**The
Academy
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Homiletics**

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"Preaching and Spirituality"

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Introduction to the Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics – Williamsburg, Virginia – 2005.

There is so much going on in the world that causes us to ponder and wonder about what we can do to help shape a new understanding and appreciation of life. Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc along the Gulf Coast and caused tremendous damage and death in New Orleans. And, the recent death of Rosa Parks who was the symbol of the Civil Rights movement – one whose sitting caused many African Americans and other Christians and Jews to stand up for justice – a stand propelled by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Williamsburg, Virginia is full of history and it has a prominent place in the life and legacy of early America. Meeting here will allow us to ponder and meditate upon the value and importance of preaching in today's world where the issues of modernity and the artifacts of history provide new opportunities for preaching and worship. From 1699 to 1780 Williamsburg was the political and educational center of the American colonies and served as the capital of Virginia. While there is a tendency on the part of some to romanticize and idealize this colonial capital, I feel compelled to point out that in the 1770's almost half of the population of Williamsburg were slaves. Williamsburg, as a meeting place, symbolizes the dialectic between freedom and slavery, and the past and present. Gathering here is truly an opportune time to reflect on the connections between preaching and spirituality and its correlates: freedom, independence, and revolution.

In the following pages you will find the ideas and thoughts of a number of Academy members. There are some papers that address the theme explicitly and others intersect with homiletics in a more nuanced effort to expand our horizons. This year we are grateful to have excellent papers in eight groups.

Thank you so much to each person who has written a paper; however, I regret that my e-mail address was listed incorrectly in the August newsletter because this ultimately meant that there may have been a few papers that I never received even after making an effort to call each group convener.

We look forward to seeing you in Williamsburg, Virginia on December 1-3, 2005.

James Henry Harris
First Vice President
2005 Academy of Homiletics

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Note from the Conveners

A brief note of introduction will help explain the arrangement of the papers for the Hermeneutics and Biblical Study section of this year's gathering of the Academy of Homiletics.

The first set of papers—presented by Alyce M. McKenzie, Stephen Farris, John C. Holbert, and Rein Bos—offer homiletical approaches to "contrary" biblical texts. Our focus is upon texts that seem at odds with the core commitment to declare good news incumbent upon all preachers. What makes a text "contrary" in the context of proclamation? How are these texts to be viewed theologically as scripture for the church? What strategies could aid and direct preaching on these texts? As has been our pattern for the past few years, our aim is to facilitate a true roundtable conversation at the Academy meeting. For that reason, the authors were not asked to submit systematic, comprehensive position papers on the topic, but instead to develop brief provocative and evocative essays that would serve as a discussion starter for the study group. As an added bonus, the panel discussion will include reflection on the *same* contrary text as a way of further demonstrating the authors' positions and strategies. We especially hope to generate a variety of hermeneutical approaches and practical ideas to offer students and preachers. The papers included here promise to do just that.

The second set of papers—presented by Michael Knowles and Eunjoo M. Kim—are related quite directly to the theme of this year's gathering of the Academy: Spirituality and Preaching. Knowles looks at this theme from a Pauline perspective, focusing on a cruciform spirituality evident in Paul's letters, while Kim takes a Lukan angle of vision, combining that gospel's spirituality with ideas suggested by narrative criticism, canonical criticism, and Buddhist meditation. We look forward to the conversation on their insights.

O.W.A. and J.R.N.

Preaching Contrary Texts

Stephen Farris
Vancouver School of Theology

Several months ago we entertained a brilliant speaker on the Vanderbilt university campus. The speaker spent some forty-five minutes explaining how to preach one of those baby-bashing texts from the Hebrew Scriptures, to be specific, *the* baby-bashing text, Psalm 137:9: "Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them against the rock!" The lecture was witty, quite brilliant, and full of homiletic insight. But when it was over, the first question from the audience was devastating. The question was, "Why bother? Why would preachers bother to preach a baby-bashing text when they could be declaring the good news of the gospel?"[1]

Why indeed? But perhaps that question can be left without response for a time inasmuch as the topic seems to propose that we may well actually want to preach, if not on Psalm 137:9 on texts that approach it in contrariness. The assignment accepted by this panel was to address the following three questions:
1. What makes a text "contrary" in the context of proclamation?
2. How are these texts to be viewed theologically as scripture for the church?
3. What strategies do you advocate in moving toward preaching on these texts?

In appropriately linear fashion, let me begin with the first question. A "contrary" text is not a text that is difficult for the preacher to preach from. In my opinion the most difficult text in the Bible to preach might well be 1 Corinthians 13. Perhaps the best sermon on that lovely text might be to stand, point to the reader of the text and say, "What she said!" Then sit down. But who could call that "contrary?" Nor is a contrary text a text that is difficult to hear. As Catherine Gonsalus Gonzalez notes in *Difficult Texts*, "a *particular* demand may be contrary to characteristic of a *particular* society… some of the gospel imperatives will find ready acceptance in some places and yet be seen as almost impossible in others."[2] We are not in this panel speaking, I think, of texts that are contrary to the mores and accepted wisdom of a given society. Many such texts are very close to the heart of the gospel. We are, rather, speaking of texts that are *contrary to the gospel of Jesus Christ.* That observation is well into "Duhh" territory and it is, of course, much more complicated than it seems. But let it stand for the moment. Texts that fall into this category might include not only Psalm 137:9 but the story of Jephthah's daughter, Elisha and the she-bears, some of the grizzlier passages from Revelation and the conquest texts from Joshua, texts to which I am more sensitive now that I am in a school with a significant Native ministry component.

Next, how are these texts to be viewed theologically as scripture for the church? The first and most important observation must be this: these texts do not stand alone but rather are part of a wider canon. That canon is both a body of literature and an invitation to a process. That is to say that Psalm 137:9, for example, is not "scripture" by itself. It is a verse from the scriptures which are *as a whole* the priceless heritage of the Christian Church. The earliest version of the hermeneutical circle of which I have knowledge is Schleiermacher's: it is impossible to

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[1] David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: WJKP, 1994), 11.
[2] Catherine Gonsalus Gonzalez, *Difficult Texts: A Preaching Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 4,5.

understand the whole without the parts and the parts without the whole.[3] To restate the point theologically: the whole of scripture is not scripture apart from its texts and the texts are not scripture apart from the whole of scripture. At this point, we are interested primarily in the second statement, that it is impossible to understand the parts without the whole and that the texts are not scripture apart from the whole of scripture. We will return to the other half of the statement shortly.

As far as I can see, no text in scripture makes a claim that texts in atomic isolation are by themselves scripture. The closest such statement is 2 Timothy 3:16-17: "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work." This text, beloved of fundamentalist Christians for some strange reason, does not affirm that every text of scripture is inerrant, infallible, or even that it contains an edifying nugget of thought. It declares that all scripture, *pasa graphe,* is useful for a whole range of valuable purposes in the church. One might even translate the text as "Scripture as a whole is inspired by God, etc." That translation does not do undue theological violence to the verse. Theological shorthand for "Scripture as a whole" is *canon.* The fact that we interpret texts within a canon means that, although both the whole and the parts are necessary for understanding, the whole is hermeneutically privileged.

But the canon is not merely the body of literature; it is an invitation to a process. Because the Church lives in, with, and under the scriptures, there is a constant process of interpretation, restatement, shifting of viewpoints and of starting points. But this constant shifting is in relation to the same body of texts. The canon is, as James A. Sanders has argued, marked both by stability and by adaptability.[4] The adaptability comes from the church's *resignification* of these texts in *new situations*. The stability comes from the fact that the resignification is of *these texts*, including the contrary texts. This resignification occurs frequently, perhaps even primarily, but not exclusively in preaching. I have argued elsewhere that inspiration resides in the "Word of God" and occurs in the encounter with God through the texts rather than in the texts themselves.[5]

The key word in 2 Timothy 3:12-17 may be "useful." The texts become scripture when the church goes to them with the intention of finding teaching, reproof, and correction in its new situation. They are Word of God when they are read with an eye to equipping for good works the people of God. It may be that some of the "contrary" texts may be particularly useful for just those purposes precisely because they are contrary and because they make us stop and take a second look both at the scripture and ourselves. The double take can be a moment of grace.

We may not pretend that the problem we face with respect to contrary texts is a new one. Some people, and apparently not merely the preachers of "another gospel," found Paul's writing difficult. "There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures" (2 Peter 3:16). Perhaps a recognizable and distinctive characteristic of "scriptures" is that they are hard to understand and capable of being twisted. "Hard to understand" is probably not merely a matter of untwisting Paul's sometimes challenging syntax. It is the ideas themselves that are difficult. They seemed

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[3] "Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can only be understood out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa." Friedrich D. Schleiermacher, *General Theory and Art of Interpretation*, as found in Kurt Muller-Vollmer, ed., *The Hermeneutics Reader* (New York: Continuum, 1997), 84.

[4] James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983). See particularly the chapter "Canonical Process," pp. 21-45. See also James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987)

[5] Stephen Farris, *Preaching that Matters: The Bible and Our Lives* (Louisville: WJKP, 1998), 10-12.

contrary to what must have been the straightforward understanding of the Christian gospel in 2 Peter's audience.

It is also precisely the challenges of contrary texts that lead much of the early church to adopt allegorical readings of their scriptures, our Old Testament/Hebrew Scriptures. In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Augustine offered counsel to interpreters of scripture facing ambiguity in the text. (Surely those texts we might call contrary may be subsumed under that category.) In such difficulties, "you should refer it to the rule of faith which you have received from the plainer parts of scripture and from the authority of the church."[6] More specifically, Augustine addressed the problem of determining when allegorical readings are justified. In this connection he consistently emphasized the primacy of love. Right interpretation must be for the "nourishment of charity."[7] "All such stories…are not only to be interpreted literally as historical accounts but also to be taken figuratively as prophetic in some way, pointing to that end of the love of God or of neighbour or of both."[8] Clearly, for Augustine the plainer parts of scripture are those parts which straightforwardly nourish love. Augustine's insight may be extended or more carefully nuanced, but in principle it seems to be still to be of great value, particularly when dealing with contrary texts. To it one might add a Christological focus. The plainest part of scripture for the Christian reader is Jesus Christ and particularly the story of his death and resurrection. It is the function of scripture to declare his love for us and engender in us a corresponding love. The heart of scripture for Luther was "Was treibt Christum," that which "pushes Christ." Once again, I consider this an insight not superseded over the centuries

At this point, it may be appropriate to return to our definition of contrary texts as texts contrary to the gospel. "Contrary to the gospel" may very easily become "contrary to what I think," or even more likely, "contrary to what people like me think." I fear that this may easily become the case with us. It is easy to see with a Pat Robertson, for example, how his perceptions of the gospel and its implications are shaped and limited by his political stance and his narrow patriotism. It is not our task to remove the sliver from his eyes.[9] It is, nevertheless, our task to remove the slivers and beams from our own eyes, and that is a far more difficult task than critiquing Pat Robertson. Those of us who are towards the more progressive end of the ideological spectrum are at least as likely, perhaps even more likely, to confuse our own ideology with the gospel. As a moderately progressive Canadian, I would find myself towards the left of the Democratic Party in the U.S., so at this point I am speaking of myself and not merely of others. Precisely because people like me are in danger of falling into this trap, let me say that the gospel is not identical to early twenty-first century progressive ideas. If we deny to the scripture any capacity to judge the sufficiency of our progressive notions, it no longer genuinely functions for us as scripture.

I should think it is all but impossible to avoid our ideology from shaping our understanding of the gospel. This realization should engender in the interpreter an appropriate humility as to her/his capacity to judge the degree to which we can rightly determine what is

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[6] Augustine of Hippo, *De Doctrina Christiana*, as translated in Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers: Wisdom on Preaching, Augustine to the Present* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 170.

[7] Ibid., 174

[8] Ibid., 175.

[9] Let us abandon polite moderation with respect to Pat Robertson. The ideology that allows him on the *Christian Broadcasting Network* to propose the assassination of foreign leaders awkward for American policy is not, I would claim, a sliver but a whopping great sequoia. A due attention to our own weaknesses ought not debar us from plain speaking in situations such as this. Why may one say this? Because in no way does a call for the assassination of Hugo Chavez conduce to the "nourishment of charity!"

contrary to the gospel. Humility is a necessary interpretive and homiletical virtue. Aside from remembering that we are not saved by the adequacy of our formulations but by the grace of God made known in the face of Jesus Christ (God justifies sinners afflicted by sins of the intellect also), it is helpful to avail ourselves of the collective wisdom of the church. This is a kind of homiletical communion of saints. It is also a consequence of the kind of understanding of contrary texts to which we have been reaching.

So, once again, what is a contrary text? A contrary text is one that neither nourishes love nor pushes Christ. (Here one might add the other theological virtues associated with love, justice, prudence, courage, etc.) A contrary text is also a text that is contrary to the center of the gospel as it is discovered by at least a significant strand of interpreters over the centuries. That definition also suggests a hint of a solution to the problem of contrary texts: interpret them in light of the gospel that is contained in the center of scripture, a gospel that focuses on the love of God made known in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit to which the church has borne at least an interrupted witness through the ages.

All this suggests several strategies with which one may approach these texts. Contrary texts are to be read in the church:

- in the light of scripture as a whole;
- in the light of Jesus Christ;
- with the assistance of a significant strand in the history of the church; and
- with a view to equipping the church to live out the gospel.

There is a small but important distinction here. What matters here is not primarily what interpreters through the centuries have said about a particular text. The interpretive consensus may itself be mistaken or dangerous. The "canon" of judgment is what the interpreters over the centuries have understood to be the gospel. So, to be specific, it is not what the church has said about Psalm 137:9 that matters. (Although I have never carried out a thorough study of the history of interpretation of the passage, I should think it has been most widely interpreted as an example of that hatred of evil which is always permissible to the believer. In this way it may well function as a validation of and excuse for hatred, period.) It is what the church has consistently claimed is the heart of the gospel that matters when reading this psalm.

At this point, another concept must be introduced: the concept of analogy. I have argued elsewhere that sermons grow from a perception of a central analogy or analogies between the situation of the text and our contemporary situation.[10] With respect to a contrary text, it is sometimes terribly easy to perceive an analogy between the text and our lives. I hinted at this earlier when I suggested that I am more troubled by texts about the conquest now that I am in a school with a strong First Nations component. Once again, however, let us return to Psalm 137 in order to show how this works out.

In *Preaching that Matters,* I used Psalm 137 as an example of the usefulness of an analogical approach.[11] At that time, however, I had not actually preached that text except within my college almost, to be honest, as an exercise to show that it could be done. Then in the autumn of 2001, I was called upon to preach on the Sunday nearest "Remembrance Day," November 11, in a large, "first steeple" church in Toronto. At that time, Canadians in general were still in a state of shock over the 9/11 attacks on the twin towers and the Pentagon. Remembrance Day, which commemorates the end of World War I, is a solemn day for many Canadians in any case. Our national identity was formed to a significant degree by the appalling slaughter of that

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[10] This is the central thesis of *Preaching that Matters: The Bible and Our Lives.*
[11] See Farris, *Preaching that Matters*, 82-88, 105-07.

horrible and ultimately futile war.[12] Some would be ready to hear with peculiar intensity that day. That particular church also hosted the Remembrance Day parade of the Toronto Police Force, and I knew that many senior police officers, some of them knowing very little about the Christian faith, would be present (In fact, the Chief of Police was present, and I have very rarely seen as obviously bored a listener. It was for him just another tedious duty. He clearly did not expect to listen at all but merely, eventually, to get it over with.)

I decided to preach from Psalm 137 and not to excise the horrible, baby-bashing ending. The first extensive move of the sermon was a simple one: people hate us the way the Israelites hate the Babylonians in this psalm. The analogies were almost eerie, "Tear it down, tear it down! Down to its foundations!" The hatred festering in the refugee camps of the Middle East of the sixth century BCE matched the hatred brewed in the Middle Eastern camps the twenty-first century. I spoke as simply and as clearly as I was able to speak of the horrors of hatred, and I acknowledged that religion is often the ladder by which the evil beasts of hatred climb up from the very pits of hell.

It is not sufficient, however, to say, "They hate us," as if we in the West are only the victims of the mindless hatred of others. We hate too. I tried to speak as honestly as I could of our own capacity for hatred. We are capable of destroying cities and slaughtering, even if by "collateral damage," the children of our enemies. I then spoke about the very thing that is the subject of our panel, how we read horrible texts like Psalm 137:9. I said that we read the puzzling and the peripheral in light of the clear center of scripture. We read Psalm 137 in light of Jesus who, when he suffered hatred on the cross, said, "Father, forgive them…" As the sermon ended, I said that truth is the first casualty of war but that hatred is its first recruit. They'll ask us to hate. But if you love Jesus, you're not allowed to hate.

Why preach this baby-bashing, hateful text? Because we live in a baby-bashing and baby-bombing and baby-starving world, and preaching Psalm 137:9 allows us to preach about the hatred that inspires it. That seems to me at least moderately useful.

By the way, the Chief of Police ended up listening intently.

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[12] Canada suffered more than 60,000 dead in the 1914-18 war out of a population of 8,000,000. By comparison, that is more dead than the U.S. suffered in the entire Vietnam War. A similar proportion of dead in the present U.S. population would be around 2,500,000.

Homiletical Approaches to "Contrary" Biblical Texts: Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Alyce M. McKenzie

Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

What makes a text "contrary?" in the context of proclamation?

Ed Farley, professor of theology emeritus at Vanderbilt Divinity School, wrote an article over a decade ago called "Preaching the Bible and Preaching the Gospel." He observed that the lectionary divides scripture into segments and that many preachers define preaching as finding eternal truth in discrete texts. He insists on a more holistic approach, defining the gospel that is the focus of our preaching as "the mystery of God's salvific working." The gospel is the good news of God's mysterious work to bring us salvation and it is the substance of our preaching. He wants preachers to ask the question, "where does this text fit in the context of the gospel?" The text is a lens through which we see the gospel. The gospel is also the lens through which we see the text. A "contrary" text is one that undermines or contradicts the gospel's depiction of God's character at work in the world.[1]

Ron Allen and John Holbert, authors of *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching From the Old Testament,* offer an even more precise definition of "gospel". They define it as "God's unconditional love for each and all (including nature) and God's call for justice for each and all."[2] When applied to specific texts, the gospel is God's unconditional desire for both mercy and justice for everyone affected by a text. In Holbert and Allen's terms, a text is contrary when it undercuts God's offer of mercy to any and all or God's desire for justice for any and all. These authors set forth three criteria for evaluating texts for preaching in the context of the gospel:

1. **Appropriateness to the gospel** (various relationships among the text, gospel, and contemporary community)
   a. The text may lead the community to see its understanding of God's love and justice is too limited.
   b. The witness of the text may be more limited than the gospel. It may deny God's love and justice for some. It may assert God's love and justice for some, but deny them for others.
2. **Intelligibility**
   a. Is the vision of the text consistent with other Christian beliefs?
   b. Does the text make sense in light of the way in which the contemporary community understands the world to operate?
3. **Moral plausibility** (moral treatment for all involved in the vision of the text and its implications) Does the text call for all who are affected by the vision of the text to be treated as if God loves them unconditionally and as if God unreservedly wills justice for them?[3]

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[1] Edward Farley, "Preaching the Bible and Preaching the Gospel," *Theology Today* 51/1 (April 1994).
[2] Ronald J. Allen and John C. Hol
bert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 74.
[3] Ibid., 73-74.

To call a text "contrary" in the context of proclamation, then, is to say that it is some combination of inappropriate to the gospel, unintelligible, or morally implausible. That is, say it undercuts some aspect of the gospel. It needs to be affirmed for certain aspects of its witness, but other aspects need to be supplemented and sometimes corrected by being set in a broader theological, canonical context in our preaching. Its portrayal of God's attitudes and behaviors may be contrary to the broader canonical portrait of God. Its vision of God's salvation may be exclusionary and narrow, not including the whole human family.

How are these "contrary" texts to be viewed theologically as scripture for the church?

When approaching such texts for preaching, the preacher needs to understand them as part of the church's canon. The canon then refers to a collection of books, but also to their interaction for the purpose of yielding knowledge of God and inviting readers/hearers to participate in God's presence and redeeming activity in the world. The purpose of the canon is to reveal the character of God in order that individuals and communities may be conformed to it. Charles Wood's *The Formation of Christian Understanding* is the definitive treatment of the way the scriptures, working together as an organic whole, are capable of shaping communities of faith and faithful disciples.[4]

The purpose of the canon is not to teach Ancient Near Eastern History or Science. It is not to show examples of dysfunctional families. The function of the canon is to reveal the character of God. It is a narrative that presents God as both loving and just. It calls us not just to remember the faith of ancient peoples, but to enter into relationship with the God of their faith then and ours today.

A couple of overarching interpretive principles for preachers flow from this canonical understanding, according to Wood.

A. To speak of the Bible as canon means we don't have to distinguish between those parts that are inspired and those that aren't, those that are without error and those that are. The whole, working together, is sufficient for our salvation. The energy of the canon is in sanctification of communities.

B. Some portions make us aware of our need for other portions (Ecclesiastes for example needs Jesus; Proverbs needs Ecclesiastes and Job.) Some portions (texts of terror) may make us aware of the continuing brutality in our world against women and children in response to which we are called to speak out and act, which are by no means the will of a God of love and justice.

A couple of concrete interpretive practices for preachers flow from these overarching principles.

1. All scriptural passages are not of equal, direct help in showing us what God is like. Exodus 34 (Ten Commandments) is more directly helpful than, say, Judges 11 (Jepthath's daughter). Yahweh's address to Job in chapter 38 is more directly revealing of the character of God than the testimony of Job's self righteous friends. Yet Judges 11 shows us the pain of a world in desperate need of the God of mercy and justice of Exodus 34. Job's friends' unsatisfactory explanations for suffering are our habitual fallbacks and cause us to reflect on and yearn for more profound, godly construals. That doesn't mean we draw up a top ten list of our favorites and call that

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[4] Charles Monroe Wood, *The Formation of Christian Understanding: An Essay in Theological Hermeneutics* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981).

our "canon within the canon" and throw out the rest. To see the Bible as canon means to take it together rather than apart.

2. No portion of scripture is excluded from usefulness (even Job's friends and "texts of terror," as Phyllis Trible calls them)
3. No text is above analysis and questioning in light of the canon's purpose of imparting knowledge of the character of God.
4. We preach the gospel, not just the text.

What strategies do you advocate in moving toward preaching on these texts?

In his book *Imperfect Peace*, Jon M. Walton sets forth a "Methodology for Problematic Texts."[5] His steps are:

- Begin with a naïve reading of the text.
- Write down all the questions the text raises for you without attempting to resolve the contradictions or the offensiveness of its witness.
- Can you find any complementary or antithetical passages of scripture that amplify or contradict the text?
- Exegetical exploration.
- State clearly the problem you are having with the passage.
- State clearly any positive affirmation you feel you can make, as a result of your interaction with the text.

Walton's method is similar to that of Holbert and Allen, who recommend articulating the surface vision of a text. Then, especially if it is intellectually or morally problematic, they recommend that we articulate the deeper vision of the text. That includes those aspects of the text that are expressed in the language and idiom of its worldview, but that transcend its worldview.[6]

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

Ecclesiastes is a contrary text in disguise. Its bland, traditional interpretation is a veneer that conceals a dynamic that is contrary to the gospel of a just and loving God.

So, the first step in preparing to preach on such a text is to debunk that traditional interpretation that listeners to sermons assume is its only meaning.
The poem on times and seasons is among the most frequently quoted of the writings of Ecclesiastes. It is commonly understood to mean that there are appropriate moments for people to act and, at the proper moment, even an ordinarily objectionable situation can be "beautiful in its own way." There is an appropriate time for everything. It is traditionally understood to be advocating the importance of human discernment of times and seasons.

The next step would be to describe its contrary significance with reference to its immediate context, its whole-book context, and its genre.
Immediate context: When looked at in the immediate context of Ecclesiastes, it becomes obvious that the poem is about God's activity and the appropriate human response to the fact that a sovereign God determines events. Furthermore, this God is inscrutable and human

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[5] Jon M. Walton, *Imperfect Peace: Teaching Sermons on Troubling Texts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999).
[6] Allen and Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches*, 71.

knowledge of life's events is limited. The theme of the chapter is God's sovereign activity illustrated in the determination of event (3:1-14) and the determination of the lot of humanity (3:16-22).

Whole-book context: Qohelet portrays God as distant and unknowable, presumably responsible for justice and injustice alike (7:13-14). He portrays human beings as limited in their wisdom and knowledge, yet filled with a futile yearning for more complete knowledge, all this by God's design (3:9-15). He portrays the human search for wisdom as helpful within a limited radius, but easily thwarted (9:18) and yielding no lasting legacy (2:12-17).

Genre: Chapter 3:1-8 belongs to a genre common in Egypt and Mesopotamia called a "catalog." There were catalogs of all kinds in ANE literature. This one is a "Catalog of Occasions," of times and situations that human being encounter. It may be that originally the passage affirmed that there is a pattern for times and seasons, that events do not happen in a haphazard manner, and so it is incumbent on humans to discern the appropriate moment for any activity. Perhaps that was the original purpose of such a Catalog of Occasions. Conventional wisdom assumed that there were auspicious moments for any human deed, and that the wise ought to know what they are to maximize their chance of success. Conventional wisdom taught that the wise know the right time to do everything (Proverbs 15:23; 25:11; Sirach 1:23-24; 4:20, 23) and even an unborn child knew when to be born (Hosea 13:13).[7]

It is likely that Qohelet was using a conventional wisdom genre in an unconventional way. It wouldn't be the first time. He uses the memorial of the great deeds of an ANE ruler as the rubric for his whole book. Ironically, this King in Jerusalem's major accomplishment was his realization that the search for a lasting legacy is empty and futile. He uses conventional proverbs to state the limited value of wisdom, but immediately undercuts them with subversive aphorisms. (2:13-14; chapter 7) Here he seems to be using a conventional catalogue of occasions originally intended to inspire the wise to use their discernment to order their responses to life, to make the point that human beings cannot discern the order in a life whose events are doled out unpredictably by a sovereign, inscrutable God.

Various patterns for the choice and juxtaposition of the occasions have been suggested, but Qohelet is not arranging them in particular order. This underscores the fact that life throws them at us unpredictably. The occasions are not those that human beings plan, nor are they contingent on human decisions. People cannot actually choose a time of birthing or dying, nor do they really determine the seasons for specific agricultural activities. People do not decide when to heal, weep, laugh, mourn, lose, love, hate, or be in war or peace. These are occasions in which people find themselves and they can only respond to them. All that mortals can do in the face of these times is to be open to them.[8]

In the endlessly repeated round of human experience, each event occurs at its proper time in God's scheme of things, and man's effort to make what happens conform to his own desires is fruitless. What it is that God has predetermined is hidden from man, who can only live in awe of the inexorable progression of "time" and enjoy such passing happiness as God may grant him.[9]

Old Testament scholar Ellen Davis asserts that "the poem's orderly cadence reinforces its message that there is a pattern to human experience, just as there is a regular pattern to the events of the nonhuman world. The wise person seeks to discern that patterns, preparing herself to

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[7] Choon-Leong Seow, *Ecclesiastes: The Anchor Bible, Volume 18C* (New York: Doubleday, 1997), 170-171.
[8] Ibid., 171.
[9] R.B.Y. Scott, *Ecclesiastes: The Anchor Bible, Volume 16* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 221.

"receive the gifts of God, yielding gracefully when familiar gifts are withdrawn and new ones, perhaps unwanted, are given."[10]

Anthony Ceresko points out that the passage demonstrates Qohelet's remarkable skill at evoking a sense of human vulnerability, helplessness and uncertainty. He attributes these themes to the unsettling times in which Qohelet lived. The Jews suffered under the Persian king. His sober counsel doesn't raise false hopes, but brings his people back to the basics of everyday human life. Be thankful at least for what food and drink and satisfaction God wills to give each day. God is all-powerful and in control. Let God be God and show him the reverence and respect that are his due.[11]

My problems with this text

The surface theological assertion is that God is in charge of everything and determines everything.

I'm not sure it's intelligible: Elsewhere in both testaments, there are passages that partake of determinism as this one does. But in many cases, human choices play an important role in God's dealings with humankind. There is a call for human beings to respond to God or to Jesus. The kind of passivity this text seems to encourage doesn't square with those other emphases.

As a United Methodist, I view scripture to be the primary guide for faith and practice, but also value the contributions of tradition, reason, and experience. All three of them militate against the extreme determinism depicted in this passage.

I'm not sure it's morally plausible: It could encourage social passivity.

Corrective Context

Qohelet's vision of a distant, inscrutable God reflects his experience with the Persian kings of his day. His book is not a pessimistic diatribe as it has sometimes been caricatured, for he does view work, food, love, and drink as gifts from God to be enjoyed gratefully. To preach this passage, I would first correct traditional interpretations of it and then present its message of divine determinism. I would set that view of God and life in the larger, somewhat more gracious context of the book as a whole.

Then I would move toward the assertion that this passage in and of itself is not the gospel. In preaching on it, I would divorce God from misfortune in life. God does not cause illness, death, and injustice. This is the witness of other portions of scripture as well as tradition, reason, and experience. I would present the loving, engaged view of God that comes to us in other Old Testament passages and also in the New Testament. I would present the deeper assertion or vision of the text listed a few paragraphs earlier.

Deeper assertion or vision

In uncertain times, we are in God's hands. Every occasion calls for trust in our sovereign God and gratitude for the gifts of the present, whatever an unknown future holds.

This is one attempt to explain why negative, tragic events happen. Its answer: it's all determined by God. We can respect the question, but cast the net for responses beyond the book

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[10] Ellen Davis, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs, The Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 184.

[11] Anthony R. Ceresko, *Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom: A Spirituality for Liberation* (Maryknoll,NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 107-108.

of Ecclesiastes. Job, for instance, replaces the unanswerable question "Why?" with the assurance that a God whose ways are beyond the reach of human wisdom abides with us in times of loss and suffering. We can be attentive to other canonical depictions of God that supplement and correct Qohelet's picture of a distant God, responsible for good and ill alike.

Keep the Faith, and Pass the Shrimp: Those Difficult Dietary Dicta

John C. Holbert
Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University

I have long had a fascination with the dietary laws of the Hebrew Bible as they are spelled out in a kind of explicitness in Leviticus 11:1-47 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21. I say a "kind of explicitness" because, to be honest, the supposed careful animal designations in the chapters are in reality very difficult to determine. It has been suggested that fully forty percent of the animals named cannot be identified with absolute certainty. Since following these dietary demands "to the letter" determines just how I am to be holy as the Lord my God is holy (Leviticus 11:45, among others), it seems I had better get the animals right! But if I cannot any longer in the twenty-first century get some of them right, their correct identification having now been lost in the ensuing twenty-five centuries of linguistic changes through multiple languages, what is a would-be holy one to do?

Well, a would-be Christian holy one has at this point punted the texts right out of purview. After all, we followers of Christ have Acts 10:1-11:18, wherein the apostle Peter is enjoined in no uncertain terms, and at least seven times (!), to "arise and eat" animals that his Judaism has instructed him to eschew completely. But he is assured that "what God has made clean, you must not call profane" (Acts 10:14 and 11:9). In other words, Pete, the old food laws have been abrogated, and crab cakes, lobster tails, and shrimp etouffee are now on the menu. And the gospel writer, Mark, has an equally pointed memory of Jesus himself offering a sharp critique of Jewish dietary practice (Mark 7:1-20). With clear dominical references such as these, surely a Christian preacher need spend little time with the old prohibitions against certain choices of diet.

But this Christian preacher, at least, wants to linger a bit. The fact that two lengthy portions of the Hebrew Bible comprise perhaps two hundred years of biblical memory, along with a vast array of later Jewish commentary on them, leads me to want to reflect further on the possible significance of the theme of diet, notwithstanding Peter's dream and Jesus' apparent convictions. If we want to take with utmost seriousness the conviction that the Word of God is contained in both the Old and the New Testaments, and I do, then easy discarding of lengthy portions of the tradition should give us pause.

My ongoing interest certainly has something to do with the rather cavalier ways in which I have heard Christian colleagues address these ancient dietary restrictions. "If I cannot mix milk and meat, there goes my beloved chicken pasta primavera!" "If you are going to be a pastor on the Gulf Coast, you had better have a huge hankering for seafood, or you may go hungry!" "If I cannot eat seafood, and simply do not eat red meat, how am I to get a consistent portion of daily protein?" "I mean, what is the big deal? The ancient Jews avoided certain foods for health reasons, but now that we have the means to avoid the dangers that they recognized, there is hardly any need to follow their lead in these matters. Besides, there is Peter's dream." These four comments are reasonable memories of conversations I have had with pastoral colleagues when the questions of biblical dietary restrictions have come up. Each has a modern rationale, from the silly (the first two), to the personal, if generally ignorant (the third), to the historical, albeit based on a shallow knowledge (the fourth). I think it fair to say that questions of biblical dietary limits

hardly arise at all in most modern Christian discussions (save for certain smaller groups like Seventh Day Adventists or Jehovah's Witnesses).

Hence, in one sense, these texts are hardly contrarian at all, given the fact that they generate so little interest. Yet, I still think they merit some more thought. I continue to believe that Christians have some important lessons to learn from these arcane notions. So, here goes.

It is well known that, in certain branches of modern Judaism, food that is permitted to be eaten is called "kosher." The rules that pertain to the creation of kosher food have evolved over the centuries, moving from the types of animals to be eaten, to the appropriate blessings of rabbis over certain fruits and vegetables, to the very detailed ways in which those designated animals are to be slaughtered for consumption. The Hebrew and later Aramaic word clusters that became the modern "kosher" meant in their older contexts "fit," "proper," and "permitted." Jewish discussions of the ancient texts were based squarely on the idea of appropriateness. Quite literally, food that should be eaten is "fit" to be eaten while other food is unfit for human consumption. Here is the way the ancient mind made these distinctions concerning fitness.

Both in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the animals discussed are divided into clean and unclean. Clean animals are fit for consumption and for religious rites while unclean animals are to be avoided in eating and sacrificial usage. If we are to understand the system in play, we first must listen to how this division is made. Land beasts are clean if they have cloven hooves and chew the cud (Leviticus 11:2-8). Water creatures are clean if they have fins and scales (11:9-12). Some creatures that fly are clean; others are not (11:13-23). Swarming things are generally not permitted, but not always under circumstances easily understood (11:29-38). Deuteronomy's discussion is a bit shorter and a bit simpler, but the general spirit applies.

Modern scholars have been far more interested in the origins of these laws than in their possible value for theological reflection. Standard commentaries on Leviticus will provide summaries of the discussion of these origins.[1] Were those origins arbitrary, or based on the dangers of spoiled food, or based on the observations of a healthy diet? Or were the ancients to learn a reverence for life by careful attention to what they put in their mouths? Such speculation can keep scholars gainfully employed for years and clearly has, given the rich bibliography the subject has generated. But the text itself evidences little interest in the question of origin. It wants to address the reasons why the restrictions of diet are significant for those who choose its demands.

Plainly, the dietary observances are part of the larger calling to the community to be holy (Leviticus 11:44-45 and Deuteronomy 14:2, 21). I fear that we modern Christians have done our best to drain away whatever possible holiness there might have once existed in our practices of access to the divine. The modern word possesses pretty much the meaning of the ancient one; it means and has meant "other," or "separate." That which is "holy" is somehow to be distinguished from that which is "profane," that is "common" or "ordinary." Ironically, much of our contemporary practice of worship has worked hard to make the holy common: common song, common, down-to-earth sermons, common words, common actions. And, though I cannot speak for you, the very last thing I have in mind as I duck through the "golden arches" to "dine" (pardon the word!) is holiness. Yet, the Hebrews wanted diligently to connect their eating and their holiness. Can we still do that?

Deuteronomy 14:2 makes it clear that holiness is a gift of God. "Surely, you are YHWH, your God's, holy people; YHWH chose you out of all of the earth's peoples to be YHWH's treasured people." Holiness is a direct result of God's gracious initiative, and to be holy is to be

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[1] John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, in *Word Bible Commentary* 4 (Dallas: Word Books, 1992), 142-146.

set apart for God's purposes. This passage makes it clear that the dietary restrictions move well beyond a simple concern for cultic regulations. God's gift of holiness is for the whole of the community's life and needs to be expressed in every arena of the community's existence, not least of all in its choice of food.

The broader contexts both of Leviticus and Deuteronomy demonstrate a basic concern for the dangers of idolatry (so Deuteronomy 12:1-13:18, for example). The very essence of idolatry is to confuse categories, to mistake one thing for another, to supplant what is centrally important by something of lesser or no importance. Holiness establishes the appropriate pattern for all of life; everything is in proper relationship with everything else. When such balance of life exists, the community manifests God's gifted purpose. Blessing is the result. Confused relationships lead to curses.

The dietary restrictions reveal how to hold categories of animals in proper relationship, thus keeping idolatry and curse at bay. Clean animals "conform to their class,"[2] whereas unclean animals mix or confuse the classes. Such distinctions on the surface may appear to be quite arbitrary, whatever their possible, more rational origins may be. However, at the deeper level, what I have elsewhere called a "deeper intention,"[3] "regulations introduce into the life of holiness and purity a concern for the order and structure of things, the recognition of difference and sameness, and a desire to maintain things as God has created them."[4]

This concern for the deeper intention, achieved by a more diligent and careful exploration of the system enshrined in the dietary laws, can lead a Christian preacher to important ideas for modern reflection. Here are two examples.

1. To follow the dietary rules is to commit oneself to God's design for order and blessing, to entune oneself to the God-given harmony of creation. To partake of the unclean, the unbalanced, is to invite brokenness and curse. Every meal can serve as a reminder to the community of God's promises and of the community's need to respond in kind by maintaining all the dimensions of the covenantal life. To partake of the clean is a sign of the community's willingness to maintain proper relationships in all of life, not just at the dinner table.

   In our world, where do we run the risk of confusing categories and inviting chaos into our lives? Are our fights over where lists of the Ten Commandments are to be posted (and the shape of those lists), over against the possible meanings and contemporary applications of those commandments, an example of a confusion of categories? When former judge Roy Moore says he demands the posting of the Ten in his courtrooms in order to create a "more civil space," is he assuming that the words, by their very public existence, will magically, osmosis-like, make us all more civil? In what categories is the discussion being held? Or, another example. Does the natural world in which we live only exist for our benefits? Upon recently leaving the Santa Fe National Forest in New Mexico, I saw a sign announcing that the forest was "a land of many uses." I hope those uses include various activities conducted quite apart from my human needs and desires, but I fear that it means human uses only. Unless the forest has intrinsic value, it can only

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[2] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966), 55.

[3] Ronald J. Allen and John C. Holbert, *Holy Root, Holy Branches: Christian Preaching from the Old Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995).

[4] Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 162.

be seen as my outdoor playground, my source of lumber, my photographic opportunity. How have the categories of our discussions of environment been confused from speaking of "my" forest, rather than "God's" forest?

2. Obedience to the dietary laws has helped many Jewish people to remember that some choices are not available to them if they are to live out their fullest identity in God. To refuse to eat certain foods is to make peace with finitude; they simply could not have and do all things. Are there places at which our choices for values and behaviors need to be limited by virtue of our Christian identity? How then do these limitations contribute to order and blessing for the community and for others impacted by it? In a world of well-nigh insatiable appetites, where obesity is an enormous problem in the U.S., while hunger blights millions of the children in that same U.S., not to mention millions in other lands far and near, a more realistic notion of finitude and limits is desperately needed. How are we to address the obscenity of the world's haves and have-nots unless we haves begin to accept our limits?

These are merely two of many possible implications of a careful look at the deeper intentions of the dietary laws of ancient Israel. It could easily be said that the search for the deeper intention of certain contrarian passages in the Bible could be a new form of allegorical interpretation, a kind of bogeyman in a world of supposed "scientific-historical readings." The longer I read the Bible, the more I am convinced that such latter readings are a chimera and that the *bete noir* of allegory may not be so *bete* nor *noir* either. But such a discussion needs far more than I can offer it here.

The dietary restrictions are only contrarian if they are set over against later convictions that are deemed better and more complete revelations concerning the eating of food. However, if their deeper intentions are probed, they become less contrary and more helpfully revelatory of ideas that need a hearing in the category-confused, insatiable world in which we Christian preachers find ourselves.

American Football or European Soccer ball?
On the shape of Scripture's core commitment

Rein Bos
The Netherlands

Throughout history, humans have enjoyed playing with a ball or something like a ball. According to historical references and legend, early balls ranged from stitched-up cloth to pig or cow bladders. Two present shapes of balls are well known: the oblong or oval shaped American football and the spherical shaped (European) soccer ball.

These images can serve the discussion on this year's theme of the hermeneutical workgroup: How to deal with "contrary" biblical texts, texts that seem at odds with the core commitment of the good news. The expression "core commitment" calls forth the image of a circle with one center and a periphery some distance from the center. With this image, "contrary texts" would be located the furthest removed from the center. But the trouble with this schema is that all the various, at times contradictory, texts cannot be accurately located in the biblical witness by means of the image of a circle or spherical ball with only one center. With the model of a circle, its absolute center can only function as a "canon within the canon" to distinguish between the alleged core testimony and peripheral texts at odds with this core.

I therefore suggest the use of another image for the testimony of Scripture: the ellipse or the oblate spheroid shape, like an American football.[1] This image has two foci juxtaposed. While the two foci are opposed, they are nevertheless always interrelated and interdependent. Such "contrary" texts need to be understood amidst an interplay of their antiphonal texts. In short, we find meaning in these contradictory texts within the dialectical tension of opposites. Every theological issue in scripture has a hermeneutical "helper as its counterpart," or a hermeneutical "help-meet,"[2] within the rich variety of witnesses of scripture. Hence, the shape of the American football seems a better model for a meaningful hermeneutic for "contrary texts" than a European soccer ball. In the brief compass of this paper, let me now illustrate how a "contrary text" offers its meaning within such a tension of opposites.

Hermeneutical and theological foundation

The bi-focal idiom about the essence and attributes of God

The LORD, the God of Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ, is both a condescending and a transcending God. The words and expressions we use to describe the essence and attributes of this unique God are not developed from an abstract perspective of deity, but are read off from experiences of God in history. The Dutch systematic theologian Hendrikus Berkhof proves convincingly that both scripture and experience make clear that these attributes never exist apart from their apparent or real opposite.[3]

a. "God is love" is an essential creed, both of the Old and New Testaments. But the love

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[1] When I discussed my elliptical hermeneutical concept with Don Wardlaw, he came up with the image of the American football.

[2] The expressions are taken from Genesis 2:18 in the translations of Rotherham, Young, and the KJV.

[3] Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith. An Introduction to the Study of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), especially §20 "Essence and Attributes of God."

of the God of scripture is far more and even completely different compared to human love. And it is exactly because of this "otherness" of God that scripture confronts us with a continuous alternation between God's wrath and love, God's grace and justice. Those words are two foci of the same ellipse. God's love and holiness belong together.

b. The same is true for the so-called omnipotence of God. And again, both scripture and experience tell us stories that seem to contradict God's omnipotence. There are texts and stories about God's "defenselessness," situations where humanity has taken and takes away the initiative from God. These two foci have to do with the passive and the receptive, the patience and the long-suffering, the enduring and the suffering of God. So we have to speak in a paradox about God as the "defenseless superior power."

c. There is a third area where we have to use such a bi-focal definition: God's immutability. God is reliable and not capricious. But scripture and experience tell us also that this God is manifested new in ever-new situations. God changes his ways in order to stay the same saving and redeeming God. So we have to speak paradoxically about God's "changeable faithfulness."

No one element of the three couples can be called the "center" of scripture's witness about God. Nor can we say that one of the elements is at odds with the "core witness" of scripture. Every element is accompanied by its theological counterpart. Proclaiming one of these elements needs and calls forth the other one to do justice to the variety of scripture.

"Core Testimony" and "Counter-testimony"

The aforementioned notion is not only true for testimony about the essence and attributes of God. It is also true for the character of the witness of scripture in general.

a. On the one hand, Israel makes bold and confident claims about the LORD as the gracious, sovereign, and steadfast God. On the other hand, Walter Brueggemann rightly says that "Israel's faith is a probing, questioning, insisting, disjunctive faith. The questions that Israel raises in its cross-examination are not of a speculative or theoretical nature. They are questions of a concrete, practical kind, arising out of life experience."[4] We hear people praying and questioning: "Why?" (Psalm 22:1; Mark 15:34 etc.), "How long?" (Psalm 6:3; 13:1-2; Revelation 6:9, etc.), "Where are you?" (Psalm 42:3; 79:10; Mark 4:38; John 11:21, etc.). In Brueggemann's words, the confident "core testimony," never exists without a questioning "counter-testimony." I would say that the "core testimony" is in itself bi-focal: words of faith and trust are always accompanied by questions, doubts, and even complaints. Scripture speaks with a polar and sometimes even ambivalent voice.

b. The poet of Psalm 8 asks with respectful amazement how it is possible that the creator of heaven and earth is mindful of mortal beings. "When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have established; what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?" (Psalm 8:3, 4). Job is amazed by the same fact and utters the same question. But the meaning of the same words is completely reversed. The amazement made place for severe complaint. God looks like a member of the secret service who leers and haunts for a human being. "What are human beings, that you make so much of them, that you set your mind on them, visit them every morning, test them every moment? Will you not look away from me for a while, let me alone until I swallow my spittle?" (Job 7:17).

c. Scripture can state, on the one hand, that death is a definitive end from which there is

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[4] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, 313, 318.

no escape (2 Samuel 12:23; Job 7:9f, 10:20-22, 14:11f). Moses and the prophets, evangelists, and apostles testify, on the other hand, that God's loyalty to the creation defies the power of death (1 Kings 17:22; 2 Kings 4:32-37; Matthew 10:8, etc.). The LORD holds on to His creatures at the other side of life and death.

       d. The LORD can be portrayed as the God who destroys all instruments of war, the God who breaks the bow, shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire (Psalm 46:9). Israel dreams about peace, tranquility, and the absence of war and violence in the name of this God (Isaiah 9:1-7; 11:1-9; Micah 4:1-5). But Israel's God is also the LORD of hosts (Literally, "LORD of armies"). This expression is used more than two hundred times in the books of Moses and the prophets. In the celebration of the exodus from Egypt, this God is even called a "man of war" (Exodus 15:3). This God musters an army for battle (Exodus 14:13f; Isaiah 13:4) and is celebrated as "the LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle" (Psalm 24:8).

"Hallelujah!" and "Why?"

       The traditional liturgical greeting of Easter is an exuberant celebration of Christ's resurrection: "It is true. The Lord has risen" (Luke 24:34). This "hallelujah" expresses joy after the death and darkness of Good Friday and after the silence of the tomb on Holy Saturday. But the gospels in their witness of the Easter events have also another tone. All the synoptic gospels give witness to uncertainties, anxieties, and unbelief on the morning of the resurrection. The earliest gospel account of Easter (Mark 16:1-8) ends not in joyous hallelujahs but in anxiety: "So they went out and fled from the tomb, for terror and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid" (Mark 16:8). It is generally accepted that this is Mark's original ending.[5] If, however, we do not stop here but read all the way to Mark 16:20, then it appears that the early church was not happy with the evangelist's conclusion that "terror and amazement" had seized them. Subsequent editors added some extra verses to the "terror and amazement" of the resurrection. The conclusion of the secondary ending to the gospel is the opposite of Mark's original: "And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere, while the Lord worked with them and confirmed the message by signs that accompanied it" (Mark 16:20). The new ending transforms the story of resurrection to an ellipse. There is both "terror" and "good news," both "saying nothing to anyone" and "spreading the word everywhere." Both endings of Mark belong to the theological heritage of the church and both endings reflect the spiritual life of the community of faith. That means that preaching has to guard an open space around the empty tomb where we can sing our hallelujahs but the cry of Good Friday ("Why?") can still be heard, an open space where the silence of Holy Saturday doesn't vanish and where the suffering and sin of everyday life are not swallowed.

Faith and works

       Paul is very clear about the relation between faith and works. "For we hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law" (Romans 3:28). James is also clear, but in another way. "You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone" (James 2:24).

       Often in history, Paul was declared to be the most important witness. It is well known, for instance, that James wasn't Martin Luther's favorite apostle and his epistle. In table conversation, he called the latter "An epistle of straw." And Luther intended to use James to fire

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[5] Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markus-evangelium*, in *Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* II/2 (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 1977), 519-544.

his stove. But that is far too easily said. The texts of both apostles (including their opposing theological paradigms) belong to the word of God. Scripture as a whole is the word of God and not a collection of individual and independent texts. So we have to read scripture in its canonical shape. The relation between faith and works is therefore to see as an ellipse with two focal points in an ongoing tension.

Seeking the things on earth and above

The LORD made humanity responsible from the beginning for the well-being of the earth. "The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Because we have been raised with Christ and because our life is hidden with Christ in God, Paul admonishes us to "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth" (Colossians 3:2). We are therefore called to seek both the well-being of the things that are on earth and the things that are "above." There is a clear tension between these two instructions of scripture.

Liturgy

The theological and existential structure of the liturgy is also marked by an "elliptical" concept: Word is set next to sacrament, praise next to lament, thanksgiving next to beseeching, speech next to silence.[6] Any one thing, in isolation, risks saying too much or too little. For instance, the word interprets the meal and the meal interprets the word. That means that each word or action in the liturgy has to be juxtaposed or even opposed by another word or action as its mate and counterpart.

Spirituality (The conference's general theme)

a. Scripture offers a rich variety of images and metaphors to name, describe, and interpret our shelter under the refuge of God. With the LORD, we are safe as on a rock (Psalm 18:3, 47; Isaiah 44:8). He hides us in his shelter and conceals us under the cover of his tent (Psalm 27:5). The LORD is our shade at our right hand (Psalm 121:5). In and through Jesus Christ, the gentile nations are invited to repeat after Israel: The LORD has inscribed our names on the palms of his hands (Isaiah 49:16). But life has more to offer than just quiet waters and green pastures. There are moments when we don't experience the comforting rod and stick of the LORD (*contra* Psalm 23). There are times when we have no reason to sing a song of joy (*contra* Psalm 150; Ephesians 5:6; Colossians 3:16). There is so much that contradicts God's promises, so much that causes physical or spiritual pain. There are so many bitter questions that go beyond the understanding of our head and heart. People can become prey of the "raging of the enemies" (Psalm 2:1f). There are indeed moments that it seems that God is asleep (Psalm 44:23f; Mark 4:38).

b. And when God comes near by, how do we notice that He is passing by? Scriptures says that the LORD can encounter us in "the rush of a violent wind" (Acts 2:2). But there are also moments that the LORD is not in a violent wind, nor in an earthquake, nor in the fire, but in the "sound of sheer silence" (1 Kings 19:11-12).

c. The elliptical character of our faith (and lack of it!) cannot be better expressed than in the words of the father of a son with an unclean spirit "I believe; help my unbelief!" (Mark 9:24).

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[6] Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy Ground: A Liturgical Cosmology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003).

Homiletical Strategy

In almost every theological issue, we can discern two poles juxtaposed and sometimes even opposed to each other. Those poles have a paradoxical relation and there is an ongoing dialectical tension between them. To reduce the variety of the witnesses of scripture to a single "core witness" in the center and to remove other voices to the periphery runs the risk to open the door to all kinds of religious extremisms (e.g., on the role of faith and works or on the presence or absence of God) and even religiously legitimized political fanaticism (e.g., on the issue of war and peace).[7] Both poles of an ellipse keep each other in balance and prevent possible radical opinions that center the attention on one focus only. The complex tension between the poles of the elliptical witness of scripture on the one hand and the equal complexity of contemporary situations on the other invites and requires ongoing interpretative negotiations of both biblical texts and contemporary situations. Therefore I suggest the following homiletical and hermeneutical strategy.

1. Discern the theological "elliptical" system of which a particular text is part. Does the text say something about the essence or the attributes of God (e.g., love and holiness)? Does the text say something about anthropology or soteriology? Is the text a prayer (lament or praise)?[8]

    What is the other pole of this ellipse? That means that we not only have the task to find "Gospel-like" texts in relation to those that seem at odds with an alleged core commitment of scripture. We also have to look for so called "contrary" texts in relation to those passages that seem to be clear in declaring the "good news." So I advocate the strategy to find always the other "focal point" in the ellipse of scripture as a whole.

2. Discern the location of the listeners on the scale between the two poles.

3. Based on what you found under the preceding two points, decide whether you want to empower, reassure, or encourage the congregation where they are, or whether you want to emphasize the "counter-point."

    a. Do the listeners, for instance, have too much attention for the responsibility to "till and keep" their own part of creation, or do they set their minds too much "on things that are above?"

    b. Do you want to balance their view on the relation between faith and works either by stressing Paul's or James's vision?

    c. Do you want to balance the view on the relation between war and peace?

Advantages of this strategy

The bi-focal paradigm has some advantages over the center-core paradigm:

a. It does justice to the variety of the witnesses of scripture.

b. It takes into account that the meaning of scripture is dependent on the particular situation of a congregation in time and place. When, for example, the "positive" texts from scripture become dominant in worship and preaching, there is a risk and even a danger that our sermons bury again the uncertainties, anger, frustrations, anxieties, and unbelief of the hearers under "editorial additions," as in the last chapter of Mark. That kind of preaching has nothing

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[7] I wrote this contribution in the weeks after the attacks on the subway stations in London (7/7).
[8] Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

more to offer as a "sugar coated" message.

      c. This paradigm offers the possibility to treat controversial issues in a balanced mode.[9]

      d. An added plus of this strategy is that exegesis and systematic theology are partners from the start and not competitors in the process of sermon preparation.

      Being European, I see a lot more soccer than American football. As a homiletician, however, I prefer the metaphor of a football. And using the bi-focal oval as the image of homiletical hermeneutics makes every Sunday a *Super Bowl Sunday* both for preacher and congregation.

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[9] Mary Alice Mulligan, et al., *Believing in Preaching. What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005), 91-110, 195-210.

Cruciform Spirituality and the Homiletics of Paul

Michael Knowles
McMaster Divinity College

Preaching and Presence

According to Heikki Koskenniemi, the main function of a Hellenistic letter—such as those Paul wrote to fledgling congregations in places like Corinth, Thessalonika, and Philippi—was "the continuance of a dialogic conversation in writing."[1] Literary theorists of Paul's day note that letters do not set forth a one-sided oration: they represent only half of an ongoing, multi-voiced dialogue intended to imitate as closely as possible the tone and manner of the writer's own verbal style. Within a few centuries, theorists will adopt the broader term *homilia* (social intercourse) to express the intentionally relational function of written correspondence. But already in this earlier period, two further rhetorical features express the social and relational dimensions of written correspondence, namely, *philophronēsis*, the expression and maintenance of a friendly relationship between sender and recipient(s), and *parousia*, whereby the letter serves as a substitute form of authorial presence.[2] So pervasive are these features that they can equally be illustrated from the Roman world: the Roman Stoic and moralist Lucius Annaeus Seneca (*ca.* 4 BCE – 65 CE) writes to his friend Lucilius, "Whenever your letters arrive, I imagine that I am with you, and I have the feeling that I am about to speak my answer, instead of writing it" (*Ep. Mor.* 67.2 [Gummere, LCL]).

As dictated to an amanuensis and read aloud for the benefit of the gathered church, Paul's letters thus represent a kind of "preaching by extension," a strategic substitute for his personal presence that conveys an epistolary rendering of his voice and sustains the relationship between apostle and congregation.[3] Second Corinthians in particular articulates a coherent theological and practical justification for the preaching of the Christian gospel: not just his own, but preaching in general. In the course of defending himself and his ministry of proclamation, Paul articulates a Jesus-centered spirituality that can best be described as "cruciform," a spiritual vision essentially shaped by Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. Whereas the canonical Gospels reflect the spirituality of Jesus—his relationship to God and the activities that proceed from it—throughout the course of his earthly ministry, Paul concentrates on the conclusion of Jesus' life, proposing crucifixion and resurrection as categories that provide a primary template or archetype for Christian spirituality, discipleship, and ministry.

Michael Gorman describes "conformity to the crucified Christ" as "a dynamic correspondence in daily life to the strange story of Christ crucified as the primary way of

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[1] So William G. Doty, *Letters in Primitive Christianity* (GBS; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1973), 12, summarizing Heikki Koskenniemi, *Studien zur Idee und Phraseologie des griechischen Briefes bis 400 n. Chr.* (AASF B 102.2; Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1956), 42-47.

[2] Koskenniemi, *Studien*, 35-44; cf. Doty, *Letters*, 8.

[3] So James W. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul. Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 27-36, although Paul and his detractors concur that his written and oral styles differ in significant respects (2 Cor 10:10-11).

experiencing the love and grace of God,"[4] arguing that it represents the single most definitive feature of Paul's theology, lifestyle, and apostolic proclamation. Whether we appropriate this paradigm in terms that are primarily spatial (crucifixion = abasement, negation; resurrection = exaltation, re-creation) or temporal (the movement from Good Friday to Easter Sunday), Paul's assertion is that God acts in the lives of Jesus' followers as God acted in Jesus' own experience, by allowing humiliation and death to provide the occasion for a uniquely divine gift of new life. Although the immediate experiential origins of this approach are related in 2 Cor 1:8-10 (describing Paul's account of affliction suffered in Asia), 2 Cor 4:5 offers a convenient summary of its theological content and of the role of the preacher in communicating it: "We do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake." In both passages and throughout this letter—indeed, partly *by means of* this letter—Paul proclaims Christ's death and resurrection both by word and by example. He embodies and articulates, both lives and preaches, a spirituality of the cross.

In short, because the Messiah is no longer physically present to the church, Paul proposes his own preaching and cruciform lifestyle in Christ's stead; because he himself cannot be present in Corinth, Paul sends letters instead; because Jesus is no longer on earth, Paul contends that the life of the congregation presents Christ to the world, insofar as they too live out the pattern of their Lord's death and resurrection.

Affliction in Asia

According to Gorman, "*Paul conceives of identification with and participation in the death of Jesus as the believer's fundamental experience of Christ*" and, moreover, "No letter stresses cruciformity as the norm of existence in Christ more than 2 Corinthians."[5] Thus the emphasis on suffering and comfort, affliction and consolation with which Paul begins this letter (2 Cor 1:3-7) is rooted not in abstract theory, but in lived experience, a "lived theology" of participation in the death and new life of Christ:

> We do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced in Asia; for we were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death so that we would rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead. He who rescued us from so deadly a peril will continue to rescue us; on him we have set our hope that he will rescue us again. (2 Cor 1:8-10)

Simply put, Paul had been firmly convinced that he and his companions would die. The fact that they unexpectedly survived this ordeal causes Paul to reflect anew on the nature of Christian experience. He concludes that they were allowed to suffer this affliction in order that "we would rely not on ourselves, but on God *who raises the dead*" (2 Cor 1:9). Although the latter formula is a conventional Jewish expression of piety, it takes on new meaning in light of Jesus' paradigmatic death and resurrection, for Paul now realizes that such experience is essentially similar to that of Christ on the cross and thereafter. If it is his and his companions' experience, as it has been Christ's experience, then surely this is the pattern for all Christian experience.

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[4] Michael J. Gorman, Cruciformity: Paul's Narrative Spirituality of the Cross (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 5; this dynamic is as much corporate as individual: "the narrative of the crucified and exalted Christ is the normative life-narrative within which the community's own life-narrative takes place and by which it is shaped" (44; emphasis original).
[5] Gorman, Cruciformity, 35, 32 (emphasis original).

Thus for preachers and congregants who suffer or stumble, Paul offers a compelling account of the spiritual life: reversals, humiliation, and affliction offer an opportunity for identification with Jesus. To some extent, he testifies, identification with Jesus' abasement will itself be reversed: just as God raised Jesus from death, so his failing followers encounter divine "consolation" as their own foretaste of resurrection. Such deliverance is only partial, however, for Paul also testifies that on this side of death and the eschaton God's grace is "sufficient" but not overwhelming (2 Cor 12:9). Nonetheless, such an outlook offers profound consolation to hearers who know that their situation exceeds the usual capabilities of human intervention, who are caught in circumstances beyond their own control, or whose endeavor to follow Jesus itself occasions debilitating opposition and rejection.

Not Ourselves

For Paul, a spirituality of the cross applies especially to the task of proclamation. While this theme reverberates throughout Second Corinthians, 2 Cor 4:5 in particular captures the character and purpose of preaching in a single telling phrase, not least because of its explicit use of the verb *kērussein*:

> For we do not proclaim ourselves; we proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.

To begin with, why does Paul find it necessary to deny that he preaches "himself"? Perhaps, as Thrall suggests,

> He is countering the charge that his evangelistic activity is motivated by the egotistical concern to achiever power over people (1.24, 10.8), or to create a reputation for himself and make financial profit out of it.[6]

Along the same lines, Furnish proposes that the Corinthians have also misunderstood the kind of injunction represented by 1 Cor 11:1: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ."[7] Presumably they find such instructions self-serving and arrogant, so that Paul must respond by assuring his congregants, "We do *not* preach ourselves." But upon closer investigation, Paul's intent is just the opposite of what it first appears, as emerges from the context of the passage in chapter four of 2 Corinthians:

> To the present hour we are hungry and thirsty, we are poorly clothed and beaten and homeless, and we grow weary from the work of our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we speak kindly. We have become like the rubbish of the world, the dregs of all things, to this very day. I am not writing this to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you might have ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers. Indeed, in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. I appeal to you, then, be imitators of me. (1 Cor 4:11-16)

Responding to congregational factionalism based on allegiances to different leaders, Paul began his argument by describing himself and Apollos as mere "servants" (1 Cor 3:5) and "God's fellow workers" (3:9); he, Apollos, and Cephas are no more than "servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries" (4:1). Rather than being "puffed up in favor of one against

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[6] Margaret E. Thrall, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994, 2000), 1.313.

[7] Victor Paul Furnish, II Corinthians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (AB 32A; Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1986), 249.

another," believers should therefore be humble toward one another, even as the litany of afflictions he cites indicates that apostleship entails humility, even humiliation. Far from being self-vaunting, Paul's appeal for imitation counsels self-basement, altogether inverting the image of apostles as powerful figures who, together with their factions, compete for supremacy.

This assertion is the direct equivalent in corporate terms of Paul's confession in Gal 2:19-20: "I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but...Christ who lives in me." Whereas that statement expresses a cruciform spirituality in personal terms, 2 Cor 4:5 articulates the same principle as it applies to all apostles and preachers of the Christian message, implying that human identity and human agency are brought to nothing by the cross. By definition, says Paul, the message of the cross turns attention away from the proclaimer and toward the One proclaimed.

On a personal level, apostolic preaching is therefore *no* —whatever apologies are due Phillips Brooks—an expression of "personality."[8] Whatever their contribution to human communication may be, Paul insists, the power of preaching is ultimately rooted not in psychology, eloquence, or the power of persuasion, but in the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Preachers know this only too well from personal experience: the sermon over which one has labored long proves to be an inexplicably awkward flop, whereas the ten-minute "homilette" thrown together at the last minute in anxiety and haste proves to be moving and memorable. Yet when one attempts the same feat the following week, entering the pulpit with a minimum of preparation and maximal hope of divine intervention, the only measurable result is embarrassment all around. This is what makes preaching so infuriating: not that one can never "get it right," but that the process of "getting it right" so often seems arbitrary. This is not to obviate the importance of good exegesis, culturally relevant illustrations, logical structure, and good oratorical skills. Paul himself employs all of these. But he is wise enough to know that the effectiveness of his preaching in bringing about conviction, conversion, and spiritual consolation is not dependent on these factors alone:

> When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified... My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Cor 2:1-5)

However arbitrary nor capricious homiletical "success" might appear at times, preaching ultimately relies both conceptually and practically on what Paul calls "the power of God."

According to Charles Campbell (commenting on the work of Hans Frei), Christian preaching intentionally imitates Jesus' own powerlessness and renunciation of violence by refusing to use coercion or manipulation. Just as Jesus moved "from ministry to crucifixion, from authoritative power to helplessness," so preachers submit to similar limitations:

> Not only is the preacher's *message* shaped by the story of Jesus...but the very *act* of preaching is itself is a performance of Scripture, an embodiment of God's reign after the pattern of Jesus... Preachers accept a strange kind of powerlessness, which finally relies on God to make effective not only individual sermons, but the very practice of preaching itself; like the Word made flesh, the preacher's words must be "redeemed by God" to be

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[8] See Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching Delivered Before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877* (New York: Dutton, 1893 [1877]), 5-8: "Truth through Personality is our description of real preaching" (8).

effective.... Faithful preaching thus enacts on behalf of the entire church an interpretive performance of the story of Jesus.[9]

For preachers to engage such a methodology entails enormous risk. There is no "guarantee" as to the outcome of their ministry, other than the assurance, experienced and attested so vividly by Paul, that what God did for Jesus God will also do for Jesus' followers. But that outcome is not up to us. Preachers can only acknowledge that they find themselves in the way that leads to death, in trust that life will ensue. To the extent that they too find themselves "rescued," and to the extent that they too are lifted from theological helplessness (or even despair!) by a "near resurrection" experience, they will be able to bear witness to their hearers regarding such redemption. To that extent they will serve as examples and illustrations of "lived theology" in much the same way as Paul did for the Corinthian congregation. Nor can preachers do more than identify the ways of suffering and death in which their congregants find themselves, and testify to the promise that God, in Christ, raises the dead. Preachers cannot, of their own accord, either insist on such "resurrection" or enable it themselves, for that is something beyond human ability that—by definition—only God can accomplish.

Thus to preach concerning the crucified and risen Messiah requires us to share the conditions of the Messiah's own ministry. If we are to follow Paul on this point, the paradigm of Jesus' incarnation dictates not only that we enter into a dialogic relationship of equals with our hearers (as God incarnate enters into a dialogical relationship of equals with us), but more pointedly mandates that before our words can live or hope to give life, they must first die—even while they attempt to speak of God's gift of life. They must fall silent, acknowledging their own futility, in order to become subject to the grace of resurrection, or its epistemological equivalent. In narrative terms, if we are characters of God's authoring, then we must follow the example of the lead actor: we must suffer and fall silent, acknowledging our absolute contingency and dependence upon God for our voices to convey anything more than human authority. For to speak *efficaciously* of new life in Christ, so that new life indeed ensues, lies within the domain of resurrection, and is effected by the agency of God alone.

Whatever authority preachers think they possess is further nullified by the fact that the message of the cross and resurrection that they announce, once spoken, has a life of its own of which the preacher is not the ultimate referent. The fact that God in Christ (not preacher or congregation) is the ultimate referent of such words prevents preachers from insisting on the authority of their own speech. Rather, we both speak to and listen with our hearers as equals before a greater Word, not knowing and unable to dictate what will become of our merely human words. We are ultimately dependent not on our own ability to convey meaning, create identity, or engender life (for we have no such ability), but rather on the meaning-making, life-engendering, identity-creating ability of God whose authorship, authorization, and authority are nonetheless graciously conveyed by means of our mere words.

The best example of this process (however unrepeatable) is that of Paul's letters. It is scarcely imaginable that he wrote with the knowledge or conviction that his letters would one day constitute a major portion of the Christian Bible. He was simply trying to instruct his converts, correct certain errors, and defend his ministry. Given the conditions of travel in the ancient world, he would have sent off his correspondence without any certainty of it even

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[9] Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Hermeneutic* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 214, 216 (emphasis original). However, Campbell adds the important qualification that non-coercive preaching is not to be confused with passivity or reluctance to assert strong moral and theological claims.

reaching its intended destination, much less being received and understood aright. Yet its influence in the life of the church and human history has been—according to God's gracious purpose—incalculably great.

Albeit on a considerably smaller scale, our own preaching is carried out under similar constraints, and with similar confidence. If preachers and hearers submit to one another's voices as both submit to the voice of God, so at the same time the voice of those who announce and expound "the word of the cross" is—at least potentially and by virtue of divine action—a more-than-merely-human voice. Certainly Paul claims that the message he preaches represents more than his own voice, for it is the means by which God announces new life "in Christ" and calls hearers into (new) being. Such a claim—whether on Paul's part or our own—is neither arrogant nor authoritarian. On the contrary, it is profoundly humbling to acknowledge that preacher and hearers alike are constituted by becoming what the divine "Other" desires them to be, even before that vision is fully realized in personal experience. It is even more humbling for those still in process of transformation to be made a means by which God facilitates such transformation in their hearers. For followers of Jesus are neither individually self-made nor defined by the consensus of the faith community, but live according to a cruciform definition of human identity that they hear and see "in Christ." Accordingly, although preachers are not the only ones to speak or listen within the Christian community, their particular responsibility is to discern, engage, and echo the voices of Scripture, theology, and human experience that are most consonant with "the word of the cross," as a representative act of submission to the saving, life-giving will of God.

It might be tempting to think that the preacher need not be concerned with content or presentation on the grounds that homiletic efficacy is a divine responsibility. The issue can be formulated along the lines of Paul's more famous query, "Should we continue in sin... that grace may abound?" (Rom 6:1). Here the question might be put, "Should we neglect homiletic method, that God may give the growth?" Paul's own example precludes this eventuality, for, he says, "I worked harder than any." He then hastens to add: "Yet it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me" (1 Cor 15:10). This aptly expresses the paradoxical dynamic: human instrumentality remains essential, yet relies on the enablement of grace. Or as Augustine once more succinctly expressed the matter, "Without God we cannot; without us God will not."

Jesus Christ as Lord

As crucifixion presages resurrection, Paul's renunciation of self anticipates his announcement of preaching's proper content. Paul is not renouncing his own role as apostle, or the need for some degree of human agency (for "how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him?" [Rom 10:14]). But the order of his syntax follows the logic of the cross, explaining the position of the preacher vis-à-vis the message we proclaims. Just as Christ draws humanity into the nullity of death in order that he and they might become subject to the "new creation" of resurrection, so preachers declare, "Not ourselves!" as a precondition for themselves and their message becoming subject to the life-giving reality of "Jesus Christ as Lord."

This formula, as most commentators observe, is an expansion of the basic Christian confession, *Kyrios Iēsous*: "Lord Jesus" or "Jesus [is] Lord" (1 Cor 12:3).[10] By combining a personal name with a theological title, this most elemental statement of faith identifies Jesus of Nazareth as the exalted "Lord" of both Jewish theocracy and Greco-Roman political ideology.

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[10] So, e.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: Adam and Charles Black, 1973²), 134.

The formulation in 2 Cor 4:5 is even more complete, incorporating three names or titles. Paul's Greek (*kērussomen Iēsoun Christon kyrion*) manages with fewer articles and particles than are required by idiomatic English, which must insert certain explanatory additions: "We preach 'Jesus Christ [as] Lord'" or "We preach '[the] Lord Jesus Christ.'"

The kind of preaching that Paul has in mind thus begins with the crucified rabbi, the historically humiliated Jesus of Nazareth: "We preach *Jesus*..." If preaching takes as its starting point the theological premise of Incarnation—God's entry into fragility and suffering—it can never be abstracted from the awkward particularities and vicissitudes of human existence. Yet neither is it bound by human limitations, for it equally confesses the reversal of Jesus' humiliation and the affirmation of his messianic anointing: "We preach Jesus as *the Christ*." Along the same lines, apostolic preaching declares that the supremely abased one has been supremely exalted: "We preach Jesus as Christ and *Lord*." Finally, the combination of "Christ" and "Lord" hints at the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile that Jesus' death and resurrection have now accomplished. Applying both *Christos* and *Kyrios* to Jesus as theological titles would thus suggest, at least for the mixed Jewish-Gentile audience of ancient Corinth, a certain meeting of worlds, communicating the soteriological relevance of his exaltation to Jew and Gentile alike.

As Paul sets it out in 1 Cor 4:5, the proper content of apostolic preaching is thus the full divine-human identity of Jesus: "We preach Jesus: Christ *and* Lord." In short, the disgraced "Jesus [of Nazareth]" and the resurrected "Lord" and "Christ" are found to be inextricably one and the same. Both for the crucified and risen One, and for his followers, desolation and consolation, suffering and glory, are bound together in God's purpose of redemption.

The irony of the situation is as biting as it is profound: Jesus' chosen twelve are famous—infamous—for having abandoned their Master at his hour of greatest need. Yet what they failed to do, Paul insists is the essence of true discipleship: following Jesus to the cross in order to be caught up with Him in resurrection. The same applies to preaching: just as in Christ we exchange sin and failure for "the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21), so in preaching we exchange "ourselves"—the prioritization of human identity, human methods, human words—for the sovereign reality of Jesus as Christ, Lord, and "Word" of God.

Ourselves as your Slaves

Yet the preacher is still very much present as the paradoxical instrument of God's redemptive purpose: "We preach not ourselves," declares the apostle, "but Jesus Christ as Lord, *and ourselves as your slaves for Jesus' sake.*" F. F. Bruce observes that "the possession of Roman citizenship was a high social distinction in the Near East."[11] As a Roman citizen, Paul likely enjoyed coveted privileges of legal protection and social distinction shared by few others in the city's small Christian community. Representing himself as a "slave"—one at the very bottom end of the social scale—would have seemed shocking, to say the least. He himself had admonished the Corinthians, "You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters" (1 Cor 7:23) and (although the wording is ambiguous), seems to have counseled slaves to take advantage of manumission if it was offered them (1 Cor 7:21). For him to propose a willing descent from the privileged position of Roman citizen to that of a slave—even as a metaphor—would have verged on idiocy. Yet it was a fitting imitation of Christ's own acquiescence to humiliation: Paul preached of a "Lord" who had himself assumed the place of a

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[11] F. F. Bruce, "Citizenship," *ABD* 1.1048.

slave (Phil 2:7), one who "though he was rich, yet for your sakes became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich" (2 Cor 8:9).

It is not enough, Paul implies, for pastors or preachers to serve as "slaves" of Christ or God, for that would fall short of fully imitating Jesus. Just as the paradigm of Jesus' crucifixion enables Paul to embrace suffering where the congregants reject it, and to see therein a gracious design where they find only degradation or divine malice, so Jesus' example determines the apostle's relationship with even the most recalcitrant converts. He refuses to "lord it" over them (*kurieuein*, 2 Cor 1:24), but has "made [himself] a slave [*edoulōsa*] to all" (1 Cor 9:19). Thus the cross not only illuminates the suffering he encounters, but even determines the humble manner in which that cross must be proclaimed. Whereas for them abasement and exaltation, humiliation and glory, "slavery" and "Lordship" are antithetical and mutually exclusive, Paul shows by his own example that for Jesus' followers, each is inherent in the other:

> This explains why Paul can actually preach himself as *doulos hymōn*. The gospel which he preaches is being worked out in his life. He is being transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ, a likeness which, as we have seen, comes to expression pre-eminently in self-giving service. Paul's behavior among the Corinthians thus embodies the message he is proclaiming. His 'service' is indivisible from his preaching.[12]

This entails a commitment on the part of preachers to the voices, concerns, and circumstances of their hearers (hence "ourselves as *your* slaves, for Jesus' sake," 2 Cor 4:5b). Preaching is social, contextual, and dialogical in the sense that it is never abstract or disembodied, but takes account of the human "other" whom it engages. The meaning of the preached gospel—notwithstanding its transcendent reference—will always be its meaning for a particular set of hearers at a particular time and place. Accordingly, the preacher listens *to* the congregation so as to enter into dialogue with them and listens *with* the congregation for the voice of God in their midst. Even as Jesus abandons the strategy of imposing authority "from above," instead taking the form of a slave, so preachers reject authoritarian proclamation and embrace the mutuality of common hearing, knowing that the message of the cross mediates between preacher and hearers and shapes both by its distinctive meaning. There is a risk in this process of preacher and congregation alike being fundamentally misunderstood, and an even greater risk of the gospel itself being fundamentally misunderstood, but this is the risk God has already taken in the person of the human Jesus. Following that example, by listening to one another so as to listen together for God's voice, preachers and congregations each submit to the judgment of the other not as an end in itself, but as a means of mutual submission to the judgment of God in the message of the cross and resurrection. Both partners in this process acknowledge that distinctively Christian—which is to say, Christomorphic and cruciform— meaning and identity emerge not simply in the dialogue between preachers and hearers alone, but in their common dialogue with the word of the cross that stands over both.

To live after the example of Jesus, in conformity to the cross, places the preacher or Christian leader in a position of almost intolerable vulnerability. The danger of what Paul proposes is that it risks subjecting the leader to the whims of a less spiritually mature congregation (although the Corinthians themselves would not have seen things quite this way). Yet at the very least (and however imperfectly he or his congregants may practice them), Paul is consistent in his theological principles. Just as Jesus subjected himself to the will of others, even at the cost of his life, so Paul offers to do the same. What this meant for Paul vis-à-vis the

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[12] Timothy B. Savage, Power Through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians (SNTSMS 86; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1996), 153.

believers at Corinth is only too clear from his correspondence, as he struggles to answer their questions, defend himself against their recriminations, and compete for the congregation's loyalty with other leaders whose style seems so much more straightforward, sensible, and rewarding. Nonetheless, declaring apostles to be "slaves" is part of Paul's larger program of redemptive vulnerability, whereby he knows himself to be in a humanly impossible situation, and for that reason to be also in the hands of a redeeming God.

Just as Jesus' suffering is neither pointless nor impotent, but intended for the benefit of others, so it is with those who suffer like Paul, in imitation of Christ. This is not a question of preachers or pastors imagining themselves to be more important, powerful, or blessed than their congregants. On the contrary, Paul's view is that leaders may exceed their congregations neither in dignity, charisma, nor material blessings, but only in tribulation, and only in the degree to which they are thereby constrained to rely utterly on the resurrecting power of God. It is this experience that gives them voice, informs their theology, and grants their preaching the authenticity of a lived spiritual reality. In such circumstances, the preacher's authority is entirely independent of office, institution, or scholastic achievement: the charism of such proclamation does not even reside in the event or activity of proclamation itself, but in the saving divine action to which it testifies. The content and method of our preaching thus derive in significant measure from our experience of Christ, not in the sense of imposing a spiritual regimen from above, but rather offering (in self-defense if necessary) an explanation of what we ourselves have found spiritually sustaining, and therefore may be of benefit to others.

It is daunting to think that one's main qualification as a pastor or preacher should be the depth of one's spiritual need (which is not, fortunately, quite the same as emotional or psychological need). Yet this is what Paul confesses to be his own qualification. True, he is also certain of having been divinely commissioned (1 Cor 9:17), but the claim of commissioning is in itself no proof of personal qualification. Even if it had been, subsequent events have convinced him that the source of his ministerial authority and effectiveness lies nowhere within himself. This being the case, the model he proposes is one of vulnerability and transparency, of confessing that one is (in a number of senses) "wasting away," in continual need of spiritual sustenance, and at the same time constantly "being renewed" by the power of God (2 Cor 4:16). Although there is the danger in such an approach of narcissism and excessive introspection (all the more so given the narcissism and excessive introspection of Western culture), Paul seems to escape this trap, managing as every preacher must to maintain his focus on Christ.

Conclusions

As we have seen, Paul sets forth the archetype of Jesus' death and resurrection as theologically and experientially constitutive of his own identity and that of his converts, as well as of apostolic ministry in particular. That is, he is concerned to show how the cross and resurrection of Jesus provide the conceptual content of the Christian message, determine the manner of its proclamation, and establish the basic pattern of Christian discipleship. For Paul the crucial issue, so to speak, is the inclusion of both crucifixion *and* resurrection as paradigmatic for Christian experience. The paradox of the message he proclaims is that, in Christ, God has spoken by means of the unspeakable: both the unspeakably "human" (or, we might say, "inhuman") and the unspeakably divine. That is, crucifixion and resurrection alike reflect the divine purpose; abasement and glorification are both integral features of Christian discipleship; "glory"— whether for Jesus or his followers—emerges out of shame rather than in spite of it; and only by

embracing the death and degradation implied by crucifixion does one become subject to resurrection and new creation. The problem is not, in all likelihood, that the Corinthians reject the idea of conformity to Christ—more likely, they embrace it in principle. But they seem to recoil at the particular demands of *cruci*formity, and at the thought that cross-like abasement in the presence of God and life-giving rescue or exaltation by God are equally integral and ongoing features of Christian discipleship. The paradox of the message Paul proclaims and embodies is that it calls for "near-death" and "near-resurrection" alike, but not one at the expense of the other.

"Be imitators of me," Paul urges, "as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). He makes this appeal in epistolary form, with the voice of a chosen emissary—perhaps Titus or the unnamed "brother" (cf. 2 Cor 8:6; 9:2, 4; 12:18)—substituting for his own presence amongst the congregants. Subsequent preachers may, or may not, make similar appeals, depending on the depth of their affliction and the extent of the consolation they experience. At the same time, Paul consistently points beyond himself, to the expectation of Christ being equally at work in his hearers. He seeks to identify evidence of Christ's life and power at work among them, amidst whatever difficulties they currently face. His homiletic method, if we may call it that, thus consists primarily of conveying a vision of Christ's gracious activity in himself and his hearers alike. "For," he tells the Philippian church, "God is at work within, among you, both to will and to accomplish his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13). Why, he exclaims to the Corinthians, "You yourselves...are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written...by the Spirit of the living God...on tablets of human hearts" (2 Cor 3:2-3). If that is true of Paul's hearers, it is no less true of Paul. Nor is it any less true of those who seek to preach like Paul. For we in turn are also letters from Christ, on whom words of death and resurrection have both been engraved, in whose lives and preaching those to whom we are sent may discern a word of grace, a word of comfort, a word of resurrection, alongside the sentence of death that Christ and sin have brought. Much as Paul's letter conveys his own presence to the early church, so our words and the "letters" we become may convey Christ's gracious presence in the church of a later day. In this sense, the hope Paul proclaims sums up the task of preaching in every age:

> Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. (2 Cor 1:3-5; RSV)

Preaching Spirituality from the Gospel of Luke

Eunjoo M. Kim
Iliff School of Theology

Earlier this year I was invited to be the guest preacher during the Holy Week Series at the First Presbyterian Church of Corsicana, Texas. I was asked to preach three sermons and prepared them based on the Gospel of Luke, following the theme of "The Everyday Practice of Following Christ to the Cross." The first sermon was a Palm Sunday sermon from the scene of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem in Luke 19:28-42. The second sermon was from the scene of Jesus' last supper in Luke 22:14-27, and the last one was from the Passion Narrative in Luke 22:63-23:49. Through these three sermons, I hoped to guide and nurture the congregation's spirituality. Based on my personal reflection on the entire process of preparing and delivering these three sermons, this essay concentrates on the following three aspects regarding preaching spirituality from the Gospel of Luke: 1) understanding Christian spirituality from the perspective of Luke, 2) exploring hermeneutical methodology combining narrative criticism, canonical criticism, and meditation, and 3) creating sermons that guide and nurture *ecclesial* spirituality.

Spirituality from the Gospel of Luke

The word "spirituality," which we often hear in various situations, is a relatively new term in both theological and secular writings, in contrast to the adjective "spiritual" (pneumatic), which has long been used in Christian theology as well as the Bible. In the *Catholic Encyclopedia* published between 1912-1915, there are no references to the term spirituality, but the revised *New Catholic Encyclopedia* of the 1970s includes eight articles containing that word. The *Webster's International Dictionary* in 1961 is one of the first dictionaries that include the term spirituality.[1] The Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary in 1973 defines spirituality in four ways: First, as "something that in ecclesiastical law belongs to the church or to a cleric as such"; second, as "clergy"; third, as "sensitivity or attachment to religious values"; and last, as "the quality or state of being spiritual." Contemporary religious people tend to use the term spirituality according to the last definition.

When we define the term "Christian spirituality" as being spiritual in relationship with God, who is revealed in the Bible, especially in Jesus Christ, Christian spirituality is often found in various descriptions within different historical and theological contexts. However, there is deep and foundational unanimity among various understandings of the term spirituality as to its source. That is, the Bible, especially the New Testament, has been considered to be a direct source for Christian spiritual life. For example, I Corinthians 2 teaches that a spiritual being or a spiritual life means accepting the things that come from the Spirit of God and living according to the instructions of the Lord Jesus Christ; a spiritual person is not someone who runs away from this world but the one who lives the renewed life in Jesus Christ in this world; and Christian fellowship and community are essential to the development of a life in the Spirit.

When it comes to the question of *how* a life in the Spirit should be most meaningfully pursued, the Bible has a variety of answers, for biblical authors have their unique spiritual experiences and attempt to apply the message of Jesus to the particular circumstances of their

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[1] Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1991), 34.

own communities. Among the diverse descriptions in the Bible about living a life in the Spirit, the Gospel of Luke appeals to me most as a significant source for preaching spirituality for several reasons: First, the Gospel of Luke "preeminently qualifies as the Gospel of the Holy Spirit."[2] While the expression "Holy Spirit" appears four times in Mark and five times in Matthew, it appears thirteen times in Luke.[3] Unlike Mark, who sees the Spirit possess Jesus and send him out to the desert (Mark 1:12), Luke states that the Holy Spirit inspires, directs, and leads Jesus in every step of his entire ministry. According to Luke, Jesus is filled with the Spirit (Luke 4:1), acts in the power of the Spirit (Luke 4:14), and is anointed with the Spirit (Luke 4:18). Jesus, who is full of the Spirit, will later become the source of the Spirit for everyone (Luke 3:16; 24:49), and the life in the Spirit will continue from Jesus to the community of his followers (Luke 24:46-49).

The second reason why the Gospel of Luke is an important source for preaching spirituality is that Luke's audience is similar to us in the sense that Luke's church was an already structured and institutionalized one, "big enough to be world-minded and distant enough from its beginnings to be interested in its own traditions and its roots."[4] Like today's church, Luke's church already passed through the early enthusiasm of a new beginning and was threatened with mediocrity and stagnation, confronting the delay of the second coming of Christ and its related issues crucial to his contemporary audience.[5] Like our church in multiracial and multicultural society of North America, Luke's church was located in the midst of pluralistic Hellenistic culture. Like our church, Luke's church needed the renewal of its identity as the Christian community and to be reminded of the importance of social justice for minorities and the underprivileged.[6]

The third reason why Luke's Gospel is significant for preaching spirituality is that Luke wrote the Gospel as a preacher, prophet, and spiritual theologian serving the church of his day rather than as an apologetic theologian or a speculative philosopher.[7] Under the internal and external conditions of his church, Luke, as a second- or third-generation Christian (Luke 1:1-4), creatively reshapes the materials handed down to him and his community by reflecting on the traditions of his church, using the spirit of discovery and confident openness of a new generation. In other words, Luke defines his own standpoint while at the same time faithfully representing the elements of the traditions to those who are accustomed to thinking quite differently than Jesus' original Palestinian followers.[8] In this regard, Leonard Doohan states that Luke is one of the first great pastoral theologians of the church.[9] The way Luke deals with the issues crucial to his community of faith gives birth to new insights into preaching spirituality to our contemporary churches.

The essence of Christian spirituality revealed in the Gospel of Luke can be summarized into three characteristics: First, Christian spirituality is *ecclesial* spirituality. Luke does not know about a life in the Spirit apart from Christian fellowship. The fellowship of the Lord (*koinonia*) is the result of the presence of the Spirit in the life of the church. Just as there is no Christianity without the church, so there is no spiritual life without the fellowship of a community of faith;

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[2] Leonard Doohan, *Luke: The Perennial Spirituality* (Santa Fe: Bear & Company, 1985), 13.
[3] Ibid., 80. In Acts, the expression "Holy Spirit" appears 41 times.
[4] Ibid., 21.
[5] Ibid., 47.
[6] Ibid., 21.
[7] Ibid., 21.
[8] Ibid., 8-10.
[9] Ibid., 40.

the salvation of the individual is indissolubly connected with the church, for the life in the Spirit means the life of the church in the Spirit. Therefore, spirituality which is presented as being "owned" by a peculiar possession of a select and closed group or presented as a cultivation of individualistic values as a way of personal perfection is neither based on the Gospel of Luke nor found in the practice of the early church. According to Luke, Christian preaching which is concerned with spirituality has to do with the life of the church in the Spirit.

The second characteristic of spirituality revealed in the Gospel of Luke is that the life in the Spirit is synonymous with the life in Christ, and the life in Christ is synonymous with following Jesus to the cross, and following Jesus to the cross is synonymous with discipleship. For Luke, discipleship means turning one's back on one's previous lifestyle and journeying with Jesus Christ down his path of suffering and death on the cross. Compared with other Synoptic writers, Luke uses the term "disciple" distinctively. Although Mark and Matthew customarily limit the term to the narrower circle of the Twelve, Luke applies it broadly to all followers of Jesus (Luke 6:13, 17, 20; 19:37, etc.) while calling the Twelve "apostles" (Luke 22:14). Particularly, in Acts, Luke uses the term disciple to refer to all the members of the early Christian church who are baptized to be followers of Jesus.[10] The journey of the church by the guidance of the Holy Spirit is a journey toward sharing the suffering and pain of the world as Jesus did. Based on Luke's understanding of discipleship, preaching is supposed to challenge the members of the church to integrate following Jesus Christ into their everyday lives as an eschatological community—a church of God with hope, vision, and a mission.

The notion of discipleship leads to the third characteristic of Christian spirituality, that is, to live out our call to discipleship each and every day in our ordinary world. Our ordinary lives— what we wear, with whom we eat, how we spend our money, what we do with our time, and so forth—reflect who we are and what we need to follow the teachings of Jesus. Therefore, preaching that is deeply concerned with ecclesial spirituality takes seriously the practice of the *koinonia* ethic: "eating with outcasts and the abject marginalized, giving away possessions to those who have little or none, following Jesus on the difficult road of discipleship."[11] This kind of preaching requires the preacher to help the church discern the directions to a life in the Spirit as an eschatological community. The preacher needs to critically review the congregation's daily lives both within and beyond the church, including the surrounding culture with its lure of materialism, hyperconsummerism, selfish individualism, militarism, etc.

Hermeneutical Methodology

In order to preach spirituality from the Gospel of Luke, it is essential for the preacher to utilize three interpretive methods: narrative criticism, canonical criticism, and meditation. The combination of these three methods helps the preacher read not only "within" and "behind" but also "in front of" the text.

Narrative Criticism. Presupposing that "the interpretive key no longer lies in background information, but within the text itself,"[12] narrative criticism is concerned with the

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[10] Paul S. Minear, "Deo Theo: The Kerygmatic Intention and Claim of the Book of Acts," *Interpretation*, Vol. XXVII, No. 2 (April 1973): 144-5.

[11] James Resseguie, *Spiritual Landscape: Images of the Spiritual Life in the Gospel of Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004), 2-3.

[12] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 5.

final form of a text and seeks the deeper truth conveyed to the audience through the interaction of such literary elements as events, characters, plot, and the setting.

The hermeneutical interest of narrative criticism is given to an "implied author"[13] and an "implied reader"[14] rather than the historical author and the historical or original reader. In other words, narrative criticism reads the text from the perspective of the implied author, which is presumably different from that of the historical author, and interprets the narrative in the position of the implied reader (or the "reader in the text").[15]

Therefore, narrative criticism does not require the reader to know about "the history of the text's transmission or to be able to reconstruct the *Sitze im Leben* that passages served before being incorporated into the narrative as a whole."[16] But, the reader is supposed to have enough historical knowledge and information to determine the implied author's perspective (values, norms, general worldview), ways of communicating (narrative patterns and linguistic and symbolic expressions), and use of spatial, temporal, and social settings.[17] In order to gain such historical knowledge and information, the reader who interprets the text based on narrative criticism relies on the guidance of scholars trained in the discipline of historical criticism. Consequently, narrative criticism is not contradictory to historical criticism, but the latter implements the former.

Canonical criticism. Out of a variety of disciplines of historical criticism, canonical criticism stands out as a complement to narrative criticism when trying to better understand both the perspective of the implied author and the position of the implied reader. Canonical criticism presupposes that "the Bible's own integrity lies in its very nature as canon" and that "the true *Sitz im Leben* today of the Bible is in the believing communities."[18] More precisely speaking, although canonical criticism reads "behind" the text by using all the pertinent tools of biblical criticism, the goals of reading behind the text are to bring the Bible to the front of the changing situation of the Christian church as the canon or paradigm and to reapply the text to the purposes and needs of the church.[19]

Canonical criticism interprets a text based on the discernment of contexts, "the contexts in which biblical texts were and are read or recited as with the texts themselves."[20] When a text is retold with great discernment of both the biblical contexts and the current contexts, the biblical text functions as a "mirror" for the identity and lifestyle of the current church because that church actualizes the biblical text by identifying itself with the characters in the text.[21] As James Sanders states, "[t]he greater the knowledge we have of the ancient contexts, the clearer becomes the impact the text had; the greater the discernment of current contexts, the clearer one's choice of hermeneutics for transmitting the point originally made."[22]

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[13] Ibid. An "implied author" is the one "who is reconstructed by the reader from the narrative."

[14] Ibid., 19-20. An "implied reader" is the one "who is supposed by the narrative itself," that is, quoting Jack D. Kingsbury, the "imaginary person in whom the intention of the text is to be thought of as always reaching its fulfillment."

[15] Ibid., 5.

[16] Ibid., 87.

[17] Ibid., 23-32.

[18] James A. Sanders, *Canon and Community: A Guide to Canonical Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 19.

[19] Ibid., 24.

[20] James A. Sanders, *From Sacred Story to Sacred Text* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 65.

[21] Ibid., 71.

[22] Ibid., 65.

Therefore, canonical criticism helps the preacher understand the particular theological perspective of the implied author by offering historical knowledge and information and interpret the text as a member of her own believing community to answer the congregants' existential and theological questions of "Who are we?" and "What shall we do as a community of faith?" through a critical analysis of their current contexts.

The Method of Meditation. The discernment of contexts does not automatically bring a point of contact between the two contexts—then and now. Rather, the point of contact happens through the preacher's meditation. Effective meditation makes it possible for the preacher to identify valid and pertinent analogies between the biblical contexts and the current contexts of her congregation.

The term "meditation" generally refers to a devotional exercise of contemplation. It is sometimes misperceived as a passive or otherworldly withdrawal from reality swallowing into a mystical experience. But, Asian meditative methods show that meditation is an active, dynamic interaction among intellect, emotion, and intuition to seek the truth in reality. According to Zen Buddhism and Pure Land Buddhism, "The truth is transmitted not through words or intelligence or cognitive understanding alone, but from an enlightened mind to a mind capable of insight."[23] Active meditation of this nature happens only through discipline.

Zen Buddhist Daisetz T. Suzuki explains Buddhist hermeneutics based on meditation as follows:

There are two ways of understanding—the analytic and the intuitive. While the former divides and dissects the text based on scientific knowledge and information about the text, the latter grasps reality in its oneness. Here, intuition does not mean an ordinary instinctive sensibility but is *sui generis*, which can be developed by spiritual discipline.[24]

The goal of Buddhist hermeneutics is to reach this intuitive understanding of things beyond the analytic, and for this goal, some methods of meditation are used. The method of Zen meditation is to concentrate on some words from the text and reflect on the symbolic, imaginative meaning of each word beyond its literal and scientific sense until new insight emerges from that word. The method of Pure Land mediation is to practice memorization, copying, or recitation of the text until arriving at the stage of enlightenment.[25]

The practice of meditation as a method of interpreting a text is also found in Christian traditions. For example, *lectio divina* (divine reading) was practiced from the ancient time throughout the Middle Ages among ordinary believers as well as monastic monks and nuns in order to nurture their spiritual lives. *Lectio divina* is a method of reading the text slowly, prayerfully, repeatedly, and imaginatively following the guidance of the Holy Spirit in prayer. The process of *lectio divina* includes four steps: First, the person reads a text slowly with full attention until she is familiar with it (*lectio*). Second, the reader engages intuitively using her imagination to experience the text personally and deepen her interpersonal relationship with God (*meditatio*). Third, the reader infers directions and guidelines for her spiritual life from the text (*ortio*). Finally, the reader experiences the grace that God has given her as a gift (*contemplatio*).[26]

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[23] Edward Conze, *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* (Bolinas: Four Seasons Foundation, 1973), 72, quoted in Eunjoo M. Kim, *Preaching the Presence of God* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1999), 82.

[24] Ibid., 82.

[25] Ibid., 82-3.

[26] Thelma Hall, R. C., *Too Deep for Words: Rediscovering Lectio Divina* (New York: Paulist, 1988), 36-45.

Through the practice of Buddhist meditation or *lectio divina*, the preacher reads "in front of" the text. That is, through meditation, she opens herself up to new insights and inspiration. The preacher meditates on the text by going back and forth between the position of the implied reader and the position of the representative of her church and finally arrives intuitively or imaginatively at "oneness" between the spiritual life of the believing community within the text and that of her congregation.

The combination of narrative criticism, canonical criticism, and meditation is effective to interpret the Gospel of Luke, for the Gospel itself is an "artistically powerful and theologically persuasive narrative,"[27] written for the ongoing community of believers. As a parable for a changing community of faith, the meaning of the Lukan narrative is open-ended. Meditating on the Lukan narrative, focusing on its characters, plot, dramatic actions, concrete images, sensory signals, and particular socio-geographical settings, makes the preacher actively imagine the biblical scene and grasp its meaning in relation to her current contexts. Interdisciplinary studies, including history, sociology, psychology, religion, and contemporary literature and art, help the preacher discern the various contexts between then and now. Considering that the biblical scholars have not come to a consensus on the authorship of the Gospel of Luke,[28] it is realistic for the preacher to read the narrative from the perspective of the implied author rather than searching for the intention of the historical author. Here, the preacher needs to read the text within the larger context of Luke-Acts because Luke's two-volume work is "a single work, a consistent narrative."[29]

In the actual process of interpretation, the three methods—narrative criticism, canonical criticism, and meditation—are not used in linear order but rather move in a spiral form until a new meaning emerges from the text.

Creating Sermons

The three texts on which the sermons for the 2005 Holy Week Series are based include three different settings—walking with Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, sitting with Jesus at the dinner table, and standing at a distance from Jesus at the Skull. In these three scenes, the followers of Jesus witness that the life in the Spirit means following Jesus to the cross and that living the life in the Spirit is not their volition but the grace of God, who continuously invites them to discipleship in their daily lives while walking, sitting, and standing, which happen quite frequently in our daily lives.

Sermon 1: Walking the Path of Peace with Jesus (Luke 19:28-42). To begin with, the preacher reads the narrative as an implied reader, imagining the scene of the procession of Jesus based on the description of the text: Jesus is riding on the back of a colt along the road covered with rugged garments of his cloddish Galilean followers, and a multitude of his disciples walk with him acclaiming Jesus as the king of peace. This imagination leads to focus on the term "peace" (verse 38) and meditate on the question: "What kind of peace does Luke (the implied author) want to tell us in this scene?"

Through historical and interdisciplinary studies, the preacher discerns both the contexts in which Luke's church was located and the contexts in which her congregation is now located. The discernment of the contexts reveals similarities between then and now, i.e., the analogical

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[27] Sharon H. Ringe, *Luke* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 7.
[28] Ronald J. Allen, *Preaching Luke-Acts* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000), 7.
[29] David Schnasa Jacobsen and Günter Wasserberg, *Preaching Luke-Acts* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 9.

connections between *pax romana and pax U.S.A.*: Both are based on military power and economic exploitation of the powerless. Just as Luke's church knows the falsity of *pax romana*, so does the preacher's congregation know the falsity of *pax U. S. A.*, but neither of them is courageous enough to indict the ruinous truth of such earthly peace.

With the discernment of the contexts, the preacher meditates again the scene of Jesus' procession and feels the mood of the scene by locating herself among "the whole multitude of the disciples" (verse 37): Jesus, who is the king of peace, is riding on an untamed colt lowly and patiently on an unpaved road, smelling the sweat of the suffering people, the sweat of labor, the sweat of oppression, and the sweat of pain. This is a hard road to travel, for Jesus knows that his journey to Jerusalem is a death march; betrayal, denial, and death await him. But, there is no turning back. He keeps on walking; his disciples keep on walking with him, too. This meditation brings us to another question, "Can we, or do we want to walk this hard road with Jesus as his disciples did?"

In relation to this question, some images of contemporary American churches run through the preacher's mind and remind her that many American Christians and their churches accommodate *pax U.S.A.*, especially its culture of consumer capitalism and militarism and that many congregants worship idols of Jesus dressed up with their own images of what Jesus should be. That means that the Jesus whom our contemporary churches know about no longer rides on the back of an untamed colt but is a symbol of wealth and power. Many churches in our society have often become little more than another appealing commodity for middle-class consumers.

In meditating on the next scene of the text, in which Jesus weeps over the city because the people living within the city walls of Jerusalem are deaf to the witness of Jesus' disciples and blind to the path of heavenly peace (verses 41-44), the preacher stands in the shoes of Jesus and empathizes with his compassionate feelings toward the people. The images of the citizens of Jerusalem, the members of the Lukan community, and the listeners of the preacher intersect in her mind, and this mixture of images leads to another question, "If God visited modern Jerusalem, i.e., our cities, where could God find those who truly understand God's peace revealed in Jesus?"

In order to find the answer to this question, the preacher meditates on the text again in the larger context of the narrative. In meditating through *lectio divina*, the preacher listens to the voice of God for both herself and her church as follows: Even though most contemporary churches do not want to follow the path of heavenly peace with Jesus and even though God has difficulty in finding those who are willing to walk the path of peace with Jesus, God does not give up on finding the followers of Christ. God continues to seek out the followers of Jesus, the messengers of heavenly peace, who will be the successors of the angelic ministry (Luke 2:13-14). If the preacher hears God's invitation to the path of heavenly peace while reading the text, the grace of God is at work. It is truly the grace of God if her listeners respond to her message of God's invitation by answering "Amen" despite their doubts and fears.

The sermon created following this flow intends to guide the spirituality of the contemporary church by reminding it of its identity as a successor of "the whole multitude of the disciples" who walked with Jesus along the path of heavenly peace. Through God's invitation in the sermon, the listeners are expected to redirect their lives to the path of heavenly peace.

Sermon 2: Sitting with Jesus at the Table (Luke 22:14-27). The text has one scene in which Jesus, sitting with his twelve disciples (apostles) at the table, foretells his death by sharing bread and wine with them. In meditating on this text by reciting it again and again until it is memorized, the preacher associates three images with that scene.

The first image appears from the preacher's memory during her childhood years: A decorative tapestry rug of Leonard da Vinci's Last Supper, hung on the large living room wall of her house. She remembers that whenever she sat on the living room sofa, she looked at that artwork and wondered who was who in the rug. It seemed obvious that the person in the center of the picture was Jesus. However, figuring out the identity of the twelve people in the picture required her imagination. Who's Peter? Who's John? Who's James? Who's Andrew? . . .

The second image that the preacher associates with the text is her imaginative picture of Jesus' last supper based on the description of the text. In it, Jesus, sitting around the neat table for the Passover meal in a large room, is serious rather than in a celebratory mood of the festival, for he knows that this Passover meal is actually his farewell party. Sharing bread and wine with his disciples at the table, Jesus says, "Take and eat. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me. . . . The cup is the new covenant in my blood." While the disciples are confused by Jesus' words and acts, he continues saying, "See the one who betrays me is with me, and his hand is on the table." At this moment, Jesus' face is replete with mixed feelings with compassion and abandonment, and the faces of his disciples are full of perplexed feelings.

This image draws the preacher's attention to the disciples' inability to comprehend Jesus' prediction of his death and requires her to read the entire book of Luke to better understand the relationship of Jesus with his disciples. A careful reading of the book of Luke reveals that according to Luke (the implied author), the message that Jesus proclaimed throughout his life and ministry was "the gospel of the cross." Jesus knew that his ministry for the kingdom of God would cost him his life, for his gospel was the reversal of the worldly order. His teaching was not about how to be served but how to serve others, not how to become a rich person but how to give up one's possessions, and not how to become a person of power and authority but how to become a friend of the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame, and the sinners. Because the world was full of pain and because God loved the world, Jesus thrust himself into solidarity with the oppressed and suffered along with them, feeling deep and sincere compassion. The consequence of his faith was his own crucifixion, and his cross represents the God who suffers with those who are hungry and thirsty, imprisoned and living in the margins of society.

Although Jesus had foretold his death to his disciples over and over again even before this farewell party, they simply could not get it. They were unable to understand the gospel of the cross or might not have wanted to understand it because it required them to live like Jesus by sharing the suffering and pain along with the weak and the oppressed to the point of one's death. Rather than the gospel of the cross, the disciples wanted "the gospel of glory." It is evident in the text that after dinner at the farewell party, they argued over which one of them will become the greatest among them as they had done before (Luke 22:24-27; cf. 9:46-48).

The inability of Jesus' disciples to understand the gospel of the cross reminds the preacher of the reality of contemporary American Christians. We, contemporary American Christians, are not much different from Jesus' twelve disciples. Like them, we love a sweet gospel of glory—the religion of worldly success, triumphalism, wish fulfillment, and material and physical blessings. Just as the disciples were not able to understand the gospel of the cross or did not want to accept it, so can't we.

It is the grace of God that Jesus, who invited his twelve disciples and later the Lukan community to his farewell party to share the gospel of the cross—despite their incomprehensibility—also invites us who are reading the text to share his body and blood.

The final image looming large in the preacher's mind is her own painting. She now draws her own picture of the Last Supper in her imagination. Although she still cannot figure out who

is who in da Vinci's Last Supper, she sees in her own painting familiar faces: her own and those of the congregants who are listening to her sermon in the sanctuary. And Jesus, sitting in the center, tells them, "Do this in remembrance of me, the suffering God."

Reading the text following these three images leads the preacher to interpret the text as a challenge to her community of faith. The sermon, based on these three images, aims to guide the members of the church to the life in the Spirit by reminding them of God's invitation to the gospel of the cross and by encouraging them to live it out in their everyday lives.

Sermon 3: Standing at a Distance from Jesus (Luke 22:63-23:49). While reading the text meditatively, particularly using the method of *lectio divina*, the preacher places herself in the text and imagines herself as one of the characters in the narrative: A female disciple who has followed Jesus from Galilee, watching the entire process of the arrest, suffering and pain, and the death of Jesus on the cross, standing at a distance from Jesus at the Skull (23:49). This imaginative identification with the female disciple gives the preacher an idea to design the sermon with two parts: the retelling of the Passion Narrative from a female disciple's perspective and a reflection on her testimony.

In the last chapter of Luke, the name of Mary Magdalene appears along with other names of female disciples who witnessed the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. After thinking about all of these women, the preacher decides to design the first part of the sermon as a first-person story-telling from the perspective of Mary Magdalene. In order to make a testimonial story of Mary Magdalene, the preacher needs to research the canonical and extracanonical resources on Mary Magdalene and study the historical and socio-cultural context of women in first-century Jewish society.

When performing the first-person narrative part of the sermon, the preacher stands in the center of the chancel, wearing a scarf on her head as a symbol of ancient Jewish women. Her testimonial story covers the three different stages of her journey with Jesus—standing close to Jesus, standing at a distance from Jesus, and standing near the cross. The first stage is her joyful days with Jesus, standing close to Jesus. She tells those days as follows:

Since Jesus healed my disease, I have become his follower. I walked with him wherever he went, listened to every lesson he taught, and saw him whenever he worked miracles and signs along his ministry journey. I was always standing close to him. Although Jesus' male disciples didn't want anyone coming close to him, particularly women, they always failed at keeping me at a distance. I loved Jesus as my savior and wanted to continue this joyful journey with him forever.

The second stage of the journey with Jesus is Mary Magdalene's fearful moment, standing at a distance from Jesus. She witnessed the false accusations by religious leaders and the unfair judgment by Pilate against Jesus, and the grim scene of Jesus' crucifixion, standing off at a distance with terror and grief. She witnesses the moment of Jesus' death like this:

Although I cried out to God to save Jesus from the cross, such a miracle didn't happen in the Skull. Instead, Jesus accepted his death as the destination of his journey of seeking the truth, calling out with a loud voice at the moment of his death, "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit.

The last stage of the journey with Jesus is a time of renewing Mary Magdalene's faith, standing near the cross. She witnessed something mysterious when Jesus took his last breath: There was no more sarcasm from the religious leaders, no more harassment from the soldiers, and no more ridicule or insults from the large crowd. Instead, everyone was overwhelmed with fear and repentance. All the people who witnessed the death of Jesus suddenly realized that Jesus

was a righteous man, and they were terribly frightened by the fact that God was so real in the midst of such human violence. She also had a personal experience at that time of the presence of God and describes it as follows:

> Watching the death of Jesus at the Skull, standing at a distance, I saw something unseen—the heavens opened, and God dawned on me, the loving God who gave Jesus strength to endure amidst his suffering and pain, the living God who was very real in the midst of human arrogance and injustice, and the God of justice, who vindicated the righteous man through the repentance of his enemies. This experience changed the rest of my life to become a true follower of Jesus Christ—from temporal to eternal, from a distance to nearness, from fear to courage, from hopelessness to hopefulness.

The first part of the sermon ends with the sentence, "I now say that I am no longer standing at a distance but very near the cross, ready to follow the footsteps of Jesus because death is only the beginning."

After the last sentence of the first-person narrative, the preacher takes off the scarf and stands behind the pulpit to begin with the second part of the sermon. The second part of the sermon brings the listeners from the Skull that is geographically located outside the city walls of Jerusalem to the Skull somewhere in the midst of our daily lives. The preacher asks the congregants if they had ever been in the Skull, where the violent and manipulative powers and authorities victimize innocent and righteous people physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The discernment of the contexts—the contexts that Jesus and the Lukan community belonged to and the contexts that contemporary Christians belong to—verifies that it is difficult for us to stand up for the truth as much as Jesus and the Lukan community did. While affirming how hard it is to follow Jesus to the cross, the preacher reminds the listeners of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer once said: following Christ to the cross is "a duty laid on every Christian living in the world..." [it is] "one's daily vocation of a life."[30]

After sharing some stories of contemporary people who have stood up for the truth in their daily lives, the preacher concludes the sermon with these words of invitation:

> Have you ever been at the Skull? What did you see? For those who have seen the unseen, there is no turning back because "no one putting one's hand to the plow and looking back is suited to the Kingdom of God." (Luke 9:62)

In this sermon, the preacher understands Christian spirituality as radical discipleship, to stand near the cross, which means sharing the suffering and pain of the innocent victims in our everyday lives. Because standing near the cross is possible only for those who have experienced the presence of God at the Skull, Christian spirituality is a gift of God.

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[30] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Collier Books, 1963), 51-2.

Reason and the English Preaching Tradition

Katherine Calore, Sewanee

Reason is one of the more difficult aspects of the personality of the *Ecclesia Anglicana.* Everyone wants to claim it: our position is reasonable, our thoughts are rational, this is a church for thinking people. People on both sides of vitriolic debates appeal to it: a rational reading of Scripture makes *this* clear, an educated person could not possibly believe *this,* our experience leads us to interpret things *this* way. Even acting with the same information on what we understand to be the principles of reason, each of us comes to contradictory conclusions. "The relationship between faith and reason has seldom been tranquil or peaceful; rather, conflict and controversy appear at every turn."[1] This conflict around the use of reason manifests itself in many ways, but it can be especially confusing to our congregations when it is manifested in our preaching.

Reason itself is a culturally conditioned quality. The use of rational thought looked different in Bede's day than in Hooker's, and our contemporary understanding is different from either. Thinking itself is different in different times and places. It is this fact which enables us to make choices different from our predecessors. But it is also this fact, well recognized by those who came before us, which caused them to insist that reason was not an eternal quality and must not be depended upon as an independent source of revelation. As with tradition, reason is a means of interpreting and applying Scripture, and is therefore subject to Scripture in all things.

If we have trouble articulating what reason is, it can be helpful to begin by saying what it is not. Reason is related conceptually to will, feeling, experience, intellect, natural law, choice, freedom, understanding, and thought, but it is not any of those things in itself. Right reason is not totally other than those things; it is those things and more as well.

It is also not expendable. Some traditions approach Scripture with a deliberate setting-aside of reason, but this has never been the case in the *Ecclesia Anglicana*. While reason must be subject to the truth of Scripture, it must be present in any encounter with Scripture. Hooker, in fact, defines reason as "the ability to think about the truth of Scriptures."[2] While it is not an independent source of authority itself, reason is necessary for the appropriation of the revelation in the lives of believers. To comment on the political or social situation, to offer pastoral care in specific circumstances, or to teach Christian doctrine from the pulpit is to use one's reason in every stage of the sermon. Reason is the quality which allows the preacher to discern the listeners' needs and to form the sermon in accordance. Reason can be easily misused, but it must be allowed a significant role in the hermeneutical and proclamatory tasks.

Hooker understood reason to be an expression of natural law. It is the natural capacity which puts us above animals in the hierarchy of creation. But because of our limitations of matter and sin, we are lower than the angels, who are neither material nor sinful, and who therefore reason perfectly. Medieval theology taught that reason is obscured by the fall and the fall's effects; therefore it is no longer sufficient to lead us to God unaided by help from God himself.

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[1]Peterson, Michael, et al*, Reason and Religious Belief: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 32.

[2] Hooker, 102.

Yet, even as reason is of the created order, it is a shadow of a divine quality. Reason is the image of God in us. It is this combination of the natural and the divine which leads to practical applications of reason. Reason is concerned with what is observable: the text of the Bible, the actions of humanity, the connections between them. Revelation is concerned with God's will: the way things should be, the choices God would have us make. It is the preachers' task to find the connection between the observable fact and the obedient action, and the preacher does so by further application of reason. This leads to an understanding of God's truth as whole and consistent, resulting in a drive to seek out as much of this undivided truth as possible. The more we can know of God's observable facts, the more we can know of God's inherent truth.

It is for this reason that education and the pursuit of knowledge have always been a formative force in the life of the *Ecclesia Anglicana.* The commitment to reason has led believers to seek a more fully developed mind and a more thorough understanding of creation. Firm in the rational conviction that God is the creator of all, therefore none of God's creation ultimately can be contradictory, English and Anglican Christians have pursued science and knowledge with passion. Much of this passion for learning and discovery has fueled some of this tradition's greatest sermons. Many of our greatest preachers have been teachers themselves, such as Bede, Lancelot Andrewes, and F.D. Maurice. Others, if they were not teachers by vocation, have had a passion for teaching the precepts of the faith from the pulpit. Jeremy Taylor, Phillips Brooks, and Desmond Tutu were preachers of this sort.

Bede thought of himself simply as a teacher of the Bible, but history shows us he was truly a scholar of the highest rank. Edwards says that Bede was "one of the last polymaths in history, one of the last people to know almost everything that was known at his time."[3] In many ways, Bede set the standard of scholarship for the next thousand years. His most famous work is his *History of the English Church and People,* which is considered even by today's standards to be accurate, largely due to the fact that it is well documented, and Bede cites his sources carefully. It is still extremely reliable and a primary source of information about the history of England up to 729. In addition, he wrote a textbook on grammar that was used until after the Reformation, wrote works on astronomy and history, and knew that the earth is round. He was the first person to use Anno Domini in chronology, and he wrote a work stating that a solar year isn't exactly 365.25 days long and that the Julian calendar would need to be adjusted. He delighted in all manner of scholarship and study, because he saw all creation as part of the divine revelation.

His class and congregation were the same: the young monks under his charge. He was a careful translator, and he was a conscientious teacher both in the pulpit and out. In his Lenten Homily on John 2:12-22, Bede discusses the significance of the fact that the Temple took forty-six years to build by calling upon contemporary science to support the allegory.

> This number of years is also the most apt for the perfecting of our Lord's body. Writers on natural history tell us that the form of the human body is completed within this number of days. During the first six days after conception it has a likeness to milk; during the following nine days it is changed into blood; next, in twelve it becomes solid; during the remaining eighteen it is formed into the perfect features of all its members; and after this, during the time remaining until birth, it increases in size. Six plus nine plus twelve plus eighteen make forty-five. If to this we add one, that is the day on which the body, divided into its separate members, begins to grow, we find the same number of

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[3] Edwards, O.C., *A History of Preaching* (Abingdon: Nashville, 2004)144.

days in the building up of our Lord's body as there were years in the construction of the temple.[4]

Though the reference to natural history is dated now, at the time it was up-to-date scientific theory. He teaches natural history to his congregation in his sermon in the hopes that it will help them to understand the importance of the revelation better. Bede was also committed to the reasonable application of the imparted information. Later in the sermon, he goes on to exhort his listeners, "Let us then cleanse the temples of our bodies and hearts, so that the Spirit of God may deign to dwell in us." We have been taught a great deal about the significance of the temple; now we are to take that knowledge and apply it to our lives.

Lancelot Andrewes was the headmaster of the school at Westminster, and also Master of Pembroke College, Cambridge, and like Bede, he sought such knowledge all his life. As a scholar of the Bible, he was asked to chair a translation committee when the Authorized Version was being translated. His sermons reflect his own learning, to be sure, but they also reflect a desire for his listeners to learn, reflect on, and appropriate the teachings offered. He took a personal interest in the education of the boys as Westminster School, and it was said of him that "[i]n his teaching he used persuasion and gentleness, rejecting any method of compulsion, an attitude that will often be found again in the pastoral pedagogy of his sermons."[5]

In his Christmas sermon of 1605, Andrewes shows us this "pastoral pedagogy." He is preaching on Hebrews 22:16: "For verily He took not upon Him the nature of angels; but He took upon Him the seed of Abraham." In what amounts to a grammar lesson near the beginning of his sermon, he communicates the beauty of the doctrine offered in the verse.

> Now the masters of speech tell us that there is power in the positive if it be given forth with earnest asseveration, but nothing to that is in the comparative. It is nothing so full to say, I will never forget you, as thus to say it; Can a mother forget the child of her own womb? Well, if she can, yet will I not forget you. Nothing so forcible to say this, I will hold my word with you, as thus, Heaven and earth shall pass, but My word shall not pass. The comparative expressing is without all question more significant; and this here is such. Theirs, then Angels, at no hand he took, but ours he did.[6]

In teaching us something about the nuts and bolts of the texts, the use of the comparative rather than the positive, Andrewes is teaching is something about God. It is not enough for God to reveal himself positively; he must communicate to us in the strongest, clearest, most moving terms possible. Only an educated person could have brought us this information, and only a caring pastor would take the trouble to present it to his listeners in a sermon. Andrewes' scholarship, his lifelong teaching and learning, was what made him this kind of pedagogical pastor.

F.D. Maurice was a teacher as well. He not only taught at Cambridge, he started parish schools for working men and women, including the Workingmen's College. Most significantly, while he was on the faculty of King's College, he founded a school he called Queen's College.[7] It was a school dedicated to the training of teachers, so that education could be more accessible. He was convinced that education should be available to all, not just the upper classes. In a lecture given preceding the opening of the Workingmen's College, he offered "an angry denial

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[4] Bede, *Volume II*, 8.
[5] Lossky, 16
[6] Andrewes, Nativity Sermon, 1605, http://justus.anglican.org/resources/pc/andrewes/v1/sermon1.html
[7] "Frederick Dennison Maurice," http://spartacus.schoonet.co.uk/REmaurice.htm

of the assumption that poor people were sent into the world to work for rich people and had no time to learn."[8] He felt that people could not be expected fully to receive the content of the faith if their minds weren't trained to understand it, and further, that all people, not just the affluent, were hungry for such knowledge. He also felt that the Church should be involved in the everyday life and concerns of those in its care, especially where social needs and issues were concerned, because he believed in "a balanced life" for all people, and that "learning and working should go together."[9] To him these conclusions seemed simply an exercise of God-given reason: "We, the overseers, should educate the flock of God."[10] His establishment of the Workingmen's College and Queen's College was one way in which he acted on his deeply held convictions.

Because of his commitment to teaching the flock of God, he placed great emphasis on the teaching function of the sermon. He felt that clergy should be offering practical, "homely" subjects to their people, rather than long-winded discourses. He criticized preachers who refused to discuss quotidian matters such as family relationships on the grounds that they were too lowly, that preaching must be reserved for more lofty topics. Yet, those theologians to whom his contemporaries looked—the Church Fathers, Reformers, and Caroline Divines-- were as likely to preach "upon the relations of parents to children…the most emphatic exposition of these duties and the most empathetic reinforcement of them," as you would be to find an exposition on a more worthy subject such as justification by faith.[11] Subjects which directly affected the hearers' lives were as suited to preaching and more effective than subjects which demonstrated the preacher's knowledge but did not edify the congregation. For this reason, Maurice determined that his own sermons should present simple, basic elements of the faith. "Everywhere Maurice's theology works on this principle: Begin from God. Preaching, teaching, prayer, and ethics all flow from "'theology in the strict sense,' i.e. the revelation and knowledge of God."[12] Maurice himself says, "The best preaching is only a simple testimony of what God is."[13]

But even for those who weren't teachers in the strict sense, by vocation, there is seen a love and an urgency for teaching from the pulpit. In some cases, clergy have found their congregations simply to be ignorant of the truths of the faith. They must be taught, and it is the clergy who must teach them. In other cases, there is a specific need for people to hear what the faith and the Scriptures have to offer—perhaps a life or death need. In these times, it is imperative that the clergy take the information, education, and knowledge that have been so much a part of their training, and offer it to the people of the Church, to whom it properly belongs.

Phillips Brooks, also primarily a pastor to his congregation at Trinity Church, Boston, felt the need for similar pastoral teaching from his pulpit. He ministered at the beginning of the liberal movement of Biblical criticism, when Christians were being given contradictory messages about the trustworthiness of the Biblical account. As a pastor, Brooks understood that his congregation needed guidance and care in the matter of Biblical interpretation and scholarship. He wanted them to be able to use their minds, and to be open to contemporary means of

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[8] Florence Higham, *Frederick Denison Maurice* (London: Bloomsbury, 1947) 98.
[9] Ibid.
[10] F.D. Maurice, *The Kingdom of Christ*, as quoted by W. Merlin Davies, *An Introduction to F.D. Maurice's Theology,* (London: SPCK, 1964) 135.
[11] Maurice, *Kingdom of Christ*, Davies, 145.
[12] Davies, *F.D. Maurice*, 171.
[13] Maurice, *The Worship of God and Fellowship Among Men*, 1858, Davies, 170.

engaging Scripture, but he also wanted them to be able to trust the Bible and to consider a firm foundation for their faith.

In his sermon "The Tree of Life," Brooks tackles this problem head on. He acknowledges it immediately, then proceeds to teach his congregation how they can go on with Scripture. The first paragraph addresses the problem.

> The recent discussions about, and criticisms of, the first chapters of the Book of Genesis have left a certain vague and uncomfortable feeling in the minds of many men. Not a few people, probably, think in a dim sort of way that geology, or something else, has made those chapters of very doubtful worth. The worst part of this feeling is that it robs the early story of our race of the spiritual power that it possesses. Apart from the question of its historic character, the account of man's origin which is given Genesis is profoundly true to man's spiritual experience, and its imagery is perpetual and universal truth. Among it images one of the most prominent and striking is this one of the "tree of life." Let us try, with the beautiful words of the Genesis story fresh in our minds, to see if we can get at the meaning of it, and understand what is meant by the history of the tree of life which runs through all the Bible.[14]

Brooks is engaged in a technique which is still used by Christians; namely, the distinction between scientific and spiritual truth. Many Christians, faced with the new scholarship, find this distinction unacceptable, and choose to reject the scholarship rather than risk misplacing their trust. But Brooks, along with many churchmen of his era, felt that that rejection was, in effect, asking Christians to close their minds to newly revealed pieces of God's truth. Truth does not change, but our perception of it does. It would be a betrayal of God's gift of reason not to take new discoveries into account as we practice our own faith. Brooks was committed to giving his people a foundation strong enough to allow for the use of reason while still trusting in God.

For other preachers, such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu of Johannesburg, South Africa, teaching the content of the faith was a more serious matter than simply successfully negotiating cultural difficulties or contemporary scholarship. He preached in the violent and oppressive days of twentieth century South African apartheid, and his teaching sermons have earned him the title of prophet from those whose lives they touched. Though Tutu was a teacher for part of his life, his admirers say that in every situation, "Desmond Tutu is primarily a pastor."[15] Like Bede, Andrewes and Brooks, his love for his people give him an urgent need to teach them the truth of God, and so to give them hope of their own.

In his sermon "Politics and Religion—the Seamless Garment," Tutu demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the socio-economic systems which were oppressing so many in South Africa. He is protesting the criticism he so often hears, that he should keep religion out of politics, by teaching his listeners, both the oppressed and the oppressors, that Christianity has to do with human beings, and therefore must be involved in politics.

> A familiar remark which has become almost a parrot cry is "Don't mix religion with politics!"…Politicians and others will utter that cry if, for instance, someone were to say that it is unchristian to neglect the development of rural areas because the inhabitants of those rural areas will be unable to resist the temptation to emigrate to the urban areas,

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[14] Phillips Brooks, "The Tree of Life" found in *The Consolations of God: Great Sermons of Phillips Brooks*, edited by Ellen Wilbur (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 2003) 129.
[15] Buti Tlhagale, Introduction of *The Right Reverend Desmond Mpilo Tutu: Hope and Suffering, Sermons and Speeches*, edited by John Webster (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1984) 17.

where they will invariably help to cause slums to emerge. They will often not be able to compete on equal terms for jobs with their city counterparts, and so they will swell the ranks of the unemployed. They won't be able to find cheap accommodation because there is no longer such a commodity in the city, and so they will be reduced to putting up some kind of shelter on any available space, and a slum will have begun. If the Church demonstrates a concern for the victims of some such neglect or exploitation or denounces the widening gap in the country between the very few who are rich and the vast majority who are poor…then the Church will be accused of meddling in affairs it knows very little about.[16]

This analysis at the beginning of his sermon is setting up Tutu's counter-argument about why politics and religion are, in fact "a seamless garment." It demonstrates an application of Scriptural values that could only be done by the application of well-trained reason; the education to know that this example he gives is indeed spoken to by Scripture, and the understanding of his society that only comes with years of intelligent and reflective observation. In his circumstances, this use of reason, this teaching of Biblical values, and this analysis of his society become a strongly prophetic message.

Bishop Charles McIlvaine, writing in 1863, states that "Closely allied to our Lord's priesthood, offering the perpetual oblation of his sacrifice, is his office as the great Prophet and Teacher of his Church."[17] To teach, then, especially in conjunction with the offices of priest and prophet, is to act in imitation of the Lord himself. He is adamant, however, as were Hooker and others before him, that this teaching must always be subject to the teaching of Scripture and the work of the Holy Spirit in prayer and revelation.

> Whatever our advantages of human teaching, even of the truest exposition of God's inspired word, all is powerless to spiritually enlighten us in the knowledge of God and of his Christ, till he who speaks as never man spake shall add to it the teaching of his Spirit, so that we shall learn, not merely by the Scriptures, but in them *from* and *of Him.*[18]

Not only does this tradition foster an acceptance of new thinking and new applications of reason, it actively seeks out those things. Technology, social norms, and political commentary are all addressed in sermons frequently, and presented as the fruits of skillfully applied reason. As with Tutu's cultural commentary and Brooks' pastoral scholarship, intelligent, rational, and proactive engagement with contemporary realities is a defining aspect of the preaching tradition of *Ecclesia Anglicana*.

Not all intellectual or scientific developments are seen as valid or worthwhile, however. Jeremy Taylor, though not an educator, had a passion for teaching his congregation the essentials of the faith. He felt this task was particularly important to help them distinguish between the different sects and denominations rampant in England during the seventeenth century. In his teaching sermons, Taylor employed his reason fully, through thoughtful exposition and interpretation of Biblical tests and historical events. But he also critiqued the use of reason in both the ecclesiastical and secular spheres. In the midst of a culture that was always arguing about religious matters, Taylor did not consider it sufficient to be wise enough to argue. In his sermon "Via Intelligentiae" Taylor asserts, "Disputation cures no vice, but kindles a great many,

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[16] Tutu, 36-37.
[17] McIlvaine, 10.
[18] Ibid.

and makes passion evaporate into sin; and though men esteem it learning, yet it is the most useless learning in the world."[19] In other words, arguing for the sake of argument, even learned and knowledgeable argument, is counterproductive to the practice of Christianity. It is an unfaithful use of God-given reason. It takes time and energy better devoted to the practice of the faith. "Christianity is all for practice, and so much time as is spent in quarrels about it is a dimunition to its interest: men inquire so much what it is, that they have but little time left to be Christians."[20]

This flawed reason, according to Taylor, is the reason for so many contradictory approaches to the practice of Christianity. Employing the use of his own considerable intellectual gifts, he lists the erroneous conclusions that some have come to through the use of misplaced wisdom. His congregation, in this case theology students who were themselves future clergy, would easily have recognized the groups to which Taylor refers as being in error. His aim, however, is not necessarily to provide an apology for the Church of England. He exhorts his listeners not to look to the establishment for the truth, but rather, "Let us go to the truth itself, to Christ, and he will tell us an easy way of ending all our quarrels: for we shall find Christianity to be the easiest and the hardest thing in the world…"[21] After identifying those whose reason has been in error, he spends the bulk of the sermon guiding his listeners into ways by which they might discern the truth for themselves and thereby do God's will. These ways have more to do with holiness of life and knowledge of God than with the ability to argue one's position. Taylor calls theology itself, "rather a divine life than a divine knowledge," and insists that "holiness is the only way of truth and understanding."[22] As with others who give a high place to education and reason, Taylor insists that human reason be subject to revelation, rather than subjecting revelation to limited human wisdom. This is the only way to discover truth, according to Taylor. He says quite emphatically that "neither truth nor peace comes from man."[23] He tells the students of his congregation

> I know I am in an auditory of inquisitive persons, whose business is to study for truth, that they may find it for themselves and teach it unto others: I am in a school of prophets and prophets' sons, who all ask Pilate's question, "What is truth?" You look for it in your books, and you tug hard for it in your disputations, and you derive it from the cisterns of the fathers, and you enquire after the old ways, and are sometimes taken with new appearances, and you rejoice in false lights, or are delighted with little umbrages and peep of day. But is there a man, or a society of men, that can be at rest in his enquiry, and is sure he understands all the truths of God?[24]

It is because we cannot understand "all the truths of God" in our own reason that we must submit that reason to the God who is truth. Taylor felt it was not only important but urgent, to teach this central fact to these students before they fell into the trap of arguing about the faith rather than practicing it, and teaching others to do the same.

Philander Chase is another preacher who engages with contemporary scholarship but finds it insufficient to support the proclamation of the gospel. Writing in 1800, well before the

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[19] Taylor, Jeremy, "Via Intelligentiae," in *Jeremy Taylor: Selected Works*, edited by John Booty (New York: Paulist Press, 1991) 356.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Taylor, 361.
[23] Taylor, 360.
[24] Ibid.

advent of the "new scholarship" of Biblical criticism, Chase addresses the less sophisticated but still pervasive thought of his Deistic contemporaries. The scholarly approach at the time was simply to say that the Biblical accounts had not happened the way they were written because that would have required some sort of supernatural involvement. Since Deists rejected the possibility of supernatural involvement in human life or history, the possibility of true prophecy in Scripture was unacceptable. Chase considers that premise a misuse of reason. He rejects it in a sermon called "Wounded for Our Transgressions."

> Thus did the Prophet foretell the sufferings of Christ…But the Objectors to Christianity deny the premises. They pretend, that these things were written after the completion: that, instead of being prophecies, they are histories of these events. And what do such men bring forward to support unqualified assertions like these? It is certainly reasonable that we should be allowed some evidence, or colour of probability at least, before we give up the truths of the utmost importance, which have been recorded as such, and believed time immemorial. Therefore let us enquire: Do these persons who say that the prophecies concerning our Lord were written since his appearance, tell us when, at what time and at what place they were forged and palmed on the world? Can they tell us how these prophecies came to find their way into the writings of the Jews? And there be alluded to by their historians, their kings, their Lawyers, and their officers of state? Do the Jews, even at this day, pretend that these prophecies are a forgery? And are they not all to be found in their Scriptures? Did any of the Gentile enemies to Christianity oppose it, on the ground that they were forgeries? Nothing of the sort was ever attempted.[25]

Chase goes on to refer to Jospehus and other scholars, both contemporary and of antiquity to press his argument. It is never that he is unwilling to have the text criticized; he challenges those who make this argument to make their case, though he is confident that they cannot do it. Scholarship is permitted, accepted and welcomed, but erroneous assertions are not.

> If the mere assertions (of people who talk much but read little and think still less) are to be the grounds of our exploding truths, and of giving up our belief in matters of the highest importance which have been examined and credited by the wisest of men, where shall we end?[26]

"Where shall we end?" seems to have been the guiding principle for those who embrace God-given reason in their preaching and teaching. Scholarship, philosophy, and teaching which supported the revelation of Scripture were and are embraced by preachers in the *Ecclesia Anglicana.* Interpretations and applications of Scripture which call Christians to union with God and holiness of life are proof that reason can be used as the divine gift it was intended to be.

Contemporary Understanding of Reason

The use of reason is still a difficult and controversial aspect of Anglican preaching. Its demands are both severe and ambiguous. One must respect it without idolizing it, and utilize it thoroughly but not exclusively. Reason cannot stand on its own, but neither Scripture nor holy

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[25] Philander Chase, "Wounded for Our Transgressions," 1800, www.episcopalian.org/gambierevangelicals/Pchase, 2.

[26] ibid

tradition is accessible or relevant without it. Yet, it offers so many dangerous detours away from its subordinate place in preaching and teaching, that errors are inevitable and frequent.

Contemporary preachers, then, need to discern not whether reason has a place in their preaching, for affording it some place is fundamental to the task of preaching, but what kind of place reason should have. Contemporary philosophers of religion Peterson, Hasker, Reichenbach, and Basinger suggest that the fundamental question the religious must ask concerning reason is whether having faith at all does or should depend on having good reasons to believe that faith is true.[27] Once that question has been answered, the preacher can then discern how best to use those reasons, or to proceed without them.

Peterson et al offer three philosophical approaches to the question of faith and reason: strong rationalism, fideism, and critical rationalism. Each of these has a significant history in western religion and theology, and all have found expression in English and Anglican preaching.

The central idea behind strong rationalism has been expressed by English mathematician W.K. Clifford: "It is wrong, always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence."[28] The question then is what constitutes sufficient evidence; Christian philosophers such as Aquinas, Locke, and Swinburne felt that carefully applied reason could provide such evidence, but Clifford and others take the opposite point of view. They point out that if one religion could be proven true, or even probably true, it would be accepted by all reasonable people, and this has never happened.

The appeal of strong rationalism is easy to see. Peterson says,

> Which of us has not felt frustrated, even angry, at the many things people (perhaps especially religious people) claim to "know" but are unable to give any good reasons for? In view of this frustration, the desire to have "real proof" for the things we believe is very understandable. The strong rationalist does not make any sloppy appeals to "faith;" she offers to *prove* that her view is correct— and challenges you to do the same for your view if you disagree with her.[29]

Strong rationalism can have an effective place in preaching. Some listeners are concrete thinkers, and preaching that will tell them what and why, with a list of sensible reasons to back it up, is very appealing to them. For these listeners, the issue is less about proof, but about being convinced that the practice of the faith has a legitimate claim on their time and energy. A strong rationalistic approach can convince the skeptical that Christianity is true enough to command their participation and commitment.

But the cautions of Taylor and Chase still stand. Reason alone cannot offer sufficient evidence for faith to those who are determined not to believe, and reason is not the only factor involved for those who are determined to believe. Preachers do a disservice to their congregations if they spend so much time arguing, even if they are arguing for the faith, that they neglect the experience of the faith. In addition, it is perhaps not even desirable to prove the probability of the whole content of the faith. The supernatural cannot be proven; by definition, it lays outsides the boundaries of rationalistic thought. In addition, the attempt to prove the faith forms believers who rely solely on their own culturally conditioned experience of reason, rather than the eternal aspects of revelation. Perhaps most importantly, every relationship, including

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[27] Peterson, 33.
[28] Clifford, W.K., "The Ethics of Belief," in George I. Mavrodes, ed., The *Rationality of Belief in God* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1970) 159-160.
[29] Peterson et al, 35.

the believer's with God, requires an element of risk. The greater the risk, the greater the potential payoff in terms of love, trust, and fulfillment. Believers who have everything cut and dried for them seem to risk little; therefore have little potential for love.

Another possible approach to faith and reason is fideism. The opposite of strong rationalism, it is the idea that "religious belief systems are not subject to rational evaluation."[30] This is not to say that reason cannot be used within those systems, but rather that the belief systems themselves are the foundation for all reasoning pertaining to them. The fideist simply argues that since all arguments begin with a set of assumptions, arguments concerning faith begin with the assumptions of faith. There is no sufficient method to argue those assumptions, except by other assumptions which may contradict the content of the faith.

Such a position fulfills the requirement that the believer take the risk required by faith, make the leap of faith. There are things of which believers can't be sure so we assume those things, without requiring proof. Part of the preacher's task is to encourage listeners to step out in faith like this, to trust in God even when the way before them seems unclear. This position also seems to fulfill Taylor's requirement that commitment to the faith takes precedence over any arguments about it.

Yet, if there's no proof at all, if the question of probability cannot even be asked of the system, how are seekers to know which path to commit to? The fideist option gives the seeker, faced with a plurality of religious options, few criteria by which to discern between these options. Why should they commit to our faith? Even allowing for the necessity of a "leap of faith," fideism allows very few rational paths into the faith. The preacher needs to be aware that many contemporary people are exploring many religious options, and need more substantial reasoning than fideism offers.

A third approach strikes a balance between strong rationalism and fideism. Neither requiring absolute proof nor shunning rationalistic involvement altogether, critical rationalism allows a significant place to both faith and reason. Peterson defines critical rationalism as the idea that "religious belief-systems can and must be rationally criticized and evaluated although conclusive proof of such a system is impossible."[31] Reason is not asked conclusively to prove the tenets of the belief system, but rather to evaluate those contents. Nor is faith asked to accept teachings blindly, but is given the tools to explore the teachings of that faith more deeply.

In this view, two things are being subjected to evaluation: the belief system and reason itself. This is a longstanding philosophical approach in the Christian tradition, long embraced as we have seen, by preachers of the *Ecclesia Anglicana*. This allows for theologians such as Maurice and Tutu to stand within the system and proclaim the necessity for faithful change, and also allows for others such as Taylor and Bede to emphasize the importance of faith. At no point are believers required to provide definitive proof for each article of the belief system, but neither are they left without resources when asked to give a defense.

Bede and other English and Anglican preachers would appreciate the approach to the use of the gift of reason that critical rationalism offers. Scripture says that we are to be prepared to "give a reason for the faith that is in us," yet also ties that faith as much to personal experience as to reasoned arguments.   The ability to articulate and defend the faith, while allowing for the risk required to be in relationship with the God whom faith serves, offers both preachers and listeners a faithful way to use the godly gift of right reason.

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[30] Peterson et al., 37.
[31] Peterson et al., 41.

Jonathan Edwards: Preaching the Feminine Face of Piety

Angela Dienhart Hancock
Princeton Theological Seminary
Advisor: James F. Kay

Jonathan Edwards spent nearly a quarter of a century preaching to one Massachusetts congregation. While the theories abound as to why the sometimes harmonious, sometimes even exhilarating relationship between pastor and Northhampton congregation ended in Edwards' dismissal, one factor noted by many is the disjunction between Edwards' traditional hierarchical view of authority and the egalitarian implications of his revivalist preaching and teaching.[1]

On the one hand, Edwards defended the Puritan understanding of a well-ordered society, where the minister exercised social, ecclesiastical, and inevitably political power in accordance with divine commission, and male heads of households were responsible for instructing their wives and children in spiritual matters as in everything else. Yet in his teaching, Edwards often bypassed this head of household to address children and adolescents directly. In his writings he idealized the piety embodied by his own wife, by a dying young woman, and by a four-year-old girl. Even the lone male hero in his writings, David Brainard, exhibits what were considered "feminine" virtues like submissiveness, gentleness, and self-sacrifice.[2]

This emphasis can be discerned in Edwards' preaching as well. There are a disproportionate number of sermons directed specifically to children and young people during the Northhampton years, and they are frequently addressed as a group in other sermons as well. But equally striking is Edwards' decision in the 1730's to the early 1740's to preach on biblical texts in which women play a central role, not just a departure from much of his inherited Puritan tradition, but also from his own pulpit practice to that point. What did Edwards hope to achieve by this homiletical choice in Northhampton, Massachusetts, during seasons of "awakening" and economic uncertainty and in response to changing social and ecclesiastical norms?

This paper will contextually and rhetorically examine one of Edwards' sermons from the Northhampton period specifically focused on biblical women: "*Ruth's Resolution*" (April, 1735).

Setting the Stage: Northhampton in the 1730's.

In her *Jonathan Edwards: Pastor*, Patricia Tracy attempts to correct what she calls an "ahistorical distortion" on the part of Edwards scholars who often forget that Edwards was "not a thinker by profession," not an "Intellectual," but a *pastor*.[3] To understand Edwards, one must

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[1]See for example Marsden, George M. "The Quest for the Historical Edwards: The Challenge of Biography" in Kling, David W. and Sweeney, Douglas A. *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*. Columbia, South Carolina: South Carolina Press, 2003. p. 9: "The party that [Edwards] helped to shape combined the Reformed heritage with the awakening. . . [It] had a paradoxical outlook that has often been noted. Aspects of it reflected Reformed establishmentarianism and cultural imperialism. Other aspects were anti-establishment, subversive, and invited individualism . . . . The tragedy of Jonathan Edwards was that he – with his usual thoroughness – wanted to preserve all the benefits of both sides of the heritage."

[2]Marsden, George. *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003. p. 249.

[3]Tracy, Patricia. *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northhampton.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1979, p. 7.

first understand him in his primary role as pastor of, and preacher to, a specific group of people, in the case of Tracy's analysis, the congregation of Northhampton, Massachusetts, in all its glory and contentiousness.

The story of the Northhampton church must begin with "Pope" Solomon Stoddard, Jonathan's grandfather, who thundered from the Northhampton pulpit for sixty years. There were at least five identifiable "revivals" or "awakenings" during Stoddard's pastorate,[4] and these times of spiritual fervor, reformed behavior, and burgeoning church membership were actively cultivated by the evangelically minded Stoddard both in and out of the pulpit. But by the time the 23-year-old Jonathan was called to Northhampton as Stoddard's assistant in 1726, it had been 8 years since the last "awakening," and Stoddard, though still preaching regularly, was slowing down at age 83. Edwards noticed early in his ministry that, with the exception of a flurry of religious zeal after an earthquake in 1727, the famous Northhampton congregation was far from perfect in its piety.

Edwards, who had trouble tolerating the antics of young people even when he himself was a young person, was particularly appalled by the behavior of the young people in the congregation who were apparently "indecent in their carriage at meeting."[5]

Patricia Tracy notes that by the mid-1720's, Northhampton is hardly the vunerable frontier town it once was.[6] After 70 years, the community had blossomed into a thriving mixture of successful farmers and tradesmen. The threat from the Indians, while looming large in the communal memory, was greatly diminished, and in spite of his great influence, even Stoddard faced challenges to his authority as the focus shifted in Northhampton from simple survival to increasing prosperity.

After Stoddard's death, at least from the point of view of his grandson and heir to his pulpit, things deteriorated further:

> Just after my grandfather's death, it seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion; licentiousness for some years prevailed among the youth of the town . . . . There had also long prevailed in the town a spirit of contention between two parties, into which they had for many years been divided . . . they were prepared to oppose one another in all public affairs.[7]

Of the three problem areas, it was the youth and their flouting of authority that Edwards tackled head-on. His ministry to adolescents would prove to be one of the most rewarding and disappointing aspects of his Northhampton pastorate.

It was a difficult time to be a teenager or young adult in the life cycle of the community. In earlier phases of development in Northhampton, as young men reached adulthood, they were given a home lot of four acres to farm, thus enabling them to marry and support families of their own. The last year of these large-scale land grants was in 1703, the year Edwards was born.

In the absence of the land grants, it was common for fathers to give some of their land to each of their sons as they matured. But by the 1730's, most of this excess private land in

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[4]Coffman, Ralph J. "Chronology," *Solomon Stoddard.* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978.
[5]Edwards, Jonathan. *Faithful Narrative*, as quoted in *Pastor*, n. 83, p. 50.
[6]Tracy, *Pastor,* p. 49.
[7]Edwards, Jonathan. *Faithful Narrative* as quoted in *Pastor*, n. 2, p. 72.

Northhampton was gone as well. Wealthier families were now amassing what had once been public farmlands and the gap between rich and poor in the town had widened. The prospect of upward mobility, so common in the early years, was now bleak. There was increased fighting over town affairs, evidence that the tavern had become a significant destination to drown one's economic sorrows, and apathy toward the things of religion.

Young men were faced with the difficult choice of leaving the town and seeking land and fortune elsewhere – an unpalatable prospect to Puritan communal sensibilities – or remaining in the parental home in a state of limbo, unable to marry, waiting to inherit their father's property upon his death. Young Northhampton women in the 1730's were likewise confined to the family home well past the age they would have married in earlier generations, because there were few young men able to support a wife and children. Patricia Tracy cites these staggering statistics: of the "grandfathers" (1st generation) in Edwards' congregation, 94% received land grants, of the 2nd generation males, 48% did, and of Edwards' native born 3rd generation converts, only 1.3% did (3 out of 236).[8]

What all this meant in practical terms was that Edwards was facing a new phenomena for the community: protracted adolescence and all the problems associated with it. Without the traditional incentives to behave well – land from town or parents, impending marriage and adult responsibility, the prospect of living on one's own – the youth of Northhampton became increasingly uncontrollable. And they had time on their hands, certainly more time than they would have had as young husbands, wives, farmers, merchants, citizens with some political voice (for the men), and parents. Given the economic situation, all those roles must have seemed depressingly far off.

What makes this analysis of Northhampton significant for my purposes is the way in which Edwards responds to this crisis among the young (which inevitably affected the entire community) in his preaching. Edwards, of course, primarily interprets the crisis in spiritual terms. Well-aware of the erosion of parental authority, Edwards fiercely reasserts the doctrine of divine sovereignty and derivative ministerial authority. The natural counterpart to this assertion is the idealization of a emotionally vibrant yet humble, submissive, dependent sort of piety on the part of parishioners. The kind of piety Edwards celebrates in Phoebe, Abigail, Sarah, sister Jerusha and later, daughter Jerusha. There may be some truth in Stephen Yarbrough's contention that Edwards' vision of sainthood

> dignified and, indeed, sanctified those feelings of helplessness, aimlessness, and uselessness already being experienced, though now loathingly, by the young. By repeatedly, week after week, hammering on the theme of dependency, by telling them, again and again, that they were *supposed* to feel helpless, Edwards provided a means to reenchant the disenchanted, to sublimate their rage, to raise the lower to the highter, to let them seem superior to their merely half-way elders.[9]

This analysis is, of course, limited to certain psychological effects of Edwards' theology on the young people of Northhampton, but it might easily be extended to include other

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[8]Tracy, *Pastor*, p. 100.
[9]Yarbrough, Stephen R. and Adams, John C. *Delightful Conviction: Jonathan Edwards and the Rhetoric of Conversion.* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1993. p. 25

townspeople in dependent social positions as well. Edwards' inherited "heart-religion" could come to anyone, regardless of station, age, race, or gender, though the challenge to ministerial and other traditional authorities implicit in this vision was something with which Edwards would struggle for the rest of his pastorate.

In spite of these tensions, Edwards never abandons his commitment to cultivate submissive, experiential piety in his congregation. The road to this piety is the road to conversion itself, so Edwards, like Stoddard before him, concentrates his energies on preparing people for God's converting grace and naming it when it is made manifest, particularly as far as Edwards is concerned, in Northhampton's women.

But how specifically does this Edwardsean vision of "feminine" piety as normative shape his preaching during the troubling years leading up to and away from the awakenings and the heady days at their peak? How do the anomalous sermons which center on biblical woman fit into the overall pattern of Edwards' pulpit practice in Northhampton? To answer these questions, we must first turn briefly from Jonathan Edwards, pastor to Jonathan Edwards, preacher.

Jonathan Edwards: Preaching "Feminine" Piety

The roots of Edwards' vision of the feminine face of piety are little evident in his most immediate pulpit influences: his father Timothy, grandfather Solomon Stoddard, prominent pulpiteers like the Mathers. But there is a work familiar to Edwards in which biblical female imagery, namely that of the "bridal" typology of the New Testament and its foreshadowing in the Song of Songs plays a central role: the sermons of seventeenth-century Puritan preacher Thomas Shepard.

Of course, the biblical typology of Christ as Bridegroom, church/believer as bride had been put to good use in many pulpits over many centuries. But there is evidence that Edwards had a particular admiration for Shepherd's series of sermons on the parable of the ten virgins, first published in 1659.[10] It would seem to be in tribute to Shepherd's work that Edwards' preaches one of his own, relatively rare, series – ten sermons on the same parable in 1737-38.

But Edwards not only employs the nuptual imagery regularly from the pulpit during the Northhampton years (there are at least 12 sermons on Song of Songs or which explicitly use bridal language in the "Doctrine" sentence from 1729 - 1742), but Edwards takes the further step of preaching on biblical narratives which feature female characters. Preaching on a narrative, at least when the narrative functions as such and not a single verse from a narrative extracted from its context, is itself somewhat of a departure for Edwards. Between the years of 1726 - 1742, the Yale Edition catalogs over 685 sermon manuscripts. Of these, approximately 34 appear to be centered on a biblical parable or story, based on the text and/or the doctrinal statement of the sermon.[11] Out of the 34, about 10 feature significant female characters which are reflected in the doctrine Edwards derives from the text. This in no way includes the countless times Edwards cites these and other "woman-centered texts" in other sermons.

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[10]Old, Hughes Oliphant. The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church, Volume 5: Moderatism, Pietism, and Awakening. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004. pp. 194 - 195.
[11]This does not include the ten sermons on the parable of the ten virgins, nor the thirty sermons published as A History of the Work of Redemption.

Preaching Feminine Piety in Northhampton: A Representative Sermon
Ruth's Resolution (Ruth 1:16)[12]

    Ruth's Resolution was preached in April of 1735, in the midst of the first awakening since Stoddard's death. The event that precipitated the revival, as far as Edwards was concerned, took place almost exactly one year earlier, when a young Northhampton man died suddenly of pleurisy.   Edwards began hosting private meetings in his home with groups of young people, and things were further intensified when another young woman died suddenly in June. By the fall of 1734, the awakening was in full flower, and soon the adults were also clamoring for additional meetings as well. At the end of December a young woman with a reputation as a "company-keeper" was, by Edwards' own assessment, "savingly converted," and began evangelizing others. By April of 1735, when *Ruth's Resolution* was preached, Edwards was overwhelmed by the almost obsessive interest in "the immediate exercise of religion" by so many, and the church had swelled to 620 communicant members.[13] George Marsden summarizes Edwards' account:

> The awakening was especially extraordinary because it affected "all sorts, sober and vicious, high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise." Included were "several Negroes," who "appear to have been truly born again." Some 30 children, fourteen and younger, "seemed to be savingly wrought on." Unlike earlier revivals under Stoddard, as many men were converted as women. Most revivals, he further observed, reached almost only young people. This one included 50 persons over forty years of age and even 2 over seventy.[14]

    There is only one ominous note, a foreshadowing of troubles to come: in March of 1735, not long before *Ruth's Resolution* was preached, an unnamed Northhampton man attempted suicide. The man lived and later, according to Edwards, confessed the sin of "yielding to temptation" in his spiritual melancholy.[15] Edwards' Uncle Hawley would not be so fortunate. He would die in Northhampton by his own hand on June 1, 1735, three months later.

    Ruth's Resolution takes a single verse from the Ruth narrative as its text (*Ruth 1:16*) though Edwards will preach on much of the preceding narrative. Most interesting in Edwards' opening "explanation" of the text is his assertion of Ruth as the mother of Christ, a designation he links to the star-crowned woman in labor described in Revelation 12:1-2. He goes on to say, "so also is every true Christian Christ's mother . . . . Christ is what the soul of every one of the elect is in travail with, in the new birth." (307) Here a female role, "mother," is affirmed as normative for all Christians. He continues, "Ruth forsook all her natural relations . . . for the God of Israel; as every true Christian forsakes all for Christ." Edwards includes the wavering Orpah in his typology as a contrast to the "remarkable" and "inflexible" Ruth.

    The "virtuousness" of Ruth's resolution is not that she stayed with Naomi, the sermon argues, but that she stayed "for the sake of the God of Israel." Motivation is key to virtue. Ruth

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[12]Page numbers in parentheses refer to Edwards, Jonathan. *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*. Volume 19. Ed. Lesser, M.X. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2001.
[13]Marsden, *Life*. p. 160.
[14]Ibid.
[15]Tracy, *Pastor*, p. 116.

"left her father and mother, and the land of her nativity, to come and trust under the shadow of God's wings."(308) What might these words have meant to Edwards' younger listeners, who were being encouraged to leave their parents and what would have traditionally been solely their parents' religious instruction to "come and trust" Edwards in their now weekly "young people's" meetings with him at his home? Edwards reminds them that for this resolution to "come and trust," Ruth was rewarded, not just eternally, but with "plentiful, and prosperous outward circumstances," something undoubtably desired by many frustrated Northhampton parishioners, young and old alike.

The text now "opened," Edwards then reveals the doctrine:

> When those that we have formerly been conversant with, are turning to God, and joining themselves to his people, it ought to be our firm resolution, that we will not leave them; but that their people shall be our people, and their God, our God. (309)

Here Edwards' probable starting point in composing the sermon – the human situation – begins to come into focus. Who is it Edwards is addressing? Not the awakened or the newly converted themselves, but those around them who are perhaps pulling away. Notice that it was either shortly before or after this sermon that Edwards preached on the text from Luke on the parable of the prodigal son, the text in which the older brother is resenting the fact that the lost brother has been found, the doctrine observing that the "long religious are oftentimes much displeased that God shows mercy to others." Obviously this dynamic is at the front of Edwards' mind as he expounds on Ruth as well, yet in the prodigal story, there is a negative example, the older brother; here the primary exemplary figure is positive and female.

Edwards begins his explanation of the doctrine of the sermon with a fairly detailed description of the great divide that had emerged in the congregation between those who had been awakened or saved and those who had not. The situation is a poignant one, for this division separates even those who have been close, even family members, one from another. Edwards drives the point home with crescendoing parallel phrases:

> One is a child of God, the other an enemy of God; one is in a miserable, and the other in a happy condition; one is a citizen of the heavenly Zion, the other is under condemnation to hell . . . .
> They are separated as they are in different kingdoms; the one remains in the kingdom of darkness, the other is translated into the kingdom of God's dear Son.
> [And back to the typology]:
> And sometimes they are finally separated in these respects: while one dwells in the land of Israel, and in the house of God; the other, like Orpah, lives and dies in the land of Moab. (309)

Edwards proceeds to give the Orpahs in the crowd the reasons why, like Ruth, they ought to cleave to their awakened brothers and sisters with "firm and inflexible resolution" that "their people shall be our people, and their God our God." (310)

As he outlines the six "reasons" Edwards produces in hopes of persuading the reluctant, he makes a strategic decision in the way he gives these reasons, not as if he is one of the saved in the congregation, but as if he too is looking in from the outside, as if he too is an Orpah longing to be a Ruth.

We ought to be influenced by our former friends, now converted and divided from us, he argues. We ought to follow their example. Our resolution to "cleave" to our converted friends "ought to be fixed and strong." (312) Ruth was "so firmly resolved" that she "brake through all; she was steadfast in it, that let the difficulty be what it would, she would not leave her mother-in-law." (313) So like Ruth, "Our cleaving" to the converted, and "having their God for our God, and their people for our people, depends on our resolution and choice." (313)

As if responding to an unspoken objection regarding the Arminian flavor of this statement, Edwards argues that:

> There are means appointed in order to our becoming some of the true Israel, and having their God for our God; and the thorough use of these means, is the way to have success; but not a slack or slighty use of them. And that we may be thorough, there is need of strength of resolution, a firm and inflexible disposition, and bent of mind to be universal in the use of means, and to do what we do with our might, and to persevere in it. Matt. 11:12, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force." (313)

It hardly sounds like an endorsement of the submissive faith Edwards regularly praises, yet the theme of "taking heaven by force," is one which Edwards revisits in *Blessed Struggle*, (August, 1735, a sermon on Jacob wrestling with the angel) and other sermons. This more "aggressive" advice must be understood in relation to the "means" Edwards describes, the "means" being the preaching of the Word and the Lord's Supper. These are the means that must be used vigorously and thoroughly, even when they seem ineffective. This sort of intense pursuit of God is itself a submission to the means, administered by the pastor, that God has ordained. This relentless submission to the means of grace is a choice, ironically, that only the converted can truly make, and in this God's prior election is reaffirmed, for

> a natural man may choose deliverance from hell, but no man doth ever heartily choose God, and Christ, and the spiritual benefits that Christ has purchased, and happiness of God's people, till he is converted. On the contrary, he is averse to them; he has no relish of them; and is wholly ignorant of the inestimable worth and value of them. Many carnal men do seem to choose these things, but do it not really, as Orpah seemed at first. (314)

Even with all the emphasis on choice and resolution, Edwards leaves room for God to act first.

Edwards proceeds to the Application, where immediately his tone becomes more personal and direct. Gone is the "their/them" language with which he identified himself with the Orpahs. Edwards tells the hearers exactly what he plans to do in the rest of the sermon: "to move sinners to this resolution." (314) And he identifies his audience within an audience even more explicitly and directly:

Many of you have seen that those you live with under the same roof, turning from being any longer with you in sin, to be the people of Jesus Christ. Some of you that are husbands, have had your wives; and some of you that are wives, have had your husbands; some of you that are children, have had your parents; and parents have had your children; many of you have had your brothers and sisters; and many your near neighbors, and acquaintance, and special friends; many of you that are young have had your companions: I say, many of you have had those that you have been thus concerned with, leaving you, forsaking that doleful life, and wretched state that you still continue in. (314)

Here the hierarchical structure of the Puritan household receives another blow: it is not only the fathers that lead the way, even proclaim the way, in which the other family members ought go. Spiritual leadership might come from wives instead of husbands, children instead of parents. If you have the resolve, no matter who you are, you are the stars, the Ruths, of this sermon, and you get to overhear the preacher pleading with others to follow *your* example:

Though you and they have been nearly related, and have dwelt together, or have been often together, and intimately acquainted one with another, they have been taken, and you hitherto left! O let it not be the foundation of a final parting! But earnestly follow them; be firm in your resolution in this matter. Don't do as Orpah did . . . but say as Ruth, "I will not leave thee." Say as she said, and do as she did. (315)

Edwards even cultivates a certain indignation among the unconverted: it is your *equals* who will be honored in heaven, and you shamed, he tells them. *They* will judge *you*. Are you going to stand for this? What are you waiting for?

now God gives extraordinary encouragement in his providence, by pouring out his Spirit so remarkably amongst us, and bringing savingly home to himself, all sorts, young and old, rich and poor, wise and unwise, sober and vicious, old self-righteous seekers, and profligate livers. No sort are exempt.
There is now at this day, amongst us, the loudest call, and the greatest encouragement, and the widest door opened to sinners, to escape out of a state of sin and condemnation, that perhaps God ever granted in New England . . . . Will you be so stupid, as to neglect your soul now?
Will any mortal amongst us, be so unreasonable, as to lag behind, or look back in discouragement, when God opens such a door? Let every single person be thoroughly awake! Let everyone encourage himself now to press forward, and fly for his life! (318)

Only weeks before this appeal, a "discouraged" parishioner attempted suicide. Here Edwards portrays discouragement, lagging behind, looking back, as "unreasonable" and "unseasonable." The language of "cleaving" more central to the Ruth text is pushed aside in favor of "pressing forward" and "flying" for one's life.

Many of the themes woven throughout the sermon reappear in its conclusion. There is again the call to the indignant: Shall *they* gain the kingdom, and not *you*? There is the repetition of the plea to the discouraged not to give in – perhaps the specter of the suicide attempt hovers in the background. And the typology has the final word: Orpah is rejected and Ruth affirmed as example to all, although the typical "female" virtue of submission has been supplemented with that of resolve, pressing forward, even "violence."

In this, Edwards recasts the experience of his target audience, the unconverted, while the redeemed in the congregation are honored from the pulpit in a way that for some would be heard as a challenge to the prevailing social order. The unconverted, especially those who are accustomed to being exemplary and in charge themselves, are to channel all their self-righteous indignation – not to putting the converts back in their place – but by striving "violently" for such honor themselves. They are aggressively to make use of God's means. In overhearing, some of the converted women and children would have been encouraged and challenged to continue in visibly practicing their faith, even in the midst of opposition at home.

Conclusion: Preaching the Dialectic of Resolution and Submission

Ruth's Resolution was not written to challenge the traditional Puritan understanding of spiritual authority. Edwards chose to preach on biblical women, and indeed used the typology of "woman" that can be found in his other sermons and writings of the period, because he thought such a choice would be helpful in his primary mission: awakening some hearers and encouraging others. But Edwards was also aware of his wider context in making that choice: the encroaching Arminianism, the charge of "enthusiasism," as critics described the revivals, and the increasing tension between inherited communalism and ever-increasing individualism in New England society.

In Ruth, as in the Northhampton women he idealized, Edwards found the embodiment of the dialectic at the heart of Calvinist revivalist theology: resolution and submission; strength and weakness; passivity and action. God is sovereign, yes, but God chooses to elect sinners through, in, and by human means, strivings, and emotions. Submit to the Almighty, but as vigorously as possible.

With no lectionary to guide him, and only sporadic forays into preaching his own *lectio continua*, Edwards did not need to seek out the relatively rare biblical texts that place women at the center of the action. But, surprisingly, sometimes, he did.[16] And there is evidence that Edwards recognized at least some of the egalitarian implications of the revivalist theology proclaimed in those, and many, of his Northhampton sermons. He was aware that elevating the state of the heart above any other consideration might mean radical changes in the status of woman and children in the church, granting them a measure of significance unknown to his Puritan predecessors.

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[16]In addition to "Ruth's Resolution," see also "Mary's Remarkable Act" in *Works,* Volume 22, pp. 378 - 399*;* "The Folly of Looking Back in Fleeing Out of Sodom" in *Works,* Volume 19, pp. 321 - 334; "Blessed Struggle" in *Works,* Volume 19*,* pp. 421 - 434; and "Peaceable and Faithful Amid Division and Strife" in *Works,* Volume 19*,* pp. 658 - 679.

After his wife Sarah's ecstatic experiences in the beginning of 1742, she became active in teaching men in the church as well as women, a departure from tradition which Edwards approved. He wrote at the end of 1742:

> Indeed, modesty might in ordinary cases, restrain some persons, as women, and those that are young, from so much as speaking when a great number are present; at least, when some of those present are much their superiors, unless they are spoken to: and yet the case may be so extraordinary as fully to warrant it . . . . I have seen some women and children in such circumstances on religious accounts, that it has appeared to me no more a transgressing the laws of humility and modesty for them to speak freely, let who will be present, than if they were dying.[17]

Ava Chamberlain has argued that perhaps the best way to understand the "bad books" incident that ended in Edwards' dismissal from Northhampton, is not that a prudish Edwards was offended by young men ogling midwifery manuals. That was not the critical issue. What Edwards could not tolerate was the fact that these men were using the manuals sexually to harass young women.[18] This the admirer of Sarah and Ruth, Phoebe and Mary, Abigail and "the wise woman" of Abel could not accept, even if it cost him his pulpit.

Like all preachers in every age, Edwards could not have foreseen all the ways his words would shape the Christendom that followed after him. Though it has certainly not been the dominant thread in Edwards' legacy, his vision of a church where the heart matters above all will only gain greater recognition as his sermons continue to be published. As it is, his heart-religion was taken up and blossomed in the denunciation of slavery and the promotion of racially integrated congregations by Edwards' disciple Samuel Hopkins and Hopkins' co-worker Sarah Osborn, in the women's missionary movement which emanated from Mount Holyoke Seminary in the nineteenth century, and in the egalitarian character of the Azusa Street revivals in the twentieth.[19] The dialectic of resolution and submission lives on in parts of the twenty-first-century American church as well.

And the long shadow of *An Angry God* has not overcome it.

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[17]Edwards, Jonathan. "Some Thoughts*", Works, Volume* 4, p. 486. Quoted in Marsden, *Life*, p. 553.

[18]See Chamberlain, Ava. "Bad Books and Bad Boys: The Transformation of Gender in Eighteenth-Century Northhampton" in Kling and Sweeney, *Home and Abroad,* pp. 61 - 81.

[19]See especially Hambrick-Stowe, Charles E. "All Things Were New and Astonishing: Edwardsian Piety, the New Divinity, and Race" in Kling and Sweeney, *Home and Abroad*. pp. 121 - 136. and Conforti, Joseph A, "Mary Lyon, Mount Holyoke Seminary and Female Piety, 1830 - 1850" in his *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995. pp. 87 - 107.

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Speaking of God: Preaching as a Spiritual Practice

Dr. Michael Pasquarello III
Asbury Theological Seminary

Concluding his handbook of pastoral theology, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Teaching Christianity) Augustine writes: "I, for my part, give thanks to our God that in these four books I have set out to the best of my poor ability, not what of sort of pastor I am myself, lacking many of the necessary qualities as I do, but what sort of pastor should be who is eager to toil away, not only for his own sake but for others, in the teaching of sound Christian doctrine."[1]

Preaching as a spiritual practice is not simply a call to believe something, to learn something, or to do something; it is to have one's life formed by the Spirit to be a wise and truthful witness to Christ, knowing and loving the Word which shapes our lives and gives shape to all the words we speak. In Augustine's words, 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 (DDC, IV.27.59). The paradox of preaching as a spiritual practice is that in listening to God more than their people, pastors are better equipped to direct others to hear the voice of the Triune God whose Word and Spirit lead a pilgrim people through time, "The one who has made us and continues to make us what we are."

To assist pastors in cultivating spiritual wisdom and understanding for speaking the truth in love, Augustine locates pastoral ministry within the activity of prayer and praise, the doxological ethos that constitutes the church's being in relation to God, educates human desire, and nurtures a disposition for receiving and responding to the Word. Indeed, worship creates the ecology of praise in which the Father speaks the Son through the gift of the Spirit to create the grace-filled conditions for participation in the mystery of salvation. In the pedagogy of worship shaped by Baptism and Eucharist, doctrine and life are made one through doxological participation in the Son's response to the Father through reception of the gift of the Spirit shared by the Father and the Son.[2] Not surprisingly, Augustine begins the *Confessions* with prayerful adoration of the Trinity, the foundation and goal which unites thinking, speaking, and doing:

> Give me, O Lord, to know and understand whether first to call upon you or praise you, and whether first to know you or call upon you. For if I do not know you I may call upon some other rather than you ....Yet how will they call upon you, in whom they have not believed? Or how are they to believe without someone preaching? And they will praise the Lord who seek him. For the ones seeking find him, and the ones finding praise him. Let me seek you, Lord, calling upon you, and let me call upon you, believing you. For you have been preached to us! My faith calls upon you, O Lord, the faith, which you have given me, which

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[1] This essay includes revised sections from my *Speaking of God: A Trinitarian Theology of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, forthcoming). *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century, Teaching Christianity: De Doctrina Christiana*, 1/11, John E. Rotelle, O.S.A. ed. (Hyde Park: New City Press, 1996). IV.31.64. Hereafter references will be included within the text, DDC. For a good introduction to Augustine's pastoral theology see Mark Ellingsen, *The Richness of Augustine: His Contextual and Pastoral Theology* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005).

[2] Here I am following the interpretation of Augustine in Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003). 90-106.

you have breathed into me through the humanity of your Son, through the ministry of your preacher.[3]

Debra Murphy has suggested that the *Confessions* be read as a liturgical book that renders joyful praise for the truth, wisdom and love revealed in Christ - knowledge of God and knowledge of the self - a gift which is received in being drawn by the Spirit to behold the glory of the Triune Creator.

> The God who is at the center of our life … is a God first prayed to, a God first worshiped, a God revealed to us as a community of persons … Catechesis, then - our coming to know who and whose we are - is inseparable from doxology, the worship of Christ, the praise and adoration of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is in worship, in the eucharistic assembly of Christ's body the church, that we are incorporated into the divine economy and given the gift of our very selves so that we might be the gift of Christ's body to and for the world. We are not and we know not apart from this communion.[4]

Through the church's doxological activity and doctrinal understanding the Spirit shapes homiletic character as a habit, disposition, and way of life cultivated through indwelling the truth of God and the things of God. Preaching as a spiritual vocation has a sense of personal truth and participatory knowledge, the gift of divine wisdom embodied in the virtues of faith, hope and love which draw and direct the church towards the enjoyment and glory of God which is the source and end of human flourishing.

Be-Speaking the Wisdom of God

In the *Confessions* Augustine wrote of an intensive seeking for wisdom prior to his conversion to Christianity. This passionate love of philosophy in pursuit of eternal truth was a commitment of him-self to a whole way of life, an intellectual, moral and spiritual awakening and inner healing facilitated by the spoken or written words of ancient sages. Following his baptism and incorporation into the Body of Christ, Augustine wrote of the intellectual vanity fostered by his love for philosophy, confessing his prideful illusion that human reason is capable of ascending unaided to divine wisdom and happiness.[5]

In his work as a Christian bishop and preacher Augustine retained the pedagogical insights he learned as a student and teacher of philosophy. Assimilating these to the doctrine of the Incarnation, revealed in the church's "folly of preaching" and cruciform way of life, he proclaimed the true "philosophy" of Christ, God's Wisdom, the spiritual principle of creation and means of its redemption.

> And so it was in the Wisdom of God that the world was unable to come to know God through wisdom. So why did she come, when she was already here, if not because it was God's pleasure through the folly of preaching to save those who believe? … That is how the Wisdom of God treats the ills of humanity, presenting herself for our healing, herself the physician, herself the psychic. So because man had fallen through pride, she applied

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[3] Saint Augustine, *Confessions,* Henry Chadwick, trans. and intro. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 1.1.1. Hereafter references will be included in the text as Confessions.

[4] Debra Dean Murphy, *Teaching That Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004) 112.

[5] William Mallard, *Language and Love: Introducing Augustine's Religious Thought Through the Confessions Story* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1994); see also Helen Charry, *By The Renewing of Your Minds: The Pastoral Function of Christian Doctrine* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 120-152.

humility to his cure. We were deceived by the wisdom of the serpent; we are set free by the folly of God. On the one hand, while her true name was Wisdom, she was folly to those who took no notice of God; on the other hand while this is called folly, it is in fact Wisdom to those who overcome the devil (DDC.I.12-14).

Augustine's affirmation links the person and work of Christ to humanity and is congruent with the Trinitarian faith confessed by the church. The whole life and ministry of Jesus is the work of God in which the Son of God, anointed by the Spirit, takes to himself our fallen world, our sinful, human flesh, and lives in it a life of faithful, loving praise on our behalf, doing the will of the Father, walking according to God's wisdom and following God's way. In this vocation Jesus learned for us the wisdom we have lost through sin and foolishness, overcoming our idolatrous, unjust and destructive ways, restoring and bringing to completion our life and destiny as creatures made for peace in the image of God. Fully God, he descended into ignorance and humiliation; fully human, he advanced in wisdom and character to demonstrate his full participation in our creaturely life for us and for our salvation, communion with God.[6]

By following this classic pattern, Augustine depicted the Christian way of life as conformity to the church's confession of faith in the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, as loving surrender to Christ, the mystery of divine wisdom who indwells the communion of saints (DDC, I.12 – 14, 13). He therefore sought to persuade pastors to yield themselves to a particular manner of believing, loving and speaking which constitutes a particular *habitus*, habits of the mind and heart, a form of theological judgment necessary for hearing and speaking the Word of God. This "knowing how" comprised the enactment of truthful practice and guided pastors in the conduct of their ecclesial responsibilities. Both knowledge and love - passionate knowledge - are required to grasp divine wisdom, the "grammar of God" which forms and guides pastoral practice for the healing of humanity through communion in Christ who with the Spirit indwells the church.[7]

Augustine, moreover, was no stranger to the wisdom and healing power of the Spirit in the ministry and fellowship of the church. Through an extended process of repentance, confession, and forgiveness, Augustine's mind was changed to see that human love and desire, a restlessness which seeks certitude and control through attachment to created things rather than the Creator, is satisfied only when reoriented and drawn into communion with God in loving friendship with others. Only the gift of faith enables acknowledgment of one's sinfulness, limits, and death within the larger story of God's goodness and love. Understanding thus increases in direct proportion to the degree one acknowledges dependence upon and belonging to God and God's people. Human lives become truthful when yielded up as acts of praise and thanksgiving to the Father in union with Christ through the gift of the Spirit.[8] As Augustine prayed in beginning the *Confessions*: "You have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in you" (Confessions, I.I). Christopher Thompson comments,

The normative guiding principle guiding the *Confessions* is the doctrine of the Church concerning God as the Triune Creator of all that exists and Redeemer of all who seek reconciliation … the overriding motif of any narrative of Christian experience is the

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[6] Colin E. Gunton, *Theology Through Preaching* (Edinburgh and New York: T&T Clark, 2001) 79-84.

[7] Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*, 3-34.

[8] See the excellent discussion of the *Confessions* in Kim Paffenroth and Robert P. Kennedy ed., *A Reader's Companion to Augustine's Confessions* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003).

claim that 'God has made us for himself' … This is the drama of the revelatory narratives: that I find in them, not confirmation of myself, but very constitution of myself. I do not place the actions of God within the horizon of my story; rather, I place my story within the action of God.[9]

Pastoral ministry, then, is a human sign of salvation lovingly and justly bestowed, pointing to the humble presence of Christ who creates and indwells the church in communicating God's continuing commitment to creation. Spiritual formation involves one in becoming a certain kind of person through the cultivation of pastoral wisdom and virtue, the intellectual and moral capacities which are necessary to unite thinking and speaking of God. On the one hand, this involves unlearning sinful habits and judgments that turn one's vision away from God and a life ordered to goodness; on the other hand, this involves acquiring new habits of thinking and speaking formed within the narrative of God's providential drama of salvation (DDC, I.14.13-20, 21).

According to Augustine, such spiritual formation occurs within and bears witness to God's saving work of restoring creation to its good end: godly fear which is the beginning of wisdom; piety, a willingness to learn; knowledge of scripture, one's self, and human sinfulness; courage and constancy in adversity gained through prayer; counsel and mercy; the purging of restlessness and love towards one's enemies; purity of sight or vision through death to the world; and lastly, wisdom enjoyed in communion with God (DDC, II. 7.9-14). Immersing one's self within the church's story of doctrine, discipleship and devotion nourishes one's proficiency in scripture, a "sense" of speaking simply and wisely, the authority of personal communication that bears witness to the crucified and risen Lord among his people. Purity of heart and the gift of understanding sustain constancy and patience, a habitual way of "seeing" the good, a sense of "knowing how" to speak in a manner that shows forth Christ in the concrete witness of the church.[10] Rebecca Weaver comments,

> Stated otherwise, if the message of scripture is the double commandment of love as joined in the incarnation, then those who are still running the way of Christ, the pavement of Christ's humanity, toward its union with the deity of Christ, the triune God, must reinterpret and renew in each new circumstance the love for God and neighbor. The way that Christ provides must be looked at anew, for even Christ himself, as human, lived a life in process. As such, he serves as a guide for both interpreting and communicating the message … scripture must be all times be read anew for the Spirit's guidance on how that dual love is to be enacted today.[11]

Augustine's discussion of learned piety and spiritual formation, loving God with both heart and mind, demonstrates the kind of insightfulness necessary for creating congruence between the means by which we speak and live and the ends to which we have been called: charity, the gift of the Spirit (the source of life) which points to Christ crucified, the One who came to provide a

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[9] Christopher Thompson, *Christian Doctrine, Christian Identity: Augustine and the Narratives of Character* (Lanham, New York, Oxford: University Press of America, 1999) 99, cf. 78-91.
[10] Andrew Louth, *Discerning the Mystery: An Essay on the Nature of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 79-85.
[11] Rebecca Harden Weaver, "Reading the Signs: Guidance for the Pilgrim Community" *Interpretation*, Vol. 58 No.1 (January, 2004) 40.

way to God (the means of life) in whom humanity alone finds completion in happiness and holiness (the ends of life). The humble way of Christ, the end of this story who is also the way to the end of this story, establishes the relation between the Word and human words, the church's message and mission, the interpretation of scripture and its performance by God's people. So united by the Spirit in the Incarnation, Christian identity, knowledge, and activity generate Christian discourse possessing a particular character and wisdom that is faithful to Christ and the church's distinctive way of life joined to him as its Head, the whole Christ.[12]

Pastoral Pragmatism and the Loss of Spiritual Congruence

Eugene Peterson has commented extensively on the contemporary lack of congruence between ends and means in ministry, between whom we are and what we do; what we do and how we do it. By congruence Peterson means a sense of wholeness, rightness, and fittingness between being Christian, speaking as Christians, and living as Christians. In a manner similar to Augustine, Peterson cites John 14:6, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life" to discuss the incongruence of Christianity in North America, those expressions of faith which have changed the subject from God to the self.[13] In addition, this change has affected a huge paradigm shift in the focus of pastoral vocation; from the person of Christ and activity of the Spirit, to the person and activity of the pastor, who in much contemporary practice is increasingly identified as a marketing manager of religion, one experienced in the instrumental use of technical reason to facilitate numerical growth of the church measured in terms of "effectiveness."[14]

Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* illumines many of the challenges presented by such incongruence, since its pragmatic program "Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission" divides and compartmentalizes the Great Commandment/Great Commission, worship/evangelism, grace/growth, salvation/success, spiritual/skilled, and message/method.[15] This separation of ecclesial content and form, which divides identity and mission, creates a program without Christ the Mediator, the One who is not only the Truth and Life, but is also the Way in whom the church, through the Spirit's power, becomes congruent with the Gospel, embodying the story of his humble birth, life, suffering and death with and for the world (48-71).

Warren's program thus locates God's power outside the Spirit's economy or narrative of creation and redemption, as an unmediated, disembodied force that acts externally and causally in reaction to the initiative and actions of human agents. This divine/human configuration separates ends and means in the name of "effectiveness," thus underwriting instrumental forms of ministry that ultimately privilege growth as the end with God as means, thereby creating a form of pastoral ministry requiring technical expertise and skill more than theological wisdom and spiritual discernment. For example, driven by the purpose to know "how to" exercise the right means of doing things to and for others - "people don't need Truth, they are looking for relief" - pastors are instructed to seek success in the "job" (The Great Commission) that a

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[12] Carol Harrison, *Augustine: Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 37-39; Mallard, *Language and Love*, 219-229.

[13] Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005) 334-338; see also idem, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989).

[14] Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 174-176.

[15] Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message & Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). Hereafter references will be included in the text.

depersonalized, "de-trinitized," domesticated god, now receded into the background, has presumably handed over to human control for its completion (64-66).[16]

By describing a world in which God and humanity act separately - without the mediation of Christ and indwelling Spirit - Warren's model displays incongruence between the pragmatism that shapes its message and method, and its putative commitment to worship God. So, for example, Warren does not discuss whether his decision to read scripture as "The Owner's Manual for Church Growth" reflects external commitments to a consumerist, marketing model of evangelism, or if the character of a "purpose-driven pastor" may be incongruent with the Spirit-led pattern and vocation of Christ whose self-giving love and obedience to death on a cross reveals the true efficacy (effectiveness) of God's self-gift in relatedness (relevance) to the world (13-47).

It is not surprising, then, given this separation of theological wisdom and spiritual practice that the tasks or means of ministry are detached from their source and end: increasing the growth of the church from knowing and loving God, evangelism from worship, human insight from divine wisdom, responsiveness to human needs from receptiveness to God's Word. In Warren's program, this dichotomy of divine power/human effort betrays incongruence between faithfulness to God and effectiveness in ministry, a matter left unresolved in favor of doing the merely practical, an implicit theological and spiritual judgment that reduces ministry to method (56). *This pragmatic solution, however, does not sufficiently acknowledge the theological and redemptive nature of the church through communion with Christ in the Spirit; nor does it show how the wisdom of theology, the knowledge and love of God incarnate and the gifts of the Spirit personally suffuse and transform the person of the pastor for the purpose of becoming a living sign and witness to the story of Christ's life, passion, death and resurrection.* Although Warren acknowledges a tension in ministry between spiritual power and human skill, his model fails to show how theological commitments and spiritual practices create, shape and guide one's "method" and "medium" for ministry.

> I know hundreds of dedicated pastors whose churches are not growing. They are faithful to God's Word, they pray earnestly and consistently, they preach solid messages, and their dedication is unquestioned - but still their churches refuse to grow; it takes skill …
> The Bible teaches that God has given us a critical role to play in accomplishing his will on earth. Church growth is a partnership between God and man. Churches grow by the power of God through the skilled effort of people. God's power and man's skilled effort must be present. We cannot do it without God but he has decided not to do it without us. God uses people to accomplish his purposes (56-57).

Peterson, on the other hand, provides a way of resolving this tension by situating ministry within the larger activity of the Triune God, a world in which we participate through prayer, adoration, receptivity and responsiveness to the grace of God; theology as knowing, hearing and doing the Word God speaks through Christ in the Spirit.

> Prayer and spirituality feature participation, the complex participation of God and the human, his will and our wills. We do not abandon ourselves to the stream of grace and drown in an ocean of love, losing identity. We do not pull strings that activate God's operations in our lives, subjecting God to our assertive identity. We neither, manipulate

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[16] For my understanding of the integral relationship between doctrine and life, the pastoral function of Christian doctrine, I have benefited from the argument in Charry, *By the Renewing of Your Minds*.

God … nor are manipulated by God … We are involved in the action and participate in its results but do not control or define it … This is the contextual atmosphere in which we find ourselves loved and loving before God.[17]

Peterson suggests that in the pervasive contemporary split between theology and practice, between who we are and what we do, much "how to" expertise deemed necessary for becoming a "successful pastor" has been dominated by the social-economic mindset of Darwinism: market-orientation, competitiveness, and survival of the fittest. Such methods form their "users" with a capacity for discerning instrumental relations between means and ends, a pragmatic vision that cultivates a particular kind of person who must acquire particular virtues or strengths such as personal appeal, promotional savvy, mastery, control, and most important, expertise in exercising cause and effect power through the practical application of techniques and skills to achieve results.[18]

Although typically defended as "value free," morally neutral "means" that "work," many technological and managerial strategies are external and even antithetical to the Spirit poured out by the Risen Christ who creates and forms the church as his Body in the world. Such unreflective activity invariably alienates pastors and congregations from their true end - participation in the life and mission of the Triune God - and produces forms of leadership that, when evaluated in light of the wisdom incarnate in Christ and the Spirit's gifts, are neither theologically nor spiritually sound.[19]

Just as troubling is the manner in which the marketing/managing pastoral paradigm alters Christian proclamation into flattened, trivialized truth, taking categories of biblical faith, packaging and presenting them in manageable shapes with neither the material substance nor spiritual force of the Word - Christ himself - incarnating preacher or people. Discrete, abstracted topics, transmitted through presumably "value free" methods of delivery reduce the mystery of God to problems and solutions, spiritual help and techniques that reinforce self-interest and only stimulate human restlessness for certitude and control. Moreover, "how to" strategies for "effectively communicating" closed, managed, useful truth easily subject the Word to uncritically examined ideologies that legitimizes the cultural status quo, its marketplace of needs and desires, and supports the powers of this world, the power of the speaker, and the powerlessness of listeners.[20] In the end, marketing privatized religion commodifies faith and transforms Christian proclamation into the work of Gnostic technicians who provide goods and services for consumers: incongruence between theology and spiritual formation depersonalizes God, displaces the work of Christ and the Spirit, and consequently, diminishes humanity.[21]

Most disturbing, however, is the silencing of the Spirit's gift of truthful speech: humble confession of human sinfulness and robust celebration of God's undeserved goodness and love,

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[17] Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*. 104-105.

[18] Ibid.*Under the Unpredictable Plant*. 174-182.

[19] I am indebted to the insights of Philip D. Kenneson, "Selling (Out) the Church in the Marketplace of Desire" *Modern Theology*, Vol. 9 No. 4 (October, 1993) 319-338.

[20] See the extended discussion in Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech For Proclamation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989). Idem, *Biblical Perspectives on Evangelism: Living in a Three-Storied Universe* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993); See also the excellent discussion in Rowan Williams, *Christ on Trial: How the Gospel Unsettles Our Judgment* (Grand Rapids: Eedmans, 2003) 38-47.

[21] Rodney Clapp, *A Peculiar People: The Church as Culture in a Post-Christian Society* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 1996) 34-36, 205-208.

since it is difficult, at best, to perceive the wisdom of Christ crucified within a model of church predicated upon results produced by dependence upon management, marketing, mastery and control. Life perceived as techniques to be practiced, as a series of problems to be solved, as a list of principles to be implemented, as a quota of results to be achieved, and as a "job" to do, provides too few means for the Spirit to draw attention away from the sovereign self long enough to behold the astonishing presence and glory of Christ, crucified and risen. When God's praise is replaced by God's utility - worshiping God as a means rather than the end of all things - pastors abandon the church's primary vocation of bearing witness to a world beyond manipulation, control, idolatry and ideology: "the delightfully purposeless, pointless, non utilitarian purpose of, the glorification and enjoyment of God."[22]

Becoming a Living Sermon

The first and last purpose of pastoral vocation is defined by the vocation of the church - worship - locating all of life within the narrative of the Triune God, whose Spirit orders the thoughts, affections and actions of his people to the wisdom of salvation, Jesus Christ. In worship we meet God who graciously comes to meet us: the love of the Father creates the possibility of prayer which begins in praise and thanksgiving, to pray with and through Christ is to be given the gift of life by the Spirit within the space created by God's own self-gift. Thus constancy in communion with the Triune God; adoration and praise, pouring out one's self in service to the neighbor, are one and not two different kinds of love, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart soul and mind and strength; an your neighbor as yourself." Don Saliers observes, "Entering into one requires entering the other. Compassion for neighbor and adoration of God are not separate intentions of two worlds; they are the modes of intending and receiving the love of God in its double manifestation … In rendering glory to God we learn to glorify him in all the commonplaces of life."[23]

Augustine was no stranger himself to the struggle with the self-love and illusion that creates divided loves, disordered desires and idolatrous expressions of human vanity and glory. As a child he concluded that human beings live in two separate worlds with two separate ways of thinking and speaking that are creations of the imagination. In this arrangement God is kept in heaven, at a distance, thus removed from ordinary human activity while human beings take hold of the world of knowledge and power to their advantage. Augustine reasoned that if God is limited to religious affairs within a "spiritual" realm, then human beings are free to compete for control of a world ruled by pride, arrogance and self-assertion.

Moreover, within this division of worlds, even religion is capable of becoming a system of domination and control; language separated from its embodiment serves partisan and vested interests, since the acknowledged loves, desires and commitments people have inevitably form the character of their community. In his pastoral ministry, Augustine was aware of the moral incongruence presented by a powerful temptation to use God and others as means of obtaining less important things - even advancing the ministry of the church - and the persistent challenge to

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[22] William H. Willimon, "Ritual and Pastoral Care" 108, and Rodney Clapp, "On the Making of Kings and Christians, 109-110, in Todd E. Johnson, ed., *The Conviction of Things Not Seen: Worship and Ministry in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).
[23] Don E. Saliers, *The Soul in Paraphrase: Prayer and the Religious Affections* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1980) 70-73.

learn the proper ordering of human desires by loving God and others within the love of God who is the true end of life.[24] He writes in his handbook for pastors,

> Thus all your thoughts and your whole life and all your intelligence should be focused on him from whom you have the very things you devote to him. Now when he said *with your whole heart, your whole soul, your whole mind*, he did not leave out any part of life, which could be left vacant, so to speak, and leave room for wanting to enjoy something else … And if God is to be loved more than any human being, we all ought to love God more than ourselves … Now if all those who are able to enjoy God together with us, some we love as people we can help, some as people we can be helped by, some as ones both whose help we need, and whose needs we help to meet … Still, we ought to want all of them to love God together with us, and all our helping them or being helped by them is to be referred to that one (God) in the end (DDC, I.22.21).

The Great Commandment, the grammar of loving God and neighbor, cultivates spiritual discernment and moral strength for resisting the temptation to manage God and use others without referring all things to the love of God.   Faithfulness in pastoral ministry requires theological wisdom even before technical skill, since it is God's Spirit which orders and draws human practice to participate in divine truth and goodness, toward nothing less than full or complete love for God (DDC, I.26-30). Augustine advises,

> … temperance is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God; fortitude is love bearing everything readily for the sake of God; justice is love serving God only …; prudence is love making a right distinction between what helps it towards God and what hinders it.[25]

Through the ministry of the Incarnation, God has provided not so much a set of rules to follow but rather wisdom or a rule of life; love wisely ordered according to the mission of Christ and the promptings of the Spirit. In his death Christ overcame the devil, not by power, but by justice, to teach humanity the proper relation between charity, power and humility. Thus the Word's incarnate example trains us in virtue, through his life and death he shows the grace of God towards humanity, and by his humility he overcomes human pride. Faith loves the image of God in the Word made flesh, and faith contemplates the Son of God, becoming like the One who is adored. Christ is loved as the paradigm for pastoral wisdom; he is the Wisdom of God incarnate who speaks in and through human weakness, thereby enabling us to attune our selves and others to God.[26]

Augustine's wisdom points us towards a recovery of theological judgment that has been lost through the pervasive influence of technique-driven pastoral practice. Paradoxically, the more the practical tasks themselves are focused upon as the primary goal of the church's ministry, the less pastors will posses the discernment necessary to carry their vocation in ways "relevant" or fitting for their true end: a world in which theology and pastoral practice are united within the life of the Triune God, in love of God and neighbor, in graced participation through faith in the mystery of Christ enabled by the Spirit indwelling the church through the common prayer of its people.

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[24] Mallard, *Language and Love*, 2-24, 78-80, 125-132, 161-65.

[25] Cited in Eric O. Springsted, *The Act of Faith: Christian Faith and the Moral Self* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 121.

[26] Ibid. 139-147.

Augustine points to what is arguably the greatest need for the cultivation of preaching as a spiritual practice in our time: the recovery of contemplation, the gifts of wonder, love and praise, prayerful attention and receptivity to the Word and Spirit who create our life and call us into a world of blessing and salvation.[27] Standing in the presence of God's self-gift of Christ, the holy mystery which draws us out of ourselves towards the Other, contemplation unites theology *and* prayer, knowledge *and* love, being *and* doing, thinking *and* speaking: "Full knowledge of God, the contemplation of God, comes by shifting the center of moral gravity from oneself to God. One comes to know God by willing to be taught and led by God."[28] Prayer is neither a technique nor a magical means to any end; prayer is presenting our-selves to be taken up into God's own life, energized by the vision and power of God's goodness and glory. Servais Pinckaers comments on Augustine's advice that pastors be prayers before speakers, "Unless you pray you will not understand."[29]

Learning to pray with Christ in the eternal conversation between the Father and the Son brings theology close to human speech and action. Within the Triune life of self-giving love, the Spirit unites the activities of listening to God, knowing the things of God, and speaking of God in the love and delight the Father has for the Son, the delight which the Son, so empowered by the Spirit in his mission to the world, returns to the Father as a continual act of self-giving love in speaking, living and dying. Knowing God through prayerful thought and loving obedience fosters the gift of humility, acknowledgment that our truest and best speaking is a gift beyond all explanation and control. Thomas Long notes, "To speak truthfully about God is also to enter a world, a world in which God is present and can be trusted. To speak about God is to live in that world and speak out of it … Authentic speech about God, therefore, can be said to be a form of prayer."[30]

Preaching, as a spiritual practice congruent with the One of whom and to whom we speak, is primarily a receptive activity: responsiveness to the Word in the Spirit of the risen Christ who breathes life into texts and contexts, into speaking and listening, thereby assimilating hearts, minds and bodies into a world constituted by the truth and goodness of the Word, the wisdom of God brought to speech. Only the Holy Spirit can transform gatherings of listeners into a body of people addressed by the Word and capable of answering with their whole selves: a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving. It is therefore foolish to think that we can make a "preaching event" happen or create "meaningful" experiences for listeners; preaching is an activity of confession and praise, the surrender of self-possession and control of our words to Christ, the mystery of God's Word made present by the Spirit in human speaking and hearing. Thus the truest sign of pastoral "spirituality" is the Word's embodiment, the practice of priestly listening and prophetic speech that participates in the Spirit's work of creating a holy people whose common life praises God, proclaiming and demonstrating God's salvation in and to the world.

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[27] See the excellent discussions by Josef Peiper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*, Gerald Malsbary, ed. (South Bend, St. Augustine's Press, 1998); Lash, *Holiness, Speech and Silence*; Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor.*
[28] Springsted, *The Act of Faith*, 124.
[29] Pinckaers, *Sources of Christians Ethics*, 163.
[30] Thomas G. Long, *Testimony: Talking Ourselves into Being Christian* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2004) 11.

"The Authority of Celebrity and the Perils of Sincerity"

Ted A. Smith
The Divinity School
Vanderbilt University

Sincerity glows with the aura of an almost-unquestioned virtue for preachers today. This aura appeals to people with a wide variety of relationships to preaching. Many congregations praise the sincerity of their preachers – you can tell she feels what she says! – and it is hard to imagine an actual congregation in the United States today celebrating a consistent clash between a preacher's private practice and her public performance in the pulpit. Congregations are not alone. Few teachers of preaching tell their students that it does not matter if they believe what they say, if they only say it well. And (despite abundant circumstantial evidence) few preachers today deliberately set out to be insincere. On the contrary, insincerity, when it comes to consciousness, can provoke a crisis of vocation. Even people outside of congregations assign moral weight to sincerity for preachers. The insincerity of preachers counts as a legitimate reason in the minds of many people for staying away from church. And preachers seen as sincere often win a kind of admiration from people who do not believe a word they say. Across the lines that seem to divide church and academy, preacher and congregation, and church and world, people take for granted the moral value of sincerity in preaching.

In this paper I offer an historical account of how sincerity came to have this power to legitimate. I try to account for the authority of sincerity, to offer thick descriptions of the practices that displayed sincerity, and to show the ways public displays of sincerity came to erode the conditions necessary for their own existence. In telling this historical narrative, I hope to estrange the too-familiar and the taken-for-granted. When values and practices become obvious, they tend to fade into the background of givenness. Telling a story of how they came to be so widely accepted can bring them into sharper relief. A contingent, empirical, historical narrative reminds us that things might have been – and might yet be – otherwise.

A country in masquerade

In the decades immediately after the Revolution, Americans felt rising anxiety about what they understood as public representations of hidden, private realities. These anxieties shot through a wide range of social spheres. New forms of exchange in the economic sphere depended on abstract representations of goods, money, agreements, and persons. New patterns of intimate relationships stressed the importance of a person's true feelings even as an emerging middle class marked itself by its ability to manipulate those feelings. International immigration and internal migration meant that people increasingly had the experience of meeting people whom they did not know. Social mobility intensified this geographic mobility. The Revolution catalyzed and focused a democratic ideal that at least every white male person should be free to make himself into whatever he could be. In nearly every social sphere, new practices of representation emerged – and produced anxiety. In 1808, eight years after leaving the

Presidency, John Adams expressed the concern many felt: "Our country is in masquerade! No party, no man, dares to avow his real sentiments. All is disguise, visard, cloak."[1]

Questions of faithful representation arose with special intensity for persons seeking to participate in emerging public spheres. In the eighteenth century *the* distinguishing mark of fully public speech became the ability to address an abstract, generalized audience. Like Jean-Jacques Rousseau pleading his case before all of heaven and earth at the end of his *Confessions*, the public person spoke or wrote to a universal body. The "greatness of democratic oratory," Alexis de Tocqueville observed after his trip to the United States, was just this drive to speak of "general verities," and to speak of them to all humankind.[2] Such speech required the development of a "prosthetic person," a public voice distinct from any private qualities and authoritative precisely because of its ability to transcend particulars of history, heritage, or biology. Public personae, by definition, stood alienated from the private persons who created them. Properly public speech required a distinct representation of a private self.[3]

Anxiety arose because people like Adams shared a deep faith in the primacy, naturalness, and *reality* of the self associated with those spaces and relationships they counted as private. If a minister preached the gospel in public and sipped whiskey at home, they had no doubt that these identities were mutually exclusive and that one of them was real and the other artificial. The man was what he was in private. He was a drunk. This basic assumption structured and encoded with moral and epistemological value a whole world of oppositions: public selves were representations, but private selves were real; public selves were self-conscious fabrications, but private selves were natural beings; the public speech of oratory was suspect, but the private speech of conversation was trustworthy; planned speech sought to manipulate people, but extemporaneous speech expressed the heart; and printed matter (the definitive public form) could deceive, but the spoken word told the truth. Qualities associated with the private sphere – natural, conversational, spontaneous, expressive, and spoken – glowed with the aura of reality and reliability. Questions of sincerity, the harmony of public and private selves, came hard-wired in to the bourgeois public sphere.

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[1] John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 20 June 1808, in John A. Schutz and Douglas Adair, eds., *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1966), 110.

In describing anxieties of representation I have learned especially from Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Univesity Press, 1986). On anxieties about social representation in nineteenth-century America, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women : A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).

The instability of representation extended even to language. Because old conventions of meaning did not bind word usage in a democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, citizens of the United States had the freedom to make and assign new meanings. As a result people often encountered one another's words, as one another's persons, as opaque and difficult to decipher. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Claflin Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), II.1.xvi, p. 455.

[2] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.1.xvi, pp. 475-76.

[3] Michael Warner, "The Mass Public and the Mass Subject," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 1992), 379-82. Warner borrowed the apt phrase "prosthetic person" from Lauren Berlant.

Questions of sincerity followed every public figure, but they hounded ministers with special intensity. Traditional systems of legitimation for clergy eroded steadily through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the colonies and then the United States. Progressive disestablishment of churches, the rise of itinerant exhorters, the spread of religious pluralism, and the increasing independence of political, cultural, and religious spheres pulled ministers into competition in an economy of attention in which successful participation came to require the formation of a public persona. But the rising importance of sentiment in religion also made a minister's private, emotional life increasingly important, even more important than that of other public figures. Preachers faced a sharper form of the dilemma faced by every public figure: on the one hand, the loss of traditional legitimation forced them to project public selves; on the other hand, the very act of projection called their sincerity into question. Preachers had to choose between publicity and sincerity, between being heard and being trusted.[4]

Measures of sincerity

The genius of the "new measures" for preaching was to turn this dilemma into a complex set of resources. New measures preachers found, made, and handed on practices for the public presentation of private lives. They fused the veracity of private selves with the omnipresence of abstracted public selves. And no one joined public and private more famously than Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875). Finney was a star.

Finney projected a sincere public persona by adapting habits of body and voice associated with private spaces and relationships. He carried private – and so reliable – ways of speaking and moving into public media like the pulpit and the press. Finney marked his speech with emblems of the private. He spoke in ways that people heard as natural, conversational, expressive, and extemporaneous.

In seeking out a "natural" style, Finney deliberately rejected the studied, neo-classical rhetoric of Noah Webster and Joseph Dana. Webster taught that particular tones and rhetorical devices should accompany particular points and purposes; Dana suggested different standardized gestures for every part of a speech. Finney swept all of that aside. If a preacher simply felt as he should, Finney promised, "He will naturally do the very thing that elocution laboriously teaches…Let him speak as he feels, and act as he feels, and he will be eloquent." Finney's public display of natural tones and gestures gave his preaching the trustworthiness of the speech of a natural, true self.[5]

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[4] Harry S. Stout rightly connected the rising importance of sentiment in religion to the differentiation of social spheres and the rise of a mass public: "As the public sphere grew more impersonal and abstract, the private self gained proportionate importance as the repository of spiritual experience." Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), xvii.

[5] Charles Grandison Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, William G. McLoughlin, ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1960), 212. For the contrast with Webster and Dana, see Joseph Dana, *A New American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking ...* (Boston: Samuel Hall., 1792), Noah Webster, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking ...* (Philadelphia: Young and M'Culloch, 1787).

Finney's natural style used the rhythms, pitches, and patterns of everyday conversation. Webster and Dana called for a high rhetorical style deliberately distant from everyday speech. But Finney spoke personally to a mass. "The gospel will never produce any great effects," Finney told his listeners in New York in 1835, "until ministers *talk* to their hearers, in the pulpit, as they talk in *private conversation*." Finney did just that. He used the truthfulness associated with private speech to secure the trustworthiness of his public preaching.[6]

Finney found ways to express emotions usually limited to private life in respectable public forms. He denounced both ignorant ranter and dignified divine. A dignified divine of the old school conformed his behavior entirely to the demands of a pastor's public life. No inkling of impropriety, no trace of what people thought should be kept private, appeared in his public preaching. But just for that reason he could not be trusted. Listeners had to wonder: did he *really* believe what he said? A ranting exhorter erred in the opposite direction. He lost all self-control and offered unedited emotional expression in public. But even if he was not a fraud, he did not offer fully public speech. He simply appeared as a private figure speaking in a public forum. Finney, on the other hand, found ways to rant with reason and to engage in respectable theological disputation with tears rolling down his cheeks. He blended the tropes of public and private ways of being into a new sort of combination.

The new measures style associated with Finney also stressed the extemporaneous style that bridged public and private forms of discourse. Finney preached not from manuscripts but from skeleton outlines. Even the printed forms of his sermons – even his *Systematic Theology*—purported to be mere transcriptions of a fundamentally extemporaneous, oral, and therefore more *reliable* reality. He presented himself in print not as a scheming, careful, tricky writer, but as private conversationalist speaking simply, without a lot of planning, and straight from the heart.

Presenting private personae in public required not only new ways of modulating tone, face, and body, but also new spaces for the display of those modulations. New measures preachers replaced high, boxed pulpits with open lecterns set on raised platforms. The crowd had to be able to see the preacher's body. Above all, the crowd had to be able to see the most private part of the speaker – the eyes. Finney used his eyes to great effect, and nearly every account of his preaching mentions his "searching" or "blazing" blue eyes. The planners of the Oberlin meeting house valued eye-contact so much that someone, perhaps Finney himself, sketched tiny lines on the architectural drawing to make sure that an unobstructed line of sight existed between each person in the building and the preacher in the pulpit. Oberlin's founders cut many other corners to save money on the building, but spent the extra money necessary to install raked pews in the gallery (where the students sat) in order to guarantee these lines of exchange.

Finney's amalgamation of public and private forms of discourse let him fit the prevailing definition of sincerity, and his perceived sincerity proved to be one of the most winsome aspects of his style. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, writing 70 years after she came to Christ at a Finney revival, had little use for Finney's theology. His "preaching worked incalculable harm to the

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[6] Finney, *Lectures on Revival of Religion*, 208.

very souls he sought to save." He cast people into despair. He filled them with fear, reasoning with them in a way that robbed them of reason. But, she concluded, "He was sincere, so peace to his ashes!"[7]

The authority of celebrity

To display a private persona in public, a preacher had to set aside the trappings of traditional authority. New measures preachers gave up high pulpits, distinctive dress, powdered wigs, and the mannered rhetoric of Webster and Dana. Those older practices legitimated a preacher by showing connections to institutions whose legitimacy could be taken for granted. They also occluded any sort of private self. That occlusion served as the basis of Finney's criticism of one traditional preacher. Finney said he was a good man, even a sincere man – but totally ineffective in the pulpit. Because the preacher completely immersed himself in his traditional role, he did not reveal a private self. He might have *been* sincere. But he did not *appear* sincere. In this new era of religious pluralism and egalitarian social relations, a successful minister had to project sincerity publicly. And public sincerity required enabling audiences to compare public and private personae. It therefore required stepping out from behind a public role, setting aside the insignia of office, and making visible a distinct, private self. New measures preachers did just that. They gave up the authority of office and tradition for a new kind of authority better suited to a democratic age.[8]

Historians have often named the authority of new measures preachers as "charismatic." Relying on Max Weber's famous typology of authority as "charismatic," "traditional," or "legal," some historians have argued that the new measures replaced a traditional mode of authority with a charismatic one. For if Finney did not have traditional authority – and for the most part he did not[9] – what other kind of authority could he have?

Finney's power did not rely on the legitimation of tradition, but neither did it rely in a pure form on what Weber identified as charisma. Rather Finney should be understood within the context of the emerging "star system" that appeared most clearly on the stage but also arose in religious and political spheres. Stars like Edmund Keane, Clara Fischer, P.T. Barnum, Andrew Jackson – and Charles Grandison Finney – found ways to represent private sentiments to mass publics. As I have argued above, they managed to combine the intensity, passion, veracity and heightened reality of a private self with the prestige, reason, power and widespread presence of an alienated public representation. That amalgamation gave stars a distinct kind of authority.

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[7] Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More (1815-1897 Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton)* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898), 43. On doubts about Finney's sincerity, see Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College: From Its Foundation through the Civil War*, 2 vols. (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), I.16.

[8] See Albert Barnes, *Practical Preaching : An Address Delivered before the Porter Rhetorical Society, in the Theological Seminary, Andover, September 10, 1833* (Boston: Printed by W. Peirce, 1833), 20-21.

[9] Finney's break with traditional forms of authority should not be overstated. He took pains to be ordained and then to make sure he located himself within denominations that would not withdraw that credential. More subtly, part of Finney's appeal depended on his status as a white male and on the traditions that attached special legitimation to his race and gender.

The nature of the authority of celebrity emerges more clearly through four subtle but decisive contrasts with Weber's classic account of charisma. First, Weber defined charismatic authority as depending on the "*extraordinary*" quality of a person. Unlike a classic charismatic, though, "Brother" Finney took great pains to show his followers that he was just like them. And they saw him as one just like them … only more so. He was an icon of their aspirations. Not the extraordinariness, but the *interchangeability* of the star's persona with that of audience members helped ground the authority of a star.[10]

A second, closely related contrast comes from the "proof" cited in support of Finney's power. Weber's charismatic leader proved her power "through miracles" that showed God's favor. She healed incurable diseases and won victories against overwhelming odds.[11] But Finney proved himself through miracles of popularity, signs and wonders that showed *public* favor. Handbills promoted Finney as the man who had converted thousands in Rochester, just as other handbills promoted Keane as the actor who had played to throngs in London, and just as today signs promote restaurants according to the billions they have served. The star embodied the new kind of authority that Tocqueville saw emerging in democratic nations. "As citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant of each to believe blindly a certain man or class diminishes. The disposition to believe the mass is augmented, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world."[12] The authority of celebrities arose out of their ability to relate to a mass of people large enough to symbolize the public to itself. Stars worked *social* miracles.

Finney also deviated from the classic charismatic type in his appeal to existing canons of reason. Weber defined the charismatic as "'irrational'" in the sense of leaving behind traditional norms of reason in order to appeal to "concrete revelations and inspirations." The charismatic preacher did not reason within existing structures, but rather said, "'It is written – but I say unto you…!'" Finney's contemporary Joseph Smith fit this model in some ways. But Finney claimed no new revelation. He simply charged what sounded like common sense with an extra aura of emotional power. This amalgamation of passion and reason, public and private, gave Finney the authority of celebrity.[13]

Finally, Finney showed a celebrity's dependence on routinized mass images and measures. Weber explicitly contrasted the initial burst of charismatic authority with its subsequent routinization.[14] With routinization charisma became regular and regulated,

[10] On the uniqueness of Weber's charismatic, see Max Weber, "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Geerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 294-301, esp. 295. On the interchangeability of star and fan, see Bruce McConachie, "American Theatre in Context, from the Beginnings to 1870," *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 148.
[11] Weber, "Social Psychology," 296.
[12] Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.i.2, 409.
[13] Weber, "Social Psychology," 296. Historian Perry Miller cut Finney to fit a basically charismatic model, stressing Finney's "demonic" power. But Miller, ever attentive to details, noted this exception: "What is fascinating about [Finney] is that he was not a bully, but an advocate at the bar." Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1965), 23.
[14] Weber, "Social Psychology," 297-301.

institutionalized and reliably reproduced. But Finney's style did not oppose routinization and charisma to one another. Instead, he joined them together. The new measures were, in a sense, reliable techniques for the reproduction of charisma. To the extent that Finney followed the measures, his charisma already depended on routinization. A Weberian charismatic might in fact follow a set routine, but Finney followed a routine with a high degree of self-consciousness *and* promised followers that the routine – and not the charismatic leader – had all the power. In stressing the power of the measures themselves, Finney managed not only to routinize charismatic expression, but also to make routinization itself gleam with a charismatic aura.

Finney's authority depended on his ability to project his private self in public, but he did not embody Weber's charismatic type. Finney might best be understood as one who found a way to be authoritative when the conditions for truly charismatic authority had begun to erode. As a rising egalitarian ethos made qualitative distinctions between persons more difficult to sustain, Finney's presentation of himself as a realization of the potential in every individual fit the times. As miracles involving the natural world became less believable to many U.S. citizens, Finney's miracles of the social world became even more authoritative. As charismatic and ecstatic speech took on the stigma of bodies out of control, Finney's charged common sense offered an exciting but respectable alternative. And as mass production seemed to make more and more things repeatable, Finney made repeatability itself something powerful, meaningful, and immensely attractive. The public-private authority of this star arose from the ruins not only of tradition, but also charisma.[15]

The price of fame

Charles Finney seemed to thrive as a star. He did not mind to project his voice into text, his sentiment into argument, or his private self into public discourse. He had nothing to fear, for his public and private personae were practically identical. He was who he seemed to be, and seemed to be who he was. The star system cost Finney just that distinction between public seeming and private being.

Finney valued the consonance of public and private selves so highly because he believed the success of revivals depended on it. Sincerity was not only moral; it was also *effective*. Finney warned his listeners that people could detect insincerity, and it would put them off. And even if a preacher could fool all of the people all of the time, a preacher could not fool the most discerning fan of all. God would withdraw God's presence from insincere preachers, and the

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[15] The last example in this string suggests an illuminating comparison. Finney took the conditions that produced the "loss of aura" that worried Walter Benjamin (and filled him with a sense of possibility) and made them auratic. Compare "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reprodzierbarketi," in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 7 vols., Theodor Adorno, et al., eds. (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1972), I.471-508. Translated as "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility" in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, trans. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings, 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), III.101-33.

revival would fail. One way or another, effectiveness in revivals depended on sincerity. Sincerity became a necessary measure.[16]

Effective revival preaching demanded more than mere sincerity from preachers, Finney thought. Sincerely expressing doubt, lust, or melancholy would save few souls. A preacher needed to express sincerely *the right set* of sentiments. If a leader felt the right feelings, and transmitted those feelings clearly and powerfully, people would flock to the revival. Not just sincerity, then, but also feeling "as one ought" became a measure for revival.[17]

Finney explained the importance of right feeling through a dynamic theory of sympathy. He described an "economy of grace" driven by sympathetic transactions of feeling. The Spirit of God inspired the feelings of a minister and worked through them to ignite right feelings in the hearers. Finney saw the exchange of feelings operating in two directions. The wise preacher did not simply pour out the same set of feelings, in the same order, at the same tempo, every time he preached. The soul-winning preacher had, Finney said, a "single eye" for the reactions of the congregation, and adjusted his feelings to give people the particular emotions they needed. Finney kept his eyes on a congregation constantly. He watched his congregation in order to adapt his public speech to their needs. Because sincerity required that public speech be identical to private sentiment, adapting public speech involved adaptations that went deep into the self that Finney and his listeners considered most authentic. Finney made eye contact not just to express himself, but also to transform himself.[18]

Understanding these self-transformations by the speaker clarifies the authority of stardom and the dynamics of the spaces in which it was enacted. Historian Jeanne Halgren Kilde understood eye contact in the Oberlin meeting as a way for preacher-professors to control the room. The gaze from the pulpit monitored and molded students, as in Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. But new measures preachers used the space differently than did Bentham's observers. The Oberlin meetinghouse did allow a preacher to make eye contact with an entire congregation, and it did facilitate attempts to discipline the feelings of students and other congregants. But a good new measures preacher disciplined others by reading their faces and then disciplining himself to feel the feelings he wanted them to feel. Disciplinary power

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[16] Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 134-35. Finney may have overstated the public's demand for sincerity. Phineas T. Barnum packed people in to see wonders even after he himself had revealed his previous "wonders" as frauds. And temperance lecturer John Bartholemew Gough drew big crowds on the lyceum circuit in the 1840s in part because people wanted to see if he would be drunk or sober when he spoke. At least some people in the United States in the 1830s and 40s enjoyed watching the play of seeming and being so much that it trumped any desire for sincerity. On Gough, see R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.

[17] Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 137.

[18] Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete and Restored Text*, Garth M. Rosell and Richard A.G. Dupuis, eds. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1989), 88. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 211.

therefore flowed along lines of sight in two directions. Eye contact made a preacher like Finney both observer and oblation, supervisor and sacrifice.[19]

Finney's determination to shape his private self for public purposes did not make him insincere. On the contrary, Finney maintained a profound and costly commitment to the identity between his public and private personae. But his instrumentalization of his public persona joined with his ethic of sincerity to make his private persona so instrumental, so malleable, that the prevailing concept of sincerity lost its content. The prevailing model of sincerity required a public self to "represent" or "express" the private self as accurately and transparently as possible. It assumed a private self sufficiently fixed and detached to serve as a standard by which to measure the private expression. But when a preacher cultivated feelings in order to move an audience, what would it mean to say that public expressions of those feelings were sincere? When the mask formed the face to fit its shape, what sense did it make to speak of the mask as a fair likeness? The new measures' blend of expressiveness and effectiveness did not lead to insincerity. It rather helped mortify their whole idea of sincerity.[20]

The point of the story
At a history conference, the paper might end there. There would be more room for details and footnotes. But preachers today have "points" to the stories they tell – another commonplace that invites a history – and I do not mean to be an exception. First, then, this genealogy of public sincerity helps to describe and account for some important features of contemporary society. Public sincerity abounds, both in the pulpit and beyond. And it has great power to legitimate. The raked pews of Oberlin have given way to the Jumbotrons of Houston, but the purpose has not changed. The big-screen close-up of a preacher's face offers a new technology for the familiar act of projecting a private self in public. And just as Finney found ways to let his private self slip into public spaces, so politicians today take great care to manage coverage of things like their leisure activities. Because the public assigns those activities to the private sphere, and because we take the private sphere as revelatory of the real person, cutting brush and chopping wood can come to define character. What is often called an emphasis on character is better understood as attention to the public projections of the "private" lives of stars.

Second, I think this history of changing patterns of legitimation can help sharpen conversations about authority. It historicizes Weber's analysis and so invites revision. And it enables us to set aside hysterical claims that we live in a world in which authority no longer exists, and to parse more carefully the many forms of authority that operate – for better and for worse – all around us.

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[19] Cf. Jeanne Halgren Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 51-52.

[20] Critics working from several different disciplines have named something like the loss of a distinct private self that I am trying to describe. See, for instance, Lionel Trilling, *Sincerity and Authenticity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 9. For a more frenzied account, see Jean Baudrillard, "The Ecstasy of Communication," in *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle, WA: Bay Press, 1983), 130-31.

Third, these countermemories of public sincerity alert us to some of the perils that face preachers today.[21] The authority of celebrity has become so reflexive that even preachers who have no aspirations to stardom find themselves projecting private selves into public discourse. We let details from the private sphere slip into public speech – sometimes in the sneakiest form of all, as we drop the personal detail that we would prefer not to speak of personal details. We speak conversationally. We move our hands in self-consciously natural ways. And, above all, we modify our private selves for public consumption. We sometimes do these things for very good reasons. But in the long run, these practices of public sincerity erode the very barriers that make private selves possible on both individual and social levels. A distinctly private self cannot survive too much public usefulness. When put too often to public purposes, it simply dissolves into other public personae.[22] And when the self of the private sphere disappears, democracy begins to give way to mass society. The perils of public sincerity are spiritual, but they are not merely personal.

Simply recalling a countermemory does not enable us to undo historical change. Even if we wanted to go back to some golden time before celebrity – and that is not what I am hoping for – a few homiletical reforms would not undo the power of stardom and the practices of public sincerity. They are entangled with social changes that run too deep: the separation of public and private spheres, the rise of a service economy, the disestablishment of religion, and more. But a countermemory can point out a rift in a practice, a crevice in its pretension to wholeness and naturalness. And critical thinking and conversation can flow into that rift, like water into a crack in a taken-for-granted rock. Countermemory can become an invitation to join the breaking up that is always already underway.

Christian preachers testify to more than breaking up, though. We also live into the hope of a redemption already at work in the world. But what would it mean to hope for the redemption of a celebrity? Remembering the fracture of public sincerity pushes us to reconsider what we take to be the subject of redemption. Too often proclamations of resurrection assume that the most fully real self is the one lived in private spheres – exactly the assumption that gives the public performance of private life such power. Then redemption makes the life a person lives in the private sphere perfect and total, all in all. Such redemption does not involve work, citizenship, preaching or other public activities, but only the consumer pleasures and affective relations of a perfect life at home. But if the deepest truth about a preacher is that she is a star – bound to a public, implicated in social orders, never quite identical to herself – then her redemption would require a resurrection of that very social body. The raising of a body bound by relationships could not help but pull up other people, both intimates and crowds, with the strings attached. The restoration of a body shot through by the eyes of others would involve the cleansing of those eyes. The redemption of a body made through social orders and practices would have to raise those orders and practices with it. The healing of a body wounded by history would require and accomplish the healing of that history. It is almost too much to hope for.

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[21] I borrow talk of "countermemory" from John McClure, who borrowed it in turn from Michel Foucault. See John S. McClue, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 2001).
[22] On the costs of "emotional labor," see Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

Food for the Soul: Word and Sacrament in the Preaching of Hugh Latimer

The Rev. Dr. Raewynne J. Whiteley
Vicar, Trinity "Old Swedes" Episcopal Church
Swedesboro, NJ

Eucharistic theology, and more broadly, sacramental theology, have become central in Anglican spirituality and identity, particularly with the influence of the parish communion movement in the twentieth century. Such an emphasis inevitably affects the preaching event. In this paper I explore how word and sacrament, and particularly preaching and Eucharist, were understood to be related in the extant sermons of Hugh Latimer (1485?-1555),[1] one of the key preachers in the formative period of the English Reformation, as he develops an apologetic for preaching and reflects upon emerging Eucharistic theologies (I.7). Although Latimer does not offer an explicit account of the relationship between preaching and the Eucharist, his work displays an implicit association between the two that is fundamentally theological rather than simply contextual, and points to the potential for the language and debates around the Eucharistic liturgy, which were central in his day, to shape a homiletic.

Early Sermons: Word and Sacrament

The earliest extant sermon of Latimer is his first Sermon on the Card, preached on December 19, 1529, in St Edward's Church in Cambridge. In this sermon, we see his definition of the means of grace as being those things by which a person is able to answer the question put by God, "Who art thou?" with the confident claim, "I am a Christian man . . . through the merits of the bitter passion of Christ,"[2] in which category he includes the evangelists and the commandments alongside the sacraments. The power of such means of grace is not intrinsic in them, but lies in Christ's death, which is appropriated through them. Hence Latimer here lays the foundation for his later identification of preaching as a means of grace.

Mid-career Sermons: Feeding the Church

Seven years later, Latimer is more explicit in his emphasis on the importance of both word and sacrament. In his two-part sermon to the Convocation of Clergy in June 1536, he argues that both word and sacrament are the means by which Christ's household of faith, the Church, is fed, "[Christ] is also the good man of the house: the church is his household, which ought with all diligence to be fed with his word and his sacraments. These be his goods most precious, the dispensation and administration whereof he would bishops and curates should have," (I.35) and form the essence of clerical ministry, both being means by which God's mysteries are dispensed (I.37, see also I.39).

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[1] This paper is developed from my doctoral dissertation, "Word and Sacrament, Preaching and Eucharist: Reformation Roots and Contemporary Contributions to a Liturgical–Theological Anglican Homiletic" (Princeton Theological Seminary, 2003).

[2] Latimer's 44 extant sermons were published in the Parker Society edition in two volumes: *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, Parker Society Publications, ed. George Elwes Corrie (Cambridge: University Press, 1845); and *Sermons by Hugh Latimer, Sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr, 1555*, Parker Society Publications, ed. George Elwes Corrie (Cambridge: University Press, 1844). In this paper, references to these works will be by volume and page in the body of the paper.

Latimer's use of the term 'word of God' has, to this point, been undefined. It is not always clear if he is referring to Scripture, preaching, or both. Scripture is the word of God to us (I.35); however, it is in preaching that Scripture is dispensed and made accessible to the people as the "good ground and foundation" of preaching (I.33). It is in this sermon, immediately following his coupling of word and sacrament, that Latimer begins to define word specifically in terms of preaching. He warns against abusing the clerical office:

> Go ye to, tell me now as your conscience leadeth you, (I will let pass to speak of many others,) was there not some, that despising the money of the Lord, as copper and not current, either coined new themselves, or else uttered abroad newly coined of other; some time either *adulterating the word of God*, or else mingling it (as taverners do, which brew and utter the evil and good both in one pot), sometime *in the stead of God's word* blew out the dreams of men? *while they thus preached* to the people the redemption that cometh by Christ's death to serve only them that died before his coming. . . . *while they thus preached* to the people, that dead images . . . *while they preached* these will-works . . . *while they thus preached* that more fruit . . .*while they preached* thus . . . (I.36-37, emphasis mine).

This parallel structure, with its series of dependent clauses, identifies the preached word as the word of God. Latimer strengthens this identification later in where he identifies preaching as being that by which people hear God's doctrine (I.38). Drawing on the words of Christ, he argues that when one hears a preacher, one hears God (I.39). Thus, when Latimer speaks of the "word," its semantic range embraces both Scripture and, derivatively, preaching.

In this two-part sermon, Latimer does, however, move beyond a simple association of word and sacrament. Here we see for the first time his adoption of a food metaphor as a way of understanding both word and sacrament, "the church . . . ought with all diligence to be fed with his word and his sacraments."(I.35). This metaphor when used of preaching, although less common than his references to pedagogical functions of the word, is noteworthy, especially when placed alongside his similar frequent references to the sacraments. Used of the Eucharist, it is derived from the physical eating and drinking of bread and wine, applied by analogy to its function as food for the soul.[3] Used of preaching, it most probably derives from scriptural descriptions of the word of God as food,[4] and stands in a long tradition of such associations. However, Latimer's particular use of this same metaphor in parallel for word and sacrament is distinctive and fruitful for our understanding of the relationship between preaching and the Eucharist. Even though he rarely talks explicitly about the relationship between word and sacrament, such a relationship is at the very least implicit in his preaching through the use of this common metaphor of nourishment, which becomes increasingly important to our understanding of how Latimer relates word and sacrament.

In this two-part sermon to Convocation, Latimer speaks of the church as a household, with Christ the master, clergy the stewards, and word and sacraments the food. He uses the metaphor to focus attention on the quality of nourishment, the faithfulness of clergy in completing their assigned task and the ongoing and frequent need for word and sacrament, the

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[3] A use Luther made in his Large Catechism of 1529, when he argues that the Lord's Supper "is fittingly called 'the food of the soul' because it nourishes and strengthens the new man." B. A. Gerrish, "Discerning the Body: Sign and Reality in Luther's Controversy with the Swiss," *Journal of Religion* 68 (1988).

[4] Deut. 8:3 (cf. Matt. 4:4; Luke 4:4); Pss. 19:7-10; 119:103; Isa. 58:14; Jer. 3:15; Ezek. 3:1-3 (cf. Rev. 10:9-11); Sir. 24:19-21; Matt. 6:11 (cf. Luke 11:3); John 6:27-58 (exegetical tradition varies); 21:15, 17; 1 Cor. 3:2; 1 Tim. 4:6; Heb. 6:5.

most noteworthy instance being his reference to word and sacraments, the "goods of the Lord" that are "meat I say, and not poison." (I.35). Latimer then focuses on feeding through the word, probably in response to the complaints rife during this Convocation about the teaching of erroneous (i.e. Reformed) doctrine. Drawing, presumably, on John 20, he places words of condemnation on God's lips:

> I commanded you, that with all industry and labor ye should feed my sheep: ye earnestly feed yourselves from day to day, wallowing in delights and idleness. . . . You preach very seldom; and when ye do preach, do nothing but cumber them that preach truly, as much as lieth in you: that it were much better such were not to preach at all, than so perniciously to preach. . . . Where I had but one house, that is to say, the church, and this so dearly beloved of me, that for the love of her I put myself forth to be slain, and to shed my blood; this church at my departure I committed unto your charge, to be fed, to be nourished, and to be made much of (I.38-39).

While the focus is on feeding through preaching, the Eucharist is also evoked here by the reference to Christ's blood, once again revealing the underlying unity of word and sacrament through the metaphor of nourishment.

Mature Sermons: Feeding Faith for Salvation

It is during Edward VI's reign that Latimer's sermons show a significantly clarified understanding of word and sacrament, focused in preaching and the Eucharist. His chief residence during the early part of this period was with Archbishop Cranmer at Lambeth; it can therefore be surmised that, at the very least, he was familiar, if not actively involved, with the discussions surrounding the preparations for the new liturgies, and that his own reflections on word and sacrament are shaped by these discussions.

Sermons on the Plough

In Latimer's famous "Sermon on the Plough" preached in the Shrouds at St. Paul's, he explores the place of Scripture and the work of those called to teach and preach it. This sermon shows both continuity with the themes of his earlier sermons, and a strengthened emphasis on Reformed perspectives. At the center of this sermon is a farming analogy, drawn from Luke 8:5: God's field is the faithful congregation, the seed is God's word, and the preacher is the sower. (I.60) The task of the sower, that is the preacher, is to ". . . bring his parishioners to a right faith, as Paul calleth it, and not a swerving faith; but to a faith that embraceth Christ, and trusteth to his merits; a lively faith, a justifying faith; a faith that maketh a man righteous, without respect of works" (I.61). Thus, when in later sermons Latimer talks of preaching as being necessary to salvation, it is not in a magical sense, but as the means by which the hearers are brought to faith.

Once again in this sermon, Latimer draws attention to the role of the word in nourishing believers. Continuing his discussion of the work of clergy, he writes,

> They have great labors, and therefore they ought to have good livings, that they may commodiously feed their flock; for the preaching of the word of God unto the people is called meat: scripture calleth it meat; not strawberries, that come but once a year, and tarry not long, but are soon gone: but it is meat, it is no dainties. The people must have meat that must be familiar and continual, and daily given unto them to feed upon (I.62).

Thus, as in Latimer's sermon to Convocation, the word preached is the everyday nourishment of the people of God, and the work of the preacher is to provide such nourishment. If, in the

medieval period, it was the task of the preacher to celebrate daily mass, then that task is now paralleled by the task of preaching.[5]

Latimer then speaks about the place of preaching in supporting the Eucharist. Preaching is the means by which to combat Satan's weeds which undermine the Eucharist, sowing instead the corn of good doctrine. False preaching evacuates the Lord's Supper of its meaning, and hence Christ's cross of its efficacy and virtue (I.72, 74). What is at stake in *both* word and sacrament is the faith in Christ which brings salvation: each supports the other in nourishing that faith. Latimer's movement from word to sacrament in this sermon, mediated by the death of Christ, attests to the closeness of the association between them in his own mind, an association which stems from their common connection with the death of Christ, the benefits of which they make present to the faithful people of God.

Lenten Sermons

Latimer's prominence as a preacher is underscored by his invitations to preach before Edward VI at Westminster during the Lents of 1548, 1549, and 1550, although only the 1549 sermons and one additional sermon from 1550 were published. It is in this series of sermons that he develops his *scala coeli*, or ladder to heaven, replacing the traditional steps of spiritual works with an emphasis on the importance of preaching in the work of salvation.[6] By this time the 1548 Order for the Lord's Supper had come into use, and the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer* was in the process of being adopted, the earliest edition being dated 7 March 1549. The rubrics of the latter required a sermon or homily in every communion service, and as a result of its adoption, Eucharistic theology now came into the forefront of intellectual debate.

The first in Latimer's series of Lenten sermons of 1549 was preached on March 8, 1549, on the text Deut. 17:14-17, and is addressed directly to the king. As such, it has little interest in matters of word and sacrament. However, as the Lenten series progresses Latimer evinces greater interest in word and sacrament, perhaps evoked by the new *Book of Common Prayer*'s first use in churches across London during these weeks. His awareness of the debates about Eucharistic theology is evidenced in his second sermon of Lent 1549, when he refers, in passing, to an argument he had with a bishop over the correct term for the "Lord's Supper," Latimer himself arguing for "Lord's Supper" as used by Paul in 1 Cor. 11:20 (I.121), a term which had probably come into use through the influence of the Continental Reformation.

It is in this sermon that we have the first recorded mention of Latimer's *scala coeli*, his ladder to heaven, based on Rom. 10:13-16. The steps of the ladder are preaching, hearing, believing and salvation; the heart of the argument is, as Latimer frequently reminds his hearers, "Take away preaching, take away salvation."(I.123; cf.178).

In his later sixth Lenten sermon of 1549, Latimer expands on why preaching is so necessary to salvation. Talking of why people sought out Christ, he writes: "It was a good coming; they came to hear the word of God. It is not to be thought that they came all of one mind to hear the word of God: it is likely, that in so great a multitude some came of curiosity, to hear some novels; and some came smelling a sweet savor, to have consolation and comfort of God's word: for we cannot be saved without hearing of the word; it is a necessary way to

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[5] Latimer does not here suggest that daily mass should be replaced by daily preaching – his emphasis is on the increase of the preaching function rather than a decrease in any other function.

[6] *Scala coeli* is a term which appears frequently in mediaeval theological literature, referring to a spiritual ascent from earth to heaven and drawing on biblical imagery including that of Jacob's ladder (Gen. 28:12-13) and John 1:51.

salvation. We cannot be saved without faith, and faith cometh by hearing of the word" (200). He then goes on to explore the hearing of the word in terms of his *scala coeli*, thus identifying preaching with the word of God. Thus at the heart of the *scala coeli*, and hence of preaching, is faith, the same faith that is at the heart of the sacrament. Both offer saving grace.

Latimer contrasts his *scala coeli* with that of the Bishop of Rome, which he calls a massing matter (I.123). If Latimer at this stage retains his previous high view of *both* word and sacrament, an assumption which is warranted by the attention he gives the sacrament of the Eucharist in his fourth Lenten sermon of 1549 and his call to participate in his sixth Lenten sermon (I.167, 213), this argument must be considered a polemical attack on an *ex opere operato* understanding of the Eucharist, rather than the apparent absolute discounting of the Mass which is apparent here. Latimer's concern is that abuse of the sacrament – a mass which functions as a ticket to heaven without passing through a faithful life, (I.129-130) or which places the work of salvation in human rather than God's hands (I.237) – undermines preaching and hence faith. For Latimer, both word and sacrament encourage, support, and draw forth faith. It is neither masses said by chantry priests nor the mere recitation of words, but Christ, whose work is appropriated by the power of the Spirit of God active in and through word and sacrament as rightly or worthily received.

Latimer develops this notion of the activity of God working through word and sacrament in his fourth Lenten sermon of 1549. Faith, and hence salvation, requires both this activity of God, the activity of the preacher to bring it to fruition, *and* the faithful participation of the hearers. Thus he argues, "[if] God work not in your hearts, my preaching can do you but little good. I am God's instrument but for a time; it is he that must give the increase: and yet preaching is necessary; for take away preaching, and take away salvation." (I.155) Latimer uses Christ as his model, one whose preaching bore relatively little fruit; this, Latimer argues, points to the necessity – and frequent failure – of the people's faith for salvation.

Faith is at the heart of the Christian life; it is, for Latimer, of the essence of fruitful ministry. This sermon reaches a climax in Latimer's words, "Faith, faith, faith; we are undone for a lack of faith. . . . 'When the Son of man shall come, shall he find faith on the earth?' Why speaketh he so much of faith? Because it is hard to find a true faith. He speaketh not of a political faith, a faith set up for a time; but a constant, a permanent, a durable faith, as durable as God's word" (I.168). Faith, he argues, is the fruit of preaching, prayer, and the Eucharist alike (I.154-155, 165-167-167-168). The importance placed on faithful hearing of the word of God points to its parallel in right reception of the Eucharist. In both cases, congregants are not merely passive observers, but active participants, whose right reception will result in the fruit of faith, through the power of the Holy Spirit.

In his sixth Lenten sermon of 1549, Latimer returns to the metaphor of nourishment, introduced in his 1536 sermon to Convocation and reiterated in his Sermon on the Plough. Here he adds an explicit identification of preaching as food for the soul, ". . . he began with the soul: Christ's word is the food of it." (I.210), an expression he later uses of the Eucharist (I.458). Thus Latimer uses language which traditionally belonged to the Eucharist, applying it to preaching. The significance of this use of Latimer's is not in its uniqueness, but in its use in context.[7] The theoretical connection between word and sacrament, set up by legislation and

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[7] Humanists often spoke of preaching as food of the soul, and Latimer was no doubt familiar with this usage, along with that a feeding metaphor with reference to the word of God in Scripture. See James D. Tracy, "Humanism: II. *Ad Fontes:* The Humanist Understanding of Scripture as Nourishment for the Soul," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt, Bernard McGinn, and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1987).

expressed in liturgical revision, is popularized in Latimer's preaching. It is not simply a coincidence of context, but a theological relationship in two dimensions: their common function as food for the soul, underpinned by their common connection as means of grace through faith in Christ for salvation by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The single sermon from Lent 1550 is striking in two respects. First, Latimer offers clear criticism of the government, a criticism that was likely the reason he was not invited to preach at court again.[8] Second, it is in this sermon that Latimer offers a substantial treatment of issues surrounding the Eucharist, particularly those of presence and anamnesis. This supports the argument that Latimer was involved in, or at least knowledgeable about, the debates on Eucharistic theology which surrounded the development of the *Book of Common Prayer*, and that these were influential in shaping both the content of and theory underlying his preaching.

Country Sermons 1550-1553

Latimer spent much of the remainder of Edward's reign staying with friends and relatives in the country, and all his remaining extant sermons were preached in that context. As such, they have a pastoral character which sets them apart from his court sermons. It is this character which makes them of particular interest for this study: here Latimer moderates his former polemical style and focuses his attention on the faith which leads to salvation, and the importance of word and sacrament in feeding this faith. The continuity of these themes across both court and country settings suggests that they are at the very core of Latimer's understanding of faith and ministry – not just polemic for reform, but important for the everyday faith of the people of God.

The first of these sermons was that preached at Stamford on November 9, 1550, on the gospel for the day. At this time it seems that Latimer was still primarily resident in London;[9] it is not surprising then that this sermon retains a level of polemic absent from the later sermons. Its focus is an unequivocal stance in favor of preaching, once again alluding to his *scala coeli*: ". . . the preaching of the Gospel; whereas it is most godly wisdom, and the preaching office is the office of salvation, and the only means that God hath appointed to salvation. *Credentes*, those that believe, be saved by this holy office of preaching" (I.291). Here Latimer clearly states that preaching is the only means of salvation, and hence excluding sacraments as means of grace; however, this contradicts his earlier and subsequent preaching. It is therefore best understood as a polemical appeal to raise the importance of preaching relative to other aspects of ministry, and owes more to the court which had been the backdrop of his life for the previous two decades, than to the countryside which will be his home for the next three years.

The next series of sermons dates from 1552, and was preached before Katherine, Duchess of Suffolk, at Grimsthorpe Castle, Lincolnshire. They represent a systematic treatment of the Lord's Prayer over seven sermons. Here Latimer turns his attention from ecclesiastical issues to the ordinary life of faith. Thus his *scala coeli* gets only a brief mention, in the second sermon, as an example of the hallowing of God's name (I..349); Latimer notes that an extended discussion of this issue is not appropriate for or relevant to his present hearers.

However, of particular interest in this series of sermons is Latimer's exposition in the fifth sermon of the phrase "Give us our daily bread." Latimer draws on the Augustinian tradition in interpreting it to mean both literal food for the body and also food for the soul (I.369), which, near the end of the sermon, he identifies with preaching: ". . . in this petition we desire that God

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[8] Allan Griffith Chester, *Hugh Latimer, Apostle to the English* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1954), 184-185.
[9] This is Chester's reading of Latimer's reference to "home" in this sermon. Chester, *Hugh Latimer*, 307.

will feed not only our bodies, but also our souls, and so we pray for the office of preaching. For like as the body must be fed daily with meat, so the soul requireth her meat, which is the word of God. Therefore we pray here for all the clergy, that they may do their duties, and feed us with the word of God according to their calling (I.412). Here Latimer forges together elements of medieval thought with a Reformed passion for preaching.

In the sixth sermon of this series, Latimer again returns to earlier themes, here effectively combining his *scala coeli* with his emphasis on the role of faith. Thus he argues,

> . . . St Paul teacheth us this, saying: *Fides ex auditu*, "Faith cometh by hearing God's word." Then if we will come to faith, we must hear God's word: if God's word be necessary to be heard, then we must have preachers which will be able to tell us God's word . . . for by this office of preaching God sendeth faith. The office is the office of salvation; for "it hath pleased God" *per stultitiam pr   dicationis salvos facere credentes*, "by the foolishness of preaching to save the believers." So, I say, we pray for this office which bringeth faith. Faith bringeth to Christ; Christ bringeth remission of sins; remission of sins bringeth everlasting life (I.418-419).

Here, Latimer has added an additional step to the salvation process, that is, forgiveness of sins. Thus, salvation comes by remission of sin, which comes by Christ, who is approached by faith, which comes by preaching.

If we read Latimer's sermons as an attempt at a systematic theology, such variations, along with his promoting of word on one occasion and sacrament on another, suggest serious flaws in his theological program. If, however, his preaching is understood to be primarily pastoral in approach, bringing the word of God in Scripture to the immediate context of the people to whom he preaches, then consistency is not his primary concern. He will argue passionately for one perspective to the exclusion of others in order to win his hearers, and equally passionately on another occasion argue for something contradictory. The overall corpus of Latimer's sermons shows a remarkable parallel of both word and sacrament as means of grace effecting faith. On occasion, however, Latimer can emphasize the former to the exclusion of the latter, but this is best taken as an accented stress rather than a repudiation of the overall pattern.

By the time Latimer preached at Grimsthorpe in October 1552, the second *Book of Common Prayer* had been published, and it is clear that in his mind word and sacrament are inextricably linked, not least by the person of Jesus Christ. Here, Latimer draws attention to Christ as both preacher and institutor of the Eucharist: "Our Saviour himself spake these words at his last supper, before he was taken. It was his last sermon that he made unto his disciples, before his departure: it is a very long sermon." (I.447) Note that he conflates John and the synoptic accounts to achieve his desired rhetorical end of placing the sermon in the context of the Last Supper — consistent with the rubrical requirements of the *Book of Common Prayer*.

The next group of Latimer's sermons represent further sermons preached at Grimsthorpe and Lincolnshire.[10] The sermon in Lincolnshire, preached on the parable of a king, the text for the twentieth Sunday after Trinity, is one of the most significant in expressing Latimer's parallel theology of Eucharist and preaching. Here he clarifies the initiative of the Holy Spirit to bring faith through preaching:

> Now that I may so handle these matters, that it may turn to the edification of your souls, and to the discharge of my office, I will most instantly desire you to lift up your hearts unto God . . . that he will give unto us his Holy Ghost: – unto me, that I may speak the

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[10] There is uncertainty about the dates on which these were preached, so that definite conclusions cannot be made about the development of Latimer's thought based on their published order.

word of God, and teach you to understand the same; unto you, that you may hear it fruitfully, to the edification of your souls; so that you may be edified through it, and your lives Reformed and amended; and that his honour and glory may increase daily amongst us (I.455-456).

Likewise, God takes the initiative in the Lord's Supper (I.456-458). In these sermons, Latimer also clearly expounds his understanding of the Lord's Supper as food for the soul in terms which are parallel to the way he has previously written about preaching. Thus he writes:

Again, our Saviour, the bridegroom, offereth himself at his last supper which he had with his disciples, his body to be eaten, and his blood to be drunk. And to the intent that it should be done to our great comfort; and then again to take away all cruelty, irksomeness, and horribleness, he sheweth unto us how we shall eat him, in what manner and form; namely, spiritually, to our great comfort: so that whosoever eateth the mystical bread, and drinketh the mystical wine worthily, according to the ordinance of Christ, he receiveth surely the very body and blood of Christ spiritually, as it shall be most comfortable unto his soul. He eateth with the mouth of his soul, and digesteth with the stomach of his soul, the body of Christ, and to be short: whosoever believeth in Christ, putteth his hope, trust and confidence in him, he eateth and drinketh him: for the spiritual eating is the right eating to everlasting life; not the corporal eating, as the Capernaites understood it. For that same corporal eating, on which they set their minds, hath no commodities at all: it is a spiritual meat that feedeth our souls. (I.458-459)

The wording here is reminiscent of the first exhortation to Communion in the 1549 *Book of Common Prayer*:

. . . we receuie that holy Sacram   t; (for then we spiritually eate the fleshe of Christ, and drinke his bloude, then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us, wee bee made one with Christ, and Christ with us;) . . . he hath left in those holy Misteries, as a pledge of his loue, and a continuall rem   braunce of the same his owne blessed body, and precious bloud, for us to fede upon spiritually, to our endles comfort and consolacion.[11]

Latimer's words echo the Eucharistic prayer's emphasis on worthy reception, and the language of what is now known as the Prayer of Humble Access.[12] This emphasis on right reception of the Eucharist parallels Latimer's emphasis on right reception of the word at the close of each of his Lenten sermons in 1549. A similar emphasis on right reception of the word is found in his fifth sermon in Lincolnshire: "Let us follow this word, and let us come unto him: for this faith that hath God's word is a true faith; but that faith which hath not God's word is a lying faith, a false faith . . . Therefore, like as the doctrine is nothing, bringeth no profit, without the word of God; so the word of God bringeth no commodities except faith be there, except it be believed; else it is to no purpose"(I.544).

Clearly, the Eucharist is as much the way to faith and thus salvation as the word in Latimer's thought, despite his polemical one-sidedness in the Stamford sermon of 1550. The parallel with the word is even more striking when Latimer goes on to argue that "when we feed upon this dish worthily, then we shall have remission of our sins; we shall receive the Holy Ghost" (I.461). This is strikingly close to what Latimer argues about the word in his sixth sermon on the Lord's Prayer at Grimsthorpe in 1552.

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[11] J. R. Porter, ed., *The First and Second Prayer Books of Edward VI* (London: The Prayer Book Society, 1999), 215, compare 384-385.
[12] Porter, ed., *Prayer Books*, 225. See also the 1549 post-communion prayer, in Porter, ed., *Prayer Books*, 227 and the first 1552 post-communion prayer Porter, ed., *Prayer Books*, 389-390.

There are other striking parallels between sacrament and word in this sermon. Latimer writes of the Eucharist, "He that hath Christ hath all things that are Christ. He is our preservation from damnation; he is our comfort; he is our help, our remedy. When we feed upon him, then we shall have remission of our sins: the same remission of sins is the greatest and most comfortable thing that can be in the world." He immediately moves to the proclamation of the word, "O what a comfortable thing is this, when Christ saith, *Remittuntur tibi peccata*, "Thy sins are forgiven unto thee!" . . . And this proclamation is cried out daily by his ministers and preachers; which proclamation is the word of grace, the word of comfort and consolation" (I.461). He offers a direct parallel between Eucharist and preaching as agents of forgiveness when he argues, "Therefore let us give credit unto the minister, when he speaketh God's word: yea, rather let us credit God when he speaketh by his ministers and offereth us the remission of our sins by his word" (I.461). Thus, both sacrament and word function similarly as efficacious agents or instruments of forgiveness.

Later in the same sermon, Latimer associates word and sacrament by arguing that those who do not receive God's word preached will be shut out from the heavenly feast, and by association, from the benefits of the earthly feast of the Eucharist. (I.470) He then continues with a long discussion of the word, concluding with a call to his hearers to keep Sundays as holy days, and to come to word and Supper: "Therefore I call you in God's name, come to this supper; hallow the sabbath-day; that is, do your holy-day work, come to this supper; for this day was appointed of God to that end, that his word might be taught and heard." (I.473) Thus this sermon, beginning with Lord's Supper and moving to preaching, clearly shows Latimer's understanding of the inherent relationship of word and sacrament, preaching and Eucharist, the common element being faith in Christ, to which word and sacrament both contribute.

In the sixth Lincolnshire sermon, Latimer uses preaching to draw his hearers to faith in Christ; in so doing he quotes from Matt. 11:28, a text used in the 'comfortable words,' said at every 1549 and 1552 Communion service.(II.10). Thus the preached word serves to invite people to the Eucharist; we see the interdependence of word and sacrament in practice.

It is clear throughout these sermons, that for Latimer, both the Eucharist and preaching have their soteriological value instrumentally, in as much as they point to Christ's death and likewise function as means of grace.

The Christmas and Epiphany sermons at Bexterly and Grimsthorpe reiterate many of the themes seen in Latimer's earlier country sermons, most notably the importance of right or worthy reception (II.86-88, 107).   And in one of his final published sermons, preached on Septuagesima Sunday, 1552, Latimer returns to the theme of nourishment, and the word of God as solid food:

> This parable is written by the evangelist Matthew in the twentieth chapter, and is very dark and hard to be understand; yea there is no harder piece of scripture written by any evangelist. Therefore it may well be called hard meat: not meat for mowers, nor ignorant people, which be not exercised in the word of God (II.198).

Summary

There is remarkable consistency in content, if not in style or degree of polemic, across Latimer's mature court and country sermons. In central position Latimer places faith as essential to salvation. Both preaching and Eucharist are placed in the same relationship to faith: they are means by which right receivers are brought to faith, and by which the benefits of Christ's death

are brought to faithful receivers, mediated by the Holy Spirit. Christ is source and end of both preaching and Eucharist, word and sacrament.

In these mature sermons, Latimer reiterates his oft-used metaphor of nourishment. Following a medieval interpretive tradition, he identifies both preaching and Eucharist as food for the soul, but unlike traditional medieval commentators, he uses this metaphor to argues for word and sacrament as everyday nourishment for ordinary believers. Hence, he argues for the importance of preaching, which he finds sorely neglected.

Latimer is forceful in his defense of preaching as necessary for salvation, which he argues in terms of his *scala coeli*; his apparently exclusive claims for preaching must be read in conjunction with his high view of the sacrament, which echoes the language of the *Book of Common Prayer* in its various revisions. Preaching and Eucharist must support each other in feeding faith, rather than one undermining the other. God has established both preaching and the Lord's Supper as means of grace. Both call for right reception in faith; both call for true enactment and pure administration by the church; and both nourish and edify the people of God.

Conclusion

Hugh Latimer, renowned as a champion of preaching, affirms the unity of word and sacrament from early on in his preaching ministry. He expresses this unity in terms of their common function as the means by which people are brought to saving faith, and the means by which the benefits of Christ's death are brought to the people. Latimer unites medieval interpretive traditions with Reformed insights in describing their common function of nourishment, which has practical implications for the quality of that nourishment, its frequency, and the task of those who feed. He also highlights the importance of the work of the recipients in worthily receiving both the body and blood of Christ and the word of Christ preached. Latimer's paralleling of word and sacrament is important in embodying the unity envisioned in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and in suggesting a theological rationale for that unity. This suggests that the current emphasis on Eucharistic spirituality in the Anglican tradition, far from undermining preaching, has the potential to strengthen and re-energize it.

The Classification of Preaching: Preaching and Class Analysis

Author: Brooks Berndt; Supervisor: Tom Rogers

Throughout its history, Christian preaching in United States has played a role in either furthering or challenging class oppression. More often than not it has played a role in either actively furthering class oppression or passively maintaining it through silence and conformity. This was readily apparent to Fannie Lou Hamer, a black working class activist in the South during the civil rights movement who was deeply religious herself. In talking about both white and black church leadership, Hamer noted that they "has mostly been bourgeois."[1] According to historian David Chappell, she viewed church leaders as easily compromised.[2] Unlike Jesus whose purpose "was speakin and preachin to the poor," she saw church leaders as middle class "white Toms and Negro Toms" because they were "concerned with the person who's already got somethin."[3]

Class conflict and oppression in the corporate-state economy of today is a given. Oppositional conditions are necessarily created by private ownership, market allocation, corporate divisions of labor, and elite domination in decision making. In such a situation, preaching is never neutral. Implicitly or explicitly, preachers always take a side in this conflict. Consciously or unconsciously, they preach in a manner that either reflects the interests and ideologies of their own class or reflects their solidarity with members of other classes. If one agrees with this assessment and wishes that preachers preached more out of solidarity for the oppressed than out of their own self-interest, the question becomes how might homiletics play a role in countering the oppressive tendencies of Christian preaching in the United States?

A sensible first step is to achieve greater clarity about the relationship between preaching and class oppression by assessing the role and function of preachers in terms of their own class position within society. The approach of this paper is to review key theoretical literature that can help define class, especially the "middle class," in ways that are useful for this purpose. To address the problem of defining class, it helps to sketch how concepts of class have evolved from orthodox Marxism to more recent theories.

The concept of class provides broad, yet useful, brush strokes for painting a picture of an economy's social organization. Two important caveats, however, are important to keep in mind as a definition of class is developed. First, as sociologist Erik Olin Wright observes, how one defines class is shaped by the question one seeks to answer. Wright further observes that one of the questions that the concept of class customarily answers is a question of conflict: "What social cleavages systematically shape overt conflicts?"[4] Class concepts that see "conflict as an intrinsic consequence of class relations" in some way owe at least a partial debt to Marx.[5] Because this paper begins its conceptual orientation with the understanding that preachers stand amidst class conflict, it draws upon theorists connected at least loosely with the Marxist tradition.

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[1] Qtd. in David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope: Prophetic Religion and the Death of Jim Crow* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 72.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid., 72-73.
[4] This is from a forthcoming book available online. Erik Olin Wright, "Conclusion" in *Approaches to Class Analysis* ed. by Erik Olin Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming), see: http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Conclusion%20Jan%202004.pdf
[5] Ibid.

A second caveat to keep in mind is that there is no such thing as a "correct" or "scientific" definition of class, as class theorists Barbara and John Ehrenreich rightly contend.[6] They note that "Marx himself nowhere clearly and unambiguously defines class."[7] Moreover, he is "thoroughly inconsistent."[8] Still, one can say that the notion of conflict did figure prominently in his conception of class. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon*, Marx asserts, "In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that divide their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and puts them in hostile contrast to the latter, they form a class."[9] A good definition of class should specify what creates and drives this conflict.

Another key issue to keep in mind in defining class pertains to power. With class, one is not talking about conflicts among equals. There is an inequality of power. How might one think of the middle class with this in mind? Barbara and John Ehrenreich suggest that possibly due to the lack of a significant middle class in his time Marx had little to say about it. At one point, however, Marx did observe the unique position of power held by the middle classes who "rest with all their weight upon the working class and at the same time increase the social security and power of the upper ten thousand."[10]

As Marxism developed its own orthodoxies of analysis, capitalist societies were mainly regarded as containing two classes: the working class and the ruling class. From this perspective, social conflict is created by private property and the question of who owns and controls the means of production. On the one hand, there is the ruling class which owns and controls the means of production. On the other, there is the working class which is excluded from ownership and control and therefore is compelled to sell its labor power to the ruling class in order to survive.

This structural understanding of classes gives one little insight into the class status of preachers who are not directly tied to the means of production. However, preachers exercise power in cultural and ideological spheres that often mediates conflicts pertaining to the social relations of production. A key development in addressing this matter occurred with Antonio Gramsci. Writing in the political context of fascist Italy in the early 1930s and the religious context of Catholic Church dominance, Gramsci offered a class analysis of priests. This analysis was part of a broader analysis of the role of intellectuals in Italy. Gramsci conceived of society as having an economic base and two major superstructural levels: civil society and the state. At both of these levels, he saw intellectuals as "functionaries" and "deputies" for the ruling class.[11] With regard to civil society in particular, he viewed intellectuals as being involved in the project of winning the consent of "the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group."[12]

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[6] Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "Rejoinder" in *Between Labor and Capital* ed. by Pat Walker (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 326.

[7] Ibid., 322.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Napoleon* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. by Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978), 608.

[10] Qtd. in Tom Bottomore, *Classes in Modern Society*, 2nd ed., (London: HarpersCollinsAcademic, 1991), 46.

[11] Antonio Gramsci, *The Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. by David Forgacs (New York: New York University Press), 306.

[12] Ibid., 306-307.

As an institution in civil society, the Church was one of the dominant cultural organizations that kept "the ideological world in movement within a given country."[13] In some instances, Gramsci saw the content of the ideology circulated by the Church as being characterized by other-worldly individualism and inward looking perfectionism.[14] In the case of Jesuits, who at the time were pro-fascists, religion was a "pure narcotic."[15] Such views of the Church suggest that Gramsci believed priests used their institutional, cultural, and ideological power to pacify the working class and incapacitate their collective potential. In one instance, Gramsci did point in the direction of the specific ways priests held and exercised power. About "ecclesiastics," Gramsci notes that they "held a monopoly of a number of important services: religious ideology, that is the philosophy and science of the age, together with schools, education, morality, justice, charity, good works, etc."[16]

Still, how exactly Gramsci saw priests as intellectuals operating in relation to other classes is somewhat unclear. Unlike "organic" intellectuals who were created and cultivated alongside a particular class by that class, priests were part of a group Gramsci called "traditional" intellectuals, intellectuals who were holdovers from pre-capitalist society.[17] These origins did not put priests outside of class conflict. However, Gramsci's various statements about the relationships of priests to the "masses" and the ruling class appear contradictory. On the one hand, he claims ecclesiastics were "organically bound to the landed aristocracy."[18] Elsewhere he describes the negative view peasants in Southern Italy have of priests as land administrators and usurers. On the other hand, in this very same context, Gramsci describes priests in the North as often being the sons of artisans and peasants, as having "democratic sympathies," and as being "more tied to the mass of peasants."[19] Possibly, for this reason, in a glossary of terms used by Gramsci, an editor of Gramsci's works states that traditional intellectuals can "attach themselves to one or the other fundamental class: for instance priests, who may have either a revolutionary or a conservative function depending on their class identifications."[20] "Identifications" is a key word here. It indicates the meeting of socioeconomics with cultural politics. It points to the choice of identity and allegiance. Priests can choose where they cast their lot.

Whatever might be said for this view, the overwhelming thrust of Gramsci's perspective of Church intellectuals is that there is a gap between them and the "masses."[21] He saw the connection between the two as that of a "purely mechanical contact, an external unity based in particular on the liturgy and on a cult visually imposing to the crowd."[22] Gramsci contends that there is in essence a difference between the religion of the intellectuals and "the people."[23] Intellectuals, nonetheless, fight to prevent "the formation of two distinct religions, two separate strata, so as not to become officially, as well as in reality, an ideology of restricted groups."[24] In the end, while Gramsci never says priests are a part of the ruling class, he paints a picture of

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[13] Ibid., 342.
[14] Ibid., 337.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Ibid., 302.
[17] Ibid., 302.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid., 180.
[20] Ibid., 425
[21] Ibid., 333, 342, 352, 361.
[22] Ibid., 352.
[23] Ibid., 361.
[24] Ibid., 352.

priests as being in a position of power in relation to the working class. While a priest might choose to stand with the working class, one senses that Gramsci saw priests as mainly in a state of conflict with the working class. They attempted to soften and minimize this conflict only in ways advantageous to their own interest. Their legitimacy depended upon preserving at least the semblance of unity in the Church.

Somewhat similar to Gramsci and at times drawing upon him, Manning Marable, a historian of African American history, has considered the different ways in which black preachers can politically align themselves with particular classes. Whereas Gramsci places priests in an ambiguous position of power between the ruling class and the working class, Marable regards black preachers as a part of "the Black elite."[25] Still, as some readings of Gramsci suggest, Marable sees Black preachers as a group that can identify with the Black working class. For this reason, he believes that preachers possibly have the greatest potential as a political ally for "the Black working class."[26] This potential, however, does not keep Marable from offering a number of critical judgements. In his book, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*, Marable at best presents a mixed picture of black preachers. In discussing prominent Black ministers in the post-civil rights era, Marable states, "They are not prepared to repudiate the system which rewards their own political accommodation at the expense of the continued exploitation of Black working class and poor people."[27]

Echoing Gramsci and others of the Marxist tradition, Marable's analysis lists theological and political views espoused in Black churches that he regards as antithetical to Black working class interests: irrationalism, other-worldliness, and individualism.[28] At the same time, Marable realizes that a broad range of political thought and praxis can be found in Black churches. On the one hand, there are those who confront the material realities confronting Blacks in "a racist/capitalist state" by engaging in protest.[29] On the other hand, Marable declares, "Those ministers who emphasize prayer over politics, salvation over suffrage, the study of Ecclesiastes over the construction of economic cooperatives, represent the Other-Worldly position of Black faith."[30] At times, contrasting tendencies can be found within the same preacher. Martin Luther King, Jr. was initially silent and moderate on economic issues but later became more radical when he "raised many public policy issues which could not be easily resolved within the existing system."[31] A telling moment in Marable's view of the sometimes bewildering array of politics among Black preachers comes when he lists a series of questions about the contradictions found within Black churches:

> How has the Black Church as an institution failed repeatedly to evolve into a coherent agency promoting the liberation of Afro-American people, and why has it succeeded to reveal itself as an essential factor in Black struggles at certain difficult historical periods? Why is the stereotypical Black preacher the frequent object of embarrassment, ridicule and scorn for the Black petty bourgeoisie and to much of the Black working class, yet simultaneously he continues to be a critically important contributor to the total sum of

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[25] Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America: Problems in Race, Political Economy and Society* (Boston: South End Press, 1983), 214.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 211.
[28] Ibid., 212-213.
[29] Ibid., 213.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 210.

Black social, cultural, economic and political life? How can such a church create Martin Luther King and Daddy Grace, Ben Chavis and Reverend Ike? Why, in short, does the Black Church continue to perform its fundamentally ambiguous role in the Black experience?[32]

Different, yet similar, sets of questions can be asked of churches and preachers within other racial groups. Examining the class position of preachers in the middle strata might help explain why preachers assume some of the diverse roles they play. Marable leaves unstated why he categorizes preachers as Black elites, but presumably it is due to the socio-economic position of Black preachers relative to other Blacks. With the drastic expansion of the middle strata in the late 19th and early 20th century, the perspective of their being primarily two classes in society became particularly inadequate. How does one explain the class position of those who appear to be in conflict with both the workers beneath them and the elites above them? What kind of power does this middle strata have, and how do they get it? The answer differs according to which part of this strata one considers. There is such a great deal of diversity in this strata that one might not consider the strata as a whole to be a single class.

In 1979, a pivotal book on this middle strata, *Between Labor and Capital*, was published. The book contained an essay by Barbara and John Ehrenreich to which a series of other writers responded with their own essays. In their essay, the Ehrenreichs argued that between 1890 and 1920 a new class emerged which they call the Professional-Managerial Class (PMC).[33] A number of historical conditions facilitated the rise of this class. In particular, through "overt and sometimes violent" ways, the class formed by expropriating "skills and culture once indigenous to the working class."[34] Two examples highlight this. First, the Ehrenreichs observe that "services" such as midwifery that were once part of working-class culture became commodities provided by an outside professional class.[35] Second, through the process of Taylorization, a significant degree of knowledge, skills, and control formerly exercised by the working class in the productive process was taken over by managers and experts.[36] Coinciding with these changes in services and production were changes in civil society. As public education expanded and philanthropic foundations such as those of Rockefeller and Carnegie dispensed funding, a regulatory and managerial character embedded itself in key institutions: "Schools imparted industrial discipline and 'American' values; charity agencies and domestic scientists imposed their ideas of 'right living'; public-health officials literally policed immigrant ghettoes, etc."[37]

In the midst of such historical conditions, occupations were created, expanded, and subsumed in the formation of the PMC. A key characteristic of many of these occupations was the development of professionalism. Professionalism entailed three particular characteristics. First, there was an emphasis on specialization with its formal education and training demands. The training requirements became a barrier to the working class, while also securing and bolstering a place for the PMC.[38] The Ehrenreichs note, "Specialization was the PMC member's

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[32] Ibid., 211.
[33] Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich, "The Professional Managerial Class" in *Between Labor and Capital* ed. by Pat Walker (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 18.
[34] Ibid., 17.
[35] Ibid., 18.
[36] Ibid., 14-15.
[37] Ibid., 15.
[38] Ibid., 26.

chief selling point, the quality which justified his or her claim to a unique niche in society."[39] Second, there was the development of "ethical standards which include a commitment to public service."[40] Third, there was "a measure of autonomy from outside interference in the practice of the profession (e.g., only members of the profession can judge the value of a fellow professional's work)."[41] In the end, these three characteristics ensured that "that the relationship between the individual professional and his or her 'client' (student, patient) is one of benign domination."[42]

Ultimately, according to the Ehrenreichs, the PMC would consist "of salaried mental workers who do not own the means of production and whose major function in the social division of labor may be described broadly as the reproduction of capitalist culture and capitalist class relations."[43] Occupations that fall under this category include managers, doctors, lawyers, teachers, researchers, engineers, scientists, teachers, psychologists, social workers, advertising writers, and a myriad of others. As a whole, the class is characterized by conflict with both the capitalist class and the working class. At the same time, the class has also played a role in mediating class conflict between these two classes.[44] Key functions of the class in reproducing capitalist culture include the exercising of social control over the working class and "the production and propagation of ideology."[45] With regard to the social relations of control between the PMC and the working class, the Ehrenreichs claim that there is a "subjective dimension of these contacts" that involves "a complex mixture of hostility and deference on the part of the working-class people, contempt and paternalism on the part of the PMC."[46]

There are some rather messy aspects to the definition of the PMC. In their response to the essay by the Ehrenreichs, Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel give a couple of criticisms. First, they argue that the basis for defining a class should be whether or not the group in question can develop its "own autonomous political vision and programs."[47] From the perspective being developed in this paper, this criticism makes sense in that for a new class to emerge it would have to have interests unique to itself that put it into conflict with both workers and elites. Otherwise, the group in question is either a sub-sector of another class, or it is in altogether ambiguous or contradictory position without a class identity.[48] Second, Albert and Hahnel argue that another problem with the definition of the PMC put forth by the Ehrenreichs is that "*all* workers receive a wage or salary, all employ mental abilities and energies, and all are engaged in

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[39] Ibid., 27.
[40] Ibid., 26.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid., 12.
[44] Ibid., 19.
[45] Ibid., 12.
[46] Ibid., 17.
[47] Michal Albert and Robin Hahnel, "A Ticket to Ride: More Locations on the Class Map" in *Between Labor and Capital* ed. by Pat Walker (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 258.
[48] This second possibility of being without a class identity is discussed by Erik Olin Wright. Typically, he discusses this classless position as a contradictory location where one is torn between classes. In a letter to the author, however, he noted that he would define preachers as being in a "mediated class location," a location where relations are defined by non-occupational social relations. This perspective is not assessed here because it fails to elucidate the connections between culture, ideology, and socioeconomic position that are relevant to preachers who do indeed have an occupation. For more, see Erik Olin Wright, *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

the reproduction of societal (including class) relations."[49] From the perspective of this paper, this criticism also makes sense in that a definition of class should point to characteristics that highlight the inequalities of power unique to a class.

A third critique of the Ehrenreichs is whether or not one needs to be directly tied to major means of production in order to be considered part of the PMC. On the one hand, they argue that the petty bourgeoisie is not a part of the PMC by asserting that it "lies outside the polarity of labor and capital."[50] People in this class are neither employees nor employers. The PMC, on the other hand, is employed by capitalists and it has a relationship of authority over workers.[51] Despite this perspective, some of the occupations listed by the Ehrenreichs, especially the professional ones as opposed to the managerial ones, are occupations where one is neither employed by capital nor in a position of managerial control over labor. Additionally, the Ehrenreichs argue for a conception of class that goes beyond consideration of occupations and the limited arena of production. They are interested in "the totality of social relationships among groups of people."[52] This includes the "cultural" sphere of life and everything that "shapes a person's political consciousness and loyalties."[53]

The Ehrenreichs never explicitly discuss clergy, but in a footnote they describe the Catholic Church as being one of the "pre-capitalist authoritarian mechanisms of control."[54] Ultimately, Christian ministry would seem to be an occupational category subsumed by the PMC over the course of history. The relationship between clergy and laity would fall within an expanded notion of class analysis that stretches into the cultural sphere of life. While clergy are not involved in the productive process in a direct way, through institutional roles and cultural relationships they function within society in ways that correspond to PMC functions. Preachers are always involved in propagating ideology and by this means often reproduce outlooks that buttress either capitalism as a whole or interests associated with their own particular class. Moreover, preachers arguably often replicate relationships similar to the professional-client relationships present in other fields. Notably, for preachers these relationships are not necessarily with working class people. However, this is also true for lawyers, doctors, and teachers.

One may or may not agree with using such functional roles as a marker of class. One might prefer to think of class not in terms of function but solely in terms of "structural" position, i.e., whether one is in a position of ownership, has control over labor, etc.[55] Regardless of where one stands on the debate, a serious analysis of class in relation to preachers should highlight how cultural, ideological, and institutional functions relate to the class conflicts of society. In developing definitions, even if one chooses to draw sharp lines of distinction between cultural and economic spheres or structural and superstructural spheres, the relationship between these spheres warrants attention. Without this attention, it would be impossible to assess the position, stance, and power of preachers amidst societal class conflict.

Similar to the concept of the PMC, in *Between Labor and Capital* and elsewhere, economic theorists Michael Albert and Robin Hahnel describe a large portion of the middle

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[49] Albert and Hahnel, 258.
[50] Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich (see n. 33), 17-18.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich (see n. 6), 325.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Barbara Ehrenreich and John Ehrenreich (see n. 33), 43.
[55] For a discussion of structure and function, see Erik Olin Wright, "Intellectuals and the Class Structure of Capitalist Society" in *Between Labor and Capital* ed. by Pat Walker (Boston: South End Press, 1979), 201-202.

strata group as the coordinator class. Despite their criticisms of the Ehrenreichs, Albert and Hahnel believe there is a class that can be located amidst the occupations that the Ehrenreichs label as the PMC. In the work place, this class is defined by power in the form of control, authority, and monopolization of conceptualization. Thus, coordinators have a significant degree of control over their own labor and/or the labor of others.[56] They "have authoritative relations with traditional workers who are either their workplace subordinates or their clients."[57] Finally, they "generally conceptualize their work in advance and/or develop concepts which must be adopted by others."[58]

If this is what can be said about how coordinators exercise power, what can be said about them in terms of conflict with workers and elites? Albert and Hahnel state, "They [coordinators] pursue wealth, autonomy and power against capitalists. They defend skill, knowledge, and authority against workers."[59] In a recent book, Albert states that coordinators "retain their more empowering jobs largely due to monopolizing certain skills and knowledge."[60] As the Ehrenreichs indicated, this was achieved through a historical process overtly defined by conflict, even violence.

In legitimating and defending their class position above workers, one can see how coordinators develop particular attitudes and perspectives. Albert and Hahnel observe that the class is characterized by both "their psychology of personal achievement and initiative" and "by their elitism and paternalism toward workers."[61] They also indicate that coordinators tend to have "habits of command and also specifically anti-worker conceptions such as 'workers are intellectually incapable or psychologically ill-equipped to administer their own lives without our compassionate aid.'"[62]

As a group, how might the characteristics of preachers compare with the characteristics of the coordinator class? First, in their parish roles, preachers may hold a position of control by virtue of performing a managerial or supervising role in relation to other staff members of their church. One might thus argue that the experience of such workplace relationships might shape the perspective conveyed in a preacher's sermon. Second, in their workplace setting preachers may also have a significant degree of control over their own work even when they are accountable to the governing bodies or offices of a particular church or denomination. With this said, the disciplining and conditioning effect of church hierarchies should be noted when considering possible influences and constraints on what is said in the pulpit. Third, one can note that preachers are often viewed as experts on the Bible and the Christian faith. In this way, they monopolize conceptualization and assume an authoritative position.

A fourth way in which one can compare the characteristics of preachers to those of the coordinator class concerns viewing parishioners of working class congregations as clients of the preacher. This raises a number of questions. Does the nature of the professional-client relationship change depending upon how one is remunerated? Does it matter whether preachers are paid for performing their parish roles through a salary determined by a diocese or through a salary set by the governing body local to the parish church? Additionally, as noted earlier, what is one to make of preachers who have non-working class "clients?" Does a preacher with a

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[56] Albert and Hahnel, 262.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Michael Albert, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism* (New York: Verso, 2003), 26.
[61] Albert and Hahnel, 261.
[62] Ibid., 262.

ruling class congregation have an authoritative relationship with them? How do the class characteristics of a preacher's congregation potentially influence the content of that preacher's sermon?

A final matter raised by Albert and Hahnel's definition relates to relational and ideological characteristics such as elitism, paternalism, authoritarian styles of communication, and patronizing outlooks. This issue raises a number of interesting questions as well. With regard to communicative style, does deductive and authoritarian preaching reflect the class position of the preacher? If so, what is one to make of inductive and non-authoritarian preaching with regard to the class position of the preacher? With regard to the ideological content of the sermon, does a sermon that emphasizes a view of charity with regard to the working class reflect the class position of the preacher? In a similar manner, does a sermon that emphasizes a critical view of the ruling class reflect the class position of the preacher? What is one to make of a preacher who eschews either paternalistic charity or criticisms of the rich? What about the preacher who celebrates struggles for economic justice led by the working class?

The tricky part here is how one regards ideology in relation to class position. A deterministic view would regard ideology as determined by class. However, one can also view the particular ideological streams of a society as generally, but not necessarily, flowing in a parallel, complementary manner to the particular material streams of a society. The key challenge thus becomes one of discerning the dominant ideological tendencies of a class while realizing that within each class there will be deviations. In explaining such deviations, one would want to consider the particularities of various cultural and religious traditions along with social forces such as race and gender.

As helpful as Albert and Hahnel are for developing a class analysis of preachers, more can be said in spelling out the most significant roles and functions of preachers within the class hierarchy of corporate-state economies. Here the focus of Gramsci, Marable, and the Ehrenriechs on the ideological and cultural functions is more suggestive. The key roles and functions of the preacher pertain to the interpretation of the world and the propagation of ideas. Regardless of whether or not they possess "strong" public speaking skills or "expert" knowledge of the Bible, preachers possess a virtual monopoly on interpretation and propagation within the primary activity of churches: the worship service. In a literal and figurative fashion, preachers have a microphone that amplifies their voice above others. While one can argue over the volume of this amplification depending upon different structures and cultures of clergy authority or parish egalitarianism, the fact remains that ordained preachers have more time at the microphone than others.

Sociologist E. Franklin Frazier touched upon the key roles and functions of preachers when he situated black preachers in the black bourgeoisie, by which he meant the black middle class. Frazier noted that the true power of the black middle class did not stem from either a political position in the larger society or an economic position in black communities as employers. Instead, its power stems from two sources. First, it holds "strategic positions in segregated institutions."[63] Second, it creates and propagates dominant ideologies in black communities.[64] While Frazier rightly noted that the position and role of the black middle class he observed was shaped by racial segregation, he pointed to insights that are broadly applicable to preachers of all races.

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[63] E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie*, (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 77.
[64] Ibid.

What do such insights offer homileticians and preachers? If preachers want to preach in a manner that does not conform to an oppressive status quo, it helps to have a sense of the potential dangers and pitfalls common to members of their class. It also helps to have a sense of the potential options available to preachers. Given the positions and perspectives of preachers highlighted by class analysis, one can say that preachers are both blessed and cursed when it comes to class. They are blessed in that they have a relative degree of freedom from relations of production. To a remarkable extent, they can choose with whom they identify and align themselves. However, preachers are cursed in that they inhabit a position of privilege by virtue of being able to publicly espouse ideas with a power not available to members of the working class. Moreover, if preachers are not aware of how their power is relative to both the working class below them and the ruling class above them, then they are destined to unwittingly conform to perspectives that preserve their position of privilege.

Due to their position between the working class and the ruling class, one can predict that the content of what a preacher says will often conform to one or more of the following: (1) an evasion of, or silence on economic issues that reflect the maintenance of class privilege over and above the working class, (2) a manner of instruction, surveillance, control, authority, and discipline that reflects the managerial position of the class to which preachers belong, (3) a moral outlook that casts a benevolent and charitable eye upon the poor in such a way that it reflects and reinforces the superior class position of preachers, and (4) a moral outlook that casts a critical eye upon the rich in such a way that it reflects the inferior class position of preachers. With an awareness of these potential trends, preachers will be more likely to think critically of their own class. This critical consciousness is essential for speaking a word of justice that is in harmony with an envisioned beloved community freed from the conflicts and inequalities of class.

"A House of Prayer in the Heart:
how homiletics nurtures the church's spirituality"[1]

The Academy of Homiletics
December 1-3, Williamsburg, Virginia

Slippery as soap are the two big words in our theme for this year's meeting of the Academy of Homiletics: "spirituality and preaching." What is "spirituality?" Go to your local bookstore and find the books shelved under that category. I have done it several times, and I have been astonished by the range of works for sale, everything from finding your true inner self through physical exercise to learned tomes on ancient meditative practices. Nearly all of the books, at least upon a quick perusal, are about individuals attending to their own inner resources. It is as though spirituality were some pure ether unpolluted by our interrelationship as material creatures.

But before we scorn the word "spirituality" because of its imprecision, we need to take stock of the word "preaching." We who have received Christ through the faithful witness of preachers and who have given our lives to teaching future preachers, consider "preaching" to be a word of honor, delight, wonder and transformation. Yet the word that is treasure to us is poison to others, as in the common phrases: "Quit preaching to me" or "I have had enough of your preaching." At a yet more painful level, we think of those groups of people who have been harmed by preaching that promoted ignorance and hatred in the name of God.

Even when we turn to more learned commentary on preaching, we quickly detect how theological conflicts, cultural differences, philosophical presuppositions, and personal predilections result in a wide spectrum of understandings of why and how we preach.[2] Of course, conflict about the purposes and means of preaching is nothing new. In the early church there were people who opposed the use of classical rhetoric for proclaiming the gospel, and there were debates between those who favored the plain meaning of scriptural texts and others who sought out the deeper allegorical or spiritual dimensions of sacred writings.

One might then argue "preaching" has always been a slippery word, and its slipperiness is only magnified by a post-modern age that is skeptical about the precision of all language and is wary of the biases and power struggles that we cloak in our various rhetorical strategies.

No matter how inexact language may be, we have no choice but to risk using it. As Stephen Webb has demonstrated: God has spoken and empowered us to speak.[3] That we may misuse the gift of speech does not relieve us of the obligation to try to use it as faithfully as we can. Therefore, I am going to take these two slippery words – "spirituality" and "preaching" – and attempt to relate them to one another in a way that illumines how they nurture and refine

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[1] This is a re-worked version of a presentation entitled, "The Temple Preaching Builds: a house of prayer in the heart" originally given to the Festival of Homiletics in Spring of 2004 in Washington, DC.

[2] Consider, for example, two recent books presenting a cross range of theories about why and how we preach: Jana Childers, ed., Purposes of Preaching, St. Louis, Chalice Press, 2004 and Paul Scott Wilson, Preaching and Homiletical Theory, St. Louis, Chalice Press, 2004.

[3] Stephen Webb, The Divine Voice

each other when understood in the context of the church gathered to worship God.   My approach is functional and contextual: I will consider how preaching nurtures the corporate spirituality of the church at prayer.   I am indebted here to George Herbert, the great Anglican poet, pastor, priest who lived from 1593-1633.

Two years ago I re-read Herbert's great collection of poems, entitled "The Temple," a work that I first encountered forty years ago as a sophomore in college. The poet acknowledges that his poems provide "a picture of the many spiritual conflicts that have passed betwixt God and my soul."[4]   The individual poems are titled after acts of worship or the architecture and furnishings of a church or the particular seasons of the liturgical year or the sacraments or the struggles of the soul.

To read the temple is to enter the imaginative world of Herbert and to find ourselves in the sacred space of a cavernous soul, a soul that is resonant with the echoes of our own hopes and agonies, a heart and a head that are practicing a strenuous spiritual discipline: distilling the struggles of Christian faith into an intellectually challenging theopoetic idiom.   I initially read the work over forty years ago, long before I had preached my first sermon, and longer yet before I started to teach homiletics. Now, after teaching homiletics for twenty-eight years, I open The Temple and begin with the first and longest poem, entitled by Herbert "The Church-Porch."   The title is significant because it suggests that we are at the point of entry.   We are on the verge of sacred space.   We are about to move into the depths and heights of encountering the holy, the numinous, the divine, the wonder and mystery that flow from the deep dear core of things.

My eyes read down through the verses and suddenly I stumble upon lines that I never noticed years ago:

> Resort to sermons; but to prayers most:
> Praying's the end of preaching. . . [5]

Of course, there are multiple ways we might end the sentence, "The end of preaching is . . ." But for the purposes of this paper, I will concentrate solely on Herbert's theopoetic insight.

Prayer, whatever form it takes, represents a living relationship to God.   Herbert's statement reminds us that the end of preaching is the vitalizing, the nurturing, the enriching, the deepening, the broadening, the heightening of our relationship to God. I believe that to participate in this dynamic divine/human relationship is a form of spirituality.   Therefore, if the end of preaching is prayer, it follows that the purpose of preaching is – at least in part – the nurture of spirituality.   It is not, however, the individualistic spirituality that I find featured on the shelves in the bookstore. Herbert makes his statement in the context of "The Temple," the metaphor that holds his collection of poems together.   The temple is a house of worship in which public prayer is offered, and Herbert makes it clear that he has in mind public or corporate prayer:

> Though private prayer be a brave design,
> Yet public hath more promises, more love.
> And love's a weight to hearts; to eyes a sign.

[4] Anthony Hecht, The Essential Herbert, New York: The Ecco Press, 1987, 10.
[5] George Herbert, Herbert's Poems: and Country Parson, A new Edition; with a Life of the Author from Isaac Walton, London: Haynes and Son, 1826, photocopied edition, 70.

> We all are but cold suitors; let us move
>   Where it is warmest.   Leave thy six and seven;
>   Pray with the most; for, where most pray, is heav'n.[6]

Public prayer covers a wide range of different kinds of petition and praise.   So when Herbert writes, "Praying's the end of preaching," we need to consider the various types of prayer that find expression in our liturgies and services of worship. Consider, then, six classic kinds of corporate prayer, common to most of our traditions of worship, each of them expressing a different dimension in the divine/human relationship:

> Adoration.
> Confession.
> Supplication.
> Intercession.
> Thanksgiving.
> Lament.

To say that the end of preaching is prayer is a deceptively simple statement because prayer, especially in the context of corporate worship, is such a complex, multi-dimensional activity. "Praying's the end of preaching" means that

> The end of preaching is adoration
> The end of preaching is confession.
> The end of preaching is supplication.
> The end of preaching is intercession.
> The end of preaching is thanksgiving.
> The end of preaching is lament.

The end of preaching is prayer, the richness of prayer, the fullness of prayer, the complexity of prayer – all of them are a part of the multi-dimensionality of our relationship to God.   In short, the end of preaching is the nurture of the church's spirituality as practiced by the gathered community.

If the end of preaching is prayer, then all preachers need to ask: What kind of prayer does their preaching awaken?   I am not suggesting every sermon ought to be about prayer or that every sermon will conclude with the preacher offering a prayer. But rather I am asking what kind of living relationship to God does preaching nurture over time?   Does it nurture the deep, broad relationship to God that is expressed through the extravagant richness of the church's corporate life of prayer?

Thomas Long makes a distinction between the "focus" and "function" of a sermon: "What the sermon aims to say can be called its 'focus,' and what the sermon aims to do can be called its 'function.'"[7]   Although I am drawing on Long's definition, I am concerned in this paper with the function of *preaching* as distinct from the function of any single sermon. What do we hope will be the accumulative effect of preaching in the life of the gathered community?

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[6] Herbert, 70.   This appears two stanzas before Herbert affirms "Praying's the end of preaching."
[7] Thomas G. Long, <u>The Witness of</u> Preaching, Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989, 86.

Taking my cue from Herbert, I am hoping that preaching will nurture a rich relationship to God, a relationship in which people can move through the whole rich range of prayer.

It is possible for preaching to encourage only one kind of prayer.   I think of a woman who told me of the preacher she listened to as a child.   After every sermon, she always felt the same prayer rising in her heart: "I need to confess my sins to God." It is not wrong for some sermons to lead to confession. But for all sermons to lead to confession is to constrict the wholeness of God and to limit the fullness of our relationship to God.

If the end of preaching is prayer then surely sometimes preaching ought to end in adoration.   I think of traditional ascriptions of praise to God:

> Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving
> and honor and power and might
> be to our God forever and ever!   Amen.

> Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee,
> God of glory, Lord of love;
> Hearts unfold like flowers before Thee,
> Opening to the sun above.

The adoration of God changes nothing.   The adoration of God changes everything. If you judge the adoration of God by utilitarian standards, then it changes nothing.   The adoration of God does not turn a profit or plant a field or build a house. The adoration of God has no results that you can immediately calculate and quantify.   And yet the adoration of God changes everything. For when we give ourselves utterly and completely to the adoration of God, nothing in creation ever looks the same as it did before. All that is becomes charged with meaning. That is why the psalmist's exhortation to praise God flows seamlessly from inanimate natural phenomena to creatures to human beings of every class, gender and age:

> Praise the Lord from the earth,
> you sea monsters and all deeps,
> fire and hail, snow and frost,
> stormy wind fulfilling his command!
> Mountains and all hills,
> fruit trees and all cedars!
> Wild animals and all cattle,
> creeping things and flying birds.
> Kings of the earth and all peoples,
> princes and all rulers of the earth!
> Young men and women alike,
> old and young together! (Psalm 148: 7-12)

Or to cast the insight of the Psalmist in words closer to our scientific ethos:

> Have you not known? Have you not heard?
> that from the very start
> God is the one whose spirit stirred

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each atom, star and heart
From God they draw their energy
to spin and burn and beat
and learn the choreography
of matter, light and heat.

God, since each atom, star and heart
depend and wait on you
and on the powers you impart
and constantly renew,
their being is a form of prayer
that makes of time and space
a temple brimming with your care
where all exist by grace.

When we adore God we come to realize that the elemental fact of our existence is itself an act of grace. When we adore God we align ourselves with the depth and core of creation as they flow from the wellspring of all that is. The end of preaching is prayer. Therefore, at least sometimes, the end of preaching is the adoration of God.

The wonder and astonishment that accompany the adoration of God, often become the seedbed for our need to confess our sins. Astonished by our existence as a gift from God we become aware of how imperfectly we reciprocate the divine generosity. And the result is that praise often leads to confession, a sequence of prayer common to many Christian traditions. However, in a feel good culture, the call to confession often meets resistance. I think of people who have told me that the very idea of confessing sins makes them feel bad about themselves so they do not want to do it. In some cases, these individuals have suffered under a form of Christianity that concentrates unremittingly on sin, and their resistance is a sign of spiritual health: they are fighting back against oppressive religion. In other cases, sin has been narrowly defined as hubris, as pride and arrogance. This narrow definition of sin does not allow for those whose sin is not pride. As Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza has pointed out, some people's sin is a failure to claim and assert the gifts God has given them.

In sum, there are often good reasons why people resist prayers of confession. But having allowed for those good reasons, I want to affirm that if the end of preaching is prayer, then the end of preaching is sometimes confession. As I often do, I turn to a poet because of the concision with which she makes the case. Wistawa Szymborska is a living poet who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1996. Born in Poland in 1923, Szymborska is well acquainted with the terror and brutality of the 20th century. She lived through the bloodshed. Her poem is entitled "In Praise of Feeling Bad about Yourself:"

The buzzard never says it is to blame.
The panther wouldn't know what scruples mean.
When the piranha strikes, it feels no shame.
If snakes had hands, they'd claim their hands were clean.

A jackal doesn't understand remorse.
Lions and lice don't waver in their course.

Why should they, when they know they're right?

Though hearts of killer whales may weigh a ton,
in every other way they're light.

On this third planet of the sun
among the signs of bestiality
a clear conscience is Number One.[8]

Feeling bad about ourselves is not always a bad response to those things that we have done and to those things that we have left undone.   No matter where we stand on the political spectrum, if we affirm faith in a God of justice and compassion, and if in the presence of that God we look honestly at ourselves, then we will confess that we have not loved God with our whole heart; we have not loved our neighbors as ourselves. We are truly sorry and we humbly repent.

To confess our sins to God is to come to terms with who we really are.   But that process involves much more than confession.   It also involves supplication: asking God for what we need.   I remember a woman who once told me: "I have never been able to pray for myself. I thought I was being too selfish to pray for me."   Her words make me think of scores of other people, who have asked me: "Do you think it's all right for me to pray for this?"

Why all these worries and rules about prayer, especially when we pray for ourselves?   I suppose there are some good reasons.   People do not want to reduce their spiritual life to narcissism.   People, have enough self-awareness that they want to avoid contracting the world down to the circumference of their personal concerns.   As valid as these cautions may be, I am struck with how Jesus does not fence prayer in with rubrics and protocols. Instead, he simply urges us to get started: "'Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you'" (Mt. 7:7). Do not worry if your prayer is right or wrong. Even the Bible has prayers whose content is perfectly terrifying: "O that you would kill the wicked, O God . . . I hate them with a perfect hatred" (Psalm 139). "Happy shall they be who take your little ones and dash them on the rock!" (Psalm 137) When Jesus says "ask," he does not specify what we will receive.   When he says "seek," he does not predict what we will find.   When he says "knock," he does not describe what the open door will disclose. If the end of preaching is prayer, then at least sometimes, the end of preaching is supplication, praying for ourselves.

I believe that if the woman who spoke to me did begin to pray for herself, it would enrich her prayer for others.   Christ says "Love your neighbor *as yourself.*" Clearly there is a kind of love of self that is healthy and right.   Such love puts us in touch with our humanity, with our elemental needs, with our own brokenness and fears, with our deepest questions and struggles, and our highest hopes and dreams.   To pray for ourselves out of these profound realities is part of finding our connection to other human beings.   Praying for ourselves instructs us in the way of praying for others.   If we are to love our neighbors as we love ourselves, then we are to pray for others as we pray for ourselves.

The process can also work in reverse: in praying for others we learn to pray more faithfully for ourselves because compassion for the other awakens a sense of our common humanity.   I believe it is this basic dynamic that lies behind Jesus' striking command: "'Love

[8] Wistawa Szymborska, translated by Stanislaw Baranczak and Clare Cavanagh, Poems New and Collected 1957-1997, San Diego: Harcourt1998, 168.

your enemies and pray for those persecute you.'" (Mt. 5: 44) It is significant that this command is one continuous sentence: "'Love your enemies and pray for those persecute you.'" If the command read only "Love your enemies." Then the command would not point us to the source of grace who can transform how we look at our enemies. Praying for those who persecute us opens us to a different perception of those from whom we are alienated. When we pray for those who persecute us, the category "enemy" begins to dissolve in the waters of the Spirit, revealing the essential humanness of the other, a humanness that we share in common.

Praying for our enemies reveals in an especially dramatic way the dynamic interaction between praying for ourselves and praying for others. When we pray for those who "are in trouble, sorrow, need, sickness, or any other adversity," then we open ourselves to the inter-connective tissue of the common creaturehood that we share with the whole human family and with the entire eco-system. We begin to let the reign of God take root in the core of who we are. Such prayer, to draw upon the homiletical work of David Buttrick, helps to create a transformed world in our consciousness,
a revised vision of reality that empowers us to act for justice and reconciliation. If the end of preaching is prayer, then at least sometimes the end of preaching is intercession,
praying for others.

Because I preach in many different congregations throughout North America,
I have the privilege of participating in a form of corporate prayer that has become common to a great many different traditions. The order of service often calls it "joys and concerns." Sometimes, the joys and concerns have been collected ahead of time on a tablet of paper or people will speak them aloud prior to praying and the minister or priest
writes them down and then offers prayers. No matter what form, these prayers take, I have observed the following pattern to be nearly universally true: when it comes to concerns and prayers for others, the church h fills with the sound of the names of particular persons and places and needs. But when it comes time to offer prayers of thanksgiving. Silence often descends. There are a few voices here and there, "Thank you for the lovely day." "Thank you for the children's choir." But the prayer of thanksgiving never rises to the level of the chorus of human need.
Why is giving thanks so hard for the human heart? Why is it that we are quick to let
God know our need, and reticent with gratitude? Whatever the answers to these questions, if the end of preaching is prayer, then sometimes the end of preaching is thankfulness to God.

When we read the Book of Psalms we discover giving thanks does not preclude
the expression of sorrow. The same book that ends: "Let everything that lives praise the Lord!" also contains some of the most anguished prayers of lament ever uttered: "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?" "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer;
and by night, but find not rest." Lament is as essential as every other form of prayer I have named. Prayers of lament allow us to express our anger, our sorrow, our perplexity and desperation in the face of tragedy.

In American culture we often think of lament and praise, sorrow and thanksgiving as polar opposites. This polar opposition sometimes gets translated into congregations who only want sermons and services that are upbeat. They want praise and thanksgiving minus lament. They want joy and peace minus sorrow. Sermons and services that are entirely upbeat destroy the essential interconnection of lament and praise, sorrow and thanksgiving. They block having

a full relationship with God. They damage the soul. The God we praise is the God who bears our anger. The God to whom we give thanks is the God who counts our tears and hears our sighs. Instead of being polar opposites lament and praise, sorrow and thanksgiving are part of the inter-connective tissue of our humanity, of the very way God created us. Furthermore, when we pray and the waters of the Holy Spirit flow over and through us, then our lament and praise, our sorrow and thanksgiving flow together in the same stream.

   To return to George Herbert's metaphor, the temple that preaching builds is a house of prayer in the heart, that profound way of being in the presence of God
that embraces the full range of the divine human relationship.   To build that temple is to nurture the corporate spirituality of the church.   Such an understanding makes spirituality a much less slippery term because it is rooted in the enduring practices of the church at prayer and in those sacred depths of being where we open ourselves to God.

   If the end of preaching is prayer, then how will we arrive at that end? The only way to arrive there is to begin there. Preachers who do not pray will never awaken prayer in those to whom they preach.   Homiletics does not start with hermeneutics or rhetoric, it starts with God and our relationship to God and the vast repertoire of human prayer.   All the scholarly disciplines that converge in homiletics matter greatly, but they are not the beginning nor the end of preaching.   The end of preaching is prayer.   The beginning of preaching is prayer.   So let us pray:

Source of all wonder,
wellspring of living waters,
womb of being,
MotherFather, creator of all,
our beginning and our end,
continually renew our relationship to you,
that we your preachers
and homileticians
may manifest in our sermons,
in our scholarship and teaching
and in our very being and acting
the fullness of prayer,
abundance of life,
and richness of relationship to you
that were perfectly embodied
in Jesus Christ.

The Interpreter of Dreams: Preaching to Effect Change

(The Rev.) Judith M. McDaniel

Abstract

Each chapter of this book begins with a theological argument, then proceeds to practical application. The book's thesis is that there is an inherent link between the character of the preacher, the character of the congregation, and the character of the gospel proclaimed. They mirror one another. Many congregations are not equipped for change, growth, or evangelism because they have become entrenched in one style of leadership or structured life; so before congregations can change, before a congregation can turn toward a new direction for gospel living, the character of the preacher must be converted. This book proposes that the character of the preacher and the preacher's congregation can draw closer to the character of the gospel through the practice and teaching of homiletics.

Prologue

In the second chapter of Acts [v. 17], Peter preaches his first sermon and quotes from the prophet Joel [2:28]: *"In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams…."* He is preaching to what might be called an interim congregation, one in which the Messianic age has begun but has not yet reached its fulfillment. God's Spirit has descended but the Day of the Lord, the end of time marked by judgment and blessing, has not yet arrived.

In a sense all congregations since the first century of the common era have lived in an interim period, *kairos* time, high time, a period of intense quality, an opportunity for listening, watching, and envisioning, a time and space for forming thoughts and forming selves. As Paul put it [Romans 8:23], we have received the "first fruits," but we groan inwardly as we wait for adoption. In the mean time, we live in the interim between the already and the not yet of the Kingdom; and in that interim period the church needs leadership.

How is leadership exercised from the pulpit and how is change effected? There is little question but that there is a constellation of power around the pulpit. Does that power belong only to the designated leader, the one chosen by the people; or can others besides the perceived leader influence congregational development from the pulpit? Put another way, does the power of the pulpit arise simply from the fact that the one speaking---whether lay or ordained--- has been authorized to give voice to the practices of the Christian faith? To say that speaking for the faith from the location of the pulpit is somehow different from witnessing elsewhere implies that there an iconic nature to preaching itself. Unlike a speech delivered before an assembly, "preaching constitutes the church."[1] In other words, at least part of the iconic nature of preaching is its capacity to create identity.

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[1] *Luther's Works*, American ed., Jaroslav Pelican and Helmut T. Lehmann, eds. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1958-86) vol. 32, p. 73.

Preaching advances the understanding of faith, **a**ffects faith development. But for the individual who does the preaching to **e**ffect faith development requires the capacity on the part of the preacher to see visions and dream dreams. Whether functioning as the interim pastor for a congregation in transition or as the senior minister in a long-term pastorate, the effective preacher discovers what the dreams of the congregation are and preaches to those dreams. Such a statement does not mean that the interpreter of dreams is a topical preacher, basing his or her vision on limited and flawed human experience. Neither does he or she tell the people what they should dream. Rather, the interpretive preacher goes with the eyes of the congregation to the Scripture to study all the aspects of the readings for the day and brings them to bear on the congregation's dreams. The congregation expects their preacher to be the rabbi, the one who knows and shares the history, the knowledge, the accumulated wisdom about the scriptural passages and ushers that good news into the present.

Knowing that there are developmental tasks to be facilitated in the creation of identity, the interpreter of dreams speaks to the theological bases of those tasks, the warrant, the deeper demand of those tasks so that those bases can, in turn, be related to the congregation's dreams. For example, "Why is ecumenical dialogue, reconnecting with other Christians, important?" some members of a congregation might ask. The theological basis of that reconnection is grounded in community, the need of all believers to be in communion with one another, mirroring the nature of God in three persons---Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternal communion. The Trinity is the model for all human community. God's three Persons acted in communion in creation; and therefore, all humans are created by God to be in communion with one another. The ideal of reconnecting is to model life on Trinitarian love, for the mission of the church is to bring about unity for the whole human race. This way the church becomes a model of koinonia ecclesiology, a model of life shared within the Trinity. When the church shares and lives that model, it becomes an agent of love for the whole world. This sort of witness enables us to live in community with those with whom we differ on issues, influencing others to love one another even when we disagree.

A preacher can influence people if only because preaching changes their experience. But note: We change their experience. They themselves change their minds. Speaking good news can make change happen because words can name God at work in the world, and that naming is power. But preachers need to be wary: We need to be transparent in the pulpit. We want to represent Someone else, not ourselves. And when we leave, we don't want the church to collapse because a personality cult, dependent on our leadership, has developed.

Naming God at work in the world requires balance, but the Bible is a vehicle for standing with one foot in this world and the other foot in the next. As we read and interpret the Bible, we are vulnerable, vulnerable to the Bible's capacity to author identity and values in those who listen to its words and the words of carefully exegeted sermons. Such vulnerability creates the capacity to see visions and dream dreams, to understand and act in new ways as God's people in the interim between the already and the not yet.

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CHAPTER ONE

PREACHING IN THE INTERIM

Moving people is one of the three tasks of every sermon, according to Augustine in the first preaching textbook, *De Doctrina Christiana*. He "baptized" Cicero's three tasks of every sermon---to instruct, to delight, and to move---by interpreting "move" to mean creating the capacity to take ethical action. So how do we encourage the capacity to take ethical action? Aristotle wrote that appropriate arguments to effect change include *ethos, pathos, and logos* in that order. If *ethos*, the character of the speaker, has more effect on the listener than either the emotion aroused in the listener or the content of the words spoken, then the cultivation of character, the ministry of presence or *ethos*, is part of the vocation of Christian leaders; and there are as many media for the exploration of character as there are definitions of *ethos*. But our purpose here is not to define *ethos*. Definition, like explanation, is too limiting. Description is a better medium for discovery and development. Description allows us to paint a picture in our minds of the life we want to form, of the character for which we will strive as Christian leaders and preachers.

"Character is fate," stated the sixth century B.C. Greek philosopher Heraclitus. "Character is fate." Christians might accede, but only up to a point. We would agree that the learning we acquire, the choices we make, the virtues we strive to emulate dictate the shape our life assumes. We might agree that character is determinative of the direction one's life takes but would add a caveat. Christians would say character is something more than irrevocable destiny. Christians claim that God is both creator and final arbiter of character's *telos* or goal, that God is both the divine source and the end of life's meaning. Because we have freedom, we sketch the form and choose the colors of our character, but God is the artist who provides the tubes of paint and brushes that implement our work, then frames our final destination.

Such a statement is not meant to imply that God is separate from character formation in the midst of life. From time to time, in those *proskairos* moments we call "grace," God passes by. God crosses the boundary from transcendence to immanence. From time to time God tints the canvas; and if we perceive that revelation, life's direction is changed. But much of the time we are the painters, schooling ourselves to recognize grace when grace occurs, searching for insight, working hard at formation, ours and the congregation's. Or as Norman Maclean would say, "All good things---trout as well as eternal salvation---come by grace and grace comes by art and art does not come easy."[2]

This formed life, this work of art we are sketching for ourselves and our congregations, cannot be achieved through a simple "paint by numbers set." The numbers we need are infinite. But one thing we know for sure: Some of the colors chosen from our palette are, by virtue of the human condition, dark. An episode from the story of Elijah is one such color.

Elijah has fled to Horeb, to the cleft in the rock of the mountain in which, tradition tells us, a simararily disheartened Moses [Exodus 33:12-23] had previously sought to discern the manner of God's action in the world. But Elijah is not so much seeking the glory of God as he is venting his own frustration. Elijah is focused on fear and consumed with complaint. He claims to be zealous for the Lord; but he has lost his direction. He wants to make his own choices, to serve his own needs. He wants to sketch a different scenario than the life he has been leading. He wants out. What's wrong with this picture? We soon discover: Elijah is not *listening*. The

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[2] Norman Maclean, *A River runs through it and other Stories* (Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1976) p. 4.

issue is not the presence or absence of God. The problem is Elijah's spiritual individualism and pride. Elijah's character has a tragic flaw: egoism. Elijah has "[arrogated] to himself the power that is properly [God's]."[3] In primary colors we see the clash of human will and divine will.

How quickly we and Elijah learn to serve our own needs. How quickly God's ministry becomes *my* ministry serving *my* own designs; or, speaking as a congregation, "We've always done it this way." Here is idolatry of a different sort from the worship Elijah has just confronted in the priests of Baal, but idolatry all the same. Too soon ministry becomes equated with what one knows and does rather than who and whose one is. The clash of Elijah's will and God's will reminds us that God makes demands of Christian identity, and God will not be mocked.

As in other theophanies---in Exodus [19:16; 20:18], Deuteronomy [4:11; 5:24], Judges [5:5], Job [38ff], Psalms [18:12-14; 68:8], Isaiah [30:27] and Nahum [1:3b; 1:5]---wind, earthquake, and fire portend the approach of God; but in this case, something more confounding heralds God's approach: the sound of sheer silence. By means of ineffable paradox God gets Elijah's attention. Only then, in silence, is Elijah aware that God has passed by. Only when he is overtaken by the awe and majesty of silence does Elijah know that God has passed the boundary from transcendence to immanence, that God is breaching the barrier erected between human will and God's will. The silence is not the point, for God is not in the silence. Silence is only a harbinger, an indication of the approach of God. Listening, expectant listening, is the point.

Is this silence that heralds the coming of God what Ignatius of Antioch had in mind when he wrote to the church in Magnesia [8:2], "…there is one God who revealed himself through Jesus Christ his Son, who is his Word which proceeded from silence…"? Certainly the silence of God emphasizes God's transcendence in Ignatius' theology. God is utterly other in sovereignty and judgment, his silence indicating hidden purposes in the unfolding of the divine plan. But it is of the essence of God to be in relationship, the nature of God to take the initiative in search of relationship; to reveal Himself as the source of life itself; to pursue us. It is of the essence of God to ע ב ר , to pass the boundary. As Ignatius' letter implies, the Word was and is present at creation and in revelation, drawing near by grace. What remains for Elijah and for us is to be still and know that God is God. Be still, not be passive, but desist. Desist from the pursuit of our own needs, our own projections, the self-focused goals for "my" ministry and the congregation's ministry, and listen for the Word to pass by. Listen…for the future to break into the present.

"I said to my soul, be still," wrote the poet T. S. Eliot,
I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.[4]
Listen and wait. Watch for God to draw near.

If you and I had witnessed this tableau, had climbed Horeb to the cleft in the rock, what would we have seen? Would we have recognized God in our midst? Faced with threats of war and terrorism, shocked by the tragic loss of life in Israel, Iraq, Afghanistan, are we prepared for something or Someone who is Other than anything we expect? How does one shape one's own character or the character of a congregation so as to be ready for God to pass by, ready to listen expectantly for the Word of revelation, ready to *listen* dreams into existence?

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[3] Jerome T. Walsh, *1Kings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 282.
[4] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1971) 28.

The psalmist [Ps. 130] tells us something of how he prepares for God to pass by. He writes, "My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning." "Out of the depths," as Psalm 130 is often named, "out of the depths" is the poetry of individual lament. But lament is always voiced with the expectation of satisfaction. Lament is uttered with the confidence that God will penetrate the boundary between height and depth, between absence and presence, between transcendence and immanence. And the human vessel for that penetration is the watchman, the interpreter of dreams.

In the tradition of many cultures there appears the theme of a watchman. Six centuries before the common era, the watchman on the Ishtar Gates of Babylon witnessed the conqueror of the known world, Cyrus, King of Persia, enter the city. You and I can see these massive sapphire blue gates adorned with mythic creatures today, in the Pergammum Museum in east Berlin. Cyrus is the only non-Israelite in the Old Testament to whom the title "messiah" is given. Unaware of his charge from God, Cyrus is depicted in Scripture as the agent of the Lord, an enlightened ruler who returns the spoils of war and permits the conquered exiles to return to Jerusalem and restore the decimated temple. But while the Persians gained much by their contacts with other civilizations, there is no evidence that Cyrus ever acknowledged the sovereignty of God. There is no evidence that he recognized God in the midst of life. And the Persian Wars with Greece ended in disaster for the house of Cyrus.

A century after Cyrus as the returned exiles were rebuilding the temple, the victorious Greeks performed their own religious ritual at home, Greek theater. For that theater, Aeschylus wrote the trilogy *Oresteia*. The first book of *Orestia*, the *Agamemnon*, opens with another watchman, another witness to war and conquest, the fall of Troy. You and I can read *Agamemnon* today and experience not the physical but the poetic/psychological reality of ancient Greece. We can experience once again a witness NOT to God but to the tragic flaws of human hubris and necessity.

A contemporary of Aeschylus, the author of Psalm 130, like a watchman stands ready within the temple precinct of Jerusalem. But the psalmist is not looking for conquerors or for signs of war. He looks for a different kind of deliverance. This poet looks for both his own and Israel's consolation. He looks for the fulfillment of hope. This artist waits to witness a vision of wholeness because he has been prepared to see that image. He has been schooled to see. How was the psalmist prepared, one might ask.

"My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning, more than watchmen for the morning" [Ps. 130:5], he writes. The psalmist's preparation---his seminary experience, if you will---has been the words of his faith tradition, such songs, prayers and promises as those found in Isaiah, "my eyes *have seen your salvation* [Is. 40:5], which you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, *a light* for revelation *to the Gentiles* [Is. 49:6] and for glory to your people Israel." The psalmist's entire reality is shaped by the images of faith. So he comes to the city where poetry and history meet. He comes to the city where earth and heaven meet, a city you and I can see, a city you and I can know. He comes to Jerusalem.

The southern steps of the temple precinct, physical steps that are there still, are steps you and I can climb today up the southern slope of the Old City walls. Approaching the eleven acre temple precinct, we see the Hulda gates, physical gates still evident though they have been sealed shut since the seventh century. To the right as we approach the Hulda gates is the southeast corner of the outer court of the temple precinct. This corner is called the pinnacle of the temple, not because it is the apex of the temple itself but because it looms high above the Kidron Valley, high enough to be the perfect spot for a watchman.

At one archeological level, Jerusalem is composed of geology: valleys, hills, springs of water. Upon that level is built biblical history: fortress walls, symbolically named gates, steps of the temple. Atop both those levels is Jerusalem's spiritual stratum: a city of memory, hope, and integration. Physical geology, biblical history, and faith. All three understandings are needed in order to comprehend the simple yet complex statement "My soul waits for the Lord, more than watchmen for the morning."

In the Middle Ages, Christian preachers added four layers of interpretation to the three we inherited from our Hebrew forefathers and mothers in the faith. At the literal level, Jerusalem is a city of Judea. At the allegorical level, Jerusalem represents the church. At the mystical level, Jerusalem is the city of God. At the moral level, Jerusalem symbolizes the soul of the human being.

In the eighteenth century, the poet William Blake[5] gave the name "Jerusalem" to all that is tender in the human soul. He wrote, "I give you the end of a golden string. Only wind it into a ball. It will lead you in at Heaven's gate, Built in Jerusalem's wall." Blake's poetry suggests that the route to the tenderness of the human soul is something like a labyrinth we follow through life. The end of the golden string is the grace given to each of us which can too easily become "hidden under the circumstances of our daily life [or even] lost if we choose not to attend to it."[6]

Now in the twenty-first century, we add our own level of interpretation. Judging from the frequency with which we hear about the search for deeper spiritual understanding, it would appear that increasing numbers of people are seeking to attend to the holy image in their lives and their role in relationship to it. But are they attentive to grace and to the soul? No, most don't negotiate that turn. The therapeutic model is much more accessible, and that model is rampant in our culture. Just go to your neighborhood newsstand or local bookstore and browse the aisles on self-improvement. True, some of these authors invoke a higher power, but that appeal is only for the purpose of self-help; and self-help is hardly the answer to hubris or human tragedy. Those whose answer is self-help follow not so much a labyrinth as a beltway that circles round and round but never enters in.

I am reminded of a Peanuts example of living as if avoiding the turn to the soul: Lucy is parked in her psychiatric booth, and Charlie Brown is sharing his problems with her. "Sometimes I ask myself questions," he begins. "Sometimes I ask myself, 'Is this your real life, or is this just a pilot film? Is my life a thirty-nine-week series or is it something special?'" In no time at all Lucy analyzes his problem and gives an instant answer: "Whatever it is, your ratings are down. Five cents, please!"

There are no rehearsals before the opening performance of our lives. There are no pilot episodes or reruns, though some of us practice the labyrinth of faith---listening, watching, envisioning---as if we were opening in Philadelphia before subjecting our show to the bright lights of Broadway! We live as if rehearsing for life because we're unwilling to go deep enough.

If we really believed God were, as God is, our ultimate audience, would our ratings be down? Churches don't have to become museums, or mausoleums. We have the images this world desperately needs to shape its life. Wall Street doesn't have them. Madison Avenue doesn't have them. Much of television doesn't have them. We have them. We have the good news of God with us, God for us every day to share with our congregations and with the world. Then why aren't we better at recognizing God in the midst of life?

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[5] I am indebted to Henry Carse, instructor at St. George's, Jerusalem, for pointing out the connection between medieval hermeneutics and Blake's poem.
[6] Bruno Barnhart, "The Golden String Newsletter," copyright @2001-2002 Bede Griffiths Association.

Perhaps we fail to see because we aren't persistent enough about seeking spiritual nourishment. We aren't persistent enough about winding that golden string. You may remember the priest who announced during Sunday morning worship that in the interest of time---which was running short---the congregation would only sing one verse of "Take Time to be Holy." Yes, it takes time to be holy. It takes time to set aside regular routines for worship. It takes time to prepare ourselves to find God in the midst of life by reading words of Scripture, meditating upon the psalms, watching for the promises. It takes a lifetime. But God is passing by, crossing the boundary between transcendence and immanence even now, bestowing grace upon grace. We can listen for God today. We can watch for God today. We can see God in the midst of life.

But nourishment dare not stop. Twenty, fifteen, even ten years from now, will you and I have preached or taught ourselves dry? Or will character formation---discovery and development---continue throughout our ministries? It has been said that the religious person thinks life is about taking some kind of journey. The non religious person thinks there is no journey to take. In Luke the word for journey is "exodus." You and I are on an exodus away from lesser images of life. You and I are on a journey towards God. The only question is whether we will listen and watch or if we will allow grace to be hidden under the circumstances of our daily lives.

We each have been and are being given the end of a golden string. That string leads to Heaven's gate, built into the wall of the city where faith and life negotiate. At the intersection of physical geology, biblical history, memory and hope, we together with the psalmist wait. We with the psalmist stand negotiating between life and faith, but deep in his soul the psalmist is expecting to meet God. Do you and I live with that same sense of expectation?

We have said that listening and watching are elements in Christian preaching and the formation of Christian character, but we have said little about the acquisition of vision. Who are those who call others to account when God passes by, and how might we paint their portrait? What are the dimensions of Christian character formation that uniquely combine to make possible the dreaming of dreams and the calling of others to follow those dreams? Does the leader have just the right proportion of listening skill and visionary ability, a charismatic personality; or is he or she less than perfect?

Those preachers who enter into this peculiar process of planting one foot firmly in the Scripture and tradition we have thus far assimilated, poising the other to step out into the unknown where character is all that we have, are treasured, treasured by God. As Frederick Buechner writes, "They are treasured less for who they are and for what the world has made them than for what they have it in them at their best to be, because ultimately, of course, it's not the world that made them at all."

When we are balancing on the boundary between who we are and what we have it in us at our best to be, we begin to live with vision. We live, not "freestyling in the zone,"[7] but steadied by the witness of Scripture, tradition, and the traditioning community of which we are a part. Balancing on that boundary, we live equipped to "mediate [God's] absolute presence within a relative world."[8] The formation of Christian leaders is for the purpose of mediating transcendence, according to Urban Holmes, mediating those moments of grace when the barrier between heaven and earth is broken.

The vocation of a Christian preacher is to be the mediator of those moments when God passes the boundary between transcendence and immanence. We mediate by leading others to

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[7] Female rap artist Sarai Howard, a.k.a. "Feminen."
[8] Urban T. Homes, III, *Ministry and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976) 8.

their own discovery of God, forming the whole people of God to envision *teleios*, to listen and watch for consummation.

The life you and I form as Christian preachers is worked out on the horizons of meaning. The Christian preacher you and I are becoming is our work of art, imagined by you and by me, perfected by God.

The French novelist Emile Zola wrote

"If you ask me what

I can do in this world,

I, an artist, will answer you:

I am here to live out loud."

Always listening, always watching, always envisioning, the life of the Christian preacher is formed to live out loud in witness to God's approach.

(The Rev.) Judith M. McDaniel
Howard Chandler Robbins Professor of Homiletics
Virginia Theological Seminary

Images of a King's Relationship with His Soldiers:
A Character Study in the David Narratives

J. Dwayne Howell
Campbellsville University

Introduction

Robert Alter in his book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, calls David, "the most complex and elaborately presented of biblical characters.[1] David is not always the stereotype of a faithful servant of the Lord. Instead, he is a flesh and blood character with both a good side and a dark side. Such a character draws our attention because we often find points of identity with him or her.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the present paper is to explore the characterization of David as portrayed in his relationship with his soldiers. Two particular passages are chosen from the Deuteronomistic History: 2 Samuel 11 and 2 Samuel 23:7-39. Both stories deal with David and his soldiers and present different aspects of the character of David.

Background of Study

The study originates in my dissertation, *Preaching from the David Narratives*.[2] As part of the writing, I discuss how the biblical writer gives clues for the retelling of the biblical narratives. These clues, found through literary analysis, can aid in the interpretation of the text. While not denying the importance of traditional critical methods of studying scripture, literary analysis allows one to read the text as literature to investigate matters such as the development of plots, the division of scenes, and characterization. Literary analysis is not intended to be the final answer to biblical studies but serves as another tool in gaining a better understanding of the text.[3]

Character Study

Alter establishes three levels of character development in the biblical narratives: what is seen of the character, what the character says or what is said about the character, and the narrator's own comments about the character.[4] Adele Berlin presents another way of developing a character: by contrast. Contrast can occur when an earlier action of a character is contrasted with a later action; when one character is contrasted with another; when the character is contrasted with an expected norm.[5] The present study shows that these areas of contrast are found in the character of David in the passages being discussed. The study distinguishes certain aspects of David characterization found in both stories. These include: 1) The Location of David

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[1] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), p. 115.

[2] Joseph Dwayne Howell, "Preaching from the David Narratives" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993).

[3] Cf. Michael V. Fox, *Character and Ideology in the Book of Esther*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmanns Co. 2002), 5. Fox believes that work in characterization is not intended to be "the answer" in biblical studies. To do so would simply lead to a stale doctrinaire teaching of scripture.

[4] Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative,* 116 and 117.

[5] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: The Almond Press, 1983)., 40.

in each narrative; 2) The Desire of David in each narrative; 3) The Actions of David in each narrative; 4) The Response of the Soldiers to David; 5) David's response to his soldiers in each narrative; 6) David's relation to God in each story.

These two stories are studied together for two reasons. First, each deals with David and his relationship with his soldiers. Secondly, each story refers to Uriah. Uriah is the foil to David's character in 2 Samuel 11. While Uriah is mentioned only once in 2 Samuel 23, at the end of a military muster, the obvious mention draws attention to the characterization of David in the story.

The Characterization of David in 2 Samuel 23:7-39

Second Samuel 23:13-39 contains two parts: a narrative about David and his soldiers outside of Bethlehem (vv. 13-17) and a list of David's best soldiers (vv. 18-39). It is a part of a larger portion of material often referred to as the appendix (2 Sam. 21-24). Second Samuel 23:13-17 is a short story about three foolhardy, but loyal, soldiers and their gift to David.

Location of David

In vv. 13 and 14 the scene is set at an Israelite battle camp outside of Bethlehem.[6] The Israelites are facing the Philistines, thus the narrative is from early in David's career.[7] David is on the battlefield with his soldiers.

Desire of David

David has the only speaking part in the narrative (vv. 15 and 17). In v. 15 he shares a deep desire for water from a certain well in Bethlehem. The use of the verb *vayyit'avveh*, "And (David) wistfully (said)" (Hitpa'el impf 3ms from *ava*) suggests that David was homesick for Bethlehem and had a deep desire for the water in the well (cistern).

Action of David

In the present account, David does nothing to fulfill his desire for water. This is done by his soldiers without David's prior knowledge or command. Perhaps realizing that it was a wistful desire, he would not risk the life of his soldiers to fulfill it.

Response of the Soldiers

Three soldiers take it upon themselves to fulfill David's wish. They break through the Philistine lines to obtain the water at the risk of their own lives. These three soldiers remain unnamed throughout the story. All the reader is told is that they are part of the "Thirty" (v. 13; cf. vv. 24-39), a contingent of elite soldiers who serve David. The narrator does not share anything about the inner life of the soldiers, just their outward actions. Through the outward actions, the reader learns that they are intensely loyal to David and brave. The soldiers are type characters, exhibiting a certain quality that is associated with loyal soldiers.

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[6] David is at the cave of Adullam which is approximately 5 ½ miles southwest of Bethlehem, 16 miles southwest of Jerusalem. David had hidden in this region earlier (1 Sm. 22:1-2). It may be seen as his stronghold/headquarters.

[7] P. Kyle McCarter, *II Samuel*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1984) 495.

Response of David

In vv. 16b-17 David responds to the gift from the three soldiers. The reader is told that David refuses to drink the water brought to him and pours it out as an offering to the LORD (v. 16).[8] The refusal was not due to ingratitude, but out of gratitude and a deep sense of appreciation for the loyalty of these three men. From an idle wish David is shown the loyalty of his men and he knows he must reciprocate.

David and God

David responds in v. 17: "Far be it for me, O LORD, to do this. Should I drink the blood of the men who went at great cost to their lives?" For David, God is the only one who was worthy of such a gift.

Conclusion

Second Samuel 23:13-17 is a short story that tells of the close relationship of David with his soldiers in the early years of his career.[9] The David portrayed in the story is one who shows both love and concern for his soldiers. Walter Brueggemann believes that the story is intended to enhance the image of David by contrasting him with the David of the Succession Narrative (2 Sam. 9-20, 1 Kgs. 1-2). The narrator intends a David with believable innocence, an egalitarian sensitivity, and an emphasis on solidarity over personal gain.[10]

However, the mutual concern between a king and his soldiers is contrasted by the inclusion of Uriah the Hittite among the most faithful of David's soldiers (v. 39). Second Samuel 23:18-39 contains a listing of David's military leaders and his "Thirty Men."[11] The final name on the list is Uriah, the Hittite (v. 39). While 1 Chronicles 11:26-47 places Uriah's name in the middle of its list,[12] the writer's placing of his name last in 1 Samuel 23:39 draws attention to the role of Uriah in David's kingship. Brueggemann sees Uriah as playing an important role in both 2 Samuel 11 and 21-24 and believes that Uriah is a reminder of the sin of David and an "assertion against the royal propaganda." Even within the stories of David's early success, the reader is reminded of his dark side.[13]

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[8] Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990). Brueggemann says that David has a "sacramental imagination." The water which was given to him at great danger had "the bonding power of a sacrament" (p. 349).

[9] Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 495: "The point of the story is that the too loyal soldiers act recklessly in response to their leader's idle, nostalgic remark."

[10] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 348-349. Cf. Brueggemann, *Power, Providence and Personality* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990). "This brief narrative is a portrayal of the greatness of David that the narrator commends" (p. 102).

[11] There are thirty soldiers found in the list (vv. 18-39a), not thirty-seven. Some conjecture that the three of the previous story are included along with Joab, David's general. Also, Abishai and Benaiah may not be counted among the thirty. This makes for a total of 35.

[12] It should also be noted that the Chronicler includes a longer list of names and does not include the David – Bathsheba – Uriah story found in 1 Samuel 11.

[13] Walter Brueggemann, "An Appendix of Deconstruction?" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 50 (1988), 391.

The Characterization of David in 2 Samuel 11

Second Samuel 11:1-27 is a story of sex, deception, and murder. The passage is also marked by narrative ambiguity. The reader's attention is directed to what is not communicated.[14] The reader is not told: Why David stayed home; Why Bathsheba was bathing outside (at first); Why David called Uriah home; What Uriah knew; Why David had Uriah killed. The story does not directly judge David as guilty until v. 27b. Instead, the reader is brought to that conclusion through the text's ambiguity.

> In other words, it is not because the text ultimately says that David's actions were
> immoral that the readers believe in David's guilt. Rather, it is because the reader
> has arrived at the same conclusion in dealing with the ambiguity of the passage.[15]

Location of David

The narrator uses the introduction in v. 1 both to introduce the story and to provide a transition from the previous chapter. While 11:1-27 is a separate literary unit, the narrator ties it in with 2 Samuel 10 by mentioning the time of war.[16] Spring is the time when of year when the "kings go out to battle." David doesn't go to battle, however, instead he sends Joab out to fight his battle. Thus, the narrator establishes irony in the introduction by contrasting David with other kings and his own servants.[17] While other kings go to war, David does not. While Joab and the servants leave home, David remains at home.[18]

Desire of David

David's desire is not stated directly as in 2 Samuel 23:15. Instead, it is implied by the writer in the description of David. Verse 2 states that David was walking on his rooftop after resting. It was from this vantage point that David could see a beautiful woman bathing. After inquiring, he finds that the woman is Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite. While David sends for the woman, nothing is said about his inner motivation for the summons.[19]

Action of David

Unlike the David portrayed in 2 Samuel 23, David plays an active role in fulfilling his desire and then covering it up in 2 Samuel 11. His actions move quickly and concisely.[20] In

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[14] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985),191.

[15] Gale A. Yee, "'Fraught with Background': Literary Ambiguity in II Samuel 11." *Interpretation*, 42 (1988), 253. See also Sternberg, 190.

[16] Cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 76. Alter states that 2 Sam. 10 provides the context for the "king's moral biography," including its "political and moral ramifications."

[17] Sternberg, 191-194. The king is placed in ironic contrast with the others by the narrator's use of ambiguity, by not telling the reader why the king is not with the others.

[18] Herschel M. Levine, "Irony and Morality in Bathsheba's Tragedy." *Central Conference of American Rabbis Journal*, 32 (1975),70. Cf. Yee, 242-243. Yee includes three other reasons for David not going besides irony. First the death of David could be demoralizing to the army (cf. 2 Sam. 21:15-17). Second, siege work was too tedious to involve the king. Finally, David could have been too old.

[19] Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 289. "The most egregious behavior possible on the part of the king is attributed to David without a word of mitigation." See also Hirsch H. Cohen, "David and Bathsheba," *The Journal of Bible and* Religion, 33 (1965), 142-148. Cohen does a psychological profile of David in 2 Sam. 11-12. He believes that David may have been suffering from "retirement neurosis: in 2 Sam. 11. Having reached the prime of his career, he might have needed something to reassure his masculinity.

[20] Brueggemann, *1 and 2 Samuel*, 273.

each juncture of the story the emphasis is on David's actions. The verb *šālaḥ*[21] ("he sent") is used to describe David's actions throughout the story:

> **v. 3** – David *sends* and inquires about the woman; **v. 4** – David *sends* for the woman
>> The emphasis of this scene is on David's initiative in the relationship.[22] David sends and inquires about the woman (v. 3), then sends for her, takes her and lies with her (v. 4). Bathsheba is a passive character, an agent, in the story.[23] The reader is not told if she came willingly or was forced.[24] As an agent in the story, Bathsheba simply serves as the one with whom David has sexual relations.

> **v. 6** – David *sends* to Joab "*Send* me Uriah the Hittite"
>> This is after the woman *sends* a note that she is pregnant. Suggestions vary as to why David sent for Uriah centering on David's hope that Uriah would have sex with Bathsheba: Either to cloud paternity or to have Uriah killed for breaking chastity during a time of battle.[25]

> **v. 12** – David promises to *send* Uriah back to the battle at Ramah
>> After David's unsuccessful attempts to get Uriah to go home and be with his wife he agrees to send him back to battle.

> **v. 14** – David *sends* a letter to Joab via Uriah
>> The letter contains instructions for Uriah's death in a textbook military blunder (cf. the story of Abimelech, Jdg. 9:50-57). David, who in 2 Samuel 23:13-17 did not consider sending his soldiers on a reckless mission to get water from a well, now does so willingly and sacrifices the life of Uriah and other soldiers.

Response of the Soldiers
> The response of the soldiers is loyalty and is seen on two levels: Uriah and Joab.

> **Uriah.** Even though David commands Uriah to "go down" to his house, the narrator tells us three times that he does not go (vv. 9, 10 [2x]). This leads to David's conversation with

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[21] The letter *het* is transliterated in this paper as *ḥ* .

[22] The story is not concern with Bathsheba's guilt or innocence but with David's guilt. Cf. McKane, W. *I and II Samuel: The Way to the Throne*. Torch Bible Commentary (London: SCM, 1983), 232 and McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 288.

[23] She "comes to him" in v. 4, but there is a variant reading in the LXX which suggests that it was all David's action (*kai eisēlthen pros autēn*, "and he went to her"). Cf. Berlin. "She is not even a minor character, but simply a part of the plot"(27). See also R. N. Whybray, *The Succession Narrative* (Naperville, Illinois: Alec R. Allenson, Inc.1968). Whybray notes that Bathsheba is used throughout the Succession Narratives: by David (2 Sam. 11); by Nathan (1 Kgs. 1) and by Adonijah (1 Kgs. 2) (40).

[24] Joyce Hollyday, "Voices Out of Silence," *Sojourners*, 15 (1986). Hollyday does not see 2 Sam. 11-12 as David's "Great Sin" but instead as Bathsheba's "Great Loss" (21). Outside of Bathsheba's mourning for her husband (v. 26) and her son (12:24), nothing is known of her inner emotions. When she is referred to, it is as "woman" or "wife" (*'ishshah*, vv. 2, 3, 5, 11, 26, 27) and as related to a male (daughter of Eliam, v. 3; wife of Uriah, vv. 3, 26; his [David's] wife, v. 27).[24] Only once is she called Bathsheba (v. 3). "She has no existence of her own but is identified by the men to whom she belongs." Even in Matt. 1:6 she is referred as "the wife of Uriah." Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 273 and 278.

[25] Yee, 243. See also Sternberg who discusses the options of Uriah knowing or not knowing (201-209). If Uriah knew of the affair, his response in v. 11 should be viewed as being sarcastic. Due to the narrative ambiguity of the text, it is up to the reader to decide if Uriah knew or not.

him in vv. 10 and 11. David's first plan falls apart when Uriah refuses to go home, so he questions Uriah's actions (v. 10). While David desired for him to go home, Uriah slept at the palace instead. It is possible that Uriah had already been made aware of David's affair through court gossip.[26] It is more likely that he stayed at the palace out of loyalty. When approached by David, Uriah responds that it is unfair for him to relax at home when his comrades are at the front:

> 11Then Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel dwell in booths; and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping on the open ground; shall I then enter into my house, to eat, to sleep, and to lie with my wife? As you live and as your soul lives, I will not do it!"[27]

Uriah is a type character, portraying the ideal soldier who is loyal and is willing to give up his home and family to fight for the king. It is this loyalty that eventually leads to his death. Uriah is contrasted with David who is not loyal to his soldiers and is consorting with one of their wives while they are out fighting.[28]

Joab. Verses 16-17 detail the execution of David's plot by Joab. Joab was mentioned in vv. 1 and 6 as the leader of David's armies. Like Uriah, Joab was a loyal soldier. Unlike Uriah, Joab did not disobey orders from the king. He follows the king's instructions without question.[29] His obedience costs both the life of Uriah and the lives of other soldiers.[30]

Joab takes care in wording his report to David. More is said about this preparation than about the act itself.[31] Joab is seeking to avoid blame for the death of all the soldiers and is anticipating David's response to the news (vv. 20-21). He is well aware of the danger of fighting so near to a city wall (v. 21, cf. Judg. 9:50-54).[32] The messenger is told that if David gets angry to say "even your servant, Uriah the Hittite, is dead." Why is the servant told this? Would such news appease the angry king? Or would Joab use such information as leverage?

David's Response

The messenger tells David the news of the battle and concludes his message with the report of Uriah's death. The report is more in depth than Joab's instructions but does not include the rebuttal. David does not respond to the news with anger as anticipated.[33] All he wanted to hear was that Uriah was dead. He responds to the news with an unexpected reply: Tell Joab, "Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes, for the sword devours one and another; strengthen your attack on the city, and destroy it." So encourage him (v. 25). The process leading up to

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[26] H. W. Hertzberg, *I and II Samuel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), 310.

[27] In v. 11 the narrator gives a subtle reminder of the irony of v. 1. David remains (*yoshev*) in Jerusalem (v. 1) but the ark and his militia dwell (*yosh^evim*) in matted tents and the mercenaries sleep in the open.

[28] Cf. George P. Ridout, "Prose Composition Techniques in the Succession Narrative (2 Sam, 7, 9-20; 1 Kings 1-2" (Ph.D. dissertation, The Graduate Theological Union, 1971), p. 71. Ridout believes that the story is essentially a study in David's character. Uriah is a foil to David. Uriah is stable while David is unstable. Uriah is chaste while David commits adultery.

[29] Cf. 2 Sam. 3:27-30 for Joab's capability to commit murder.

[30] Sternberg, 214. Sternberg view Joab as a pragmatist, seeing the loss of other casualties as a natural consequence of war.

[31] Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 276-277.

[32] Cf. Sternberg, 220-221. Sternberg equates David with Abimelech (Judg. 9:50-54 since both fall because of a woman.

[33] Following the MT and not the LXX.

Uriah's death had made David both morally numb and cynical.[34] He shows no regret for his actions.

David and God

        Verse 27b serves as both the conclusion to 2 Samuel 11 and the transition to 2 Samuel 12: "However, the thing which David did was evil in the eyes of the LORD." The statement is made from the narrator's point of view to emphasize God's displeasure over the actions of David.[35]   It is the only mention of God in the pericope. The entire story has been marked by narrative ambiguity until now for this is the most unambiguous statement in the story.[36] This is the turning point of the story. The narrator has dealt with the human response to sin in 11:1-27a. In 12:1-16 the narrator shows God's response to the sin.[37]

        Verse 27b is a play on David's statement in v. 25: "Tell Joab, 'Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes,...'" Several translations fail to demonstrate the parallel relationship between vv. 25a and 27b. The "thing" that was not to be "evil" in the eyes of the Joab was "evil" in the eyes of the LORD (cf. 2 Sam. 12:9).[38]

Summary

        Second Samuel 11:1-27 is a story of the downfall of David after he sins.[39] Thus, David is the primary character in the narrative. Bathsheba is an agent used in conveying the initial sin. Little is known about her outside of her beauty, lineage, and pregnancy. Uriah and Joab are both type characters of loyal soldiers. Uriah displays a loyalty to the cause and to his fellow comrades. Joab exhibits unquestioning loyalty to David by carrying out the murder of Uriah.

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Theological Reflection

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        The two stories found in 2 Samuel 23:13-17 and 11:1-27 provide a contrast in the study of the character of David.

An Earlier Action of a Character is Contrasted with a Later Action

        The first story shows David at his best while the second story shows David at his worst. Second Samuel 23:13-17 recalls David early in his career. He was a leader who served with his soldiers. He shares personal desires with them, such as the one to have a drink of water from the well by the gate in Bethlehem. He is a leader for whom his men were willing to lay down their lives in order to fulfill his desire, a drink of water from Bethlehem. He does not drink the water that they had brought to him because of the risk that his men had taken to get it. Instead, he uses it as an offering to God.

        In 2 Samuel 11:1-27, David no longer goes with his soldiers to fight, but stays at home in Jerusalem. While at home he allowed his personal desires to get the best of him and

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        [34]Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, 278.

        [35] Berlin, 47. Cf. Sternberg, 219. "…the narrator is still careful to quote it with due (and distancing) acknowledgment."

        [36] Yee, 247.

        [37] Cf. Ridout, 66.

        [38] See also the LXX.

        [39] Levine, 74.

sinned by having sexual intercourse with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, one of his soldiers. David set into motion a series of events that led to the death of Uriah as well as other soldiers. The point of the story is David's abuse of power in order to cover-up his sin. In 2 Samuel 23:13-17, David does not ask his soldiers to risk their lives to get him a drink of water from Bethlehem. However, in 2 Samuel 11 he sends some of his best soldiers to be killed in a "textbook" military blunder (vv. 20-21, cf. Judg. 9:46-57). The cynicism of David emerges in v. 25 when he shows no concern about the death of these soldiers.

A significant difference between the two Davids portrayed in these stories lies in their recognition of God. In 2 Samuel 23:13-17 David recognizes that both the gift of water as well as the loyalty of his soldiers belong to God (vv. 16 and 17). In 2 Samuel 11:1-26, David does not acknowledge God at all. Instead, he took for himself another's wife as well as another's life. Even when confronted with the outcome of his act (v. 5), he does not confess it. He seems more concerned about protecting his honor than following God's law.[40] He does not consider Uriah's death as being "evil" (v. 25), but God sees it as "evil" (v. 27). Second Samuel 11 does not end with David praising God as in 2 Samuel 23:17, but with God's displeasure with David.

One Character is Contrasted with Another

Not only are the actions of David contrasted in the two stories, but David is also contrasted with Uriah, the true faithful soldier, faithful even to death. Such a contrast cannot be avoided with the positioning of Uriah in both stories. David is loyal to his soldiers in 2 Samuel 23 of which Uriah is a part. However, David's disloyalty is seen in 2 Samuel 11 especially as it is contrasted with the loyal soldier Uriah who will not even sleep with his wife while fellow soldiers are in the field of battle; David sleeps with his soldier's wife while his fellow soldiers are in the field of battle.

The Character is Contrasted with the Expected Norm

The narrative in 2 Samuel 23:13-17 is considered a normative story of David. Richard G. Bowman describes such stories as "as a compelling narrative that imparts acceptable community virtues and values."[41] Such stories endear David to the people, validating his kingship.[42]

2 Samuel 11 provides a counter-narrative for the story found in 2 Samuel 23:13-17, presenting a contrast to the view of David found in the normative story. From the start the narrator emphasizes that something is wrong with David since he has not gone to war. The narrator then follows David through sin, cover-up, and murder. By the end of the story the reader finds a David who is not concerned about the death of one loyal soldier but the death of several loyal soldiers. This is heightened by the fact that the death was ordered by him.

The stark contrast that we find in the characterization of David in the two narratives discussed provides a challenge for the believing community. On the one hand, David is a primary actor in the Old Testament and serves as a model for the coming Messiah. However, on

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[40] A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco: Word Book, Pub., 1989), 156.

[41] Richard G. Bowman, "The Complexity of Character and the Ethics of Complexity: The Case of King David in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community and Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmanns, 2002), 73.

[42] Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *David's Truth: In Israel's Imagination and Memory*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1985), 67-86. Even though this passage is not mentioned in his chapter on "The Sure Truth of the State" it shows how royal propaganda sought to validate David's kingship and authorize his political agenda.

the other hand, David, especially as found in the Deuteronomistic History, is one who is not perfect and has character flaws.

The counter-narratives in the biblical stories should not be avoided by accepted as part of the believing community's story. [43] Such stories let us see ourselves for who we are: seeking to be faithful amidst the struggles of life. "Perhaps better than normative stories, counter-stories 'explain us to ourselves.'"[44]

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[43] Bowman, 74-75. Bowman discusses the role of the counter-narrative in the "confessing community".
[44] Ibid., 75.

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Slow Preaching: Reflections on a Homiletical Spirituality

Gail A. Ricciuti

It is undoubtedly said in every generation that preaching in America has its work cut out for it; and ours is no exception. We live in a culture that is constantly in motion, frenetically *en route* via the high-speed configuration of daily life. Thanks to the availability of every kind of technology and a veritable tsunami of information, with many of us constantly wired to Internet, fax, and cell phone, even the subtlest aspects of our lives have gradually accelerated far beyond their original pace. We have become disciples of instant gratification, apprentices of "The One-Minute Manager," sprinters in a roadrunner culture whose obsession with mindless speed has been characterized as a kind of idolatry. A recent article in Maclean's magazine[1] noted that over the past two centuries the tempo at which classical music is played has gradually increased, at certain cost to the original intentions of the great composers. While Franz Liszt documented in 1876 that it took him "almost an hour" to play Beethoven's *Hammerklavier Sonata, op. 106*, today's pianists perform it in 35 to 40 minutes. A century after Liszt– in 1976– the optimum standard for the timing of a recorded dance track was 120 beats a minute; but by the 1990s, drum and bass music was averaging 170 beats per minute (although one popular 1992 single recorded by the rock musician Moby[2] clocked in at 1,000 beats a minute).

The Slow Movement

In the face of these postmodern trends, however, there is another worldwide movement afoot, its goal the gentle cure of our addiction to speed. The movement is actually legion, and has its roots in many countries: Slow Food and Citta Slow ("Slow Cities") originating in Italy; Slow Life (Japan, Holland, Denmark); Slow Sex (Italy, again!); Slow Schooling (USA); with other "slow" movements focused on medicine, leisure, even speed-awareness programs for over-caffeinated drivers. While today's musical performance has gone up-tempo, the Slow movement in general seeks a quality of life lived at what musicians call *tempo giusto*, the "right speed," a kind of balance missing in much of 21st century urban-suburban life. Carl Honoré**,** the foremost spokesperson for the return to *tempo giusto*, describes the concept of Slow this way:

> ...Fast and Slow do more than just describe a rate of change. They are shorthand for ways of being, or philosophies of life. Fast is busy, controlling, aggressive, hurried and analytical, stressed, superficial, impatient, active, quantity-over-quality. Slow is the opposite: calm, careful, receptive, still, intuitive, unhurried, patient, reflective, quality-over-quantity. It is about making real and meaningful connections—with people, culture, work, food, everything. The paradox is that Slow does not always mean slow. As we shall see, performing a task in a Slow manner often yields faster results. It is also possible to do things quickly while maintaining a Slow frame of mind.[3]

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[1]Brian Bethune, "Don't Worry, Be Happy," *Maclean's*, August 1 2005, 48-52.

[2] "Moby" is (ironically, in light of my subject!) the great-great-grandnephew of Herman Melville. See Eugene Peterson's reflection on the "slow" lesson of *Moby Dick* later in this paper.

[3]Carl Honoré, *In Praise of Slowness. How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 14f.

The principles of "Slow" in the secular realm suggest intriguing applications for the pulpit, by way of an approach I would christen as "Slow preaching." To apply "slow" in this sense to our own discipline would not refer to the speed of manuscript preparation ("I spend 35 hours a week on my sermons alone, and proud of it!") or tempo of delivery ("Pastor Dora speaks so slowly she puts me right to sleep") or some lack of mental acuity ("That new reverend's not the sharpest tack in the barrel!"), but to a spirituality that serves the truest purpose of preaching. After all, preachers are no less vulnerable to the seductions of speed than the rest of the populace. If, as I believe, it is the calling of preachers to lead hearers into a transforming awareness of where and when their life in the world is metaphor for the Gospel, then a Slow spirituality tailored to *noticing* the nuances of life can best generate effective proclamation. Just as the Slow movement suggests a new consciousness (or return to an older one), offering against the backdrop of contemporary culture a truly *counter-cultural* way of being in the world, so does Slow preaching.

It was Marjorie Proctor-Smith who tendered perhaps the most elegant general definition of a spiritual life: "Spirituality, before it is particular disciplines or prayers, is a way of being in the world: a way of living, of knowing, of seeing and hearing..."[4] *A way of being in the world*: this is a state of soul, if you will, that not only yields the rich loam in which powerful preaching can germinate but also seeds Christian witness. (And because the realm of spirituality as Proctor-Smith understands it involves our relationships with others, God, the created world, and ourselves, that spirituality is also political-- an apt foundation for the prophetic nature of our task.)

The Affinity of "Slow" Preaching and the Arts

In many ways, the sort of awareness to which I refer is also the purview and offering of the arts within culture. My current research project explores how it is that preaching should take its place among the arts, parallel to disciplines like painting and sculpture, and how preachers are foremost, by nature and calling, artists. While countless definitions exist for what constitutes "art," as well as ongoing deliberation on the subject among scholars in aesthetics, the limits of a paper like this preclude definition-by-definition examination. I find it helpful to circumvent the debate about what art is "ontologically" and consider instead what art <u>does:</u> what it accomplishes in its viewers, hearers, participants, and recipients.

Calvin Seerveld, in his provocative book *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves*, posits the idea of *allusivity* or *allusiveness* at the forefront of his thinking about the nature of art: for him it is, indeed, art's qualifying function. No painting or sculpture, he observes, is merely a xeroxed copy of what meets the eye. "Instead, the artist apprehends things visible and invisible, very complicated meanings, affairs we all know experientially like sin and love and meekness but could never duplicate in a mirror . . ."[5] By alluding to underlying meanings and nuances of life

[4]Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite. Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 164.

[5]Calvin Seerveld, *Bearing Fresh Olive Leaves. Alternate Steps in Understanding Art* (Toronto: Tuppence Press, 2000), 79.

beyond its subject matter, a work of art in Seerveld's sense expresses metaphor. It opens the door to a world of Spirit that co-exists simultaneously with the "mundane" surface of things.

From a slightly different perspective, Richard Viladesau (Catholic theologian and author of *Theology and the Arts*), makes the case that the duty of preaching as art is to bring forth beauty: to make the ideas and visions it advocates beautiful to the hearer, and in that way desirable. If I can envision, or if I am led to envision, a world different from the one I am standing in (the realm of God, whose norms and practices are different from those we think are the only ones available to us) and it is beautiful, then I long for it; I am drawn to it; and I am already converted. It becomes the object of my desire.

Susanne Langer, following yet another trajectory, maintained that the essential accomplishment of the arts is "the education of feeling." Indeed, the case might be made that such emotional development constitutes the fundamental goal of pastoral theology and practice, if members of the community of faith are to mature in receptiveness toward the movement of God in their lives.

Allusiveness, enhancement of vision, education of feeling: three functions of the arts that are also characteristic of preaching and thereby might be said to qualify the craft as itself an art. As an art form, Slow preaching produces in its hearers something quite different from what is usually expected of "speed preaching." Subconsciously, our culture has come to view preachers as instructors; and at its best, our preaching certainly teaches. But using it exclusively as a vehicle for instruction is to truncate the pulpit beyond recognition. "Don't preach at me!" snaps a teenager to her parents, reflecting yet another common expectation–that preaching will rely heavily on admonishment. The epithet "preachy" carries more baggage than even a duffle full of the didactic: it is no wonder that at least one word processing program offers *sermonize*, *moralize*, and *pontificate* as synonyms for the "p" word! The word "sermon," on the other hand, actually proceeds from Middle English and medieval Latin terms meaning conversation– *serere*, to "link together" (once again, a function of art).

It is my contention that the homiletic community must "sermonize" in this way: linking together both an artistic approach to our creative process and a spirituality of artistry similar to that of other artists.

A Biblical Paradigm for the "Slow" Artistic Process

Behind the faults and failings of speed-preaching, the culprit is not so much fast-food delivery (the time actually spent in the pulpit) as fast-food *preparation*. Although I have used the shorthand designation "Slow preaching" to characterize my subject, the actual preaching of the sermon is the tip of an iceberg compared to its essential backdrop, slow preparation. In the lives of most seminarians, as well as in my own experience in the pulpit, it is evident that what undermines preaching isn't first of all lack of knowledge but lack of the sort of leisure or repose that both welcomes and allows for empty space. A friend of mine who is preparing for the Episcopal priesthood recently remarked to me that she knows very few priests who are excited about preaching – and yet it is the "major thing" congregants look for in a priest. Could it be that

the lack of ardor for the pulpit by many overextended clergy stems from an uneasy awareness that their lives do not allow sufficient space to do it justice?

Eugene Peterson points to a turbulent scene in Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* in which a whaleboat pursues the great, white whale. On a frothing ocean, the sailors' muscles are taut with fierce labor, every fiber of strength and attention concentrated on their task.

> In this boat, however, there is one man who does nothing. He doesn't hold an oar; he doesn't perspire; he doesn't shout. He is languid in the crash and the cursing. This man is the harpooner, quiet and poised, waiting. And then this sentence: "To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet out of idleness, and not out of toil."[6]

Realizing that for most preachers and pastors, suggesting that our pre-pulpit posture should be that of "poised harpooner" is counter-intuitive, perhaps an easier way to approach sermon preparation from a framework of "Slow" is by thinking biblically.

It has struck me that the pre-eminent biblical paradigm for this awareness on at least two levels (creative process and spirituality) is found "in the beginning," with the book of Genesis and its opening creation account. Much has been said by students of the Bible about the fact that God's creation of the earth and its inhabitants is portrayed as happening in "only" six days, with a seventh set aside for rest. Little noted, however, is the fact that this God above all other gods, omniscient and omnipotent, the One who (our creeds presume) could have accomplished the entirety of creation in a *moment,* chooses to stretch out the creative process: to give it time, give it attention, allow it to unfold organically rather than exert the prerogative of supernatural speed. It is a relatively slow process in the everyday definition of the term: God as creator takes time as an artist does, to take stock at each juncture and admire the unfolding handiwork.

It is my hunch that the deeper implication of this divine creative process pictured in Genesis 1 is something other than most of us carried away from years of childhood Sunday School. There the unspoken assumption (certainly in my own experience) was that the Bible begins with God having in mind the completed project– a kind of blueprint, a prescient vision of how things would be at the end– and simply taking six days to accomplish it. By that judgment, the pictures and stories in this children's-bible version of Genesis 1 portray not a work of *creation* but a task of *construction*!

And yet one day, as I began to think of the biblical account through the lens of divine creativity, I was struck by an entirely different storyline. God[7] begins with the raw material (or non-material) of chaos and void, and begins to play, to experiment, to invent. A cycle of dark and light is hit upon . . . and then water as separate stuff from dry ground. And I began to imagine the Divine musing "Well, this is good!" ("good" not only as a delighted exclamation, but also meaning "interesting"). God studied the primitive *darklightwetdry* and experienced

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[6] Eugene Peterson, The Contemplative Pastor. Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 24f.

[7] "...and someone else," as James Kugel muses, reflecting upon Genesis 1:26a in The Bible As It Was (Belknap Press, 1999).

inspiration (companioned by the muse of the "someone else"?): "Hmmm: something could grow in this! What could I make that would feed on dark-and-wet, light-and-dry...?" And then– grass. Leaves. Plants. "What could swoop into and out of these branches?" wondered Yahweh the artist. "All this green is full of rich soil and air and wetness; could it provide food?" Hence– cattle. Cherry-headed conures. Luna moths. Mice. And all that feeds on *them...* and on, and on.

Envisioned this way, the Genesis story came alive for me– an intriguing account of God creating *without* a predetermined goal, a holy Force romping in fields and waters and mountain valleys, daily being dazzled by Her own creations.[8] The story takes on an organic tenor– much like the whole of the living Word itself.

The paradigm, if adopted by the aspiring Slow preacher, would require him to be content not yet knowing the "end" of a sermonic interpretation when beginning to write the sermon. (Characters in "Shakespeare in Love," the imaginative pseudo-biographical movie about the Bard's early career, regularly make it through some tight spots by exclaiming "It's a mystery!" when questioned about how the drama will play out.) It is a process most akin to the approach of many visual artists. Meinrad Craighead– artist, author, and former monastic (at Stanbrook Benedictine Abbey in Wales)--now lives in Albuquerque and paints dreamlike feminine images of God. About her creative process, she says "When I go into the studio in the morning, I don't know what is going to happen with a painting. To be inside that mystery, the creative mystery, is to be inside the unspeakable mystery of the Universe."[9] When she has finished a painting, Craighead routinely turns it to the wall and leaves it there, image hidden, for seven days. When a week has passed, she reverses the painting outward with eyes closed, walks away several paces, and then suddenly pivots around to look. She reports it is in this moment that she knows whether the image is complete, or whether yet another figure demands to be incorporated.[10]

A Spirituality for Artistry

Given these intersections among Slow movements around the globe, biblical creative paradigm, and an understanding of preaching as artistic process, what might "Slow preaching" look like? Let me suggest that it doesn't look like a method so much as a threefold spiritual practice.

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[8] Steve Turner writes that "...playfulness is an important component of art and perfectly in keeping with a Christian understanding of creativity. Look at the animal kingdom. Can't we sense a spirit of playfulness in the designs? Watching fish from the windows of an underwater observatory in the Red Sea recently I was struck first by the incredible array of colors and then by what I think can only be described as God's humor. The flattened out shapes, the bulging lips, the hammer heads– it was like looking at the sketch pad of someone who had come up with a basic design and was having fun creating as many variations as possible." *imagine. a vision for christians in the arts* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 53-54.
[9] Meinrad Craighead, "Sacred Art: the Mother's Song," *Kindred Spirit* magazine, issue 54. 26/08/05 <http://www.kindredspirit.co.uk/ISSUES/54.asp>.
[10] Meinrad Craighead, from the author's notes on unpublished remarks made at "Imaging God as Our Mother," a conference held at Kirkridge Retreat Center, Bangor, Pa., in the early 1980s.

Beginner's mind. What if we approached even the most familiar text "as if for the first time...,"[11] sitting at its feet, inquiring only what it *does* mean? What if we asked what we have never noticed here before; or how it wants to turn our assumptions upside down, up-end us, append itself to our hearts? What if we set out to be open to revelations that seem contradictory to the way we understood the self-same words in the past? The practice would in many ways approximate what Buddhist practitioners call "beginner's mind"-- unfiltered by preconceptions, the opposite of a closed mind that believes it already has all the answers. For a preacher to have a beginner's mind doesn't mean that exegetical knowledge is discarded or superceded in encounter with the text, but that we who hope to preach the Word will come to the biblical word with an attitude of humility, like a student before a respected teacher.

Playfulness. In his classic *The Courage to Creat*e, Rollo May wrote about the value and significance of the limitations essential to any work of art. If the observation rings true that "absolutely everything in nature arises from the power of free play sloshing against the power of limits,"[12] then I would suggest that in its most artful form, a sermon's power arises from *free play* unleashed within the "limits"of the text. To open a window on an unlimited God via the limits of human speech, sloshing against the limits of scripture, formed within the self-imposed limit of a particular theology: that is the creative and <u>artistic</u> task of the preacher. To draw the thematic thread of Slow through the fabric of this idea, remember that play cannot be pushed or speeded up, or it is undone as play. Foundational to a Slow homiletic spirituality, then, is playfulness.

Deep observation. To echo a precept behind the inductive preaching pioneered by Fred Craddock and implied in Eugene Lowry's narrative approach,[13] it is still true that Slow preaching should show rather than tell. For folks to "stop and smell the roses" they must first be *shown* the roses; and this is not only the work of the painter, photographer, sculptor– but also of the artist/preacher. Certainly, it will take me longer to show you the roses than to tell you that I saw some or to outline their botanical classification. Simply *telling* is the work of expedience or haste; but Slow preaching, the work of art, is a less driven, more thoughtful approach, the equivalent of "non-anxious presence" in the field of pastoral care. Both require a spirituality of deep observation.

"The millions are awake enough for physical labor" wrote Thoreau in *Walden*[14];
> "but only one in a million is awake enough for effective intellectual exertion, only one in a hundred millions to a poetic or divine life. To be awake is to be alive. I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?"

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[11] A line from an old novel by Adella Rogers St. Johns, *Tell No Man*– in which the protagonist, reclaiming himself from the ravages of alcoholism, decides to read from the Bible every day "as if for the first time." The practice transforms his life.

[12] Stephen Nachmanovitch, *Free Play. Improvisation in Life and Art* (New York: Tarcher/Putnam, Inc., 1990), 33.

[13] Not to exclude all who have joined or followed them, often creating further transformational understandings of preaching: among that diverse company Tom Troeger, Barbara Brown Taylor, Samuel "Billy" Kyles, Anna Carter Florence, and countless others.

[14] Henry David Thoreau, *Walden.* (1854), chapter 2. <http://eserver.org/thoreau/walden02.html>

It requires deep observation, the poised stillness of one who is fully awake, to identify God's face hidden within that physical labor, intellectual exertion, or even the divinely poetic moments of life. At least sometimes, the Slow preacher may offer her congregation simply "the hint half guessed, the gift half understood"[15] that will inevitably require the hearers' intensified involvement in the creative movement as well. It may be that Slow preaching as a collaboration by both homiletician and congregant is one compelling way of coming to know God– the ultimate goal of our proclamation.

Where does Slow preaching as an artistic act begin? Perhaps it begins first with a dawning realization in the preacher's mind that she <u>is</u> an artist. Simple as that sounds, it is in no way self-evident to most preachers, and certainly not to seminary students; and, indeed, it takes years of ministry to occur to some of us. It is sometimes more apparent to wise parishioners, who may not be familiar with the concept of "Slow" but in hearing and seeing, understand that in some profound way they have witnessed an artist at work. Some of us will resist such a self-understanding, perhaps fearing it to be alien to the realm of Christian proclamation or even the "work of the devil." But there are those whom I would number among the finest preachers of our day who are able to trust their artistic impulse as the intention of a profusely creative God, and who embrace their calling to pulpit artistry. They will learn to be Slow preachers, cultivating the spiritual *tempo giusto* demanded by the lively, living Word.

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[15] T.S. Eliot, "Quartet No. 4: The Dry Salvages V" *Four Quartets*. (Harvest Books, 1968).

**Getting in on the Act: An Evangelical Dialogue
with the Performance School in Homiletics**

Presented to The Academy of Homiletics
By Lisa Lamb, Ph.D. student, Fuller Seminary
Mentor, Dr. Clayton Schmit

In June of this year, a church in Cardiff, Wales gained the attention of the press when it installed for its members' convenience a Wi-Fi wireless network. The rector, Rev. Keith Kimber, commented, "I have no problem with people quietly sending an e-mail or surfing the Internet in church, as long as they respect the church."[1] Evidently Rev. Kimber has a rather low expectation that a transformative event might occur in his sanctuary. In contrast, upon entering contemporary evangelical churches many North Americans find flashing on the projection screen, along with a waterfall scene to lift their hearts heavenward, the polite reminder to silence cell phones. Whether they are installing or decrying distracting technology, preachers are engaged in a hotly contested battle for the attention of their listeners. A promising new line of thinking within homiletics is emerging, whose advocates are particularly keen to recover a church-going culture where one would not dare to surf the Internet during church, for fear of missing something crucial. At the heart of the performance school is a rich, fertile metaphor: preaching as theatre. A new metaphor functions much like a new frame or lighting scheme does for a familiar painting; the change brings neglected features to light. Like any metaphor, theatre highlights some truths about preaching, and obscures or de-emphasizes others. This paper will examine the strengths and weaknesses of the performance school, with an eye to how its insights could extend into evangelical, low church[2] traditions. In considering the effectiveness of understanding preaching as theatre, I will argue that all preachers must answer four cries of their listeners: "Help me to see, help me to believe, help me to overcome, and help me to respond." Locating preaching within the realm of theatre holds great promise for more adequately responding to each of these needs, though it is weakest in clearly delineating response, or action.

Proponents of preaching as performance make certain assumptions about the nature, power and purpose of speech itself in the preaching event. This line of thinking draws upon speech act theory, and also on the analogy of the performatory power of speech in the surrounding liturgy. Thus, it finds resonance more easily within a high church context. As an evangelical whose church service is marked by informality, I am eager for my kin to benefit from the insights of the performance school. But translation issues currently limit its transferability. Terms and designated roles might need to shift so that the insights would be able to find greater resonance with low-church traditions. Ecclesiology has a loud voice at central casting, determining whether we conceive of preacher as performer, director, or lowly lines coach. The understanding of when and how a word is actually performed may shift as well. In a Baptist or Anabaptist understanding, the church service is not the performance, but only Act One, or perhaps an important rehearsal. The preacher does less proclaiming and more inviting and persuading. Thus the onus shifts from preacher to individual listener, or to church community, to enact the word. Keeping various Christian traditions in mind, we will look now at

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[1] *The Week*, June 10, 2005, 6
[2] In this paper I use the term 'low church' as others might use the term, 'non-liturgical,' to refer to churches with little formal liturgy. I am referring more to the 'culture' than to a doctrinal statement.

the risks, rightness, and effectiveness of locating the preaching endeavor within the realm of theatre.

Calling preaching theatre raises eyebrows. It emphasizes preaching as an art more than a skill, and Christians, perhaps especially evangelicals, have always been uneasy about aspects of the arts. For centuries the church has associated theatre with vanity and decadence. Many also perceive theatre to be the realm of illusion, and acting to consist in posturing. Authenticity is one of the rallying cries of postmodernism, and contemporary preachers are loath to adopt any practice that would imply insincerity. As Childers notes, "Many preachers use the word, 'performance,' in fact, as a way of designating inauthentic preaching—the very kind of preaching they themselves are trying to avoid."[3] We sense Charles Bartow's understandable difficulty as a theologian and homiletician in feeling completely at home within the world of the arts when he writes, "…performance of a work should not be thought of as an artistic accomplishment."[4]. Charles Rice expresses a similar ambivalence. He disdains the passivity involved when, "The congregation is an audience and the preacher a performer."[5] Yet he later asserts, "The questions is not whether preaching is a performance—it obviously is-- but how the preacher can perform in a way that forwards the liturgical work of the people."[6]

Art is slippery; it is difficult to analyze and evaluate, much more to replicate artistic processes. How one achieves that quality which others receive and perceive as excellence in artwork is elusive and mysterious, as is the process by which a piece of art elicits a transformative response in the one who beholds it. Like any art, the artistic performance of a sermon is difficult to distill into a how-to manual.

Despite the risks, performance theorists in homiletics are on to something. They have rightly grasped the dramatic dimensions of reality and of the theological narrative that shapes the Christian faith. As Dorothy Sayers put it, "The gospel is the greatest drama ever staged…a terrifying drama of which God is the victim and the hero."[7] The word *theatre* comes from the Greek verb, *theaomai*, to see or behold, and means, 'seeing place.' In preaching we are seeking a 'seeing place' for truth, a vantage point from which our congregations can look anew at the beauty of Jesus Christ, at the world, and their lives. Aidan Nichols notes that in Hans Urs Von Balthasar's view, "seeing goes hand in hand with transformation."[8] While an evangelical would want to raise a cautionary flag in response to Balthasar, saying, "Not always," or "Not automatically," all would agree that vision is a necessary, if not sufficient, precursor to transformation.

Preachers who look at the gospel and the sermon through the lens of drama will be more effectively attuned to the needs of their listeners. People come to church for a myriad of motives, but many of their needs could be distilled into four cries: "Help me see, help me believe, help me overcome, and help me respond." We will consider here how a performance approach can focus our attempts to meet each of these needs.

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[3] Jana Childers, *Performing,* 48

[4] Charles Bartow, *God's Human Speech* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 79.

[5] Charles Rice, *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 43.

[6] *Ibid*, 134. (Richard Ward noted Rice's ambivalence in his article, "Performance Turns in Homiletics," http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?=title=340, p. 2.)

[7] Dorothy Sayers, *Creed or Chaos*? (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1949), chapter 1. Cited in Kevin J. VanHoozer, "The Voice and the Actor: A Dramatic Proposal about the Ministry and Minstrelsy of Theology," in *Evangelical Futures*, John G. Stackhouse Jr., editor. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000), 64.

[8] Aidan Nichols, *No Bloodless Myth: A Guide Through Balthasar's Dramatics* (Washington, D.C., The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 3

1. Help me to see:

While Yahweh in his sovereign freedom always retains an element of hiddenness and mystery, he also longs to be revealed and made known to his people. That longing corresponds to the cry of his people to glimpse and comprehend him. As Schmit writes, "When the people of God assemble for worship, they gather as if to say to the preacher and ministers, "Friends, we wish to see Jesus…. The minister's role…(is) to perform in ways that disclose the one whose presence is hidden."[9] The theatre world has thought hard about how to use various tools to enhance vision, including the manipulation of distance and space. Childers notes that, "Aesthetic distance creates psychological or spiritual space."[10] When that space is created within the church setting, transformative vision becomes possible, as congregants gain the perspective required to see aspects of their individual lives within the larger drama of creation, sin, redemption, and restoration. Highlighting tension also provokes new vision, so the preacher attuned to performance dynamics is always on the lookout for points of conflict within a story that may have been overlooked, in hopes of sparking fresh apprehension.

2. Help me to believe:

Can a sermon actually help the listener to believe? While many evangelicals divide the world into 'seekers' (or, in their unguarded moments, 'non-believers') and 'believers,' in fact we are all 'doubters' in many areas. Hanson writes of the power of the performed word to lower the barriers of doubt. "(The oral performance of the gospel)…creates a world the audience inhabits, and thus compels, or at least makes more difficult to resist, the text's claims and values; it helps collapse the distance between text and audience…"[11] Oral performance can serve as a form of brush-clearing, removing intellectual and psychological barriers. Our resistances are lowered when we are playing, and theatre invites us to a form of playing where childlike belief becomes more possible. Richard Ward speaks of the ability of the performer to, "… unmask established orders and structures."[12] He cites Dwight Conquergood's reference to the actor as 'trickster,' who upsets our certainties. "The trickster's playful impulse promotes a radical self-questioning that yields a deeper self-knowledge, the first step towards transformation."[13]

Performance theorists and other artists speak of another powerful dynamic that may occur during the beholder's encounter with art, the moment of *resonance*. Using Walter Ong's work in *The Presence of the Word,* Schmit writes, "…resonance is the capacity that allows for that which is interior to one person (or object) to reciprocate with that which is interior to another person (or object)."[14] In an effective work of art, the artist's vision touches and evokes a vision that is dormant or obscured within us. In a sermon, the artful preacher proclaims her belief in, or her vision of, the gospel so compellingly that it taps into and draws forth corresponding, resonating faith and belief in the listeners.

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[9] Schmit, *Too Deep*, 39.
[10] Childers, *Performing*, 46.
[11] James G. Hanson, "Faith Comes from What is Heard," *Translucence,* 174.
[12] Richard Ward, "Performance Turns in Homiletics," in *Reformed Liturgy and Music (*Vol. 30, No. 2, 1996), found online at
http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=340, p. 5.
[13] Dwight Conquergood, "Communication as Performance: Dramaturgical Dimensions of Everyday Life," cited in Ward, *Ibid*, 5.
[14] Schmit, *Too Deep for Words*, 12.

3. Help me to overcome:

Many in our congregations come on Sundays in deep pain. The cry of some hearts is raw and basic: "Help me to survive the week ahead." Pastorally sensitive, performance-oriented preaching can do much to impart hope, to remind listeners of the faithfulness of God, and even to provoke actual spiritual growth. That growth in part comes for the listener through engaging with a larger story than his or her own, and developing the capacity for empathy. Drama is unparalleled among the arts in its ability to call forth empathy. As audience members are drawn into the struggle on stage, they move from mere sympathy to identification, the source-point of empathy. By providing a space in which viewers may name and relinquish fears and resentments, the enacted story carries the potential to unleash real therapeutic power in the congregation.

4. Help me to respond, to live and to act.

The gospel calls us to action. An effective sermon helps listeners overcome inertia and fear. Our listeners sense the goodness of responding in faith to the word. The potential strength of any sermon event over a printed essay is the element of *immediacy* in oral language. Buttrick notes this power when he writes, "What happens in sermons that imitate immediacy is that passages are allowed to exert their intentional power on congregational consciousness through preaching. We are not sitting back and contemplating an inert, done-with passage; no, we are being altered, perhaps transformed, by the performative movement of the text."[15]

But, does that experience of transformation lead to concrete action? Performance theorists tend to speak of 'transformation' much more than obedience; a fear of Pelagian moralizing or mere surface-level change leads to more talk of abstract 'change' or 'transformation' than of *actual* changes. Rick Warren's immense popularity is due in part to his ability to reduce the gospel message to simple action items (often forming an acrostic) that can be put into practice in the coming week. While it is easy to critique Warren and others as simplistic, he has grasped something important. Listeners have a genuine need to take practical steps of growth and obedience, and to see outward evidence of the internal change Christ is effecting. Of the four cries of the listener, the performance school is weakest at answering this one, at least on the most practical, day-to-day level. Tables 1 and 2 summarize how preaching in the performance mode and in an evangelical/low church models answers the cries of the listener.

Broadening the Reach of the Performance School: Who Performs the Word, and When? For those with a with a low church understanding of the worship service and the sermon, besides the cultural differences that make theatre initially suspect, there may be a deeper divide over the assumptions regarding the performatory power of the proclaimed word. Here we will examine certain assumptions that seem to be common to those who advocate a performance approach to preaching, such as speech-act theory, and the tight connection between sermon and eucharist and other formal liturgy.

In *Too Deep for Words*, Schmit provides a helpful summary of the categories of philosopher J.L. Austin, and applies them to worship and preaching. While Austin prefers his coined word 'performative,' to denote a word that enacts its meaning as it is spoken,

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[15] Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 323.

Table 1: How Preaching Answers the Four Cries of the Listener: Performance Mode				
Cry of the Listener	Help me to See	Help me to Overcome	Help me to Believe	Help me to Act or Respond
Role of Preacher	Actor who reveals	Priest who proclaims	Actor as playful trickster; actor as witness	Actor who creates transformative moment
Means	Create Distance Highlight tension, resolution	Awaken imagination through hopeful narrative	Dispel doubt; Create resonance from faith of actor to latent faith in listener	Transformative experience
Desired Outcome	To see depth, horizon, beauty of God	To grow in empathy and hope	To believe with faith born of new vision	Inner transformation

Table 2: How Preaching Answers the Four Cries of the Listener: Evangelical and Low Church Preaching				
Cry of the Listener	Help me to See	Help me to Overcome	Help me to Believe	Help me to Act/Respond
Role of Preacher	Sage	Life-coach	Instructor/ Apologist	Director
Means	Clear logic, compelling illustrations	Insight and optimism	Persuasive logic, demonstrate relevance, testimony	Show goodness and accessibility of obedience
Desired Outcome	To see the wisdom of the Gospel, and the path ahead	To trust in Jesus, to take practical steps to improve life	To gain intellectual and spiritual confidence in the truth of the Gospel	To choose action that conforms to Jesus' teaching

Schmit points out that Schecter and others in performance studies have appropriated that word to relate to the artistry of a text and its interpretation. Schmit prefers then, to use 'performatory' to refer to words that he sees as having liturgical power. Here we will follow Schmit and use 'performatory' even where Austin uses 'performative.'

Austin describes the performatory word as a type of perlocutionary speech, which effects change as it is spoken. He gives as examples the wedding vow and the christening of a ship. He goes on to describe various types of circumstances that could invalidate the utterance, which he calls *infelicities*. These include incorrect or non-existent procedures, inappropriate speakers or audiences, and failure of follow-through on the part of participants.

He raises an issue that has relevance for our discussion of the performatory nature of preaching, using the example of choosing sides for a game. "… At a party, you say, when picking sides, 'I pick George': George grunts, 'I'm not playing.' Has George been picked?"[16] Is the speech-act at that point rendered non-performatory, or is it a performatory word that fell victim to an infelicity? Would it have been better to ask, "George, would you like to be on my

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[16] Ibid, 28.

team?" The answer depends on our understanding of the assumptions shared by all the people in the room. If we have been given to understand that everyone there wants to be on a team, it is entirely appropriate to make the performatory statement, "I pick George." This leads us to ask, "What do we understand that we are doing, and what sort of people do we assume are in the room, when we preach?" Stanley Hauerwas asserts, "Most preaching in the Christian church today is done before strangers."[17] If this reality does not necessarily limit the authority with which we make claims in our preaching, it at least changes the way we wield that authority.

Schmit writes, "Given the power of performatory forms of expression, there is a theological imperative at work for people who preach and lead in public worship. The theological principle derives from biblical imagery surrounding acts of divine utterance and relates performative (having to do with artistic execution) considerations to the performatory power of liturgical language."[18] This understanding corresponds to Bartow's assertion that when he steps into a pulpit, his words become performative (or performatory, in Schmit's use of the terms), because of the public nature of the event and the expectation that in that moment Christ will be revealed by the power of God and the efforts of the speaker in service to the word.[19] The difficulty in drawing a straight line between Austin's categories and the speech-acts we perform in church, of course, is that Austin is dealing with bi-directional, horizontal transaction, on the civil and social level. Change there is more verifiable, and public assent to the change is more assured. In preaching a number of less verifiable claims are made, and what actually transpires within the listeners may vary widely. Schmit acknowledges this limitation, and yet strives for the performatory force of prophetic speech in preaching when he says, "The words that we use when we craft our sermons are not explicitly performatory. But, because they presuppose God's promise and imply its fulfillment, they have the strong performatory force of words in which God's power inheres."[20]

Here both Schmit and Bartow assume a high degree of shared assumptions on the part of all who are gathered, a strongly covenanted community with a high level of agreement as to the meanings inherent in the words proclaimed. Describing the conditions that make a statement performatory, Austin includes this one: "the particular persons and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure involved."[21] Does the assertion that preaching is performatory acknowledge adequately the presence of strangers and seekers, and even varying levels of belief among believers? We can proclaim promises with great personal certainty and even with a certain level of prophetic authority, but part of what makes them performatory in Austin's paradigm is the assent of those gathered, and their agreement that we have the authority to 'name the ship.' In contrast, shall we say that our sermons will at best have performatory power among some of our listeners? Preachers cannot escape this tension, and its accompanying inevitable tentativeness, if they hope to extend their reach beyond 'the choir.' This argues for a 'sower and seed' approach to preaching, one that understands itself to be inviting and persuading as well as proclaiming, sowing in hope of encountering soil that will produce or perform well. It is still performing, but with only a minstrel player's level and type of

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[17] William H. Willimon and Stanley Hauerwas, *Preaching To Strangers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 7.

[18] Clayton Schmit, *Too Deep for Words,* 46

[19] Charles Bartow, *God's Human Speech: A Practical Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997), 2

[20] Schmit*, Too Deep for Words*, 56.

[21] John Langshaw Austin, *How To Do Things With Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 15.

authority, contingent and dependent on the soil's condition for the growth or final performance of the word.

The nature of the power of the sermon's words also proceeds by analogy from the power of words in liturgy. We see this tight linkage in Rice's words. He asserts, "When we say preaching, we say liturgics."[22] Similarly, Thomas Long refers to preaching as the 'audible sacrament.'[23] This leads to some conclusions about preaching that sound quite foreign to a low church evangelical's ears. Where preaching is located within liturgy, though ability may vary, all preaching seems to carry tremendous power. Schmit writes, "Change occurs because the preacher's words have the power to transform. They are words that not only proclaim the promise and create the expectation of its fulfillment; they also have the potency to *bring* the promise to fulfillment."[24] Barbara Brown Taylor puts it even more strongly, in a sermon that Schmit quotes. She writes, "John the Baptist cried in the wilderness saying, 'Prepare the way on the Lord,' and *the way was prepared*, his very words paving the desert where Jesus would walk."[25] In Taylor's view, John's words had a mystical, even magical or miraculous force. Their proclamatory force overwhelmed any need for the listener to play a role. But, if John had spoken the words, and the cheating tax collectors had stood stony-faced, and continued to overcharge (rather like George grunting, "I'm not playing," in Austin's example above), would the way have been prepared, simply because John had spoken? I suspect that the way was *actually* prepared when tax collectors stopped overcharging, in *response* to John's words. John then functioned as a sower of the word. In the language of theatre, he served as a director, urging the people to perform their roles with integrity and zeal. In a dialogue with Taylor over where the locus of power for transformation is in the moment of preaching, I would shift it closer to that spiritual place within the hearers where they choose to *respond* to the words, and not within the words themselves. The heavy emphasis on proclamation in Taylor and Schmit's words could imply that the only role of the listener is to hear the promise, and await its fulfillment.[26] This could relegate the congregation to 'mere' audience, acted upon but not enacting.

The question is not only who performs the word, but also when and where it is actually performed or enacted. This question turns on the divergent ways liturgical and low church leaders conceive of the worship hour. For high church traditions, the church service itself the performance, whereas others view it as Act One, with Act Two being the six days that follow, the script for which is as yet unwritten. Some would downgrade it even further, to the status of an important dress rehearsal. As with the Act One understanding, if the sermon or church service is a dress rehearsal, the actual doing of the words takes place in response to the sermon, though it has a decisive beginning during the preaching. Of course, the most crucial divide between high and low church in terms of whether the service is performance or not does not center on the sermon, but on the understanding of what is happening in the eucharist. For, if something vital and transformative is occurring in that moment, then the service could never be relegated to dress rehearsal status. It is *the* event that defines the church: it is not only performance but opening night, not to be missed. Whereas if communion is viewed as a memorial, and in some cases

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[22] Charles Rice, *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 134.

[23] Thomas G. Long, "Whatever Happened to Narrative Preaching?" *Journal for Preachers*, Volume 28, Number 4, Pentecost 2005.

[24] Schmit, *Too Deep*, 57.

[25] Barbara Brown Taylor, "Dare to Preach," cited in Schmit, *Too Deep*, 57. (Italics mine)

[26] Schmit, *Too Deep,* 56.

rarely practiced even as that, then the delinquent actor who missed rehearsal could be 'caught up' on his lines, and dash out to join the troupe, still potentially performing well in the coming week.

On the radical edge of low church understandings of communion, Thomas Finger summarizes Anabaptist thought when he writes, "that narrative (of Christ's death) is best embodied directly in ethical activity and need not be expressed or mediated through symbol, drama, or ritual."[27] The lack of sacramental emphasis, at least in the traditional understanding of the word, corresponds to a flattening of hierarchy. Thus the one who preaches is an equal brother or sister in the family, with authority to teach, exhort, and even proclaim, but only as a collaborator with the ongoing exegetical work of the believing community.

In comparing the words of a sermon to performatory speech acts, and in drawing heavily upon the authority of a priest in a formal liturgical act, preaching may lose some of the tentative quality Jesus alluded to in his parable of the sower and the seed. There, while the sower is responsible for acquiring and dispersing high-quality seeds, the ultimate question of fruitfulness lies with the soil. In the parable, the responsibility for whether the speech-act functioned as perlocutionary or fell prey to infelicity depended upon the listener. To those like rocky or thorny soil, the word sown was locutionary, mere utterances. A preacher might not know on Sunday if his or her words had performed. Some growth might only surface years later. So the preacher proclaims, but with hopeful humility and prayerful watching.

The Evangelical Minstrel Show: Preacher as Teacher/Director or Player-Coach
What is the popular evangelical conception of the preacher, and how might it intersect with the performance school? Kevin VanHoozer's words about how evangelicals do theology in the context of drama relate to how they preach as well. He writes, "Evangelicals typically are better at improvisation than ritual."[28] He advocates for a flexible drama troupe, nurtured by theology. "Canonical-linguistic theology aims at cultivating minstrels of the Word—players who can interpret the text rightly in diverse situations; players who can stage the gospel anywhere, anytime." The theologian's task is to, "…instruct the community in what constitutes a fitting understanding of the faith and to monitor the integrity of its subsequent performance

If we applied this description of the theologian to the preacher, his or her role would align more closely with that of director than performer of the word. Balthasar evokes a powerful image for the task of the director. He says, "The director has to show himself to be a "water-diviner," discovering springs of creativity in the actors…"[29] The task of a water-diviner requires patience and sensitivity; it evokes the faithful, essential work of a pastor who calls forth and celebrates the gifts and abilities within his congregation so that they are unimpeded in performing their parts.

In athletic terms, the type of highly involved instructor who forms the ideal pastor in the evangelical church is akin to the player-coach. The evangelical preacher is energetically running up and down court, cheering on the team, calling timeouts to correct errors and strengthen strategy, and suiting up to join the game intermittently as well. In this model, the ideal preacher is both persuasive, winsome 'inviter' to the seeker, and pragmatic sage to the believer. Can this picture of preacher as ragged, energetic player-coach, instructing, directing, and also joining the fray, find resonance with the more elegant portrait of preacher as skilled and authoritative actor, performing the word as he proclaims the promise? I believe it can, and that we have much to offer each other.

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[27] Thomas Finger, *A Contemporary Anabaptist Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 205.
[28] Kevin Van Hoozer, *Evangelical Futures*, 103.
[29] Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, Vol. I, 301.

First, we all acknowledge that, though much is gained in understanding the preacher as performer, ultimately it is the entire church that performs the word. As Schmit puts it, "Whether they are among the many who assemble or the few who lead, all people are active in worship as non-audience. And so is God."[30] Childers also is quick to assert this. "Worship is about *all* of God's people performing—giving form to—their response to God."[31] While the lines may blur as to who is observing and who is enacting at various moments in the drama, we all share an aversion to creating passive spectators in our pews. The goal of the performance school, to use the tools and sensitivities of the world of theatre to enliven the perceptions and responses of those who hear the preached word, is one which should excite preachers from low church traditions as much as those from liturgical ones.

Second, while our understandings of liturgy, and particularly the Lord's Supper, are different, we can gain from each other's emphases. VanHoozer reminds evangelicals of the centrality of communion when he writes, "The shared bread and wine recall the play's climax and rehearse the play's conclusion. It is a key scene, and it must affect our interpretation of all other scenes."[32] Too many 'seeker-targeted' evangelical churches, in their rush to throw off the 'oppressive shackles' of formal liturgy, have abandoned practices that would nourish, shape, and instruct them. Improvisational theatre adds sparkle and vitality to drama, brings it to the streets, and makes it accessible to amateurs. But it would be an impoverished theatre world that had no one who could perform in a well-rehearsed way the lines of the great playwrights.

Third, though evangelicals might need the metaphor shifted in order to resonate fully with it, they have much to gain from a vision of preaching as dramatic. Deep down, the cry of the evangelical may well be, "Help me to see… a little *less* clearly." The drama of the gospel is filled with mystery, complexity, and depth, and evangelicals in their quest for clarity and action have flattened that mystery, reducing the gospel to simplistic formulas. A dramatic perspective could bring renewed energy by acknowledging the tension points within the life of faith and the mysterious unknowns of the God we follow. Evangelicals, especially those working hard at seeker-sensitivity, tend to focus on the preacher as sage, teacher, or inspirational coach. This limits their repertoire, and reflects a limited theological vision as well. The performance school, rooted as it is in a high view of the role of promise in the sermon, reminds low church traditions of the sovereign role of God in the preaching endeavor. The performance school draws more strongly on the images of preacher as priest, declaring to the people the forgiveness and grace of God, and the preacher as prophet, proclaiming and enacting the promise of the gospel. Evangelicals remind those from more formal liturgical traditions of the limits of those metaphors and modes of speaking, especially in the context of 'strangers.' But in their focus on the sermon as a place of instruction and invitation, evangelicals may have lost sight of the sermon's potential to be the locus of a transformative event. A greater grasp of the drama that pervades the gospel will raise the expectation among evangelicals that something could happen on a Sunday like the moment the great director Stanislavski described: "But there is another kind of theatre. You have come in and taken your seat as an onlooker, but the director of the play changes you into a participant in the life that is unfolding on stage. Something has happened to you. You are carried away from your position as mere onlooker."[33] The possibility of participating in that kind of

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[30] Schmit, *Too Deep*, 32.
[31] Childers, *Preaching As Theatre*, 123.
[32] *Ibid*, 103.
[33] *Stanislavski's Legacy*, p. 6, cited in Bozarth-Campbell, *The Word's Body*, 114.

theatre would motivate all the strenuous effort required to create sermons that communicate, through artful performance and persuasive logic, the truth and the beauty of the gospel.

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Anxiety and Preaching

Debra J. Mumford
Graduate Theological Union – Ph. D. Student
Supervisor – Mary Donavan Turner

Introduction

For Alla Renee Bozarth, the art of interpretation is a psychophysical act.[1] First of all, interpretation involves creation, wherein, the body of literature presents itself to the human senses for a dialogic encounter.[2] The oral interpreter is an active participant in the perception of the poem not merely a passive body of flesh onto which the poem is written. Secondly, in the incarnation phase, the poem and the interpreter interact in the processes of kenosis/plerosis. In kenosis, the interpreter empties herself by willingly subordinating her will to the will of the poem.[3] Plerosis is the filling of the interpreter with the poem. During kenosis/plerosis a new creation is made. Thirdly, in the transformation phase, a state of communion is reached. The voice of the interpreter is becomes "utterance of interiority" which invades others from within and captivates all who hear.[4] In communion, words and silence are experienced together.

It is my contention that biblically based preaching is also a psychophysical act. First of all, it involves creation wherein the preacher is an active participant in the perception of the biblical text through reading and biblical exegesis. In the creation process, the preacher wills the text to speak to her in her contemporary context from its ancient milieu. Secondly, in the incarnation phase, the preacher and the biblical text interact in the processes of kenosis/plerosis wherein the preacher submits herself to the will of the text and is filled with the vast riches of the biblical text. In this phase of interpretation, the preacher unearths the message itself and decides how best to present it to the audience. Thirdly, in the transformation phase, a state of communion is reached during the performance. The speaking voice of the preacher manifests itself as an "utterance of interiority" which invades the hearers from within creating transformation in all who hear her voice. It is through the tools of performance theory that the preacher enables her hearers to experience true communion with God.

Each of these processes is vital. However, since preaching is a psychophysical act, are there psychological barriers that prevent the preacher from fully participating in each phase of the interpretive process? It is with potential psychological barriers in mind that I will briefly review psychological concepts related to anxiety. Then we will take our learnings and apply them to each stage of the interpretive process to explore how anxiety may or may not impact preaching performance.

Human Psychology

According to Sigmund Freud, the source of anxiety can be traced to a person's childhood. Children admire and fear their parents. At some point in their psychological development,

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[1] Alla Renee Bozarth, *The Word's Body: An Incarnational Aesthetic of Interpretation* (New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1997), 1.
[2] Ibid, 13.
[3] Ibid, 91-4.
[4] Ibid, 133-35.

children take their parents into themselves.[5] The *super-ego* is that place in the mind where injunctions and prohibitions of parents and other influencers, in the form of conscience, exert influence over the individual's morals.[6] The *id* is the location in the mind of our most primitive needs. The *ego* seeks to balance our conscience with our most primitive needs. People experience a sense of guilt (which often manifests itself in the form of anxiety) when there is tension between the demands of and actual attainments of the *ego*.[7]

In the section of *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* entitled "Stages of Life", Jung writes that the demands of life put an end childhood. In childhood and beyond humans develop pre-suppositions.[8] Presuppositions do not always reflect reality. When expectations are exaggerated, difficulties underestimated, optimism unjustified, and attitude negative, the individual experiences conscious problems.[9] Anxiety arises for Jung in the form of *complexes* which represent a kind of inferiority. *Complexes* are psychic contents which are outside the control of the conscious mind.[10] *Complexes* contain memories, wishes, fears, duties, needs, or views, none of which the person experiencing the complex has come to terms.[11] Though all *complexes* are manifestations of unresolved issues, they can be either obstacles or stimuli towards new possibilities of achievement.[12]

Anxiety is Normal

For some, normality is defined as total freedom from any type of anxiety. However, according to David Smail, anxiety, distress and despair are normal reactions to the social institutions constructed by human beings[13] Therefore, normality defined as freedom from anxiety is a myth. What is real, is the pressure individuals feel in their lives to be what others feel they ought to be. For many people, the aim in life is to "be something".[14]

> *You cannot be anything if you are not recognized as something; in this way your being becomes dependent on the regard of somebody else.[15]*

And the more honor and recognition being something brings upon them, the more successful they are perceived to be by those around them.[16] It is through others that we gain our validity, identity and our reality. If instead of being confirmed, an individual is disconfirmed often enough and strongly enough, she can cease to exist.[17] Even when people have grown up with confirming relationships, they can experience disconfirmation when a person or people close to them inflict pain upon them through words or actions.[18] It is important for all of us to feel loved or validated for who we are.

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[5] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id* (London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1972), 47-48.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] C. G. Jung, *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1933), 112.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid, 90.
[11] Ibid, 90-91.
[12] Ibid.
[13] David Smail, *Illusion and Reality: The Meaning of Anxiety* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1984), 1.
[14] Ibid, 3-5.
[15] Ibid, 17-18.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.
[18] Ibid.

For James Prochaska and John Norcross, anxiety is a pattern of responses of the sympathetic nervous system when an individual is exposed to threatening stimulus.[19] Prochaska and Norcross agree with Freud and Jung in their assertion perceptions of threatening stimuli are formed in childhood.[20]

Preaching and Anxiety

By reviewing psychological concepts related to anxiety, we have determined that anxiety is formed in the nervous system when individuals are exposed to threatening stimuli. Each individual's social conditioning during childhood defines what is threatening stimuli for her. Performing a sermon before others can be threatening stimuli. How can the preacher effectively mitigate anxiety in each component of the interpretive process?

Creation

The creative phase of the interpretive process entails several different components. The first component is the selection of the biblical text from which to preach. The preacher can also decide on the theological approach she wishes to take when reading the text. Black liberation, feminist, womanist, mujerista, post-colonial feminist or traditional colonialist perspectives (which all grew out of out of the very complex contexts of Asia, Africa, South America and the South Pacific) are all options.[21]

The preacher often chooses the approach to the text with the intended audience in mind. For example, one would hardly approach a text which is intended to be preached to an African American congregation accustomed to hearing sermons of liberation from a traditional colonialist perspective.

After the text has been chosen, translated and exegeted, the preacher must then listen to, brood over, meditate and pray upon the text until the message uncovered in exegesis "becomes the authoritative and acting Word of God for us, spoken into our contemporary situation."[22]

Creation and Anxiety

The goal of the creation process is to allow the text to speak to the preacher. Anxiety arising from fear of rejection can raise its head throughout the creative process. The preacher may feel anxiety when preaching in some contexts where he perceives that the hearers have high expectations; such as, highly educated congregations or seminaries. The hearers expect to hear something new and fresh in the text. They expect depth. If the preacher is unsure of his exegetical skills, feeling that he does not have the ability to find sermon-worthy material in the text, he may skip various parts of the process or the entire process altogether in favor of finding his main points in commentaries or sermon outlines of someone else.

The need for the validation of the receiving community can be evidenced by the sources the preacher chooses to perform exegesis. The preacher may tend to use commentaries with views similar to those of the intended congregation.

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[19] James O. Prochaska and John C. Norcross, *Systems of Psychotherapy: A Transtheoretical Analysis* (Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole, 284-5.

[20] Ibid.

[21] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvati*on (New York: Orbis Books, 1973), xix,

[22] Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Creative Preaching: Finding the Words* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), 52.

During the exegetical process the preacher may ignore findings which challenge or offend the intended audience even if the findings are valid and important for the audience to hear.

Incarnation[23]

The incarnation phase is where the preacher and the biblical text interact in the processes of kenosis/plerosis. Kenosis/plerosis is the process whereby the preacher submits herself to the will of the text, empties herself of presuppositions and is filled with the vast riches in return. In this phase of interpretation, the preacher unearths the message itself and decides how best to present it to the audience.

Sermon Form

From the vast riches to which the preacher is exposed during kenosis/pleurosis, the preacher makes a decision about sermon form. Fred Craddock advises preachers to allow the biblical text to instruct the sermon on form.[24] However, Achtemeier acknowledges that the form of the sermon may often be predetermined by practice and tradition rather then by interaction with the text itself. Some of the sermon forms she presents as creative options are thematic, narrative*, expository, word identification, evocative, dialogue, multi-logue, first person, mime & symbolic action and dance, drama and personal testimony.

*Narrative Preaching and Filling in the Gaps

Much has been written about narrative preaching in the past few years. Henry Mitchell writes of narrative preaching:

> The tale well told is a marvelous means for reaching the whole of a person, appealing to the intellect, providing vicarious experiences for the feeding of the intuitive tapes of faith, and setting the fires of emotional joy which culminate in celebration.[25]

One of the challenges of narrative preaching is the development of characters. When we are reading biblical texts, we are very often not given the ability to understand a character from the perspective of the character herself. Narrators provide the readers of the biblical text with the details of the character which they feel the reader needs to know.[26] But what if we want more? What if we would like to know how a particular character may have felt in a particular set of circumstances? How can we possibly delve into the character to such an extent that we get to know him or her on their own terms and not for just the person the writer communicates they are.

Unfortunately, for most of our biblical characters, getting to know them beyond the perspective presented by the narrator is a nearly impossible task. There are no historical writings by them or about many of them apart from the biblical text. However, all is not lost. We can get to know some of the characters by understanding more about the social world in which they lived

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[23] Achtemeier. In trying to decide where sermon form best fit in the creative process, I debated between transformation and incarnation. I believe it could fit in either category. However, in the transformation phase, I decided to concentrate primarily on other tools of performance.

[24] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1985), 178.

[25] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration & Experience in Preaching* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990), 87.

[26] David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell, *Narrative in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 52.

during our exegetical process. When we know their gender, the period in which they lived, their geographical location, culture and ethnicity, and their social status, we can begin to understand them and how they may have reacted in given situations. This historical data does not give us an insider's perspective of our characters. However, it does create for us a range of possibilities.

After the preacher has gathered information about the characters in the biblical text, there may still be gaps in the text that need to be filled if the preacher is to attempt to embody the character in the sermon (i.e. in a first person sermon). It is at this point where Stanislavski's *Building a Character* can assist the preacher.

Building a Character

In Constantin Stanislavski's *Building a Character*, Tortsov, the teacher in the text who is really Stanislavski in disguise, teaches several students lessons about how to embody a character. In one lesson, Tortsov brought a character to life for one of his students so vividly, that the student was simply amazed. When the student asked how Tortsov was able to perform such a vivid characterization, his response was:

> Each person evolves an external characterization out of himself, from others, takes it from real or imaginary life, according to his intuition, his observation of himself and others. He draws it from his own experiences of life or that of his friends, from pictures, engravings, drawings, books, stories, novels, or from some simple incident—it makes no difference. The only proviso is that while he is making this external research he must not lose his inner self.[27]

In order for the preacher to take Stanislavski's advice and simultaneously avoid the pitfall of distorting the meaning of the text, the preacher must be very focused and thorough in her exegesis. She should employ as many of the biblical criticism methods (traditional historical criticism, reader-response, genre analysis, and literary, rhetorical and narrative criticisms) as needed to develop a well-rounded and factually accurate character. As always, the preacher must be careful not to read contemporary circumstances and opinions into the biblical text.

Incarnation and Anxiety

The goal of incarnation is for the preacher to submit herself to the will of the text and become filled with it. The will of the text may be the presentation of the text and the sermon in a in a form suggested by the text itself or by tradition and practice. Anxiety arising from fear of rejection can affect the incarnation process. The preacher may be most tempted to use a sermon form with which the hearers are most familiar and comfortable instead of one suggested by his encounter with the text. By using an unfamiliar sermon forms, the preacher risks rejection; not only of the sermon form and the message, but of himself as a preacher

Transformation

In the transformation phase, a state of communion is reached during the performance. The speaking voice of the preacher manifests itself as an "utterance of interiority" which invades the hearers from within, creating transformation in all who hear her voice. The speaking voice of

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[27] Constantine Stanislavski, *Building a Character* (New York: Theatre Arts Books, 1949), 7-8

the preacher is integral in preaching performance. Childers provides the preacher with sage advice about how best to enhance performance by proper use of the voice.

Vocals in Performance

For Childers, four key elements build a firm foundation for a skilled vocal performance: rate, pitch, volume, and pause (otherwise known as vocalics).[28] Ideally, the preacher will learn to control these elements to such an extent that he can create a reading that is in synch with the moves and rhythms of the text. Childers advises the preacher to rehearse the reading often to discover the variation of the reading that best honors the text.[29]

Phrasing or mastering the use of pause is imperative for the preaching event. By using pause effectively, the preacher can insure that related thoughts are kept together, and the hearer is provided with enough silence to absorb the message.[30]

Using emphasis effectively can breathe life into a dead reading.[31] Accentuation is a way of highlighting or "pointing the finger" at a key word in a phrase.[32] When used properly, accentuation can simulate normal speech. In both scripture reading and preaching, the preacher should be aware of words that seldom deserve to be accentuated. Generally words that indicate time or place-- *here, there, that place, now,* and *then* --do not need to be emphasized unless they are contrasted by another time and place.[33] Common adverbs and adjectives such as *very, really, big*, and *all* also usually need no accentuation.[34]

By internalizing the scripture and the sermon, the preacher can embody the message. Internalizing the text and message allows the interpreter to actually think the thoughts and feel the impulses that are being spoken.[35] Internalization of the message feels more natural to the interpreter and looks more natural to the audience.[36]

Childers highlights the commitment of the faithful preacher. Preaching is at its best and not just entertainment or propaganda when the preacher is faithful in relation to the biblical text.[37] The faithful preacher is one who is committed to rehearsal of oral interpretation guidelines and internalization of the scripture and sermon.[38]

Body in Performance

Though the voice is the primary medium used in sermon performance, effective use of the body is also important in sermon delivery. Stanislavski referred the body as a "physical instrument".[39] He taught his actors that though they were often surrounded by bodies with "flabby muscles, poor posture, and sagging chests" in their daily lives off stage, such physical

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[28] Childers, 80.
[29] Ibid, 81.
[30] Ibid, 82.
[31] Ibid, 84-5.
[32] Ibid, 85.
[33] Ibid, 87.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid, 91-2.
[36] Ibid, 93.
[37] Ibid, 95.
[38] Ibid.
[39] Stanislavski, 35.

states attracted attention when the actor took the stage.[40] He recommended that his actors take ballet classes to help correct distorted posture, and lend definiteness to choppy gestures.[41]

Stanislavski also taught his actors the importance of restraining and controlling the use of gestures. Excessive use of gestures dilutes a part in the same way that water dilutes a good wine.[42] Using gestures that reflected the mannerisms of a particular character required the actor to be very deliberate in her use of gestures. To impose personal gestures into the performance which were in no way related to the character, distorted the performance by displaying the actor's personality instead of the personality of the character.[43]

Stanislavski also warned of actors who were gifted with two different types of stage charm. There was one type who had only to set foot on stage and their audience would be delighted. Even the actor's idiosyncrasies and shortcomings were copied by admirers. An actor with this type of stage charm would be guaranteed to hold the attention of the audience. However, if not wise, he could fall prey to his own good fortune. The actor could become obsessed by self-admiration and exhibitionism, thereby destroying the power of the charm.[44]

The second type of stage charm was one in which the actor only had charm when in character. The audience was drawn to the actor's manufactured charm.[45] Off stage, this actor lacked the power to attract.[46]

There were also actors who were unattractive on stage but really attractive people off stage. Stanislavski pointed out that it was unfortunate that often these actors were more intelligent, gifted and conscientious about their acting that the ones blessed stage charm.[47]

Performance Anxiety

Preaching can also learn how to effectively manage the body and voice from psychological theories developed for specifically for performance. Performance anxiety has three components: physiological, cognitive, and behavioral.[48] The physiological component is exhibited through difficulty concentrating, loss of appetite, increased heart rate, shortness of breath, dizziness, shaking knees and hands, and sweaty palms.[49] These physiological symptoms may interfere with performance by making it difficult for the performer to control parts of the body (such as hands) and breathing.[50] Cognitive symptoms of anxiety include fear of making mistakes, feelings of inadequacy, and worrying about what could happen.[51] Behavioral symptoms include not being able to do things which would otherwise happen naturally.[52]

Age appears to be a significant factor in performance anxiety. For example, older professional musicians are better able to cope with stress than younger performers.[53] As

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[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid, 39.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid, 72.
[44] Ibid, 239.
[45] Ibid, 239-40.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Ibid, 240.
[48] Carole B. Miller, "A Discussion On Performance Anxiety", (London, 2002, accessed 15 May 2005); available from http://www.mostlywind.co.uk/performance_anxiety.html; Internet.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.

musicians age and gain more experience, they develop strategies for coping with anxiety.[54] Mastery of task and anxiety are related.[55] If the task is simple or well learned so that the correct responses are dominant, then an audience enhances task performance.[56] However, if the task is poorly learned so that incorrect responses are likely to be dominant, then an audience inhibits task performance.[57] In either case, the audience enhances the dominant response.[58]

Anxiety can also be caused by: fear of illness, other people's expectations, the pursuit of technical perfection, and a predisposed tendency to anxiety.[59] Strategies for coping with anxiety vary from the formal or extreme measures to the commonsensical. On the extreme end, there is cognitive behavioral therapy and medication (such as tranquilizers, beta blockers or corticosteroids). Some performers choose to ingest natural beta-blockers such as bananas in lieu of medicating.

Common sense approaches to reducing anxiety include avoidance of uncomfortable clothes or shoes, thinking about why one plays music, getting to the performance venue early enough to relax, and checking out the stage to insure that everything is arranged as it should be. One of the most necessary of all of the coping strategies is adequate preparation. By rehearsing often for performance well in advance of performance date, the performer can lessen the severity of her anxiety.[60]

Transformation and Anxiety

The transformation phase is where the preacher brings the text to life for the hearers while incorporating all of the work done in the creation and incarnation phases. An inadequate or dull performance can render all of the preacher's prior work mute and cause the mind of the hearers to label as *forgettable* that which could have been *unforgettable*. Many of the characteristics of performance anxiety can affect the preacher in this phase. The preacher can develop cognitive symptoms such as fear of making mistakes, feelings of inadequacy, and worrying about what may happen as a result of inadequate preparation.

However, the preacher can use strategies to help lessen the severity of performance anxiety. If the preacher is a "faithful" preacher and internalizes the scripture and the sermon and rehearses the sermon delivery in tandem with use of gestures and body movement, he decreases the severity of performance anxiety.

Performance anxiety can be experienced if the preacher is obsessed with technical perfection to the point of losing sight of the goal of the preaching event. Performance anxiety can also be experienced if the preacher is preoccupied with the expectations of the hearers instead of being focused on the task at hand.

The preacher can fall prey to his own pulpit charm and not do the preparation needed to perform well. When people seem to be in awe of the preacher's pulpit presence, the preacher can develop a false sense of her own importance. The potential downfall of having so much pulpit charm is that preacher can become so self-obsessed that she loses her pulpit charm altogether.

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[54] Ibid.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.
[57] Ibid.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.

Conclusions

The human mind is an incredible entity. Psychology enables us to better understand how the mind works; thereby, allowing us to better understand human behavior. Humans need to be loved and validated for who they are in order to function in the world. Fear of rejection can be the impetus for making many decisions in our lives. We have deduced from Freud and Jung that anxiety occurs when people feel their behaviors do not measure up to the expectations of family, friends and other influencers. Smail contends that everybody has some anxiety about who they are how they are perceived by others in the world.

Armed with the knowledge that all humans have a need to be loved and accepted and that we all have anxiety, we set out to demonstrate that the need for love and validation and fear of rejection permeates even the realm of sermon performance. Preachers are indeed human.

Anxiety in the creative process can result in the preacher short-cutting the exegetical process and co-opting sermon outlines when he feels his own exegesis is not good enough for the hearers. Anxiety in the incarnational process can result in the preacher failing to explore new sermon forms which may be more appropriate for the text they are preaching.

The preacher can sabotage her own sermon by her performance and by failing to rehearse and internalize the message. By rehearsing and employing other coping strategies, the preacher could lessen the severity of performance anxiety and achieve a state of communion.

Effect of Anxiety on the General State of Preaching

Fred Craddock wrote the following about the general state of preaching in his seminal work, *As One Without Authority:*

> The alarm felt by those of us still concerned about preaching is not response solely to the noise outside in the street, where public disfavor and ridicule have been heaped upon the pulpit. On the contrary, most preachers are quite skilled at translating such criticism into "crosses to be borne" and appropriating for themselves the blessing lodged in some proper text, such as, "beware when all men speak well of you." These are not new sounds; to a large extent, the pulpit has from the first century received poor reviews (2 Cor. 10:9-10). To explain this general reaction, perhaps one need not look for reason profound; it may be simply that these critics have heard us preach![61]

Though this book was first published in 1971, it would not be a challenge to find people in the pews who listen to sermons Sunday after Sunday and wonder if these words are not true today. Craddock goes on to list six different reasons for the state of preaching in 1971. Nowhere on the list do we find human psychology (and the fear of rejection that produces anxiety in preachers) as one of the reasons for the state of preaching.

How much better would the state of preaching be today if preachers were not so afraid of rejection that they do not try to improve and use their exegetical skills, they do not try experiment with sermon forms, and they do not try to achieve communion with the hearers by doing their part to maximize the performance moment?

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[61] Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2001), 3.

Safe Places to continue Preaching Development

Is there a way to address the fear of rejection in the hearts of many preachers while simultaneously improving the general state of preaching today? I believe there is. I believe that if seminaries or other entities created, on a regular basis, safe places for experienced preachers to hone their exegetical skills, experiment with new sermon forms, and practice their performance skills, the general state of preaching could be greatly improved.

Seminary students benefit greatly from participating in preaching classes where they feel safe enough to try new things and even fail while trying. However, once the preacher graduates, though she may attend continuing education courses that present the latest developments in the preaching world, often these courses do not provide an opportunity for the preacher to test her new learnings.

There is hope for improvement of the general state of preaching. Perhaps we can encourage our seminaries to be a safe place for experienced preachers to try new things.

Virgil's *Destruktion* of the Stoic Rational Agent:
Rereading <u>Aeneid</u> IV after Nietzsche and Heidegger

P. Christopher Smith
The University of Massachusetts Lowell

Though Virgil played a most important role in the Middle Ages as a prefiguration of Christianity and of the coming of the Christ – in Dante in particular – he seems to have fallen into disregard in contemporary Christian theology and, in fact, generally. The loss suffered as a consequence is great if unnoticed. For though largely unacknowledged in this, our postmodern era, Greek and Roman philosophy continues to define our thinking, theological and otherwise. With the neglect of Virgil, however, this poet's questioning of the Greek and Roman philosophical tradition is no longer available to us. Virgil, of course, is an Augustan, Golden Age poet, for whom the classical ideal of reason over passion is to be celebrated. Still, precisely as a poet he knows at the same time that this ideal is in fact only a useful fiction that cloaks but barely and superficially our real, visceral humanity. His <u>Aeneid</u> is thus strikingly ambiguous: On the one hand, it would justify the emperor Augustus and praise the line of heroes who preceded him in founding imperial Rome. On the other, it calls their Stoic *ataraxia* and *apeitheia* into question, the very imperturbability and dispassion that was held to have made their glorious feats possible. When Virgil writes in the prelude to his song *tantae molis erat Romanum condere gentem*, "How great was the trouble in founding the Roman people"(<u>Aeneid</u> I, 33) the *molis* or "trouble" intones a somber note in what otherwise might seem to have been a hymn of praise.

Of what interest, however, is this ambiguity for homiletics in general and performance theory in particular? Here is my train of thought: First, if *logos*, reason, is, as Heidegger, following Nietzsche has shown convincingly, only a secondary phenomenon that floats precariously on the primary *Untergrund* and *Abgrund*, the underground and groundless non-ground and abyss, of *pathos* or feeling, then not the logic and reasoning of what we say *or what we preach*, but the communication of the underlying feeling must be the primary concern. Poets have always known this, but philosophers from Plato on have sought, as in mathematics, to communicate things seen and known cognitively and purified of any affective quality. Naturally, for such communication words that are seen, that is, writing read, becomes the appropriate medium – again, as in mathematics. The conversion of these written word signs into the natural language of audible speech becomes irrelevant or worse, a source of confusion. Nobody cares how you pronounce "4" as long as we know what the significatum is that you have in mind. If, on the other hand, the pure *logos* of mathematics is a secondary abstraction and if the communication of affect, *pathos*, is primary and basic, *pronuntatio*, declamation, delivery, performance, is crucial. For the communication of *pathos* is achieved above all by the sound of the voiced word that we speak to each other. It follows that there can be no silent reading of a "text" if we are to experience more than the surface logic of what we "see" for ourselves, and if, instead, we are to "hear" and be moved by what is addressed to us by another. In preaching we are, accordingly, not showing onlookers something for them to see but, fundamentally, voicing a call to an audience that, upon hearing it, is moved, for example, from enmity and hatred to mercy and love.

Poets have always known the musical, affective matrix of all thinking and the consequent importance of voice for reaching down to this matrix in communication. But schooled as we are in Plato's, Aristotle's, and Stoicism's suppression of passion, we are subject – *pace* Derrida – to a strange inversion that would have it that audible speech is based in visible writing and that, as in the French *dicté,* the listeners' task is to convert what they hear read aloud back into writing that they can see and grasp conceptually with what Plato calls "the eye of the mind." Book IV of Virgil's <u>Aeneid</u> makes palpably clear the magnitude of distortion in such thinking as this.

Having fled the ravaging of Troy by the Greeks, Aeneas, the founder to be of the Roman people, and his band of fellow refugees, are saved from a disaster at sea by the dignified and capable Carthaginian Queen Dido, who graciously and unreservedly welcomes the Trojans to her land: *non ignaro mali miseris succorrere disco*, she says "Not unacquainted with sorrows, I am learning to give aid to the suffering" (I 630). She too had been a fugitive but, in contrast to Aeneas, she has already established her new city, Carthage, on foreign soil. Before long Aeneas and Dido find themselves caught up in forces beyond their control and comprehension, forces Virgil personifies as gods and goddesses whose sport is to make play things of mortals in complete disregard of the pain caused by their schemes. (And "Love" does make fools of us all!) Thus Dido, under the sway of "Venus's" child "Cupid" and abetted by a malevolent "Juno," falls uncontrollably in love with Aeneas, who responds by all too willingly playing the prince consort to Dido's beautiful queen of Carthage. But what for her is a total commitment at great risk and even a breach of her oath never to marry again after the murder of her previous husband Sachaeus years before, is for Aeneas simply a passing diversion. Wholly oblivious to the harm he might inflict on Dido when he leaves her, as he knows he must – defenseless, she will have no recourse but to kill herself – he pretends not to be holding himself back. But then, in the person of "Mercury," *pietas*, his sense of duty, calls him to get on with his fated task of founding Rome and to leave Carthage at once. Looking for an easy way out, he racks his brains for a way to dodge her anger, but it is too late. She has long since read the signs and confronts him.

Our homiletical concern here will be with the contrast Virgil develops between the way Dido speaks (Cicero: *quo modo*) and Aeneas's dispassionate reasoning in response. She is absolutely honest with herself and with Aeneas about the feelings that generate and sustain the cognitive content of what (Cicero: *quid*) she says. On the other hand, he, following the inner voice of his "Mercury," his Roman male conscience, denies his own feelings and reasons inauthentically and even cruelly though the Stoic in us might claim that he is only being "objective." For in good Stoic form he attempts to strip his *logos* of its basis in *pathos*, unsuccessfully, however, since clear traces of underground malevolence surface throughout what he says. She, in contrast, speaks with no disconnection between *pathos* and *logos*. True, she is driven by *furor* or frenzy, but her reasoning, though always embedded in her feelings, is, as we will see, never illogical.

Virgil, master of the undecidable and questionable that he is, is provocatively ambiguous here. On the one hand, he leaves open the possibility, which surely his patron Augustus would have demanded, that Aeneas is, so to speak, the "very model of a modern major general," who rigorously suppresses his feelings in order, with exemplary self-control, to follow the demands of his *pietas* or sense of duty, and he does this regardless of the consequences for himself. Seen this way, as it surely can be, particularly by Anglo-Saxon interpreters, Dido is simply overcome by mad passion. Moreover, in succumbing to her desires, she violates her vows of fidelity to Sachaeus. Indeed, she herself is keenly aware of her *culpa* or guilt. On the other hand, Virgil makes it equally possible to see Aeneas as Dido sees him, that is, not as some kind of hero, but as a heartless, perfidious shell of a man, wholly out of touch with his feelings even as he struggles in vain to deny them. This paper, will take the second point of view. It will insist on communication of *pathos* by enacted voice, by the tone, tenor, timbre, pitch, rhythm, and tempo, of the spoken word, in order thereby to highlight the abstraction in philosophical stoicism and its ideal of rational argument, *logos*, uprooted from its ground in passion.

(1)   Before turning to the speeches of <u>Aeneid</u> IV, let us equip ourselves with at least a summary knowledge of Stoicism's pretensions to imperturbable, pure rationality and, then, of Heidegger's demolition of these pretensions. There is a verse long debated because of its typical Virgilian ambiguity, that will serve nicely to introduce our considerations here: *mens immota manet, lacrimae volvuntur inanes*, "His mind remains unmoved; the tears come rolling down, empty" (IV, 449). The scene is this:

Dido has, in desperation, sent her sister Anna to plea with Aeneas to wait out the winter before leaving for Italy. In this way Dido might at least have time to come to grips with her grief. But Aeneas's mind remains unchanged. The question, then, is whose "tears come rolling down"? Are they Anna's and/or Dido's, in which case *inanes* means "in vain," or are they Aeneas's, in which case *inanes* means "empty," that is, with no content or substance behind them?

No less an authority that St. Augustine can be called upon to assist us here. Taking this verse to epitomize Stoicism, he writes,

> Thus the mind, where the resolve is fixed (*fixa ... ista sententia)*, permits no disturbances (*perturbationes*) to prevail in itself against reason (*contra rationem*), should these befall the lower parts of the soul. Rather reason itself dominates them, and thus without consenting to them, rather in resisting them, it practices the reign of virtue, and even Virgil will describe Aeneas as such a one when he says, 'his mind remains unmoved; the tears come rolling down, empty'. (de Civ. Dei IX, 4)

The key word in Augustine's interpretation is "*perturbationes*," disturbances, disorders, perturbations. For if the mind were not fixed in its resolve, *fixa ... ista sententia*, these *perturbationes* in the lower parts of the soul could shake mind loose from the choice and decision it has made. The clear reference here is to the Stoic doctrines of *ataraxia* and *apatheia*, imperturbability and dispassion.

Though he comes roughly 80 years after Virgil, Epictetus, more than the eclectic Cicero who precedes Virgil by a few decades, is our best source of the moral teachings of Stoicism in the early Roman empire, teachings to which we may confidently say Virgil is responding in his portrayals of Aeneas as the exemplary Stoic, and of Dido as Virgil's counter to Stoicism. For our purposes a brief summary Epictetus's key concepts will suffice to make clear how Stoicism plays itself out in Virgil. We begin with Aristotle's word *proairesis*, meaning first of all, choice, or literally, taking up *hairein*, one course of action instead of, *pro*, another, but, more importantly for its late role in Stoicism, the choice of life, *proairesis tou biou*, to which one holds through both temptation by pleasure and adversity (see Enchiridian §§ 4, 9, 13). In Epictetus, one's *proairesis* becomes the guiding principle, the *hêgêmonikon* (38) that keeps one's life in accordance with *phusis* or natural intelligence. *Prohairesis*, this is to say, is based in reason, *logos*, and here Plato's Socrates is the model, for in regard to everything that happened to him, he "paid no attention to anything other than reason (*ê tôi logôi*)" (51). To hold to one's *proairesis,* the virtues of *enkrateia*, *karteria*, and *anexikania*, self-control, perseverance and equanimity, are crucial, but most of all, *ataraxia* and *apatheia*, imperturbability and dispassion (12, 29). The latter depend upon disengagement and detachment and are thus sustained by *hupexairesis*, reserve, holding oneself back, and even *katphronesis,* disdain, contempt (19, 26) that make one immune to the seductive desire of pleasure and fear of pain (12). In this way one shields oneself against *tarassein*, perturbation; indeed, the injunction is, "[H]old yourself back completely from anything that moves you greatly (*polu sunkinesthai*)," literally, from "any great commotion" (53), don't get involved. Only such distancing will enable us to fulfill our obligations, *ta kathêkonta* (Cicero: *officia*), and our duty, *to kathêkon*, to family and nation (30). Virgil refracts these values through the prism of Aeneid IV's clash between Dido's raging passion, *furor*, and Aeneas's *pietas* or sense of duty, but with the surprising turn that in the end Dido seems far more genuine and real than Aeneas. As with Schiller's critique of Kant's "duty over inclination (*Pflicht über Neigung*)," the poet here too displays the artificiality and even falsity of the philosopher's *logos* severed from its actual underground in *pathos*. Indeed, in violently dispatching his rival Turnus at the end of the Aeneid, Virgil shows Aeneas to be no less a creature of *furor* than anyone else in the poem.

Despite the self-evident shallowness of Stoicism, many of us, especially Anglo-Saxon males like me, will recognize how powerfully it continues to shape our thinking – *and*, to turn to homiletical concerns, our speaking. American philosophy's emphasis on well-reasoned "arguments" (*logoi*), in which the "cognitive" is purified of the "emotive," is plainly a contemporary manifestation of Stoic influence. To be sure, deconstruction and postmodernism have mounted a serious challenge to the idea of rational argument, but given the French, hyper-literate prioritizing of writing, the principal communication of *pathos* by the sound of the spoken word has been utterly neglected. Deconstruction's suspension of the law of non-contradiction is an anti-logical strategy that does nothing to recover the musical matrix of what we say, nothing to root *logos* in its *Untergrund* and *Abgrund*, its underground un-ground and abyss of *pathos*. In putting it this way I am drawing, of course, on Nietzsche's <u>The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music</u>, a detailed discussion of which must be reserved for another occasion (<u>Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik</u>, (GT)). Instead, I wish to turn here to Heidegger's <u>Being and Time</u> and the idea of *Destruktion*, which paved the way for Derrida's deconstruction but which in fact proceeds in a very different way that might, if indirectly, allow us to restore the priority of the voiced, audible word (<u>Sein und Zeit</u>, (SZ))

We do not know how important Nietzsche's <u>Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music</u> was for Heidegger, for whom music is of virtually no interest. Heidegger, after all, comes from the tradition of light (*phôs*) metaphysics and phenomenology where seeing phenomena, things as the appear, *phainontai*, to sight, takes precedence over hearing. Still, the communication of affects by the sound of voice, charity in particular, is a primary concern for the homiletic, apologetic, Christian philosophers on whom Heidegger draws for his own rediscovery of the fundamental importance of the affects, Augustine, Pascal and Kierkegaard in particular. For us it is significant that he treats emotional predispositions and affects, Aristotle's *diatheseis* and *pathê* (see Rhet. II, 2-12) under the headings, respectively, of *Befindlichkeit*, the way one finds oneself feeling, and *Stimmungen*, the latter variously translated as frame of mind and mood or "attunement." *Stimmung*, however, contains *Stimme* or voice, and to render this acoustical dimension of it, we might best speak of things like "voicing," "tenor," "tone." In this way the centrality of the spoken word in any communication of *pathos* becomes patent. Moreover, it is not by chance, I suggest, that *Stimmung* also occurs in Nietzsche's <u>Birth of Tragedy</u>: Nietzsche cites the poet Schiller's account, "that as the condition preparatory to the poetic act, he did not have before him and in his possession some sequence of images ordered causally in his thoughts but, on the contrary [found himself undergoing] a musical mood (*eine musikalische Stimmung*)" GT §5). (We have referred similarly to the "musical matrix" of speech.)

Moreover, whatever the defining influences were for Heidegger, he joins Nietzsche in his own challenge to the ideal of the Socratic "theoretical human being" (see GT §§ 11-14). Factual human existence is not "looking on" at distance, not *theôrein*, not *Hinsehen*, but *Dasein*, always already having to be "there" in the midst of a world of things that one has to "see about" "taking care of" (Heidegger: *Sich-Umsehen, Besorgen*), and whose being is always already determined (*bestimmt*) by the *Stimmung* one finds oneself in. In his own way, then, Heidegger's "fundamental ontology" may be said to have carried out Nietzsche's project of the deconstruction of the Apollonian surface of tragedy. When confronted with the "dithyrambic servants of Dionysus (*Dionysusdiener*)," Nietzsche tells us, "the Apollonian Greek must have trembled to think that his Apollonian consciousness only covers up this Dionysian world and, so to speak, veils it from him.... To comprehend this we must take down the artful building of Apollinian culture stone by stone, as it were, until we catch sight of the foundations (*Fundamente*) on which it is grounded" (GT §3) As a similar *Destruktion*, Heidegger would take down the reduced world of objectified things statically present to the detached onlooker – and let us add "silent reader." He would uncover beneath it our original worried, anxious way of existing in the world, either

owning ourselves authentically or disowning and abandoning ourselves to an standardized code of what one (*man*) ought to do. And as different as these two *Destruktionen* are, the both would reverse the artificial dissociation of mind from the body, of *logos* from *pathos*, the reasoning of the mind from the feelings the body undergoes. They both would display the superficiality of supposedly unaffected, unmoved reason.

Indeed, there is an undeniable, if unacknowledged Nietzschean quality to Heidegger's contention that even when human existence is "rationally enlightened" there is no argument against the fact that,

> ... the tonal mood (*Stimmung*) confronts human existence with having to be, having to be 'there,' and stares back at it, unremittingly baffling. Taken existentially, ontologically, there is not the least justification for suppressing the evidence of the feeling one finds oneself in (*Befindlichkeit*) by measuring it against the apodictic certainty in theoretical cognition of something purely objective (SZ 136).

Above all, theoretical detachment deletes the existential *Grundbefindlichkeit*, the underlying affect of *Angst*, and with it, the entire affective dimension of our original human existence: "In looking on theoretically the world is always already dimmed down to the monotone of what is purely objective" (SZ 138). And monotonic too, we might add, is the speech of the theoretical onlooker (and sermon reader!). But let us now turn to Virgil to see how a poet substantiates Nietzsche's and Heidegger's claim that philosophy's pure reason, untainted by emotion, is a fiction and philosophy's unperformed written word, a pale abstraction.

(2)   Marking yet another key juncture in the course of the story, the signal words *At regina*, "But the queen," introduce Dido's confrontation of Aeneas at 296, just as they had introduced the whole of Book IV at verse 1, and just as they will introduce the tragic denouement of Dido's inevitable suicide at 504. She has a presentiment of Aeneas's deception, a cognition grounded in the *pathos* or affect of her love: *quis fallere possit amantem*, comments the authorial voice, "Who could possibly deceive a lover? " And there is, to speak with Heidegger, *Angst* in the back- and underground here too, that indeterminate apprehension that a *nihil* is forever annihilating one's entire world: das *Nichts nichtet,* or as the poet Virgil can say it much more gracefully*, Interea tempus fugit, fugit irreparabile* (Meanwhile time flees, flees irretrievabl*y).* Clearly for the poet Virgil, Dido thinks what she thinks and knows what she knows based on what she feels.

To be sure, she is *furens* too, raving, and in verses strongly reminiscent of Euripedes' Bacchae, she is said to rage through the whole city like a a Thyiad or Maenad, Nietzsche's *Dionysusdiener* (300-303). Austin notes her complete loss of "self-control" in contrast to Aeneas, but this is spoken from the male Anglo-Stoic tradition of the stiff upper lip. One might better say, on the contrary, that Dido is a concrete, psychosomatic unity, whereas Aeneas, in suppressing his physical feelings, is abstracted and split. Moreover, Dido's speech is not in the least irrational or illogical all the while it remains genuinely embedded in the passions that give rise to it. And it is cogent. We note the *compellat* in *tandem his Aeneam* compellat *vocibus ultro*; "Finally, she moves before he can and calls him to task, voicing these words" (304):

> Did you even hope, you perfidious bastard (*perfide*), that you could fake your way past (*dissimulare*) such a gross wrong (*tantem nefas*) and sneak away in silence? (305-306)

In trying to save himself, Aeneas had been racking his brains to find one of those "50 ways to leave a lover" that would let him escape unscathed. To no avail. And she calls him on it.

Our first task is to identify the affective underground out of which her speech arises by attending to the voiced words that express it, in particular the *perfide*, *tantem nefas* and *dissimulare*. There is anger here, hurt and indignation. Unlike philosophical concepts, these words of the poet are not terms with definite meanings, rather they are indeterminate acoustical foci with infinite resonances radiating from them. On the one hand, Virgil's choice of these words with their ever proliferating e-vocations and equi-vocations lets us *see* and know what Dido is feeling. But that is not all. Language in Virgil is always onomatopoetic in that the sound of the words, say, the hissing s's in these verses, *dissimulare etiam sperasti, perfide, tantum/ posse nefas tacitus ...,* makes us hear and feel the hatred ourselves.

Unlike philosophical speech, *logos* uprooted from *pathos*, the poet's *logos* grounded in *pathos* rests in a substrate that is not subject to abstract logic's law of non-contradiction. Indeed, the *pathos* ground is itself inherently self-contradictory even when the logical surface it supports is self-consistent. For this reason, *pathos* cannot serve as a logical foundation or cause on which to base a logical inference. With Nietzsche, the *Grund* of *pathos* is an *Abgrund*, an abyss over which reasoning floats precariously but on which it cannot be grounded. Hence if pressed to its depths, the bottom drops out of any reasoning and we are plunged into the swirl of contradictory feelings beneath it. In Dido hate mixes with its contrary, love, and the sharp and searing s's thus quickly give way to gentler, slower, long vowels, a's o's and u's and the liquid n's, m's and r's of

> nec te n**o**ster **amor** nec te d**a**ta dexte**ra** quonda**m**
> nec m**o**ritu**ra** tene **cru**deli f**un**ere Did**o**?
> (Nor are you held back by our love, nor by the
>   right hand pledge once given,
> nor by the cruel death Dido is about to die?) (307-308)

Along with the slow pulse that these long vowels (spondees) create, we note the ralantando in the anaphora of repeated *nec* ("nor") phrases, the first two in half verses but the last drawn out to a full six foot verse. For a moment the edge is off and disillusioned fond remembrances blended with woeful anticipations rise up in languid sadness and apprehension. But quickly the harsh s's begin to insinuate themselves again as Dido's *Stimmung* and *Befindlichkeit* shift:

> ... hiberno moliri **s**idere cla**ss**em
> et medii**s** propera**s** Aquilonibu**s** iri per altum
> crudeli**s**
> (By winter stars you hasten to ready your fleet
> and to go out on the high seas in the midst of winter
>   storms,
> you unfeeling beast (*crudelis*)?) (309-11)

Such is the depth of instability expressed in what she says.

It is significant that only against this back- and underground of surging, inconsistent feelings does something in the order of a "logical" argument – a fortiori, to be precise – arise, for grounds, reasons are indeed given for a conclusion to be drawn, not in the form of assertions, to be sure, but as rhetorical questions. For Dido is not making intellectual "claims" (see Toulmin), rather she is addressing someone as one psychosomatic unity speaking to another. Not the unmoved intellect of an onlooker is addressed but the will of someone who hears or does not: she does not seek the answer from Aeneas, "Yes, I see," rather "Yes, I will." But for the moment, let us uproot the logic of what she says from the feelings that sustain it, i.e., turn the poetry into prose: "If it still were standing, you would not set out for

Troy on such stormy seas (the stronger, *fortior* possibility). Why then would you set out for unknown shore?" Now clearly this is coherent and valid reasoning, and I fail to see how Dido as Virgil portrays her here can be dismissed as a victim of passion incapable of clear headed thinking. Even when she senses herself on the verge of madness (see 376f., 536f.), she is capable of transcendent reflection upon her condition and remains self-possessed. The point is, rather, that there is no disconnection of what she thinks from what she feels and she therefore never suppresses, disguises, dissembles her feelings however intense and overwhelming they may be. Instead, Virgil displays for us her remarkable authenticity and openness.

Mene fugis? (314); "Is it me you are fleeing?" As a matter of fact it is, and with that Dido preempts and demolishes the screen of prevarications that she rightfully anticipates from her lover turned faithless. Even so, she is still willing to put enough trust in him, misplaced though it will be, to open herself fully to him and risk the coldly inhuman rebuff that she will in fact receive. At this point vituperation modulates into a plea for pity as the underground feeling modulates from hatred to a last trace of love and trust:

> If I well deserve anything from you, or if there is anything that seemed to you
> sweet about me (*dulce meum*), take pity on this shaking house,
> I pray – if there is still any room in your heart for my pleas, abandon the plan you have in
>   mind. (317-19)

And again reasons, sound reasons, are advanced why Aeneas should hear her pleas: her love for him has exposed her to grave threats:

> On your account (*te propter*) the Lybian people and Numidian kings
> are full of hate. My own Tyrians are indignant. On your account (*te propter*) my
> sense of shame and my former reputation, by which alone I was carried to the stars,
> have been extinguished. (320-23)

Logical enough, but the intensity of the repeated *te propter* with the hyperbaton of the *te* moved forward – literally, "**you** are the reason that" –lets us hear the Nietschean *Untergrund und Abgrund* of crushing anguish, from which her "reasoning," as it were, arises and into which it collapses. Nothing is affectively neutral in genuine speech:

> For what? For what do you leave me destined to die, my guest (*hospes*),
> – 'guest' is all that remains now of 'spouse' (*conjuge*) –
> perhaps when my brother Pygmalion destroys my city's
> walls or when the Gaetulian Iarbas leads me away captive? (323-26)

There is caustic, denfensive sarcasm in her reversion to *hospes* or "guest" here after their season of intimacy, but in the end this proud and noble ruler drops all her defenses. Far from trying to defeat her lover become opponent, she leaves herself completely vulnerable to him:

> If at least I had conceived a child from you
> before you took flight, if there were for me a little (*parvulus*) Aeneas
> to play in my halls, whose face, despite everything, would tell me of you,
> then, after all, I would not see myself so completely betrayed and deserted. (327-30)

For my Anglo-stoic ears this sounds maudlin at first, and true to the Stoicism Aeneas affects, his response will be something in the order of "Come off it!" But we must realize what has happened here: regal and commanding heretofore, Dido has now laid herself open in a last ditch effort to break through the armor of Aeneas's contrived indifference and reach the real human being ensconced behind it. (Compare 319, *si quis adhuc precibus locus*, "if there is still any room in your heart for my pleas.") The "little," *parvulus*, is a word of endearment, a striking one-time occurrence in Virgil, from the realm of family. Following the Plattdeutsch *der Lütsche*, for instance, my wife refers to our youngest grand children as "little Mathew" and "little Derek." This is a realm of tender affection, however, to which Aeneas has forfeited all access, and his response to what Page calls "a plea that would move a stone" is utterly abstract. Despite Austin's and Williams's attempts to justify Aeneas, I have to agree with Page's assessment: "Not all Virgil's art can make the figure of Aeneas here appear other than despicable.... Aeneas replies with the cold and formal rhetoric of an attorney" (quoted in Williams).

Indeed, as we will hear now, Aeneas does sound like a lawyer, like someone impartial and dispassionate making a case for somebody else rather than himself. Having distanced himself, he is not really "there." Virgil the poet's mythological way of showing this is to say, first, that, "having been admonished by Jupiter, Aeneas kept his eyes unmoved/ and struggled to suppress his care deep in his heart./ Finally he responded in few words (*pauca*)" (331-33). Virgil then proceeds to craft a remarkably prosaic speech in which the true *Untergrund* and *Abgrund* of *pathos* is evident but obviously suppressed. Since no feeling is supposed to be communicated, the voiced sound becomes seemingly indifferent. *Pace* Page, Virgil, I think, displays extraordinary skill precisely in making Aeneas look so despicable, and in this we have the core of his *Destruktion* of Stoic imperturbability and dispassion, *ataraxia* and *apatheia*. For with Heidegger we should acknowledge that affective neutrality, which is to say the passion of dispassion, is the indispensable affective precondition and basis of any supposedly objective "argument" (see SZ 138). Aeneas's prosaic and monotonic speech renders this self-deceit here perfectly. In short, the very unpoetic barrenness of his speech is Virgil's ingenious poetic device.

His stripped down "counter-argument," ostensibly a *logos* with no *pathos*, begins, "I will never deny, queen (*regina*,) that I am in debt to you for the many things you mention and validly enumerate, nor that I will regret my remembrances of Elissa/ for so long as memory does not fail me, for so long as my spirit moves these limbs"(333-36). Even more than the third person "Elissa," Aeneas's name for Dido, the *regina* (queen) here reverts to the same level of detached formality as Dido's *hostes* (guest), and this in abrupt rejection of the opening for intimacy that Dido leaves at the end of her speech. Thus the prerequisite affective neutrality is established for the "case" he is now about to make: "I will say just a few words in regard to this matter (*pro re*)," he continues with lawyer-like brutal objectivity (336). If anything, the frigidity of this verse makes clear to us how potently affecting affective neutrality really is, and that the surface of what is said is never "what it's about", rather, as poets know, the underground feeling beneath what is said, here the anxious desire to protect himself from discomfort by not getting involved.

Aeneas now moves to a point by point refutation as variations on the theme of "Frankly my dear I don't give a damn": "I neither hoped to flee like a thief – don't imagine such a thing (*ne finge*) – nor have I ever pretended to carry wedding torches or to have entered into the bonds of marriage" (337-39). Note the parenthetical *ne finge*, which ruptures the logical line and allows the underground antipathy to surface, as if to say, "You are making the whole thing up." And he goes on: "If the fates allowed me to lead my life under my own auspices/ and to arrange my concerns according to what I want,/ I would first of all have tended to the city of Troy and the sweet things there remaining to me (*dulcisque meorum*)," this, deliberately opposed to the "sweet things about me" (*dulcis meum*) Dido suggested he might once have found in her (see 318). Here the vindictive desire to inflict pain surfaces and, he continues,

rubbing salt in the wound, "Were only Priam's high walls still standing/ and Troy could be brought back by my own hand for the defeated./ But now it is greater Italy that Apollo from Gryneum and the Lycian oracle command me to seek at once./ There is my love, there is my fatherland" (343-45). In essence the argument runs, "You are not even my second choice, dearie, and I never intended to stay here anyway building your walls with you as we have been doing." There follows what is supposed to be an objective argument by similarity: You, a Phoenician, fled and founded the city of Carthage on foreign soil. So how can you begrudge us founding a city of our own when it is the "right thing" (*fas*, in refutation of her accusation of *nefas* or "gross wrong" at 306). There is a sinister underground to this, however: Aeneas is intentionally reminding Dido of the *dis*similar circumstances of her flight from Tyre, the murder of her husband, Sacheus, by her brother Pygmalion, who threatens Dido herself even now, and of her *culpa* or guilt in breaking her pledge never to marry again..

But with Aeneas's momentary deviation next, from the prosaic and juridical into the full patho-logical unity of poetry, Virgil makes plain that the logical surface of "what it's about" is not really "what it's about" after all: "Each time that night casts its pall of damp shadows over the earth," Aeneas says, "each time that fiery stars rise up, the turbulent image (*turbida imago*) of my father Anchises admonishes me in my sleep and terrifies me" (351-53) Here the underground reality of uncontrollable fear, for which his rational arguments are mere rationalizations, intrudes and shatters the Stoic façade of imperturbability. And to be sure, Virgil will elaborate Aeneas's fundamental perturbation shortly in an account of a second dream visitation by "Mercury" and the misogynous, outright lies that he tells Aeneas, which is to say, that Aeneas tells himself: "Are you so demented that you discern neither the dangers soon encircling you/ nor hear the west wind Zephyrs blowing?/ That woman is churning with schemes and gross wrongs (*nefas*, again) in her breast, certain she will die, and multiple gusts of rage excite her/ .... You will already see the sea riled (*turbari*) with her timbered ships, and wild raging/ torches lighting up, already, the beaches ignited in flames/. ... Woman is an ever inconsistent and changeable thing (*varium et mutabile semper femina*)" (561-70). So much for Stoic *ataraxia* and *apatheia*. Aeneas's paranoia reminds me of a bumper sticker seen in Cambridge: "I couldn't go to work today. The voices kept telling me to stay home and clean my guns."

The conclusion of Aeneas' response to Dido's startling for its brutality: "So quit enflaming me, and yourself too, with your quarreling. I don't seek Italy of my own free will" (360-61); in short, "The gods made me do it, so shut up."

Dido, of course, does not buy a word of this, and Virgil makes clear by sheer force of the speech he gives her in reply to Aeneas -- James Fox calls it "perhaps the finest thing in all poetry" -- that, by the contrast, his audience is meant to feel the poverty of Aeneas's stoic flat-lining. Having left herself open to Aeneas's cold dismissiveness, she tears into him like a cornered animal. For with her, there is no disjunction of *pathos* and *logos*: what she says is the authentic voicing of what she feels. Hence Dido refuses to engage Aeneas on the superficial level of falsified dispassion and "reasoned" argument. One might read a logical argument silently, but this, even in my meager translation, must be spoken aloud to hear and feel its meaning:

> Neither was a goddess your parent, nor Dardanus the author of your line,
> you perfidious bastard, but the hard rocks of horrid
> Caucasus gave you birth, and Hyreanean tigers gave you their teats to suck.
> For what now should I play the fool, for what greater insult should I reserve myself?
> Did he so much as sigh at my tears, did he once turn to look at me?
> Did he, overcome, shed tears or take pity on his beloved?
> What thing worse than this could I expect? No, not anymore does her highness Juno,
> not anymore does Saturn's son, father of the gods, look on at this with equanimity.

Nowhere is faith rewarded....

    ....Now it's the seer Apollo[he says],
now it's his Lycian fates, and now, sent by Jupiter himself,
it's the messenger of the gods, who brings his horrifying commands through the air.
Sure. That means work for those superior ones, I mean, such worries upset their
peace and quiet!
(Note the stinging s's: and hard, gutteral c'c and q in this cynical verse with its oblique reference
to divine *ataraxia* : **sc**il**c**et is **s**uperi**s** labor e**s**t ea **c**ura **q**uietos / **s**olli**c**itat.)

    ...Nor do I keep you here,
nor do I refute the things you say.
Get out (*i*)! Follow the winds to Italy, seek your realm across the waves...
    ....Though absent, I will follow you with black flames,
and when frigid death has led the soul away from my limbs,
as a shade I will be everywhere present. You, you scum, will pay the penalty.
And I will hear of it. The Manes will come to me with the tale deep below. (365-87)

    What homiletical significance does our extra-biblical excursion through Virgil
have for us? Above all, it has made clear that the Stoic, philosophical project of purifying the
mind of the body and thereby severing reason from the influences of the feelings leads only to an
abstraction from, and falsification of, our original, whole humanity. "Objectivity" is *dissimulatio,*
as Virgil would put it. For in what we say to each other we are, to begin with, patho-logical and
poetic, not impartial lawyers making a good prose "argument." Consequently the sound of our
voice is an indispensable component in the communication of full meaning. To be understood,
what we say must be voiced and heard, not just seen and read. Reading the score of a Mozart
concerto (or Virgil's poem the Aeneid) (or the Bible) will show us the composer's logic, but it is
quite a different thing to hear the work performed. It ought to be like that with sermons.

Contemporary Cultural Artifacts, the Bible, and Story

Dena L. Williams
Iliff School of Theology—D Min 2005
Sponsor—Richard Ward

The origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible have been underlying issues for much contemporary writing including: novels, films, and magazines. The "Left Behind" series of novels[1], "The Passion of the Christ" movie, written and directed by Mel Gibson, "The DaVinci Code" novel:[2] all these are examples of the culture's fascination with and debate about the Bible. Based on my experience as a parish pastor, the issues raised around these cultural artifacts have often gripped the imagination and thought of contemporary mainline Protestant church-goers in considering the Bible, particularly in the last five years. Parishioners seem to hear and read as much or more about the Bible outside of church as they do in church. Their opinions regarding the origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible are often shaped by what they read and view in cultural artifacts. What they hear can be confusing and conflicted, leaving these Christians uncertain about what to believe regarding the Bible. Unlike fundamentalist churches where a single position of Biblical inerrancy and infallibility is universally taught and believed, mainline Protestant preachers, pastors, and lay persons often hold a variety of opinions. These opinions come to worship with their holders each Sunday morning, creating a challenge for preachers.

The "Left Behind" series of novels, authored by Jerry Jenkins and Tim La Haye, portrays an interpretation of the end times based on a particular reading of what the authors regard as the prophetic texts of the Bible. The rapture theology that forms the basis for the novels was first conceived by John Nelson Darby, a British minister, in the 1830s. Darby found in the Bible, a series of texts that he believed could be used to prophesy the end of the world, beginning with the "rapture." Jesus will return to the skies and gather up all Christians who are "saved" according to Darby's definition of salvation. There will follow seven years of "tribulation", a time of horror and suffering for all the world. Darby did not predict a specific time for the rapture, but created a series of intervals of time, called "dispensations", that represent God's timetable for the world. He made several trips to the United States between 1859 and 1877 and converted many Christian leaders to his ideas. Darby's system was popularized in the *Scofield Reference Bible,* a best-selling work published in 1909. Cyrus Scofield's work interwove Darby's dispensationalist system into marginal notes of the King James Version of the Bible. Darby's system, as presented by Scofield was embraced in particular by the founders of the Dallas Theological Seminary, founded in 1924. Hal Lindsey, associated with the seminary, reworked Darby's system and published his interpretation in the best-selling book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, in the 1970s. His version of dispensational thought incorporated Cold War politics, nuclear weapons, the rise of Islam, the fall of the Soviet Union.[3]

The "Left Behind" novels graphically portray the lives of those who were not "saved" and were not taken up by Jesus at the time of the "rapture." The "rapture" begins with the disappearance of millions of people across the world.

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[1]Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, *Left Behind*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1995).
[2] Dan Brown, *The DaVinci Code,* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).
[3] Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed,* (Boulder, CO*: Westview Press, 2004) 22-25.

I expect the Rapture to be electrifyingly sudden but not secret, for when Christ calls His living saints to be with Him, millions of people will suddenly vanish from the earth. An unsaved person who happens to be in the company of a believer will know immediately that his friend has vanished. There will certainly be worldwide recognition of the fact, for when over one-half of a billion people suddenly depart this earth, leaving their earthly belongings behind, pandemonium and confusion will certainly reign for a time.

A million conversations will end midsentence.
A million phone receivers will suddenly go dead. . .

A mother will pull back the covers in a bassinet, smelling the sweet baby smell one moment but suddenly kissing empty space and looking into empty blankets.

Think of the countless homes where, "in the twinkling of an eye," only clothes will remain in the chair where a believer sat moments before. Consider the passengers aboard airplanes with a Christian crew. Many believe that the Rapture will result in titanic chaos as Christian auto and bus drivers, train engineers, pilots, and others suddenly vanish. The Rapture just may create the greatest freeway gridlock in history![4]

This scenario sets the scene for the novels in the series. There follow stories of those left behind in a world consumed by the evils of warfare, drought, hunger, death, disease, and destruction. The series has sold more than 50 million copies worldwide. The stories and the literalist interpretation of the Bible espoused in them are part of the experience of many Christians, including mainline Protestant churchgoers. While it behooves parish pastors to actively pursue the education of parishioners that refutes this fundamentalist interpretation, the people in the pews on Sunday morning may be at best confused and at worst convinced by the "Left Behind" stories. The task of the pastor is to proclaim the good news from the pulpit in ways that may confront literalist thought without so offending listeners, including church members and visitors, who may be so taken in by the story's perspective, that the potentially transforming message of the sermon is missed.[5]

The movie, "The Passion of the Christ", premiered in 2004 to great acclaim. The portrayal of the last days of Jesus' life, his suffering and death, was widely viewed by Christians. The movie concluded with a grisly death scene on the cross, graphically portrayed. The horror was unrelenting; the movie ended with little or no sign of hope. Jesus' teachings, loving relationships, and acts of compassion and healing, as portrayed in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John did not make the cut. The Gospels, indeed, were not treated as separate portraits of Jesus, but the most awful parts of the stories were spliced together as though they comprised a single story.

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[4] Tim LaHaye, *The Rapture, Who Will Face the Tribulation?*, (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, *2002),* 39.

[5] Recommended resources: Barbara Rossing, *The Rapture Exposed,* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2004) and Robert H. Smith, *Apocalypse, A Commentary on Revelation in Words and Images,* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2000).

The task of the preacher on Sunday morning is altered by the cultural phenomenon of such a movie. Many churchgoers will be more familiar with the story as told in the movie than with the story as told by the Gospel writers. It becomes the responsibility of the preacher to fill in the gaps, sort out the portraits, provide the meaning, offer hope to those whose most informed experience of the meaning of the passion comes from this movie. Again, it becomes the preacher's call to proclaim the good news from the pulpit in ways that may confront those whose views are synonymous with the movie's tale, without so offending those listeners, including both church members and visitors, that the potentially transforming message of the sermon is missed.[6]

Dan Brown's, *The Da Vinci Code*, has created much confusion and many questions among Christians with its claim of the existence of sacred secrets and texts regarding Mary Magdalene and her relationship with Jesus. According to the story in the novel Mary Magdalene bore a child whose father was Jesus and fled to France where the bloodline continues to the present. Using famous artifacts, including Da Vinci's, *The Last Supper, The Mona Lisa,* and symbols from ancient Egypt, the fast paced bestseller feeds the imagination of readers by proclaiming just enough "truth" to be believable. The book opens with this statement, entitled "Fact."

> The Priory of Sion—a European secret society founded in 1099—is a real organization. In 1975 Paris's Bibliotheque Nationale discovered parchments known as *Les Dosssiers Secrets,* identifying numerous members of the Priory of Sion, including Sir Isaac Newton, Botticelli, Victor Hugo, and Leonardo da Vinci.
>
> The Vatican prelature known as Opus Dei is a deeply devout Catholic sect that has been the topic of recent controversy due to reports of brainwashing, coercion, and a dangerous practice known as "coporal mortification." Opus Dei has just completed construction of a $47 million National Headquarters at 243 Lexington Avenue in New York City.
>
> All descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.[7]

The artifacts discussed in the novel may be accurately described, but their relationships to each other and to history are distorted for the sake of the story. The novel is spellbinding and convincing. The danger lies in the intertwining of fact and fiction in ways that prevent distinguishing between the two without careful thought. A rather thorough knowledge of the Bible and of history is necessary to sort fact from fiction.

The book has been widely read across the United States. It has sold 7.5 million copies worldwide.[8] A positive outcome has been renewed interest in the life of Mary Magdalene and her portrayal in the Gospels. An unfortunate outcome has been the tendency to regard as accurate Brown's portrayal of Mary Magdalene as a "fallen woman," a characterization not present in the Gospels. Once more, it becomes the preacher's task to convincingly tell the story as it is present in the Bible without offending the sensibilities of Brown's devotees so that the potentially transforming message of a sermon may still be heard.

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[6] Recommended resource: Stephen J. Patterson, *Beyond the Passion, Rethinking the Death and Life of Jesus,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).
[7] Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, (New York: Doubleday, 2003), 1.
[8] The Rocky Mountain News, Denver, CO, February 19, 2005, p 35A.

The above examples indicate the difficulties faced by preachers in responding to the portrayal of the Bible in contemporary cultural artifacts. Though not as widely read, articles such as the ones regarding the Christmas story published in December 2004 issues of *Time* and *Newsweek* magazines raise other issues for believers.[9] John Meacham writes: " . . . the Nativity narratives are the subject of ongoing scholarly debate over their historical accuracy, their theological meaning and whether some of the central images and words of the Christian religion owe as much to the pagan culture of the Roman Empire as they do to apostolic revelation." He goes on to present a balanced view of historical accuracy and the role of faith, emphasizing the difference between literal interpretation and interpretation that finds truth in the Gospel stories. David Van Biema takes a similar stance. He discusses the virgin birth: "As New Testament scholars have delved deeper into the pagan faiths that competed with early Christianity for followers, Mary's virginity has been challenged from the opposite direction—not as an impossible novelty but as a theme borrowed from literature of the non-Jewish world." He goes on to describe the faithful experience of many Christians, who every year, don costumes and act out the Christmas story as an act of devotion.

While mainline Protestant preachers may be relieved that *Time* and *Newsweek* have published articles that make use of contemporary Biblical scholarship, confusion and questions will also arise among parishioners that will need to be addressed in thoughtful ways in the classroom, in pastoral care interactions, and from the pulpit.

The common theme that arises from these cultural artifacts that deal with the Bible is story. La Haye and Jenkins, Brown, and Mel Gibson have most effectively used story as a hook in order to engage readers and listeners in their view of the Bible. Van Biema and Meacham have wisely used story, the Christmas story, to engage readers in issues of contemporary Biblical scholarship and its relationship to faith. Preachers would do well to heed the effectiveness of the use of story by these authors and writers.

Preaching with Honesty and Honor—Use of Story

The broad spectrum of views held by churchgoers regarding the origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible, often gleaned from cultural artifacts, presents a challenge for preachers. Transformative preaching precipitates a positive change in thought and/or behavior in listeners, a change that indicates growth in love of God, love of neighbor, love of self. Is it possible for the same sermon to be heard in transformative ways by hearers who gather divergent views of the Bible from a variety of sources, often including cultural artifacts? Does potentially transformative preaching that reflects a single view of Biblical origin, literalness, sacredness, and/or usefulness risk not being heard by people who view the Bible in ways that differ? Is it possible to so offend the sensibilities of hearers regarding the Bible that it is unlikely that the transformative message of the preaching can be heard?

It is my experience that when my views of the origin, literalness, sacredness, and/or usefulness of the Bible are overtly apparent in my preaching, my listeners who view the Bible in markedly different ways may focus on the discrepancy between their views and my views and are likely to miss the potentially transformative message that is the purpose of the sermon. While I regularly challenge others' views of the Bible in my teaching, and, at times, in pastoral interactions, I have become convinced that it can be counter productive to challenge views of the

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[9] David Van Biema, "Behind the First Noel," *Time*, Vol. 164, No. 24 (December 13, 2004): pp. 48—61. and John Meacham, "The Birth of Jesus," *Newsweek*, Vol. CXLIV, No. 24 (December 13, 2004): pp. 48—58.

Bible from the pulpit. How can preaching allow for variously held views of the Bible, enabling sermons to be potentially transforming for listeners regardless of their views? How can preaching that is transformative for listeners take place in ways that honestly reflect the preacher's view of the Bible and also honor the spectrum of views held by listeners?

As a mainline Protestant preacher, I find myself in a position common to many of my colleagues. A particular problem arises because we often hold views of the Bible that are more informed by contemporary Biblical criticism than are the views of the majority of our listeners who are often strongly influenced by cultural artifacts. The privilege of graduate theological education has afforded preachers the opportunity to study source and text criticism that has enhanced our understanding of the Bible. This knowledge has influenced our views of the origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible. I find that I, in general, hold more liberal views than do most of my listeners. My views of inspiration, for example, do not include the influence of the divine to the degree of most of my listeners. Study of the transmission of text from oral tradition to papyrus to vellum to paper brings me to a conclusion that precludes viewing text as generally historically accurate, although historical accuracy is an understanding held by many listeners. A study of the origins of non-canonical ancient literature leads me to regard other texts in the same category of "sacredness" as that which, for many listeners, includes only the Bible. It is important, however, that these personal views of the Bible do not preclude me from agreeing with many listeners that the Bible contains truths to live by, even though not all of the rules, laws, and examples apply to life in today's world.

A problem arises—how do I proclaim the truths of the Bible in transformative ways that are honest to my understanding of the origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible while still honoring the views of my listeners, which are often different than mine?

It has been my experience that meaningful preaching can use story,[10] Biblical or non-Biblical, and remain honest to the particular view of the Bible held by the preacher, while at the same time honoring variously held views of the Bible among listeners, enabling preaching to be potentially transforming (increasing love of God, love of others, love of self) for listeners regardless of their views of the authority of the Bible.

A Study

The questions raised above and the thesis that use of story can result in transformative preaching to allow a preacher to remain honest to his or her view of the Bible while honoring variously held views among listeners were the focus of my recent research.[11] Data were collected from 266 listeners at eight preaching events in seven congregations involving five different preachers. Data collected included listeners' views on the origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible, opinions regarding the preacher's use of the Bible in the sermon, and

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[10] Well-told story adheres to the following description: "Story is a coherent unit of action that has a beginning, middle, and an end. It moves from conflict to complication to resolution. It may arise from personal experience, the arts, or Scripture and might be used variously in preaching to illustrate, to give shape and form, to begin or to complete a sermon." Dr. Richard Ward, personal communication, March 25, 2004, Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO. In this paper, story is additionally understood as a way of shaping personal experience, personal knowledge and understanding of the Bible, history, or the culture into a form that communicates a potentially transformative message and that supports homiletic purpose.

[11] "With Honesty and Honor—Use of Story in Transformative Preaching" is the title of my project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry in the Practice of Preaching, awarded May 2005 by Iliff School of Theology, Denver, CO.

whether or not and in what ways the listener found the sermon to be transformative. Data indicating the preachers' views of the Bible were also collected. The eight sermons were analyzed for content using these categories: story, exhortation, theological explanation, interpretation of scripture, pastoral comfort, current events.

Use of story varied among the eight preaching events researched, ranging from 0% to 87%. Table 1 summarizes the content of the eight sermons preached as a part of this research. Pastor Ellen and Pastor Peter, whose views of the Bible rather closely matched their listeners' views, used 17.9% and 0% story, respectively, in their sermons. Pastor John, Pastor Chris, and the researcher, Pastor Dena, whose views of the Bible less closely matched the views of their listeners, used significantly more story in their sermons. Pastor John used 48.4% story. Pastor Chris used 54.1% story. Pastor Dena, the researcher, used 50%, 53%, 70.4%, and 87% story in her four sermons. There is no way to tell in the case of Pastor Ellen, Pastor Peter, Pastor John, and Pastor Chris whether or not the choice to use or not use story was conscious or unconscious or connected at all to their views of the Bible. For me, the researcher, the choice to use story was a combination of conscious and unconscious thought and was, at least in part, connected to my views of the Bible. I find the use of story an important means of being honest with myself regarding how I hold the Bible, while still honoring the wide range of views of the Bible present among listeners. Whether intentional or not in the case of these five preachers, an admittedly small sample, those whose views of the Bible more closely matched their listeners' views used less story, while those whose views varied more from their listeners' views used more story.

Preacher	Story	Exhortation	Theological Explanation	Interpretation of Scripture	Pastoral Comfort	Current Events
Pr. Ellen	17.9	40.4	30.5	4.6	6.6	0
Pr. John	48.4	14.7	10.9	17.0	1.5	7.0
Pr. Peter	0	41.5	0	53.1	5.3	0
Pr. Chris	54.1	0	39.2	6.6	0	0
Pr. Dena Transfiguration	53.0	17.0	0	12.0	4.0	0
Pr. Dena Light of Christ	70.4	5.3	12.7	4.8	6.9	0
Pr. Dena New Life	50.0	20.0	21.0	0	0	9.0
Pr. Dena Prairie	87.0	8.9	0	4.1	0	0
Average	47.6	18.5	14.3	12.8	3.0	2.0

Table 1—Summary of Sermon Analysis (all numbers are percentages)

All congregations were made up of people holding a variety of views regarding origin, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible. Among all respondents who are thought to have considered the question at all preaching events, i.e. those who answered at least one question on the reverse side of the listener's questionnaire, 183 of 223 or 82% found the sermon to be transformative. Listeners' positions regarding the Bible do not appear to have adversely affected the transformative message of the sermon. It is encouraging to preachers to think that,

at least in this study, 82% of respondents heard the transformative message of the sermon and were able to articulate how their thought and actions would be affected by that message in positive ways, ways that increase love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. Although it is impossible to know the effect of the sermon on those listeners who did not respond by completing a questionnaire, the numbers are still encouraging. It is also sobering for preachers to realize that a large number of respondents are listening carefully, seeking a transformative word from the preacher.

Based on this study, it would seem that meaningful preaching can use story, Biblical or non-Biblical, and remain honest to the particular view of the Bible held by the preacher, while at the same time honoring variously held views of the Bible among listeners, enabling preaching to be potentially transforming for listeners (increasing love of God, others, and self) regardless of their views of the authority of the Bible.

Conclusions

Issues are raised regarding the origins, literalness, sacredness, and usefulness of the Bible in a variety of ways by cultural artifacts such as novels, films, and magazines. The influence of these artifacts on Christians is widespread. It is reasonable to assume that the views of the Bible gleaned from these sources influence the spiritual and religious lives of Christians. Although pastors are called to address concerns that are raised from exposure to cultural artifacts in thoughtful ways in the classroom and in pastoral care interactions, the ability to address concerns from the pulpit is a challenge. It is necessary to preach in ways that are honest to a pastor's views of the Bible while honoring the listeners' views, views that may well have been gathered from the culture, and are often, therefore, quite different from the pastor's views. Story may be used in transformative preaching to bring honesty and honor, using the very means by which the culture effectively promulgates a variety of views of the Bible.

Preaching the Spirit: The Liberation of Preaching

William C. Turner, Jr.[*]
Duke University Divinity School
Durham, North Carolina

Some years ago Albert Cleage published a book of sermons he called The Black Messiah. One of the sermons was entitled "Let's Not Waste the Holy Spirit."[1] Among all else this sermon did, it showed the crucial link between the Spirit and liberation. A somewhat forgotten figure in the black theology movement, Cleage was a pastor in Detroit who was known for his outspoken support of the Civil Rights Movement and the struggle for social justice toward the middle of the twentieth century. While possessing sympathies for the work of Martin Luther King, Jr. in the South, he nevertheless acknowledged the limitations of this approach in the different regions of the country. He seemed to be more inclined toward the direct action of Malcolm X for the cities. And in the long sweep of things, he established his own Black Christian Nationalist Movement and the Pan African Orthodox Church, which included economic ventures, like a farm in South Carolina.

Cleage's position was that Jesus was a black revolutionary who came to call the Black Nation of Israel back to its vocation and its rightful standing in the world under God. They had slipped from their position as a light to the nation, largely through their disobedience. Consistent with the themes from prophetic writ, it was their lack of concern for the poor and downtrodden that caused the internal weakness, which made them prey for the stronger nations.

Jesus called them to nationhood. Paul distorted the message of Jesus, the black revolutionary, into a teaching of universal salvation. What's more, he changed the focus from Jesus' message to a message about Jesus. In this position Cleage's thought is akin to what one sees in Howard Thurman, who was influenced by his grandmother and certain strands of Afro-Christian thought, who credit Paul with planting the seeds of slaveholding Christianity. Thurman's mother, for instance, would not allow him to read from the epistles of Paul, believing they could not be the true gospel. In his understanding of Jesus as revolutionary, Cleage's thought is akin to that of S. F. Brandon.[2]

For Cleage, the Spirit is given to empower the black nation in its struggle. By means of this "divine energy" the downtrodden are strengthened to lift themselves from their feeble state and throw off their captors. Worship, which is one of the primary venues in which this power is released, is to be energetic and lively. It lifts persons from their doldrums; it encourages them to withstand all they must endure. But the Spirit is wasted if energetic worship does not translate into the work of making revolution. For him worship is a waste if it does not issue in some greater acts that exceed ecstasy and ephemeral joy.

Two points need to be made from the outset. The first is that Cleage's was perhaps the first attempt to take seriously the Holy Spirit within the purview of the black theology project. This observation is consistent with the critique of Cecil Cone, who argued that the identity crisis

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of black theology was its over-reliance on European theologies, and black power as political ideology rather than the encounter with the almighty sovereign God as experienced by the faithful.[3] The second point is that he as one of the major early contributors was a pastor, who knew firsthand the significance and explicit reliance on the Spirit within the worship and life of African American Christians. Methodologically, it is of utmost importance that he attempted to work out his pneumatology in the sermon.

<div align="center">Let the Spirit Be Preached</div>

What stands out in startling clarity from this attempt on Cleage's part is the crying need for pneumatology for the African American Church. To be sure, Cleage is not the only theologian to name this need. This theme is reiterated in the work of Henry Mitchell, Major Jones, and J. Deotis Roberts, to name a few. Indispensable contributions have been made by James Forbes and Reuben Speaks to name two. But the need for pneumatology actually increases with the frequency of references to the Spirit in the life of worship and the cries for liberation.[4]

The need is for pneumatology as the discourse of the church that opens space for speech concerning the Spirit in a manner consistent with all else that must be said about God and God's saving work in the world. But it must also be a discourse with capacity to critique the speech and practices so they are consistent with life and liberation that witness to Christ and bring glory to the Father. The grounding for such pneumatology, I would argue, necessitates faithful reading of the scriptures among the people in the work of preaching. The creedal, dogmatic, and systematic productions of the church are required, but they cannot replace the first order spirituality located in the contemporary praxis of ongoing reflection, where the pulpit and the preacher are focal.

The work of preaching, in this regard, is intensely theological. The work to which I have reference is far more than recycling the thought of other vendors. It cannot be reduced to rehearsing the findings of critical historical scholarship or storytelling. Rather, it must wrestle with the present reality of God among the people. The advantage of preaching is that speech must be in the language of the people. But it must also put their language to the test. Most of all, it must explore and expose the limited domain that is supplied by human speech and culture. In this regard, pneumatology offers a service that is not surpassed.

While the direction in which Cleage points us is helpful in the extreme, cautions concerning his project must not be overlooked. In making the Spirit merely instrumental, as he does, one runs the risk of "commodification" of the very sort seen in Simon (Acts 8: 13, ff.). The gift of God is not for sale. Without the Spirit as divine person, there is no account of Jesus to whom the scriptures bear witness. The divine person is not an item to be manipulated at will. Indeed, to do so would be to undermine the very liberty the Spirit gives. But once again, we see the value to be found in preaching, celebrating the sacraments, and executing the pastoral office. This is where the Spirit touches life concretely, and the concrete testimony concerning the Spirit takes on fresh meaning. The mystery reaches the tissue of life, as in the incarnation of the Son. God is with us, making a difference in hunks of clay—earthen vessels.

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[3] Cecil W. Cone, *The Identity Crisis in Black Theology*, Nashville, Tenn.,: AMEC Publishing House, 1975

[4] Henry H. *Mitchell, Black Belief*, New York: Harper and Row, 1975; Major J. Jones, *The Color of God*, Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1987; J. Deotis Roberts, *The Prophethood of Black Believers*, Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994; R. L. Speaks, *The Prelude to Pentecost*, Charlotte, N. C.: A. M. E. Zion Publishing House, 1988; James Forbes, *The Holy Spirit and Preaching*, Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989

At the same time, Cleage's point must not be missed. Pneumatology as critical theology is not to be assumed because of the number of explicit reference to the Spirit in preaching and worship life. It is not to be equated with languages of Spirit baptism, being slain in the Spirit, Holy Ghost preaching, speaking with tongues, and other ecstatic practices. Similarly, the Spirit is not the captive of "right" execution of the sacraments. The first datum of pneumatology is God. More, specifically, it is concerned with the life within God, and how that life overflows. The Spirit is God proceeding—going forth into the creation, entering the creature made in the divine image, and regenerating those who are dead in sin. The Spirit is God preparing the body of obedience for the Son, sustaining the Son is the obedience of his passion, raising the Son from death, and fashioning believers into one body that bears witness in the world. The mystery of godliness is that God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, taken up into glory, and believed on in the world (I Tim. 3: 16).

Although the Spirit gives the capacity to experience and respond to God, the identify of the Spirit must not be blurred with the human expressions offered through the idioms of culture. The Spirit remains sovereign over every human act. The same Spirit who filled Peter could chastise him on the rooftop in Joppa or forbid Paul to take the course he preferred during his missionary journeys. Likewise, the Spirit who authors preaching and worship remains sovereign over these practices when they are faithful. Without robust pneumatology African American, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christians have no theological advantage over Protestant and Western tutors who admit their neglect in this regard.

The problem of neglect in pneumatology is serious for Christian ministry. On the one hand, it yields diminished sensitivity to the Spirit, who is the operator—the one who makes ministry effective. Neglect can arise from squeamishness over experiences credited to the Spirit but not preferred by segments of a given culture. It can result from reticence over giving testimony to the ways in which God is experienced. Or, it can result from inadequate attention to critical and reflective work. However, attempts to remedy the neglect create a new set of problems if all three levels of spirituality are not engaged in an adequate manner. Critical and reflective work can open space for immediate experience and accounts. Accounts can be the occasion for reflection and further experience. Experience gives rise to the account, and it requires reflection. Pneumatology is essential for being able to say what is not as well as what is the Spirit. In its positive aspect it invites the descent of the dove, fresh wind, and fire.

The value of preaching for doing pneumatology is how it forces extended excursions into concrete reality, when it is done well. This is particularly the case in those communities where the preacher is not afforded the luxury of preaching a word that does not connect with the people, and where the response is immediate and clear. Where dullness is not permitted, the pressure on the preacher is to "make it plain." Unlike other forms of discourse, the sense in such communities is that no preaching has occurred unless hearts have been touched and the hearers have been moved. In some degree this is the litmus of all preaching, and in church traditions that understand themselves as "free," there is the proverbial "voting of the feet" on the part of those who cannot abide esoteric verse or meaningless prattle.

Preaching affords the unsurpassed privilege of probing the thickness of mystery and offers an invitation into the imaginary world of the text. Imaginary is not to be mistaken here for false or untrue. Rather, it is the world of images by which mystery is unfolded and rendered accessible. From the world of images, knowledge that is possessed is appropriated for the journey, the voyage into the realm of truth that may have no other mode of transport into the world of the people. Accordingly, preaching compels a handling of the material of life, and so

affords a word that matters. Because it is done among the people it cannot avoid the "hot potato" one would prefer to leave lying in its place.

True preaching is work of the Spirit. Without the Spirit there is no account that can be given that is consistent with the scriptures. Some would even go so far as to elevate preaching to the status of the sacrament. It is true that there is no account of the sacrament that does not take the character of proclamation. But within this context, preaching is more: it is the means by which the world of images in which the Spirit must be known is opened to the people, and they are invited to enter. Preaching the Spirit is essential for this task. For in exploring this world one is thrust deep into the realm of mystery where all speech about God has added resonance.

This vitality in preaching is abundantly manifest in the early church. In the ministry of the Lord Jesus credit for the anointing to preach and to perform mighty acts is given squarely to the Spirit. Indeed, the threat for ascribing the works of the Lord to Beelzebub is the consequence of blaspheming against the Spirit (Matt. 12: 31-32). For that offense there is no forgiveness. For only the Spirit can bring the sinner to repentance through the same convicting power that permits the confession that Jesus is Lord. This robust pneumatology is present in the writings of the Apostle Paul. Even where the explicit references are not so copious, it is clear that there is a "sense of the Spirit" underlying the writings and waiting to be made explicit by the faithful dispenser of the word. It appears and resonates in the lectures of Cyril and the defense against the pneumatomochians mounted by Saint Basil.[5]

What is being called for here is somewhat of a critique of Protestant preaching that tends to collapse the Spirit onto the word. While it is true that preaching relies utterly on the Spirit, reliance is weakened in the absence of robust pneumatology. The Spirit gives power to the word and keeps it alive. Similarly with preaching Christ: there is no account or experience of the living Christ without the Spirit. The relative opposition is crucial: the Spirit coming upon Christ is the paradigm for Christian ministry. This is the procession that prevents Christ from collapsing on the pages of a historical text as a dead hero or as one more martyred prophet. The Spirit accompanying the word prevents it from being one more philosophical tome.

Naming the Spirit in the thickness and density of the imaginary world in which it is revealed is no less than a lifeline in vital preaching. Then, even where the Spirit is not named, there is the sense of the procession of this divine person, whose nature is to come and go like the wind, and to give life and liberty as the first gift. Credit is due the Spirit for all her/his works. Not limited to structures—whether of the church or otherwise—the Spirit is known intimately in the interstices, in liminal moments, when one is caught between worlds. Indeed, the truly profound moments in the life of the Lord occur when life touches the limit, where boundaries are being crossed, and no barrier is posed that is too hard for God. As the angel said to Mary, "…With God nothing shall be impossible (Luke 1: 37).

Preaching as method, then, is about more than an honorable mention of the Spirit. It is also about more than narrating what the Spirit gives to preaching and does for preaching. It embodies the word; it proclaims the word as living, alive with power, adequate for cutting where joint and marrow divide, and of searching hearts. It performs rather than sitting around like a dead letter. The Spirit imports faith into unbelieving hearts, and gives through baptism the means for being carried into the life of Christ.

Preaching the Spirit is crucial for maintaining the Spirit as subject in all areas of the believer's life. O so easily the subject can be lost or merged with the one who is visibly present.

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[5] Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, *Lectures on the Christian Sacraments*, Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1977; Saint Basil, *On The Holy Spirit*, Crestwood, N. Y.: St. Vladimir's Press, 1980.

This can lead to excessive veneration of the priest as performer of magic (hocus pocus), or the preacher as some smooth operator. Preaching and sacraments remain in a tension that prevents domestication of the heavenly dove. The issue is not so much changing the number of channels through which the Spirit works. Rather, it is for sustaining the consciousness that the Spirit is the actor, who like all other persons is in possession of his acts. These are clarifications needed in preaching—not mere formal knowledge, but through the preacher as instrument of the Spirit.

Preaching the Spirit compels such discipline. For then we can no longer speak of God as mere philosophical category, predicate, or problem. Unlike the case with the Father and Son, the Spirit cannot be collapsed onto a social role. The Spirit is the breath of God. The same is so of the Son: the Christ we know by revelation cannot be confessed without the Spirit.

Interpreting the Scriptures

What must never be forgotten is that pneumatology, like every other aspect of theology, is about how to read and interpret the scriptures. O so easily this is forgotten if theology becomes a discipline of its own and a project to itself. Then it is a matter of reading theological texts and the texts that are written about the texts. The point of refreshment, reinvigoration, and renewal is ever that of reading the scriptures themselves—with fresh eyes, and feet mired in the clay of life. The issue forced by pneumatology is whether there is confession of the living God. When we come to and live in the world of the scriptures, we see that this is the only God we know by revelation—the only one who touches us inwardly, and in whom we have salvation. God saves, delivers, liberates, and gives abundant life.

But more, how this God is made known to those who worship and serve him is more than formal fact. It is life-giving, life-changing reality. Because God is in the midst, we shall not be moved; the help of God will come right early. We are never far removed from questions of epistemology—namely, 'How shall God be known?'

In his encyclopedic study in three volumes, Yves Congar sets forth his confession, saying, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*. He continues in the subtitle of volume three to insist that we know, "…The River Runs East and West."[6] This is fortunate in the extreme. For in the flow between the East and the West we find "marrow" to transplant into the spiritual leukemia of the church in the West as it has to do with matters of the Spirit. What one can see of the Spirit in that mutual flow is all but obscured from view to those absorbed with the pneumatological neglect of the West. This is particularly the case for those who cannot press beyond the split of the church in the twelfth century.

The East tended to follow a pattern in its Trinitarian formulation that starts with the three divine persons (hypostases) living in one another from eternity in a perichoretic flow of life. The Father, who is self-derived, is begetter of the Son and breather of the Spirit from eternity. The Son is begotten of the Father, who is the breather of the Spirit. The Spirit proceeds from the Father who is the begetter of the Spirit. This is the nature of life in God, and there is no point in time or space that precedes eternity. Put another way, there is no metaphysical or philosophical antecedent to the living God. Or, one might say the Trinitarian persons are antecedently present in one another. This is the mystery of God. The depths of the wisdom are unsearchable, and the ways of God are past finding out. But they may be confessed. Indeed, they must be confessed unless one is to invent or reason their way to another God.

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[6] Yves M. J. Congar, I *Believe in the Holy Spirit. III. The River of the Water of Life Flows in the East and in the West* (trans. David Smith New York: Seabury Press, 1983).

In speaking of God in this manner one can confess mutual interrelationships. The Spirit receives and gives in this flow of life, as does the Son. There is no antecedent relationship between the Father and Son, in which the Spirit is not necessary, or into which the Spirit must be introduced. There are no modes of divine existence that appear for a space of time and then are no more. From everlasting to everlasting, God is who God is. God dwells in light inaccessible from before time and forever.

What was seen in the East as fractured speech was an attempt by the West to overcome the problem incurred when Arius introduced temporality into the life of God. By dent of his reason, this presbyter argued that to be Son of the Father, there must have been a time when there was no Son. Starting with a concept of monotheism, or a radical monarchy in God, Arius' notion of unity demanded logical consistency. His conclusion was that the Son must be a creature of the Father—although far superior to all other creatures. But even less honor could be bestowed upon the Spirit. Followers and defenders who were even more radical in this regard came to be known as "haters of the Spirit" (pneumatomachi).

In defense of the Son, the West advanced a philosophical notion of unity, holding that all things the Father has have been given to the Son, who is the image (ikon) of the invisible God. Indeed, in the Johannine witness, Jesus says, "…He who has seen me has seen the Father…I am in the Father and the Father is in me…"(John 14: 9-10) More, the promise of the Son is to send the Spirit who proceeds from the Father. To insist on the deity of the Son, the argument was advanced that the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son in one spiration, giving rise to the insertion of "filioque" (and the Son) in the third paragraph of the Nicean (Constantinopolitan) Creed. The consequence was a "reflection trinity" (or binity), in which the Spirit is said to be the "bond of love" between the Father and the Son. It is then difficult in the extreme to say how the Spirit is essential in the eternal life of God, and even more difficult to confess what the Spirit gives to the Son and the Father in mutual exchange of life. This disagreement over the proper language of the creed, which gave rise to the split between the East and the West, has led to the practical subordination of the Spirit, and to what the Eastern Church nominated as "christomonism."[7]

In defense of the West, first and foremost the concern was to hold off the "scandalous teaching" that the Son was but a creature. The consequences would be enormous: salvation is at stake. The question, which went to the heart of the theological debate, is how a creature could be the mediator to save another creature? If the Son is but a creature there is hardly a difference between the new covenant and the old. All that the gospel claims is nullified. For no atonement has been achieved and we cannot be partakers of the divine nature. The intention of the West was to preserve the witness of the Spirit to Christ. The spirit of antichrist and any other false spirit is the one who does not confess that the Son has come in the flesh. By Christ the test is made of every inspiration, even those who claim to be by the Spirit of God.

In addition, the West sought to protect from the danger of "tritheism" it perceived in the terminology used in the East. Greek Fathers (the Cappadocians in particular) made a technical use of the term "hypostasis" to account for the distinction between the Father, Son, and Spirit, who are of the same "ousia" (substance). Greeks were suspicious of the Latin term of distinction (persona), due to the easy confusion with "role" (as in a theatrical production). This confusion could lead back to the problem of modalism (Saballenism). But since the Greek term

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[7] Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981; Catherine LaCugna, *God For Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*, San Francisco, Calif.: Harper; Jose' Comblin, *The Holy Spirit and Liberation*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.

"hypostasis" has a meaning that is nearly the equivalent of the Latin term "substantia" (substance) the fear was the perception of three gods.[8]

Complicated as this all may seem to the modern reader, the bottom line was how to read and interpret the scriptures correctly. The stakes were enormous. They are still. If there is no internal and eternal connection with the Son, the Spirit can be credited for inspiration and authority of every sort. The blurr between the divine Spirit and the human spirit becomes an exchange of identity. However, the equal if not greater threat for the practical subordination of the Spirit is dispensability, and ultimately a lost identity. When capacity to confess what the Spirit gives to the Son is excised there is resulting difficulty for speaking in concert with the scriptures and confessing what the Spirit gives to the believer. Congar is correct: the river runs East and West. Put another way, whether one speaks in tomes of East or West, there is a set of cautions by which to say what speech does not (must not) mean.

Alas, since this is far more than enlightened, pragmatic, modern, or postmodern minds can bear, it brings one back full circle to the work of the preacher as pulpit theologian. Learning the language from ancient discourses, pneumatology operates as a hermeneutic which allows the language of the scriptures to speak for itself. By means of pneumatology one is carried back to the data of the scriptures and reintroduced into its imaginary world, but not with the naiveté that plagued the generation of Arius and Sabellius. The history of heresy can function as a compass to warn against what cannot be meant in a given instance for the sake of what has already been or must be confessed. The data concerning the Spirit can speak with clarity through the filter of corrected and anticipated errors by means of cautions from the East and the West. This amounts to fresh reading for the present generation that takes on the tone of what one finds in the work of St. Basil. It comes through reading the scriptures with the people with a sharpened sensitivity to what the Spirit has to say to the church.[9]

Between Protestantism and Pentecostalism

Just as the river runs East and West for the ancient church, so with the contemporary and evangelical churches: the whole truth is hardly contained in one sector. On the one hand, care must be observed for confessing how the Spirit bears witness to Christ. On the other hand, there must be care to confess how the Spirit as divine person indwells the believer. Receiving the Spirit is being baptized into Christ and being fashioned into the Spirit body. This is objective fact, and it is also subjective experience. It does not depend on how one is affected; but it does give rise to affections that are set on things above.

Another way of articulating the issues at stake is to narrate the tension that exists between Protestantism and Pentecostalism. This is a tension that remains obscure when Pentecostalism sees itself as merely another branch of Protestantism. Then its self understanding is reduced to the fact that Pentecostals are "not Roman Catholic." But the issues of the present are not nearly those of the Reformation Era of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. What's more, obsession with the "Protestant hiccup" leaves blindness to what is not contested, and an even greater blindness to the larger tradition of the church that precedes the division between the East and the West.

One might say that in a real sense "protesting movements" within Protestantism are quests for the "larger vision" which are on the same order as the Reformation. Over and over, the quest has been to know God, not only as formal fact, but in intimate communion—in Spirit

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[8] H. B. Swete, *The Holy Spirit in the Ancient Church*, London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1912; G. L. Prestige, *God in Patristic Thought*, London: SPCK, 1964.
[9] Christopher Morse, *Not Every Spirit: A Dogmatics of Christian Disbelief*, Valley Forge, Pa.: Trinity Press, 1994

and truth. Oddly, such a quest carries one to the very point at which the streams between the East and West run their courses.

Protestantism, which is centered in right preaching of the word and right celebration of the sacraments, tends to put emphasis on correctness of confession and verifiable knowledge. The epistemology is spurred by distrust of mystery, especially when entrusted in the hands of priests to whom the people are subservient. It was enhanced by the rise of historical consciousness and modern theories of knowledge that put the human knower at the center. A resultant was decreasing capacity to speak faithfully of mystery. Even when the mystery is present, it is diminished when the language for proclaiming it is undermined.

Roman Catholics tended to accent the presence of the mystery and preserved the modalities by which it was experienced—beauty, aroma, and aura. But there was a decline in the utterance of the pneumatic word. Protestants undermined the mystery, but did not develop adequately the capacity to speak the pneumatic word, which is forced by preaching the Spirit. The pneumatic word forces the language of the Spirit into the consciousness of the people and participates with the drama and aura of the mystery to which witness is given.

Pentecostal theology all too often has been an excerpt of evangelicalism or fundamentalism that failed to develop its voice. It focused on the experience of the Spirit. But the consequence was that it did not go far enough to address constructively the problems in pneumatology left by the Reformation--namely, how to preserve the place for mystery and theologically sound pneumatic speech. Pentecostalism was keen to develop practices to initiate, and celebrate mystical experience. Sometimes this meant reading coveted experiences into texts that do not warrant the same. But the theology was not careful to guard the boundary where blurring occurs between the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. Nor has Pentecostalism supplied adequate theology to account for the sovereignty of the Spirit as divine person who can speak to resist the believer and the church. It took a definite posture against elements of culture involving destructive personal morality. Yet it stopped short of showing the procession of the Spirit in liberative praxis and prophetic witness against structures of oppression.

Here we see once again the task of preaching. The Spirit is not only to be worshipped: the Spirit is to be heard and obeyed as more than the projection of sentiment, emotion, and human desire. Here the Trinitarian matrix is crucial—not as mere formal confession—but as template and guide for faithful reading of the scriptures.

Once again, preaching texts with integrity is key for maintaining the Spirit as subject. The sacraments remain important, not merely as means for restricting and domesticating the Spirit. No, the heavenly dove cannot be so restrained. Sacraments are not channels in which the Spirit is to be canalled. What's more, we and not the Spirit are the instruments. These are the clarifications to be made through preaching. In this regard, preaching is not merely the dispensation of formal knowledge; it is an instrument of the Spirit for opening the space in which the Spirit speaks to the church.

One might say that preaching as faithful reading of the scriptures with the people is the critique of theology as science. I am speaking here of science in the sense of the human subject being elevated as knower, who imposes the logic of the human creature to measure truth. In such an instance knowledge is dragged within the frame of human comprehension. What does not fit is cast out, rather than serving as a force to expand the domain of human knowledge. One might say this is the precise opposite of faith seeking understanding. Rather, it is understanding

seeking to operate as false faith. Here the apt image is the one Hegel offers, where the dog circles the prey and then gobbles it.[10]

Preaching the Spirit, on the other hand, is the pneumatic word that exposes the limits of theology as another mode of scientific discourse. It is not unscientific in the sense of being ignorant of science or ignoring science. Rather, it refuses to grant science the last word or to regard it as having plenary authority. It dares to take up the mystery in a speech act that declares limited domains while [11]witnessing to the one that is plenary. It dares to declare the God who is not reducible, resonating with the apostle who cried, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements, and his ways past finding out!…"

This essay closes with the admission that it may well border on the esoteric discourse being critiqued. But in the words of an even greater preacher named Koheleth, part of the preacher's task is to give the mind to know madness and folly.[12] If this critique be true, it only serves the good with which I am truly concerned—namely, that the sermon be revisited as theological essay. This would reverse the tendency to reject it as if it is not useful theology.

Actually, I am very much encouraged by a project undertaken by Eerdmans that focuses on the Apostle's Creed. Each section of the creed is taken up in a theological essay, which is accompanied by a sermon. The sermon is thereby commended as more than an illustration of theology or an application of doctrinal content. Rather, it is itself a useful theological essay that takes from and contributes to the constructive and critical task of doing vital theology.[13]

The sermon as theological essay mediates between the "friendly talk" or the "chit-chat" often heard in the pulpit, and the stodgy, incomprehensible treatise that is a mere insertion into the liturgy. It I bounded by the requirement that it be rendered in the language of the people. It makes contact with their vernacular, while meeting the stringent requirements of being precise, exact, nonheritical. It is one construction among many that seeks to declare the mystery of God.

The view of the sermon being adduced in this essay is by no means the template for every sermon preached. It may not even be for all who preach. It may well be work that is to be done by those who walk in a specific vocation. Without a doubt, it requires sufficient time at the fountains of sacred wisdom and sustained attention to the needs of the people.

My hope is that this essay can serve as an introduction to a series of sermons on Romans 8 that illustrate the principles of homiletical theology that have been discussed, with an explicit focus on the Holy Spirit. They are an exercise in doing pneumatology by reading the scriptures with the people.

Let's not waste the Spirit.

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[10] See "Dialectic and Human Experience," in Frederick G. Weiss, *Hegel: The Essential Writings*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1974
[11] Romans 11:33-36
[12] Ecclesiastes 1: 17-18
[13] Reference is to an unpublished collection of 19 sermons on Romans 8. These were made available to my class on the Holy Spirit.

Invitational Rhetoric as Nonviolent and Inherent Persuasion

Richard H. Park
Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley
Supervisor: Thomas G. Rogers

Violent/Manipulative Nazi Rhetoric

Violence, whether physical or verbal, destroys the peace and the wellbeing of a society. Ethical persuasion, unlike violent and manipulative persuasion, makes communities more peaceful and happier. Undoubtedly one of the worst cases of violent, manipulative rhetoric in modern history (that we may call nefarious sophistry) would be the Nazi rhetoric that coerced and manipulated the German populace to destroy the world peace and kill Jews. Hitler had understood that, if he were going to attain power in Germany, he would have had to achieve it, not through the use of violence alone, but through the parliamentary procedure, which he detested.[1] Hitler knew the power of speech. Haig A. Bosmajian thus explicates the Nazis' persuasion movement:

> For twenty years the Nazi speakers had preached the National Socialist Weltanschauung to the German Volk. These were speakers who had been told that through speech they could awaken faith, harden convictions, destroy degeneration, bring out new ideas, and pull the masses from the old ways of thinking, these were speakers who had given their speeches to millions of Germans who listened through periods of inflation, depression, war preparation, and war.[2]

Nazi rhetoric was persuasion leading to holocaust. The Nazis knew how important and influential speech and persuasion were. They manipulated their audience, but the audience liked it. They preached killing, and the audience was persuaded to do it. When evil uses persuasion for evil purposes, and when the good forsakes to preach resistance to evil because persuasion is thought as evil, then evil may prevail in the world. Therefore, persuasion may be necessary to resist evil forces. This is why Augustine involved the issue of persuasion in the antagonism between good and evil.

> Since rhetoric is used to give conviction to both truth and falsehood, who could dare maintain that truth, which depends on us for its defense, should stand unarmed in the fight against falsehood? This would mean that those who are trying to give conviction to their falsehoods would know how to use an introduction to make their listeners favorable, interested, and receptive, while we would not; that they would expound falsehoods in descriptions that are succinct, lucid, and convincing, while we would expound the truth in such a way as to bore our listeners, cloud their understanding, and stifle their desire to believe; that they would assail the truth and advocate falsehood with fallacious arguments, while we would be too feeble either to defend what is true or refute what is false...[3]

Throughout this essay, I will argue that persuasion is necessary and essential to the welfare of human beings. I will introduce the topic of Invitational Rhetoric in the light of the debate regarding whether or not it presupposes persuasion. My conclusion is that Invitational Rhetoric

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[1] Haig A. Bosmajian, "The Nazi Speaker's Rhetoric," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 46 (1960), 365.
[2] Ibid., 371.
[3] St. Augustine, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995) IV, ii 3.

is inevitably persuasion. I will also propose that Rogerian Rhetoric is historically relevant because it gives Invitational Rhetoric theoretical foundation and resources. I will also analyze Rogerian and Invitational Rhetoric models in the light of Aristotle's Classical Rhetoric and determine whether or not the latter models are new and different concepts. My conclusion is that, while Rogerian and Invitational Rhetoric models have precedents in the long history from the classical to the contemporary versions, they still remain essentially variations of the ancient practice. On this point, I will also introduce some of the contemporary theories in contrast with Invitational Rhetoric and analyze the persuasion factor viewed in the light of ethical considerations. Invitational Rhetoric traces many of its characteristics from both past and present; however, I argue that its methods and goals are identical to those of antiquity while other aspects have been re-created in contemporary image, reflecting more of our post-modern rhetorical situation and experience. This is above all evident in modern feminist rhetoric.

Invitational Rhetoric as Nonviolent Persuasion

I will explore the new feministic rhetorical theory and the Invitational Rhetoric, and I will investigate whether it is virtually a new concept or a form of Classical Rhetoric. Further, I will analyze what kind of progress, if any, the theory has registered, how critics have viewed it, and what is its theoretical and historical contribution. Finally, I will try to determine who is most inspired by this theory and to attempt to evaluate the theory from another feminist rhetorician's perspective. I will argue in this chapter that Invitational Rhetoric claims the persuasion factor not as an intrinsic, mandatory aspect of rhetoric but merely as a supplementation feature.

This essay will take a defensive stance on behalf of Invitational Rhetoric as I believe that, in spite of what some critics have said, the model proposed does not so much oppose persuasion in itself but the violent, coercive persuasion. A superficial reading makes it possible to misunderstand Invitational Rhetoric. The proposition of going "beyond persuasion," does not imply a negation of persuasion but rather adding another "communicative option" to the rhetorical history.

Sally Miller Gearhart, a well-known feminist communication scholar, for the first time, has attempted a new, feministic rhetoric, called "the womanization of rhetoric" (*Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 1979), attacking the established conquest/conversion model of rhetoric which she sees as patriarchal and violent. Later, on the basis of Gearhart's work, Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, both feminist communication scholars, have written "A Feminist Perspective on Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Clarification of Boundaries" (*Western Journal of Communication,* 1992), where the rhetorical theory of the radical feminist Starhawk was contrasted with Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theory, a patriarchal rhetorician so labeled by Foss and Griffin.

In the following year, at the Speech Communication Association Convention, Foss and Griffin presented their famous essay, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric," which marks the emergence of the Invitational Rhetoric. The essay was subsequently published in *Communication Monographs* (1995).

However, Foss and Griffin's Invitational Rhetoric "Beyond Persuasion" (1993) seems to have been inspired also by Catherine E. Lamb's essay "Beyond Argument in Feminist Composition."[4] The two major works that lay out the theory of the feminist Invitational Rhetoric in recent times are *Inviting Transformation: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World*

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[4] Catherine E. Lamb, "Beyond Argument in Feminist Composition," *College Composition and Communication* 42 (1991).

(2002/2003) by Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, and *Invitation to Public Speaking* (2004) by Cindy Griffin.

   While the Invitational Rhetoric has had numerous followers, it also invited several critical voices, among whom are Irwin Mallin and Karrin Vasby Anderson with their essay "Inviting Constructive Argument" (*Argumentation and Advocacy*, 2000) as well as Jessica Lee Shumake with her work "Reconceptualizing Communication and Rhetoric from a Feminist Perspective" (*Guidance & Counseling*, 2002).

   I will look first at the critique of Invitational Rhetoric, in order to determine whether this rhetoric model has indeed rejected an understanding of persuasion from Classical Rhetoric. Irwin Mallin and Karrin V. Anderson together introduced some of the criticism against Foss and Griffin's proposition. This attack, however, seems to reflect a misinterpretation of Invitational Rhetoric as "an alternative to patriarchal modes of persuasion that have informed and governed rhetorical studies since the classical era."[5] Did Foss and Griffin mean to propose an alternative rhetoric to classical patriarchal approach? This question, which I will attempt to answer in this essay, is crucial in understanding Invitational Rhetoric. Reporting on the criticism encountered by Invitational Rhetoric, Mallin and Anderson note that,

> Some resist what they characterize as a tendency for Foss and Griffin to bifurcate rhetorical strategies into gendered categories, reifying dichotomization. Others object to what they perceive to be Foss and Griffin's rejection of argumentation as a viable or ethical rhetorical tool.[6]

While acknowledging the critique, Mallin and Anderson see the merits of Invitational Rhetoric in the potential to "facilitate constructive transformation, collapsing the dichotomy between "persuasion" and "empathy." They further note that, "when rhetoric is refigured in this manner, it can function to enable those who are marginalized by more adversarial formulation."[7] Emphasis on the distinction between conquest/conversion rhetoric and the non-antagonizing Invitational Rhetoric may have so much preoccupied some critics that they misinterpreted Invitational Rhetoric as completely giving up on persuasion as violent and evil.[8]

   Jessica L. Shumake also differs from Gearhart, Foss and Griffin's position. First, Shumake disagrees with Gearhart that "using-the-intent-to-change model is not always a violation both of our own integrity and the integrity of others."[9] Shumake argues, using the

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[5] Irwin Mallin and Karrin Vasby Anderson, "Inviting Constructive Argument*," Argumentation and Advocacy* 36 (Winter 2000), 121.

[6] Ibid., 121.

[7] Ibid., 123.

[8] Invitational Rhetoric is not the first to distinguish rhetoric and speech in terms of power and relationship between speaker and audience. For instance, Brockriede categorizes the arguer as "rapist, seducer and lover." See Wayne Brokride, "Arguers as Lovers," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 5 (1972). Also Brownstein has already mentioned that "the methods of the speakers are the methods of the lovers, for the non-lover is a kind of rapist." Confer, Oscar L. Brownstein, "Plato's Pahedrus: Dialectic as the Genuine Art of Speaking," the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 51 (1965), 392. Simons, also, in the "The Emerging Concept of Communication as Dialogue" (*The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 57/1971) introduced Martine Buber's 'lover's talk' defined as I-Thou relation, emphasizing I-thou mutual equality, 373-382.

[9] Jessica Lee Shumake, "Reconceptualizing Communication and Rhetoric from a Feminist Perspective," *Guidance & Counseling* 17 (Summer 2002), 99-104. Source: Database 'Academic Search Elite' (Orradre Library: Santa Clara University)

subject of a Holocaust denier, claiming that, in that situation, intention to change others and resist is adequate.[10] She continues by saying that,

> My approach is preferable in the instance of dealing with a Holocaust denier, because I take the position that I can still attempt to maintain respect for the integrity of the person who professes a mistaken belief, and yet make a compelling case by offering reasons in support of the reality of the Holocaust.[11]

Shumake appears to see that there is a rhetorical situation in which a speaker has to accomplish change in opposing an evil act, and she takes exception from Gearhart's "womanization of rhetoric." Shumake also brings a direct criticism to Foss and Griffin's 1995 essay, "Beyond Persuasion," stating that she is not convinced that "inviting another to share her perspective is all that importantly different from trying to persuade someone to see the world as she does."[12] She finds Invitational Rhetoric to be "unrealistic"[13] because it concludes that all attempts to persuade someone stem from an effort to dominate and/or gain power over him or her.[14] She goes on to say that,

> They (Foss and Griffin) oversimplify the task of developing a more adequate rhetorical model by demonizing persuasion as a patriarchal tool, and exalting nurturing or cooperative methods as the domain of the feminine. As M. Lane Bruner argues, to suggest that women cannot aggressively seek change while at the same time nurturing their communities disempowers women by creating a false dichotomy between seeking influence and caring[15]

Shumake seems to argue that feminists should not give up persuading in order to resist and confront "conflict and agitation … vital elements to women's liberation."[16] Then, did Gearhart, Foss and Griffin, as feminists, give up resisting, transforming and changing the injustices of the social system? Did they neglect the cause of feminism and the effort for transformation? Should their proposal, as another option to the classical and contemporary rhetoric, be understood as an authoritarian, dichotomous, either/or choice? In order to answer these questions, I move to Gearhart, Foss and Griffin's own works.

It is appropriate to begin with Gearhart's pre-Invitational Rhetoric, as it apparently inspired Foss and Griffin to create their concept. In "The Womanization of Rhetoric," which specifically gave Foss and Griffin an affirmative springboard, Gearhart distinguishes patriarchal rhetoric from women's rhetoric without constructing a new formal rhetoric model. Although the dichotomization of rhetoric as men's and women's is theoretically problematic, from women's experience and perspective it might be acceptable because a rhetorical situation creates a unique communication.

Gearhart, in her proposal, pays attention to violence in communication. She points out that "the fact that it has done so with language and meta-language, with refined functions of the mind, instead of with whips or rifles, does not excuse it from the mind set of the violent."[17] For Gearhart, the most serious problem is the violent intention to change others, according to the

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[10] Ibid.
[11] Ibid.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid. For more critiques regarding Invitational Rhetoric, Cf. M.L. Bruner, "Producing Identities: Gender Problematization and Feminist Argumentation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 32 (1996) 185-198.
[16] Shumake, ibid.
[17] Sally Miller Gearhart, "The Womanization of Rhetoric," *Women's Studies International Quarterly* 2 (1979) 195.

speaker's planned goal, which is a form of manipulation and coercion. Gearhart is not to be misread; she is not radically opposed to persuasion itself. According to her,

> To change other people or other entities is not itself a violation. It is a fact of existence that we do. The act of violence is in the intention to change another.[18]

Gearhart appears to accept the need for persuasion as a tool of change, a necessary fact of existence, while at the same time acknowledging that the intent to "change another" is an act of violence. Gearhart quotes Mao Tse Tung's metaphor of the egg and the chicken as the "internal basis for change"[19] in the proper environment. Thus, for her, the act of communication, in view of maintaining respect for the human individual as a self-decision-making entity, should focus on constructing a better ethical relationship between speaker and audience, as well as an environment in which the communication takes place safely and equally. She maintains that,

> Communication can be a deliberate creation or co-creation of an atmosphere in which people or things, if and only if they have the internal basis for change, may change themselves; it can be a milieu in which those who are ready to be persuaded may persuade themselves, may choose to hear or choose to learn.[20]

Gearhart, using feministic perspectives, proposes a better milieu in which persuasion, directed to free agents of self-determination, may occur. Therefore, under this overarching perspective, Gearhart's radical terminology such as "conquest/conversion," "womanization of rhetoric," and "patriarchal rhetoric" should not be misunderstood as being an absolute negation of rhetoric as persuasion.

I now turn to Invitational Rhetoric of Foss and Griffin (1992, 1993, and 1995) and Foss and Foss (2002, 2003). Along the way, there was some progress of thought that was followed by a modification of the theory. Just as it is crucial to distinguish the theologian Karl Barth's early thoughts from his later views, so these three feminist rhetoricians' thinking also seems to have grown and developed with time. In the acknowledgements of their book (Foss and Foss, 2003), the authors admit that, from the start, they did not have a clear idea regarding the project:

> We never intended to write a public speaking book. In fact, for years, we steadfastly refused even to consider the possibility because we did not believe the world needed another public speaking textbook. There came a time, however, when we felt we had something to say about public speaking that had not been said before and that maybe needed to be.[21]

A comprehensive reading is helpful in gaining insight into the origins, the development, and the practical implications, if any, of these authors' proposed rhetoric model. In "a Feminist Perspective on Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Clarification of Boundaries" Foss and Griffin seem to have most radically opposed patriarchal conquest/conversion rhetoric, by contrasting feminist Starhawk's rhetorical theory with Kenneth Burk's, whom they labeled as patriarchal. According to Foss and Griffin,

> Starhawk would agree with Burke that, in a rhetoric of domination, rhetoric is used primarily to attempt to change others' perspectives—to persuade. The distinguishing

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[18] Ibid., 196.
[19] Ibid., 198.
[20] Ibid., 198.
[21] Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, *Inviting Transformation: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World* (Illinois:
  Prospect Heights, 2003) v.

feature of a rhetoric of inherent value, however, is not its persuasive capability but its affirmation of immanent value.[22]

Foss and Griffin adopt Starhawk's definition of rhetoric rather than Burke's; Starhawk's rhetoric "would involve the use of symbols to maintain connection with and to value all beings."[23] Interconnectedness does not require persuading one another because connections already exist; rather, the need to understand and respect each other is emphasized. Burke's notion of division, which creates the drive toward identification, does not exist in the rhetorical theory generated from Starhawk's perspective.[24]

An essay presented for the 1993 Speech Communication Association Convention shows a theory more developed than the previous year's article. For the first time, Foss and Griffin categorize rhetoric as "conquest rhetoric, conversion rhetoric, advisory rhetoric, and Invitational Rhetoric,"[25] the first of which Gearhart had already introduced as "conquest and conversion mindset."[26] Here, Foss and Griffin expand the categorization to four rhetoric types. Later, in their book *Inviting Transformation* (2003), they add one more model to their rhetoric list, the "benevolent rhetoric."[27] This demonstrates an increasingly discriminating view of the topic. Moreover, the authors' rejection of rhetoric as persuasion appears to be mitigated in this later work. While previously analyzing Burke's rhetorical theory in opposition to that of Starhawk, the tone against persuasion was confrontational, the traditional rhetoric being dabbed patriarchal and violent and thus dispensable. Nonetheless, their convention proposal shows a shift to a more inclusive perspective, with the phrase "Communicative Options,"[28] appearing in the presentation. Here the authors have started to build a range of discourse "beyond persuasion." From the dichotomy of rhetoric they have moved to a plurality of boundaries. In their 1993 proposal, although the charge against a rhetoric of dichotomy abated somewhat and a flexible view of the variation of rhetorical circumstance is demonstrated, one can still find a definite boundary set between persuasion and non-persuasion rhetoric.[29] Foss and Griffin suggest that,

> The exclusive focus on persuasion in rhetorical scholarship has limited the scope of the discipline and has hindered efforts to understand forms of rhetoric that do not involve the intent to change the behavior or beliefs of others… We offer a taxonomy of four rhetorics—conquests, conversion, advisory, and invitational—with the first three involving a conscious intent to persuade that is not present in the fourth.[30]

However, this position changes quantitatively in the following book, *Inviting Transformation* (2003), in which Foss and Foss add a new form to the mainframe:

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[22] Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "A Feminist Perspective on Rhetorical Theory: Toward a Clarification of Boundaries," *Western Journal of Communication* 56 (Fall 1992) 338.

[23] Ibid. Schlueter suggests a "Feminist Homiletics" like Starhawks, noting "interdependence of nature and all human beings," that is a narrative imagination which tells stories and experiences of people, above all, women. See Carol J. Schlueter, "Feminist Homiletics: Strategies for Empowerment," in *Women's Studies: Theological Reflection, Celebration, Action* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1995) 138-151.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for and Invitational Rhetoric," presented at the Speech Communication Association Convention (1993).

[26] Gearhart, 196.

[27] Foss & Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 5.

[28] Foss & Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion," (1993) and Foss & Griffin, *Communication Monographs* 62 (1995) 7. The paper presented at the convention was later republished.

[29] Foss & Griffin (1993).

[30] Ibid.

Conquest and conversion modes of communication have their uses and their place. They are not, however, the only ways—and often not the best ways—for engaging in communication. The other available modes of rhetoric—benevolent, advisory, and invitational—offer additional ways to talk with one another and to create alternative realities.[31]

As shown above, from 1993 to 2003, their proposal to Invitational Rhetoric progresses from the combative and exclusive tone against rhetoric as persuasion, to the inclusive and pluralistic coexistence. The *Inviting Transformation* (2003) even allows that conquest and conversion rhetoric may be inevitable in some situation.[32]

Now that Foss and Foss admit to five types of rhetoric and to each one's utility, according to the situation, I do not see any reason for rejecting the word "persuasion" and replacing it with "presentational," since "presentational rhetoric" may also mean "presentational persuasion." Likewise, the apparent disparity in the semantics of the word "persuasion" used in Foss and Griffin is problematic. It seems that readers would have been better served by the addition of modifiers such as "violent," "coercive," "conquering/converting," or "direct," in the case of "Invitational Rhetoric." I have argued that Invitational Rhetoric is not an outright rejection of persuasion in itself, but against violent, coercive persuasion.

Rogerian/Inherent Rhetoric and Its Classical Roots

Here I will introduce another inspiration model for Invitational Rhetoric, the Rogerian Rhetoric, in an attempt to distinguish common grounds and place both the Invitational Rhetoric and Rogerial Rhetoric in historical perspective in comparison with Classical Rhetoric. I will also argue in this chapter that, although Invitational Rhetoric and Rogerian Rhetoric are newly developed, they are not so much at odds in methods and goals with Classical Rhetoric as in their added emphasis on audience, ethics of speaker, relationship between speaker and audience, and milieu and attitude of communication. Therefore, I argue that though Invitational Rhetoric challenges what has been neglected and marginalized in the rhetorical history.

Why do I introduce Rogerian Rhetoric? It is because it has had an impact on Invitational Rhetoric's formation.[33] It also seems that Rogerian Rhetoric lends several core assumptions to Invitational Rhetoric such as "understanding" as the purpose of communication, equality between speaker and audience, diverse perspectives as resources, change as self-chosen, and willingness to yield,[34] as well as creating an environment for transformation such as freedom, safety, value, and openness.[35] These concepts are important contributions not only to Invitational Rhetoric but also to the rhetoric in general.

In 1996, very close to the time when Invitational Rhetoric came about, another interesting argument was made by Douglas Brent:[36]

…I believe Rogerian Rhetoric is more an attitude than a technique. The specific form of Rogerian discourse in which one must be able to reflect another's point of view before stating one's own is not just a technique to get someone else to listen to you. It's a

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[31] Foss & Foss, Inviting Transformation, 9.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 10.
[34] Ibid., 10-15.
[35] Ibid., 35-39.
[36] Douglas Brent, "Rogerian Rhetoric: An Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric" in the Argument Revisited, Argument Redefined: Negotiating Meaning in the Composition Classroom. Ed. Barabara Emmel, Paula Resch, and Deborah Tenny, (Sage, 1996), 73-96. http://www.ucalgary.ca/~dabretn/art/rogchap.html.

technique that helps students learn to connect with other points of view, explore them fully, and place them in a dialectical relationship with their own as part of a process of mutual discovery. [37]

According to Brent, Rogerian Rhetoric is concerned with an "attitude change,"[38] and "presupposes a different relationship between ethics and rhetoric than does Classical Rhetoric."[39] For Brent, "Rogerian training in speaking well helps to create a 'good' person by contributing to ethical as well as cognitive growth. Good rhetoric is a precondition to virtue."[40] Brent summarizes Rogerian Rhetoric as having three distinguishing features:

> Rogerian Rhetoric also moves away from a combative stance, but is distinct from other models of argumentation in three ways. First, it goes even father than most other models in avoiding an adversarial approach. Second, it offers specific strategies based on nondirective therapy for building the co-operative bridges necessary for non combative inquiry. Third, and in my opinion most important, it has the potential to offer students an opportunity for long-term cognitive and ethical growth.[41]

As shown above, the position of Brent is that Rogerian Rhetoric is distinct in the history of rhetoric and is similar to Invitational Rhetoric. As seen from the *Inviting Transformation* "understanding" as the purpose of communication,[42] Rogerian Rhetoric's most significant contribution is "empathy" in the communication.

However, Shumake who critiqued Gearhart and Invitational Rhetoric, also takes issue with the Rogerian model from a feminist point of view and argues that, "one criticism of Rogerian technique is that thinking of argument in terms of withholding judgment of the positions others advance can sound like a prescription for self-abnegation."[43] Shumake, a feminist, is skeptical of Rogerian Rhetoric, because "Rogers seems to ignore the phenomenon of male linguistic dominance and presupposes an equal communicative exchange between males and females, when such may not exist."[44]

Nonetheless, what Carl R. Rogers found from his studies is that "those clients in relationships marked by a high level of counselor congruence, empathy and unconditional positive regard show constructive personality change and development,"[45] yet "clients in relationships characterized by a low level of these attitudinal conditions show significantly less positive change on these same indices."[46] Rogers distinguished "negative change" from "constructive change." Like Foss & Foss' Invitational core values of "change as self-chosen and willingness to yield," Rogerian Rhetoric facilitates or persuades clients (audience) to change by themselves constructively not coercively/negatively through other's compulsion. This also corresponds to the Invitational model in which an environment is created, and in which the audience is encouraged to choose and freely decide (freedom).[47] Also, Audience is respected for

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[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Foss & Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 10.

[43] Shumake, "Reconceptualizing Communication and Rhetoric (2002)."

[44] Ibid.

[45] Carl R. Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship: The Core of Guidance," *Harvard Education Review* 32 (1962) 425.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Foss & Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 36.

"their intrinsic or inherent worth of each individual."[48] The "invitation" changes and decides among the diversity of perspectives (openness),[49] without risk and threat to their identity (safety).[50]

Thus Invitational Rhetoric seems to have drawn from two main sources: Starhawks and Rogers. In the 1993 Convention proposal, Foss and Griffin emphasize "human interconnectedness and autonomy" from Starhawks and "a necessary and inevitable element of an environment conducive to growth and change" from Rogers.[51] Especially the concept of audience's "growth," in the persuasion process, has an important ethical connotation as it implies positive regard and respect for the audience which is persuaded. For Rogers, the personal "growth" of his clients (his audience)[52] was the goal of his interpersonal communication, divested of the speaker's own interest.

Another important element of Rogerian Rhetoric is "congruence" in the interpersonal relationships. To facilitate constructive change, a speaker should decrease the degree of defensiveness, but, without congruence between parties, there still remains a communication block between speaker and audience. If someone feels incongruent, one would defend oneself against what is being communicated. As Rogers holds,

> The greater the congruence of experience, awareness and communication on the part of one individual, the more the ensuing relationship will involve: a tendency toward reciprocal communication with a quality of increasing congruence; a tendency toward more mutually accurate understanding of the communications; improved psychological adjustment and functioning in both parties; mutual satisfaction in the relationship.[53]

Foss and Foss emphasize "the equality of speaker and audience." They do not see the speaker as having "power-over" audience; rather, the speaker has "power-with."[54] It follows that the authority and its benefits should go to both parties ensuring mutual interests and reciprocal growth. Moreover, "individuals gladly embrace a new way of believing or acting,"[55] when, while being in congruence with the speaker, they make an attempt to "change as self-chosen."[56] Some of the most important features of Invitational Rhetoric are a respect for the audience, the renewed relationship between speaker and audience, ethical consideration, and an emphasis on the environment of communication. Most of these aspects are consistent with Rogerian Rhetoric. Therefore, in answering the question—"Is Invitational Rhetoric new in the history of rhetoric?", I would rely on the above stated commonality between Invitational and Rogerial approaches and draw conclusions from analyzing the resources available on Rogerian Rhetoric in relation to the Classical Rhetoric. This allows me to overcome the scarcity of resources regarding comparisons between Invitational Rhetoric and the classical model.

Paul Bator analyzes Rogerian Rhetoric as new and distinct from classical Aristotelian rhetoric. For instance, he compares "ethos" of Aristotle and "ethics" of Rogerian Rhetoric.

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[48] Ibid., 38.
[49] Ibid., 39.
[50] Ibid., 37.
[51] Foss & Griffin, "Beyond Persuasion (1993).
[52] Rogers, "The Interpersonal Relationship" 426.
[53] Carl R. Rogers, *On Becoming a Person: A Therapist's View of Psychotherapy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,
   1961).
[54] Foss & Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 10-11.
[55] Ibid., 13.
[56] Ibid.

According to Bator, "the ethos of the speaker-listener relationship, in Aristotelian terms, is set by the speaker alone. Ethos is a concept associated with the rhetor; it is the quality of the rhetor's character which can be one of the most potent of all the means to persuasion."[57] Bator interprets Aristotle's ethos as a persuasive method that presupposes,

> an antagonistic speaker/audience relationship, and its aim is to win advantage through discovery of psychological weaknesses in the audience. The Aristotelian rhetor thus seeks to establish and control the emotions and expectations of the audience in an effort to persuade them to his own point of view.[58]

Andrea A. Lunsford, however, thinks differently. Lunsford believes that Aristotle's position stresses the importance of understanding a given audience; that the good speaker must get the audience in a right frame of mind, and that he can do so only by evincing a proper character—one of a conciliatory, honest, understanding speaker—to his audience.[59] Lunsford also adds that "nowhere is this attitude clearer than in Aristotle's discussion of love or friendship,"[60] suggesting that "these passages are very close both to the first step of Rogerian argument, and to Rogers's entire notion of empathy and unconditional positive regard."[61]

In terms of enthymeme and audience analysis, Aristotle's rhetor starts out from the opinions of the audience, establishes areas of agreement, and values different positions.[62] Also considering "Aristotle's accommodation to audience and his use of the enthymeme (which is based on premises, opinions, or values common to both parties in an argument),"[63] Rogerian Rhetoric may in fact find its antecedent in Aristotle.[64] From this analysis, Lundsford concludes that Rogerian Rhetoric (Invitational Rhetoric) is not new and not an alternative; rather, it is supplementary to the classical approach, and it has been developed from the concept of a Classical Rhetoric which is seen not so much as combative but as co-operative.

Maxine Hairstone points out that some controversial topics in speech, for instance, philosophical and theological claim, racial issues, sexual matters, moral questions, and personal standards of behavior require invitational rhetoric. "Where there is dispute about this kind of issue, communication often breaks down, because both parties are so emotionally involved, so deeply committed to certain values, that they can scarcely listen to each other, much less have a rational exchange of views."[65] Hairstone proposes that, in those situations, Rogerian Rhetoric may work when most conventional strategies fail.[66] However, one should note here that Hairstone did argue the role of Rogerian Rhetoric not as an alternative but as a supplement, as Foss and Foss have already admitted. The other available models of rhetoric may offer additional (supplementary) ways to talk with one another and to create alternative realities.[67]

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[57] Paul Bator, "Aristotelian and Rogerian Rhetoric," *College Composition and Communication* 31 (1980) p.428. Cf. Aristotle's Rhetoric. i. 2.

[58] Ibid., 428.

[59] Andrea A. Lunsford, "Aristotelian vs. Rogerian Argument: A Reassessment," *College Composition and Communication* 30 (1979) 148. Cf. Aristotle Rhetoric ii, 1.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Aristotle, *The Rhetoric of Aristotle*, trans. lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1960) II, ii, 22 p. 156.

[63] Lundsford, "Aristotelian vs. Rogerian Argument," 149.

[64] Ibid., 150.

[65] Maxine Hairston, "Carl Rogers's Alternative to Traditional Rhetoric," *College Composition and Communication* 27 (1976) 373.

[66] Ibid., 373.

[67] Foss & Foss, *Inviting Transformation*, 9.

Conclusion

From this study, I conclude that Invitational Rhetoric, in light of Rogerian Rhetoric, has its long history and roots in the Classical Rhetoric but has developed from the need to supplement traditional rhetoric. It is a rhetoric that emphasizes the ethics of the speaker, values the audience and its participation, creates consensus between the speaker and audience, and organizes a propitious communication environment. Therefore, Invitational Rhetoric is still a persuasion, but it is a persuasion seeking non-violence, non-coercion, non-manipulation, and invigorating self-reflection, in terms of spirituality. I end this essay by asking several heuristic questions: Is our Homiletics "nonviolent?" Does our Homiletics help seekers to search truth "from within?" Are we, as preachers, "empathic midwives?" De we believe in the inherent spiritual power of our hearers who are regenerated through the incarnate Christ and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit?

Dwelling in the Word: Spirituality, Hymnody, and Preaching

Peter W. Rehwaldt
Alameda CA
Director of Research; The Hymn Society in the United States and Canada

In an essay for *Spirituality Today*, Leonard Doohan describes the academic discipline of Christian spirituality. "Spirituality is a practical discipline, and studies the vital activities that lead to the growth and maturity of Christian life. It is concerned with identified causes of growth, necessary stages in commitment and development, and means that will help in directing others to the goal of union with God."[1] These causes and means vary widely, from person to person and community to community, as a quick scan of both academic and popular books and articles reveals.

Writing centuries earlier, the author of Colossians attempts to direct the growth of Christians toward union with God:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." [3:16-17 (NRSV)].

Seen in this way, "dwelling in the word" might be an apt description of spirituality, whereby Christians live their lives in such a way that Christ dwells within them. As the first chapter of Colossians puts it, "Christ is the head of the body, the church . . . in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things" (1:18-20). As the fullness of God dwelt in Jesus, so also it dwells in his sisters and brothers. And so, dwelling in this Word of God, we proclaim and we sing – two vital activities indeed, complementing each other and leading to growth and maturity in Christian life.

Hymns have long been seen as instruments of spirituality. Linda Clark notes that "A hymn does not only *tell of* the faith, it *tells* it, declares it, or bodies it forth. . . . A hymn produces or intensifies the faith that its images carry or evoke."[2] Hymns that do a particularly good job of this become favorites – of individuals and of communities. Repeated singing imprints these hymns as memory hymns

Drawing on a study of music programs in churches, sponsored by Boston University School of Theology, Clark points to "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" (also known as the "Navy Hymn") as an example of the power of a favorite hymn. She writes, "Many men who served in World War II chose the 'Navy Hymn' as their favorite," because it

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[1] Leonard Doohan, "Current Trends: Scripture and Contemporary Spirituality," *Spirituality Today* 42, no. 1 (1990): 62.

[2] Linda J. Clark, "Hymn Singing: The Congregation Making Faith," in *Carriers of Faith: Lessons from Congregational Studies*, ed. Carl S. Dudley, Jackson W. Carroll, and James P. Wind (Louisville KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 53.

represented for them one of the most profoundly human times in their past as well as one in which their faith was tested to an extreme. What singing that hymn does for them now is to recall that time *in all its emotional vividness*. Communities are strengthened and blessed when times such as these [emotionally vivid and faith-filled times] live again among them.[3]

Hymns that touch the lives of those who sing them persist. They live beyond a single worship service, to be sung again and again, to touch the lives of the singers and assist their spiritual growth and maturity. Some hymns spread geographically, some temporally, and some both. Some have persisted for centuries, spanning the world in language after language. They serve to shape the spirituality of the singers, by giving them words to express their relationship to God and God's creation.

In preparing the hymns of the church, composers do much the same work as preachers. They study scripture, they envision the community for whom they write, and they play with words and images and metaphors, with narrative and drama and the development of plot. They write, rewrite, and write again. They view the drafts of their labors through the lenses of history and tradition and theology. Thomas Troeger calls hymns *midrashim*, for the myriad ways in which hymns serve to interpret and re-interpret scripture.[4] Finally, these composers put their work before actual people in worship, and the song, like the sermon, is no longer the composer's but the church's. Some hymns, like some sermons, are paraphrases of scripture, or retelling a biblical narrative in a new way. Others explore a metaphor, tease out an image, or lay out a fresh drama of faith. By their efforts, both preachers and composers invite those for whom they labor to enter into a new and closer relationship with God and with the community of God's people.

Contemporary homiletics draws parallels with music and hymnody to distinguish itself from older models of preaching. Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Reid note "Preaching is expressed in language. When we use language we make choices, we select, we use symbols, we tell stories, we make arguments. We *compose* a sermon. It is constructed by a human being."[5] Eugene Lowry, in emphasizing the movement and flow of a sermon, also draws musical parallels: "One could speak of the basic *musicality* of any sermon. Music, after all, is also an event-in-tem art from, with melody, harmony and rhythm coming sequentially. No one *builds* a song; it is shaped and performed."[6]

Evans Crawford takes this one step farther, using musical language to describe how a congregation reacts to a sermon. In *The Hum: Call and Response in African American*

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[3] Ibid., 58. Emphasis in the original.
[4] Thomas H. Troeger, "Hymns as Midrashim: Congregational Song as Biblical Interpretation and Theological Reconstruction," *The Hymn* 49, no. 3 (1998)
[5] Lucy Lind Hogan and Robert Reid, *Connecting with the Congregation: Rhetoric and the Art of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999). Emphasis in the original.
[6] Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 55. Emphasis in the original. In classes and lectures, Lowry demonstrates this by illustrating what happens in the absence of sequence. He announces that he will play the melody notes of a favorite hymn on the piano. Playing with one finger, and sounding each for the same length of time, he plays: CCCCCCDDDFFFFFFFFFFFFGGGAAAAAAAAACCC. These are the *notes* for "Amazing Grace," he explains, but without putting them in the right order, and playing each for the right duration, the hymn is unrecognizable – indeed, it is *not* "Amazing Grace" at all.

Preaching, Crawford posits that the preacher's "homiletical musicality" is an important factor in awakening a response from the congregation. This homiletical musicality is "the way in which the preacher uses timing, pauses, inflection, pace, and all the other musical qualities of speech to engage all that the listener is in the act of proclamation."[7] Whether with verbal ejaculations or silent nods of the head, the hearers are moved from the expectant calls and prayers of "Help 'em Lord!" to authentic exclamations of "Glory Hallelujah!" "Preaching is holiness in timing,"[8] says Crawford, and the result of such good and holy timing is "the people's amen," a phrase he borrows from the final stanza of Joachim Neander's famous hymn "Lobe Den Herren" or "Praise to the Lord! The Almighty," to describe the both the "feel-back" and "feed-back" from the hearers of the sermon:

> Praise to the Lord!
> O let all that is in me adore him!
> All that has life and breath,
> come now with praises before him!
> Let the amen sound from his people again,
> gladly forever adore him![9]

And yet, for all this use of musical language to speak *about* preaching, there is precious little in homiletical literature that speaks of the intersection of hymns *with* preaching. *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, for example, is woefully silent when it comes to congregational song and its links to preaching. In the essay "Arts and Preaching," Charles Rice mentions the art forms of novels, television, films, literary poetry, paintings, sculpture, and dance – but nowhere mentions hymns or music.[10] There are essays on acoustics, architecture, and television, but there are no entries at all for "music" or "hymn" or other related musical terms. Even the essay on the Psalms barely touches on the fact that these texts are hymns to be sung.

But there are hints of hymnody's connection to preaching in the *Concise Encyclopedia*. Jon Michael Spencer's essay on African American folk preaching posits that the creation of various spirituals grew out of the folk preaching of slave preachers.

> It is probable that the more frequent development of these folk songs came from extemporaneous preaching (and prayer) that intensified little by little into intoned utterance. This melodious declamation, delineated into quasi-metrical phrases with formulaic cadence, was customarily enhanced by intervening tonal responses

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[7] Evans E. Crawford, *The Hum: Call and Response in African American Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 16. Crawford later (p. 21) thanks Jon Michael Spencer for the term "homiletical musicality."

[8] Ibid., 17.

[9] Translation as found at #543 in *Lutheran Book of Worship*, (Minneapolis and Philadelphia: Augsburg Publishing House and Board of Publication, Lutheran Church in America, 1978). Minor differences (has=hath, for instance) appear in other collections.

[10] Charles L. Rice, "Arts and Preaching," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995). Rice's longer work, *The Embodied Word: Preaching as Art and Liturgy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), similarly lacks any substantive consideration of hymns as an art that is somehow connected to preaching.

from the congregation. Responsorial iteration of catchy words, phrases, and sentences resulted in the burgeoning of song, to which new verses were joined.[11]

Each repetition of the key phrase resulted in a stronger response from the congregation, as they literally joined in to help the preacher preach, and over time the resulting song became part of the community's spiritual foundation.

Another, stronger hint on the interplay of congregational song and preaching in the *Concise Encyclopedia* comes from Richard Lischer's essay on Martin Luther King, Jr. Lischer notes that King used spirituals and gospel songs to conclude many of his sermons – although not always, and also not always in print.

> In black churches, but rarely in white, King extended his use of homiletical set pieces to include gospel and spiritual formulas with which he brought his sermons to a thunderous climax and his services to the prescribed altar call. . . . Such formulas, along with most topical references and other typically African-American religious expressions, have been omitted from his major volume of printed sermons, *Strength to Love*.[12]

Why only in black churches, but rarely in white? Lischer never ventures an explanation, either in the *Encyclopedia* essay or in his book *The Preacher King,* but the likeliest rationale to me comes from the discipline of congregational studies. When King was preaching at Ebenezer or another black church, he could be reasonably sure that the people of that congregation knew the songs to which he referred – and not only knew them, but loved them. This was *their* language he was speaking, to drive home *his* message. By contrast, when he spoke in white churches, to white audiences, the same resonance with the spirituals could not be assumed, and thus, he closed his sermons differently.

King's famous "I have a Dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial was not a sermon per se, yet reveals how King could use music to strengthen his preaching, so that the "people's amen" would sound loud and long. His political "text" was the Declaration of Independence, with its declaration of equality, and in his conclusion he pulls in the music of "My country, 'tis of thee," to create the thundering climax of his address. He declaims the entire first stanza, ending with its call to "let freedom ring." King picks up this call, and throws it down as a challenge: "and if America is to be a great nation, this must become true." He repeats the call again and again, drawing the vast assembly into his address:

> So let freedom ring from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire.
> Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York.
> Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania.
> Let freedom ring from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado.
> Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California.

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[11] Jon Michael Spencer, "Folk Preaching (African American)," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 142. For a longer treatment of this, see the chapter "Sermon and Surplus" of Jon Michael Spencer, *Protest and Praise: Sacred Music of Black Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 225-242.

[12] Richard Lischer, "King, Martin Luther, Jr.," in *The Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 288. See also Richard Lischer, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. And the Word That Moved America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) for a fuller discussion, especially chapters 9 and 10.

But not only that.
Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia.
Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee.
Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi, from every mountainside, let freedom ring.

Having built this grand crescendo, King then makes a remarkable move, shifting to a kind of political altar call, tying this patriotic anthem to an "old Negro spiritual":

And when we allow freedom to ring, when we let it ring from every village and hamlet, from every state and city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children – black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Catholics and Protestants – will be able to join hands and to sing in the words of that old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, we are free at last."[13]

As Clark noted in her study of church music, communities function like individuals, in that they, too, have their favorite hymns that form an indispensable part of that congregation's spiritual life together.

The favorite hymns of a congregation are also an expression of the mythos of the people who comprise it. As anyone who has worked in the church for longer than six months can tell, the favorite hymns are ignored to the peril of the leadership of any congregation. If they are, a hue and cry is inevitable because these events bring to life aspects of the tradition *which only live through them*. Nothing can take the place of singing these hymns.[14]

This is what King tapped into with use of "My Country, 'tis of Thee" and "Free at Last." Homiletically, King took the language of one of the dominant culture's "favorite hymns" and fused it with the language of a spiritual so dear to the African American community, to bring all his hearers to their feet, offering their resounding amen – together.

Lischer observed that King widely used spirituals to connect with the black community in the climax to his preaching, but not in the white churches. Still, King used other music to make the same connections in these settings. For example, in "A Time to Break Silence" addressed to a meeting of Clergy and Laity Concerned at Riverside Church, when he directly challenged the Vietnam war, he closed not with a spiritual, but with James Russell Lowell's "Once to every man and nation."[15] In his last Sunday sermon, preached at the National Cathedral, he pointed to that same hymn in the conclusion, which had been sung earlier in the service.[16]

King's use of hymns in this way is not unique, although it may be more documented and public than other preachers. Preachers with a musical bent see hymn writers as partners in proclamation. Martin Luther, for example, closed his sermon on Christmas afternoon 1530 by turning to "In

[13] Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986), 219-220.
[14] Clark, 57. Emphasis in the original.
[15] Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break Silence," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986)
[16] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Remaining Awake through a Great Revolution," in *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1986)

Dulci Jubilo" as an expression of faithful joy at the birth of Jesus, our savior.[17] Billy Graham, in his words at the National Prayer Service on September 14, 2001, used "How Firm a Foundation" to summarize his thoughts in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.[18] Much less famous preachers, too, draw on hymns to tie the new words and thoughts of the sermon to the old words and thoughts already present in their hearers through hymns. For example, in 1913, Rev. L. Buchheimer, pastor of the relatively new English Evangelical Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer mission congregation in St. Louis, published a collection of his sermons through various seasons of the church year, many of which conclude by quoting a stanza of a hymn.[19]

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale calls on preachers to use "the language of local preaching" when crafting a sermon. "Preaching as folk art," she tells us, "exhibits a preference for the simple, plain, conversational speech of the local congregation," and "uses examples and illustrations that are reflective of life as members of the congregation actually experience it."[20] Tisdale makes no specific mention of hymns or music in this context, but her words apply to the songs of a parish as much as they do to the other elements of the lives of the people in the local congregation. If "Amazing Grace" is powerful of the lives of a community, all it takes for the preacher to call the power of that hymn to life is to quote a portion of it: "I once was lost, but now am found . . ."

Tex Sample understands the power of music to connect pastor and parishioner. In *White Soul*, he recounts a conversation between a pastor in rural Kansas and one of the teenagers in the youth group. The teen is having all kinds of personal relationship problems, and came to the pastor for help. Sadly, Quentin (the pastor) just couldn't connect, and began to get anxious, because he "knew they weren't speaking the same language." The impasse was broken by an unlikely inspiration.

> "Do you see any light at the end of the tunnel?" Quentin asked.
> "I guess, but I'm never sure."
> In desperation, and trying to "connect," Quentin responded, "You mean it's like that [country] song, 'I see the light at the end of the tunnel, but I sure hope it's not a train.'"
> With that the teen stopped dead in his tracks, shot around to look at Quentin but with his face beaming in recognition that someone had finally understood. He almost shouted: "Exactly! That's exactly what it's been like with her. Every time I think things are OK, the light at the end of the tunnel turns out to be another freight train!"
> Quentin is a quick study and came back quickly: "You know, when I go through tough times like this, I always think of Hank Williams's song, 'I'm So Lonesome I Could Cry.'"
> "Oh, yeah," the teen responded, almost shouting, "that song says more about what I feel than words could ever say!"

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[17] Martin Luther, "Sermon on the Afternoon of Christmas Day, 1530," in *Luther's Works*, Vol 51, ed. John W. Doberstein (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 209-217.

[18] Billy Graham, "How Firm a Foundation!," in *Shaken Foundations: Sermons from America's Pulpits after the Terrorist Attacks*, ed. David P. Polk (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 9-13.

[19] L. Buchheimer, *The First Gospel and Other Sermons*, vol. 1 (St. Louis: Rudolph Volkening, 1913).

[20] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 126-129

The teen and the pastor then began trading one-liners from country songs in a conversation that went on for over an hour. Once the dam was broken by the shared language of country music, the pastor and teen could look at the pain in the young man's life and what his next steps might be.

Sample calls this kind of ministry "pitching a tent with the indigenous practices of a people." He calls on pastors to learn the music that speaks to the souls of (in this case) working class Christians. This isn't a call to become a country music fan, but something much deeper. By delving into the music that speaks to the souls of working folk, preachers can learn of the struggles and means by which working people resist the forces arrayed against them. Sample would not think the analogy too forced to say that in the same way that those who wish to do ministry among Hispanic immigrants need to learn Spanish, so too do those who wish to do ministry among working class people need to learn country music.

Music speaks to the soul, and congregational song forms the bedrock spirituality of those who sing "psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God." Hymn singing is one of those vital activities that encourage spiritual growth, yet preachers seem deaf to the language of hymns that can bridge their world and the world of their hearers. Strangely, despite the fact that the African American church does so much with combining music with preaching on a regular basis (the organist who plays underneath the climax to the sermon, for example, bursting into the hymn as the preacher concludes), even Henry Mitchell says little about how congregational song can be used to strengthen preaching. "Just as a dramatist writes a play whose acts move up to the resolution of the conflict, and just as a composer creates a symphony whose movements climb to the last crescendo, a sermon lifts up and finally celebrates its Good News."[21] Yes, but what kind of a celebration is it if nobody sings?

It doesn't take much to link preaching and hymnody in the rhetorical work of homileticians. It can happen in any parish with any preacher who takes the time to understand the "soul music" of that place. It can use many different approaches to preaching. Mitchell's call to praise in preaching can be pushed further, to tie the spirituality of hymnody into the celebration. David Buttrick's moves and structures could be used to describe the crafting of a fine hymn as well as they do a fine sermon, and also to understand the movement of worship from scripture to sermon to hymn. Lowry's work on plot and dramatic movement can do the same. The uses of imagination laid out by Thomas Troeger or Paul Scott Wilson can be seen at work in hymns as well as in preaching, and hymns can serve to stimulate imaginative connections for the preacher and the hearers both. Surely the naming of grace urged by Mary Catherine Hilkert can draw on the naming done by generations of hymn writers.[22]

Preachers and those who listen to their sermons often dwell in the word in very different ways. In preparing for a sermon, preachers will dig into Greek and Hebrew, pore over commentaries for historical background, consult theologians for clarity and insight, and do a thousand and one

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[21] Henry H. Mitchell, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990), 34.

[22] See David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987); Eugene L. Lowry, *How to Preach a Parable: Designs for Narrative Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989) and also *The Sermon* , cited earlier; Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990); Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988) and *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999); and Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997).

other things that are not a part of the lives of most of their hearers. The writers of beloved hymns – whichever these hymns may be for a particular person or community – have often already done that same work, and done it in such a way that the people who have sung these hymns have committed them to memory because the songs connect with them at a deep and spiritual level. If preachers can profitably refer to the prose of scholars like Raymond Brown, certainly we can also use the musical rhetoric of Isaac Watts or James Weldon Johnson to great advantage.

Homileticians are not alone in missing the connections between preaching and hymnody. Charles Wesley, one of the greatest hymn writers in the English language, held such a high view of preaching – "the principal work of ministry" – that he spoke of his own hymn writing in much more humble tones:

> God, having graciously laid his hand upon my body, and disabled me for the principal work of the ministry, has thereby given me an unexpected occasion of writing the following hymns . . .
> Reader, if God ministers grace to thy soul thro' any of these hymns, give Him the glory, and offer up a prayer for thy weak Instrument, that whenever I finish my course, I may depart in peace, having seen in JESUS CHRIST his great salvation.[23]

Strong John does the principal work, and weak Charles is left to write hymns. One wonders what Charles would say if he realized that his hymns like "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Come, Thou Almighty King," and "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" have shaped the lives of far more people than ever heard his brother John preach.

Many preachers dread preaching at Christmas, for a whole variety of reasons. The story is so familiar and the songs are so well known that the sermon will be lost. Yet what if preachers saw the music of the season not as a competitor to their preaching, but a partner with it? All kinds of imaginative possibilities begin to appear: a sermon preached jointly by pastor and choir, a young girl singing the Magnificat while an older angel preaches, or simply building a more traditional sermon around the scriptural interpretations given by the hymns of the season. At Christmas, people want to sing, even if they are hesitant at every other time of the year. Homiletically, this is no reason for weeping, wailing and gnashing of teeth, but an opportunity to let the songs in the hearts of the hearers already open them up in new ways to hearing the good news in the sermon.

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[23] Charles Wesley, *Short Hymns on Selected Passages of the Holy Scriptures*, 2 vols. (Bristol: E. Farley, 1762), unnumbered preface.

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From Listener to Learner:
A Learner-Centered Model of Preaching

Robert Stephen Reid
University of Dubuque

Imagine what would happen if preaching's listeners became learners. The invitation is implicit in Doug Pagitt's book *Preaching Reimagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith*.[1] Pagitt begins with the assumption that speech-making has been the primary metaphor for preaching and offers a challenge that this frame of reference may constrain the effectiveness of preaching for 21st century post-Christian seekers. Instead of "speaching" Pagitt wishes to invite preachers to consider a presentational mode he calls "progressional dialogue." His proposal represents an effort to shift the spiritual seeker's question away from the individualistic "What does this have to do with me?" to invite the seeker to become part of a community of learners who ask "What does this mean for us?" The implication of this shift in sermonic purpose reflects Pagitt's concern to embed the sermon in the life of a faith community that has as its purpose to make passionate followers of Jesus Christ. It is not a model of preaching for *friendly* churches that welcome people hoping they will consider joining them for worship once a week. Pagitt's version of the Christian community is more demanding than the typical institutional model of the church that has dominated so much of the 20th century

Pagitt writes, "At Solomon's Porch, the church where I am the pastor, progressional dialogue takes several forms. The two most obvious are the sermon preparation which involves in-depth conversation with a group of other people from the church, and the weekly open discussion that happens during the sermon—I talk for a while and then invite others to share their ideas, input, and thoughts about what has been said."[2] Solomon's Porch in Minneapolis is an innovative congregation that is at the forefront of the emergent church movement. This is no Willow-Creek, nor does this congregation have Willow's mega-church mass communication aspirations. The LCD lit screens at two ends of the room at Solomon's Porch serve merely to provide words for the contemporary music composed by musicians that make up one of the artisan groups within the congregation. During the sermon the screens are used to provide the words of the biblical text that form the basis of Pagitt's talk. On one hand, Pagitt's basic messages are mostly a version of expository preaching salted with comments and conversation by and with his parishioners. On the other hand, they are dialogical in the way they invite those present to imagine themselves as people living out the unfinished story of Jesus as part of the spiritual formation of a people in community with one another.

This idea was first developed in *Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church*. In this book he lays challenge to the idea that "the most effective way

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[1] Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Reimagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).

[2] Pagitt, *Preaching Reimagined*, 24. A picture of Pagitt preaching to people sitting on a sea of sofas at Solomon's Porch can be seen in the photographs that accompany Andy Crouch's idiosyncratic report on the emergent church movement in Crouch, "Emergent Mystique," *Christianity Today*, Vol. 48, Issue 11 (Nov 2004): 36-41. Pagitt is a graduate of Bethel Seminary, an ordained minister of the Evangelical Covenant Church, and a Senior Fellow with Emergent. On the Emergent Church movement see the cover story of *The Christian Century* (November 30, 2004).

to deepen a person's spiritual life [is] to increase her knowledge about God."[3] *Reimagining Spiritual Formation* invites readers to rethink the continued value of a 19th century education model of spiritual formation "that has failed to produce the kind of radical commitment to life in harmony with God in the way of Jesus that we are called to."[4] In *Reimagining Preaching* Pagitt brings a similar argument to bear, arguing that the educational model of preaching as public lecture leads to the same knowing rather than doing dichotomy of spiritual formation.

As a homiletic for the emergent church movement *Preaching Reimagined* models this move away from public speaking's structured, formal argument to imagine a different way of inviting involvement in the conversation. The initial essay lays out his basic challenge to the view of preaching-as-speaching with variously numbered links to 40 subsequent sections of the book that develop ideas from the essay at greater length.[5] His model of preaching, as much as possible, seeks to subvert the established view of the sermon as an oral essay by replacing it with communication that permits honest dialogue even during the service much as he is trying to facilitate in the way he has written the book. Pagitt believes that the priesthood of the believers is the great gift of the Reformation. However, preaching is the one area that remains fixed in the hierarchical model of the sermon as lecture, leading him to conclude that preaching remains as the most significant "unfunded mandate of the reformation.[6]"

Pagitt's penchant for problematizing the education model at the heart of so much of contemporary Christian *praxis* is both perceptive in its Christian critique and naïve in its critique of educational theory. It is perceptive because it offers an insightful postmodern challenge to one of the most sacred cornerstones of Christendom: that knowledge gained through a largely passive education process will [somehow] lead to active behavior change. Pagitt simply lays challenge to the way in which the church has institutionalized this educational theory without tracking how it has been coupled with system processes that tend to turn parishioners into passive consumers of theological teachings. On the other hand, his problematic is also naïve because the American educational establishment is also undergoing a similar postmodern assessment of the limitations of its practices and has arrived at some conclusions strikingly similar to those of Pagitt. Specifically, the American Association for Higher Education's *Joint Task Force on Student Learning* has identified the problem of the teacher-centered paradigm rather than learner-centered paradigm of education. They contend that educators need to shift teaching strategies from content centered education to a skill-centered education consistent with a learner-centered education paradigm.[7]

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[3] Doug Pagitt and the Solomon's Porch Community, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation: A Week in the Life of an Experimental Church*, An EmergenetYS Book (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 22. Reissued as *Church Re-Imagined: The Spiritual Formation of People in Communities of Faith (Emergentys)* in fall 2005.

[4] Pagitt, *Reimagining Spiritual Formation*, 22-23.

[5] See http://pagittbooks.blogs.com/preachingreimagined/2005/06/preaching-beyon.html. Respondents can move their conversation with the book to Pagitt's blog at the Solomon's Porch homepage. On this website, Pagitt lists 40 ideas from the book that await further "progressional" engagement from readers. This model of writing caters to the hyper-link mode of thought made possible by the web. It represents a genuine effort to shift the metaphor of presentation away from the careful development of a cumulative argument that, since antiquity, has been the print version of a well-structured speech and a well-structured sermon, to that of an ongoing dialogue.

[6] Pagitt, Reimagining Preaching, 23.

[7] Joint Task Force on Student Learning, *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (Washington, DC: The American Association for Higher Education, 1998). The task force was comprised of the following organizations: the American Association for Higher Education, the American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators. The website was not up at the time of this writing. My source for this and all subsequent supporting Joint Task Force definitions these definitions is:

The problem is not that the church has historically drawn on modern education theory to structure how it communicates a life of faith to parishioners. The problem is that it needs to continue attending to the changes in educational theory in the 21st century. Thus, in a move similar to Pagitt, I wish to suggest that the urgent task of the 21st century pulpit is to examine the degree to which it is still dependent on an outdated theory of education for its metaphoric frame of reference in its theology of preaching. However, I wish to argue that educational theory's new metaphor of "the learner" can serve as a productive frame of reference for contemporary homiletics—especially those homiletics interested in the role of conversation and dialogue in preaching. Homiletics' shift during the last quarter of the 20th century to a listener-centered approach to preaching and to exploring the performative nature of the biblical texts in preaching were valuable first steps toward identifying the importance of conversation and dialogue in preaching, but a further re-orientation is needed that shifts the focus from sermons shaped for listeners to sermons that make learners.

We would do well to realize that in Matthew's Great Commission Jesus invites his followers to "Go and make *learner*s (*mathêteusate*) of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* (*didaskô*) them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:19-20). The question education theory has grappled with is the same question we must grapple with. In the effort to teach learners have we turned them into passive listeners? In the 21st century the lecture has diminishing appeal for those who wish to learn which is why 21st century parishioners will increasingly come to expect preachers to discover how to make sermonic learning a more collaborative venture.

FROM LISTENER TO LEARNER

So what would this shift in our educational metaphor look like? How do we move from lecture to learner in what seems to be an intrinsically monological art form? Unlike Pagitt, who arrived at his questions in the trenches of a local congregation, I come by my questions as one who teaches in the communication department of a university.[8] My initial foray into these questions was at the hands of Mary Huba and Jann Freed's book *Learner-Centered Assessment on College Campuses: Shifting the Focus from Teaching to Learning*.[9] And it is to Huba and Freed that I turn for continued comparative insight as I try to apply these questions to preaching. These co-authors chart the following comparison between the traditional teacher-centered paradigm of education and the emerging learner-centered paradigm: [10]

Teacher-Centered Paradigm	Learner-Centered Paradigm
Knowledge is transmitted from professor to students.	Students construct knowledge through gathering and synthesizing information and integrating it with the general skills of inquiry, communication, critical thinking, problem solving, and so on.
Students passively receive	Students are actively involved.

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information.	
Emphasis is on acquisition of knowledge outside the context in which it will be used.	Emphasis is on using and communicating knowledge effectively to address enduring and emerging issues and problems in real-life contexts.
Professor's role is to be primary information giver and primary evaluator.	Professor's role is to coach and facilitate. Professor and students evaluate learning together.
Teaching and assessing are separate.	Teaching and assessing are intertwined.
Assessment is used to monitor learning.	Assessment is used to promote and diagnose learning.
Emphasis is on right answers.	Emphasis is on generating better questions and learning from errors.
Desired learning is assessed indirectly through the use of objectively scored tests.	Desired learning is assessed directly through papers, projects, performances, portfolios, and the like.
Focus is on a single discipline.	Approach is compatible with interdisciplinary investigation.
Culture is competitive and individualistic.	Culture is cooperative, collaborative, and supportive.
Only students are viewed as learners.	Professor and students learn together.

The first response homileticians will likely have to this juxtaposition of paradigms is a question: 'How can an educational theory grounded in outcomes assessment be employed in critique of homiletic practice?' It's a good question and one that does not have a simple answer. However, preachers should begin by admitting that outcomes do matter. I have previously argued that most preaching can be categorized by four hoped-for responses to the question "What do I hope will happen as a result of people listening to this sermon?" In a 2003 Academy paper and in my forthcoming book *The Four Voices of Preaching* I argue(d) that preaching in the Teaching Voice expects the response "Yes! This is what we believe;" preaching in the Encouraging Voice expects "Lord, may this be so in my life;" preaching in the Sage Voice expects, "Whoa! What will I do with/make of that?" and preaching in the Testifying Voice expects "Yes! This conversation matters. Let's keep talking."[11] In other words, the issue is not whether outcomes matter. They do if we wish to speak in a culturally coherent voice.

So, rather than taking on the issue of outcomes and their relationship to assessment at the front end of this paper, I prefer to let the relationship develop in my exploration of the eight **hallmarks** of a learner-centered paradigm of teaching Huba and Freed tease out of their chart. In what follows I will footnote the essential definitions of learning developed by the Joint Task Force on Student Learning (JTFSL) with a relevant Hallmarks of the learner-centered approach.[12]

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[11] See, Robert Stephen Reid, "The Four Voices of Preaching." A paper presented for the Rhetoric & Preaching Working Group at the annual meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, December 5, 2003, Claremont CA. My *The Four Voices of Preaching* is forthcoming from Brazos Press, August 2005.

[12] These eight hallmarks are developed in Chapter 2 of Huba and Freed, *Learner-Centered Assessment*, 32-64.

THE HALLMARKS OF A LEARNER-CENTERED APPROACH

1. Learners are actively involved and receive feedback.[13]

The lecture-centered paradigm of preaching invites clergy to listen, read, reflect, engage in dialogue with others, and generally try to be aware of current information and emerging trends in theology and practical Christian living. Preaching, in this model, becomes an active reflective engagement between this ongoing dialogue and a concurrent reflective engagement with the performative concerns of a biblical text or a topical concern relevant to Christian practice. Preachers turn this reflection into an oral talk, delivered as a kind of lecture for parishioners that joins the preacher's reflection-insight with existing biblical knowledge. In this model, parishioners are expected to listen carefully, receiving the talk in a passive fashion. There is no clear expectation concerning how listening is expected to become learning. In this model, the individual who learns the most is the preacher, because it is the preacher who is involved in the active construction of knowledge, the active synthesizing of the information, and the effort to imagine how it can be applied to inquiry, life skills, problems solving, etc.

This is a classic liberal arts approach to education, which is far different from the emerging forms of education in professional studies that place increasing significance on the role of educator as a performance-oriented coach. In traditional liberal arts education, instruction occurs either by lecture or discussion. In the professional programs presentations are typically followed by skills assessment, whether the subject matter is nursing, flight instruction, teacher preparation, musical training, playing sports, or even the basic public speaking course. In these courses learners are encouraged to participate in simulations and/or real practice and receive feedback concerning their performance. Of course there is still a necessary place for the basic lecture that presents ideas and information, but learners, having heard such presentations, are then invited to turn the information into practice in their effort to develop mastery. Only then are they given more information. Feedback is the essential component in this model of learning. In an educational environment, feedback for learners is provided by way of discussion with peers, assessment by the professor, by rubrics that help interpret the criterion of excellence, etc.

Implications for preaching: Apart from the call and response style of Black preaching, feedback has been relegated to sender-receiver models of communication or talk back sessions after the sermon because parishioners have been primarily envisioned as an audience listening to a sermon-as-lecture presentation rather than as active learners. Assessment is also alien to thinking about the activity of listening to sermons because sermons generally construct an audience as passive participants in the appropriation of understanding. What would happen if we turned this on its head, even beyond the participative styles of Black preaching and/or Pentacostal participation in preaching and made spiritual formation the task and preaching?

2. Learners apply knowledge to enduring and emerging issues and problems.[14]

A learner-centered education no longer simply presents knowledge as facts. A learner-centered education even moves beyond the strategic ambiguity posture that solicits answers as facts. Today's educator is tasked with developing curriculum that facilitates student's ability to learn the ropes. Some coursework is still controlled by the well-defined problem; e.g., the

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[13] "Learning is an ***active search for meaning*** by the learner—constructing knowledge rather than passively receiving it, shaping as well as being shaped by experiences" (JTFSL).

[14] "Learning is enhanced by ***taking place in*** the context of a ***compelling situation*** that balances challenge and opportunity, stimulating and utilizing the brain's ability to conceptualize quickly and its capacity and need for contemplation and reflection upon experiences" (JTFSL).

appropriate steps for critical-care nursing in a "xyz" situation. But educators are increasingly interested in developing what are called "ill-defined" case problems—problems that permit students to problem-solve in ways they can apply unique talents and learnings to compelling classroom situations. The goal is to move away from the one-size-fits-all assessment of the well-defined problem (the kind that can be answered with multiple-choice tests, etc.) to assessment where a student can approach, solve, and communicate learning in his or her own way. Instead of emphasizing acquisition of knowledge outside the context in which it will be used, emphasis is on using and communicating knowledge effectively to address enduring and emerging issues and problems in real-life contexts. Assessment of "an ill-defined problem" learning is typically explored by way of projects, case studies, performances, portfolios, exhibitions, etc.

Implications for preaching: Traditionally, parishioners have been expected to turn understanding that arises from preaching into Christian service (*diakonia*), into a valuing of socialization with other Christians (*koinonia*), and into a choice to engage in more interactive learning through small groups (*didachê*). Preaching in this model provides education that presents ideas as well-defined facts. As with the classroom, well-defined problems have tended to produce well-defined answers—and congregations that long for a faith that is characterized as established facts and well-defined answers. Homiletics has already begun challenging this posture by offering models of preaching that value questions more than answers, models that value a posture of strategic ambiguity more than a posture of measured certainty.

We must move beyond strategic ambiguity by helping parishioners acknowledge the value of the ill defined problems as a way into faith's possibilities? The contexts of *diakonia*, *koinonia*, and *didachê* can serve as the classrooms in which a parishioner's spiritual formation is first allowed to confront these ill defined problems—as contexts where negotiations of various solutions can be proposed and tested. In this way parishioners can learn how to practice faith. Preaching's task is to report on the intersection between this practice as part of scripture's presentation of Jesus' unfinished story. As learners work out their faith in this way, encouraged when their preacher pastorally frames their practice as a naming of grace, they come to believe that their ill-defined problem practice matters in how they name God as relevant to everyday life.

3. **Learners integrate discipline-based knowledge and general skills.**[15]

We clearly grasp the role of assessment in education but have had more difficulty imagining ways to assess learning that occurs through preaching. Huba and Freed can help us to think about the relationship between preaching and assessment by reframing the kind of question we have traditionally asked. Where we once wanted to know, 'Are listeners 'getting' the right answers?' the shift to a learner-centered model of preaching refocuses this question. Consider how Huba and Freed's questions asked by a learner-centered teacher could be applied to help preachers think about the relationship between preaching and spiritual formation:[16]

- Can students demonstrate the qualities we value in educated persons, the qualities we expect of college graduates?
- Can they gather and evaluate new information, think critically, reason effectively, and solve more problems?

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[15] "Learning is fundamentally about **making and maintaining connections**: biologically through neural networks; mentally among concepts, ideas, and meanings; and experientially through interaction between the mind and the environment, self and other, generality and context, deliberation and action" (JTFSL).
[16] Huba and Freed, *Learner-Centered Assessment*, 41-42.

- Can they communicate clearly, drawing upon evidence to provide a basis for their argumentation?
- Do their decisions and judgments reflect understanding of universal truths revealed in the humanities and the arts?
- Can they work respectfully and productively with others?
- Do they have self-regulating qualities like persistence and time management that will help them reach long-term goals?

Huba and Freed argue that authentic assessment focuses more on what it means to act like a professional within a field of practice than on universalizing all assessment for a one-size-fits-all model of education.

Implications for preaching: On those occasions when we ask whether preaching matters we are raising a question of assessment. Preaching that shifts the focus from listeners to learners will begin to frame what sermons are supposed to accomplish by asking whether those whose lives are shaped by engagement with sermons are able to talk and act like Christians in complex life-settings. This approach to preaching would need to be a kind of dialogue about the ongoing process of the community's ability to appropriate, internalize, and turn belief into a skill-set that permits them to live as people who professes faith in God.

4. **Learners understand the characteristics of excellent work.**[17]

When listeners are encouraged to become learners grade-scales must change. Subtracting points or grading on the curve must be jettisoned in favor of encouraging students to engage in effort where mistakes will happen. Mistakes in learner-centered education are opportunities to learn how to move toward excellence rather than as events to be avoided. Where demonstration of an ability to choose or provide right answers was the model of a teacher-centered approach to learning, improvement is what matters in a learner-centered approach to education. In the teacher-centered paradigm of learning, mistakes are red marks on the paper that lower the eventual grade. Coursework in a teacher-centered model of education is about how quickly a student can figure out what the professor wants and deliver it, rather than an environment where learning the ropes is what matters.

When I assign students to work on writing a senior thesis or a Master's thesis, I collaborate with them each step of the way. I help them to enter into the world of thinking involved in doing literature reviews and formulating a project that problematizes some issue and then finds a way to address the problem with theory-framed understanding. The result is carefully considered chapters in which the student and I can agree on excellence in their communication. An "A" is generally awarded to the finished product because the student has reached for excellence in appropriating knowledge for a context that matters.

In the teacher-centered paradigm the professor's role was that of primary information giver and primary evaluator. In the learner-centered paradigm the professor's role is that of coach and facilitator; professor and students evaluate learning together. Instead of using assessment to monitor learning, assessment is used to diagnose appropriation of learning in order to assist learners in gaining knowledge from errors to better generate new questions and viable solutions.

Implications for preaching: What would happen if we envisioned preaching-beyond-speaching? In *Reimagining Preaching* Pagitt is at least asking the question of how we can make

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[17] "Learning is enhanced by *taking place in* the context of a *compelling situation* that balances challenge and opportunity, stimulating and utilizing the brain's ability to conceptualize quickly and its capacity and need for contemplation and reflection upon experiences" (JTFSL).

preaching a progressional dialogue where the emphasis is directed toward spiritual formation. This is preaching where pastor and learners work together to create community. The pastor serves as coach. Rather than assuming the role of the Wizard with all the answers, this preacher operates like Dorothy who sees her role as helping people get on down the road in the journey they are making together as a community participating in the unfinished story of the gospel.[18]

5. **Learners become increasingly sophisticated learners and knowers.[19]**

In the teaching-centered approach the focus was on mastery of the content of a single discipline and the classroom was treated as the context in which this learning was encountered. The learner-centered approach focuses on appropriation of knowledge that arises as the result of interdisciplinary engagement and an acknowledgement that no one arrives in the classroom *tabula raza*. Ideas are engaged out of the cauldron of pre-conceptions with the assumption that all new ideas are born of a previous generation's concerns and engagements. Learner-centered education invites participants to share what they already know and don't know, before exploring what new possibilities of knowing can occur. When engagement is explored in this way, *misunderstanding alerts* can be imagined before the fact with "A Student Asks…." rubrics provided to help students learn the ropes of a new way of knowing.

Implications for preaching: If approaches to preaching that value 'ambiguity and the importance of the question' more than 'certainty and the importance of answers' are to succeed, preaching must find ways to engage listeners in the task of becoming more sophisticated learners and knowers. Preaching that invites this engagement will initially create confusion. It may even be seen as threatening because it involves a shift in the learners' cultural epistemology. In such situations preachers must find venues to invite parishioners to discuss and process the way that *truth* is being presented. Otherwise, the preacher is still assuming the posture of the all knowing Wizard of Oz rather than the stance of a collaborative Dorothy-like coach. In the latter model, the learner is invited to ponder the mysteries of faith as ill-defined questions that admit the complexity of truth and the many ways truth may play out as ways of faithful living.

6. **Professors coach and facilitate, intertwining teaching and assessing.[20]**

Where the professor's role used to be that of primary information giver and primary evaluator, the professor's role in the learning-centered approach is one of coach and facilitator. In this model students join the professor as co-evaluators of responses to ill-defined questions and thus become co-constructors of their own education.

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[18] See Brian D. McLaren, "Dorothy on Leadership: Or "How a Movie from our Childhood Can Help us Understand the Changing Nature of Leadership in the Postmodern Transition." Original in Rev. Magazine, Nov.-Dec. 2000. http://www.emergentvillage.com/downloads/resources/mclaren/DorothyonLeadership.pdf

[19] Four definitions apply: "Learning is **developmental**, a cumulative process **involving the whole person**, relating past and present, integrating the new with the old, starting from but transcending personal concerns and interests." "Learning is **grounded in particular contexts and individual experiences**, requiring effort to transfer specific knowledge and skills to other circumstances or to more general understandings and to unlearn personal views and approaches when confronted by new information." "Much learning **takes place informally and incidentally**, beyond explicit teaching or the classroom, in casual contacts with faculty and staff, peers, campus life, active social and community involvements, and unplanned but fertile and complex situations." "Learning involves the **ability of individuals to monitor their own learning**, to understand how knowledge is acquired, to develop strategies for learning based on discerning their capacities and limitations, and to be aware of their own ways of knowing in approaching new bodies of knowledge and disciplinary frameworks" (JTFSL).

[20] "Learning is strongly **affected by the educational climate** in which it takes place: the settings and surroundings, the influences of others, and the values accorded to the life of the mind and to learning achievements" (JTFSL).

Implications for preaching: In this model the preacher is invited to re-envision her or his task as one of coaching learners rather than explaining answers or providing insights. If the task is to "make learners as we go" this posture envisions the process as a journey made by fellow travelers on their way to faithfulness where the response to the journey makes them fellow theologians. Huba and Freed argue that "in a learner-centered environment . . . teaching and assessing are not separate, episodic events, but rather, they are ongoing, interrelated activities focused on providing guidance for improvement" (54). Instead of ministers needing to practice what they preach themselves, learner-centered preaching would invite preachers to re-envision the possibilities that would enable preacher and learners alike to practice what is preached in the process of their co-constructed journey of spiritual formation.

7. **Learning is interpersonal, and all learners—students and professors—are respected and valued.**[21]

Assessment theorists Seymor and Chaffee contend that both the process of and the love of learning are fundamentally social phenomena.[22] In an environment where the culture is competitive and individualistic, real learning only occurs for the few. In a culture where learning is cooperative, collaborative, and supportive, learning happens as a community.

Implications for preaching: Institutional models of Christianity have long supported the model of preaching that mounts the hierarchy. In the third millennium, North American Christians are increasingly looking to be part of congregations where commitment to community matters but they are not sure this should mean submission to someone else's final authority. "Because we say so" may work for children, but increasingly it does not work for parishioners. In the teacher-centered model of preaching, the preacher often had a responsibility to play the parent. We all know this paradigm. What is interesting is how far removed it is from the model of Jesus who gathered a community of learners around him as learners. These learners often struggled with ill-defined questions, made mistakes as they were learning, and are the story's co-participants in the saving life of Christ. Imagine a model of preaching that invites preachers to be Dorothy-like leaders in this same co-participation toward faith's home in Christ. This suggestion leads to Huba and Freed's last hallmark.

8. **Professors reveal that they are learners too.**[23]

In the teacher-centered paradigm only students are viewed as learners. However, in the learner-centered paradigm professor and students learn together. The learner-centered approach takes time to gather opinions from learners along the way. The syllabus in a learner-centered course is designed to permit course corrections as the professor gathers information along the way about how the course design and assessment techniques are working in facilitating student learning. Such information helps the professor analyze, discuss, and judge his or her own performance as one of the learners in the learning context. Far from the dreaded course-evaluations, these are invitations to shape the journey that invariably improves the final evaluation because the resulting course is co-created by professor and student. Few things a

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[21] "Learning is done by **individuals** who are intrinsically **tied to others as social beings**, interacting as competitors or collaborators, constraining or supporting the learning process, and able to enhance learning through cooperation and sharing" (JTFSL).

[22] D. Seymour and E. E. Chaffee, "TQM for Student Outcomes Assessment," *AGB Reports*, 34.1 (1992): 28. Cited in Huba and Freed, 58.

[23] The JTFSL offers no definitions of learning relevant to this hallmark.

professor or preacher can do will create the sense that "we are in this thing together" more than a willingness to check in and find out how learning is progressing. It was once termed, "the cure of souls" and is the necessary "cure" to views of pastoral care that too easily devolve into problem-solving for parishioners.[24]

Implications for preaching: Preachers need to ask, "How do I reveal to my parishioners that I need their help in order to improve my preaching or make the substance of what I am up to in preaching more useful to them?" "How do I reveal to parishioners that, like them, I am still continuing to learn more about what I believe and how I understand who God is calling me to be in this time and this place with them?" "How can parishioners help me to name God and name grace in my preaching?"

A LEARNER-CENTERED MODEL OF PREACHING

Attention to the listener has dominated progressive homiletic theory in the last quarter of the twentieth century.[25] Many practitioners already accept the value of turning away from a preacher-centered, content-centered paradigm of preaching and turning to a listener-centered paradigm. These practitioners are farther along the journey than many to whom Pagitt speaks. What is needed now is to shift our metaphor from listener to learner. This shift can enhance existing theories of preaching as conversation and preaching as dialogue.

Of course there are differences between the pulpit and the classroom, but less than we might imagine. Doug Pagitt may have challenged the existing teacher-centered educational model that still constrains so much of what preachers are up to in the institutional church, but my hunch is that Doug would embrace the notion of a learner-centered homiletic that surrenders the lecture and values the collaborative process of spiritual formation in the life of a community of faith. The fact that some will argue that such a model is unworkable given the nature of our contemporary understanding of the institutional church may be more comment on our ecclesiology than on our homiletic.[26] A learner-centered homiletic offers a model of preaching that values "the more you do" instead of "the more you know." It is a homiletic that gives voice back to the people and trusts the work of God in a community that makes spiritual formation central to the task of faithful Christian vocation.

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[24] A quick search of Amazon.com's database for the top 30 books on pastoral care has only two books out of thirty in which the title suggests pastoral care might be about something other than psychological counseling: William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1986) and Spurgeon's *Lectures to My Students* (Zondervan, 1979). Admittedly, this is searching based on sales rather than substance, but I suspect that such a search may be more telling about contemporary orientations concerning the subject. Two helpful books that did not appear among the thirty are Nancy Ramsay, ed., *Pastoral Care and Counseling: Redefining the Paradigms* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) and Robert Dykstra, *Images of Pastoral Care: Classic Readings*. (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005).

[25] See John McClure, *The Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); McClure, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001); McClure "Conversation and Proclamation: Resources and Issues," *Homiletic* 22.1 (1997): 1-13. Lucy A. Rose, "Conversational Preaching: A Proposal," *Papers of the 1995 Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics* , (1995): 31-40; Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Lucy Lind Hogan, "Homiletos: The Never-ending Holy Conversation," *Homiletic* 21:2 (1996): 1-10; Jeffrey Francis Bullock, *Preaching with a Cupped Ear: Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern Wor(l)d,* Berkeley Insights in Linguistics and Semiotics (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1999).

[26] Nancy Ammerman reports that it may always have been bad ecclesiology to depend on the culture and one hour of worship to carry the gospel, but congregations that have found other ways to involve parishioners in the life of the community now prove that it was also bad sociology; Ammerman, "Running on Empty: The Problem of the Mainline," *Christian Century* (June 28, 2005): 8-9.

What Does It Mean to 'Listen to Listeners?'

Joseph M. Webb

1.

The academic arena known as "communication theory and research" drew on numerous established disciplines in the 1930s and 40s to define itself and reach a kind of maturity in the years after the war. Today it has taken its place on virtually every major American university campus, as well as numerous European campuses. It began with an all-out emphasis on the "sender" of messages; its central image was the hypodermic needle—a belief, in short, that whoever sent the message controlled the message's outcome. Wielders of propaganda were assumed to be very powerful forces indeed.

Research studies by the hundreds, almost all of them meticulously empirical, were undertaken by communications scholars of both psychological and sociological bent (despite their commonalities, still two distinct research traditions). Virtually all of the studies made the same assumption of an *active* message sender and a *passive* message receiver. The goal of the research throughout those early decades was always the same: to develop scientific means of *predicting* how receivers would act when confronted with a given message. There just had to be empirically-identifiable "laws" that govern communication behavior. Or so it was thought.

In the 1950s, though, a bewildering impasse settled over the communications research establishment. Researchers were realizing that no such empirical "laws" of message communication were emerging. Just when such a "law" seemed to be in sight, another group of studies would undermine or even disprove it. Moreover, it was increasingly apparent that the sources, or the senders, of messages were simply not much in control of the communication situation. While a few things had been inadvertently learned along the way, what was most significant was that the fundamental empirical premise of active-sender/passive-receiver had also been stunningly disproved.

It was Raymond Bauer, one of those communication researchers, who wrote a seminal essay saying all of this out loud. Bauer proposed that communications research had been looking in the wrong place: that it was not the sender of the message who ultimately controlled the situation—but the *receiver*. As easy as that was to see in retrospect, it was an awareness that changed the focus of the entire communications research world. A newer, more broadly-based form of empirical research emerged, drawing on other disciplines and perspectives. Now the motivating questions of the research became: How did the receiver come to understand the message in a particular way? What function did the message play for its receiver? And, what did the receiver of the message do with it and to it? With that, communications research entered a much more vigorous and fruitful era.

This shift took place in the decade and a half before I entered graduate school at the University of Illinois in the late 1960s to study communication theory and research. It was a heady time. New theories were everywhere, theories about "receivers" of messages, about "hearers" and "watchers" of the countless messages with which we were then and are still

bombarded. While we all as Ph.D. students had to prove ourselves with the old empirical research methods, the doors were open for being critical of those methods, and even supplementing them with other, decidedly more effective and well-rounded, methods for doing research.

My own specialization revolved around what was known as "content analysis." It involved, at one level, a process of empirically evaluating content in as objective a manner as possible. At another important level, it was about working on ways to determine how—and why—different people could look at the same message, the same "content," and find in it very different things as a basis for behavior. At still another level, it was about how to probe deeply enough to understand what lay behind verbal content: attitudes, values, intuitions, and much more.

I say all this to indicate how much I appreciate the Academy's gradual but now quite visible shift from an emphasis on the preacher and her/his "craft" to the "listener," the "hearer," the "subject" of the preacher's work. It is certainly time that such a shift take place. In this paper, though, I want to reflect, if somewhat critically, on what I take to be the two distinct forms in which one can see this shift happening in the intellectual circles of homiletical work.

2.

The matter of studying hearers or listeners to sermons, though, has two very large dimensions, both of which are now represented to some extent within the Academy. Both are being advocated in various ways by our most important scholars—and both deserve comment, even if the words written here do, in fact, represent no more than a minority perspective.

The first concerns the matter of "how communication works," of how "listening" works. In short, what happens particularly within the listener when one person talks and someone else hears? The focus is on the "hearer" and the dynamics of listening rather than on what the "speaker" does or is going. The second dimension of "listening to listeners" does not have to do with the *nature* of hearing and responding *itself*, but with inducing hearers to *explain* and *describe* what they have heard and participated in. This second kind of research, "listening to listeners," focuses almost exclusively on *interviewing* subjects and then *analyzing* the interview results.

The first half of my 1998 book, <u>Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism</u>, published by Chalice Press, was concerned explicitly with the question of why and how we hear the things we do when we listen to someone else, even a preacher. More specifically, why do we all *hear* such different things when we listen to the same words by the same person talking? Beyond that, it was about why we all *behave* so differently as a result of our hearing different things in the same words and phrases from others. The discussion there drew on a long and varied tradition of sociologically-oriented communication theory to indicate that there is no such thing as a "passive hearer," whether in one-on-one conversation or when listing as part of a crowd to a single speaker. While hearers say nothing and smile often, their heads are bustling, and even bristling, with what George Herbert Mead first described as an "internal conversation." People talk to, and within, themselves. Constantly, as well as "loudly" and emotionally.

When they—we—are listening to someone else speak, the internal conversation for virtually every hearer is a three-way conversation. It all takes place internally, however, so every one appears still, passive. In our heads, though, we take in everything around us—reacting to it emotionally and even talking with ourselves about it. I try to recreate some of the nature of that internal "dialogue" in my pluralism book. Then, of course, we carry on a complex internal "dialogue" with the *one* who is speaking—sometimes becoming angry (despite our half-smile), sometimes expressing to ourselves our bewilderment and confusion, sometimes just so darn happy at what we are hearing that we actively discuss with ourselves who we should hurry to tell about what we have found here.

It sounds like one person is talking, but that just isn't true. When we are children alone in a room, we can play by the hour, voicing the diverse dialogue of a half dozen characters at war or at a party or whatever; and we do it all aloud. The only thing that changes in their remarkably human activity when we become adults is that the talking characters are not dolls, and we learn to "internalize" the conversation we carry on with ourselves and others. Among the questions about *how* this process of "hearing" actually works is this: Where do we all get the materials— the symbols, emotions, and even values—from which our "internal conversations" are constructed? It is truly a question worth asking and answering, since it is the key to why people "hear" and "act" as they do toward how and what we preach.

It is no wonder, though, that "conversation" and "conversational style" public speech form the dominant modes of small and large group interaction with which we are most comfortable.

<center>3.</center>

A couple of years ago I stumbled across what I thought was a break-through idea in academy literature: a discussion of "preaching as conversation." I thought, "Aha, we are making progress in our understanding of the dynamics of public address." I subsequently learned, however, that in a sense I was quite wrong. The word "conversation" was being used not in its communicative sense at all, but as a metaphor. It meant only a process of trying to take account of the myriad of perspectives that bombard us on any subject, including religious ones, in our world today. It was a metaphor, in short, for pluralism. It was a metaphor for "listening to some members of the conversation who might have ideas for the sermon."

Even Wes Allen's new book, <u>The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach</u>, treats "conversation" as only metaphor. Aside from talking to a few people before the sermon and after or dividing congregations into "discussion groups," there is virtually nothing in these studies that comes close to taking the *communicative* nature of human "conversation" seriously. There is even an understandable desire to push the idea of "conversation" to the level of a "theology of preaching," connecting it to various postmodern theologies.

The problem from my point of view—and I continue to be amazed at how different our perspectives are within the Academy of Homiletics—is that by both background and training I do not take the word "conversation" when it is used in relation to preaching as either metaphor or

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theology. It can be those, I understand, if one chooses to extend the concept in such directions. But both uses are, in my judgment, derivative notions of it—not primary ones. I take the word "conversation" when used to talk about preaching as a "praxis" concept—one arising from and related to the "practice" of preaching. In intellectual discussions praxis usually gets short shrift, to be sure; and that is to my mind the case here. Still, for communication scholars, conversation is conversation. The art of conversation is practiced one-on-one, which we are all used to; it is also practiced in small groups, say in our classes, even if we practice (as we often do) the improvisational art of stand up or sit on the desk lecturing; it can also be practiced, as it should always be, as the *public speaking* form of choice. Preaching as great conversation—lively, dynamic, robust conversation: it is not a theoretical or theological concept, but first and foremost a profoundly praxis-oriented art centered in the very act of public communication. We hear and digest nothing better in the speech of others than natural, conversational language.

<center>4.</center>

The second of the two orientations to "listening to listeners" is the one in which listeners—hearers—are urged (invited?) to talk about what they have seen and heard, about what they like and do not like, about the preaching experiences they know. Over the years we have had very little of this kind of basic research. This even though sometime ago it had become more and more apparent that the sharp decline in mainline denominational membership and church attendance over the past decades meant that something was badly needed to help understand what was going on. Now we have some new materials with which to work.

For this, we owe Ron Allen a debt of gratitude for his remarkable success in luring funds from the Lilly Endowment for a multi-year study of "hearers" of sermons. The gratitude must also be extended to that intrepid band of scholars who have set some of their own projects aside to work on the "hearers" study. We are promised at least four books and a satchel full of articles, though I suspect the number will grow beyond that.

Even though more than one book has now appeared in the Allen series, I will stick only with the first one in the brief notes that follow. In that book, <u>Listening to Listeners</u>, we get two kinds of material—the rather extensive, though edited, *transcripts* of the interviews with a significant number of people. We also get the *analyses* of the interviews by a half dozen or so of our scholar-friends. I need to say up front that the time, energy, and creativity that went into the selection of subjects, the interviewing and transcribing make this material one of the most valuable bodies of work ever available to the homiletical community. The questioning was rigorous and thoughtful, the subjects were well engaged, and their resulting statements are stunningly candid and enlightening.

The analysts of the material—among our best and best-known scholars—on the other hand, found themselves in a tight spot. So before I get to the content of the interviews, it is necessary (again as a kind of minority report) to make some notes about the need to separate the interviews from the analysis. I will only pick only the one central problem I have with the analytical materials in <u>Listening to Listeners</u>.

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It is that the consistent and rigid use of Aristotle's three-part rhetorical "model" of logos, pathos, and ethos as a basis for analyzing the "content" of the interviews was, in my judgment, a mistake, plain and simple. While there is certainly heuristic value in these conceptualizations as they have come down to communication and rhetorical scholars, they were designed to generally delineate the three large dimensions of the public speaking process—the intellect, the emotions or passions, and the actual context/situation of public address itself. The categories were never meant to serve as delicate tools for analyzing words and sentences. It is like trying to study to study a strand of hair through a telescope. It doesn't work. The instrument is wrong. Everything is blurry.

It becomes a situation in which the instrument becomes an enormous barrier between the observer and the complex object that is being examined. There are countless finer-scaled tools, almost all of them well-known and even refined among communications researches—even speech/rhetorical researchers; but this is not one of them. The result is a series of distorted notes about very important raw material. Even beyond that, though, the result in the analytical notes of this book—both those in the interview margins as well as those end-chapter notes—is that the analysis plays down, misconstrues, and even mocks, without meaning to, the countless insightful things that are said by these thoughtful, vigorously-involved interviewees.

We are told that during his negotiations for Lilly Funding Ron Allen was told that he had to devise or select a "research model" of the analysis of the interviews that he and his team proposed to do. For reasons that undoubtedly have more to do with familiarity than with research needs, Aristotle's venerable rhetorical categories were chosen, and were deemed acceptable by the Lilly research folk. That meant, apparently, that from then on the analysis of the interviews could *only* be done using those concepts What we end up with is a group of our very best homiletical minds unable to bring their own best insights, sensitivities, and understandings to bear on a remarkable body of new preaching-oriented information.

The analytical outcome is, at best, an awkward and in some places confusing running commentary along the right hand column of the book's interview transcripts. It seems clear that the authors of the chapters found themselves in the position of *having* to use the words "logos," "pathos," and "ethos" in all or at least most of the short notes they were to write about specific things the interview subject's said. Undoubtedly, the "make notes in the margin" format had something to do with the lack of clarity—but the problem was usually the struggle with those ham-fisted categories.

5.

For example, Jim is asked to comment on his associate pastor, and his reply is striking in its richness and subtlety. In part he says:

> *When he came, I was in college. I was in my freshman year in college. In the summer, we had the college class. The college class was of decent size, but not very big…I got to know him real well. When Tom is…I don't want to say when he's unprepared, he's better than when he prepared. That's not the truth, but when he's off the cuff, he's just unbelievable. He comes up with things, just 'How does he come up with that stuff off the cuff?' He's just an entertaining, fun guy to be around.*

The analyst comments on this statement like this:

> *One aspect of the logos of preaching is rhetorical 'invention,' or, in Jim's words, 'coming up with stuff' to say. Jim links this positive logos-quality of inventiveness with the preacher's character—'he's just an entertaining, 'fun guy' (ethos). Notice, however, that Jim carefully distinguishes between being 'unprepared,' a negative logos-quality and 'off the cuff,' a positive ethos-quality. This raises an important question for consideration. How can preachers appear spontaneous and at the same time deliver well-prepared sermons?*

I am not trying to fault or criticize here; what I do call attention to is that this statement is like trying to untie the string around a package with both hands tied behind one's back. And the couple of paragraphs that each analyst is allowed at the end of the interview continues this language, which means it only tends to make matters worse. Jim's statement, along with his entire interview, is a remarkable and valuable statement from one who loves charismatic preaching, and tries to describe what it is and does. Just as remarkable, in our context, is that the analyst in this case is the redoubtable John McClure.

One more example, briefly, before we try to be constructive about this "exercise." The interviewer asks Anthony to "think of a sermon that you've heard that has caused you to act differently in some way or to do something in particular." At first he seems stumped, but then he replies like this:

> *No more than just stand up and no more than just say, backing the preaching on what he says, knowing that those things are right. To me, saying…Not saying I say the right things, but what comes from my heart, saying 'Hallelujah,' 'Praise the Lord.' Those things to me make me feel good. Those things entirely. I can stand up and say it. I'm never been that…person to feel that I'm going to dance out in the aisle, but I seem like I'm dancing right there without dancing.*

The analyst's note on this response says this:

> *Anthony attempts to describe the pathos and logos reactions as integrated, and does so in the bodily language of reaching out, as if a hand is extended. This is particularly interesting given his earlier attempts to distinguish between the two.*

That last phrase was interesting enough to become the "title" of the chapter for Anthony's interview. But what did he say? What did he mean? What is necessary, as they say, to "unpack" it, to put it into the context of Anthony's often tangled but ultimately very important observations? What does Anthony feel, what does he experience, how does he "take part" in worship? He is talking about "reacting to sermons," to a sermon—but how to we move from his very unusual words to what is "inside him?" How do we go about trying to <u>hear</u> him?

The writers of brief marginal notes like this one concerning Anthony will talk about their "limitations," largely of space and scope; such limitations are often a part of how scholars and writers have to work. Here, though, the *categorical* limitations are the most constricting—having to work in and through the logos, pathos, and ethos language throws up the biggest barrier to such complex and nuanced statements by these interviewees. Even the chapter near the end of the book titled, "Insights, Discoveries, and Things to Watch" also strains to make important interviewee comments fit into the old tripartite rhetorical chestnuts. Ironically, there are a few places, only a few actually, marginal notes where the analysts have "just written" their

observations—and a couple of those clearly demonstrate what the commentary on the interviews *could* have been.

<p style="text-align:center">6.</p>

All that aside, these interviews, even in their edited version of this first volume, are pure gold. Last year this time after I read <u>Listening to Listeners</u> I was distressed by it, particularly by its methodologies, both before and after the work; I believed then, as I think I still do, that the advisory group did not get the best outside advice that it could have. It was only after getting around that initial reaction to what I had read, though, that I began to meditate carefully and methodically on the *interviews* themselves. Even edited for space, they are truly rich. The "listeners" by and large took their questioners seriously; they were smart and canny in trying to grasp what their questioners wanted to know—and they answered as openly, seriously and in as detailed a fashion as anyone could possibly expect.

It is my hope that academicians in homiletics (as well as a lot of thinking preachers) will carefully study these interviews, reading them with empathy and open-hearted naivete. After spending time with them last year, I began my own book on these interviews, with a chapter devoted to each one, both the individual and the group ones, all eight of them. There are numerous contemporary ways to study, probe, evaluate, and assess "content," the kind of very personal, even intimate content embodied in these interviews. Some of the ways are quantitative, or empirical; some of them are qualitative in nature; the best are a combination of both types of research orientation. However one goes about it, the study must be guided by careful, thoughtful, insight—a trained, sensitive mind that is empathetically conditioned not just to read lines, but to read between and behind lines, even into minds and hearts.

During my early years of communicative study, this kind of "interviewing" research that appealed profoundly to a great many of us was being done by a young, tape-recorder wielding child psychologist named Robert Coles. A trained psychotherapist, he believed in nothing more than in listening—really listening—to people; mostly children for him, but countless others as well. His books, particularly his landmark three-volume series, Children of Crisis, was, in large part, the tape recordings of his interviews, interspersed with his notes, his questions and comments, and above all his attempts to digest and articulate what he found in, under, behind, and around the words from his recorder. He was looking not just for meanings and perceptions, but for feelings and emotions, for beliefs, judgments, fears, angers, hopes, and anxieties.

Coles was no stranger to interviews with both children and adults <u>about church</u> either, about God, about things religious. What is striking is how similar his interviews from more than 35 years ago still seem today, particularly in reading the interviews in <u>Listening to Listeners</u>. From Coles' chapter called "Rural Religion" the final chapter of <u>Migrants, Sharecroppers, Mountaineers,</u> comes this remarkable tape-recorded piece of an interview with one of the mountaineer miners:

> *I'll admit there are times I wonder about things. I ask myself why don't all the ministers go and call on the mine owners and people like that and tell them they're sinners. A lot of good it does us to know that! Maybe some ministers do that, but I've never heard of it. You can tell that the minister in the church near our mine is all cozy with the owners. He'll never say anything out of line. The ones that come*

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through here, the ones that go on the circuit from one church to the other, some of them are better than others. But I don't believe we're supposed to believe everything the ministers say. Only the Bible. They'll read the Bible, and sometimes I can go along real good, and sometimes I'm not clear on what it call means. I ask myself questions a lot of Sundays. I'll be there in church, sitting and praying, and I'll get ideas in my mind. I'll say to myself, why <u>are</u> we here, and what's it all mean? If God knows in advance how it's all going to turn out, then why does He bother putting us through all this?

Later, the mountaineer says:

The way I see it, on Sunday you get a chance to get together, the whole family, and collect yourself, that's how I'd put it, <u>collect</u> yourself—and you're doing it right before God. If the minister says something foolish, which he'll do from time to time, then he's going to have to square himself before God, too—and I'll bet a lot of those reverends, they've got some explaining to do before Him God. You could say I learned that from my father, and I've never forgotten it, how it's not the minister who is God, but God who is God. And down in that mine, when we thought we'd all be killed pretty soon, I believe that's what we all knew. We all said if we were going to be called by God right there and then—well, that's all right, but we didn't want to hear that because we're poor and the next guy is rich, that's fine and God wants it to be like that or else He'd come and change things. No minister could tell me that and have me believe him.

How does one listen, *truly listen*, to this miner's talk about church and about the preachers, the ministers, he's known? How does one hear into and behind the lines? How does one interpret the thousand and one profound and subtle nuances of meaning and emotion? One reads again and again. One empathizes, slowing massaging words on paper into real, honest, and multilayered feelings. Listen for a moment to Coles turning over these words; Coles has much to teach us about this process of "listening to" interviewees, real people from whom we wish to learn:

He wants and needs an explanation not only for his acknowledged misery but for a million injustices he knows exist all over the world: up and down the mountains and in cities—indeed, wherever there are people. He is not willing to accept what he is told by a particular minister, and he even senses but doesn't talk about some of the tensions and contradictions that preoccupy more theological minds than his. Implicitly, though, he makes his point: there is God and there is church and there is man. The minister is a mediator between man and God—through an institution, which is the church. As for the Bible, it is God's Word—but heard and written down by men. Does that mean he really dares question God's Word as revealed in the Bible? If so, can he not be considered a free-thinker, a corrupted modern man, like so many of us? He seems not to worry about such things. He reads the Bible, and in doing so becomes stronger, speaker louder, feels more certain about things. Something happens to him that is physical: I have seen it happen as grace is said over a meal the vast majority of American citizens would find hard to eat, let alone say grace over….

I am reminded of Kierkegaard's formulations (in Fear and Trembling and Repetition) because like him, this mountaineer in essence demands a particular relationship with God, one that in the clutch will glad dispose of all intermediaries, be they ministers, politicians, secular propagandists, wise neighbors and friends—and yes, overbearing would-be advocates and helpers. What is more, signs of resignation appear again and again in his words and sentiments—and I say resignation, not depression or despair…Yet, again in the company of Kierkegaard, the mountaineer understands that he is human, that he is bound to demand and expect the impossible (from himself, from others, and from God) but that ultimately whatever goes on between him and Him, as it were, is mysterious and beyond rational calculation or analysis….

These few lines do little justice to either the mountaineer's long monologue or to Coles' extraordinary probings into what the man has said. I share these pieces, however, to say that the interview transcripts that have come to all of us from the Lilly study in which ordinary people

talk about sermons are as profound in their own way as Coles' interviews from the past. What we now need more than anything else, in my judgment, are a number of homiletics scholars to spend time with them, massaging them as Coles always did, helping us to understand through empathic listening and interaction with these congregants are trying to tell us in such subtle ways about what we are doing to them week in and week out. But we have to *learn* to listen. I am going to try to do that in my book—and I am encouraging various colleagues to do the same.

<div align="center">7.</div>

For example, to conclude, here are a few brief edited (by me) sections from one moving interview in Listening to Listeners, one that is left unanalyzed in the book. The interviewer first asked Albert what would be missing from worship if there were no sermon:

> *It would be a major piece of the service. It's almost like when you're pastor's out of town and they send in a substitute pastor who just doesn't hold your interest. You say, 'I'm getting nothing out of this service.' He may have been a very monotone person. He may be a great guy and a wonderful Christian, but something about the delivery just didn't catch on. You're here, and you spend more time looking at the kids or talking over here and you miss the whole sermon. Without it being there, you wouldn't have church….*

> *One of the things when we were trying to get our certification for teaching, the one thing they stress is movement. Don't stand in one place when you're giving your lessons…Move around the room; touch people, so people so they can bet a better feel…The movement keeps the people involved. Hand movements. Talk with movement and hand gestures. It's actually what keeps the eyes focused, along with your voice, but your movements keep people focused on you….*

> *You can tell a Bible story to where a person really, really feels it. That's when I'm being touched. That's touching you when the pastor is telling you almost as if he was there. That moves people. That's what keeps people coming to church. Most pastors in this church are nice, quiet guys. They tell the stories with less emotion. I think that's just the [name of the denomination] way. Sometimes I think [with this church's way] and with these pastors, that's the reason a lot of churches are dying. People want to feel. People want to hear music that's up-tempo, upbeat. The hymns were beautiful, but people want more. It's almost being entertained as far as in the sermon, an with the music I guess that helps….*

> *You can see the times and tell when someone has passion. You can tell the anger. Sometimes you can feel it. He gets to a point that maybe he feels that you're not listening. He needs to shake it up. He gets to the point where maybe someone is look at him in a way that prompts him to say, 'Maybe you're not understanding what I'm saying.' He'll say, 'I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings. I don't mean to. Sometimes he'll set up before he throws the fire, He might say, 'I don't mean to hurt anyone's feelings,' or, 'I'm not talking about anyone personally, but I want to say this.' You can read him. You can tell if it's from the heart….*

> *The preacher has to make me [participate]. He can't just stand at the podium and flip papers and just read. I want to know personal stories. I want to know stories from the Bible. Tell me what happened to your friend, Joe. Just normal folks. That's what I mean about being touched. You can't just read to me and send me home. I want to feel it. Folks want to do that. I'm just speaking for myself, but I speak for the young folks of my age group, and they're saying the same thing. That's why their brothers and sisters don't come because they don't get nothing out of it. Everything is too monotone. You've got everybody sleeping.*

How do we "study" these words in order to learn something about preaching from them? We read and think and meditate and listen. Above all, we listen with our minds and hearts. In

one of his chapters on "method" for learning to "listen" to his mountaineers and children, Coles wrote these words:

> Once upon a time (a long time ago, it now seems) I desperately wanted to make sure that I was doing the respectable and approved thing, the most 'scientific' thing possible; and now I have learned, chiefly I believe from these people in this book, that it is enough of a challenge to spend some years with them and come out of it all with some observations and considerations that keep coming up, over and over again—until, I swear, they seem to have the ring of truth to them. I do not know how that ring will sound to others, but its sound after a while gets to be distinct and unforgettable to me.

> The aim of all these trips and visits can be put like this: to approach certain lives, not to pin them down, not to confine them with labels, not to limit them with heavy intellectualized speculations but again to approach, to describe, to transmit as directly and sensibly as possible what has been seen, heard, grasped, felt….

"LISTENING TO LISTENERS"
The Board Reflects Critically on the Study

Ronald J. Allen
Christian Theological Seminary
Indianapolis, Indiana USA

In 2000, a group of researchers through Christian Theological Seminary funded by the Lilly Endowment carried out one of the first large scale empirical studies of people who listen to sermons, "Listening to Listeners."[1] An Advisory Board supervised interviews of 263 lay people in 28 congregations in the Middle Western in the United States asking listeners to identify qualities of preaching that help them engage the sermon or that frustrate them from engaging.[2] We interviewed 128 people in hour-long individual sessions. In each church we also conducted a small group interview to have some check on the degree to which the individuals represented the congregation and were not simply idiosyncratic. The number of people participating in the small group interviews was 135. We also interviewed 32 ministers who regularly preach in the 28 congregations.[3]

The questions were organized by Aristotelian categories. Listeners were asked questions about how their response to sermons are affected by (1) their perceptions of the character of the preacher and of their relationship with the preacher (ethos), (2) their perceptions of the content and appeals to reasoning in the sermon (logos), (3) their perceptions of how the feelings generated by the sermon affect them, and (4) their perceptions of how the preacher's embodiment affects their sense of connection with the sermon. Similar questions (though pitched to the preacher) were asked of the 32 preachers who served the congregations in which the

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[1] For other efforts, see Lori Carrell, *The Great American Sermon Survey* (Wheaton: Mainstay Church Resources, 2000) and Lora-Ellen McKinney, *View from the Pew: What Preachers Can Learn from Church Members* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 2004). David Buttrick based his preaching system on interviews with laity, but (as commonly noted), does not make the interviews directly available. See his *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Cf. Ronald J. Allen, "The Turn Towards the Listener: A Selective Review of a Recent Trend in Preaching," *Encounter* 64 (2003), pp. 165-194.

[2] The project is described more fully in John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Moseley, and G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletic Case* Studies (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). I served as Project Director with Mary Alice Mulligan as Associate Director. The members of the Advisory Board are Dale P. Andrews. Jon L. Berquist, L. Susan Bond, John S. McClure, Dan P. Moseley, G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., Diane Turner-Sharazz, and Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm. The congregations were from the following denominations and movements: African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, American Baptist Church, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Christian Churches and Churches of Christ, Church of the Brethren, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Mennonite Church, National Baptist Church, non-denominational community churches, Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., and United Methodist Church. Nine of the congregations were primarily African American in make up, three of mixed ethnicity, and sixteen mainly non-Hispanic European. The congregations came from diverse settings (urban, suburban, county seat, small town, rural) and were of various sizes (mega, large, medium, small).

[3] The interviews asked listeners to reflect on preaching from the perspective of their histories of listening to sermons over time and to illustrate their responses (as they were able) from sermons they remembered. We did not have the interviewees listen to a particular sermon and then to respond to questions about that particular sermon.

interviews took place.[4]

To date, the project has resulted in four books published as an informal series under the title "Channels of Listening." The books do not simply say the same thing but consider the data from different perspectives.

- John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews. L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Moseley, and G. Lee Ramsey, Jr., *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). This book presents six case studies in which five individual interviews (and one small group) are analyzed for what we learn about preaching.

- Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004). This book explores the discovery that each listener tends to enter the sermon through one setting: perception of character of the preacher and relationship with the preacher, the content of the sermon, and feelings aroused by the message.

- Mary Alice Mulligan, Diane Turner-Sharazz, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, and Ronald J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005). This book describes the diverse clusters of how listeners perceive the purpose of the sermon, the role of the Bible in preaching, how preachers should handle controversial subjects, etc.

- Mary Alice Mulligan and Ronald J. Allen, *Make the Word Come Alive: Lessons from Laity* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2005). This book identifies the twelve most frequently mentioned qualities that listeners say engage them in sermons.

In addition, the study has generated several articles.[5]

This paper reflects critically on the project. At what points does the work of the project seem promising with both respect to methodology and interpretation of the data? At what points

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[4] For the questions asked in the interviews, see McClure, et. al., *Listening to Listeners, pp.* 181-182 and Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship, Content, Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1004), pp. 135-136. We did not ask interviewees to listen to a particular sermon and then to reflect on that message, but rather asked them to think about the preaching they have heard over a long period of time.

[5] Articles published or accepted for publication thus far include: Ronald J. Allen, "Three Settings on Which People Hear Sermons," *Lectionary Homiletics* 16/1 (2004-05), pp. 1-2; Ronald J. Allen. "What Makes Preaching *Disciples* Preaching?" *DisciplesWorld* 4/2 (2005), pp. 28-29; Ronald J. Allen, "Preaching on the Days and Weeks after a Tragedy: Lessons from Listeners in Congregations after September 11, 2001," *Encounter* 66 (2005), pp. 221-232; Ronald J. Allen, "How Do People Listen to Sermons?" *Preaching* 21 no. 1 *(*2005), 45-52;); Ronald J. Allen, "What Listeners Most Value in Sermons," *Homiletics* 17/5 (2005), p. 7; John S. McClure. "The Practice of Sermon Listening" *Congregations* (forthcoming, fall, 2005)*;* Diane Turner-Sharazz, "The 'So What' Factor in the Sermon: How the Sermon Connects," *Journal of Theology* (forthcoming, fall, 2005Ronald J. Allen, "What Lay People Most Want to Know about God," *Encounter* 66 (forthcoming, winter, 2005); Ronald J. Allen, "I Think Money Should Be Preached from the Pulpit," *The Clergy Journal* (forthcoming, fall, 2005). A previous paper presented at the Academy was Ronald J. Allen, "How Some Ministers Learn to Preach," (2004).

does the work of the project seem limited? If we were carrying out the project again, what would we do differently? What might be next steps with respect both to the use of this data and to empirical research in the field?[6] While Ron Allen is the immediate author of this paper, the reflections come from conversations among the members of the Advisory Board.

This paper is intended as an invitation to dialogue not only about the study itself but more about the possibility of a larger place for empirical methods in research in the field of preaching as well as in educational experiences preparing women and men for the preaching ministry, and in strengthening the preaching of ministers in the field. Indeed, as one Board member says, "We *welcome* critical reflection. How else will we learn?"

The Board views the work of the project not as a final word but as an initial exploration of the preaching event from the perspective of what listeners themselves say. We see this work a part of the "first generation" of sustained empirical research.

For ease in discussion I have enumerated each item below. The enumerations are simply a matter of convenience and do not indicate importance.

Points at which the Project is Helpful

The project is helpful in understanding preaching at a number of points.

1. Most interviewees underscore the fact that preaching is very important to them. Many of the listeners in this study attend carefully to what preachers say for theological and ethical guidance. Many people believe that preaching makes major differences not only to their personal lives but to their congregations and even to larger communities. This discovery underscores the importance not only of the ministries of the preachers themselves of preparing women and men for preaching.

2. The project has a heuristic value in confirming the "turn to the listener" in discussions of preaching over the last generation.[7] Many congregants in the study speak insightfully about their perceptions of preaching and about what happens to them during the sermon and about how preaching influences their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The Advisory Board believes that listeners have much to teach us about preaching.

3. The study makes an important contribution to the prominent contemporary interest in Christian practice. Indeed, our work focuses on an aspect of Christian practice that has not hitherto been studied: the practice of listening to sermons.[8] Furthermore, the interviews in which listeners actually describe what happens to them in listening to sermons moves the discussion of this practice in a more qualitative direction than is often found in discussions of other Christian practices. Discussions of Christian practice often describe a practice as it is discussed in

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[6] To my knowledge, only one review of any of the publications has appeared thus far: O. Wesley Allen, Jr., "Review of *Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies*" in *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 39 (2004), pp. 185-187.
[7] See Allen, Allen, "The Turn Towards the Listener: A Selective Review of a Recent Trend in Preaching."
[8] For an initial discussion, see John S. McClure. "The Practice of Sermon Listening" *Congregations* (forthcoming, fall, 2005).

Christian history and theology and provide an anecdote of the practice today but seldom attend closely to the experience of the practice. Our work illustrates a way of probing the degree to which Christian practices actually function in the ways claimed by those who discuss the practices.

4. The interviews magnify an insight already present in the literature of preaching: individuals and congregations listen in diverse ways. The members of this project team no longer speak casually of "people who listen to sermons" as if everyone processes sermons in the same way. Instead, we speak of discrete units, such as "the listeners in the study," or "many hearers," or "some people." Often we speak only of particular individuals. When developing the theory that a listener hears the sermon through one of the settings (ethos, logos, or pathos), we resisted the temptation to speak of "*the* ethos listener." Even when a person hears the sermon mainly through one setting, other settings operate. To speak simply of "the ethos listener" overlooks the complexity that is each listener. Preachers need ways of preaching to respect such diversity.

5. Although we did not directly intend for the project to assess the value of Aristotle's categories of ethos, logos, and pathos for understanding the event of preaching, the research does confirm that these continue to be useful frames within which to think about aspects of what happens in the listening community during preaching. The study thus provides some empirical justification for the use of these categories in the literature interpreting preaching and for their appearance in broader theological discourse.

6. Our study reinforces awareness of a dynamic that is discussed by some other scholars of preaching (especially in recent years). One the one hand, congregational culture plays significant roles in shaping listeners' perceptions of the sermon. On the other hand, preaching does help shape congregational culture, though an area to be more thoroughly investigated is the *degree* to which preaching shapes congregational culture and the degree to which people interpret sermons and congregational culture itself from the perspective of already existing theological worldviews. In any event, as scholars such as Nora Tubbs Tisdale, James Niemann and Thomas Rodgers have alerted us, preachers need to have a "thick understanding" of the context and culture in which sermons come to expression. Preachers need to understand how congregational culture shapes listening and how the sermon can contribute to the shaping of the listening culture.

7. The members Advisory Board found that working with the listeners created an unexpected sense of energy, and, indeed, has become formative in our broader work. The proposal for the project called for the Advisory Board simply to advise Ron Allen and Mary Alice Mulligan. However, when the Board worked with listeners, the Board itself was drawn into exploring listener perspectives through detailed analysis. We initially expected the project to produce one book written by Ron and Mary Alice, but when the Advisory Board became a writing team, four books eventuated in the first wave of publication and others are incubating. We anticipate that working with listeners will create this kind of energy among other preachers and scholars of preaching.

8. The first book from the project, *Listening to Listeners*, is a candid account of how we collected the data and of *one* aspect of how we interpreted it. While the book is limited by what

an unintended verification methodology (see no. 12 below), especially with respect to the use of the categories of ethos, logos, pathos and embodiment, the volume has the larger heuristic value of helping others researchers think about how they might go about empirical research.

9. We found that the questions posed under the rubrics of ethos, logos, pathos, and embodiment revealed quite a lot of what takes place in listeners. However, the data collected under Aristotle's categories transcends those categories. We wrote two books that make explicit use of ethos, logos, pathos and embodiment (*Listening to Listeners, Hearing the Sermon*) but two books drawn from the same data (*Believing in Preaching*, *Make the Word Come Alive*) identify broader trends in hearer perception with little explicit reference to the Aristotelian categories. The transcripts are a remarkable mine of listener perspective on many more subjects than ethos, logos, pathos, and embodiment.

10. In several instances, the fact of the interviews in particular congregations created openings whereby local preachers and parishioners talked with one another about preaching in ways they had not previously. While we do not know whether such conversations improved communication between pew and pulpit, we suspect that an opportunity existed that did not before for preachers and people to enrich their understandings of the other.

11. Our undertaking is certainly not the first collaboration of scholars in the field of preaching, but it does involve one of the largest numbers of scholars in a single undertaking. The project models a collegiality that can be possible when members of the field come together in mutual support around a common research interest. Indeed, one of us said that the *esprit* of working together "is why I went into graduate school and sought a call to teaching in the first place." We hope this venture will reinforce and inspire other collaborations in the Academy.

Points at which the Project Is Limited

As indicated, the Board acknowledges that the project is an early word in what we hope will become an extended discussion of the possibilities and limitations of empirical research to help us understand what happens around sermons. In this vein, the Board acknowledges limitations in the project. Some topics that we could discuss here under the heading of limitation appear in the last section as possibilities for future exploration.

12. Maintaining a qualitative focus proved more difficult than we anticipated.[9] From the beginning, we *intended* to do a qualitative study and not a quantitative one. Indeed, the consultant in empirical research who worked with us repeatedly urged us to keep our sample small. We realized from the beginning that we were not trying to prove that our observations were true for all cases of all listeners. We did not intend to quantify but to create theory. However, we acknowledge now that some unreflective quantitative modes crept into our work. For example, in our early books, we refer several times to the small number of persons interviewed and the limited number of categories of listeners represented (e.g. race and

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[9] On some ways quantitative thinking often creeps into qualitative research see Anselm Strauss and Barney G. Glaser, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1967), p. 17. On qualitative methods themselves, see John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Traditions* (Thousand Oaks, CA.: Sage Publications, 1998).

ethnicities, and denominations). Furthermore, without intending to do so, in the early stages of the project, we had a tendency to work with the Aristotelian categories in a verification mode. We asked questions of the interviewees, and we analyzed their responses, in part, from the perspective of the degree to which the data verified Aristotelian perspectives. These problematic qualities are most evident in the first two books—*Listening to Listeners* and *Hearing the Sermon*—but are much less present in the second two books—*Believing in Preaching* and *Make the Word Come Alive.*

13. The project focused on the interviewees' conscious perceptions of preaching. Our methodology did not allow us to explore the degree to which the interviewees' conscious articulations represent how they actually respond to sermons. Given the fact that so much awareness and motivation appears to derive from the unspeakable depths of human being and community, we cannot always be sure that the interviewees reports are what actually happens in the moment of listening and afterwards.

14. Assuming the value of the study as it unfolded, the questions could better have been divided into five arenas: ethos, logos, pathos, embodiment, and congregational culture. After the interviews and during the process of working with the data, we realized that only two of our nine questions on ethos explored the traditional quality of ethos—how the congregation's perception of the character of the preacher affects their response to the sermon. Seven of our nine questions asked under the ethos heading focus more on the relationship of congregational culture and the preaching event than on traditional ethos concerns. A little ideology criticism may explain how this happened. Members of the Advisory Board are somewhat more oriented towards congregational studies than towards rhetoric and probably unconsciously used the ethos rubric as venue through which to formulate our intuitive interest in congregational culture. Two questions asked under this heading not only confirmed the importance of many listeners' perceptions of the character of the preacher but also helped many listeners state that having a positive sense of relationship with the preacher adds to their willingness to interact positively with the sermon. However, more questions focused specifically on ethos could have nuanced our discussion of that dimension of listening.

15. While the use of the categories of ethos, logos, pathos and embodiment is often illuminating, we (in looking back at some of our early interpretive efforts and publications) confess that we tried to too hard to jam some listener statements into these frames of references. This is particularly true in the first book, *Listening to Listeners.* The categories themselves, while helpful, are also somewhat artificial. People respond to the three appeals in complicated ways that cannot always be sorted out easily in the sidebars.

16. A correspondent who expressed general appreciation for the study none-the-less noted that "Methodology often determines results." This connection is perhaps most apparent in *Hearing the Sermon* wherein we propose that most listeners hear the sermon through one of the following settings: ethos, logos, or pathos. We could have been more critical in thinking about the relationship between methodology and results.

Some Things We might have done Differently

This paper now turns to the question of what we might we have done differently in the project. Before the advisory board was created, in the initial phase of conceiving the project, I proposed to the Lilly Endowment a study of how people listen to sermons adapting Aristotle's categories of ethos, logos, and pathos in concert with some motifs from congregational culture. I focused on Aristotle because (a) the Endowment requires a social science component in such projects, (b) I was already familiar with aspects of Aristotle's work whereas I was not as familiar with other approaches to the communication event nor to contemporary methodologies of social science research, and (c) despite the reverence with which Burke is held in speech communication circles, I sometimes find aspects of his work to be reductionistic. After the project was approved, an Advisory Board came aboard and formulated interview strategies and questions. However, the board was limited in its influence because the basic design of the project was already in place.

17. In retrospect, I should have applied for a *planning grant* that would have brought together a community of scholars to think about what we most wanted to learn and how to do so. Although the board members were willing to go along with the project as I designed it, some had other ideas. A planning grant would have allowed for collegial process of formulating the proposal that went to the Endowment. Such a process would have generated a different methodology. In retrospect we would begun with what people wanted to tell us about preaching as guides for developing our questions and theories instead of beginning with questions suggested by Aristotelian categories.

18. A study must start somewhere, and we think that the use of Aristotle's categories was a legitimate and useful beginning point for thinking about how listeners respond to sermons. However, we acknowledge that none of us is an expert in Aristotle. Indeed, we spent some time debating how to interpret and use some of Aristotle's categories. In our publications that make use of these categories (not all of them do), we could have shown more self awareness regarding our tentative points.

19. Reading the transcripts, we discovered some things about which we would like to know more from the listeners. For example a listener briefly mentioned a preacher or a sermon from past that seemed powerful. While analyzing the transcript, we thought that memory could be instructive if it could be opened up, but we did not have the resources to return to the listener to get it. If we were planning the grant again, we would provide for return visits to the congregations for resampling after reading the first wave of transcripts.

Next Steps in the Use of the Data and in Empirical Research

We now turn to some next steps with respect to both the use of the data collected in "Listening to Listeners" and to broader issues of empirical research in preaching.

20. Perhaps the most important next step is that the Academy needs to have a sustained conversation on the value of empirical research in coming to understand the event of preaching.

Indeed, he Academy might profitably form a working group whose mission would be to alert the broader Academy to the variety of methods of empirical research and the promises and limitations of each.

21. Several colleagues in the field of preaching have pointed out that our study took place in a limited geographical area, involved small numbers of interviewees, and a and small sample of ethnic communities and denominations. We reply that in qualitative method, researchers hope to make discoveries that are theoretically important without having to prove that the discovery is important for every single member of the population. Nevertheless, a next phase of work in listener study could profitably explore how people listen to preaching in other protestant bodies, as well as in Roman Catholic, and Orthodox communions and in synagogue and mosque.

22. I considered writing a book that would have compared listening patterns in different cohorts in the sample (e.g. men and women, African Americans and persons of non-Hispanic European origin, different ages). However, I scuttled that idea when the board feared that any insights in such a work would be lost in a firestorm of identity politics around the organizing categories. I see the wisdom in that reservation. However, I wonder if it is possible to carry out such comparisons in a framework of respect.

23. Our study focused mainly on traditional forms of preaching in relatively traditional services of worship. We did not specifically take up sermons in contemporary services nor did we consider a significant number of sermons that make use of PowerPoint and that are otherwise crafted to be "contemporary." A study is needed of listening proclivities in people who attend contemporary services. In what ways is such listening similar to the kind of listening investigated in this initial study? How is it different? Similar questions could be asked of preaching in those settings.

24. A correspondent suggested that scholars of preaching need to consider listeners who have never gone to church and those who went to church at one time but drifted away. What kinds of sermons might appeal to such folk?

25. The study presses the issue of theological method with respect to hermeneutics and preaching. Much of the literature of preaching currently subscribes to an applicational model in which the purpose of the preacher is to discover a truth in a biblical text or other source of theological insight and then apply that truth to the congregation today. Indeed, some theologies of preaching within this family eschew paying empirical attention to listeners because they assert that the Word has the power to shape its own reception. Other literature about preaching employs a correlational model in which the preacher correlates aspects of the tradition with elements of experience today with an eye towards showing how present and past help interpret each other. Beyond that, mutual critical correlation asks whether classical and contemporary texts and experiences criticize one another. The preaching community needs to consider the degree to which studies of listeners confirm or challenge these different approaches (that is, insofar as one can even ask such a question of applicational models).

26. The value of things learned through interviews in the study suggests that preachers could profit from setting up interview processes in the congregation to determine how local

congregants respond to various aspects of preaching. Some of the members of the Advisory Board have worked with D.Min. students who, in the spirit of *Listening to Listeners*, have carried out interviews in congregations. These students claim to have learned much about what their congregations value and disvalue in preaching.

27. Much of the literature prescribing how to preach has come from insightful individuals who have what John McClure describes as "clairvoyance" into the minds and hearts of listeners. Even literature in preaching that draws on philosophy and on communication theory tends to rely heavily on his element. Many successful preachers appear to have the clairvoyant quality as well—the capacity to imagine what the world seems like to the listener and then to create sermons in which listeners recognize that the preacher is connecting with their world. The successes of such approaches to preaching are typically verified through anecdotal experience. The effort to study listeners discussed in this paper suggests that researchers can often confirm or challenge aspects of "clairvoyant" theories of preaching. At what points do our listeners confirm what authors in our field recommend for understanding listeners and developing sermons? At what points do our interviewees challenge suggestions made by current authorities in preaching? To what degree, for instance, does our research reinforce the picture of the listener and the consequent implications that we find in the approach of Fred Craddock? Henry Mitchell? Eugene Lowry? David Buttrick? Teresa Fry Brown? Lucy Atkinson Rose? Paul Scott Wilson? Thomas Troeger? Others?

28. Early in the process of articulating the theory that congregants listen to the sermon through one of the settings of ethos, logos, or pathos, we recognize affinities between this taxonomy of perception with that of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. There are also some parallels (though not as obvious) with neuro-linguistic programming and even with faith development theory.[10] In the press of preparing materials for publication, we did not have time to pursue points of comparison and contrast (especially with the MBTI). This task awaits, and with it the blunt question of the degree to which we might have simply generated a pale version of a more robust and better approach to understanding how people process information.

29. Although we interviewed ministers in the congregations in which the lay interviews took place and have planned some initial comparison between perceptions of preachers and people regarding essential aspects of the event of preaching, we have not delved deeply into this arena.

30. As noted previously, in the book *Hearing the Sermon*, we report that listeners *hear* sermons through one of the settings of ethos, logos, or pathos. We think it likely that a minister typically *perceives and prepares* sermons through such settings. That is, one minister may prepare the sermon through an ethos setting, another a logos setting, and still another a pathos setting. If this idea can be verified, what would preachers on each setting tend to envision as the purpose of the sermon? What kinds of insights would a preacher on a different setting tend to seek in biblical texts and doctrines and ethical analyses? What methods would a preacher on each setting prefer for interpreting the biblical text and thinking theologically and hermeneutically? What would a preacher on each setting need to take into account to incorporate

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[10] See, for instance, Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., and Ronald J. Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching and Different Listeners in the Congregation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002).

insights from other settings? Do ministers who enter the world of preaching through one setting tend to communicate more easily with persons on the same setting? What do preachers need to remember to communicate effectively with listeners on other settings?

31. One of our Board members had a conversation with a sociologist of religion who exclaimed with delight that scholars in the field of preaching are turning to methods that sociologists have found fruitful in exploring religious community. Efforts such as this study may lead to new kinds of conversation between the study of preaching and other disciplines.

32. Several Advisory Board members have now constituted a new research group that will use grounded theory as a way of moving beyond the original study. This group (Dale Andrews, Susan Bond, John McClure, Lee Ramsey and Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm) is attempting to be more rigorous in is use of qualitative method.

Gratitude and Prayer

We express gratitude to the Lilly Endowment for making this study possible, and to the many colleagues in the Academy who have asked about it and helped with it in one way or another over the years. We end this paper as we did one of our books with the prayer that the work of the project will strengthen the gospel witness through preaching

Rethinking Other-wise: Divine Reference in a Levinasian Homiletic

Wes Avram
Yale Divinity School

Does God signify as the theme of the religious discourse which names God—or as the discourse which, at least to begin with, does not name him, but says him with another form of address than denomination or evocation? (Levinas 1996, 135)

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas stretches toward a thinking that thinks of the relationship between transcendence and discourse *otherwise* than within the hermeneutic presumptions that inform most homiletic thinking, bound up as homiletics tends to be in working relationships among theories of interpretation, theology, and rhetorical theory. He ponders an event that is otherwise than thematically meaningful in a form of signification that does not fall within the realm of the interpretable. What Levinas calls his "phenomenology of sociality" adds to the hermeneutic identification of human consciousness, time, and thematic representation the idea of a meaning bound to an unrepresentable time. This meaning means in a time without presence, a time outside of time which, while unrepresentable, does not abandon language. This paradox becomes the core of Levinasian metaphysics. And this metaphysics is bold enough to suggest that discourse in response to this paradox is preconditioned in all cases by this non-interpretive texture of human interaction—whether in compassionate response or tyrannizing eclipse. So also, it might be said, is the revelatory dynamic of preaching. In all cases, compassion borne in response to the revelatory word or rhetorical violence done against it is at stake, quite outside of the content or form of the preaching. I will dive into the belly of this rhetorical theological beast and argue that a rhetorical praxis proper to Christian preaching can and *should* be culled from Levinas's writings. This praxis is textured by anarchic openings, or traces, within homiletic rhetoric that participate in revelation as they awaken conscience before making known.

Specifically, I want to look at the usefulness of interconnecting concepts in Levinas's later writings for theorizing this way in which Christian preaching so participates in the event of divine speech (the preached word becoming the word of God). Elsewhere I've called participation in divine speech the "sacramental-rhetorical paradox" of homiletics, noting that preaching is simultaneously a product of human rhetorical invention and a word otherwise than human (2004b, 2). This is a particularly important idea in Reformed homiletics. Levinas doesn't address the question directly, but provides a phenomenology of communication proper to opening the question up without having to either take refuge in metaphor (preaching "as if" the word were revelation) or lodge revelation in an dynamic extraneous to the speech-act itself (reason or thematic reference, imagination and its issue, liturgical response such as communion or altar calls, or missional response as the message is carried forth). In Levinasian language, this participation is a "saying" in the "said" of the sermon, with which every sermon must deal—either attending it or hiding it.

John McClure's *Other-wise Preaching* (2001) provides the most thorough use of Levinas in homiletics to date, bringing Levinas forward as our most helpful guide into the implications of postmodern theory, specifically deconstruction, for homiletics. My reading of Levinas is in strong sympathy with John's, but attempts to work a bit closer to certain concepts in Levinas's phenomenology of communication than he does, and so does so free of the admirable task of

bringing Levinas into the larger sweep of deconstructive as named by Derrida and others. Derrida's early description of Levinas's work does see it as a "thought for which the entirety of Greek logos has already erupted, and is now quiet topsoil deposited not over bedrock, but around a more ancient volcano" (1978, 82). And Levinas himself describes the "catastrophying" or "destructuring" effect of alterity on the site of ontological pretension in language in a way resonant with what deconstruction sees (1996,139, n.15, 190). Yet Levinas never directly links his work to Derridean deconstruction. In fact, he takes great effort to distinguish his work from Derrida— his defense of the possibility of a discourse "toward" (not "about") God that does fall into either theology or philosophy being one strong example (1996, 129-148). McClure argues, as have I, that there are structural similarities between Derrida and Levinas as they acknowledge a meaning-less dynamic, beyond being, within meaning-making—with the early Derrida consumed by the implications of *nothing*ain (the abyss) and Levinas fascinated by the infinite possibility of *something* (glory) (Avram 1994, 1996; McClure 2004). Nevertheless, I would argue that this impulse to glory (God?), and the responsibility it provokes, takes Levinasian ethics away from a deconstructive impulse sooner than the frame within which McClure brings Levinas into our conversation might allow. I want to momentarily bracket the association with deconstruction in hopes of reading the next wave forward and discovering additional insights available for homiletics in Levinas, including reference to the significance of God and God-reference to this work. Paul Scott Wilson has recently criticized the homiletic McClure develops through Levinas for being insufficiently theological, and so remaining within the realm of human ethics and inadequately describing how postmodern preaching references God (2004). By carefully, though briefly, touching on how the idea of God enters Levinas's phenomenology, and so how God might enter Levinasian rhetoric, I hope to respond to Wilson's critique—and so restate and potentially reinvigorate an other-wise homiletic (albeit in a particular way).[1]

Me-ontology and The Philosophy of Language. Levinas's interrogations of Western thought, and the spirituality it carries, compose a unique critique of the pretension to understanding that he claims to be the very foundation of the West (1981, 96). The ash of this volcanic rethinking of these origins to which Derrida refers settles upon what Levinas most often calls an "ethics," though sometimes a "religion" or a "speech," more volatile and more unsettling to human consciousness than either philosophy or the theology philosophy legitimizes. Levinas also calls his questioning a "meontology" (*me-on*, no being) (Levinas and Kearney 1986, 25), identifying the Greek origins of philosophy in science of ontology (*ontos*, being and *logos*, reason or language). He wants to think of a meaning derived differently than within the forms of thinking by which the meaning of existence is disclosed to philosophy (and theology). He attempts to describe that which has no being, which is not—not a no-thing as opposed to a some-thing, but outside of or beyond the dialectic of being altogether. Levinas's thought stretches toward the absolute alterity (absolute otherness, radical difference) of what he calls "otherwise than being," beyond what any thinking bound to philosophy (including theology) can grasp, bound as such thinking is to ontology.[2] To unpack this, I begin with his discussion of how consciousness is described within modern ontological presumption.

Levinas asserts that vision dominates the sphere of the reasonable. He says that consciousness is a union of vision and knowing by which a world of meaning is intended; it is a

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[1]For more on "God" in Levinas than can be used here, see Levinas, 1998.

[2]For Levinas, the origins of philosophy form the bedrock of all forms of inquiry (including theology).

unifying modality in which an ego is identical to an *I think*, "aiming at embracing, or perceiving, all alterity under its thematizing gaze," with a "*seeing* having a *seen* for its object or theme." (1987b, 97; subsequent references from this essay unless noted). Sense making thus originates in apprehension. "Thus the priority of knowledge is announced," according to Levinas, "where all that we call thought, intelligence, mind, or simply psychism, ties together" (97). The intentional structure of this "aiming at embracing" in knowledge invests consciousness with the ability to render alterity (otherness, outsidedness) *present* to mind. "The other is thus present to the ego. And this 'being present,' or this *presence* of the 'I think' to the ego, is equivalent to *being*" (98).

Levinas calls this ontological structure of intentionality a "temporal modality." By this he means that an object is offered to the ego in an *immanence* to thought, in a "now" that privileges "in the very temporality of thought, the present in relation to the past and future" (99). This temporality of re-presentation (making present—symbolically—in intending consciousness) is the identification of consciousness with language, in which all representations of alterity are bound to the presencing of the *I think* this or that. Consciousness, as thinking, thematizes being by "leading its *other* back to the *same*" in a re-presentation that brings the *was* and the *will be* into this immanence of the present, born of thought (99). The absolutely past and the unimaginable future are reduced to ideas (themes) *in* and *of* the present. Thematization is thus the way we are conscious of time and gather otherness into synchrony. It is interpretation itself, the meaning of meaning mediated by language (99-100).

Intentional consciousness thus establishes itself in relation to others as a particular eikonic representation of an event, a functioning-in-focus (la parole) of a relatively stable system of signifying symbols (la langue). Levinas accepts the notion that the imperatives of actual communication break apart the egological gathering of the world in representation, splitting that gathering via an exigency one might call rhetorical (the need to make sense to another, or to oneself—making knowing *known*). The distinction between the individual knowing of the world and the act of communication is extremely porous, even to the point of being nearly a hypothetical distinction altogether. We are always speaking to others, even when talking to ourselves. Knowing is thus always a kind of communication, rendering in a way to make known. Difference is thus resolved, albeit temporarily, in the meaning-making function of language (100).

On the one hand, this process is the very substance of consciousness. On the other hand, it is incapable of responding to difference with any form of responsibility other than in the ontological dialectic of interpretation and communication (or its failure). In this hermeneutic re-presentation the "thread" of being is retied. Levinas summarizes this conundrum: "The dialectic that tears the ego apart ends by a synthesis and system whereby the tear is no longer seen. Even if the Other enters into this language —which is indeed possible—reference to the egologycal work of representation is not interrupted by this entry" (100). This is, for Levinas, a reducing of the other (coming to me out of nothing) to the "same" (as what I imagine as something), even as my repertoire of representational strategies (my world) develops over time. The instigating difference is thus eclipsed in thematic consciousness.

In response, Levinas speaks of a something else with which the dialectical relationship between speech and language, still within ontology, is itself in relation. This placing of *la langue* and *la parole* together into a relation with a third repeats at a linguistic level a more general realignment Levinas suggests between theory and practice, with both oppositions deferred for still more radical oppositions between both and something other than each. Language, like theory, and speech, like practice, are brought together in order to be placed

together before this transcendent *third* thing. This transcendent *third*, however, cannot be observed. It can only be sensed, or spied, by its effects—and even then, only tentatively, because it is not a *thing*, as such.

Levinas asks whether there is not a "forgotten but effective sociality" upon which language, even with its "allegedly interior scissions," rests. He believes this "prior" sociality is one where "interlocutors are distinct" and interlocution does not resolve itself in meaning or making-known. Other than the representation of being, it suggests a transcendence within discourse that is other than the transcendence of a language system.

This "forgotten but effective sociality" coincides with Levinas's idea of me-ontological ethics (103). It is not a boundary phenomenon, simply at the edge of what is knowable. No perfection of means of knowing will reach it, for it is outside of the drama of what "is" and "is not" knowable. It is genuine transcendence, the transcendence of the *other* with respect to the *same* that insinuates into human interaction the vibrations of radical difference that cannot be incorporated into an idea, theme, or word, but nevertheless alter them. It is the sociality of the hortatory origin of human intersubjectivity, a "saying" of an *other's* word in every dialectically structured "said." In this way, Levinas replaces the traditional linguistic dialectic of system and instance with this other rhythm, that between the "saying" (*le dire*) and the "said" (*le dit*).

The genuine transcendence of this "saying" is it reducible to silence. It is a vibration *within* language-in-use. It is infinite because it is "in-the-finite" (1961, 213; 1996,135-137). This "saying" of radical difference "attends" speech, like an erupting volcano (a trace, of sorts, within that which is more). It is a hyperbolic space within discourse, an alternative geometry inexplicable in the dimension of representation.   Levinas also calls this "saying" the "question mark" in being, signaling an "ethical" dimension of sociality.

> Is language only reasonable in its *said*, in all that can be written? Is it not reasonable in the sociality of *saying (dire)* in responsibility with regard to the Other who commands the questions and answers of the saying, and through the 'nonpresence' or the 'apperception' of the interlocutor who thus contrasts strongly with the presence of things according to the underlying simultaneity of the given universe? From the ego to this interlocutor there is a temporality other than the one that allows itself to be assembled into the presence of the *said* and the *written*. (1987b, 103)

Once again, the word that resounds in a "saying" beyond representation cannot be considered to *be* anything, except in the effects in being that attend it. Consequently, the "saying" cannot simply be wholly equated with indirection or a meaningful pre-verbal body language. It is not simply more or less of the same. In its effects, it "is" a signaling, speaking, vibrating, catastrophying, calling, creating, resounding, unrepresentable yet ever present *absence* that is neither silence nor the abyss of multiple meanings. It is traced by the breaking up of thematic consciousness, a traumatic yet inspiring awakening of moral consciousness (1996,137; 146). The gathering of temporality into a re-presentation is here ungathered in a double movement, not as a disorienting negativity, or a nostalgia, or a daydreaming, but as an *anachronism*.

My interpretation of Levinas to this point demonstrates the way in which deconstruction does work itself out from a Levinasian me-ontology. Levinas's meditation on the me-ontological significance of the "face" is peculiar, however, and stretches beyond. For Levinas approaches his idea of a deformalization of representation from a beginning in the actual experience of facing another person. In the potential of the face of another to exceed, as an *other*, the

interpretations my intending consciousness can place on her, the face of an other speaks beyond being. It is an *other*. The face preserves, without representation, this forgotten sociality.

Many interpreters read Levinas's association of the "face of the other" with this non-present urgency literally, and so assert that Levinas simply raises the significance of our responsibility to others—signaled by the ways in which human faces demand compassion. I would argue, however, that a differently nuanced reading is possible. For while the experience of encounter in facing the face of the other is a most immediate signal, or trace, of Levinasian ethics—it is not the ethics itself. For the "face" carries a doubled meaning. It is at one time the physical face that can be attended to, hurt, ignored, cared for, interpreted and recognized. It is also the "face" that holds back and can neither be experienced nor even noticed. It only leaves the faintest of traces in being, in the rupturing of self-consciousness in a certain awakening of a disposition *toward*. For there is always more to the other, if the other is allowed to be other. This seemingly secondary, but phenomenologically prior, otherness in the "face" of the face witnesses to a moral urgency in our thematic representation of the others that cannot be accounted for ontologically. The "face" of the face calls us before we hear, demands attention before we see. This suggests a certain irony in Levinas's use of the face, for mere visage is insufficient to his phenomenology. For face faces us by virtue of its speech (commanding attention). Visage is "face" because it can speak, and so the face is the potency of speech itself. And by so 'speaking,' the face becomes an intensely focused trope for the ethical urgency of all speech acts—wrapped up as all speech acts are in interpreting and effecting a world, and conditioned as all speech acts are by the potent face-to-face encounters from which discourse originates. The (speaking) face of the other is the first beat of the moral impulse and so places moral urgency at the very origin of consciousness itself, metaphorically *prior* to time. But it is not the lone beat. The face of the other, signaled by a sense of moral urgency in human interaction, is here a trope reminding its other (the interpreting self) of what it doesn't know but must needs respond to. The trope of the face, signaled by and never escaping living faces yet not limited to their materiality, may bear an otherness that addresses the self even while ever beyond the human encounter. *It may bear the divine*, traced in speech, though not by identifying the divine with the human. It opens a larger geometry of materiality and transcendence rather than leveling them.

> I cannot evade the face of the other (autrui), naked and without resources. The nakedness of someone forsaken shows in the cracks in the mask of personage, or in his wrinkled skin; his being 'without resources' has to be heard like cries not voiced or thematized, already addressed to God. There the resonance of silence . . . certainly sounds. . . . It is the latent birth of religion in the other (autrui), prior to emotions or voices, prior to 'religious experience.' (1996,143)

The modality for which Levinas calls makes this leap and indulges a thinking of language that, as noted above, defers the distinction between language-system and language-use for a distinction between the language of being (thematic) and the proclamation (without theme) in being of such an *otherwise than being*. This new modality proceeds as a form of responsibility to an absent *other word* from a time without presence. But how can this be? How can discourse bind itself to the unrepresentable otherwise than in the simple induction or indirection of negative poetics? And so how can the ineffable proximity of an *other*, claiming my consciousness prior to representation, effect homiletic rhetoric? Any approach to the idea of a me-ontologically responsive rhetoric derivable from such an ethics will simultaneously operate

on practical and theoretical levels, enacting me-ontological responsiveness even while it tentatively describes (theorizes) certain dimensions of that response.[3]

Moral Consciousness as a Me-ontological *Dynamis*. Levinas speaks of the "hollowing" out of thematic consciousness by radical alterity. The philosophical mind may draw frightening or negative inferences from this image. It may assume the hollowed out consciousness to be in a chaotic state of unreflective emotion or uninhibited behavior, a condition of absolute tyranny over the self by powers over which the self has neither control nor understanding. Levinas resists such inferences. Instead, he speaks of the hollowed out self as a textured consciousness— unsettled, displaced, "unsatisfied" with language, but not dismantled.

> The unsatisfiedness of conscience is not simply a suffering of delicate and scrupulous souls, but is the very contraction, the hollow, the withdrawal into itself, and the systole of consciousness as such. . . . It is the concrete form of what precedes freedom, but does not lead us back to violence, the confusion of what is separated, necessity, or fatality. (1987a, 58)

Levinas's use of the metaphor of a heartbeat (as a "systole") here is significant. The diastolic and systolic beat of human consciousness—intending being in a representation of reality and withdrawing from being in a sheer responsiveness to unrepresentable otherness— matches the whole series of oppositions through which Levinas constructs his philosophy. These oppositions include the diastolic and systolic beat of the "said" and the "saying." They also include the oppositions between the totality of knowledge in the linguistic representation of otherness and the infinity of sheer responsibility to the alterity of the other in-the-finite, or the opposition between a person's freedom to create a world of meaning and her essential obligation to the already creative *hearing of a word* prior to all meaning making. This heartbeat draws the whole plot of ethics within what I want to call *moral consciousness*. Its beating works within what Levinas calls a continuing and unresolved "rhythm" (a metaphor effectively synonymous with the metaphor of a heartbeat) (1996,148). It is the *dynamis* of Levinasian praxis.

The systolic beat of moral consciousness has no measure; it has only a sense of the absolutely *other* in the presence, or proximity, of the *existing* other. Have I not taken the place of the other by representing a world to myself in thematic consciousness? Whenever faced by the face of another, looking at me with a look that speaks what I cannot interpret—"with the total uncoveredness and nakedness of his defenseless eyes, the straightforwardness, the absolute frankfulness of his gaze" (1987a, 55)—I am faced with the unresolvable conundrum of moral consciousness. My secure place in the world is questioned. I am obliged. *Face shatters form*.

In this idea of moral consciousness, the rhythm of oppositions are placed alongside of hermeneutic consciousness in a complex event of thematic comprehension transparent to uninterpretable responsiveness. The beat of this rhythm signifies something other than some frightening chaos lurking on the other side of the knowable; it signifies the very heartbeat of the personal, and the irreducible dynamic of a me-ontologically responsive rhetoric. The effects of this *dynamis* appear within the rhythm of consciousness as a surplus to thematic coherence. They are a *positivity*. Borrowing language from Edward Said, they appear along the lines of a

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[3]On rhetoric as a praxial relating of *dynamis* and *techne*, from Aristotle, see Farrell, 1993. Other treatments of Levinas and Rhetoric, see Handelman 1990; Smith 1983, 1986; Hyde 2001; Webb 1999; Levinas 1993, 135-143.

"barely perceptible nick," an "irony," an "imposition," or an "odd decorum."[4] This "nick" within language upsets the primordial freedom of interpretive expression presumed by hermeneutic definitions of consciousness. They draw us in, and awaken us in relation.

To assert the rhythm of the heartbeat, Levinas must radicalize the significance of moral consciousness. He does so by absolutizing it. Its absolution, however, seems to pace the responsible ego within an unreasonable, even bizarre, beat—*moral*/thematic; *response*/knowledge; *obliged*/free; *love*/care; *other*/self; *God*/human. But this is, for Levinas, the burden that paces the beat. For he insists that the moral consciousness inspired by the proximity of the neighbor and open to God, conditioning but not identical with theology, is a consciousness that stretches toward *all* others signified by a responsibility to the *particular* other, stretching to the point of accepting the burdens of others' responsibility as one's own (1981, 146; 1996,144). He puts it bluntly: "It is I who support all. . . . I am responsible for a total responsibility, which answers for all the others and for all in the others, even for their responsibility. The I always has one responsibility *more* than all the others" (Levinas 1985, 98-9).[5]

My burden *for* all may be my liberation from the striving for knowledge *of* all. Read within a logic that cannot accept Levinas's attempt to think me-ontologically, this appears to be a stern moralism that refuses the mutuality of responsibility and the freedom of choice that is necessary for emotionally and psychologically 'healthy' communication. Yet this strangeness is precisely the point for Levinas. For Levinas believes, in a way counterintuitive to thematic consciousness, that an over determination of appropriateness and measure in human relations is more dangerous, finally, than the apparent excessiveness of absolute obligation. Likewise, a modernist presumption of an *a priori* autonomy out of which human obligations are freely chosen by reasoning persons eclipses the very pre-condition of human consciousness Levinas intuits in human response-ability before, and responsibility to, the proximity of others that precedes their being present and the other other (God) who "is" only as the other's Other (1987a, 50-1). For the apparently free measuring of human responsibility in a totalizing thematic consciousness betrays otherness and so also eclipses the possibility of thinking/speaking *toward* God.[6] It pretends to know enough. Preaching reduced to technique indulges this betrayal.

Without measure, "the uniqueness of the [preaching] self is the very fact of bearing the fault of another"—*without knowing enough* (1981, 112). One must posit this pre-thetic responsibility *for* all and *to* all if one is to preserve any notion of the alterity of God within consciousness. A me-ontological praxis thus beats *between* the dynamic extreme of moral consciousness and the measured freedom of thematic consciousness. Since Levinas admits of no synthesis of these beats, but insists on their being bound to each other in a rhythm that does not hide their difference, the discreet claims each makes on the self must be somehow preserved

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[4]The images I borrow here are from Said's description of the devoured site of meaning attending his experience of exile and disequilibrium as a Palestinian refugee (1986, 63). It suggests what I spy in Levinas.

[5]These subjectivities that generate the self as substitution. In this idea, the radically plural "and" between discreet identities becomes a radically other-disposed "for." God *and* humans *and* the world becomes God *for* humans *for* the world *for* God. See Handelman 1991, 186; McClure 2004, 120-1. Also see Rosenzweig, 1985.

[6] "As soon as he is conceived, this God [of whom the Bible speaks] is situated within 'being's move.' He is situated there as the *being* (*étant*) par excellence. If the intellectual understanding of the biblical God, theology, does not reach to the level of philosophical thought, this is not because it thinks of God as *a being* without first explicating the 'being of this being,' but because in thematizing God it brings God into the course of being. But, in the most unlikely way—that is, not analogous with an idea subject to *criteria* or subject to the demand that it show itself to be true or false—the God of the Bible signifies the beyond being, transcendence" (1996, 130).

without moderation.   As with the idea of ubiquitous obligation, however, it should be asserted that the rhetorical burden implied by this burden does not describe what moral consciousness *is*, but how its ontological effects present themselves in language. The whole plot of moral consciousness inspires an other-responsive, or as McClure would say an other-*wise*, rhetorical praxis.

Me-ontological Praxis as a *Work* of Moral Consciousness. Levinas recruits a cluster of terms to describe me-ontological praxis, including *work* and *liturgy*. I begin with *work*.

Work appears to be an intimacy of action and sense in an uninhibited attentiveness to the other, the other's others, and the Other other that "leaps" beyond knowledge. Work is thus a way of describing the disposition toward moral creativity in our experience of conscience. Levinas describes it as a giving of oneself, a "signification where the *for* of the-one-for-the-other, outside of any correlation and any finality, is a *for* of total gratuity, breaking with interest: *for* characteristic of the human fraternity outside of any preestablished system" (1981, 96-7).

How many preachers are responsive enough to be able to communicate within their preaching, without articulating it as a logos-laden theme or reducing it to a pathos-laden appeal, their uninhibited delight, gracious respect, and passionate desire for their hearers' life-giving responsibility before their own others simultaneous, though not identical, with their responsibility before God? (Speaking) face to (speaking) faces of others, how many sermons (in their "said") "say" a responsivity to those others such that those others are invited, even called, to such a "saying" themselves. How many sermons can, in Levinas's term, "undergo" such a disposition simultaneously *toward* others and *toward* God (1996, 139)? "Sincerity is the name of this extraversion," Levinas writes in "God and Philosophy" (1996, 145). Its radical impulse is accompanied by a radical patience. The radicality of this patience reorients this *work* toward the time outside of time by which Levinas has already broken the hegemony of representation in consciousness (1987a, 92).

To renounce the need to know the results of our actions is to resist the temptation to turn a *work* into a technique. A *work* is a disposition, an orientation of effort in response to a moral consciousness of the other that demands no reward. "A work is neither a pure acquisition of merits nor a pure nihilism" (1987a, 92). Not without reason, a *work* of this sort is nevertheless sustained outside of its own reasoned construction and calculatable results. It is its own enjoyment, as an enactment (1961, 110-14). It is a praxis. I work for a purpose beyond the products of my effort, outside of my vision and beyond even myself—beyond even my death. "There is a great nobility in the energy liberated from the hold of the present," says Levinas (1987a, 93). This effort is a "passage to the time of the other" (1987a 92) that is a participation in God.

Consider ordinary talk of reconciliation among alienated sisters and brothers in the faith, or nonvoyeuristic memory of prayerful confessions. Such talk may be a product of calculated need for what narrative retelling can give that thematic or doctrinal exposition withholds. It may also conform to a set of moral prescriptions or rhetorical norms abstracted from the moral urgency of the moment, and so fall into a kind of homiletic insincerity. Yet such talk may also signify a sharable sense of *pre-thetic* obligation, more urgent and in some ways more confusing than any calculable reason or rhetorical norm. We may be drawn to reconciliation—to whatever extent we are—as much or more out of a sense of the very ethical urgency of our humanness before each other and before God than out of a *comprehensible* need. Our talk may admit more than calculation, and less than power. It may proclaim a me-ontologically inspired, ethical

subjectivity lovingly disposed *toward* God simultaneous with its loving disposition *toward* others.

Here enters another theological resonance, as this radically impatient patience is, for Levinas, an *eschatology*. Eschatology is here the "ending" of the time of representation, a liberation from the time of the ego toward the time of absolute responsiveness. "To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one's work is to envisage this triumph in a time without me, to aim at this world below without me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time, in an eschatology without hope for oneself, or in liberation from my time" (1987a 92).

Levinas also borrows the concept of *liturgy* to describe the patience innervating this work. Liturgy is a work that "is not defined by the triumph of technology for the sake of technology, as it is not defined by art for the sake of art, and as it is not defined by nihilism" (1987a, 93). Instead, the work of liturgy is a "going beyond oneself which requires the epiphany of the other" (1987a, 93). Me-ontological praxis proceeds as a liturgy of transcendence.

> We could fix its concept with a Greek term 'liturgy,' which in its primary meaning designates the exercise of a function which is not only totally gratuitous, but requires on the part of him who exercises it a putting out of funds at a loss. For the moment all meaning drawn from any positive religion has to be removed from this term, even if in a certain way the idea of God should show its trace at the end of our analysis. . . . Liturgy is not to be ranked alongside of 'works' and ethics. It is ethics itself. (1987a, 93)

This notion of liturgical, eschatological work in the "saying" of conscientious "saids," is also the me-ontological dimension of *prophecy* (the "cry of revolt, which is the first witness to the Infinite) and also of *testimony* (a "here I am" in a giving account) (1996, 141-148). One can infer that me-ontological praxis is simultaneously liturgical in is effect, loosely analogous to liturgy in its pattern, and, in fact, the very condition of liturgical practice. It is a common and repeatable form of communicative action motivated not by productivity or the perfection of form, but by an obedience born of trust. And its eschatological quality—like the work of prophecy, testimony, and I would add prayer—suggests a "hollowing out" before its Other.

Such a discursive, homiletic, work bears the weight of living others' oppositions and desires and provokes self-sealing arguments with both the moral demands of actual persons and the Infinite Possibility of an otherwise than existing but ever hunting, wooing, and interrupting God. And in doing so it tends toward making strong claims in the form of <u>witness</u> rather than advocacy, toward what McClure calls a "testimonial" logic (2004, 123-131). Witness positions the speaking self in relationship with judgments made, thus conditioning reason by relationship and assertion by character (the "here I am"). Witness also defers control, and so respects difference, even as it interprets. It responds to questions it does not pre-determine. As such, it is more elastic in its representation of experience and more quickly bound to the contingencies of life than to the plot of ideas.[7] Moreover, in seeking to open closed systems, not simply for the sake of opening but in the service of an other-textured hope, such preaching will remain suspicious of ideology (theological or otherwise). It will resist networks of words that signal other words in systems of interpretation that finally hold no opening to meanings or demands outside of themselves (and so become self-sealing and totalizing). Appearing in the guise of ethical sensitivity, such preaching can be, in practice, ingratiating, parasitic, and imitative. It is essentially aggressive rather than ethically responsive, confident in the power and illusory health of theological self-satisfaction rather than drawn to theology's other/Other. Such preaching flirts

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[7] On the idea of "witness," see Levinas 1981, 26-30, 140-152; and 1996, 97-108. For further exploration, see Ricoeur 1980, McClure, 2001, 119-131 and for my own take, Avram 2004a.

with truth in a way that transforms the creative heartbeat of divine *work* and ontological *play* into nihilism. Rather than this, me-ontologically inspired preaching lives in abundance and grace.

Conclusion. Preaching in this Levinasian key will be constituted in this heartbeat between interpretive *play*, which in this case refers to the "play of being" by which Levinas describes ontology, and *work*, which in this case refers to the ordinary repetition of extraordinary impulse toward generosity, service, attentiveness, mercy, or love. It is never enough to sustain this ethics by simply providing evaluated norms for political, rhetorical, or poetic action. For the ethos, or dwelling place, of this ethics is not, finally, the logos of prudent judgment. It is the pathos of human interaction, textured by, and originated in, a giving over of the self to the commanding and appealing word of the others/Other that awaken one in religious consciousness.

Such a homiletic will include whole persons in full sensuality—seeing, touching, hearing, speaking—in its liturgy/work. This modality draws out a language of embodied action expressed through words and gestures. It suggests an *ethos* that is discrete and respectful, a *logos* that is largely confessional, and a *pathos* of unquenchable desire for transcendence, hope, and an eschatological future of communion between the "otherwise than being" and we who are, always coupled with a tragic sense of the complexities of human needs that tend to overtake this desire. This is a communicative praxis textured by mercy before and within propriety, and by gift giving before and within an economic exchange of interpretation. It signals obedience before and within rectitude, "face" before and within form, liturgical sensibility before and within theological conviction.   Born in humility, it is both a leaning toward others and a leaning toward God.

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Spirituality, Wealth, and Proverbs

Academy of Homiletics, December 2005
Dave Bland
Harding University Graduate School of Religion

Contemporary Understandings of Spirituality

As I write, splashed across the front cover of the latest <u>Newsweek</u> magazine is the heading "Spirituality in America." The issue contains a special report on the search for the spiritual.[1] The idea of spirituality continues to generate a tremendous amount of interest in our culture. James Herrick in a fairly recent work identifies several characteristics of contemporary spirituality.[2] First, the primary means for discovering spiritual truths is through human reason. Human reason possesses divine authority. Second, science is the instrument reason employs to discover spiritual knowledge and confirm what humans have discovered through religious traditions. Third, not only does science reveal spiritual knowledge but through the experiences of specially gifted individuals comes insight. Certain extraordinarily gifted people possess spiritual knowledge. By inquiring of these individuals an ordinary person can tap into the hidden secrets. Fourth, nature also possesses revelatory power because it is divine. Thus creation is worthy of careful study.

There are a number of qualities about these characteristics that are commendable. That spirituality is sought among numerous sources including self-understanding, human reason, experience, nature, and gifted individuals is admirable. At the same time, major limitations exist. Little interest is placed on the role of the community. Spirituality becomes an individualistic enterprise which is equated with the primary task of seeking self-understanding.

This appears to be the perspective of Elaine Pagels who identifies the Gnostic Christian groups of the early Christian centuries as some of the strongest models of spirituality.[3] According to Pagels, the Gnostics recognized that "the capacity to discover truth is within you."[4] They were on a journey of self-discovery. Therefore Christian spirituality is a journey of discovering the inner self. It is the process of individuals assembling their own system of beliefs. Thus self-understanding is the primary goal.

While the quality of self-understanding has a place, when it becomes the primary drive, it leaves spirituality anemic. When spirituality turns into an individualistic endeavor then individuals craft their own spiritual life in a way that fits their lifestyle.[5] As one of my colleagues

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[1] "Spirituality 2005" <u>Newsweek</u> (September 5, 2005): 46-65.

[2] James A. Herrick, <u>The Making of the New Spirituality: The Eclipse of the Western Religious Tradition</u> (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 33-34.

[3] Elaine Pagels, <u>Beyond Belief: The Secret Gospel of Thomas</u> (New York: Random House, 2003).

[4] <u>Ibid</u>., 32, 54.

[5] In a recent work, two psychologists identify spirituality as an important virtue for people to cultivate. There is clearly an individualistic flavor to their description of spirituality: ". . . spiritual people have their own practices for nurturing their own version of this strength, whether it be volunteer work at a hospice or a quiet walk through the Muir Woods" (535). However, they also acknowledge that spirituality is cultivated through religious institutions, churches, para-church organizations and families (618). Yet they seem to relegate these to the margins. Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, <u>Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification</u> (New York: Oxford UP, 2004).

sarcastically put it, for many people today spirituality consists of nothing more than "thinking deeply about yourself." Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow observes that today spirituality primarily concerns itself with providing therapy.[6] Its purpose is to give individuals relief from the anxieties and frustrations of life. One's relationship with God is a way of enabling one to feel better about decisions already made and lifestyles already chosen.

In contrast to this perspective on spirituality, Gordon Wakefield offers a more holistic definition, ". . . Christian spirituality is not simply for 'the interior life' or the inward person, but as much for the body as the soul, and is directed to the implementation of both the commandments of Christ, to love God and our neighbour."[7]

In this same vein, Alister McGrath proposes the following perspective on spirituality: "Spirituality is the outworking in real life of a person's religious faith—what a person *does* with what they believe."[8] He continues, "Spirituality concerns the quest for a fulfilled and authentic religious life, involving the bringing together of the ideas distinctive of that religion and the whole experience of living on the basis of and within the scope of that religion."[9] In other words, spirituality is not only the exploration within of discovering the self but it is the expressing without of one's values and beliefs. Marjorie Thompson expresses it succinctly, "The spiritual life invites a process of transformation in the life of a believer. It is a process of growing in gratitude, trust, obedience, humility, compassion, service, and joy."[10]

At its core, spirituality is relational.[11] That is why biblical wisdom and, in particular, Proverbs make an important contribution to the understanding and practice of spirituality, because it too is relational.[12] It is concerned with how we relate to God and to others, not just to the self. Proverbs directs spirituality to its implementation in life. Proverbs gives spirituality rigor and discipline, keeping it from becoming, to use Fred Craddock's phrase, "just a bog of blessed assurance."[13] Wisdom pushes spirituality into the streets of daily living; it is a quality woven into the very fabric of life.

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[6] Robert Wuthnow, God and Mammon in America (New York: Free Press, 1994), 5.

[7] Gordon S. Wakefield, "Spirituality," The Westminster Dictionary of Christian Spirituality , ed. Gordon S. Wakefield (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 362.

[8] Alister E. McGrath, Christian Spirituality: An Introduction (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1999), 2.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Marejorie J. Thompson, Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 7

[11] Thompson, Soul Feast, 6.

[12] Dave Bland, The College Press NIV Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, & Song of Songs (Joplin, MO: College Press Publishing, 2002), 13.

[13] Fred Craddock, "The New Homiletic for Latecomers: Suggestions for Preaching from Mark," eds. David Fleer and Dave Bland, Preaching Mark's Unsettling Messiah (St. Louis: Chalice Press, forthcoming).

Spirituality and Proverbs

There have been some worthwhile attempts to identify the value of wisdom for spiritual development from the pulpit and in academia.[14] Still there remains a tendency for some contemporary scholars and preachers to ignore the book of Proverbs as a viable resource in this regard. James Crenshaw, representing the voice of scholarship, makes the pronouncement that the "vast majority of proverbial sayings tends toward the banal, hardly commending themselves as worthy of careful study by serious students."[15] Representing the voice of many pastors, William Willimon announces, "Generally, I dislike the book of Proverbs with its lack of theological content, its long lists of platitudinous advice, its 'do this' and 'don't do that.' Pick up your socks. Be nice to salesclerks. It doesn't hurt to be nice. Proverbs is something like being trapped on a long road trip with your mother, or at least with William Bennett."[16] These voices express the views of many that Proverbs contains little that deserves serious reflection. Those assessments, however, are premature.

The book of Proverbs does contribute a healthy understanding to spirituality and to spiritual development. For the sage, spirituality is the living out of one's ethical responsibilities. Wisdom is concerned with negotiating the day-to-day affairs of life in a way that reflects the fear of the Lord. Derek Kidner states it concisely when he writes that Proverbs is Scripture's effort to put spirituality in working clothes.[17] Proverbs' ability to activate spirituality in the real world and to hold it accountable to the faith community is an important contribution it makes to the discipline.

Proverbs and Wealth

Proverbs addresses a variety of themes that contribute to activating spirituality in life. For example, it engages students in the process of reflecting the fear of the Lord through developing, righteousness, justice, and equity (1:3, 7). It trains students in the task of acquiring self-control, humility, patience, diligence, trust, compassion, integrity, generosity, and other qualities of spirituality.[18]

I want to take one particular theme addressed in the book and use it as a way of demonstrating one of the ways Proverbs contributes to spiritual formation. It is the theme of wealth. The spirituality of Proverbs addresses the hard economic decisions individuals must make in terms of the use of wealth and how those decisions affect their relationship with God and others.

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[14] For example, see Alyce Mckenzie's works: Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom for the Pulpit (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-Help Society (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002); Hear and Be Wise: Becoming a Teacher and Preacher of Wisdom (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004). See also William Brown, Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

[15] James Crenshaw, Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 232.

[16] William Willimon, Pastor (Abingdon Press, 2002), 255-256.

[17] Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: Tyndale, 1964), 35.

[18] Thompson identifies the process of growing in these qualities as the task of spirituality. See Thompson, Soul Feast, 7.

The book begins with the image of a gang (1:8-19). This gang embodies the vices of greed and violence. They steal, abuse, and mistreat others in order to selfishly gain wealth for themselves (vv. 10-14). Ultimately, their greedy lifestyle results in their own downfall; they "kill themselves" (v. 18, NRSV). The sage concludes with this observation, "Such is the end of all who are greedy for gain; it takes away the life of its possessors" (v. 19). Proverbs thus begins with a full-blown image of the destructive power of greed. It destroys community; it destroys the self.

From this destructive beginning, the book works its way through a plethora of instructions, sayings, and admonitions building to the final image in chapter 31:10-31, the woman of strength. The family of this woman has acquired financial security. Her acquisition and use of wealth stands in stark contrast to that of the gang. The whole obsession of the gang was to obtain more and more: "we shall fill our houses with booty" (1:13). For this woman, wealth does not appear to be her ambition in life. In many ways it was merely incidental. She and her family took a different perspective on wealth. They developed a lifestyle of generosity or what the sages earlier refer to as "good eyes" (22:9).[19] Their primary focus was on the fear of the Lord which moved them to serve others. In the process of demonstrating diligence in their work, the by-product was prosperity. In the process of caring for family, reaching out to the poor, offering counsel, and instructing others, God blesses them materially. But again, prosperity was *not* the goal. The goal was developing a lifestyle that identified the family as one that truly feared the Lord.

In Proverbs the journey from the gang to the woman of strength is arduous. The sages do not orchestrate the journey in a nice step-by-step process. Rather these chapters are a storehouse of rich rhetorical forms and a variety of images and themes that often times stand in tension and even blatantly contradict one another. The pedagogy of Proverbs is complex and demanding but so is the process of spirituality.

Cradled between the two images of the gang and the woman of strength is the sages' pedagogy for moving individuals from a lifestyle of greed to a lifestyle of generosity. Contrary to popular belief, the collections of poems and sentence literature in chapters 10-29 are not completely haphazard.[20] It has been fairly well established that there is a progression of movement in terms of the rhetorical form of the sentence literature, from simple antithetic proverbs that dominate chapters 10-15, to a more challenging mixture of proverbs in chapters 16:1-22:16, to the most complex assortment of instruction, analogical, antithetic, synthetic, and synonymous proverbs in chapters 25-29.[21]

Not only is this true of the rhetorical movement, it holds true for the content as well. The various themes dealt with by the sages seem to intentionally move from a simple to a more complex treatment. William Brown observes that, "Generally, the greater the variety of forms in a given collection, the more encompassing and complex the overall moral setting in which the various sentences and instructions are set."[22] The first Solomonic collection (10-15) exhibits the least variety with a predilection for clearly defined categories of righteous and wicked behavior.

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[19] Proverbs 22:9 reads, "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor" (NRSV). The term "generous" is literally the Hebrew phrase "good eyes." The woman of strength has developed good eyes.
[20] Crenshaw argues that they are, Education In Ancient Israel, 230.
[21] Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," in The New Interpreter's Bible (Nashville, Abingdon, 1997), 105.
[22] William Brown, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1-31:9," in Character & Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation, ed. William Brown (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 180.

Then Brown remarks, "Splashes of gray are in greater evidence in the moral nuances conveyed in the latter collections than in the black-and-white world of the initial antithetical section. Stereotyped polarities are tweaked and, in some cases, transformed."[23]

This is true with the sages' teaching on wealth. The pedagogy of wealth begins with an elementary understanding of its theological nature in chapters 10-15. At this initial phase, wealth is a reward for righteous living and poverty the consequences of indolence. However, near the end of the first Solomonic collection (ch. 15) the pedagogy begins to shift. More ambiguity is introduced into the instruction. With the entry of the better-than proverbs near the end of the first collection (15:13-17) and with their concentration in 16:1-22:16,[24] material goods are viewed more indeterminately. Life gets a little more complicated; wealth is qualified.[25]

The better-than proverbs take the desirable physical quality of wealth and place it in the context of strife or chaos. Suddenly a reversal occurs. The desirable element is no longer as attractive. The less desirable physical component (e.g., a little income, a dinner of vegetables, poverty) becomes the better way because an atmosphere of peace and tranquility accompanies it. A comparison is made between combinations of negative and positive elements. In the better-than proverbs, the sages make value statements about the more important dimensions in life. For example, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better-than silver or gold" (22:1). That is, one's reputation is more important than simply amassing stocks and bonds.

Proverbs 15:16 serves as another example:

> Better is a little with the fear of the Lord
>   than great treasure and trouble with it.

In this proverb, it is not that "little" is better and "great" is worse. The point is that the scale of material prosperity (from little to great) is subordinated to the character scale (from trouble to fear of the Lord). Accumulating wealth is good, but developing character is better.

The most complex proverb collection is the Hezekian collection of chapters 25-29. Its perspective on wealthy is multifaceted. The rich are chastised for their arrogance (28:11). Even kings are critiqued for their treatment of the poor (28:3; 28:15). In this collection, certain kinds of wealthy people are actually a menace to the community (28:8) and share a common bond with the wicked. The poor are commended for their integrity (28:6). Those who use their wealth to serve the poor are rewarded (28:27). Knowing the rights of the poor is what separates the righteous from the wicked (29:7). In Brown's words, "Of all the collections featured thus far in Proverbs, the Hezekian series looks most critically on wealth and most sympathetically upon the poor."[26] This collection describes the rich as greedy and the poor as righteous.

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[23] Ibid.

[24] The majority of better-than proverbs are located in the second Solomonic collection (16:1-22:16).

[25] Elizabeth Huwiler observes that a "solid majority" of these better-than sayings are concerned with wealth. See Elizabeth Faith Huwiler, "Control of Reality in Israelite Wisdom," Unpublished dissertation, Duke University, 1988, 90, 129. In looking at Egyptian influence on the "better-than" sayings in Israelite wisdom literature, Glendon Bryce compares the twelfth century writing of Amenemope with the Proverbs collection. He maintains that in Amenemope there are nine "better-than" sayings. Five of the nine deal with the subject of wealth and poverty. Of the twelve better-than proverbs in Proverbs 15-22 six deal with riches and poverty (pp. 347, 349). Bryce, " 'Better'–Proverbs: An Historical and Structural Study," The Society of Biblical Literature Book of Seminar Papers. L.C. McGaughy, ed. (Missoula: SBL, 1972) : 343-354.

[26] Brown, 174.

One other important pedagogical strategy deserves mention and that is what is known as the disputational proverbs. The sages frequently resort to an "intentional disputational technique" in which they place contrasting proverbs side-by-side so that one can correct or interpret the other.[27] The sages believe that one proverb never says it all. Thus the sages use proverbs to engage in a kind of moral sparring that challenge readers to wrestle with ambiguity. These pairs are scattered all through the various collections.

Take for example the following proverb pair in 14:20-21:

> v. 20 The poor are disliked even by their neighbors,
>   but the rich have many friends.
> v. 21 Those who despise their neighbors are sinners,
>   but happy are those who are kind to the poor.

These two proverbs are held together by the catchword "neighbor." Verse 20 appears to be a neutral observation about things as they are. Because of their poverty, the poor have no friends. But people flock to the rich. Verse 21 serves as a critique or as a corrective to this social phenomenon.[28] In other words, it stands as an ethical response to the social inequity of verse 20. The proverb pair highlights two different ways of behaving toward the neighbor who is asking for aid. One can either despise the neighbor or treat the neighbor with kindness.

Certain proverbs, by themselves, appear to promote an ethic that is primarily concerned with protecting one's own financial interests. Proverbs condemning the practice of surety[29] seem to promote such a self-interest mentality. However, another proverb juxtaposed to the surety proverb often tempers its thought. One must interpret the practice of surety in context. Such is the case with the following disputational pair in 17:17-18:

> v. 17 A friend loves at all times, and kinsfolk are born to share adversity.
> v. 18 It is senseless to give a pledge, to become surety for a neighbor.

The catchword "friend" or "neighbor" (the same word in Hebrew) connects these two proverbs. Not offering surety to a neighbor does not necessarily indicate selfishness.[30] Rather, to engage in such a venture was a precarious business practice that jeopardized the security of one's own family. Going surety indicates a lack of forethought. It spreads the disaster rather than containing it. That does not, however, relieve one of one's responsibilities to the friend or neighbor (v. 17). Especially in times of crisis, a friend was to come to the aid of a neighbor. Verse 17 serves as a check on the person in verse 18 who might use the admonition against going surety as an excuse for not helping the neighbor. But the sage mandates that a person use money wisely, even when offering help to another.

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[27] See Harold C. Washington, <u>Wealth and Poverty in the Instruction of Amenemope and the Hebrew Proverbs</u>, (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 193.

[28] See further 14:31, "Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker, but those who are kind to the needy honor him."

[29] For a more extended treatment of surety see Proverbs 6:1-5.

[30] Andreas Scherer, "Is the Selfish Man Wise?: Considerations of Context in Proverbs 10:1-22:16 with Special Regard to Surety, Bribery and Friendship," <u>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</u> 76 (December, 1997) : 59-70.

The sages' perspective on wealth and poverty is complex. They call on readers to wrestle with these perplexities, come to understand what is appropriate for the occasion, take ownership of their conclusions, and act on them. The sages equip readers with the ability to think critically. The very quality of wisdom itself invites the reforming and rethinking of ideas.

At the same time, the sages did not practice a values clarification approach leaving everything up to the individual to decide. Certain behavior, like greed, destroyed community life; it was not a gray area. Avarice is the way of the wicked while the righteous practice generosity. The sages were clear about their goal of moving individuals from those controlled by greed to those shaped by generosity. That task, for Proverbs, is a spiritual enterprise.

Wealth and Spirituality

One of the responsibilities of preachers is to equip their listeners to discern the spiritual food they eat. Preachers offer words of caution about a spirituality that is superficial or undisciplined.[31] At the same time, we expose people to a spirituality that integrates the faith of the community and a theology of God with their lived experiences.

One's understanding and use of wealth plays a significant role in either diminishing or contributing to spiritual development. The use of wealth is a concrete way of living out one's spirituality. Proverbs provides a model for how preachers might engage a treatment of this subject and move listeners to a deeper and more substantive spirituality.

On occasion the preacher will deal with the subject of wealth, as do the better-than proverbs, more on a values scale. On such a scale, the better-than sayings reveal that relationships are more important than material goods. They subordinate external qualities to internal character. Community and character transcend creature comforts. Wealth is not bad but there are many things that are better.

On other occasions the preacher will work to engage listeners in the complexities of wealth and poverty by casting two realistic but contrasting scenarios along side one another, as do the disputational proverbs, and allowing the listener to learn to live with the tension and the ambiguity. For example, the preacher might set along side the image of the woman of strength, the image of the Jerusalem church in Acts. Here is a church that practiced generosity (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37), as did the woman of strength, but with a different outcome. Unlike the woman of strength, God did not bless the Jerusalem church with wealth. They remained in poverty. Paul spends several years of his life raising funds for the church so that they could get financial relief (2 Cor. 8-9). So the tension remains. On the one had, there is the scenario of righteousness with wealth (see Prov. 3:9-10). On the other hand, there is the scenario of righteousness with poverty (see Prov. 3:11-12).

The preacher invites the congregation to mentally interact with the sermon rather than "just telling it like it is." Neither the preacher nor the sermon conveys an authoritarian posture. Sermons that tell the congregation exactly what to believe and how to act stifle spiritual development. For spiritual development to occur, the sermon will activate the listeners' minds.

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[31] Alyce McKenzie observes, "We are deceived all the time by the sweet taste and seductive packaging of cultural wisdom." See Alyce McKenzie, Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-Help Society (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 42. She uses the analogy of reading the labels on food packaging to know what the contents are with preachers guiding their congregation in the spiritual nutrition they consume.

The sermon creates a certain level of dissonance in order to allow listeners to work through a process of resolution. The sermon works to create mental interaction between the preacher and the congregation.

The issues surrounding economics, wealth, and poverty are multifaceted and thus must be treated accordingly. The responsibility for preachers to address the subject is demanding and the cost high for listeners willing to take the arduous journey from greed to generosity.[32] As Proverbs demonstrates, the path to generosity does not always or usually follow a straight line. It is filled with twists and turns and contradictions and tension and conflict. However, the results are a more mature spirituality.

Our culture is jaded with materialism and greed which directly influences our spiritual diet. Many whose lives are consumed by the acquisition of more possessions destroy themselves and contaminate the environment in which they live. The preacher identifies and names those powers and principalities that promote greed.[33] The advertising world is one of those powers. Current advertising slogans feed the self-indulgence of Americans. For example, a recent GMC slogan says of a product, "It's not more than you need, just more than you're used to." Such contemporary wisdom incites greed. Many others like it generate a craving for more and lead individuals to embody characteristics of the gang described in Proverbs chapter 1. However, following the pedagogy of the sages, preachers can rely on the abundant resources that Proverbs provides to guide the faith community into a more responsible use of wealth leading them ultimately to a lifestyle that embodies generosity. Such a lifestyle is a way in which Proverbs puts working clothes on spirituality.

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[32] Marjorie Thompson describes spirituality as dynamic. It "is continually challenging, changing, and maturing us." See Thompson, Soul Feast, 7.

[33] I understand this task in a way similar to what I believe Charles Campbell advocates when he argues that preachers have the responsibility to name the powers and principalities that are at work in our world. See Campbell, The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Publishing, 2002), 92. Further Campbell states that one of the purposes of preaching is to form a people who can resist the powers (94).

From Below.
On the Significance of the Spiritual Component in Preaching

Runar Eldebo
Professor at Stockholm School of Theology, Sweden

I like to address the social and spiritual construction of the preaching event. Sometimes we imagine preaching as an act where a man or a woman in splendid isolation performs a monologue in which the words confront a crowd of people that will be it. There are so many more facets to the phenomenon of preaching. I intend to investigate a few. Preaching is a constructive work in and of the preacher that has both social and spiritual dimensions.

Imagine a Sunday morning at a local church. People are gathering. Bells are ringing. The choir has rehearsed into excellence. The preacher hides a nervous breakdown and says one more prayer. The organist introduces the hymn. Everybody shows expectations through the singing. Passages from Scripture are read. Everything goes well. The preacher enters the pulpit. All eyes and ears are focused. Preaching happens.

What is really going on in that very event? Preaching is as much what is heard as what is said. That goes for all oral communication.[1] Listeners are showing up from so many different circumstances that you almost can say there are as many sermons as there are listeners on a given Sunday.[2] That goes again for much of oral communication. There are so many similarities between the preaching event and other acts of oral communication. Preachers need to face these similarities and thrive after the excellence of oral communicators in general. David Browns thorough investigation in *Transformational Preaching* can make a huge impact on many preachers in this direction.[3]

The Preaching Event

Let us focus on the preaching event *per se.* Gregory Bateson states that you do best justice to a phenomenon by studying it where it happens.[4]

I like to propose *an additive way of understanding preaching.* So often we ask if preaching is the word of a human being or the word of God. We struggle with if there are as many sermons as listeners or if, by the grace of God, a congregational crowd may have a word that transcends human limits making them one body in a listening crowd. Is it necessarily either-or?

On a given Sunday the preacher stands in a monologue in front of a crowd of people talking about God. My point is really a talk about God like other speeches may be a talk about politics, about culture or about money. Here we see the similarities with other examples of oral communication. The preacher digs into the experience of being a man or a woman and is to be honest to that experience to be viewed by the crowd as a trustworthy communicator. The listener is a unique human being and is, at best, addressed by the preacher in a worthy way. We all share the world together and we are to be faithful to what is our experience of human existence.

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[1] A study very helpful to understand oral communication in general is Nick Morgan, 2003: *Working the Room. How to Move People to Action through Audience-Centered Speaking.* Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
[2] Point taken in Paul W Jones, 1989: *Theological Worlds.* Nashville: Abingdon Press.
[3] David M Brown, 2003: *Transformational Preaching. Theory and Practice.* College Station: Virtual Bookworm.
[4] Gregory Bateson, 1972: *Steps to an Ecology of Mind.* New York: Ballantine.

The written work that is to be seen as the principal matter for what is to be said and heard is Scripture, a gathering of writings from long ago divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. This written work can be studied both by preacher and listener and is to be seen as a surface of communication between those two through which what is said and heard may be evaluated.

The additive way of trying to understand preaching is that there is so much more to it than what is so far mentioned. Let me add what I see on a given Sunday.

First, the event takes place in a church. The building itself points at heaven to address that what here takes place is not only to be investigated like any human affair but has an added dimension to it. This building was consecrated by a bishop or called upon God for in ways we do not treat other buildings.

Secondly, the room where the preaching event happens is furnished in a way to upgrade this specific event.

Thirdly, the preaching event is surrounded by a liturgy that is composed to involve God and to invite God and the people of God to be interacting with one another. The preaching is put in proper form with hymns, prayers, passages from Scripture, silence and offerings as an important part, not to say the important part, of the totality of that very relational event.[5] Paul Scott Wilson stresses this very encounter with God as essential for the preaching event.[6]

Fourthly, the actual words used as principal matter for what is said and heard through the preaching event is not only to be recognized as words from long ago but as vehicles for the revelation of God here and now.

Fifthly, the listener in the pew is not only preparing to listen to the preacher but has prepared to listen to God through praying and devotion during a lifetime. The relational event does not only address what is going on in a church but what is going on between heaven and earth. This makes a huge difference in the interaction between preacher and listener in the preaching event.

Sixthly, the preacher is an ordained individual, or at least called for this given Sunday. The pulpit is not for sale. There is no human right to address a congregational crowd. Churches and denominations identify and choose whoever they want to preach. To be ordained is to be recognized by church authorities to be chosen and gifted by God. And when we pray for those who are to be ordained we do not pray that they are to be brave and successful in the pulpit, we pray that they are to be faithful to the revelation given so that the miracle will happen, that a relation will be established between God and listeners through their words in the pulpit. The preacher stands not only in the pulpit when preaching but in the faithful experience of the consecrated people that is church. The expectancy is therefore not really to hear words about God but to hear words from God, that is, to hear God speak as it has been made possible so many times before.

My point is that the preaching event whenever it happens is dressed in outer and inner significance. For example, it matters how the preacher is dressed. In some traditions the preacher is carrying Scripture, big size, in other traditions the preacher is dressed in a collar or in liturgical garments. It matters, and in both traditions we are asked not only to grasp the mind of the preacher, when listening, but reach out for the mind of God.

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[5] Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki, 1999: *The Whispered Word. A Theology of Preaching.* St. Louis: Chalice Press, p. 24.
[6] Paul Scott Wilson, 1995: *The Practice of Preaching.* Nashville: Abingdon Press, p. 21.

Authority

Next topic is the authority exercised in the preaching event. It seems long ago Fred Craddock wrote his masterpiece *As One Without Authority.*[7] Now we more try to navigate in different ways of exercising the authority being present. I can highly recommend Jackson Carrolls study in leadership *As One With Authority,* perfectly fit for preachers being recognized as leaders in the pulpit.[8] *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* views the topic of authority and preaching from six different angles.[9] Authority can be borrowed from the authority given to Scripture. Authority can be viewed as pastoral and relational as an authority already there and exercised in the preaching event. Authority in preaching can be part of the authority of liturgy giving the preaching event an integrated authority. Authority can derive from intellectual excellence. Authority can be motivated by the integrity and moral example of the preacher. Authority can be energized by the rhetorical and metaphorical power of the preacher contributing to the faith and growth of the listeners.

It is interesting to recognize that all these facets of authority are viewed from the standpoint of the listener. The question really seems to be how listeners today identify and give authority to the preaching event. I think this is a fair question and a great contribution to the topic of authority. Looking at the preaching event from the pulpit would maybe add some dimensions. From where does the preacher tank authority? And what kind of authority is to be exercised from the pulpit?

My answer would be Scripture of course. I would argue through the pastoral impact already there through the relations to the listeners. I would answer through the whole liturgical event in which the preaching moment is an integrated part. Yes, I would argue according to all the six facets given in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*. But I would add the external church building and the furnished interior of the church. I would add the listener as a praying individual and the preacher as ordained or called upon for this special occasion. I would for sure stay and explore the distinctive character of the spirituality given to the Christian tradition and exercised in preaching worldwide and for centuries. What treasure of spirituality is to be found when the preacher prepares to exercise preaching in the faithful experience of the consecrated people that is church?

Before doing that I like to comment on an important distinction between authority and authoritarian. With Max Weber I truly believe that giving authority to someone expresses an act of free will and a voluntary participation in something bigger than your self.[10] Exercising authority, I like to add, must be to address those qualities in man making it possible for him or her to act upon according to free will. Not always has that been the case when it comes to preaching. We all have experiences or examples of authoritarian preachers. Nevertheless I like to make a contribution when it comes to the spiritual component to make the voluntary act to happen.

Spirituality

The component of spirituality brings to the preaching event a window of opportunity. I like to address the spiritual component in the mind of the preacher. Spirituality is not only what shapes our actions, it is the construction of the imagination that fills our eyes and thoughts

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[7] Fred B Craddock, 1971: *As One Without Authority. Essays on Inductive Preaching.* Enid: Philips University.
[8] Jackson W Carroll, 1991: *As One With Authority. Reflective Leadership in Ministry.* Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.
[9] *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching,* 1995. Eds. William H Willimon & Richard Lischer. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press.
[10] Max Weber, 1947: *The Theory of Social and Economic Organizations.* Glencoe: The Free Press, p. 324-423.

with character before they turn into actions and words. What character can we expect from the pulpit? What is the distinctive character of the spirituality of preaching? Jesus says according to Scripture:

> The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you;[11]

I like to explore the spirituality of "not so with you".

From below

When Paul is trying to understand what they are doing as followers of Jesus when they are preaching he writes to the Corinthians:

> Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men; but what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to be proud of us, so that you may be able to answer those who pride themselves on a man´s position and not on his heart. For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.
> From now on, therefore, we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. So we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.[12]

To be ordained, etymological, is to be "under order". It means being the mouth and the voice of someone or something that is not in your own possession. You can in the mind of the preacher recognize the tension between the preacher as an interpreting self and the preacher as being "under order". It´s not enough to be honest being a preacher, you need to be faithful as well, whatever that is. You need to preach from below and I can, navigating from the passage from Scripture above, localize seven different perspectives in which the spiritual component challenge the preacher to come from below and not like others who exercise authority.

Under God

The preacher is located in between "the fear of the Lord" and "persuading men". She or he gives voice to the gospel but the gospel stands above the preacher and the power of the preaching event sometimes is said to come from above or from outside the preacher. The

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[11] Luke 22:25-26, Revised Standard Version.
[12] 2 Corinthians 5:11-20, Revised Standard Version.

preacher has to submit to the message rather than construe it. The preaching event is an act where you as preacher listen as much as you speak.

Under the written word of God

Every preaching event is to be recognized as the result of a negotiation between the preacher and a passage from Scripture. The preacher always says more than the passage itself but at the same time it is the passage that gives limits to the possibilities of interpretations. Very seldom the intention of a preacher is to dispute, destruct or sabotage a passage from Scripture. In those cases the preacher might rise to become a favourite among some listeners, being a hero of few, but in the length not carry the reputation of being the servant of God´s Word.

Under the interpretation and exposition of the tradition of the church

The voice of the preacher is but one voice of the voices who together express the room of interpretation that is church. Every preacher is at the same time an originator, a follower and part of the choir together with all the other voices of the preaching and interpreting church.

Under the task of doing theology

No preacher can have any excuse not being a theologian. Everyone stands in a hermeneutical and theological tradition that determines what the preacher will find in doing the preparation. To be conscious about this fact is essential and also to give honour to the theological tradition the preacher benefits from. There is of course no clean preaching, that being an impossibility in a culture deriving from incarnation.

Under a denominational framework

Every preacher is appointed or ordained in a denominational framework. To be in a critical solidarity with that very denomination is sometimes the healthy condition for a preacher, not being in too much solidarity to do the homework of exploring the avenues yourself, not being in too much criticism making you more alone in the pulpit then you can really afford. When you are no longer recognized as a gift to your denomination your days as a preacher in that very framework are counted, and we all the time see this happen.

Under the local church

According to Paul "God is making his appeal" to the local church through the preacher. The position of the preacher in the local church is to "beseech the people on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God". It all comes down to the eyes of the preacher. It is in respect the preacher turns to the listening crowd. That respect derives from the preachers love for the sociology of faith that is the local church. This is what makes the authority of preaching coming from below. It is about loving the ones you lead.

Under the listeners who choose to show up

When Jesus, according to Scripture, viewed the tax collector Zacchaeus sitting in a sycamore because he was small of stature it is said:

> And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, make haste and come down; for I must stay at your house today."[13]

The preacher has the privilege to "look up" at people, recognizing their efforts and trials in life and addressing them in their vulnerable beauty. People are always more beautiful than you at first hand think. They are also much more hurt than you ever can imagine. This is what is going on in the imagination of the preacher. This is the preface to the reconciliation to God. Preaching therefore is a servant leadership and not performed in the authority of the masters of the world rather constructed by the preacher in a spirituality from below.

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[13] Luke 18:5. Revised Standard Version.

The Spirituality of Preaching as the Praxis of an Implicate Order of Grace

Gregory Heille, O.P.
Professor of Homiletics
Director, Doctor of Ministry in Preaching
Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis, www.ai.edu

This past summer I taught a one-week course on the Spirituality of Preaching to thirty Lutheran, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, UCC, and nondenominational students—both ordained and preparing for ministry. We structured our week according to the following quotation by Donald Goergen, O.P., of the Friends of God Dominican Ashram in Kenosha, Wisconsin:

> Christian spirituality is concerned with what it means to be human. In the end, it is a theology of the human. Jesus is paradigmatic of the human, and Jesus discloses that being human, or being whole, invites both an experience of God as intimate and praxis of the reign of God. Authentic Christian praxis is both mystical and political. Political love, or the political shape that love of neighbor necessarily takes in our world today, constitutes a particular understanding of holiness—an image of God as a God of people, a God whose concern is humanity. To be holy is to be concerned with human beings. Holiness never legitimates an escape from the world, but rather it necessitates a *presence au monde* and its struggles for human liberation.
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> The human, which is God's innermost concern, is not definitively definable and is only fragmentarily found. It is best expressed in symbolic language, or metaphorical speech. Three great metaphors from the New Testament suggest the *humanum*. First is the definitive salvation, or radical liberation, of all men and women for a sisterly and brotherly community or society that is no longer dominated by a master-servant relationships: the metaphor of the reign of God. Second is the complete salvation and happiness of the individual person within the society: the metaphor of the resurrection of the flesh. Third is the perfection of the ecological environment necessary for human life: the biblical idea of the new heaven and the new earth.
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> In *Church: the Human Story of God*, [Edward] Schillebeeckx adds a fourth, the real significance of Jesus ultimately becoming transparent to all in the midst of so many world religions: the metaphor of the parousia, or second coming of Jesus. These four metaphorical visions of the eschatological future are the source within Christian spirituality of Christians' power and joy.
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> Again we are reminded that spirituality is not just one aspect of human life that can be singled out. It is the whole of human life, and the making of human life whole. It is following the praxis of Jesus, the praxis of the reign of God, an orthopraxis both deeply mystical and necessarily political. It is an intimate involvement with the God who loves people and all of creation.[1]

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[1] Donald J. Goergen, "Spirituality," chapter 7, 117–31, in *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert J. Schreiter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002): 129–30. Underscoring is added.

Authentic Christian Praxis

Goergen speaks of spirituality in terms of orthopraxis—a set of deeply mystical and necessarily political practices. In the fall edition of the Academy's *Homiletix e-Forum*, I replied to the question "What is the gospel?" by pointing to an *implicate order of grace*, as suggested to me by Daoist and Aristotelian metaphysics; by Thomistic theology and *analogical* or *sacramental imagination* (David Tracy and Mary Catherine Hilkert); and by quantum physics (David Bohm).[2] God's implicate order of grace exists in potentiality in each of us by virtue of creation; our vocation is to actualize or make explicit—to incarnate—grace through the practice of virtue. This work if actualizing grace (spirituality) is at once deeply mystical (interior) and necessarily political (public). Spirituality is the authentic praxis of the implicate order of grace in both our interior and public life.

To understand why the practice of spirituality is so difficult in our modern world, I find it helpful to think in terms of a *collapse of the Great Chain of Being*. Transpersonal psychologist Ken Wilbur writes, "Virtually all the world's great wisdom traditions subscribe to a belief in the Great Chain of Being…. According to this nearly universal view, reality is a rich tapestry of interwoven levels, *reaching from matter to body to mind to soul to spirit.* Each senior level 'envelops' or 'enfolds' its junior dimensions—a series of nests within nests within nests of Being—so that every thing and event in the world is interwoven and enfolded by Spirit, by God."[3] "With the rise of modernity in the West, the Great Chain of Being almost entirely disappeared. …the modern West, after the Enlightenment, became the first major civilization in the history of humanity to deny almost entirely the existence of the Great Nest of Being. In its place was a 'flatland' conception of the universe as composed basically of matter (or matter/energy), and this material universe, including material bodies and material brains, could best be studied by science, and science alone. Thus, in the place of the Great Chain reaching from matter to God, there was now matter, period."[4]

We live in flatland, and yet our vocation is to preach an implicate order of grace.

The Metaphor of the Reign of God

Dorothee Soelle, a German lay mystic and anti-nuclear activist exemplified the practice of authentic spirituality. She wrote, "For the sake of what is within, I seek to erase the distinction between a mystical *internal* and a political *external*. Everything that is within needs to be externalized so that it does not spoil, like the manna in the desert that was hoarded for future consumption."[5]

The metaphorical idea of the Reign of God refers to an implicate order of grace made explicit through the public practice of politics. As mystic and activist, Dorothee Soelle served the Reign of God through what I would call a holistic practice of (interior) contemplation and (public) theological reflection.

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[2] Gregory Heille, O.P., "A Daoist, Aristotelian, Thomistic, and Quantum View of the Implicate Order of the Gospel," *Homiletix e-Forum* (Fall 2005), at www.homiletics.org.

[3] Ken Wilbur, *The Marriage of Sense and Soul: Integrating Science and Religion* (New York: Random House, 1998), 6-7.

[4] *Ibid.*, 9-10.

[5] Dorothee Soelle, *The Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001; originally published in Germany, 1997), 3.

In our Spirituality of Preaching class, we introduced the practice of contemplation through a daily practice of *lectio divina*.[6] If preaching preparation begins with prayer, *lectio divina* is a practice for doing so.

Following Paul Ricoeur's interpretive dynamic of First Naiveté–Critical Enquiry–Second Naiveté, we at Aquinas Institute of Theology propose a *Contemplō–Studēo–Praedico* (I contemplate; I study; I preach) hermeneutical process for preaching preparation[7]—a process that grounds hermeneutical study of Scripture in contemplation through a first practice of the habit of *lectio divina*. In my teaching, I have seen that this prayerful practice of *lectio divina*—as a first step in preaching preparation, prior to the second step of hermeneutical study or enquiry—can redeem preaching preparation from a flatland propensity to give preaching over to the external authority of biblical commentators or preaching websites. In this process, prayerful *lectio* guides study; as a result, preaching is grounded in the internal authority of a spiritually and intellectually transforming personal encounter with the scriptural text.

In preaching, the implicate order of grace made explicit in the interiority of contemplation strains for further expression in the public realm. Politics as we now know it, however, is a two-dimensional flatland of (we now say) blue and red in which "the critical link between personal responsibility and societal change is missing on the left" and in which "the reality of structural injustice and social oppression" is denied on the right.[8] If we believe with Roderick Hart that preachers in the United States have in essence flattened their pulpit speech to conform to a sacred-secular silent rhetorical contract in which government rhetoric refrains from being overly religious and religious rhetoric refrains from being overly political,[9] how do we reinvent Christian political discourse according to the internal authority of our transforming encounter with the Word of God and according to the implicate order of God's vision for us as suggested by the metaphor, the Reign of God?

In my work with this summer's Spirituality of Preaching students, I turned to the see–judge–act methodology of theological reflection. Just as the contemplative practice of *lectio divina* explicates the implicate order of grace in our interior life, the contemplative practice of theological reflection explicates grace in political life.

See–Judge–Act traces its articulation to Joseph Cardijn, a Belgian priest during the generation of Karl Barth who went into the factories to inquire about working conditions and to form study circles among young Christian workers. Cardijn's stated goal was to "Christianize the entire secular life in its individual as well as its social dimensions."[10] Inspired by his apostolate among the working class, he founded the Young Christian Workers (YCW) and Young Christian Students (YCS)—lay Catholic social action movements in which young people learned to observe the facts of their everyday life, to judge these facts from the perspective of the Gospel and Catholic social teaching, and to act on their insights with a view to changing their immediate environment and transforming society. The see–judge–act method later found expression in the Christian Family Movement (CFM) and has profoundly influenced liberation theology. In Latin

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[6] See Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., "Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of *Lectio Divina*," at the Valyermo Abbey homepage at www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html.

[7] Attributed to Professor of Biblical Studies, Mary Margaret Pazdan, O.P.

[8] Jim Wallis, *The Soul of Politics: Beyond "Religious Right" and "Secular Left"* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace, 1995), xiv.

[9] Roderick P. Hart, *The Political Pulpit* (West Lafayette IN: Purdue University Press, 1977); also, "Twenty-five Years after *The Political Pulpit*," a special issue of *The Journal of Religion and Communication* 25:1 (March 2002).

[10] Meinrad Scherer-Edmunds, "See–Judge–Act: How Christian Workers Renewed the Church," *Christian Family Movement ACT Newsletter,* May 1996; accessed at www.cfm.org , 30 March 1998.

America, Africa, Asia, the Pacific, and North America, See–Judge–Act moved the locus of theology from the academy and the pulpit to the workplace and the community.

The theory and practice of theological reflection owes much to the appearance in 1980 of a small booklet by Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., from the Center of Concern, an interdisciplinary team in Washington, D.C., engaged in social analysis, theological reflection, and public education on issues of social justice. The booklet elaborates on the see–judge–act model in a further model called the *pastoral circle*, emphasizing the evolving relationship between reflection and action in a never-ending movement from experience to social analysis to theological reflection to pastoral planning. Participants in this circle of reflection move away from an anecdotal rehashing of experience toward a more systemic analysis of experience by exploring its historical and structural relationships.[11]

The see–judge–act methodology is a circular and ongoing movement of listening, valuing and acting. Listening—with its suggestion of more direct participation—seems a more apt word that seeing or observing to describe the insertion point into this reflective process. Having listened to the religiously relevant information in a dialogue with personal experience, ecclesial tradition, and culture, the next movement in theological reflection is to evaluate the information in terms of the core values and sense of mission of the communities and individuals involved as stakeholders. To the degree that the relevant facts of a situation are perceived to be out of sync with the group's core values or mission, the group is diminished and its integrity is called into question. Having identified one or more critical issues affecting the group's ability to function toward achieving its mission in a manner consonant with its core values, the reflection turns to action strategies by which the critical issues can be addressed. This reflective cycle of listening, valuing, and acting repeats itself as the members of a community faithfully continue to reflect on their experience with a view to action in accordance with core values and mission. The reflective cycle of listening, valuing, and acting is a theological reflection to the extent that it explicitly includes the Christian tradition, Gospel values, and the call to discipleship in its dialogue and analysis, and in its strategic planning and political action.

Cuban-American pastor and pastoral theologian Jorge Presmanes, O.P., has suggested bringing the see-judge-act process to the service of an *inculturation model of preaching*. The following (I believe unpublished) outline suggests how theological reflection in the form of See–Judge–Act can give shape both to the *studēo* and *praedico* steps of the contemplate–study–preach hermeneutical process and add dimensionality and spirituality to the flatland of sacred-secular rhetorical discourse:

A. *SEE*
    Stage 1: Understanding the culture
         • The preacher is attentive to all elements of the culture.
            —ways of communicating, language (verbal, nonverbal)
            —myths, symbols
            —socio-economic and political structures
            —ways of celebrating life
            —vision of God

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[11] Joe Holland and Peter Henriot, S.J., *Social Analysis: Linking Faith to Justice*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books; Washington DC: Center for Concern, 1983), 7–9.

• The preacher attempts to identify his or her relationship to the culture.
• The preacher begins to place his or her culture in dialogue with the culture of the hearers.

B. *JUDGE*
Stage 2: Naming the grace in the culture
• How is God revealed in the culture?
• What is human or humanizing in the culture?
Stage 3: Challenging the culture
• Given that culture is a human reality and therefore limited, what are the areas of incompatibility between the culture and the Gospel?
Stage 4: Culture, the preacher, and the Christian tradition
• How has the culture enriched you in particular and the Christian tradition in general?
• How can you and the Christian tradition enrich the culture?

C. *ACT*
Stage 5: Preaching in word
• Actual proclamation, in word, of the Christian message done from within the cultural context of the Christian community
Stage 6: Preaching in praxis
• Preacher and hearers work together to make the Kingdom [Reign of God], as it is preached in word, concrete in the culture (using culture in the broad understanding of including socio-economic and political structures).

The Metaphor of the Resurrection of the Flesh

If the metaphorical or implicate order of the Reign of God can become incarnate or explicit in the spirituality and practice of preaching via the practices of *lectio divina* and theological reflection, what additional Christian practices can preachers keep in mind as pastoral agents of a more authentic humanity?

Another metaphor by which Scripture symbolically represents the implicate order of authentic humanity is that of the Resurrection of the Flesh. This metaphor challenges us to embrace a spirituality of the body. In our flatland world of cosmetic makeovers and the technology and chemistry of allopathic medicine, it is admittedly difficult to claim an implicate order of grace—at the depth level of spirituality—in embodiment. Yet, in the words of Bahá'í physician, H. B. Danesh:

> We human beings are at the crossroads of material and spiritual realities—the junction at which the material and spiritual meet. We have one foot in the animal world and the other in the spiritual. We can live totally materialistic, animalistic lives, or we can choose to transcend our animal nature and enter the realms of spirituality. This choice is the essence of our freedom. As humans we are endowed with the capacities to know, to love, and to will. We have to decide what to learn and how to use our knowledge. We can use our knowledge to wage war or peace. If we choose peace and dedicate ourselves to its cause, we have chosen a spiritual life style. The same holds true for other choices such as truthfulness, trust, justice, compassion, cooperation, beauty, humility, service, and all

other spiritual qualities [virtues]. If we make the objective of life to use our minds to learn about the spiritual qualities [virtues], to focus the power of our love and attraction on them, and to employ our will to commit acts according to them, we will have embarked on a spiritual lifestyle.[12]

Implicit to this quotation is an ancient realization that—as we Christians would say—we are made in the image and likeness of God; that this *imago Dei* exists in potentiality in each of us from conception until death; and that this potentiality is actualized through the practice of virtue. As I have noted in the *Homiletix e-Forum* article, we witness this ancient realization in "the convergence in Chinese medicine, philosophy, cosmology, mythology, and martial arts of an Inner Tradition in outward practice as an extension of the practitioner's own spiritual journey in learning virtue and fulfilling one's innermost or highest purpose, or destiny." We witness it, too, in contemporary expressions of virtue theory—as in Roman Catholic moral theology, with roots going deep into Aristotelian metaphysics and Thomistic theology.

In my ministry, I have made profitable use of several of the resources of the Virtues Project, an international virtues-education program orchestrated by the Bahá'í community. My own life has been changed by Linda Kavelin Popov's book, *A Pace of Grace: The Virtues of a Sustainable Life*, which I recommend to the reading of any busy minister.[13] Popov is the founder of the Virtues Project; this summer her ideas sparked lively discussion among my Spirituality of Preaching students about virtue and sustainability in the life of a preacher. By way of example, the following Five Strategies of the Virtues Project speak both to the critical issue of sustainability in the life a preacher and to the deeply relevant theological message of virtue theory in a preacher's message to his or her congregation:[14]

> *Strategy 1: Speak the language of virtues.* Language shapes character. The way we speak, and the words we use, have great power to discourage or to inspire. The language of virtues helps us to replace shaming and blaming with personal responsibility and respect. It is a frame of reference for bringing out the best in children and ourselves. It helps us to become the kind of people we want to be.
>
> *Strategy 2: Recognize teachable moments.* Recognizing the gifts and life lessons in our daily challenges helps us to cultivate character in ourselves and others. When we have the humility and confidence to learn from our mistakes, every stumbling block becomes a stepping stone.
>
> *Strategy 3: Set clear boundaries.* Virtues-based boundaries focus on respect, restorative justice and reparation to create a climate of peace and safety. Personal boundaries help us to build healthy relationships and protect our time, our energy and our health.
>
> *Strategy 4: Honor the Spirit.* This strategy begins with respect for the dignity of each person and encourages us to make time for reflection, reverence, and beauty. It is expressing what is meaningful in our lives by participating in the arts, honoring special

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[12] H. B. Danesh, M.D., *The Psychology of Spirituality: from Divided Self to Integrated Self* (Switzerland: Landegg Academy Press, 1997), 31-32.

[13] Linda Kavelin Popov, *A Pace of Grace: the Virtues of a Sustainable Life* (New York: Penguin, 2004); the Virtues Project.

[14] See www.virtuesproject.com.

life events, and sharing our stories. Creating Vision Statements increases unity and morale in our homes, schools and workplaces.

    Strategy 5: Offer spiritual companioning. By being deeply present and listening with compassion and detachment, we help others 'to empty their cup'. This counseling approach empowers others to define teachable moments and to reflect on their virtues. It supports moral choice, intimacy in relationships, and peaceful conflict resolution. This process is a powerful tool for healing grief, anger, and trauma.

Practically speaking, in terms spiritual practices, the metaphor of the Resurrection of the Flesh can be seen to speak to learning and practicing virtue in our embodied life from cradle to grave. The practice of virtue both cultivates the interior life and serves to enhance justice and sustainability in right relationship to other persons and also to the planet, its creatures, and the cosmos.

The Metaphor of a New Heaven and a New Earth

    Donald Goergen, in his listing of three great New Testament metaphors that implicitly speak to the authentic humanity that is the goal of the spiritual life, adds to the metaphors of the Reign of God and the Resurrection of the Flesh the complementary metaphor of a New Heaven and a New Earth. Virtues literature customarily presents the virtuous life in terms of the practice right relationship to persons, planet, and cosmos: a new creation or New Earth. Yet, it behooves us to bear in mind additionally that when our corporeal bodies (and their five senses) are laid down in death, our virtues become the lasting sensorium we take with us into the expansive right relationship of a New Heaven.

    My Spirituality of Preaching students this summer found benefit in a discussion of an article by Robert Gilman on "Sustainability: The State of the Movement—the essential threads of who we are and where we're going." Gilman offers the following key concepts in a consideration of sustainability.

    Sustainability: …While the word is a mouthful, what it refers to is a very old and very simple concept—the ability to keep going over the long haul. As a value, it refers to giving equal weight in your decisions to the future as well as the present. You might think of it as extending the Golden Rule through time, so that you do unto future generations (as well as to your present fellow beings) as you would have them do unto you….

    Whole-systems thinking: [This approach], surprisingly, seems to more profoundly define the movement than even the concern for sustainability. What distinguishes whole-systems thinking is a keen awareness of the importance of interconnections, relationships, consequences, and feedback loops. It involves a willingness to consider all significant aspects of an issue, and not to jump to appealing (but usually wrong) simplifications….

    Humane and *biocentric focus*: People in the sustainability movement value both the human and the non-human *equally*. We resist the temptation to pit humans against nature, and we are often just as interested in issues of economic fairness and human rights as we are in environmental well-being. Indeed, we will usually insist that separations between these various categories are artificial and misleading.

    Learning and innovation: Closely associated with the movement's whole-systems perspective is the high value it places on learning and innovation as a response to

problems, rather than critique and complaint. The movement certainly has many who are skillful at criticism, but criticism is used as a tool, not an end. For the movement is basically vision-oriented—it is motivated by a desire to build a better world, not just tear down the one we have. The movement is *not* peopled by Pollyannas: it faces our culture's problems squarely, with a hard-nosed realism, but it is decidedly optimistic about our capacity to learn and grow….

Leadership and partnership: It also seems characteristic of people in this movement to adopt the role of "servant leaders"—acting in the background, doing what needs doing, not directly calling attention to themselves. Like enzymes, we often work to break down artificial barriers and create partnerships; and like catalysts, we seek leverage points or bottlenecks where a little effort can set processes in motion that have beneficial, system-wide effects (citizen diplomacy is a good example of both strategies). As Hazel Henderson puts it, we are "designing new cultural DNA" and trying to splice it directly into society's genes.

Spirituality: There is a tremendous diversity of spiritual orientation within the movement, from active members of various traditional religions to free thinkers of all types. Nevertheless, it is accurate to say that most people in the movement are comfortable with the *idea* of spirituality—with the idea that there may be "more things in heaven and earth" than is included in the standard materialist description of the Universe. There is also no sense of antagonism between spirituality and science. Indeed, if there is a spiritual bias in the movement, it is towards "creation-centered" spirituality—including the sense that what we are learning about the world through the sciences has positive spiritual significance.[15]

What is your vision for a sustainable life for your self, your family, your village, your nation, your world; what virtues do you bring to planning for a sustainable life; what virtues would you like to work on: where would you like to focus; what do you feel called to do—and in doing so in this life, how are you making an eschatological investment in developing and refining a sensorium of the virtues for the next?

The Parousia

To the New Testament metaphors of the Reign of God, the Resurrection of the Flesh, and a New Heaven and New Earth, Goergen notes that Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx adds a further metaphor of the Parousia or the Second Coming of Jesus. These metaphors together give shape to the vision of the eschatological future or, we might say, to the implicate order of grace that gives ultimate shape to a Christian vision of authentic humanity and therefore of Christian spirituality.

I recently heard a most amazing preaching story—the story of Christian Führer, the Lutheran pastor of Nicolaikirche (St. Nicholas Church) in Leipzig—a city not far from Poland in easternmost Germany. For forty years the people of Leipzig lived behind the Iron Curtain separating East from West Germany. In 1989, during the months leading to the October 9th fortieth anniversary of communist occupation, Pastor Führer preached at a peace vigil every Monday evening at Nicolaikirche in the center of Leipzig. As the months progressed, the crowd spilled out from the church into the neighboring plaza, numbering in the thousands. On the

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[15] Robert Gilman, "Sustainability: The State of the Movement—the essential threads of who we are and where we're going," *In Context* 25 (Spring 1990), at http://209.68.31.252/ICLIB/IC25/Gilman.htm.

Monday of the fortieth anniversary, tens of thousands of people from throughout East Germany assembled to hear Pastor Fűhrer's preaching in a nonviolent candlelight vigil at Nicolaikirche. These people gathered at great risk—well aware of the events at Tienanmen Square in Beijing six months before. But Mikhail Gorbachav in Moscow chose to show restraint as crowds continued to assemble in Leipzig and then in Berlin—where only four weeks later on November 9th the Berlin Wall came down. Circumstances had been ripe for one pastor's preaching to tip the scale of history. As the Iron Curtain crumbled, so did the Soviet Union in the months that followed. And the Monday peace prayers at Nicolaikirche continue to this day.

I was given the opportunity to visit Leipzig and to pray at Nicolaikirche this past May, just prior to my Spirituality of the Preacher class in Saint Louis. Aquinas Institute of Theology had been invited to cosponsor an academic colloquium in Leipzig with the German Dominican *Institut fűr Pastoralhomiletik* and the Office for Social Ethics of the German Bishops' Conference. Our Academic Dean, Sr. Mary Kay Oosdyke, O.P., and I were privileged to meet leading German Catholic preachers and academics engaged in dialogue about the challenges of preaching in secular Germany today. Only a small percentage of contemporary Europeans hold active church affiliation. Yet, as the Monday peace vigils at Nicolaikirche and the fall of the Berlin Wall demonstrate, preaching can be a dynamic force even in secular times—proclaiming the good news of freedom for captives and human dignity for all: indeed, preaching points to that day when God will be all in all.[16]

The preaching of Pastor Christian Fűhrer gives witness to what our colleague Christine Marie Smith calls *resurrection preaching* or *preaching as resistance.*[17] Yet another approach to proclaiming the good news of freedom for captives and human dignity for all—an approach that takes preaching, or the ministry of the Word, out of the pulpit and into the committee room—is that of consultation or dialogue.

Here again, the Bahá'í community has given leadership in its articulation of the attitudes—both virtues and deadly sins—of dialogue:[18]

> Consultation is a process of sharing thoughts and feelings through talking things out with others in an atmosphere of love and harmony with a commitment to accomplishing some definite, common purpose.

The Seven Virtues

Motive	Working for the same thing without hidden motives speeds the process along.
Spirit	Enthusiasm and a positive outlook aid in finding good solutions.
Detachment	Holding preconceived positions or answers conflicts with finding new solutions.
Attraction	Eagerness to hear the contributions of others brings forth better ideas.
Modesty	Moderation aids consultation; arrogance or patronizing undermines it.
Patience	Patience and grace under stress all of the best answers to develop.

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[16] See the Nicolaikirche homepage at www.nikolaikirche-leipzig.de/e/home/home.html.

[17] Christine M. Smith, "Preaching as an Art of Resistance," in *The Arts of Ministry*, ed. Christie Cozad Neuger (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996); Christine Smith, *Risking the Terror: Resurrection in this Life* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2001).

[18] John Kolstoe, *Developing Genius: Getting the most out of group decision-making* (Oxford: George Ronald, 1995), ISBN 085398400X: Appendix 2, 249–54. The steps are paraphrased summaries adapted from *Bahá'í Administration*, pp. 21–2.

> *Service*   An attitude of service gives priority to the group over the self.

The Seven Deadly Sins

Discord	Power plays and contention interfere with getting the best ideas.
Stubbornness	Guarantees discord and wrangling and silences the group genius.
Pride of Authorship	Ideas belong to the group. Once you present an idea, let go of it.
Discounting	Putting others or their ideas down stifles the group genius.
Advocacy	Each one should present her or his own views and not those of another.
Criticism	In or out of the meeting, this prevents decisions from proving their worth.
Dominating	Superior/subordinate roles should be set aside and ideas considered on merit. When one person wins over another, the group loses. When the group wins, there are no losers. Winning is working together.

Dialogue is a call to pluralism. In reflecting on the extraordinary Triple Dialogue of the Roman Catholic bishops of Asia—with the poor, their cultures, and their religions,[19] Peter Phan of Georgetown University speaks of dialogue as a "mode of being Church" and as a "fourfold presence": (a) The *dialogue of life*, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations. (b) The *dialogue of action*, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people. (c) The *dialogue of theological exchange*, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values. (d) The *dialogue of religious experience*, where persons, rooted in their own religious traditions, share their spiritual riches, for instance, with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute."[20]

There is a synergy and spirituality to this virtuous approach to life which actualizes an implicate order of grace. This way of life—and this good news—is worthy of our preaching.

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[19] See Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll NY: Orbis Books, 2002).
[20] Peter C. Phan, "Cultures, Religions, and Power: Proclaiming Christ in the United States Today," *Theological Studies* (2004): 714-40, 730.

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The Politics of Grace:
Developing A Trinitarian Theology of Preaching

Lucy Lind Hogan, Ph.D.
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, D.C.

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Lucy Lind Hogan, Ph.D.
Wesley Theological Seminary
Washington, D.C.

> For where two or three are gathered in my name,
> I am there among them.
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> Matthew 18:20

Theological Assumptions

In a recent essay exploring the centrality of theology in the preaching ministry, John McClure concluded his examination by turning to "the final, and perhaps most important aspect . . . 'the theology of preaching'" (McClure, 266). Preachers, McClure observed, must study and analyze, not only their congregation's operative and functional theology, but they must "assess their [the preacher's] most profound understanding of what kind of theological 'event' or transaction with God is taking place when a preacher speaks" (McClure, 266).

Professor McClure's essay echoed a similar question posed by Paul Scott Wilson in his work, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory,* published the same year, with the aim of encouraging "discussion about the agenda for homiletics and preaching in the coming years" (Wilson, 1). In a portion of the book devoted to the theological dimensions central to the homiletical discipline, Wilson, like McClure, raises the question that he believes should be central to preachers: "What theological assumptions and understandings do we as preachers bring to preaching?" (Wilson, 59) For, Wilson observes, our beliefs and understandings shape the practice of preaching which, in turn, reflexively shape our theological understanding of the preaching discipline. But, unlike McClure, who provides his readers with a broader typology of theological options, Wilson argues that only the trouble/grace structure of the theological understanding of "preaching as event" provides the preacher with an adequate theological underpinning for preaching.

The purpose of this essay is to add my voice to those of McClure and Wilson who stress the importance of theological assumptions in the practice of preaching, This paper, building on the previous century's recovery of the Trinity, is an initial attempt to offer a theology of preaching that, while complementary, proposes a broader theological understanding than the "event" theology that predominates much of the practice by developing a Trinitarian theology of preaching.

I will begin by reviewing Paul Wilson's discussion of contemporary theologies of preaching. Then, following Wilson's model, I will offer a critique of Wilson's theological approach. I will then propose, not an alternative to Wilson's theology, but this complementary theological program that is in the early stages of development.

The Eventful Word

As part of a series, "Preaching and Its Partners," in which several theological disciplines were asked to engage the practice of preaching, Paul Scott Wilson was posed the question, "Does this [theological discipline] help preaching as much as it could?" (Wilson, Preaching, 1)

Wilson's contribution, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, examines three major theoretical dimensions of preaching: biblical, theological, and pastoral. This book might be seen as a part of Wilson's larger project, that of keeping God "front and center" of preaching (Wilson, "Radical Postmodern," 230).

In the section on the theology of preaching, to answer the question, "what theological assumptions and understandings do we as preaching bring to preaching", Wilson selectively reviews and selectively critiques the theological assumptions of twentieth-century preaching theorists, with the ultimate goal of arguing for one "correct" theological approach.

Under the heading "The Eventful Word," Professor Wilson examines four theological approaches that he argues predominate in contemporary preaching: preaching as event; the performative word; preaching as transformation; and, preaching as poetic language and structure (Wilson, 59). Although it appears that Wilson is providing the reader with a broad typology, all four "vital and related emphases of contemporary theologies of preaching" are, in reality, variations on one emphasis, that of "the eventful word."

Preaching, according to Wilson, building on the theology of the reformers, and more recently Karl Barth, is to be understood as "the 'event' of the word of God itself" (Wilson, 60). While there are a variety of ways one might approach this event, at the center of this theological approach are the assumptions that: God is the ultimate preacher; preaching is to be understood and analyzed as an event; and preaching must be text based, i.e., the preacher must only and always "present the biblical text as the sermon's source" (Wilson, 99).

Wilson then, in a theological variation of a classic structuralist move, identifies the key element of a sermon as being the binary opposition of trouble and grace. Opposing the separation of form and theology, Wilson then joins with those who have argued that form is not neutral. Rather, theology should drive the form and structure of a sermon. According to Wilson, "the most significant implication for preaching as event [is] theological structure" (Wilson, 73). And, if preaching is an event, the "trouble/grace school of homiletics is perhaps the only one that is explicitly theological" (Wilson, 101). The only authentic preaching events are those characterized by this structure - the movement *from* trouble *to* grace. This tension becomes, for Wilson, the "deep grammar" of the sermon.

Challenges to Wilson

In his effort to keep God front and center of the sermon, the penultimate section of Wilson's approach to a theology of preaching prescribes a grammar of preaching – the rules for what a sermon *should do.* A sermon should, according to Wilson: "be hopeful, build up the community of faith, present the biblical text as the sermon's source," etc. (Wilson, 99) Then, in the conclusion to the chapter, Wilson invites members of the discipline to engage in a discussion of the trouble/grace school, offering a series of questions, in an effort to "help homiletics move to new ways of rendering scripture and God" (Wilson, 100). According to Wilson, identifying and improving excellence in preaching is linked to exegesis, "theological structure and theological guidelines for the sermon" (Wilson, 100).

I would like to offer several challenges to Wilson's approach. However, I do so with qualification. I will be the first person to admit that I am not the best person to judge whether Wilson's theological approach is coherent within a Reformed structure. Therefore Professor Wilson, and you, dear readers must recognize that these challenges are offered by one who

stands outside that tradition and in a tradition that is reformed but not Reformed.

First, should God be the front and center of all we say and do as preacher? Absolutely. The disagreement, however, may revolve around how that happens and what it will look like.

Second, do I think that exegesis and interpretation are crucial to the practice of preaching? Yes. But is the discipline of homiletics limited to finding "new ways of rendering scripture" (Wilson, 100)? Do we meet God when we read and hear of God's love and saving acts as recorded in the books of scripture. Yes, but those are not the only places that we meet God. We meet God when we, as the body of Christ gather as *ecclesia*. We meet God when we gather around the table to break the bread and share the wine of Eucharist. We meet God in the face of the stranger when we, in the name of Christ, offer food, water, and clothing to the least. The challenge that I would offer is that, unlike Professor Wilson, who would argue from a text-based position, I would challenge preachers to be attentive to God's actions not only in scripture, but in the world and lives of people around them.

Third, are structure and form important for preaching? Wilson will get no argument from me on that. However, do I believe that we can or should limit that structure to those of law/gospel or trouble grace? I think not. Here, I believe we begin to see a major difference, for Wilson begins always with trouble, and as I will offer in the next section, will argue that we begin with grace, God's love and God's grace.

Fourth, is there a grammar of preaching? This is a point that I am truly willing to engage in discussion. Am I willing to accept Wilson's list of sermon characteristics? Yes, as long as he is willing to accept that this is not an exhaustive list.

Wilson's theological approach focuses on the process of exegesis and the structure of the sermon. How are we to answer the question, "what is a sermon?" On that point, Wilson is clear, it is the scriptural rehearsal of the movement from trouble to grace brought to bear on our world of trouble. Professor Wilson seems to give the impression that if a preacher, using the trouble/grace hermeneutic, engages in the correct exegesis and interpretation of scripture, and employs the trouble/grace structure, the preacher will be able to produce an excellent sermon. But, is such a structuralist analysis of event helpful? Is the particular structure that Wilson has identified adequate? By stressing the linguistic, is Wilson able to adequately account for the interpersonal or inter-subjective dimension of preaching?

A number of questions remain unanswered. Who is a preacher? Apparently one who learns a particular exegetical approach and is able to apply it to a particular sermon structure. Who is the listener? One who lives in a world of trouble. And how is God involved in the sermon? Wilson does allude to the power of the Holy Spirit, but how and when that happens is left unexplored.

The Politics of Grace

There will and must always be opportunities in our preaching to explore the trouble and sin of the world. We have been called to offer cups of water and words of hope to a sin sick world. Professor Wilson is correct when he reminds us of this gospel challenge. But, building on Professor Wilson's excellent discussion and answering his call to explore the theological assumptions and understandings of a theology of preaching. Is "Eventful Preaching" the only way of keeping God "front and center" of preaching? I think not.

I would like to offer the beginnings of a Trinitarian theology of preaching. I would like to

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propose a broader, fundamental theological understanding, rooted in relationship, what I am calling *a politics of grace.*

At least since the Enlightenment, individualism and the individual have taken precedence over the social nature of the person. Whether the Cartesian *cogito*, the egoic self of German idealism, or the individual saved through a moment of acceptance of Jesus, the person has remained essentially isolated until choosing to affiliate in relationship. In political theory, John Locke might be a good example. In his book *Habits of the Heart,* Robert Bellah observes, "The essence of a Lockean position is an almost ontological individualism. The individual is prior to society, which comes into existence only through the voluntary contract of individuals trying to maximize there own self-interest" (Bellah, 143). There are echoes of this political approach in many contemporary ecclesiologies which understands the church as a voluntary organization of like-minded individuals whose goal is meeting the needs of the membership.

An older alternative philosophical tradition exists, that of Aristotle's affirmation of our sociality in the *Politics* (1252a, 1-3). More importantly, another theological tradition exists as well, one in which the individual exists always in a nexus of relationships with other persons and with God. But even more originary is the relationship within the Godhead, a relational mode of being that is so characterized by love that, in Meister Eckhart's terminology it "boils over" (*ebullitio*) in creation. And so to preach, we begin first with that self-communicating trinitarian God.

The Round Table of the Trinity

St. Patrick may have used the clover, but Andrei Rublev, the preeminent iconographer in medieval Russia, used the table to paint for us an image of the mystery of the Trinity. In one of the most famous icons of the Trinity, Rublev drew on the story of Abraham and Sarah entertaining the angels (Genesis 18) to portray within our world the relationship among the divine persons. Seated around an earthly table, Abraham's tent has become the temple of Jerusalem and oaks of Mamre the tree of life. Abraham invited the strangers to rest under the tree and so in Rublev's icon we see the three angelic figures enjoying Abraham's gracious hospitality. They are seated around the table on which Abraham has placed a chalice. Each figure looks at or gestures toward one of the other figures creating an open, circular image of the *perichoresis*, the divine dance that is God. The icon, Catherine LaCugna observes, "expresses the fundamental insight of the doctrine of the Trinity, namely, that God is not far from us but lives among us in a communion of persons" (LaCugna, "God in Communion," 84).

Recently, homiletical scholars have returned to this trinitarian table as an image of preaching. Lucy Rose wrote about preaching in the roundtable church, and John McClure described the "Round-table Pulpit." We speak, shout, praise, sing and preach because we have been created in the image of this God in communion whose grace fills the earth, and whose breath and voice bring all life into being.

> In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. Then God said; "let there be light; and there was light." (Genesis 1:1-3)

The writer of Genesis tells us that it was the very breath of God that moved over the water of chaos and separating the land from the water, the dark from the light. God spoke and trees,

flowers, fish, birds, and humans came into being. We communicate with God and with one another because of God's self-communication within God's-self and self-communication to us.

In the doctrine of the Trinity we come to know who and what God is like. As Catherine LaCugna observes, "The ultimate aim of the doctrine of the Trinity is not to produce a theory of God's self-relatedness. . . . The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to say something not only about God, or only about the recipient of the divine self-communication, but about the encounter between God and humankind and indeed with everything that exists" (LaCugna, *God For Us*, 320).

Pentecost to Trinity

At the close of the time of the New Testament, the early Christians had experienced God as *Abba*, as Christ, and as Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that after the startling events of Pentecost, those who "believed" gathered together "praising God and having the goodwill of the people" (Acts 2:47). They told of what God had done in Jesus how, though he had died, God had raised him, and how they had been sent out to continue to tell this good news. But what did it all mean? Who was this Jesus that they had known and followed? What was the relationship between Jesus and the one that he called "*Abba*"? How did the death and resurrection of Jesus brought about our salvation? While it took centuries for the early church to begin to make sense of what was meant by what we call the Trinity, by the fourth century, the trinitarian understanding of God as one nature and three persons had come to be the orthodox position.

At the Council of Nicea in 325 the church rejected Arianism and declared that Jesus Christ was God, that he was begotten, not made, of one substance with the Father. Jesus was not an intermediary or "demi-god," but was in fact God who came into the world. To speak of Jesus, who he was, what he said and did, was to speak of the transcendent God. To know Jesus was to know God. And this speaking, this reflection was made possible by the ongoing grace of God the Holy Spirit poured out into the world. Therefore, the doctrine of the Trinity declares that we know God because God makes God's self known to us through God's saving acts in the world, but especially in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity, tells us both about the *immanent* Trinity - God's eternal being and inner life, and the *economic* Trinity, salvation history and God's relationship with us.

Recovering the Fulness of the Trinity

Over the centuries more attention was paid to the immanent Trinity, to God's nature and less to the economic Trinity. Consequently, the doctrine of the Trinity came to be viewed as an abstract theological concept that had little or nothing to do with the daily, practical life of the Christian. We neglected the image of the table set in our midst.

At the urging of many major Twentieth-century theologians, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Jürgen Moltmann, the church turned a corrective eye toward the doctrine of the Trinity in order to renew and recover this understanding that is central to our identity and belief as Christians. The Trinity is not, they argued, an abstract, outdated, and outmoded thought. Rather it is the way that we are able to speak about who God is, how God acts in our world, and how God is in relationship to us, to the world. Catherine LaCugna observes:

> the affirmation of God's intimate communion with us through Jesus Christ in the Holy Spirit. As such it is an eminently practical doctrine with far-reaching

consequences for Christian life. . . . In Jesus Christ, the ineffable and invisible God saves us from sin and death; by the power of the Holy Spirit, God continues to be altogether present to us, seeking everlasting communion with all creatures. (LaCugna, *God For Us*, ix)

In other words, David Cunningham observes, "the doctrine of the Trinity postulates an integral connection between God's own character and God's relationship to the world" (Cunningham, *These Three*, 57). It is this character and this relationship that shapes who we are and what we do as preachers.

What does it mean to say that God is one nature and three persons? What are some of the characteristics of God with which we have been reacquainted by a revitalized theology of the Trinity? How do these characteristics shed light on our role as grace-filled and therefore graceful communicators? There are many, but three are central – relationality, mutuality, and participation.

Relationality

Many of us live in cultures that celebrate and prize autonomy and independence. Whether we ground that understanding in Descartes', "*Cogito ergo sum,"* or Frank Sinatra - "I did it my way;" our sense of personal freedom and self-reliance take priority over all relationships - with God or with our family, friends, and neighbors. Paul spoke of the church as the body, and each of us as the separate but necessary parts. He understood that I might be an eye within the body of the church, necessary, but without the hand or foot or others, I could not function. Today, we prefer to think of ourselves as a full, complete human beings who join with other full, complete human beings. The church is viewed more as a collection of separate, finite individuals who come together by choice rather than a community that comes together out of necessity because they need other. Do we understand that we *need* to be in relationship in order to be whole and complete? Rather than "doing it our way," what if we are to do it *God's way*?

To speak of God as three persons in one communal relationship is to speak of difference. The Father is different from the Son, and they are each different from the Spirit. They are each the distinct, unique "other". And yet, they are in a relationship of oneness. In this relationship, Elizabeth Johnson notes, "Relationality is the principle that at once constitutes each trinitarian person as unique and distinguishes one from another" (Johnson, 216).

In the Eastern Church's understanding of the Trinity, being in relationship was the "supreme characteristic of God" (LaCugna, "God in Communion, 91). In the *immanent* Trinity, therefore, the Father was understood to be a full and complete "person" but only when understood to be in community, in relation to the Son and to the Spirit, "the three divine persons mutually inhere in one another, draw life from one another, 'are' what they are by relation to one another" (LaCugna, *God For Us*, 270-271). If we think back to Rublev's icon of the Trinity, there are three divine beings sitting about the table, but to remove one would not leave an empty space at the table, it would remove the entire being.

Rublev drew on the image of the table, but early Greek Father's referred to this relationality as the *perichoresis* of the Trinity. Close to the Greek word for dancing in a circle, the use of this word presents us with an image of Father, Son, and Spirit in a dynamic, transcendent, self-giving, self-receiving "divine dance."

As preachers, we are engaged in the same kind of dance. As Martin Buber put it, "In the

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beginning is the relation" (Buber18). Our lives as preachers are informed by the reality that we are not individuals who choose to be in relationships, but rather we preach the Word in a milieu in which relationships with God and other persons – even when they are estranged – are in the foreground. But what else do we learn about our lives as communicators from the Trinity?

Mutuality

What is the character of the relationship among these three different divine persons? It is not just enough to say that they are in relationship. As David Cunningham observes, there are very different degrees and qualities of relationships (Cunningham, 165). Some are deep and long lasting, others superficial, and some are abusive. To say that individuals are in relationship does not tell us enough. The doctrine of the Trinity declares that the divine persons are in a relationship of radical equality and mutuality.

A principal argument in the development of the doctrine of the Trinity revolved around the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. As we noted earlier, Arius (whose ideas were eventually declared heretical) taught that the Father was superior to the Son. But, as Cunningham goes on to note, "One of the central claims of classical trinitarianism is that the Three are radically equal to one another; none is in a position of superiority over the others" (Cunningham, 111).

It is difficult for us, I believe, to imagine what that looks like and what it means to live in such a relationship. By applying the terms Father and Son to the different persons of the Trinity we imply a hierarchical relationship. I certainly knew, when I was growing up, that I was <u>not</u> in a relationship of "radical equality" when my mother or father asked me to do something that I didn't want to do - mow the lawn or clean my room. We value autonomy and individual freedom, yet we also live in a world that compares and contrasts our autonomy to that of those autonomous others. Some are our superiors, others are our inferiors. Consequently, our thinking is challenged when it comes to the Trinity.

In spite of the fact that we speak about the Trinity in terms of the parental-filial relationship or numerically as the first, second, and third persons of the Trinity, theirs is a relationship of co-equality. The persons of the Trinity join in the divine dance where all are equal - no one person leads and no one follows. Elizabeth Johnson observes, "They are coequal in divinity, greatness, and love. . . There is no subordination, no before, or after, no first, second, and third, no dominant and marginalized. . . .The trinitarian symbol intimates a community of equals" where difference flourishes and does not exclude or threaten the relationship (Johnson, 219).

This image of a discipleship of equals also makes a difference for preachers and pastors who understand their responsibilities speakers and hearers within the community of faith. Relationality and mutuality recognize that the authentic differences among persons, their sometimes enriching and challenging otherness, are part of the communicative structure within which preachers are called to engage in their task.

Participation

Another way of envisioning the relationality of the Trinity is the concept of participation. The persons of the Trinity "participate" with one another in a profound way. It is not just the idea of taking part in or working along side someone. Rather, as David Cunningham suggests, "I

am interested in those instances in which we take part, not in some*thing*, but in some*one* - an *other*. . . dwelling in, and being indwelt by, one another" (Cunningham, 166). Each person of the Trinity dwells in and is indwelt by the other persons of the Trinity. It is a deep relationship of communion and fellowship that characterizes not only the *immanent* Trinity - God's self, but our relationship with God as well, the *economic* Trinity. God invites humanity to join in the dance.

Rather than dancing, perhaps we should use the image of juggling when envisioning the participation in and with the Trinity - the juggling of radically different things. How do we combine things that are different so that they are all equal and are able to exist in unity? How can we speak of a God who is omnipotent, transcendent, eternal, and at the same time, Emmanuel, God with us? "The Beyond and the Intimate," Ted Peters notes, is a challenge at the center of our relationship with God. How, he asks, are we to hold together "God's eternity and the world's temporality. To know God as only the eternal one beyond time is not enough. We need to know God also as intimate," as God with us (Peters, 19).

We know that intimate God in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that God in the Spirit who dwells with us, even until the end of time. We know that we have been invited by the living and loving God to participate in this relationship of mutual equality. The incarnation of the Word demonstrates that God dwells not only within God, but within us, "It would be hard to imagine a more thoroughgoing instance of mutual participating between humanity and God. . . . [And] the significance of the incarnation is precisely its revelation of a more intimate relationship between God and human beings than was ordinarily thought possible" (Cunningham, 181-182). As preachers, we participate in the intimacy of that relationship of the Trinitarian persons among themselves and with us. Pastors genuinely participate in the lives of those around them, and their preaching is part of that participation.

And so we lift our voices to praise the God who has created , redeems, and sustains us. We declare that God is three persons in one nature, in one joyous, divine dance, and that we have not only been created in the image of this dancing, loving, God, but we have been invited to participate in this life of radical, mutually in-dwelling equality. The doctrine of the Trinity grounds everything we are, everything we do, and everything we say. It, therefore, is the grounding for our theology of preaching.

Portions of this paper will appear in a planned textbook of preaching to be published by Westminster John Knox Press.

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Theological Concepts in Empirical Homiletics

F. Gerrit Immink & Theo Pleizier

Utrecht University
The Netherlands

1. Introduction

Homiletics is a theory of practice. As a theological theory it not only deals with inter-human discourse and psycho-social processes. Although rhetoric, social sciences and the humanities are essential to the discipline, homiletics nevertheless remains a theological discipline. It has the intention, for example, to describe and analyse the preaching event in terms of the divine – human relationship, or in terms of the formation of faith and the administration of salvation, or in view of the formation of a new humanity and the kingdom to come. Preaching sets free for a new life in the world. '[I]t opens to us salvific new life and discloses the reality of God-toward-us', so Buttrick argues.[1] Recent research shows that listeners and preachers alike think that God is somehow involved in preaching. Some are quite certain that God is doing something between the words the preacher speaks and the listener, while others are more insecure and hesitant.[2] This awareness of the divine presence and the experience of grace as part of the homiletical interaction cannot be ignored in homiletics.

The view that homiletics is a theological theory does not necessarily imply a turn to the deductive and normative paradigm. Homiletics is not a sub-discipline of systematic theology, neither of biblical studies. Theories of practice deal with concrete religious practices and since these practices are embodied in the human realm, practices can also be studied as a social phenomenon and a human product. For that reason theological theories of practice mostly have an intra-disciplinary structure: in these theories theology cooperates with the social sciences, the humanities and practical philosophy. This relationship can be considered in different ways.[3] Some argue that sociology and psychology study practices in terms of the human construction of meaning, while theology conceives reality in terms of our human dependence upon God. There may be some sort of dialectic between the two, but they cannot really be related. Others, Browning for example, hold that theology is hermeneutical and must be seen as a religious *interpretation* of the human realm.[4] We can, however, also consider practical theology as *empirical theology*, that is, as *a theological theory that describes and analyses empirical phenomenon with theological concepts*. In this paper we will develop this position. The first part (1 –4) deals with the more theoretical questions and the second part (5 – 9) with empirical research in homiletics.

2. Empirical Theology

Empirical theology focuses on concrete religious practices (with the help of empirical methods), yet in a theoretical framework in which theological concepts structure both the research question and the observation, description and analysis. Consequently, practical theologians must look for theological concepts which fit the practice under reconstruction. That is, concepts which are somehow near to the practice and inherent in the "rationality" of

[1] David Buttrick, *Homiletic. Moves and structures*, London: SCM Press 1987, 451
[2] Mary Alice Mulligan, Diane Turner-Sharazz, e.a. (eds.), *Believing in Preaching. What Listeners Hear in Sermons*, St. Louis: Chalice Press 2005, 161-167
[3] Johannes A. Van der Ven, "Practical Theology: From Applied to Empirical Theology", Journal of Empirical Theology (1), 1988,17-18
[4] Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991

the practice itself. As we see it, the theological concepts must be loosely related to three major structural elements of religious practices: (a) the realm of the human mind, (b) inter-human discourse, (c) and institutional aspects of religion. Why so? With respect to (a), we hold that the *intentionality* of the human mind and the *relationality* of the human self are fundamental categories in anthropology. Since human beings are constitutive in practices, theological concepts must more or less fit these notions. With respect to (b) we think that d*iscourse* is structural to the human condition. Likewise language and ritual are fundamental categories in religious practices. Further, discourse and communion bring forth institutional settings as well, and these settings are quite relevant for the maintenance and transmission of the Christian practice.

Let us assume that *discourse* is a key concept in religious practices. From the perspective of discourse we can both apprehend the functioning of the human mind as well as the social institutions. Schleiermacher in particular was aware of the fact that discourse is at the heart of religious practices. Although he locates religion primarily in the landscape of the heart, he nonetheless emphasizes the fact that religion is a social practice and is expressed in mutual communication. The dialectic of (re)*presentation* and *reception*, 'Darstellung' in terms of 'Productivität und Emphänglichkeit' is central to practices.[5]

Hence, theological theories of practice must, in order to cooperate with non-theological theories, explore theological concepts which loosely fit the above mentioned dimensions of religious practices. This does not mean that these theological concepts must be translated into psychological or sociological categories, or into the language of discourse analysis. There remains a non-identity between the different conceptualizations because they function in different theories and presuppose a different ontology in the field of research. Nonetheless, the theological concepts must somehow refer to discourse-related facts or processes.

3. The theology – practice relation
Let us first re-evaluate the role of theology in theories of practice. We hold that in addition to the normative and hermeneutical approach, we have to work on a third dimension: *theological conceptualization*. Homiletics is a theory *of* practice, not only *for* practice.

(a) First we look shortly at the *normative* component. Since theories of practice are dealing with concrete practices (as social realities) they promote human flourishing and are concerned with justice and peace. In this sense practical sciences might be considered to be *normative* sciences: they intend to contribute to a common good. A theological theory of practice formulates the greater good in religious language. Judgements about the "greater good" can be formulated in teleological terms, for example "the kingdom of God", but also in deontological terminology, for example as a divine command.[6] Theories of practice can also be normative in a more technical sense: they intend to regulate and improve practices. Since practices are theory and value-laden, theories of practice are quite important for the good functioning of practices. Schleiermacher, for example, holds that practical theology deals with that kind of practice or agency for which we can formulate rules ('ein *Handeln* in der Kirche …wofür sich Regeln darstellen lassen').[7] These rules are embedded in a theory that has a practical aim, it construes a 'Technik zur Erhaltung und Vervollkommung der Kirche' (PT, 25). Just because religion as such is so deeply anchored in the emotional en passionate layers of the human self, it is important to express and communicate it orderly and

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[5] See F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith. A Practical Theological Reconstruction*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2005, 138-155
[6] Richard J. Mouw, *The God Who Commands. A Study in Divine Command Ethics*, Notre Dame 1990
[7] Friedrich Schleiermacher, Praktische Theologie, 27

appropriate ('Gemüthsbewegungen in die Ordnung einer besonnenen Thätigkeit zu bringen').[8]

(b) The *hermeneutical* component has been flourishing the last decades. In the dialectic of continuity and change hermeneutical theories emerged. Especially in the second half of the 20th century rapid changes took place within the western world: secularization and religious pluralism. Religious practices were considered to be part of an ongoing process in the development of humanity. Hermeneutical theories address the issue of identity through time: what is the relevance of that what is handed over from tradition in our present time? Don Browning is a good representative of this approach. Descriptive theology focuses on a particular area of practice, on what is actually going on, and this, he says, 'inevitably leads to a fresh confrontation with the normative texts and monuments of the Christian faith – the sources of the norms of practice'.[9] So, crises in practices call for an empirical description and in view of a transformation of these practices we stand in the need of a new reflection on the normative sources of these practices. It turns out that in Browning's approach the description is mainly performed with the help of the social sciences, while the theological point of view resides in hermeneutics: the present re-interpretation of normative texts. It is primarily this normative perspective (arising form Scripture and tradition) that turns the hermeneutical approach into a theological theory. Religious practices are not primarily described and analysed by means of theological concepts, rather changes and developments in practices are described with the help of the social sciences and interpreted and evaluated with the help of theological criteria.

(c) We hold that theological theories of practice have a deeper theological structure. As theories of practice offer insight in how practices function, so a theological theory provides *theological concepts* in terms of which the description and analysis of religious practices (as theory laden practices) take place. A theological theories of practice cannot describe and analyse practices solely in terms of social or psychological theories. They have to address the life of faith involved and they have to deal with the specific religious truth claims of religious communities. Van der Ven argues that practical theology investigates practices in the 'perspective of transcendence (i.e. the perspective of religion, especially the Christian faith)'.[10] Although this may be rather vague (*Transcendence – religion – Christian faith*), these concepts turn our attention to that what theology is about. Hermans holds that practical theology deals with: 'the human being as actor in relationship to God or an ultimate reality'.[11]

   Theories of practice pursue knowledge and truth. No doubt, theories are to some extent *reconstructions* of reality. They use specific concepts and these concepts are put in a theoretical framework. Although theories of practice are directed toward concrete practices, they remain nonetheless theoretical constructs. Furthermore, theories are contextual, not objective in an absolute sense. Theories of practice, so Jennifer Mason argues, imply ontological perspectives (what's the nature of the phenomena) and epistemological positions (how do we know, how do we have access).[12] By developing theories to comprehend

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[8] In recent practical theology the action theory paradigm has contributed to the academic status of this type of theories of practice. Johannes A. van der Ven & Michael Scherer-Rath (Eds.), *Normativity and Empirical Research in Theology*, Leiden: Brill 2004, 126

[9] Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1991, 49

[10] Van der Ven & Scherer, *Normativity and Empirical Research*, 127

[11] This perspectivistic approach suggests that the divine is only indirectly an object of practical theological reflection and analysis. See for a critical discussion F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith*, 188-190

[12] Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative researching*, 14-17

practices, we at the same time partake of a discourse on what religion, church and faith actually are.

Theology, as we see it, has to do with the way in which we speak of the divine. The truth of the matter concerns *the human in relationship to God*. No doubt, theologians construe the relationship in different ways. They differ in opinion about the character of the relationship. Can we, for example, really understand it in terms of a relationship? Let alone a reciprocal relationship? So all kind of truth claims are involved. Propositions about the character of the relationship, about religious experiences, about God and revelation, et cetera.

4. Theology indispensable

Homiletics has to deal with religious experience and discourse as constitutive factors in the homiletical interaction. This also includes the notion of revelation, although revelation is closely related to experience. It is experience in a qualified sense, for it tells something about the character of the experience. Revelation is an experience perceived as a disclosure, a self-disclosure of God, which is somehow appropriated by the person who receives it. He who reveals himself is understood as an active agent – an agent who does something deliberately. According to Old Testament scholar Brueggemann God is acting 'powerfully, decively, and transformatively' in the life of Israel and the world. 'God is the party who holds the initiative and who characteristically acts on the other party'.[13] So, a revelation is an experience brought about deliberately and, at least in part, for the sake of knowledge which is the experiencing person to gain, or for the sake of action, or for a new insight.

Theological theories of practice investigate how believers practice their faith in the midst of modernity, and how religious communities administer and communicate the divine involvement. It is not primarily about opinions and beliefs, but about how communities of belief encounter the divine. Qualitative empirical research can help to outline the practice of *communion with God*. Three things are important in this type of research.

1. What does it mean to observe or approach the domain of practice theologically. What is: *theologische Wahrnehmung*?[14] It is a specific way of dealing with the human realm, namely in terms of an *ontology of religion*. We take for granted that within the human realm there is a possible manifestation of the divine. Or, we take for granted that human beings experience / perceive / become aware of a work or practice of God. These works, evidences, signs, revelations, insights, voices, are hermeneutically ambivalent. Their reference to God needs an act of discernment. This is in particular true since religious experience and knowledge is mediated by (objects, persons, processes in) created reality. Since works of God take place in the phenomenal world, some kind of human judgment and appropriation is involved in order to discern that God is at work. Therefore, in a *practice of discernment* believers come to hold that God is involved.[15] If this is true, then theological observation takes for granted that religious practices embody human practices in which the dynamic presence and activity of God is experienced and recognized.

2. Practical theology needs a theoretical framework in which the relevant *theological concepts* are generated. A theological theory of practice must conceptualize the religious realm in such a way that it does justice both to human experience and to the truth of the Gospel. Truth claims should not be put into brackets, but expressed in concepts which fit real life. Unlike the social sciences, practical theology cannot ignore *the alleged dynamic relation between God and humanity* as being part of the religious practice. Consequently it is

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[13] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 125

[14] cf. Wolf-Eckart Failing, Hans-Günter Heimbrock, *Gelebte Religion wahrnehmen. Lebenswelt – Alltagskultur – religionspraxis*, Stuttgart 1998, 11-36

[15] Richard Robert Osmer, *The teaching ministry of congregations*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press 2005, 43-56

important that practical theologians are well-trained in theological anthropology, soteriology and ecclesiology.

In his book *Faith*, F. Gerrit Immink argues that the concept of faith is central to Christian practices, in particular in the Protestant tradition. Faith implies on the one hand the involvement of the human subject and on the other hand a dynamic relationship with God. Divine activity and human experience, external Word and indwelling Spirit go hand in hand. Theological concepts which express divine involvement (like faith does) and which at the same time relate to the human realm help us to describe religious practices theologically. Faith relates to dispositions of trust and distrust, acts of loyalty and disloyalty, in which psychological and social worlds converge.[16] Human intentionality and social relations are presupposed. Likewise faith is a gift of grace. The Reformation underscores this in the expression 'the justification of the sinner', which means that ultimately salvation is a divine work, an *imputation* of the righteousness of Christ.[17]

3. The theological reconstruction of practices of faith assumes the generation of new concepts and the formulation of theory. New theoretical insights concerning the actual practice of preaching contribute to the development of homiletics as academic discipline. In the following part, we illustrate how an integrated theological and empirical approach functions in a research project on sermon reception. We argue that the discovery of abstract concepts, grounded in the actual listening experience, provide us with empirically relevant and theologically adequate links between practice and reflection. One of the newly discovered concepts is `cultivation of faith'. During the preaching event faith is cultivated, either serendipitously, without any active intervention by the audience, or by way of active involvement of the listener. The concept `cultivation of faith' illustrates how in the course of empirical research, theological concepts are discovered and used to reconstruct the practice of sermon reception. This takes place according to received methodological standards. The formation of theory is one of the chief objectives of empirical homiletics.

5. Grounded Theory and empirical homiletics

In Utrecht our PhD-program in practical-theology is in particular concerned with developing theological concepts and theories to reconstruct practices of faith. Though we do not deny the importance of strategic questions motivated by the desire to improve church ministries and practices, the main concern of our program lies with faith-as-it-is-lived. Characteristic for our program is a scholarly commitment to a realist conception of theological language. Within this program we have a wide variety of projects, ranging from a project that studies the awareness of God among young people to several projects in the field of homiletics. One of the latter concerns the study of sermon reception. In this project, of which this paper presents some results, we study the preaching event as complex inter-human communicative practice embedding the living voice of God.

Our research aims at the development of a theoretical reconstruction of the practice of listening, the formation of empirical-theological theory. Therefore, we need a methodology that is developed to meet this objective and that is apt to process a broad variety of phenomena that reveal aspects of the practice of listening. A qualitative approach will satisfy this criterion more adequate than a quantitative, mainly statistically orientated method of research.[18] Reception research in homiletics started some decades ago on the European continent with the quantitative study of listeners. How do they retain the preached message

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[16] Cf. Richard H. Niebuhr, *Faith on Earth. An Inquiry into the Structure of Human Faith*, New Haven: Yale University Press 1989

[17] See Immink, *Faith*, 73-89

[18] For differences and overlap between qualitative and quantitative approaches in the empirical sciences, see John W. Creswell, *Research Design. Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches*, Second ed. (London, 2002).

and how is their hearing-behaviour connected to background variables such as age, gender, social status, and religious commitment.[19] The complexity of the field, however, asks for a more qualitative and explorative approach, with in-dept interviewing rather than survey-research. Ronald Allen's project `Listening to Listener's'[20] is a recent example of a qualitative study of sermon reception. Its thrust is to listen to the voice of those who are silent during the service and they provide a huge amount of valuable insights for preachers to enter into a conversation with their listeners.

Because the generation of theory and conceptual categories is the main thrust of our empirical approach, we have adopted the methodology developed by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, known as *Grounded Theory* (GT).[21] Its objective is to construct a fitting, working, relevant and modifiable theory[22], empirically grounded in actual practices. According to Barney Glaser, a theory fits the substantive area when the concepts `adequately express the pattern in the data which it purports to conceptualize'.[23] For our practical-theological study of the sermonic audience this entails that we aim at producing a conceptual reconstruction that adequately expresses *theologically* what listeners are talking about when they report their listening experiences.

6. The cycle of research
The actual research takes three steps: conceptualisation, collection and coding. These steps are repeated until a theory emerges, a network of relationships between empirically grounded concepts that fit the substantive area of research.

We start the study of formation of faith in the preaching event with a loose conceptualisation of the field, so called `sensitizing-concepts'. The notions *faith*, *homiletic discourse* and *divine-human dynamic* help the researcher to sensitize to the field of study. First, faith denotes the relationship to God, its actualisation in life and practicing through individual and corporate activities such as prayer, worship and acts of justice. Second, homiletic discourse refers to the inter-human communicative event in preaching. Speaking and listening in the context of corporate worship is a discourse practice and creates a shared consciousness of the gospel of Christ. Thirdly, the notion `divine-human dynamic' focuses the researcher upon the purported activity of God, his presence in discourse, his Word coming alive in preaching. These three concepts guide the formulation of the research problem: *How is the dynamic between God and humanity mediated in the inter-human realm of homiletic discourse*? Though this question is put in conceptual terms, these starting-concepts are only loose pointers that direct the attention of the researcher; they make explicit the theory-ladeness of the practice of listening.[24]

In the second step the data are collected or generated. For our project we conduct in-depth interviews with a broad sample of listeners. A qualitative sample does not need to be representative, since theory-formation does not concern itself with quantification and statistics, but is guided by the need to discover concepts and departs from the sensitizing

[19] See for instance the Dutch study, Johannes Gerardus Maria Sterk, *Preek en toehoorders. Sociologische exploratie onder katholieke kerkgangers in de Bondsrepubliek Duitsland.* (Nijmegen, 1975). For an American study, see Lori Carrell, *The Great American Sermon Survey* (Wheaton, 2000).

[20] Chalice Press (St. Louis) published four volumes between 2004 and 2005. See also Allen's paper for the Academy: Ronald Allen and Mary Alice Mulligan, "Report to the Academy On 'Listening to the Listeners'. A Study of How People Listen to Sermons," in *Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics. 37th Meeting (1965-2002). Preaching and Resurrection (unpublished)* (Boston, MA, 2002).

[21] See for its basic textbook: Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Strategies for Qualitative Research* (Chicago, 1967).

[22] Barney G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory. Issues and Discussions* (Mill Valley, 1998). p. 17..

[23] Ibid. pp. 18-19.

[24] The status of sensitizing concepts has divided Grounded Theory-researchers into two camps. Those who side Glaser are most anxious not to force the data with preconceived theoretical notions, see Barney G. Glaser, *Basics of Grounded Theory Analysis. Emergence vs. Forcing* (Mill Valley, 1992).

concepts.[25] In the first phase, we started collecting five interviews, distributed rather intuitively according to gender, age and affiliation. Hence, two man and three women; two between 25 and 35; two between 35 and 55 and one older than 65. All of them are regular churchgoers; two of them had a different religious orientation than the church they belong to now. The five listeners belong to two different congregations in the Protestant Church of the Netherlands. Two participate in a mainstream protestant church; three belong to an orthodox brand of Reformed theology. The hypothesis is that these listeners represent different experience though they participate in the same practice, being hearers of the Word. To discover the concern of listeners during the preaching event we ask them two questions. First, what do you expect that will happen during the preaching moment? Second, did listening to this sermon satisfy you? These two questions induce a narrative concerning the actual reception of the sermon in this listener.[26]

The final step in the cycle of research concerns the analysis of the data, the analytic coding-procedures. Though vital, the first two steps are merely preparatory for the actual process of building concepts and theory. The interview is cut into fragments, each being coded with a new, tentative concept or category. Codes such as `performance of the preacher', `receptivity of the listener', `awareness of God' are generated by comparing these fragments. An illustration will help to get a more concrete picture of what grounding theory is like, so let's turn to some research results.

7. Cultivation of faith

What is actually happening in the pews when people listen to a sermon? What do they tell us when we focus upon the aspect of the formation of faith? When asked what she expects what will happen in the event of preaching, Caroline, a 25 year old women replies:

> `Perhaps, I think, that I wish to hear about the Lord Jesus. That is what makes listening to a sermon valuable for me. I would like to understand how the text of the bible is related to Jesus and what he has done. (…) So, I would like being taught, you know. On the other hand, you need to hear it, even if it is not something entirely new, so that you do not doze off. That you start thinking, well, that's it, I think I know it all… Yes, I do go to church to be taught about the bible. And it makes me happy when I hear about Jesus. That's the gospel that's not supposed to be missing. Actually, that is why I do it. That's giving me joy.' (Fragment 1, Caroline)

This listener is talking about a lot of things. From a discourse point of view, she uses cognitive language (being taught from the Scriptures) and affective language (a feeling of happiness). Concerning the shared intentionality that is build during the communicative event, she refers to the Scriptures, not just as texts in themselves, but in their ability to disclose to her who Jesus is. The sermon is the means for making the Scriptures alive and to point to Christ. She talks about Jesus and getting to know more about or from him. Though it is not very clear from this passage whether this knowledge is merely cognitive, clearly the joy she experiences is an emotional response.

We can go on like this for a while, offering interpretations, wondering what she might have meant by some phrases, what is hidden between the lines etc. Our goal however is not to produce a thick description, the result of a careful hermeneutical enterprise, as if this listener is an object of a case study. Rather, the aim is to construct conceptual categories that reflect upon what goes on in the formation of faith through preaching. These concepts and categories transcend the individual cases. Thus, coding is theorizing about the actual

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[25] See Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (London, 1996). for qualitative sampling; Glaser: Theoretical Sampling, see Barney G. Glaser, *Theoretical Sensitivity*, Advances in the Methodology of Grounded Theory (San Francisco, 1978).
[26] For narrative inducing interviewing see Tom Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing. Biographic Narrative and Semi-Structured Methods* (London, 2001)..

interview discourse to reach a more abstract level. I propose the following four categories: *understanding the Scriptures, acquiring knowledge of Christ, keeping the faith* and *enjoying the presence of Christ.* These concepts thus generated have indicators in other fragments in the interview, as well as in interviews with other people.

Let us take another concrete example and listen to different voice. This man, let's say Ronald, is in his late sixties and belongs to another spiritual brand in the Protestant Church of the Netherlands. Earlier in the interview, he talked about preaching as `practicing religion'. The interviewer wishes to understand what the respondent is talking about:

> `Well, that again and again I am comparing myself to and trying out, the life that Christ lived, why he eventually was crucified, and how that actually was a very injust and horrible deed, indeed. But is gives me an impression that in this earthly life, in the course of life, we can only approximately live such a life, almost asymptotic as I would say. (…) Testing, yes, trying out. So, what is the preacher saying, what is he reading, o, really is that what he takes from Scriptures? O, yes. I need to read it over again. I always try to simplify it.' (Fragment 2, Ronald)

This listener has a background in Christian Scientism before he joined the Reformed Church at a certain occasion when his marriage was going through a severe crisis. His spiritual journey is totally different than Caroline's, but this does not impinge upon our program to generate abstract concepts that theoretically transcends the individual cases. So we compare fragment 2 to fragment 2. Do we find concepts that already were there in fragment 1? Two of them reappear in Ronald's story: *understanding the Scriptures* and *acquiring knowledge of Christ.* The concept *keeping the faith* that we generated in the previous fragment, however, does not seem to be capturing what is at stake in Ronald's account. Fragment 2 gives ample evidence to generate a new concept, namely *living up to the life of Christ.* The knowledge of Christ is set in the framework of the *imitatio Christi*, and the Scriptures provide us with a paradigm narrative to test our own life of faith.

The comparison of Caroline's and Ronald's reports generates tentative ideas about the possible relationships between the emerging categories. First, the pattern of acquiring knowledge of Christ *by means of* understanding the Scriptures *through* what the preacher is saying is prevalent for both listeners. These listeners are using the sermon to get access to the Scriptures in order to get to know Christ. A next pattern is that the knowledge of Christ is not just a piece of information that is nice to know, they both express how knowing Christ is relevant to the life of faith. But here, they also exhibit two different dimensions. Caroline talks more about the *ritual representation of Christ*. Listening to a sermon is a means for *keeping the faith* and in sitting and listening she is *enjoying the presence of Christ.* So, keeping faith and the joy that she experiences in listening - the feeling of happiness she talks about, give the practice of listening an intrinsic value. Ronald, on the other hand, is more concerned with a *reflective representation of Christ*. Listening to a sermon generates a process of reflection that consists in comparing one's own life to that of Christ. The representation of Christ through the sermon calls to *live up to Christ's life.*

These conceptual bits and pieces prompt us to look for one category that adequately covers the concepts we have generated this far to transcend to more abstract theoretical level and which accounts for the variation we encounter in the data. Listening to a sermon seems to be about the *cultivation of faith.* The people in the pew are relating the sermon to their own life of faith, which means, that their faith in Christ is invoked, critically examined in the light of the sermon or enjoyed during listening to the sermon. Two concepts emerged in comparing the fragments 1 and 2. They account for variation within cultivation of faith: there is a *ritual dimension* to cultivation of faith, just to be there, sitting and listening, enjoying the substance of the gospel, realising that this is what makes it true to be here. There is also a *reflective*

dimension to cultivation of faith. Listening is partly a moment of self-criticism: do I live up to Christ?

8. Revelatory moment
Besides the concept `cultivation of faith', another category is being generated that expresses a pattern in the data and points to the dynamic of divine activity. A *revelatory moment* is a moment in listening to the sermon in which the listener becomes aware of God's presence, a moment of his self-disclosure in the event of preaching. This moment of *illumination* is characterised by a high level of involvement on the part of the listener.

Although contemporary homiletics stresses that the audience is actively involved in creating meaning, there is a passive aspect to illumination. Listeners report that they *become involved*. Two properties appear in the data that specify this becoming involved in this moment of illumination. First, it there is a phenomenal element of *awareness of God*, in which the life in the here and now is transcended, put into perspective. It generates a feeling of basic trust `everything will be all right'; it comes with a new seeing, the experience of being put into another dimension beyond the trivialities of life. The language in which respondents starts to talk is phenomenal, affective, rather than reflective. The sermon does not merely provides new knowledge or makes old knowledge alive, but produces `new seeing' beyond the mere cognitive functioning of the mind. It creates a sacred moment.

Second, the revelatory moment also has a component, *focussing the listener's intentionality to God*. The listener starts to think about what is being said of God in relation to her own life. She reports back how God accepts her, despite `me not living according to the rules' (a 35-year old woman). The sermon prompts the listener to think about her life in relation to God, which causes an important religious insight: divine acceptance in spite of human failure. Though it is not a full blown account or definition of justification, it hints at least to what in Reformed theology the justification of the sinner is about: sin is not a hindrance for God to freely accept a human being; she is ensured that she counts, despite sin and an imperfect life.

9. Theory formation
The next step is to compare the newly generated concepts `cultivation of faith' and `revelatory moment' with new data. Do they the field adequately? Can we discover new dimensions or properties? Further, we can ask a whole series of new research questions:
1. Is there a conceptual relationship between cultivation of faith and the revelatory moment? Does one causes the other, are they consequential or phases in a broader process?
2. Does cultivation of faith requires active intervention on the part of the listener, or does it happen serendipitously?
3. Is cultivation of faith an individual concept or does it also apply to the audience as a whole? What about the `revelatory moment', is it an individual experience or does it have a communal dimension as well?
4. How does the `revelatory moment' relate to the performance of the preacher, the liturgical context, the conditions of the listener?

Finding new concepts also generate new questions to research. These questions call for new conceptualisation, both substantial and formal. A new cycle of collecting data, comparing, coding and conceptualisation starts. Research generates new research. Rather than just being an instrument for strategic change and advice to preachers to improve their preaching, empirical homiletics is a means for discovering new theological insights. To pursue research

for the sake of acquiring insight in the rationality of corporate and individual practices of faith is an exciting enterprise in itself!

A Spirituality Made in China

Peter Lovrick
Professor Gregory Heille, O.P., Advisor
Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri

When the Jesuit Matteo Ricci went to China in the sixteenth century to preach the Gospel, he shaved his head and wore the habit of a Buddhist monk. Later, he dressed as a Confucian scholar. He wanted to bring the Gospel and western science to China packaged in familiar terms. This approach also made a statement about the validity of Chinese spiritual and philosophical insights. Much of my own spirituality and preaching practice derive from my experience in China. I am a convert from the Chinese mission field. My first confession and communion, my confirmation, and my marriage were not in the North American context where I was born and raised. My first experience as a member of the Church was set in Taiwan against a background of Buddhism and Confucianism, both of which I found very appealing. These great traditions have given me many interpretive keys for experience and provided insights into my own faith. I went to Taiwan in 1978 to teach and then to work in an educational television studio. Religion was not a priority for me at the time. It was not long, however, before it broke into my life and became an important force. It started with the Buddhists.

The witness of Buddhists against the ways the rest of us were living was striking. Their lives seemed firmly orientated to a reality beyond the material. Peering into a spiritual world made distinct differences in their lives. For the most part, they seemed to be peaceful, unhurried and compassionate. Intrigued, I made several pilgrimages to temples on the tops of mountains. In them, I witnessed rows of shaven-headed nuns or monks as they walked in a serpentine pathway in the main hall, chanting to the deep sounds of the large wooden fish and the resonant clear brass bowl struck at various points in their prayer. The Buddhists taught me the importance of mystery. They showed me that mystery creates awe and awe opens one up to the possibilities of the spirit that underlie what our senses take in. Everything I encountered in those places—the sacred art, liturgy, music, and monastic life—pointed to a reality that would not let me ignore it. It was my first experience of how precious religious practice really is as a vehicle to an incalculably rich dimension of the spirit. From the Buddhists I learned to value a liturgy of mystery, which is at the same time sensuous and otherworldly. It was through the smell of the rising incense, the sound of chant, and the fantastic temple art that my soul was lifted up.

But there was a turning point. On one of my many expeditions to a mountaintop temple, I was stunned and troubled by an engraving in Chinese characters across the top of the temple door: "There is no god in heaven." Something withered in me. I felt adrift. The form and practice of the faith had lifted me up; yet the content of it, or at least this part of it, was not finding its way as part of my spirituality. Their religious practice had great appeal. Yet, my spirituality needed to be directed outside of myself to a personal God.

It was then that I discovered Confucianism. Though I had dismissed it earlier as a collection of pithy sayings around social etiquette, an elaborate ritual at a Confucian shrine changed all that. Suddenly, I saw a tradition involving a way of thinking and living that stretched back over two and a half millennia. Social etiquette was at the outer ridge of that tradition, but at its center were questions of goodness. The spirituality of Confucianism was based, I learned, on a search for what it means to be fully human and, in particular, on finding out the will of what they called "Heaven" for humanity. I wanted to find out what they had discovered.

A Fundamental Question

Ancient Chinese philosophers considered one question to be of the utmost importance: is a human being basically good or basically evil? The answer to that question determines a worldview and a spirituality. Confucians debated this issue with vigor. Hsun Tzu (298-238 B.C.) became the spokesperson for the conviction that human beings were at bottom depraved. He writes unequivocally, "The nature of man is evil; his goodness is the result of his activity. Now, man's inborn nature is to seek for gain. If that tendency is followed, strife and rapacity result and deference and compliance disappear. By inborn nature, one is envious and hates others."[1]

In his view, any goodness in the world was imposed activity; it did not come from within. One group of thinkers, the Legalists, adopted this position and strenuously argued that only strict laws with clear punishments could keep civilization going. "The reason is," states the Legalist Han Fei Tzu (d. 233 B.C.), "that few people value humanity and righteousness."[2] He argues that people, like raw materials in nature, must be straightened and bent with force: "There is not one naturally straight arrow or naturally round piece of wood in a hundred generations, and yet in every generation people ride carriages and shoot birds. Why? Because of the application of the methods of straightening and bending."[3]

It was the Confucian philosopher Mencius (371-289 B.C.?), however, who provided the answer that was to become mainstream in Chinese thought. He denied that human nature was evil. He did so by telling a now famous story: "Suppose a man were, all of a sudden, to see a young child on the verge of falling into a well. He would certainly be moved to compassion, not because he wanted to get in the good graces of the parents, nor because he wished to win the praise of his fellow villagers or friends, nor yet because he disliked the cry of the child."[4]

Mencius reasoned that this moment of selfless compassion said something very important about human beings. The feeling might last only a moment and not even be acted upon, but that it was there at all showed an original orientation to goodness. Mencius emphasized that this feeling is normal for humanity—so much so, that we call anyone who does not experience it or even takes delight in the child's predicament as depraved. "From this it can be seen," he writes, "that whoever is devoid of the heart of compassion is not human."[5] It is a strikingly clear and beautiful concept—to be human is to be compassionate. Thus, compassion is the heart of any spirituality founded upon this insight. Mencius also supplied Confucianism with the analogy of Ox Mountain to explain why if humanity was originally good, so much of the world suffered from a lack of compassion. Once a luxurious mountaintop, it had been denuded just as humanity's original nature was deformed. There was something radically wrong. If Mencius had ended there, we would be left with the kind of pessimism that gave rise to Legalist thinking. Mencius did not end there, however, but insisted that just as a natural law kept urging Ox Mountain to send up new greenery, so did it also push human nature to "a heart of humanity and righteousness originally existing in man."[6] In other words, humanity is called and drawn to goodness.

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[1] Hsun Tzu, in *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, ed. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1973), 128.
[2] Han Fei Tzu, in *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 258.
[3] Ibid., 253.
[4] *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1976), 82.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Mencius, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 56.

Mencius provided me with a way of grasping the Christian doctrine of original sin. There is clearly something wrong with humanity. It is a deformity, or more precisely, a frustration of what we were meant to be. The critical point, however, is that human nature is originally good and continues to be oriented to the good. It is always (sometimes consciously but always unconsciously) striving for that which is good and holy—and it is irresistibly persistent. Human nature reaches up to heaven just as surely as the mountaintop's new growth strains for the sun.

D. C. Lau, a Confucian scholar, sees an implication in the story of the child on the edge of the well: "In this way, Mencius broke down the barrier between Heaven and Man and between the Decree and human nature. There is a secret passage leading from the innermost part of man's person to Heaven, and what pertains to Heaven, instead of being external to man, turns out to pertain to his truest nature."[7]

If mystery lifts me up, it is to a destination etched deeply in the human spirit evidenced by innate goodness. That innate, if deformed, goodness is what St. Augustine referred to when he wrote, "Our heart is restless until it repose in Thee."[8] For Mencius, this means that Heaven draws people unto itself and the natural law working in the human heart propels people to heaven. Thus, my spirituality came to see that God, like the sun at Ox Mountain, continually draws up the goodness originally in humanity. The divine is at work exteriorly and internally.

A Sacramental Imagination

If the foundation of my spirituality is that God continually speaks to and draws an originally good humanity in many ways, then that would seem to put me in what Mary Catherine Hilkert describes in *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* as a distinctly Catholic approach to spirituality called "the sacramental imagination."[9] When she defines the sacramental imagination, she notes that it "emphasizes the presence of the God who is self-communicating love, the creation of human beings in the image of God (restless hearts seeking the divine)."[10] This was something I had learned from Mencius. It means that the spiritual life is focused on becoming and arriving. We become what we were meant to be and arrive at a destination to which we are both propelled and drawn.

Ending up closer to God is a step-by-step process toward heaven. It is fixed on the beatific vision, an immediate experience of God. Psalm 73 tells us:

Whom have I in heaven but you?
And there is nothing on earth that I desire other than you.
My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Indeed, those who are far from you will perish.
You put an end to those who are false to you.
But for me it is good to be near God.[11]

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[7] *Mencius*, trans. D.C. Lau, 28.
[8] Augustine, *The Confessions of St. Augustine* (Burlington VT: The Christian Library, 1984), 5.
[9] Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1998), 15.
[10] Ibid., 15.
[11] Ps. 73: 25-28 NRSV.

The longing for goodness in the human heart that Mencius so clearly saw, the desire of the psalmist, and the restlessness of St. Augustine are fulfilled only in an immediate and direct experience of God. That is heaven, and that is what God offers to each of us. That is why God uses history, our lives, and the entire world for revelation. It is why I could find God in China and enter the Church after encountering God in surprising ways there. God offers graces wherever we are and calls us to an intimate, face-to-face encounter that fulfills our deepest longings.

But Not Alone

The operative word here is "us," not "me." I recently spent a summer with my family in China and once again learned something there about the spiritual life. We went to the city of Jinan to a stone Church over one hundred years old. It had been ravaged during the Cultural Revolution, but now had been lovingly restored by the community. The church overflowed. People knelt on the coarse brick in the courtyard. Everyone wore the very best clothes they had. It was the Feast of the Assumption, and the church was decorated with roses inside and out. A brass band played Immaculate Mary and Salve Regina for the occasion. The devotion was palpable. When Mass was over, people did not rush to leave. They stayed in silent prayer. The whole scene was deeply moving. Whether or not it was the official Patriotic Church, these people were witnessing in a powerful way to their faith in God. In an officially atheistic country where in those people's living memories it had been dangerous to profess that faith, this was an act of courage. To stand out and declare themselves as Christians cost. It required fortitude, and it cost in ways that I will never know. The church has been persecuted in China, denuded like Ox Mountain, but an inner force continues to push up shoots from the seeds of faith. At that moment, all of the people in that church seemed very dear. I have not had to pay a cost like theirs for professing my faith. I do not know if I could. What I realized watching these people who were seeking God so devoutly was that any spirituality worth its salt must include the fortitude of conviction. When the merchant discovers the pearl of great price, he puts everything on the line to pay the cost. The people in that church in Jinan treasured their faith. Gratitude and fortitude, I realized, make a powerful combination for spirituality. Their faith was public, not private, and it was important to approach God together as a community of the faithful whatever the cost might be.

Traditional Confucian thinking always emphasized community and human relationships. Confucians, unlike Taoists who followed the mystical ways of Lao Tzu, were not hermits. They spent considerable time working out how people should live together and treat each other. Any spirituality influenced by Confucians will be focused on community even when oriented to God and heaven.

Michael Schmaus in the last volume of his series on dogma makes the following statement about heaven: "In its fullest sense heaven means the union with one another and with God seen face-to-face of the whole community of the saved."[12] It is a remarkably efficient line that captures the message of hope to which my spirituality moves. Our hope is not a separated hope, but one of union with each other and with God. It is implied in the prayer that Jesus taught us. We learned to say, "Our Father who art in Heaven," not, "My Father."

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[12] Michael Schmaus, *Dogma* 6 (London: Sheed and Ward, 1977), 25.

Preaching the Word: A Starting Point

A spirituality based on what I had learned in China has implications for preaching. The starting point for talking about God in my preaching is our experience with pain. The Buddhists start with the fact that there is a great deal of misery in life. They have concluded that it is the result of attachment to the illusions of this world. In this, they seem to agree with the writer of Ecclesiastes, "Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity."[13] The Confucians also start with the problem of suffering and disorder in the world. They conclude that the problem is that humanity has forgotten what it is to be human. Mencius, who is so convinced of our innate goodness, also says: "Humanity is man's mind and righteousness is man's path. Pity the man who abandons the path and does not follow it, and who has lost his heart and does not know how to recover it. When people's dogs and fowls are lost, they go to look for them, and yet, when they have lost their hearts, they do not go to look for them."[14]

Consequently, although my imagination is sacramental, my preaching approach is what Hilkert defines as dialectical. Her definition of that approach "stresses the distance between God and humanity, the hiddenness and absence of God, the sinfulness of human beings, the paradox of the cross."[15] At first glance, a sacramental imagination and a dialectical approach seem contradictory. They look as if they are two opposite points on a line on which the preacher situates her or himself. It is clear from Edward Schillebeeckx's work, however, that they can work together. Although he is firmly in the tradition of sacramental imagination, he uses dialectical thinking. It is significant that his "Prologue: Human God-Talk and God's Silence" in *The Praxis of the Reign of God* is organized under subheadings like "Dialectic of Suffering and Life."[16] In fact, the term "dialectic" appears in three of the subheadings in that short essay. John P. Galvin in that same book makes this observation about Schillebeeckx's work: "Schillebeeckx's christology begins with a problem, not a formula or a theory. His quest for a suitable starting point common to all human life and, therefore, accessible to all leads him to concentrate on the universal experience of evil, the bitter awareness that the history of the human race is one of suffering."[17]

Mencius begins with a problem, too: our experience on the denuded mountaintop. He then takes us to the possibilities of hope when he calls on us to recover our hearts—to go in search of our humanity. Another kind of suffering, however, comes to us from outside of ourselves. It is not the kind that derives from forgetting what it means to be human. It might be a natural disaster, a sudden illness, or just the sorrow that comes from the death of a loved one. Confucians, convinced that there was guiding reality called Heaven, saw it this way: "When Heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on any man, it will exercise his mind with suffering, subject his sinews and bones to hard work, expose his body to hunger, put him to poverty, place obstacles in the paths of his deeds, so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and improve wherever he is incompetent."[18]

In other words, Heaven can make suffering serve the purpose of an ultimate good. Traditional Christian theology has called this sort of approach God's ordaining will or unlimited

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[13] Eccl. 1:2 NRSV.

[14] Mencius, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 58.

[15] Hilkert, 15.

[16] Edward Schillebeeckx, "Prologue: Human God-Talk and God's Silence," in *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx*, ed. Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert J. Schreiter (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), xvi.

[17] John P. Galvin. "The Story of Jesus as the Story of God," in *The Praxis of the Reign of God*, 81.

[18] Mencius, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy,* 78.

dominion.[19] Some writers speak of God's permitting will as well as an ordaining will.[20] That is, God does not send suffering, but permits it for a particular purpose. That suffering can serve a purpose of ultimate good is clearly the view of Jean-Pierre de Causade who incorporates pain with his idea of the sacrament of the present moment in an extraordinary passage: "We are now living in a time of faith. The Holy Spirit writes no more gospels except in our hearts. All we do from moment to moment is live this new gospel of the Holy Spirit. We, if we are holy, are the paper; our sufferings and our actions are the ink. The workings of the Holy Spirit are his pen, and with it he writes a living gospel; but it will never be read until that last day of glory when it leaves the printing press of this life."[21]

Confucianism asserts there is a Heaven, but respectfully declines to speculate about it except in the broadest generalities. Jesuit missionaries in Taiwan affirmed for me what I learned in the Chinese philosophical tradition, but began to fill in the rest of the picture from Christian sacred tradition, which does tell us some definite things about God. One of these things is that God is omniscient. The psalmist declares, "Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely."[22] Another of these things is that God is omnipotent. The first line of the creed declares that God is "almighty." The most important thing, however, is that this omniscient, omnipotent, and personal God has come to us in the incarnation and suffered, what Martin Luther described as *theologia crucis*. Douglas John Hall explains this theology in *The Cross in Our Context*: "The essence of God, then, is for Luther God's 'with-suffering'—which is of course why he could speak of God (not only of the Christ, but of God) in what, against the background of the patripassian controversy, was a scandalous way; the crucified God (*Deus crucifixus*)."[23] God made the decision to share in the same kind of physical suffering, rejection, and abandonment that human beings experience. Jesus experienced it to its very depths. "'*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*' that is, 'My God, my God, what you have forsaken me?'"[24]

We suffer, and God suffers. Both we and God experience the bareness and total abandonment of Ox Mountain. Schillebeeckx holds that it is precisely in moments like these that we have a point of contact with God. He calls them "negative contrast experiences."[25] Thus, my theological foundation of preaching begins with hard questions and difficult experience. It looks for whatever points to God in what we all go through in life. Another spiritual writer, Dietrich Von Hildebrand, writing against a background of Nazi persecution, stated much the same thing. In *Transformation in Christ*, he asserts that "those who consciously suffer from estrangement from God are closer yet to Him."[26]

Estrangement is key. We can feel estranged from God in our suffering when we feel completely in the dark without help or consolation. We also are estranged through sin. Paul Tillich is helpful in understanding this concept. He writes: "I should like to suggest another word to you, not as a substitute for the word 'sin', but as a useful clue in the interpretation of the word 'sin': 'separation'. Separation is an aspect of the experience of everyone. Perhaps the word 'sin'

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[19] Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure, *Claiming Theology in the Pulpit* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 38.

[20] Richard McBrien, *Catholicism* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 343.

[21] Jean-Pierre De Causade, *Abandonment to Divine Providence,* trans. John Beevers (New York: Image, 1975), 45.

[22] Ps. 139:4, NRSV.

[23] Douglas John Hall. *The Cross in Our Context: Jesus and a Suffering World* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 22.

[24] Mt. 27:46 NRSV.

[25] Schillebeeckx, 5.

[26] Dietrich Von Hildebrand, *Transformation in Christ* (Manchester, NH: Sophia Institute Press, 1990) 358.

has the same root as the word 'asunder'. In any case, *sin* is *separation*. To be in the state of sin is to be in the state of separation."[27]

If we see sin in this light, then it becomes another experience of estrangement. In this case, rather than God seeming to have abandoned us to suffering, we abandon God in the choices we make. Such estrangement is the center of the dialectical imagination's approach in law and gospel preaching, which Richard Lischer discusses in *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*. Applying this approach to the case of a particularly desperate man listening to a sermon, Lischer writes, "In its exposition of the man's alienations, the sermon—as law—drew upon the classical view of sin as privation, that is, the absence of completion that prohibits a being from fulfilling its own nature."[28] This line from Lischer struck a familiar chord. That was the insight of Ox Mountain. We may experience desolation, but through it all our nature yearns for something better.

Preaching the Word: Hope

If my preaching starts with the denuded mountain and perplexity, it does not stop there. The Confucian view, at least the mainstream view that owes so much to Mencius, is hopeful and well balanced. It does not abandon us to pessimism, but rather reminds us that we are connected to Heaven, that we are guided by it, that original goodness is our nature and that it is, in the end, indefatigable. My preaching then leads into the interior of the soul to discover the goodness, talents, graces, and predisposition for God that God has put there. These things might be uncultivated or frustrated, but they are there. My preaching reminds people that God wills that we do fulfill our nature and that God has gone to extraordinary lengths to make it possible.

Lischer's desperate man also finds hope in the sermon he hears. He learns that "the God from whom he was so hopelessly estranged had drawn nigh in the message of Jesus."[29] The result is a discovery of God's grace. As with Schillebeeckx's negative-contrast or Hildebrand's estrangement experiences, the starting point of addressing suffering and sin, which are both alienation, ends up in revealing the presence of God. St. Paul teaches this same concept when he writes in his letter to the Romans that, "But law came in, with the result that the trespass multiplied; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."[30] God's grace is everywhere, in the high points of religious experience and in the low points of alienation. That is why psalm 139 declares:

> Where can I go from your spirit?
> Or where can I flee from your presence?
> If I ascend to heaven, you are there;
> If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.[31]

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[27]Paul Tillich, "You Are Accepted," *American Sermons: The Pilgrims to Martin Luther King Jr.* (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 809.

[28]Richard Lischer. *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 32.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Rom. 5:20 NRSV

[31] Ps. 139: 7-8 NRSV.

Preaching the Word: Practice

Confucianism is eminently practical. What I had taken to be a code of social etiquette was in fact a serious attempt to put its insights into practice in human relationships: "The reason why the superior man is different from other men is because of what he preserves in his mind. He preserves humanity and propriety. The man of humanity loves others. The man of propriety respects others. He who loves other is always loved by others, and who respects others is always respected by them."[32]

Fulfilling our humanity has to do with the way we treat each other. It is a matter of both respect and love for others. For Confucians, that treatment begins close to home and then extends to everyone: "Treat with respect the elders in my family, and then extend that respect to include the elders in other families. Treat with tenderness the young in my own family, and then extend that tenderness to include the young in other families."[33]

After turning attention to the interior of the soul to look for the gifts and goodness there, my preaching then focuses on using those gifts in concrete ways first to those closest to us and then to others. That is, if on the one hand my preaching is based in Christ's teaching, "The kingdom of God is within you," on the other hand it is based on exteriorizing that insight based on another fundamental teaching, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."[34] In the same way that Mencius advocates extending respect and love first close to home and then to everyone as an extended family, my preaching begins with proximate neighbours and then extends to a wider understanding of what neighbour means.

Pulling It Together

Saint Gregory Nazianzen, a fourth century bishop and later hermit, has provided me with a way of pulling my thinking together. He writes in one of his justly celebrated sermons: "This is what the great mystery means for us; this is why God became man and became poor for our sake; it was to raise up our flesh, to recover the divine image, to re-create mankind, so that all of us might become one in Christ who perfectly became in us everything that he is himself."[35]

Saint Gregory begins with a recovery of the image of God within in each of us. It is that image that Mencius discovered while considering a child on the edge of a well. It is not that Christ transforms a totally depraved humanity, but rather recovers or restores that which marked our nature when we were created in God's image. It is there still, but the fact that it needs recovery demonstrates that it is wounded, deformed, or like Mencius' Ox Mountain, denuded. That recovery depends upon God becoming poor and suffering with us. It remains, as St. Gregory says, a great mystery, but Christ's suffering has a purpose, namely to draw us up to what the Confucians could not define, but could name, heaven. Finally, St. Gregory underscores that this act leads to an incredible destiny for humankind—or as he puts it, "for all of us"—in which together we experience unity with God. It is in an understanding like this one that I find the threads of my experience and thinking in China coming to together, and out of which arises my spirituality.

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[32] Mencius, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, 77.

[33] Ibid, 61.

[34] Mark 12:31 NRSV.

[35] Gregory Nazianzen, from a sermon excerpted for Friday, Thirty-First Week in Ordinary Time, in *The Liturgy of the Hours* IV (New York: Catholic Book Publishing Company, 1975), 493.

Contemplation: The Good Soil of the Preacher

Mark McCormick
Our Lady of the Black Hills Catholic Church, Piedmont, South Dakota

Professor Gregory Heille, O.P., Advisor
Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri

As I think of my own experience as one who has been called to the preaching ministry, and as I think about the spirituality that flows from preaching God's Word, I cannot help but to think of the Parable of the Sower in Matthew's Gospel, in which we hear:

> Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen![1]

It has been only in the last several years that I have begun to listen with the "ears of the heart"—even though I have been ordained for fourteen years. It is in listening with the ears of the heart, entering into the silence, and surrendering all that I am to the Spirit of Christ that I have found the good soil on which to preach the Good News. Without a continual practice of silence in my own life, I find the soil too rocky and without much depth.

In the past, I was too busy with other aspects of parish life, which included administering a cluster of four parishes and additional diocesan responsibilities. I did not have enough time to be silent, to simply sit at the feet of Jesus. I was like Mary in the story of Martha and Mary; to be quiet in the presence of Christ was a luxury. To be silent and to let God's Word take hold of my heart was not part of my regular practice. My preaching became shallow and was choked off because of the lack of attention paid to the interior movement of the Spirit in my heart.

I am embarrassed to admit that because of the busyness of parish life there were weeks that I did not start breaking open the Word until Friday or even Saturday afternoon. And to be completely honest, there were periods when I went to the commentaries first before going to the scripture texts themselves. Again, it is hard for the Word of God to take root when I simply rely on the commentaries themselves. I felt as though I was simply serving up leftovers, taking someone else's words and trying to make them my own.

I have found out that preaching is hard work, and that having good intentions is not enough if I want my preaching ministry to bear fruit a hundredfold. Thomas Keating in his book *The Better Part* describes Martha in this way: "She is thoroughly devoted to the Lord. They are friends. Jesus loved to stop at her home. She exemplifies 'good souls' at the beginning of the spiritual journey when they have the best intentions to serve God."[2]

Even though Martha had the best of intentions, it was Mary who chose "the better part." Keating in his reflection notes that "Mary is not doing anything but listening, yet as she listens

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[1] Matthew 13.2-9 NSRV.
[2] Thomas Keating, *The Better Part: Stages of Contemplative Living* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 16.

her attention moves beyond the words or even the physical appearance of Jesus. She penetrates to the divine Person present in the humanity that is visible and palpable. Her faith is expanding."[3] Mary is standing in the rich soil that is able to bear an abundant harvest.

Keating goes on to say, "The word of God in Scripture orientates us towards the transformation of our entire being," as he quotes St. John of the Cross: "God the Father spoke only one word and he spoke in an eternal silence, and it is in the silence that we hear it." [4]

It has been only recently in my spiritual journey that I have come to experience silence as a great gift of God—one that brings me to the heart of Jesus. I have come to learn that even though I may have the best intentions to preach God's word with zeal—to be that prophetic voice—without a good dose of silence every day my preaching is scattered on soil that is parched, dried out, and unable to bear sustaining fruit.

Robert Mulholland Jr, in his book *Shaped by the Word* says, "Serious and earnest prayer should be constantly used before we consult the oracles of God; seeing scripture can only be understood through the same spirit whereby it was given. When we are open to God on our side of the inspirational equation, the creative inspiration of the scripture becomes the productive inspiration of God in our lives. We become an inherent part of the inspirations of scriptures."[5]

Even though I feel as a neophyte with this new profound sense of silence in my life, I must say that the Scriptures and my preaching have taken on a whole new depth, much to my surprise. It seems that the rocks, the thorns, and the weeds have been roto-tilled by the spirit of contemplation.

"Contemplation," as Keating reminds us, "is the Spirit that prays in us if we consent."[6] Contemplation is really about the surrendering of our total selves to the will of God through prayer. Keating goes on to say that "the root of prayer is interior silence."[7]

In the past it seems that my prayer was more discursive. I usually prayed: "Listen Lord, your servant is speaking," rather than: "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." I had it all mixed up. The prayer of contemplation, the prayer of quiet, is really one of attentiveness to the Spirit of Christ in one's life.

As I mentioned earlier, contemplation is something new to me, but has profoundly changed and transformed my heart anew. At times I find myself disappointed in my seminary formation that it did not expose me to the contemplative way of life, or really the spiritual journey. I do not remember hearing about Centering Prayer or Lectio Divina in my time at the seminary, unless I missed that series of lectures or slept through them.

This past summer I had an opportunity to visit with the Academic Dean of the seminary to which I went. I asked him about why we were not taught about Centering Prayer or Lectio Divina. He told me that the staff thought we were not ready for the contemplative journey.

The regular practice of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina has been a life-changing experience for me, for which I am truly grateful. I find myself to be more peaceful and more open, not only to movements of the Spirit, but also to the needs of others. Keating explains: "Contemplation is not only prayer but action as well. And not only prayer and action, but the gift of one's inmost being. And all that one is. We are to allow God to be God in us."[8] When we are

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[3] Ibid., 19.

[4] Ibid., 19-20.

[5] M. Robert Mulholland Jr., *Shaped By The Word* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1985, 2000), 43.

[6] Thomas Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer and the Christian Contemplative Life* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 15.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Keating, *The Better Part*, 29.

open and attentive to God dwelling in us, the soil of hearts becomes rich, enabling us to produce much fruit.

The regular practice of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina has not only called me to quiet in my heart, but in my house as well. If you would have said two and a half years ago that I would give up my television, especially with the new plasma screens coming out with surround sound, I would have said you were crazy! But the truth of the matter is that, in quieting my heart, it has helped to quiet the other parts of my life.

When I have guests or family over, I am amazed when they comment on how peaceful my home feels to them. We are able to have wonderful conversations and enjoy each other's company because we not completing with the latest reality shows.

Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina have become my reality show. Without them, I am not centered and I begin to let the weeds and thorns and the pressure of preaching and ministry grow unchecked. I find myself back in the rat race, running aimlessly from here to there at break-neck speeds.

Keating says, "Centering Prayer as discipline is designed to withdraw our attention from the ordinary flow of our thoughts. We tend to identify ourselves with that flow. But there is a deeper part of ourselves. This prayer opens our awareness to the spiritual level of our being."[9] It is my experience that Centering Prayer opens and prepares my heart for Lectio Divina as I wait for the Word.

In a Catholic Coalition on Preaching keynote address entitled "Words for the Wordless," Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., said (I am paraphrasing): "The beginning of all preaching is when the Lord spoke, in the beginning was the Word. We think the challenge is to look for the Word; no, the Word looks for us. When we expose our humanity, a bit of our flesh, the Word will find us—God becomes a heat-seeking missile."[10] The key is the willingness to surrender ourselves so that God's transforming work can begin to rework the hardpan earth of our hearts.

Michael Casey, in his book *Sacred Reading: the Ancient Art of Lectio Divina*, talks about the importance of making Lectio Divina part of ones daily life:

Lectio Divina demands a solid commitment of time. The process is void if it is confined to spasmodic periods of no more than a few minutes. To generate its specific results it requires a certain density of experience—especially at the beginning of the journey. It is like the idea of the critical mass in nuclear physics; without a certain quantity of fissionable material no chain reaction follows. The formation of mind and heart that is due to Lectio Divina is realized only after a solid investment of time. I am thinking, for example of a near-daily slot of about thirty minutes continuing over several years.[11]

To preach the Word of God effectively, the soil must be good if we hope for it to yield a harvest that is a hundredfold. What I have learned from the past fourteen years in my preaching ministry, something which I have only begun to appreciate, is that the soil that is rich, alive, and full of nutrients is made up the "Spirit of Contemplation."

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[9] Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer*, 32.

[10] Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., "Words For The Wordless," a compact disk recording of a keynote address to the Catholic Coalition on Preaching national conference in San Jose CA, September 2004. Cf. www.dovetapes.com/ccop.

[11] Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina, (*Liguori MO: Liguori/Triumph, 1995), 21.

For me, that good soil is rooted in the practice of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina. These two practices go hand in hand; they flow in and out together. Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., puts out a wonderful brochure on Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina in which these two practices are described as a gift to one another. "Centering Prayer is a gift to Lectio Divina as it frees us from the obstacles to hear the word of God on a much deeper level in Lectio Divina. Lectio Divina is a gift to Centering Prayer; as our relationship with God deepens we will be renewed in our intention to rest with God in Centering Prayer."[12]

Theses two practices have been a tremendous gift to me. I am learning all over again that the Word of God is not only changing my heart but my entire being. Mulholland says: "That Word of God is for us! It is for our wholeness. It is for our re-creation. It is for our transformation, not our destruction."[13]

When we read the scriptures simply for information, we are not allowing God to penetrate deep within our being. An example, perhaps, would be me looking at the scriptures on Friday afternoon or Saturday morning when I had to preach on Sunday. In this way I keep God at the surface, not allowing enough time for the word of God to germinate in the depths of my heart. But when we read scripture for formation, such as in Lectio Divina, it is out of our intention to be transformed by God's Word which is alive and dynamic. We long to go below the surface where the Word of God can begin to work on the total root system of our being, nourishing us with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

Since I have been trying to live a more contemplative lifestyle, I have met a number of people who are hungering for more silence in their lives. They, too, see Contemplation and the practice of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina as real gift to them and to their spiritual journeys. They have asked the same questions that I did of my seminary dean: "Why haven't we heard about this form of prayer?" Some of them asked whether this type of prayer was "new age," and still others asked whether the Church approves of this form of prayer. Some were even shocked that they were being encouraged to a contemplative lifestyle, for they thought it was just for the monks or those in religious orders.

Keating often mentions in his writings that contemplation for the first fifteen centuries of Christianity was very much part of the tradition of the Church. It was only during the sixteenth century that a negative attitude started to prevail—and it seems to continue to this day.

Keating says that the contemplative tradition was summed up by Gregory the Great at the end of the sixth century "when he described contemplation as the knowledge of God that is impregnated with Love. For Gregory, contemplation is the fruit of reflection on the word of God in scripture and at the same time a gift of God. It is resting in God. In this resting or stillness the mind and heart are not actively seeking him but are beginning to experience, to taste, what they have been seeking."[14]

I am a member of a Centering Prayer and Lectio Group that meets every Thursday at a local monastery. We do two twenty-minute periods of Centering Prayer, with a meditative walk in between. Then we finish with a group Lectio Divina, usually based on one of the readings for the coming Sunday.

I always am astounded by the depth of the sharing that takes place during our Lectio time. The words, the phases, and the images that spill out of this group week after week truly

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[12] *Lectio Divina: Listening to The Word of God in Scripture* (Butler NJ: Contemplative Outreach, Ltd., 2005).
[13] Mulholland, 40.
[14] Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer*, 20.

provide rich soil for my own preparation of preaching the Word. It is fun to watch the expressions on participants' faces, the aha moments when they are able to make the connection of scripture not only to their own lives but to the world. I sense that the Holy Spirit is alive and well.

Michael Casey says, "Union with God is experienced only on the condition that one is united to all the whole creation. This is the meaning of the double commandment to love God, love your neighbor. If Lectio leads to contemplation, it must also be a progressive initiator into solidarity with all humanity."[15]

One of the aspects of group Lectio that helps to foster this action, this solidarity with humanity, is when we pause for a few moments each time someone shares a word or phase from the scripture passage after the first time it is read. This gives all of us in the group time to repeat that word or phrase several times, simply letting it sit in our hearts.

I find myself throughout the week repeating some of these words or phrases. In a way, they become part of my active prayer throughout the week. Keating says the repetition of sacred words or phrases is "designed to lead us into silence."[16]

This silence again has been an incredible gift to me—life changing. The power of silence in the spirit of prayer restores the heart anew. Natalie Goldberg, in her *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within*, calls this "composting." Composting is when one is able to allow the experiences of life with "the richness of sifting for a while through our consciousness and through our whole bodies." [17] Goldberg goes to say:

> Our bodies are garbage heaps: we collect experience, and from the decomposition of the thrown-out eggshells, spinach, leaves, coffee grinds, and the old steak bones of our minds come nitrogen, heat, and very fertile soil. Out of this fertile soil bloom our poems and stories. But this does not come all at once. It takes time. Continue to turn over and over the organic details of your life until some of them fall through the garbage of discursive thoughts to the solid ground of black soil.[18]

The process of contemplation through the practice of Centering Prayer and Lectio Divina has turned my preaching from soil that was arid, wind blown, and full of weeds and thorns to a soil that is good and rich, providing an environment in which a harvest of hundredfold is much more possible.

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[15] Casey, 40.

[16] Keating, *Foundations for Centering Prayer*, 114.

[17] Natalie Goldberg, *Writing Down the Bones: Freeing the Writer Within* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1986), 14.

[18] Ibid.

From Fosdick Back to Formation: Re-orienting the Ethos of Preaching

Assistant Professor Kay Bessler Northcutt

Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, Oklahoma
Professor Gregory Heille, O.P., Advisor

Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, Missouri

The Contexts of Preaching

Alan of Lille (c. 1182-1202) was the first rhetorician after Augustine to write a systematic examination of homiletics. In *The Seventh Rung*, he posits that "preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behavior, whose purpose is the forming of men" (Alan 1981, 16-17). Alan initiates a remarkable shift in homiletics, forsaking "one key element in the classical definition of oratory, namely, persuasion, and instead speaks pastorally of 'formation' as the goal of Christian preaching." Persuasion implies a sudden change of behavior, a decision. Formation, by contrast, implicates an entire lifetime: a *process* (Lischer 2002, 3).

An All-Christian or Post-Constantinian Context

Alan's turn to "formation" was influenced by the Constantinian assumptions of his era. One did not have to persuade the peasants to be Christians; they were Christians. Yet, as Margaret Miles has pointed out, while everyone may have been "Christian" culturally and legally, vast numbers of illiterate peasants understood very little of Christian faith. For most of them, the biblical stories depicted in the stained-glass windows of cathedrals limned their grasp of Christianity (see Miles 1985). Formation, therefore, and not persuasion, would have been the pressing concern of thoughtful preachers.

From a very different—yet uncannily similar—North American context, our era resembles that of Alan of Lille's and evokes the need to reawaken preaching as formation. Though living in a profoundly more literate society than that of Alan's, American Christians are remarkably unfamiliar with the basic themes and stories of the biblical text. In the dramatic cultural shift over this past century from that of a print, "word-driven" culture (books, newspaper, magazines) to that of a multi-media, "image-driven" culture (television, film, laptops, video games, and the internet) we find ourselves again in an age needing something akin to images in stained glass to convey the basic vocabulary of Christian faith in a compelling way. This need for formation has great impact and consequence for our preaching.

Modernity's Contexts

The influences of the larger cultural contexts in which preaching occurs cannot be underestimated. At the height of modernity, for example, higher criticism and science strode into the seminaries and pulpits of the United States. The long arm of psychology and Sigmund Freud strode in as well. In a gradual evolution, pastoral formation, preaching, and theology based themselves upon modern, psychologically constructed models, eventually becoming the cornerstone of mainline Protestant preaching and pastoral care. Liberal theology's naïve belief in the foundational goodness of humanity, deeply influenced by psychology, also came to the fore.

The Late-Modern Context of Preaching as Counseling

Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969), America's "most prominent liberal Protestant preacher when religious liberalism knew its finest hour" pioneered and nurtured the late-modern notion of preaching as "counseling" (Miller 1995, 154). In his sermon, "The Real Point of Conflict Between Science and Religion," Fosdick brilliantly demonstrated the modern sermon's preoccupation with science and human progress while simultaneously revealing his context in a highly personal yet public way: "What areas of human need science has met in my lifetime! When I was born, Edison was thirty-one years old; Sigmund Freud was twenty-two; Henry Ford was fifteen; Charles Steinmetz, thirteen; Madam Curie, eleven; Orville Wright, seven; Marconi, four; Einstein, minus one" (Fosdick 1941, 141). Fosdick, the preacher-scholar, places himself squarely in the context of the "greats" of the modern "myth of progress" with its unrestrained confidence in science and human invention. In Fosdick's energetic words one can hear—like a heart beating—the liberal theologians' project of human striving and becoming.

Fosdick launched his new model (and a new era) of preaching with his article in *Harper's Magazine*, July 1928, called "What is the Matter with Preaching?": "Every sermon should have for its main business the solving of some problem—a vital, important problem, puzzling minds, burdening consciences, distracting lives—and any sermon which thus does tackle a real problem, throw even a little light on it and help some individuals practically to find their way through it cannot be altogether uninteresting" (cited in Crocker 1971, 29). "The method of preaching [Fosdick] recommended in the article has been variously described as 'life-situation' or 'problem-centered,' but [Fosdick] referred to it as the "project method" (Edwards 1995, 223). Call it what you will, it is preaching founded on psychology and pastoral counseling.

The Influence of Fosdick's Model on Preaching

Fosdick's monumental influence on the development of late-modern preaching was immense. His sermons were broadcast over The National Vespers Radio Hour, and Fosdick's voice "year after year reached millions of people" (Miller, 1995, 154). After World War II, "the American people came to accept psychology as the new orthodoxy," and Fosdick's example of doing pastoral counseling from the pulpit was adopted throughout America's mainline, liberal pulpits (Edwards 1995, 223).

Edmund Linn explains clearly the project of the modern sermon as Fosdick envisioned it: "If religion seems to such people—or seemed to the people of Fosdick's congregations—to have a valid place in this cosmos, it must be rational and intelligible. These people need to be convinced that both scientific and Christian truth can contribute to their fulfillment as persons" (Linn 1966, 13). But not only is preaching's task that of interpreting the scientific modern era and harmonizing it with Christian scripture and tradition, Fosdick also exhorts, "We need more sermons that try to face people's real problems with them, meet their difficulties, answer their questions, confirm their noblest faiths and interpret their experiences in sympathetic, wise and understanding cooperation" (cited in Linn 1966, 13 n. 2). With this forceful statement Fosdick clarified a second-fold purpose in preaching: pastoral counseling.

"By application of the principles of personal counseling to preaching, the counseling sermon becomes no less a technique for the transformation of persons than actual counseling itself" (Linn 1966, 16). The preacher enters the pulpit, "expecting that lives will be made over, families will be saved, young people will be directed into wholesome paths, potential suicides will become happy and useful members of the society, and doubters will become vibrant believers" (Linn 1966, 16). Preaching becomes a wonderfully rational, problem-based, problem-solving project with modern psychology as its foundation. The progress of individual well-being

is the aim of preaching. Neither the formational and missional aspect of congregational preaching nor the broader context of the congregation's role in toward becoming God's justice and mercy in the world) are primary concerns.

In his sermon, "The Great Hours of a Man's Life," Fosdick beautifully employs personal experience to reveal and illumine his privileging of psychology in this counseling model of preaching: "One of my boyhood's recollections is my father dealing with me when I was in a bad temper, "Where's Harry?" he would say, and I would answer, "Why, here he is." And he would say to me, "NO! You are not Harry. Harry is lost. Go find him. I want Harry!" So,...I would wander off through the house, getting myself under control until, returning, I could face him again, saying, "I've found him. Here he is." Thus my father said to me, as a child, *what modern psychology is saying now*—that we are not just one self, but varied selves,...and that the art of life is to identify oneself with one's best self" (Fosdick 1946, 145; emphasis added).

We see here the reaction against didactic, expository preaching. We see also the genius Fosdick developed for "exegeting" individuals within the congregation. This, for its time, is a thoroughly modern, refreshing model of preaching, yet one that may have embraced modern assumptions and conventions too wholeheartedly. However, Fosdick himself eventually came to recognize the perhaps naïve assumptions of liberal theology following several years of influence exerted by Reinhold Niebuhr. As early as 1941 Fosdick confesses as much in his sermon, "The Modern World's Rediscovery of Sin" (Fosdick 1941, 112). But even Fosdick's own concerns as expressed in this sermon could not slow the momentum of the liberal project and the overwhelming influence of Fosdick's preaching-as-counseling model.

There is a further aspect of Fosdick's preaching-as-counseling model, according to Linn: "When a preacher speaks to the real condition of his people he soon discovers that he is being sought more and more by individuals who need to discuss their private personal problems" (Linn 1966, 23). Linn captures here how the self-identity of pastor as therapeutic listener is both glorified and institutionalized. He continues: "One of the ultimate tests of the worth of a sermon is how many individuals want to see the minister alone. The process has now run full circle: preaching originates in personal counseling; preaching is personal counseling on a group basis; personal counseling originates in preaching.… The object of helping some specific person is before him as he prepares the sermon" (Linn 1966, 24). As the self-identity of the preacher as therapeutic listener grows, the authority of the preacher should increase, too, when "individuals leave the sermon confident, cleansed, generous, and with high ideals" (Linn 1966, 25). When the foundational tool in the preacher-as-counselor's toolbox is psychology, the basic identity of the pastor becomes that of therapist and the preacher's authority is vested as therapeutic healer.

By way of contrast: conscious, attentive spiritual formation of the congregation, as well as wisdom texts from classical Christian spiritual traditions, and the recognition of pastor as *spiritual guide* or *religious authority* are virtually absent from modernity's project and consequently from preaching as well! Instead, late-modern's preaching emphasis invariably has focused upon individual problem-solving, and the kind of wisdom referenced in preaching-as-counseling is that of modernity's disciplines: psychology, science, and sociology. Given the prominence of these discourses, the voices of Christian wisdom and spiritual formation, as well as the religious authority and identity of the preacher, have been obscured.

The Problem with Pastoral Care as a Metaphor and Model for Pastors

When pastoral care became the foundational model for both the pastor and preacher, the very curriculum and landscape of theological education was altered. Pastoral Care Centers took

up residence next door to seminaries where a modern conceptualization of care of the soul was practiced. The post-World War II conceptualization of the "care of the soul" collapsed into a virtually exclusively psychological understanding of the human person, in which the language of the "self" virtually eclipsed any mention of the "soul." The church's classical Christian traditions, texts, and practices—as well as critical interpretations of those historical landscapes—lay discarded.

Some scholars, such as Don Browning, sounded alarms:

Nothing more clearly indicates the church's lack of direction and general identity confusion than this penchant for borrowing uncritically and with almost reckless enthusiasm for the newest technique that attracts the attention of the popular mind.

The free and ready utilization by modern pastoral care and counseling…leaves the impression that larger ecclesiastical and cultural contexts are somehow neutral concerning its assumptions and procedures. Insights from psychoanalysis, from the therapies of Carl Rogers, Eric Berne, Fritz Perls, and B. F. Skinner, can be readily borrowed and employed with breathtaking rapidity.... What is astounding about this phenomenon is not so much the willingness to experiment but rather the almost total lack of critical reflection on the question of compatibility.

How do these various techniques and theories relate to the larger goals implicit in the church's ministry? (Browning 1976, 17-18; emphasis added)

Yet, in the late-modern era when science, technology, and the myth of progress were gods, warnings like Browning's were largely ignored. Practices such as spiritual direction were suspect for their lack of scientific, foundational principals and proof of efficacy. They also were little known by the Protestant mainline community, a lasting residue of the Reformation's unintended yet negative consequence. Ancient wisdom had a whiff of theologically fuzzy unseemliness, dealing with the affective and mysterious, suspiciously "papist." Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, was representative of this modern skepticism regarding anything "mystical."

To be fair, it is possible only now—from the vantage point of post-modernity when texts no longer belong, or are limited, to their own roots, culture, and religious intentions—that this turn to classic Christian texts becomes evident in its possibility. It is on the wide-open terrain of a post-modern landscape that spiritual direction is freed to speak to the post-modern, American, mainline, liberal church. Indeed, as Browning had noted, many aspects of the various approaches to psychology could be "basically useful at the level of increasing a person's ability to be free to act" (Browning 1976, 107). Yet, freedom to act, and self-actualization, while helpful, are not be confused with the self-knowledge, spiritual freedom, and relationship to God's presence and mission in the world that define the telos of the Christian vocation.

The Detrimental Consequences of Preaching as Pastoral Counseling

Most mainline Protestants adopted, too uncritically, that post-World War II model of preaching which had neither pre-modern persuasion nor Alan of Lille's formation as its aim. Instead we placed our liberal theologies in concert with a therapeutic or counseling model of preaching. In my eight years of hearing student preachers, virtually every sermon—though not always intentionally—can be categorized within Fosdick's problem-solving model. Problem-solving preaching has become a form we appropriate without even knowing we are doing so. Like fish, we have swum around so long in the waters of the therapeutic model we no longer

recognize it. The "wisdom" texts referenced by student preachers (extra-canonically speaking) emerge entirely from modernity's project. *Psychology Today* and *Bowling Alone*, for example, receive remarkable press in student preaching, while classical Christian texts of spiritual formation, with their nuanced and brilliant understanding of the complexities of the human soul, are never quoted.[1] The basis of a pastor's *religious* authority to preach—rather than the authority of "pastor as expert problem-solver"—is seldom visited in student sermons or class discussions.

The counseling model of preaching brought great strengths to the pulpit. We learned that congregational history and experience must be interpreted, as well as scripture. Human experience became a palpable source for investigation and proclamation from the pulpit. Thomas Long adds, "We began to pay attention to the inner dynamics of preaching" (Long 1989, 32). But there also are negative consequences though never intended to be such by Fosdick or other pastors. The four consequences that I discuss, while not exhaustive, clarify significant gaps.

First Negative Consequence of the Counseling Model of Preaching: Preaching as pastoral counseling shrinks the grid of Christianity to fit modernity's project by (a) viewing our spiritual lives as problems to be fixed (or solved) and subsequently treating individual Christians like clients and viewing God as the "fixer" and (b) allowing a too naïve understanding of objective reason and perfectible solutions which transform churches into can-do solution oriented chambers of commerce.

Douglas John Hall rightly argues in *Thinking the Faith* that the Enlightenment tended toward an overly optimistic view of the human project and over time came to function as a kind of cultural boosterism that avoids grappling with shadows of suffering (Hall 1991, 158-169). This mistaken cultural optimism lay in the confidence that modern science could grasp the world objectively, and that experts could, in turn, apply that objective knowledge to solve human problems. Drawing on that confidence, the therapeutic model's preoccupation with diagnosis inevitably treated both the person seeking the cure and their suffering as a kind of object and as a technical problem to be solved. Paul Tillich's *Systematic Theology* alerted us to the difference between "technical reason" and "ontological reason."[2] Other thinkers in the neo-orthodox school, Reinhold Niebuhr, for example, and later Langdon Gilkey criticized the optimism of modern, liberal culture and specifically liberal theology as utterly naïve. Reason, they argued, tended to follow the cultural, political, and institutional self-interests of various groups.[3] Far from being objective or disinterested, reason—these theologians argued—frequently functioned as a means of self-deception, blinding both the self and the community to the abiding problematic of human sin. Claims of objective reason, therefore, can function as a form of denial, blinding both the self and the community to its moral obligations. It took time, however,

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[1] There is one exception to this. Teresa of Calcutta is oft quoted in student sermons. I'm not certain why—except that she is contemporary so my students (who have been formed by media-driven culture rather than by print) have been *visually* exposed to her, her life, and her mission through television. By way of comparison, Teresa of Avila (who is decidedly *not* visually communicated via media) is virtually unknown by my students.

[2] While the former has been enormously helpful in the modern period, sharpening our capacities for critical analysis, it does not exhaust the nature of human reason. Ontological reason, by which we engage in wonder at the mystery of Being, both personally and collectively, moves in a different direction and with a different orientation than its technical partner. It does not solve the mystery of existence, but encourages us to enter more fully into it. Tillich's distinction proves helpful for recognizing that viewing the Christian practices of preaching and pastoral care in terms of the technical strategies of modern psychology was bound to be too constrictive.

[3] For example, see Langdon Gilkey's description of life within an internment camp in *Shantung Compound*.

for voices such as Tillich's, Niebuhr's and Gilkey's to be heard, not only in theological circles, but in local churches as well.

In the meantime homileticians like Fosdick had begun to understand both church life and preaching in terms of the problem solving techniques of modern psychology, with the pastor in the role of local expert. In this model of preaching-as-pastoral-counseling, pastors approach their congregations as a group of discrete individuals: clients. Community organizer, John McKnight, in his insightful essay, "Professional Service and Disabling Help," argues that professionalized therapeutic culture has been disastrous for life in the public square generally (McKnight, 1995). Rather than a community full of *vocations* in need of *direction*, the congregation is viewed as a set of individualized and private clients, whose tithes and offerings constitute a fee for the professionalized services of the pastor. Therapeutic preaching becomes a message to a group of hurting individuals in a hurting world rather than mystagogical instruction on beholding the body of Christ that we are to become. Pastors and congregants take their eyes off the prize—and forget the work of God that is ours to do in the world. Paradoxically, while we gaze introspectively into ourselves in a psychologically informed model, rather than self-knowledge—which the spiritual models teach us—we are distracted from the vision God asks us to behold.

When the human condition becomes a problem to be solved for which science and psychology offer the cure: is there any need for God? Or—as in the case of many late-modern Protestants nurtured on this counseling model of preaching—is God a fix-it god to be worshipped or placated? Theologically speaking the late-modern crisis becomes one of idolatry rather than unbelief. Ultimately, the fix-it, problem-solving approach presumes the fixable nature of human beings rather an interdependence with the Divine Mystery at the heart of all being. Churches imbued with this approach to preaching tend to exhibit a kind of can-do optimism and solutionism in their life together which papers over or avoids the real suffering in a situation or community (Hall 1991, 169-196). Solution-oriented churches focus their attention on us and "getting our needs met" rather than on God's insatiable thirst for kin-dom love and justice—and thus abdicate playing anything but a private role in bringing about such a kin-dom. In the problem-solving model, people approach every situation—even their spiritual lives—in light of a solution, or product, to be produced. But the fruits of the spirit cannot be consumed and harvested so much as *cultivated*. They are not products, but a process to be lived into rather than achieved. These gifts of the spirit are elusive, consistently slipping through our grasp, as eternal things always do. While Julian of Norwich assured us that "all will be well," her confidence lay not in our ability to produce solutions, but in the elusiveness and beneficent presence of God.

The problems of rationalization, self-centeredness, and professional objectification, which we find in a solution-oriented church, participate in the cultural mis-adventure of consumerism. The transformation of the American economy from an economy that at the turn of the twentieth century largely produced things into to economy which at the beginning of the twenty-first century largely produces services has been astounding. The new service-based economy's need for ever-new human neediness that then can be *solved* by purchasing the latest fix, the newest technology, and most recent self-help book, has contributed greatly to the church's bondage to the therapeutic model (McKnight, 1995). The solution oriented, problem-solving approach to preaching is also responsible, I suspect, for much of the burnout in pastors and lay ministers. We have been so busy trying to solve problems with technical solutions that we have no time to nurture our longing for God or God's longing for justice in the world. As long as we approach huge systemic issues as problems to be solved, rather than as a life-long

process that is engaged corporately, we are increasingly easily discouraged, weak hearted, and (paradoxically) less likely to take on huge issues like racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism.

Spiritual director, Margaret Guenther wryly notes the "assumption that everything is, in principle, fixable" is a myth (Guenther 1992, x). Spiritual direction stands in direct contrast with North America's myth of progress, presuming instead the "un-fixability" in human life and institutions! "It's about mortality. It's about love. It's about things that can't be fixed" (Guenther 1992, x) but which can be lived into, *deeply*, with God's help.[4]

Second Negative Consequence of the Counseling Model of Preaching: Preaching as pastoral counseling ignores the Christian wisdom tradition.

The therapeutic model of preaching ignores wisdom traditions within the history of Christian thought and practice, while treating secular psychological models as gospel. While some authors such as Parker Palmer have sought to retrieve the best insights of monasticism to inform and confront our own struggles to form disciplined and publicly engaged Christian communities (Palmer 1986), I have yet to hear a student sermon reference the wisdom of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, or St. Benedict, Teresa of Avila, Julian of Norwich, Catherine of Sienna, Ignatius of Loyola, Bernard of Clairvaux , Meister Eckhart, Thomas Merton, or Simone Weil (to name a few). Like jewels, the treasures of Christian spirituality and their shimmering wisdom are waiting to be mined—to be re-appropriated and re-interpreted —in our preaching, teaching, and church life.[5] While these texts, prayer disciplines, and pastoral traditions will need to be re-interpreted in light of today's vastly different circumstances, we must first acknowledge their claim upon us. Far from ignoring these texts, they are incandescent enough to light our way in this post-modern time of disorientation.[6]

When, in the progression of modern discourse, the "self" and the psychological understanding of human psyche replaced the "soul," the shift tended to objectify and universalize the human (and the natural). It was during modernity's shift from "soul" to "self" that preachers abandoned classical, spiritual texts. Unintentional reductions of human nature in the modern disciplines of psychology and economics to self-interest or to unconscious drive left little room for the ennobling of the spirit or soul. The modern emphasis upon the logic of exchange in virtually all social sciences (which has found its way into our preaching) discounts the possibility and reality of "gift" (Webb 1996, 7). By contrast, the classics of western Christian spirituality

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[4] Once, while on retreat, someone inquired of Fr. Berrigan why he kept participating in "ineffective" protests against nuclear arms by merely denting them with a "few blows of a hammer" and marking them with human blood. Berrigan responded, "That's what we do. We repeat ourselves." Berrigan looked quizzically at the person—as if Berrigan himself were confused by the "effectiveness" question being asked of him. It was as if it had never occurred to him that a faithful person might presume or *hope* to be (or worse: be evaluated by whether her/his efforts had been) effective. After a few minutes' silence, Berrigan added, "Living the question. That is what we're called to be: public witnesses who *live* the question."

[5] See William Paulsell's *Disciples at Prayer*, Amy Hollywood's *The Soul as Virgin Wife: Mechthild of Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete, and Meister Eckhart*, and Stephanie Paulsell's *The Scope of Our Art: The Vocation of the Theological Teacher*, all of which are beginning to retrieve the classics of the common Christian tradition.

[6] For example, Teresa of Avila's autobiography is chock-full of advice and tips for developing and maintaining community well being. I remember being drawn up short as a young pastor—who preferred certain members of my congregation over others—when I read Teresa's advice in *The Way of Perfection*, "All must be friends of each other, all must be loved, all must be held dear, all must be helped mutually and equally." She goes on to caution against either "excess or defect of love" toward those in our community. Granted, hers was a professed religious community. But the wisdom remains transparent to post-modern pastors.

hold open the possibility of deep existential renewal and transformation, correcting the reductionist tendencies of modernity.

Modern emphases upon rationality in science and the social sciences (including not only psychology but the historical criticisms of both Scripture and tradition) have been fruitful for "understanding" the world and the world of Christian tradition (both its strengths and failings). But ultimately these rationalities have not helped us orient our lives in profound and purposeful ways. For that, our preaching must turn to the wise voices of the geniuses of Christian formation and spirituality that span the centuries.

Third negative consequence of the counseling model of preaching: Preaching as pastoral counseling mistakes "understanding" for healing and substitutes "pain relief" for spiritual growth and engagement.

Within the psychological model lies the presumption that understanding brings healing. That my mother called me the light of her life, that I am the middle daughter of three girls, that I was a gifted child in the midst of an Oklahoma culture of football with its suspicion of learning and the intellectual life—all these things affected me certainly. I am grateful to therapy for understanding how certain causes and effects operated within my sphere of development. In fact, it is difficult to conceive my life without this therapeutic context. But in the end these rationalities did not help me to orient my life in profound, purposeful ways. All the understanding in the world therapeutically did not give me a solid rock on which to build a life. Only theologically—and through the *paedia* of Christian school: church, prayer, mystics, my spiritual director, and spiritually alive mentors and preachers—do I grow into my human becoming—something therapy with its gifts of understanding was unable to accomplish.

The therapeutic aspect of relieving symptoms of pain and suffering has had a long and negative impact on our theologies and our spiritual lives. We have come to presume that the avoidance of pain and suffering, and its alleviation, is virtually *always* a good thing (Hall 1986, 49-71).[7] By accepting uncritically the modern project of fixing human suffering, Christians have, along with the rest of American culture, been persuaded that suffering can be avoided. As the optimism of modernity's problem-solving ethos fades, and as confidence in its various modes of technical reason turns to profound moral dismay, postmodern people, Christian and not, are discovering again that not all forms of human suffering can be or should be eradicated.

In pointed contrast to modernity's ethos of optimistic boosterism, Douglas John Hall has described the peculiar North American *problematique* in terms of avoidance and flight from suffering. Opting too easily into myths of progress and success, which promise happiness through an ideology of endless *vacation*, North American Christianity has failed to attend to the deeper *vocation* of discipleship (Hall 1986, 31-48). In Hall's work, indebted particularly to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, human suffering as such is not something to be avoided but rather to be entered into as part and parcel of the Christian vocation. Hall deftly combines a developmental view of human growth, rooted theologically in the writings of the early Christian bishop Irenaeus, with a description of basic modes of suffering which human beings must learn to negotiate as part of what he calls the "suffering of becoming." Intended by God, these modes of

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[7] Arguably, psychological models of various sorts have provided helpful ways for people to face serious problems and suffering with courage and hope, particularly in the midst of mental/emotional crises. In the attempt to treat such disorders, therapies seek to alleviate suffering of mind and body. While this is certainly a worthy endeavor, and while psychological therapies and psychotropic pharmacological therapies have their place in contemporary understandings of mental healing, the wholesale acceptance of modern psychology's assumptions of human personhood has been deeply problematic in Christian theology.

suffering cannot be dismissed as suffering resultant from Adam's Fall, and hence as something to be cured or fixed by the redeeming act of Christ. Instead, these modes of suffering—loneliness, anxiety, temptation, and the experience of limit—are necessary to the full experience and joy of being human. They must be entered into if we would become the kind of people God calls us to be, the kind of people Irenaeus described as the "glory of God" (Hall 1986, 49-72).

Attendant to that vocation of entering more deeply into life, according to Hall, is a vision of God who is not to be understood as a Supreme Being, a Father Almighty, existing beyond the world and controlling all of life. Such a god of mastery, who lurks still behind and within the ideologies of the modern project, does not reflect the Biblical vision of *Emmanuel*, of God-with-us, who is enduringly committed to the healing of the world. In the stories of Israel and of Jesus of Nazareth we discover a God who is not simply beyond us, but *for* us, and a God who goes before us—calling to us and forming us by attraction.

Fourth negative consequence of the counseling model of preaching: Preaching as pastoral counseling empties pastors' healthy religious authority and leadership by substituting expert "therapist" for "pastor."

The therapeutic model infects the self-understanding of the pastor—turning pastors into empathic listeners and passive sounding boards rather than spiritual guides who are wisdom figures in a complex, seeking world. Consequently, congregants all to often have mistakenly interpreted therapeutic listening on the part of their pastors as a welcome station for dumping complaints, finding fault with the fellow church folk, or quibbling over last week's typographical error in the bulletin rather than expressing their hunger and thirst for God or examining their own sense of desolation. If Moses thought there was murmuring in his flock, he ought to check into the current state of affairs in local congregations. Therapeutic, empathic listening has unwittingly ignited a firestorm of complaining to the pastor instead of listening to God's activity and intentions for the congregation.

If only as a congregational pastor I had begun every conversation with a congregant in my office based on a spiritual-direction model instead of on empathic listening! The first step, of course, would always be prayer—invoking God, asking for wisdom and guidance as we sit together—and then actively listening with the congregant for God's activity in her/his life rather than receiving a laundry list of "what's wrong with the church" or "my family" or "my life" or fill-in-the-blank. Even on the occasion of valid concerns brought forth regarding love of self, neighbor, the congregation's well-being, and God's needs in the world, a spiritual director's question rather than "What should we do about this?" would be "Where is God leading in this?" More listening would be occasioned along with a broader conversation among the congregation, and an interactive model of God-Holy Spirit-congregation would be enacted.

A Post-Modern Model for Preaching: Spiritual Direction

Over my eight years of hearing student sermons, I began to notice some gaps: (1) a lack of healthy authority and self-identity upon which to base one's preaching; (2) a lack, theologically speaking, of hope; (3) the absence of historic, classical texts of spiritual wisdom; and (4) the absence of preaching on topics of vocation and formation. Because of modernity's influence, and that of the preaching-as-counseling model, I have heard lots of "fix-it" sermons. We fixed the church. We fixed sin. We fixed the congregation. We fixed our enemy (either liberal or fundamentalist). We fixed our insecurities (with really bad sermons on *love*). We fixed crabby, uncooperative church members (or *not*!). But when it came to intractable tragic suffering and war—the insoluble—my preaching students literally *lost hope* because their preaching was

founded on the modern project that *everything is fixable.* Spiritual direction as a metaphor and model for preaching begins in a much different place. Preaching as spiritual direction is not about fixing problems—life is ultimately insoluble after all—but about ongoing guidance and orientation to God, self, others, and the world.

Preaching as spiritual direction does not see congregations as a group of discrete individuals in a client/patient model but as human persons and communities passionately needful of receiving their individual and collective vocations, of seeking God always and in all ways.

Preaching as spiritual direction does not surrender its gospel authority to psychological counseling models of wisdom, but instead mines the biblical and extra-canonical resources of Christian wisdom and theology as our normative texts to be learned, preached, and lived into. As a model, spiritual direction is not unrestrainedly confident—though it is filled with ceaseless hope in God.

Preaching as spiritual direction is not primarily about empathic listening but about discernment of the presence of God in our lives. The emphasis falls on listening for God, for the elusive, present One-with-us and for companioning that One's desires for peace, justice, mercy, and well being of all.

Preaching as spiritual direction moves beyond understanding to a praxis of continuing commitment and development of Christian human persons and communities acknowledging the church as *paedia*, a school for learning.

Preaching as spiritual direction views suffering not as something to be avoided but as intrinsically a part of life, a resource for human individual becoming and communal growth.

Preaching as spiritual direction sees its authority and self-identity in the formation of Christian persons and communities. It is, above all, formational in its telos.

The metaphor for preaching, the model for being a pastor and for the practice of sustaining a life's ministry in a post-modern landscape, can be found in spiritual direction.

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"I am Ready to Step Out of my Shame:" Women and Preaching in the Highlands of Chiapas

Deborah A. Organ, D.Min.
Assistant Professor of Homiletics
The St. Paul School of Divinity
St. Paul, Minnesota

Homiletic preaching makes the Word that is invisible visible, touchable, livable. Never has this truth been more apparent to me than in a very cold, partially built parish church in the Highlands of Chiapas, Mexico, during a three day workshop with 18 Mayan indigenous women ranging in age from 17 to 60. In this paper I describe the context for the workshop, the pedagogy and process for the three days, and some implications that the self-evaluations of the women who participated in the workshop have for contemporary homiletics and the teaching of preaching in a variety of contexts.

Context

I was invited by the Pastoral Team that serves the Tzotzil speaking Mayan communities in the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas to come and accompany a group of women who were interested in developing skills for speaking publicly, and specifically for sharing in the ministry of homiletic preaching in their communities.

The women were from about a dozen different small villages nestled in the mountains of Chiapas, the most southern Mexican state. Some walked for hours to arrive. The purpose of their gathering was to explore what it means to speak publicly in the midst of their communities—these women were interested in developing the craft of proclamation. Most of them were spouses of men who were permanent deacons or catechists, and who supported a growing public role for their wives. A common cultural pattern in Mayan communities is for women to defer to their husbands, fathers or brothers in most things, and certainly in public conversation. The Catholic community of the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas is committed to developing a model of ministry that involves close collaboration and co-responsibility of women and men. While the model is somewhat counter-cultural in contemporary Mayan life, equality and co-responsibility between genders is a core value of Mayan cultural heritage, and has been evident in various periods of Mayan history. I was invited to lead the workshop in response to concerns about the women's hesitance to speak publicly, and to participate at preaching events during Liturgies of the Word in their local communities.[1] The genre of preaching indicated by the liturgical context and pastoral need was deemed by leadership to be homiletic, and they asked me to introduce homiletic to the women.

Most of the women had very little formal religious training, but had come to commitment to faith expression in the Catholic Church through the work of indigenous deacons working as part of a pastoral team serving the needs of the Tzotzil language group in the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas. The women primarily spoke Tzotzil, with a few of them understanding Spanish. One woman was designated to interpret for me Spanish to Tzotzil, as well as Tzotzil to Spanish.

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[1] Most of the communities are remote from the city, and a priest can only visit to preside at Eucharist every few months. These communities participate in weekly Liturgies of the Word, presided at by permanent deacons (there are 660 permanent deacons in the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, and 40 priests) or catechists.

The workshop was residential for three days, and the women stayed in the church building itself, and kept warm in the unseasonable cold by keeping the cooking fire in a room adjoining the main worship space blazing.

Process

When I received the invitation to come and lead the three-day workshop/retreat, I decided that I would consult with colleagues to put together a basic, flexible process. Because I had very little knowledge of the group, although I had traveled in the region several times, I did not want to set anything in stone. I determined that putting a basic structure in place for the first day would be the best way to go, and then I could evaluate along the way. Fortunately, my colleague Christine Smith was traveling with me, and although she did not participate in the leadership of the workshop, she was present, and our subsequent dialogue was invaluable in the continuation and evaluation of the process.

Before introducing the experience of the workshop itself, I will briefly focus on the theoretical basis for the approach I took to the workshop. The two most pertinent areas are pedagogy and homiletic theory.

Theoretical Basis: Pedagogical Perspective and Homiletic Focus
Pedagogy

My approach to pedagogy in general is closely related to critical pedagogy, perspective on education that has taken many forms and that originated in the work of Brazilian educator Paolo Freire.[2] Essentially, the starting point for education for Freire was lived experience. He focused on literacy education, and one way he articulated his experiential focus was by stating that adults needed to read the world and to read the word.[3] He believed that illiteracy was a force that kept people down, and made societal change all but impossible. At the same time, Freire believed that every person had the ability to reflect critically on his or her reality. Such reflection would, then, transform not only the individual's life, but also society. For Freire, then, education was not an abstract process of acquisition of information (what he refers to in his writing as the "banking method"[4]) but the process of becoming aware of the dynamics of one's reality (a process he referred to as conscientization[5]) in order to become a protagonist in one's future—able to transform reality. The process of education is about acquiring the skills necessary for transformation—systemic thinking as well as reading and writing.

Homiletic Theory

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[2] Freire's foundational work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* was published in 1970 Rev. Ed., New York: Continuum, 1999), and was followed by many other writings, some of which I think are an easier read for someone interested in getting the gist of his pedagogy. I recommend *Pedagogy of Hope (New York: Continuum, 1994).* I also recommend *Teaching to Trangress* by bell hooks (New York: Routledge, 1994), as well as her more recent *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003) as examples of one person's articulation of critical pedagogy in a North American context.

[3] See Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo, *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1987), 35.

[4] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 17.

[5] For a sustained discussion of Freire's notion of conscientization, see *The Politics of Education: Culture, Power and Liberation* (South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Harvey, 1985), 106, quoted in an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Steven Barrett (University of Missouri-Columbia, 2004, pages 134-135.

Freire's starting place is where I believe formation for preaching and the art of proclamation also need to begin—the lived reality of the preacher and the community. Beginning with the experience of the preacher and community is central to what is often referred to as the New Homiletic, which is the basis of most of the homiletic theory that has emerged in the last thirty-five years. In short, the New Homiletic refers to a fairly dramatic shift in focus from deductive, idea-driven preaching to preaching rooted in the experience of preacher and community, and often taking on an inductive form that invites the congregation to participate in the making of meaning in the interpretive act of preaching.[6] And from there, the homiletic preaching event moves preacher and community to encounters with one another and the Word that result in the transformation our families, our churches and our society need so badly.

A significant American Roman Catholic articulation of essential principles of the New Homiletic is contained in the theological vision for homiletic preaching presented by the United States Catholic Bishops in *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: the Homily in the Sunday Assembly* (USCCB, 1980). This document focuses on the liturgical context of homiletic preaching, and speaks about the centrality of the homily in bringing the Word of God alive in the midst of community. An important theological assumption that the document makes is that God self-communicates in the midst of the gathered community, as a sign and manifestation of God's self communicating love that is present in the larger world. [7]

Although FIYH was written in a North American context, its central concerns pertain to the situation of Mayan communities in Mexico, in part because the focus on preaching life and experience through the scriptures is compatible with a central pastoral challenge in San Cristobal: to accompany people into relationship with God who loves. This is difficult in part due to some manifestations of syncretism of pre-Columbian Catholicism and ancient Mayan beliefs and practices that portray deities as personalities to placate, convince, and even occasionally to fool. Introducing communities to the loving God of Christian tradition and engaging inculturation in a way that invites retrieval of core Mayan beliefs that reinforce Christianity is at the root of much catechesis and pastoral practice in the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas. Preaching and liturgical celebration are essential in this task. Equally important, the importance that FIYH, along with other elements of the New Homiletic, places on the subsequent transformation of life and society following the Word coming alive in Eucharistic assembly strongly reinforces the social transformation that the communities in San Cristobal struggle for in their daily lives, and reflect on in their community celebrations. Thus, beginning point in experience, the continuing story and self-revelation of a God who loves us into life, and the concrete societal transformation that flows from community life and worship are the three strongest elements connecting the life of Mayan communities in Mexico with the thrust of the New Homiletic articulated, among many other places,[8] in FIYH.

Story and Image

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[6] For a concise treatment of the roots of and foundational scholars who developed the New Homiletic, see Robert Waznak, *An Introduction to the Homily* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 23-25.

[7] The theology of the liturgy in FIYH was strongly influenced by Karl Rahner. For a discussion of Rahner's Liturgy of the World, see Michael Skelly S.J., *The Liturgy of the World: Karl Rahner's Theology of Worship* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1991).

[8] For further discussion of the implications for justice in preaching based in experience, see Christine Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1992).
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An element that is key in the inculturation in the Mayan context of the New Homiletic is narrative—the importance of story and image in bringing alive the Word in community. Referring to the importance of story and imagination in the New Homiletic, Robert Waznak quotes homiletician Thomas Troeger in *An Introduction to the Homily*, "We preachers need to build our sermons so that our listeners can step securely from image to image, from story to story, and thus climb up into the truths of our lives."[9] Essentially, I saw my role in the workshop with the Mayan women as accompanying them as they "climbed up into the truths of their lives." The elements of process based in critical pedagogy were designed toward that end, and the results of the workshop were truly the work of the women in community. They reflected on their reality (including their history, family situations, cultural mores, religious beliefs, and community commitments), and then moved to encounter with the resources of the Catholic faith (Bible and tradition, as well as local church practice), and then reflected on possibilities for transformation in themselves, in their communities, in the local church.

Explicit in the workshop was the fact that the women were present and reflecting as subjects of their own lives and in their communities, rather than objects, or only receivers, of the Word of God. For a good number of the women, the role of subject was a relatively new one—the role of object was much more familiar to them, and consistent with gender role stereotyping in contemporary Mayan and Mexican Mestizo society. One of the striking aspects of pastoral practice in San Cristobal is the effort, as previously mentioned, to reclaim central (and often ancient) Mayan cultural traditions that stressed the importance of men and women working together, as mutual subjects.

That is a strong reason why I rely on the tenets of critical pedagogy for creating and developing the process for the workshop. The focus was on the work the women did together, with myself as a part of the process, facilitating but not lecturing. I saw my role as creating an environment for interaction, learning and growth. As you will see as I here move through the process, I occasionally gave a brief introduction to a theme or topic area, but then the bulk of the conversation was shared between us.

The Process Itself: Day One

Mayan culture tends to be high context,[10] so it was important to begin the process of the workshop with some activity that would build context. Many of the women were slightly acquainted with one another, and in some cases they had never met one another. At the same time, there were several women present with their comadres (relationship between the mother and godmother of a child, as strong as family bonds in most Latino cultures). As the purpose of the workshop was to "sacar la voz" (bring out the voice) of the women, I wanted to get them on their feet speaking right away. So we began with an invitation to each woman to tell her story. I expected very brief presentations delivered in soft voices, based on my first acquaintance with the women as they gathered.

The Telling of the Stories

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[9] Waznak, 25.

[10] In the work of Eric Law (most significantly in his first book *The Lion Shall Lay Down with the Lamb)* he defines high context cultures as those in which it is important to establish a personal and communal context prior to performing a task at a gathering. It is important for people to connect and get to know one another in order to work together effectively. In contrast, in a low context culture, Law reflects that the people can begin a meeting and launch immediately into a task-driven agenda without a problem.

Much to my surprise, from the very beginning, the women took this invitation very seriously. They spoke at great length about their experiences, many of which involved much suffering and deprivation—there were a number of women who had survived domestic violence at the hands of husband or father, and, in at least two stories, both. Death of children and other close family members was also a common thread through several of the stories, as was abuse of alcohol by family members, and on the part of one of the women herself. Conversion to Catholicism rooted in contemporary tradition and Scripture was a common focus in the stories, and many of the women talked about how participation in church had transformed their family relationships, as partners stopped abusing alcohol and incidents of violence against the women and their children were completely curtailed in a number of cases. It became clear as the workshop went on that the women were searching for their own proactive practice of Christianity, as they had observed changes in their spouses, they wondered just what kind of transformation might await them.

Each woman had the opportunity to speak for as long as she wanted to, and the stories averaged 10 to 20 minutes apiece. There were tears, and laughter as well, in the telling, and on the part of the listeners. After each story, I invited the women to respond to the speaker with a connection that she had made when listening, with a similar experience from her own life, or with an affirmation for the woman who had told the story. I joined in this process with the women as a participant in dialogue.

Once the dialogue and affirmations were done, I invited the women to make a suggestion or two regarding how the speaker had presented herself. I modeled what a suggestion might be, i.e., "You told such an interesting story, Maria, I think it would have come across even more powerfully if you had spoken a little louder." After two or three suggestions, we moved to the next speaker. The women applauded each speaker, and it seemed clear that some of these women had not often been applauded in their lives. A pastoral agent who works with women in the Diocese of San Cristobal was present for the workshop, and told me that she had never heard the voices of some of these women before.

Tying it Up

The telling of the stories took most of the day. We broke every couple of hours, either for tea prepared over the open fire (it was cold enough that we needed to get near the fire regularly in any case!), or a simple meal of tortillas, eggs, beans, etc.

When all the women had had the opportunity to tell their stories (17 of the 18 did so), we gathered again to talk about the experience. At this point, I mentioned preaching for the first time. I talked about how preaching is our story, and God's story, and about the sense in which they are one and the same. We talked about different kinds of preaching, and they were amazed to know that the first Christian preacher was a woman—Mary Magdalene. There was a tiny girl there named Magdalena, who sat up very straight in her chair when we brought up her name and its significance in Christian tradition!

Listening Dynamic

Following the invitation to each woman to speak, they divided into pairs, and I asked them to dialogue with one another about themselves. I asked them to listen carefully to one another, as each would be asked to tell the larger group something significant about her partner. There was a lot of laughter during this exercise, and a high level of interest as each woman

spoke. We concluded that "sacando la palabra" in a community, with a community and for a community involved listening first, only then followed by sharing and proclamation.

Looking at Scripture

I then introduced the lectionary Gospel reading for the next day, which dealt with law and spirit. The women went into groups of three or four, and they reflected on the following questions:
"Where do you see tension between law and spirit in your community?"
"What is the challenge of this Gospel for you, and for your community?"

The responses were interesting, and demonstrated that the women were gaining understanding of the fact that the tensions that existed in the first century remained part of their lives today, and that the message of the Gospel was relevant and held challenge for themselves and their communities.

The very next morning, we had a celebration of the Eucharist with the local pastor, and he invited the women to respond to the same Gospel passage informally. I had let them know that they would be invited, and a number of the women stepped forward and spoke. Most of the responses were brief, and the women were obviously very nervous, with the exception of the few who had some experience speaking in front of others. But it was an important first step for some of the participants.

It became apparent during the course of this first day together that the central issue in "sacando la voz" of these women had very little to do with technique and genre—and everything to do with journeying with them as they came to believe that they had something worthwhile to say.

The Second Day

We began the second day with the celebration of the Eucharist, and the shared preaching. After a cup of tea, then, I asked the women who spoke what it felt like to reflect on the Word in a public way. One of the significant reflections was that there were so many understandings of the same Gospel passage. This was an opportunity for us to dialogue about the value of diversity of voice in community, and why it wasn't appropriate for only their husbands to speak in public. A number of women observed that an important perspective gets lost if women remain silent in these gatherings of their communities.

The Voices of Women and Men

Our dialogue about diversity of voice led us smoothly to the next session. I would like to note here that, as the women gained confidence in one another and in the workshop experience, the sessions took longer and longer. By noon of the second day it was clear that it was important to the group that each participant respond at least once during each session. As a result, response to one open-ended question could take an hour and a half to two hours.

Continuing with the theme of diversity of voice, we moved to discussion of how women's and men's voices and opinions may differ concerning a wide range of topics. To illustrate this concretely, the women divided into pairs and each pair was assigned a theme (the themes were family, work, hope, money and alcohol, and some of the themes were assigned to more than one pair). Each pair then prepared a dialogue, with one of them playing the part of a man, and the other a woman. They could hardly work for the laughter, as they put into words the differences that they have always known to exist. Many of the teams used props in their

presentations, and some recruited the children who were present as additional players to better convey the reality they were trying to represent. As they presented their dialogues, the most recurring comment was, "Yes, that is how it is. This is true."

After all of the dialogues had been presented and commented on at length, I reinforced how the reality of the different perspectives of men and women also extended to differences within gender groups due to many factors. The women demonstrated in their comments increased experience of the importance of their voices.

Social Transformation

The dialogues revealed a number of societal and social situations that are widespread and problematic to these women and their communities, and some of the women themselves had experienced or were experiencing discrimination, inability to make decisions concerning use of family resources, effects of the abuse of alcohol, and other issues raised in the dialogues. A good number of the dialogues were preceded by comments to the effect that the women doing the role play experienced a different reality than that which they were about to convey, which they said was common among family and neighbors. I thought that these initial comments demonstrated changes that had come about in the women's family and social relationships, as well as the fact that some of the women already saw their lifestyles in contrast to some of the social and cultural norms of their communities.

The conversation turned to the resources that the women had encountered as they and their families became active in Catholic faith community, primarily the Church's strong stance against abuse of alcohol and its persistent message about the dignity of human beings. They reflected on changes that they had seen in people dear to them, as well as on the continued need for transformation in their communities. Interestingly, the conversation focused very clearly on interpersonal relationships in the family and small local community, and very little on systemic oppression that extends beyond the local context. The exception to that was in the area of general view of women by Mayan and larger Mexican society. These women recognized that women suffer and had suffered from alienation, discrimination and the lack of opportunity or choice in the areas of education, lifestyle and childbearing. They acknowledged a certain shame about even being a woman, and how that was a major factor in keeping women out of public dialogue—the fact that public opinion is often against a woman with a strong voice in a local Mayan community also had a lot of bearing in these womens' discernment about speaking publicly. Comments like, "Who is she to speak about . . .," or "She should be quiet and let her husband speak, and take care of the children" were common as the women observed others, and, in some cases, themselves, beginning to break out of the cultural mold of quiet submissiveness.

At the same time, a number of the women reported surprise at being viewed and accepted as leaders in their communities. One relatively young woman was amazed that the older women from her community came to her to ask how to properly host an important community event. She had recently begun practicing as a midwife, after learning from an experienced person. One of the interesting things that she observed was that leadership in one area seemed to invite people to turn to her for other things as well—and her new role was challenging, and, at times, acutely uncomfortable. She considered herself still a novice trying to determine her role in the community, while being sought out to lead in areas that she did not feel qualified.

Getting Very Personal—the Next Generation

We focused the dialogue even more by beginning to talk about how the changes that were happening in these women themselves as they become aware of the value of their voices would or were changing the situation for their families or communities.

The response to this question was hesitant at first, as it was clear that the women had not considered themselves agents of transformation. I shared a story that my colleague Christine Smith had told me about a similar conversation she had with a group of women in Africa, and how reflection on choices they were making helped them to see themselves as agents of transformation, and that seemed to help the women create a context for talking about themselves as agents of transformation. Many of their responses were compelling and unforgettable. "I think things are going to change for my daughters because I am beginning to speak. Maybe they will never have to live silently." "My sons, God willing, will not be the kind of man some of my male relatives are—I hope they can be more like their father is now, and I also hope that they know that a woman deserves and expects to be treated with respect because they see how I act." We focused on the little children present right there in the group, and observed that their attendance at meetings like this where they hear their mothers' voices speaking out about important things would provide them a model for how to interact, not only in their own families, but as architects of their communities' futures.

The insight penetrated the group—they realized that their efforts, even if they were fledgling, to speak their reality (whether in homiletic in a worship context, or about issues in community in other contexts) would ultimately change the reality of life for themselves, their children, and their community. Further, they seemed struck by the reality that, whatever they say or do, they are affecting the next generation and the dynamics of their communities.

Scripture and Transformation

We also went back to Scripture on the second day by dividing the participants into three groups, each of which focused on a specific Scripture passage (one focused on Exodus 2, one on I Corinthians 12: 4-7, and the third on Matthew 28: 57-61). Before beginning work with the passages, we talked about the Paschal Mystery as paradigm for preaching. The conversation essentially reinforced all that we had been saying about commitment, consequences and transformation and put it squarely in an ecclesial context.

Each group considered the following questions as they reflected on their scripture passage:

- What does the passage say?
- Where does it live in my life, and in my community?
- Where is the challenge?
- Where is the resurrection/hope?

Two things really stood out in this session. The first was the recurrence and significance of the theme of hope in the dialogue, and the second was the interpretation of the story of the Canaanite woman rendered by one of the small groups.

Hope

There was a noticeable tendency as the workshop went on towards increasingly hopeful sharing among the women. In a number of the sessions, they spoke of hope against hope, and what it means to have hope even if one's situation showed few signs of changing. Hope was consistently portrayed as a way to see the world, rather than as a reasonable expectation of best

outcome. Hope as a way to transform life emerged as a theme as well, with one woman in her fifties commenting that "I have suffered for most of my life. I never knew that I could speak about my life in community and find hope in the words." Clearly, hope sustains these women. And they find it in community, and those in womens' groups consistently referred to hope as something that had deepened in them as a result of spending time sharing life with other women.

The connection between seeing hope in Scripture and proclaiming it in preaching was a natural for most of these women, and the courageous examples of their own lives and choices were very moving in the dialogue, and throughout the workshop. Hope was woven into the context of all that happened during the workshop, and was even present during conversations about painful realities that the women and their communities continue to grapple with.

The Canaanite Woman

I hesitated to assign Matthew 28, the story of the Canaanite woman, to the groups because of the apparently disrespectful way that Jesus addresses the woman through most of the passage. Fortunately Christine Smith convinced me to see what the women would do with it. The group that reflected on the story spoke about two main things that essentially turned out to be metaphors for their whole experience. First, one participant, a grandmother, said that the woman in the story had helped Jesus to see beyond his own cultural reality. She had broadened his vision, and he allowed himself to be changed by his encounter with her. Then, another pointed out that the Canaanite woman got what she wanted and needed because she was persistent. She kept asking, in reality demanding, her daughter's health. The dialogue moved to the lives of the participants, and they realized that they are called to persistence in their contexts, and that, somehow, that persistence will bear fruit in their lives, in the lives of those dear to them, and even in the very systems that oppress them.

These women lived inside that Scripture passage. Their experiences were and are living signs of this nuanced and often disputed story—wise persistence in the face of resistance can bear fruit. And transformation is possible.

Tying it All Together

The last part of the second day of the workshop, as well as the third day, were mostly devoted to tying together the workshop. Each woman had the opportunity to stand and preach from the Word that she and her group had reflected on, and the whole group gave feedback. It was inspiring to listen to the depth, beauty and connectedness of what they said.

The impact of the workshop time together became even more evident in the evaluation section. It took two and a half hours to evaluate, and the women used the time as an opportunity to reflect on the experience and its implications in their lives. One young mother of two from a very remote village said, "I am ready now to step out of my shame." She felt like a subject, and was ready to begin to relate to her community in a different, more public, way together with her husband. Shame and the need to leave it behind had been a common thread in conversations during the workshop—there is an culturally inbuilt feeling of shame for just being a woman that was deep in the mind and hearts of the majority of the participants.

Using the paschal mystery language that we had used around preaching, the woman who was asked to report on the workshop at a general assembly of men and women in San Cristobal a couple of days after the conclusion of the workshop rose from her chair at the time of the report, and simply said, "We were dead and we have risen." Then she sat down. Perhaps this speaks better than anything else to the context of struggle that the women come from, to the hope that

they find woven in their lives and strengthened by God's Word and their being together, to the possibilities for the future, even though what will happen in the future is not at all clear.

I realized as I listened to them that, if preaching is the Word alive in community, that I had been graced to be with the Word for three graced days in ways that changed me forever.

Implications of the Workshop for Homiletic Preaching

This experience really reinforced the importance of context (with culture a major factor) and relationship in the preaching of the Word. I was reminded that preachers need to use every resource at their command to accompany people into seeing the Word alive in their own lives as they are present at and go forth from liturgical celebration. Understanding of culture and a willingness to engage people in a way that seeks response in life are necessary basic attributes of a preacher who seeks to preach an authentic word. The strong message that hope comes through relationship also has implications for the preacher—to preach a word of hope, then, it is important to be in some kind of relationship with a community.

Conclusion

I have found resources from critical pedagogy helpful in accompanying people as they connect their experience to God's Word, and their lives to the possibilities of transformation. These resources are consistent with various characteristics of the New Homiletic, and may have the potential to lead us further toward preaching that is authentic Word alive in community, leading us to build a world of greater justice, with the possibility of laying a foundation of peace.

Radical Preacher Training

James E. Hayes
Simpson College, Indianola, Iowa
Collaborative Preaching Consulting

Social Context

The primary concern of this article is Radical Preaching—ongoing preacher training at the roots—in local churches. The ground of this pedagogy is a blend of necessity and reaction. The necessity springs from the lack of manageable ongoing formation for preachers in this area of Iowa, which lacks educational institutions related to preaching. The reaction is the fruit of my denominational context—Roman Catholic—which remains unclear on a practical level about who should be preaching, when they should preach, and how they should be trained. The inherent questions of spirituality and preaching underlie the investigation not only for the preachers themselves, but for the people they serve.

We begin with the question of local necessity. Local churches and denominations vary in their expectations of the ongoing formation of preachers. The default model allows the individual preacher or congregation to choose how they might best improve his or her preaching skills. Typically, ordained preachers interested in deepening their appreciation of the art of preaching and refining the craft of same, participate in the occasional workshop. I have personally taken part in many such workshops and learned plenty. Through these personal experiences I have noticed consistently that time constraints impede practical application of the theories presented. The inspirational thoughts of facilitators, notes of reminder for future projects, and intentions of implementing all the ideas discussed are placed in files entitled "Preaching," perhaps never to be seen again. Such impediments limit the transformational quality of the educational experience—and this is to say nothing of the overconfident or lethargic preachers who have no concern for improvement! In Iowa, geographical challenge further hinders preachers desirous of improved skill. There are few graduate theological schools in Iowa, even fewer that deal specifically with pastoral theology and specialties such as preaching and the spirituality of the preacher. This lack of resources renders ongoing formation for preachers difficult, to say nothing of the dearth of responsible initial training programs for the non-ordained. Some preachers seek improvement by traveling to educational institutions or programs, but most lack the desire or financial resources to pursue such methods. There is a strong need for radical preacher training which springs from the roots of the local community and which is both accessible and serious.

The second challenge of preacher identity springs from my Roman Catholic context. At present the bishops of the United States are in the preparation phase of a document on lay ecclesial ministers.[1] The explosion of ministries in the post conciliar church includes lay preaching in various forms. The fallout of this renewed charism includes tension resulting from a lack of theological clarity in the area of ministry and the sacrament of holy orders. Also, the resurgence of lay preaching necessitates stipulation of institutional order to this charismatic renewal. The fluidity of historical moments such as that of the current increase of lay ministries,

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[1] "Spiritual Formation of Lay Ecclesial Ministers," http://www.usccb.org/laity/laymin/spiritformlem.shtml , accessed 1August 2005.

typically involves such unclear moments of transition. Recent Vatican documents reflect the concerns of the hierarchy for sharper distinctions between clergy and laity.[2] Apparently there is concern that the various roles and ministries of the Church have become confused. In my opinion this concern has led to mistrust and division in the Body of Christ. Among laity and clergy, I have personally witnessed the lack of trust or respect for the gifts of the other. As a church, we are called to collaborate in the ministry of the Word, regardless of vocation. One goal of my consulting and teaching is that in the context of small groups touched by time-tested trust, the members will recognize the gifts they have to offer one another vis-à-vis their growth as preachers and ministers of the word. Perhaps through a renewed focus on the shared life of the spirit to which we are all called will help the church to bridge the current painful divide.

My interest in the above challenges and proposal of radical preacher training as an appropriate solution is personal, professional, and prophetic. Personally, I have been passionate about preaching for some time, which led to my pursuit of doctoral studies in the discipline. Professionally, I have recently completed my degree and am anxious to put my research to good use in the church. Ultimately I hope to teach seminary students and master preachers, but I also want to remain rooted by using my gifts to facilitate skill development for preachers—ordained or lay—in local churches. On the prophetic level, my project includes subversive interests. Lay preachers in the Roman Catholic tradition, particularly lay women, lack ready acceptance from various quarters. My hope is that the pedagogy discussed in this paper will affect preaching at its roots, helping those who often find themselves underground and invisible to the larger church, to excel locally as preachers with a strong sense of identity and self-assurance. Such healthy radicals, much like the word of God burning in the heart of the prophet, necessarily spring forth at the appropriate time.

My awareness of the above social context and challenges results from time I have spent with preachers around the country through recent focus group research. The rich experience of gathering with lay preachers provided me with insights related not only to my research, but to the nature of preaching and ministry. For the sake of brevity, I offer the following succinct conclusions.

In one Midwestern city I noticed the need to acknowledge the dynamic of power in working with church groups. The lay preachers were well aware of the differences that exist between them and ordained preachers, especially on the level of required ongoing formation. From them I learned that if there is to be an expectation of growth on the part of lay preachers, it must be a value for all preachers in order to be effective. The insight of these preachers regarding their unique voice also contributes to our study. The people in the pew mention to them that the lay preachers' insights and credibility are treasured. For the purposes of this study, that means that not only are the lay preachers in need of mentoring in some kind of an ongoing formation model, but they have insights to offer to ordained preachers. Though many members of the church value the concept of ongoing formation, it is not something that can be forced. If preachers are to truly grow from the experience, they must be motivated. Finally, there is an issue of justice. If the church expects quality on the part of ministers, they must all be supported through the resources of the community as they seek to improve in the carrying out their call.

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[2] Among the most volatile is the 1997 Vatican document, *Instruction On Certain Questions Regarding the Collaboration of the Non-Ordained Faithful in the Sacred Ministry of the Priest* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997) http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cclergy/documents/rc_con_interdic_doc_15081997_en.html accessed 12 August 2005.

The gathering of a focus group in the East impressed upon me the importance of the support of the bishop and priests in order for any program of preacher formation to be truly effective. That support allows for contagious energy on the part of all persons involved in the preaching ministry. It also provides sustenance for a spirit of collaboration, which builds trust among the preachers and renders them better able to hear honest criticism so that they might grow in their abilities. I learned too that a promoter of preaching or centralized authority within a diocese need not establish a curriculum for ongoing formation based only on theoretical experience. If you want to know what the preachers need in order to improve in their preaching, ask them. Then provide them with the necessary resources to grow in the areas expressed. Any program of ongoing formation must also take into account the importance of autonomy. The areas for growth in preachers are as myriad as the number of preachers themselves. Thus, any model of ongoing formation must leave some decisions at the local level where the respective preachers understand best what they need. A blanket curriculum proposed by religious or seminary leaders might not understand the local requisites for improvement.

By the time I interviewed a final group in another part of the country it dawned on me that women represented the majority of each focus group. Any proposal for ongoing formation of lay preachers requires input and critique from women of the local church. If the church is to truly respect the ministry of the word, we must acknowledge that preaching on the part of lay persons is widespread and we must do our best to assure that the preachers ministering are qualified and competent and that they have dependable structures to support them in their ministry.

Time spent with these preachers has led me to a deeper conviction of the importance of local and adaptable models to continue the formation of spiritually enlivened preachers. The conviction is not only mine. The bishops of Canada have also noticed the *sitz im leben* of the preaching ministry of the church and as early as 1981 recognized the necessity of regulating the selection, training, and ongoing formation of all preachers.[3] Though their opinions were motivated by the inability of a diminished number of priests to minister to the local communities, their insights gaze far beyond the pragmatic. In the area of lay leadership they called for a process of discernment of spirits in order to find pastoral leaders from within the local community, including preachers. Preachers needed when priests are not available or "morally competent" should be chosen from the community. The persons chosen to carry on the preaching ministry should be either those already in roles of leadership or those that "are capable of becoming adequate leaders."[4] The cited issue of the Canadian bishops' *National Bulletin on the Liturgy* also mentions what the diocese is obliged to provide these new lay leaders: 1) Formation, so that they are able to think according to the mind of Christ and his Church. Formation takes time, effort, and prayer. 2) Training in the manner of preparing and leading, including how to use the liturgical books. 3) Occasional renewal. (The piece that seems to be missing from many formation programs)[5] The same document calls on dioceses to assess their current programs and add to programming and training where necessary, in order to provide the required help to the lay ministers while maintaining a long range view with regard to vocations.

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[3] *National Bulletin on the Liturgy* from the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB), 79 (1981): 97-144. The entire issue covers the issue of lay presiding.

[4] Ibid, 103.

[5] Ibid.

These directives, in my estimation, are not limited to the scarcity of ordained ministers, but to a charismatic church that feeds a world hungry for the Word of God. William Skudlarek agrees with the sentiment through these words: "The opening up of preaching to the non-ordained makes possible a wider, and therefore more creative, intersection between the Word of God and human experience."[6]

The question thus becomes, how? How can a diocese, professor of preaching, or a local church establish and maintain a program that speaks to all of the insights we have gained through this investigation of social context? What model of preacher training and ongoing formation could possibly respond to the breadth of needs to which the ministry of the Word must speak in the contemporary church?

The organization of this paper responds to the above challenges and questions by first describing the history of what I have learned about establishing a consulting resource for ongoing formation of preachers on the local level. Critical reflection follows the proposed logistics in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the pedagogy as it actually occurred in working with a local church. This evaluation includes the thoughts of workshop participants with whom I recently worked. The paper concludes with an accounting of future considerations following the rubric of my personal, professional, and prophetic interests.

Collaborative Preaching Consulting.

To understand the necessity of establishing a local consulting resource for preachers requires a closer look at the "who" is preaching, particularly in the Roman Catholic context. The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA) released a 2002 study of the effects of lay preaching on the diocese of Great Falls/Billings, Montana. The training program for these preachers was administered by diocesan officials and Partners in Preaching whose founder, Patricia Hughes Baumer, is a member of the Academy of Homilteics. The study is extensive, soliciting data from clergy, laity, and the preachers themselves; some of the data is of direct consequence to the thesis of this work. The overall findings of the research point to satisfaction among the people of the diocese regarding the implementation of lay preachers. In general the data show that the people are more concerned about the quality of the preaching than the nature of the preacher.

The most common setting for lay preaching for the study was the ritual *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest* (SCAP). The majority of the lay preachers in the study were women; 62% are married. Specific to the purposes of our study, the research opines that though "[l]ay preachers are sufficiently prepared, most would like more training in preaching."[7] A radical training and ongoing formation model speaks directly to this desire for more training. "Nine in ten agree that every lay preacher could benefit from mentoring after initial training."[8] 28% believe lay preachers are not sufficiently prepared. 93% of the priests surmise that the lay

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[6] William Skudlarek, "Lay Preaching and Liturgy," *Worship* 58 (November, 1984), 500.

[7] Mary Gautier, Mary E. Bendyna, RSM, and Mary Charlotte Chandler, RSCJ, *Evaluation of the Lay Preaching Ministry: Diocese of Great Falls-Billings and Partners in Preaching* . (Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate [CARA] Georgetown University, 2002), 2.

[8] Ibid.
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preachers would benefit from mentoring, though there is no mention of what percentage might find it personally beneficial for the priests themselves.

The study is of particular interest for our purposes because of the demographics of those questioned, including three publics: the lay preachers themselves; priests and pastoral administrators; and parishioners. The CARA study shows that priests, pastoral administrators, and the people of the assembly—though they are pleased with the quality and experience of lay preaching--also recognize the need for substantial initial training and continuing formation. This recognition implies that the initial training be supported by ongoing training and formation.

The difficulty for persons in rural locales, or even those for whom schedule or lack of resources represent insurmountable challenges, are in need of a new paradigm for preacher training and ongoing formation. This is true not only for the ordained, but especially for lay preachers who might lack substantive initial training. Perhaps the radical nature proposed by this paper necessitates a new model of training and formation that will function outside the traditional academy.

The exploration of what such a new paradigm might look like led to the establishment of Collaborative Preaching Consulting. I offer personal time apart from my teaching and administrative responsibilities to evaluate, consult, and strategize follow up with local congregations. The resources I provide include workshops and retreats on the nature of the ministry of the word; provide resources that help the local community and preacher(s) identify the most important electronic and bibliographic literature relative to their needs; establish and provide organizational structure for sermon preparation and critique groups; and individual training and critique for preachers seeking to improve in their ministry. The hope of this enterprise is that it remains adaptable to local needs in a way that complements the existing structures of continuing education provided by more organized seminary and distance learning programs through affordability, accessibility, and adjustable programming tailored to the needs expressed by the community.

A Prototype

A recent "client" or local church provides evaluative insights vis-à-vis the usefulness and necessity of ongoing preacher formation on the local level. Through a rudimentary marketing process I have slowly informed local pastors that I am available for consultation on how they might enliven the preaching ministry in their churches through a combination of education, provision of resources, and an ongoing process for critique. This particular pastor sensed a dull inadequacy as a preacher and was not convinced that paying deeper attention to his preaching would improve the life of the local church. Notice the language of spirituality in his self-assessment. In spite of his skepticism, he is a man of deep faith and interested in any program that might intensify the church's love of God and sense of discipleship.

As he had heard of my recent doctoral research and the model of ongoing formation for preachers, he inquired of me how my research might be translated into an effective means of adult formation in his parishes. His concern as a preacher was not only for his own spiritual identity as a pastor and preacher, but that of the entire church.

I have selected these churches as the example of my proposed model for preacher training and ongoing formation because they represent a wonderful prototype of what is happening in the Roman Catholic Church in Iowa—and many other areas in the United States. The pastor is responsible for three churches, in addition to his duties as a spiritual and retreat director at a

nearby retreat center. Personally stretched in terms of how to best offer his time and talent to the church, he regularly invites his parishioners to consider their own investment of resources in order to advance the mission of the church. These are small, rural churches with little access to professional spiritual and faith formation. The lack of resources should not be misconstrued as indicative of a lack desire of the people to grow in their faith. Their invitation to develop a workshop demonstrates to me the depth of their spiritual commitment.

The planning process started with a private meeting through which the Pastor made clear his agenda and expectations. In his own words, he hoped that in our working together, "that the folks would gain a bigger picture/perspective/understanding of what our sessions are and could be about, bigger than simply a "bible study" class (which is how some still refer to it...). As I outlined originally in my little sheet for/about our sessions, I hope we will think/pray/participate in the sessions, and Sunday liturgy, not just to gain information (about the scriptures, or the life/teachings of the church, or even God), nor improve our conformation (to the laws and rules and regulations and expectations of...whomever, even God), but that we open more and more to the transformation that "it's all about".

One notices the deep concern and regard for the Word of God as the foundation of the preacher's spirituality, as well as the mandate to go forth and preach that word to others. The comparison of conformation and transformation is inspiring.

After the initial invitation from the pastor I proposed the following model for working with the churches. First, I wanted to take advantage of the local assets. They already had a faith sharing group in place which met weekly to study the lectionary readings. In other churches, establishment of such a group has been the first stage of my design. The pastor wanted the bible sharing group to have individual attention on how they might reflect, not only on how the weekly scriptures related to their lives, but how their time together related to the preaching process, particularly since the pastor/preacher was a member of their group. In addition, we hoped to invite the parish in general to consider their role in the preaching ministry. The Pastor assumed an effective way for this to occur would be to invite the entire parish to attend an adult education opportunity in order to reflect on how the proclamation of the word impacts their daily lives. Thus, the initial commitment was to facilitate two workshops, one for the committed weekly group and one for the parish in general. In this instance there was no need to train lay preachers to help carry out the preaching mission, though such training has been another part of my work with other churches. The idea was to evaluate what the parish would need after the workshops if they were to commit to an ongoing formation model which dealt specifically with preaching.

Critique from the Roots

Once the training sessions and adult education opportunities with the three churches were completed, I was interested in how the time we spent together related to the expectations of the participants. From my perspective, I had hoped that the consulting would lead to a sense of empowerment and appreciation that the preacher and people both share in a common spirituality and mandate to proclaim God's word. Another hope was that there would be a deeper sense of commitment from the group and a stronger grasp that all of its members share an identity as ministers of the word.

A qualitative evaluation process was used to solicit data. I asked the Pastor and two members of the group to provide comment on the significance of the experience and on how the ministry would be continued in the future. Contact was made through phone calls and written

responses to the following questions: "Basically, if you're willing, I'd ask that you let me know what you were looking for, what you got, and what more needs to be done."

What follows are some of the suggestions and comments of the three:

Pastor Dan

Also... I really liked the idea/explanation that people could experience better preaching by bettering their own side/role in the conversation that a homily is, even though the preacher's preaching may not change at all.

And... I utterly loved the identification of the word used in description of the Emmaus disciples' conversation/discussing as the same word for homily.

I have long been familiar with the process of preparing and participating in a homily preparation group such as ours, such as St. Thomas/Tarrant was doing when I was at ISU, 1970 and beyond, so the particulars of that were not really new to me, but the follow up and follow through possibility was, though no one here has picked up on that.

All in all... I was very pleased and satisfied with your presence and presentation, and I believe it did at least expose more folks to more of an understanding/explanation of the bigger picture to preaching and everyone's role, responsibility, and possibility in it. . . .

Rose

I find the weekly question, "What would your sermon be this Sunday," particularly challenging. It really puts us on the spot.

I have deepened my love for and study of the Bible.

I know that what we do helps to deepen the insights of the homilies.

We get more out of the preaching because we've participated in the work.

You're not going to get the entire parish to these meetings, but it really benefits those who come.

Shannon

I anticipated that your presentation might suggest ways that parishioners could better prepare for Mass in order to get more out of the readings. You most certainly met those anticipations in full detail! For me, the scripture sharing that we do is just as it states--a lively sharing of ideas between people of similar interest. By 'interest', I mean that all are interested in either growing in their relationship with God, or for some, trying to bring the scriptures into focus in relation to their own values, beliefs, and experiences with God. When you pointed out to the people that

what they brought to Mass was very much linked to what they would get out of Mass, this placed the responsibility squarely in the laps of each parishioner. I believe that is where the responsibility lies in faith growth--in our own laps. For far too long, many have depended on the priest to 'tell them how to 'live' or to 'interpret' what the scriptures are saying to them. This places much too much emphasis on the priest, and much too little emphasis on our own ability to come to experience God in our lives. Reaching out to others to help them feel God's love in their lives is something I find uplifting, and I would hope that all ministers, all people of any faith would feel joy from that sort of ministry. After working with priests for a number of years, I recognized the need for ALL people to share in the ministry of helping those in need--whether that be spiritually, physically, or emotionally in need. Really, we are ALL in need of spiritual growth and renewal, but as I already mentioned, that growth has to come from within, not from someone else. I believe you addressed those ideas well in your presentation. As for people reviewing or 'critiquing' the homilies, I believe it is a wonderful idea, although maybe not as practical as wonderful. At first, I was very excited about the opportunity to give input about the homilies. Yet, as the weeks progressed, I found it challenging to work in the time to set aside for that input. 'Not having time' is probably the biggest reason or excuse most folks will make, but indeed, it would take a sincere effort to come up with a perfect time for a small group of people to meet for this reflection. There are days that I find it very difficult to get through the study notes and readings that are sent to us for our scripture reflections, let alone try to come up with ideas for a homily as Fr. Dan often asks. Reading the scripture readings ahead of time, attending the scripture sharing session, and finding quiet time to 'sit with God' are the most valuable ways for me to prepare for Mass. If there are times when I 'reach out' to people, I feel I do so more outside of church than within its walls. I believe that your presentation was a huge help to people in gaining an understanding of their role in the Mass. Thank you for your efforts in bringing this issue to light!

A Plentiful Harvest

        The purpose of this paper has been to explore the notion of Radical Preacher Formation and to offer further questions in response to the preliminary questions raised in the "Social Context" section with which we began. I have made extensive use of comments by the participants in the consultative session because those comments focus the questions.

Do small groups sharing faith and the ministry of the word respond to the need of ongoing preacher formation is geographical areas that lack seminaries and graduate schools of theology?

Does participation in such groups prepare non-seminary trained persons to responsibly share in the preaching ministry?

Do such groups further gray the lines of identity between clergy and lay persons in the Roman Catholic tradition?

Does the Pastor's comment which refers to experiences at Iowa State University lead to the conclusion that once a person has participated in a group such as this, they will long to establish like groups in future parishes? Is this evidence of a contagion that was planted at that time?

The questions currently evade response because the quality of the harvest to spring forth from such roots is unknown at this time. Let us exploration preliminary forecasts of the harvest through the rubric my aforementioned personal motivations: personal, professional, and prophetic.

The personal desire to share passion for the preaching ministry has certainly been fulfilled through this process. Though a number of the comments exude passion, the most touching quote for me was Shannon's comment, "If there are times when I 'reach out' to people, I feel I do so more outside of church than within its walls." If participation in the preaching process and ministry leads to such insights on the level of spirituality, I see great potential in such programming.

Professionally there is rich soil to be tilled with this pedagogy. As the paper began with social context that describes the evident need for preacher training and ongoing formation at the local level, it becomes even clearer that such radical preacher formation needs the attention of the church, specifically those trained in the teaching of preaching. These needs include the mission of Collaborative Preaching Consulting of affordability, accessibility, and adaptability. The comments regarding the inability of the local community to raise the commitment of their faith sharing group to the level of critiquing the homilies points to the need for ongoing guidance until the sense of identity has been strengthened.

The prophetic word of God eludes tidy conclusive paragraphs. I sense in my soul, however, that there are roots ready to burst into the light of my faith tradition and there is urgent need to tend carefully to this budding life. Ultimately, such care is also rooted in the spirituality of the preacher. Edward Schillebeeckx is competent to compose tidy conclusive paragraphs which capture the essence of this spirituality and the ministry we all share:

> The real norm and justification for competent proclamation of the gospel message is the praxis of Jesus himself embodied in the life of the preacher. The Christian who is really competent to preach today is one who, in his or her faith, is able to enter into the *sequela Jesu* fully. The competent preacher is one who can be totally concerned with human situations, one who can set in motion the processes of admiration, joy and liberation that Jesus himself set in motion and continues to initiate today.[9]

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[9] Edward Schillebeeckx, O.P. "The Right of Every Christian to Speak in the Light of Evangelical Experience" in *Preaching and the Non-Ordained,* Nadine Foley, ed. (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 37.

Seeing the Truth: The Use of Visual Illustration in Preaching

Dr. Michael Duduit
Editor, *Preaching* magazine
Executive Director, American Academy of Ministry

Abstract:
A major trend in contemporary preaching is the use of visual tools to illustrate truth: props, backdrops, video, and so on. This paper will discuss the emerging use of such tools, suggesting strengths and weaknesses and ideas for future development. Examples will be shown during the paper's presentation.

When J. Grant Howard wrote his book *Creativity in Preaching* (Zondervan) in1987, he had the foresight to include a final chapter on "Creative Use of Visual Aids in Preaching." What did he propose? He suggested that preachers make occasional use of object lessons and projecting appropriate pieces of clip art using an overhead projector. Let's not be too tough on Dr. Howard, however; in 1987, that wasn't too far from state-of-the art technology.

As we all know, the world has changed since 1987 (even if some of our sermons have not). Particularly in the past decade, the use of visual imagery and tools has exploded into the church in a remarkable way. Anyone who questions that should consider this fact: look at a church sanctuary or worship center that has been built in the last ten years. It may or may not have a pulpit, but it is almost guaranteed to have one or more projection screens installed.

This significant increase in the use of visuals in preaching has not gone without its critics, but the purpose of this paper is not to debate the validity of the visual trend or to discuss word vs. image. Rather, the purpose of this paper is to consider what is happening in the churches, why it is happening, and suggest some issues for future conversation.

Allow me to raise one other explanatory note: although this paper will talk about the use of visual tools in preaching, that is done with full recognition that the revolution in which we are engaged is multisensory, not simply visual. Many of those who are influencing this homiletical trend make it clear that they do not simply want their listeners to hear the sermon; they want us to see it, feel it, taste it – to experience the sermon in a way that would leave previous generations of preachers scratching their heads in wonder.

There is little question as to the culprit in this issue of the increasing influence of visual media: television. As TV and film critic Michael Medved has pointed out, "The average American spends 26 hours a week in front of a television set . . . that would be 13 years, uninterrupted, 24 hours a day, over a normal life span."[i]

Today's pervasive TV culture is a relatively new phenomenon, as Barbara Mraz observes:

> Though television today shapes many aspects of our lives, in the early 1950's it was a
> luxury item, present in only the more affluent households. It was a time of three channels

and two colors. Previous to the Fifties, a longer workweek made leisure time a meaningless concept. As the early Fifties wore on into the mid-Fifties, the forty-hour work-week made it possible for even the average family to gather around the TV in the evenings and watch their favorite shows. Daytime TV was filled with soaps, children's shows and game shows. . . .

Daily use of TV in all types of American households averages seven and one-fifth hours a day. In homes with teenagers under eighteen, the average viewing time is fifty-five hours weekly, or about seven and four-fifth hours a day. The Nielson rating system in 1999 reported this.

"Nearly every household (99%) has at least one television. Three-fourths (75%) have several sets, and more than half of American students have a television in their bedrooms. TV has become as indispensable in the home as a bathtub or a refrigerator, and probably garners much more attention than either of those appliances. Furthermore, the public's fascination with TV now extends beyond the home. A recent Neilsen (1998) survey found that about twenty-three million Americans watch TV when in restaurants or bars, and more and more are watching TV in airports, hospitals, and other public places. Television is now the main source of news, information, and entertainment for the overwhelming majority of Americans."[ii]

Of course, today the television must compete for our attention with another visual medium: the personal computer. Yet another medium which is a powerful influence – particularly with teens and young adults – is video gaming. (In fact, the video game industry now is larger than the movie industry in terms of annual sales.) We look, we watch, we interact – often with multiple media simultaneously.

That is why Alan Nelson writes, "Although we can sit around and discuss the theoretical benefits of solemnity, solitude, and slowing down, the bottom line is that it's getting more difficult for people to do only one thing at a time. When they try, they feel that life is passing them by. When they come to church to watch the equivalent of a talking head lecture for twenty to forty minutes or more, it's probably one of the most adrenaline-deprived moments of their week. Mind-wandering, fidgeting, grogginess, and feelings of under-stimulation run rampant in today's church audiences."[iii]

In the face of this powerful cultural reality, much of the contemporary church has responded with a sincere effort to become more visual. That a visual emphasis has engaged the contemporary church almost goes without saying. According to Wilson and Moore in their book *Digital Storytellers*, "One study in the secular audiovisual industry asserts that over 75 percent of churches in North America have purchased or are planning to purchase technology systems in the coming year. The typical system costs around $10,000 and consists of a screen, a projector, a computer, and a videocassette and/or DVD player."[iv] (That percentage makes sense if you assume it includes only those churches with full-time pastors – about a third of the total churches in the U.S.)

Many of those churches now investing in such technology are caught up in a "corporate presentations" model, which essentially involves the use of software like Microsoft PowerPoint to create a succession of images that consist "of a number of textual, aural, and visual elements

tossed together in a PowerPoint document, with little sense of design and zero sense of story or experience."[v]

In some churches it is as simple as projecting announcements before the service and the words of songs and hymns during worship; in others, the screen may be used during the sermon to project an outline or key phrases. In some large congregations, the screen is used for image magnification of the preacher during the sermon, so that people who sit far away from the front can see the facial expressions and gestures of the preacher. And in an increasing number of churches, the screens will be used to project a film or video clip that helps illustrate the worship or sermon theme; the clip will typically be used just before the sermon or some time during the sermon where a traditional illustration would have otherwise been used.

So we are faced with the reality that the generations which have come along since the Baby Boomers is are visual in orientation. They grew up on television, they mark the stages of their lives by memorable movies, and now they spend hours each day in front of a computer monitor. They want to see truth, not just hear it.

Can illustrations be visual?

Preaching is an inherently oral medium and most of us who preach have been taught to think in oral and literary terms, yet we are trying to reach a generation that tends to think in images and story, a generation that is visually-oriented. If you are preaching to a typical congregation, you will be speaking to a combination of learning styles. As a result, preachers are increasingly thinking strategically about communicating truth using a variety of methodologies, including visual ones.

In the book *Rediscovering Expository Preaching*, Richard Mayhue points out that illustrations are used "to enlighten or make clear." He notes several purposes for illustration, including (in part): "to interest the mind and secure the continuing attention of the audience; to make our preaching three-dimensional and lifelike; . . . to communicate convincingly to those who respond better to pictures than to facts; to ensure that the message is unforgettable; (and) to involve all the human senses in the communication process. . . ."[vi] It would not be difficult to make the case that illustrations presented in a visual format could effectively accomplish those purposes – in some cases, more effectively than many illustrations presented verbally.

In his book *Using Illustrations to Preach With Power*, Bryan Chapell argues for the superiority of illustrative material such as parables and allegories, as opposed to items like "figures, analogies, and examples . . . (which) do not involve listeners to the same degree as do true illustrations." According to Chapell's definition, "Illustrations are 'life-situation' stories within sermons whose details (whether explicitly told or imaginatively elicited) allow listeners to identify with an experience that elaborates, develops, and explains scriptural principles. Through the details of the story, the listener is able imaginatively to enter an experience in which a sermonic truth can be observed."[vii] Once again, it is possible that many listeners will be able to more readily "enter an experience in which a sermonic truth can be observed" if the sermon utilizes visual illustration as well as the spoken word.

Allowing for the strategic use of visual illustration does not require that it be used in every sermon, any more than one would use a "football story" in every sermon (though I have known preachers who have attempted the latter). Indeed, in an interview with *Preaching*

magazine, Ed Young, Jr. – whose use of visual illustrative material would rank him among the most avid practitioners – insists that the key to effective illustration is not flash and dazzle, but being unpredictable in your communication, to avoid loss of audience interest resulting from slavery to predictable patterns. He says,

> "Sometimes it can be as small as changing the time when you speak, or it can be maybe one time giving a message outline or message map and then one time you don't do it. Maybe it's having the choir or your praise team singing in one area in the church one weekend and another area another weekend. Maybe it's using video clips for two straight weeks and maybe it's not using it for six weeks. Maybe it's being very loud and having all the lights for three or four weeks, and maybe it's totally dialed down, totally simplistic for four straight weeks. So the church should be consistently inconsistent because the higher the predictability the lower the connectivity.[viii]

While they are not the only ones we could discuss, let's consider two major visual methodologies which are becoming more and more common as illustrative tools in contemporary preaching: the use of film/video clips and the use of props and sets.

The Video/Film Clip as Illustration

For many years, preachers have used visual media as sermon illustrations; they have just described those media in words, rather than displaying the actual images. It is not at all uncommon to hear sermon illustrations based on television shows, movies, comic strips, even paintings – all visual media. Why do we think it is acceptable to describe such images, but not to show them?

Over the past five to ten years in particular, there has been a significant increase in the use of video and film clips as part of worship and preaching – not simply among innovative mega-churches (which have always tended to be "first adopters" of new methodologies), but also among small to mid-size congregations. In a July 2004 survey sponsored by the *Preaching Now* newsletter, 60 percent of respondents expressed interest in using new strategies for reaching different generations, with many citing video and film clips as part of their own new approaches. What was interesting about that survey is that 90 percent of participants were from churches of less than 500 members, with 55 precnet from churches of 199 members or less.

Part of the reason for this growing interest is technological; as costs for equipment have declined, video has become a more realistic option for more churches. Another factor is also, in part, technological; with the availability of information via the Internet and other resources (such as mega-church sponsored conferences), smaller churches are increasingly knowledgeable about the techniques and resources used by larger congregations, and many of those smaller churches are using their larger cousins as methodological models.

An additional factor in the use of video and film clips is the wide range of video resources that are now available. For example, with films now available via DVD within a few months of their theatrical release, film clips are now accessible quickly and easily. Even more important, an increasing number of multi-media services and websites are now being launched for the purpose of providing visual images and video for use in worship services. In 2005, for the

first time, *Preaching* magazine included a survey of nine sources for quality video productions developed specifically for use in worship and preaching, and that list is now far from comprehensive. One website, www.sermonspice.com, has been developed as a "broker" on behalf of a wide range of video producers; a pastor can go to the site and browse more than 400 videos by topic or genre (testimonial, dramatic, comedic, etc.), see a preview, and download the video (typically for a cost range of $12-$20 each).

There are helpful resources available that suggest different film clips to go with different themes. Group and Zondervan both have books that suggest video clips for various themes, with other publishers no doubt entering the arena as well.

How are these clips used in conjunction with the sermon? One approach is the used of video to introduce the theme of the message, get the attention of the listeners, and prompt their thoughts on the issue at hand – in other words, video is sometimes used as a sermon introduction. For example, in the congregation where I worship, the pastor used a video clip that combined a coordinated sequence of images from television programs about families. In each clip, someone was coming home. After about a minute or so, he began his sermon about "coming home" to God's family. The video clip established the subject and got the attention of the listeners – essentially, it became the introduction to the sermon, much as a pastor might have told a story in another sermon.

Video clips are also used as illustrative material within the sermon. Rather than verbally relating an anecdote or even describing a scene from a film or television show, the pastor comes to the appropriate part of the message, then pauses as the video clip is projected onto the screens. Unlike using video as an introduction – where the clip or short film might be as long as four or five minutes – the illustrative video clip is typically two minutes or less.

[During the presentation of this paper, participants will have the opportunity to see several examples of video productions which have been developed specifically for use as sermon illustrations.]

To paraphrase a maxim of previous pastoral generations, these days the preacher has his Bible study software in one hand and his DVD in the other.

Use of Props and Sets as Illustration

An additional trend in the use of visuals as illustrations is the place of props and sets as object lessons and reinforcement for the truth statements of the sermon.

The use of props is certainly nothing new. As the Lausanne Occasional Paper on "Media and Technology: observes, "The media was widely used in biblical history. Noah used the Ark, Moses used the staff, Nehemiah used the city wall, Jesus used mud for healing the blind and God used the rainbow, the dove and the cross. The media has been a symbolic means to signify spiritual meanings in the past."[ix] Yet in the church in recent generations, few preachers made significant use of props apart from the occasional object lesson during the children's sermon.

That is no longer the case, as preachers have begun to regularly use a variety of physical objects, and even theatrical-type sets, as an integral part of the sermon.

Rob Bell is pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan. One Sunday he gave out thousands of pieces of modeling clay, so that each person in the congregation was

holding his own clay as Rob preached on the principle that we are God's workmanship, God's artwork. In a sermon about Esau and Jacob, he discussed the episode in which Jacob stole his brother's birthright for a bowl of soup. As congregants entered the service that day, they were handed a cardboard bowl as a personal prop to hold during the message. (At one point, Rob suggested they could make notes on their bowl.)

Rob says, "I'll try any method to get you thinking, feeling, touching, and smelling. I want to assault as many sense as possible. So I'll be doing something with a prop, then I'll read a text, then I'll go back to the prop, then I'll tell a story, now back to the text, now back to the screen. I want to work off of many different surfaces."[x]

Ron Martoia is Pastor of Westwinds Community Church in Jackson, Michigan. Once a month they do a special Encounter service where they touch the senses in order to create a spiritual experience. For example, when they wanted to talk about having a "thirst" for God, they created a mock "desert" using more than a ton of sand, complete with cactus. To deal with spiritual hunger, they displayed food commercials on TVs around the room, and put fresh-baked bread, cookies, and pizzas around the auditorium. Ron explains, "It smelled great. People began salivating. After 20 minutes we asked, 'How can we provoke spiritual hunger at a salivating level?' Suddenly, people realized, I don't salivate like this for spiritual things at all."[xi]

In his book *Refining Your Style*, Dave Stone (of Louisville's Southeast Christian Church) offers several examples of "outside the box" sermons. In one sermon, Andy Stanley gave out money to every church member and challenged them to see how God could multiply their efforts. Kyle Idleman, a young preaching associate at Southeast Christian, filled the platform with street signs, then moved from one to another discussing the meaning of each one. Rick Rusaw (LifeBridge Christian Church, Longmont, CO) set up crosses at various spots around the sanctuary, and during the service he invited people to go to one of the crosses and nail to it pieces of paper on which they had written their sins. Dave Stone preached a sermon on parenting while "moving from room to room in a makeshift home built onstage."[xii]

The master of the use of props may be Ed Young, Jr., pastor of Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas (suburban Dallas). Since founding Fellowship in 1990, Ed has led the church from its original 150 members to a weekly attendance of more than 18,000 people. Fellowship Church has been characterized by creativity in worship and preaching, and now the church is sharing its resources with others through its Fellowship Connection network and CreativePastors.com.

Ed regularly uses props or contextual settings to establish the theme of the sermon and/or to illustrate a point in the message. Talking about marriage and the family, Ed has a young couple come onto the platform with him, complete in formal wedding attire; when he started talking about the progression of family life, they were joined by a playpen. In a series on spiritual warfare, Ed spoke from an actual British Scorpion tank which had been driven onto the platform. (In an interview for *Preaching* he explained, "To do that we had engineers to measure how much weight our stage could take – just being able to pull that off and the turret and how to do that and how I can get in the tank and climb up on the tank."[xiii]) He also did a series on dating (RPMs – Recognizing Potential Mates) in which each Sunday saw a different fancy sports car used as a backdrop for the message. (The attendance at Fellowship is as much as 50 percent singles, so many of the message series deal with marriage, sexuality, and issues that connect with young urban single adults.) Often the props are quite simple. For a message on communication called "The Table," the setting was a simple table and chairs.

Like Rob Bell, Ed has also utilized illustrative material that was placed in the hands of the listeners, creating both a visual and a tactile experience. For example, they handed out small packages of lifesavers to each person during a message on evangelism, and asked them to keep the package in their pockets until the person they were working with came to faith.

Another time, in a message about tithing, he handed out packages of Skittles "to everyone to communicate the fact that everything we have is from God. I told the story about the time I bought my daughter a bag of Skittles, which she then refused to share with me. She didn't understand three things: I bought them for her; I could take them away from her; and conversely, I could take my credit card and buy so many Skittles for her she wouldn't know what to do with them. It's the same with God. He entrusts all of us with some "Skittles"—some a small pile, some a medium pile, some a big pile—and he merely asks that we give back to him a portion to help finance his work in the local church. Any size church can use an illustration like that."[xiv]

Despite his own reputation for creative innovation, Ed stresses that,

Creativity is not bouncing off the walls. It's not gimmicky. It has to be biblically-driven. We're not above the Bible or on the same level as the Bible. We're under the Bible – we're under scripture. So it has to be Biblically-driven. And I believe when its biblically-driven you're going to find that sweet spot of communication.

I think that small tweaks take us to giant peaks in communication. It doesn't have to be these big honkin' things and flying down from the ceiling or painting the walls orange and throwing sand in the foyer. It's within your context and sometimes it can be as small as changing the time when you speak, or it can be maybe one time giving a message outline or message map and then one time you don't do it.[xv]

As Rob points out, when we talk about being visual what we are really doing is trying to engage the senses in understanding and responding to truth. We are used to connecting with the listener's sense of hearing, but in today's culture it is even more effective if we can engage their other senses. If we can help them see as well as hear, there's a greater chance that more people will begin to understand God's truth for their lives -- and that's the first step to changed lives.

The use of visual tools for illustrating the message involves more than simply discovering clever and entertaining ways to distribute information. Postmoderns hunger for experience and community and connection. As a result, part of our creative challenge as preachers is to find ways to satisfy that hunger while creating a context in which the Holy Spirit will draw them into an encounter with Jesus.

Cautions and Issues for Further Conversation

One caution for us in the use of images as major elements of preaching is that, as Quentin Schultze says, "we do not live in an *image-savvy* culture. We must contend with an *image-saturated* yet largely *image-ignorant* society. Our lives are *image-intense*, and undoubtedly movies and commercials have an enormous impact on young and old alike. But at the same time we are not very astute about how images communicate"[xvi] (italics the author's).

Even as we face such a culture, we must be cautious not to use images in a manipulative way. Powerful images can have a strong emotional appeal, and it is possible to use them in a way that can manipulate the behavior of our listeners, just as earlier generations of preachers might have used a "tear-jerking" story. As Bryan Chapell observes, "Where there are illustrations there are showmen, and where there are showmen there are charlatans."[xvii] What is true of verbally-presented illustration is just as true of visual; indeed, the potential for emotional connection may require us to use even more caution in the careful selection of material to avoid manipulation of our listeners. Nevertheless, the potential for abuse does not preclude the validity of properly-selected and used illustration, verbal or visual.

Another caution is that preachers can become enamored of visual tools and use visuals when they may not be the most effective illustrative tool for a particular situation. As Ed Young points out, "If the visual does not stand alone then throw it out. If you have to explain the visual too much it's a sorry visual. Some people force visuals."[xviii]

Many evangelical churches have begun to project the scripture passage on the screen as the pastor reads it prior to the sermon. While this seems like a positive step, since our church members will often arrive at church with a dozen or more different translations of scripture – one person has the New International Version, another the New American Standard Bible, and so on – there is an unintended consequence. Where this is the practice, people start depending on the screen and they quit opening their own Bibles to read along with the pastor. As a result, they don't have those Bibles open to follow along during the sermon, and something important is lost in helping people learn to read and understand God's Word. So even as we use projections of the text, if we are serious about guiding people into the truths of God's Word, we must be careful to encourage people to open their own Bibles, or provide page numbers for where the text can be found in the pew Bibles.

In his excellent book *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely*, Quentin Shultze offers some helpful guidance to churches considering the use of such technologies. He reminds us that: "Our technological assumptions are deeply cultural. It is right to want worship to be relevant to the people of God; it is entirely different to assume that worship must reflect the technological biases of a particular culture, whether it is high-tech or high-touch."[xix] In other words, we must be careful not to let the technology tail wag the dog; use technology where it strengthens communication and enhances the worship experience, not simply to be cutting edge or to keep up with the church down the street.

Finally, allow me to suggest some topics that will require further conversation within both the academy and the community of Christian preachers in coming days:

- Within the academy, it will be important to introduce this issue of visual illustration into the study of homiletics. Those theological institutions which learn to do so effectively will provide their pastoral graduates with an important communicative tool as they begin their own ministries.
- As many innovative churches "push the envelope" in attempting to find new and fresh ways to communicate biblical truth, how do we determine where to set the parameters of appropriate methodology so that young ministers will have a sense of where to "draw the line" in their own preaching.
- One of the methodologies Ed Young, Jr., has emphasized as a key to innovative communication is the use of a team-process in sermon development. (See his article

"Communicating with Creativity" in the May-June 2005 issue of *Preaching*.) A video produced to demonstrate the work of the sermon-planning team at Fellowship Church is the best-selling resource provided by the Creativepastors.com resource site. With increasing interest in this approach, we must be prepared to deal with ministerial students interested in this model – either to teach them ways to implement the approach in their own congregations, or to discourage its use (with appropriate explanations). And for those of us who were taught in an earlier generation, we may have to consider this model with fresh eyes.

For Further Reading

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[viii] "Preaching Creatively: An Interview with Ed Young, Jr.," *Preaching* magazine, January-February 2005, p. 9.

[ix] *Media and Technology*, Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 48, 2004. Edited by Wing Tai Leung. http://community.gospelcom.net/lcwe/assets/LOP48_IG19.pdf

[x] Stone, p. 214.

[xi] "Immersion Experiences: A Conversation with Ron Martoia" *Leadership*, Winter 2004, p. 15.

[xii] Dave Stone, *Refining Your Style* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 2004), p. 210

[xiii] "Preaching Creatively," *Preaching*, op. cit., p. 55.

[xiv] Ed Young, Jr., "Creative Tensions," *Leadership* Journal, Winter 2005

[xv] "Preaching Creatively," *Preaching*, op. cit., p. 9

[xvi] Quentin J. Schultze, *High Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely.* Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004. pp. 20-21.

[xvii] Chapell, p. 25.

[xviii] "Preaching Creatively," *Preaching*, op. cit., p. 57

[xix] Shultze, p. 18.