These vivid metaphors may not, however, indicate in it, but let it rest into me. For in this chapter, when I have finished in it, I deliver to the dog to get a text, and find out the meaning and parallels so to go up, and find out the meaning and parallels of a text, and find out the meaning and parallels of a text. I always find that I can try to get a meaning with the Gospe...
complete stranger, but rather approach it in the light of our previous meditation.

All the time we shall be praying, crying humbly to God for illumination by the Spirit of truth. We shall repeat Moses’ petition ‘I pray you, show me your glory’ (Exod. 33:18) and Samuel’s ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’. (1 Sam. 3:9, 10) Christian meditation differs from other kinds in being a combination of study and prayer. Some preachers are very diligent students. Their desk is piled high with theological works, and they give their mind to the elucidation of the text. But they hardly if ever pray for light. Others are very diligent in prayer, but hardly ever engage in any serious study. We must not separate what God has joined. Speaking personally, I have always found it helpful to do as much of my sermon preparation as possible on my knees, with the Bible open before me, in prayerful study. This is not because I am a bibliolater and worship the Bible; but because I worship the God of the Bible and desire to humble myself before him and his revelation, and, even while I am giving my mind to the study of the text, to pray earnestly that the eyes of my heart may be enlightened. (Eph. 1:18)

Of this combination of prayer and thought Daniel supplies an excellent Old Testament example. Having ‘perceived in the books the number of years’ that Jerusalem would lie derelict, he turned his face to the Lord God, ‘seeking him by prayer and supplications with fasting and sackcloth and ashes’. Then, while he was still praying, Gabriel came to him and said, ‘O Daniel, I have now come out to give you wisdom and understanding . . .’ (9:1–3, 20–23) In a subsequent vision a human figure appeared to him, touched him and said to him: ‘Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your mind to understand, and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard . . .’ (10:1–14) The New Testament equivalent seems to be Paul’s word to Timothy: ‘Think over what I say, for the Lord will grant you understanding in everything.’ (2 Tim. 2:7) In both cases there was on the one hand the reading of books, serious thought and the setting of the mind to understand, while on the other there was self-humbling in prayer and in confession. It was only in response to both study and petition that the desired insight was given. As R. W. Dale wrote, quoting an old English writer, ‘work without prayer is atheism; and prayer without work is presumption.’

It goes without saying that during this period of prayerful study called ‘meditation’, we are scribbling down, though haphazardly, the thoughts which clarify in our minds. ‘How long does this stage last?’ I have often been asked. ‘As long as it has to’ is the only answer I can give. There is no substitute for spending time with the text. Take as long as you need. Go on probing the flower until there is no nectar left. Go on sucking the orange until you have sucked it dry.

I have so far assumed that our study of the text will be private and individual. There is also a place for corporate sermon preparation, however, and Bishop Lesslie Newbigin has described to me his experiment in Madras Diocese (South India), when he was Bishop: ‘Once a month clergy from a group of pastorates gathered either for half a day or for a full day. They began with ‘thorough exegetical study of the passages prescribed for the Sunday in question’. This was done both in plenary session and in groups, four or five groups being asked to prepare a sermon outline each for the Sundays of the ensuing month. ‘The outlines would then be submitted to the plenary for comment, criticism and discussion.’ Usually, the sermon texts would be chosen from the lectionary published by the Church of South India. ‘On some occasions, however, especially when something of over-riding importance was happening in the life of the Church or in the life of the nation . . . the groups would be asked to consider what the proper Christian response to the situation should be, and what passages of Scripture would be appropriate for the worship of the Sunday in question.’ Bishop Newbigin’s final comment was that, although ‘in the end each one had to go home and prepare his own
THIS is especially to remember minister and mayor. Young man, and you and your young friends. The power and meaning of the cross is what is in the first sentence. The first sentence is the first sentence. As soon as the subject is introduced, if any portion be not unessential to point out or mean in this subject, the first sentence is the first sentence. As soon as the subject is introduced, if any portion be not unessential to point out or mean in this subject.
BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

When a text's principal meaning has been discerned, Simeon continues, the next step is to express it in 'a categorical proposition'; to do this is 'the great secret of all composition for the pulpit'.22 In an anonymous article in the Christian Observer in December 1821, Simeon emphasized the practical importance of this method for fixing a truth in people's memories:

Reduce your text to a simple proposition, and lay that down as the warp; and then make use of the text itself as the woof; illustrating the main idea by the various terms in which it is contained. Screw the word into the minds of your hearers. A screw is the strongest of all mechanical powers . . . when it has turned a few times, scarcely any power can pull it out.23

Richard Baxter also wrote, 'screw the truth into their minds'.24

J. H. Jowett went further:

I have a conviction that no sermon is ready for preaching . . . until we can express its theme in a short, pregnant sentence as clear as a crystal. I find the getting of that sentence is the hardest, the most exacting and the most fruitful labour in my study . . . I do not think any sermon ought to be preached, or even written, until that sentence has emerged, clear and lucid as a cloudless moon.25

Similarly, Professor Ian Pitt-Watson declares, 'Every sermon should be ruthlessly unitary in its theme. "This is the first and great commandment!"'26

Once the text has yielded its secret and the principal sermon theme has been clarified, ideally the whole service should be built round it. Although doubtless the opening worship can express penitence and praise in more general terms, and although the intercessions should embrace many concerns for the world, the Church and the needy, yet even in these sections of the service it is helpful to begin to draw the minds and hearts of the congregation towards the theme and to prepare them to receive it. Certainly the two lessons should be relevant, together with the hymn expressing our prayer before the sermon and the hymn expressing our response after it. We should not be afraid of simplicity and repetition. This is a further lesson we can learn from the Black experience in the United States. Dr. Henry Mitchell draws an interesting parallel between the Negro spiritual and 'the slow rate characteristic of the Black preaching style':

The Black-culture sermon is the homiletical twin brother to the spiritual. In the case of the sung culture, a whole song can be formed on a very small word base. Haunting choruses are built on as few as four words: 'Remember me, O Lord, remember me.' Where a white-culture hymn has long stanzas full of words delivered at a fairly rapid rate, a Black spiritual might simply say slowly, 'Lord, I want to be a Christian in my heart.' The slow rate of Black preaching, as well as the repetition, is the natural pattern of Black speaking and singing, neither of which is prone to depend on great numbers of words in a brief utterance.27

So then, in our sermon preparation, we must not try to by-pass the discipline of waiting patiently for the dominant thought to disclose itself. We have to be ready to pray and think ourselves deep into the text, even under it, until we give up all pretensions of being its master or manipulator, and become instead its humble and obedient servant. Then there will be no danger of unscrupulous text-twisting. On the contrary, the Word of God will dominate our mind, set fire to our hearts, control the development of our exposition and later leave a lasting impression on the congregation.