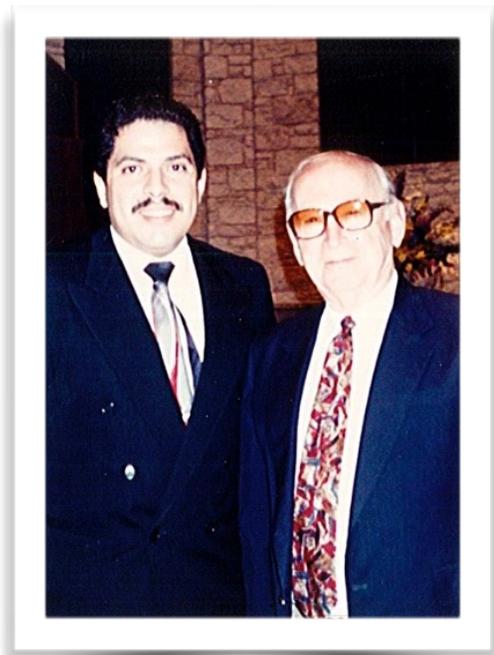


The Father of Contemporary Homiletics

Remembering Fred B. Craddock

by Pablo A. Jiménez

"What are you doing this Summer?", asked the Rev. David A. Vargas. "Watching the grass grow," was my answer, because my dwindling financial resources forced me to stay home. In response, Vargas invited me to serve as a translator at the General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the United States and Canada of 1985, which was held in Des Moines, Iowa.



Since I was majoring in the field of Homiletics, the discipline that studies the Christian art of preaching, I volunteered to translate all the Assembly sermons. The translation booth was on a mezzanine from which I could see the stage perfectly. I had the privilege of translating sermons of two of my favorite authors: Walter Brueggemann and Fred B. Craddock.

Eventually, Brueggemann was my dissertation advisor at Columbia Theological Seminary, but that's another story. However, it was Craddock—with whom I never took a formal course—who had the greatest impact on my career.

I had discovered Craddock's writings earlier that year, when I started my Master of Sacred Theology at Christian Theological Seminary (CTS) in Indianapolis, IN. Ronald J. Allen, my teacher and mentor, assigned me a number of readings in the field of Homiletics. However, he stressed the importance of Craddock's *As One Without Authority* (originally published in 1969), affirming that it marked the beginning of the "New School" of American Homiletics.

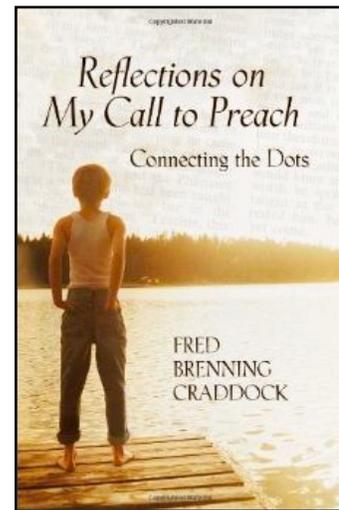
Soon I read not only that book but all I could find penned by Craddock. However, reading was only half of the equation. It was amazing to see Craddock in person, mesmerizing thousands of people with his soft voice and his Southern drawl polished by years of higher education.

Shortly before I could finish that Masters degree, I met Craddock when he gave a series of lectures on preaching at CTS. Nonetheless, when I tried to enter the Doctoral program at Emory University, Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia—where Craddock taught—my request was denied. At that time the idea of a Puerto Rican-minister whose first language was Spanish studying Homiletics in English at graduate level seemed ludicrous.

Still, I continued my career as a professor of Homiletics, teaching the inductive preaching style advocated by Craddock both in the United States and in Latin America and the Caribbean. I also incorporated his technique into my own personal style, to the point that today the vast majority of my sermons are inductive, which means that the sermon, rather than departing from a theological proposition, begins exploring everyday life. This sermon invites the audience to participate in the search for truth, maintaining a conversational tone. It uses dialogue, storytelling and surprise endings to assert the sermon's main idea, which is usually introduced toward the end of the exposition.

Later, I took another Homiletics workshop with Craddock at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago (LSTC) and kept translating several of his sermons in various assemblies of the CCDC, where for decades he was the main preacher. However, in 1999 I had the opportunity to participate in a panel with Craddock at a workshop held in San Marcos, TX. Craddock, who did not remember me, was pleased with my participation and agreed to take the photo accompanying this writing.

When Craddock retired from Emory, he founded a church in the mountains of Georgia, called Cherry Log Christian Church. Paradoxically, it was at that time that I established a stronger relationship with him. In my role as Senior Editor of Chalice Press, I asked him to write a book called "Your Call as a Preacher" which was supposed to provide some basic notions about preaching to lay people interested in the discipline. Craddock signed the contract, but a few months later called me to say that he wanted to change the title of the manuscript. The publisher accepted the change, publishing a beautiful childhood memory of this famous preacher titled to :*"Reflections on my Call as a Preacher"* (Chalice Press, 2009). Editing this book was sweet.



A few years later I edited another of his books, entitled "Craddock on the Craft of Preaching" (Chalice Press, 2011). Although I knew that the old preacher's health was deteriorating, it was sad to figure out from the introduction of the manuscript that Craddock had decided to publish the lectures which, until then, had been reserved for his workshops. The inference was clear: this would be the last original book by Fred Brenning Craddock.

I receive the news of Craddock's death with immense sadness. The world loses a great man; the Church, a great minister; and contemporary American Homiletics, its father. May God grant that, over the years, Fred B. Craddock's legacy continues to have a positive impact on every person interested in Christian art of preaching.

