understanding God's voice in preparing the preaching?*
- Sometimes a preacher could feel that God is speaking, or being aware of the Holy Spirit, or the presence of Christ. In what language would you describe this?

- Were there any negative or positive experiences or changes in your life that made you change your thoughts and/or feelings about the way you prepare sermons?
  - *What positive or negative experiences have been in your life? Or what greater changes have caused your thinking to change about the way you prepare your sermon?*
- Have you encountered times when you could not hear God through your preparation of the sermon? How did this affect your preparation? How did you respond? What might be the cause of that experience?

Questions related to the reflection of the sermon during it was given
- Are there examples of direct feedback you receive during the course of the sermon?
  - Potential Subquestions:
    - In what shape or form does this happen?
    - Are there types of feedback you implicitly or explicitly request for (e.g. 'talk-back', note-taking, …) that influence the way you listen and discern during the course of the sermon?
    - During the sermon, do you experience a sense of awareness that God is talking through/to you?
    - If so, could you describe something about those experiences as they are examples of listening and discerning.
      - Do you act on those experiences?

Questions related to the reflection of the sermon that was given
- How would you describe the post-sermon time, i.e. the time after the sermon?
  - Potential Subquestions:
    - Describe your practices after the sermon.
    - Describe something about the experiences that accompany these practices.
    - What conditions are important under which these experiences emerged. What conditions could mute these experiences? E.g. does it make a difference if you reflect on the given sermon in solitude, driving/walking home or if you reflect on the sermon via an intervisionary moment with someone else (partner, child,…)?

- How does feedback from listeners integrate with your own understanding of how God spoke to you?
  - After the sermon, are there particular questions you ask the listener?
    - E.g. "Whas this meant for you?" "What did it mean to you?"
      - Other questions?
    - Is it important for you if the listener hears the same (or different) message than the one you had in mind?
      - Is this question is not relevant for you, why not?
- Sometimes the listener is addressed by God in your sermon, or is aware of the Holy Spirit, or the presence of Christ. Is this feedback important for you in relation to the way you were aware of God's presence in your preparation?
- In what way does reflection on your sermon, be it via own reflection or through feedback from others, have an influence on your subsequent preparations of sermons?

Other questions

- What do you think are the most important ways to listen to God and discern His message for the congregation?
  - Potential Subquestions:
    - What does it mean for you to meditate on Scripture? How does 'listening' to God for you occur?
    - In what shape or form does 'listening' happen?
- Is there anything about the way you prepare your sermons or reflect on your sermonic process (before/during/after) that is important for me to know but wasn't covered in this interview?
- Is there anything else you think I should know to understand the way you listen better?

Third Wave Interview

The third wave interview was in the form of a more heavy-structured interview where questions were based on the received data of the respective respondents. The focus of the questions was on the sermon preached before the second interview took place. It included also the written preparations, the audio of the sermon (later transcribed), the PowerPoint presentation they used, notes they took during the worship time leading up to the sermon, and finally the journal entries they made as they prepared their sermon.

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