



# Homiletics and The First Great Awakening

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## Abstract

**Objective:** I aimed to understand how the homiletical plots used by the clergy impacted the outcomes of the First Great Awakening.

**Methods:** To achieve my understanding, I looked at their sermons and academic writings through the lens of C.F.W. Walther's theses and Gerhard Aho's sermon format.

**Results:** They stuck to an expository sermon format however according to O.C. Edwards Jr. Johnathan Edwards strictly followed Perkins sermon form while Whitefield followed an Evangelical adaptation of the neoclassical style.



## Definitions

**The First Great Awakening:** A religious revival from 1730-1740.

**Homiletics:** The study of sermon form, the structure, and the rhetoric used.

**Kerygma:** The proclamation of the Gospel.

**Law:** In its proper sense, it refers to God's word of command.

**Gospel:** In its proper sense, it refers to the doctrine that humanity has been saved from sin and death by the work of Christ alone and that this benefit is given solely by his grace, apart from human works.

**Perkins Sermon Form:** A way of referencing topics by connecting them to verses that relate to said topic.

**Evangelical:** "Someone who focuses on the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News"(Veith, 2010).

**Expository Sermon:** The expansion of the idea in a scriptural passage.

**Neo-Expository Sermon:** Elaboration of a scriptural passage by going verse by verse.

**Lectio Continua:** A sermon series going through an entire book of the bible.

## Context

The average weekly churchgoer in New England listened to something like seven thousand sermons in a lifetime totaling about fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening (Edwards Jr, 2004). The church was also the only event that regularly brought the whole community together providing the most effective mode of communication.

## Results

According to a poem by Phyllis McGinley, Johnathan Edwards's preaching of the law caused fear and agitation amongst those who heard it. He was focused on forcing an awakening through means of the law causing mental torment in his congregation; as they found themselves in an unredeemable state of sin. Which Edwards would only release them of after he had deemed them to have awakened. This method caused his congregation and others to repent and turn to God, which led to an increase in self-study of the scriptures further leading to more divisions in the Christian faith with the foundation of the Baptist and Methodist churches.

Although George Whitefield would also invoke the wrath of God to induce an awakening, he would also apply the Gospel as it was his custom to move back and forth between the Law and the Gospel. However, controversially he would argue people into conversion which according to Hughes Old, "seemed to have been most effective in awakening the church from a period of dry formalism, sexual immorality, and deep-reaching heresy"(Old, 2004). What made Whitefield effective and popular was his oratory skill which would cause some people to say he was the best orator the English language had ever seen. This helped him to spread awakening ideals across the colonies and Europe.

## Objectives

- To determine how the homiletical plot used in the First Great Awakening contributed to its impacts.

## Limitations

- We are limited in the number of sermons that were preserved and the context for the sermon is lost for most.

## Conclusions

- The ideals pushed through the use of Law and the Gospel led to increased study of the scripture and greater division through the formation of the Baptist and Methodist churches.

## Implications

This is significant because the impact of sermon style on an audience can influence the decisions they make and affect their emotional state.