# The Academy of Homiletics

## 2006 Annual Meeting

Marriott Hotel
West Palm Beach, Florida

***"Preaching for Renewal, Transformation and Liberation"***

Hosted by:
Palm Beach Atlantic University

Terriel Byrd
Gerald Kisner
Joseph Webb

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*Robert Reid, Convener*



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**Introduction to the Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics**
**West Palm Beach, Florida: November 30 – December 2, 2006**

Perhaps this year's annual meeting theme would be appropriate for any time in history. Yet, there seems a special urgency at the present hour to focus our attention on "Preaching for Renewal, Transformation, and Liberation." Those of us who live in the United States are painfully aware of the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Our hearts have broken many times over as we have gazed at photographs from southern Lebanon, northern Israel, Gaza, and a tiny Amish school house in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania. We hear God's name spoken in the public square but wonder who this God is who sanctions violence and calls for revenge. What word shall we speak in the midst of such a world? What shall we teach our students as they move out from classroom to pulpit? What words of challenge and encouragement can we share with one another as this year comes to an end?

Thankfully, the Academy of Homiletics has never been called "The American Academy of Homiletics." Our membership extends far beyond the United States, including not only Canada, but reaching far beyond North America. You will see that this year's academy papers come from as near as our host school in West Palm Beach, Florida and as far away as Australia, South Korea and London. We again anticipate Academy members from Scandinavia joining us as well.

In the pages that follow you will find some papers that directly address the conference theme, "Preaching for Renewal, Transformation, and Liberation." Other papers relate more closely to themes of particular working groups, though connections to the theme may also be heard. As in the past the papers are grouped according to Academy working groups with conveners named in the Table of Contents. Hopefully, you will have a chance to read many of these papers before coming to West Palm Beach.

Grateful thanks to each person who wrote a paper for this year's meeting. This gratitude is extended to full-time faculty as well as several graduate students who have written papers this year. Even a quick reading of the Table of Contents should whet your appetite to open the files and see what in the world a certain writer had in mind (even if that writer isn't part of your work group).

Now as the days turn colder, as leaves are falling here in the northeastern part of the United States, and 22 inches of snow have already fallen on Buffalo, we look forward to spending a warm weekend together in West Palm Beach, Florida. We hope you will be there to engage this year's timely theme, to greet colleagues from across the world, and perhaps – at least once – to walk barefoot on the beach.

Barbara K. Lundblad
First Vice President

## HERMENEUTICS AND BIBLE STUDY

### Note from the Conveners

For the last few years, the Hermeneutics and Bible Study Group has attempted to develop roundtable conversations around various topics by inviting a panel of scholars to develop short, provocative papers as conversation starters. The following topics have been considered:

2003..... The Authority of Scripture for Preaching
2004..... Teaching Exegesis for Preaching
2005..... Homiletical Approaches to Contrary Biblical Texts

This year's discussion topic involves the issue of the social location of the preacher and the congregation in the connection between biblical interpretation and preaching. Our three panelists—Charles L. Campbell, Lincoln E. Galloway, and Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm—approach the topic from different perspectives, promising an engaging session.

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

**Dislocated Exegesis**

Charles L. Campbell
Columbia Theological Seminary

Have you ever read a chapter from the book of Revelation out loud in a mall? How about the Sermon on the Mount in the unfinished attic of a church? Or the Gospel of Mark on a city bus? Although the importance of social location (e.g. race, gender, and socio-economic status) for biblical interpretation has been widely recognized in recent years, less attention has been given to the importance of physical location—the actual physical spaces in which people, including preachers, read and interpret Scripture. However, as I hope the above examples suggest, the physical spaces in which we read texts color the ways we interpret those texts, as well as the ways those texts interpret the world around us. Indeed, in the different physical locations through which we move in life, elements of "social location" may take on different priority and meaning. In addition to "social location," greater attention needs to be given to "physical location" in biblical interpretation.[1]

About a decade ago, my New Testament colleague, Stan Saunders, and I began to explore the importance of physical location as we team-taught courses and struggled to help students engage with Scripture in fresh ways. We noticed that when students (and professors!) interpreted texts in the classroom, the interpretations tended to be rather abstract and academic; students even seemed to distance themselves from Scripture as they formally analyzed the texts. As we moved into other spaces, however, we noticed that perspectives on the texts began to change. When we read sections from Revelation, for example, on the steps of the state capitol building, at the Coca Cola museum (officially called, "The World of Coca Cola"), in malls, and at homeless shelters, we engaged with those texts in different ways than when we read them in classrooms or in the seminary chapel.

Through such experiments we became convinced that physical location plays an important, though often neglected, role in biblical interpretation. As a result, we have continued to explore what we call the practice of "dislocated exegesis," which involves reading and studying Scripture in odd, even jarring spaces. Such a practice, we believe, can help people engage both text and context in fresh and creative ways. Different physical locations help us read the text in new ways, raising different issues and questions, or raising them with different immediacy and priority. In addition, Scripture engages and interprets the world around us in fresh ways when it is juxtaposed to certain physical locations.

Such dislocation is critical as a means of setting us free from the taken-for-granted presuppositions we often bring to the text. Because our "vision" is so shaped by the contexts, including the physical spaces, in which we live, we regularly need to move out of those spaces in order to see both Scripture and the world in new ways. Consider, for example, the primary spaces in which most people read Scripture and the possible implications of those spaces. People read Scripture in church, and most people are comfortable doing that. But in that space,

[1] For a fuller discussion of the importance of physical location for biblical interpretation, see "Street Readings/Reading the Streets: Reading the Bible through the Lens of the Streets, Reading the Streets through the Lens of the Bible," in Stanley P. Saunders and Charles L. Campbell, *The Word on the Street: Performing the Scriptures in the Urban Context* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 86-94. This chapter focuses on interpreting Scriptures on the streets of Atlanta, often among homeless people. I have not repeated examples from this chapter here, but have chosen examples from other class situations.

Scripture can often take on primarily "religious," "churchy" or "spiritual" meanings. People also often read Scripture in their homes as part of their personal devotional life. And, accordingly, Scripture often is interpreted individually and personally. Finally, for many of us—students and professors alike—the study or the classroom or the library becomes the primary space in which we read Scripture. In these spaces, as I noted earlier, interpretation can often take on a rather academic and abstract feel, which can lead to rather academic and abstract sermons, as most of us have undoubtedly experienced.

All of these spaces are important locations in which to read Scripture. We need the interpretations that emerge when Scripture is read in church, home, and study. However, if these are the only spaces in which students, professors, and preachers read Scripture, then we may miss important dimensions of the texts, and we may also miss the urgency and immediacy of these texts for the world around us. We may even remain captive to angles of vision that are reinforced when we always read Scripture in the same, familiar places. When we begin reading Scripture in strange locations, however, a different kind of engagement with Scripture may begin to emerge.

Time and again, I have seen this happen as students have been challenged to read Scripture in new spaces. And I've had this experience myself on numerous occasions. Recently, students took a class on an adventure that began on a MARTA train (Atlanta's public transportation). As we sat on the train, one student, much to my surprise, suddenly stood up and began walking up and down the car reading the Beatitudes out loud (Matthew 5:3-12). She wasn't proselytizing or preaching. She simply stood up and began reading the Beatitudes humbly and respectfully amidst passengers who came from the margins of Atlanta society: poor working people, homeless people, exhausted people, several of them sleeping. "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God," the student read.[2] "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted." "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled."[3]

I was stunned. I had never experienced the Beatitudes the way I did at that moment—and it was all because of the physical space in which the student was reading. For the first time I experienced the Beatitudes not primarily as a series of demands, but as a series of radical, comforting, subversive blessings addressed to those on the margins, outside the centers of privilege and power. In my head, I had known they were such blessings for a long time, but never had that reality entered my heart and soul until I heard those words spoken on the MARTA train.

I have often referred to the following comment about preaching written by Soren Kierkegaard:

> Sermons should not be preached in churches. It harms Christianity in a high degree and alters its very nature, that it is brought into an artistic remoteness from reality, instead of being heard in the midst of real life, and that precisely for the

[2]As Warren Carter has argued, this beatitude does not "spiritualize" poverty. According to Carter, "the poor in spirit ... are those who are economically poor and whose spirits are being crushed by economic injustice." Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2001), 131.

[3]On translating this beatitude in terms of righteousness/justice, see Carter, *Matthew and the Margins*, 133-34.

> sake of the conflict (the collision). For all this talk about quiet, quiet places and quiet hours, as the right element for Christianity, is absurd.[4]

Now I often think Kierkegaard's words could be adapted to apply to biblical interpretation:

> "[The Bible] should not be [read] in churches. It harms Christianity in a high degree and alters its very nature, that it is brought into an artistic remoteness from reality, instead of being heard in the midst of real life, and that precisely for the sake of the conflict (the collision). For all this talk about quiet, quiet places and quiet hours, as the right element for Christianity, is absurd.

Although Kierkegaard's comment is extreme and overstated, he makes a critical point: the Bible takes on new life when it is interpreted in new and different spaces.

This insight should not come as a surprise. As we see in the New Testament, the earliest Christian interpreters of Scripture often do their best work in public spaces. In the New Testament, people do not simply interpret Scripture in the synagogues or homes or classrooms. They interpret Scripture in public spaces, where they discern the Spirit of God at work. Jesus interprets Scripture on town streets, in fields, on mountaintops, in houses, and on highways. And the early Christians follow his lead. Philip interprets Scripture with the Ethiopian eunuch in a chariot out on a highway. And as a result he comes to a new understanding of the boundary-breaking implications of Jesus as the Suffering Servant. And Paul does some of his most impressive interpretive work while in prison, where he gained special insight into the nature and urgency of the gospel. The New Testament itself probably would have looked very different if all of the biblical interpretation had taken place in the library or the classroom. As Kierkegaard suggests, the New Testament pioneers interpreted Scripture in the midst of real life—which often resulted in "collisions."

An acquaintance of mine, who regularly engages in dislocated exegesis, told me that he had been reading the Bible in the emergency room of Grady Hospital—Atlanta's public hospital. He noticed that the people in that emergency room were the very people he was reading about in the Bible: those who were poor, lame, ill, and suffering. And he came to a critical realization: "I really don't have to take the 'old' Bible from 'way back then' and force it to be relevant to our world today," he said. "My God," he continued, "the world of the Bible <u>is</u> our world—as we will discover if we just read it in the right places."

In most of our preaching classes at Columbia Seminary we now require some form of dislocated exegesis. For example, in the introductory course we give the following assignment:

> Please spend at least one hour reading Mark 5:21-43 [the story of Jairus' daughter and the hemorrhaging woman] in one of the following locations:
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> Waiting room (auditorium) of Pratt Street Pharmacy, Grady Hospital[5]
> MARTA (train, bus, or terminal)
> Woodruff Park[6]

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[4]Soren Kierkegaard, *Attack Upon Christendom,* trans. Walter Lowry (Princeton Univ. Press, 1944; Beacon paperback edition, Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), viii.

[5]Grady Hospital is the public hospital in Atlanta. There is a large auditorium at the Pratt Street Pharmacy, where people often wait for hours to have a prescription filled.

[6]Woodruff Park is a highly "contested" space in downtown Atlanta, where many homeless people spend the day.

Phipps Plaza[7]
Pharmacy waiting area at the VA Hospital
Main Lobby of the Marriott Marquis Hotel[8]
Emergency waiting room at DeKalb Medical Center
A night shelter

You may do this assignment in pairs or small groups, though you will need to take into consideration the location you have chosen (e.g. a group in the emergency waiting room might be too disruptive).

If you would like to use another location, please check with your small group leader.

When we gather in small groups to discuss the texts, students share their experiences of "dislocated exegesis." For some students nothing significant happens. And that is to be expected. Dislocated exegesis needs to be a regular, repeated practice. It is not a magic formula that guarantees something extraordinary will happen on every outing.

Other students, however, often share not only new insights into the text, but new excitement about it. "We dressed in our sloppiest clothes and went and read the text in the lobby of the Marriott Marquis," one student shared. *Everyone* avoided us. Some people stared disapprovingly at us. The security guard kept an eye on us. And we suddenly realized: that's the kind of life the hemorrhaging woman endured every day for twelve years. And Jesus stopped to have a conversation with that very woman. That was a very radical action. And the social dynamics in the text are very much alive today." The students began to explore not only the physical healing in the text, but the radical social implications of Jesus' actions.

In addition to such insights, students also begin to reflect on their uneasiness (even embarrassment) reading Scripture in public spaces (especially when the assignment requires them to read the text *out loud*!). They have to explore this discomfort and why the Bible seems "out of place" in a ritzy hotel or a mall or the MARTA station. Scripture becomes public again, and all of us are forced to wrestle with the ways in which we often prefer to keep it private and personal.

Finally, the text often takes on a new urgency for the students, whatever their specific interpretation may be. They gain a renewed sense of the aliveness and significance of Scripture, and often a new realization of the social character of the Bible. Scripture (and hopefully the resulting sermon!) becomes engaging and relevant in powerful ways. In the process, that mysterious "gap" between text and sermon often closes. Students no longer have to "force" the old text into the contemporary world, but sermons are born in the surprising "collision" between the biblical text and the physical location. And when that happens, the homiletical implication of

[7]Phipps Plaza is an upscale mall in Atlanta.
[8]The Marriott Marquis is an upscale hotel in midtown Atlanta.

dislocated exegesis become exciting. The practice may not simply contribute to a fresh engagement with the text, but possibly to a livelier pulpit as well.

**Reading Drunk in Search of the Naked Truth:**
**A Case for Ideological Commitments**

Lincoln E. Galloway
Claremont School of Theology

Caribbean scholar George M. Mulrain uses the lyrics from a calypso that describes vivid encounters between the living and the dead to demonstrate how Caribbean folklore can assist in biblical interpretation.[1] In his view, the interpreter can use these folk traditions to bridge the gap between the world of spirits and demons reflected in the biblical text and the contemporary experiences of Caribbean people. Christopher Rowland relates his experience in Brazil where the poor and marginalized, human rights workers were studying the Book of Revelation. They found parallels with their own experiences of persecution and harassment, and they readily identified with the language of witness, endurance, and tribulation found in the book.[2] Both of these writers call attention to the experiences of the communities as a critical context for interpretation, and the interpreter is encouraged to read with the community.

The underlying assumption is that interpretation requires particular ideological commitments on the part of the interpreter, in this case, a commitment to the lived experiences of the people. Liberation theologians began their reflection in the context of oppressive poverty and marginalization, and spoke of interpreting texts from the perspective of God's preferential option for the poor, or reading from the margins. Reading from the margins is a search for God in the midst of struggle and oppression; a challenge to systems designed to privilege one group of people; a subversion of normative readings that have sustained these unjust systems.[3] R. S. Sugirtharajah "wary of the danger of 'marginality turning into separatism and resistance hardening into dogma'" describes the margin not simply in opposition to the center but as a place of critical activity (reflection and clarification), and a place of creativity.[4]

Does activity at the margin require a different set of tools or methodology? If there are interpretations that sustain unjust systems are they derived from methodological approaches and interpretive tools that are flawed? Is it possible that a method can be so flawed that its application will always lead, *inter alia*, to acts of genocide, slavery, war, crusades, colonialism, economic plunder, gender oppression, and environmental degradation? Some scholars who write from the margins claim that conventional tools or methods can be employed in liberative ways since one may utilize the "same language employed by the dominant power, to dispute its

[1] Calypso has developed into a Caribbean musical phenomenon with a range and repertoire that is wide and varied. See Errol Hill, "The Calypso," in Michael Anthony and Andrew Carr (eds.), *David Frost Introduces Trinidad and Tobago* (London: André Deutsch, 1975), 83. See George M. Mulrain, "Is there a Calypso Exegesis?" in R. S. Sugirtharajah, ed. *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997), 37-47.

[2] Christopher Rowland, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1999), 1.

[3] Liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez calls this "a militant reading" from the perspective of those dwelling on "the underside of history" revealing the universality of God's love and God's preferential option for the poor. See Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*. Trans. By Robert R. Barr (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1984, xi).

[4] R. S. Sugirtharajah, *Voices from the Margin*, 2. Sugirtharajah is quoting Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993), 63.

hierarchy and methods, to elucidate what it has hidden, to pronounce what it has silenced or rendered unpronounceable."[5]

Miguel De la Torre argues that claims to objectivity in biblical interpretations "mask the subjectivity of the person, groups, or culture doing the interpreting." He indicates that "many of us have been taught to read the bible through the eyes of those in power, specifically through the eyes of white, middle and upper class males. When the bible is read from the social location of those whom society privileges, the risk exists that interpretations designed to protect their power and privilege are subconsciously or consciously constructed."[6] In short, interpretation does not happen in a vacuum and social location is associated with every reading of scripture even if the interpreter does not wish to be explicit about this.[7] Dwight Hopkins claims that "the overwhelming majority of European American men rarely confess their racial identity in religious scholarship, yet that color trait determines their approaches to theological anthropology. In contrast, the progressives among white female theologians are quite comfortable in naming their culture as white women's culture. And blacks, Native Americans, Hispanics/Latinos(as), and Asian Americans are most readily willing to address the rainbow races of America. One reason derives from their celebration of racialized selves in order to embrace the beauty of their cultural peculiarities as contributions to a universal well-being."[8]

Does it follow, however, that a clarification of one's social location also leads to ideological commitments? R. S. Sugirtharajah observes that a few years ago, the field of biblical studies (scholars and publishers) would have met the notion of Asian, African, Latin-American, Caribbean and Pacific biblical interpretation with incomprehension and dismissed such efforts as presumptuous. Today there is a growing recognition of the hermeneutical potential that resides in the work of scholars who address issues of struggle, marginality, and colonialism.[9] These perspectives on liberation present a challenge to any biblical interpretation that perpetuates social, economic, and political injustices or reinforces values and practices that deny, distort, or diminish the full humanity of others.[10]

In summary, reading with communities may provide unique perspectives; employing particular methodologies may be productive; recognizing one's assumptions, presuppositions, and social location may be liberating. However, is recognition of one's social location synonymous with ideological commitments to justice, liberation, and full authentic humanity? Can one interpret texts in communities that have experienced the destructive effect of perverse biblical interpretations without explicit ideological commitments? Will these commitments

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[5] Edward W. Said, "Nationalism, Human Rights, and Interpretation," in Barbara Johnson, ed., *Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 198.

[6] Miguel A. De La Torre, ed. *Handbook of U.S. Theologies of Liberation* (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004), 90-91.

[7] I am reminded of an example that Prof. Gail O'Day uses in her preaching class. She makes reference to the opening line of an article in the Atlanta Journal Constitution about Hispanic day laborers waiting to be hired. It began: "You see them every day ..." What assumptions does the writer make about the (social location of the) readership of the AJC?

[8] Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 119.

[9] Sugirtharajah, 1.

[10] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983): "The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive. Theologically speaking, whatever diminishes or denies the full humanity of women must be presumed not to reflect the divine or an authentic relation to the divine (18-19).

reveal that scripture is too oppressive to be held as sacred or does sacred scripture need to be rescued from oppressive interpretations?
Let us examine a text with a long oppressive history of interpretation. What ideological commitments can be brought to the interpretation of this text by biblical scholars in the 21st century? Let us ask the question to the story of Ham in Genesis.

Interpreting Scripture in full view of Ham:

The biblical narrative about Ham is an excellent example of racialized biblical interpretation that provides the foundation, rationale, and reinforcement for a worldview that justifies the oppression of black people. In the narrative (Gen 9:18-27), Ham, the father of Canaan (v.18), saw his father (Naoh) in his tent naked and passed out in a drunken stupor. Ham exits the tent and informs his brothers, Shem and Japheth, who then "covered" their father's nakedness while turning their faces in order to avoid seeing his nakedness for themselves (v.22-23). Upon awakening, Noah learns what had transpired and utters the most damning pronouncement: "Cursed be Canaan, the lowest of slaves shall he be to his brothers" (v. 24-25). Since (or so the argument goes) Canaan (like Cush, Egypt, Put) is one of those biblical terms indicating blackness or black people (or nations) in the world of the bible, then Noah, recovering from his drunken stupor was God's mouthpiece to pronounce a curse, not on Canaan, Noah's grandson, but on blackness throughout the world for all time. Interestingly, in the narrative, Ham, himself is not cursed by the recently intoxicated Noah, nor are his other descendants Cush, Egypt, and Put (Gen 10:6). However, a racialized reading renders Noah's condemnation as a divine utterance with lasting ramifications not only upon the individual called Canaan, but on the nations of Canaan, Cush, Egypt, and Put, and on the condition of "blackness" wherever it is found in the universe.

Undoubtedly, ideological commitments are reflected in these racialized readings that utilize scripture to engender or support negative understandings and representations of people of African descent. These representations suggest that blackness should be understood as cursed, evil, impure, and demonic and having no place in religion where whiteness is the ideal of purity. It is this white religion with its white divinity and white biblical characters that was introduced through missionary activity to the subjugated and colonized regions of the world.[11] Missionary activity was influenced by a worldview that was informed and shaped by philosophical thought, religion, and science.[12]

Immanuel Kant the German thinker in his work about religion, reason, and moral imperatives drew on the work of David Hume in his 1764 essay *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime*:

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[11] Caribbean theologians have long questioned whether worship can still lift up images that contribute to a negative appropriation of Christianity. For example, does "Lord, wash me and I shall be whiter than snow" have any place in a Caribbean context where snow is a foreign commodity and whiteness is held up as the ideal of Christian purity? Can Caribbean people still pray from the Book of Common Prayer: "Lighten our *darkness*, we beseech thee, O Lord ...?"

[12] Indeed religion (biblical studies and missiology), philosophy, and science (anthropology) shared very common assumptions. David Hume, an Englishman writing in the middle of the 18th century crafted theoretical abstractions that provided credence to a white supremacy and modern day racism. He wrote in an essay entitled "On National Characters": "I am apt to suspect the negroes and in general all other species of men (for there are four or five different kinds) to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was a civilized nation of any other complexion than white, nor even any individual eminent either in action or speculation" [Quoted in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and Enlightenment: A Reader* (Cambridge: Mass.: Blackwell, 1997), 33.]

"The negroes of Africa have by nature no feeling that rises above the trifling. Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the lowest rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world. So fundamental is the difference between these two races of man, and it appears to be as great in regard to mental capacities as in color."[13]

These assumptions about the world contributed to systems of dominance that are still with us today.[14] Biblical interpretation paid no attention to the ideology embedded in the biblical narratives or the ways in which the narrative constructed theological warrants to establish or evoke a particular world view. Generations of interpreters, faith communities, and nations simply used these texts as divine mandates for their own imposition of systems of marginalization, oppression, genocide, chattel slavery, and segregation.

Jacqueline Lapsey recounts the story told by Setri Nyomi, the general secretary of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches of a visit of WARC leaders to a historic Reformed church in Ghana. The visitors were aghast to learn that for centuries the worship of God had been taking place directly over a holding pen where slaves were being held before their transport to the Americas. Nyomi asks what it was in the worshippers' reading of Scripture that "did not equip them to deal with the injustices taking place seven feet below them?"[15] Perhaps one can also ask what kinds of interpretive strategies enabled the juxtaposition of these two realities - a worshipping community and a slave holding pen?

The use of the Genesis narratives (and table of nations) to make statements about the absence of virtue or industry among black people of the world extends to the interpretation of the narrative concerning Nimrod. In this narrative Cush (another signifier of blackness) is father of Nimrod, the first man on earth to become a mighty warrior and a mighty hunter before the Lord (Gen 10:8-9). His kingdom included Babel in the land of Shinar (Gen 10:10-11). In keeping with the negative approaches to the story of Ham, Nimrod, a "black man," the grandson of Ham is indicted by virtue of his blackness and the supposed curse on all Blackness. His sin is that of not knowing his place and thereby causing confusion and disorder. Everyone on earth, speaking the same language, endeavored to build a city with a tower, in order to "make a name" for themselves "lest they be scattered all over the world" (Gen 11:4). Upon realizing the potential of their endeavor, God thwarts their efforts, confounds their speech, and scatters them. One racialized approach to this narrative is to identify Nimrod as a black figure whose leadership is part of the eternal drama that connects blackness to absence of accomplishment, virtue, or honor. This trajectory has had horrendous consequences for Blacks who from the perspectives of missionaries, colonizers, or enslavers were categorized as subhuman species and heathen people lacking in every virtue, value, moral, or honor.

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[13] Eze, *Race and Enlightenment*, 55.

[14] One member of the consultation that produced the volume *Stony the Road we Trod* shares his own testimony of a stony road. He notes: "From fifth to eighth grade I had two subjects, arithmetic and spelling. I spent time trying to learn on my own. There were ancient and medieval history books in our home. On the front pages there were pictures of different races; blacks were depicted as hideous. It was stated that all races, except blacks, had contributed something to civilization; blacks were meant to be hewers of wood and carriers of water for others ..." See Cain Hope Felder, ed. *Stony The Road We Trod* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press), 3.

[15] Jacqueline Lapsey, "'Am I Able to Say Just Anything?': Learning Faithful Exegesis from Balaam," in *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* (Jan, 2006:22-31).

There are other lines of interpretation that are available. Would a focus on the social location of the interpreter help to resolve difficult texts with competing lines of interpretation? Jacqueline Lapsley relates the following incident that took place at a conference of Reformed biblical scholars and theologians in South Africa in 2001: "Ted Hiebert, professor of Old Testament at McCormick Seminary, a highly multicultural context, presented an interpretation of Gen 11 ("The Tower of Babel") that affirms God's will for cultural diversity on the earth. Yet several of the South African hosts observed that a similar interpretation of the text was one of the central biblical foundations for apartheid. On the pro-apartheid reading, Gen 11 teaches that God does not want different cultural and linguistic groups to live together. A stunned silence accompanied the realization that these two interpretations bear such striking similarities." Lapsley recognizing the ethical consequences of each line of interpretation wonders how one might adjudicate between these two readings? She points to Hiebert's conclusion that the interpreter's cultural context (American concern for diversity; South African concern for unity) is crucial for making interpretive judgments. I am not sure what that means.

It seems to me that social location does not go far enough in bridging the gap or moving beyond the "stunned silence" of these two interpretive communities. I suggest that an interpreter will derive useful perspectives by reading with the community for whom the interpretation is being prepared. The interpreter may also examine the methodology to see if it functions to reinforce systems of dominance and oppression. The interpreter may boldly recognize and even articulate her/his own assumptions. In other words, any interpreter whose interpretation can speak in clear tones about "God's will" should be able to speak in even clearer tones about her/his own commitments to the ethical demands that reside in the act and outcome of biblical interpretation. Finally, for the hermeneutical circle to be complete, the biblical interpreter must have particular ideological commitments to justice, liberation, and the flourishing of a full and authentic humanity.

## In What Ways Is the Bible Relevant to Our Context and Concerns?

Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm
Bethany Theological Seminary

It is the bane and blessing of every culture to produce the rhythms of life and patterns of thought that mark our individual and corporate identity. Underlying these rhythms and patterns of social life are several very basic human needs that propel us to create the cultures we inhabit, the religious rituals we practice and the ways we relate to other cultures and practices.[1] And beyond our socially defined boundaries, people of faith confess that their needs and desires are themselves divinely given and spiritually sustained; that God is alive among us and working amid the seeds and weeds that grow in the very different soils of various social locations. Whether we find ourselves within the center of a culture's norms, at its margins or somewhere in between, part of faith's power is to provide us with an alternative way of engaging others as we develop personal and social expressions of meaning and behavior.[2]

A key reference point for persons of faith in discerning and studying God's way among us is Scripture. However, the task of understanding biblical texts and their relevance to our lives is quickly complicated by the fact that Scripture itself arises out of numerous ancient contexts (i.e., the Song of Miriam not only originated in one particular event but was recited in myriad other settings before it was recorded in its present form in Exodus 15; the book of Isaiah reflects various periods of Israel's history; the apocalypse of John has different socio-politics referents than that of Daniel). Yet preachers and congregations insist that Scripture has the power to inspire worlds of meaning and practice beyond any one social setting and counter to the cultural norms of any one particular time and place.[3] It does so not only because of its ingenious combination of literary genres and theological perspectives but because, as people of faith, we approach sacred texts as a means of knowing and relating to that which is beyond the recorded text itself, the living God. Scripture's ultimate reference is not itself. It points to God and, Christians would say, to the reign of God as that which is other than what we can create by means of our own social inventiveness. At the same time, we who believe in the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ also believe that the Spirit of Christ and the reign of God he has inaugurated among us are revealed in the particularities of innumerous social locations. This is perhaps what Edward

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[1] See, for example, Gail Ramshaw, *Ritual and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1987). Also, Tom F. Driver's discussion of culture and the human longing for ritual in the introduction of his book, *Liberating Rites: Understanding the Transformative Power of Ritual* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 1-11.

[2] Here, I am thinking of Walter Brueggemann's *Prophetic Imagination*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001) where he explores the biblical alternatives to a politics of oppression, economics of affluence and religion of immanence as a politics of justice, economics of equality and the religion of God's freedom.

[3] In my own Anabaptist faith tradition, John Howard Yoder has spoken eloquently of biblical faith and the living Christ as calling us to an alternative vision of culture: "The tension will not be between a global reality called 'culture' on one side and an absolute spiritual distance called 'Christ' (or 'monotheism') on the other side, but rather between a group of people defined by a commitment to Christ seeking cultural expression of that commitment (on one hand) and (on the other) a group or groups of other people expressing culturally other values which are independent of or contradictory to such a confession." Glen H. Stassen, D. M. Yeager and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 74. For examples of faith communities that seek to develop and bear witness to alternative cultures in contrast to those that surround them, see Fernando Enns, Scott Holland and Ann K. Riggs, *Seeking Cultures of Peace: A Peace Church Conversation* (Telford, PA: Cascadia Pub. House, 2004).

Farley means when he speaks of the primary reference and criterion of Gospel: "To use Gospel without the definite article transforms it from an abstract noun (*the* gospel) to the more direct notion of 'good news.' When the *ecclesia* is true to its calling and its distinctive reality, it practices good news of an ever-arriving, redemptive transformation of situations."[4]

My personal and professional interest in this topic (namely, the ways in which Scripture is interpreted in light of the preacher and congregation's social location) arises out of my passion for our understanding the breadth and depth of the gospel's claim on our lives: I am concerned that we neither reduce Scripture to a list of right behaviors nor wildly extrapolate from a few verses of Scripture to develop a political platform or social reform movement that reflects more of our own anxieties and priorities than God's just and loving intentions for humanity.

As one who is wholly convinced that Scripture speaks to both our personal and corporate lives, I am eager to explore our current fascination with the so-called "applicability" of biblical texts.[5] In particular, my recent work with the Listening to Listeners study funded by Lilly Endowment uncovered a pervasive interest in preaching that is "biblically relevant" among people who regularly listen to sermons. Among 263 laity from 28 congregations representing a variety of ages, ethnic groups, congregational locations, sizes and denominational affiliations, people repeatedly voiced both a high regard for the role and authority of Scripture in preaching as well as the importance of the relevance of the Bible for today. In carefully reading the interview transcripts I began to notice certain patterns with regard to how interviewees expressed their passion for biblical relevance.[6] In particular, the listeners in our study tended toward one of three "arenas" when they spoke of biblical relevance: 1) *relevance to personal life*, 2) *relevance to congregational or community life*, and 3) *relevance to the world at large*.

Those who spoke of *the relevance of the Bible as it pertains to personal life* often appreciated sermons that address an individual's specific needs and give immediate care and attention to individual problems or interests (i.e., help with parenting, establishing life priorities, addressing moral dilemmas). Without wanting simplistic answers to difficult questions, these persons appreciate hearing sermons that are of immediate and personal relevance to their own struggles and those of loved ones. Those who spoke of *the relevance of the Bible as it pertains to congregational or community life* were interested in hearing sermons that tackled everything from church budgets/tithing to the local school board. These listeners do not want advice as to who to vote for in upcoming elections but many do hope the sermon will help them make a connection between Scripture and what they are struggling with in their local economy or election. Finally, those who spoke of *the relevance of the Bible as it relates to the world* at large were interested in understanding, for example, how one discerns responsibility for neighbors near and far or how one relates Scripture to the events of 9/11 (many interviews took place immediately after 9/11/01). Although some cautioned against becoming too focused on "worldly things" there was also concern that preachers talk about larger social and global issues in light of Scripture.

Perhaps most fascinating of all was the fact that very few interviewees spoke of more than one of these three arenas when referring to the importance of biblical relevance for

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[4] Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2003), xiv.

[5] For example, I am thinking of the popular appeal of sermons that offer good advice for daily living more than focusing on the good news of God's impending reign – for example, preaching inspired by Rick Warren's *The Purpose-driven Life: What On Earth Am I Here For?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002).

[6] See Mary Alice Mulligan, Diane Turner-Sharazz, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm and Ronald J. Allen, *Believing in Preaching: What Listeners Hear in Sermons* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005), chs. 2 and 5.

preaching. Instead, each listener seemed to have one preferred arena when they spoke of the importance of Scripture's relevance – personal, local/faith community, or global. Also, even though one could sometimes detect a tendency among listeners in the same congregation to favor one arena over another, more often than not individual listeners simply identified with their own arena of preference.

As preaches and teachers of homiletics, this raises several questions for those of us who believe that the whole of the biblical witness addresses personal, communal and global concerns and that Scripture offers us an alternative sense of God's presence and power among us, working amid all three arenas. Two questions in particular may help focus our discussion:

1. Are there indeed Scripture texts that lend themselves well to one particular arena (personal, local/faith community, global) more than another? (For example, does Jesus' proclamation of God's reign in Mark 1:14-15 relate to one arena of relevance more than another)? If so, do preachers tend to select one type of text more than another and ignore the whole witness of Scripture? If not, how can we become more aware of the ways a particular text addresses multiple arenas of concern?
2. How can we help preachers, listeners and congregations become more aware of the ways Scripture not only speaks to their own social location but that of others – so that the biblical witness not only supports our own values and concerns but serves as a means of self-critique, helping us to reach beyond our immediate circles of concern to relate to others? (In other words, how do we allow gospel concerns for poverty, physical health, racial prejudice, etc., to critique, inform, direct and motivate our relationships with others inside and outside our present social location?)

## Erasmus and the Renewal of Preaching

Dr. Michael Pasquarello III, Asbury Theological Seminary

During the past thirty years there has been a shift away form certain traditional interpretations of Erasmus of Rotterdam (d.1536) a bias shared by both Protestants and Catholics that has viewed him has a skeptic, indifferent or hostile to doctrine, a rationalist, and a precursor of enlightenment. Some interpreters have contended that his humanism, his love for philology and pagan letters and wisdom threatened Christian theology, while his dogmatism led to a moralist view in which Christianity was confined to a life of ethical purity. Eschewing creed, cult, and ceremony, the religion Erasmus promoted was a spiritualized one, a form of deception and modernism.[1]

Hilmar Pabil argues that we must not overlook the main purpose of Erasmus' religious work, namely the practice of piety (*pietas*). While Erasmus was not interested in writing theological books in the mode of scholastic discourse, his desire was to arouse his contemporaries from their spiritual slumbers and to awaken them to a revitalized Christian way of life, to a spirit devoted to loving God and neighbor through loving obedience to Christ and his *philosophia*.[2] John O'Malley has persuasively argued that Erasmus' piety was pastoral, that nothing is more characteristic of Erasmus in this regard than his striving to integrate piety, theology, and the practice of ministry in service to the church: "Piety, theology and ministry were for him but different aspects of the one reality." Moreover, Erasmus' piety was corrective, reforming, in large part an alternative in comparison with much that was around him. His goal was to use the past as an instrument to correct, not confirm, the present.[3] As Erasmus communicated to Pope Leo X, "To restore great things is sometimes not only harder but a nobler task than to have introduced them."[4] Erasmus occupied a moderate position that cultivated both a Catholic sense for the traditional development of doctrine and a Protestant critique of tradition on the basis of the once-and-for all evangelical standard. He could neither support radical reformers, nor would he join Catholic theologians who tended to use the Gospel to justify the status quo of ecclesiastical tradition and practice.[5]

Although Erasmus was not a preacher, his teaching and writings articulated the intellectual and evangelical virtues Fisher desired to impart in the formation of devout and learned pastors. His evangelical humanism aimed to reunite the activities of theology, ministry,

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[1]The material for this paper is revised from my *God's Ploughman, Hugh Latimer: a "Preaching Life"* (forthcoming, Paternoster Press) chapter 1.
For discussion of shifts in interpretations of Erasmus, see Hilmar M. Pabel, *Conversing With God: Prayer in Erasmus' Pastoral Writings* (Toronto, 1997) 1-10; ibid., "Promoting the Business of the Gospel: Erasmus' Contribution to Pastoral Ministry" in *ERSY* 15 (1995) 53-70; Manfred Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology: The Hermeneutic of Erasmus* (Toronto, 1994) 15-26; ibid. "Erasmus on Church and Ministry" in *ERSY* 6 (1986) 1-30; John O'Malley, "Introduction" in *CWE* 66 (Toronto, 1988) ix-xxx; Cornelius Augustijn, *Erasmus: His Life, Works, and Influence*, trans. J.C. Grayson (Toronto, 1986) 185-200; Leon-E. Halkin, *Erasmus: A Critical Biography*, trans. John Tonkin (Oxford, 1987) 289-96.
[2] Pabel, *Conversing With God*, 4-5.
[3] O'Malley, "Introduction" *CWE* 66: xvii.
[4] *CWE* 3: 221-22; Allen, II, 184.
[5] Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology*, 268; see the excellent discussion in Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation*, 64-80; John O'Malley, "Form, Content and Influence of Works about Preaching Before Trent: the Franciscan Contribution," chapter IV of *Religious Culture in the Sixteenth Century: Preaching, Rhetoric, Spirituality and Reform* (Aldershot, 1993).

and piety within the *philosophy of Christ*: sacred rhetoric derived from the holy page of scripture. Because Erasmus hoped to provide both laity and clergy with a model of clear, simple, scriptural faith, he viewed patristic piety and wisdom as better and more fruitful than the arid, complex, and proud disputations of medieval schoolmen that had led to malpractice in preaching and pastoral ministry.[6]

O'Malley notes that in the piety of Erasmus, Christ stands out as a teacher and exemplar for the life one must live in order to imitate him. Yet Erasmus' philosophy of Christ does not forget that Christ is also Redeemer and Savior. Writing to Jan Schlecta in November 1519, Erasmus offers a clear précis of this vision for his fellow priest,

> Besides which the whole of Christian philosophy lies in this, our understanding that all our hope is placed in God, who freely gives us all things through Jesus his Son, that we were redeemed by his death and engrafted through baptism with his body, that we might be dead to the desires of this world and live by his teaching and example, not merely harbouring no evil by deserving well of all men; so that, if adversity befall, we may bear it bravely in hope of the future reward which beyond question awaits all good men at Christ's coming, and that we may ever advance from one virtue to another, yet in such a way that we claim nothing for ourselves, but ascribe any good we do to God.[7]

Erasmus viewed himself as a steward of the philosophy of Christ who practiced the cure of souls by speaking through priests to minister to Christians, applying to their lives and for their benefit the teaching and wisdom of scripture.[8] Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle comments, "If Erasmus had wished, he could have mounted the pulpits of Europe. He was no preacher, however, but a teacher of teachers. The printing press could straddle the Continent more effectively than any sermon, and it served him well."[9] In spreading *docta pietas* through the written word, Erasmus committed himself to the business of the Gospel, which he hoped would bear fruit in godly wisdom and virtue. Thus, the aim or conversion and transformation were constitutive of all he wrote, "…the seamless robe of his *pietas*."[10]

In March 1516, Erasmus published the long-awaited *Novum Testamentum*, directing considerable attention to the subject of scripture and its importance for the church.[11] It consisted of a dedication, followed by preliminary matters, the *Paraclesis*, *Methodus*, and *Apologia*, respectively a persuasive appeal to read the New Testament, guides for its use, and a defense of the undertaking. The Greek text was provided with a Latin translation by Erasmus him self. Finally came the *Annotations*, notes on the text, which take up almost as much space as the Latin and Greek texts put together. The introductory material pleads for a theology that would start from the words and concepts appearing in scripture, promoting the normalization of biblical

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[6]Eugene F. Rice Jr., *Saint Jerome and the Renaissance* (Baltimore,1985) 93-4.

[7] Eugene Rice Jr., *Saint Jerome and the Renaissance* (Baltimore, 1985) 93-4; see the excellent discussion of Erasmus' use of biblical scholarship for training clergy and laity to distinguish faithful and unfaithful pastoral practice in Jane E. Philips, "The Gospel, the Clergy, and the Laity in Erasmus 'Paraphrase on the Gospel of John' in *ERSY* 10 (1990) 85-100.

[8] Pabel*, Conversing with God*, 9.

[9] Marjorie O'Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus, On Language and Method in Theology* (Toronto, 1997) 69.

[10] O'Malley, "Introduction" *CWE* 66: xxx.

[11]For a good discussion see, Erika Rummel, *The Humanist-Scholastic Debate*: *In the Renaissance and Reformation* (Cambridge, 1998) 96-125.

language as an instrument for bridging the gap between theology and pastoral practice. Erasmus notes how he often felt while listening to a sermon: "I see how simple people, who hang open-mouthed on the lips of the preacher, yearn for food for the soul, eager to learn how they can go home better people."[12]

In the introductory letter to the general reader Erasmus explains how he produced the work, describing it as "the humblest service in pious devotion," and "a work of piety, a Christian work." Its purpose is to render scripture more eloquent, lucid, and faithful to the apostolic discourse, thereby showing forth Christ and finding more followers for his sacred philosophy. This is repeated in the dedicatory letter to Pope Leo X, whom Erasmus addressed as, "a second Esdras, a re-builder of the Christian religion" to whom he offered the *Novum Instrumentum* as a gift for the daily advancement of the Christian life.[13]

Erasmus chose the title *Instrumentum*, which may mean organ, instrument, or means of teaching and writing.[14] His purified text of the New Testament is an instrument for the philosophy of Christ, the living Word spoken by the Father and revealed in scripture. A striking and controversial expression of its rhetorical purpose appeared in the 1519 edition, the *Novum Testamentum*, which rendered the translation of *John* 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word," as *sermo* rather than *verbum*, meaning not simply words uttered singly, but discourse that is copious, eloquent, and meaningful. Christ is the sermon of God, divine wisdom and eloquence incarnate who, in the writings of the evangelists and apostles "still lives and breathes for us and acts and speaks with more immediate efficacy than any other way." The written word of scripture is the incarnation of divinity, and the spirit of this word possesses the power of revelation. Replete with the authority of God, the sacred text is alive with the presence of Christ as the transcendent and transforming Word who speaks through human speech.[15]

Erasmus, therefore, viewed his biblical scholarship as an instrument for communicating to readers the enlivening power of Christ. This purpose is embodied in the *Paraclesis,* the classic statement of his biblical humanism.[16] Written in the form of a doxological hymn that praises the philosophy of Christ, the *Paraclesis*, or word of exhortation, appeals to Christians to read with a desire to be translated into the message of the New Testament.[17] Although Erasmus wrote his short "trumpet blast" to address a general readership, its startling force was felt particularly by preachers, generating an immediate response that anticipated its eventual popularity among Protestants who were drawn to its strong focus on the speech of Christ through the medium of scripture.[18]

Erasmus' striking claim is that scripture, if used appropriately, speaks with sufficient persuasiveness to accomplish its spiritual purpose: to render the living mind and image of Christ and to draw listeners into the transforming power of divine love. This requires rhetoric appropriate to its sacred subject, even if less ornate than sophistry that aims to stimulate pleasure

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[12]Cited in Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 103.
[13]*CWE* 3: 204, Allen, II, 166-7; *CWE* 3:222, Allen, II, 185.
[14]R.J. Schoeck, *Erasmus of Europe: The Making of a Humanist: 1500-36* (Edinburgh, 1992) 190.
[15]Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*, 1-57; Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology,* 81-93.
[16]*Paraclesis, id est, Adhortatio ad Christianae Philosphiae Studium*, LB, V, 138-44, ed. and trans. John Olin, *Christian Humanism and the Reformation: Selected Writings of Erasmus* (New York, 1987) 97-108. Hereafter page numbers will be given in the text.
[17]Augustijn, *Erasmus*, 78-9. O'Malley, *CWE*, 66, xxvi.
[18]Dickens and Jones, *Erasmus the Reformer*, 198; See the assessment of Margaret Mann Phillips, *Erasmus and the Northern Renaissance* (Woodbridge, 1981) "Almost all the ideas expressed in the *Paraclesis* were in accordance with those expressed by Luther." 85.

and delight. In contrast to the fleeting futility of classical oratory the eloquence of scripture renders the wisdom of Christ which, "not only captivates the ear, but which leaves a lasting sting in the minds of its hearers, which grips, which transforms, which sends away a far different listener than it received." (…*quae non aures tantum mox peritura voluptate transformet, quae multo alium dimittat auditorem quam acceperit*. LB, V, 138E). When the word of scripture is unhindered by human syllogisms or exclamations the Spirit is free to inflame and incite hearts that sing Christ's praises (98). Erasmus saw Christian people everywhere for whom the word of Christ had been muted and even silenced by uninspiring performances, pastoral malpractice, and lukewarm piety. The *Paraclesis* extended a compelling invitation to acquire new capacities and possibilities for reading and speaking scripture in a life-changing manner.

To introduce this subject --- the philosophy of Christ --- Erasmus cited examples drawn from human philosophy. There are Platonists, Pythagoreans, Academics, Stoics, Cynics, Peripatetics, and Epicureans, communities whose members possessed not only a deep understanding of their teachings but also committed them to memory, fought on their behalf, and even died in their defense (98). Teachers of ancient philosophic schools addressed the most painful problems of human life, working as compassionate physicians of the soul whose arts could heal many types of human suffering. Their practice of philosophy, the love of wisdom, was neither for the purpose of intellectual technique nor the display of their own cleverness, but rather was an activity of grappling with human misery, distorted passions and disordered loves; a "therapy of desire." Philosophers made therapeutic use of speech, utilizing their words as instruments of pastoral care --- psychagogy --- to promote human happiness through the art of living well.[19]

While Erasmus believed pagan philosophy was capable of promoting the human good, he considered it sheer folly that Christians would ascribe to Aristotle or any other teacher authority equal to Christ. Only the new and wonderful philosophy of Christ is to be wholeheartedly pursued, since it presents a simpler and more satisfying form of life than all human philosophies. Moreover, its wisdom may be only acquired through intimate attachment to its Author and Prince. He who was a teacher who came forth from heaven, He alone can teach certain doctrine, since it is eternal wisdom, He alone, the sole author of human salvation, taught what pertains to salvation, He alone vouches for whatever he taught, He alone is able to grant whatsoever he has promised (99). (*Certe solus hic e coelo profectus est Doctor, solus certa docere potuit, cum sit aeterna sapientia: solus salutaria docuit unicus humanae salutis auctor: solus absolute praestitit, quidquid umquam docuit: solus exhibere potest, quidquid promissit.* LB, V, 139D).

From the time of the Greek Apologists adherents of Christianity absorbed the practice of philosophy as a way of life: the love of Christian wisdom was practiced as an exercise of thought, will, and one's whole being, demanding radical conversion within a particular community. Christianity therefore presented itself as *philosophia*, love of wisdom, and as a method of forming a people to live in and look at the world in a new way. For ancient Christianity, learning how to read scripture facilitated the acquisition of habits of the soul that focused the attention of readers to both method and content, thereby extending their spiritual and moral progress. Christian philosophy was a way of life conducted according to the mind of

[19]Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton, 1994) 3-7;Piere Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Spiritual Exercises from Socrates to Foucault*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Michael Chase (Oxford, 1995) 47-144; John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York, 1951) 17-41.

Christ - philosophy himself.[20]

Why is Christ's philosophy unique? Erasmus acclaims, "To teach this wisdom God became man; He who was in the heart of the Father descended to earth, rendering foolish the entire wisdom of the world." Formal training in a philosophical school cannot lead to knowledge of Christ; only a pious, open mind and simple faith will do, "The journey is simple, and is ready for anyone." (*Simplix & cuivis paratum est viaticum, tantum fac adferas pium ac promptum animum, & inprimis simplici puraque praeditum fide*. LB, V, 140A). Advancement is granted to the docile and humble, those whom Christ inspires and draws like a good teacher, communicating the grammar of piety to eager young minds (100).

Many in Cambridge would have heard the *Paraclesis* as a trumpet blast to awaken England from its spiritual slumber. Erasmus asserted that if Christ accommodates his wisdom to all who love him, his embrace must include the highest to the lowest, regardless of one's position in life. Since Christ and his wisdom are more common than the sun, only the proud are excluded from his reach. Even the humble and lowly may share in Christ's riches, the Gospels and Epistles, so that "the farmer sing some portion of them at his plow, the weaver hum some parts of them to the movement of his shuttle, the traveler lighten the weariness of the journey with stories of this kind (101).[21] The language of scripture is the medium by which Christian conversation and life are renewed (101). (*Ex his sint omnia Christianorum omnnium colloquia.* LB, V, 140C).

Moreover, this new possibility exists since the divine *sermo* came into the world through the word of Christ, the ultimate expression of the divine nature and power. Thus, if Christ's word is received and translated into life, a person will speak a living language, simply and from the heart. The spirit of Christ will inspire human speech to become a theological instrument that exhorts, incites, and encourages (102). (*Haec, inquam, & hujusmodi, si quis afflatus spiritu Christi praedicet, inculcet, ad haec horteur, invitet, animet, is dimum vere Theologus est …* LB, V, 140F). As Hoffman notes: "Language plays a pivotal role in Erasmus' thinking ...The truth of both the sensible and intelligible world is so deeply embedded in the word that there is no other way to comprehend it than by reading and hearing, and no other way to communicate it than by writing and speaking."[22]

Many in England and on the Continent heard the message of the *Paraclesis* as a persuasive call to the practice of reading scripture as a means of conversion and a holy life. Erasmus exults in the generative power of Christ's wisdom, the rebirth of humanity and its restoration by God to its original goodness. (*Quid autem aliud est Christi Philosophia, quam ipse renascentiam vocat, quam instauratio bene conditae naturae*? LB, V, 141F). Because this wisdom has been perfectly proclaimed in the Gospels and Epistles, it is inscribed with power to effect what its Author has spoken. Everything that is required has been provided: a teacher and model to imitate, divine happiness and satisfaction for the mind, healing for troubled souls, passion and strength for the journey as learners of Christ. (*Nimirum, hic unicus est Doctor, hujus unius discipuli sitis*. LB, V, 143C). Erasmus summons his readers to this journey: "Let us, therefore, with our whole heart covet this literature, let us embrace it, at length let us die in its

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[20]Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven, 1993) 178-80;

[21]"So the humanist effort was not restricted to scholarly pursuits and the world of intellectual elites. Its clear objective was the education and salvation of simple folk, and this aim was to unleash a flood of vernacular literature" Wooding, *Rethinking Catholicism*, 22.

[22]Hoffman, *Rhetoric and Theology*, 61; Schoeck, *Erasmus Grandescens*, 83-4; Rex, *The Theology of John Fisher*, 60-61; O' Rourke Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*, 100-1.

embrace, let us be transformed in it, since indeed studies are transmuted into morals (102). (*Has igitur toto pectore sitiamus omnes, has amplectamur, in his jugitur versemur, has exosulemur, his demum immoriamur, in has transformemur, quandoquidem abeunt studia in mores.* LB,V, 144C).

The *Paraclesis* concludes with a critical glance at traditional devotional practices that utilized religious relics, remains, and images of saints. Erasmus urged Christians to redirect their vision toward the words and images of scripture since they render, "the living image of his [Christ's] holy mind and the speaking, healing, dying, rising Christ Himself … so fully present that you would see less if you gazed upon him with your very eyes" (102-3).[23] (…*at hae tibi sacrosanctae mentis illius vivam referunt imaginem, ipsumque Christum loquentem, sanantem, morientem, resurgentem, denique, totum ita prasentem reddunt, ut minus visurus sis, si coram oculis conspicias.* LB, V, 144D).

Although the *Paraclesis* was written for a general audience, it produced significant implications for preachers, since it demonstrated a lively faith in the real presence of Christ rendered by the scriptural text, the divine *sermo* of the Father spoken in the persuasive power of the Spirit. As Hoffman concludes, for Erasmus, "Christ is the living word of God, the image of God's mind, and as such he is the supreme preacher endowed with the utmost power of persuasion." Since preaching is learned by conforming to the life and practice of those who know how one should not presume to do so without first being taught by God. Reading the Bible in this manner is an act of desire to know and to obey, a sacramental act in which God answers the reader's prayer. In Christ's school of preaching, reading and listening precedes speaking, wisdom comes before style, and truth before expression. The better and clearer the theology, especially when taught by Christ, the more persuasively the human heart may bring sacred rhetoric to human speech.[24] Wabuda observes that for Erasmus, "The person of the preacher was the pivot, in the sacredness of the moment, the mouthpiece of the wisdom of God, infused with the spirit of Christ, who dwelt in his heart."[25]

Although Erasmus declared that Christ is more vividly present in scripture than he was during his earthly ministry, he asserted that Christ cannot be apprehended without a volitional assent of sincere faith.[26] Thus a preacher cannot shine without burning; a preacher cannot inflame others without the mind being fired, without the transport of thought. Only when preaching and life, study and prayer, are one, does proclamation pass over into hearers' lives with persuasive power. One who presumes to speak God's word must be so consumed and transformed by whom and what one knows, that one becomes a living sermon, an instrument of the word of Christ who, "…preaches, teaches, inculcates, exhorts, incites, and encourages…" (102).[27]

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[23] For a discussion of Erasmus' critique of late medieval piety and its reliance on images, see Carlos M.N. Erie, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1996) 36-45. "Erasmus, in the first place, considered religious images as powerless …the Christian ought to revere the portrait of God's mind that the skill of the Holy Spirit has portrayed in the writing of the Gospels." 39. On Erasmus' view of history and human responsibility for the past, see Istvan Bejczy, *Erasmus and the Middle Ages: The Historical Consciousness of a Christian Humanist* (Leiden, 2001) 182-90.

[24]See Shuger's discussion of the emphasis placed by Renaissance rhetorics on the passion of the preacher's heart and speech being enflamed by divine charity; Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 221-40.

[25] Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation*, 69, 65-69; see the discussion in John O'Malley, "Erasmus and the History of Sacred Rhetoric" which forms chapter VII of *Religious Culture.*

[26]Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*, 80-83.

[27]Manfred Hoffman, "Erasmus on Church and Ministry" in *ERSY* 6 (1986) 23-25. I am indebted to Hoffman's essay in formulating this section.

In 1518 a new edition of the *Enchridion militis Christiane* (Handbook of the Christian Soldier) was published. This work extended the message of the *Paraclesis*, articulating a vision of scriptural wisdom being embodied by Christian people.[28] In the prefatory letter to Paul Volz, Erasmus described the *Enchridion* as an expression of piety that would contribute to the making of "theological lives" (*vitam theologicam*) rather than theological arguments. He reiterated his desire that Christ be made accessible to even the untrained multitudes, that pastors teach the path of sincere faith, unfeigned love, and confident hope, kindling desire for it by their passion and example.

Erasmus envisioned a Christian society reconstituted by preaching that renders the living image of Christ as its *scopus*, its goal.[29] Radiating outward from Christ are a series of concentric circles, the nearest comprised of priests, bishops, cardinals, and popes whose duty is to follow and adhere to the Lamb. Christ draws the orders of priests to himself, inflaming them with divine charity and purifying them from earthly stain. In succession of Christ, clergy must embrace what is pure, transfusing his teaching to rulers whose vocation is to defend the public peace and restrain evildoers. By mirroring Christ with sharpness, clarity, and purity, clergy accommodate the special needs of princes who exercise power without benefit of the fullness of divine justice (117).[30]

The third and most solid circle around Christ is the common people, the grossest part of this world, but still belonging to the body of Christ. Erasmus considers their greatest need to be pastoral forbearance and mercy. Therefore, in their dealings with common folk clergy should imitate the *decorum* of Christ, who endued his disciples with gentleness and accommodated his teaching to their capacities. Clergy must support the weak with fatherly indulgence until they grow strong in Christ, since to strive after Christ is the vocation common to all citizens of a Christian realm (120).

The philosophy of Christ is his simple eloquence proclaimed for the cultivation of pure Christianity, "in the dispositions of the soul, not in the mode of life; in the soul, not what a person eats or wears." Christian vocation is not the exclusive possession of those who live according to a religious rule; rather it is granted to all in baptism for a common life within the rule of Christ. Erasmus exclaims, "What else is a city but a great monastery?" (…*quid aliud est civitas quam magnum monasterium*? Allen, III, 376). All Christians are monks, *monachi*, called to purity of heart and singleness of mind in devotion to Christ (122). The task of clergy is to render Christ's lively presence intelligible through the proper use of scripture, thus promoting charity and concord throughout the commonwealth (123-7).[31]

The wisdom offered by the *Novum Testamentum* and *Enchridion* was supplemented by the publication of the *Paraphrases on the New Testament* (1517-24), providing preachers with a

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[28]*CWE* 6: 72-90; Allen, III, 362-70*; Letter to Paul Volz*, ed. Olin, *Selected Essays of Erasmus*, 109-29. Hereafter page numbers will appear in the text. Volz was Abbot of the monastery at Hugshofen, in Alsace; see Wabuda, *Preaching During the English Reformation*, for a discussion of Erasmus' influence on the political nature of preaching. 65-90.

[29]Here I am following the excellent discussion of Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*, 84-97. "Christ is the center of theological attention."

[30]Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology*, 84-87; see Wabuda's discussion of Erasmus' influence on the political nature of preaching, *Preaching During the English Reformation*, 89-99.

[31] "Erasmus perceived the grave mistake of separating Christian faith from the theological life." Romanus Cessario, O.P. *Christian Faith and the Theological Life* (Washington, DC, 1996) 132.

continuous exposition of scripture that rendered the philosophy of Christ in homiletic style.[32] As Cardinal Campeggi wrote to Erasmus in 1519, "I seized every opportunity to acquire your image, which I found reflected ... most recently in your sermon-paraphrase on the Pauline Epistles."[33] The sermon-paraphrase, which was an instrument for Erasmus to preach with pen and printing press, "says things differently without saying different things, especially in a subject which is not only difficult, but sacred, and very near the majesty of the Gospel."[34]

The goal of Erasmus' sermon-paraphrases was to render the genuine meaning of the biblical text, offering more than translation but less than commentary, writing by means of the language of scripture rather than writing about the language of scripture. Erasmus hoped the reader would not be offended by the fact that he had changed the words of Holy Scripture in order to enable the voice of Paul or even Christ to be heard. Thus the rhetorical object of the *Paraphrases*, therefore, was to get the mind of Christ off the pages of scripture and into the minds of readers, since in spiritual regeneration Christ is the content, goal, and final efficient cause.[35] When used in this manner, the words of scripture and the words of the *Paraphrases* would serve a mediating function, respectively, between Christ and the church, Erasmus and his readers, preachers and their people.[36] By accommodating himself to both the biblical text and the contemporary context, Erasmus presented himself as a model of pastoral discourse.[37]

In preaching the gospel, as in writing homiletic paraphrase on it, the spirit of Christ proceeds through the soul (or mind) of the preacher into the soul of the hearer or reader.[38] In the *Paraphrase on I Peter 4,* Erasmus describes how this spiritual transformation enables the word of Christ to be spoken and heard.

> If it falls to a person's lot to receive sacred doctrine or the gift of a learned tongue, he is not to use it for personal gain or pride or empty glory but for the salvation of his neighbor and the glory of Christ, and his audience should perceive that the words they hear are from God, not from men, and that the one who speaks to them is but an instrument of the divine voice.[39]

In the *Paraphrase on* 2 *Timothy*, Erasmus instructs preachers on the moral qualities required for their ministry, exhorting them to fulfill its evangelical duties.

> The need to strengthen in advance the hearts and minds of our people is all the greater because hereafter there will be, as I said, a grave and dangerous time when some will abandon their evangelical confession and will not tolerate the true and healthy teaching of Christ ...Be watchful, enduring everything for the gospel's sake. Make yourself truly a herald of the gospel ... be sure to conduct yourself in a way that is completely persuasive

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[32]Augustijn, Erasmus, 99-102; Albert Rabil Jr., *Erasmus and the New Testament: The Mind* of *A Christian Humanist* (San Antonio, 1972) 115-41.
[33]*CWE* 7: 5, Allen, IV, 4.
[34]*CWE* 5: 196, Allen, III, 138.
[35]J.J. Bateman, "From Soul to Soul: Persuasion in Erasmus' 'Paraphrases on the New Testament'" in *Erasmus in English 15* (1987-8) 8.
[36]*CWE* 42: xiv-xviii; Albert Rabil Jr. "Erasmus's Paraphrases on the New Testament" in Richard DeMolen, ed. *Essays on the Works of Erasmus* (New Haven, 1978) 145-62.
[37]*CWE*, 41, x-xii; Bateman, "From Soul to Soul: Persuasion in Erasmus' Paraphrases on the New Testament" 7-16.
[38]Bateman, "From Soul to Soul" 13-14.
[39]*CWE* 44: 103, LB, VII, 1097.

> and deeply implanted in people's minds, so that they are not easily shaken by those who will endeavor to teach a contrary doctrine.[40]

*The Paraphrase on Acts* was a model for the renewal of the sixteenth-century church. Erasmus' description of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost is highly rhetorical, reflecting his commitment to training preachers to become worthy instruments of sacred eloquence.

> Sounds are not uttered without breath, without a tongue. Accordingly, the breath from heaven puts forth a heavenly sound; a tongue of fire carries off and sets aflame the hearts of hearers. The tongue of the Pharisees is cold, the tongue of the philosophers, however erudite, or of the orators, however fluent, moves no one. This gift comes from heaven; the disciples are only the instruments through which the Holy Spirit puts forth his voice. A man cannot give this gift to another man, nor does anyone impart it to himself, but God bestows it upon each person as he sees fit ... The spirit is a thing of force; fire is something lively and always in motion.[41]

Erasmus' *Paraphrases on the New Testament* was an instrument for the education and formation of preachers. Through his sermon-paraphrases, Erasmus identified himself with pastors, instructing and encouraging them for the highest calling and function: to spread the teaching of the gospel. His biblical scholarship was received by many in England, and especially at Cambridge, where it rendered the word of God attractive and accessible for readers to acquire the habits of Christian faith and speech.[42] Upon leaving Cambridge, Erasmus wrote to Thomas Bullock about changes that had occurred, giving special attention to the impact on preaching.

> Now tell me, what has been the effect of all this upon your university. Why, it has blossomed forth so as to rival the leading modern schools, and now contains men of such quality that in comparison, those of the old time appear near shadows of theologians rather than the reality ... As to your preaching, I applaud your course of action in doing this and offer my congratulations on your success: especially since you teach Christ in purity and make no boast of merely human subtleties.[43]

Erasmus took the biblically derived imperatives uncovered by the New Learning and applied them to the reform of the church to re-appropriate the power of sacred rhetoric for the life-changing communication of sacred teaching.[44] Although the spirit of Christian humanism was essentially orthodox, it created a new context for interpreting reform, which prepared the way for a more radical vision to impact the polity at large. The intellectual foundations for this vision were deeply influenced by Erasmian biblicism and its catalogue of "things indifferent," which for many provided a purer, simpler, and more appealing way of construing and practicing the

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[40]*CWE* 44: 52, LB, VII, 1059.
[41]*CWE* 50: 15, LB, VII, 667.
[42]A good summary of Erasmus' work in England is provided in Thomson and Porter, *Erasmus and Cambridge*, 1-109; McConica, *English Humanists and Reformation Politics,* 76-106; Wooding, *Rethinking English Catholicism in Reformation England*, 16-30; O'Malley points out that Erasmus emphasized sermons more than other parts of the liturgy, *CWE,* 66, xxv.
[43]Cited in Thomson and Porter, *Erasmus and Cambridge*, 195; *CWE* 4: 47, Allen, II, 322.
[44]Wooding, *Rethinking English Catholicism*, 30.

faith.[45] As Hoffman notes, "Erasmus wished for the church's external means of grace to operate according to their spiritual purpose. This pertains particularly to the ministry of proclaiming God's word incarnate in Christ and the Scripture."[46]

Preaching persuasively with his pen, Erasmus issued an enthusiastic call for preachers to take up the evangelistic task of making Christians by means of the message and spirit of Christ in scripture. Just as Christ is the image and embodiment of God's Son, so is the Bible the inscripturation of Christ's image and Spirit. It is capable of regenerating faith, spiritual vitality, and moral commitment by means of human speech.[47] In emphasizing the need for pastors to learn, absorb, and rely upon the wisdom and persuasiveness of scripture - a *theologica rhetorica* - Erasmus called for a return to the model of the preaching life depicted by Augustine in *De doctrina christiana*. The serious business of preaching is simply Christ, the eloquent "sermon" of God who communicates himself through the speech of pastors who are becoming "living sermons."[48]

[45]Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Vol. I., Laws Against Images* (Oxford, 1988) 196-200; Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge, 1986) 28-46; Paul O'Grady, *Henry VIII and the Conforming Catholics* (Collegeville, 1990) 64-82; Bernard J. Verkamp, *The Indifferent Mean: Adiaphorism in the English Reformation to 1554* (Athens, 1981) 1-14, 24-41.

[46]Hoffman, "Erasmus on Church and Ministry" 27.

[47]Eire, *War Against the Idols*, 38-41; O'Boyle, *Erasmus on Language and Method in Theology,* 83; Matheson*, The Imaginative World of the Imagination*, 125-6.

[48]On the importance of Augustine for sacred rhetoric in the sixteenth-century see, Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric*, 47-65; For a discussion of Erasmus and his use of Augustine see Peter Iver Kaufman, *Augustinian Piety and Catholic Reform: Augustine, Colet, and Erasmus* (Macon, 1982) 111-28; James McConica, *Erasmus* (Oxford, 1991) 14-5; On the rhetorical theology of Erasmus see, O' Malley, "Introduction" in *CWE* 66: xxviii-ix; Charles Trinkaus, *In Our Image and Likeness*: 2 vols. (Chicago, 1970) I. 126-8; John D' Amico, "Humanism and Pre-Reformation Theology" in ed. Albert Rabil, Jr., *Renaissance Humanism: Foundations*, *Forms, and Legacy*: 3 Vols. (Philadelphia, 1988) III. 369-73.

**"More Mobile Than Any Motion:"**
**A Liberative Approach to the Operative Theologies of Disciple Preaching**

Kay Bessler Northcutt
Phillips Theological Seminary

## Prolegomenon

This paper attempts to develop an historical approach to preaching sympathetic to the concerns of post-colonialism. Further this paper provides a brief history of Disciple preaching that is both respectful *of* and emerging *from* tradition. This paper is also an initial effort toward examining how a post-colonial perspective might emerge organically *in continuity* with Disciple preaching traditions.

## Introduction

An amazing amalgam of a church, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)—with its righteous anger against church divisiveness and its distinctively modern insight that Protestant reform movements were themselves contributors to such divisions—has not surprisingly birthed a wondrous variety of preaching, midwifed by a diverse chorus of preachers.

While founders of the movement intended to "Revive the religion of ... union taught by Jesus and his apostles"[1] the aspect of the early church the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) most aptly *restored,* however unintentionally, is that of spending its first century in disputes and sufferings over the basics of what constitutes *church*. And, like the early church, Disciples spent their second century sorting out those aspects of diversity which could be hospitably engaged from those that could *not*, examples of which surfaced during the split with the non-instrumental churches of Christ and the Independent Christians. It is no small paradox that the founders' intentions to restore the modern church to the New Testament church's presumed Golden Age has, by contrast, rather perfectly imitated the early church's ambiguities and insecurities. Though such a fluid situation might elicit frustration among church historians and theologians, one can scarcely imagine a more fruitful catalyst for preaching! "For wisdom is more mobile than any motion" (Wisdom 7:24). Surely God has been at work among the Disciples in their over one hundred and fifty years of versatile, contextually rich preaching!

While the movement's founders spoke of the early *church*, contemporary church historians note it is more astute to speak of the early *church**es***. It follows that the CC(DoC)—again uncannily paralleling that of the early churches in its development—is not singular so much as it is plural. It is not so much the Christian *Church* (Disciples of Christ) as it is the Christian *Church**es***[2] (Disciples of Christ), taking its shape from a breathtakingly non-unified and diverse set of foundational leaders, geographies, theologies, and peoples. Consequently, positing "an operative theology" of Disciple preaching is as artificial (and naïve) a concept for *this* era as the founders' notion that within the pages of the New Testament there was *a* church to be restored. It follows that Disciples are not in possession of an operative *theology* of preaching so much as many operative *theologies* of preaching.

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[1] Barton Warren Stone, "An Address To the Elders, Preachers, and Brethren, in the Church of Christ," *Christian Messenger* 2 (1827): 70.

[2] Those well-acquainted with Disciples' history will, no doubt, notice that my use of the term "church*es*" echoes the language of *pre-restructure*——it seems, however, an apt description of our current context.

That being said, each of those earliest, unique "New Testament" churches held broad characteristics in common, such as, for example, practices of hymn singing, praying, prophesying, and table fellowship. Even within the almost chaotically diverse traditions of the current CC(DoC) from *Park Avenue Christian Church* in New York City, to *First Christian Church* in Sand Springs, Oklahoma, to *Primera Iglesia Cristiana de Orlando* in Florida, to Atlanta's mega-church *Ray of Hope*, to *Communauté des Disciples du Christ au Congo-Poste Ecclesial de Kinshasa*, Congo, the CC (DoC) parallels the development of early churches, holding certain broad characteristics in common, preaching being central among them. In fact, the cherishing of preaching is among the very few essentials *all* Disciples revere. The encouragement of great preaching—as well as the *teaching* of preaching—reaches like a plumb line through all its theological diversity as well as cultural, gender, and racial differences; privileging the Word and its effective proclamation.

## I. Initial Homiletic Expressions of the Movement:

Stone and Campbell

Even a quick glimpse at the writings of Barton Stone (1772-1844) and Alexander Campbell (1788-1866) reveals two diverse, "more mobile than any motion" approaches to preaching! Stone's homiletic is heart-felt, Spirit-driven, God-centered, biblical preaching. Stone advises preachers: "Be careful that you live and walk in the spirit everyday. Your preaching will then be spiritual and profitable to your hearers. A ... spiritless ministry is a ... ministry of death."[3] Stone further advises that preachers who "address the hearts of their hearers" are preachers whose hearts themselves are filled with "the love of God."[4] For Stone, "The successful preacher is the feeling preacher, and the feeling preacher is one who converses much with his own heart, and is often on his knees conversing with God…"[5]

Campbell's homiletic (though intentionally Biblical like Stone's) was driven by the philosophy of John Locke (1632-1704). Campbell's first biographer Robert Richardson, noted that Campbell maintained a perfectly motionless stance—one arm extended on a cane—while preaching.[6] Campbell's physical restraint while preaching symbolically represented his disagreement with the "excited feeling—of sympathy with tones, and attitudes, and gestures—of the noise, and tumult, and shoutings of enthusiasm" exhibited in the evangelistic preaching of the Great Awakening. Campbell was convinced that human persons could *not* "get religion on the spot."[7] Consequently, Campbell argued that preaching's task must be that of substantively *shaping* Christians. Because preaching must shape human persons *into* Christians, Campbell, in 1862, expressed "a view which he had held for at least forty years"[8] namely that the teaching function of preaching be separated from its evangelical function of persuasion to decision:

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[3] Ibid., 71.
[4] Stone, "Letter to J.C.," *Christian Messenger* 4 (1829): 225.
[5] Stone, "An Address," *Christian Messenger* 2 (1827): 71. Gender exclusive texts will retain their historic voice throughout this paper.
[6] Cloyd Goodnight and Dwight E. Stevenson, *Home to Bethpage: A Biography of Robert Richardson* (St. Louis, Mo.: Christian Board of Publication, 1949), 123.
[7] Alexander Campbell, "Religious Excitement-No. 1," *Millennial Harbinger*, n.s. 4 (1840): 167-168.
[8] Dwight. E. Stevenson, *Disciple Preaching in the First Generation: An Ecological Study*, The Forrest F. Reed Lectures for 1969 (Nashville, Tenn.: The Disciples of Christ Historical Society, 1969), 92.

> A *preacher* proclaims *facts* and then proves them by *witnesses;* a *teacher* ascertains and develops *truth,* and supports it by *arguments;* an *exhorter* selects *duties*, and recommends and enforces them by *motives.*[9] (emphasis Campbell's)

While Campbell and Stone exhibited diverse approaches to preaching—the driving force of *uniting*, which primarily motivated both of them, muted the sometimes daunting theological and homiletic differences between them. As Disciple historian Mark Toulouse (1952-) points out, both of them sought "Simple and reasonable preaching about how God acted in Christ to save human beings."[10]

"Many women were there..." (Matthew 27:55)

Women were essentially silenced during the initial expressions of the Disciple movement's homiletic—if by homiletic we insist upon an exclusively narrow definition such as *pulpit* preaching. If, on the other hand, a broader understanding of homiletic is adopted, such as a *homiletic of activity* as well as a homiletic of public, *non-ordained preaching* —there is a very rich heritage to explore.

Many Disciple women during this era imitated the women of the earliest churches—such as Lydia and Phoebe—through becoming philanthropists and leaders. Benefactress Emily Tubman (1794-1885) gave tens of thousands of dollars supporting "causes of the Stone-Campbell movement." Tubman's will included "charitable bequests totaling $195,800" much of it endowing educational institutions, for example Bethany College, where Disciples preachers and evangelists were educated.[11] But also, several late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century kairotic developments, both within the United States and the "Christian" movement, initiated an era of liberty and egalitarianism resulting in a small cascade of non-ordained, itinerant women preachers!

Nancy Gove Cram (1766-1815), a Freewill Baptist, became swept up in the ideals of the "Christians."[12] In 1812, following a prayer she prayed publicly (uninvited!) at a Baptist funeral in Charleston, New York, moving many to tears, Cram was invited to conduct revival meetings, preaching to large crowds. Tragically, Cram died at forty years of age but not before she founded and organized a church for her converts. Not being an ordained minister, Cram borrowed ordained "Christian" ministers from Vermont to do so. Cram converted at least seven future "Christian" male ministers,[13] as well as Abigail Roberts (1791-1841), a former Quaker, who, like Cram, became a powerful itinerant preacher, founding at least four churches in her twelve-year ministry (1816-1828).[14]

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[9] Alexander Campbell, "Pre-eminence of Preaching in Public Worship," *Millennial Harbinger*, 5th ser. 5 (1862): 154.

[10] Mark G. Toulouse, *Joined in Discipleship: The Maturing of an American Religious Movement* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 1992), 85.

[11] R. Edwin Groover, "Tubman, Emily H. (1794-1885)," in Douglas A. Foster, Anthony L. Dunnavant, Paul M. Blowers, and D. Newell Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2004), 746-747.

[12] John F. Burnett, *Early Women of the Christian Church: Heroines All* (Dayton, Ohio: The Christian Publishing Association, 1920), 9-13. The "Christians" referred to here were the "New England Christians" started by Elias Smith and Abner Jones in ca. 1801, one of the "Christian" movements which, like Barton Warren Stone's "Christians" in Kentucky, ultimately gave rise to both the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ.

[13] Ibid., 18.

[14] Ibid., 20.

Nancy Towle (1796-1876), converted in 1818 under the preaching of "Christian" exhorter Clarissa H. Danforth, was a "bold itinerant ... relentless preacher on the move" who covered "fifteen thousand miles in a decade of preaching."[15] Both Towle's family and her community so fiercely rejected her call to preach that when finally she took up her itinerancy it required turning her "back on country and kindred as Abram did."[16]

"And others..." (Luke 11:8)

Historical records "of 1820 list African Americans as members of the two earliest Disciple congregations at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, and Brush Run, Pennsylvania."[17] African Americans "[t]hough most often as slaves ... were nevertheless charter members" in the American born religious body eventually known as CC(DoC).[18] The institution of slavery kept masters and slaves separate from one another during worship, with slaves "sequestered" in slave galleries. The Lord's Supper, too, was divided by race.

Within mixed congregations African Americans served as exhorters, deacons, and custodians. But soon black preachers arose and with them the early black congregations of the CC(DoC).[19] Records concerning early African American Disciple leaders are woefully "sketchy"[20] but those mentioned are: "Alexander Campbell of Cane Ridge, Samuel Buckner, Isaac Scott, Abram Williams, Thomas Phillips, J.D. Smith, Henry Newson, Peter Lowery, and Hesiker Hinkel."[21]

From its inception the voices engaged in Disciple preaching were varied not only in race, gender, social status, and class but in diverse theologies and homiletic approaches as well. The compelling theme of *uniting* served as fulcrum and balance amidst such diversity. Preachers within the Stone-Campbell movement were preoccupied with God's saving acts through Christ. It was this preoccupation with soteriology which formed the basis of the Disciples' nascent operative theology of preaching.

**II. The Evangelists:**

The Evangelists—like the preachers who gave initial homiletic expression to the movement—proved "More mobile than any motion," bringing diverse theologies and unique homiletic approaches to bear upon their work. The Evangelists deserve credit for transforming Stone's and Campbell's ideas and insights into a movement with thousands of converts. Unity remained a commitment held in common.

Well-known for his "five-finger exercise" of salvation, Walter Scott (1796-1861) is credited with bringing over three thousand converts into the Stone-Campbell movement and stabilizing what would become the CC (DoC). Not surprisingly, the complex question "What must a person do to be saved?" drove Scott's operative theology of preaching though he held a

[15] Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 78.
[16] Ibid., 79.
[17] Hap C. S. Lyda, "African Americans in The Movement," in Foster, Blowers, Dunnavant, and Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement,* 11.
[18] Darryl M. Trimiew, ed., *Out of Mighty Waters: Sermons by African-American Disciples* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 1994), 1.
[19] See Lyda, "African Americans," in Foster, Blowers, Dunnavant, and Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone Campbell Movement,* 11.
[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

unique position (in conflict with Calvinists and other revivalists of that era) regarding the Holy Spirit.[22] Scott insisted the spirit works through *external* testimonies such as preaching and the Bible, prompting a rational assent to faith—rather than an internal working within the soul.[23] Though Scott's overriding homiletic of *persuasion* was typical of the Evangelists, his distinctive take on the Spirit is representative of the diverse theological approaches found among Disciple preachers.

"Raccoon" John Smith: An Ecumenical Approach

John Smith (1784-1868) practically "single-handedly spread the message of reform over much of the state of Kentucky."[24] People loved to not only hear Smith's sermons—they loved to *listen* to them. Smith possessed a sonorous voice and reportedly the aural cunning of his sermon delivery was captivating. Though Smith evangelized for the Disciples of Christ—he worked for unity among all Christians—inaugurating an effective method upon which later Disciple homileticians could model their ecumenical preaching.

"And the others…"

By 1861 there were over 1500 African American churches in Georgia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Ohio, and Tennessee."[25] One can only imagine the magnificent preaching that so dynamically evangelized and supported 1500 African American churches. This tangible accomplishment (1500 churches!) elicits not only admiration but also grief for the absent (perhaps yet undiscovered) written records of such powerful African American (CCDoC) preaching. The written absence of such voices—and the activities of African American women—tragically diminishes the homiletic heritage of the Disciples.[26]

**The First Ordained Women**

Melissa Terrell (b. 1834), was, on March 7, 1867, the first woman ordained as an *elder* and licensed to preach as "an ordained minister of good standing" by the Southern Ohio Christian Conference—having also preached the conference sermon.[27] The first woman to be ordained from within the "Campbellite" branch of the "Christian Church" movement, however, was Clara Celestia Hale Babcock (1850-1924). Among the Evangelists, Hale Babcock was exceptional, reported to have converted over fourteen-hundred people, baptizing a thousand of them personally.[28]

Scott's unique view of the Spirit—and Smith's evangelizing for the Stone-Campbell movement while simultaneously championing unity—along with the ordination of the first women preachers, and the dramatic increase of African American congregations demonstrate the

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[22] See Mark Toulouse, "Scott, Walter (1796-1861)," in Foster, Blowers, Dunnavant, and Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement,* 673-679.
[23] Ibid.
[24] See Bruce E. Shields, "Smith 'Raccoon' John (1784-1868)," in Foster, Blowers, Dunnavant, and Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement,* 690.
[25] Lyda, "African Americans in The Movement,"11.
[26] Happily this situation is dramatically changing as demonstrated by the recent dissertation by Gregory K. Widener, "The Interethnic Black Preaching Style of Cynthia L. Hale: An Exploratory Study" (Ph.D. diss.: University of Kentucky, 1998).
[27] Burnett, *Early Women*, 25-29.
[28] Nathaniel S. Haynes, *History of the Disciples of Christ in Illinois 1819-1914* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Standard Publishing Co., 1915), 446-447.

rapidly expanding and diverse preaching of the Evangelists. But a unifying theme among them can be found within the operative theology of an economics of exchange—one's confession of Christ in exchange for salvation.

**III. Preaching in Settled Pastorates**

When Disciples moved to weekly preaching in settled pastorates it became necessary to re-imagine preaching's primary aim. Since most of those filling the pews in established DoC congregations were already "saved"—the previous theology of transaction proved to be not fully adequate. About this gradual shift historian and homiletician Joseph R. Jeter observes, "*Theologically speaking* in terms of sermon content (in moving away from thinking of salvation as a transaction to that of a relationship *with* God) many modern preachers weren't certain what to do."[29] Disciple historian Ronald Edwin Osborn (1917-1998) too, observed "a shift from theological understanding having to do with the biblical concept of salvation—[to] thinkers of our time [who] emphasize salvation as a relationship."[30] That is to say, once Disciple preachers inhabited settled pastorates, they asked not so much "What does it mean to be saved?" as "What does it mean to be Disciples of Christ, a people of faith, in relationship to God who saved us?" Many Disciple preachers resolved the latter question regarding the meaning of faith through ethical categories such as duty, fidelity, and self-sacrifice, but also in existential categories including risk and self-disclosure. Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971), in his *Nature and Destiny of Man,*[31] invoked the language of relationship to interpret revelation but remained deeply skeptical of anything that hinted of Roman Catholic mysticism in seeking God. Similarly, many Disciple preachers adopted an ethical/existential theology while remaining wary of Roman Catholic sacramental (or monastic) understandings of the spiritual life.[32]

The paradigm shift with respect to preaching within settled pastorates was not limited to the theological shift from transactional to relational theology. Homiletic theory itself shifted emphasis, during this era, from persuasion to explanation. An influential textbook by John Broadus (1895-1927) proved pivotal in this homiletic shift. Broadus' text, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons,*[33] was "widely considered to be the most successful American textbook on preaching of all time with forty editions published from 1870 to 1896 alone."[34] As homiletician Thomas Long (1946-) notes, "The preacher as persuader was being replaced by the preacher as explainer."[35] North American sermons became informational, propositional, and content-driven with multiple illustrations and "proofs." The purpose of such

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[29] Joseph R. Jeter, telephone conversation, August 17, 2004.

[30] Cited in Ken Lawrence, ed., *Classic Themes of Disciples Theology: Rethinking the Traditional Affirmations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Fort Worth, Texas.: Texas Christian University Press, 1986), 135.

[31] Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man.* Vol. 1: *Human Nature* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941), 125-131.

[32] Some Disciple preachers (in this modern generation) capably forged a homiletic bridge between Stone's more heart-felt, affective preaching and Campbell's more rational, *teaching* sermons. Disciple preaching is most remarkable when—both theologically and homiletically speaking—the strengths of Stone's method and Campbell's are held in tension with one another. Perhaps the brilliant and greatly beloved Disciple preacher Fred Craddock (1928-) was intent on constructing such a bridge with his inductive method of preaching, though he never explicitly stated as much in his seminal book, *As One Without Authority* (Enid, Okla.: Phillips University Press, 1971).

[33] John Broadus, *A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* (New York: Sheldon and Co., 1870).

[34] Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit: Preaching in American Protestant Spaces* (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003), 60.

[35] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 158.

preaching was "the clear, logical, and rational presentation of ideas derived from the gospel."[36] Many Disciple preachers scaled with mastery and power the heights of the modern homiletic's content-driven, rational sermon.[37]

Other Disciple preachers adopted the "counseling model of preaching" profoundly influenced by Harry Emerson Fosdick (1878-1969) whose weekly sermon-broadcast on The National Vespers Radio Hour reached "millions of people."[38] Fosdick pioneered and nurtured the notion of preaching as "counseling" in 1928 with an article called "What is the Matter with Preaching?"

> Every sermon should have as 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.[39]

Invariably these sermons focus upon individual problem-solving, and the wisdom sources cited in preaching-as-counseling are those of modernity's disciplines: psychology, science, and sociology.

Given the prominence of these discourses in modern preaching, the distinctive voices of classical Christian wisdom, as well as exegetically-driven Biblical preaching, and the congregational aspects of community formation, as well as the religious authority and identity of the preacher, were relatively obscured by the assumption that *all* of us faced a new, common situation: modernity.[40]

By the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, however, new voices arose to challenge the assumptions of both the liberal, "explanation" and Fosdickian, "therapeutic" models of preaching—both of which privileged primarily Caucasian, male, middle-class experience, and both of which had assumed incorrectly (and somewhat naively) the "commonality" of modern life—that sense that we were all in the same boat together. The Civil Rights and feminist movements sounded the alarm on behalf of economic and political equality for African Americans and women. These calls for justice, which interpreted the theological notion of *imago Dei* through the modern lens of political equality and, simultaneously, challenged the implicit racial and patriarchal assumptions of Christian God language, shifted the language of salvation from divine reward to this-worldly transformation, and the terms of authority from the religious tradition to that of social experience of injustice.

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[36]Ibid.

[37] Disciple homiletician, Hunter Beckelhymer edited such powerful modern preaching in *The Vital Pulpit of the Christian Church: A Series of Sermons by Representative Men among The Disciples of Christ.* (St. Louis, Mo.: Bethany Press, 1969). See also Eugene M. Boring's, *Disciples and the Bible: A History of Disciples Biblical Interpretation in North America* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice Press, 1997) for greater detail regarding key persons, places, institutions, events and the biblical interpretations on which operative theologies of Disciple preaching are based.

[38] Robert M. Miller, "Fosdick, Harry Emerson," in William Willimon and Richard Lischer, eds., *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 154.

[39] Cited in Lionel Crocker, ed., *Harry Emerson Fosdick's Art of Preaching: An Anthology* (Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1971), 29.

[40] It was, in part, the shared situation of modernity that enabled Disciples in the U.S. to become a prominent voice in ecumenical discussion and dialogue. The sense of facing a common situation—in the experience of modernity—provided a space for inter-denominational co-operation and for healing the theological rifts of the past. Finally (or so it seemed) the nascent moment for *unity*—and the role of Disciple preachers and leadership toward it—had arisen.

Many African American preachers of this era greatly utilized the "relational theology" or the "feeling" track of Disciples preaching, exhorting their congregations to keep the faith and stay together—close to the Cross of Jesus—in the face of the Klan,[41] Jim Crow segregation, and a thousand other daily forms of racism. The emergence of the Civil Rights movement, however, also united with the Black churches' deep identification with the suffering of Jesus. Prophetic, activist, black preachers exhorted their congregants to participate in the Civil Rights Movement's prophetic critique of racial injustice.[42]

Previously muted (or silenced) voices—of feminists, Latinos/as, Hispanics, and African Americans—asked of their congregations both political and social commitments resulting in theological and cultural tensions with primarily middle-class, male, Caucasian voices. [43] Denominational publications, such as *the Disciple* took a leading role in attempting to educate and persuade its readers of the importance of social justice concerns, in the mid to late 1970's *the Disciple* magazine was consistently recognized as the leading social justice publication by The Associated Church Press.

These previously silenced voices informed a new generation of preachers with theological and moral convictions that did not always square with either the modern therapeutic or more traditional other-worldly salvation model of Christian preaching. The result has been a further diversification of theological perspectives as Disciples entered the postmodern era of proliferating voices, existential bewilderment, and an often confused sense of congregational orientation and denominational identity.

**IV. The Postmodern Church: In Process**

Paradoxically, the twenty-first century for Disciples mirrors the nineteenth century from which Disciples emerged; the "new" global reality uncannily replaying anxieties and concerns of that earlier so-called "unsettled" frontier.[44] What began as a minuscule regional movement has become an international denomination currently rapidly expanding in Africa.[45] Remarkably, a religious movement founded upon difference *and* unity has flourished into phenomenal difference *with* an *unsettled* unity which contemporary Disciple preaching—throughout the United States, Canada, Africa, Puerto Rico, Australia, New Zealand, and the world—reflects.

Among Disciple preachers in Congo sermons are not expository but rather topical. Almost all preaching is focused on *hope*. Since Congo's great sufferings—both prior to and following independence in 1960—the country and its people have encountered heart-wrenching and life-endangering struggles. It is no surprise that Disciple preachers in Congo focus on hope and *faith*; Romans 8:28 serving as a principal, privileged text. Congolese preachers shape their sermons toward an eschatological theology.[46]

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[41] The cemetery plot records from the internment of Clara Celestia Hale Babcock, quoting from her obituary, listed among attendees the Ladies' Guild of the KKK.

[42] Those preachers exhorting congregants to social action included Caucasian as well as African American preachers. *The Vital Pulpit of the Living Church* contains such calls-to-action representative of both races.

[43] James Cone, *My Soul Looks Back* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1986; repr., Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1982), 66.

[44] The "undiscovered" territory (and its unsettled frontier) which eventually became known as the United States of America was neither "undiscovered" nor unpopulated. The systematic annihilation and crucifyingly horrible violence perpetrated by white settlers (and eventually the United States' military and government) upon American Indians is an open historical record, representing one of the greatest holocausts of the Imperial Era.

[45] According to the statistic published in *Operation World*, the twenty-first century edition by Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, the Disciples of Christ in the Congo number 720,000.

[46] Reverend Eale Bosela, the General Minister and President of the two hundred and fifty-nine churches comprising the *Communauté des Disciples du Christ au Congo-Poste Ecclesial de Kinshasa (Church of Christ in the*

By way of theological contrast a great many Disciple Latino/a preachers in the United States rely on liberation theology. Interestingly enough, "the most influential manual of homiletics in Latin America" was John Broadus' *Tratado sobre la perdicacion* (also profoundly influential in Caucasian preaching in the United States) which presumes preaching's purpose is to instruct and persuade.[47] Disciple homiletician Pablo Jiménez (1960-) notes that in contemporary Hispanic preaching the emphasis is shifting from form and content to "the theological interpretation of Latino and Latina experience"[48] and that maintaining Hispanic cultural identity is central to the purpose of Hispanic preaching. Ultimately Hispanic preaching must *empower* Hispanics "to persevere and prevail in their *lucha por la vida,* their struggle for life."[49]

African American Disciple sermons convict, convert, and celebrate with breathtaking power. Though African American preachers cover the gamut of theological perspectives—from that of the God of providence to those of womanist and liberation—African American preachers display masterful skill in shaping and forming human persons *into* Christians. Campbell's suspicion of Revival "emotionalism" would, little doubt, be humbled by the emotional power of Disciple African American preaching in the United States.[50] Especially in light of the fact that Disciple Black preachers faithfully perform what, for Campbell was preaching's most basic purpose: the *formation* of Christians.

North American Pacific Asian Disciples (formerly the Fellowship of Asian American Disciples, 1978) currently represent twelve different language groups. In 1992 there were only eight Asian American Disciple congregations.[51] Consequently Geunhee Yu was appointed to "develop and grow Asian ministries" resulting today in over seventy Asian American congregations "consisting primarily of seven different ethnic groups: Chinese, Japanese, Filipino, Korean, Vietnamese, Indonesian, and Samoan … though Korean Disciples represent about seventy-five percent of all NAPAD congregations." Currently there are over one hundred Korean Disciple ministers in the United States. Though as of yet there are no published books of Disciple Korean sermons or about the history of Disciple Korean preaching, United Methodist homiletician Jung Young Lee notes the "most popular [Korean American] sermons are uncritically exegetical and uncompromisingly doctrinal,"[52] "stressing the witness of the Holy Spirit"[53] with a "continued nineteenth-century missionary emphasis on conversion."[54]

Globally speaking Disciples are separated by theology, location, culture, race, class, identity, gender.[55] In the rapidly escalating Disciple population in Africa for instance, issues of

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*Congo/Disciples of Christ Community-Kinshasa Region)* in a June 2006 conversation at Disciples Divinity House, The University of Chicago.

[47] Gusto L. González and Pablo A. Jiménez, *Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2005), 5.

[48] Ibid., 13.

[49] Ibid., 14.

[50] See Disciple homiletician Frank A. Thomas, *They Like to Never Quit Praisin' God: The Role of Celebration in Preaching* (Cleveland, Ohio: United Church Press, 1997).

[51] Geunhee Yu, "Asian American Disciples," in Foster, Blowers, Dunnavant, and Williams, eds., *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement,* 40-41.

[52] Jung Young Lee, *Korean Preaching: An Interpretation* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1997), 67.

[53] Ibid., 71.

[54] Ibid., 74.

[55] Though representative data on pastors of recognized congregations from the 2005 *Yearbook* (of the CC[DoC] in the United States and Canada) is readily available (74% Men, 26% Women; 81% Ordained, 19% Licensed; 83%

feminism and womanism are virtually silenced as irrelevant—while in the United States feminist and womanist views are representative of most women Disciple preachers.[56] In the side-lined white, middle-class churches of North America—issues of liberation theology are relatively unknown and un-emphasized—while in the Disciple Hispanic churches daily survival depends upon a liberating God. That being said, Disciples persist in holding certain broad characteristics in common. These include not only prayer, table-fellowship, and singing, but also the cherishing of the Word and its effective proclamation.

**Conclusion**

Theologian Letty Russell (1930-) uses the image of a round table as a metaphor for what Christian faith ideally should be: utterly inclusive, *without* exclusionary corners.[57] Truthfully, a "not-quite-round table"[58] is a more apt metaphor for global Disciples today—even though many voices remain marginalized, some "corners" of exclusion are gradually being sanded away. There is room at the table for a breathtaking variety of voices, cultures, operative theologies of preaching, and homiletic approaches.[59] Yet, it has taken Disciples almost two hundred years to catch even a glimpse of the richness of God's mobile wisdom.

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Caucasian, 10% African American, 4.8% Hispanic, 1.6% Asian and .1% Other) that same representative data is less available *globally* speaking.

[56] See for example, Joan Campbell and David Polk, eds., *Bread Afresh Wine Anew: Sermons by Disciples Women* (St. Louis, Mo.: Chalice, 1991).

[57] Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round: Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1993).

[58] Weekly communion at The Community of Hope United Church of Christ in Tulsa, Oklahoma, is celebrated around a "not-quite-round" table.

[59] See Don A. Pittman, "On Preaching the Word: Notes from the History of Religions," *Homiletic* 23 (Winter 1998): 1-7, for the contribution a history of religions perspective brings to this discussion.

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**We are 4 Keep this Place:**
**The Preaching and Missionary Activities of Arthur Wellington Clah**

Robert P. Hoch

This paper explores the ways in which one First Nations preacher, Arthur Wellington Clah (1831-1916), refashioned the missionary-colonial gospel of assimilation of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries into a transformative message that contributed to the beginnings of a First Nations witness to the good news of Jesus Christ.[1] Historically, the view that Christianity and First Nations cultures were intrinsically opposed has hindered serious hearing of First Nations preaching.[2] While that historical problem is beyond the scope of this paper, the following examination of Clah's missionary activities will show him refashioning a gospel he received from Euro-American missionaries into preaching that, interacting with the richness of indigenous contexts, was transformative not only for First Nations cultures but for the church as well.[3] It is also possible that this study may lend needed insight for contemporary discussions around questions of the church's missional witness in North America's increasingly pluralistic environment.

The primary source for Clah's preaching and missionary activities are his handwritten journals, which span a period of about fifty years.[4] Following a brief introduction to Clah and Tsimshian society, the body of the paper will turn to an exposition of his preaching and missionary activities. For purposes of order, the material will be organized into three areas where Clah's activities as a preacher and missionary were especially intense: (1) the settlement church; (2) the tribal council and in "Canaan," a community he established on his ancestral lands; (3) itinerant activities which led him to interact with other tribal groups and non-Indian peoples. The paper closes by reflecting on some contemporary questions of missional preaching, First Nations Christians, and pluralism.

## A Brief Introduction

Today, most people are familiar with Tsimshian art, easily recognizable with its characteristic symmetry and bold patterns, often representing clan symbols in totems, masks, boxes, and other items. By comparison, the Tsimshian worldview is still largely unknown. For example, the smallest social unit in the Tsimshian community was matrilineal in organization,

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[1] Although no term is without problems, First Nations is often used by indigenous peoples in Canada. For purposes of this paper, I will use "Native American," "Native," "Indian," or "First Nations" interchangeably.

[2] This view is generally present among those scholars who employ the deprivation thesis to account for First Nations Christianization. For a summary of the use of the deprivation thesis in Native American culture studies, see Susan Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing: Nineteenth-Century Protestant Missions and Tsimshian Christianity* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 11-5. Other scholars, among them my colleague Bonnie Sue Lewis, have challenged the deprivation thesis through their study of missional history. See, for example, her work, *Creating Christian Indians: Native Clergy in the Presbyterian Church* (Norma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003).

[3] What I refer to as the "received gospel," delivered by Euro-American missionaries to First Nations peoples, was most often tied to a gospel of missionary-colonial conquest. See below for further elaboration.

[4] Arthur Wellington Clah Diary, WMS Amer 140/1-72, Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine Library, London.

with ancestry traced through the mother rather than the father. Although sometimes seen as intensely hierarchical in nature, the Tsimshian were actually more interested in each person's appropriate place, based on ancestry. The Tsimshian were also deeply spiritual people, who saw the cosmos as a collection of villages, human and non-human. What held those different villages together was the principle of reciprocity or balance between creatures. Balance was achieved through a variety of practices, among them the feasting tradition, sometimes known as the potlatch, in which a chief gave away her or his property, demonstrating that they were people who could reciprocate the gift of ancestry that they had received in being made into a leader for their people. In addition, the Tsimshian tended to divide the world into fours (as compared to the western penchant for "threes"): four villages (Sky, Land, Cave, and Sea), four clans (Eagle, Blackfish, Wolf, and Raven), four organizing powers (Heaven, Sun, House, and Heart) and even, according to one chief, four appropriate churches (Anglican, Methodist, Catholic and the Salvation Army).[5]

At the time of contact, the Tsimshian lived in an area that included the Nass and Skeena Rivers, extending south to the islands of the Douglas Channel in present day British Columbia. "Tsimshian territory was bounded by the Tlingit and Athapascan groups on the north, by the Carrier to the east, by the Northern Kwakiutl groups to the south, and by the Haida of Queen Charlotte Islands to the west."[6]

Such boundaries began to shift, particularly with the arrival of the Hudson's Bay Company, which opened a trading center at Fort Simpson in the middle half of the nineteenth-century. At that point, Native groups began moving into closer proximity with one another, competing for the lucrative trade that came with the beginnings of colonialism. Disease also began to ravage the population, and, in its wake, added further stress to an already rapidly changing environment. As settlers began to arrive, they made permanent incursions into lands that belonged to First Nations peoples. Missionaries, for their part, not only brought more change, but *total* change: total change meant the unmitigated subversion of Native culture.[7] Preaching, many believed, was the vanguard of this cultural assault.[8]

Clah was born into this period of change and conflict and, not surprisingly, he bears the characteristic birth-marks of the missionary-colonial period: employed for a time in the Hudson's Bay Company; married in a Christian ceremony; baptized in a Methodist settlement church in 1881; active throughout life in the settlement church; gaining income as a fur-trader and through other non-traditional trades; a leader in the Band of Workers (a group not unlike the Salvation Army). In rather convincing terms, Clah seemed to have shed his Tsimshian traditions and donned the garb of western civilization.

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[5] Jay Miller, *Tsimshian Culture: A Light Through the Ages* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 12.

[6] Margaret Seguin, "Introduction" in *The Tsimshian: Images of the Past; Views for the Present* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1984), ix-x.

[7] Robin Fisher, *Contact and Conflict*: *Indian European Relations in British Columbia*, 1774-1890 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992), 120.

[8] "Modern missions have shown that the preaching of the Gospel is the most powerful agency to give a barbarous or savage people the blessings of civilization." Board of Foreign Missions, Annual Report (1846), 11-2, cited in Michael C. Coleman, "Not Race, but Grace: Presbyterian Missionaries and American Indians, 1837-1893" in *The Journal of American History*, Volume 67, no. 1 (June, 1980), 43.

Even so, while Clah may have cultivated a taste for western appearances, language, and gifts, his participation in the world of the Tsimshian, according to Robert Galois, extended back in time and reached out across space. Clah was a member of "four units of Tsimshian social organization" (house group, a network of closely related house groups, a clan, and a tribe).[9] As a member of the Blackfish Clan and the head of his house group, Clah was woven into a shared story of ancestry, kinship, and reciprocity. He was also a preacher of the Great God of Heaven and his Son Jesus Christ, a preacher who testified in delight at the mystery that there were "4 in this place," the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit ... *and the Tsimshian*.[10]

## The *Un*/Settlement Church

The excerpt below is one of Clah's earlier and more autobiographical entries, in which he articulates a theme of reciprocity in his relationship with William Duncan,[11] a theme that re-appeared in different forms throughout his relationship with the settlement church:

> When Clah 24 years old and he have been learning school. Clah is head School an of Tsimshen. an of North and It was Wm. Duncan Teaching to Clah. an english language. But Clah teaching Him an Tsimshen language.[12]

In fact, whenever Clah recounted the story of his early encounters with Duncan, he was always careful to say that while he received something of value from the missionary he also gave a gift of reciprocal value in return. In so doing, Clah was expressing a basic value of the Tsimshian people that aimed to keep the inhabitants of the world in balance with each other.

If this concept of reciprocity were to be placed alongside the missionary view of their relationship with the Native peoples of the Northwest, the contradictions could not be more pronounced. Henry Ward Beecher, an admirer of William Duncan's work among the Tsimshian, articulated a concept of missions that was embodied in many of the missionary settlements in the Pacific Northwest: "It is your office as preachers to take so much of the truth of Christ Jesus as has become *digested and assimilated* into your own spiritual life, and with that, *strike!* with that, *flash!* with that, *burn men!*"[13] The metaphoric violence of the missional witness was echoed by

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[9] Robert Galois, "Colonial Encounters: The Worlds of Arthur Wellington Clah, 1855-1881" *BC Studies: The British Columbia Quarterly: Native Peoples and Colonialism*, nos. 115 and 116 (Autumn/Winter 1997/1998): 109-10.

[10] Clah Diary, 30-31 July 1896, 140/48.

[11] William Duncan (1832-1918) was a lay missionary, originally associated with the Anglican Church, who organized "Old Metlakatla," about twenty miles from Fort Simpson. He was born in Yorkshire, England and trained with the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS) in London for two years before arriving in Vancouver, BC, in 1857 to begin his missionary work with the Tsimshian. In 1887, as he sought greater freedom from both the CMS and the Canadian government, Duncan moved to "New Metlakatla." Clah refused to join him.

[12] Clah Diary, December 1858, 140/1.

[13] Henry Ward Beecher, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: J.B. Ford and Company, 1872), 10 (my italics).

another leader in missions, Richard Pratt, who said that it was his goal to "kill the Indian and save the man."[14]

Given the absence of reciprocity in Euro-American missionary rhetoric, it is not surprising that Clah was often in conflict with the missionary. Indeed, much of what follows is a description of the specific character of that conflict. What is surprising in this account is the tenacity with which Clah remained faithful to the settlement church and the missionary impulse of the gospel itself. That is, while Clah may have refashioned the received gospel, recognizing Tsimshian values and practices in the biblical witness, he did not sever his witness from either the missional dynamic of the gospel or even the settlement church itself:

> And now I do thank God that he has sent the Missionary, and I thank the good people of Canada for their help. I pray much that I may see the house of God put up. Long ago I was blind, and now God has opened my eyes. I hope the good people of Canada will still pray for us, for we are very dark.[15]

In addition to repeated statements of gratitude to the missionary, he regularly inveighed against the "old ways" as is suggested in this sermon recollection: "[Jesus] told me to stop all kinds dances. same he told to give me good news to preach the people words of God. Jesus told me in my heart to put all the chiefs out in every tribe because thee spend all peoples goods keeping dances every year and big potlatches."[16] However, not all was "settled" in Clah's testimony, particularly in terms of what the "new man" was to be, and this question, it turns out, was where he often found himself in conflict with the Euro-American missionary program of assimilation.

That divergence makes a striking appearance in the question of who has the right and authority to preach the gospel. The following excerpt is typical of the kind of resistance that Clah met from the leaders of the missional church when he began preaching in earnest without the approval or oversight of the Euro-American missionaries:

> News Come up yesterday to say Duncan laugh at me Because I teach the people in truth. I making to understand how to Prayer and to Thank God for god looking upon us He gaves us all We want. Some News Said to me If I got license alright I can preach the people Now I think his little mistake God gave the Licence in our hearts he gaves us One Soul in our hearts to Teach us to love Him an to know him with all our hearts and Keep his commandments Jesus Teach us how to prayer and how to thank God. He teach us everything.[17]

Naturally, some might argue on behalf of the settlement church, asserting that the Euro-American missionary was simply promoting an ordering of life that builds up the community of

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[14] Peter Iverson, *Carlos Montezuma and the Changing World of American Indians* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 9.

[15] Although not certain that this is actually Clah's testimony, Neylan believes that it is sufficiently characteristic of him to include it as part of the record. See Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing*, 162-3.

[16] Clah Diary, 21 November 1891, 140/29.

[17] Clah Diary, 18 January 1874, 140/5.

life, just as Paul did for the Corinthian churches. While not arguing that point, there is a sense in which Clah's issue with the settlement church was not only about order per se, but rather what was at stake was a dispute about the deeper expression of God's order in the creation, of which the Tsimshian were a fundamental part.

Suggestive in that respect is the following excerpt, in which Clah recounts how he was called to a lay missionary's house and ordered to give an explanation for his preaching in the previous days. In preaching, Clah had related his nephew's report that, after apparently dying and then rising from the dead, he had seen God. His vision was interpreted as a dream, which, for the Tsimshian, was one of the ways that God communicated with people:

> Cschutt laughing to me. Nobody see the Heaven, an nobody see God. Same he told me about mosses [Moses]. That if anybody who dreamed God or Christ stone or killed dead. So I told him Mr. Schutt I think you mistake. I have seen all the dreams on Holy book. Jacob had good dream. John had good dream. Cshutt says not now. God sent words long ago, not now. So I speak to him, you not know who make you live now. I believe myself the Great God His with me now He gave me live [life] an spake [and speech] and my eyes an mine fut [feet] to walk. Not long ago an not yesterday tonight. I believe his with me Jesus always Come see the men's heart. Cschutts says goodnight.[18]

His interlocutor probably viewed the Spirit's activity in the apostolic era as a "special dispensation" that was no longer in effect. Apart from doctrine as such, it may be that the denominational churches were reluctant to speak of the Spirit's vocation in preaching because to do so would be to relinquish the reigns of scientific progress (expressed in the Native world as the mandate to colonize) to the mystery of God's presence in a world more ancient than their own. Indeed, Clah's interpretation of his call to preach subverted the overbearing claims of missionary led colonialism: "Because God Father told me to teach all them people. Now I do what our Father said to me. I not speaking myself but God Father sent words to me, to tell all the people about him."[19] The Spirit of God was both immediate and powerful in Clah's articulation of his call.

## Preaching for and by the Canaanites

Perhaps not surprisingly, one of Clah's favorite doxological outbursts was the following: "He is stranger. He is every where. Jesus His every where."[20] In a colonial world where people of color were "less" than Whites, and where "true" civilization existed in distant places (both geographically and theologically), to sing a doxology to the triune God in the fourth world of indigenous experience was indeed strange, mysterious, and prophetic. In a real sense, what Clah was articulating was not a gospel for the conquest of the Canaanites, but a gospel proclaimed *for and by* the Canaanites.

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[18] Clah Diary, 24 January 1880, 140/11.

[19] Clah Diary, 9 January 1874, 140/5.

[20] Clah Diary, 28 July 1875, 140/6.

In this regard, there is a paradoxically rich analogy between the Moses narrative of Exodus and the biblical Canaanites, and Clah's own "exodus" experience as a leader of a people often identified as America's Canaanites. On 23 August 1878, Clah recorded his exodus out of the missionary settlement located at Fort Simpson, to establish a Tsimshian Christian community on his ancestral lands: "Sailing all way down [Nass River]. Arrived in Canaan. My new land. The Great God given me to live with only wife and 5 children."[21] One week later, Clah preached from Mark 11:1, the beginning of Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

Six months later, in December, during the Christmas cycle of the Christian calendar, Clah writes that "11 of us build two 3 4 houses at Canaan." Six days later, Clah inaugurates the New Year:

> We have [been] in the house about [1/2?] in [an] hour when old years gone and New Years Come. then we have nicily prayer felt happy Because New. Once come this [is] when we have had new things. This same when New Spirits come an New life New hearts when have new food then we felt happy this same when New Year come the great God's work Father of our Lord Jesus Christ His Son.[22]

At the height of his New Year celebration at Canaan, Clah testified that what God had begun was a new thing in the heart of an ancient world.[23]

Thus, in ways both dramatic and subtle, Clah's preaching expressed a missional witness that was radical by comparison to that of the settlement church. By comparison, Euro-American missionary preachers were often sent into the world of Native peoples to take them "captive for the gospel," hobbling their listeners with the manacles of a colonialist system that ultimately promoted narratives of conquest and slavery over freedom and dignity. Memorable in this vein is Clah's encounter with an older Native person, who, too weak to walk, had given up the long journey to worship at the settlement church:

> My dear friend, is no matter [that you cannot walk to the missionary church]. if we stop any were prayer to our Father in Heaven God knows everything we do. I said to him If you stop in your house. We prayer for you. God His [he is] in every were [everywhere]. Jesus His [he is] every were [everywhere]. *the bell rang in his own church old man running back.*[24]

This willingness to speak of the Tsimshian house as God's habitation permitted Clah's exploration of the biblical witness through the symbols of the Tsimshian world and, in a manner of speaking, liberated Tsimshian sign as an appropriate location for gospel witness.

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[21] Clah Diary, 23 August 1878, 140/8.

[22] Clah Diary, 31 December 1878, 140/8.

[23] The winter period for the Tsimshian was a time of intense religious and cultural activity, whereas the more temperate seasons were reserved for food gathering and trading activities. In fact, while Clah often relates his Christmas and New Year's worship experiences, he is comparatively silent during the Easter cycle.

[24] Clah Diary, 8 November 1874, 140/5 (my italics).

Although preached after he had been forced to abandon Canaan, in the sermon below Clah focuses on the "heavy heart," a Tsimshian metaphor for wealth and, in turn, social responsibility.[25]

> I walk round the houses to ask who wants Be a Christian are [or] who wants take Jesus Name or who want be baptized because some friends were Believe Gods commandments, but they hearts very heavy. some friends heart weigh 10 or some 20 lb. some weigh 50 pound some hundred pound. I remember when the flood was Drown everybody round the world they all drown because there hearts very heavy Noah an all his family there hearts very light. Because Noah and all his family Believe God's commantments [commandments]. They went into the ark. The Great God save them lifes flooding ark but all the heavy heart drown. Why Sodom and Gomorrah not run away when them 2 big places burn of [or] why the friends not run fast? Because there [their] hearts very heavy. weigh hundred bb some weight 50 pounds. Why Lot and all his family run very fast? Because they hearts very light. Why? Because Believe God's commantments [commandments]. Why Lot wife running away few miles and she tight [died]? She look back because she had 50 pound in her heart. She break God commandments. The great God make her shame. lot he had no power to tell almighty God to not make salt his wife. Because God had power himself to make anyone shame who break his law and shame for ever.[26]

Here the Tsimshian cultural context provides the hermeneutical lens for appropriating a biblical text. Susan Neylan identifies both Tsimshian and Christian imagery in this text, saying "dark/light imagery is especially common to Euro-Canadian mythology and Christian theology, while the emphasis on weight (heavy/light) in association with 'traditional' culture recalls the Tsimshian concept of filling the house (*walp*) with wealth, names, and property." [27]

The story of Raven, a hero and trickster among Pacific Northwest peoples, is evoked by this sermon as well. The beginning of the story of Raven focuses on how he is driven out of the village because he eats everything – his appetite is insatiable. After being driven from his village, his life is only redeemed after he steals light from the Great God of Heaven and then gives it to the world, reciprocating his vast consumption with the dramatic and transforming power of God's light. Light appears as a basic theme in Clah's testimony, which of course is a biblical theme, but it may also be charged with the narrative overtones of the Raven story, where light is, in some way, the agency of creation itself, fashioning not merely the sight of creation but creation in its richest form. Thus, like Raven, to be in fellowship with God is to have received wealth – a wealth that mandates ethical reciprocities within the complex web of human and creaturely community.

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[25] Heaviness of heart means something quite different for Clah than it might mean for contemporary readers. "Heaviness" pointed not to "sadness" or "despondency," but to wealth, status, power, and, potentially, realness. Given this sermon, however, it also suggests imbalance. Those with "heavy hearts" were not acting as they were socially obliged to act.

[26] Clah Diary, 30 December 1886, 140/31.

[27] Neylan, *The Heavens are Changing*, 166.

Issues of justice and social empowerment were not at all foreign to Clah's preaching of the gospel. Of course, that was not unique since Euro-American missionaries attempted to secure some degree of justice for Native peoples against the rising tide of settlers. However, this view of the missionary as "Indian helper" can sometimes obscure the way in which Native preaching was itself prophetic, providing leadership and critique of the missionary colonial system.

For his part, Clah, who was himself a high ranking member of the tribal council, did not hesitate to challenge the justice and faithfulness of Euro-American actions. While speaking to a group of high ranking chiefs who had gathered in Victoria, British Columbia, Clah declared: "If we lost our land, also we lost our Christian."[28] Even when in the settlement church, he wielded his responsibilities as a tribal leader, criticizing Euro-American leadership while preaching in the settlement church:

> … Last night when I was in church of God I had telling the friends who in church I say that friends when you prayer tell our God about this land Because He give the land to our generation to live with. But the whit men taken away from us let us tell God about it and He will helping us about our land. Because almighty God had power to help the poor and love and peace and happy for Christ Jesus sake. Amen.[29]

Clah's preaching also focused on other aspects of First Nation's culture, particularly the feast traditions, more often known as the potlatch. Missionaries had outlawed the feast as a "wasteful" use of resources. Clah defended the practice on ethical grounds saying that it was analogous to a "glean feast" or a feast for the poor.[30] There were times, too, when Clah's preaching blasted western forces of racism and capitalism in North America, questioning the entire edifice of the colonial-missionary empire.[31]

## Preaching in Tongues, Listening in Mystery

Fisher, writing about the Pacific Northwest, has said that it was one of the most culturally pluralistic areas in North America. Clah showed great willingness to welcome that diversity as an expression of God's own richness:

> ... Indian church prayer meeting. 8. oclock this evening. Williams and Taite [White missionaries] using Chinock [Chinook][32] for mixed indians [different tribes present in the worship service] pray in Chinock [Chinook] an preach in chinock [Chinook]. I use my own language [and] my daughter to this same [does the same]. One Nassiki woman use her own language when we pray class at nine. Before we walk out I have told Mr. Taite I don't want using Chinock when your

[28] Clah Diary, 2 June 1891, 140/29.

[29] Clah Diary, 8 January 1894, 104/44.

[30] Clah Diary, 4 January 1893, 140/29.

[31] Clah Diary 8 December 1883, 140/22.

[32] Chinook was not considered a proper language; it was a jargon language, used for trade and commerce.

> prayer Almighty God [but he objects saying] ... Because them all mixed strangers. I say yes. But Our God knows all languages.[33]

Perhaps part of the reason that Clah could appreciate the diversity that is presupposed by a radically missional embodiment of the gospel was the way in which tribal boundaries had changed as a result of his own adoption of the Christian vocation:

> I keep the Holy Bible with me to tell the people about Jesus Christ the Lord Because Jesus said Matthew XVIII 19.20 [XXVIII] go ye therefore and teach all nation. So I beleive what God will said in my heart to teach the poor people alround. Sometimes I walk 200 miles some 300 miles some 400 miles 8 hundred miles round trips from Casiar Sometime go way up north an alaska usa telling the friends about our savior Jesus.[34]

In his study of Clah's travel, Galois estimates that in 1864, at the age of thirty-three, Clah walked and canoed a little under 3,700 miles. Nine years later, at the age of forty-two, he embarked on another journey of some 2,200 miles, also by foot and canoe.

Each of these journeys combined prospecting, trading ventures, and sometimes wage-labor – and a clear sense of missional vocation:[35]

> I give confess that Jesus give me long life that I drink his Blood. I told the friends you know who makes my hair on my head whit [white]? Because I drink of Jesus Blood. And you all know I came here as ... [I] suppose you all thinks: that only myself in Canoe. No, 4 of us. all in church now. Me and God and his Son and Holy Ghost. Bless the Lord his [he is] with me everywhere.[36]

Clah's impressive mileage is only comprehensible in light of his even more profound sense of God's sending activity, a sending presence into which his own humanity had been woven:

> 30. [July 1896] Thursday. rough day. N.W. some rain. I have fishing 9 hours last night. I caught 2 humm back [humpback salmon] 3 dog fish [dog salmon] one plunder [flounder] one crab. was very wet last.
> 31. Friday. Clouden but Fine. N.W. We are 4 keep this place. My Father and His Son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. that makes me stronger. my heart stronger as strong lion.[37]

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[33] Clah Diary, 9 August 1895, 140/47. The same issue appears again about two weeks later (25 August, 1895).

[34] Clah Diary, 4 January 1893, 140/43; cf. November 21, 1894, 140/46 and 29 December 1895, 140/47.

[35] Galois, "Colonial Worlds" *BC Journal*, 129-33.

[36] Clah Diary, 14 June 1894, 140/49.

[37] Clah Diary, 30-31 July 1896, 140/48.

## Conclusion

During this brief exploration of Clah's preaching and missional activities, we saw Clah's preaching refashion a received gospel of assimilation into a gospel that was liberative and transformative, even contributing to the beginnings of a specifically Tsimshian witness to the gospel. Indeed, his refashioning of the missionary gospel of assimilation was not only liberative for First Nations peoples, but it also contributed to the transformation of the church from a mission of linguistic homogeneity to a missional witness of linguistic multiplicity.

In that vein, as of late, it is not uncommon to hear scholars speak of our own increasingly pluralistic environment, among them, Darrell Guder, who compares our contemporary situation to the first few centuries of the Christian movement.[38] One insight that might be discerned in this brief exposition of another, and far more recent period in missional history, is that metaphor is the linguistic equivalent of God's own habitation within the human condition. However, it is also possible that metaphor and story can be seen as little more than a strategic outpost for further conquest and assimilation into a homogenizing ideology. In the former, metaphor becomes the seat or font of the new creation in an ancient world. In the latter, it seems as if language, and the people who use it to create a meaningful world, are reduced and even ransacked in the name of God.

From the perspective of the present interpretation of Clah's preaching, it seems as if the colonial-missionary system understood the power of language and, in that particular understanding, attempted to exploit it. Clah, who knew and used language, seemed to delight in the mystery that God had chosen to dwell in it. This is not to say that there was not tension in Clah's exploration of biblical and Tsimshian languages, but it was tension that was alert with the anticipation of a Word graciously sent and abiding, through the Spirit's hospitality, in the seat of language, even a language apparently unknown.

Of course, for the missional church (especially one that is still yearning for days of Christendom gone by), when enough of these linguistic "unknowns" are put into one place, the church may not have the same openness to God's presence as did Clah -- multiplicities may seem more like the babble of incoherence than the witness of Pentecost. Warning against that view, Wendell Berry, speaking of the tension between certitude and mystery in natural systems, cautions us to be patient in the presence of complexity: "... To call the unknown 'random' is to plant the flag by which to colonize and exploit the known... To call the unknown by its right name, 'mystery,' is to suggest that we had better respect the possibility of a larger, unseen pattern that can be damaged or destroyed and, with it, smaller patterns."[39]

If we were to replace "random" with the church's experience of cultural pluralism, an apparently "random" environment, preaching might be tempted to *colonize* contemporary peoples with its particular pre-understanding without *anticipating* the mystery of God's presence that has, as Mark's gospel reports, "gone ahead" of us already. None of this is to say that missional preaching does not have a teaching vocation, particularly today when the story of good news is often a colonized word rather than the Word full of grace and truth. However, it is to say

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[38] Darrell L. Guder, "Leadership in New Congregations," in H. Stanley Wood, ed., *Extraordinary Leaders in Extraordinary Times: Unadorned Clay Pot Messengers*, vol. 1 (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 4.

[39] Wendell Berry, *Home Economics* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), 4.

that the missional witness anticipates in faith the Word and world that God has uttered and blessed in one mysterious breath of creation and redemption.

The importance of this seemed evident when, recently, students and teachers from First Nations backgrounds gathered together in a circle at the University of Dubuque Theological Seminary. Some told stories of growing their hair long; others of demons faced; of God's love embraced and embracing; of learning how to dance again; of not being ashamed to be Indian anymore; of remembering ancestors whose world was chosen and elected by God from before the creation. Clah's witness is part of that circle and part of that story, that recovering of mystery. Indeed, his voice and the world it spoke to may be unknown to the western world, but it belonged to the mystery of God, or so he prophesied: "He is stranger. He is every where. Jesus His every where."[40]

[40] Clah Diary, 28 July 1875, 140/6.

**Learning from History: a homiletical approach to a divided church**

Raewynne J. Whiteley

The Anglican Communion is going through a difficult period in its history. Recent debates over sexuality have exposed rifts that go beyond that issue to matters of biblical interpretation, authority and ecclesiology. They also reflect our history, particularly the legacy of colonialism and the traditions established by different missionary societies in different places.

But this is not the first time this has happened in our tradition. Time and time again the church has struggled with controversy. Sometimes these struggles have resulted in splits and schisms, other times, people have stayed together, bound by ties greater than the issue at hand. As a preacher — who sometimes gets phone calls from people demanding to know where I stand on *the* issue of the day, so that they can decide if what I preach will sully the purity of their ears — my question is, does any wisdom lie in our homiletical heritage that might be a model for the life of the church today? And as a teacher of homiletics, my questions is, could exploring our homiletical heritage be a way in which students from diverse perspectives could find common ground in which to grow their homiletical roots?

**Stepping back**

It was with these questions in mind that I revisited a period in the history of the English Church that I first studied during my doctoral work: late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England. After the turmoil of the first half of the sixteenth century, with Henry VIII's theological and political vacillations, the protestant swing under Edward VI, and the return to Roman Catholicism under Mary, the Elizabethan Settlement provided a measure of stability to the newly independent English Church. In a historical context in which the unity of state and religion was assumed and religious pluralism was associated with political instability, the Elizabethan Settlement allowed — and established as normative for the Anglican tradition — the development of a church that encompassed multiple religious perspectives, balancing and incorporating both Catholic and Reformed elements. Nevertheless, this apparently idyllic vision of a church that encompassed all was not exactly the reality. Recusant Roman Catholics continued to worship in secret; within the nascent Church of England, fracture lines appeared along theological, political and eccclesiological lines, resulting in factions typically characterized as 'Anglican' and 'Puritan.' Nevertheless, during most of this period, the Church of England was able to embrace both Anglicans and Puritans, and it had an inherent unity in that "everyone in the English church (until at least the mid 1620s) thought of it as Protestant or Reformed, and church writers regularly spoke of the Romanists as 'the adversaries.'"[1]

In order to explore this dual reality of both comprehensiveness and division, I turned to the work of three preachers of this period, George Gifford, John Donne and Richard Sibbes. All three were ordained priest and held cures in the Church of England, although Donne came from a Roman Catholic background and Gifford and Sibbes were known as Puritans. The following analysis is based on sermons by each of the three preachers on the same text, Song of Songs 5:3.[2]

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[1] Daniel W. Doerksen, *Conforming to the Word: Herbert, Donne and the English Church before Laud* (Lewisberg: Bucknell University, 1997) 15-16.

[2] George Gifford (1548-1599/1620) was ordained in 1578, having studied at Oxford, and in 1582 became vicar of Maldon in Essex. After being deprived of his parish posting in 1584 for

A number of factors have been identified as distinguishing Anglican metaphysical from Puritan preachers.[3] For the purpose of this study, they will be addressed under the following categories: structure, style and authority.

An interest in the writings of the Old Testament is found in both Puritan and Anglican metaphysical literature of the period under consideration, and the prevalence of the Song of Songs as the text for sermons draws on a rich interpretive tradition going back to the early church Fathers. It is particularly interesting for the purposes of this study, as it naturally gives rise to exploration of the use and interpretation of Scripture and of metaphor, key criteria used to distinguish the 'Puritan' and Anglican' classifications of preaching in this period.

*I. Structure*

At first sight, the most distinctive difference between the three preachers is in the sermon structure. The metaphysical preachers tended to preach sermons with complex divisions, often reflecting the structures typical of medieval *ars praedicandi* while Puritan sermon structure, such as that outlined by William Perkins, was characteristically simpler.

Nor surprisingly, then, Donne's sermon is highly crafted, reflecting the classic structure of introduction, division and subdivision, and (a brief) conclusion. His introduction (one and a half pages of a total of fifteen) establishes the opposition of nature and grace, an opposition to which he repeatedly returns in the course of the sermon, and then explores grace as seeking

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conformity, was permitted to hold the office of lecturer at Maldon, where he gained the reputation of a preacher and reformer. Although labelled a non-conformist, he later wrote anti Separatist works, and in 1591 preached a sermon at Paul's Cross in London praising the queen's rule; he is probably best classified as a "conforming Puritan". The sermon to be considered is the ninth of fifteen sermons on the Song of Songs, first published in 1598 (the original date and place of preaching is unknown); the text is Song of Songs 5:2-7.

John Donne (1571/1572-1631) was a leading metaphysical poet and preacher. Ordained priest in the Church of England in 1615 after a career in the legal and diplomatic fields, he was appointed divinity reader at Lincoln's Inn in 1616, and was named Dean of St Paul's in 1621. He too preached at Paul's Cross on at least five occasions; on at least two of these occasions he took the opportunity to urge a middle way between papacy and presbyterianism. The sermon to be considered was freestanding and occasional in nature, originally preached at the service of the Churching of the Lady Doncaster at Essex House in December 1618.

Richard Sibbes (1577-1635) has also traditionally been identified as a Puritan, though of a more moderate variety than Gifford. Ordained in 1609, he was both professor and lecturer at Holy Trinity in Cambridge, but was deprived of these in 1515 because of his Puritanism. However in 1617 or 1618 he was chosen preacher at Gray's Inn, London, and in 1626 added to this the post of master at St Catherine's Hall in Cambridge. He was known for actively avoiding conflict with the authorities and was awarded the perpetual curacy of Holy Trinity in Cambridge in 1633. Two of Sibbes sermons are to be examined here, the seventh and eighth of a series of twenty on Song of Songs 4:16 to 6:3, which together form a single rhetorical unit on Song of Songs 5:2-3 (and for simplicity will be treated as a single sermon in this paper). There is no indication of the original date or place of preaching.

[3] See for example Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England* (Vol. III; combined edition; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1996) 161-2; O. C. Edwards, *A History of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004), 362-364, 369-372.

salvation in terms of *visionem Dei*, the sight of God, and *unionem Dei*, union with God. He propounds the notion of union with God as the subject of the Song of Songs, establishing it as the theme on which the divisions of the sermon are developed. He concludes this section with a statement of the text for the sermon, "Worldly unions have some corrupt foulnesses in them, but for this spirituall union, *Lavi pedes, I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?*"[4]

A further page and a half comprises an outline of the structure of the remainder of the sermon: Donne divides his work into two divisions based on the second half of the scriptural text: "I have washed my feet," becomes "resurrection of the soule and Gratulation," and "how shall I defile them?" which becomes "Ascension of the soul, and Indignation."[5] These divisions also take an association with past and future, omitting the present and thus distinguishing this schema from Donne's favored tripartite pattern of past, present and future. Subdivision of the first division results in a structure of the body of the sermon as follows:

I. Resurrection and Gratulation
   a. *ablutio necessaria* - baptism
   b. *ablutio pedum* - repentance and Eucharist
   c. *ego lavi* - my part in washing
   d. *lavi* - washing is already done
   e. *pedes meos* - washing of self precedes washing of others

II. Ascension and Indignation

Donne engages in an extended discussion of each of the subdivisions under the first division (a further nine and a half pages), during which the nature-grace opposition is again raised, with a relatively brief discussion of the second division (two pages). There is almost no conclusions to this sermon: it consists in only a final sentence, in which Donne reiterates the themes of the two divisions, with an assurance and an exhortation, a persuasive device which functions to apply the meaning of the text to the life of the hearers: "And let this meditation bring you *ad voce, gratulantis*, to rejoyce once againe in this *Lavi pedes*, that you have now washed your feet, in a present sorrow and *ad vocem indignantis*, to a stronger indignation, and faster resolution, then heretofore you have had, never to defile them againe."[6]

By contrast, Gifford's sermon exhibits a plainness of form very much consistent with Perkins' exposition of sermon structure. After reading the portion of text on which his sermon is based, Song of Songs 5:2-7, he begins by summarizing the previous portion and introducing the next, "We had in the former Chapter almost nothing but the prayses and commendations which Christ giveth to his Church: So highlie, and with so manie speeches doeth he magnifie and extoll her beautie and excellencie. Here in this chapter we have another manner of Song, even an accusing and a bewayling Song…"[7] The introduction is brief, one page of twenty-four, and concludes with what could be identified as the theme of the sermon, "This is the Battell in them, between the Flesh and the Spirite."[8] The rest of the sermon follows a simple pattern: Gifford states the verse or part thereof on which he intends to comment, explains it briefly, draws out one

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[4] John Donne, *The Sermons of John Donne* (ed. George R. Potter & Evelyn M. Simpson; Vol. V; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 168, 169.
[5] Donne, 170.
[6] Donne, 183.
[7] George Gifford, *Fifteen Sermons upon the Song of Salomon* (London : Barnard Alsop, 1620), 228.
[8] Gifford, 229.

or more doctrinal points, and comments on its practical application; he follows this process for each succeeding verse. In the final verse treated in this way, the practical application is more sustained, being an opportunity for Gifford to speak out against the "papists." Just as in Donne's sermon, there is no formal conclusion: Gifford finishes abruptly, "thus much for this time."[9]

Sibbes' sermon is different again in structure. Of the three, it reads most like a written rather than an oral work, suggesting that it was heavily edited for publication. Like Gifford, Sibbes follows the scriptural text closely; however his sermons is highly ordered and relatively complex. He breaks the texts into much smaller components, sometimes addressing as small a unit as two words, for example, "my love" or "my dove." His pattern in this sermon is to draw one or two doctrinal points from each piece of text, and then to amplify this by uses for the doctrine, questions and answers, or objections and answers. Thus for example, in commenting on Song of Songs 5:3, "*I have put off my coat; how shall I put it on? I have washed my feet; how shall I defile them?*" he gives a brief discussion of the meaning of the verse, culminating in the summary "*that it is not an easy matter to bring the soul and Christ together into near fellowship.*"[10] This is followed by two observations, four objection and answer pairs, and six hindrances, at which point the seventh sermon ends. The eighth sermon continues after a brief introduction, "We are now, by God's assistance, to speak of *the remedies against the lazy distempers we are prone unto in spiritual things*; where we left off the last day,"[11] listing a question and series of eleven answers. Again it ends abruptly after the eleventh answer.

Thus the three sermons are not simply distinguished by complexity: Sibbes' and Donne's sermons are equally complex. All three follow the scriptural text closely; however Donne's sermon is distinct from the Puritan sermons in that its overall structure is shaped in accord with an external standard, rather than being contingent upon the scriptural text.

*II. Style*

The second most distinctive area of difference is style. Donne's "pulpit eloquence" is described by Davis as "a liturgical poem, a meditation on Scripture, a journey through Scripture to another world."[12] The emotional power of skilled rhetoric is joined with the intellectual force of Scriptural interpretation to speak to both heart and mind; language is used intentionally to evoke the grace and graciousness of God.

The style of Donne's sermon on Song of Songs 5:3 is not as flamboyant or studied as that of some of his later sermons; nevertheless it relies on complexity of sentences, with multiple sub-clauses, a richness of language, full of metaphor and synonyms, complex and relatively difficult to understand. He frequently uses a piling up of images to convey an idea, rather than a more simple explanation. Thus in speaking of repentance, Donne says,

> …There may be a *washing* then, and no *drying*; thou maist come to weep the of *desperation*, to seek mercy with teares, and not find it; teares for worldly losses, teares for sinne, teares for bodily anguish, may overflow thee then; and whereas

[9] Gifford, 250.
[10] Richard Sibbes, *The Complete Works of Richard Sibbes* (Vol. II; Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1962-62), 87.
[11] Sibbes, 91.
[12] Ellen F. Davis, *Imagination Shaped: Old Testament Preaching in the Anglican Tradition* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1995), 1-3.

> Gods goodnesse to those, that are his ... who have already by teares of repentance, become worthy receivers of the seale of reconciliation, in the Sacrament of his body, and bloud; To them, God shall wipe all teares from their eyes; but to the unrepentant sinner, he shall multiply teares; from teares, for the losse, of a horse, or of a house, too teares for the loss of a soule, and wipe no teare from his eyes.[13]

The complexity in style is evident here, in the length of the sentence (of which the quoted section comprises only about a quarter), proliferation of sub-clauses, and use of repetition, metaphor, alliteration and other linguistic devices, which move the hearer to repentance.

The contrast with Gifford's sermon is dramatic. His use of language is simple and clear with little elaboration, and is compelling in this simplicity. The sentences are shorter, and grammatically less complex. Gifford has no need to *move* the hearer to repentance; it is rather his purpose to teach the hearer by clearly stating the necessary. Thus on repentance he says, "And let every man enter into his own conscience, and see what excuses the Flesh doeth minister to keepe him backe, at the daily knocking and calling of Christ to open the heart unto him, that there may be a sound profession of the Gospell."[14]

Sibbes' sermon falls further towards the middle of the spectrum. Like Gifford, he uses straightforward speech to convey his meaning, for example,

> Therefore, we can never be sufficiently instructed what a vile nature we have, so opposite to religion, as far as it is saving. Corrupt nature doth not oppose it so far as it is slubbered over, but so far as may bring us to that state we should be in. We have no worse enemies than our own hearts. Therefore, let us watch ourselves continually, and use all blessed means appointed of God whereby we may escape out of this dangerous, sleepy disposition of soul, which cost the church so dear, as we shall hear, God willing, hereafter.[15]

Yet Sibbes uses language in a more complex way than Gifford, capturing poetic rhythm and form and using such devices as rhyme and alliteration.

A further distinction in style is in the use of linguistic play, commonly described as 'wit.' Donne frequently uses a piling up of similes to convey a point, thus, "If it be a vessell of gold, it is but a vessell of excrements, if it be a bed of curious plants, it is but a bed of dung; as their tombes hereafter shall be but glorious covers of rotten carcasses, so their bodies are now, but pampered covers of rotten soules…"[16] He displays his linguistic skill with Latin paronomasia, such as " In the temple there was *Mare Φneum, a brazen sea;* in the Church there is *mare aureum*, a golden sea…,"[17] and plays on multiple meanings of words, as in the following, "Thus the voice of this religious indignation, *Quomodo*, is, how is it possible, but it is also, *Quomodo, how*, that is, *why should I*? The first is, *how should I be so base,* the other, how should I be so bold?"[18] Other linguistic devices used by Donne include repetition and parallelism, for example, "in which Sacrament, besides the *naturall* union, (that Christ hath taken our *Nature*), and the

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[13] Donne, 178.
[14] Gifford, 137.
[15] Sibbes, 91.
[16] Donne, 172.
[17] Donne, 173.
[18] Donne, 182.

*Mysticall union*, (that Christ hath taken us into the body of *his Church*) by a *spirituall union*, when we apply faithfully his Merits to our soules, and by a *Sacramentall union*, when we receive the visible seales thereof…"[19] Furthermore, the whole of Donne's interpretation of Song of Songs 5:3 relies on his understanding of it as synecdoche, whereby the washing of feet is understood to refer to the washing of the whole body.

One device that Donne frequently uses in this sermon is the movement by illustration from a familiar concrete physical reality to an unfamiliar abstract spiritual reality; for example,

> Now, for uniting things in this world, we are always put to employ baser, and courser stuffe, to unite them together, then they themselves; If we lay *Marble* upon *Marble*, how well soever we polish the Marble, yet we must unite them with morter: If we unite *riches* to *riches*, we temper a morter (for the most part) of our owne *covetousnesse*, and the losse, and oppressing of some other Men; if we unite *honours* to *honours*, titles to titles, we temper a morter, (for the most part) of our owne *Ambition*, and the supplanting, or excluding of some other Men; But in the uniting of a Christian soule to Christ Jesus, here is no morter, all of one *Nature*; Nothing but *spirit*, and *spirit*, and *spirit*, the soule of Man to the Lord Jesus, by the holy Ghost.[20]

He constantly uses metaphor as an invitation to the imagination to grasp what the intellect alone cannot. His metaphors in this sermon tend to be brief but powerful: he speaks of the shipwrecking of souls, and the soul as a tenant.[21] Such metaphorical language is largely drawn from outside the world of the text, and very often from nature, as in the stone falling through water or mud, the flame shooting upward through pure air or cloudy.[22]

Gifford, by contrast, confines himself almost entirely to the language of the text or other scriptural material, explaining metaphors from the text rather than using metaphor to extend meaning. Thus he explains, "The similitude is drawne from hence, as if a Lover should goe farre in the night, and indure much inconvenience to visite his Spouse for her good. True it is, that the paines and sorrowes which Christ hath under-gone for his Spouse, cannot be expressed."[23] However he does use some of the simpler linguistic devices, such as alliteration, as in "I thinke the Church was never in greater *slumber* and *securities* than it is now here in this land: peace and wealth hath wrought it," and parallelism, "O quickening Spirite of grace, O happy touch with the finger of Christ, what should become of us, what dueties to our Lord God should we performe without him?"[24] But such play is rare: the language of Gifford's sermon is largely propositional.

The language of Sibbes' sermon is, like Gifford's, largely propositional; however it is significantly more complex, as can be seen from the very first paragraph of his sermon, where he uses repetition and parallelism to good effect to capture the hearer's interest: "…now up, now down, now full of good resolutions, now again sluggish and slow…"[25] Sibbes uses occasional

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19 Donne, 173.

20 Donne, 169.

21 Donne 178, 179.

22 Donne, 168.

23 Gifford, 234-235.

24 Gifford, 236-237, italics mine; 242.

25 Sibbes, 76.

metaphors, such as describing Christ as one in whom "majesty hath stooped low"; these are still largely drawn from Scripture. However he more commonly uses illustration to further understanding of his argument: his amplification of "my dove" includes the example of the dove in Noah's Ark, and the character of a dove as known in Scripture and nature.

Clearly both Gifford' and Sibbes' sermons are plainer in both style and language than Donne's. Yet the differences are not so much those of extremes as of different stages on a continuum, with significant overlap between them.

*III. Authority*

The third factor traditionally identified as distinguishing the Anglican metaphysicals from the Puritans is that of authority, in both the interpretation and use of Scripture and the attribution of authority to the preacher through such means as patristic citations and Greek and Latin.

Each of the three preachers bases their sermon on Scripture. Donne focuses on the smallest segment of text, the second half of a single verse, that is, of Song of Songs 5:3. He draws little attention to its context within the flow of the book of Song of Songs, other than outlining in this introduction his understanding of the book: ""Now these two unions, which represent our eternall union with God (that is, the union of the *Church* to him, and the union of *every good soule* in the Church to him) is the subject of this Song of songs, this heavenly *Poeme*, of *Solomons*."[26] In the body of the sermon, Donne reads the text as if it were an isolated proposition: thus the text "I have washed my feet, how shall I defile them?" becomes the basis of a sermon on the need for washing through baptism and repentance. Donne follows the interpretive tradition epitomized by Bernard of Clairvaux, in which the Song of Songs is seen as referring to the relationship between God and the church.

Donne himself elsewhere argues for the literal or plain sense of Scripture as "the principle intention of the Holy Ghost, in that place";[27] however his tendency to work with a single verse stripped of its immediate literary context and thus of clues to its literal or historical sense tends to shape that plain sense in allegorical, tropological and anagogical directions; the richness of a multi-faceted approach to interpretation mirrors his complex and imaginative rhetorical style. Each word is of importance: "Every word hath force and use, as in Pearle, every *seed Pearle* is as medicinall, as the greatest, so there is a *restorative nature* in every word of the Scriptures, and in every word, the soule findes a rise, and help for her devotion."[28] Each word has import in the process of association that develops his persuasive argument.

Gifford's sermon is very different in its approach to the scriptural text. As one of a series on the Song of Songs and taking six verses as its basis, it is firmly rooted in its scriptural context, beginning with a summary of the previous chapter. Brief reference is made to the same interpretive tradition that influences Donne, the Song of Songs as referring to the relationship between Christ and the church. Gifford treats the scriptural text as if it is narrative, moving from event to event in the relationship of spouse and bride as illustrative of the relationship between Christ and church: each verse is addressed in relation to the ongoing story as it unfolds. Throughout his sermon Gifford stays close to a single historical reading of the text, which he applies typologically to Christ and the Church.

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[26] Donne, 169.
[27] Davis, 78.
[28] Donne, 171.

Sibbes, like Gifford, preached his sermon as part of a longer series on a larger segment of text, although the text of the sermon itself is only two verses. There is, however, no broader contextual information given; this is dealt with in the opening of the first sermon in his series, in which he, like Donne and Gifford, identifies his interpretative paradigm as being the relationship between Christ and the Church. While Sibbes builds his argument from the text piece upon piece, the force of progression comes not so much from the context of the text itself, but is rather at one remove from it. He makes few allusions to the immediate literary context, and perceives the text as applying directly to Christ, albeit without the typological focus.

On the other hand, like Donne, Sibbes builds his argument through a series of word associations: for example, he takes the phrase "my dove" and develops it in terms of Christ, "*that Christ should have the property and disposition of a dove*", and "*to shew what his office should be*", and in terms of the church, "*For the like disposition as is found in a dove*", in meekness; being without guile, faithful and of neat disposition; loving communion and fellowship; and responding to suffering like a dove in flight, mourning, and building high.[29]

A further dimension of the use of scripture is the way in which other scriptural texts are used to develop, illustrate or support the argument. In this sermon, Donne uses forty-nine distinct references to Scripture, of which almost half are from the Old Testament; of the New Testament references, John, Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians and Revelation are quoted most frequently. Sibbes similarly refers to numerous Scriptural passages, over a hundred in all,[30] of which almost two thirds are drawn from the New Testament. His use of Old Testament texts is interesting, with citations from 2 Samuel, Psalms and Proverbs being most frequent, books which lend themselves to typological interpretive methods. In the New Testament, he cites Matthew more often than the other gospels, together with Hebrews, 1 Corinthians, and a scattering from the other Pauline and Catholic epistles. Almost every point made within Sibbes' sermon is supported by at least one scriptural citation; thus his sermon has a collative character similar to that of Donne's. By contrast, Gifford uses only twelve Scriptural references other than his sermon text, of which ten are from the New Testament. His explication of Scripture is grounded in the immediate rather than the broader context.

The use of external authorities in preaching is not, however, limited to Scripture. Donne uses a number of patristic citations, although far fewer than his scriptural references: he cites Gregory, Basil, Tertullian, Augustine (twice), Origin, Chrysostom, and Bernard of Clairvaux (five times, reflecting the singular contribution Bernard made to the history of interpretation of the Song of Songs). By contrast, there is not one clear external reference other than to scriptural texts (and as noted above, these are infrequent) in Gifford's sermon. The text of the sermon is of sufficient authority in itself – another citation could only lessen the authority of Scripture. Sibbes has only one brief reference to Augustine,[31] and it is as illustrative of the human yearning for religion rather than to substantiate a doctrinal point. Similarly, while Donne's sermon is littered with Latin phrases, albeit often also translated, neither Gifford nor Sibbes uses any Latin terms.

The use of Scripture and other authorities in these sermons generally substantiates the distinctions typically identified between 'Anglican' and 'Puritan' preaching; however they are less clear cut than sometimes presumed. The mosaic effect in the use of scripture commonly

[29] Sibbes, 78-81.
[30] In a sermon that is substantially longer than Donne's.
[31] Sibbes, 89.

identified in Puritan preaching is clearly evident on Donne's sermon; typological interpretation finds its way into Gifford's otherwise classic Puritan preaching. This is of course not surprising, given the dominant interpretive tradition of Song of Songs during this period; however the fondness of Puritan preachers for preaching on this book shows that their strategy for seeking a single meaning does not bind them to the literal-historical reading.

*IV. Conclusion*

This close examination of three sermon texts shows that in terms of structure, style and authority, the distinctions commonly made between Anglican metaphysical and Puritan preachers largely hold true; nevertheless there is a greater degree of overlap than might be supposed from much of the literature, supporting the argument that these are not distinct "schools" of preaching but are rather clusters of characteristics which tend to be found in one or other of the groups.

In structure, complexity itself was not a distinctive factor. While a distinction can be made on the basis of whether the structure was derived from the scriptural text or from external tradition, the text was still important in shaping it, even within the classical rhetorical form.

In terms of style, Donne's and Gifford's sermons are clearly distinguished in such characteristics as grammatical structure, use of language and rhetorical and linguistic devices; Sibbes' sermon , while deductive like Gifford's sermon, exhibits in a small degree some of the linguistic devises common in metaphysical preaching, together with a grammatical structure which could be considered to be midway between the other two preachers.

In the area of authority, there is more fluidity. All three follow the allegorical interpretive tradition of Bernard of Clairvaux dominant in their time; all three sermons are saturated with scripture, however in this case Gifford differs from the other two preachers in largely confining his use of Scripture to the sermon text itself. However in the use of non-Scriptural authorities, the distinctions between Anglican metaphysical and Puritan preaching is clear: Donne freely quotes from other sources and displays his erudition for all to see; both Gifford and Sibbes limit their quotations almost entirely to Scripture, and only use illustrations from the world around them sparsely. However the lack of contextual information about the settings in which these sermons were first preached makes it difficult to ascertain to what extent the education and literacy of the hearers may have shaped the use of scripture and other authorities.

What this suggests is that the divisions so commonly identified in the church of this period, while reflected to some extent in these sermons, are less distinct than might be supposed. The differences in understanding of structure, style and authority were not so great as to be definitive; rather, their overlap suggests that at least in the early stages of its post-Reformation identity, the English church was able to encompass a larger measure of diversity, both drawing form common sources and allowing conversation between the various "parties."

**Return to the Present**

It sometimes feels like we are the first generation in the church to have experienced conflict. That's not the case — we know that — but it can be difficult to imagine what a comprehensive church could truly look like, one in which the different traditions and parties might actually feed rather than destroy. Exploring the sermons of one such period is a useful way of beginning to see how this might have happened in the past, and how it might indeed be possible to reclaim that spirit of Anglican comprehensiveness.

This paper has been a test case for a larger project, the design of a syllabus that would allow us to bring into the open the varying perspectives and commitments of students, enabling conversation and understanding of diverse perspectives, as well as of the students own homiletical heritage. A preliminary draft syllabus for such a course follows.

## TITLE: PREACHING, TRADITION AND CULTURE

**DESCRIPTION:** This course explores the traditions of preaching within Anglicanism, both historically and in different cultural contexts today. The purpose is not simply to develop an academic knowledge of these traditions —useful as it may be as a resource for preaching — but to use them as a way of better understanding our own preaching traditions and practices.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:**

Upon successful completion of this unit, it is expected that the student will be able to:

1. Critically reflect on the ways in which culture and tradition have shaped preaching.
2. Draw on appropriate historical homiletical material as a resource for preaching.
3. Prepare sermons which take into account the culture and tradition of the hearers as well as one's own culture and traditions.

**COURSE OUTLINE:**

1. Tradition and culture in Anglicanism: An introduction
2. English preaching prior to the English Reformation: Celtic and Anglo Saxon, monasticism, scholasticism, mendicant preachers, protest
3. English Reformation: Cranmer, Latimer, the Book of Homilies, court and parochial preaching
4. Puritan and Metaphysical: Perkins, Smith, Gifford, Sibbes, Andrewes, Donne, and Herbert
5. Modernity: The Age of Reason (Tillotson) and the Recovery of Feeling (Wesley)
6. Victorian Preaching: Missionaries, the Oxford Movement, Evangelical and Romanticism
7. Twentieth Century: Morality, biblical theology, prophecy, narrative, theology
8. Postmodernism, technology, generational shifts
9. Race and Ethnicity: African-American, African, English, American
10. Gender and preaching

**ASSESSMENT:**

1. Choose either two preachers from the same historical period but different cultural contexts or two preachers from different historical periods. Critically compare and contrast one sermon from each, with both sermons being related to the same scriptural passage or liturgical date, paying attention to exegesis and hermeneutics, structure, and content, and how these reflect their wider historical context, tradition and culture.
2. Prepare and preach a sermon for the same text/liturgical date.
3. Comment briefly on your own cultural context and how that has shaped your hermeneutic, structure and content.

*4. Class preparation, attendance and participation

**"Helpin' Me Resist and Refuse:"**
**Class-Consciousness and Preaching**

Brooks Berndt
Supervisor: Tom Rogers

"Preacher man wanna save my soul.
Don't nobody wanna save my life.
……...
I ain't sittin in your pews less you helpin' me resist and refuse."

—The Coup, "Heven Tonite," a rap song[1]

If preachers are to address the entirety of the human condition and if they are to join in resisting and refusing powers of oppression, then ultimately—among other things—preachers must become conscious of their own class position and the tendency of their class to preserve the economic status quo from which they benefit. To a significant degree, the present class system partially maintains itself by remaining below the conscious awareness among non-elites. Preachers have the potential to play an important role in developing a movement for economic justice once they have acquired the requisite class-consciousness for informed and strategic struggle. This paper considers how preachers can build from a consciousness of class to more liberating preaching and to a more liberating church.

Avoiding the Pitfalls of Class

Depending upon how one conceives of class, clergy in capitalist societies arguably belong to the professional-managerial class that lies between the working class below them and the ruling class above them.[2] If clergy are not aware of the manner in which their power is relative to both these classes, then more than likely they will unwittingly conform to perspectives that preserve their position of privilege. With an awareness of one's class and its characteristics, a preacher can then avoid potential pitfalls. Based upon the economic position of clergy as members of the professional-managerial class, one can predict what they say in the pulpit will often conform to one or more of the following: (1) an evasion of or silence on economic issues that reflects 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 but refrains from casting a critical eye upon one's own class or the economic system from which it benefits. With an alertness to these potential pitfalls, preachers will have taken an important step in developing a class-consciousness that can lead them to see their church, their world, the Bible, and even the

[1] The Coup, *Party Music*, Tommy Boy Music, New York, 2001.
[2] The theoretical foundation for the perspective offered here was developed in the paper I presented at the 2005 Academy of Homiletics meeting. See Brooks Berndt, "The Classification of Preaching: Preaching and Class Analysis."

presence of God in new ways. Ultimately, class-consciousness entails a distinct approach to preaching and the ministry of the Church that has far reaching implications.

Bringing Class-Conscious Preaching to the Church and the Larger World

A fundamental orientation for class-conscious preaching is the necessity of choosing sides. Class is a constant battle in which one cannot maintain neutrality. Christine Smith argues for conceiving preaching as an act of solidarity.[3] In the context of class conflict, this means solidarity with the working class. How this solidarity becomes embodied in the pulpit depends significantly on how one maps the economic character of the congregation and the world outside the church that they engage.[4] As Mary Catherine Hilkert has argued, there is a need for preachers to equip themselves with the tools of social analysis.[5] In considering one's congregation through the specific lens of class analysis, this means asking what their class composition is, what their level of class consciousness is, and what ideological barriers might be present.

To preach from a stance of solidarity with the working class does not necessarily entail a diminished view of the humanity of those belonging to the dominant classes, as if taking sides means one side is more human than the other. In class conflict, the primary struggle is not against the individuals—morally culpable though they are—who belong to the dominant classes but against the institutions that produce class relations. Class power and exploitation are predominantly exercised through the institutions of the corporation and the state within an economy that operates according to the norms and practices of private property, markets, hierarchical divisions of labor, elite decision-making, and remuneration based on one's property, power, or production.[6]

One might not use this highly conceptual language in the pulpit, but it can inform one's preaching strategy. Consider, for example, the view I have heard from MDiv students on more than one occasion that a preacher should call to account the middle and upper class members of one's church. I am never clear as to what they mean by this. Are they planning to single out CEOs in their congregation for exploiting their workers? Are they going to encourage guilt-ridden self-flagellation on the part of the congregation for being a particular class? A couple of points might help bring clarity to the matter of developing a class conscious approach to preaching in this instance. First, there is no reason to believe that individual accusation, pulpit harangues, or guilt-tripping will be of use if one wants to be heard and thoughtfully considered by the listeners. One can nevertheless provide people with information, perspectives, stories, and images that enable them to decide for themselves what makes for a responsible Christian life. Second, keeping in mind that institutions through policies, practices, and norms often compel individuals to act in certain ways, a sensible moral response in many instances is to address the institution that exploits and causes harm rather than specific persons connected to

[3] Christine M. Smith, *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance: Radical Responses to Radical Evil*, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 161.
[4] In a manner similar to what I am presenting here, Justo Gonzaelez and Catherine Gonzalez have discussed the need for preachers to read their political situation by being cognizant of their own identity and the identity of their congregation. See Justo Gonzalez and Catherine Gonzalez, *The Liberating Pulpit*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 67-71.
[5] Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, (New York: Continuum, 1997), 177.
[6] Michael Albert, *Parecon: Life After Capitalism*, (New York: Verson, 2003), 24.

that institution. The individual members of one's church are not left off the moral hook in taking this approach. In such instances, the best course of moral responsibility is often for the individual members of a church to decide that they want to join together collectively in confronting an institution. This approach accords well with preaching that has as its purpose proclaiming "the kingdom of God," the beloved community of God. If one is to preach to a community for community, then the sensible strategy is to encourage responsibility by the community.

However, because communities are inherently diverse by virtue of the individuality of persons and social divisions such as class, one must recognize that a community will not necessarily respond with uniformity. While a preacher might aim to say something that all can hear despite their diversity, this aim will often not be met. Some persons may be too indoctrinated to be reached by any one sermon if they are to be reached at all. Still, members of dominant classes often can consider information about oppressive institutions or listen to stories about the plight of the oppressed in persuading themselves as to the best course of moral action. Members of dominant classes are indeed capable of perspectives critical of the established order. Marx's collaborator Engels, for example, was a member of the capitalist class.

For an example of the approach being developed here, consider that one is preaching to a downtown church in an urban area with a membership composed largely of both the professional-managerial and the ruling classes. The predominantly white congregants of the church come from neighborhoods within the city limits and the suburbs. The congregation has a history of participating in charitable causes such as providing financial support and volunteers for a nearby soup kitchen. At the same time, the congregation in general has never made a concerted attempt to understand the causes of hunger or poverty. Even though the congregation has not had a strong activist history, there are members of the congregation who would like the congregation to assume a greater level of participation in community organizing coalitions fighting for affordable housing and a local living wage ordinance.

In this situation, one might preach on the miracle of the loaves and fish by presenting the congregation with a portrait of world hunger and then raising the question of why this hunger exists. Dom Helder provided an apt quote for reflection in this vein when he said, "When I give bread to the poor, they call me a saint; but when I ask why people are poor, they call me a communist." Helder realized that sometimes one has to call into question the economic order that leads to poverty and hunger. An economic order that places profit above people is an order that allows for some to go hungry while others grow fat.

Jesus responded to the problem of hunger with compassion by implicitly calling on his disciples to act on faith. In acting on faith through the pooling and sharing of resources, the disciples were able to get a glimpse of God's beloved community, a community that contrasted sharply with the economic order of the Roman Empire. Likewise, the congregants of our imagined downtown church have the possibility of acting on faith. One approach is to act on faith to meet the immediate needs of the hungry. Guarding against paternalism, this response is one of merit. However, if one is to take seriously Helder's prompt to consider why people are poor and if one is to take seriously the meaning and import of God's beloved community, then one will also consider what additional steps of faith can be taken to move closer to an alternative economic order that places people above profits. One step might be to struggle for a more just compensation for workers receiving less than a living wage. The living wage movement in the United States began when people working in Baltimore's soup kitchens and homeless shelters noticed that many of those they served had full-time jobs. In response to this situation, a group

of religious leaders launched a campaign to persuade Baltimore's City Council to raise the wages of city contract workers.[7]

To underscore how the strategy of preaching offered here relates to the conceptual discussion of the economy preceding it, let me summarize: The preacher presents the congregation with a perspective that calls into question the general economic order of the day. The preacher points to how economic institutions in our society operate according to policies and practices that value profit over people. Utilizing the story of Jesus and the disciples providing bread and loaves for the hungry, the preacher provides an opportunity for the congregation to think through how they can assume moral responsibility as faithful Christians. The preacher then suggests a concrete way to collectively express their faith and moral responsibility. This response to poverty and hunger promotes a systemic change to institutional policies so that the bottom line is not the only factor local businesses must consider in deciding how much to pay workers.

Different congregations will require different preaching strategies. In developing a strategy, there are some other issues worth considering. First, there is the matter of preaching across class. When preaching to a working class congregation, a preacher would especially want to guard against the paternalism of taking on the role of expert advisor and presuming to know what is best. In *Preaching to Every Pew*, James Nieman and Thomas Rogers cite instances of preachers mistakenly assuming that they should simplify worship services for poorer members of their church.[8] To counter such paternalism requires education not only in the form of books but in the form of interaction and listening. This is particularly relevant in a class-segregated society where the lives of working class people rarely receive appropriate representation in the corporate media. In such circumstances, clergy in congregations composed of the dominant classes can become insulated from the experiences and perspectives of working class persons. Nieman and Rogers mention the possibility of forming biblical text study groups that include people from different classes.[9] Involvement in actual working class struggles also affords one the opportunity to learn the conditions and stories of local workers while having the additional benefit of moving from a passive gaze at another's life to the formation of an actual relationship of solidarity in the midst of an organizing campaign. A national organization called Interfaith Worker Justice provides an internet listing of groups in cities throughout the United States in which one's church can become involved.[10]

It is important to consider cultural dynamics when preaching across class. Because class relations are an integral part of the broader matter of culture and how people live out their lives on a daily basis, one can consider preaching across class as cross-cultural preaching. Thinking of class in terms of culture, however, can be dangerous. In her book *Class Matters*, Betsy Leondar-Wright notes that it is easy to fall into stereotypes in trying to discern class cultures. There is a tremendous amount of cultural diversity within each class, and often class cultures are not readily identifiable.[11] Nevertheless, Leondar-Wright argues for thinking in terms of class

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[7] Jon Gertner, "What Is a Living Wage?," *New York Times*, January 15, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/15wage.html?pagewanted=1&ei=5090&en=f7043a8ee7bc6102&ex=1294981200 (accessed August 8, 2006).

[8] James R. Nieman and Thomas G. Rogers, *Preaching to Every Pew: Cross-Cultural Strategies*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 64.

[9] Ibid.

[10] See Interfaith Worker Justice, "Local Groups," <http://www.iwj.org/outreach/lg.html>.

[11] Betsy Leondar-Wright, *Class Matters: Cross-Class Alliance Building for Middle-Class Activists*, (Gabriola Island, Canada: New Society Publishers, 2005), 16.

cultures as she points to how people are socialized by whether or not they have steady employment, "the expectation of and experience of four years of residential college," and a corresponding geographic, ethnic, or religious rootedness.[12] Perhaps, even in the holy confines of seminaries, many of us can attest to Leondar-Wright's observation that "self-worth among college-educated middle-class people often rests on feeling smarter than other people."[13] She notes this is "a major obstacle to cross-class alliance building."[14] One might add that it is also a major obstacle to cross-class preaching.

Nieman and Rogers devote a chapter in their book to preaching across class cultures. In doing so, they pay particular attention to how class is internalized in deeply felt ways and shapes one's perspective of "worth, justice, labor, loyalty, and voice."[15] They also consider how class influences the way one views different forms of authority: personal, pastoral, and scriptural.[16] Because of the authoritarian roles the dominant classes can assume in the workplace in relation to the working class, pastoral authority is a particularly relevant matter for a class conscious preacher to consider in order to avoid replicating similar relations in the church. Nieman and Rogers note one case in which a pastor "spoke of how difficult it had been to follow a string of pastors who abused and neglected her predominantly working class congregation in the past."[17] To consciously counter abuses, non-authoritarian ways of preaching can be found in Fred Craddock's inductive preaching, John McClure's collaborative preaching, and Lucy Rose's conversational preaching.[18] Later, this paper reflects on possible institutional changes that might be made in churches to foster a non-authoritarian environment.

A second issue to consider in developing a preaching strategy is whether there are people from more than one class in one's congregation. If so, are all of the members aware that class differences exist? Nieman and Rogers note the problem in churches of class differences appearing hidden as the poverty of some remains invisible to others.[19] In addition to basic recognition of class differences, one might ask how much members from different classes know and care about each other's lives? For example, if working class members who live near a church in an urban community face gentrification, are members from the professional-managerial class who come in from the suburbs aware of this and feel it is an issue of importance to them as well? At times, one might have to provide relevant information about local economic circumstances in order to enable church members to ministry and action within and beyond the church.

A third issue to consider in developing a preaching strategy is how experiences of class are often simultaneously experiences of social phenomena such as those pertaining to race, gender, disability, citizenship, and nationality. For example, Jean-Bertrand Aristide during his days among working class Haitians as a priest in Port-au-Prince emphasized in one homily how working class Haitians experienced heightened exploitation as Haitians at the hands of transnational elites:

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[12] Ibid., 21-22.
[13] Ibid., 23.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Nieman and Rogers, 61.
[16] Ibid., 64-67.
[17] Ibid., 65.
[18] Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1971); John S. McClure, The *Roundtable Pulpit: Where Leadership and Preaching Meet*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995); Lucy A. Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).
[19] Nieman and Rogers, 61.

> In the factories here, the workers of iniquity pay Haitians seven percent of what they pay people in other countries. Isn't that eating the people? Isn't that sucking the blood of my brothers and sisters who work here, of the poor who work in the factories for the big bosses? And every time the big capitalist bosses pay out one dollar, they take in four. When they invest $400, they make four times that; when they invest $1,000, they make $4,000. They make a lot of money, while the little that they pay you can barely buy food enough for you and isn't enough to feed your children, to pay for your rent, to pay all your bills.[20]

One need not deny the multi-dimensional experiences of oppression to speak of class exploitation and power. Indeed, this recognition can highlight points of resonance that can serve as entryways to discussing class oppression.

Class-Consciousness and the Bible

Class-conscious preaching entails mapping the economic dynamics of not only the congregation and its surrounding world but also of the biblical text at hand. For the preacher, the immediate problem to be confronted in developing a class-conscious hermeneutic is the difference between the political economy of today and those of biblical times. Among New Testament scholars, for example, there is a general consensus that a "middle class" did not exist in the Roman Empire. A wealthy minority of about 3% of the population owned most of the land while about 7% of the population lived as merchants, traders, special artisans, and veterans. The other 90% lived at a subsistence level or struggling to get there.[21] Because of this situation, New Testament scholar Bruce Malina has gone so far as to say, "Fortunately, most Americans still belong to a middle class, and the New Testament has no words for the middle class."[22]

While the differences between the political economies of each era are substantial, there are some similarities that arguably provide hermeneutical pathways on which preachers can travel. Although the question of whether or not one owned land was indeed a defining matter of class in the Roman Empire, other social relations often tied to class are pertinent to consider. First, class conflict has always been defined by relations of unequal power and of exploitation. A text approached with attentiveness to these relations should necessarily compel members of the professional-managerial class to consider how these relations divide people into classes today. While there are other factors to consider in contemporary class formation, the similarity is enough to present members of the professional-managerial class with the question of whether they will join in solidarity with the working class. In doing so, it is important to realize that solidarity essentially requires a conscious rejection of one's own class tends to operate and think. An explicit recognition of this dynamic is often missing in the writings of liberation theologians who make their own class invisible in discussions of the rich and poor. This occurs despite the implicit focus in many of their writings on non-poor people joining in solidarity with the poor.

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[20] Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *In the Parish of the Poor: Writings from Haiti*, trans. Amy Wilentz (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 75-76.
[21] Ray Pickett, "Conflict at Corinth" in *Christian Origins*, A People's History of Christianity, vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 118.
[22] Bruce J. Malina, *The Social Gospel of Jesus: The Kingdom of God in Mediterranean Perspective*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 98.

A second area in which to pursue possible pathways from the past to the present is in looking at the occupational roles and characteristics within the class systems of each era. In particular, one can draw comparisons between occupations that involve the management of labor, the monopolization of knowledge and skills, the propagation of ideology, and the violent repression of rebellion and subversive politics. Some roles are more analogous than others. For example, in Luke's parable of the dishonest manager, the manager was likely a slave. Nevertheless, it is interesting that he fears losing his position because he is "not strong enough to dig" and "ashamed to beg."[23] This brings to mind what Barbara Ehrenreich describes as the middle class "fear of falling" into the working class.[24] In the New Testament, perhaps a more fertile ground for analogy can be found in reflecting upon how the scribes and Pharisees used their monopolization of knowledge and skills to gain a position of privileged authority from which they could wield influence over Jewish peasants with their ideas. Their class character might provide fruitful reflection for preachers and other professions.

A final issue to consider in bringing a class-conscious approach to the Bible is how to interpret parables where persons of the elite class serve as metaphors for God. Debates surrounding these metaphors can be perplexing. One might consider for example the interpretations of biblical scholar Warren Carter who brings a high degree of class-conscious to his study of Matthew. Carter offers seemingly contradictory interpretations of the metaphoric meaning of the householder in the parable of the vineyard laborers (Matt. 20:1-16) and the householder in the parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-46). Regarding the householder in the parable of the vineyard laborers, Carter asserts that the householder could not represent God because of clues such as "his large accumulation of land" and his failure to address "the inequality of his own wealth."[25] Carter then claims that in paying each of the workers the same wage the householder did a "Godlike thing" by treating them as equals even though "the parable presents him as a cartoon figure with exaggerated and ironic characteristics."[26] With the parable of the wicked tenants, Carter by contrast argues that the householder who he describes as a "tyrannical landlord" does indeed represent God.[27] Carter regards this metaphor as part of the gospel's strategy of imitating "the very system it seeks to oppose."[28] Nonetheless, the final slave who is sent by the absentee landlord and then murdered by the tenants represents Jesus according to Carter. For the preacher convinced that these two parables are devoid of oppressive meanings, the difficulty in determining what is ironic imitation and how such irony can be meaningfully rendered to a congregation.

## Class-Consciousness and Theology

How might class-consciousness affect the who, where, and how of discerning God's presence in the world? In terms of who does theology in the public sphere, Smith speaks of the need for the poor to "do their own theological naming."[29] Hilkert argues for the importance of

[23] Luke 16: 3
[24] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Fear of Falling: The Inner Life of the Middle Class,* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1989).
[25] Warren Carter, *Matthew and the Margins: A Sociopolitical and Religious Reading*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 395
[26] Ibid., 398.
[27] Ibid., 427.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Smith, 152.

preaching by non-dominant groups.[30] One concerted step for moving in this direction with regard to the working class is a national event called "Labor in the Pulpit." This event is locally coordinated every year on Labor Day weekend by unions and faith organizations. During worship services on this weekend, union members and leaders speak about causes they currently face.[31] Another step would be to encourage and prepare working class laity for preaching. The Leadership Institute at Allen Temple Baptist Church in Oakland, for example, provides classes in biblical studies, theology, and African American preaching that foster the development of preachers.[32]

In terms of the how and where of doing class-conscious theology, one can consider the matter in both historical and contemporary terms. One can look to discern God's presence in working class struggles for justice past and present. In his book *The Power of the Poor in History*, Gustavo Gutiérrez argues for looking at history from "the viewpoint of the poor, from a point of departure among the 'condemned of the earth.'"[33] He contends, "It is in this subversive history that we can have a new faith experience, a new spirituality—a new proclamation of the gospel."[34]

In facing the present, one not only can look to discern God in campaigns and organizing efforts aimed at improving the circumstances of working class people, one can also look to discern God at work in spaces where glimpses of equitable and cooperative alternatives to the corporate-state economy can be seen. In his book *Economic Justice and Democracy*, Robin Hahnel gives "a critical review of alternative currency systems, employee stock-ownership plans, worker and consumer-owned cooperatives, intentional egalitarian and sustainable living communities, and small experiments in participatory economics in the United States and Canada."[35] About alternatives that embody an ethic of equitable cooperation, Hahnel notes, "This is the only way to develop the new habits necessary for people to transcend the culture of competition and greed that capitalism breeds."[36]

Class-Consciousness and Being a Just Church

Ultimately, the words of preachers from the pulpit will lack legitimacy if they are not capable of living out an ethic of economic justice in their own communities. Would it be an appropriate analogy to say that the hypocrisy of such preachers are worthy of being called modern day Pharisees and scribes? The matter of living justly in churches presents a range of challenges. The work of Robin Hahnel and his frequent collaborator Michael Albert in developing a model of alternative economic arrangements known as participatory economics presents the greatest challenge to clergy interested in creating economically just communities in their own church. Seminary scholarship, and more importantly, actual experimentation with

[30] Hilkert, 180.
[31] Interfaith Worker Justice is a national organization that provides an internet resource for Labor in the Pulpit. See <http://www.iwj.org/outreach/labor_day.html>.
[32] One can learn more about the Leadership Insitute at Allen at < http://www.allen-temple.org/web/education/liat/liat.htm>.
[33] Gustavo Gutierrez, *The Power of the Poor in History*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1983), 21.
[34] Ibid. A discussion of how preachers can utilize a history attentive to the struggles of the oppressed can be found in a conference paper I presented in 2003. See Brooks Berndt, "Radical History, Radical Preaching."
[35] Robin Hahnel, *Economic Justice and Democracy: From Competition to Cooperation*, (New York: Routlege, 2005), 11.
[36] Ibid., 11.

participatory economics in churches is needed in order for greater clarity to be gained about what constitutes just living within the church.

Hahnel and Albert have done extensive work in describing in great detail an economy based upon what they believe are the requisite values for a just economy. Albert states the following value-oriented questions steer his envisioning process:

1 Equity: How much should people get and why?

2 Self-management: What kind of say over their conditions should people have?

3 Diversity: Should paths to fulfillment be diversified or narrowed?

4 Solidarity: Should people cooperate or compete?[37]

Room does not permit a recapitulation of the full vision presented by Hahnel and Albert. However, in application to a multi-person paid staff for a church, it would require eliminating hierarchies of pay, hierarchies of decision-making power, and inequitable distributions of labor and tasks. In place of such operations, staff would be paid according to the effort and sacrifice they expend. Decisions would be decided in accordance with the principle that one's say in a decision should be proportional to the degree one is affected by the decision. Information required for decisions would be equally accessible for all staff.[38] Tasks would be distributed so that every person performs a balanced mix of jobs that are pleasant and unpleasant as well as empowering and not empowering.[39] In endeavoring to implement these practices, churches would want to learn from the experiences of collectives in the United States and Canada that have already operate according to the principles of participatory economics.[40]

If clergy want to advocate living according to values that could only be fully realized in a classless society, then they should begin by striving to put those values into concrete practice in their own workplace. At the very least, they can start by advancing a living wage policy for all of the workers in their church, if the workers are not already paid one.

Class-Conscious Preaching and the Hope for Tomorrow

Class-conscious preaching is of integral importance to preaching that seeks to both embody and proclaim the promise of God's beloved community. Class-conscious preaching is needed not only for working class struggles for economic justice but for all movements for justice and peace. Leondar-Wright points to the need for a consciousness that enables crucial cross-class alliances in the women's movement, the racial justice movement, the anti-war movement, the environmental movement, and GLBT movement as well. All of these movements would have a much greater potential for bringing about change if they more effectively built bridges across class within their own constituencies.[41] In the building of cross-class alliances, the professional-managerial class at times has admirably involved itself in

[37] Albert, 28.
[38] Ibid., 84.
[39] Ibid., 104.
[40] Hahnel, 368-372.
[41] Leondar-Wright, 10-12, 49-50, 79.

movements for social change. Still, Leondar-Wright notes, "We also have a not-so proud history of overlooking potential allies from other classes, failing to come through for movements led by poor and working-class people and stepping on the toes of coalition partners through classist assumptions."[42] Let us hope that the preachers of tomorrow can build upon a well informed class-consciousness so that they can stand firmly in solidarity with those seeking to resist and refuse.

[42] Ibid., 12.

**Hearing the Eunuch's Children:**
**A Study of Sermons Preached**
**in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Communities**

Presented by the Rev. Dr. Mark Lee, D.Min., Iliff School of Theology
Sponsored by Dr. Richard Ward, Iliff School of Theology

Preaching in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered and allied ("glbt") communities has not yet received a great deal of attention in the homiletical literature. Scholarly reflection by Christine Smith[1] and doctoral theses by J. Bennett Guess[2] and O. Elaine Hinnant[3] have staked some ground for discussion of the unique issues regarding preaching in glbt communities. They have provided good theoretical background, describing some of the social contexts that preachers need to take into account, and give guidance to preachers seeking to minister more effectively to the glbt minorities in their congregations. There has remained a need for study of what is actually being preached in and for glbt communities.

The present inquiry collected and studied a variety of sermons preached in many glbt communities.[4] Fifty sermons from a variety of denominations were gathered, the chief criteria being that they were preached in congregations where there was a significant demographic of glbt persons. Just less than half the sermons were preached in Metropolitan Community Churches, the balance were from Roman Catholic "Dignity" masses, independent evangelical or charismatic glbt congregations, and mainline open/affirming/welcoming congregations. A scoring grid was developed to weight the issues that were addressed in a sermon, and then totals were made based on both the weight a topic had in a sermon and in the frequency a topic was addressed across the sermons. This provides a window into the actual preaching taking place in glbt communities.

There was some difficulty in gathering the sermon sample, particularly from mainline congregations. There was reluctance by leaders of glbt caucuses or organizations to identify majority-glbt congregations, and even when congregations had been so identified, when the pastoral leadership was approached, they often declined to participate, saying, "We aren't a gay church, we welcome everyone," or "We don't ask people their sexuality at the door." This is remarkable when you consider that there would not be a problem in acknowledging the demographic of a historically African-American congregation, or a Spanish speaking service. One might speculate about the reasons for this (fear of oppressive outside forces such as those which have recently sought to oust open and affirming American Baptist congregations, or residual homophobia even in an officially welcoming congregation).[5]

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[1] Christine Marie Smith, "A Lesbian Perspective – Moving Toward a Promised Place," in Preaching Justice: Ethnic and Cultural Perspectives, ed. Christine Smith (Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998).
[2] J. Bennett Guess, "The Words We Hear: Listening to Sermons from a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Perspective," D.Min. Thesis, University of Chicago, 2001.
[3] O. Elaine Hinnant, "God Comes Out: Toward A Lesbian and Gay Homiletic," D.Min. Thesis, Iliff School of Theology, 2004.
[4] This paper is based on Mark Bryan Lee, "Hearing the Eunuch's Children: Preaching in Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered Communities," D.Min. Thesis, Iliff School of Theology, 2006.
[5] See Hinnant, "God Comes Out," for a discussion of the difficulties even officially "Open and Affirming" congregations have in living out that commitment.

What was striking, however, was that the denominational variations between the sermons paled beside the commonalities across confessional lines. Whether Catholic or protestant, conservative or liberal, they tended to deal with the same issues. This is consistent with the contention that the social location of glbt people, even in as varied settings as San Francisco or Great Falls, MT, in an independent charismatic congregation in suburban Detroit or a middle-of-the-road MCC in Florida, has priority in shaping the preaching in and for those communities.

Though recently it has been questioned whether glbt identity provides a strong or stable enough basis for any lasting theological project (including the project of church-building and queer preaching),[6] the working assumption in glbt worshipping communities is that glbt identity does in fact provide a framework useful for theological construction. Sermons are one place where the community self-consciously develops its theology.[7] The questions people ask, the insights they share, the issues they raise, all go into the crucible from which the preacher brings forth the sermon on behalf of the congregation. As an event in time for a particular community in a particular time and place, a sermon will reflect that community's thought. There is an unspoken social contract between preacher and congregation that the preacher has freedom to preach what she or he deems important, but will keep within the bounds of what is "seriously imaginable" for the congregation.

The sermons were originally approached with an eye to discerning an inductive glbt-liberation theology, asking questions such as: How was God conceived? What was humanity like? What made for salvation and the good life? Who was Jesus presented as? What was found was that while these traditional theological loci were in fact present in the preaching, they were so far in the foundation and background as to pale in comparison with the life-issues that were the main topics of discussion. It is not as though God were missing; it is just that God chiefly made appearances, for example, as a supporting assumption for discussions of the goodness of creation and sexuality.

What was in fact discovered from the sermon sample was that the real life issues of the people shaped the preaching. Preachers were addressing where people itch. The areas that rose to the surface were, first, the development of a healthy glbt and church community; second, negotiating the dual and sometimes dueling identities of being gay and Christian; third, struggling for social justice in a world that is often overtly hostile to glbt persons; and fourth, issues of sex, sexuality, and relationships. The study also looked at the biblical hermeneutics underlying the sermons, with the discovery that far from the Bible being irrelevant or treated with great suspicion, it was the primary source for the sermonic material, and its authority functioned in serious dialogue with the real-life experiences of the community. What was as striking as what the foci were, was what they were not: very few of the sermons were apologetic in nature or dealt with the classical "clobber passages,"[8] few sermons engaged the ongoing "culture-war" polemics, and there was

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[6] Elizabeth Stuart, "Gay and Lesbian Theologies: Repetitions with Crititical Difference," Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003.

[7] Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, Preaching As Local Theology and Folk Art, (Minnneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997), 39.

[8] The "clobber passages" refers to the traditional anti-gay proof texts of Genesis 19, Leviticus 18 & 20, Romans 1, I Corinthians 6, I Timothy 1, and to a lesser degree, various interpretations of Genesis 1 & 2, so called because they have been used to "clobber" glbt people. They function to reinforce homophobia in much the same way as the "texts of terror" (Trible) function to reinforce sexism.

little use made of the social sciences as a primary source or authority (in contrast to the bulk of the secular discussion of glbt civil rights). The focus was not on controversy, but as Ben Guess astutely observed, "the most liberating sermons… are not the hard-hitting prophetic messages that are largely written to persuade heterosexual audiences, but… the imaginative sermons that reveal new images of the presence of God already within/around them…. [GLBT people] yearn for preaching that speaks to their lives, not their issues."[9]

Community

The most often preached issue was the development of healthy community. It was an important theme for two-thirds of the sermons in the sample, and for two-thirds of those, it was primary. This would seem quite natural, given that the preachers are engaged in taking a wildly diverse group of people and helping to form them into a unified community for worship, fellowship, and service. The task among glbt people is heightened by factors that make community formation more difficult. Many glbt people have reported feeling extremely isolated prior to coming out, "like I was the only one in town." This has made them wary of community involvements, where the discovery of their true identity might well lead to stigma, ostracism, or worse. The result of this is a high degree of autonomy among glbt people, coupled with deep suspicion of social structures, even those that they themselves have created. Secondly, much of the broader cultural narratives about glbt communities are that they are primarily about sex. This gets internalized by glbt people, so that glbt churches end up lampooned as "a place less smoky than the bars to hook up," or somehow less than a real church because composed of glbt people. So to build full-orbed institutions that are sex-positive yet have concerns that far transcend meeting and coupling is a challenge.

GLBT communities function much like ethnic communities (with the exception of kinship ties), in terms of having varied economic institutions, internal mores and jargon, roots in geographic neighborhoods, and working together in concert for common ends politically and socially. The churches in the community becoming a family of choice for people discovering their place in the tribe. A recurring theme is found in expositions of I Peter 2:10, "Once you were not a people, now you are God's people." Given that many glbt people have been rejected by their families, the idea that the church is a family of choice in Christ is highly attractive. In the words of preacher Michael England,

> The psalmist also wrote of God's inclusiveness: "Though father and mother forsake me, yet will Yahweh receive me." Had the psalmist just come out to his parents perhaps? Well, probably not, but that promise certainly resonates with the need of many of us: "Though my father and mother forsake me, yet will Yahweh receive me." Many, many queer folks have experienced terrible reactions from parents upon coming out to them, as we know too well, "Yet will Yahweh receive me." … God's realm is infinitely inclusive, far beyond our fears and limits.[10]

[9] Guess, 42.
[10] Michael England, "Anyone Who Is Not Against Us Is With Us," (sermon preached at MCC of Greater Hayward, Hayward, CA on October 19, 2003).

The bounds of the community are a recurrent issue, with preachers seeking to lay out values of Christian community characterized by forbearing love among the members. The preaching contains many pleas for inclusivity, for tolerance, for learning from other people with varied beliefs and experiences. This reflects the fact that most glbt congregations contain the entire gamut of Christian theologies and styles, from fundamentalist-minus-the-homophobia to liberal feminist, from low-church charismatics to high church Catholics, from lay-led free churches to hierarchical Lutherans. In addition, there are the wide variations within the glbt community, from the assimilated suburban soccer-moms to the out-loud-and-proud leather folk and drag communities. Just getting all these folk together in one place is a challenge; getting them to work together and worship together is nothing short of miraculous. Yet connecting with supportive spiritual community is a key aspect of growth in the faith. Father Dick Young reflects that,

> To find your true spiritual family, you have to take a detour and go to where the wisdom live….It was essential that I be with other gay folk who were serious about their faith… where I could see the GAY body of Christ, where I could delight in the goodness of our God-given sexual orientation, where I could honor it as a gift….. GLBT folks have been forming families in this way since the first bigot threw the first insult.[11]

Another area that glbt preachers can work on is to hold up truths to the glbt community that counteract the ubiquitous homophobic narratives in the broader society that are often unreflectively absorbed within the glbt community. Preachers can replace the false narratives with true, hope-filled ones. In particular, the illustrations a preacher chooses helps the community envision its character. This is not a one-time event, but an "ongoing willingness to weave images of LGBT relationships, friendships, and culture into the collective body of a pastor's sermons."[12] For example, preachers can hold up the fact that glbt communities create counter-cultural spaces where the usual assumptions about masculinity and violence do not hold sway; gay-on-gay violence at gay bars is rare and arrests at gay pride marches pale in comparison with, for example, arrests at a St. Patrick's Day parade. Preachers can commend the gay male community for the wholesale changes in sexual culture brought on by the AIDS crisis, where within a few short years, safer sex practices went from unknown to the moral and behavioral norm, with correspondingly steep drops in the infection rate. Contrary to horror stories of out of control male sexuality, they can point out statistics that show high levels of commitment and even abstinence within the community. They can highlight the work of glbt people in addressing issues of male dominance and privilege, so that glbt organizations, far from the mono-sexual structures one might expect, reflect high degrees of co-participation by both women and men. Though there are many ways that the transgendered community can suggest that gay and lesbian groups can be more understanding and accommodating, it is within glbt communities that the conversation is taking place that the broader society is scarcely aware of.[13] There is no shortage of negative narratives regarding glbt people; those who preach in and for the glbt community need to be attentive to the work of the Spirit and unfold the positive narratives of the community's life.

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[11] Dick Young, "Holy Family," (Sermon preached for Dignity, Philadelphia, on December 28, 2003).
[12] Guess, 30.
[13] These examples are taken from David Nimmonds, *The Soul Beneath the Skin,* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2002).

Identity

The second most preached upon topic was that of identity. What is it to be gay? What is it to be Christian? And what is it to be both, when partisans on both sides say that such a synthesis is impossible? Though the homophobia of much of the Christian community is well known, well analyzed, and amply responded to, many glbt Christians report that it is as difficult to be accepted as Christian within the glbt community as it is to be accepted as gay or lesbian in the church. Preachers do their people a great service as they tell stories of people who are effectively integrating their sexuality and their spirituality. Both sexuality and spirituality are rooted in the image of God, in the human capacity for relationship, and are therefore "twins hatched from the same egg."[14]

A helpful approach for the preacher is to consider that coming out is not a one-time event, but an ongoing series of life choices in which a person lives into their identity as gay and Christian. Coming out stories form bedrock narratives in the socialization of glbt persons, ranging from the tragic to the hilarious. They also often are strikingly similar to traditional evangelical conversion narratives: an unhappy before, then a crisis experience in which life is reordered, and a happy resolution:

> I once was lost but now am found;
> Was bound but now I'm free.[15]

Psychologists have outlined several models of the "coming out" process, as a person progresses from knowing that something doesn't fit between their internal experiences of the world and the external heterosexual expectations, all the way through a comfortable integration of glbt sexuality with the other truths of their lives. For example, Vivienne Cass describes a six stage series from Identity Confusion through Identity Comparison, Tolerance, Acceptance, Pride and finally Identity Synthesis.[16] Unlike many models which end with public disclosure of sexuality, hers continues on through life. She also outlines ways the process can be frozen, short-circuited and even regressed, generally with regrettable consequences. By providing these kinds of road-maps, people can make sense of their experiences and have a sense of what to expect as their lives unfold. In addition, the needs of the listeners are very different at different stages. A person at the Identity Comparison or Tolerance stages may need biblical materials around the clobber passages, to unlearn homophobic theology and replace it with something more life-affirming. By contrast, someone in the Identity Pride stage might need encouragement to engage the political processes in ways that sustain their spirit for the long haul of social change. Even complaints about "preaching too much on gay issues" can have very different meanings if coming from someone in the Identity Tolerance stage than from someone in the Identity Synthesis stage.

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[14] The image is Jack Pantaleo's.

[15] From the hymn Amazing Grace, by John Newton, as paraphrased by lesbian songwriter Marsha Stevens (Costa Mesa, CA: BALM Ministries Publishing, n.d.).

[16] Vivienne C. Cass, "Homosexual Identity Formation: A Theoretical Model," *Journal of Homosexuality* – Vol 4 (3), Spring 1979.

Preachers have a wealth of Biblical material to draw from in outlining the journey of coming out. This is not a question of trying to find the hidden glbt or queer people in the Bible (though a few sermons did work on that project, highlighting Ruth, eunuchs, and Jonathan), but rather people who had a journey of self-discovery and self-disclosure that is akin to that of glbt people. Moses, Esther, Jesus, and Paul underwent such journeys and dealt with the consequences. So Jeff Miner can hold up Moses as an example of the courage needed for coming out:

> Think about it: he had been raised to be a prince in Egypt, he was the grandson of the Pharaoh, he was destined to be in a senior government position in the most powerful nation in the world at that time…. And then he learned that, not only was he no the grandson of Pharaoh, he's not even an Egyptian! He's a Hebrew! A member of that race the Egyptians enslaved, and despised and feared. Can you imagine what he felt like when he learned that? I bet you can. Many of us have been there…. And tonight I am looking at a congregation of people who are walking in the footsteps of the greatest prophet of Israel. You have made that same decision… passed through the fire and had the courage to say, "I'm going to be who God created me to be!" By faith [Moses]… and we… must embrace our identity and our people. Moses came to the place where he could stand up and say, "I am a Hebrew…." And by God's grace, many of us have come to the place where we can say, "I'm a gay man," or "I'm a lesbian." … Embrace who God created you to be![17]

Most glbt activists and preachers proclaim coming out as an unvarnished necessity for healthy and whole living. A typical plea to come out is that of Bonnie Crawford-Bewley:

> The most important thing I have learned in my 15 years of being involved in the Gay and Lesbian movement is that I have yet to meet a single person who said to me, "I support gay rights but you are the first gay person I have ever met." … If we hide away in our closets… we conspire in our own oppression.[18]

However, there are dissenting voices. Virginia Mollenkott suggests that coming out may be a privilege reserved for those higher up on the social-economic scale.[19] By contrast, youth, those in the US military, the elderly, the poor, persons with AIDS, and others who are more vulnerable may be well advised not to come out. Marco Rubio, preaching from an unnamed city where the civil and police authorities are notoriously hostile to glbt people contends,

> "There is a time to speak and a time to keep silent," (Ecclesiastes 3:7b). This is fundamental knowledge of those who are persecuted and oppressed… Jesus, precisely in solidarity with the persecuted and oppressed, decides to jealously hide his "Messianic secret," lock himself up in the closet. Confronting a tyrannous system that invades our privacy in violent and harmful manners, a lie is not an "obstruction of justice," or a sin, but rather the expression of courage and solidarity with the oppressed…. And just as there is a time for everything, there is… another time to show yourself. With his

[17] Jeff Miner, "Prince of Egypt," (Sermon preached for Jesus MCC, Indianapolis, on September 12, 1999).
[18] Bonnie Crawford-Bewley, "A Bed of Thorns," (Sermon preached at St. John the Evanglelist Church, Toronto, Canada, for Pride Day, July 11, 1999).
[19] Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, "A Call to Subversion," *The Other Side Online* 35:4, (July-August 1999).

> triumphant entrance into Jerusalem, Jesus comes out of the closet…as Son of God…assuming all the consequences that this declaration entailed.[20]

Justice

The third area that the sermons focused upon was justice. Justice, in this sense, is the community's response to living in a larger hostile society that would eliminate both the glbt identity and glbt communities. Preachers map out ways of living in this hostile society by mitigating the most onerous aspects of societal hostility and seeking ways to change the society in ways beneficial to glbt people. Few of the sermons in the sample dealt solely with justice issues; most often it appeared in a closing "So what then shall we do?" appeal pointing the congregation beyond personal or community interests to a more systemic involvement in bettering society. This is an area where there is often a high level of resistance on the part of listeners; being active in justice work may involve coming out in new contexts and taking new risks. So preachers give allowances for people tending to the realities of their need for safety and security, while pushing for greater engagement with systemic issues. Some preachers simply called upon people to confront internal and personal issues, to take injustice as an opportunity to go deeper into love of God, neighbor, and even enemy. Others focused on the interpersonal, encouraging people to come out and take stands in interpersonal relationships. Yet others focused on specific political events, such as attendance at a rally or march. And still others encouraged systemic analysis and engagement with the "principalities and powers" that reinforce multiple layers of oppression.[21]

There are two movements in the work of preaching justice for glbt communities. The first is to preach against the injustices themselves, naming them, laying bare the claims of the powers that reinforce homophobia and heterosexism, and expose them for the frauds they are. This is especially important to the degree that Christian language and symbols are used to reinforce oppression. One of the sad discoveries of those who have worked at defusing the clobber passages is that often, after the exegesis is all said and done, and the homophobic use of the passages is annulled, the homophobia is still intact. The texts provide rationale, but not reasons, for the prejudice. The preacher needs to deal with larger issues of patriarchy and heterosexism to get to the roots of the matter.

The second movement is to paint an alternative rendering of the world, one in which justice for glbt people (and for all oppressed persons) is the norm. The most common theological basis for justice making was proclaiming Jesus' vision of the realm of God. This enabled preachers to deconstruct homophobic and heterosexist narratives and replace them with more inclusive, egalitarian, and peaceable narratives. This was an area where glbt preachers had the opportunity to scour glbt lives, history, and culture for "tokens of the resurrection," those places where the

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[20] Marco Rubio, "Jesus, the Closet Messiah," (Sermon preached at ICM Casa de Luz, Monterrey, Mexico, n.d.)

[21] I found Charles Campbell's *The Word Before the Powers* (Lousiville, Westminster, 2002), to be a useful conversation partner in helping to move the analysis of injustice from the issue of the day (discrimination, gays in the military, gay marriage, etc.) to more systematic engagement (homophobia, heterosexism, patriarchy, hierarchy and domination systems). The concepts of "tokens of the resurrection," "dangerous memory," and "hyperbolic imagination" all are taken from his work (though he credits Walter Wink and Christine Smith with some of them before he adopted and adapted them).

new life of God's realm is now breaking into present experience. Finding God's work even in the midst of grief and loss, Nori Rost summons the "dangerous memory" of not many years ago:

> That in the midst of the AIDS crisis, Christ was at the door, and the realm of Christ was established in the lesbians who cared so diligently for our brothers, in our brothers who advocated clean needles for the straight junkies. MCC specifically was the fist to provide not only spiritual support but also practical support… The first World AIDS Day was in 1986 started by our pastor in San Diego… many of our pastors tell of dressing the bodies of people who died of AIDS on their kitchen tables because mortuaries and other churches wouldn't touch them… Could it be that Christ was at the door, and it was up to us to usher him in?[22]

The sermons repeatedly appeal to Jesus' vision of the realm of God as a window of not only what the church community should be like, but what the world ought be. Jesus broke conventions in his table fellowship, welcomed the untouchable, rejected systems of domination and violence, and lived as if God's reign were already here. After all, what would a world without homophobic violence look like? What would a world that treated men and women equally appear to be? What would a world be like where class, race and nationality did not determine a persons' access to treatment for illnesses such as AIDS? What if everyone believed that "love makes a family," and gay people were permitted to marry? What might it be like if transgendered persons were not pathologized and thus delayed for years before being allowed to transition into a more comfortable relationship with their bodies? So much political and social energy has been spent just keeping the freedoms that glbt people have won, that there has been little energy left to do the constructive work of envisioning a better world. Yet preachers are in a unique position by their role and calling to open windows to what such a world might be like. Penny Nixon uses her "hyperbolic imagination" in preaching on resurrection:

> We will know that we have embodied resurrection when all bodies with differing abilities are seen and no one is invisible. We will know we have embodied resurrection when HIV/AIDS is no longer stigmatized and religious rhetoric will no longer fuel legislative discrimination. We will know that we have embodied resurrection when bodies of children around the world are cared for. We will know that we have embodied resurrection when we would rid ourselves of weapons of mass destruction because the destruction of bodies everywhere would be unacceptable to everyone. And we will know that we have embodied resurrection when you believe that Mary Magdalene could actually be Jesus' successor. And when the President and First Lady, James and Bruce, take up residence at the White House, and you will know we have embodied resurrection when the Pope is a woman. You out there: Can you imagine it? … We will always have a cross and a tomb to remind us of where we have come from, but, Honey, we are alive![23]

[22] Nori Rost, "Advent1Sermon2002." (Sermon preached at Pikes Peak MCC, Colorado Springs, on December 1, 2002).
[23] G. Penny Nixon, "The Queer Body is Alive," (Sermon preached for MCC San Francisco, San Francisco, CA, on April 20, 2003).

Sexuality and Relationship

The fourth area that arose in the sermon sample dealt with sexuality. Somewhat less than half the sermons dealt with the areas of sex, sexuality, or relationship. This low frequency is remarkable given that in the popular imagination, and even in many glbt people's self-understanding, sexuality is the *sine qua non* of glbt identity. Given that in glbt circles as in straight, the answer to the question of "Where do I find a good spouse?" is often "At church," and the energies heterosexual congregations pour into discussions of dating, coupling, and family building, one might have expected more preaching in this area. What was striking was that in many respects the preachers dealt with sexuality up to a certain point, and then were pointedly silent beyond that. They proclaimed the goodness of sexuality, but were largely silent on the ways that might be actually lived out in practice.

The sermons amply employed slogans about "integrating sexuality and spirituality" and appealed to the goodness of sexuality as a gift created by God (Genesis 1 & 2) and blessed by the incarnation of God in Christ (John 1:14). In fact, the most common approach to affirming the goodness of glbt identity is to affirm that a person's sexual and gender identity are endowed on all people as a result of their creation in God's image. "God didn't create you so he could have someone to sit around and hate."[24] This does not negate the often problematic issues sexuality has in a fallen world – either a denial of sexuality's goodness or an idolatry of sex. However, the overwhelming weight of the preaching is at pains to emphasize the goodness and embodiedness of sexual life.

> In the Beginning, God created them male and female, some of them he created butch and femme, black white, red, yellow. And brown, big and small, gay and straight, bi and transgendered. And the great message of creation is that God said of all he created, "It is good!" … We are marvelous reflections of God's Divine Image and fabulous creativity. And it is good![25]

The silence arose in regards to concrete advice or teaching regarding sexual ethics and the nuts and bolts of relationship-building. It was suggested that sexual ethics is a "third rail" for preachers because of the radically differing subcultural norms between gay men and lesbian women: to touch the issue risked alienating one side or the other. Closer inspection revealed that perhaps the fears were overstated. While there was not agreement around "monogamy" or "open relationships," there were ample areas of agreement on other issues. Values of consent, competence, compatibility and mutuality were common, often rooted in expositions of Genesis 2. The covenant love expressed in Ruth, "where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people, my people; your God, my God" was an often used example of this kind of commitment.

This is frontier work which deals with mystery (Ephesians 5). As Glenna Shepherd says, "Queer people of faith have held as sacred… the mystery of and our passion for God AND the

[24] Troy Perry, *10 Spiritual Truths for Successful Living for Gays and Lesbians (and everyone else!),* (Kearney, NE: Morris Publishing, 2003), 7.
[25] David C. Strong, "Saint Mark's Cathedral Reflection," (Sermon preached for an interfaith Pride service at St. Mark's Cathedral, Seattle, Washington, n.d.).

mystery of and passion for one-another."[26] Core Christian values of love of God and neighbor surely apply to ones sexual partner. In this regard, preachers can be encouraged to address issues of choosing an appropriate partner, communication, problem solving, and fair-fighting. Given that glbt relationships meet obstacles rather than support in the broader society, preachers should be charting ways through the icebergs that homophobic society, unhappy in-laws, wandering eyes, money disparities, health-challenges, child-raising, aging, and other issues through which couples need to navigate. Though neat rules or mores are unlikely to develop any time soon, sexuality is perhaps the most important area for preachers in the glbt community to spend their time, risks, and energy.

## Conclusion

Detailed consideration of what it means to preach redemptively for glbt communities is but beginning. Explicitly glbt communities of faith and openly glbt preachers have existed for scarcely a generation. Even in this short length of time, there has been considerable development in the community and in the preaching. In particular, the political and social concerns have shifted. Once the focus may have been on simple acceptance by God and the deconstruction of anti-gay proof texts. Now the issues are much broader. Common experiences of isolation, exclusion, silencing, being demonized and condemned have helped form a common basis for glbt people to come together for mutual support, affirmation, community building and working together for justice. This study found that preachers in glbt communities found common focus on issues of coming out and claiming Christian glbt identity, creating healthy, affirming Christian community, and working to build a vision of God's realm characterized by justice for all people. They are doing constructive theological work to develop a theology of sexuality, testing out various queer hermeneutical approaches to the Bible, and exploring an authoritative canon for glbt preaching. The future path of preaching in this community is yet to be seen but likely will build on these issues. There will be fuller elaboration of glbt liberative theology, bridges built with other faith communities working toward a world of justice and love, practical help for glbt people as they make sense of their lives in the light of the gospel, and a fuller telling of the story of God's work in the glbt community.

The children of the eunuch are finding their voices. They are sharing their concerns, questions and insights with their preachers, who in turn are articulating a liberative glbt theology. The first non-Jewish convert to Christ was a eunuch (Acts 8), whose sexual difference made him outcast from the community of faith, yet he found welcome in Christ. His spiritual descendants, once silenced because of their own sexual differences, now challenge the whole church to listen to the work of God among them.

> For my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. For thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, "I will gather others to them besides those already gathered." (Isaiah 56:7c-8)

[26] Glenna Shepherd, "Divided No More," (Sermon preached at MCC Portland, Portland, OR, for Pride Sunday 2004, n.d.)

**Preaching the Promised Land for the Canaanites**

The Reverend Deacon Dr. Duncan Macpherson
Part-time Tutor in the College of Preachers

London, England
duncan@deaconduncan.com

*'But as for the towns of these peoples that Yahweh your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as Yahweh your God has commanded.'*
*(Deuteronomy 20:16-17).*

*'The obvious characters for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the Promised Land....I read the Exodus stories with Canaanite eyes.'*
*(Robert Allen Warrior)*

## Introduction

Preachers who preached this summer with any sensitivity to 'the world in front of the text' could scarcely ignore the events took place in Iraq, Israel, Gaza and Lebanon; an escalating theatre of violence that leapt out daily from the news bulletins on the TV screens and that seemed to suggest that the worst was yet to come. Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which the preacher can interpret such events. The first proceeds from one form or another of Christian Zionism; the conviction that the restoration of the State of Israel in 1948 and its subsequent fortunes are part of a divine plan. The second perspective is based upon general humanitarian principles of peace and justice, is sensitive to international law and attempts to interpret Scripture according to the hermeneutic of Liberation Theology.

This paper will pass briefly over preaching perspectives on Middle Eastern conflicts adopted by the enormously influential fundamentalist dispensationalist preachers and as well as the subtler kinds of Christian Zionism that inform the words spoken both in the pulpit and the theological academy.[1] It will then focus its main attention on the way in which preachers operating out of a peace and justice hermeneutic relate to contrary texts that appear to not only justify but to command bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity on the sole condition that they form part of a revealed plan. Finally I will suggest preaching strategies for preachers who are prepared to engage prophetically with the politics of the Middle East conflict. My discussion of these issues will draw freely from the writings of my late friend and colleague, Professor Michael Prior CM, Vincentian priest, biblical scholar, peace activist and liberation

[1] Approaches to preaching on the issues of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were discussed in some detail in my paper "Preaching and Holy Land Studies: With Special Reference to Preaching in the Holy Land," Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, "Prophetic Preaching," Hosted by Boston University School of Theology, Boston, Massachusetts, December 5-7, 2002, 5-14, and in "Take Away the Stone: Prophetic Preaching and the Israeli Palestinian Conflict," Papers of the Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics, "Preaching and the Resurrection," Hosted by Memphis Theological Seminary, Memphis, Tennessee, December 2-4, 2004, 87-95. I would also refer readers to my book, *The Pilgrim Preacher: Palestine and Pilgrimage* (London: Melisende, 2004).

theologian, who took up the cause of the Palestinians and engaged with a moral critique of the land traditions of the Bible as contrary texts.

In an article entitled 'Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites' [2], written in tribute to Edward Said and just before his own death, Michael Prior acknowledged the source of the title of his essay. Well into his study of the relationship between the biblical traditions on land with colonialism he encountered the phrase, reading the biblical narratives 'with the eyes of the Canaanites' by the native North American, Robert Allen Warrior in Said's collection, *Blaming the Victim* [3] and reiterated by Warrior in 1991: '"The obvious characters for Native Americans to identify with are the Canaanites, the people who already lived in the Promised Land....I read the Exodus stories with Canaanite eyes."'[4]

**Fundamentalist Christian Zionist Approaches**

Unfortunately, it is difficult to find Christian preachers sympathetic to the sufferings of the modern equivalent of the Canaanites. Fired by the conviction that the scenario for the last times is being acted out before our eyes in the Middle East, dispensationalist Evangelical preachers in the United States have been foremost in supporting President Bush over the war in Iraq. They were also been enthusiastic in urging Israel on in its Summer 2006 invasion of Lebanon and have continually supported the most uncompromising Israeli advocates of 'Greater Israel' policies in the West Bank and Gaza. Writing in the New York Times (01/20/2006), evangelical Professor Charles Marsh, catalogues some of the many American evangelical preachers and writers who have condoned the Iraq invasion. These include TV evangelist Charles Stanley of the First Baptist Church of Atlanta ("We should offer to serve the war effort in any way possible…. God battles with people who oppose him, who fight against him and his followers"). In addition, Billy Graham's son, Franklin Graham, and Marvin Olasky, editor of World magazine and former advisor to Bush on faith-based policy, both suggested that the American invasion of Iraq would create exciting new prospects for proselytizing Muslims. Tim LaHaye, of "Left Behind" fame, saw Iraq as "a focal point of end-time events," and Jerry Falwell declared that "God is pro-war." Marsh reports that 87 percent of all white evangelical Christians in the United States supported the president's decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and that 68 percent continue to do so.

For Further evidence of Evangelical attitudes to the latest conflict we can instance the pro-Israel rally in Washington on 18-19 July when Christians from Florida and other states lobbied politicians to back Israel's military campaign in Lebanon. According to a Miami Herald report, John Hagee, pastor of a mega-church in San Antonio, founder of 'Christians United for Israel and organiser of this lobby, 'has issued dire predictions about instability in the region leading to apocalypse'. In his 2006 book *Jerusalem Countdown: A Warning to the World*, Hagee warns: "The coming nuclear showdown with Iran is a certainty. The war of Ezekiel 38-39 could begin

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[2] Michael Prior, 'Reading the Bible with the Eyes of the Canaanites: Homage to Edward W. Said*',* in *A Living Stone: Selected essays and Addresses: Michael Prior, CM*. Edited with an Introduction by D Macpherson (London: Living Stones of the Holy Land Trust, 1 Gough Square, London EC4A3DE, 2005), 277.

[3] See Edward W. Said, 'Michael Walzer's *Exodus and Revolution*: A Canaanite Reading', in Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (Eds), *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question* (London/New York: Verso, 1988), 161-78.

[4]Robert Allen Warrior*, The Sweetgrass Meaning of Solidarity: 500 Years of Resistance* Vol. 20, No. 1 (January 1991), 269.

before this book gets published.'"[5] On July 22 Jerry Falwell characterised recent events in the Middle East "as a prelude or forerunner to the future Battle of Armageddon and the glorious return of Jesus Christ'' and Pat Robertson warned that ''God himself'' will fight for Israel. Darien Bennett, pastor of Upscale Scottsdale Bible Church, on the 10:00 PM news of July 15 on the US Channel 5 sought to justify the Israeli destruction of the modern Lebanese cities of Tyre and Sidon by displaying a Bible open at verses from Ezekiel chapters 26 to 28. According to Bennett their destruction, along with that of Gaza, are signs of God's march towards Armageddon. 'Israel's war is God's war and let no man stand in the way.'[6]

**Main Stream Christian Zionist Approaches**

It would be a mistake to simply laugh at the inanities of such simplistic hermeneutics. Such preachers make up in influence what they lack in intellectual sophistication. It would be similarly mistaken to ignore the subtler influence of main stream Christian Zionism. Among politically and theologically liberal Protestant Christians guilt for Christian oppression of Jews throughout history combines with residually fundamentalist interpretation of the land traditions of the Old Testament to exempt Israel from serious criticism. Instead of the unequivocal support for Israeli aggression of the Armageddon fantasists, we have a constant plea for 'balance.' Thus Canon Andrew White, Anglican Vicar of Baghdad and head of the Foundation for Reconciliation in the Middle East, was against support for an unconditional ceasefire in the Israeli-Lebanon conflict because, 'just condemning one side will not actually deal with the matter realistically. The fact is that in any conflict there are usually two sides involved.'[7] So too with his approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; White opposed the Church of England synod's decision to consider disinvestment in Caterpillar tractors on the grounds that the Anglican Church had 'fallen into the trap of thinking that you must be either pro Israeli or pro Palestinian. The reality is that we should be pro both people (sic). Both have suffered and both need our support, love and understanding…. I despair at my own Church, but the reality is that it causes me to ask questions about the Church rather than Israel. We will press on with our work, fortunately it is no longer the work of the C of E and we will continue loving both peoples and seeking truth and justice for all and never falling into the evil trap of anti Zionism and Anti Semitism.'[8]

For White, as for many involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue anti-Zionism is the twin of anti-Semitism, part of the same 'evil trap.' Even the great civil rights leader Martin Luther King is reported as being concerned that the natural sense of sympathy felt for the Palestinians by African Americans might lead to anti-Zionism: "Antisemitism, the hatred of the Jewish people, has been and remains a blot on the soul of mankind. In this we are in full agreement. So know also this: anti-Zionism is inherently anti-Semitic, and ever will be so.... How easy it should be…to understand and support the right of the Jewish People to live in their ancient Land of Israel. All men of good will exult in the fulfillment of God's promise that his People should return in joy to rebuild their plundered land. This is Zionism, nothing more, nothing less. The times have made it unpopular, in the West, to proclaim openly a hatred of the Jews. This being

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[5] Alexandra Alter, 'Middle East Crisis', *Miami Herald*, 8 August 2006.

[6] Charles E. Carlson, 'The Christian Right: Not Right, Not Following Christ,' July 24, 2006: http://www.whtt.org/index.php?news=2&id=901.

[7] http://www.christianpost.com/article/20060803/23460.htm.

[8] http://www.anglicansforisrael.com/docs/2006/02/09/important-statement-from-canon-andrew-white.

the case, the anti-Semite must constantly seek new forms and forums for his poison. How he must revel in the new masquerade! He does not hate the Jews; he is just 'anti-Zionist'!

'My friend, I do not accuse you of deliberate anti-Semitism. I know you feel, as I do, a deep love of truth and justice and revulsion for racism, prejudice, and discrimination. But I know you have been misled—as others have been—into thinking you can be 'anti-Zionist' and yet remain true to these heartfelt principles that you and I share. Let my words echo in the depths of your soul: When people criticize Zionism, they mean Jews—make no mistake about it'.[9]

Roman Catholics have been slower to accept this equation. In 1982, the Vatican Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews[10] advised preachers and catechists that 'the existence of the State of Israel and its political options should be envisaged not in a perspective which is in itself religious, but in their reference to the common principles of international law.' In 1989, the Pontifical Commission "Justitia et Pax" suggested that Anti-Zionism, while logically distinct from anti-Semitism, 'serves at times as a screen for anti-Semitism, feeding on it and leading to it'.[11] However in July 2004 the eighteenth International Catholic-Jewish Liaison Committee meeting in Buenos Aires expressed the view that anti-Zionism was synonymous with anti-Semitism. This was a first time that any semi-official Roman Catholic document had made this identification and the Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz* (10 July) recorded this under the headline, "Catholic Church equates anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism". The Anti-Defamation League then quickly put the joint statement on its website. In an article printed just after his death[12], Michael Prior identified two objections to criticism of Zionism 'being seen as, "an attack against the whole Jewish people". The first of his objections was rooted in Jewish theological considerations, and the second on the rights of an indigenous population, expelled from, or dominated in their land;:'If the former concerns preoccupy some religious Jews, then secular Jews, and some religious ones also, are among those most disturbed by the human cost of the implementation of Zionism. 'Such people should not be dismissed as "self-hating Jews", nor should those who share their concerns, for either theological or humanitarian reasons, be accused of being "Jew haters"'

Prior concludes by suggesting that 'the failure of the Catholic and Jewish leaders to include a thoughtful religious perspective on one of the great moral crises of our time calls the integrity of the actual Catholic-Jewish dialogue into question. How does the evasion of hard truths in any way benefit the noble ideal of inter-religious relations? There are religious and moral considerations of even greater importance than cozy relations with another faith group. One

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[9] From M.L. King Jr., "Letter to an Anti-Zionist Friend," *Saturday Review*, XLVII (Aug. 1967), 76. Reprinted in M.L. King Jr., "*This I Believe: Selections from the Writings of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr."* The sources of this letter has been challenged but it certainly has the ring of Luther King's style and may be based on unpublished or even on oral material. For details of the challenge to the authenticity of this letter, see Fadi Kiblawi and Will Youmans, 'The Use and Abuse of Martin Luther King Jr. by Israel's Apologists' on http://www.blacksandjews.com/Israel.MLK.html.

[10] http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/relations-jews-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_19820306_jews-judaism_en.html.

[11] *Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis:* VI. *Judaism and Christianity in History* http://www.bc.edu/research/cjl/meta-elements/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/catholic/church_Racism.html.

[12] *"A Disaster for Dialogue,"* A Living *Stone, 297-300. Originally published in* The *Tablet, 31 July, 2004.*

might not unreasonably have hoped that the combined wisdom as reflected in the Buenos Aires joint statement would transcend the liberation rhetoric of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and President George W. Bush.'

Prior was one scholar, perhaps the only one, who focused adequate attention on the difficulty of preaching peace and justice in the Middle East using inspired texts that appear to not only justify, but to command, bloodshed, ethnic cleansing and other crimes against humanity on the sole condition that they form part of a revealed plan.
It was from the Bible that Prior had learnt the hunger for justice that underwrote his political sympathies, and in particular from the two texts that he saw as most directly inspiring this hunger; the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7:29) and the preaching of Jesus at Nazareth (Luke 4:14-30).

Resisting the interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount as an abstract ideal, Prior asserted that 'It should spur one on to a higher kind of living' and although the Sermon has 'special relevance to anyone who claims to be a follower of Jesus', Prior conceded that it was not practicable for the world of politics. Nevertheless he held that it had considerable relevance for those seeking to influence social and political realities. The disposition to treat others as one would wish them to treat oneself (Matthew 7:12) 'offers the most serious resistance to the idolizing of the divisions of the human race on the basis of nationality, creed, race, or wealth.'[13]

The inspiration to resist the 'idolizing of such divisions of the human race' found further support in Luke's Gospel with its perceived emphasis on a preferential option for the poor. Prior penned several articles[14] developing this thesis, in preparation for his *Jesus the Liberator, Nazareth Liberation Theology.*[15]

**The Old Testament as an Instrument of Oppression**
However, despite finding so much inspiration from the Bible for his political theology, Prior found that some of the themes in the Old Testament were less conducive to his liberationist theme. The problem is to be found in the fact that the Torah 'is fundamentally rooted in the escape from Egypt of the Hebrew slaves, who entered and occupied a land which was already occupied by others. The occupation of another people's land realistically demands systematic pillage and killing. What distinguishes the biblical account of this activity is that it is presented as having not only divine approval, but as happening at the command of the divinity. 'In the traditions in the Book of Joshua, in particular, the Israelites killed and butchered in conformity with the directives of God. This presentation of God as a monster gloating over the destruction of others must be rejected out of hand by anyone who presumes that the conduct of an ethical God, at the very least, will not fall lower than that of ordinary secular decency.'[16]

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[13] Ibid, 65-6.
[14] '"Evangelizare Pauperibus Misit Me": Jesus in the Synagogue at Nazareth'. *Colloque* No. 22 (1990): 50-62. In 'The Poor in Luke's Gospel' *Colloque* No. 23 (1991): 349-69 and in 'Isaiah and the Liberation of the Poor (Luke 4.16-30)'. *Scripture Bulletin* 24 (1994): 36-46.
[15] Michael Prior, *Jesus the Liberator: Nazareth Liberation Theology (Luke 4:16-30),* The Biblical Seminar 26 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).
[16] 'Clinton's Bible, Goldstein's Hermeneutics and Rabin's Metal Detectors,' *Middle East International* (16 December 1994), 20-21, and reprinted in *A Living Stone*, 158-9.

Prior points to the contradiction that liberation theologies look to a whole range of biblical themes that 'fit the concept of liberation very comfortably (e.g., liberation from oppression in Egypt, Babylon, etc.),' but they ignore texts of oppression. 'If the Bible is looked to as providing a theological basis for Liberation Theology elsewhere, the sad reality is that in its place of origin it has become an equally well-founded basis for a Theology of Oppression.'

In his 1997 Lattey Lecture,[17] Prior makes a related point that, whereas liberation theologians 'have appropriated the Exodus story in their long and tortuous struggle against colonialism, imperialism and dictatorship…,' the perspective on the Exodus story takes on a different complexion when read 'with the eyes of the Canaanites', that is, with the eyes of any of several different cultures, which have been victims of a colonialism fired by religious imperialism, whether of the Indians in North or Latin America, the Maoris in New Zealand, the Aborigines in Australia, the Khoikhoi and San in southern Africa, or, the Palestinians in Palestine.' Prior goes on to ask whether a consistent reading of the biblical text does not 'require the liberating God of the Exodus to become the oppressive God of the occupation of Canaan?'

Prior's major work, *The Bible and Colonialism,* published in 1997[18] and subsequently in translation in Arabic, French and Spanish editions, argued that, by the standards of secular modern moral values, what the biblical narrative commands are war crimes and crimes against humanity. This work was penned by Prior in 1996-7 during a sabbatical year as Visiting Professor of Theology in Bethlehem University and Scholar-in-Residence in Tantur Ecumenical Institute for Theology, Jerusalem. Written against the background sound of bullets and rioting, Prior gave the issues discussed added relevance and poignancy.

The book's examples of the oppressive use of the biblical narrative focus on Latin America, South Africa and Palestine[19] are followed by an examination of the textual and historical evidence relating to the Pentateuch and, in particular, to the historicity of the Exodus and the Conquest and he argues that modern biblical scholarship 'has shifted from viewing much of the biblical narrative as simple history to concentrating on its authors as historiographers, whose reconstruction of the past reflected their own religious and political ideologies.'[20] After a review of the research findings that support this view of the biblical narrative, Prior asks whether 'texts which belong to the genre of folkloric epic and legend, rather than history…confer legitimacy on the Israelite possession of the land and on subsequent forms of colonialism which looked to the biblical paradigm, understood as factual history, for legitimization later?'[21] Prior then proceeds to examine scholarly discussion of the 1705 references to the word 'Land' in the Bible and found only two scholars to have analyzed the use of the word; W D Davies and Walter Brueggemann, both professors at Union Theological Seminary. Davis' *The Gospel and the Land,* 1974, and *The Territorial Dimension of Judaism,* 1982, were both written from a Zionist standpoint and the first

[17] 'A Land flowing with Milk, Honey, and People,' *Scripture Bulletin* 28: 2-17 and reprinted in *A Living Stone*, 161-179.
[18] *The Bible and Colonialism: A Moral Critique.* The Biblical Seminar 48 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997).
[19] The original title was to have been '*Land of Israel, God and Morality.*' Originally Prior had intended to focus his discussion exclusively on the Zionist use of the land traditions of the Bible, but his publishers urged that he broaden the scope of the discussion to include the other two examples.
[20] Prior, *The Bible and Colonialism*, 247.
[21] Ibid., 252

of these in response to a specific request to lend support to Israel after the 1967 war. Brueggemann's 1977 work, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, refused to engage with moral or political questions relating to Israel-Palestine. Prior considered that such discussion, that neglected moral considerations, inevitably reflected the Euro-centric perspectives of virtually all western historiography, and in the case of W F Albright, traces of its racism. The Bible, for some, 'was the idea that redeems the conquest of the earth.' Prior conceded that there were a 'breadth of views within the Old Testament on land occupation and war' but insisted that there remained 'the major question of the portrayal of God as one who does not conform to even the minimum morality which nation states commit themselves to today'.[22]

**Preaching Strategies**

Inevitably, readers of the Bible have different ideas not only on how to interpret the Bible but also on which bits they find problematic. What unites them is the reality that there are texts that seem to run contrary not only to the core moral values of the Gospel but to any kind of human moral sensitivity. In a paper given at the 2005 Academy of Homiletics Stephen Farris of the Vancouver School of Theology gave a paper on the 'Preaching of Contrary Texts'[23] and asked three questions: what makes a text contrary, how such texts are to be viewed theologically as scripture for the church and what strategies to use for preaching these texts. Farris distinguishes between texts that are simply contrary in a culturally relative sense—that they are inimical to the culture that the interpreter comes from and those that are inimical to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As a response to his third question he advocates Schleiermacher's use of the hermeneutical circle so that the totality of Scripture is explicated by the parts and the parts by the whole. In this understanding although the parts and the whole are both necessary for understanding 'the whole is hermeneutically privileged.' The Church is able to adapt the significance of each text, including contrary texts in the light of changing circumstances and insights.

Michael Prior considered several possible ways of rehabilitating the unacceptable parts of the Old Testament. In the section on 'Rehabilitating the Bible,' in *The Bible and Colonialism,* he examined potential solutions but found them all, to some degree, unsatisfactory. The first of these, going back to Augustine, is the understanding that the Old Testament is only Revelation in the light of the New ('In Augustine's dictum, 'the New Testament lies hidden in the Old, and the Old becomes clear in the New'), (270). The second way, akin to that of Augustine, is to interpret the Old Testament christologically, an approach exemplified by two Palestinian Christians whom Prior particularly admired: Latin Patriarch Michel Sabah and Anglican theologian, Canon Naim Ateek[24]. Both propose a christological hermeneutic: whereby the Old Testament is to be understood in the light of what we know of God through his self-revelation in Jesus Christ. Ateek, in particular, finds a progression in the moral development of the Old Testament from the nationalistic and exclusivist perspective of the Pentateuch and the early prophets through to the universalism of the later prophets which was to reach still greater openness in the person and teaching of Jesus. In this understanding, religious Zionism represents a regression to the earlier harsher vision. Michel Sabah in an important pastoral letter[25] 'allows those passages in the Bible

[22] Ibid., 268.
[23] 2005 Archive, 7-11. http://www.homiletics.org/members/Files/PDFs/2005/2005%20Farris%20-%20Preaching%20Contrary%20Texts.pdf.
[24] *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998).
[25] *Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible* (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate, 1993).

which abhor violence to correct those which promote it, and rejects any kind of violence which seeks justification in the biblical text. Without commenting decisively on the validity of these approaches, Prior pressed on with some humor to consider the way in which the Roman lectionary simply censors out scandalous or difficult portions from its list of appointed readings. Prior saw a similar approach taken by Liberation theologians who use the Exodus as a paradigm for political and economic liberation but leave out of account that the land of the promise already belonged to others.

It has not perhaps been generally recognized that Christian attempts to cope with the colonialist and genocidal contrary texts of the Old Testament can feed into an approach to the anti-Judaic or supecessionist problem for interpreting the New. Likewise anti-supersessionist approaches to the New Testament, in reaffirming the enduring independent value of the Old Covenant, tend to reinforce the problems we may have with the contrary texts of the Old Testament. For Fundamentalist Christians there is of course no problem. God's notions of compassion and justice are far above ours and it is quite possible for God to command ethnic cleansing and genocide for the Canaanites—and by extension the Palestinians—and also to condemn the Jews for their refusal to accept Christ. Admittedly, the Dispensationalist Christian Zionists find a role for the Jews in the final struggle; to that extent the Old Covenant still stands. However those Jews who do not then convert will have no place in the future Kingdom. There is after all no contradiction in Zionist anti-Semitism. One feeds upon then other and it is interesting that some of then leading American Zionist evangelical preachers have been accused of anti-Semitic remarks.[26]

For preachers who do not share the fundamentalist Christian Zionist perspective the solution to this problem may be discoverable in a liberationist version of the hermeneutical circle. The central motif of Scripture is seen as the promise of the Messiah who will preach good news to the poor combined with 'serious resistance to the idolizing of the divisions of the human race.' Once this is understood, contrary texts become part of the very human collateral narrative in which the divine message is discerned. Those preachers who use the Bible to justify colonialism or the oppression of those regarded as the modern Canaanites—be they Palestinians, native Americans, Jews or anybody else—have failed to see the biblical narrative in the totality of its message of divine liberation which, in turn, explicates each and every one of its parts.

[26] For examples of the slip showing see Debra Nussbaum Cohen, 'Falwell Antichrist remark sparks anti-Semitism charges,' J*ewish Telegraphic Agency*, New York, January 22, 1999. (www.jewishsf.com/content/2-0-/module/displaystory/story_id/10405/format/html/displaystory.html)or James Warren 'Nixon And Billy Graham Anti-Semitism Caught On Tape*, Chicago Tribune*, 1 March 2002 (http://www.rense.com/general20/billy.htm). Rev. Dan C. Fore, former head of the Moral Majority in New York, once professed, "I love the Jewish people deeply. God has given them talents He has not given others. They are His chosen people. Jews have a God-given ability to make money. They control the media; they control this city." The sentiment has been echoed by Falwell, who remarked during one sermon that "a few of you don't like the Jews, and I know why. They can make more money accidentally than you can on purpose." Others, such as Rev. Donald Wildman, founder of the American Family Association, have adopted the view of evangelical leader R.J. Rushdoony's conviction that the mainstream television networks promote anti-Christian values because they are mostly controlled by Jews.

## What I Now Think I Think vis-à-vis Homiletic Theory[1]

John S. McClure

My published work, such as it is, has moved progressively away from the dominance of ideas of language, code, and culture as the most fundamental elements in theological communication. As I glance backward, I can see that the seeds for this were already present in my doctoral dissertation years ago at Princeton Theological Seminary. In that essay, I struggled to move beneath semantic and syntactic ways of thinking about the production of theological meaning in preaching and worship toward a "pragmatics of human divine communication," in which "pragmatics" was understood according to Charles W. Morris (following Pierce, Dewey, and James) as "the relation of signs to their users."[2]

*The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* became an exercise in what I have come to call "the pragmatics of consistent sign usage," an elaborate attempt to line up language usage *under code* – to engender theologically and rhetorically consistent language users in the pulpit (and in congregations). In many respects, this book represented a dominance of code over use, or of what Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure once called "langue" (the language system) over "parole" (human utterance).

In *The Roundtable Pulpit*, I attempted, in what now seems to me to be an overly communitarian way, to reverse this entirely. I became keenly interested to see how preaching could emerge at the intersection of the wild improvisations with scriptural, theological, and everyday language that take place in ordinary spiritual conversations about God, Christ, and ultimate meaning, within Christian congregations. My experience teaching the Bible as a parish minister had highlighted for me the often epiphenomenal role of various sub-cultural languages (including the biblical text) in the task of pursuing shared theological meanings.

In many ways, my more recent academic monograph, *Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics,* was an effort to exit the house of semiosis (language, and its "usage") altogether.[3] I hoped in that effort to set the preaching event back onto the ground of "proximity" or "proxemics"[4] as the deepest ethical grounds for communicative pragmatics. Using the radicalized concept of testimony in Levinas' work, I suggested finally that "…by moving back onto the …ground of the glory of the Infinite, of proximity, something dangerous in the *said* is *erased* in its *saying* (witness, *martyria*). Something (perhaps everything) in the

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[1] In some ways this constitutes a more theoretical kind of "How I've Changed My Mind" essay similar to those that used to appear in *The Christian Century*. I offer this as a small supplement to other helpful interpretations of some of my ideas provided by friends and colleagues such as Paul Scott Wilson, O. Wesley Allen Jr., Lucy Lind Hogan, Beverly Zink-Sawyer, Ronald J. Allen, Lucy Rose, Robert Reid, and others.

[2] See Charles W. Morris, Foundations of the Theory of Signs, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1938, 7th printing, 1951), 29. According to Morris, pragmatics "deals with the biotic aspects of semiosis, that is, with all the psychological, biological, and sociological phenomena which occur in the functioning of signs." (30) The "pragmatical dimension" refers to "the habit of the interpreter to use the sign vehicle under certain circumstances and, conversely, to expect such and such to be the case when the sign is used." (32) Pragmatics, therefore, refers to both the conditions and the expectations associated with the usage of signs.

[3] Semiotics is classically understood to include three aspects: *semantics* (linguistic reference, code), *syntactics* (linguistic juxtaposition, trope, intertext, style), and *pragmatics* (use, context).

[4] I use the word proxemic not in the more limited sense of anthropologist Edward Hall, (*The Silent Language*, 1959), who limited it to the theory of space in human communication. Levinas broadens this term to include aspects of contact, gesture, face-to-face meeting such as eye contact and mirroring, caress, presence, and all forms of non-verbal connection or relation.

homiletic theme or narrative is erased, not merely countered or re-framed, by approaching its other."[5] One of the goals of that project was to clear some ground within which homileticians could begin to re-think homiletics as grounded less in language (what Levinas calls the "said") and more in living speech ("the saying"), that is, in a face-to-face ethics of inter-human witness to the transcendent.

The limits of semiotic models of communication struck home for me most deeply years ago in the wake of my first book, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies*. That book focused almost entirely on the restrictions placed upon preaching by the prior codes, homiletic culture, stylistic conventions, and language systems which preachers "use" and within which preachers must "negotiate a hearing" in the pulpit. The Kantian and Whorfian hypothesis that categories, language, and culture *create* reality largely controlled that book. In my estimation, this hypothesis has either explicitly or implicitly ruled homiletics and our understanding of theological rhetoric for at least the last 30 years, if not much longer. In the latter half of the twentieth century, this hypothesis achieved its greatest power through the work of structural linguists and cultural anthropologists and by the influence of linguistic philosophers such as Wittgenstein and Derrida.

Language-driven modes of thought in homiletics have taken many different forms. Sometimes it is assumed that the production of theological meaning is controlled by linguistic and cultural codes latent within historically conditioned styles of pulpit communication. Such was the premise I attempted to articulate in the *Four Codes of Preaching*. In another version, under the influence of semiotic theologians and congregational studies scholars such as Robert Schreiter and James Hopewell, and the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz, the dominant linguistic culture for theological communication shifts toward local interpretive communities, as in Leonora Tubbs Tisdale's *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*. In another approach, homiletics becomes a form of resistance to the dominance of hegemonic cultural ideologies, as in Christine Smith's *Preaching as Weeping, Confession and Resistance* or Kathy Black's *A Healing Homiletic: Preaching and Disability*. In a postliberal model the strange acculturating power of biblical linguistics becomes dominant, as in Charles Campbell's *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology,* or William Willimon's The *Intrusive Word: Preaching to the Baptized*. In a variation of the postliberal approach, making use of therapeutic models that assume contemporary systems theory (yet another social-constructionist model), Walter Brueggemann, in *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*, assumes that a *re-framing* of language will lead to a re-framing of reality. In all of these models, the prevailing assumption is that language and culture lead the way and exert a controlling influence in all things when it comes to the communication of theological meaning and truth.

Embedded within the semiotic approach I used in the *Four Codes of Preaching* was the hint of a contra-semiotic pragmatic interest in the ways that words and speakers co-create one another across seemingly distinct language games or cultures. This interest would become increasingly important for me in the years following. Here's how that "hint" emerged into consciousness. Once I thought that I had determined the various styles of language within each "code" that preachers use, and categorized them, it occurred to me that I had not simply described these codes and rhetorical styles, but that through the conduit of each code I had moved over onto the *lived ground* out of which each of these "styles" of preaching emerged. I began to understand both the conditions that produced each code and rhetorical style as well as the consequences, good and bad, projected by each style as its "future." In other words, I had

[5] Other-wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 131.

begun to understand the shape that desire for God ("practical theology") took for those who were attracted to and using each rhetorical style, that is, as Ted Smith puts it, "the promise, the hope, implicit in the performance of each code."[6]

At the time, however, I did not see the *openness* of these codes and styles clearly, especially when they were juxtaposed with one another. I was not attuned to the ways in which, when juxtaposed in conversation toward God these codes might, in fact, "learn" from one another! At the time I was too committed to the "consistent usage model of pragmatics." I was consumed with the need for semantically and syntactically consistent models of pragmatics – caught up in the business of purifying sign-usage within the range of options established by current codes and conventions. This prevented me from seeing the dynamic ways in which codes and users co-create one another, often in violation of code-consistency, *as needed* in real-life situations of speaking together toward God.

In spite of this failure of clear-sightedness, I had stumbled into what for me was a discovery of sorts. Having moved over onto the practical theological ground occupied by fundamentalist preachers, historicist preachers, literary and artistic types, doctrinal preachers, contextual communicators, evangelists, testimony-givers, and so on, in order to describe their rhetorical styles within each code, I became aware that theological and homiletic reality had, in fact, *grown* and enlarged tremendously for me! This growth was an extension both of the problems and the prospects, not within each homiletic and theological "language" or "culture," but within the desire for God voiced by those who *lived* both the real life conditions and the projected consequences that created those languages in the first place. In this sense, I had moved into a situation in which language and culture (the semantic and syntactic aspects of semiotics) were not the all-controlling features of communication. Instead, the *conditions and anticipated effects* of speaking about God in a certain way had become central for me. Or, from a theological perspective, the God-desire that led to the creation of those homiletic languages had become fundamental to my thinking.

At the end of each chapter of *The Four Codes* I encouraged the pastor-preacher to stand in the midst of the community and choose one style over another within each code based on practical theological wisdom. In order to determine which style was best, of course, homileticians would need to stay very close to the emergent conditions for theological discourse in the situation in which theological invention for rhetorical practice would be taking place. By the end of the book, I found myself rather feebly wondering what would happen if seemingly inconsistent mixtures of styles should emerge, *based on heretofore undreamt life and ministry conditions or the need for different effects*. What conditions, for instance, would make for the appearance of a preacher combining a literary (form-critical) biblical hermeneutic and a liberationist theology, or an infalliblist hermeneutic with a Christ-transforming-culture form of illustration or "cultural coding."

Over time, I began to change the way that I used the *Four Codes of Preaching* in the classroom. I ceased encouraging preachers to adopt a wholly consistent configuration of codes in order to preach with the best "rhetorical strategy." Instead, I used the codes to help me, and those who supervised my students as individuals or in small groups, to move as quickly as possible toward the lived ground upon which students stood theologically and homiletically, in order that they might initiate supervisory conversations about aspects of preaching that were attenuated to the cultural, contextual, and ecclesial realities underpinning the sermons they heard. I also found myself accenting the reality and further possibility of novel juxtapositions of codes in order to

[6] From comments on an earlier draft of this essay by Ted Smith.

help students experience the many grounds for theological desire, and the infinite varieties of theological speaking that were theoretically possible. In short, I had become less enamored of these homiletic "codes," "rhetorical styles," or "languages" than of the myriad possible *conditions* that produced them and their projected *effects*, ethical and theological.

All the while, I felt the strong urge to move the locus for preaching toward the place where *lived theology* is most powerfully and actively emergent. Why not locate preaching in the give-and-take of real human beings striving to *invent a language adequate to their having come into proximity with one another and the transcendent at this time and place*? In order to pursue the possibility of this kind of homiletic creativity and agency, I wrote *The Roundtable Pulpit*, desiring to re-locate preachers in the middle of the kind of spiritual conversations in which discerning individuals listen to one another and cross over into one another's life world and begin to see the hybrid possibilities for theological communication made possible through such engagement.

It occurred to me, when I wrote that *The Roundtable Pulpit*, that perhaps my own thoughts about such matters reflected a sea-change within theology, ethics, and homiletics at that time: a movement from theological language to spiritual proximity, from purifying the "said" to creating the "saying." I expressed my own deepest commitments to relocating preaching somehow at the fast moving intersection of the company of strangers as they collaboratively listened for and uttered the God of Scripture into hybrid categories and language. I believed (and still do) that no matter how it is enacted homiletically, this vision of preachers hosting an emergent word into code-transgressing presence is the key to an ethical and spiritually transforming homiletic practice. I remember thinking that surely it is time for a shift to forms of preaching that recover and promote communicative action along with real speaker/listener empowerment and agency!

This was not the sea-change, however, that seized the larger academy's imagination at the time. It was ultimately Lindbeck's and Hauerwas's "post-liberal" sea-change that exerted a controlling influence on theology and to a lesser extent on homiletics at that time. I believe that this sea-change was not new, and has its roots (paradoxically) in the Enlightenment and Kant's categorical reason – and the predominance given to categories, language, and ultimately culture (a word not yet fully invented during Kant's day) in the definition of reality. Lindbeck argued that the "linguistic turn," in philosophy (Wittgenstein, Derrida), and especially in cultural anthropology (which by this time had fully allied itself with linguistics) would lead to a radical re-constitution of the intellectual history of theology in our day. According to Lindbeck, theology would abandon liberal "experiential-expressivism," the presumption that our language in some way (perhaps symbolically) represents or at least expresses a prior, extra-linguistic experience. Instead, (and here I stretch Lindbeck's ideas to attempt to represent his most ardent followers) theology would realize what Thomas Kuhn and Ian Barbour pointed out years ago, that our "paradigms" of language and culture *create* reality, and that theologies, both academic and homiletic, are language-games, and whoever plays such games the best ultimately wins.

The more I thought about *The Four Codes*, the more I worried that the push I had made for perfectly consistent "rhetorical strategies" was similar in many ways to the post-liberal push for supervening language games or cultural-linguistic frameworks. Within the context of post-liberal ascendancy, the nagging realization of my own complicity in this model of communication required me to actually "face-down" or deconstruct each of the codes I thought controlled homiletic practice in the *Four Codes*. This became the principal task in *Other-wise Preaching*. At the same time, it required that I re-think the *way* that I was committed to

feminism, ablism, and multi-culturalism. I found that I had become increasingly *caught up in*, yet compelled to *abandon,* the structuralist bifurcation of language and reality and the idea that language and culture dominate human communication. This bifurcation had created a set of chicken-egg conundrums that was, to my way of thinking, agonistic and potentially dangerous. The academy was increasingly polarized by arguments about the "priority" of language or experience (the so-called cultural-linguistic vs. experiential-expressivist quandary), forgetting the deeper priority of both silence (listening and gesture) and utterance (or speech act). At the same time, scholars of feminism, ablism, and multi-culturalism had begun to experience the problems inherent within language and culture-based models of thought, especially the potential isolation (or marginalization) of people within language-games, whether traditional, cultural, linguistic or ethnic, and the promotion of boundary-building, separatism, and center-margin othering. The exclusive focus on language, culture, and code was working against itself, separating us, even as it made us increasingly mindful of difference.

In a series of essays[7] I tried to show the complex ways in which language-driven communication turns on itself, creating multiple "double-binds" in which each language center needs other (marginal) languages in order to prop itself up as its own (relative) center. I suggested that both the tacit ("You and I both know what we mean….") communication within women's testimonial speech and the celebration within African American preaching were forms of meta-communication designed to break this double-bind. When the Zen master holds a stick over the pupil's head and says: "Don't move and I'll strike you. Move and I'll strike you," the pupil's only recourse is to take away the stick. So it is with language. It must ultimately be exited in order to bring communication back to its senses.

Even as we become more and more convinced that religious pluralism, multiple sexual orientations, and multi-culturalism present us with a deeply troubled situation of incommensurate language games within which to think about preaching and theological discourse, we notice that more and more people are finding that they are able, when face to face with living human beings, to move across the so-called language boundaries, without losing the particularity (at some level) of the languages transgressed. People are finding ways to transgress the "othering" center-margin double-bind implied in linguistics-driven models of communication.[8] They are somewhat surprised to discover that, as in ordinary discourse, they can experience the conditions for another person's "alien" ways of speaking in another "culture" and find ample means to generate a range of shared theological ideas, words, language and meaning within and across strange or even estranged life worlds. In this situation, we see people using utterances, wordless gestures,

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[7] "Preaching and the Redemption of Language," in Jana Childers (ed.) Purposes of Preaching (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004; "The Way of Love: Loder, Levinas, and Ethical Transformation through Preaching," in Dana Wright and John D. Kuentzel, eds. Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 95ff.; and "From Resistance to Jubilee: Prophetic Preaching and the Testimony of Love," in the Yale Institute of Sacred Music Colloquium: Music, Worship, Arts, Vol. 2 (Autumn, 2005): 77-85.

[8] A good recent example of this is the communication process within the Presbyterian Task Force on Peace, Unity, and Purity that met over the past few years to discuss the issue of the ordination of self-affirming homosexuals. This task force reported to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in Birmingham, Alabama, in June of 2006. It was fascinating to observe the marked difference between the agonistic reception of the report on the General Assembly floor and the task force's own inner sense of its theology of communication or "coming to terms," and therefore the deeper meaning (semantics) of their report. This difference of between the plurivocal, paradigm-transgressive user meanings allowed by the committee and the univocal user meanings of its receptors is also present in attempts to re-interpret the report within the still language-driven models of communication fostered in various periodicals, newspapers, internet, and other and public forums.

hybrid linguistic constructions, and invented categories to create theological meaning in spite of seemingly incommensurate "language games." Instead of language and culture becoming more and more atomized and fragmented, therefore, we find ourselves in a situation in which we stand the great opportunity to begin to treat language and culture as more contingent, fluid, malleable things alongside us in the world that can be hybridized or spoken-across, in the communication of theological meaning and truth. This, in itself, constitutes a certain exiting of language and culture – paradoxically at precisely the moment in which ideas of language and culture have become the most popular, powerful, and divisive terms in our midst.

In *Other-wise Preaching*, I attempted to take homileticans with me and follow Levinas on a journey through the semiotic realm, or what he calls "the said," toward the proxemic, pragmatic, and dialogic realm he calls "the saying." As I did so, I suggested that the cultural and linguistic practice of preaching, in our generation, was "exiting" itself, *in order to recover its deeper meaning and practice*. In part, what I hope to do now is to encourage preachers to re-enter the house of preaching (a house for me that now has no walls), but to do so precisely without the *dominance* of either language or culture controlling their assumptions and practices.

To begin where *Other-wise Preaching* left off, therefore, the question for me becomes: once we have exited language, shared beliefs, community and tradition, and biblical grammar, arriving on the (ever present) originary scene of spiritual and theological desire and representation without the formerly assumed tools of representation to guide us, how in the world is communication possible? Are we thrown back into the tongues of fire? Is this a call to spiritual enthusiasm: the world of the *schwermer*? Perhaps. Some, such as Cheryl Bridges-Johns would point us in this direction. At the very least, the cornerstone of theological speech in this situation is precisely what is disclosed first to the "exit-person," that is, that theological communication begins *without representation at all*! It begins with encountering the real conditions for the God-speech and theological language spoken by one another, with the discovery of ethical proximity and requisite utterance before witnessed transcendence. In other words, through a range of gestures, utterances, and speaking-across-codes, we find that we can cross over onto the ground of another's desire for God (not, of course, the hypothetical ground represented by a pure cultural-linguistic-semantics), and, if this process is reciprocated to some extent, we can begin to utter together something of the God witnessed through the lens of these divergent desires. This means beginning (and ending) communication with love.

It is here that I should mention a range of other experiences that have recently changed my thinking. In 2000 Ronald Allen invited me to participate as a board member for the Listening to Listeners of Sermons Project. In this project, between 2001 and 2002, the research team interviewed over 260 African American and Anglo congregants of diverse ages and genders, along with their preachers. As we studied the transcripts of these interviews, we were struck initially by the emphasis on *relationship* among those interviewed. The deep and pervasive desire for "connection," "care," "authenticity," and "presence" as the center of preferred homiletic practice was a striking testimony to the desire for and perception of proxemics. At the same time, we were struck by the *agency* exercised by sermon listeners. It was illuminating, and sometimes unnerving, to see what laity are doing with sermon, cutting and pasting bits and pieces of language into personal and communal religious narratives. It is true that, in some small sense, sermons "construct" a world-in-language for listeners – the semiotic, cultural-linguistic, and narrativist assumption that under girds so much of contemporary homiletics. More striking, however, when reading the transcriptions of interviews, is the *inventive* powers of listeners, the creative ways in which words and sentences were being taken up into multiple narratives of

spiritual and theological discernment.[9] In large part, the preachers' words were removed from the ground (paradigm, life world, premises) on which the preacher stood and inserted wholesale onto a very different ground, in each case controlled by unique life conditions. Although there might be some resemblance between the future projected by the imagination of the preacher and that of the listener, more often than not, listeners were painting the preacher's words and sentences into a very different horizon of meaning altogether. More than anything else, the move toward studying the listener in recent homiletics has placed squarely before us the myriad inconsistent ways in which sermons are "used" by listeners. In other words, it has brought us face to face with the *pragmatic* aspects of human communication in preaching.

This brings me to yet another recent influence. In 2004 I gave a keynote lecture at a worship conference for the United Church of Canada in which I observed (as many sociologists have done before) that there was already around us a huge "dropped-through" church – a largely non-religious, anti-institutional, set of seekers after God, who were extremely eclectic in their listening-partners when it came to matters of spirituality and God. I suggested that a great many of these people were sitting in front of us on Sunday mornings, barely hanging onto institutional church gatherings – and in most ways already dropped through. In many ways these persons are truly postmodern in the ways they think. They are, to some extent, "exit-persons" who represent a radical de-centering of what constitutes religious authority, as well as an even more radical de-centering of the boundaries separating secular-sacred, inside-outside, and center-margin. I suggested that with this growing segment of the population, the church would need increasingly de-centered forms preaching – such as collaborative preaching, and worship that both made sacred symbols large (but not overly complex) at the same time that it conspicuously juxtaposed these material symbols with the mundane aspects of ordinary life, in order to "give them away."

The United Church of Canada places these lectures up on their website for a year or so, and I began to get a little stream of emails, some chastening me for being a deconstructive atheist, and others wondering whether or not I was potentially a closet mainstream "emergent" church thinker. I decided that I should read into the emerging church literature in order to get some grasp of this movement. After finishing several key books I decided that among some so-called "emergents" there exists, in fact, some bare-bones correspondence to my thinking, albeit from within a more conservative-evangelistic perspective. To a great extent emergents are, indeed, exiting the conflictual, agonistic language/culture model of communication mentioned above. They are doing this, however, without any explicit ethical or theological reflection on the problems and prospects of their interest in de-centering communicative practices in the theological guild. From a perspective guided by worries mostly about evangelistic, doctrinal, and liturgical de-centering, they are beginning to explore proxemic, pragmatic, *agapic* and desire-driven models of communication such as I am suggesting. They are doing this in very immediate and obvious ways, by moving across language and belief paradigms in what Brian McClaren calls a "generous orthodoxy,"[10] and taking the time to see if they can find, within the conditions

[9] This listener agency seems to involve, not clear and consistent "strategies," but a set of "tactics," to use Michel De Certeau's language, a "calculus which cannot count on a 'proper' (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a border-line distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of a tactic belong to the other."…it is always on the watch for opportunities that must be seized 'on the wing.'" *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, paperback, 1988), xix.

[10] Brian McCLaren, A Generous Orthodoxy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2004). See also Dave Tomlinson, The Post Evangelical (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2003), Pete Ward, Liquid Church (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Press, 2002).

giving rise to "liberal," Eastern orthodox, Roman Catholic, and even new age thought, useful elements for re-inventing categories of thought about God today.

In my opinion, most post-evangelical thinkers in the "emerging conversation" ultimately re-capitulate to a "consistent usage model of pragmatics" for theological communication, lining up reflexively under the semantics of the conservative evangelical movement and the new measures pragmatism of Finney.[11] They are, however, "playing to" and in some cases "playing with" an actual de-centered model of inconsistent, hybridized communicative pragmatism that reflects the one I think is emerging within our culture at large. This is especially true in the way that they transgress codes, languages, and cultures in their appropriation of "vintage" religious traditions.[12]

Although they are not appropriating these other "vintage" traditions (yet) in any great depth, this naiveté is, perhaps, one of the *strengths* of this way of thinking about theological communication. McClaren, Kimball, and others intentionally seek out the simplest pragmatic conditions of life and the positive effects (future) sought by liberal, orthodox, and Catholic believers. These are given priority over the warfare over doctrine, linguistic turns of phrase, or ritual practices, as the way forward theologically. In the words of Peter Collins, they are re-thinking orthodoxy as "a way of being in the world (love) rather than a means of believing things about the world."[13] (parenthesis mine) Those of us who are aware of the complexities of these traditions and languages will perhaps be horrified with this "reduction" of our language games to their "use-value" on the street, but this is to miss the genius involved in assuming first of all the importance of having a real *relationship* with those who speak/practice these "other" traditions, seeking out the ways these traditions are actually spoken into human life and relationships. I had such an experience when I walked out of a local theatre where Jim Wallis was holding forth. There on the sidewalk a small group of liberal mainstream denominational types had struck up a conversation with a couple of young (post) evangelicals, talking together fruitfully in ways that stretched both of their language systems *beyond* the breaking point. Emergents, it seems, believe that piecing together a new street-narrative of discernment and hope is more important than "getting it right."

What I think I see, therefore, is a glimmer of a new theology of communication that is no longer dominated by language and culture at all. Increasingly, I think that we will see that languages, traditions, doctrines, homiletic constructions, religious cultures, and so on are not incommensurate, mutually exclusive grids. Instead, languages are *things in the world* that human beings shape and re-shape in order to identify, and deal *together* with the conditions of life under which they live, as they perceive them, and to identify, live into, and bring about certain (hopefully good and true) desires and effects given that situation. In spite of the joy we find in a vibrant and consistent usage of a particular semantic field, we do not have to stop there, protecting and asserting one grid of meanings over against another, or using elements of one grid to bring about a happy "re-framing" of another's rather inadequate grid. Rather, we have the option to listen to multiple languages in order to gain some access to the conditions of life

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[11] Many thanks again to Ted Smith, whose excellent book on Charles G. Finney will be off the press soon, for helping me articulate this felt tension in the work of post-evangelical emergents. See Ted Smith. The New Measures: A Theological History of Democracy in America. (forthcoming., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007)

[12] For the idea of "vintage Christianity" see Dan Kimball, The Emerging Church: Vintage Christianity for New Generations (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Press, 2003).

[13] Peter Collins, How Not to Speak of God (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2006), 3.

endured by others along with the ways that they are using language to help them find their way to God, and act that involves discerning God's word. We listen, therefore, in order to expand, grow, increase our own world, language, and our discernment of God, and in order to co-create a new world of discernment and hope with others. This does not mean "sharing horizons" (Gadamer) or achieving a final consensus (Habermas), but an attempt to "come to terms" with one another (Levinas) before God. Language, then, is properly the partner, not the servant or master: the epiphenomenon that provides hints, clues, and traces of the ways in which we and others are navigating the world. More than this, words are real things with real powers within that world. They are not just representations to be tested for veracity, or supervening programs to be lived out regardless of the "alien" roles they impose upon us, but powerful things used to help one make one's way in the best way possible. In this sense, words and sentences don't just represent or program things, they *are* things in the world.

But what kind of things in the world are theological words when they are spoken? And what is theological speaking for? Two things immediately come to mind – and these two things stand at extremes from one another.[14] From there, we must begin to imagine the middle.

On one extreme, theological speech bears testimony to a *certain kind of silence* in the world: the silence of God. On one hand, this is experienced as the silence through which God always escapes naming, or disappears when named. (cf. negative theologies, and some deconstructive theologies, especially Altizer's work) I have discussed this silence in its relation to preaching, to some extent, in *Otherwise Preaching*. On the other hand, however, I am increasingly convinced that the silence of God is the silence of *resurrection*, the silence of God *making room for speech*, a welcoming silence, silence in which, in the words of Rachel Muers "*God* hears God's Word."[15] (italics mine) Theological speaking reminds us of the silence of God listening to God's Word in the world, hearing into living speech all those who desire God. Theological speaking creates within human speech "the communicative pattern that conforms to God's act of hearing…."[16]

On the other extreme, it seems to me that theological speech is the transgressive *breaking* of this certain kind of silence. Theological speaking is noisy, cacophonic, celebrative, ecstatic, glossalalic, over-determined, shared speech, a voicing of what Charles Winquist once called the "unrestricted desire to know." Theological speaking indicates an infinite desire for God by breaking silence in extravagant utterance. In this sense, theological speaking always expresses a gap, or gaping, in God's silence – an erotic breaking open of that silence toward the unknown *in the world* that implicates and deconstructs the known. This, some might say, is the speaking of the Spirit through which our desire for God's Word emerges from and "stands in" (for) God's desire for (hearing of) God's Word in resurrection.

Both of these aspects of theological speaking are, in their originary form, contra-semiotic. They are not non-semiotic, or non-linguistic; rather, they speak "across" language in a way that

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[14] This final section reflects the fact that, at this point in time, I find myself happier with one of two very different options for thinking about language within human communication. One option is the almost apophatic form of ethical linguistics pursued by Emmanuel Levinas, for whom any substitution of word for thing always already stands under ethical erasure as potentially, if not actually, part of a linguistic totality. Another option is a straight pragmatist view of language, in which words are things in the world like anything else, a view in which the world and theological words co-determine one another. I now wonder whether both options couldn't function as mutually informing limit-conditions under the aegis of ethical and theological *desire*.

[15] Rachel Muers, *Keeping God's Silence: Towards a Theological Ethics of* Communication (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 119.

[16] Muers, Keeping God's Silence., 121.

restores theological language its role as "saying" rather than "said," as utterances identifying a certain kind of silence and breaking that silence. Indeed, as every preacher knows, testimony, the breaking of a certain kind of silence signals simultaneously *God's silent hearing of us in our desire for God* and *God's Word uttered among us as God's desire for us*, in that very moment.

**Embodying Wisdom and Preaching Justly: Reconsidering Matthew 26:6-13**

Katy Rigler – Ph.D. student in Homiletics and Liturgics at Vanderbilt University
Sponsored by: John S. McClure

*Abstract: Scholars have been divided upon whether or not the Gospel of Matthew was written or redacted by a Jewish-Christian or a Gentile-Christian because the author of Matthew relies heavily on the connection between Jesus and the Jewish tradition to validate following Jesus. This gospel introduces readers to "the new Moses," and "the new Israel" in an effort to emphasize and/or co-opt Jewish tradition. Likewise the account of the anointing woman in Matthew 26:6-13 also builds upon a valued Jewish tradition, namely that of Wisdom. This paper examines the role of Wisdom in this narrative by discussing the historical and ideological contexts of the narrative and the Wisdom tradition, performing a careful exegesis of the pericope, and examining the implications for preaching this text (and other Matthean texts in light of this exegesis).*[1]

Although the anointing woman in Matthew 26:6-13 never speaks, the story revolves around her actions. Her story is written to emphasize a Jewish tradition, the tradition of Wisdom. For the author of Matthew, this woman represents "the *new* Woman Wisdom," a well-known personification in Hebrew Scripture and deuterocanonical writings. In Proverbs, the Wisdom of Ben Sira, and Song of Songs Woman Wisdom serves as the medium between heaven and earth; she explains how the world came to be, how humans know and respond to God, why Israel experiences evil, and how God would save Israel."[2]

The author of Matthew intends for readers to recognize *Woman* Wisdom within this text because *She* is the way to obtain favor from the Lord (Proverbs 8:35). Celia M. Deutsch suggests that Matthew transforms Wisdom from a female persona into Jesus' actual character.[3] However, the author's tendency to maintain essential characteristics of the Jewish tradition (such as the giving of the new law on a mountain similar to the way Moses gave the law, and the twelve tribes of Israel being associated with 12 disciples) makes it more likely that Jesus exhibits the characteristics of Wisdom (as one of her students) and that Wisdom remains female in order to adequately reflect the Jewish tradition. The author does not emphasize Wisdom as female because there is something particularly holy about being female; rather Matthew seeks to convey the similarities between the Wisdom tradition within Judaism and following Jesus. According to Proverbs, Wisdom was first to be created and was present during the creation of the earth (8:22-31). She was with God, and they were male and female. In Jewish texts Wisdom is female, and divine knowledge is the gift of Wisdom; she holds the key to realize God's power in its entirety (Proverbs 2:1-5). According to the authors and followers of Wisdom literature, God can only be understood by embodying the knowledge offered by Woman Wisdom (Proverbs 8:35).

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[1] Of particular interest on the homiletic implications for preaching Wisdom texts is the work of Alyce McKenzie; cf. *Preaching Proverbs: Wisdom for the Pulpit* (Lexington: Westminster John Know Press, 1996), and *Preaching Biblical Wisdom in a Self-help Society* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002). This essay builds upon her work.

[2] Celia Deutsch, "Wisdom in Matthew: Transformation of a Symbol," *Novum Testamentum*, XXXII, no.1 (1990): 31.

[3] *Ibid*, 3.

Biblical scholars consider the author of Matthew to be a proponent of Wisdom literature.[4] The anointing woman, as a representative of Woman Wisdom, gives her "obedient child" the gift of divine knowledge. According to Jewish tradition, Wisdom was known through the words and actions of her students. Likewise, Jesus gives the anointing woman's gift a voice through his own interpretation. Thus, Jesus represents the son of Wisdom (Proverbs 8:32) in conforming with Matthew 11:19, "But Wisdom was vindicated by her children/deeds."

Jesus' defense of the anointing woman's action is a response to Wisdom and an acceptance of her gift of divine knowledge. In Wisdom of Solomon 8:8, Wisdom acts as a prophet; Woman Wisdom knows what is to come; she accompanies her "sons" along the "tortuous paths" (Ben Sira 4:17), and she describes rewards for those who embrace her (Proverbs 4:6-9).[5] Similarly, the anointing woman realizes what is to come, vows to be associated with Jesus even in his suffering, and promises reward to Jesus because he is willing to accept her. He recognizes her act as a compassionate acknowledgment of his impending suffering; her actions are the prophecy of Woman Wisdom.

## The Setting of the Story

The story of the anointing woman appears in all of the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 14-19, Matthew 26:6-13, and Luke 7:36-50) and the Gospel of John (12:8). All of the stories share some basic information; the multiple attestations allow us to assume that a woman did anoint Jesus, some people were offended by her actions, and Jesus defended the woman's actions.[6] There are some striking differences between the story as it appears in Matthew and Mark versus Luke and John; for the purposes of this paper I will concentrate only on the redactional changes made in Matthew upon the story as it appears in Mark.

The anointing woman appears at the beginning of the passion narrative in both Mark and Matthew – her story is associated with the death *and* resurrection of Jesus. The story is located between the conspiracy to kill Jesus by the priests and elders and Judas' agreement with the chief priests to betray Jesus. The setting is Bethany, in the house of Simon the Leper, which contrasts with the setting in the previous passage, at the palace of the high priest (v.3, 4). The leper's house is involuntarily secluded because of fear of ritual impurity. According to Jewish tradition, to be in the presence of a leper was to become unclean. A person found in the proximity of one affected by a skin disease would have to perform acts of purification before being allowed into the Temple for worship. The leper's home (a place where one would risk impurification by association) is a vastly different setting than the palace of the high priest (a place where wealth was abundant and purity laws were strictly upheld).

Yet both of these locations are places where men have gathered, and in both locations Jesus' death is an issue. At the palace the priests and the elders (not the Roman government)

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[4] Frances Taylor Gench, *Wisdom and the Christology of Matthew* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1997), and Celia M. Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus, and the Sages; Metaphor and Social Context in Matthew's Gospel*. (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996) and Mary Rose D'Angelo, "(Re)presentations of Women in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke-Acts," in *Women and Christian Origins* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) 171-195.

[5] Celia M. Deutsch, *Lady Wisdom, Jesus, and the Sages* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996) 10-11.

[6] W.D. Davies and D.C. Allison, *The International Critical Commentary, Volume III* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark Ltd, 1997), 443.

discuss killing Jesus. They use their wealth and power to plot to kill Jesus. While Jesus' death is plotted at the palace, the leper's home is a place where Jesus confirms that he will die. A leper, because of the social stigma associated with impurity, would not have been a wealthy person. However, the woman brings costly ointment to the leper's home, so wealth is introduced into the story; however, the woman uses her wealth to give, while the high priests and elders conspire to take away. The woman's action contrasts with the chief priests' and elders' conspiracy to arrest and kill Jesus (v.4), but her act also contrasts Judas' agreement to betray Jesus in verse 15.

The passage immediately following Jesus' anointment is another gathering of men, Judas and the chief priests. Here, Judas acts by asking the chief priests, "What will you give me if I betray him to you?" Asking is contrasted with the woman's gift of pouring the ointment onto Jesus' head. The woman models discipleship by engaging her body in her faith claim. Matthew portrays her as a woman intending to do something and doing it. The disciples also intended to follow Jesus, but they question his role and misunderstand the significance of what he tells them, and finally Judas betrays him. The disciples' speaking roles are compared with the anointing woman's actions and faith in Jesus. Woman Wisdom of Jewish literature is also an active figure. She is portrayed as one who goes out into the streets, one who acts upon her Divine connection.

Preaching usually occurs in church settings. However, this Matthean text challenges the assumption that the gospel must be preached in a formal church setting. The text does not challenge church preaching, but it does challenge the audience's thought about where and when preaching can and should occur. The anointing woman, like Woman Wisdom in wisdom literature, seizes the opportunity to express her faith in any context, even ones that involve risk. In today's world preachers risk denominational suicide by speaking out, or being an ally with certain kinds of people, especially those associated with alternative sexual lifestyles. This woman's actions permit a powerful example, of the risk witnesses must make, not only in their words, but also by their associations, in order to proclaim the Word of God.

This woman's actions also demonstrate that witnessing often occurs in spaces not considered sacred. This presents a challenge to the idea of sacred space being aesthetically pleasing. Wisdom texts make us reconsider the physical spaces where the gospel is proclaimed. Sanctuaries that blur the lines between sacred and mundane spaces may be the places where the gospel is best proclaimed. This story invites us to imagine pews that fade into cots, or the table of the Lord sitting opposite tables where homeless persons dined just a few hours earlier.

## Examining the Text

Matthew neither names the woman in the passage, nor explains her presence at Simon's home. The author omits the Markan detail that the woman breaks the jar and pours an ointment of μυρον on Jesus' head (v.3). In Matthew, the woman simply pours costly ointment on his head. Matthew is not concerned with the details –it is not important that the reader recognize the woman as an individual, but as a symbol.

The mention of the cost alludes to the fact that the woman sacrificed money to perform this act for Jesus.[7] Some scholars think proponents of Wisdom were from an elite class that was considerably wealthy and that wisdom literature betrays a class-consciousness of the well to do.[8]

[7] Davies, *Critical Commentary*, p. 445.

[8] For further discussion of this please see Frank S. Frick, *A Journey Through the Hebrew Scriptures* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995), 491-492.

Perhaps Matthew wished to convey that a wealthy woman performed the act. Regardless of the intention, the author draws attention to the disciples' response. They want Jesus to rebuke the woman and legitimize their desire to help the poor. The consideration of the poor would have been important especially before Passover because "of the strong tradition to help those too poor to afford their own wine and to buy the essentials for the celebration of Passover" (John 13:29).[9] Their condemnation of the woman's act seems to make sense following Jesus' admonition for the rich man to sell his possessions and give the money to the poor (Matt. 19:21).[10] In the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt. 25) Jesus exhorts people to feed, clothe, and take care of those who are among the least. The costly ointment could have clothed many orphans, fed many families, or taken care of the homeless. The woman's actions gave the disciples the perfect chance to show Jesus how much they had learned from him and that they shared his concerns. Yet instead of rebuking the woman for her wasteful act, Jesus rebukes them instead, "Why do you trouble this woman?"

Matthew tells us that Jesus rebukes them because he has knowledge (v.10). However, Matthew does not reveal the source of Jesus' knowledge. The Greek word for having knowledge is γνους. Having knowledge in the Gospel of Mark most likely refers to the fact that Jesus knew what the disciples were saying about the woman's act even though they only spoke *to one another* (προς εαυτους). Jesus could not actually hear what they were saying, but he *knew* they were angry with the woman. It does not make sense that "having knowledge" in Matthew means the same thing as in Mark because, in Matthew's redaction, the disciples' spoke aloud; their comments are known to everyone in the room. Wainwright suggests "having knowledge" in the Matthean text refers to Jesus' interpretation of the woman's action.[11] Jesus had knowledge of his impending death, so he was able to rightly interpret the woman's actions. But, if we understand the woman as the personification of Woman Wisdom then it is appropriate to say that Jesus, having accepted Wisdom, has knowledge. In Proverbs there are many references to the acceptance of Wisdom's teachings being equated to finding the knowledge of God (Proverbs 2:4-5; 5:1-2; 8:1-14).

Instead of rebuking the woman, Jesus rebukes the disciples saying, "For you will always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" (v. 11). Wisdom tradition also speaks of 'the poor'. Those who heed Wisdom's advice are promised riches and wealth (Proverbs 8:18-21), and this implies that the poor do not discipline themselves in the ways of Wisdom. Frick writes, "In the wisdom tradition, Proverbs, in a somewhat condescending and possibly censorious tone, promotes the traditional idea that poverty is the undesirable, but inevitable consequence of laziness."[12] Much wisdom literature accepts poverty and wealth as an element of society with which one must learn to cope (Proverbs 11:16).[13] For Matthew, the expression, "For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me" may simply further emphasize the connection between Jesus and traditional wisdom literature.

However the author of Matthew omits several Markan details, "For you always have the poor with you *and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish*; but you will not always

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[9] Walter Riggins "Jesus and the Scriptures: two short notes," in *Themelios*, 16 (Jan – Feb 1991), 15.

[10] Davies, *Critical Commentary*, p. 445.

[11] Elaine Wainwright, *Towards a Feminist Critical Reading of the Gospel According to Matthew* (New York: DeGruyter, 1991), 272.

[12] Frick, *A Journey*, p. 491.

[13] *Ibid*.

have me. *She has done what she could…*" Matthew's omission of the italicized narrative allows him to emphasize a parallel to Deuteronomy 15:11, "the poor will never cease out of the land."[14] In Deuteronomy this verse appears in the context of describing a Jubilee year, which fosters radical social reform and provides permanent safeguard against pauperization.[15] R.S. Sugirtharajah suggests Jesus was alluding to this context in an effort to say:

> Unless there is a collective conversion to solidarity with the marginalized, the poor will continue to be with us…Stereotypically put, the routine relief-works the disciples wanted to promote, perpetuate the process of pauperization rather than eradicating it.[16]

The woman's act could promote the idea of a Jubilee year because it takes place in a leper's house. Since the lavish gift of anointment is given in a most unlikely place and by a woman, a person with no legal rights in ancient Israel, this act is associated with Sabbatical ideals because it temporarily erases class lines.[17] Jesus, as Wisdom's interpreter, points out that there is more to the woman's act than what is immediately visible.

Jesus describes the woman's act as a "good work." In the Jewish tradition there are two kinds of "good work": charity (tzedakah) and acts of kindness (gemilut chasadim).[18] The ritual of preparing a body for burial is considered an act of kindness in that "it is a helpful action done without expectation of reward or recompense."[19] The act of burying the dead was also considered useful because, "it could not, like almsgiving, be done at any time but only at the required time, and also because it involved personal service, not an impersonal gift of money."[20] Therefore the woman's act is not only useful in preparing Jesus' body for burial -- the only preparation Jesus' body receives in Matthew -- it is also useful in that it was considered to be a gift of personal service. Wisdom was also a personal gift and often her gift is addressed to "my child" (Proverbs 4:10, 6:1, 6:20, and 7:1). While the gifts of Wisdom are often directed at an individual, the gifts always benefit the entire Jewish community. Although the woman's act is a personal gift to Jesus, because it occurs in a public place, it is for the benefit of the entire community that surrounds Jesus. It is a message that is for Jesus, but informs those around him,

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[14] Davies, *Critical Commentary*, p. 447.; R.S. Sugirtharajah, "For You Always Have the Poor With You: An Example of Hermeneutics of Suspicion," in *Asia Journal of Theology*. (April 1990), 104.; Walter Riggins "Jesus and the Scriptures: two short notes," in *Themelios*, 16 (Jan – Feb 1991), 15.; M. Eugene Boring, *The New Interpreter's Bible, Volume VIII*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995,p. 466.

[15] R.S. Sugirtharajah, "For You Always Have the Poor With You: An Example of Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Asia Journal of Theology*. (April 1990),104.

[16] *Ibid*.

[17] Alyce McKenzie elaborates upon the idea that Proverbs, as Wisdom texts, function in two ways: they can create order or subvert order. This theory helps explain the confusion regarding whether or not Matthew 26:6-13 reflects the values of the culture or subverts them. *Preaching Proverbs*, 27-58.

[18] Tamara Wolfe, *Gemilut Chasadim* [article on-line] (Tinton Falls, NJ: Monmouth Reform Temple, 2002, accessed 29 July 2002); available from http://www.monmouth.com/~mrt/special/conf/2002tw.html; Internet. "This is the teaching of Simon the Just and can be found in Pirke Avot, the tractate of the Talmud that contains the spiritual wisdom of our people."

[19] William Koller Berkson, *The Book of Principles: The Ethical Classical Pirkei Avot* [Discussion Guide on-line] (Tel-Aviv: Tel-Aviv University and The Shalom Hartman Institute for Advanced Jewish Studies, 1999, accessed 29 July 2002); available from http://mentsh.com/avot1-2.html;

[20] Douglas R. A. Hare, *Matthew: Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 294.

and those who read the story, that Jesus' life will physically end, but there is also hope for this story.

Hope is revealed in the word the author chooses for 'good', the adjective καλον. This word is used instead of αγαθος, which is another word meaning 'good'. Αγαθος refers to good as something that is beneficial. Καλον, on the other hand means good in the sense that something is beautiful. The term gives a message of hope to the rest of the passion narrative. This is a beautiful work the woman has done for Jesus, and it will be remembered. The end of Jesus' life is degrading and violent; however, Matthew exhorts the reader to remember *this* beautiful act. It stands out, and is an example of how a "beautiful" gift can live outlive and be remembered wherever the good news is proclaimed in contrast to the darkness and misery that appear in the rest of the passion narrative.

Within the context of Woman Wisdom, the act also has another component of usefulness and beauty. Wisdom literature explains that blessed immortality flows from righteousness (Wis. 1:15), from the Wisdom that is the gift of God (Wis. 7:7, 9:4). Immortality is possible because of the relationship one has with God, and death is unable to sever the relationship that is strengthened by Wisdom.[21] Therefore the act is useful because the woman, as a symbol of Wisdom, offers comfort by her association with immortality. The woman's actions and the interpretation of them, allows the audience's faith to be renewed because Matthew places emphasis on Jesus' being freed from death (through the promise of resurrection) rather than being physically killed by death.

The meaning of the last verse of this pericope is controversial, "Truly (Αμην) I say to you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, even this, what she did, will be spoken in remembrance of her." The conditional clause once again issues a message of hope – there *will be* good news to proclaim. The first word, αμην, shows that what follows is reliable. Schlier declares that the saying "Αμην λεγω υμιν" has significant theological meaning: "The one who accepts His word as true and certain is also the one who acknowledges and affirms it in their own life, and thus causes it, as fulfilled by him, to become a need of others."[22] The woman affirms the truth of Jesus' life and foretold death and resurrection by performing the act of anointing Jesus. Thus, others need her performance, as it bears witness to the hope she has proclaimed by performing the anointment. The anointing woman shows true discipleship because she embodies her proclamation; she lets the good news have a claim upon her life and how she acts in the world. This is the essence of Matthew's Christology. The Christological narrative cannot be separated from discipleship because Matthew understands Christology only as it corresponds with discipleship. Likewise, wisdom literature compels people to act in the world. Wisdom literature is full of maxims and practical advice for living in the world; it also reveals how one should act in order to walk in the ways of Wisdom and attain God's favor (Proverbs 8:20, 8:35).

In Matthew 26:6-13 the anointing woman affirms Jesus' presence in her own life, and in doing so shares his burden. For Matthew, her meaning is twofold: symbolically, she shows that Jesus is a disciple of Wisdom, and physically she demonstrates what a true disciple of Jesus

[21] Roland E. Murphy, "Wisdom in the Old Testament," in Volume 6 of *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 926-927.

[22] Heinrich Schlier, "Αμην," in Volume 1 of *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, edited by Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 338.

looks like. Jesus said, "What she did will be told in memory of her." She alone recognized who Jesus was. He was sent to establish the kingdom of God, he would be rejected, and he would die. This simple act that took only seconds to perform and involved no words said so much, "I love you, I know who you are, you are my king, you are not alone, I know your pain, I will comfort you, I recognize that you will suffer and die, but I know the good news will continue to live, I will live *this* good news! I will live *this* good news!" The author of Matthew emphasizes that the good news is here and now, not after the resurrection. The good news is all around us if we open our eyes and our hearts to look for it. That is what this woman did – she lived the good news, she made the good news a present reality, a part of her life in that very moment – she opened her heart and experienced it, she rose above her fears and chose to love. That good news is also for us! This good news is what needs to be preached! We no longer need to be afraid. The fear of rejection is nothing compared to love of God, and even the least among us can proclaim the gospel simply by recognizing the potential in a single moment to show another person love. God intended for us to live in this present reality.

Mark and Matthew both use the phrase, "λαληθησεται εις μνημοσυνον αυτνς" (will be told in remembrance of her). Wainwright suggests, "the reader should understand by implication that if her story is not told to her memory then the Gospel is not being truly preached..."[23] Matthew wants to emphasize that Jesus' message is intricately intertwined with the tradition of Wisdom. Jesus is a child and interpreter of Wisdom just as he is also a child and interpreter of the Law in The Sermon on the Mount (25:21-48). His teachings do not reject his heritage; rather, he perfectly fulfills the demands of his tradition in his life. Thus "her memory" points to the memory of Wisdom and the continuation of a valued tradition that teaches what it means to follow God in the world. However, Wisdom is more than a teaching, "…the most important thing is that wisdom does not turn towards man in the shape of an 'It,' teaching, guidance salvation or the like, but of a person, a summoning 'I.' So wisdom is truly the form in which Yahweh makes himself present and in which he wishes to be sought by man."[24] The "I" seeks to identify with individuals. Jesus, as student of Wisdom, recognizes God in the woman's actions.

This is not just a message for Matthew's community. The text uses a demonstrative pronoun, ολω, in the phrase, "εν ολω τω κοσμω," to indicate the audience. This good news is for the *whole* world. Just as the gospel ends with the Great Commission to "make disciples of *all* nations…," this message is not limited by geography. Wisdom does not exclude based on race, sexuality, or gender; wherever the gospel is proclaimed Wisdom is present.

The implications Wisdom has on preaching are many. First, preachers are encouraged to recall that the woman does not seek remembrance for herself. Preaching is God's work; therefore, preachers must have relationship with God in order to preach rightly. This woman's act is an act of discipleship, not obligation. As such, her act will be remembered wherever the gospel is preached, but she remains nameless. Her act points to something that is much larger than her – it points to knowledge of God through Wisdom. Preaching should also point to God, not to one's self. In a day where sermons are widely broadcast and preachers accumulate wealth like celebrities, we need to remember that the good news is not proclaimed unless Wisdom is remembered.

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[23] Elaine Wainwright, "The Gospel of Matthew," in *Searching the Scriptures: a Feminist Commentary*, Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994) p. 663.

[24] Murphy, quoting G. von Rad, 927. The language in this quotation is exclusive and masculine.

Additionally, preaching is a way to declare, at least temporarily, the radical idea of Jubilee. Preaching is not performed selectively; it should be done wherever and whenever the opportunity arises. It should seek to break down the human barriers that interrupt our communion with one another. Wisdom is for the whole world. Likewise, just as Wisdom lives in this world, preachers live in this world. Preaching not only names a heavenly kingdom vastly different from our world, it also names Wisdom's presence in this world. We can have knowledge of God by paying attention to the works of Wisdom performed by everyday people in this world and point to them as examples of discipleship.[25]

Finally, preachers often emphasize the spoken Word to the exclusion of all other words. Many times, volumes of words can be spoken without opening one's mouth. The anointing woman powerfully proclaims Jesus without using the spoken word at all.[26] While this implies being conscious of our everyday practices, it also implies broadening our liturgies to fully embody God's Wisdom and proclaim the good news using all of our bodies, not just our mouths. Doing so would provide listeners with a chance to experience worship not only as a sermon, but also as an opportunity to witness to the Word with our entire bodies and through expressions of love.[27]

## Conclusion: How can we Find Wisdom?

Wisdom is all around us; she is always present. She may find us, but we must be willing to accept her gifts. Her teachings provide a model for living. Moreover, following Wisdom means choosing a "path" or "way" that "secures one will live life in the fullest sense and have prosperity and relationship to the Lord (Proverbs 2:19; 6:23; 15:24)."[28] Matthew also describes the "way" or "path" (οδος) of the Lord (3:3) that leads to life (7:14). Discipleship involves conscious choice to practice a certain way of living in the world. Preaching Wisdom will allow us to know that there is much knowledge to be gained in life through experience. Oftentimes Christians do not engage in this world, especially the messy and ugly parts. We want to find all of the right answers in the Scripture alone. Perhaps we neglect the obvious - there is much to gain in life itself; sometimes the answers we seek require us to get off of the page and proclaim God by our actions. For the author of Matthew, Jesus is a child of Wisdom, but the author also suggests there is more to Wisdom than tradition. In this passage a human woman serves as a symbol of Woman Wisdom, but underlying the symbol is a real person with individual courage and motivation. The tradition is no longer an ideal but a reality made manifest in a woman who teaches us how to truly give, and shows love with the whole self. In sum, she acts and her

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[25] See John S. McClure, "From Resistance to Jubilee: Prophetic Preaching and the Testimony of Love," *Colloquium Journal* 2, Autumn 2005 [journal on-line]; available from http://www.yale.edu/ism/colloq_journal/vol2/index.html; Internet; accessed 31 September 2006.

[26] Paul Ricoeur elaborates upon Emmanuel Levinas' idea of "saying" as a real act of testimony given by devotion unto death. Here, the act performed by the anointing woman is an act of testimony that extends beyond words. See Paul Ricoeur, "Emmanuel Levinas: Thinker of Testimony," in Mark I. Wallace ed., *Figuring the Sacred: Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*, trans. David Pellauer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 117. See also, Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermenuetics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, Lewis S. Mudge, ed. (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1980) 119-54. Additionally, Rebecca Chopp builds on Ricoeur's theory of testimony as act in *The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989) p. 61-62.

[27] See Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 49-60.

[28] Murphy, "Wisdom in," p. 924-925.

identity is known by her actions. Jesus accepts her gift; Christians need to learn to do the same: to give *and* receive God's gift of Wisdom.

For Further Study

Although it is beyond the scope of this study, careful investigation of this passage should also be examined in relation to the roles other women play throughout the Gospel of Matthew. For the author, women mediate the entrance of Jesus into this world (through the act of childbirth), and they also mediate the exit of Jesus from this world (by their presence at his death). In this way, women have framed the life of Jesus; they are listed in his genealogy (1:2-16), present at his birth (1:25), prophetess of his death (26:6-13), and later primary witnesses to his death (27:55) and his resurrection (28:5-6). The roles women play in the Gospel of Matthew are paramount to Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Further study may reveal that Wisdom is mediated throughout the gospel by all of the women that surround Jesus.

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**"Preaching Ethnic Atonement: A Homiletic Study of Ephesians 2:11-18"**

Noel Schoonmaker
Vanderbilt University Graduate Department of Religion
Supervisor: Professor Brad R. Braxton

There is only one monograph available on preaching the doctrine of the atonement: Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright's *Preaching the Atonement*. In this volume, the authors explore "a variety of ways in which the Christian doctrine of the atonement, God's act of making humanity one with himself [*sic*] in Christ, may be presented in preaching today."[1] They analyze ten biblical passages concerning atonement, offering an exegesis and a sermon for each. The book is valuable and will instruct and inspire contemporary preachers in proclaiming a foundational doctrine of Christianity.

While I appreciate Stevenson and Wright's work, it has one significant shortcoming. The book treats atonement as "at-one-ment" between God and humanity but never as "at-one-ment" among humans.[2] This lack is representative of a widespread homiletic deficiency: Few preachers proclaim the human-to-human dimension of Christ's atonement.

"Liberals" are often embarrassed by atonement theories, especially those related to Jesus' "blood sacrifice." They proclaim the gospel's social implications, but usually not in terms of atonement. "Conservatives," on the other hand, emphasize the personal, individual implications of Christ's work: "Jesus died for my sins." Typically, they consider atonement as strictly between the believer and God. Theologian James McClendon observes that when the word atonement was "coined in the sixteenth century" it connoted "unification—neighbor with neighbor, or God with us."[3] Today, the "neighbor with neighbor" side of atonement suffers from homiletic neglect. Unfortunately, rather than offering a corrective to this problem, Stevenson and Wright have reinforced it.

This essay is a response to Stevenson and Wright's book and hopefully a corrective to the homiletic avoidance of the social ramifications of Christ's atonement. In this essay, I will argue that Eph 2:11-18—where atonement is both vertical (i.e. God-to-human) and horizontal (i.e. human-to-human)—requires the preacher to elucidate the inter-ethnic[4] dimension of Christ's

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[1] Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright, *Preaching the Atonement* (London: T&T Clark, 2005) xi.
[2] Atonement can be broken down "into three words belonging together, 'at-one-ment'…In developing theological vocabulary the term has come to refer to the state of reconciliation between our gracious God and the estranged human race, the state of at-one-ment, accomplished through the work of the savior, Jesus Christ." Ted Peters, *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000) 212.
[3] James McClendon, *Doctrine* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994) 199.
[4] "Ethnicity" is a more appropriate term than "race" when speaking about the biblical world. However, the concept of race is important in American history and the contemporary context. Currently, there is no scholarly consensus on the definitions of and differences between the terms "ethnicity" and "race," and these words are often synonymous in common usage. Therefore, I will use the terms interchangeably in this essay. For the scholarly debate concerning the definitions of these terms, consult, for example, Paul Spickard and W. Jeffrey Burroughs, eds., *We Are a People: Narrative and Multiplicity in Constructing Ethnic Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

atonement. While I aim to illuminate Eph 2:11-18 for its homiletic potential, my primary objective is to explore it as a paradigm for Christian proclamation about race relations.

**Ephesians 2:11-18: A Homiletic Commentary**

Ephesians 2:11-22 is no obscure passage. Markus Barth calls Eph 2:11-22 "the key and high point" of Ephesians,[5] and many other commentators view it as "the theological center of the letter."[6] I will focus on 2:14-18, the centerpiece of the centerpiece of Ephesians.

Many scholars have maintained that "2:14-18 represents an early Christian hymn used in corporate worship…Prominent hymnic elements include the heavy use of participles, parallelism of members, and cosmic language."[7] Scholars have tried assiduously to reconstruct the "original version" of the ostensible Christ-hymn. However, Tet-Lim Yee suggests:

> Previous scholarship has been substantially hampered by its attempt to "discover" a preformed material in Ephesians 2:14-18, failing to recognize the discussion in Ephesians 2:11-13 which sets the parameters for understanding Ephesians 2:14-22. Rather than a "parenthesis" or "digression," which is tangential to the primary design of the author's argument, I suggested that vv. 14-18 cannot be fully understood in isolation from vv. 11-13.[8]

Yee is right. Even if 2:14-18 represents a preformed hymn of early Christianity, the author has employed it, and perhaps molded it, to serve a crucial rhetorical function in the overall argument of Ephesians. Eph 2:14-18 is no "christological excursus."[9] Christ is never an excursus in the Pauline school of thought.[10] Moreover, Eph 2:14-18 contains the only explicit reference to "the cross" in Ephesians,[11] and in Pauline theology the cross is essential (e.g. 1 Cor 1:18ff). Eph 2:14-18 is central to the overall discussion in Ephesians and is related to the topics addressed in vv. 11-13.[12] Thus, I will begin the analysis with v. 11:

> **Verses 11-12:** So then, remember that at one time you Gentiles by birth, called "the uncircumcision" by those who are called "the circumcision" – a physical circumcision made in the flesh by human hands – remember that you were at that time without Christ,

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[5] Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1-3* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1974) 275.
[6] William Rader, *The Church and Racial Hostility: A History of Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1978) 246.
[7] James E. Howard, "The Wall Broken: An Interpretation of Ephesians 2:11-22" in F. Furman Kearley, Edward P. Myers, and Timothy D. Hadley, eds., *Biblical Interpretation: Principles and Practices: Studies in Honor of Jack Pearl Lewis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1986) 298.
[8] Tet-Lim N. Yee, *Jews, Gentiles, and Ethnic Reconciliation: Paul's Jewish Identity and Ephesians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 217.
[9] Rudlolf Schnackenburg, *Ephesians: A Commentary*, trans. Helen Heron (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991) 109.
[10] Paul's number one conviction was: "The Christ event is central for understanding God's plan for the world." Brad R. Braxton, *Preaching Paul* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2004) 50.
[11] Pheme Perkins, *Ephesians* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997) 70.
[12] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) 192.

being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.[13]

The author of Ephesians was probably a Jewish Christian disciple of Paul. He writes to Gentiles,[14] reminding them how they were once far from God, accentuating their great distance from God with the terms "strangers," "aliens," "having no hope," and the Greek word *atheoi* ("without God"). Thus, "there are four 'strikes' against the uncircumcised Gentile."[15]

**Verse 13:** But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

Yet just when the Gentiles could not be any farther from God, v. 13 declares that the Gentiles have been brought near to God.[16] In Ephesians, the blood of Christ signals redemption and forgiveness (Eph 1:7). In 2:13, "as elsewhere in the NT, the blood of Christ signifies his violently taken life and stands for his atoning death."[17] Other references to the atonement occur in v. 15 ("in his flesh") and v. 16 ("through the cross").[18] Moreover, 2:18 speaks about Christ granting "access" to God. This imagery refers to the Old Testament sacrificial system where persons entering God's presence brought gifts and sought atonement (cf. Lev 1:3-4).[19] Therefore, Eph 2:11-18 concerns atonement from start to finish. To preach from this passage is to deal with the core of the Pauline gospel: Jesus' death on the cross for us, which reconciles us to God.

**Verse 14:** For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

The conjunction "for" ties this section to the preceding claims in 2:11-13, thereby demonstrating the interdependence of 2:11-13 and 2:14-18. The entire phrase, "for he is our peace," stands like "a title to the whole passage" and introduces the crucial theme of peace.[20] Jewish tradition anticipated that the Messiah would be the "Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6).[21] But in v. 14, Christ does not "make peace" but rather *is* peace.

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[13] Unless otherwise noted, all biblical quotations are from the *New Revised Standard Version*.
[14] "That the recipients of Ephesians are Gentiles (or constitute a Gentile majority) is stated explicitly for the first time in v. 11. Scholars who believe…that Ephesians is deutero-Pauline are virtually unanimous in holding that the author of Ephesians was a Jewish Christian." Margaret Y. MacDonald, *Colossians and Ephesians* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2000) 251-252.
[15] Bonnie Thurston, *Reading Colossians, Ephesians, and 2 Thessalonians: A Literary and Theological Commentary* (New York: Crossroad, 1995) 108.
[16] "Far off" and "brought near" represent "the language of Isa. 57:19 combined with Isa. 52:9 which had already been adapted in Judaism to apply to proselytes." M. Eugene Boring and Fred B. Craddock, *The People's New Testament Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004) 601.
[17] Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990) 28.
[18] James T. Cleland, "Someone There Is Who Doesn't Love a Wall: From Text to Sermon on Ephesians 2:11-22," *Interpretation* 21.02 (April 1967): 150.
[19] O'Brien, 209.
[20] O'Brien, 193.
[21] Ralph P. Martin, *Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1991) 34.

The term "peace" carried significant theological and political meaning. Theologically, it refers to *shalom*, the Old Testament concept connoting the absence of strife and also overall well-being in God's covenantal care. Politically, it challenges the *Pax Romana*, the "peace" provided by Caesar. Thus, if Christ *is* peace, he is "the fulfillment of *shalom* for Israel and the true alternative to the so-called *Pax Romana*."[22]

The "peace" referred to in 2:14 is not a mystical, individual serenity of the soul; it is "a spiritual, political, and social event."[23] Specifically here, Christ is peace between two groups: "the circumcision" and "the uncircumcision" or Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians (v. 11). Barth argues that the two groups are Jewish non-Christians and Gentile Christians, but "the flow of the letter as a whole, as well as the immediate context, assumes that it is believing Jews and believing Gentiles" that the writer has in mind in 2:14.[24]

The two groups do not represent different religions but different ethnic groups. The peace in v. 14, therefore, is specifically an inter-ethnic peace within the body of Christ. Amy Plantinga Pauw asserts, "The claim that Christ is our peace will have to find articulation not only within the Christian community (the focus of Ephesians) but in Christian relations with non-Christian Jews as well."[25] I agree; however, to focus homiletically on Jewish-Christian relations in Eph 2:11-18 is to miss a biblical summons to preach about ethnicity.

The "dividing wall" which Christ has "broken down" has been interpreted in various ways. The Greek phrase in v. 14 (*to mesotoichon tou phragmou*) is literally "the dividing wall of the hedge" (or fence).[26] Since this wall is a salient feature of the text, I now summarize the most prominent interpretations of it.

(1) The wall means "the wall in the temple at Jerusalem that separated the court of the Jews from the court of the Gentiles."[27] In this theory, v. 14 refers to a literal, historical wall that divided Jews and Gentiles in temple worship. This interpretation is plausible, given the "temple" language in Eph 2:21. Nevertheless, "would Gentile Christian readers in Asia have understood this allusion?"[28]

(2) The wall refers to "the curtain or veil that separated the Holy of Holies from the Holy Place in the Jerusalem temple."[29] Mark's Gospel declares that this curtain was torn in two at Jesus' death (Mark 15:38). Some interpreters think that in Eph 2:13-14 Jesus' death is again linked to the destruction of the temple curtain. The temple language in 2:21 supports this view in the same way it supports interpretation 1 above (i.e. the writer had the temple in mind). However, the term in verse 14 is "wall," not "veil" or "curtain." If the writer wanted to refer to

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[22] John Muddiman, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Continuum, 2001) 125.
[23] Howard, 305.
[24] O'Brien, 203-204.
[25] Amy Plantinga Pauw, "Theological Meditations on Ephesians 2:11-22," *Theology Today* 62 (2005): 80.
[26] Perkins, 71.
[27] Bruce W. Fong, "Addressing the Issue of Racial Reconciliation According to the Principles of Eph. 2:11-22," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 38/4 (December 1995): 572.
[28] Martin, 35.
[29] Fong, 572.

the temple curtain, he likely would have used that term explicitly. Furthermore, the wall in 2:14 separates people from people, while the Temple curtain separated people from God. Therefore, this interpretation is more tenuous.

(3) "The Sayings of the Fathers (*Pirke Aboth*), a rabbinical document containing many elements taught at Paul's time, includes the commandment to 'build a fence around the law.'"[30] Thus, the "fence" reference in v. 14 (*phragmou*) combined with the abolishment of the law in v. 15 leads some to suppose that the "dividing wall" means the Jewish Law.[31] On the other hand, Bruce Fong notes that the rabbinic teaching about building a fence "referred more to the protection of the Law rather than to the hostility that is in this context."[32] Furthermore, v. 15 does not clearly link the Jewish Law with the wall in v. 14. This interpretation is not completely unfounded, but it is less than convincing.

(4) Heinrich Schlier insists that the wall refers to a cosmic barrier that "in some Gnostic and other schemes of thought, separated the world below from the upper world." However, F. F. Bruce rightly rejects this idea because "the barrier between Jews and Gentiles was not a horizontal barrier, separating those above from those below, but rather a vertical barrier."[33] Schlier's interpretation is untenable.

(5) "Some church fathers identify the wall with the 'flesh' (in the evil connotation of this term), or simply with enmity against God."[34] This view is unpersuasive because the wall in v. 14 represents inter-personal enmity.

(6) "We have an ordinary metaphor of a separating wall and are wrong to look for recondite meanings in it;"[35] the wall "appears to represent the enmity that exists between Jews and Gentiles."[36] "What separated Jew and Gentile in history was far more than a physical barrier."[37] The wall does not refer to a single, literal partition, but rather is "constituted by all the expressions of social enmity, familiar to any Jew or Gentile in the Hellenistic world, the differences in place of residence, manner of worship, food and dress, politics and ethics, and above all the blank wall of mutual incomprehension, fear and contempt between the two groups."[38] Of all the exegetical options, I prefer this interpretation.

Exegetically, interpretations 1, 3, and 6 are strongest. Homiletically, we should not identify the wall as either the Jewish Law or the balustrade in the temple that divided the court of the Gentiles from the court of the Jews. Interpreting the wall in either of these ways safely locates ethnic hostility in the distant past. Yet the pulpit demands that we acknowledge

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[30] Barth, 284.
[31] Perkins, 71.
[32] Fong, 572-573.
[33] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistles to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984) 296-297.
[34] Barth, 285.
[35] Ernest Best, *Ephesians: A Shorter Commentary* (London: T&T Clark, 2003) 102-103.
[36] Fong, 573.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Muddiman, 128.

contemporary ethnic hostilities that are so often present in our communities. Ephesians has in its purview Jews and Gentiles. But the pulpit demands that we explore how scripture "transcend(s) its [ancient] historical referents,"[39] in an effort to examine scripture's *current* historical referents. Therefore, preachers should understand the wall metaphorically to include ethnocentrism and ethnic hostility in every time and place. Said simply, the dividing wall is racism, and Christ died so that it might crumble. When the cross of Christ is lifted, the wall of racism falls. The celebrated Baptist preacher Clarence Jordan provides a compelling homiletic interpretation of the wall in 2:14. Amid violent racial tension in rural Georgia in the 1960s, Jordan powerfully identified the wall as segregation:

> 11. So then, always remember that previously you Negroes, who sometimes are even called "niggers" by thoughtless white church members, were at one time outside the Christian fellowship, denied your rights as believers, and treated as though the gospel didn't apply to you, hopeless and God-forsaken in the eyes of the world. Now, however, because of Christ's supreme sacrifice, you who once were so segregated are warmly welcomed into the Christian fellowship. 14. He himself is our peace. It was he who integrated us and abolished the segregation patterns which caused so much hostility.[40]

Would that we all preached about race relations with such relevance, courage, and faithfulness to the gospel.

> **Verses 15-16:** He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

Scholars debate whether the "law" which is "abolished" in v. 15 is the entire Jewish Law or certain elements of it. The author seems to have in mind the entire Law. However, in contradistinction to this deutero-Pauline abolishment of the Law stands Paul's conviction that Christian faith does not abrogate the Jewish Law: "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Rom 3:31). The tensions concerning the Law in Pauline and deutero-Pauline texts pose serious challenges to Christian preachers in a Post-Shoah world. Without theological and cultural finesse, contemporary proclamation about the Jewish Law can easily become a manifestation of "anti-Judaism." It is possible to claim the distinctive aspects of Christian faith in our proclamation without denigrating other religious traditions in general and Judaism in particular.[41]

The second half of v. 15 speaks about Christ creating "in himself one new humanity in place of the two." This seems to say, along with Gal 3:28, that "there is no longer Jew or Greek…for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Caution is needed here. The point is not "the

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[39] MacDonald, 254.
[40] Clarence Jordan, *The Cotton Patch Version of Paul's Epistles* (New York: Association Press, 1968) 107.
[41] Ronald J. Allen and Clark M. Williamson explore ways to avoid anti-Judaism when preaching from the Gospels. Their counsel is useful and demonstrates the need for more resources like this. *Preaching the Gospels Without Blaming the Jews: A Lectionary Commentary* (Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, 2004).

obliteration of difference, but rather the obliteration of *dominance*."[42] While unity is paramount in the body of Christ, ethnic heritage is an important identity marker that should not be ignored. In the Pauline tradition, the aim was not to eradicate or ignore ethnic differences but to create "multiethnic communities that worshiped Christ."[43] Thus, the ecclesial goal is solidarity without sameness. Believers are to uphold their various ethnic identities while also upholding their common identity in Christ.

In v. 16, Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians are reconciled to God through the cross. Here, we encounter the atonement with God that most Christian preachers stress. However, v. 14 declares peace between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians before v. 16 proclaims peace between both groups and God. Horizontal "at-one-ment" is both present and prior to vertical "at-one-ment."

The horizontal atonement and the vertical atonement in Eph 2:14-18 do not occur sequentially but simultaneously. The reconciling of Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians and the reconciling of both groups to God are interdependent, synchronized reconciliations.[44] Jews and Gentiles cannot be fully reconciled to each other without being reconciled to God, and they cannot be fully reconciled to God without being reconciled to each other. "The [two] reconciliations are as inseparable as the two great commandments of love."[45]

The homiletic implications are significant. If becoming one with people of different races is part of becoming one with God, we must preach about race if we are to bring listeners closer to God. Preaching racial reconciliation is not only a social responsibility; it is a theological necessity. Popular American Christianity, which focuses too much on the individual, often highlights one's "personal relationship with God." Eph 2:14-18 reminds us that our personal relationship with God is interpersonal, *and even interracial*. Interracial hostility is a significant part of the hostility between God and humanity. But v. 16 says this hostility was overcome on the cross. Christ died to rid the world of ethnocentrism and racism.

> **Verses 17-18:** So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

In v. 17, scholars debate when and how Christ proclaimed peace between Jews and Gentiles. Conjecture abounds: (1) Christ preached this prior to the incarnation. (2) The incarnation was itself a preaching of peace. (3) Christ's earthly life constituted this preaching. (4) The resurrection was Christ's declaration of peace. (5) This preaching happens in the coming of the Spirit after Jesus' ascension. (6) "Christ preaches in that he instructs and inspires those who then proclaim the Gospel to Jew and Gentile…part of the task of missionaries will be the bringing of peace (Mt 10:13) and when missionaries are received it is as if Christ were received (Mt 10:40)."[46] (7) "His work on the cross…*is* his proclamation of peace with God to both the

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[42] Brad R. Braxton, *No Longer Slaves: Galatians and African American Experience* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002) 94. Emphasis in original.
[43] Braxton, *Preaching Paul*, 14-15.
[44] Francis Foulkes, *The Letter of Paul to the Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1989) 91.
[45] Best, 107.
[46] Ibid., 112.

Gentile readers and Jews."[47] (8) "The clause most likely refers to the whole of Christ's saving work."[48]

Of the foregoing interpretations, I am especially drawn to number six—Christ proclaims peace as his disciples proclaim his peace. In this interpretation, Christ preaches through us when we declare inter-ethnic peace. When we broach the topic of racial reconciliation in the pulpit, Christ says to us as he said to his disciples of old, "Whoever listens to you listens to me" (Luke 10:16).

The "access" to God in v. 18 is atonement language that echoes cultic traditions of Judaism. This access is provided through the Holy Spirit. Thus, in our passage, racial reconciliation is articulated christologically and pneumatologically. In God's Spirit, Jewish and Gentile believers have equal standing before God.

David Buttrick poses an important question: "In our preaching, it is not too difficult to connect the death of Christ to our personal sins: 'Christ died for *you*,' we claim with confidence. But how on earth are we to connect Christ's atoning death and the systems of our social world?"[49] Eph 2:11-18 is a promising place to start, since it explicitly links Christ's atoning death with race relations. It does not apply the gospel to a pressing social issue; it reveals a pressing social issue at the heart of the gospel. Therefore, "if churches adopt the attitude that involvement in race relations will distract from [their] primary calling of preaching the gospel…then [they have] in fact denied the gospel."[50]

**Race Relations in the U.S.: A Homiletic Imperative**

> Preaching about race is a homiletic imperative. "The problem of race relations in America is not one topic among many to be addressed in the pulpit, but *the* dilemma that has haunted American life from the beginning."[51] Indeed, the "near genocide committed against Native Americans, coupled with the enslavement of millions of Africans, constitutes our nation's 'original sin.'"[52] The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s pointed America toward racial justice, but the profound problem of racism in the U.S. remains. As Brad Braxton observes, "the painful realities of slavery" and "overt segregation" are now followed by "the subtle, sophisticated racism of the twenty-first century."[53] Both the biblical text and the cultural context summon ministers in the U.S. to preach about race. But how might we do so responsibly and with power?

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[47] O'Brien, 206. Emphasis in original. This was John Calvin's interpretation.
[48] MacDonald, 247.
[49] David G. Buttrick, *Preaching Jesus Christ: An Exercise in Homiletic Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002) 51. Emphasis in original.
[50] Fong, 579.
[51] Richard Lischer, "Preaching About Race Relations" in Thomas G. Long and Neely Dixon McCarter, eds., *Preaching In and Out of Season* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1990) 19. Emphasis in original.
[52] Ronald C. Potter, "Race, Theological Discourse & the Continuing American Dilemma" in Dennis L. Okholm, ed., *The Gospel in Black and White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997) 35.
[53] Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, 16.

*First, we must preach race relations as a central gospel concern rather than as a social issue to which we can apply the gospel.* The author of Ephesians is our example. In Eph 2:11-18, to speak about the peace of Christ is to speak about interracial peace; to speak about Christ's atonement is to speak about inter-ethnic at-one-ment; and to "lift high the cross" is to bring down the wall of racism. Thus, we might consider the two beams of the cross in this way: The vertical beam symbolizes God's at-one-ment with humanity in Christ and the horizontal beam symbolizes interracial at-one-ment in Christ. Preachers must help congregants understand that racial reconciliation is as close to the gospel's heart as Christ, the cross, and the doctrine of atonement.[54]

*Second, we must reject the specious virtue of "color-blindness," the ideal of completely ignoring people's race.* Color-blindness is America's "virtue" of choice to replace the vice of racism. Ironically, color-blindness only furthers racism. To ignore someone's skin color is to ignore race. And when we ignore race, we ignore racism, which is one of the most racist things we can do. The ideal of color-blindness assumes that racism is exclusively a personal moral problem. But it is also a *social-systemic* problem. Racism is "built into our society [and is] tacitly accepted in politics, education, commerce, and religion."[55] Injustice related to skin color already pervades American life; so ignoring skin color is ignoring the problem.

Color-blindness is especially suspicious when promoted by white people. Since white culture is dominant in the U.S., ignoring race is a convenient way for white people to uphold the status quo and encourage minority cultures to assimilate to white culture. "In America there is a plethora of races and ethnic groups, and statements of artificial unity that ignore or play down the beauty and complexity of these differences will not resolve the schisms."[56] This study of Eph 2:11-18 teaches us not to ignore or eliminate ethnic differences, but rather to recognize and appreciate them in Christian love and harmony. The goal is solidarity without sameness.

*Third, we must preach about race consistently*. One "race relations Sunday" per year is not adequate, nor is an annual "pulpit swap" with a preacher of another race.[57] We must regularly challenge our congregants toward righteous race relations because, as Eph 2:11-18 demonstrates, ushering people closer to God involves ushering them toward the "ethnic other." Christ's atonement is incomplete without ethnic at-one-ment, and so is the gospel. In order to cultivate racial peace, preachers must be willing to "disturb the peace" of our quiet ethnocentric Sunday mornings!

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[54] White preachers must be aware of how the "hermeneutics of sacrifice"— "the understanding that personal sacrifice in the imitation of Christ is the sine qua non of Christian character"—has been utilized to oppress African Americans. JoAnne Marie Terrell, *Power in the Blood? The Cross in the African American Experience* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998) 22.

[55] David G. Buttrick, *The Mystery and the Passion: A Homiletic Reading of the Biblical Traditions* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002) 212.

[56] Braxton, *No Longer Slaves*, 95.

[57] For example, Ronald J. Allen and Jicelyn I. Thomas suggest including "a significant discussion of an issue related to race at least once a month." Ronald J. Allen and Jicelyn I. Thomas, "The Challenge of Preaching on Racial Issues for Euro-American Preachers" in Barry L. Callen, ed., *Sharing Heaven's Music: The Heart of Christian Preaching: Essays in Honor of James Earl Massey* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) 175.

**Journey to Mount Horeb:**
**Cognitive Theory and I Kings 19: 1 - 18**

J. Dwayne Howell, Ph.D. and Susan H. Howell, Ed.D.
Campbellsville University



Elijah's journey to Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19:1-18 portrays the struggle of an individual who displays hopelessness. In 1 Kings 18:14-16 he defeats the prophets of Baal and Asherah at Mount Carmel. However, instead of bringing about national repentance, Elijah is threatened by the Queen of Israel, Jezebel. Fleeing for his life, Elijah journeys 40 days to Mount Hoerb where he is confronted by the reality of his situation and is directed by God to return to Israel. Using cognitive theory as a base, the paper explores Elijah's experiences and God's response as described by the writer of the text. Beck's cognitive triad,[1] which consists of a negative view of one's self and one's future and a negative interpretation of one's experiences, provides the framework for understanding Elijah's sense of hopelessness. God's directive response to Elijah is also consistent with the approach advocated by cognitive theory.[2]

The use of psychology in biblical studies is a post-modern approach to interpreting scripture.[3] Wayne G. Rollins sets the following premise for Psychological Biblical Studies:

> From a biblical-critical perspective, the Bible is to be seen as part and product, not only of a historical, literary, and socio-anthropological process, but also a psychological process. In this process, conscious and unconscious factors are at work in the biblical authors and their communities, in the texts they have produced, in readers and interpreters of these texts and in their communities, and in the individual, communal, and cultural effects of those interpretations.[4]

The use of psychology with bibical studies employs a variety of theories in its research, including cognitive theory. Cognitive theory proposes that behavior and emotional reactions originate within our cognitions (e.g.., thoughts, beliefs, assumptions).[5] Thoughts such as "I'll never amount to anything" or "No one cares about me" prompt the emotional reaction of depression and its accompanying behavioral symptoms (e.g., sleep and appetite distrubance, detachment from people and activities that previously brought pleasure). Consequently, a change in cognition will result in a change of emotion. The task of cognitive therapy, therefore, is to identify maladaptive thought patterns and work toward changing them to more adaptive

[1] Aaron T. Beck, A. John Rush, Brian F. Shaw, & Gary Emery, *Cognitive Therapy of Depression* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1979), 11.
[2] Ibid., 3.
[3] Cf. D. Andrew Kille, *Psychological Biblical Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001) for a concise study of this approach.
[4] Wayne G. Rollins, *Soul and Psyche: The Bible in Psychological Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 92.
[5] Judith S. Beck, *Cognitive Therapy: Basics and Beyond* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 1.

thought patterns which result in the alleviation of the symptoms.[6] "No one cares about me" can become "I am disappointed that the one I care for doesn't return my affection, but I am still a person of worth and there are others in my life who care about me very much." These elements are found in Elijah's flight to Mount Horeb in 1 Kings 19.

Elijah is one of the key prophets during the divided monarchy period. He, along with Elisha comprise the two major non-writing prophets of the Old Testament. His ministry deals with the Omri Dynasty of the Northern Kingdom, primarily with the reign of Ahab, the son of Omri. The status of Elijah gains such importance that his return is expected before the coming Day of the LORD (Malachi 4:5; cf. Mt. 17:10-12; Mk. 9:4-13). The character of Elijah plays a prominent role in the New Testament as well. Both Jesus and John the Baptist are believed to be Elijah returned (Mt. 16:14; Mk. 6:15; Lk. 9:8, 19) and John the Baptist's power is equated with Elijah's power (Lk. 1-17; John denies being Elijah or the Christ in Jn. 1:19-28). Jesus makes reference to Elijah's rejection in Israel and his ministry to those outside of Israel in comparison to his own ministry when confronting the pharisees (Lk. 4:24-26). Also both Elijah and Moses appear in the Transfiguration with Jesus (Mt. 17:1-18; Mk. 9:2-8; Lk. 9:28-36) James refers to the effectiveness of Elijah's prayers (5:16-18). Finally, Paul makes reference to 1 Kings 19 when he compares the faithful remnant of his day to the 7000 faithful who remained in Israel in Elijah's day (cf. 1 Kings 19:18).

Elijah's ministry begins during the reign of Ahab at which time the prophets of the LORD are being replaced with the prophets of Baal. This was done under the leadership of Jezebel, Ahab's wife and a native of Canaan. It is within this context of combating the prophets of Baal that the Elijah narratives appear (1 Kings 17-19; 21; 2 Kings 1-2). Three key stories in 1 Kings 17-19 serve as an introduction to Elijah's ministry.[7] Elijah is first introduced in 1 Kings 17:1. Little background is given concerning the prophet, simply that he is from Tishbe in Gilead. The sudden appearance of Elijah in this first narrative is a theme that runs throughout the Elijah narratives (1 Kgs. 17:10; 18:7; 21:17). Confronting Ahab, Elijah states that the LORD will withold both rain and dew from the land because of its adoption of Baal worship. This is a direct challenge to the efficacy of Baal who is seen as the God of the Storm. Elijah leaves as quickly as he appears in the story and goes to the Brook at Cherith where God provides both food and water through the use of ravens. The role of God as provider during desparate times will appear again in 1 King 19 when God provides for Elijah bread and water in the wilderness (vv. 5b-9a). God sends Elijah from Cherith to Zarephath where he is aided by a widow (1 Kgs. 17) First Kings 17 shows the independent nature of Elijah. He travels alone relying on the hospitality of God and others.[8] Also, Elijah appears, shares the divine oracle and leaves, a common pattern in the Elijah narratives. Obadiah makes reference to the movement of Elijah by the Spirit of the LORD in 1 Kings 18:11-12.

Elijah's personality seems to fit the profile of an introvert as described by the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI),[9] one who is more energized from within rather than from others.

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[6] Aaron T. Beck, et al., 4.

[7] Cf. Robert L. Cohn, "The Literary Logic of 1 Kings 17-19", *Journal of Biblical Literature*, September, 1982, 333-350. Cohn views a literary progression developed in 1 Kings 17-19 which introduces the reader to the character of Elijah.

[8] Despite Carmelite ideology, Elijah is seen as an independent prophet. Cf. Jane Ackermann, "Stories of Elijah and Medieval Carmelite Identity," *History of Religions*, vol. 35 November 1995, 124-147. Anderson discusses the ideology that the Carmelites developed in associating themselves in a direct succession from Elijah.

[9] I. B. Myers, *Introduction to Type* (Palo Alto: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1987).

While the MBTI asserts that introversion is no more or less healthy than extraversion,[10] introversion has been correlated with an increased tendency toward depression.[11] This correlation might emerge from the introvert's tendency to pull inward, which might become problematic in situations conducive to depression. Without the perceived need for as much outside stimulation, the introvert might unknowingly cut himself or herself off from other people and experiences which could provide a challenge to maladaptive thinking. If such is the case, Elijah's pattern of sharing and leaving might have set the stage for a depressive episode once a situation emerged conducive to a depressive reaction.

First Kings 18 presents the second story that introduces the reader to the character of Elijah. This story provides a direct catalyst to the crisis Elijah faces in 1 Kings 19. After being told by Obadiah, a servant in Ahab's court, that he is protecting 100 prophets of the LORD (vv. 7-15), Elijah challenges the prophets of Baal to offer a sacrifice to their god and he will offer a sacrifice to his god. Whichever sacrifice is found acceptable will determine the true god. The writer recounts the number of the prophets of Baal (450) and Asherah (400) while only Elijah is named as the prophet of the LORD. After the failure of the prophets of Baal and Asherah in their sacrifice, Elijah prepares the altar for his sacrifice. Significant in this preparation is his speech to the people. He chastises them for trying to follow both Baal and the LORD. In verse 22 he states "I, even I only, am left a prophet of the LORD;…" This theme will be carried over into 1 Kings 19 as he flees to Mount Horeb.

Elijah's statement is an example of what cognitive theorists refer to as "all-or-nothing thinking,"[12] which assumes two extreme alternatives in a situation, rather than the more realistic assessment that alternatives are often found between the extremes. Elijah claims that all have abandoned God, rather than the more likely alternative that while some have, others have not. Already the reader has been told that Obadiah has protected at least 100 prophets of the LORD (v. 13). However, Elijah shows no recollection of the other prophets. With fewer alternatives, hope diminishes, which is not only a symptom of depression, but perpetuates the destructive thought pattern characteristic of the depressed individual. While evidence of Elijah being depressed at this point is absent, it appears that he is engaging in maladaptive thought patterns which further set the stage for a depressive episode when the right trigger emerges.

The result of the challenge in 1 Kings 18 is a victory for the LORD and Elijah. After the sacrifice, Elijah proceeds to kill the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Also, with Baal's defeat, rain returns to the land. However, the victory does not lead to a national repentance. Instead, in 1 Kings 19, upon hearing the report from Ahab of Elijah's success, Jezebel sends a death warrant through her messenger to Elijah (vv. 1-2). Elijah responds with fear (vv. 3-5a) fleeing south out of Israel and through Judah to the edge of the wilderness. It is at this point that he leaves his servant behind and begins his journey in the wilderness.[13] The seclusion of Elijah is emphasized with the reference to a solitary broom tree (*rôtem 'echâd*) under which he finds rest (v. 4). It is at this point that he expresses his desire to die: "It is enough, O LORD, take my life; for I am no

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[10] Ibid.

[11] O.W. Lacy, "Nonthreatening, objective psychometric identification of students at risk for depression and/or suicidal behavior," *Journal of College Student Psychotherapy*, vol 4(3-4), 1990. However, a correlation between extraversion and bipolar disorder has been reported by David S. Janowsky, Shirley Morter, Liyi Hong, and Laura Howe, "Myers Briggs Type Indicator and Tridimensional Personality Questionnaire differences between bipolar patients and unipolar depressed patients," *Bipolar Disorders*, vol. 1 (2), (December, 1999).

[12] Judith S. Beck, 119.

[13] The wilderness plays an integral part in spiritual pilgrimages throughout the Bible (i.e., Israel's wilderness wanderings [Num. 14 ff], Jesus in the wilderness [Mt. 4:1-11; Mk. 1:12,13; Lk. 4:1-13]).

better than my fathers;" and then he falls asleep (vv. 4b-5a). Elijah is awakened by a messenger of the LORD and fed bread and water (vv. 5b-6a). Once again the theme of the reliance of Elijah on the hospitality of God re-emerges. As before, God cares for Elijah through an intermediary. *Malak* in vv. 6 and 7 is translated as "messenger" instead of "angel" because it is a direct play on the "messenger" of Jezebel in v. 2. While the messenger of Jezebel brought a threat to Elijah, the "messenger" of God now brings comfort. After Elijah eats, he once again goes to sleep (v. 6b) The second time the messenger awakens Elijah to eat, he tells him of the journey he is about to take (vv. 7-9a). Elijah proceeds to travel 40 days through the wilderness to Mount Horeb, the mountain of God.[14]

Jezebel's threat provides the trigger and Elijah responds with several symptoms of depression. Elijah flees from others, even leaving his servant behind, as he seeks solitude. In addition to being symptomatic of depression, isolation can perpetuate depression as the individual ruminates over his own faulty interpretation of events and separates himself from those who could provide a challenge to such maladaptive thought patterns. The fact that Elijah falls asleep and is awakened twice by a messenger of God to be fed reflects a possible disruption of sleeping and eating patterns, both characteristic of depression. His desire to die also reflects the suicidal ideation sometimes experienced by depressed individuals.

The cognitive triad[15] appears to be present as well. First, Elijah expresses his negative interpretation of experience in his statement that he is the only faithful one who has not turned from God. Second, his desire to die reflects his lack of hope in his future. Finally, Elijah also might be disappointed with himself, particularly since Jezebel's threat comes following a recent high point in his life. Inflexible expectations and over reacting when falling short of those expectations is referred to as "Should" or "Must" statements in cognitive theory[16] and appear to be a factor in Elijah's negative view of himself. This could also illustrate "selective abstraction," the inordinate focus on negative aspects of a situation[17] as Elijah is no longer focusing on his success, but on his potential defeat.

First Kings 19:9b-18 is a dialogue between God and Elijah. God opens the discussion with the query "What are you doing here?"(v. 9) Elijah's response is reminiscent of his initial argument found in 1 Kings 18:22, "I have been faithful for the LORD, God of Hosts; the people of Israel have forsaken your covenant; I, even I only, am left." In this query it appears that God is prompting Elijah to voice his thoughts which Elijah does by stating his interpretation of the situation. From a cognitive perspective, specifically identifying one's interpretation of a situation is an important step in evaluating its accuracy[18] and questioning is a method used by cognitive therapists toward this end.[19]

In verses 11 and 12 God responds to Elijah through four theophanies. The first three are associated with the giving of the law on the mountain: Storm (v. 11b); Earthquake (v. 11c); and Fire (v. 12a). Elijah does not find God in any of the first three theophanies. Two suggestions can be given for why Elijah does not experience God at this time. First, these theophanies are commonly associated with Mount Horeb but to say that God can only communicate in this

[14] Mount Horeb is synonomous with Mount Sinai and displays two traditions concerning the name of a single place. Also, the forty days in the wilderness is also seen as a time of spiritual pilgrimage (i.e., flood account (Gn. 6), spies in the land (Num. 13), the beginning of Jesus' ministry (cf. fn 13).
[15] Aaron T. Beck et al., 11.
[16] Judith S. Beck, 119.
[17] Ibid., 119.
[18] Ibid., 8.
[19] Ibid., 8.

manner limits divine communication. Richard Nelson suggests that another reason why Elijah does not respond to these first three theophanies is depression. "Seen in this way, the impressive wind, earthquake and fire are simply failed attempts to get Elijah out of the cave (v. 11a) and out of his depression."[20] In this sense, his failure to recognize or to acknowledge God's presence in the first three theophanies might reflect difficulty in decision-making or a decrease in motivation characteristic of the depressed.

The fourth theophany is a voice that again asks the question "What are you doing here?" (vv. 12b-13). Often the voice of the theophany is interpreted as a silent whisper, contrasting the forceful nature of the first three theophanies. However, J. Lust believes that the phrase *qôl demāmâ dāqâ* should be translated as "a crushing and roaring sound" based on its etimology and a parallel use of *qôl* and *dāqâ* in Psalm 93:3:

> …the seas have lifted up *their voice* (*qôlâm*);
> they have lifted up their *crushing waves* (*dâkîm* from the same root as *dāqâ*).

Lust believes that the roaring voice would be a natural theophany to follow the first three theophanies.[21] Whichever intepretation of the voice is held, it is effective in bringing Elijah out of the cave.

Elijah's response to the question is the same as before, stating his belief that he is the only one who has remained faithful to God (v. 10). God responds with an imperative "Go" (*lêk* - v. 15) recommissioning Elijah to return to Israel (vv. 15-17). In the process Elijah is to anoint the new king of Aram (modern day Syria), the new king of Israel (Jehu) and his own successor (Elisha). The three that Elijah anoints are portrayed as carrying out God's purpose while it is Elijah's role to set them apart. God also provides a proper perspective for Elijah concerning faithfulness to God: he is not the only faithful one left in Israel. The reader has already been told that Obadiah had saved 100 prophets of the LORD from death (18:13). God states that 7000 others have not followed after Baal (v. 18).

God's response to Elijah is also reflective of the cognitive perspective. Cognitive therapy utilizes homework assignments to provide the depressed individual an opportunity to test the validity of their beliefs, practice new behaviors, develop new thought patterns, and promote feelings of self-efficacy.[22] God provides this opportunity to Elijah in the command to "Go" (v 15) and in the instruction to "get up and eat" earlier in the story (vv. 5b and 7b). In providing Elijah with tasks to complete, first with simple everyday tasks of sustenance and then with returning to Israel to anoint new kings and a successor, God refutes Elijah's negative view of self and prompts Elijah's more realistic assessment of his own abilities and usefulness. This cognitive restructuring continues as God states that Elijah is not the only faithful one left in Israel. In refuting Elijah's distortion of reality, God provides a realistic assessment of the situation which frees Elijah to consider other possible outcomes for his own future.

As an addendum to the paper, the importance of the use of cross discipline approaches to hermeneutics should be noted. Classical Historical-Literary criticism does provide parameters for

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[20] Richard Nelson, *First and Second Kings* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), 125. While other authors mention that Elijah shows symptoms of depression, Nelson gives a thorough discussion of Elijah's symptoms (126 and 127).
[21] J. Lust, "A Gentle Breeze or a Roaring Thunderous Sound - Elijah at Horeb: 1 Kings xix12" *Vetus Testamentum*, 25 (January ,1975), 110-115.
[22] Judith S. Beck, 248.

the study of the text. However, by including such disciplines as psychology, the reader is allowed to move beyond simply what the text meant in a given historical context and is encouraged to discover the multivalent meaning it possesses for interpretation. Psychological Biblical Studies offers the opportunity to look at the text from varying perspectives.[23] The present paper has employed just one method of study, a character study using cognitive theory.

Wayne G. Rollins notes a two-fold benefit of doing psychological studies of biblical characters.[24] First, it adds a new aspect to new literary and narrative criticism by "drawing attention to the psychodynamic factors." Aspects in the characterization of Elijah in 1 Kings 17-18 suggest the situation that Elijah experiences in 1 Kings 19: introversion leading to isolation[25]; cognitive distortion; and depression. God's response to the situation provides a directive response and cognitive restructuring which liberates Elijah to continue in his work.

Secondly, the psychological study of biblical characters aids in understanding why the believing community is drawn to certain characters in the biblical text. The characterization of Elijah in 1 Kings 19 parallels the experiences in ministry today for both clergy and laity. When expectations do not become reality, one can believe that only he or she remains faithful to God. As with Elijah, withdrawal from the situation might be an opportunity for cognitive restructuring which frees one to continue his or her work.

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[23] Rollins, 6. Rollins notes that in the 1990's the American Psychological Association noted 58 different fields in Psychology, many of these fields with the ability to inform biblical hermeneutics.
[24] Ibid., 127.
[25] It should be emphasized that introversion, as well as extraversion, is not necessarily reflective of mental health or illness. Rather, each personality trait embodies potential strengths and potential risks. See D. M. Keirsey, *Personality:Character and Temperament*. Retrieved from http://www.keirsey.com and I. B. Myers, *Introduction to Type* (Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, Inc., 1987).

**WOE TO THOSE THAT ARE AT EASE IN ZION**
**Preaching in the Black Church and the HIV/AIDS Epidemic**

Marvin A. McMickle, Ph.D.
Ashland Theological Seminary
Ashland, Ohio

*This paper is prepared for the 2006 session of the Academy of Homiletics. It is a first draft of some basic arguments that will be used in a forthcoming book that is still in the developmental stages. Feedback is not only desirable, but it would be timely so far as this project is concerned.*

In August of 2006 ABC News reported on the incredibly devastating impact that the HIV/AIDS epidemic is having on black communities across the United States. Five reasons were suggested as to why HIV/AIDS remains such an uncontrolled medical and social emergency within black America. One of those five suggested reasons was the near total silence on the issue of HIV/AIDS from the pulpits of the vast majority of black churches across the country. Civil rights leaders and organizations that are usually quick to embrace any cause that has a negative impact on black America remain unusually silent on this issue. Historically black denominations; Baptist, Methodist, Holiness and Pentecostal have not elevated the near pandemic status of HIV/AIDS in the black community to a matter of urgency.

This silence cannot be justified on the grounds that HIV/AIDS has not reached into the lives of black churches across the United States. To the contrary, there is not likely a single black congregation anywhere in the country that has not discovered that one of its own members is living with, has died from or has someone within their circle of family and/or friends that has been touched by this deadly disease. The funerals may not announce that the death was due to HIV/AIDS related causes, but that fact usually leaks out sooner or later. Acting as if HIV/AIDS has not already made its presence felt in the life of the black community in general and in the life of the black church in particular is one of the great charades currently being perpetuated.

HIV/AIDS is at staggering levels in black communities across the country. We are aware of the link between HIV/AIDS and human sexual activity. We know that the virus can spread as a result of the activity of same-sex couples, bi-sexual couples, monogamous wives and philandering husbands (and vice versa). Among young women between 18-30 years of age it is the leading cause of death. HIV/AIDS is impacting teens that are just beginning to experiment with their sexuality. It is impacting senior citizens who thought that safe sex only pertained to those who were concerned about birth control. HIV/AIDS shows up in the black community every time one of the hundreds of thousands of men and women once living in prison return to the general population.

It has also been clearly established that the HIV/AIDS virus can be transferred and contracted through the sharing of IV needles among persons who use them to inject themselves with various illegal drugs; primarily heroin and cocaine. Drug addiction is as burgeoning a problem as risky, unprotected sexual encounters among large portions of the population in communities across the country. When taken together they suggest a breeding ground for the spread of HIV/AIDS. None of this is news anywhere in the United States, and yet the black

church remains virtually silent on this entire issue. Little or nothing is said about sexuality oR drug abuse. Little or nothing is said about the link between those two behaviors and the spread of HIV/AIDS. Little or nothing is said by black preachers or from the pulpits of black churches about the astounding spread of HIV/AIDS within the black communities of the United States.

This moment in time is ideally suited for preaching that can result in renewal, liberation and transformation. Each of those notions offers multiple opportunities to address aspects of the gospel to the lives of people and institutions. The ministry of the black church needs to be renewed as it seeks to focus on the crushing problems that confront black people in American society. There does need to be a continuing focus on the historic issues of racism, poverty, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, lack of access to adequate medical care either because of affordability or location. These topics and the toll they take on the souls and bodies of black people must continue to concern those who occupy the pulpits of black churches, and they must also be of concern to non-black preachers who regularly have black people seated in the congregations where they preach.

However, while those historic areas of concern must continue to be addressed, this more recent and far more deadly and destructive problem of HIV/AIDS infection and transmission within the black community must be moved to the top of the agenda of those who seek to preach a word of hope, renewal and comfort to persons who look to the church for light and life. It is shameful that ABC News could charge the black church of basically ignoring this problem that is consuming lives and families every day, knowing that they can make that charge without any fear of contradiction. The only thing that could possibly be more shameful than that accusation in August of 2006 is if things remain the same so far as the pulpits of black churches are concerned in August of 2007.

How many more black people must contract HIV/AIDS before the church realizes its need to address this crisis in word and deed? How many more black families must be impacted by the slow-death or the chronic condition triggered by contracting HIV/AIDS before black preachers begin searching the scriptures and their own hearts to find "a word from the Lord" that suits this moment in history? And, just as important, how many of those preachers who do decide to stand up and speak out will have anything to say beyond the vicious, hurtful, narrow minded words of judgment and condemnation that have been how most preachers, black and white, have chosen to respond to this epidemic in our country?

The renewal that can come with compassionate, biblically-based preaching on the problem of HIV/AIDS is significant. At the church where I serve as pastor a successful, long-term HIV/AIDS ministry has been in effect since 1999. I have seen how people impacted by this disease draw new hope and strength as the issue of HIV/AIDS is raised and discussed openly and honestly. I have seen families breathe deeply in church again as they discover they no longer have to hide from their church family the fact that they or someone in their family has contracted HIV/AIDS. I have seen congregations shift from judgmentalism to compassion as they are helped to think about HIV/AIDS from new and different points of view.

Sometimes the renewal and transformation comes with a consideration of the conduct of Jesus in Luke 5: 12-13 and in Luke 17: 11-19. In the first passage Jesus physically lays his hands upon a person infected with leprosy. After years of having to declare himself/herself "unclean" and being sure to avoid making any physical contact with any uninfected person, here is Jesus who responds to this person with love and compassion. When might have been the last time any human being, other than another leper had ever touched that man? This was not the first time this leper had sought a compassionate response from someone in the family of God; it was just the

first time that anyone had responded. The man said, "If you are willing you can make me clean." Jesus then responds with the words "I am willing." I am willing to touch him from whom others have drawn away. I am willing to help him whom others have only avoided. I am willing to heal him whom others have never offered to help.

I raise this question with anyone who preaches the gospel, but especially with those who preach in black churches and/or to large numbers of black people; if Christ put his hands upon the lepers in the first century where does he expect us and command us to lay our hands in the twenty-first century? Persons impacted by HIV/AIDS must surely be on that list. Leprosy was the infectious, contagious, debilitating, socially isolating disease in this first century AD text. Leprosy was the word that chilled the spirit and sent persons out of their communities and into colonies of "untouchability."

The same thing occurs with HIV/AIDS in the twenty-first century. To be diagnosed with HIV/AIDS can send a person into a panic as they begin to consider the implications of losing their health, their relationships and perhaps even their lives. Surely those who preach the gospel have something comforting, compassionate, encouraging and renewing to say to persons in this position. Surely we who train and equip the preachers for the next generation can train and equip them in such a way that they do not overlook or under value the human tragedy that is caused by an HIV/AIDS diagnosis that happens to hundreds of persons somewhere in the United States every day.

If the Luke 5: 12-13 passage offers us one angle of vision into this text, then surely Luke 17: 11-19 offers yet another way to proceed. In this passage Jesus offers healing to ten lepers encountered in a Samaritan village. The only one who returns to give thanks is a Samaritan. That person was outside the social circle of the average member of ancient Jewish society. It would have been easy enough to withhold any help from "those people." But instead, that person was drawn to Christ precisely because Christ had responded with love and compassion. In other words, it may well be that the church's best evangelism and church-growth strategy may not be handing out tracts on street corners or going door-to-door with invitations to a Sunday morning worship service. The church growth desired by so many may come as a natural result of the church showing compassion to people impacted by HIV/AIDS who finally encounter a church that places love and compassion above judgment and condemnation.

Any preacher who wants to bring the message of renewal or transformation to bear around the issue of HIV/AIDS will, no doubt have to respond to those who will be quick to point out the difference in the ways that infection occurs as between leprosy and HIV/AIDS. For some people the analogy will break down, not because they can argue with the similarity in the physical and social effects of the two diseases. The analogy will break down because they will get stuck on how the two diseases are initially contracted. Those who are inclined to respond to HIV/AIDS with hate and condemnation will focus on the behaviors that may have likely been the means of contracting that disease. They will assume that every one living with this disease was or is either sexually promiscuous or is an IV drug user. Presuming that to be the case, it will be argued that persons with HIV/AIDS deserve the consequences of their prior, sinful actions.

There are two practical ways that caring and compassionate preachers and churches can respond to this scenario that seems to justify an HIV/AIDS infection as being the victims' fault. First, it must never be forgotten that many of the women now living with or having already died from an HIV/AIDS related illness had engaged in no risky behavior whatsoever. The first four persons I ever encountered who were living with this disease were monogamous, church-attending wives who were infected by their less than faithful husbands. In one case, the infection

occurred from the husband, but not because he had been unfaithful after he got married. Remembering that the HIV/AIDS virus can lay dormant in the human body for up to seven years before it presents itself as full-blown AIDS, a person can bring into their marriage the consequences of sexual encounters conducted up to seven-years prior to that time.

What condemnation shall be spoken to the man or woman who contracts HIV/AIDS through this process? How should the ministry of the church in general and the interpretation of the gospel message in particular be informed by this every day reality? Not everybody living with HIV/AIDS "did something" to bring this disease into their lives. Surely we who preach and who train others to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ can discern the subtleties of this issue that now confronts the black community in the United States. Surely we are not prepared to paint with broad strokes in an area where detailed attention is needed.

The issue can be discussed by yet another approach. Suppose a person has contracted HIV/AIDS as a result of some risky behavior. Suppose they were engaged in unprotected same-sex or heterosexual activity, or suppose they were sharing an IV needle while injecting themselves with drugs. Does that reality give license to the kind of hate-filled diatribes that have so often been directed toward HIV/AIDS victims? Here again, insightful and prophetic preaching can play an important role. The very same Bible that many people use to heap attacks upon people impacted by HIV/AIDS can just as easily be used to speak a word of renewal, liberation and transformation.

It is long past time for preachers to stop being selective in the so-called "sinful behavior" they will address and confront and condemn. It is amusing to watch preachers attacking many of the sins they say the Bible condemns, while at the same time ignoring or justifying other sins that seem to receive equal attention from the scriptures. They do not seem to notice that their favorite anti-homosexual passages in Leviticus 18 and Romans 1 actually spend far more time focusing on behaviors that are in no way linked to homosexuality. Shall we cast all adulterers into the flames of hell? Shall fornicators also be viewed as godless sinners undeserving of the forgiveness of God or the fellowship and friendship of the church?

The hypocrisy at this point is almost too much to bear. There are black preachers across the United States who are famous, or perhaps infamous for their multiple sexual encounters with members of their own congregations. Shall we really take them seriously when they attempt to speak to us about their views on 'the sin of homosexuality?" There are pastors who have been caught in their church offices engaged in sexual acts with under age children, and yet they have the audacity and the temerity to suggest "what the Bible says" about homosexuals. Physician heal thyself. This is not an attempt to affirm or approve any one conduct above the others. This is an attempt to call preachers to honest exegesis and thorough biblical analysis, so that preachers are not knowingly hypocritical in their pulpit work.

More importantly, whatever conduct any one person may find objectionable in another human being is not the unpardonable sin. We have no right to withhold the warmth of God's embrace or the comforting and soothing "balm of Gilead" from anyone simply because we may find their behavior objectionable. Just how far does the grace of God extend? Just how far does God's forgiveness reach? It must be allowed that whatever sins we think God sees in the lives of others is matched, and perhaps exceeded by the sins God sees in our own lives. This is something that we who preach must apply to our own lives and then, through our preaching encourage others to do the same. The song of my slave ancestors applies at this point: "It ain't my mother, and it ain't my father, but it's me, O Lord, standing in the need of prayer."

Those who would preach about the church's response to HIV/AIDS must work their way through the actions of Jesus and the assembled crowd as recorded in John 8:3-11. A woman was brought to Jesus who was caught in the very act of adultery, and they wanted to press Jesus publicly to see if he would adhere to the requirements of the Mosaic Law as they applied to adultery. The issue in this passage was not the woman and what she had done; the issue was Jesus and what he was going to do in that moment. What he did, or even better, what he said should inform us in this discussion about the appropriate response of the church to HIV/AIDS.

First, he did not rush to judgment. He did not take as true the accusations of the mob. He did not get swept away in some anti-adultery frenzy. He paused to reflect on the situation and the people that confronted him. He separated the actions of the woman from the intentions of the mob. He did not in any way seek to justify, excuse or overlook the actions with which she was charged. Rather, he focused his attention on the mob that was united in their condemnation of the woman and her behavior. "Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone." When will this hermeneutic come to apply to the approach to HIV/AIDS of those who are so quick to condemn?

Is the church so free from sin that we have the luxury of heaping all of our scorn upon risky sexual conduct and IV drug use with nothing else to attract our attention? The church is as infected with the sins of racism and sexism as it has ever been. Women are still disallowed from leadership, and sometimes from membership within the ranks of the ordained clergy. Blacks and other racial and ethnic minorities are still treated with as much contempt and disregard within many church-related circles as they are within the wider American social, political and economic scene. How is it that the church can focus so much attention on the issues related to how a person has contracted HIV/AIDS, but has nothing to say about racism and sexism?

The nation is involved in a reckless military venture in Iraq whose partial cost is the $400 billion that has already been spent and the three thousand American fatalities that have already been endured as of September 1, 2006. That does not include the tens of thousands of mangled bodies and the hundreds of under funded social programs that are the additional costs of this war against weapons of mass destruction that could not be found, or against a terrorist threat that never invaded or attacked our country, or against an evil dictator who had been our ally when he waged a war against Iran only twenty years earlier.

What kind of theology is it that allows the church to speak so hatefully and hurtfully about people living with HIV/AIDS, however they contracted that disease, while remaining so silent about the evil that is war in general, and the lies and deceptions that have surrounded this war in particular? What is even more astounding is how preachers of the gospel actually find a way to interpret the gospel so that war and all of its destructiveness can be embraced, but who cannot find anything in that same gospel that would allow them or compel them to speak compassionately about this dreadful disease and its wide ranging effects.

## The Infected and the Affected

There are two ways for the pulpit to respond to the problem of HIV/AIDS. One of them is to respond to and speak to those persons who are themselves infected with this disease. The preacher can offer renewal and hope and encouragement to persons who have just been informed of their positive status, or who are going through the rigors of ingesting all of the prescription drugs that can turn HIV/AIDS from eventual death to a chronic condition. The medicine may be good for treating the disease, but it brings massive side effects that must be endured every day. That is true whether the person contracted HIV/AIDS from engaging in risky behavior, or by simply sharing an intimate moment with an unfaithful spouse or long-term partner.

All that has been said thus far about the black church's response to HIV/AIDS falls under the rubric of a ministry or a message to the infected. In all honesty, most churches will have limited exposure to persons who are immediately impacted by this disease. People living with HIV/AIDS have long since discovered that churches are very unfriendly places so far as they and their disease are concerned. Our earlier lack of compassion on this problem has already removed needy people so far from our doors that we may not be in an immediate position to respond to HIV/AIDS victims with compassion and care. Most churches and preachers, should they ever choose to get involved in this area, would have to work long and hard just to establish enough credibility with the infected population to be taken seriously.

The church in 2006 cannot simply open its doors and expect people living with this disease to suddenly come running in for help. Most of them will have some memory of having been forced out of those same doors by bigotry, ignorance, hypocrisy and fear. Our lack of attention to this problem on the one hand, and the attention we have given it in the form of condemnation on the other hand has had the effect of robbing the church of any real credibility or authority if and when it finally does decide to get involved with the infected community.

However, there is a second line of attack where we might have more success if we are willing to enter the fray at all; and that is with persons who are affected by but not infected with HIV/AIDS. There are undoubtedly persons in every church in the United States who are affected by this disease. That simply means that someone who is very close to them is infected even if they are not infected themselves. Their parent or their child may be infected. Their friend or their co-worker may be infected. Their sibling or their spouse may be infected. They have not done anything that would bring them under the umbrella of condemnation or denunciation, but they are impacted by the disease nonetheless.

In Romans 12:15 we are urged to "weep with those who are weeping." Our churches are full of persons who are weeping, not because of their infection but because of their affection for those who have the disease. They crowd our churches, but they do not freely share their burdens with us because they are not sure how other Christians will respond. Will they be judged as "off-limits" and outside the family of God simply because they are affected by HIV/AIDS? There are thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of people who walk through life with tear stained faces and broken hearts as a result of a loved one being infected with this deadly disease. However, they resist the invitation to let the church share their burden for fear that the very word HIV/AIDS will result in more scorn and rejection than compassion and support.

Preaching can help to alleviate this problem and bring about renewal and transformation for those who are involved. The black church, which has historically done this for persons affected by racism, prejudice, hatred, poverty and dehumanization, is expert in bringing healing to hurting people. Why does it not do so more openly and freely where HIV/AIDS is concerned? If they are afraid to get their hands dirty and their theology challenged by the issue of the infected, certainly there is no problem attached to extending the message of renewal and transformation to those who are numbered among the affected.

## Talking about HIV/AIDS is not enough

As the ABC News program revealed, there are many black preachers that are at least willing to talk about HIV/AIDS from their pulpits. However, none of those who were interviewed for that program, and most of those who regularly appear on TV talking about this problem have gone beyond mere words to involve themselves and their congregations in direct areas of ministry that are justified by a biblically based rationale. High-profile preachers taking

an AIDS test is a good thing and should not be mocked. However, opening the doors of the church to wide-spread HIV/AIDS testing done through safe, anonymous and confidential means is even better.

I was once asked to write the Foreword to a book of sermons contributed by black preachers from across the country. While those sermons were all very forceful and accurate in their description of the scale of the problem posed by HIV/AIDS, there was not a single person contributing a sermon to that book who was actually running an HIV/AIDS ministry in his/her school, church or institution. They all had opinions on the issue, but not one of them had decided to commit the buildings, budgets and bodies of their respective institutions toward an ongoing ministry that attacked or addressed the problem of HIV/AIDS. I wrote the Foreword to that book, but I made sure to make the point that we cannot simply preach our way out of this problem; no matter how good that preaching may be.

The message of James 4: 17 applies as much to the issue of HIV/AIDS as it does at any other point in the life of the church; "Faith if it is not accompanied by action is dead." Therefore, our preaching around this subject should be designed to do more than just raise the topic of HIV/AIDS. Educational forums and posters in the wall that warn of the transmission of the disease are important. However, there are actual living, dying, suffering human beings who need the support of a community of faith. They need a room in which to meet together, cry together, grieve and mourn together over the death of other infected family and friends that are already dead.

People who are infected and/or affected by this disease need a church sanctuary in which to observe The Black Church Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS that is encouraged by the New York City based group called The Balm in Gilead. That is the group that has been calling upon black churches to respond to the issue of HIV/AIDS for at least the last ten years. That is the group that knows better than any other how their words have fallen on deaf ears.

The leader of The Balm in Gilead is Pernessa Steele, and she appeared on that ABC News program, and her message was unchanged; it is imperative for the black church to respond to this epidemic. Her frustration was also apparent in that program as she acknowledged that a handful of churches across the country have begun to respond to the epidemic in tangible, programmatic and budgetary ways. A few more pastors are at least willing to talk about the issue from time to time. However, the vast majority of black preachers and black churches, perhaps as many as 95%, refuse to engage this issue in any way.

In a forthcoming book by Pilgrim Press entitled, Where Have All the Prophets Gone?, I seek to ask the question of why urgent issues like HIV/AIDS, war, poverty, racism and sexism and other concerns with clear biblical connections so often go unaddressed from so many pulpits in America. Can it be that preachers in the black community are so caught up with the superficiality of praise and worship and the sheer lunacy of prosperity theology that they can no longer see clearly what the real issues are in today's world? Do the people of God suffer because the prophets cannot see clearly what is happening to the flock?

Can it be that the issue of justice has been so narrowly defined to matters of same-sex marriage and abortion, that the many other problems that clamor for our attention and for the comfort and direction that solid preaching can deliver simply go unaddressed? That seems to be the case, at least so far as the black church in the twenty-first century is concerned. How sad that it may take ABC News to unmask this absence of authentic preaching and pastoral concern within the black community.

I say again, that I do not doubt that what was alleged in the news report concerning the black church is also true within other segments of our society. It may be true that within white, Hispanic, Asian and Native American circles there is an equally unpardonable silence on this issue that claims lives and impacts families within those communities every day. However, I am speaking from within the ministry setting where God has placed me. I will not challenge other communities to respond to the problem of HIV/AIDS before I acknowledge that my own faith community, so outspoken on other issues, is so silent on this matter.

I am reminded of the words of Amos 6:1 that say, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion." How shameful it is when people can feel so comfortable and secure in their own position in the world that they cannot or will not see or respond to the desperate needs that are obvious all around them. Amos goes on to say, "Woe to them that lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock…but are not grieved over the affliction of Joseph" (6:4-6). Is that where the black community is on the issue of HIV/AIDS? Are we so focused on owning a Lexus, or a Rolex watch or an oceanfront condominium that we have lost focus on or interest in or courage for the struggle related to HIV/AIDS?

I do not know which one it is, I only know; and that beyond any fear of contradiction, that the vast majority of black churches and the vast majority of black preachers are guilty as charged on the issue of not responding to the impact of HIV/AIDS in our community. It is long past time for the pulpit of the black churches of this nation to speak a word that brings renewal and transformation to a community that is being devastated by a disease whose victims are both the infected and the affected.

I will leave it to other preachers and other homileticians who help train preachers to speak for themselves and for their primary communities of identity. I will not argue or debate the charges. I will only fall on the mercy of the court of God's justice and ask for a second chance so that we might prove ourselves to be more faithful. However, all of us, no matter what our community of identity might be are mutually accountable to the warning of Ezekiel 3 and Ezekiel 33. Those texts call upon the preacher to be the person in the watch tower or the guardian of the safety and security of the city. The task of the person in the watch tower is to keep an eye out for any danger that might be approaching and then sound the alarm so that those relying upon the person in the watch tower can have time to respond.

The people who hear the alarm coming from the watch tower may choose to ignore it, in which case the danger will still overtake them and their blood will be on their own hands. However, if the person in the watch tower fails to sound the alarm and the danger eventually overtakes the city, the blood of everyone involved will fall upon the hands of the person in the watch tower who failed in the exercise of the duties of that office.

It is sad and somewhat shameful that it took Terry Moran and ABC News to sound the alarm about what is happening in the black communities of the United States so far as HIV/AIDS is concerned. Black preachers should have been doing that all along, but they have been part of the problem and not part of the solution. However, as we consider preaching that has the power to bring renewal, liberation and transformation, we would do well to direct some of that preaching to the problem posed to the black community by the continuing spread of HIV/AIDS.

**A Positive Theology of the Imagination**
**for Preaching Renewal, Liberation, and Transformation**[1]



Preaching that empowers renewal, liberation and transformation is preaching that is initiated, sustained and carried to completion by hope. We use the word hope in an astonishing range of ways:

"I hope the plane will be on time."
"I hope the doctor comes now."
"We hope our children have a better life than we have had."
"I hope I can find food and shelter for the night."
"We hope for vengeance and retaliation."
"We hope for peace."
"We hope in the Lord."

We could go on and on with sentences that begin "I hope ..." "We hope ..." Some of the hopes would be casual, and some of them anguished, some of them would be spiteful and some of them generous. Consider the number of hopes that are alive right now around the entire globe: billions upon billions of hopes, the boundless hopes of human hearts, hungering for justice and peace, for kindness and compassion, for meaning and assurance. Amidst this vast complexity of hopes what hope will we preach?

I believe the hope that empowers renewal, liberation and transformation is the hope that thrills the heart of God: the hope that all human beings will live in harmony with one another, with creation and with their Creator.

Ahn Sangnim, who has served as the General Secretary of the Korea Association of Women Theologians, illuminates this hope when she states: "God's purpose for us is to be reconciled one to another between God and humanity, between person to person, between humanity and nature."[2]

When I write about using the imagination to preach hope, I am talking specifically about this magnificent hope that God has for us and about the hope we have in God: namely, that the risen Christ and the Holy Spirit will empower us to embody God's hope in our lives.

Yeow Choo Lak of Singapore captures the two fold dynamic of God's hope for us and our hope in God when he describes: "God's continuing, all-embracing, fulfilling work of creation, judgment and re-creation, throughout all our nations: a purpose which is intensely present in the life and passion of Jesus – yet present also in all the creative elements of our cultures, histories and religious traditions, all works of truth, liberation, justice and peace. God's purpose is therefore recognized in the larger and deeper dimensions of the Spirit's activity to bring about a new humanity, a new creation, new women and men."[3] God's hope for us, and our hope in God – to keep this hope alive requires preaching that engages the imagination.

The literal meaning of the word "imagination" is "image-generation" or

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[1] This is a revised version of an earlier paper that was delivered to Societas Homiletica in Pretoria, South Africa on August 7, 2006 with the title "Seeing Visions and Dreaming Dreams: The Imaginative Power of Preaching Hope."
[2] Ahn Sangnim, "Doing Theology with God's Purpose in Korea" in Yeow Choo Lak, ed., Doing Theology with *God's Purpose in Asia*, Singapore: ATESEA, 1990, p. 83.
[3] Yeow Choo Lak, "Preface" to *Doing Theology with God's Purpose in Asia*, p. v.

"image-creation." Imagination is the ability to create and hold before the mind's eye an image of something that is not actually present. By the power of the imagination we can see a world renewed, liberated and transformed. By the power of imagination we can see with the prophet Micah a world where every sword is beaten into a plowshare, and every spear into a pruning hook. (Micah 4:3) By the power of imagination we can see with Saint Luke a world where people come from north and south, and east and west and seat together at table in the reign of God. (Luke 13: 29) By the power of imagination we can see with Saint John a world where God wipes away every tear and where "death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21: 4) We can see all of these things through the God-given capacity of the mind to generate images.

How, then, can we use the imagination to preach God's hope for us, and our hope in God?

It is easy to misuse the imagination in preaching, especially given the fact that we preachers are as human as our listeners, and our hearts are as crammed as theirs with every assortment and kind of hope. However, the complexities of engaging the human imagination in preaching hope go deeper than the distorting properties of the human heart. Imagination itself has received ambiguous treatment in the history of Christian thought, and any effort to explore its use in the preaching of Christian hope requires that we face up to this troubled history. We need to go through a process of historical review and theological reflection that will give us confidence to use the imagination boldly and faithfully.

To make that process as clear and coherent as possible, I am going to divide my exploration into three sections:

1. The ambiguous status of imagination in western thought and theology.
2. Developing a positive theology of the imagination.
3. Training the imagination by attending to the world in light of God's word and the expansion of human knowledge

Imagination has not always been welcome in the house of faith. For many centuries the imagination was treated in one of two ways: it was either ignored or rejected. Imagination, as we now define it, was not initially a topic of major interest in Christian thought. When early theologians and preachers became self-conscious about the creative power of the human mind they did not name it "imagination". St. Augustine, for example, believed that memory is the source of human creativity. By the power of memory Augustine is able to raise images of cloud and sky and sea within his thought process and to envision new actions and hopes. When "imagination" does become a topic of theological self-awareness in the Protestant reformers, it is usually attacked for its role in creating idolatrous understandings of God.

However, beginning in the late 17th century and continuing into the 18th century, imagination becomes a subject of more positive interest. The famous American theologian, Jonathan Edwards, became interested in how "the true character of God" is known through our "imaginative perception."[4] And this more positive assessment eventually began to evince itself in homiletics. Henry Beecher in his famous Yale lectures on Preaching (1872-1874) declares imagination to be the most important prerequisite for effective preaching. Beecher calls

[4] Sang H. Lee, "Imagination and the Increasing Reality in Jonathan Edwards." In *PrepPrinted Papers for the Section on Philosophy of Religion and Theology*, compiled by David Griffin for the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, 1973, p. 39.

imagination "the God-power in the soul" which for him means "the power of conceiving as definite the things which are invisible to the senses, of giving them distinct shape."[5]

In summary, the imagination in Western Christian thought has sometimes been ignored, sometimes rejected, and sometimes affirmed. This vacillating history has left its mark on how we now view imagination. Common speech reveals a great deal of ambiguity about the value of the imagination. For example, if we want to disparage the fears that have gripped another person's courage to act, we will often say "It's all in your imagination." On the other hand, if someone responds to a critical life situation in a particularly creative and helpful way, we may praise the person for being "imaginative."

This ambiguity about imagination is found in more than common speech. Nathan A. Scott Jr. has traced how the modern philosophical tradition, as represented by Hobbes and Lock and Hume, mistrusted the imagination. Scott points out that empiricism harbored "great fear of the threat which [the imagination] is thought to present to the integrity of tough, hardheaded rational reflection on what is actually given in our world."[6]

Preachers, like everyone else, have inherited this ambiguous understanding of the imagination as it exists in common speech and as it is manifest in philosophical thought. During my thirty years of teaching homiletics, I have encountered this ambiguity again and again: preachers tell me that they want to preach more imaginatively but at the same time they are fearful of being "too imaginative." And the ambiguity of preachers is often shared by their congregations. I have known many cases where the major criticism leveled against a preacher was that she or he was "too imaginative."

Rather than live with the ambiguity, preachers sometimes get rid of it by drawing a hard line between being imaginative and being scholarly. Gene Lowry warns against making such a simplistic distinction: "I hope we do not need to choose between dull, scholarly, instructive lecture-sermons and snappy, creative sound bites. So I say, let the imagination run loose for a while...One great result of significant imaginative preparation time is that when we then turn to our scholarly work, our minds are ready with questions born of actual confusion, and wonderments waiting expectantly for birthing resolution."[7]

How do we overcome the ambiguity preachers feel toward the imagination so that they can use the imagination in preaching hope? It is my experience that the first step is to develop a positive theology of the imagination. If preachers lack such a theology, then the use of the imagination runs the risk of being nothing more than a homiletical technique, catchy and entertaining but lacking the substance of a profound and enduring faith in God. Furthermore, if preachers are not convinced that using the imagination has theological integrity, they will lack the motivation to develop and discipline their creative powers over the long haul.

There are many ways we might develop such a theology. But given the constraints of this essay, I am going to explore only three. I will be suggestive rather than exhaustive, leaving it to you to fill out these ideas with more research and creative thought.

First, I will consider briefly the image-filled language of the Bible and how it presents us with a model of imaginative creativity and expression.

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[5] Henry Ward Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching*, New York: Fords, Howard, & Hulbert, 1896), pp. 110-11. For a fuller account of the history of the imagination see "Understanding the Church's Resistance to Imagination" in Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1990.

[6] Nathan A. Scott, Jr. *The Poetics of Belief: Studies in Coleridge, Arnold, Pater, Santayana, Stevens, and Heidegger,* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985, p. 3.

[7] Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997 p. 106.

Second, I will examine how being created in the image of God implies that we are created to create, that being faithful to God requires that we engage our imaginations.

Third, I will place this positive theology of the imagination in the larger context of the ministry of pastoral leadership in the church.

I turn first to building a positive theology of the imagination by considering the idiom of biblical speech. The scriptures are filled with highly imaginative language. Consider the scores of vivid images that the biblical writers use to express the wonder, presence and power of God. J. C. L. Gibson in his excellent little monograph, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament*, points out that what the Bible gives its readers "is not doctrinal 'facts' to ponder, but something more valuable, an imaginative vision of God and his dealings with human beings to which to cling. It is the stories and poetry of Scripture and especially perhaps its figurative language which create that vision."[8]

Gibson is aware of the tendency to hold poetic, imagistic speech as less reliable, less sophisticated than philosophical, analytical language. Gibson warns us not "to confuse the inability of the Israelites to think abstractly with an inability to think profoundly. The writers of the Old Testament were not men of today; they did not imply a complicated philosophical or technical terminology, but to get over what they were trying to say had to use in the main stories and poems."[9]

And the teaching of Jesus clearly stands in this grand tradition of using stories and images. As J. N. K. Mugambi observes: "Jesus began his public ministry with the announcement that 'the kingdom of God is at hand.' When he was asked to describe this kingdom, he did not offer direct, objective and empirical explanations. Instead he used parables, analogies and metaphors. After giving such figures of speech he left the people to draw their own conclusions and then discern the practical implications of his figurative answers."[10]

In short, the Bible abounds in imaginative language, a language that is not only profound but also energizing. It is language that vitalizes preaching for renewal, liberation, and transformation. Amos Wilder in his little classic, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination* writes eloquently about this life giving power of the imagination: "Imagination is a necessary component of all profound knowing and celebration; all remembering, realizing, and anticipating; all faith, hope, and love. When imagination fails doctrines become ossified, witness and proclamation wooden, doxologies and litanies empty, consolations hollow, and ethics legalistic. It is at the level of the imagination that any full engagement with life takes place."[11]

In summary: one way to encourage preachers to claim imagination as a gift for proclaiming the hope of God is to help them see how the biblical writers use the imagination in ways that are vivid, vitalizing, and profoundly theological. In using our imaginations, we preachers are carrying on the imaginative tradition of the Scriptures.

A second way to build a positive theology of the imagination is to consider what it means that we have been created in the image of God. I take as a starting point for this approach the priestly account of the creation of us human creatures: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1: 27).

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[8] J. C. L. Gibson *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1998.

[9] Gibson, p. 6.

[10] J. N. K. Mugambi, p. 75.

[11] Amos Wilder, *Theopoetic: Theology and the Religious Imagination*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976, p. 2.

Ian MacFarland traces how "The image of God" is one of those deep, rich phrases from the Bible that has awakened a wide span of interpretations: "The [image of God] has been understood in primarily cognitive terms as referring to a particular created capacity, whether that be reason [as in Thomas Aquinas], freedom [as in Gregory of Nyssa], the capacity for self-transcendence [as in Reinhold Niebuhr], or even an intrinsic orientation to God [as in Emil Brunner]."[12]

But for our purpose of developing a positive theology of imagination I will focus on only one interpretation of the image of God. It is an interpretation that emerges from a highly poetic reading of the text. I would never suggest this is the only interpretation. But for now I will explore how being made "in the image of God" means that we are created to create.

The first image of God that appears in the Bible is no image at all: "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" (Genesis 1: 1-2). There is no picture of what God looks like in these verses. There is, however, a vivid portrayal of what God does: God creates. God sends a wind over the waters, and then names creation into existence.

This imageless image of God as creator is the only image of God that has yet appeared in the Bible when we read twenty-four verses later: "Then God, said, 'Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1: 26a). As the biblical witness continues to unfold, God will be revealed through scores of other images: redeemer, shepherd, fortress, liberator etc. But at this point, in the first chapter of the first book of the Bible, the first image of God we have encountered is the imageless image of God the creator. Therefore, to be made in the image of God is to be created to create.

Michael Edwards makes essentially the same point, although he uses the verb "to name" while I use the verb "to create." Edwards writes: "Naming is clearly intrinsic to 'Adam' or the original man, who is presented, not exclusively yet nevertheless quite pointedly as *homo nominans*, Man the Namer. *... his power to name would follow from the fact that he had been made in the image of a God who was himself a name-giver***,** and who had named his creation as it issued from him ..."[13]

We honor the image of the Creator in ourselves whenever we create works of language, music, science and art that are in harmony with the One who has made all that is. Notice exactly how I put this: it is not everything we create that honors the image of the Creator. We human beings create a lot of things that desecrate the image of God. We create prejudice, injustice, diatribes, manifestos of hate, systems of injustice and oppression, weapons, and instruments of torture. There is a long list of things soaked in blood that we human beings have created. And when we create them we distort and disfigure the image of God in ourselves. Perhaps this is why the biblical writers reserve a particular Hebrew word – *bara* – to describe the creative work that belongs exclusively to God: they are eager for us not to hallow our destructive creativity by appealing to the name of God. And perhaps it is this same awareness that makes preachers reticent about being creative, about using their imaginations. They have enough self-awareness to realize that preachers can fashion sermons that are as lethal as any weapon designed by human intelligence and forged by human hands.

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[12] Ian A. McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005, p. 2.
[13] Michael Edwards, *Towards a Christian Poetics*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1984, pp. 141-142. Emphasis added.

If, however, we disavow using the gift of the imagination because of its potential for misuse, then we will have to disavow all other gifts as well because we have the capacity to abuse any gift God gives us. We engage our imaginations as preachers in order to remind ourselves and our congregations that we are created to create in ways that reflect rather than distort the image of God. When we faithfully engage our imaginations, then our preaching gives hope because it embodies the potential of human beings to use their creativity to renew, liberate and transform the world. I do not mean every sermon will be on the imagination and human creativity, but rather over time our preaching is a witness to the Creating Spirit that swept over the waters and that blows anew upon our congregations through the sermons we create. When we use our imaginations to create sermons, we are carrying on the process that started with "In the beginning God created ..." Our goal is not simply to be creative, but to create in ways that are in harmony with the source of every good and perfect gift.

So far I have suggested two ways to create a positive theology of the imagination One, we can understand our use of the imagination to be a continuation of the Biblical tradition of using poetic, image-filled, narrative language. Two, we can honor the image of God within ourselves by faithfully claiming the creative gifts with which we have been endowed.

I now turn to my third step in creating a positive theology of the imagination: I place the use of the imagination in the larger context of the ministry of pastoral leadership in the church.

Developing "the pastoral imagination" is the central theme of a recent multi-authored study of theological education in North America. The title of the work is *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*. The pastoral imagination is described as "'a way of seeing into and interpreting the world' that in turn, 'shapes everything a pastor thinks and does.'"[14] The study goes on to affirm the need for "finding ways to cultivate the pastoral, priestly, or rabbinic imaginations of [theological] students as cultural representatives and builders of their religious traditions in the midst of these global and local movements (Schreiter, 1997)."[15] The study covers the full range of ministerial practice and not homiletics alone. It thus places our search for a positive theology of the imagination in a much larger framework. In developing our imaginations we are doing something far profounder than tinkering with better methods of communication. We are helping preachers in their most consistently public role "to be both representatives of the cultures of their religious traditions and agents or builders of those cultures in the changing dynamics of globalization in the modern world."[16]

From a global perspective we need a positive theology of the imagination because the entire human community, for better and for worse, is going through a process of re-imagining, re-imaging what it means to live together on this whirling, watered stone we call planet earth. Will we use our imaginations in ways that feed upon our fears and prejudices or will we use our imaginations to keep before us the hope that thrills God's heart? the hope that all human beings will live in harmony with one another, with creation and with their Creator. To preach this magnificent sacred vision in the context of globalization is a challenging task because globalization itself is hotly contested. Some people denigrate globalization as a cover up for the spread of aggressive capitalism. It is the antithesis of renewal, liberation, and transformation.

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[14] Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006, p. 22. Quotations within quotations are from C. R. Dykstra, "The Pastoral Imagination" in *Initiatives in Religion* 2001, pp. 2-3, 15.

[15] *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, p. 264. The citation refers to R. J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the* Local, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books 1997.

[16] *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination*, p. 264.

Others welcome globalization as an imperfect but hopeful movement to claim our common humanity.

Nayan Chanda, recognizing both the negative and positive values associated with the word, concludes that globalization will continue: "With all its promises and pitfalls, the historical process of reconnecting the human community is here to stay and increasingly visible and increasingly a challenge."[17]

Miroslav Volf puts this challenge in a specifically theological context in his article "Exclusion and Embrace:" Volf writes: "Modern means of communication and the emerging world economy have transformed our world from a set of self-contained tribes and nations into a global city. The unity of the human race is no longer an abstract notion. And the closer humanity's unity, the more powerfully we experience its diversity. The 'others' – persons of other culture, other religion, other economic status and so on – are not people we read about from distant lands; we see them daily on our screens in our living rooms, pass by them on our streets ...It is not too much to claim that the future of ... the whole world depends on how we deal with ethnic, religious, and gender otherness."[18]

To deal with otherness requires an empathic imagination, the capacity to stand in someone else's shoes, to see the world with someone else's eyes, to gain at the very least a glimpse of the way life is for someone utterly unlike ourselves.

In summary, our positive theology of the imagination makes three central affirmations: One, imagination is vividly evident in the idiom of the biblical writers. Two, imagination is built into the very way God has made us: we are created to create. Three, our globalized world is desperate for us to use the gift of imagination to envision a way of being, a way of speaking, a way of acting that will help us realize the hope that thrills God's heart.

Having proceeded through our process of historical review and theological reflection, I now turn to our final exploration: training the imagination by attending to the world in light of God's word and the expansion of human knowledge.

Just because we have been given a gift by God does not mean we automatically know how to use it. Think of all the energy it takes to teach a child how to be grateful, how to treat people fairly, how to have a proper sense of self worth and dignity. Parents and communities pour out massive amounts of energy to develop these gifts in their children. And so it should come as no surprise that we cannot assume people will simply know how to use their imaginations.

In a fascinating essay entitled "Attending to Attention," Carol Zaleski combines the words of Richard Niebuhr with her own thought to observe "'We dwell in our world according to the way in which we imagine our world' – and we imagine our world by faithfully attending to it."[19] The statement succinctly summarizes the major dialectic involved in training the imagination by attending to the world in light of God's word and the expansion of human knowledge.

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[17] Nayan Chanda, "What is Globalization? Coming Together: Globalization means reconnecting the human community," November 19, 2002 at http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/about essay.jsp All subsequent quotations of Chanda come from this on line article.

[18] Miroslav Volf, "Exclusion and Embrace" in William A. Dyrness, ed., *Emerging Voices in Global Christian Theology*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, p. 23.

[19] Carol Zaleski, "Attending to Attention" in Sang Hyun Lee, Wayne Proudfoot, Albert Blackwell, eds., *Faithful Imagining: Essays in Honor of Richard R. Niebuhr*, Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995, p. 149. The quote within the quote is from "Living Symbols," in *Streams of Grace: Studies of Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William James*, The Second Neesima Lectures, Doshisha University (Kyoto: Doshisha University press, 1983), 10.

Let us consider each half of the statement separately: First, "We dwell in our world according to the way in which we imagine our world." If we imagine the world to be utterly without any potential for redemption, if we see it simply as a tiny pebble drifting through the cold vastness of space, and if we see our social world as nothing more than a wilderness in which the only way to survive is to look out for ourselves and no one else, then the way we dwell in that world will match our vision: the only meaning we will acknowledge is the meaning we ourselves create, we will fight mightily to get whatever we can get, we will be unconcerned about the others who are so different from us that we can see them only as the stranger, the alien, the competitor for earth's paltry resources.

But consider what happens, if we imagine the world in the light of God's word and the expansion of human knowledge. Our vision is transfigured by what we behold:

> Above the moon earth rises,
> a sunlit mossy stone,
> a garden that God prizes
> where life has richly grown,
> an emerald selected
> for us to guard with care,
> an isle in space protected
> by one thin reef of air. [20]

If that is how we imagine the world, then we open the possibility of dwelling in world in a more gracious and faithful way. Since the world is prized by God and is entrusted to our care, we will honor the wonder and glory of its resources for sustaining life and we will view human beings not as congeries of unrelated others, but as fellow travelers on this mossy sunlit stone. Of course, because of sin, we may not always live up to our best imaginings. But that is part of the role of preaching: to remind us of a faithful imagining of the world in the light of God's word and the expansion of human knowledge, thus empowering us to renew, liberate and transform the world.

Such imaginative preaching requires us to consider the second part of Carol Zaleski's two part statement: "We imagine our world by faithfully attending to it." In other words, the faithful use of the imagination requires the discipline of attending to our world, of looking acutely and profoundly at the actuality of the world and being ready to read what Jesus calls "the signs of the times" (Matthew 16: 3).

There is a reciprocal relationship between attending closely to the world and being able to imagine the world in new ways. The teachings of Jesus embody this reciprocal relationship in an exemplary way. On the one hand, Jesus pays close attention to the actual worlds of masters and slaves, farmers and seeds, shepherds and flocks, parents and children. His teaching reveals someone keenly observant of human life as it is lived day by day. But out of this close attention to reality he creates amazing parables about masters and slaves, farmers and seeds, shepherds and flocks, parents and children. These parables often shock us with their surprise endings and awaken us from our slumberous inattention to the signs of the reign of God.

In our own age there are many factors that work against living attentive lives. I think particularly of the impact of technology. Thus, Masao Takenaka of Doshisha University in Kyoto observes: "we live in a world limited by our own inventions, cut off from the natural

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[20] Thomas H. Troeger, title poem from *Above the Moon Earth Rises*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 2.

world, the undomesticated or untamed wilderness."[21] In a similar manner in a recent newspaper column Thomas Friedman writes about "the disease of our age, what the former Microsoft executive Linda Stone aptly labeled 'continuous partial attention.' Continuous partial attention is when you are on the Internet or cellphone or BlackBerry while also watching TV, typing on your computer and answering a question from your kid. That is, you are multitasking your way through the day, continuously devoting only partial attention to each act or person you encounter. It is the malady of modernity. We have gone from the Iron Age to the Industrial Age to the Information Age to the Age of Interruption."[22]

By way of contrast Friedman describes a Peruvian rain forest guide named Gilbert. "[Gilbert] carried no devices and did not suffer from continuous partial attention. Just the opposite. He heard every chirp, whistle, howl or crackle in the rain forest and would stop us in our tracks and immediately identify what bird, insect or animal it was. He also had incredible vision and never missed a spider's web, or a butterfly, or a toucan, or a column of marching termites. He was totally disconnected from the Web, but totally in touch with the incredible web of life around him. I wonder if there's a lesson there."

Yes, there is a lesson there, a profound lesson. The lesson is not that we should all become Luddites and throw away our computers and cell phones and BlackBerries. But if we are going to keep alive our imaginations so that they can be a resource for preaching hope, then we will have to make sure that every day we are attentive to the incredible web of life around us. The cultivation of such awareness is how we develop and train what Mary Catherine Hilkert calls a "sacramental imagination." A sacramental imagination has "the power to reconfigure reality by seeing it through an alternative lens ... reality redescribed and perceived in a new way is experienced as genuinely new reality. New energy is available to us when we see new possibilities. There is a new impetus for action when symbols and stories awaken our deepest hopes and potential and reveal to us that those most in need are indeed our sisters and brothers."[23]

Opening us to new possibilities, the imagination opens us to hope. Thus the use of the imagination in preaching hope is something far greater than a technique for making our sermons lively and engaging. We nurture our visionary powers by attending to nature and society in light of God's word and the expansion of human knowledge, and as a result we open ourselves to see visions and dream dreams that are ultimately the gift of the Spirit. We are empowered to preach the living hope of God because hope lives in us.

Our imagination is sacramental because we treat it as a faculty of God's grace, a way of waiting upon the Holy Spirit, to blow upon us even as in the beginning "a wind of God swept over the face of the waters" and as at Pentecost, a rush of wind came upon the gathered church.

By using the sacramental imagination, preachers model how their listeners are themselves called to attend to the world, and to re-imagine creation and society in ways that vitalize hope. It is a hope that gathers up all of our imperfect hopes and refocuses our energies for the transformation of the world. It is the hope that thrills the heart of God: the hope that all human beings will live in harmony with one another, with creation and with their Creator. It is a hope

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[21] Masao Takenaka, "Spirituality in the Wilderness through Asian Christian Art" in *Doing Theology with God's Purpose in Asia*, p. 42.

[22] Thomas Friedman NY Times 7 5 06 "The Age of Interruption" p. A 17.

[23] Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination*, New York: Coninuum, 1998, p. 189.

that inspires us to preach and our people to act for the renewal, liberation, and transformation of the world.

**"Collaborative Re-authoring: the sermon and narrative epistemology"**

Tanya Wittwer
Supervisors: Assoc Prof Andrew Dutney, Dr Peter Lockwood

For the past century, 'narrative' has been a significant conceptual theme across and within many disciplines. Within theology, the nature, method and task of virtually every specialty has been re-examined from a narrative perspective. In the latter half of the twentieth century attention also turned to narrative in the field of homiletics. Narrative has been discussed as genre and means of engagement, and through literary analysis and communication theory. There is often a stated assumption that stories are integral to human existence; a narrative epistemology, however, seems to have been little explored. Might there be discoveries made that could enrich an approach to preaching, and the teaching of preaching, if homiletics were to enter more deeply into a dialogue with narrative philosophy or epistemology?

**A narrative epistemology**

The central concept to a narrative epistemology is that we draw our identity from and make meaning in our lives by the story we tell ourselves about our life. We constitute our personal narrative from our experiences, filtered through and structured by the discourses available to us. Gregory Bateson's exploration of the nature of mind suggested that the set of beliefs we have acquired through our relationship with society and the world, create the world we perceive.[1] As Sharon Parks observes, "The human mind is not a very good transmitter but it is a powerful transformer, continually composing reality from the many elements of our experience."[2] We pay attention to those elements of our experience that conform to our set of beliefs.

The narrative or linguistic development of these ideas proposes that our personal narrative contains multiple plots, and is context sensitive; in addition to our beliefs shaping the narrative, different circumstances lead us to pay attention to or elevate particular strands. Our stories and the knowledges[3] that they build on are created and negotiated within a community. As the discourses available to us are shaped by the social structures and institutions of our community and society, the stories and knowledges reflect our position within society and our personal narrative is likely to be gender specific. The narrative will also link us beyond our contemporary community, to our forebears and successors.

Our personal narrative embraces a *landscape of action* – where events and decisions can be viewed within a temporal framework – and a *landscape of consciousness* – where realizations,

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1 Gregory Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind: a Revolutionary Approach to Man's Understanding of Himself,* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), passim. Bateson proposes a cybernetic epistemology where the individual mind is a function of a complex of relationships (pp 461-465). The particular approach to narrative ideas that I am using draws insights from Bateson's epistemology but rejects the cybernetic model. The conclusions that can be drawn from Bateson, however, are consistent with narrative ideas: "to change basic, perception-determining beliefs … [a person] must become aware that reality is not necessarily as [one] believes it to be" (summarized by Mark Engel in "Foreword," p vii).

2 Sharon Daloz Parks, *Leadership Can Be Taught : A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Pub., 2005). In making this comment, Parks refers to the work of Suzanne Langer, *Philosophy in a new key: a study of symbolism of reason, rite and art,* Cambridge, MA: Beacon Press, (1996).

3 The word *knowledges* is used as a continuing reminder of the multi-faceted nature of our knowledge and experience of self and the world.

speculations and conclusions are found.[4] When elements within the landscape of consciousness become sufficiently elaborated we become committed to them and the life-style they suggest. So not only do we story our lives, but we also live within these stories, "performing" them. Our knowledge of the world and of our selves is premised within our story.

Identity – our perception of the self – is thus understood to be a social construct, with its meaning and boundaries being constantly renegotiated and redefined, depending on circumstances.[5] The discourses of my particular society are highly individualized, so it follows that I find my identity as an individual within a community. For other societies the group identity will be dominant, as expressed in the African notion of *ubuntu*, "I am a person through other persons" or "I am because we are". Our lives and relationships are shaped by and performed in association with the knowledges and stories embraced within our personal narrative.

It may be that one's life has been impoverished by our focus on those elements of the narrative which result in a thin, problematic description of ourselves. A group of Middle Eastern refugees living at this time in my country or yours, for example, is likely to have its narrative much influenced by the dominant discourse of the wider society which features a one-dimensional description. While the discourse of the community-of-origin of the group may have room for a thick and rich description, this may be discounted by the group as it seeks to find its place in relationship to its host society. Again, if you have grown up being told you are "a lazy, useless" individual, it is possible that any experience that contradicts this will be minimized, and any events that reinforce that evaluation will be accepted as norm.

Thus, rather than "words will never hurt me …" words and expressions have real impact in the lives of people, as the "sticks and stones" contributing to the shaping of the personal and communal narrative. The description of ourselves embedded in the personal narrative may promote proficiency and wellness, or may constrain and minimize our sense of competence. The prevailing or dominant story of our life determines the nature of our lived experience.

**The sermon**

The sermon has universally been considered to be performative: it is assumed to have a real impact on the lives of the hearers (and the preacher): "My word … shall not return empty, but … it shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it."[6] Within the framework of narrative epistemology, the sermon may be conceptualized as contributing to the authoring of the personal narrative, with its very real life consequences.

At one level, this is obvious. It is by living within and hearing the stories of our faith community that we come to know God. Brueggemann suggests that "… the imaginative, generative power of rhetoric offers to the hearer of [Scripture] a God not otherwise known or available or even – dare one say – not otherwise "there."'[7]

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4 This metaphor is adopted from Jerome Bruner's analysis of text. Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press, 1986).

5 Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition : A Report on Knowledge*, Theory and History of Literature ; V. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

6 Is 55:11 NRSV

7 Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 58.

At another level, the church has traditionally attributed the performative aspects of the sermon to the Holy Spirit. We are told that "no one comprehends what is truly God's except the Spirit of God"[8] and believe that it is the interplay of the Holy Spirit with the perceptual and analytical processes of the human that produces an awareness of God, and thereby, faith. There is resultant confusion around the agency of the preacher, both in the crafting of the sermon and in the impact of this crafting on the listener; sometimes it seems that the editorial work of the Holy Spirit is less effective than her inspiration. Agency is perhaps made clearer if we consider the sermon (or sermons) to be a significant contribution to the public discourse of the faith community. It is within the context of this discourse that the story-line of the Christian life is co-authored by the Holy Spirit and the individual or group.

For the preacher, authentic preaching will arise from reflection on the Word within his/her own co-authored personal narrative. For the pew sitter, the sermon is a part of the shaping of the narrative that occurs within, and as a result of, the ritual gatherings of the community. The task of the preacher, then, is to speak of "Christ, and him crucified"[9] in ways that assist the creative task of authoring.

**"Mind the gap"**

My entrée to narrative ideas was through the practice of narrative therapy.[10] The basis of this therapeutic approach is the re-authoring of a problematic personal or communal story. Through conversations, letters and rituals, attention is drawn to those aspects of experience or relationship which may have been neglected, so that different threads of the personal narrative are highlighted. A rekindled interest in understanding and assigning meaning to the experiences of one's life leads to a reengagement with life and with one's own history. This provides options for people to more fully inhabit their lives – to live "life, and have it abundantly."[11]

I propose that the transformational capacity of the sermon may be in its ability to assist *the authoring of the personal narrative to embrace its intersection with God's story.* If this is so, some of the tools and processes of narrative therapy that have been developed to assist individuals and groups in the reauthoring of their narrative, and to produce resilience in the new story, may also be used to develop the art of preaching.

A key concept of narrative practice is being alert to the practices of power. The dominant discourses of any society privilege certain knowledges over others.[12] Alternative knowledges are often silenced through disqualifying practices which define "expertise" and "truth." The disqualifying of what Foucault refers to as *local knowledge* by an "expert" may make this knowledge inaccessible even to those that have acquired it. The impression of objectivity is created by privileging certain methodologies and shrouding interpretations in the jargon of

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8 I Cor 2:11b NRSV

9 I Cor 2:2

10 I am specifically referring to narrative practice/therapy as it has been developed in Australia and New Zealand over the past thirty years. There are other forms that have been developed elsewhere in the world, which do not necessarily share the same values or processes. Alice Morgan's, "What is narrative therapy?" at http://www.dulwichcentre.com.au/alicearticle.html is a useful introduction, as are other articles on the same website, and the writings of Michael White and David Epston.

11 John 10:10b NRSV

12 An example used by Stephen Madigan in "The Application of Michel Foucault's Philosophy in the Problem Externalizing Discourse of Michael White" to illustrate privileged knowledge, is the power of the pharmaceutical lobby to sideline alternative medical practices and naturopathic medicines. http://www.yaletownfamilytherapy.com/publications/sample_handouts.html (28 February 2003).

professional discourse. Within the therapeutic arena, the belief in objective truth about persons and systems may render invisible to the consultant the very real effects of their words on those that have consulted them.

Similarly, the twin notions of expertise and universal truth may hide the potentially negative effects of some styles of preaching. The preacher has experience and skills in working with scripture, but is not an expert on anyone's life apart from their own. In critiquing "transformational" homiletics, Lucy Atkinson Rose refers to "the gap" between congregation and preacher.[13] The position of the preacher is not equivalent to the position of the congregational members; the background, experiences and faith journey of the preacher are not identical to those of the parishioners. Nor is the preacher free of the constraints of her/his own discourse community.

The processes of narrative practice are intended to assist the people seeking help to understand that the consultant is not an expert on the life of any other person. The consultant authentically does not know the answers to the questions they raise and the dilemmas they are exploring, so the local knowledges of the person consulting them are foregrounded. Within these local knowledges are alternative stories and neglected aspects of experience – known only to the people who have come for assistance – which can be uncovered to provide options for preferred ways of being. The narrative practitioner brings an attitude of deep respect, of curiosity and a genuine interest in the life of the people consulting them, whose own narrative, set in a specific community and cultural context, provides direction towards the preferred way of being. By a collaboration that includes transparency of process and constant deferral to the person(s) consulting them regarding the direction of questioning, the narrative interlocutor attempts to minimize negative impacts of the power differential. Narrative practitioners also engage those who have consulted them in "deconstruction" of the therapeutic process itself.

When I consider a parallel to these practices in the light of preaching, rather than the preacher imagining she is taking the listener on a journey of discovery, the preacher understands that the discoveries will be made by the listeners. These discoveries may be quite unexpected for both preacher and congregant. The sermon will be constructed with the recognition of the experience and meaning-making of those listening. Language that indicates curiosity, that is tentative, open and invitational, will help make space for exploration in the minds of those listening. To use such language also honors the ambiguity, complexity and indeterminacy of the text.

When questions are asked within the sermon, these should not be simply for rhetorical effect – questions that have an expected, predictable answer. Alternatively, they will be in a spirit of genuine curiosity about what the answers might be, and mean, for those responding to them (generally in the privacy of their own meditations).

For these elements to be authentic rather than merely technique, they need to arise from an attitudinal base. When we preach, we are participating – albeit from a privileged position – in a web of conversations where the church is building itself as the community of saints, enlarging its vision of itself as the body of Christ.[14]

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[13] Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 58-61.

[14] The practices of "the roundtable church" as explored by Rose in *Sharing the Word…* and McClure in *The Roundtable Pulpit : Where Leadership and Preaching Meet* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995) encourage practical processes of collaboration between pastor and congregation, including pre-sermon text study groups.

**Reauthoring the personal story**

The authoring metaphor conveys the image of a continuing dynamic process – even a long, painstaking one. Sermons are a continuing resource to this authorial work. Among those listening to any specific sermon will be people in many different places on their baptismal journey. We believe God can speak through the sermon to each person. This applies equally to those who have walked into a church for the first time as to those who have had the privilege of having grown up within and staying connected to the body of Christ. The most faithful of parishioners "sees in a mirror, dimly"[15] and each of us continue to negotiate our identity as a child of God.

It may be that the image of re-authoring is even more applicable than that of authoring. If our personal narrative is problem-saturated we are likely to move from one episode of disappointment and sadness to another. However the dominant story is not the only possible narrative to be told about the events of our lives. Because our narrative has multiple plots or strands there are other possibilities. Within the therapeutic encounter, questions are asked which elicit "unique outcomes" or "sparkling moments," those experiences which appear to contradict the dominant story. These contradictory experiences may then be used as points of entry towards reauthoring the personal story in transformative ways.

The Story[16] of God's people is problem-saturated. But within the Story can be found alternative narratives – unique outcomes, sparkling moments. Brueggemann declares, "Jewish testimony relishes the disjunction that disrupts the large claims and that attends to the contradiction as the truth of the matter."[17] The first eleven chapters of Genesis can be read as a reauthoring of the story of Israel: out of the despair of Babylon arises the Story of God's chosen, who have gone astray but are not abandoned. The most sparkling of moments, the breath-takingly unexpected event in our community history is the gift of reconciliation through the Christ event. It is an initiative of love from God toward God's creation.[18] We believe that through this the most broken human can find wholeness.

Unlike the narrative practitioner beginning the process of a collaborative re-authoring of a person's story, the preacher begins with access to some elements of the alternative story-lines which provide the clues to liberation. S/he will not know the specifics of any other person's experience of God or even their experience of God's church, and the points of entry into the life-affirming story will be different for each person. The rituals and stories of the Christian community, however, are likely to assist in locating those points of entry.

Within the therapeutic context, identifying alternative stories which speak of the preferred ways of being is a first step. The practitioner will then use a number of strategies to build the resilience of the re-authored story-in-progress: these include, "scaffolding conversations", "deconstruction", and the use of "re-membering." I wish to make some tentative suggestions regarding the application of these specific strategies to preaching.

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[15] I Cor 13:12

[16] I will use the capitalised "Story" when referring to the Story of Scripture, rather than the more generalised narrative or story of the Judeo-Christian community, the church or an individual.

[17] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, 325.

[18] 2 Cor 5:18, Eph 2:4-7.

**Scaffolding conversations**

When points of entry are found into people's alternative stories, those stories are fragile threads, sometimes just fleeting glimpses of possibility. For these stories to provide a real alternative to dominant narratives, they need to be more defined. Through the processes of narrative practice people are encouraged to "recruit their lived experience" and to "exercise their imagination and their meaning-making resources" through processes that are "engaging of their fascination and curiosity" so that the gaps in the story-line might be filled in.[19] Scaffolding questions enable reflection on the significance of developments in one's life.

The sermon can help erect the scaffolding: through theological reflection on the text and our world the alternative story of grace and liberation may be strengthened and supported in the individual/group so that their story-line becomes thicker and richer. Wondering aloud about the impact and significance of everyday events or pericopes, highlighting forgotten corners of stories from the news or the Bible and the sharing of personal experience in a tentative rather than normative way, can all contribute to this.

Central to narrative conversations is the evoking of identity conclusions that arise out of purpose, beliefs, values, hopes and dreams, rather than from structuralist notions of being (strengths, deficits, motives, resources).[20] These non-structuralist categories are elemental to our community of faith and it would seem to be stating the obvious to raise their profile for preaching. However the influence of systems thinking and business models has been pervasive, not least in the injunction to be able to state in one sentence the aim of one's sermon. When assisting the authoring of a narrative, creativity is the focus, rather than an agenda.

Many have written about the value of metaphor and imagery to open up what otherwise cannot be explored and in evoking imaginative responses in those listening and preaching.[21] Images allow us to wander through aspects of our experience, and bring insight and stellar shifts into our view of the ordinary. Within the framework I am proposing, images and metaphor help create space for those listening to explore their own experience and imagination to fill in the gaps in their alternative story, and evoke curiosity about God's action in their lives and the meanings they attribute to this.

**Deconstruction**

So that the reauthored story can stand against the life-denying dominant stories within our society, these need to be exposed for the lie that they are. Within narrative practice, questions regarding the credentials and power of oppressive ideas and societal forces are used to assist the person to "deconstruct" them, and thereby depower them. The word "deconstruction" has a meaning in narrative therapy that is subtly different from that in the work of Derrida. Michael White, its founder, defines "deconstruction" as being about

> procedures that subvert taken-for-granted realities and practices; those so-called "truths" that are split off from the conditions and the context of their production, those disembodied ways of speaking that hide their biases and prejudices, and those familiar practices of self and of relationship that are subjugating of people's

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[19] Michael White, "Workshop Notes " Dulwich Centre, www.dulwichcentre.com.au.

[20] Ibid.

[21] For example, the classic work of Sallie McFague, *Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) and Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor : Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language* (London [England]: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).

> lives. Many of the methods of deconstruction render strange these familiar and everyday taken-for-granted realities and practices by objectifying them.[22]

Much recent writing has explored the prophetic task of deconstruction.[23] I consider the deconstructive enterprise to be central to preaching. However, within this paper I will limit my own comment to affirming that through the preacher modeling the deconstruction of discourse that is limiting and life-denying, "a community of resistance"[24] is formed. In the light of God's grace we can learn to look beyond the limiting "truths" about ourselves or our culture.

The Story attests to the need for reiterative critiquing even of notions of God, for without this "Yahweh will also become an absolute, absolutizing idol, the very kind about which Moses aims his protesting, deconstructive work at Sinai."[25] The person of Jesus incarnating God's love to the world, radically oriented toward God and God's sovereignty, and giving expression to the reality of the God who is concerned about humanity, shows us alternative truths that have been rendered invisible in societal discourse.

Katie Geneva Cannon writes, "I have long known that grace is an unmerited gift from God. However, not until recently did I understand grace as a sacred, life-transforming power for those of us whose identities are shaped by multiple forces at odds with the dominant culture, primarily those of race, sex and class. God's freely given gift of grace enables us to resist the forces of death and degradation arrayed against us and to affirm our dignity as beloved persons created in the image of God."[26]

**Congregation as audience**

Our personal narrative is a social construction. The reauthoring of our story is necessarily also a relational achievement. Authentication[27] of our identity claims comes when our story has an audience.[28] The preacher can intentionally build supportive links between those who are listening, and also beyond the assembly to the wider communion of saints. Corporate worship provides a community that has the potential to support our authorial work and to be an audience to our preferred ways of being. We may be enabled to see each other through the eyes of Christ, and to grow together towards the community we seek to be.

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[22] David Epston and Michael White, *Experience, Contradiction, Narrative and Imagination* (Adelaide, South Australia: Dulwich Centre Publications, 1992), 121.

[23] Core resources include Walter Wink's *Powers* trilogy: *Naming the Powers* (1984), *Unmasking the Powers* (1986), *Engaging the Powers* (1992) (Philadelphia/Minneapolis: Fortress Press); James E Loder, *The Transforming Moment: understanding convictional experiences* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981); John S. McClure, *Other-Wise Preaching: A Postmodern Ethic for Homiletics* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001); works by Walter Brueggemann, for example, *Cadences of Home : Preaching among Exiles*, 1st ed. (Louisville, Ky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997); Charles Campbell, *The Word before the Power: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002).

[24] Campbell, *The Word before the Power,* 3.

[25] Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 332.

[26] Katie Geneva Cannon, "Transformative Grace", in Amy Plantinga Pauw and Serene Jones, *Feminist and Womanist Essays in Reformed Dogmatics*, Columbia Series in Reformed Theology (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 139.

[27] The narrative ideas on which this paper is built are post-structuralist with a non-essentialist account of authenticity. A sense of authenticity is gained within this metaphor with the on-going performance of specific identity claims, which have been chosen from a range of claims/story-lines and therefore possible authenticities.

[28] Michael White and David Epston, *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990).

Another applicable feature of narrative practice is that of consultee becoming consultant. Those who have accessed narrative therapy are often invited to share their new knowledges with others similarly seeking assistance. Their knowledges and skills are thereby ac-knowledged. So too, the alternative story is thickened when the pew sitter becomes an evangelist. Rather than sharing one's story being motivated out of Christian duty, it arises from the image of each person as an expert on the developments in their own life, with knowledge and vision to share.

**From the past**

For a narrative to be resilient for the present and future, it needs to be grounded in the past. Our rituals bring past and present together, as we celebrate as the children of Israel or the body of Christ. "My father was a wandering Aramean." "Take and eat, this is my body." In this way, the past becomes part of our experience and links us strongly to our forebears in faith. Stephen Connor suggests that one definition of post-modernism is "the condition in which … the past appears to be included in the present, or at the present's disposal."[29] There is the sense of a long or enduring present. Judeo-Christianity could, by this definition, be seen to have been post-modern from pre-modernity. As we draw the reality of the past into the reality of our present, our engagement with the sacred text also thickens and enriches the metaphors that we hold in common as Christian community, so that symbolic layers are available for individuals and the community to access.

Within the sermon we also have the potential to make the past accessible to the present. Our task is to proclaim the gospel history in a way that it becomes an experience or expression which can be incorporated into the personal narrative. Randolph asks of the sermon, "What happened?"[30] and Craddock refers to the members of a congregation leaving the gathering "thinking their own thoughts, dealing with their own situations, and being responsible for their own faith."[31] Within my own denomination, the emphasis on a daily remembrance of one's baptism provides a foundation of regularly recalling that I am named and claimed by our nurturing God.

In narrative therapy "re-membering" is a process used to enhance the resilience of the reauthored story. Re-membering conversations aim to engage significant figures from one's past or present in supporting the directions one is seeking to follow. Such engagement may reflect relationships that have been held previously, or the imaginative construction of potential relationships; re-membering may be entirely within the imagination or, where appropriate, may lead to the renewing and restoring of supportive relationships in actual time and space.

In addition to our companions in church community, we can also call upon the cloud of witnesses, the saints with whom we share the table, to authenticate the preferred developments in our lives, in our ways of being and ways of thinking. The struggles of Augustine or the service of Sister Theresa may speak to any of us in a way that enables us to invoke their voices along with those of the people we actually know or have known, to be a part of the conversation that leads to the reauthoring of the personal narrative.

While we may prefer the confidence of the question, "What has Jesus done," WWJD is a type of re-membering question: a consciousness of Jesus is brought into the present, to assist in

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[29] Steven Connor (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 10.

[30] David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 132.

[31] Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority*, 3 ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 157.

moving in the direction one has chosen.[32] The "performance" of our lives as members of the body of the risen Christ may be seen as a particular – even iconic – version of re-membering.

**As we live within our future**

As the therapeutic journey develops, the reauthored life-story gives a platform from which people can "step into the near future of the landscapes of action of their lives."[33] The consultant will ask questions that invite a journey of the imagination towards the preferred lifestyle. So, too, in preaching, we invite those listening to share the proleptic vision of God's sovereignty. Arising out of our own personal narrative, co-authored with the Holy Spirit in collaboration with our faith community, the decisions we make and the actions we take are authentically ours. As we live in the now-but-not-yet we engage the imagination to learn to live in the future we cannot yet see. It is not the size of the steps we take towards it that counts, but the direction.

Many of the practical implications of using a narrative epistemology in thinking about the task of preaching are congruent – even identical with – the practice developed through other narrative approaches. However, just as re-authoring a personal narrative may open space for the performance of preferred ways of being, to highlight different words and a different structure may create open space to think further about how to assist the formation of transformational preachers.

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[32] We live with the dichotomy that Christ has done all that is needful, but that we also run toward the goal (Hebrews 12:1,2; I Cor 9).

[33] White, "Workshop Notes ".

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**LI OYUNE (I am Here): Gospel Brought Alive in Mayan Indigenous Community, and Implications for Homiletic Pedagogy in the United States**

Deborah A. Organ
University of St. Thomas

*Lidia stood over me, as I sat on the hard, stone steps of the hall where we held our retreat. One of the few Mayan women I have ever known with gray hair, she was at least 60 years old and had never learned to read or write. She told me, "I started drinking the year that three of my children died. I drank and drank so that I wouldn't feel the hurt of it quite so badly. Year after year. But then I started to hear the Word of God, and I stopped drinking. The Word gave me hope and helped me to live."*

*Maria sat among us early one morning in a tiny chapel. About 40 years old, divorced (very rare in the Mayan experience) after suffering horrible abuse at the hands of her husband, and raising her child alone, she told us, "What really changed everything for me was standing at the tomb with Mary Magdalene and embracing the resurrected Jesus Christ."*

Clearly, the Word of God for these women has very little to do with a book. And it has everything to do with transformation. The Word has changed the lives of many illiterate (as well as literate) Mayan women and men that I have met over recent years in and around the city of San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico. Often, this transformation has not come about as a result of having read the Word themselves; rather, it all began with the hearing of the Word, and continued with their participation in an experience of the Word alive. This paper will examine the experience of oral hermeneutics, and the implications for Western homiletics education that arise from the fruits of biblical interpretation among these largely illiterate Mayan communities.

First, I will describe and illustrate the pastoral approach of the Tsotzil ministry team in the Diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas that attempts to support an environment in which transformation in the Word can be nurtured. Having focused a previous paper on connections between the pastoral approach in San Cristobal with the discipline of critical pedagogy, I will dedicate this section, after a brief discussion of Paulo Freire's "reading the world," to specifically pastoral method and community experience.

Then I will look at the implications of the experience of these Mayan communities for students of preaching in the United States by connecting it with recent theological and scriptural developments. The identification of the Word, and the preaching of the Word, as rooted in experience as opposed to being primarily a didactic or academic exercise is a theme that has emerged again and again in theological circles over the past twenty years. Some of the experiences of the Mayan communities actualize elements of theological discourse that locate the beginning point of biblical interpretation and theological reflection in life experience.

Finally, I will describe concrete pedagogical interventions that may help students to draw themselves and their listeners deeper into the mystery and concrete reality of their own faith experience and its communal and social implications through homiletic preaching.

***Reading the World***

Paulo Freire made important connections between what he named "reading the word and reading the world."[1] He was referring to the fact that reading the written word cannot be separated from interpreting that word in one's context. For better or worse, in many Western academic circles, there is often an intermediate theoretical step that may or may not assume objectivity, but that in fact distances the interpreter from the concrete implications of the word being interpreted. All of us have heard preaching that seems to do just that—rather than bring people into connection with the Word spelled out in the reality of their lives and the life of the world, the preacher speaks abstractions that, far from illuminating the Word, keep it at a theoretical level.

The biblical Word is central to the faith experience of the 54 largely illiterate Mayan communities that make up the parish of San Juan Dieguito. The people gather in the communities weekly for Word/Communion celebrations with permanent deacons or local lay leadership. Because there is only one priest to serve their sacramental needs, Mass is celebrated only once or twice a year in many of the communities, partially accounting for the strong emphasis on the Word found in their religious ritual and faith expression.

***Interpreting the Word in San Juan Dieguito***

I was privileged to spend summer of 2006 as part of a pastoral team that sought primarily to invite and support these small communities into a self understanding as subjects rather than objects in their lives and faith expression.[2] The team's pastoral approach included three elements that most specifically lent themselves to the formation of the communities as subjects. They were: the use of image in biblical pedagogy and reflection, the invitation to role play and drama to contextualize the interpretation of the proclaimed Word, and the use of group process in ways that maximized participation.

**Image**

*One day in late June, the pastoral team (Pastor, four religious sisters, and myself) made our way to a remote region where the people gathered for a day of reflection on the life of their community. We planned to use the Pauline analogy of the body as a beginning point for dialogue about what brings community together and what tears it apart. It occurred to us in the planning that it might be beneficial to have a visual, and so we created a template of a life-sized human body that we invited the community to use in various ways throughout the day.*

*When we arrived, we met as a large group, read and then broke up into small groups. I was accompanying the women, who numbered 35. I quickly discovered that no one in the group could read, write, or speak Spanish. The power of image and picture became immediately apparent as the group began to speak about what holds the body together and what breaks it apart. Dialogue did not come easily to them, largely, I thought, because they were not accustomed to being asked what they thought. As they watched a young religious woman write all of their names on a part of the paper body that we were working with, they began to speak, though still in somewhat hushed tones, about what it means to be part of a body in that remote and beautiful place that contains so much suffering..*

[1] Paulo Freire,

[2] The distinction between people as subject and objects was developed by Freire and others in the area of pedagogy and continues to be used by liberation theologians, as well as biblical scholars (among others) to refer to dignity and self-determination in people as subjects, as opposed to being controlled, oppressed and co-opted as objects.

Image, whether presented as a beginning point in reflection on the Word, or created by participants as a response to that Word, is very significant in the interpretation of the proclaimed Word. Images hold cultural freight, and point to concreteness. They can also be an important conduit for creativity in expression, and in emerging identity as subject. I have seen a close connection between the seeing and creating of image and an individual or group's ability to identify themselves and act out of that identity.

Image and imagination, then, can lead to encounter, and then flow from it. Maria, in the introductory story, sees her conversion and relationship to Christ in terms of an empty tomb, a repentant sinner, and a loving encounter. All of those images are so alive in her that they have led her to continually deepen her sense of identity as part of a community of disciples with a mandate to proclaim the Word. Maria's experience points directly to central issues of the function of homiletic preaching: to bring the Word alive in a way that leads to mission.

**Drama**

*Thirty-five women gathered in the clouds in a high village in the mountains for a three day retreat. It rained constantly, and, after the first day, no one could get completely dry at any time. But the group reflected faithfully on their experience in response to the question, "What does this Word look like in your life and community?" One group of women, ranging in age from 17 to early sixties, reflected on Acts 6:1-6. They acted out three situations in which they feel called to address the growing edges of their relationships to one another in community: dealing with illness, communicating with those who are isolated in a variety of ways, and sharing resources with those who do not have enough.*

*Often, when I ask groups to dramatize or do role plays, they begin very hesitantly, afraid that they won't be able to think of anything. As they continue to work together, I have very consistently seen a growing enthusiasm for the work, as the groups realize that what they are portraying is not something "made-up" but reality as they live and perceive it. And that is exciting.*

Drama can offer the opportunity for people to not only see how things are, but how they could be if they live close to the Gospel. The Word is like a seed embedded in the reality that they know, with the potential to transform it. Sometimes the dramas have two parts: the reality now, and the possible, both in the same context. I have observed drama and role play to open people's perception of their own reality. Typically, after each dramatic presentation, I ask the group if what they saw was a true reflection of their community life, and the answer is generally a resounding "yes!" Digging their feet deeply into their own context can pave the way for an encounter with Gospel, with the living God, that is potentially transformational.

On one womens' retreat, the women role played relationship between men and women at home, first in the way many of them experienced it, as laced with conflict, oppressive gender roles and sometimes violence. Then, they role played the Gospel transformed way—and one group brought in a child and had the woman playing the father holding the little girl's hands while the woman playing the mother brushed the child's hair. It was poignant and moving—and possible. One of the participants spoke to me after a workshop about the changes that have come about in her family since they had begun to "listen to God's Word." From being a family that dealt daily with alcohol abuse and violence, this family had moved to effective communication between spouses, and to teaching all of their children how to take care of the house (regardless of gender expectations and in the face of criticism from their neighbors for making their boys do "womens' work"). Role plays help to outline how a vision of Gospel transformation might look

in the very fabric of the lives people live. This experience of role play points to one the most difficult aspects of homiletic preaching: concretely envisioning and naming the possible, redeemed reality toward which we believe, live and work.

**Group Process**

*On a beautiful Sunday afternoon, we were in a community just outside the city of San Cristobal, situated in the mountains overlooking the city. Inside the chapel were some of the people in the parish who suffer the most. They have been squeezed out economically to the point where many don't know how they will be able to move their families into the future. Many live a kind of poverty that erodes at the deepest levels of their identity. As one man said, "Living this poverty makes me have to focus so much on where I will get the material things that we need that I forget about everything else. And I hate it." Many of the people didn't want to speak. But the noise level in the place grew as many spoke to the people sitting nearest them. First about the pain in their lives. And then about the hope.*

Rather than a lecture or "talking-to" format for adult faith formation, the pastoral team intentionally adopted methods that would maximize participation in the communities. Speaking one's word in the Mayan cultural context is a sign that that person is respected, and a subject in his or her dealings with the community. Women are often not welcome, nor do they feel qualified, to speak their word. The pastoral team invited participation whenever possible. One strategy was by asking the first questions about things the people know a lot about—their homes and children. As an outsider, I was able to ask very basic questions out of a real need to understand their context, and out of interest. They were able to see that, and responded—often hesitantly at first, but growing in confidence as conversations continued.

There are different levels for offering one's word. The first is response in small group dialogue. The second is initiating conversation in small group dialogue, and third is reporting on small group dialogue in plenary. The fourth and most risky is offering one's own commentary in plenary. In many of the more remote villages, the first level was as far as we got. In other places, however, many people were willing and able to be challenged to participate in new and potentially riskier ways.

One problem, particularly for women, in public speaking of any kind was the ridicule that they are sometimes subsequently subjected to in the community. "Who are you to speak in public?" was a question often put to new leaders. This can erode confidence, or keep people humble. Formation can support people in the face of this kind of opposition, and one-on-one dialogue with leaders was an important aspect of the process work done in communities. Where participation happens, the Word begins to emerge in the word of the community.

***Implications for Homiletics Education***

The experiences of these Mayan communities have implications at the deepest level for homiletic students in the West. Homiletic preaching, at its heart, invites both preacher and community to a lived encounter with the Risen Christ, revealed in Word and Sacrament. Essentially, the experience of the Mayan communities serves as an important reminder of that goal, and of the diverse possibilities for attaining it. Through the ages, in both theology and biblical hermeneutics, the Church and the Bible have been used to colonize and dominate indigenous peoples like the Mayans. In fact, during a recent era when some indigenous people in Latin America began to gain a stronger sense of themselves and their worth, they rejected the

Bible as a tool of oppression. In a letter written by Andean Indians in 1985 to Pope John Paul II, they said:

> We, the Indians of the Andes and America have decided to give you back your Bible, since for the past five hundred centuries it has brought us neither love, peace or justice. We beg you take your Bible and give it back to our oppressors, whose hearts and minds are in greater need of its moral teachings. As part of the colonial exchange we received the Bible, which is an ideological weapon of attack. The Spanish sword used in the daytime to attack and kill the Indians, turned at night into a cross which attacked the Indian soul.[3]

What I have seen in these Mayan communities, however, is an example of the use of what has indeed been a text of oppression used as a means of liberation and transformation of the people. Their largely oral hermeneutics, in the tradition of many peoples around the world, offers insight into a way that is "other" in many respects from readings of biblical texts from Western perspectives.

Here I would like to name three specific ways that the hermeneutics engaged by these Mayan communities differ from Western interpretations in ways that point to issues of concern for students in homiletic and ministerial formation in the United States today. First, the very difference of interpretation from what is often an oppressed place challenges students who have never looked at life or the Bible from that perspective to learn at the feet of Christians very different from themselves, but whose concerns for liberation might well be very present among the people these students will serve in congregations.[4] Second, the concreteness of the transformation experienced by the Mayan people in their encounter with the oral Word was often apparent in their lives. This concreteness is counter to the abstraction of some preaching, and the sometimes tendency of preachers to remain on a theoretical level in their breaking open of the Word. Third, the power of the cultural heritage of these indigenous people that has survived more than 500 years of marginalization brings richness to Christian religious practice that easily leads to reflection on the variety of expressions of faith that are possible and indeed exist throughout the world. In other words, the experience of these Mayan people has something to say to the whole Catholic world.[5]

### *The Relationship of Oral Hermeneutics to Preaching*

I find it interesting that the theological and specifically biblical literature reflecting on indigenous peoples throughout the world often neglects to mention the very real fact that the majority are illiterate, a fact that has implications for their encounters with the Word. Illiterate people are hearers of the Word, and, for many of them, that Word is not easily relegated to a book that can be put aside following worship. One can hardly escape the irony of the fact that those in the contemporary world who, in some respects including widespread illiteracy, most

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[3] 'Pope asked to Take Back the Bible,' *The Telegraph* 7 February 1985, quoted in R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial and Postcolonial Encounters,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, 222

[4] See Sugirtharajah, 223-225 for treatment of the movement toward inculturation as opposed to outright rejection of syncretistic religious practice in indigenous communities.

[5] Pablo Richard, in his *La Fuerza Espiritual de la Iglesia de las Pobres,* Costa Rica: Editorial Dei, 1987, pages 39-41, describes what he sees as the theological underpinnings of the relevance to the whole Church of the struggle for liberation of the poor in Latin America.

closely resemble the first hearers of the Gospel, do not have direct access to something as central to Christian faith as the Bible.

Patrick Kalilombe, in his study of the Bible and illiterate Malawian Catholics,[6] points out that illiteracy in a community can give disproportionate power to those who can read and write to choose what of the Bible their illiterate brothers and sisters will hear, and what parts they will not. He claims that the central issue is interpretation, and those who are literate may well share only what they think is important, disregarding, albeit sometimes unintentionally, legitimate concerns that other members of the community may have. Power and educational differentials are issues clearly not to be taken lightly by the preacher in any cultural context.

The importance of the preacher knowing her or his own social location and being present in the community to learn about the social location(s) present in their specific community is even more important when a large number of community members are illiterate. Sharing the proclamation of the Word, and, when appropriate, the ministry of preaching can help to create an environment of proclamation, fertile to the possibilities of interpretation of the Word by illiterate and literate alike.

Social location becomes an issue in preaching both in style and homiletic content. In an illiterate community, for example, a preacher would likely not invoke the authority of biblical scholars to make his or her point, but may preach through images familiar to the people, but with the potential to invite them (and the preacher) to new growth.

In addition to these concerns, living and working among the Mayan people constantly reminded me that preachers and ministers cannot assume that the concerns of all indigenous people, all illiterate people, all educated people, etc., are the same. There is no substitute for being present to and listening to people, and engaging in authentic dialogue.

***Transformation***

Homiletic preaching, according to the United States Bishops' document on preaching, *Fulfilled in Your Hearing: the Homily in the Sunday Assembly,*[7] should be an experience rather than a didactic exercise. The document's exhortation to preach life through the scriptures is often difficult for students steeped in academia to grasp. I recall a student coming to me a couple of years ago, almost belligerently defending his desire to preach theological abstraction. He returned a few weeks later, crestfallen, to report that the people in his parish had given him a talking-to, and that they wanted his homilies to relate to the reality of the daily lives they were living. They also let him know that they wanted the connections to be deep, rather than superficial, and to challenge them to new life.

The image of the bored listener and boring preacher is almost iconic in dominant United States Church culture. Many people of faith go to church Sunday after Sunday, not expecting much. And some appear to be perfectly happy that way. At the same time, there is a deep hunger to hear a relevant Word, one that reaches into the soul. It is in that hunger that the experience of these Mayan communities may speak to other Catholics in very different cultural contexts. And, it is to that hunger that the preacher responds.

Transformation is never given by one person to another. God works in the life of the listener to the Word to make transformation happen in the very fabric of life. The preacher's job

[6] Patrick A. Kalilombe, "A Malawian Example: The Bible and Non-literate Communities," in R. S. Sugirtharajah, Ed., *Voices from the Margin: Interpreting the Bible in the Third World,* New York: Orbis Books, 1991, 397-399.
[7] USCCB Secretariat for Priestly Life and Ministry, 1980.

is not to tell reality to people in a way analogous to Paulo Freire's banking method of education,[8] but to proclaim the Word in such a way that the listeners recognize that Word present in their lives, and can begin to imagine just where that Word might take them.

Edward Farley writes of the importance of preaching Gospel rather than Bible.[9] His distinction is largely based on the common perception in dominant United States culture that the Bible is not a living Word, but an antiquated book. Rather than focus on specific passages, Farley argues for the need to proclaim Gospel, the central message of the Word of God in the context of community, with a view toward transformation. Edward Schillebeeckx offered insight on the living nature of the Christian tradition by reflecting that the tradition only remains alive if it is handed on by a living history of discipleship, and that such a living history includes new moments of revelation that genuinely actualize apostolic faith.[10] The preacher is privileged to speak words that attempt to proclaim a Word that is at its heart mystery, even while its expression is in the concrete circumstances of human living.

Kwok Pui-lan points out that often the re-telling of the Word by illiterate people brings alive that Word in striking and unique ways that are vividly connected to life.[11] She notes that the imagination and life of such interpretations may arise out of a primary concern for the hearing of the Word in their present context rather than with the historical reality out of which the Word emerged. I believe that such interpretations offer, in the people themselves, concrete glimpses of God's goodness, mystery and salvation.[12] The life of these interpretations has something to offer—particularly to us as academics. It is an opportunity to remember that lived encounter with God and one another is central to our lives and our preaching.

Preaching, then, is invitation to ever-deepening encounter with the mystery of the living God, and to all that such unfolding encounter may concretely mean to individuals and communities of faith, and to the preacher.

***Different Voices***

*While I was in San Cristobal, I hosted a group of theological students from my home institution. Most were seminarians from the United States preparing for ordination to the priesthood. A number had never been outside of the U. S. and all were honored by the warmth of the hospitality given them by the Mayan communities.*

*Their theological reflection was rich and full of questions, as they could see the reality of commitment and transformation in the lives of some of the people, and yet Catholic faith expression and ritual were so different (particularly in their inclusion of Mayan cultural elements) that they struggled with the possibility that there is more than one way that Christianity is true and that Catholicism is practiced. Some of their most fundamental beliefs*

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[8] Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* 20th Anniversary Edition, New York: Continuum, 1991, describes the banking method as teaching with the assumption that the mind of the student is empty, awaiting the deposit of knowledge from the teacher.

[9] Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church's Ministry,* Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2003.

[10] Mary Catherine Hilkert and Robert Schreiter, Eds., *The Praxis of the Reign of God: An Introduction to the Theology of Edward Schillebeeckx,* Second Edition, New York: Fordham University Press, 2002, 60.

[11] Kwok Pui-lan, *Introducing Asian Feminist Theology,* Cleveland: the Pilgrim Press, 2000, 54.

[12] Here I lean heavily on Schillebeeckx's distinction between salvation and revelation, in that salvation in its entirety is distinct from human experience, but is revealed through that experience. Thus, our basis for faith in a loving God must of necessity be in what we can see in our experience of moments when good is advanced and evil put back. See Hilkert, section beginning on page 61.

*about what constitutes a Catholic and a Christian were called into question, and the complexity of relationship between cultural context and faith expression/inculturation was a significant issue.*

Despite the proliferation of writings by theologians and scripture scholars in developing countries and from perspectives in the United States outside of the dominant cultural reality, there is still often present in United States theological education the tendency to see Western perspectives as normative, and diverse cultural, racial or gender perspectives as marginal, or, at best, enhancements of the central theological perspective.

Hermeneutical approaches that privilege diverse cultural contexts in actualizing the Word in those contexts do not typically deny the value of historical critical method, and other approaches that offer insight into the historical and cultural realities of the ancient times when the biblical texts were produced.[13] An experience like the one the students had with the indigenous communities can keep the tension between Western cultural hegemony and diverse voices alive, and perhaps open them (as it does me) to the diversity that they will find in their local communities of faith.

**Pedagogical Approaches that Lead to Encounter**

How professors present homiletics as an academic discipline and as a craft definitely influences how theological students see themselves as preachers and how they exercise the preaching task. I believe that there are important things that we can do in the classroom to create a climate where students are more likely to preach toward transformation. Here I will deal briefly with four of them: inviting students to reflect on their own experiences of transformation, creating a climate of dialogue and critical reflection on the discipline of homiletics while providing diverse writings as texts, naming and keeping present both individual and communal aspects of transformation, and using transformation and connection to social location as important criteria in offering feedback on classroom preaching.

***The Preacher's Own Experience of Transformation***

Most students are in seminary because they feel a personal call, or vocation, to serve God specifically as priest or pastoral minister. Almost everyone has a story. Often the stories include some elements of transformation, either of one's heart by God in personal prayer, or of invitation/affirmation/witness by community members, and very often both elements are present. Keeping those memories and their attendant mystery fresh, and continuing to reflect on how God transforms are important for the preacher, and some of this can be done in the homiletics classroom. For example, I often give brief speaking exercise assignments to students at the beginning of their first homiletics class, just to get them on their feet. One focus for such an exercise can be some aspect of each student's own experiences of transformation. Each presentation can be followed by peer feedback and questions. With carefully crafted and expressed ground rules of listening and mutual respect, such an exercise can help to create an environment conducive to continued transformation.

I can scarcely over emphasize the importance of listening in the creation of a classroom environment of trust and openness. Real listening, in class and parish and in prayer, keeps us from ever thinking of our own experiences as normative, and open us to the many possibilities

[13] Kwok Pui-lan, in *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology,* Louisville: Westminister John Knox Press, 2005, 78-79, reflects on the importance of dialogue between the text in its original context and the contemporary interpreter in a way reminiscent of Ricoeur.

for transformation that are potential resources for homiletic preaching. While a preacher's experience of transformation is not normative, it is the place out of which his or her preaching will flow, with or without direct reference in the homily itself.

As a professor of homiletics, I find it important to continually challenge myself with the question of what/who is at the center of my teaching of homiletics: Do I attempt to somehow mediate students' encounter with the Word, or do I, together with students, create an environment where students express and preach out of their own unmediated relationships with God and community?[14]

***Climate of Dialogue and Critical Reflection***

In my experience, often apparently objective methods of scripture interpretation, and preaching that directly flows from those methods, are attractive to students because they fear a relativism that removes meaning from the sacred text of the Bible. Parker Palmer said it well:

> The great things disappear in the face of both absolutism and relativism. With absolutism, we claim to know precisely the nature of great things, so there is no need to continue in dialogue with them—or with each other. The experts possess the facts, and all that remains is for them to transmit those facts to those who do not know. With relativism, we claim that knowledge depends wholly on where one stands, so we cannot know anything with any certainty beyond our personal point of view. Once again, there is no need to continue in dialogue with great things or with each other: one truth for you, another for me, and never mind the difference.[15]

Offering a variety of materials to students and challenging narrowness of perspective in both teacher and student, is an important pedagogical task in homiletics. Students may be more likely to delve into the messy nature of the sacred in an environment of trust and mutual respect. Factors that influence the creation of such an environment include the ethos, or integrity, of the teacher, pedagogical method that gives space to substantive dialogue while providing stimulating and quality material to initiate and feed the dialogue, and specific exercises that encourage reflection on social location.

For example, one thing I have done that has worked fairly well is that I give the students two short hermeneutical pieces that each interpret a specific scripture reading. I ask them to choose one of the readings, and to interpret it in writing from each student's own social location. Then, I ask the students to compare their writings to the pieces I provided and to note both differences and similarities in interpretation.[16]

***Individual and Communal Aspects of Transformation***

Students, particularly those from dominant United States culture, may see themselves and their faith experience mainly from an individual perspective. And yet they will soon be at the service of a parish community, however united or fragmented. The Mayan communities offer a

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[14] Parker Palmer, in *Courage to Teach,* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998, p. 118, writes about this related in general to pedagogy with any subject matter. He offers helpful diagrams of teacher-centered and Great Thing-centered approaches to teaching.

[15] Palmer, 109.

[16] There are a number of good selections for this purpose in Fernando Segovia and Mary Ann Tolbert, *Reading from this Place: Biblical Interpretation and Social Location in the United States,*

perspective from people who first and foremost see themselves as members of a community rather than as individuals. This difference can be formative for students as the interpretive concerns of those communities come to light.

While respecting where students are coming from in terms of identity, I see value in encouraging them to reflect from a communal perspective as part of their homiletic preparation. When presenting them with the three-phase process that I base all content of my Introductory course on, Contemplo-Studeo-Praedico,[17] I teach a Benedictine methodology for *Lectio Divina*[18]that makes explicit reference to considering how the community as a whole, as well as specific members of the community, might hear the Word.

Proclamation, hearing and responding to the Word of God as community is one of the things that Mayan communities, and other people from around the world, have to offer to us in the West. Staying close to those experiences is important in the formation of preachers—both for their personal benefit, and also so that they may be prepared to enter into and serve communities that include immigrants and others who may come from a communal perspective. Consideration of the impact of immigration on preaching is beyond the scope of this present paper, but suffice to say for the moment that immigration makes all of the concerns that I deal with here much more urgent and real for theological students here because of the increased proximity of growing numbers of people who come from a great diversity of racial and cultural contexts and perspectives, who may be literate or illiterate, and who bring their own encounters with and ideas about God to the communities they join in the United States.

***Transformation in Preaching Feedback***

Careful crafting of criteria for good homiletic preaching helps to establish the centrality of transformative encounter in the preaching event. Specific questions such as, "Did you see evidence of this preacher's encounter with God, and with this community, in the preaching?" can further dialogue.

**Conclusion**

The indigenous Mayan communities of San Cristobal consistently point to aspects of homiletic preaching that lead to transformation. Their cultural context, fraught as it sometimes is with still-strong colonial influences, economic poverty and the ensuing suffering on many levels, and, in some places, fragmentation of family and community structures that are furthered by the effects of globalization, nonetheless offers interpretation and incarnation of the Word that has much to say to teachers and students of homiletics in the United States.

[17] Contemplo-Studeo-Praedico was developed by Mary Margaret Pazdan, O.P., Professor of Biblical Studies at the Aquinas Institute of Theology in Saint Louis, Missouri. Contemplo is praying with and reflecting on the texts as they fall on one's own ears and other ears in the community, Studeo is the consultation of scriptural resources that allow the preacher to delve into insights and questions from Contemplo, and Praedico is the development of a focus into a homiletic form appropriate for preacher and community, and likely to name, invite and challenge to transformation.

[18] See Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., *Lectio Divina* in the public domain.

**The Work of Our Hands:**
**Listener Involvement in Liturgical Preaching**

Jim Schmitmeyer
Sponsor: Craig Satterlee, Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

## Introduction

Have you ever remodeled a house? Have you ever served on a steering committee for a church renovation? If so, you know what that kind of work entails and you know the kind of people that get that kind of job done.

So, picture a typical blue collar worker in your mind, perhaps a carpenter or a welder. Why? Because the goal of this paper is to highlight the ability of liturgical preaching *to forge a vital connection* between the work of human hands and the worship of our sovereign God.

This paper will demonstrate that such connections depend on the relationship between the preacher and his or her listeners and development of a "partnership in preaching" mindset within a congregation.

## Part I: The Relationship between Work and Worship

Before we consider specific aspects of the preacher-listener relationship, it is necessary to consider the setting in which liturgical preaching takes place. A comparison between what takes place at the Table of the Word (ambo or pulpit) and the Table to the Eucharist (altar of sacrifice) will reveal the sacramental dimensions of liturgical speech and its reliance on "the stuff" of ordinary life, i.e. the work of human hands.

We begin with the proposition that homiletic preaching is different from other kinds of preaching. How is it different? *It sanctifies*.What does it sanctify? It sanctifies the work of human labor, human love and human longing.

The key word here is *sanctifies*. The words of the preacher *make holy* the work of human hands in a similar way that the words of a priest consecrate the Bread and Wine on an altar. If Sunday worship is comprised of two segments: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, each segment contains its own "communion service"

A liturgical view of preaching sees the homily as "the communion service" of the Liturgy of the Word. In my particular tradition, this is strongly supported in of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: " In every liturgical action the Holy Spirit is sent in order to bring us into communion with Christ as so to form his Body" (#1108).

Homiletic preaching is not "time out" from the experience of awe that true worship engenders. Moreover, preaching is not "time out" from worship for a few words of instruction or clarification from the preacher. Rather, Jesus said, "Those who hear you, hear me."

That's a reference to human communication as a form of divine communion. Jesus is speaking here about a type of communion that occurs when people talk in a certain way. Therefore, it follows that the homily can in fact become a "linguistic-sacramental" moment.

The purpose of this unique rhetorical form called *homiletic preaching* is to engender within the assembly a mystical encounter with God through the faculty of human speech, speech that reveals the hidden presence of God in the world in which we live.

When a preacher weaves associations from the lived experience into the matrix of sacred tradition and scripture, a transformation occurs. The longing of our hearts and the work of our hands is viewed as something holy and worthy of God, in short, our life and our world is *sanctified* through contact with the Divine Word of God.

The process of sanctification occurs in *descending* and *ascending* pattern. In the former, human labor is accorded respect and honor simply by receiving attention in the course of a sacred rite. In other words, listeners are reminded that the work of their hands is important to God, as this quote from sociologist James Stockinger eloquently conveys:

> Each of us lives in and through an immense movement of the hands of other people. The hands of other people lift us from the womb. The hands of other people grow the food we eat, weave the clothes we wear and build the shelters we inhabit. The hands of other people give aid and comfort in times of affliction and distress. It is in and through the hands of other people that the fruits of the earth are appropriated to the needs of our individual lives. And, in the end, it is the hands of other people that lower us into the earth. (James Stockinger as quoted in "The Good Society" by Robert Bellah et al Knopf, 1991)

The *ascending* movement of the liturgical sanctification of everyday life is expressed in this quote by theologian Teilhard de Chardin, S.J. who, as a chaplain in World War I, wrote this reflection on the Mass on a day when the required elements of bread and wine were unavailable.

> Over there, on the horizon, the sun has just touched with light the outmost fringe of the eastern sky…. I will place on my paten, O God, the harvest to be won by this renewal of labor…
>
> *Grant me the remembrance and the mystic presence of all those in office, in laboratory and factory…*
>
> Once upon a time men took into your temple the first fruits of their harvests, the flower of their flocks. But the offering you really want, the offering you mysteriously need… is nothing less than the growth of the world….
>
> *Receive, O Lord, this all-embracing host which your whole creation…offers you at this dawn of a new day.* (*Teilhard de Chardin's "Mass on the World")*

The "all-embracing host" to which Chardin refers is not the bread of the Eucharist, but the work of human hands. He is telling us—through language inspired by the sacred liturgy—that human labor and commerce matter to God and, when offered to God, are sanctified by God.

This joining of our lives to the sacrifice of Christ is vital to the human spirit and lies at the very heart of the Church's sacrifice of praise. The homily serves the sanctifying nature of the liturgy whenever it endeavors to make holy the offering of our day-to-day life.

The classroom is the proper setting for education. A church provides the place for praise. With this in mind, it should be clear that Christians do not attend the sacred liturgy to be lectured. We come to be sanctified so that, when we return to our regular duties on Monday morning, God might use the resumption of our human labor to sanctify that world to Himself.

In other words, the worship paid to God inside a church begins long before the pipe organ cranks up and the opening hymn is sung. This why preachers who engage the experience of listeners who work in agriculture, sales, construction, communication, health care, etc. place themselves in an ideal position to help the people of God to connect the Word of God with the world in which they live.

There is a saying among the Orthodox: "With the eyes of flesh we see bread and wine upon the altar. With the eyes of faith we see the Body and Blood of Christ." Can a similar statement be made about the sacramentality of preaching? I.e. "With our human ears we hear about human experience, but with ears of faith we hear the voice of Christ."

Consider the possibilities with the following texts:

- the prodigal son who runs away from home,
- a wedding reception in the village of Cana that runs short on wine
- a fishing boat suddenly, miraculously full of fish.

That's what we hear with our human ears. But then, through the preaching of the Word, a transformation occurs.

- the story of the prodigal son melds with the image of a kid loitering outside a 7-11 convenience store
- we find ourselves dancing at a wedding and note the rhythm of grace in the shuffle of our feet and the passing of the years
- we're fishing with a grandchild on a pond in Indiana or Tennessee but get our minds off "the miracles" all around us.

This is what happens when we worship. We listen to ordinary words but hear the language of angels spoken with a Southern, Minnesotan or Mexican accent.

In a sense, it's Pentecost all over again as we hear the proclamation of God's wonderful works in our own language; the deep mysteries of God conveyed in words we understand.

Such is the impact of preaching when partnerships are formed to make connections happen between God's world and our world.

Part Two: A Brief Look at a Rhetorical Framework

To help us understand the unique rhetorical qualities of homiletic discourse, we'll compare it to three other categories of preaching.

Throughout the history of the Church, there has existed four distinct types of preaching: Evangelistic, Catechetical, Theological and Homiletic. The following analysis is drawn from Fred Baumer's doctoral dissertation, "Toward Homiletic as a Rhetorical Genre" (Northwestern

University, 1985). In this work, each traditional type of preaching has its unique purpose which can be summarized as follows:

| | |
|---|---|
| Evangelization: | Conversion |
| Catechesis: | Right behavior |
| Theological argument: | Right thought |
| Homiletic: | Worship |

Each type of preaching as its own unique content:

| | |
|---|---|
| Evangelization: | Information |
| Catechesis: | Advice |
| Theological argument: | Analysis |
| Homiletic: | Integration |

Integration can be viewed in terms similar to those used above to describe sanctification:

- integration places the mysteries of God in the context of ordinary life
- integration enhances the experience of mystical transformation, i.e. God's presence becomes *real* through the agency of the spoken word.

In short, integration happens when the preacher, like a blue collar worker, welds our world to God's world, enabling, for instance, a young boy to think about St. Joseph as he envisions the basement at home and his dad's work bench in the corner or allowing a visitor to a hospital to recall Christ healing a leper at the sight of a nurse changing a bandage.

Integration is an act of sanctification and illumines the insight at the heart of de Chardin's words: Receive, O Lord, this all-bracing host, this work of our hands, which all creation offers you at the beginning of this day."

**Part Three: Making the Connections Happen**

How is integration accomplished in public discourse? The primary rhetorical strategy used by liturgical preachers is that of description.

The more that preachers can describe the experience of grace in the lives of their listeners, and the more that listeners are willing to share their experience of grace with their preachers, the more effective the homilies become.

The preacher is the one who stands in the midst of the community and cries out: "Look! Here is God! And there is God! And over there, yet another hint of God!"

Through describing such things as the yearning at the heart of human love, the hurt that lies amid the fragments of broken dreams or sketching a vision of a world where terrorists abandon their bombs and lions lie down with lambs, the people of God begin to grasp something of the wonders of the God in whom we live and move and have our being. The result is True Worship, that is, sincere and heartfelt praise, thanksgiving and exultation.

No one accomplishes this important work better than an effective homilist. Here are recommendations to foster a attitude of partnership in preaching within one's congregation:

1. Introduce a "Take Your Preacher to Work" Initiative

Can you imagine Jesus preaching to roughneck fishermen without ever climbing into one of their boats? Jesus did not shun the work of the dock…or the dust of the field…or the din of the marketplace. His preaching was full of references to ordinary life. Because of this, His words had immediate appeal and lasting effect. So, ask your listeners for a tour of their work place, join a parishioner in the company lunchroom or request an hour or two of "shadowing." Visit the job sites and the places where your listeners work, and you'll be following the example of the greatest preacher who ever lived.

2. Enter the Marketplace

Jesus referred to money more often than he mentioned sin. If you include his references to coins and market place, the gospels mention commercial transactions twice as often as they mention the word, "sin."

3. Form Homily Reflection Groups

Homilists aren't professors. We're more like reporters out in the field. A homily reflection group that reviews an early draft of the Sunday homily can help the preacher refine the focus and add detail to make the exposition of a particular passage realistic and compelling.

**Conclusion: A Sample Homily**

This homily for the Fourth Sunday of Advent illustrates the use of listener input as well as the use of descriptive language in bringing about an experience of "communion" in the context of the Liturgy of the Word.

*Do not be afraid, Mary.*

We hear those words in today's gospel,
but as any mother will tell you,
fear and worry fall heavy on the heart.

*Do not be afraid, Mary.*

But nine months of pregnancy
means nine months of worry.
Will my child be healthy?
Will my child be strong?

*Do not be afraid.*

What about colic and jaundice;
ear infections, speech impediments?

*Do not be afraid.*

What about school?
Will my child have friends?
What will I say
when others make fun of my child?

*Mary, do not be afraid.*

Will my child be brave?
Will my child save the life of someone drowning?
Defend the rights of those shoved aside?

Maybe it was here, at this point in the conversation,
that Mary bowed her head
and opened her heart.

And new life in her was conceived.
And the salvation of the world commenced.

It began in fear, but the fear did not flee.

It tugged at her heart
and showed in her eyes
each time the baby's cry turned shrill,
each time he ran from the house
--as little boys do--
only to come back with a swollen lip
or blood matted in his hair.

Fear.
It was always there, as it is for every mother.
Sometimes muffled,
like the sound of a hammer
in the carpenter shop.

Other times sharp and loud,
like the cries of the crowds that began to gather
on the shore of the sea
to hear the words He would speak.

This son of hers,
this child she carried in her womb
now cradling lepers with open sores
now lifting children into his lap…

This son of hers
now going down to the river,
now going out to the desert
now going out on the sea
to pull in nets of fish
with strong arms bronzed with the sun.

And she knew…(as only a mother can know)…
she knew that one day
bright blood
would string down those arms of his
now so strong, but once so small.

And nails would pierce the hands she once washed.
Because her son's words were strong, much too strong.

And some day soldiers would come…
she knew they would come…for him.

*Do not be afraid. Mary, do not be afraid.*

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**Art Has its Reasons: The Emerging Role of the Arts in Protestant Congregations**

Lynne M. Baab, University of Washington
with Robert Stephen Reid, University of Dubuque

> Churches and synagogues, museums and galleries, and community art programs are playing an increasing role in bringing Americans' interests in the arts to bear on their quests for the sacred. In the process, new attention is being given to the religious imagination, and many people are experimenting with the arts in their devotional lives, at their houses of worship, and in their efforts to serve others. The consequences are sometimes profound. Making greater use of the arts becomes a path to personal growth. For many churches, it has also been a dynamic source of new vitality (Wuthnow, *All in Sync: How Music and Art are Revitalizing American Religion*, 2003; p. xiv-xv).

According to The Princeton sociologist of religion, Robert Wuthnow, congregations have increasingly begun experimenting with greater use of the arts by holding art festivals and craft fairs and by hosting artist-in-residence programs and concert series. Larger congregations have occasionally sponsored entire orchestras and touring musical companies (p. 18). In addition films, theater productions, popular music, and the visual arts have increasingly explored religious and spiritual issues, showing the close connection possible between the arts and the sacred. Wuthnow believes that "one of the most important reasons that spirituality seems so pervasive in American culture is the publicity it receives because of its presence in the arts" (p. 16).

Emergent churches, which appear to represent a significant direction for the larger church serve as a particularly vivid demonstration of this trend. These congregations often rely heavily on the arts in their worship experiences, using video projections of images during sermons and frequent use of symbols and rituals in a variety of ways. In these demographically young congregations, the connection between the Christian faith and the use of the arts, symbols and rituals is taken for granted (Carson, 2005; Crouch, 2004; Bader-Saye, 2004; Gibbs and Bolger, 2005). This comfortable give and take between the expression of spirituality in the arts and the embrace of the arts in Protestant congregations has not always been present. While the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic churches have historically used the arts in worship, Protestants have been "inclined to underestimate the power of images in religion" (Edwards, 2004, p. 31). Many early Protestants were "iconoclasts," destroying icons and other artistic images intended to represent religious truths. Even when Protestants have acknowledged that the arts might be acceptable as a way of accessing religious truth, they have often sought to limit the power of this expression to music. The visual arts have often been viewed as a gateway to idolatry (Brown, 2005; Dyrness, 2004).

As Wuthnow has documented a new engagement with the arts, including the visual arts can be observed in many Protestant congregations. More Protestant Christians seem to be willing to embrace the view articulated by Edwards (2004), who writes that Christians in the modern era "tend to view religious images and symbols (and associated rituals) as representing an inner state of belief that precedes the image, symbol or ritual... Yet images, symbols and rituals can move us and shape us at nondiscursive levels; they can impart feelings, understanding and aptitude of which we literally cannot speak" (p. 32). Morgan (2005) and Jensen (2004) argue that images

and symbols shape us at these nondiscursive levels by accomplishing a number of purposes, such as ordering space and time, imagining community, emboding forms of communication with the supernatural, and influencing thoughts and behaviors. In this paper, I argue that the arts fulfill an additional role: the arts provide a much needed place of balance between unity and diversity. This unity and diversity consist, first of all, of the common challenge in Christian congregations to embrace a diversity of gifts, talents, and viewpoints while affirming the community's spiritual center in one God and one faith. This tension is described in I Corinthians 12: 4, 5 as "varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit, and ... varieties of services, but the same Lord" (NRSV). In addition, I argue that the arts can provide a place of balance when the forces of unity and diversity are more extreme: when the "one faith" is articulated in a uncomfortably restrictive fashion, and when the forces of diversity, within and outside the congregation, verge on chaos.

In what follows I wish to locate my interest in a specific case of a congregation in which I have served. I then wish to explore the issues raised by drawing on the theories of M. M. Bakhtin, who I believe can help us understand this vital role of the arts in congregations. I am particularly interested in the way Bakhtin explores the ability of a novel to present a diversity of voices that enables the reader to find a balance point between, on the one hand, the forces that draw us inward toward a single, unitary, authoritative voice and, on the other hand, the cultural momentum that pushes us outward toward diversity, fragmentation, and ultimately chaos. I wish to contend that the burgeoning interest in exploring the arts in Protestant worship may be enabling parishioners to find that same tenuous balancing point, that safe place, that helps them negotiate the tensions between the authoritative voice of the church – coming from the Bible, Christian history, pastors and other church leaders – and the cultural forces that encourage diversity, openness and a multiplicity of voices.

**A CASE STUDY**

From 1997 to 2004, I served as associate pastor in a midsize to large evangelical congregation in a major metropolitan area. During those seven years, I witnessed an explosion of interest in the arts, both within my own congregation and in many others. Congregations in my city, ranging across the theological spectrum, established arts academies, hosted arts events, and offered classes on literature, poetry, many forms of visual art, drama and music. Artists in many disciplines found new opportunities to use their gifts within their own congregations, and parishioners engaged in more opportunities at church that enabled them enjoy the arts.

When I began my service as associate pastor in 1997, the congregation already had some commitment to the arts. A congregational theater group had been putting on plays once or twice a year for more than a decade. A couple of years before I began work at the church, an annual "Festival of Gifts" was instituted, and continued for half a dozen years. On that one Sunday each year, the church building became an art gallery, with displays of visual arts and many kinds of crafts, almost all of them done by congregation members. On that Sunday afternoon, members performed various kinds of music. In the evening, poets and writers in the congregation read from their work. Some of the contributions to the Festival of Gifts – poetry, music, visual art – were explicitly Christian; many were not.

After my arrival in 1997, the arts continued to blossom in the congregation, and I witnessed a rapidly growing interest in the images, symbols, and rituals of various art forms. An arts group formed. The group put museum-quality rails on the walls of two rooms in the church so rotating art exhibits of work by congregation members could be put up. Some of these displays focused on Christian themes and some did not. They set up a monthly coffee house to

feature musicians from both inside and outside the congregation. For three years, they hosted a monthly poetry class. Each class session focused on one poet, ancient or modern, who addressed Christian themes in his or her poetry. When the poetry class ended, they continued to sponsor adult education classes several times a year on various artists and artistic techniques. Around 2000, the bylaws of the congregation were changed to add an additional board member (elder). Each of the 16 board members focused on a specific area of ministry, and this new board member was an arts elder, selected to lead the growing arts ministry of the congregation. The church board felt this position was necessary to provide board representation for this new and thriving area of congregational life.

The artistic projects were often connected with sermons. A series of drawings by children was used for several years during Advent on the cover of the worship bulletin, illustrating the traditional themes for the Sundays of Advent, which were also discussed in the sermons. During several sermon series, the senior pastor invited the arts group to submit line drawings for bulletin covers that would coordinate with the sermons. Several years during Lent and one year at Pentecost, the arts group was invited to create large charcoal drawings for the walls of the sanctuary to illustrate themes of the season that would also be echoed in the sermons. On several occasions an associate pastor in his late twenties arranged for an artist to draw images related to the sermon on a large canvas as he preached.

Two noteworthy events happened during my seven years in the congregation. The first was a gradual shift in congregational demographic. The congregation had been almost entirely white and upper middle class. An open dinner on Wednesday nights, which began several years before I came, developed its own life as a community involving many homeless, disabled and marginalized people. During my years at the church, some members of the Wednesday night community began to attend Sunday worship and became a part of the church community, changing the feel and look of the congregation. The second significant event was the renegotiation of a congregational policy about homosexuality. The earlier policy denied membership to practicing homosexuals. After a series of forums and much discussion, a new policy was crafted, still affirming that sexual intercourse belongs in heterosexual marriage, but requiring that only congregational leaders adhere to the policy. The discussions around the changes in policy were sometimes painful and the congregation was not unanimous in appreciating the new policy. he pastoral staff came to believe that this engagement with the arts, along with the congregation's strong commitment to mission beyond the congregation, was responsible for this change in demographics and for helping sustain the congregation's identity through the tumultuous renegotiation its policy on homosexuality.

## BAKHTIN AND HETEROGLOSSIA

Bakhtin (1981) uses the terms "centripetal" and "centrifugal" to describe the kinds of movement that are initiated by language. Centripetal speech is a centralizing force, the kind of language that exercises a homogenizing and hierarchicizing influence on the reader or hearer. Centripetal speech may take the form of a highly structured poem, where the poet has to restrict his or her creativity in great measure to adhere to a formal structure. Another form of centripetal speech is what Bakhtin, writing in Stalinist Russia, calls "authoritative discourse," which lays out one centralizing viewpoint in written or spoken speech, often by an authority.

In contrast, centrifugal speech spins outward, generating possibilities, embracing diversity, moving towards fragmentation. Bakhtin uses the term "heteroglossia" to describe the

intersection point of centripetal and centrifugal forces in written and spoken speech. Heterglossia comes from "prose's three-dimensionality, its profound speech diversity" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 315). Particularly in a novel, the reader encounters profound speech diversity in the multiplicity of voices of the characters, with the author's voice refracted through the voices of the characters and through the narrative.

Bahktin (1981) argues that a variety of horizons, a diversity of worlds, open up through heteroglossic text:

> The prose writer as a novelist does not strip away the intentions of others from the heteroglot language of his works, he does not violate those socio-ideological cultural horizons (big and little worlds) that open up behind heteroglot languages – rather, he welcomes them into his work. The prose writer makes use of words that are already populated with the social intentions of others and compels them to serve his own new intentions, to serve a second master. Therefore the intentions of the prose writer are refracted, and refracted at different angles, depending on the degree to which the refracted, heteroglot languages he deals with are socio-ideologically alien, already embodied and already objectified (p. 299, 300).

Bakhtin greatly admired Dostoevsky's novels as being "polyphonic." He noted that Dostoevsky allows his heroes to have "independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminancy" (Bakhtin, 1994, p. 93), which contributes to a dialogic relationship both between the author and the hero and between the reader and the characters. This dialogism invites the reader to engage with diverse, hereroglossic voices of all the characters. Bakhtin particularly appreciates the role that humor, often in the form of the voices of rogues or clowns, can play in breaking up authoritative discourse. "Laughter demolishes fear and piety before an object, before a world, making of it an object of familiar contact and thus clearing the ground for an absolutely free investigation of it" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 23). Bakhtin influenced contemporary film and theater studies by his emphasis on the power of the carnivalesque to help us think creatively about previously rigid ideas.

Bakhtin believed that the heteroglossic speech of the novel has exercised a profound influence on other literary genres, and will continue to do so. He describes this influence as "novelization," and argues that novelization drags other forms of literature into a "zone of contact with reality" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 39). This novelization of other genres carries over into other forms of art in addition to literature. Music has always been heteroglossic to some extent, with Mozart paying homage to Bach by inserting small melodies and rhythms that echo themes from Bach's work. Contemporary music is highly heterglossic, with the voices of earlier musicians incorporated frequently through imported bass lines, melodies, and lyrics. The same is true in the visual arts. Perhaps no artist wants to be told that his or her art is derivative, but even the uneducated viewer of the visual arts can often see styles and forms that seem to echo the voices of earlier artists. This multiplicity of voices in many forms of art is one key to the significance of the arts in evangelical congregations. The multiplicity of voices enables congregation members to accept and experience, often in a nondiscursive way, some of the

multiple voices in the culture without having to dispute the authoritative voices of the congregational leaders.

Another key concept in Bakhtin's theory is the notion of internally persuasive discourse, which Bakhtin contrasts with authoritative discourse. Internally persuasive discourse arises when we are able to speak in our own words with our own emphases and our own frames of reality. As we grow emotionally and intellectually as human beings, we continuously struggle between these two kinds of voices, the authoritative discourse that comes from outside of us and that tries to tell us what is right and true, and internally persuasive discourse that comes from within us and which reflects what matters to us and what touches us. Bakhtin describes the process of human development, "When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced discourse, along with a rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345). Embracing the arts enables congregation members to participate in a discourse that matters to them, that touches them. Participation in the arts – both in the creation of art and in the observing of art – allows self-expression and exploration of meaning and values. Emergent church leaders seem particularly committed to enabling worshippers to discover their own internally persuasive discourse (Pagitt, 2005); the wide embrace of arts in emergent churches parallels this commitment.

Kenneth Burke points out that "[c]ritical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situation in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers" (Burke, 1973, p. 1). Artistic works are called forth by specific situations and provide strategic responses to those situations. The cognitive apparatus that shapes any particular time or culture has to be considered in studying the role of visual culture (Morgan, 2005). Our culture is becoming increasingly dependent on visual images (Evans and Hall,1999), perhaps because of increased use of technology and increased multiculturalism (Kress, 1996). "The visual is becoming increasingly dominant, as the verbal is becoming less so in many areas of public communication... Language has become, largely, a visual element" (Kress, p. 20 and 25). In the midst of an increasingly visual culture, I wish to contend that the art being created in contemporary Protestant congregations is providing strategic and stylized answers to the questions and challenges experienced in these churches.

## THE ROLE OF THE ARTS

In any congregation there exists a diverse set of opinions on controversies that affect the church, whether related to complex issues such as homosexuality and women's roles (see Elklund, 2003) or related to more local conflicts such as sanctuary remodels or building use by non-members. Doran and Troeger (1992) use the language of "tribes" to describe the various alliances around contentious issues that can occur in congregations. The arts can provide a safe place for parishioners to gather and engage culturally rich expressions of concern without having to "have the right answer." The arts enable parishioners to engage nondiscursively with spiritual truths in order to negotiate the liminal tension between specific fixed positions and a more global view or the tension between the typical expressions of structure and anti-structure that occur in Christian worship (Nichols, 1985). Parishioners can enjoy music, a play, a visual art display, without having to focus on uncomfortable topics. Yet the arts do more than distract parishioners from the hard issues; because they are inherently heteroglossic, they enable participants to remember and experience, in a largely non-verbal way, that diverse voices exist and have value.

For Bakhtin, heteroglossia is the intersection of the centripetal forces that pull us toward a unitary view and the centrifugal forces that spin us outward towards diversity and fragmentation. The arts provide that balance point, that place of intersection. The beauty in a painting or a musical performance, or the joy we experience in creating something, reminds us of the beauty of the Christian faith to which we were originally drawn, that unified place of truth, justice, harmony and peace. The diversity of voices present in a work of art, or the diversity of voices we draw on in order to create, remind us that God created an incredibly complex world. The multitude of voices we experience can seem to be fragmenting, but we know we would lose immeasurable richness without such a plethora of voices. The arts provide a place to embrace both unity and diversity, to find some measure of peace and rest in the midst of challenging times.

The arts also function as a nondiscursive reminder that life is complex, and in that complexity we sometimes find insight. Burke (1954) uses the phrase "perspective by incongruity" to describe the way the arts sometimes give us an ability to "connect events by a 'deeper' scheme of logic than prevails in our everyday rationale of utility ... merging things which common sense had divided and dividing things which common sense had merged" (p. 113). Finding a way through so many of the complex issues facing us will require intensely creative thinking and new ways to merge and divide ideas. The arts enable us to stand aside from our "everyday rationale of utility" and experience, however briefly, that we are capable of looking at things differently.

The fact that the arts can provide a safe place, a point of balance, affirming both unity and diversity of voices, and that it can give us perspective through incongruity, has special significance in evangelical congregations. In many evangelical congregations, the value of diverse voices is not affirmed, and incongruity of any kind is not outwardly accentuated or accepted. For many conservative Protestant congregations, experiencing diversity and incongruity in the arts plays an increasingly important role in enabling congregation members who live in a complex world to turn to a church to be in touch with eternal verities. This encounter with the arts within the community provides a means for congregants to explore the tension of structure and anti-structure, authority and mystery as a liminal negotiation of truth that can provide a way for many congregations to keep from becoming overly committed to understanding community only with reference to the rational voice of argument and disputation.

Numerous voices from the church where I worked serve to illustrate these concepts. Greg[1], a visual artist in the congregation, reflects, "I've always been impressed by the divergence in how people view beauty, and how art speaks in different voices to different people. You can be one body and still have divergent views about what constitutes beauty. Art symbolizes that we are one, but we're different, too." Diana[2], a member of that same congregation, remembers a Lenten art display around the theme of Christ's hands. Eight different artists were invited to create large charcoal drawings which were displayed on the walls of the sanctuary; each artist portrayed Christ's hands differently. Diana notes that undoubtedly each person in the congregation focused on different images or part of an image. "The power of the visual arts is that you have an individual response to each work of art. You can view it, absorb it, spend time with it, dismiss it." Yet everyone is responding in some way to the art display. Diana believes that "because we are all doing it, ultimately it creates unity. It's ironic to think that you create unity by affirming the diversity of responses. Even though different people look at each drawing

[1] Not his real name.
[2] Not her real name.

differently, we will all probably eventually say, 'What do the hands of Christ mean to me?' We're all going to come away with the hands of Christ in our minds. Because we are all focused on the same thing, we experience unity."

Ken[3], the elder for the arts in that congregation, remembers when an art activity at the open dinner on Wednesday night created a sense of both unity and diversity. Members of the arts group assembled packets of art supplies, each with a large piece of paper, glue, and small pieces of paper cut from magazines. Over the course of a month, people at the dinner were invited to create collages using the materials in the packets. There would be no rules, no judgment of the final product; the goal was to have fun. Ken remembers, "This had an honoring effect. We honor what you feel enough to invite you to express it artistically. This event created a sense of unity because there was an even playing field. Everyone had a kit to work from. Yet we experienced diversity, because everything was accepted." Ken notes the parallels between this art activity and the fact that the congregation has grown more diverse through the addition of members of the Wednesday dinner community, while still retaining its unity in being centered in Christ.

These three voices illustrate the way unity and diversity are affirmed nonverbally through the congregation's participation in creating and viewing art. Sara,[4] also a member at the congregation where I worked, has a vivid memory of an experience of art in the congregation that illustrates even further the heteroglossic gift that art provides in congregations. Sara does not agree with her church's conservative position on the ordination of gays and lesbians, and she has considered leaving her congregation many times. Sara remembers a particular art installation, in which church members and attenders were invited sign up to paint or use collage on a door. The 13 doors would stand in a group on the lawn of the church, in its urban setting, as a symbol of welcome to neighbors and passers by. Sara approached this particular art display with the wariness she experiences so often in her congregation. As a long time church member, Sara knew most of the people who had decorated the doors. As Sara walked among the doors spread over the lawn, she was pleased to note that some of the doors were painted by people who hadn't before participated in the congregation's artistic endeavors, among them a woman and her sister. Sara was well acquainted with these two women, and knew that they did not agree with the church's conservative position on gays and lesbians. As Sara looked at the door painted by those two women, she shared later that she found herself thinking, "Maybe people of all kinds really are welcome here." Perhaps these doors served as metaphors for a reality that the leadership was trying to express in its official policies.

In the middle of all the doors, a podium on the lawn held a guest book, where browsers could write their responses to the doors. This invitation to people to draw their own conclusions about the exhibit corresponds with Bakhtin's concept of internally persuasive discourse. The congregation may have its written policies that express authoritative discourse, but its artistic practices encourage people to experience and express their own internally persuasive discourse. This embrace of the artistic imagination and the invitation to heteroglossic discourse is increasingly common among conservative congregations. But other congregations still view imagination, drama, and the visual arts with suspicion. Sara notes that in her parents' congregation almost no creative expression is encouraged. The church building has stained glass windows, which have traditionally been viewed as a way to teach Bible stories (Kieckhefer, 2004). The women of the church create quilts that are sent overseas, .but even these quilts tend to be viewed as utilitarian, valued for their function of providing warmth for people in need, rather

[3] Not his real name.
[4] Not her real name.

than aesthetic expressions of Christian imagination. Sara observes that in that particular congregation, members are given very little opportunity to think about issues and come to their own conclusions. However, as churches, even conservative churches re-embrace the visual and the arts, it appears to be a significant means to move them beyond the narrow sectarianism that can arise when only the verbal is valued in a congregation.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHERS

If Doug Pagitt and others in the Emergent Church Network are right (Pagitt 2005), and younger generations are looking for active involvement in worship and learner-centered opportunities for spiritual formation, then the arts may be a way to encourage congregation members to engage in and discover internally persuasive discourse. Preachers have long considered the way the hymns, worship choruses, and choral music might complement their sermons. For the past few decades, drama connected with sermons has not been uncommon; drama is word based and therefore fairly comfortable for many preachers. For generations, preachers have read poetry, also word based, to provide sermon illustrations. In some churches PowerPoint is a regular fixture during sermons, providing an outline of the sermon along with Scripture quotations. Christians who are engaged with arts invite further movement in the direction of the visual arts. As one congregation began a sermon series on the Christian life as journey, the floor of the aisles of the sanctuary were decorated with signs that suggested a trip or voyage. In another congregation, medieval and renaissance paintings that parallel sermon themes are used in the top center position on the homepage of the church's website. In yet another congregation, a videographer in the congregation creates videos that illustrate sermon themes. Artists in some congregations create a pen and ink drawings for bulletin covers illustrating sermon themes. From time to time in some congregations, an artist paints on a large canvas while the sermon is going on. A painting – either contemporary or historic – can be projected as a Powerpoint slide. Paintings can be created to be hung on the walls for a season of the church year or for a particular sermon series. An art display somewhere else in the church building can be coordinated with the lectionary readings for a church season.

Incorporating art into sermon preparation and presentation isn't simply for the purpose of being up-to-date and embracing new trends. The arts provide a genuine opportunity for congregation members to find a place of liminal balance in the midst of forces pulling them towards fragmentation and other forces pulling them towards an uncomfortable and unsustainable narrow view of reality. This place of balance comes from their own experience and values, their own internally persuasive discourse. Words may perhaps no longer be able to accomplish this purpose. Preachers, who center their ministry on the power of words, are delivering their sermons in a culture that increasingly relies on visual images to navigate everyday life.

Eliosoph (1998), in her study of volunteers in non-profit organizations, found a deep need among participants not to talk about controversial issues. They wanted a safe place to serve and meet local needs without having to address the complexities of larger political issues that might lie behind those local needs. In many congregations, the arts provide that safe place, with the additional benefit of allowing participants to experience nondiscursively the reality that diverse voices exist within any community, enriching that community while also challenging it. Burke (1954) writes that metaphor reveals "hitherto unsuspected connectives ... exemplifying relationships between objects which our customary rational vocabulary has ignored" (p. 90).

What metaphor accomplishes in written or spoken speech, many art forms accomplish for members of congregations. The arts in congregations provide a safe place in our world filled with over-stimulating high-tech gadgets, divisive issues, and baffling cultural shifts that seem to negate so many of the values of the past. This safe place is located in a tenuous balance between diverse voices and the central unifying experience of beauty and the sacred; these voices and experiences are found in the arts.

The blossoming of the arts in Protestant worship enables congregation members to experience feelings that may not be encouraged by the authoritative discourse of the congregation and to understand spiritual truths that are hard to articulate. In the midst of new global connections, bewildering technological advances, and all the annoying conflicts that can occur in any community, engagement with images, symbols and rituals at church helps parishioners move into new patterns of spirituality in a nondiscursive manner. The formal discourse of the congregation can remain fairly static and the culture can border on chaos, while the arts help congregation members retain their center in God and at the same time embrace new truths. For one congregation in which I was privileged to serve, I came away deeply committed to the belief that the way forward in recognizing diversity in congregational life will come by way of this recovery of the visual in community together.

When we look at increased electronic mediation and globalization, again we see the presence of a large number of diverse voices: the voices of people from other countries who we hear about on the news, people who write blogs, people who stand invisibly behind websites. These diverse voices influence the everyday lives of congregation members, standing in stark contrast with the often unitary authoritative voices of congregational leaders. The arts play a valuable role for congregation members in affirming the presence of diverse voices while also providing a gathering place for the Christian community centered around supernatural experience of God in Christ.

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**The Rhetoric of Remembering:**
**One of these Days, Someone's Going to Need this Sermon**

Peter W. Rehwaldt, Alameda CA

At the end of Deuteronomy, we are shown Moses and Joshua at the tent of meeting, where the LORD commissions Joshua to take the place of the elderly Moses. It is the final scene of a grand story that started with slaves in Egypt and confrontations with Pharaoh, then moved through the sea into the wilderness, where Moses received the Law from the Lord. The story had miracle upon miracle – plagues, the escape from Pharaoh's army, manna and quail in the wilderness, water from the rock, and two pillars to guide the people (cloud by day and fire by night). Now, at the edge of the promised land, Moses gives his final speech to the people to say farewell.

But God wasn't done with Moses yet. "One more thing," said the Lord to the prophet. "The people will be disobedient once you are gone," and so God commands Moses to write a song and teach it to them that very day, so that it can testify against them when those disobedient days come. "It's not enough to preach," the Lord seems to be saying to Moses. "If you really want it to stick with the people, you've got to sing. No, you've got to get *them* singing."

Consider the ancient epics, from cultures around the world. From the *Iliad* to the Icelandic *Eddas* and other Scandanavian sagas, from Beowulf to the songlines of Australian native people – the epic stories of these oral cultures were most likely sung, not merely spoken, and certainly not written. Despite the lack of writing – or perhaps because of it? – these songs were powerful enough to make their way from singer to singer, from generation to generation, from one century to the next.

"A person's music," says Tom Long, "is a powerful alloy of memory and emotion, experience and conviction, expression and aspiration. No wonder feelings are aroused, defenses mounted, and passionate arguments ignited whenever the topic of music and worship is raised."[1] Perhaps the Lord was onto something with Moses about this singing thing. While homileticians have often used musical language and metaphors to talk *about* preaching,[2] a closer look at congregational song reveals much more that can be of value to our work as homileticians, especially as we seek to renew, liberate, and transform our communities.

The Scottish preacher and hymn composer, John Bell of the Iona Community, wrote a small book called *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song*[3]. It is aimed at church musicians, clergy, and all who love congregational song, to help them understand what happens when people sing, especially in church, and what gets in the way of that singing. Section one is built around the question "Why do we sing?" to which Bell gives ten answers:

1. Because we can
2. To create identity
3. To express emotion
4. To express words
5. To revisit the past
6. To tell stories
7. To shape the future
8. To enable work
9. To exercise our creativity
10. To give of ourselves

[1] Thomas G. Long, *Beyond the Worship Wars: Building Faithful and Vital Worship* (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 2001), 55.

[2] For descriptions and examples, see Peter W. Rehwaldt, "Dwelling in the Word: Spirituality, Hymnody, and Preaching," *Papers of the 40th Annual Meeting of the Academy of Homiletics*, Williamsburg VA, December 1-3, 2005, 200-201.

[3] John Bell, *The Singing Thing: A Case for Congregational Song* (Chicago, IL: GIA Publications, Inc., 2000).

Section two is the converse of section one. "Why do some people not sing?" he asks, which he answers in four ways:

1. Vocal disenfranchisement
2. The fallout from a performance culture
3. Places and spaces
4. Bad leadership

Bell concludes the book with an essay "The Ambiguity of Communication," which notes how both the music and the text of congregational song is ambiguous, though the people who sing often see them as anything but – thus, the "worship wars" that have been waged for centuries. Writing of the subject of those worship wars, Long writes

> …we tend to find ourselves so often in conflict over music in worship because, regardless of our age or situation, music is so very powerful and formative in religious experience. It was probably only a slight exaggeration when one church musician suggested that we get our theology far more often from the hymns we sing than from the sermons we hear. We would not fight so vigorously over music if it did not means so much to us, and this meaning resides at levels often difficult to articulate.[4]

I agree with Long's general observation, but I think the unnamed church musician was not exaggerating at all. Few Lutherans go around quoting Martin Luther's sermons, but millions of Christians sing "A Mighty Fortress" from memory. Few Methodists can quote from John Wesley's fine sermons, but millions sing Charles' wonderful hymns. In our own time, Herman Stuempfle has been known as a professor of preaching and former President of Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg, but after he retired as president in 1989, he took up a new career as a hymn text writer. He has had such an impact in that field that in 2004 he was named a Fellow of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada. In an article for Gettysburg's *Seminary Views*,[5] John R. Spengler writes:

> In Lutheran and seminary circles, Stuempfle is known for having taught preaching to a generation or more of pastors and again for his decade of service as president of the historic school. But an increasing number of people will say that his most lasting contribution among future generations of Christians will be his hymn writing...
>
> Stuempfle acknowledges the preaching parallels: "In homiletics classes, I used to tell students that sermons emerge from the space where three intersecting circles overlap: 1) the biblical text; 2) the situation of the parish and its individual members; 3) the persona and gifts of the preacher. These three realities must always be in dynamic interaction with each other in the creation of a sermon. I believe the same model applies to the creation of a hymn text."
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> Randall Sensmeier noted that Stuempfle was well into his "sixties" when he began to devote time to writing hymns. And while the hymnwriter views this as a "subtle career change," he knows he is working with a powerful medium: "hymns are the sung testimony to God's mighty acts of grace and judgement...attaining their fullest expression in Jesus Christ." And while hymnwriting has become his fourth and perhaps most lasting and "global" calling,

[4] Long, 54.
[5] John R. Spangler, "Gettysburg's Great American Hymnwriter," *Seminary Views*, vol. 41, no. 1, posted on the internet by Music Gettysburg! at http://www.musicgettysburg.org/news/hymnwriter.htm.

it remains for him a part of his "fundamental vocation to communicate the Gospel."

Many good sermons are fine for the moment or fine for a while, but a good hymn can sink deeply into the consciousness of the community that sings it, especially with repeated singing and singing at deeply moving and personal times. The hymn text is well crafted to be both singable and memorable, and the music aids in both the singing and the remembering. Sermons may be memorable to the preacher, but at best, only fragments or brief sections of sermons are memorable to the hearers in any significant way, and few sermons last beyond a couple of weeks or months. As Bell writes,

> When [the Iona Community's Wild Goose Resource Group] asks people to recount what for them has been a significant worship experience, only one in a hundred ever mention a sermon – and those who do are usually preachers. More commonly people will talk about a song, a silence, a symbolic action, a service of worship in an unusual place. And yet clergy commonly hold that it is the sermon or homily which primarily informs people's thinking about God. This is an arrogant assumption. It is much more what they sing that shapes their faith. For when the most memorable line of the most rhetorically astute sermon has been forgotten, people will remember the words of *Abide With Me* or *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling,* or *Majesty.*
>
> And they will remember such texts because, unlike sermons, the same combination of words will be used on many occasions. And, unlike sermons, the words will be in verse, set to a tune, both of which aid memory.
>
> And people will remember them because of the truth in the basic educational maxim: WHAT I HEAR, I FORGET; WHAT I SEE, I REMEMBER; WHAT I DO, I UNDERSTAND.
>
> Singing is a hearing and seeing and, above all, doing activity.[6]

Preaching can learn from our musical partners, the hymnwriters. Indeed, a close look at what happens when we sing can inform the rhetorical work of preachers in crafting sermons that stick with the hearers and sink deeply into their lives. Without such deep and memorable preaching, any renewal or transformation that the preacher hopes to accomplish will be minor and transitory at best.

At the opening of his book *Praying Twice*, Brian Wren defines "congregational song" as "anything that a worshipping congregation sings, not as presentation or performance to someone else, but as a vehicle for its encounter with God."[7] Applying Wren's definition to preaching leads to the conclusion that, to the extent that preaching is a presentation or performance and not an encounter with God, it will fall short of its potential to transform and renew. Lasting transformation is the result of an encounter with God's love, not an explanation of God's love or a discussion about it. Near the end of the book, Wren returns to the topic of singing hymns as doing theology, and lays out this definition:

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[6] Bell, 56-57.

[7] Brian Wren, *Praying Twice: The Music and Words of Congregational Song* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 2.

> Christian theology is done when anyone attempts, by artistic skill and creativity, the interplay of intellect and imagination, and/or the methods of reasoned inquiry, to grasp, know, and understand the meaning of God's creating, self-disclosing, and liberating activity centered and uniquely focused in Jesus Christ.[8]

Hymns do not do theology alone, says Wren, but in concert with those who practice theology in other arenas. The limits of syllables, lines, and stanzas force hymns "to state, pithily and vividly, theological viewpoints whose claims are argued elsewhere, or to frame praise, thanksgiving, longing, lament, trust, commitment, and other God-centered responses based on such viewpoints." This is not to say that hymns do not make their own theological claims, but that they do so by engaging the more prosaic work of others and recasting and reshaping it in new ways.

Bell's observations about music, singing, and the practice of composing that he lays out in *The Singing Thing* could easily be shifted into a discussion of preaching. Bell's questions quoted above become "Why do people participate in a sermon?" and "Why do some people not participate?" and his answers flow easily into homiletics.

"We cannot all speak together, but we can all sing together," says Bell. When we try speaking in union, some are faster and others slower. Some stumble over unfamiliar words, and we all take different lengths of pauses at the commas and periods. But when we sing, the music keeps us together with rhythm, and the rest of the voices of the community pull us along when we stumble. "And because of this facility which singing offers," says Bell, "songs have for long been the means whereby people created or celebrated their identity."[9]

Surely preachers strive for the same effect in their preaching. Though only one voice speaks the sermon – the preacher – the rest of the community is participating, either silently or audibly, sometimes sitting still and other times jumping up with great joy. As a preacher, I want folks to "be on the same page" with me and with each other – not falling behind nor racing ahead. At some level, a sermon creates and celebrates the identity of the community as God's people, beloved and cherished in all its diversity.

When he writes about revisiting the past and shaping the future through singing, Bell says, "In the days before literacy was commonplace, it was the function of the poets and the storytellers to shape memorable narratives and ballads through which a people learn of the past, thereby helping them to shape the future."[10] Is this not what homileticians claim to be about as well, as we seek to enable renewal, liberation, and transformation of our communities and the people within them?

Here, the homiletician nods. This is familiar stuff to we who craft sermons – we connect the stories of God at work in the past as found in scripture with the lives of people today, so as to shape tomorrow. Bell and the homileticians are in agreement here, but note carefully the use of the word "memorable." In crafting sermons, the results of the preacher's labors in the study are often so dense that they cannot really be listened to but must be read, not just by the preacher but by the hearers as well.[11] As a theologically literate layperson – my conservative Baptist sister – once said to me about her own pastor (and sadly applicable to many others who preach), "If the

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[8] Ibid., 364.
[9] Bell, 17.
[10] Ibid., 48.
[11] I do not wish to open the discussion of preaching with or without a manuscript. That is a different subject for a different day. My point here is that all too often, sermons are crafted to be read by readers and not heard by listeners.

preacher's sermon is so convoluted that *he* can't remember it without reading it, if it is so intricate that he has to project the outline on to a screen for everyone to see a map of where he's going, and if he's spent all week poring over the biblical text to come up with this rhetorical so-called "masterpiece" ... how in the world does he expect *us* to follow it, *us* to take it all in, and *us* to take it home after we hear it go by just once on a Sunday?" How, indeed?

This complaint is a variation of one aimed at some hymnwriters as well. "Some hymn texts," says Gail Ramshaw, "modeled after twentieth century poetry, are far too dense to be accessible for the singing congregation."[12] One difference between good religious poetry and a good hymn is that religious poetry often invites the reader to linger over a phrase or an image, while a good hymn moves you along from the beginning to the end. A good hymn is both theologically deep and yet quickly grasped the first time it is sung, just like the sermons my sister and her counterparts in pews everywhere want to hear. They want to be part of it as it moves by, not take home a manuscript of it to linger over later.

A study of hymns in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*, begun as part of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America's "Renewing Worship" project and expanded to include several Roman Catholic and Episcopal hymnals, revealed that hymns widely acknowledged as essential and important in the life of the church share a number of poetic characteristics. One characteristic is the use of repetition, either as a refrain at the end of each stanza or text that is repeated in various places throughout the hymn. Another is narrative and plot – either the hymn is tied to a strong narrative (like the Christmas story) or is itself a strong narrative with a fully developed plot. Third, these hymns employ vivid imagery, paint stunning pictures, or employ powerful metaphors. Most of these essential and important hymns employed two if not all three of these characteristics, while those hymns see seen to be poor and unimportant had none of them.[13]

These characteristics are what make a hymn memorable. They enable singers to easily enter the world of the text, to sing it and make it their own. The words of the composer become the words of the singer – and lives are transformed in the process. Surely sermons can employ these same poetic devices to do the same, moving the assembly from passive hearers of the sermon to active participants in it. What we hear, we forget ... what we do, we remember.

On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed on the moon, and the world watched as human beings made their first footprints beyond the earth. David E. Green, librarian at San Francisco Theological Seminary, sent out a request to a number of Presbyterian ministers, asking them for any sermons related to the moon landing, so that he might create a special collection of these sermon manuscripts as they were delivered in ordinary congregations by ordinary preachers.[14]

One sermon in the collection was preached a week after the moon walk, on July 27, 1969 by David D. Cockcroft of Riverdale Presbyterian Church in the Bronx, New York. In contrast to most of the other sermons in the collection, Cockcroft's was crafted in a way reminiscent of a five stanza hymn.

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[12] Gail Ramshaw, *Words That Sing* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992), 5

[13] See Peter W. Rehwaldt, "Let All the People Say "Amen!": A Multigenerational Understanding of Rite, Hymnody, and Preaching" (Ph.D. dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2005), 147-153 for more on the methodology and results. Note that the music employs these characteristics as well as the words of the texts.

[14] David Edward Green, Editor, *Sermons on Man's First Landing on the Moon - July 20, 1969* (San Anselmo, CA: San Francisco Theological Seminary, 1969), unnumbered collection of separate manuscripts [pages 71-75 as bound].

Stanza one is built around a refrain: "Three men walk on the sea." Five times the phrase is repeated, each time described further by two sentences. "One is *this*" or "One does *that*" (Jesus on the sea of Galilee) followed by "Two are *this*" or "Two do *that*" (Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin on the Sea of Tranquility). No names are used, just vivid evocative descriptions and images, and it's not hard to envision who is being portrayed. After five of these "One is ... Two are ..." couplets, the refrain is repeated a final time with a slight change: "yes, three men walk on their seas." Stanza one sets the scene, identifies the characters, and gives us the refrain to link them and the seas to which they belong.

Stanza two is about fear and trust – the disciples' fear, the astronauts' fear, the disciples' trust, the astronauts' trust – and then introduces us into the hymn's story. We have our questions, our fears, our trust, just like the disciples and the astronauts. The rhythm is still there, though more muted.

Stanza three picks up on our presence, and returns to the refrain. "Two walks on the sea have changed our views of ourselves." Cockcroft returns to Jesus and the disciples and how their walk changed us, then moves to the astronauts and their walk's effect on humanity, and then to the present and the future for the hearers: "Where's walking on the sea HERE?"

Again with the refrain – "Two walks on the sea" – and we're into stanza four. One walk did this, the other did that, and we are not the same.

Stanza five brings the song – the sermon – to an end. "Three men walk on the sea." One walked then, back there; two walked up there, last week; and we walk now. "We can walk on the sea, if we will."

To extend the musical analogy beyond simply noting that this sermon is shaped like a hymn, the presentation is more akin to a well-accompanied hymn where the organist plays more than just the same notes in the same ways for five straight stanzas. Cockcroft lays out a basic melody in the opening stanza, expands and explores the melody of the hymn through the middle stanzas in the manner of an organist's hymn improvisations, then returns in the final stanza to the basic melody more fully and powerfully developed.

The assembly that hears this sermon becomes a part of it, walking along with the preacher. The shape, movement and development of this sermon could easily be discussed using Buttrick's moves and structures[15] or Lowry's attention to plot.[16] The poetry of it, however, needs the rhetorical language of hymnody. There's a rhythm to the sermon, back and forth, back and forth, moving the hearers along in the story. By the third or fourth repetition of the chorus in the opening stanza, when the preacher says "Three men walk ..." the congregation is right there with him in their heads as they all say together, "... on the sea." They have become (to borrow from Bell and from James) doers of the sermon, and not hearers only. They are inside the sermon, and the preacher carefully, thoughtfully carries them along to the end as he expands the image of walking on the sea, changing it and shaping it anew through creative repetition. There are two powerful, vivid, and familiar images, of Jesus walking on the sea and the astronauts walking on the moon. For a New York City parish in July, with proximity to the beaches along the Atlantic, the image of walking by (if not on) the sea is immediately accessible and vivid. For viewers around the world in July 1969, the images of two astronauts walking on the Sea of Tranquility were captivating, and about as universal an experience as could be had with the technology of the time.

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[15] David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987)

[16] Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997)

Just as the process of writing of a hymn shares certain features that can be transferred to the task of writing a sermon, the performance practices of hymn accompaniment can also inform our homiletical discussion, to help our sermons "sing." To illustrate this, let me introduce you to St. Timothy's Episcopal Church of Mountain View, California.

For the last six months, I have served as "assisting clergy" at St. Timothy's, a large parish in Silicon Valley. Their former rector took a new position last December, the associate was named "priest in charge" to handle the day-to-day life of the parish, and I was brought on board to provide "outside guidance" in their search for a new rector, and to preach and lead worship at each of their four quite different worship services every Sunday.

The 7:45am service is a traditional Rite One eucharist with the old thee's and thou's in the liturgy. There is a quiet dignity and formality to this service, where the only music is a closing congregational hymn, played on the organ. A noisy and enthusiastic "children and family" service with contemporary music is held at 9:00am, where a children's sermon (generally preached by one of the Sunday School teachers) follows the reading of the gospel. The "adult sermon" is held in abeyance until the very end of the service when the children are dismissed to their Sunday School classes and the adults adjourn to the fellowship hall for refreshments and the "adult sermon." The 10:30am service follows Rite Two of the *Book of Common Prayer*, with energetic contemporary music, and the 5pm service is a more relaxed, informal, contemplative eucharist, again with contemporary music. Each service has its regular attendees, each has visitors, and each has people who came to this service one week and a different service the next.

Again and again, both at St. Tim's and elsewhere, I have been asked about preaching at these very different services. Do you preach the same sermon at each service? If not, what's the difference? Isn't that a lot of work? Some weeks, the words of my sermon would vary only slightly from service to service, while on other weeks, they would vary a great deal. Every Sunday is a lot of work.

But what of the differences? Each service has its own tone (see the various descriptors above: formal, noisy, energetic, reflective, etc.), and the sermon in each service needs to fit that same tone. Sometimes this meant that the delivery style would change but the words of the sermon would remain the same from service to service. At the 7:45 service, movements (gestures, facial expressions, walking across the front of the chancel, etc.) would be slower and more muted, while at 10:30 they might be bigger and bolder. The use of silence and pauses would be greater at the 7:45 service or the 5PM service, but fewer at the 10:30 service and very little use of silence at the 9:00 service. (Getting forty 3-6 year olds quiet *simultaneously* ranks up there with feeding 5000 from a couple of fish and a few loaves of bread.) To return to the musical analogy of hymns and hymn accompaniment, these changes to the sermon's presentation would be akin to changing the registration on the organ to accompany they hymn. The notes are the same, but the sound (and overall feel) is different, depending upon which stops are pulled.

During other Sundays, the need for an appropriate match of sermon and service tone meant that the words themselves of that week's sermon would change from service to service. A section with several sentences at one service might be shortened to a single sentence for another, and a single sentence in one service might be expanded at another. In a sermon built around a series of images, one image might be highlighted more prominently than the others at one service, and a different image take prominence at another.

This approach is more along the lines of a hymn improvisation. A skilled organist accompanies a congregation of shaky singers in one way, stressing and supporting the main

melody of the tune. The same organist accompanies a congregation of confident singers in another way, using their instrument to augment the melody (and harmonies) of the singers in more complex and creative ways.

Preaching that enables renewal, liberation, and transformation requires that preachers act more like hymn writers and hymn accompanists. In a collection of interviews with contemporary hymnwriters, Paul Westermeyer asked Thomas Troeger "Why do you write hymns?" Troeger's response could be the response of any sound preacher, if you change "hymns" to "sermons": "I write hymns because the love of God is beyond all telling of it, and yet I must try."[17] The words of the sermon must become the words of the people, which is the day-in, day-out task of hymnwriters. Hymnwriters have much to offer homileticians, as seen in Gracia Grindal's *Lessons in Hymnwriting*[18] which provides a basic introduction for writing hymns that can be transferred to preaching, or Gail Ramshaw's *Words that Sing* with its concrete discussions of excellent hymns, illustrating and exploring the effects of the poetic labors of the composers.

Words matter, whether sung or spoken. Brian Wren closes *Praying Twice*: "Today, words still matter, but in different ways from even the recent past. In emerging electronic culture, whether or not we have the desire or resources to create worship spectaculars, we need to use our worship speech (including song lyrics) more economically, more vividly, in a seamless unity of words, visual images, drama, dance, and music."[19] Especially in our sermons, I might add.

[17] Paul Westermeyer, *With Tongues of Fire: Profiles in 20th Century Hymn Writing* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1995), 135.
[18] Gracia Grindal, *Lessons in Hymnwriting*, third edition ed. (Boston MA: Hymn Society in the United States and Canada, 2000).
[19] Wren, 382.

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**Rhetorical Situation and Asian Theology for Transformational Preaching**

Richard H. Park
Assistant Professor of Homiletic/Rhetoric
Presbyterian College and Theological Seminary, Seoul, Korea

Inspirational, life-changing preaching should proclaim truth and yet encompass reality. Too often, however, modern preaching seems to be only about the excellent use of language in the pulpit. Even more frequently, modern preaching doesn't care about the actual world where suffering, injustice, and oppression are happening all around. When preaching forgets that the actual world exists, so to speak, then preaching is no longer divine proclamation of good news for the people who suffer. Evangelist Luke quotes from Isaiah by slightly modifying it:

> The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.[1]

This good news is the embodiment of all that preachers should preach, but "good news" means more than the emotional euphoria of selfishly happy insiders who are already faithful churchgoers. According to the Gospels, preaching this good news also carries with it the responsibility of teaching freedom, liberation, and justice. .

The good news doesn't forget truth; the good news doesn't forget reality. It is a truth that people in the world suffer from oppression and injustice in various forms; it is a reality that people within the church and outside of it need salvation and liberation from their actual, real, sufferings. Therefore, we preachers must not take our calling lightly, but instead we should preach with seriousness and urgently call for significant change among people in the church and out. Thus, in order for transformational preaching (good news) to truly occur, the preacher should consider the biblical, rhetorical situation and its contemporary application of truth in the present context.

As an Asian homiletical theologian, I acknowledge some inspirational correctives for the New Homiletic from what Asian theology does so that the New Homiletic becomes more transformational when the former and latter talk about "inductive, event, and experience." Even if they speak with the same vocabularies, transformational Asian theology challenges the New Homiletic to utilize actuality of those usages. Finally, I will suggest some solutions to the problem of the New Homiletic if it has not become fully transformational preaching of the good news: The call to greater discipleship by more thorough self-denial within preachers and audience alike; striving for *ethos*-experience more than *pathos*-experience; and finally, the practice of resistance against oppression, injustice, and social evils. In so doing, the restored rhetorical situation may help the New Homiletic to become transformational and liberating preaching.

[1] Gospel Luke 4:18-19 New International Bible.

## Rhetorical Situation and Contemporaneity

Why do I combine "rhetorical situation" and "contemporaneity" together? The former term comes from Lloyd F. Bitzer, a famous rhetorician of our time, and the latter comes from Kierkegaard, a philosopher, rhetorician, and hermeneutician of modernity. I believe they are speaking of an actuality where text and context changes and produces new truth, where the problem of presence is searched and answered, and where the past –with its universal truth— meets the present to produce future solutions. For Bitzer, rhetorical situation is not merely emphasis on context and interaction of some rhetorical factors such as speaker, subject, audience, (the so-called rhetorical triangle), but more than that, rhetorical situation is the actual modification of present situation, because this is the start-point from which rhetorical discourse is raised and deployed, seeking answers and solutions that transform and liberate the past situation to the better present one. This process is being done in the present, making the action of truth a contemporaneous event.

### *Rhetorical Situation*

I believe the most interesting aspect of Bitzer's "rhetorical situation" is his revolutionary emphasis on the potential of the rhetorical situation of exigency, which makes the communicator confront more actual situations.[2] The situation or exigency is no longer only one factor among situational components, but it affects and transforms the rhetorical event. We know Burke's pentad of dramatism[3] where actor (agent), action (act), setting (scene), method (agency), and motive (purpose) are interacted, but more than Burk's equal emphasis of pentad, Bitzer furthers the significance of actual situation which is more than just setting (scene). Bitzer's viewpoint is that rhetorical situation is the origin and source from which rhetorical discourse springs. Without the rhetorical situation, rhetorical discourse does not exist. Without it, rhetorical discourse goes astray. It may become mere word-play: ineffective and unconstructive, far from the actual world, actual problem, and actual urgency, which may be (homiletically speaking) suffering from oppression, injustice, and evils.

Rhetoricians talk about the rhetoric triangle in relation to rhetorical situation. The rhetoric triangle is comprised of author, audience, and context centered on a medium, which is text or speech. However, it requires caution when it is applied to preaching, because rhetorical situation and homiletic situation are different. We preachers have two texts unlike rhetoricians. For preachers there is Holy Text, which is biblical passage as well as sermon text, which may be compatible with rhetorician's speech text. Therefore, homiletic situation's triangle would be different from rhetorical situation's triangle.[4] In the preaching moment, the listeners and their

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[2] Bitzer, Lloyd F. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Contemporary Rhetorical Reader: A Reader*. Ed. John Louis Lucaites, Celeste Michelle Condit, and Sally Caudill. New York: The Guilford Press (1999): 217-225.

[3] See also, Burke, Kenneth, *A Grammar of Motives*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969, in which Burke introduced the concept of Pentad.

[4] Park, Richard Hee-Chun, *Organic Homiletic: Samuel T. Coleridge, Henry G. Davis, and the NewHomiletic*, American University Series VII Theology and Religion Vol.251, New York: Peter Lang, 2006, p. 162. The triangle of preacher, text, and audience is emphasized by various homileticians. Don M. Wardlaw questions the linear model in favor of a dynamic, multi-dimensional, model. Preachers encounter two cultural, social worlds when they converse with both the past audience of text and the contemporary audience. Two horizons are interfaced in a sermon. ("Preaching as the Interface of Two Social Worlds: The Congregation as Corporate Agent in the Act of Preaching," in Arthur Van Seters, ed., *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology and Practice*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988, pp.55-93). J. Grant Howard also discusses this triangle in *Creativity in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987). The triangle is at work, "creatively recreating the life setting of the text," "creatively relating to the life setting of the congregation," and "creatively using the life setting of the preacher" (pp.

personal suffering would become preaching's rhetorical situation from which the situation and biblical text starts conversation in order to transform the listener. Without seriously taking into consideration their sufferings, the situation preaching may not become liberating, because rhetorical or homiletic discourse originates from rhetorical or homiletic situation, which is actual people's actual suffering. That situation can be called as problem of people, wounded heart of people, and oppression of people which should be solved inductively by preachers to transform those.

***Contemporaneity***

According to Jeffrey Bullock,[5] Kierkegaard's contemporaneity is a tool for the new hermeneutic. Absolute truth which existed in the past no more exists as universal; truth always is to be interpreted by interacting with the contemporary situation. Truth as it was interpreted in the past by the majority, the powerful, and the ruling classes should be re-interpreted by the present, the minority, the powerless, and the oppressed. This is the most striking notion of Kierkegardian rhetorical hermeneutics. God is a *living* God; God is *for* the living, not for the dead. God *exists*, not existed. God *speaks* to the living today, and will continue to speak to people in the future. God exists in the present and future present. God cannot be limited by past events or past speaking; God is bigger than His past words and actions. God is mysterious in His actions and spoken words. He is unpredictable because He is God, and we are created *by* Him. Therefore, in God's eyes the future is always open in the present. God is bigger than Text; He is himself true Text.

> Through Kierkegaard's conversational style, the reader eventually discovers that he or she is involved in a text that has no real exit, no resolution; it is, in effect, a text without end. It is a text that is functioning as a continuing conversation. This does not mean that the text is without purpose or meaning. By becoming part of A's experience and part of B's experience, the reader undergoes an encounter in which he or she is prompted to think, to question, to engage in a way that facilitates a fusion with the text.[6]

Bullock introduces Kierkegaard's "contemporaneity": "Yet, unlike New Homileticians who have yet to separate their understanding of experience from an innovative re-presentation of the text, Kierkegaard's stylistic conversation moves this experience of meaning out of the text and locates it in that moment of contact between the text and the reader, which may be called rhetorical situation in Bitzer. Kierkegaard calls this moment of contact 'contemporaneity,' and it is an extremely significant component to his postmodern view of communication."[7] For Kierkegaard, "the reader becomes a co-participant in a contemporaneous event of

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31-76). Attention to this triangle creates a metamorphosis and synthesis resulting in the potential for unlimited pluralities of sermon form. Karl Barth, in *Homiletics* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1966), states, regarding this triangle, "Preaching is exposition, not exegesis. It follows the text but moves on from it to the preacher's own heart and to the congregation" (p.81).

[5] Bullock, Jeffrey F. "Preaching in a Postmodern Wor(l)d: Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Homiletical Conversation," *AAR/SBL*, 1997. Also see Bullock, Jeffrey F. *Preaching with a Cupped Ear:* Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics as Postmodern Wor(l)d, New York: Peter Lang, 1999.

[6] Ibid., *Preaching with a Cupped Ear* , p.62.

[7] Ibid., p.63.

understanding."[8] And "through the concept of contemporaneity, the historical past is fused with the present or, as Gadamer notes, memory and expectation have been fused with the experience of life."[9] In this sense, for preaching to be transformational it should be contemporarily situational rather than universally past, text-oriented discourse.

## Asian Theology Talks to the New Homiletic

Since 1970, indigenous Asian theology has broken out in different Asian countries. In South Korea there was *Minjung* Theology, in India *Dalit* Theology, in Japan *Buraku* Theology, and in Philippines *Struggle* Theology, for instance.[10] Those Asian theologies are all different from traditional Western theology. These theologies influence and renew the theological field revolutionarily in connection with the Liberation Theology of South America, the Black Theology of North America and Africa, and the Feministic Theology. These Asian theologies challenge to acknowledge the situation where people actually live. The preachers of these theologies are concerned about the actual sufferings of real people and seek to find the best solution for eliminating their sufferings. These preachers seek to impart contemporary situational truth by interpreting the truth of text through context. Indigenous Asian theology listens to the actual voices of the suffering people, and brings them to the text and facilitates dialogue between context and text to produce transformational truth for thoughts and actions alike. They refuse captivated truth, caged within mere words; they march on the front line where actual suffering exists. They refuse the ruling ideology by the powerful; they side with the ruled and the oppressed. Their voice is the voice of the captives. They strive with compassion for the particular change and liberation of actual people, not seeking merely to expound with proud and boastful words of their vast knowledge. Interestingly enough, Asian theology and the New Homiletic use the same vocabularies: inductive, event, and experience, but for different semiotics. I believe Asian theology may challenge the New Homiletic to renew the usages of those vocabularies.

### *Inductive*

Asian theology may be called Situational or Contextual Theology, but it does not stop at the situation. It goes further back to the text from the situation, and searches for answers from text with context. This is an inductive method of theology rather than deductive. Tae-Soo Lim states of Asian Theology's inductive method,

> Asian theology tried to escape from traditional Western theology which neglects actual people's actual suffering and does not respond properly and justly to their need. Asian Theology wishes to participate in the historical situation of the suffering people to have become suspicious of universal application of the Western Theology. And so Asian Theology is situational theology which strongly responds to the situational need and problem of the populace. Asian Theology prefers the inductive method of theology instead of the deductive method. The situational Asian Theology, however, does not linger in merely situation. It starts from situation of suffering and reflects biblical text from the light of the situation

[8] Ibid., p.64.
[9] Ibid., p.65, see also, Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Method and Truth*, Trans. Joel Weisheimer and Donald Marshall. Second revised ed. New York: Continuum, 1993, pp.127-128, and p.572.
[10] Lim, Tae-Soo, "Asian Reading of the Scripture: chapter 1," *Minjung and Theology*, vol. 7, a lecture in Institute of Minjung Theology, Seoul, Korea, Fall, 2001.

> and interprets it by the situational insight, and then finally it goes back to the situation for action. This is the interpretive or hermeneutical cycle.[11]

It starts from the actual situation of the audience both within and outside of the church, and then it dialogues with the text answering and solving for that situation. The New Homiletic father appropriated this inductive method of preaching, and it may not be unfair when we state that the New Homiletic is inductive preaching.

However, what is the difference between the Asian inductive method of theology and inductive preaching? What was missing in the inductive preaching in connection with Asian inductive theology? Of course, inductive preaching does care for actual audience's problem and seeks to solve it. It is inductive for sure. And yet, there is still missing significant something. The actual situation of the audience outside of the church is missing. However, if inductive *preaching* starts from the sufferings of the unchurched people, it will then have become a natural outgrowth of Asian inductive *theology*. We preachers should ask questions: Do we start our preaching from actual suffering of our audience in and out? Do we have certain rhetorical situations of contemporaneity? Does our rhetorical discourse attempt to solve and change, liberate and transform the suffering situation inductively? Asian theology challenges some Western theology because that theology tends to linger deductively regardless of the actual suffering of the audience in and out. The phrase "lingering deductively" denotes an approach that is purely scholastic, with no praxis of participation into actual suffering.

***Event***

The New Homiletic emphasizes the Word's eventfulness. The Word becomes an event. In the preaching moment the Word becomes a living event so that the preaching is a medium for that actualized event in the audience. If the Old Homiletic merely transmitted noetic knowledge to achieve agreement from the audience, the New Homiletic goes beyond this simple transmission of truthful knowledge; it facilitates an event in the audience.

Asian theology cares for events. "True liberation and change of humans are not accomplished only by education of theory and knowledge, but it is done in the event of praxis."[12] Also famous Korean Minjung theologian Byong Moo Ahn argues, "The church is a place where the Minjung-event happens when Minjung (suffering people) meets Jesus, where solidarity and liberation happens by resistance against oppression of social evils."[13] Therefore, local churches are a seedbed for raising up Christian leaders who are unafraid of transforming the suffering events of people. As with inductive theology, this also challenges the New Homiletic and/or sides with it at the same time. If the New Homiletic only concerns itself with subjective, individual, and emotional Word-events in the audience, it will not have reached yet to the true transformational events of the Word. As with Asian theology, the New Homiletic should seek the actual transformation of suffering people within one's reach, but not just within the church. The only appropriate audience for every preaching opportunity is the audience out the world. It is important to note, however, that the church audience may be the initial audience who is changed

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[11] Ibid, p.3. This is my translation from Korean text. All other materials later on were read in Korean with my translation.

[12] Kyeong Ho Kim, "Church based on Minjung Theology," *Mingjung Theology*, p.6. http://www.minjungtheology.net/mook/2ho/2kkh.htm. I am so appreciative of this article by Kyeong HoKim in which he at the same time analyzes and shows models of transformational new churches based on Minjung Theology theory.

[13] Ahn, ByeonMoo, *The Story of Minjung Theology*, Seoul: Institute of Korean Theology, 1988, p. 160.

and empowered to become the liberators and transformers that the larger world audience needs, helping to set them free of their suffering from oppression, injustice, and evils. Unlike some homileticians who propose that the psychological eventfulness only in the preaching action is lacking for the true event, meaning an event that breaks people from oppression, a transforming event is actual and real. So often we hear of preachers who have no foes to fight, no goals to achieve, and no purpose for achieving those goals. Preachers should march on the front line, not hiding behind.

***Experience***

Asian Theology has painful experience as its theological seedbed; it starts from solidarity with suffering others. Experiencing the suffering of others is nothing but the most significant resources for Asian Theology. It is theology of not the oppressor but the oppressed, and because of that, it participates in people's alienation and suffering. It recovers the mission of theology as for the powerless and the ruled instead of the powerful and the ruling. The Asian Theology such as *Minjung* Theology of Korea sees the experience with the oppressed on the spot as indispensable when it seeks liberation of the Korean people from the military dictatorship. Christian Smith considered the object of preaching as resistance to radical evils in solidarity with the oppressed;[14] therefore, experiencing the suffering of others is inevitable.

Likewise, the New Homiletic emphasizes *experiencing* the Word, not merely understanding or agreeing with it. If the Old Homiletic transmitted the truth in a noetic way,[15] the New Homiletic pursues experiencing the good news in the preaching moment. Experiencing gospel is the key goal in the New Homiletic. Are the Old and the New the same experience? Not at all! Experience in Asian Theology is more akin to the suffering situation of people, while the one in the New Homiletic is within the church and the preaching moment in the heart of the audience. In a way, experience in the New Homiletic seems more individual than social, more emotional than ethical, and more subjective than objective. Experiencing good news only by hearing it is not sufficient; it should be acted upon through participation.[16] According to Asian Theology, the New Homiletic may be challenged: meaning, asked if it has actual participation in solidarity with suffering others, and whether or not it aims to liberate and transform those. When the New Homiletic only aims for individual, emotional, and subjective experiences, it may need to be liberated first before it can liberate the suffering of others, which is the true goal of preaching.

## Problem-Solving Toward "Renewed" New Homiletic

Through this dialogue between Asian Theology and the New Homiletic with the Rhetoric of Situation, I would like to suggest three solutions to renew the New Homiletic so that it may become liberating and transformational.

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[14] Smith, Christine M. *Preaching as Weeping, Confession, and Resistance*. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992.

[15] Christian Breuninger, "Søren Kierkegaard's Reformation of Expository Preaching," *The Covenant Quarterly*, August 1993, p.22. Breuninger penetrates the Old Homiletic's assumption "that truth is preeminently noetic, and that a responsible presentation of truth ends with the listener's cognitive assent to an idea about truth."

[16] Kyeong Ho Kim, "Church based on Minjung Theology," p.8. He mentions of "Mission-Experience for Minjung," which is quite different from evangelical mission experience. That is the experience of solidarity with the suffering of the Minjung, people.

***Call to Discipleship***

True discipleship is self-denial. Jesus asked us to follow Him by taking up His (and thus our) cross daily. To become Jesus' disciples means to deny ourselves. We are all called to become His disciples, and we have to pay the cost, which is the cross. Bearing the cross means denying our rights and privileges instead of giving up and sacrificing ourselves. First preachers should deny themselves. Some preachers only strengthen the prejudice and the oppression by his/her ideology-oriented preaching. Preachers should resist against the ideology of the powerful, the oppressors, and the ruling. However, it is not easy for them to deny themselves because doing so sometimes means losing *status quo*.[17] The audience in the church should deny themselves. This audience is quite often homogenous and prejudiced, but they are called to deny themselves for the suffering audience in the world. This self-denial of true discipleship is a tough job for both preachers and churchgoers. But, when they deny their own selfish interest and reach out sacrificially to the audience in the world, then true liberation and transformation will happen.

***Ethos-Experience***

Every summer church parents are happy to send their children to the mission field to experience the need of good news and love. In addition to this experience, I would like to add one more—*ethos*-experience—which is the experience of justice and suffering in the world. The New Homiletic is a sort of *pathos*-turn of Homiletic from the Old Homiletic's *logos*. It encourages the audience to experience the *pathos* in the preaching moment through story-telling and inductive plotting. This helps the audience to experience the *pathos* of the sermon, but to prepare them to be liberators and transformers. We need to help them experience *ethos*-experience. By *ethos*-experience I mean that the audience needs more than just the subjective, emotional experience of literature and discourse; rather, they should experience suffering and injustice by solidarity with suffering others. Inviting audience to the pulpit and the world of the Word is important, but at the same time inviting them to the suffering world is also crucial. When they experience the suffering of others concretely they will be more involved in the mission of liberation and transformation.

***Praxis of Resistance***

Some Christian audiences are so satisfied with their own selfish interests that it blinds them to the actual suffering in the world. They are filled with euphoria just thinking about a paradise which has not yet come. We need to pray the Lord's prayers: Lead us not into temptation, and deliver us from evil. Jesus taught His disciples to resist against temptation and the evil powers that cause oppression and injustice. The temptation to exploit and oppress others exists everywhere in this world, and under its dominion people are moaning bitterly. Lust, prejudice, and avarice devour the powerless.[18] Flattering the powerful should not be the job of preachers and church audiences. Boldly they should resist against social evils and injustice.

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[17] Keon, Jin-Kwoan, "Theological reflection for the church which restores the ideal of the essential community of Christianity," *Korea Theological Study Institute*, winter, 1993, p.154. Minjung theology resists those ideologies which empower *status quo*.

[18] Lim, Tae-Soo, "Asian Reading of the Scripture," pp.1-4. Lim characterizes Asian Theology: 1) Anti or different Theology from Western Theology 2) Situational Theology 3) Theology of the Oppressed/ the Ruled 4) Post-Colonial Theology or Anti Western Colonial Theology 5) Theology for Liberation 6) Theology in the religiously plural society. In particular and in general, Lim emphasizes Asian Theology as a theology of resistance in solidarity with suffering people.

Asian Theology resists against every form and manifestation of oppression being done against innocent people.

## Conclusion—Gospel of Liberation for Transformational Preaching

The Old Testament prophet Isaiah so cared for the poor that he preached the good news to those poor; he cared for the brokenhearted rather than the healthy, and he cared for the captives or prisoners. Evangelist Luke demonstrates his care for the blind and for the oppressed. Proclaiming good news has to do with this liberating and transforming of innocent people's suffering into a blessed new reality. It strives for change and significant modification in human lives. The Gospel is a gospel of liberation, and preaching should be for the purpose of liberation. As the New Homiletic's inductive, event, and experience characteristics embrace the Asian Theology's correctives, and put into action practical steps for teaching the self-denial of discipleship, the ethos-experience for others' suffering, and to do resistance against evils which cultivate oppression and injustice, it may become a renewed New Homiletic, a Homiletic of liberation and transformation, a Homiletic of participation and solidarity with suffering others, making paradise one step closer within reach.

## Dancing at the Edge of Rhetoric*

Robert Stephen Reid©, University of Dubuque**

In last year's Academy of Homiletics papers, Joe Webb's essay "What Does It Mean to 'Listen to Listeners?' (219-228) begins by sketching developments in the field of communication theory and research and then goes on to discuss why these developments should matter for the Academy. The opening sections of his essay provide an overview of development in communication theory that is both historical and occasionally autobiographical and the larger portion of the essay offers a challenge concerning the problematic communication theory assumptions in the Lilly Endowment "Listening to Listeners" project. Ron Allen simultaneously acknowledged some of these problems in an essay by this title in the same volume of papers (229-238). I have no wish to revisit the issues surrounding the work of this Lilly-sponsored project, but I realized that further reflection on the issues Joe raised in his set-up are worth exploring at greater length. In theological homiletics' dance with rhetoric there is an unavoidable if occasionally contentious collaboration in which homileticians need to understand that when they speak and write, their communication theory leaks out in the conversation. For this reason, as the chair of the rhetoric working group, I think it may serve a useful purpose to write about distinctions within the field of rhetoric and communication studies that matter for homiletics. Why? Two illustrations must suffice.

First, in a recent email where a colleague in homiletics asked me to look over an essay, I discovered that this colleague presented the basic active sender-active receiver (S-R) model of communication and then went on to draw on the European philosophical hermeneutic tradition to say something about the communicative implications of conversational preaching. This person was unaware that these ideas are predicated on disparate presuppositions in communication theory. This raises the question "Which model of communication do we assume?' in our talk.

Second, I recall a conversation several years ago with a colleague who questioned why the Academy need bother having a rhetoric working group. After naming several major rhetoricians of the mid-twentieth century, this person said, "Has anyone really added anything else that matters for preaching since then?" Unknowingly this person was just updating Welldon's sardonic appraisal cited in the opening paragraph of Edwin Black's famous *Rhetorical Criticism* that Aristotle's *Rhetoric* is 'a solitary instance of a book which not only begins a science but completes it."[1] In responding to the question whether any contemporary developments in rhetoric matter for disciplines like homiletics, a prior question needs to be asked: 'Which rhetoric are we talking about?'

This essay constructs homileticians as its audience but my purpose is to answer these two questions in order to help people in this field become aware of some of the issues relevant to the partner that, like it or not, 'they brung to the dance.' This means that the burden of the essay will discuss communication theory and rhetoric rather than homiletics. As one of the co-authors of what appears to have become a basic rhetorical primer for preachers, I want to expand on that

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* With apologies to David Buttrick, Gene Lowry and all who fear I am suggesting that rhetoric is the sacred rather than the academic mystery in the collaborative dance between theology and rhetoric that is preaching. This essay seeks to explore ways in which it is the latter and why it matters. The essay was written for the Academy rather than for potential publication. Therefore, permission is granted for classroom reproduction and for quotation and citation in other writings.

[1] Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (1965; reprint, Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1965).

study (which was meant for preachers) with an essay meant for teachers and students who may wish to listen in. I am not writing for John McClure or Wes Avarm and others like them who are already engaged in sensitive efforts to appropriate a Levinasian language of transcendence for a conversational homiletics. Nor am I writing for Joe Webb, Richard Eslinger, or others who already have an intimate grasp of divisions in the field of communication theory. My purpose is to say something about commensurate and incommensurate assumptions in communication theory and their relationship to the question of contemporary development in rhetoric and why these subjects matter for homileticians. And rather than adopt the artifice of neutrality I present the distinctions as an argument as to why some approaches are more useful than others in homiletics.

**How Communication Works: Which model of communication do we assume?**

We all know that there are philosophical divisions among us in the Academy so there should be no surprise that the same philosophical divisions occur among communication theorists. A standard reference work for discussing these divisions in Communication has been *Theories of Human Communication* by Stephen Littlejohn and (now) Karen Foss.[2] The most recent edition of this book divides the schools of communication theory into seven different traditions of inquiry: 1) semiotic, 2) phenomenological, 3) cybernetic, 4) socio-psychological, 5) socio-cultural, 6) critical theory, and 7) rhetorical.[3] At times these schools may be in clear opposition to one another while at other times schools may share some basic assumptions. Many schools represent a distinctive appropriation of a research methodology shared with another discipline and here applied to communication research. The first two schools in this list represent the fundamental divide in discipline between quantitative and qualitative inquiry, between the scientific view and the humanistic philosophic presuppositions.[4] The former were largely shaped by semiotics and the latter tended to shaped by European philosophical hermeneutics. The remaining schools, with the exception of rhetoric, tend to describe orientations affected by research shared with other disciplines applied to communication research rather than philosophical commitments.[5]

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[2] Stephen Littlejohn and Karen Foss, *Theories of Human Communication*, 8th ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2005); hereafter *Theories*.

[3] This division is based on an important essay by Robert Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," *Communication Theory* 9 (1999): 119-161.

[4] Turning points in humanistic inquiry in the 20th century were the rise of the study of rhetoric in the Cornell School (1910-1950); the emergence of study of the New Rhetoric (1960s), interpersonal communication (1970s), intercultural and organizational communication (1980s); the Postmodern Turn in interpretive studies with the rise of Critical Theory, philosophical hermeneutics, social constructivism, and post-semiotic research agendas that emphasized the turn (return) to qualitative study across the disciples (1980s). Turning points in the scientific inquiry were the study of Media Effects in Communication Technologies and Mass Communication from 1930-1960; the study of compliance gaining tactics identified by social influence research since the and the rise of quantitative study to assert rigor in methodology since the 1950s; the study of advertising, marketing, public relations, and integrated communication studies since the 1960s; semiotic research in interpersonal and organizational communication since the 1970s; the dominance since the 1970s of *method* and issues of validity in applied communication research agendas. For further discussion beyond Littlejohn and Foss see Em Griffin, *A First Look at Communication Theory*. 6th. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005); Michael Dues and Mary Brown, *Boxing Plato's Shadow: An Introduction to the Study o Human Communication* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2004). The latter is quite brief and ideal for a quick overview by students of homiletics.

[5] I am troubled by their choice to treat rhetoric as one of seven divisions within a comprehensive gathering of communication theories. This separation of rhetoric as one of many is new to the 8th edition of this standard reference work and supports an argument that Karen Foss has sought to assert that permits a bifurcation of

The basic semiotic model of communication primarily treats communication as a process of idea transmission. It tends to be focused on causal concerns. More sophisticated versions of this research agenda see communication as the production and exchange of meaning (i.e., that receivers are not passive) examined by an analysis of talk as a language symbol system. The basic process model is typically reproduced in many undergraduate textbooks as a sender-receiver model of communication. This well known depiction of communication is grounded in Shannon and Weaver's S-R Theory of Communication but one can find lots of variations in theorists such as Lasswell, Osgood and Schramm, Gerbner, Berlo, and Newcomb and other theorists who are concerned with operationalizing quantitative and/or empirical analysis in communication studies.[6] This model views communication by way of the transmission of messages through physical channels as a symbol-making and symbol-inducing process, whether the communication is person to person or by way of a mediated technology. Typically it identifies the source, the encoder, the channel, noise, the decoder and the receiver of information. As theory goes, it treats communication at the syntactic level of semantic theory (assuming language's grammatical structures and codes) and tends to be abstracted from all questions of contextual meaning. Its research generally focuses on the study of message-making as a symbol process of communication.

The "triangle of meaning" developed by I. A. Richards and C. K. Ogden is the basic semantic overarching explanatory assumption of semiotic theories of communication. The triangle places a symbol in the lower left corner tracked by a firm line to the apex of the thought or reference which is then tracked by a second firm line to the referent symbolically represented by the thought. This last relationship is indicated across the bottom of the triangle by way of a dotted line, indicating that it is a causal rather than a real connection that makes up the triangle of meaning.[7] A more sophisticated division of the semiotic school sees communication as the production and exchange of meaning rather than mere processing of signs, but its theorists still develop the argument as a symbol *system* of cognitions people employ to accomplish purposes through language. Theory in semantics and semiotics originally developed by Pierce, Saussure, Russell, and Wittgenstein is appropriated by communication researchers who then describe *How to Do Things with Words* (J. L Austin) or have developed a theory of *Speech Acts* (John Seale).

The second school of communication theory looks to philosophical hermeneutics rather than semantic theory. It is sometimes identified as post-semiotic communication theory and views communication as a phenomenon of meaning-making that is always continuous, complex, contextualized and collaborative.[8] This approach tends to treat communication, by way of

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communication theory and its historic relationship to rhetoric as classical study of "the art of persuasion." On the other hand, Craig's essay, on which Littlejohn and Foss draw their schemata, represents a division of schools into traditions of inquiry. Rhetoric unquestionably has theoretically different modes of inquiry than conversation analysis. This is different than dividing communication theory into domains. Littlejohn and Foss write, "Many see *rhetoric* as synonymous with the term communication, and the decision of which term to use depends largely on the philosophical tradition with which you [the theorist] most identify ... [But] we will not focus further on rhetoric in this book because it has a lengthy tradition apart from communication theory, and we can not do justice to both here" (*Theories* 51). Some would find this shift from traditions to domains problematic and this disclaimer inadequate.

[6] For a thoroughgoing overview of communication from a semiotics perspective see John Fiske, *Introduction to Communication Studies*, 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 1990.

[7] C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language Upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1923).

[8] Cf. John Stewart, "Communicating and Interpersonal Communicating" *Bridges Not Walls: A Book About Interpersonal Communication*, 8th ed. John Stewart, ed. (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2002), 22; John Stewart, Karen E.

Heideggar, as a phenomenologically constitutive inhabitation of language as a *way of being*.[9] These theorists critique the process/system models of communication as overly-simplified and too committed to a linear, causal model of explaining what happens in interpersonal communication. Post-semiotic theorists like Michael Hyde, John Shotter, Calvin Schrag, Stephen Mailloux, Julia Wood and John Stewart do not accuse semioticians of misunderstanding the referential problem inherent in the symbol system approach.[10] Rather, as Stewart notes, "Many scholars appear not to recognize how some version of the symbol model inheres in every semiotic account of language communication. This is because when language and communication scholars adopt 'sign,' 'symbol,' and 'symbolizing' vocabulary, they are led by this vocabulary toward a position strikingly close to the discredited referential versions of the symbol model."[11] Post-semiotic theorists argue that language is presentational rather than representational. Rather than reflecting reality, they believe that language creates reality by constructing meanings located in the context and complexity of culturally continuous negotiation of meanings in talk.[12] As Julia Wood explains to her undergraduate students, "When you say, 'I love you' for the first time to another person, something happens. You are not just describing an objective phenomenon. You are changing your identity and the relationship you have with the other person. This suggests that identities and social experiences arise in discourse."[13]

Post-semiotic communication theorists tend to accept Gadamer's dictum that "Being that can be understood is language" or they may explore communication by way of the French (rather than German) tradition of European philosophical hermeneutics found in Ricoeur or Levinas.[14] They assume that language is constitutive of human being and reality rather than mirroring it representationally. Figure 1 offers a summary of John Stewart's contrast between semiotic and post-semiotic communication theory:[15]

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Zediker, Saskia Witteborn, *Together: Communicating Interpersonally: A Social Construction Approach,* 6th ed. (Los Angeles: Roxbury, 2004), 23.

[9] See Gary B. Madison, "Being and Speaking," *Beyond the Symbol Model: Reflections on the Representational Nature of Language*, John Stewart, ed. (New York: SUNY, 1996), 69-98.

[10] E.g., Calvin O. Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1986).

[11] Stewart, "The Symbol Model," *Beyond the Symbol Model*, 21.

[12] Humans respond to "what" not the facticity of "that." "What" involves interpretations, understandings and social constructions of reality that are not a contradiction of reality's facticity or "that"-ness.

[13] Julia T. Wood, *Communication Theories in Action: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Belmont: Wadsworth, 2004), 86.

[14] E.g., Madison draws on both Gadamer and Ricoeur; G. B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity: Figures and Themes* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1988).

[15] The chart is my own appropriation of Stewart's text-based argument in John Stewart, "The Symbol Model vs. Language as Constitutive Articulate Contact" *Beyond the Symbol Model: Reflections on the Representational Nature of Language*, John Stewart, ed. (New York: SUNY, 1996), 9-63. Essays by a variety of post-semiotic communication theorists are included in this volume. Stewart's fully developed argument is in John Stewart, *Language as Articulate Contact: Toward a Post-Semiotic Philosophy of Communication* (New York: SUNY, 1995).

| Semiotic Inquiry Focus | Post-semiotic Inquiry Focus |
|---|---|
| It requires the theorist to distinguish between a linguistic and a non-linguistic world, between the world of language as signifier and some other world of mental experiences, things, ideas, concepts, etc. signified. A commitment to two-worlds. | Language should be viewed as event rather than as a system. A commitment to language as an event in which meaning continually occurs. |
| It operates with an "atoms vs. molecules" metaphor where a linguistic world is composed of phonemes, morphemes, words, utterances, and speech acts. A commitment to atomizing. | Communicative events that are human presume the distinctive element of humanity as a contextual requirement of understanding. A commitment to view language is both contextual and collaborative. |
| It can not avoid the subject-object dichotomy inherent in the representational claim of the symbolizing relationship between the units of these two worlds. A commitment to representationalism. | Humans constitute world and reality through languaging. A commitment to treat a human contact event as something participants live into by inhabiting language. |
| It operates with the assumption that these ontologically distinct worlds function as an operative system. A commitment to a system. | Human understanding occurs in contact between persons making it irreducibly dialogical or interpersonal. A commitment to refute 'brute data' of systems in favor of treating world as always world-for and the beings for whom it is for are relational beings. |
| It assumes that language thus functions as a tool to accomplish communicative ends. A commitment to a functional understanding of language as tool. | Human understanding occurs as a function of articulate contact—accomplishes differentiation paradigmatically as a result or oral-aural contact. A commitment to treat language as the primary ways humans accomplish who they are since humans *inhabit* or live in language. |

Stewart draws a distinct line between semiotic and post-semiotic inquiry by stating that, "language can not be both a *way of being* constitutive of humanity and a system instrumentally employed by already constituted humans to represent cognitions and accomplish goals."[16] In semiotic theory subjects are separate from objects and one represents the other while post-semiotic thinkers treat understanding as the way humans inhabit language and, thereby, inhabit being-in-world. So, to the question, 'Tell me again why this matters for homileticians?' one perspective views communicating as derivative and secondary (speech representing that which is real) while the other views communicating as a constitutive phenomena by which humans understand themselves as people in relationship to others and to our human world.[17]

In describing what happens in communication, whether in teaching or writing, we can easily become confused if our reference books always seem to begin with a simple S-R model of communication or a discussion of general semantics. What if we then want to move on to discuss other ideas derived from a post-semiotic perspective?[18] Pedagogically this can work, but it only works well when the speaker or writer clearly understands when and where these theories are not longer commensurate. A good rule of thumb here is that most non-semiotic theorists

[16] Stewart, "Editor's Introduction," *Beyond the Symbol Model*, 275.

[17] An excellent example post-semiotic work that assumes the perspectives of philosophical hermeneutics can be found in the work of our own working group member, P. Christopher Smith, *The Hermeneutics of Original Argument: Demonstration, Dialectic, Rhetoric.* Northwestern University Studies in Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1998).

[18] In trying to explain the complexity of contextually understood language I draw on I. A. Richard's semantic theory before making a move to describe a post-semiotic view of language in Robert Stephen Reid, *The Four Voices of Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 123-32.

(Hermeneutic and Social Constructivists) tend to see the semiotic perspective as too dependent on the conduit (process) metaphor. They prefer to speak of 'world' or 'worlds' as their metaphor to frame an understanding of language. Metaphors matter. My point is that, whenever we talk, our basic assumptions about how communication works—our implicit theory of communication— 'leaks' out in our discourse.

**Developments in Rhetoric: Which rhetoric are we talking about?**

As one who has just written a book about homiletical theory that functionally surveys its developments across the latter half of the 20th century I am keenly aware of the question of canon.[19] Who should be elevated to the Pantheon and by what criterion? I am also aware of how challenging it was to try to describe an emerging substantive development within the discipline of homiletics and keep it contextual instead of turning it into an objectivist system. So let me clarify some basics about the development of rhetoric and contextualize the question of 'which rhetoric?'

First let me return to the sardonic observation that the discipline begins and ends with Aristotle (and to be fair Cicero). Of course, Aristotle's "means of persuasion" still matter, but contemporary theory has developed more than these three appeals. For example, in Herb Simons' undergraduate textbook *Persuasion and Society* attention is certainly devoted to the significance of *ethos, pathos, logos*. However, in subsequent chapters of the book, Simons proceeds to identify a variety of other "means of persuasion"; e.g., Hugh Rank's six means of argument appeal in advertising; twelve compliance gaining tactics identified by social influence research; Robert Cialdini's seven cognitive shorthands for persuasive appeal in sales; and a host of other techniques.[20]

Welldon was wrong. The discipline advances. Rhetoric did not stop with the Classical era's trivium of *ethos-pathos-logos*, or developments during the Medieval era, during the Renaissance and Enlightenment eras, during the 19th century, or the modern era. Rhetorical development in each of these periods can be readily found in Patricia Bizzell's and Bruce Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present.*[21] This is the standard collection of works that provide the means to determine 'Which rhetoric are we talking about?' The editorial introductions supplied by Bizzell and Herzberg masterfully contextualize the tradition for contemporary readers. However, like any standard work caution needs to be noted. Since the editors are both literary rather than communication critics the bias toward literary rhetoric rather than rhetorical development is evident.[22]

For example, in their overview of the modern era of developments in rhetorical theory, Bizzell and Herzberg attend to theorists familiar to the homiletical community: Mikhail Bakhtin

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[19] Reid, *The Four Voices of Preaching*.

[20] Herbert W. Simons, *Persuasion in Society.* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2001).

[21] Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001).

[22] As a rhetorician looking at development of rhetorical theory in the nineteenth century I would argue that three individuals from this era architecturally advanced disciplinary theory in the 19th century: Friedrich Nietzsche, Soren Kierkegaard, and John Henry Newman. Only Nietzche is covered in their compilation of sources. For Nietzche's rhetoric see *Friedrich Nietzsche on Rhetoric and Language with the Full Text of His Lectures on Rhetoric Published for the First Time,* S. Gilman, C. Blair, and D. Parent, eds. (New York: Oxford UP, 1989). For Kierkegaard see Roger Poole, *Kierkegaard: The Indirect Communication* (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1993). For Newman see Walter Jost, *Rhetorical Thought in John Henry Newman* (Columbia: U of South Carolina P, 1989).
What matters here is that the authors of all three of these studies treat these rhetoricians as theorists contributing to an hermeneutical rather than a semiotic approach to communication theory.

I. A. Richards, Kenneth Burke, Richard Weaver, and Chiam Perelman/Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca.[23] This is a fine canonical list. And with perhaps the exception of Bakhtin they are all theorists whose work emerged during the ferment of the development of semiotic communication theory. This is not to say that these theorists don't have things to add to homiletics; e.g., Burke on the centrality of identification for persuasion and for discovering motives; Weaver's claim that all language is sermonic because it invites counter-response; Richard's insight that rhetoric is so pervasive that it constitutes the vast majority of our talk and that we must attend not only to how we use language but how it uses us; Bakhtin's claim that meaning is always dialogically construed by way of our ideological filters and that communication is always situated as a strategy intended to produce effect; and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's effort to re-conceive Aristotle's rhetorical theory of *analytics* as a special form of dialectical reasoning opposed to demonstrative reasoning. Canonical develop by one and all. The ideas of all of these theorists need to be encountered and integrated into our own proposals.

Compare this list to those surveyed in *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* by the Foss sisters and Robert Trapp.[24] Now in its third edition this textbook provides an overview of the *major* contemporary theorists of rhetoric in the field of communication: Richards, Grassi, Perelman/Olbrechts-Tyteca, Toulmin, Weaver, Burke, Habermas, hooks, Baudrillard, and Foucault; fairly similar to Bizzell and Herzberg with the addition of their postmodern theorists. In other words, regardless of one's philosophy of communication, most scholars in the field would recognize these individuals as having made significant contributions. However, when the Foss sisters teamed up with Cindy Griffin to write *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* (a book similar in format to *CPR*) they were freer to recognized contributors to a specific division within the critical tradition school—a subdivision of one of the seven divisions of the discipline noted above. They provide overviews of the work of Kramarae, hooks, Anzaldúa, Daly, Starhawk, Allen, Minh-ha, Gearhart, and Johnson.[25]

Now to my point. The question I posed in response to thinking about development in rhetorical theory is: 'Which rhetoric are we talking about?' To answer this question a homiletician should ask the prior question: 'Which model of communication does the rhetorical theorist whose ideas I am thinking about using assume as operative?' For example, consider the book by Foss, Foss, and Griffin. The majority of theorists included in *Feminist Rhetorical Theory* tend to be rhetoricians opposed to a rhetoric of dominance and elitism traditionally associated with rhetoric as 'the art of persuasion." This is good so far and is to be expected. But Foss and Foss (and perhaps to a lesser degree Griffin) have used this collection of theorists elsewhere to mount an argument to re-situate public speaking as a kind of dialogue as invitational speech rather than as an expression of rhetorical speech.[26] In their effort to argue for this invitational speaking in which the appeal of the discourse is to invite further conversation

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[23] The Postmodern authors whose works are included are: Stephen Toulmin, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Wayne Booth, Hélène Cixous, Henry Louis Gates, and Stanley Fish.

[24] S. Foss, K. Foss, and R. Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, 3rd ed. (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2002).

[25] Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Giffin, *Feminist Rhetorical Theories* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1999).

[26] See especially Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss, *Inviting Transformation: Presentational Speaking for a Changing World*, 2nd ed. (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 2003). This public speaking textbook has 5 core assumptions intended to shift public speaking from the domain of rhetoric to the domain of communication: (1) the purpose of communicating is to gain understanding; (2) the speaker and the audience are equal; (3) different perspectives constitute valuable resources; (4) change happens when people choose to change themselves; and (5) all participants are willing to be changed by the interaction.

rather than to persuade listeners, they tend to shift the burden of their theory to the domain of communication and disassociate it from the tradition of rhetoric which they believe has been compromised by the tyranny of appeals grounded in persuasive purposes. Clearly one of the goals of this proposal of 'presentational speaking as dialogic communication' is to suspend the need to convince others in order to be open to the possibility of advancing understanding. However, the effect of this proposal is to cut speech off from its historic commitment both to argument and to rhetoric as a mode of reasoning—something Aristotle affirmed by viewing rhetoric as part of the division of analytics.[27] Their proposal of invitational speaking remains in the field of communication but it privileges dialogue rather than rhetoric—or at least not a rhetoric in which the art of persuasion matters. It is less clear how this 'rhetoric as communication sans persuasion' also functions as an art of reasoning that invents *arguments* as well as strategies of communication.

This bifurcation of a communication into persuasive arts concerned with argument and communicative arts concerned with dialogical reasoning became particularly apparent in a 2005 NCA panel discussion on recent developments in feminist communication theory in public speaking. The Foss sisters and Cindy Griffin each took time to try to argue for the space they were trying to make for developing a model of public speaking that does not seek to dominate listeners or assume elitist answers on their behalf. However, when Julia Wood stepped to the rostrum she clearly distanced her own feminist commitments from these efforts to move speech and public speaking out of the domain of rhetoric and into the domain of dialogue's interest in understanding. She argued that the domain of rhetoric and the domain of communication are not incommensurate. She was unwilling to make rhetoric a sub-division of communication (see theories of communication above). For Wood, the willingness to suspend the need to persuade in presentational speech can not be moved into a separate domain of communication without losing the essential nature of argument that characterizes all rhetorical thought and reasoning. She made it clear that she was unwilling to cede her model of communication theory to the particular feminist concern being raised by the proponents of invitational public speaking. Though it is unclear whether Woods would accept Stewart's entire argument for a post-semiotic theory of communication presented here, her sympathies clearly lay in the appropriation of philosophical hermeneutics as the context to understand what happens in dialogue.[28] She recognized that making rhetoric a subdivision of communication would destroy the rhetorical underpinnings of her own model of how communication works.

So what's at stake in this debate over which rhetoric? Herb Simons can help make this apparent. His *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry* is the second of two collections of essays intended to give birth to what is now called the "Rhetoric of Inquiry" movement.[29] The 'turn' referred to in the title involves the recognition by many scholars across all disciplines that reason is fundamentally rhetorical and therefore inquiry as argument and scholarship in the human sciences is fundamentally a rhetorical enterprise of argument-making. Herb Simons prefaces the essays of the volume by stating that, "The emerging consensus among the contributors to this book is that, much as evolutionary biologists or others

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[27] See Chiam Perelman, "The New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning" *The Great Ideas Today—1970*. Robert M. Hutchins and Mortimer J. Adler, eds. (New York: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1970), 281.

[28] Cf. J. T. Wood, "Diversity in Dialogue: Commonalities and Differences between Friends," *Communi-cation Ethics in an Age of Diversity*, J. Makau and R. Arnett, eds. (Urbana: U of Chicago P, 1997), 5-26.

[29] Herbert Simons, ed., *The Rhetorical Turn: Invention and Persuasion in the Conduct of Inquiry* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1990); J. S. Nelson, A. Megill, and D. McCloskey, eds., *The Rhetoric of the Human Sciences: Language and Argument in Scholarship and Public Affairs* (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1987.

engaged in the conduct of inquiry might wish to rely on hard fact and cold logic in support of their claims, there is no escape from rhetoric: no escape from informal argument, or from figures and topes, or from the enthymematic appeals to good sense that mark the discourse of the civic arena."[30] In one of the essays on the value of the rhetoric of inquiry movement he concludes, "The general premise of the rhetorician must be, rather, that *even* if reality is symbolically constructed, some constructions are surely preferable to others. Similarly, *even if* reason is rhetorical, some reasons are surely superior to others. Rhetorical engagement may help us to discover the better reason and also help make the better *appear* the better reason. This is reason enough for a rhetoric of inquiry."[31]

Do we lose something that is essential to the identity of the communication discipline if rhetoric is marginalized as only a school within communication because it has participated in the evils of sometimes making the worse argument look better or making any position appear "superior" to another? Ideally we can concede rhetoric's problematic history without necessarily trying to dismantle its role as the languaging context of human communication. Though all would agree that we need to find ways to engage in dialogue that truly listens to one another in the civic sphere, there is less agreement that we should make rhetoric the villain because for too long it has been conducted as an either-or art of civic discourse.[32] There are some rhetoricians, especially some feminist rhetoricians, who are exploring whether this separation is possible. But homileticians need to be aware as they listen in on these conversations that these questions currently being debated within the communication discipline represent the points where the distinctions between qualitative research and quantitative research collide, where the humanistic tradition of rhetoric is colliding with the scientistic tradition of research in communication studies; where the latter is increasingly troubled by its association with humanistic rhetoric and its commitment to persuasion. The conversation will continue in the discipline, but its participants tend to be aware of this "baggage" I have recounted and why these issues matter. To those listening in from other traditions like homiletics or contributing to the conversation with reference to some of these theorists, we need to keep asking the questions about which model of communication does our argument assume and what rhetoric are we talking about?

**Concluding Reflection**

Those who wish to explore this issue in greater depth should look at the essay by Robert Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field."[33] Craig is the author of the sevenfold division of schools within the discipline of communication adopted by Littlejohn and Foss. However, he explores the tension between constitutive and transmission models of communication with sensitivity to where they are commensurate and where they are incommensurate. He does not reduce the issue to one of either-or but understands that it is essential for communication theorists to understand the dialectical relationship between these approaches. What is clear from his analysis is that we must always ask 'What theory?' and 'Which rhetoric?'

So what does all this have to do with homiletics? Some basic questions may help clarify issues at stake. In our discussions about conversational preaching we sometimes blur the

[30] Herbert Simons, "Preface," *The Rhetorical Turn*, x.
[31] Herbert Simons, "The Rhetoric of Inquiry as an Intellectual Movement," *The Rhetorical Turn*, 22.
[32] See R. Anderson, L. A. Baxter, K. N. Cissna, *Dialogue: Theorizing Difference in Communication Studies* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2004); R. C. Arnett and P. Arneson, *Dialogic Civility in a Cynical Age: Community, Hope and Interpersonal Relationships* (New York: State U of New York P, 1999).
[33] Robert Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field" at note 3. On the dialectical tension between transmission vs. constitutive models of communication theory see 124-28.

presuppositional distinctions between rhetoric and dialogue as means of engaging in communication. When feminist, communication theorists are used in support of dismantling hierarchies in favor of dialogue in preaching, the homiletician may be unaware that significant issues are at stake which may be dependent on semiotic rather than post-semiotic distinctions in communication theory. Again, in distinguishing between persuasion and the assumption that sermons make implicit appeals a homiletician may be drawing on a 19th century conception of rhetoric that distinguish informative from persuasive speech from one another rather than a 21st century understanding that "there is no escape from rhetoric." And again, some would argue that rhetoric is a term too damaged to be rehabilitated for homiletics,[34] but we who work in this field (rhetoricians and homileticians) also need to be able to distinguish popular and technical understandings of the terminology of our discipline. It is possible to argue about the role of persuasion in preaching without having to deny that all discourse makes implicit rhetorical appeals, that all speech calls forth a response from the other.

This overview is intended to invite teachers and students in homiletics into further dialogue about our implied theories of communication and how they "leak out" in our writings and our sermons. It is an invitation to take time to understand how some of our arguments, dissertations, and conversations trade in these assumptions in ways that we might otherwise be unaware. Dancing with a partner requires keeping in step with and also not stepping on the partner's toes. The Divine-human dance is always afoot in preaching; theology must lead, but homiletics still needs to know what its dance partner is thinking and how to keep from tripping over the steps it takes.

[34] E.g., Lucy Rose argued that continued use of the word in preaching is "potentially dangerous in sanctioning previous definitions and practices." Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), 133.

## *Horizontverschmelzung* (Horizon Fusion), *Katallagê* (Reconciliation) and the *Odyssey's* Inverse Similes: A Gadamerian/Pauline Reading of Penelope's and Odysseus' Exchange

P. Christopher Smith, University of Massachusetts Lowell

(1) There is a remarkable example in Book 8 of the *Odyssey* (523-31) of an "inverse simile," that will serve nicely to introduce our considerations of the importance of this rhetorical figure for Christian homiletics. The scene is this: having nearly completed his 20 years of adventures and perils, first at Troy and then on his *nostos* or journey home to Ithaca, Odysseus finds himself a guest/stranger *xeinos* in the court of the hospitable Phaeacians. As is their custom, and in perfect conformity with *xenia* or the protocols for hosts and guest/strangers, they have assured him of safe passage home following their entertainment of him and, in response, his entertainment of them with the tale of his return from Troy. After a feast meal the blind bard Demodocus is called in to "sing the famous deeds of fighting heroes." After a variety of festivities including Demodocus' "tragic" song of Odysseus and Achilles quarrelling at Troy and Demodocus' "comic" song of Hephaestus catching Ares with his wife Aphrodite, Odysseus sends the choicest cut of meat to Demodocus with the request that he now sing of the sack of Troy. Then, as Homer tells it,

> he sang how left and right they ravaged the steep city,
> sang how Odysseus marched right up to Deiphobus' house
> like the god of war on attack with diehard Memelaus.
> There, he sang, Odysseus fought the grimmest fight
> he had ever braved but he won through at last,
> thanks to Athena's superhuman power.
> That was the song the famous harper sang
> but great Odysseus melted into tears,
> running down from his eyes to wet his cheeks. (Fagles, 8.582-97 (515-22)).[i]

And now we come to the rhetorical figure in question, an "inverse simile": Odysseus wept, Homer tells us,

> as a woman weeps, her arms flung round her darling husband,
> a man who fell in battle, fighting for town and townsmen,
> trying to beat the day of doom from home and children.
> Seeing the man go down, dying gasping for breath,
> she clings for dear life, screams and shrills –
> but the victors, just behind her,
> digging spear-butts into her back and shoulders,
> drag her off in bondage, yoked to hard labor, pain,
> and the most heartbreaking torment wastes her cheeks.
> So from Odysseus' eyes ran tears of heartbreak now. (Fagles 8.588-98 (522-31))

Odysseus' tears are not, as we might have expected, like those of someone who has struggled through the ardors of war to victory but precisely like those of the victim of such a warrior. Our task here will be to apply we can learn this surprising upside-down comparison in regard to Gadamer's idea of *Horizontverschmelzung,* or horizon fusion, and St. Paul's *katallagê,* or reconciliation.

Let us begin with Gadamer. His hermeneutical theory is, of course, focused on the fusion of the past with the interpreters' present as this happens when interpreters reach an understanding of the

text by laying it out in, and applying it to, their contemporary situation. Still, the phenomenon underlying any horizon fusion and the understanding this makes possible, is the merging of the experience of someone other than, and in this case even opposite to oneself, with one's own experience, so that the other's perspective becomes continuous with one's own. That continuity of the foreign and other with what is one's own is precisely what Homer's inverse similes bring about for his audience, who are then able to understand things from both the victor's and victim's perspective, each in terms of the other. We must keep in mind that up to this inverse simile in the *Odyssey* we had been hearing how things were experienced from Odysseus's point of view as a conquering hero. In fact, we will hear Odysseus himself say, only some 70 lines later, " The wind drove me out of Ilium and to Ismarus, / the Cicone's stronghold. There I sacked the city, / killed the men, but as for the wives and plunder, / that rich haul we dragged away form the place" (Fagles 9. 45-47 (39-44)).[ii] Such is his world. Yet it is Homer's genius to make Odysseus' tears on hearing the tale of his own experience understandable to us by their very sameness with the tears of someone who suffers at Odysseus' hands. When Gadamer tells us that horizon fusion is the "articulation" of "a shared world held in common (*einer gemeinsamen Welt*)" (GW II, 6), this surely includes the sharing of grief by both victor and vanquished. In this universal affect the horizons of most disparate, polar opposites, the captor man and the captured woman, fuse together as alike. [iii] In what follows here we will consider how Odysseus and Penelope, having lived and grown apart from each other over twenty years of separation, reach an understanding that Homer will represent for his audience in Book 23 with yet another inverse simile. In their exchange their disparate horizons fuse as each shows understanding (Gadamer: *Verständnis*) for the opposite experience of the other. Her release from despairing of her husband's ever returning, from doubt that this stranger is indeed her husband Odysseus, who has come home at last, brings tears, Homer tells us, like the tears of shipwrecked man awash at sea who at last comes ashore (23.233-39). Her tears, this is to say, are understood by comparison to an experience from a world wholly other than her own – her husband's – and for us who hear this two different sets of horizons initially exclusive of each other now merge.

To be sure, Gadamer's focus is ultimately not on the evolving relationship of the two speakers in an exchange with each other and consequently not on the understanding or *Verständnis* they come to show for each other. Instead, he exposits how in their conversation two speakers reach an understanding, of some *Sache* or subject matter with which they are both concerned. The change in emphasis that we are making from *Verstehen* to *Verständnis*, from mutual understanding of some thing to understanding of each other, thus necessitates that we import into Gadamerian hermeneutics considerations that go well beyond Gadamer's original concerns. First, we will assume that whatever is said on the intellectual level of *logos* is in fact an epiphenomenon that rides precariously on the largely unconscious basis of will and feeling, of *pathos* or what Homer calls *thumos* and Paul, *kardia*, the heart and viscera. Put another way, to think only in terms of understanding some *Sache*, some subject matter, cognitively is to abstract from what is really going on; for any talk is never "about what it's about," instead, more fundamentally, it expresses the interplay of wills and contradictory emotions. (We will see that on this level logic's laws of non-contradiction and consistency or self-identity do not apply.)

Furthermore, we will assume that for human beings what Gadamer calls *Verständnis* is only the end result of what begins as a contest, an *agôn*, in which each party first seeks to establish her or his "being for self" by reducing the other to mere "being for another," only to discover that losing this contest is precisely what makes possible getting beyond it to valid community with the other and mutual recognition of each other's "being for self." How this works is represented in a Zen story – with near haiku density – that I heard told by the Japanese philosopher Nishitarri as a guest speaker

in one of Gadamer's Heidelberg lectures in the early l960s: Two people who know each other well, A and B, chance to meet. A asks B, "What is your name?" [iv] B adroitly parries by responding, "My name is A." Caught off guard, A responds, "No, *my* name is A." And the two walk away arm in arm laughing. In this sketch, as we will see, we have the exact schema for the exchange of Penelope and Odysseus. Paul will refer in this regard to overcoming an initial *echthra* and *apeitheia*, enmity, and mistrust, diffidence or even defiant disobedience, which the sinner brings to his relationship to God, and here, of course, the analogy with the exchange between Penelope and Odysseus is imperfect. For God never breaks faith with human beings and it is only the sinner who experiences the relationship agonistically. Still, we may say that after we have wrestled with our angels and lost, we do walk arm in arm with God, however unsteadily.

Put another way, we accept from Paul the concept of *katallagê* or reconciliation. The idea here is that through their exchange two persons who have been apart from each other while one was away, and who have become strangers, *xenoi*, to each other where once they had been *philoi* or kin dear to each other, experience restored communion with each other. Again, there is a radical difference in the reconciliation of two human beings like Penelope and Odysseus, who in jousting initially for advantage find their way back to each other, and God's reconciliation to himself of the wayward sinner. Nevertheless, we can say that in a certain way in Penelope's and Odysseus' exchange models for us crucial features of what sinners experience in their exchanges with God despite the asymmetry of the God-sinner relationship. And just as Homer can communicate their horizon fusion and reconciliation with a inverse simile comparing Penelope's tears to the tears of the cast-away Odysseus who pulls himself from the pounding surf, so for St. Paul's audience the image of the Christ crucified is thus the inverse simile in which the horizons of an infinite God who only acts and never suffers and of finite human beings who suffer and die, are fused.

(2) Significantly, given that Odysseus is supposed to be a *xeinos* or stranger, the exchange or talk of Penelope and Odysseus with each other takes place at the center of their home and original communion, the hearth. The first part begins at l9, 103 and runs, with a significant narrative digression on how Odysseus got his name and his telltale scar, until the end of that book some 500 verses later. It resumes, again at the hearth, at 23, 173, and ends, so we are told, with the lovers, reunited in the famous marriage bed, where after making love they tell each other their stories of all that they have been through while Athena conveniently holds back the dawn. However, the occasion for their talk in Book 23 is very different from Book l9. In their exchange in Book l9 they "reach an understanding about a subject matter" (Gadamer: *sich verständigen über eine Sache*), but not yet an understanding of each other (Gadamer: *Verständnis*): they agree, namely, on a way to get Odysseus' bow into his hands so that he, as just one, might have a chance to engage the many suitors from a distance as an archer rather than in direct combat, where they would surely overpower him by their sheer numbers. Penelope, however, still withholds recognition from her husband Odysseus.

The scene for Penelope's and Odysseus' exchange is set with the treacherous maid servant Melantho's stinging rebuke of the "beggar" (65-69), and "the man of many devices," *polumêtis* Odysseus' equally sharp response, and, most important, "cagey," *periphrôn,* Penelope's even sharper castigation of Melantho. Penelope then directs her trustworthy housekeeper Eurynome to prepare a seat for the "stranger/guest," the *xeinos*, at the hearth opposite her, for, she says, *in Odysseus' hearing*, "I would like to ask him questions point by point" (Fagles 19, 109 (99). The Greek here, *exereesthai* would seem to mean something like "grill." She has, in other words already thrown down the gauntlet, and the duel for who will recognize whom as being for themselves is on. And now "cagey," *periphrôn*, Penelope begins her interrogation, "Who are you? where are you from? your city? your parents?" (115 (105)), and, the man of many devices, *polymêtis* Odysseus, counters,

first with highest praise in the form of a inverse simile comparing Penelope's fame, *kleos*, to that of an excellent king (108-14). He follows this, however, with a refusal to answer her questions about his provenance out of fear, he says, that "one of your maids, or you yourself, might scold me" – an obvious allusion to Melantho, who has just abused him, and to his awareness of the danger of betrayal her presence presents. Penelope then tells Odysseus of the impossible behavior of the suitors, of her love for Odysseus, and of her fending off the suitor's pressure to marry one of them with the *dolos* or deceit of the "web" or shroud for Laertes she "spins out" (*tolupeuô*), and the betrayal of her scheme by those "bitches" (*kunai*) (123-63). (She has just used *kuon* in her castigation of Melantho at 91.)

If we take this as code and ask behind the surface meaning what it is that she hopes to accomplish by saying what she does, we can see that she is reassuring Odysseus of her love for him and her cunning; she thereby establishes herself as a capable co-conspirator in any plan to rid themselves of the suitors. This does not mean, however, that she is ready yet to recognize Odysseus as her husband. At this point she is still ambivalent, pulled in both directions: whether to grant recognition or to withhold recognition from him. As she herself will say later on, "so my heart (*thumos*) is split in two and driven now this way, now that" (524). It is important to note, therefore, that *Sich-Verständigen über eine Sache* can take place without both the partners in the exchange yet showing full *Verständnis* for each other: Penelope and Odysseus can first reach an understanding about how to destroy the suitors and postpone their *agôn* or contest for recognition from each other for later. For now, Penelope keeps Odysseus at a distance by continuing to call him *xeinos*, stranger/guest, though this will modulate to *xeinos philos*, "dear guest," as they come closer together later in Book l9 (350).

When Penelope asks again where he comes from Odysseus, again expressly called *polymêtis*, a man of many devices, counters now with one of the extended lies for which he is notorious, that he is from Crete and that his name is Aethon (164-84). But then at 185 he begins to speak of meeting and hosting Odysseus on his way to Troy 20 years before. And, Homer tells us, "He knew how to make the many falsehoods he told like the truth" (203), so much so, in fact, that Penelope bursts into tears like streams from melting snow (204-207). And here Homer gives a first indication of their drawing near to each other in gut-level fusion of each one's feelings for the other in a famous simile that presages, as we will see, the magnificent account in Book 20 of their sensing each other's immediate proximity all the while they are sleeping apart:

> as the heavy snow melts down from the high mountain ridges,
> snow the West Wind piles there and the warm East Wind thaws
> and the snow, melting, swells the rivers to overflow their banks –
> so she dissolved in tears , streaming down her lovely cheeks,
> weeping for him, her husband, sitting there beside her.
> Odysseus' heart (*thumos*) went out to his grief-stricken wife
> but under his lids his eyes remained stock-still –
> they might have been horn or iron –
> his guile (*dolos*) fought back his tears. (Fagles 237-46 (205-12)

*Dolos*, we note is the same word used for Penelope's "deceit" of the web. For all the tension between them, *periphrôn* Penelope and *polymêtis* Odysseus epitomize the sameness in difference that Homer's reverse simile concluding their exchange will represent.

Though Odysseus might seem to have gained a preliminary advantage in this duel by withholding his feelings from her while she has revealed hers so ingenuously, Penelope is quick to

recover, and she begins her first "testing" of Odysseus for "signs" (*sêmata*) that he really is her husband (215). (The famous issue of the marriage bed will be the last of these "tests.") What sort of clothing was your "guest" Odysseus wearing, she asks, to which he responds in such detail as only Odysseus himself could know: his cape, he says, was clasp with a golden brooch,

> twin sheaths for the pins, of the face a work of art:
> a hound clenching a dappled fawn in its front paws,
> slashing it as it writhed. All marveled to see it,
> solid gold as it was, the hound slashing, throttling
> the fawn in its death-throes, hoofs flailing to break free. (Fagles 261-66 (226-231))

And Penelope weeps again as she recognizes the "signs" Odysseus gave her (250). Indeed, she will say in Book 23 "For there are signs (*sêmata*) that we two know but that are hidden from others" (23.108-109), and here we have the first instance of one of these. But in her willful refusal to recognize him, Penelope still calls the man sitting across the hearth from her *xeinos*, albeit now with a significant change: you were pitied in my house before, she says, but now you will be *philos* and *aidoios*, dear like kin and honored. And with her having drawn this close, Odysseus can say of himself that he is "very near" (*agchou*) (271) and can even tell her the story of his homecoming. He is also able to tell her that along the way he has accumulated all the wealth they will need to restore their estate (270-284). Now they can begin scheming how to rid themselves of the suitors – in code to prevent betrayal. She threatens to punish anyone who disrespects he guest, saying pointedly, "For how else, *Xeinos*, could you learn that I, shrewd (*epiphrona*) as I am, excel all other women in intelligence and craft (*mêtis*)" – the very things for which her husband is notorious (325-26). Bonnie and Clyde have nothing on these two!

Soon after this Penelope tells about a dream in which an eagle kills her geese and then returns to explain precisely,

> These geese were your suitors – I was once the eagle
> but now I am your husband (*posis*), back again at last,
> about to launch a terrible fate against them all! (Fagles 618-20 (548-50)

And then, pointedly, she asks Odysseus how this dream, which obviously contains its own interpretation, is to be interpreted. On cue he responds,

> Dear woman (*gunai*, "wife")... twist it however you like,
> your dream can only mean one thing. Odysseus
> told you himself – he'll make it come to pass.
> Destruction is clear for each and every suitor;
> not a soul escapes his death and doom. (Fagles 625-29 (555-58))

In other words, "I'm ready when you are. How shall we do it?" to which she responds by proposing a contest with Odysseus' bow, a contest that only Odysseus himself could win:

> The hand than can string the bow with greatest ease,
> that shoots an arrow clean through all twelve axes –
> He's the man I follow, yes ... (Fagles, 649-51 (577-79)

They have now reached an understanding about what to do. However, they have yet to fuse horizons in the fundamental sense we mean this; they have yet to show understanding, *Verständnis* for each other, yet to reconcile. Whether consciously or unconsciously – I tend to think the latter – Penelope is still not willed to recognize Odysseus as her husband. Indeed, she will withhold

recognition to the very end of their exchange when her feelings about her guest finally change and *katallagê,* reconciliation becomes possible. The gap between them is slowly closing, however, and Homer has an exquisite way of telling us how near they have already drawn to each other on a visceral if not conscious level. While one has bedded down in the hall and the other in her chamber, each, in that hazy state between sleeping and waking, has a vision. Penelope dreams,

> Again – just this night – someone lay beside me ...
> like Odysseus to the life, when he embarked
> with his men-at-arms. My heart (*kêr*) raced with joy.
> No dream, I thought, the waking truth at last!
> At those words
> Dawn rose on her golden throne in a sudden gleam of light.
> And great Odysseus caught the sound of his wife's cry
> and began to daydream – deep in his heart (*thumos*) it seemed
> she stood beside him, knew him, now at last. (Fagles 20. 98-105 (20.88-90)[v]

(3) We come now to Book 23 and the second time Penelope and Odysseus meet at their hearth. The issue now is entirely *Verständnis*, understanding for each other, since there is no longer any subject matter to be understood and agreed upon. As in the Zen story of A and B, the couple here begin antagonistically with Penelope maneuvering adroitly to keep the upper hand by withholding recognition from her husband and "testing" him. I would have to say now that she does this consciously, for her visceral refusal to believe the trusted old nurse Eurykleia when she tells her that Odysseus has killed the suitors – it could only have been a god who did this, she says (23.63) – has given way to Penelope's conscious deliberation,

> ... should she keep her distance,
> probe her [beloved] husband (*philon posin exereeinoi*)? Or rush up to the man at once
> and kiss his head and cling to both his hands? (Fagles 23. 97-99 (86-87)

She opts at first for keeping her distance and putting Odysseus to the test one more time, but though conscious, her decision is not intellectually guided but viscerally driven: "so greatly was her heart (*kêr*) pressured" (95). Her contradictory feelings of confidence and fear, affection and jealousy, love and resentment – many of which, as we will see, drive sinners on their way to reconciliation with God – turn her will this way and that, with the second of each of these pairs prevailing for the time being.

They begin by each talking past each other to their son Telemachus, though in each other's hearing. She responds to Telemachus' having scolded her for her hard hearted reserve (96-103) that the *thumos,* the heart in her chest, is not ready for a talk eye to eye, but if this is really is Odysseus, she says, they have those secret signs by which he can identify himself (106-10). She is, this is to say, preparing to spring the test of the marriage bed on him, for these signs, the ones known only to them, clearly do not include the scar by which the old nurse Eurycleia had recognized Odysseus. Everybody knew about that sign. Of course Penelope could have asked him for that as proof of his identity, but her game is a different one that goes to things more intimate and central to the two of them. We must keep in mind what is unsaid but in play here, namely that Odysseus has been warned of the dangers of an unfaithful wife by Agamemnon himself in the underworld where the latter ended up after his wife Clytemnestra and her paramour Aegisthus stabbed him to death. With the marriage bed test Penelope will play on this fear in, her trump card in winning the advantage over her husband. For the moment, however, Odysseus can play the sovereign male. Let her test me (*perazein emathen*), he says to Telemachus, again in her hearing. My dirty rags are confusing her

(113-116), and in the meantime let us two attend to men's matters: how to delay the rebellion that the killing of the suitors is sure to generate (117-128).

Odysseus, bathed by the faithful servant Eurynome and newly beautified by Athena, is now fully confident of himself and ready to engage his wife directly. He does not get the reaction he thought he would, however, and he loses his composure and attacks her sharply in nearly the same language he had scolded his son for using a short time before. What is more, his opening *daimonie* is the same word he had used to rebuke Melantho at l9.71:

> "Strange woman (*daimoniê*)! So hard – the gods of Olympus
> made you harder than any other woman in the world!
> What other wife could have a spirit so unbending?
> Holding back from her husband, home at last for her
> after bearing twenty years of brutal struggle.
> Come, nurse, make me a bed, I'll sleep alone.
> She has a heart of iron in her breast." (Fagles 186-92 (166-72))

We note the ploy here of speaking about his wife in the third person to someone else, the nurse, while speaking to her, a clever device (*mêtis*) for objectifying your antagonists in the *agôn* for recognition, and robbing them of their being for themselves. Like B in our Zen story, however, who answers "I'm A" when A tries to pin him down by getting him to name himself, Penelope has a *mêtis* of her own to turn the tables:

> "Strange *man* (*daimoni'*),"
> wary (*periphrôn*) Penelope said. "I'm not so proud, so scornful,
> nor am I overwhelmed by your quick change ...
> You look – how well I know – the way he looked setting sail from Ithaca years ago
> aboard the long-oared ship." (Fagles 193-96 (173-76))

So you look good again. Big deal. And now she speaks of *him* in the third person to someone else, and plays her trump card. :

> Come, Eurycleia,
> move the sturdy bestead out of our bridal chamber –
> That room the master built with his own hands.
> Take it out now, sturdy bed that it is,
> and spread it deep with fleece,
> blankets and lustrous throws to keep him warm." (197-202 (177-180)

If ever there was and instance of something said "not being about what it's about," this is it, and Gadamerian hermeneutics, based as it is in coming to understand some subject matter as it displays itself in the medium of language between partners in conversation, is therefore not able to help us much in understanding what is going on here. To be sure, one must listen very attentively to what is said, but more to its undertones and overtones than to some cognitive content artificially stripped of its affective setting. The issue here is certainly not where Odysseus will sleep. The point instead, that Odysseus surely hears, is that it will not be with Penelope, that she is turning him down. The point is also, therefore, that she does not yet recognize him as her partner in the marriage bed, that she is rejecting his advances, as if to say, "Don't think things are going to be just the way they were before you left on your twenty year excursion. Not so fast buster." What is said here is thus the expression of a nexus of underground feelings, mistrust, fear, resentment, and the like, and it is these that the attentive listener must hear.

Odysseus' response makes this clear: he does not say, "Here is how I see things from my different perspective," but rather "Oh woman, how much these words you say pain my heart (*thumalges*)" (183). He *hears* exactly what she has said. The communication here is not mind to mind but gut to gut and not logical but passionate. Like A when B answers "I'm A," Odysseus has been outmaneuvered and loses control of the situation to the opponent/partner he had hoped to dominate. The equivalent of A's "No, I'm A!" is Odysseus' "Who could have put my bed somewhere else?" (184), for this exposes his feelings of fear and jealousy that Penelope may have been unfaithful to him: "There isn't any man (*tis andrôn*), and had he the strength of his prime, who could easily raise and move it," he says (187-88). Or maybe there was such a man, a younger man "in the strength of his prime"? "Did some man split the olive stump and move it somewhere else?" (203-204), he adds at the end. To recover his shaken being for himself Odysseus now lays claim emphatically to the marriage bed and to his role as a husband that it symbolizes, both of which Penelope had seemed to deny him. He tells the tale of its unusual construction around the trunk of an olive tree before even the bedchamber and then the house itself had been built. But Odysseus' defenses have been breached. Penelope has won; he has lost. And now the game, the *agôn* of antagonists, is over. He surrenders and she need withhold herself no longer.

> Penelope felt her knees go slack, her heart surrender,
> recognizing the strong clear signs (*sêmata anagnousêi*) Odysseus offered.
> She dissolved in tears, rushed to Odysseus, flung her arms
> around his neck and kissed his head.... (Fagles 231-34 (206-208)

And for Odysseus,

> the more she spoke, the more a deep desire for tears
> welled up inside his breast – he wept as he held the wife
> he loved, the soul of loyalty in his arms at last. (Fagles 259-61 (230-31))

Here we have horizon fusion of a fundamental sort, of tears, a horizon fusion not of *Verstehen* but of *Verständnis*, as Homer brings home with another striking inverse simile:

> Joy, warm as the joy that shipwrecked sailors feel
> when they catch sight of land – Poseidon has struck
> their well-rigged ship on the open sea with gale winds
> and crushing walls of waves, and only a few escape, swimming
> struggling out of the frothing surf to reach the shore,
> the bodies crusted with salt but buoyed up with joy
> as they plant their feet on solid ground again,
> spared a deadly fate. So joyous now to her the sight of her husband, vivid in her gaze
> that her white arms, embracing his neck
> would never let him go. (Fagles 263-73 (233-40).

One marvels here at how beautifully this simile fuses the horizons of the Odysseus' struggle to get ashore on the islands of Ogygia and Scheria with the horizons of experience Penelope has of recovering her long lost husband. Now we, the audience for Homers's tale, understand how at last the two of them have come together. As Fagles puts it so elegantly elsewhere, they lose themselves in love. Horizon fusion has become reconciliation.

(4) *Dio mnemoneute ... hoti ête tôi kairôi chôris Christou, apellotriômenoi tês politeias tou Israêl kai xenoi tôn diathêkôn tês epangelias.*

> Therefore be mindful … that you were at that moment in time away from Christ, alienated from the community of Israel and strangers to the testament of the promises. (*Eph.* 2:11-12)

To correlate Paul's idea of *katallagê* or reconciliation with the horizon fusion we have been tracing in the exchange Penelope and Odysseus, let us begin with the deutero-Pauline *Ephesians'* account of the contrary condition of *apallotriousthai*, alienation as it occurs here in the past participle, *apêllotriômenoi* or "alienated." We note the common stem, *alla*, *allo*, *allê*, in both words, meaning "other" as in par-allel from *para* and *allêlôn*, "along side" and "one another." In both cases we are dealing, that is, with the way one person or thing stands in relationship to an other in their exchanges, *enallagai*, with each other. In *Ephesians* 2 the relationship characterized is between people, on the one hand, who are outside and away (*chôris*), gentiles who at that decisive moment in time, *kairos*, had not yet "come in," and, on the other, the family of things and people to which they are presently strangers (*xenoi*). Similarly, we have Odysseus, who has been away from home and wife for 20 years and returns as a *xenos* (Homer: *xeinos*) recognized only by his dying dog Argos (17.291-304). Seen this way, the exchange between Penelope and Odysseus leads to much more than Gadamer's horizon fusion in which they come to understand things from each other's perspective; it is the process of coming home from having been "out there." In their *enallagê* or exchange they come to understand each other and *apallotriousthai* becomes *katallesthai*: being an outsider and stranger becomes being reconciled and restored to community.

The are, of course, important differences between Odysseus' and Penelope's exchange and reconciliation with each other and God's reconciliation of the wayward sinner to himself. We have already mentioned the asymmetry in the exchanges between God and sinner: in their exchanges, both Penelope and Odysseus move from estrangement to love, but God has always loved us in our exchanges with him though our attitude may create the semblance of wrath. Beyond this asymmetry, however, there is in Paul's understanding of reconciliation what we might call the dialectic of *echthra* and *eirênê,* enmity – even hatred – and peace. There is high tension between Odysseus and Penelope at the beginning of their exchange, and indeed their resentment and jousting for advantage, one over the other, continue almost to the very end of their words with each other. But when Paul says that "while we were enemies (*echthroi*), we were reconciled (*katêllagêmen*) to God by the death of his son) (*Romans* 5.10), he implies the more extreme level of hostility characteristic of *Ephesians'* "children of disobedience (*houoi tês apeitheias*)" (*Ephesians* 2.2 ). Odysseus and Penelope have become distant and alien to each other over the 20 years of Odysseus' absence and they do compete with each other antagonistically. But behind their mistrust and jealousy there is always deep affection. There is always this love in God as well, but the sinner is on a path of self-assertion in defiance of God. Hence reconciliation with God implies, not only moving beyond the games the partners in the exchange play with each other, but a transition on one side from willful belligerence to peace. It could be, however, that the difference here is in quantity not quality. After all, we may speak in both cases of letting go of resistance and finally "giving in."

And how is this surrender to be communicated? 2 *Corinthians* 5:17-21, perhaps the central text in regard to *katallagê*, speaks of the renewed human beings who have experienced in Christ God's reconciliation of themselves with him, and to whom he assigns the "ministry of reconciliation (*tên diakonian tês katallagês*)" (5:18). This ministry consists in preaching the "word of reconciliation (*ton logon tês katallagês*) (5:19): "Now we are ambassadors for Christ since God exhorts through us; we entreat you in Christ's place: Be reconciled to God (*katallagête tôi theôi*)" (5:20). And what is the rhetorical figure by which this reconciliation is to be preached? The inverse simile of the Christ crucified: "The one who did not know sin he made sin for us, so that in him we became the

righteousness of God" (5:21). This, in our human terms, is what God is *like*. To those of us who were far away (*makran*) and to those of us who are near (*eggus*) Paul preaches the good news of peace (*euêggelisato eirênê*) (see Ephesians 2:17-18). Just as Homer allows us to understand the domestic reality of Penelope's tears within the horizons of Odysseus' seafaring experience and bridges the gap for us between their two disparate realms, so in preaching the crucified Christ Paul represents God to us within the horizons of our sin, suffering, and mortality and thus reconciles us to him. In this way, then, the homiletical surpasses the hermeneutical. *Katallagê* surpasses *Horizontverschmelzung*, Paul's reconciliation, surpasses Gadamer's fusion of horizons.

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[i.] For extended passages from the *Odyssey* I will use Robert Fagles' poetically nuanced translation and verse numbers. The standard verse numbers follow in parentheses. See *Homer, The Odyssey*, translated by Robert Fagles, (Penguin, New York, l996).

ii. I am greatly indebted to Jasper Griffen for calling attention to these passages as well as to the inverse simile with which we will conclude our exposition of Odysseus' and Penelope's exchange (23.233-39). See his *Homer: The Odyssey* (Cambridge, U.K, Cambridge UP, l987), 57-58. Indeed, I owe him the idea for this paper.

iii. Related to the inverse simile is the rhetorical topic of "correlatives" (*ta pros ti*), in which the agent who does something and the patient who undergoes the action are put in relationship to each other (see Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.23. 1397a25-b8, and P. Christopher Smith, *The Hermeneutics of Original Argument*, Evanston, Northwestern U.P., l998), 64). For example, if someone stole, someone was robbed. As in the inverse simile the point here is sameness in difference, namely, that disparate contraries, agent and patient, are for all their differences connected by something that is the same about them, in this case, the experience of theft, and are thus comparable.

iv.Compare Moses' question to the burning bush, "[if] they ask me 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (*Exodus* 3:13).

v. Once again I am indebted to Jasper Griffen, who singles out this remarkable passage. See note 2 above.

**Removing the Barriers between Black and White Churches**

Terriel R. Byrd
Associate Professor of Religion, School of Ministry
Palm Beach Atlantic University

**"***...We don't deal with this race issue, and we don't preach enough about it. I believe God is disturbed and hurt by that"* (Bernice King).[1]

"I have a dream." These four words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. are immortal. They express in poetic elegance the hopes and aspirations of people, around the world; those who love and yearn for freedom and justice. Perhaps no individual more conveyed, in sacrifice and service, the spirit and meaning of these words than did Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I remind myself of several lines in the "I Have a Dream" speech that are not quoted as often as some others, but reflect the poignancy of Dr. King's message. He said,

> "…we will be able to speed up the 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 the old Negro spiritual, "free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty we are free at last."[2]

I was only seven years old when Dr. King delivered what has now been labeled, in prose and form, one of the world's most famous speeches. At the time, in spite of my youth and lack of understanding of the substance of the Civil Rights Movement, I was nonetheless impressed by the sounds of its progress, all quite embodied in the words spoken by Dr. King. Even then, I understood the syntactical passion of Dr. King. I knew that he was extremely gifted. I knew that the articulate import of his words was mighty. Now, more than four decades later, the speech still resonates with me, and around the world with meaning and hope, for all people who still want, love or seek justice and peace.

Dr. King voiced concerns about fairness in life everywhere and in all social institutions. He cared about the existence of right standing in practices in every sphere of American life. As much as this society at large was fragmented by racial injustice, he saw "The Church" equally as fragmented and stagnant, unable and unwilling to rise to its true moral responsibility on the serious issues of racism and segregation. Consequently, it was such that when Dr. King needed the full cooperation of the Church in America the most, it was not there for him.

Throughout the years of America's most serious moral and spiritual failure, the Church was not unified. For a generation, and rightly so, the bailiwick of Civil Rights was the spearhead of the so-called "Black Church." Though there were notable exceptions; by and large, mainstream Christianity ignored the plight of millions of black Americans who suffered second class citizenship, and systematic denial of their civil rights, in every sector of American life.

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[1] Stream, Carol. Interview with Reverend Dr. Bernice King. "She has a dream, too" Christianity Today (June 16, 1997), 36.

[2] James M. Washington, ed. *A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (HarperCollins, New York, 1991), 220.

Despite the plethora of issues that divide us in America—race, class, and values that relate specifically to race and class—the one question that presses most on my mind regarding our nation these forty years after the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's is: Can and should King's call for desegregation, equality and unity, still concern and challenge the actions and formation of identity surrounding the Christian church in American society? In King's fight for equality, he observed and said, "Eleven o' clock Sunday morning is still America's most segregated hour, and the Sunday school is most segregated school of the week."[3]

Because the work of Dr. King made such a sea change in the outlook of the American social landscape, I was educated in an integrated public school system**.** My college and seminary experiences were integrated. Every secular job I ever held was in an integrated environment. Yet, my earliest religious experiences were all segregated. That's the way the church in America was and continues to be stratified. How bizarre it seemed to me that the church was the only social institution in which I was involved that remained, essentially, segregated along racial lines long after the gains of the Civil Rights Movement for social unity and equality.

As an ordained minister, I have long been as troubled and as perplexed by the inaction of the church, black and white, as was Dr. King, and by the assurances provided to it by the status quo of mandatory separateness of certain aspects of American life—especially by the sustained separate nature of church life; by the spiritual mandate in America of a separate, a segregated Church. Because the views and symmetry of separation have a special dynamic, if not a peculiar pathology, which needs to be examined by the faithful, I wonder why the Church in all its ethnicity, is at peace with itself.

I grew up in Ohio during the 1960's and 1970's in a black Baptist tradition in a small semi-rural community of approximately 16,000 people. Of course, all the neighborhood churches were divided, first along denominational lines, by color. Since these demarcations were so customary, I never perceived them to be the result of any intentional meanness or hatefulness from either the white or black religious institutions. I suspect that, in that era, most of the religious communities in town felt the same way: this is just the way things are, don't rock the boat!

So, in my town, we had the white Methodist church. And just two or three blocks away, there was the black Methodist church. Both congregations sang traditional Wesleyan hymns that united in the same melodic reframes. Also, there was the black Baptist church. Just two or three blocks away, there was the white Baptist church. Both congregations followed the same traditional pattern of extending invitations or calls to discipleship while often singing Billy Graham's favorite traditional hymn, Just as I Am. "Just as I am with out one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me, And that Thou bidd'st me come to thee, O Lamb of God! I come! I come!"[4] (But with only those who look and act just like me!) Then, there was the Christian church (Disciples of Christ), one white and the other black. Both congregations followed their ritual of serving communion every Sunday. And there were the white Pentecostals and the black Pentecostals, both felt the Presence of the Spirit and expressed their awareness of that contact

[3] *A Testament of Hope,* 479.
[4] New National Baptist Hymnal, "Just as I AM" (National Baptist Publishing Board, 1977), 145.

with ecstasy. They moved, they clapped their hands, and sang in robust vocal celebration of their great, good God. But they did it separately, in buildings that were located two miles apart.

It perplexed me that those Christian groups, which were representatives of the moral standards of our community, seemed to tolerate without question or debate racially separated religious communities. I viewed these long standing generational practices in my hometown as small snapshots of the larger trend of spiritual and worship exclusivity based on race throughout the nation.

Early in my seminary career, I had the privilege to teach courses on Black Theology and African American religious experience at two predominantly white colleges. One venue was at a Catholic college and the other at a state university. I was taken totally by surprise by the number of non-African American students who enrolled in the course. I was even more surprised by the fact that not one of the non-African American students had ever attended an African American worship service—however, each student expressed to me their wish and willingness to so.

Therefore, as a requirement to pass the courses, I built into the syllabus an African American church visitation exercise. I wanted the students to learn about black worship, but my greater desire was that each student would come to know worship outside of their own tradition, that each would make it a lifelong practice to attend a black church as part of their occasional or regular worship experience. This activity also gave me a forum to look closer, to ask questions about religious perceptions; in particular, I could ask questions that offered answers to me regarding the continuing need, or the relevance of racial separation within a religious worship context.

Slavery, its shameful facts, its historical, social and economic inequalities, its damaging impact on the souls and on the psyches of black people, gave birth to the independent black church. Each of these influences was a dominant factor in the rise of sustained institutionalized separate worship communities. These historical conditions shaped the perceptions of both blacks and whites within religious institutions and church life that today represent society in "micro" what is lived in "macro" and are, it appears indicators of intractable vestiges of separation laced within the whole society of American life.

In spite of the clarity and weight of these unalterable facts; at the heart of practiced Christianity by many in America, is the belief that the Bible is truth inerrant. If white Christians and black Christians say they love God, and we all know that His word says we should all love one another, and if that is the truth, then why can't we plow up engrained social behaviors, reach beyond their past constraints and, as "The Church," unconditionally, love one another.

For me, since this does not happen, ultimately more questions are raised: the first, do the consequences of those former historical conditions continue to prohibit blacks and whites from participating fully with one another in a shared worship of God? In order to broach an answer, I had to ask myself the question: what *is* the African American Religious experience? Are there elements in the African American religious experience that are not present in other Christian religious experiences? The next question I probe is that of archetypal alienation. In other words, does an experience with oppression and dehumanization, such as that which impacted blacks for

three centuries in America, and was the foundation that formed their worship experience, still impact African Americans in their religious expression in ways that alienate those who have not shared the same or a similar oppressive experience?

Another major task is to look at perhaps a more serious problem that concerns intra-racial as well as inter-racial relations within religious communities and in society. This is the problem of "color caste." Sadly, this idea encompasses a special kind of spiritual corruption, the politics of color, prevalent over the ages within the black church, and the cultural elements that underlie issues of power, status and individual meaning in black church life. Specifically, this theme makes the argument that historical stereotyping and conditioning has occurred in the minds of both blacks and whites and has proven to be significant factors influencing the separation of worshipers inside the black church.

My contemplation on the issues of spiritual separation and segregation concludes with an exploration and examination of ways in which both the white and black communities can work together to breakthrough the disjointing barriers of religious partitions to build bridges of unity—brotherhood and sisterhood—in the 21st Century Christian Church.

When the political advances in American institutions are observed, and when achievements in socio-economic arenas and in education are taken into account—the openness, the equality of opportunity, and the representation of all races in the sports and entertainment industry are considered, it is all the more evident that the church is the last vestige of exclusivity where institutional segregation in the society is practiced and accepted.

As soon as the first European settlers arrived to America at Jamestown in the early 1600's and staked the Cross of Christ on the shores of the beach, it became the symbol of the importance religion would play in every sector of American life. In 1619, the first general assembly of the New World was convened in the Jamestown Church. Its first order of business was to "establish one equal and uniform government over all Virginia." The purpose was to provide "just laws for the happy guiding and governing of the people there inhabiting." At the time of this convention and crafting of its governing decrees, the inhabitants of Jamestown also included the first Africans, who were not then slaves, to have been delivered to the land by a Dutch sailor.[5]

No record is extant of a distinction being made between the "happy governing" of the European inhabitants and the "happy governing" of African inhabitants present in Jamestown. Obviously, people in America, at its earliest stages viewed the concept of inclusiveness as an important aspect of its success. Much later, when the Revolutionary War was fought, it was in part to affirm, to establish and to solidify the freedoms and ideas conceived by those early settlers. As was their desire, one of the primary ideas and ideals was to foster an atmosphere of freedom for the Church, for individuals to have the ability to worship freely, without encumbrances of a religious directive by the state. At that time, there seemed no concept by them to have a Church for the white brethren and one for the Africans who were settling alongside them at Jamestown. America was, therefore, on its way to structuring one of history's

[5] Kirk D. Kehrberg Park Ranger, Colonial NHP, "The First Legislative Assembly at Jamestown, Virginia," Colonial National Historical Park 1999, http://www.nps.gov/colo/jthanout/1stASSLY.html (July 25, 2006).

greatest experiments in liberty and brotherhood: a unified society where men were assumed to be humane and tolerant of one another and able to self-govern. From all historical evidence; at that moment, the Church was the nucleus of that self-governing society.

At the close of the Revolution, a fledgling democracy, at least in theory, prevailed. The Constitution emerged through long and difficult debates, but yielded: "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights…" These, arguably, are the most important words ever to have been written by any person regarding the worth of man and the sanctity of human life. Dr. King, himself, unmatched in the twentieth century as crafter and orator of dynamic words that elevated life and embraced humanity, held these particular words of the nation's forefathers as the bedrock of the Civil Rights Movement and of his humanitarian aspirations. King said, in the "I have a Dream Speech":

> When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was the promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.[6]

Yet, despite the promise inherent in these ennobling words, it followed that at some point on the grand tapestry of democracy, the concept to "establish one equal and uniform government . . .," was eventually lost in the snares and tragedy of human slavery of the Africans. This act, of taking Africans chattel, was followed further by the chronological legacy, the entrenchment, and the devastation of authorized segregation of the nation's growing black citizenry. As a result, democracy became a loose garment that was rent and subsequently tortured into a privilege for the few based solely on the color of one's skin. Lost was the belief that democracy was for every individual, a national birthright that is the inherent liberty and freedom intrinsic in life itself, inculcated in the concept of democracy for all human beings. After that fateful ideological change in course, America became one nation with two societies: one black, one white—and the Church, inevitably, was caught in the middle.

The sweeping momentum gathered by the Black Church, along with the demands of the Civil Rights Movement, acknowledged the need not to go idly by, continuing to merely observe and endure the repugnance of the lingering tragedies from the aftermath of slavery. The Movement, in all its profundity, bore witness to, was evidence of how this human disaster continued to unfold; how it drilled deeper and deeper into the fabric of American life and spirituality. As time passed, the seepage of hatred and racism became more accepted expressions of Church life than the ethics and principles of theology and democracy.

The more that the democratic loss of equality was enshrined in America, these altered concepts of church life and spirituality make fitting for this discussion, a maxim uttered by Reinhold Niebuhr. "There is no social evil, no form of injustice whether of the feudal or the capitalist order, which has not been sanctified in some way or other by religious sentiment and

[6] *A Testament of Hop*e, 217.

thereby rendered more impervious to change." This saying is applicable to the history of the Christian church throughout the ages. It is especially poignant and can be applied to the state of the Christian church and American social order throughout most of the history of this nation.

As a movement of resistance, in an effort to reopen pathways of entrance and participation in mainstream American life for its constituents, the Black Church had to streamline its spiritual mission to include and address social issues that were hostile to the very existence of its members.

After centuries of being socially excluded and marginalized, the Black Church responded to her indignation; it responded to her plight, Rosa Parks, in Alabama in December 1955. The Black Church rose spiritually to a daunting civic call. The White Church stood by and watched. Part of the responsibility for the existence of racism, separatism in America belongs to The Church. These are the obnoxious offspring of the spiritual bifurcation of protestant Christianity.

The *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr's. reply to white clergy who complained that he was an "outsider[s] coming in." Said he, Dr. King, was there to "engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if deemed necessary. . ."[7] having been invited by the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth, and other affiliates of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Heeding their call, Dr. King relayed to his white counterparts, that he came in the same spirit of the Prophets who went "beyond the boundaries of their home towns" in response to the prophetic calls of God. Jesus went beyond the boundaries of Galilee to carry the message of liberation and reconciliation of Jews to God. Dr. King pointed out that the disciples, the Apostle Paul and others left their provinces to disseminate the Gospel of Jesus Christ to every far flung corner of the earth. The White Church was unmoved by the plight of its black brothers and sisters. And so, Dr. King, chided them,

> You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes.[8]

Still, the white clergy and its members were "Like a tree planted by the rivers of waters,"—they were not moved by Dr. King's impassioned reason nor did they intend to be. They were not moved by the violence of racism; they were not moved by the official and civic violence committed against black people who struggled for the right to obtain justice and to live free in the society that heralded itself as the world leader of democracy, justice and freedom.

If white Christians were smug and pleased with their spiritual obstinacy, black Christians responded with their spiritual obstinacy. They, too, were not moved. The Black Church was not turned back by the stubbornness of white Christians and the rest of white society who thought their activities "unwise and untimely." Their trajectory was to stand like an old oak tree planted

[7] *A Testament of Hope,* 289.
[8] *A Testament of Hope,* 290.

by rivers of deep waters—its roots dug in like those of its white counterparts, because they wanted to be free just like them.

This post Civil Rights vision for the church, this positive vibrancy of the so-called "prophetic" ministry was most definitely a catalyst to inter-racial worship and has, since the late 1960's, helped to redefine the Church as we move into the 21st century. Blacks, whites and other ethnic groups are not only free today to worship together, but they are comfortable doing so. In what was once an unconventional setting socially, spiritually and racially, this gifting of black members into these new white congregations early on did not go unnoticed by black leaders. There was concern voiced about the spiritual well-being of black congregants with white pastors and naturally so. Along with that concern, there was an undertow of resentment—hence more separation—by black pastors about the exodus of black Christians into the ranks of white churches.

I was impressed during a recent visit to Southern California, while thumbing through the Yellow Pages looking for a place to worship, by the number of congregations that were listed as multicultural worship communities. The advent and growth of these centers are the progeny of Dr. King's spiritual foresight. They demonstrate the naturalness of inclusion. It is my belief that many churchgoers tend toward racial inclusion rather than the opposite. What might have hindered people from seeking integrated worship before was that they lacked the forum to step outside the boundaries of the politics of exclusivity or a family tradition of worship to make inclusiveness happen. A more open and accepting society on issues of race provided that forum for them, and aided by men and women church leaders who seized upon the prospect at the conclusion of Dr. King's work, that helped Christians to make inclusiveness in worship another aspect of a new social and worship tapestry.

When new civil rights laws abolished old racially restrictive ones, that was the key that unlocked the door to new access in American society for blacks; however, some institutions, and many common citizens were not ready to throw away the padlock that kept the country operating like an elite country club. As well, just after the Civil Rights Movement, the American demography began to shift, to be reshaped. With equal housing opportunities now available to blacks, many began to wish for life in better houses and wanted to move into neighborhoods better than their old neighborhoods.

Not surprisingly, the banks responded with red lining practices, exorbitant rates, or by making it as hard for blacks as possible to get loans to improve their housing. Dual lending practices—though they were now illegal according to federal law, for a while, succeeded to keep blacks out of houses in modest neighborhoods that were previously all white. Blacks, who were not welcomed at the bank, but who did manage to get a loan and to get a house in a better neighborhood, were not welcomed in the new neighborhoods. Some new black homeowners were terrorized by hate crimes, by rude or bullying neighbors, but the typical response around the country to black neighbors by white homeowners was to pack up and move into other neighborhoods, those more expensive, where there were no blacks.

This is the fact: many whites were committed not to share the landscape, the good of the land, in any way, with blacks. Whites began to leave the urban areas in droves and to take comfort in a world of refuge—in "white flight." New sprawling suburbs were built to

accommodate this new ideology of separation. White congregations, which had anchored communities for generations moved to areas outlying cities. Edifices of former white churches became large gaping hulks, abandoned, in cities where blacks were becoming more mobile. Some of those churches were purchased by black congregations, but many soon fell into disrepair because of the economic burden of keeping them maintained. Many urban areas became all black, and blighted as whites sought new and cleverer ways to resist, resent the changes, to ignore the existence of a black population in America. Deserted white churches trumpeted a loud and sad commentary on the spiritual state of American Christianity.

On the other hand, many mainstream white Christians did not flee locales from cities and towns that were making possible a new way of life for blacks. Model Cities projects were under way, jobs training programs were underway, open entry college admissions, and student loans were making it possible for many blacks to pursue a higher education, and minority set asides were making it possible for blacks to compete for lucrative government contracts. While white congregations that remained in the cities did not go out of their way to actively recruit black members, some did become more responsive to the spiritual realities of black life and the needs of this people. It is not apparent that they did anything to disparage or hinder the new civic and economic opportunities being offered to change the lives of African Americans.

I am not suggesting at all in this work the abolishment of the Black Church or the White Church. What I am suggesting is that if black Christians and white Christians lay aside their differences, and instead, lay down their lives for one another, and pick up an act of biblical significance, "Greater love hath no man than this . . . that a man should lay down his life for his friends."[9] Jesus told his disciples that they would be identified by this selfless act—by their demonstration of love for one another.

What I am suggesting, therefore, is that black Christians and white Christians should be willing and able to come together routinely for fellowship, for spiritual vetting, for mapping social harmony, to discuss how they can participate in united worship of a true and loving God. These actions would follow in the noble footsteps of Martin Luther King, Jr. who walked in the footsteps of Jesus. He laid down his life for his brothers, in an act of redemption, sacrifice and reconciliation. Joint fellowship would be a practice that honors the lives of black and white Christians, one that honors true worship; and that, honors Christ.

As we enter the 21st century, an unsettling erosion of the gains of the Civil Rights Movement is and has been apparent for a couple of decades. In the 1980's, the country took a dramatic shift to a more conservative posture. People became comfortable during the Regan era to move away from the "liberalism" of a Great Society. Many black leaders squandered the gains realized through hard fought Civil Rights Movement of the 50's and 60's, not fully understanding the magnanimity of the Movement, and its significance to future inheritors. America rested on its spiritual and civic laurels as if the work of spiritual and civic restoration had been completed, and mainstream Christianity was still absent and silent on these concerns.

[9] *John 15:13, KJV.*

After the death of Dr. King, no solid voice of leadership emerged, even from his own circles, to move the country forward. There still has been no defined moral, humanitarian, or civic compass that nurtures and enlarges upon his gains. What did arise, however, were a cacophony of voices that exploited the rewards of the Civil Rights Movement, rather than build on them, or to contribute to them; but none has arisen, even to this day, that is capable of moving the big Dream forward despite the apparent and desperate need of the country to move toward full equalitarian values. As a result; America, in spirit and attitude, has drifted back into the complacency of a separate but unequal society.

Separation and inequality are no longer legally sanctioned or mandated by a majority of the culture—but the presence and effects of invisible segregation are every bit as destructive as the social and spiritual virulence which scourged the country for the majority of its 230 years. A recent Harvard report points to the fact that school desegregation nationwide, specifically in grades K-12, is on the rise. The aftermath of Hurricane Katrina revealed in horrific starkness how huge is the gap between the rich and the poor—between those who have and between those who do not have, almost exclusively along racial lines, consequently, blacks are the majority of those that "do not have."

Whether black worshippers are in Harlem, New York, or whether white worshipers are in Billings, Montana—of course, there is a difference in location, spiritual needs, and what is needed and expected from their individual worship communities—the challenges of getting each need met for each individual parishioner is the primary yet enormous challenge of a dynamic transformative Christian community. Nonetheless, there is a clamorous wake up call that is sounding, and The Church is snoozing right through it.

The proliferation of hate crimes against blacks in the latest reported statistics show there were more of such crimes committed against blacks than against any other American minority group. According to *People's Daily Online*, The FBI Hate Crime Statistics issued in October 2005 stated, "of the 9,528 victims of hate crimes in 2004, 53.8 percent were victims of racial prejudice, and 67.9 percent were blacks. Among the hate crime offenders, 60.6 percent were whites."[10] In his February 2005 article, "*FBI Reports Increase in Hate Crimes Against African Americans"* Russell Malik, for The Crisis wrote that, "hate crimes against African Americans were nearly twice that of all other race groups combined." This ominous reality included four murders. The source of Malik's information was the FBI report, "Hate Crimes Statistics. 2003." Moreover, statistics also show that blacks are twenty times more likely than whites to be victims of hate crimes.

Nearly 100,000 blacks die annually because they lack health insurance; blacks are unemployed at the rate of 10.6 percent as compared to their white counterparts at 4.3 percent.[11] Racial profiling and police brutality continues unabated as the country moves along the first decade of the 21st century. In a report issued by the Center for Policy Alternatives, in 2005 "a report by the U.S. Department of Justice found that police were significantly more likely to carry

[10] Malik Russell, "FBI Reports Increase in Hate Crimes Against African Americans," The Crisis, Jan/Feb 2005, http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4081/is_ai_n9522077 (Jan/Feb 2005).

[11] People's Daily Online, "Racial discrimination in U.S. serious, says report,"http://english.people.com.cn/200603/09/eng20060309_249225.html (9 March, 2006).

out some type of search on an African American (10.2 percent) than on a white driver (3.5 percent). This same report states that, "African Americans and Latinos were three times more likely to experience force or threat of force during a police stop."[12]

Obviously, with these kinds of murky findings, the commitment to fill the breach in America's racial divide is lacking leadership in every sector of the population. It goes without saying that not enough is being done to do so. These are sober reminders that there are legitimate reasons for the fears and suspicions among African Americans about whether America can make good on the promises of a free, equal and just society.

The racial past of America is painful, it impregnates the present with doubts and it unfairly barters the future of every American with distorted images of one another, and with fear and mistrust. What is more, it taints the views of African Americans who reject outright the notion that large numbers of white Christians are committed to social equality, or that they are willing to boldly embrace the biblical concepts of unity, unfeigned love of all people, reconciliation and brotherhood, when it comes to religion and principles of justice, they are silent.

If silence appears to parody consent for white Christians on racial equality, certainly this is not the time for African Americans to become weary, for that would parody defeat, and consent of another type. This is not the time for the Church—black or white to retreat into social conformity. Both organizations, if moved out of the cocoon of tradition, suspicion, nostalgia, and their unremitting addiction to spiritual comfort, an unrelenting resistance to change, they might, together, assume their rightful place in the forefront as vanguards of human rights, as protectors of freedom and liberty in America. Each community is needed, right now, to step up to the task.

[12] Center for Policy Alternatives: Racial Profiling.xm http://www.cfpa.org/issues/issue/RacialProfiling.xml (6 July, 2006).

**Quantitative Empirical Studies of Preaching: Do Sermons Persuade?**

Cliff Guthrie
Bangor Theological Seminary[1]

## Introduction: Listening to listeners

A useful discussion has recently emerged among homileticians as a result of the Lilly Foundation-funded "Listening to the Listener" project. Its impetus was the observation that despite the well-known "turn to the listener" in late twentieth-century homiletics relatively little empirical work has been done about how people actually hear sermons.[2] An appreciative but critical view of this project was written by Joseph Webb and presented to the Academy of Homiletics[3] … Allen himself gives a report of evaluative conversations carried on among the research board members. They are well aware of both the contributions and limitations of their methods. They discuss, for example, classic issues about truthfulness in self-reports, the bluntness of the Aristotelian categories, and their decision to focus on qualitative methods[4] .

The project has made a number of valuable contributions. First, it has grounded the theoretical turn toward a more nuanced understanding of preaching as something created in the alchemy of listener, setting, occasion, and preacher. Second, as Webb notes, it has yielded a large amount of interview data that can be investigated by others. Third, and most important in my view, it has given us an opportunity to think about our field and the scholarly methods we employ. Perhaps more than any moment since the late 1970s and early 1980s, when communication theory's influence over preaching reached a high-water mark, we now have an opportunity to consider what kinds of empirical approaches may best further the field. Indeed, Allen himself comments near the end of his paper: "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, the 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"[5] .

I agree entirely with Allen here. There is a need to take stock of empirical approaches, review what has been done, and plot a course for a productive future. A previous review of empirical literature on preaching conducted in 1982 also raised critical questions about the methods employed.[6] New studies and changes since then warrant a reexamination of the question. The goal of this article, then, is to contribute to this conversation by reviewing the scattered *quantitative* studies that have been done on preachers, sermons, and hearers of preaching.

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[1] This article is an excerpt from a much longer article entitled "Quantitative Empirical Studies in Preaching: Methods and Findings," submitted to the *Journal of Communication and Religion*.
[2] Ronald J. Allen, "The Turn toward the Listener: A Selective Review of a Recent Trend toward Preaching," *Encounter* 64 (2003).
[3] Joseph Webb, "What Does It Mean to 'Listen to Listeners?'" (paper presented at the The Academy of Homiletics, Williamsburg, Virginia, 2005).
[4] Ronald J. Allen, "'Listening to Listeners': The Board Reflects Critically on the Study" (paper presented at the Academy of Homiletics, Williamsburg, Virginia, 2005).
[5] Ibid.
[6] Horst Albrecht, "Antworten Und Nichts Sagen Können--Literature Über Empirische Untersuchungen Zum Predigthören," *Theologica Practica* 17 (1982).

**The independence of homiletics and science:** (in the full paper I review of our field's engagement with science, arguing that it has largely followed a path of independence from science, although there have been scattered attempts at dialogue along with occasional assertions of inherent conflict.)

… It has not helped that sociologists and psychologists who have studied religion scientifically have largely and curiously ignored preaching, apparently thinking it is covered under their study of ritual. For example, Wulff's massive, *Psychology of Religion*, does not mention preaching except to cite a doctoral study that examined Congregational funeral sermons for clues about theological shifts in eschatology.[7] Two other major texts in the psychology of religion do not mention it at all.[8] Sociology of religion textbooks are similarly mute.[9]

If we act as good phenomenologists and bracket theological claims about preaching for the moment, then this mutual quietness between science and religion in the field of preaching seems strange. Preaching remains a pervasive phenomenon in many of the world's religions and is central to some, especially Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It rivals the classroom lecture and the live singing performance as the most enduring form of live public oral communication in a world otherwise awash in print and electronic media. Therefore, it deserves study by both religiously interested and disinterested parties using the best available methods, if only to document and understand such a wide phenomenon. Preaching, like letters, diaries, and lectures, lives in the muddy middle of a continuum between written and spoken language and its study has its part to play in increasing our understanding of the way humans communicate.[10]

**Methods in quantitative homiletics**

Quantitative research of preaching has generally approached the subject in three ways. The first are forms of naturalistic observation or field research. Personality type and individual difference research falls under this category and has been used extensively in some quarters for the study of preaching. Quantitative studies of verbal communication could also involve having trained observers code a presenter for frequency of gesture, vocal inflection, or signs of nervousness. Although there appear to be no such studies related to preaching *per se*, a scale to measure social anxiety, the Social Performance Rating Scale[11] was modified and used to assess patients with social phobia in a public-speaking setting.[12] Such a study could be replicated among, say, student preachers or those who continue to experience strong anxiety in the pulpit.

More commonly, naturalistic quantitative studies of preaching uses content analysis methods to analyze the sermon itself in both oral and written forms. [13] New software programs are making

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[7] David M. Wulff, *Psychology of Religion : Classic and Contemporary*, 2nd ed. (New York ; Chichester: Wiley, 1997).

[8] Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, eds., *Handbook of the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* (New York, London: Guilford, 2005), Bernard Spilka et al., *The Psychology of Religion: An Empirical Approach*, Third Edition ed. (New York: The Guilford Press, 2003).

[9] Kevin J. Christiano, Jr. Swatos, William H., and Peter Kivisto, *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), Roberto Cipriani, *Sociology of Religion: An Historical Introduction*, trans. Laura Ferrarotti (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2000).

[10] Wallace Chafe and Deborah Tannen, "The Relation between Written and Spoken Language," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 16 (1987).

[11] R. P. Mattick and J. C. Clarke, "Development and Validity of Measures of Social Phobia Scrutiny Fear and Social Interaction Anxiety," *Behaviour Research and Therapy* 36 (1998).

[12] Gerlinde C. Harb et al., "Behavioral Assessment of Public-Speaking Anxiety Using a Modified Version of the Social Performance Rating Scale," *Behaviour research and therapy* 41, no. 11 (2003).

[13] R. P. Weber, *Basic Content Analysis*, 2nd ed. ed. (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990).

such studies simpler and more effective.[14] When done well, the benefit of this approach is that it avoids the classic problem of surveys that may elicit socially desirable rather than objective responses from their subjects. This method can be combined with scales and surveys for insight into, for example, whether certain forms of sermonic speech are more prevalent among theologically conservative or liberal preachers. Too little of this work has yet been done and may be one of the most promising ways forward.

The second and most common approach to study preaching quantitatively has been to administer surveys about preaching, for example, to find out what preachers think they are doing or how hearers report being affected by preaching. These are often done while at the same time probing the significance of demographic factors. Lori Carrell's book, *The Great American Sermon Survey,* is perhaps the best-known example.[15] More sophisticated survey approaches include standardized personality inventories or scales of religious attitudes honed in earlier research and then look for correlations between variables. This method is the one usually used (along with qualitative work) by the European empirical theologians centered in the University of Nijmegen, The University of Wales in Bangor, and others who participate in the International Society of Empirical Research in Theology (ISERT). It is also the favored method of the congregational studies centers in the U.S., such as Duke's Center for Excellence in Ministry (Pulpit & Pew) and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research. Neither of the latter, surprisingly, has conducted substantial research on preaching, although it sometimes factors in other research questions, such as how pastors spend their time. Survey research about preaching has the advantage of being comparatively easy and inexpensive and the disadvantage of giving little or no insight on causal relationships. Survey-style preaching research has too often been weak because questions are loaded or poorly phrased, fail to use proven question forms, or draw from non-random or small samples.

A final approach, the quasi-experiment or even true experiment, takes us further away from the naturalistic study of preaching. Quasi-experiments test results of a treatment or program in pre-existing groups.[16] This design is typically used in educational program evaluations and has occasionally been used to study whether preaching is persuasive. Such studies can be very effective if designed carefully and if they include control groups and both pre- and post-tests measurements. However, because not all of the variables are controlled for, quasi-experiments give only weak predictions of causal relationships. True experiments that control extraneous variables look for clear causal evidence between an independent variable and a dependent variable, and hence a predictive cause. Experiments are difficult to carry out when one is studying as complex a matter as religious rhetoric, but not impossible. It is telling that only one study related to preaching has used a true experimental method.[17]

Quantitative research on preaching has used all of these methods. Those that combine them, like a study that adds a survey of religious attitudes to a form of naturalistic observation, are

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[14] Michael E. Eidenmuller, "American Evangelicalism, Democracy, and Civic Piety: A Computer-Based Stylistic Analysis of Promise Keepers' Stadium Event and Washington D.C. Rally Discourses," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 25, no. 1 (2002).

[15] Lori Carrell, *The Great American Sermon Survey: The inside Scoop on What Preachers and Their Listeners Think About Sermons* (Phoenix, AZ Mainstay Church Resources 2000), Eric Reed, "The Preaching Report Card: Today's Listeners Grade Pastors on What They Hear from the Pulpit," *Leadership* 20 (1999).

[16] Paul C. Cozby, *Methods in Behavioral Research*, Eighth Edition ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2004).

[17] Kenneth I. Pargament and Donald V. DeRosa, "What Was That Sermon About?: Predicting Memory for Religious Messages from Cognitive Psychology Theory," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (1985).

often the most interesting and fruitful. A human behavior such as preaching is complex enough that it generally warrants the use of multiple methods — naturalistic observation, surveys, and experiments — to give us a relatively full picture of what may be happening and what difference interventions (such as feedback or training) may make.

**Topics in quantitative homiletics**

Although the sources are widely scattered, bibliographic research uncovers a striking number of quantitative approaches used to study preaching by a variety of fields, especially communication, sociology, individual and social psychology. Reviewing these studies is the task of the remainder of this paper. In such a review, there are different ways that one can arrange the material. For example, we could sort the studies by research method and rate the studies for such factors as methodological strictness and generalizability. However, because the studies vary so widely in terms of quality and because so many different methods have been used, I have opted instead to organize them broadly according to the research questions they have pursued. I believe that this approach will be more interesting and valuable for homileticians as they consider the future of the field.

After surveying the research, it appears that quantitative studies of preaching can be fairly divided by the research questions they have most often pursued. I found seven recurring questions:

1. What are preachers actually preaching?

2. How often do preachers preach on social issues?

3. Do sermons persuade?

4. Do individual differences in hearers matter for preaching?

5. What qualities in a sermon make it more effective?

6. Does feedback and training help the preacher to preach more effectively?

7. How do people best understand and retain religious messages? …

**Do sermons persuade?**

Many pastors and homileticians approach preaching as a circumstance in which persuasion is expected,[18] but this is not a universal opinion among experts.[19] Some, observing the social power of the lone pulpit voice, the potential for manipulation, and the importance of understanding preaching as an event created by the entire faith community, would dismiss the idea of preaching

[18] Michael Faberez, *Preaching That Changes Lives* (Nelson Reference, 2002), Barbara K Lundblad, *Transforming the Stone: Preaching through Resistance to Change* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), Robin R. Meyers, *With Ears to Hear: Preaching as Self-Persuasion* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 1993).

[19] Lucy Lind Hogan, "Rethinking Persuasion: Developing an Incarnational Theology of Preaching," *Homiletic* 24, no. 2 (1999), Richard Lischer, "Why I Am Not Persuasive," *Homiletic* 24, no. 2 (1999), Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997).

as persuasion. The fears are reasonable and call for an ethics of persuasion in the pulpit. However, they do not dismiss the fact that many sermons (if not all) do seek to be persuasive and change attitudes and behaviors, however gently they try to do so. As Hogan[20] puts it, saying that sermons should not persuade is "like suggesting that a group of musical instruments should not make music."

Perhaps the way to move the discussion forward is not to takes sides about whether preaching should or should not be persuasive, but to continue research about whether and how preaching actually does or does not persuade. Here we could discuss likely differences in the persuasiveness of preaching with the persuasiveness and pervasiveness of other media. That is an essay of another kind. In this review, it is interesting merely to note that some research has been done to try to discover if preaching persuades at all.

It is apparent that preachers believe it does. When Lori Carrell asked preachers what their primary goal in preaching was, by far the highest response was to change hearers' beliefs, values, or actions (54%) while smaller numbers aimed "to translate Biblical truth to today's culture" (17%), "to inspire" (13%), or "to transmit information" (11%). Four percent didn't seem to know why they were preaching.[21] A majority of U.S. preachers therefore aim to make their sermons persuasive.

On the other hand, the laity reported to Carrell somewhat different reasons why they listen to sermons: 35% hope to be inspired; 30% look for life-application ideas; 21% hope to be taught something new; and 14% want insight. When asked which part of the Sunday service has the biggest impact on their spiritual lives, more people mention the sermon (35%) than anything else, including communion (20%). But while 68% of the respondents could remember some way that a sermon had made an impact on them, only a quarter of those could remember having had their beliefs or attitudes changed as a result of a sermon, although about 50% said they had learned something, and 20% experienced God's love.

This survey therefore points to some discrepancy in expectation between preachers and listeners about the sermon's persuasiveness. However, another study showed that hearers have unclear expectations about what impact sermons should have them, other than it should be "a source of comfort, spiritually satisfying, and a help for coping with life." They also tend to equate the inclusion of biblical references and language with the judgment that a sermon they have heard has presented the "Word of God."[22] When Liz Gulliford of the University of Cambridge asked a small sample about how sermons actually do change them, the most frequent responses were that it encouraged them to pray more often and to help others.[23]

A quasi-experimental study was done by Thomas Crawford[24] to see if a wide-scale preaching effort made a difference on a community's attitudes toward racial integration. After a summer of intense racial conflict and violence, the Roman Catholic bishop of an urban diocese in the Midwestern US launched a multifaceted program of anti racism. He instructed all local pastors to

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[20] Hogan, "Rethinking Persuasion: Developing an Incarnational Theology of Preaching,": 9.
[21] Carrell, *The Great American Sermon Survey: The inside Scoop on What Preachers and Their Listeners Think About Sermons*.
[22] William O. Avery and A. Roger Gobbel, "The Words of God and the Words of the Preacher," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980).
[23] Liz Gulliford, "Falling on Stony Ground?: A Field Study on the Effectiveness of Preaching," (unpublished paper, Cambridge University, Faculty of Divinity, 1999).
[24] T. J. Crawford, "Sermons on Racial Tolerance and the Parish Neighborhood Context," *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 4, no. 1 (1974).

deliver sermons on Sunday February 12, 1967 on "unity among people of diverse race and background" and on February 19, on "Catholics and Racial Justice." According to Crawford, the diocese included "extensive guidelines and suggestions for sermon content."

Graduate research students attended 12 randomly selected parishes from the diocese. Taking samples of members from the congregations, they did pre-sermon and post sermon interviews (within 10 days after the sermons). In all, 328 white respondents were interviewed by white interviewers before and after sermon dates; 281 of these had heard at least one of the sermons (54% of them female). They also used control groups to check for the validity of the experiment design: 39 other Catholics were interviewed after the sermons, but not before, and, a random sample of 64 white Catholics from another large Midwestern city without a similar campaign were interviewed twice. Each sermon was rated by three research assistants for content (whether it included an anti-racism message) and intensity (how strongly the sermon expressed opposition to segregation and discrimination). There was significant variation in the sermons heard: some priests barely mentioned the topic while others discussed it vigorously and made it specific to the congregation's situation in the city.

In the second interview after the two sermons, the researchers asked an open ended question: "Since we spoke with you last, have you heard or read anything about racial prejudice or discrimination?" Astonishingly, only 10 percent of those who had attended these masses spontaneously mentioned the sermon. The other 252 respondents were asked specifically whether their priest had talked about the topic. Of these 172 said yes, but 80 said no. That is, 29% denied having heard sermons they had heard. Therefore, almost three times more people denied hearing these sermons compared with those who spontaneously remembered them. What was no surprise was that the researchers discovered that sermons that were highly rated as pro-integration by the researchers were more likely to elicit spontaneous memories, and those rated lower rated more likely to lead to replies that the sermon had not been heard.

Subsequently, the pro-integration intensity of the sermons was correlated with the social factors of the members of the congregation (education level, income, occupational status, authoritarian attitude). Researchers found that the sermons varied considerably in relation to the income level of the congregation: "relatively strong sermons condemning racial intolerance were delivered to more affluent congregations, while sermons that played down the topic of race relations were delivered in blue-collar, working-class parishes. Dozens of studies (including this one) have found that higher socioeconomic status is associated with less racial prejudice; therefore, it can be inferred that extremely pro-segregationist parishioners were not, for the most part, confronted with sermons that took a strongly anti-segregation position."

Crawford suggests that the best explanation for these results is that the contents of the sermons were substantially influenced by the priests' perceptions of integration attitudes among their parishioners. The research design did not include an investigation into the integration attitudes held by the priests themselves, however, so it could have been that the priests were simply well-matched to their congregations. He recommends further research that would determine precisely how much clergy modify their own beliefs to fit their perception of the beliefs of the parish. In either case, however, whether the priests were adapting their sermons to their hearer's expectations or whether they were appointed to parishes based on similarity of attitudes, the results argue for a view of preaching that sees it emerging from a dialectic between the parish and pastor. As Crawford notes, "it is certainly conceivable that the investigator studied a situation in which the audiences influenced the communicators more than the communicators influenced the audiences."

A more discouraging note is sounded by Crawford when he also observes that after all the analysis of the data, the sermons showed no significant effect on attitudes toward housing integration. In the discussion section, he cites similar field studies of communication research that show that persuasive communication is virtually ineffective against "ego-involving" attitudes (attitudes that serve important needs or functions in those that hold them). This is consistent with research that shows that attitudes influence cognition. For example, one study of logical and non-logical religious statements showed that positive attitudes towards religion influence our willingness to accept non-logical arguments.[25]

This seems to confirm what Merrill Abbey noted in his book about preaching as communication: people tend to filter messages to agree with positions they already hold and they follow the herd. "Since one objective of preaching is to induce change in persons," he cautions, "findings such as these sound a warning note. While they do not support the conclusion that all preaching intended to influence change is futile, they indicate ways in which preachers can define objectives and employ methods that work within the discovered limitations." These include strengthening commitment that is already present and adding elements of dissonance in entrenched positions.[26] Charles Bartow similarly argued that events changed the lives and hearts of people and that sermons, at best, were methods to explain and justify those changes.[27] A more recent review of psychology relevant to preaching has observed that, "Research undertaken by social psychologists over several decades into effective communication techniques has found that the process of attitude/behaviour change is so complex as to be nearly unpredictable." It comes as a relief to them that human freedom is therefore preserved: "We cannot make someone change their attitude or their behaviour."

It is no surprise then when quantitative research into preaching as persuasion indicates that sermons are not very good at directly causing changes in people's attitudes and opinions. However, these studies have often omitted consideration of the abilities and the motivations of sermon listeners as variables, not to mention the variables of sermonic form, quality, and style. If anything, these studies indicate that sermon effectiveness is best investigated, not with blanket surveys of clergy and hearers, but with careful studies that correlate demographic factors, existing attitudes, and measures of sermon quality with sermon impact. Crawford's finding that more explicitly pro-integration sermons were more likely to be remembered demonstrated that content matters when it comes to sermon memorability and persuasiveness.

As noted, research on argument-based persuasion has not yielded straightforward rules about how it works. However, it has illuminated the complex relationships between variables present in circumstances of persuasion, such as message style, attention, comprehension, retention, and yielding.[28] Theorists such as Hovland, McGuire, Greenwald and Chaiken have put forward process-oriented models of persuasion that have been the subject of extensive research.[29] In

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[25] N. T. Feather, "Acceptance and Rejection of Arguments in Relation to Attitude Strength, Critical Ability, and Intolerance of Inconsistency," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 69, no. 2 (1964).
[26] Merrill R. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976).
[27] Charles Bartow, "Preachers' Words and God's Word," *Religious Communication Today* 5 (1982).
[28] Klaus Jonas, Alice H. Eagly, and Wolfgang Stroebe, "Attitudes and Persuasion," in *Companion Encyclopedia of Psychology*, ed. Andrew M. Coleman (London: Routledge, 1994).
[29] C. I. Hovland, I. L. Janis, and H. H. Kelley, *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1953). W. J. McGuire, "Attitude Change: The Information-Processing Paradigm," in *Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. C. G. McGlintock (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972), W. J. McGuire, "Attitudes and Attitude Change," in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, ed. G. Lindzey and E. Aronson (New York: Random House, 1985). A. G. Greenwald, "Cognitive Learning, Cognitive

general, they have shown that the motivation and ability of the message recipient is at least as important as the content of the message if persuasion is to occur. Preaching research that has taken these factors into account gives us a more subtle view of how preaching works as persuasion.

Joseph and Thompson used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to design a much more subtle investigation of the way a sermon may be persuasive.[30] ELM describes two routes toward individual attitude change. The central route entails attention, comprehension, retention, and elaboration upon arguments. The peripheral route of attitude formation is the adoption of attitudes for other reasons, such as the attractiveness or sincerity of the communicator, or desire for social conformity. That is, it bypasses careful scrutiny of the content of the message. As advertisers and marketers (and some preachers) have long known, establishing motivation or desire through this peripheral route can be more important than argumentation, especially in a short message.[31] However, in the ELM, the central route is the one associated with more enduring changes in attitudes and behaviors. That is, a message (such as a sermon or a lecture) that takes the time to carefully lay out an argument in a coherent, logical, non-emotional way, may win the most long-lasting agreement. If a message is bounded by time or a smaller part of a ritual whole, emotion, artistry, and personal interest may need to be fore-grounded to effect hearer change, but then it would most likely be ephemeral change, such as that one might expect through music or art. But now we are landing squarely in the middle of a classic discussion in homiletics about the desirable qualities of a sermon: deductive or inductive; explanatory or evocative; logical or narrative? If the ELM model is correct, it may be that both basic types are effective but in quite different ways.

In fact, a large German study of 6687 Protestants lends support to this view.[32] Dividing sermons roughly (acknowledging that few real sermons land purely in one type or another) between those that are personal-dialogical (Type 1) and those that are dogmatic-didactic (Type 2), it found that each of these types was judged by hearers as succeeding or failing according to its own characteristics. Type 1 sermons are judged successful if they accurately portray the complexities of real life. In their openness and trust in the listener to draw his or her own conclusions, they tend to appeal most to people who do not fully-identify with traditional church values and beliefs. They are also more likely to be rated ambivalent and without a clear message. The second, dogmatic type, is judged successful by hearers when it makes clear pronouncements and boundaries about correct behavior. Type 2 sermons are perceived to be more closely aligned with the biblical text and easier to understand. But because these sermons seek to be persuasive, they tend to provoke disagreement more strongly than the first type, especially with those on the margins of the church.

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Response to Persuasion, and Attitude Change," in *Psychological Foundations of Attitudes*, ed. A. G. Greenwald, T. C. Brock, and T. M. Ostrom (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 1968). S. Chaiken, "Heuristic Versus Systematic Information Processing and the Use of Source Versus Message Cues in Persuasion," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39 (1980).

[30] Satish A. Joseph and Teresa L. Thompson, "The Effect of Vividness on the Memorability and Persuasiveness of a Sermon: A Test of the Elaboration Likelihood Model," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 272 (2004). R. E. Petty and J. T. Cacioppo, *Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1986a), R. E. Petty and J. T. Cacioppo, "The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion," in *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, ed. L. Berkowitz (New York: Academic Press, 1986b).

[31] Robert B. Cialdini, *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion*, Revised ed. (New York: Quill, 1993).

[32] Karl-Fritz Daiber et al., *Predigen Und Hören*, vol. 2: Kommunikation zwischen Predigern und Hören: Sozialwissenshaftliche Untersuchungen (Munich: Kaiser, 1983).

A related study of Catholic preachers and their listeners was done in the late 1970s, in the aftermath of Vatican II and the growing influence of new homiletic methods that aimed to be more interactive and listener-oriented. James T. Maguire surveyed Mass attendees at 26 parishes in one (unidentified) province about their religious attitudes, beliefs, and attitudes toward preaching. Additionally, he developed a Hortatory-Interactive Preaching (HIP) scale to include in a survey of priests to help determine whether this difference could be a useful way to understand sermon effectiveness. For Maguire's purposes, an "interactive" sermon is "dialogic, acknowledges the potential influence of the preacher's personal biases, and is sensitive to the social situation of the audience;" a "hortatory" sermon is predominantly "dogmatic, unidirectional or neutral, if not insensitive, to biases in the preacher and the social forces intruding into the lives of his audience."[33] These categories are similar, therefore to Daiber et al's Type I and Type 2.

Fitting his expectations, Maguire found that priests who preferred the hortatory style tended to be older and more conservative, while those who favored interactive approaches were younger and more socially progressive. Unlike Daiber's findings among German Protestants, however, among U.S. Catholic laity there was a heavy preference for the interactive styles and an expectation that their priests should include awareness of the contemporary situation. Additionally, Maguire found evidence to suggest that the interactive style was more likely to provoke both affective and faith responses in hearers, and to be more effective in helping people remember sermon content.

However, he cautioned that the findings showed a key difference between the priests and the laity: while the former linked interactive preaching with progressive ideas about the church's involvement in social affairs, the latter preferred interactive sermons to focus on the realities of their personal lives. "Thus," he concludes, "while the interactive style appears to hold some promise for fostering personal faith more effectively, preachers who employ it as a means of stimulating greater involvement of the laity in the church's social ministry may expect to meet some resistance."

These studies suggest a more nuanced picture of sermon effectiveness that varies with sermon style, setting, and listener preferences. Sermons are effective within the bounds of their own rules of discourse and the particularities of the communities of hearers. While sermons, like other brief forms of communication, may be unlikely vehicles for changing contrary individual attitudes (at least in the short run), they do effectively accomplish other things. If Abbey and Bartow are correct that sermons tend to follow and cement rather than lead change, then preaching may be better studied as a form of group identity formation. For example, the use of certain verbal markers and discourse forms in preaching may affirm the group identity of a congregation (we are an evangelical church, a well-educated church, a family-friendly church, an open and affirming church). Preaching might serve in this capacity to help form lines between in-group and out-group characteristics (here we preach the full gospel, but down the road they don't); or, it might serve to counter such divisions (God accepts us all). If this is the case, then preaching's effectiveness may be better investigated in light of the work of "rational choice" theorists of religion. Preaching may function primarily as a way of forming a particular community identity within the larger economy of the religious marketplace. Cognitive scientist, Harvey Whitehouse, in a similar vein, puts preaching's role firmly in the realm of the "doctrinal"

[33] James T. Maguire, "A Scale on Preaching Style: Hortatory Vs. Interactive Preaching," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 1 (1980).

mode of religiosity (in opposition to the "imagistic" mode), and its primary purpose is to re-iterate orthodox teachings.[34] All of these theoretical hunches beg further empirical investigation.

Perhaps, then, quantitative research on preaching should concentrate less on its impact on individuals and more on correlations between preaching styles and content and congregation characteristics. It may not be that preachers and hearers are wrong to report that preaching is effective at changing people, but that the change they seek and experience is less a matter of winning over contrary individual minds than building group commitments. This would cohere with recent research in religious conversion.[35]

[34] Harvey Whitehouse, *Modes of Religiosity: A Cognitive Theory of Religious Transmission*, ed. Harvey Whitehouse and Luther H. Martin, *Cognitive Science of Religion* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2004).
[35] Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

**Preaching and the Church's Participation in the Life of God**

L. Roger Owens

Talk of participation is making a resurgence in theology. Theologians are re-awakening to the heart of the mystery of Christianity, which Henri de Lubac calls the mystery "of our participation, through the grace of Christ, in the internal life of the Divinity."[1] This reawakening finds its most articulate voice in the efforts of the movement called Radical Orthodoxy, led by John Milbank. Milbank and others have forcefully, and rightly I think, argued that all knowledge, all the efforts of culture, the works of humans and the works of all other creatures, find their true source and meaning in their being created and held in creation by a God who shares his being with them. Art, music, sociology, sex, and many other subjects have been approached from the perspective of a theology of participation to show that rightly conceived these disciplines find their intelligibility in the heart of the Christian mystery, the mystery of creation's participation in the Triune God.[2]

Yet I suspect that this return to participation does not have much purchase among practicing pastors and practical theologians concerned with the very real transformation of the church into the image of Jesus because this account of participation too often appears an affair of the mind. It can seem unrelated to the mundane tasks of the church, its day-in and day-out affairs of administration, eating, preaching, singing—tasks aimed at the church's own transformation and the transformation of the world. Radical Orthodoxy has gotten theologies of participation off the ground; pastors and practical theologians are still waiting for them to land. As R. R. Reno has astutely argued, "Whether the focus [of Radical Orthodoxy] rests on Scripture, creed, or tradition, a certain 'ideality' seems to govern, a tendency to think theologically in terms of higher, purified, and untainted forms. A formal claim, a 'way of being,' supersedes the determinate particularity of apostolic teaching and practice."[3] In other words, the return to an ontology of participation has been achieved at the expense of the particularities of the church's embodied life together.

If this talk of participation stands at the heart of the Christian mystery, then we have every reason to believe it can be articulated in a way that does not disregard the particular, embodied nature of ecclesial practice, but rather finds its own intelligibility in the very practices that constitute the church as God's transforming and liberating community in the world. If the

[1] Henrie de Lubac, The Motherhood of the Church, trans. Sr. Sergia Englund, O.C.C. (San Franscisco: Ignatius, 1982), 113.

[2] See, for instance, Radical Orthodoxy, edited by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock, and Graham Ward (London: Routledge, 1999). In the introduction they write, "The central theological framework of radical orthodoxy is 'participation' as developed by Plato and reworked by Christianity … Underpinning the present essays, therefore, is the idea that every discipline must be framed by a theological perspective; otherwise these disciplines will define a zone apart from God, grounded literally in nothing," 3.

[3] R. R. Reno, In the Ruins of the Church: Sustaining Faith in an Age of Diminished Christianity (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2002), 72.

God in whom we participate is the God incarnate in Jesus Christ, then participation, rightly understood, will show itself to be particular, practical, and eminently visible.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's lectures on homiletics can help us as we begin to develop a theology of practical participation. By conceiving preaching in terms christology and ecclesiology, in terms of Christ and Christ's relationship to the church, he offers a social account of the church's task of proclamation, showing this task to be one mode of the church's embodied participation in God's own life. Proclamation for Bonhoeffer is the task of the whole church, as we shall see, the church as totus Christus, as it embodies its obedience to the Lord, its practical participation.

## Bonhoeffer's Christo-ecclesiology

For Bonhoeffer preaching is decidedly christological; it is also a propoerly ecclesial practice, finding its source, its intelligibility, and its goal in the church. In his works, spanning from his first doctoral dissertation Sanctorum Communio (1927) through his Discipleship (1937; commonly known as The Cost of Discipleship) Bonhoeffer articulates a coherent and consistent ecclesiology, an ecclesiology intimately tied to his christology.[4] A brief account of the salient features of this christo-ecclesiology is necessary as a background to his theology of the proclaimed word, for preaching is nothing other than the church's enacting one of its core practices of participation by which God takes the church into his own life.

> Bonhoeffer writes near the end of Sanctorum Communio:
> We believe that God has made the concrete, empirical church in which the word is preached and the sacraments are celebrated to be God's own church-community. We believe that it is the body of Christ, Christ's presence in the world, and that according to the promise God's Spirit is at work in it. … We believe in the church as una [one], since it is "Christ existing as church-community", and Christ is the one Lord over those who are all one in him; as sancta [holy], since the Holy Spirit is at work in it; as catholica [catholic], since as God's church its call is to the entire world, and wherever in the world God's word is preached, there is the church. (italics his)[5]

When Bonhoeffer writes, "We believe in the church as una because it is 'Christ existing as church-community,'" he is expressing the ecclesiological insight which comprises the culminating thesis of Bonhoeffer's book and, in a way, of his career. Bonhoeffer writes, "In and through Christ the church is established in reality. It is not as if Christ could be abstracted from the church; rather, it is none other than Christ who 'is' the church. Christ does not represent it; only what is not present can be represented. In God's eyes, however, the church is present in Christ. Christ did not merely make the church possible, but rather realized it for eternity."[6] What

[4] The following account of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is greatly influence by Clifford Green's Bonhoeffer: A Theology of Sociality, revised ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), especially my emphasis on the consistency of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology across his career and on the identification of and distinction between Christ and the church.
[5] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Sanctorum Communio: a Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church, trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 280.
[6] Ibid., 157.

Bonhoeffer means when he says that the church is "Christ existing as church-community" and "Christ 'is' the church" is the heart of Bonhoeffer's christo-ecclesiology.

Christ, for Bonhoeffer, is at once the founder of the church, Lord over it, but also, the Church itself; as Bonhoeffer writes, "Thus the church is already completed in Christ, just as in Christ its beginning is established. Christ is the cornerstone and the foundation of the building, and yet the church, composed of all its parts, is also Christ's body."[7] Christ's work of reconciliation brings human individuals, condemned after the fall to an unfulfilled social reality characterized by isolation, "into the church—that is, into the humanity of Christ."[8]

Some might fear that Bonhoeffer simply identifies Christ with the Church. Though it can look that way, we should not be afraid to say with Bonhoeffer that "Christ 'is' the Church" if we keep in mind some appropriate qualifications. For Bonhoeffer Christ is always over the church, its Head and Lord, creatively and freely present in the church. So the "Church 'is' Christ" only on Christ's terms, in his freedom. While the church somehow "is" Christ, the church never "has" Christ as a possession.[9] The christo-ecclesial themes introduced in Sanctorum Communio—Christ existing as church-community, Christ as representative of the new humanity because Christ is the new humanity, and Christ as Lord over the Church—are maintained throughout Bonhoeffer's teaching and writing career.

The language Bonhoeffer uses to talk of Christ and the church in his lectures on christology (1933) shows the development of the themes introduced in Sanctorum Communio. Here he elaborates and reworks the theme of Christ as the vicarious representative of the new humanity:

> Christ stands for his new humanity before God. But if that is so, he is the new humanity. There where mankind should stand, he stands as a representative, enabled by his pro me [for me] structure. He is the Church. He not only acts for it, he is it, when he goes to the cross, carries sins and dies.[10]

Bonhoeffer's articulation of the pro nobis (for us) structure of Christ is the most significant development in Bonhoeffer's Christology, largely present in Sanctorum Communio in the discussion of Christ as vicarious representative who gives himself for the church. In the christology lectures Bonhoeffer presents the pro nobis structure of Christ as an ontological description of who Christ is. Christ would not be Christ if he did not exist "for us." For Bonhoeffer, there is no such thing as Christ existing for himself. "Christ is not first a Christ for himself and then a Christ in the Church. He who alone is the Christ is the one who is present in the Church pro me."[11]

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[7] Ibid., 142.
[8] Ibid, 143.
[9] As Green writes, "Bonhoeffer is not identifying Christ and the church but describing their dialectical relationship." Green, Bonhoeffer, 60.
[10] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ the Center, trans. Edwin H. Robertson (San Francisco: Harper, 1978), 48.
[11] Ibid., 47.

While Bonhoeffer's earlier work on the church and Christ finds its fulfillment, so to speak, in these christology lectures, they also point forward to themes in later writings. Indeed, in Discipleship (1937) these christological themes are similarly expressed. What we notice, however, is that certain themes are even strengthened, particularly the theme of Christ's identity with the church based on the pro nobis structure of Christ, that is, his vicarious giving of himself for and standing in the place of the new humanity as the new humanity.

When Jesus takes on flesh Jesus takes on all humanity and thus makes it the new humanity. Having taken on the weakness and sin of humanity, Jesus lives, dies, rises, and ascends on behalf of this new humanity, indeed with this new humanity in his flesh. Jesus did everything that he did "for us" so that he might constitute the new humanity, the church.[12] According to Bonhoeffer, Paul was able to express in many ways the mystery of the Incarnation, but one way sums up all the rest: the pro nobis structure of Christ's existence. Bonhoeffer writes, "The Body of Christ is in the strictest sense of the word 'for us' as it hangs on the cross and 'for us' as it is given to us in the Word, in baptism and in the Lord's Supper. This is the ground of all bodily fellowship with Jesus Christ."[13]

Because the pro nobis structure of Christ is "the ground of all bodily fellowship" with Christ, Bonhoeffer can reiterate certain claims with a clarity and force found in neither Sanctorum Communio nor the christology lectures:

> The Body of Christ is identical with the new humanity which he has taken upon him. It is in fact the Church. Jesus Christ is at once himself and his Church. … To be in Christ therefore means to be in the Church. But if we are in the Church we are verily and bodily in Christ. … Since the ascension, Christ's place on earth has been taken by his Body, the Church. The Church is the real presence of Christ. … We should think of the Church not as an institution, but as a person, though of course a person in a unique sense. … Hence the new man is both Christ and the Church. Christ is the new humanity in the new man. Christ is the Church.[14]

At this point let us summarize the three aspects of Bonhoeffer's christo-ecclesiology. First, Christ exists in and as the church; the church is really the Body of Christ, Christ's presence in history, in time and space, and thus Christ's availability to the world. Second, Christ's existing as church is possible because of Christ's pro nobis structure. Christ cannot exist other than "for us", as the collective person, the representative of the new humanity who is himself the new humanity and stands in place of the new humanity and redeems the new humanity. Third, while Christ is the church Christ cannot be confused with the church, but Christ remains Lord and Head of the church, ever calling it to follow obediently. Christ exists as the church freely and graciously.

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[12] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Discipleship, trans. Barbara Green and Reinhard Krauss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 263-268.
[13] Ibid., 268-269.
[14] Ibid., 269-270

## Proclamation as an Ecclesial Practice of Participation

Even though Bonhoeffer does not use the language of participation, the language of ontology, he is nonetheless offering a theological account of how the church participates in Christ and therefore in God. The dependence of his ecclesiology on a strong, one could say Alexandrian, reading of Chalcedon establishes his claim that Christ is the church insofar as the church is the new humanity assumed by Christ as Christ's own humanity. "Christ 'is' the Church" is, with appropriate qualifications, the foundation of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology. It is also his christological account of participation. What we need to see is how through the practice of proclamation the church is enacting this participation in Christ; or, in other words, how the church's practicing itself is God's sharing his life with the church. For that account we turn to the lectures on homiletics which Bonhoeffer delivered to his students at the underground seminary Finkenwalde beginning in 1935.[15] The discussion can be divided into two parts: 1) Proclamation as christological participation in the life of God; and 2) Proclamation and the shape of participation.

Proclamation as christological participation in the life of God.

That the church's proclamation of the word enacts the church's christological participation in God follows directly from Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology and christology summarized in the previous section. If the church itself is the new humanity assumed by Christ, then to show how proclamation is christological participation in the life of God Bonhoeffer needs to makes one more move, namely, to show that it is through the church's practice of proclaiming the word that Christ makes the church his own body. In these lectures he reiterates the seminal christological principle: "In the incarnation the Word became flesh. God, the Son, took on human form. So he accepts all humankind with its genuinely sinful nature. … This also means that in the incarnation the new humanity is established. … The congregation is already present in the embodied Christ … the Church is included in the incarnation as the sanctorum communio [communion of saints]."[16] These claims repeat many of the christo-ecclesial themes we have already encountered; there is no new information. Then he adds: "The proclaimed word is the Christ bearing human nature."[17] I have already suggested that Bonhoeffer's ecclesiology is dependent on the christological tenets of Chalcedon. He is employing a similar Chalcedonian logic here. Since, on the principle of Chalcedon, after the incarnation there is no Logos without humanity just as there is no human Jesus without the Logos, and if the proclaimed word is indeed the Logos of God, then it follows that the "proclaimed word is the Christ bearing human nature." This very point he clarifies, using his strongest participation language: "This word is no new incarnation, but the Incarnate One who bears the sins of the world. Through the Holy Spirit this word becomes the actualization of his acceptance and sustenance. … Because the Word includes us into itself, it makes us into the body of Christ."[18] Proclamation is participation in the life of God precisely because the proclaimed word is the Logos of God who "includes us into himself" through the Holy Spirit. A few paragraphs later he puts it a little differently: "As the Logos has

[15] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Worldly Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics, revised ed.,trans. and ed. Clyde E. Fant (New York: Crossroad, 1991).
[16] Ibid., 101-102.
[17] Ibid., 102. emphasis mine.
[18] Ibid., 102.

adopted human nature, so the spoken word actualizes our adoption."[19] Proclamation itself is participation in the life of God. This follows organically from his account of Christ and the church when one sees that the proclamation of the word is the proclamation of the same Word who includes the new humanity in himself as the very gathered congregation.

There is one passage in particular that deserves special attention for in this passage it sounds like Bonhoeffer is denying the very claims about participation I have been outlining. Rather than denying participation, he is once again employing the logic of Chalcedon to set the parameters of faithful Christian speech about participation. Bonhoeffer writes, "While the Word accepts and sustains us, there is nevertheless no fusion of God's being with ours, no identification of the godly nature with the human nature. … There is no mystical metamorphosis that occurs, but rather faith and sanctification."[20] Here he is saying what the Christian tradition has always maintained needs to be said when talking of participation. Even when the church uses the language of deification, it must make clear that we become like God through participation in a way appropriate to our created natures; we never become divine so as to be not-created. Bonhoeffer is guarding against a latent eutychianism that is like the shade at the church's right hand whenever it talks about deification. In his use of words like "fusion," "indentification," "metamorphosis" we can hear Bonhoeffer's attentiveness to the issues of Chalcedon, which denies any confusion between the human and divine natures of the one Christ. He is not denying the notion of participation, but setting the parameters, so to speak, for faithful Christian talk of participation, speech that respects the limits set on the church's speech at the Council of Chalcedon. Within these parameters we have ample space to say quite faithfully, "the Word [in this case the preached word] includes us into itself." Thus, the practice of proclamation is God's drawing us into the active life of God's triunity. As Bonhoeffers says, "In the proclaimed word Christ is alive as the Word of the Father. In the proclaimed word he receives the congregation into himself."[21]

Proclamation and the shape of participation.

It must be remembered that Bonhoeffer is giving these lectures while he is living and teaching in an illegal, underground seminary, hidden from the Nazi's penetrating gaze. We cannot think that he is dabbling in speculation about the Christological and ecclesial foundations of proclamation because he has the luxury of time. Rather, for Bonhoeffer, the gift of participation, which the church enacts in its own practice of proclamation through which Christ assumes humanity, has a particular shape, a form; it has its own peculiar visibility because it is Jesus Christ of the gospels whose identity the church is enacting in its proclamation. For this very reason, Bonhoeffer's account of participation stands in stark contrast to any account that approaches participation in terms of our created being alone. Bonhoeffer, remarking that "word and deed were a unity in the life of Christ," says, "to the preaching word belongs the acting of the church."[22] Again he writes, "The witness of Christ involves both preacher and listener in word and deed."[23] That the proclaimed word is the Logos of God assuming the new humanity is

[19] Ibid., 103
[20] Ibid., 104.
[21] Ibid., 103.
[22] Ibid., 106.
[23] Ibid., 106.

not an empty abstraction precisely because the Word's assumption of humanity as displayed in the gospels is the obedience of the man Jesus to the will of the Father. His is the obedience in which the church participates when its proclamation of the gospel finds its fulfillment in the word and deed of preacher and listener. If the church is in some sense the continuation of the Incarnation, as Bonhoeffer's Chalcedonian logic leads him to suggest, then the unity of word and deed in the life of Christ, a unity which is nothing other than the unity of humanity and divinity in the man Jesus, continues in the Word's assuming human visibility in the practices of the church, especially in the church's practice of proclamation. Participation has a particular shape, and his name is Jesus.

In a remarkable passage, reminiscent of George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic account of truth,[24] Bonhoeffer writes:

> It is possible for the church to preach pure doctrine that is nonetheless untrue. The truthfulness of it hinges upon the form of manifestation that the church adopts for itself. This form, however, implies discipleship and not proximity to what people expect or unity with their culture.[25]

Bonhoeffer's Chalcedonian account of Christianity hits the ground, so to speak, in this statement, which can only be read as a critique of the culturally accommodated Christianity of Nazi Germany. The Logos-assuming-humanity cannot be abstracted from the narratives of the gospels, where that same Logos calls people to follow in a costly, life-giving way. The accommodated Christianity of Bonhoeffer's day might have maintained the "true" doctrines of Christianity, but truth for Bonhoeffer is not, in this case, getting the words right, but it is the very form that participation takes when it is participation in a Christ who cannot be separated from the calling-to-discipleship Christ of the gospels. In other words, for Bonhoeffer, truth is visible, and thus so is participation. Critiquing again the accommodated, indeed apostate, Christianity of his day, Bonhoeffer writes, "The basis of the preaching church is not flesh and blood, customs and culture, and its form is not one of cultural unity, but rather its basis is the Word and its form is obedience."[26] The shape of participation is obedience.

In a striking line that should ring as a wake-up call to the culturally accommodated Christianity of our own day Bonhoeffer writes, "The contemporary truth of the church is revealed in that it preaches and lives the Sermon on the Mount and the admonitions of Paul."[27] At the end of all of Bonhoeffer's ecclesiological and christological reflections, along with his rich theology of preaching, lies this conclusion: the shape of participation, the shape of the church as it practices its participation in the life of God, is the church's transformation into the shape of the life of Jesus, and thus its liberation from cultural accommodation.

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[24] George Lindbeck, The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1984), 31-41.
[25] Bonhoeffer, Worldly, 113.
[26] Ibid., 113.
[27] Ibid., 113.

## Practical Participation

At the beginning of The Word Made Strange John Milbank writes that "it is uncertain as to where today to locate true Christian practice … the theologian feels almost that the entire ecclesial task falls on his own head."[28] This is not a sentiment Bonhoeffer can share. It is not unclear to Bonhoeffer how to identify true Christian practice. Bonhoeffer's articulates an eminently practical account of the church's christological participation in God, an account that allows him to discriminate between true and false Christian practice. Participation is not first of all the hidden depths of the meaning in all creation, though it will be that too. First of all, participation is the church's visible sharing in the obedience of the Son because the Son, through the participatory practices of the church, especially the practice of preaching, assumes the church's humanity as his own visible presence in the world. Since this Son is the very Jesus whose walking the earth is recorded in the gospels, Bonhoeffer's account of participation is far from a theoretical abstraction; it is on the ground because the church about which Bonhoeffer is talking participates in the embodied humanity of Christ.

Finally, Bonhoeffer gives a preacher and the congregation a way to think about their task together of proclaiming God's word that goes beyond homiletical technique. The success of the sermon will no longer be judged by whether it made the congregation think or by whether it made the congregation feel. Rather, the whole church will step back, review the shape of its life, and ask, "Does this life conform to the obedience of the Son? Have we embodied the Sermon on the Mount and the admonitions of Paul in a way that shows forth the truth of our proclamation?" Indeed, they will no longer talk about the "success" of a single sermon. They will consider instead the shape of their life together, a shape which, by God's grace, they might find to be their visible participation in God's own life, their being made holy, their sanctification, their transformation, their becoming the humanity of Christ.

[28] John Milbank, The Word Made Strange: Theology, Language, Culture (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 1.

**Economy according to the Trinity - a particular challenge for preaching**

Arthur Van Seters
Knox College, Toronto School of theology

> Pastors find it excruciatingly perplexing to preach and teach on the economic life of Christians and of the society in which they live. Church leaders, theological professors, and ecclesiastical bodies often falter when the world wants to know what they have to say about economy.
>
> M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist*[1]

Let me begin with a sobering thought. The seriousness of the economic and ecological crisis facing our entire world has been masked by what Ronald Wright has called the "progress trap." The notion that progress is inherently good and limitless (in spite of some casualties along the way) is a trap into which previous civilizations fell and either collapsed or were radically dismembered. This is history not speculation and the price of failing to learn from it increases exponentially. Wright calls urgently for a move from short to long term thinking because economically and ecologically the entire globe is increasingly one interconnected system. Failure in one part can have far more devastating consequences than ever before.[2]

The subject of economics is not just a serious analytical issue for me; it is also personal. In June of 1979 I was given a copy of Ron Sider's *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger*. Almost two years later I finally, though still reluctantly, began reading it. Even now, I recall my resistance vividly. I wasn't afraid of the facts of poverty, but of the guilt I feared would be stirred in me – a fear that proved to be rather well-founded as it turned out.[3] While I was grateful for Sider's trenchant analysis, my struggle with the economics of poverty deepened experientially when I went to Central America in 1981 and saw the terrible desolation of Managua, Nicaragua. That experience had a profound influence on my involvement in the Academy of Homiletics culminating in the publication of *Preaching as a Social Act*.[4]

In January, 1991, I was part of a group visiting a favela in Recife, northern Brazil. A Pentecostal pastor welcomed us and explained that the favela (nicknamed *Vietnam*) had once been on the main street, but one day, with little notice, the government came in a bulldozed all the homes to make room for a supermarket. Even more devastating was my visit to war torn southern Sudan in 2001 to speak directly with ordinary Dinka farming families whose villages had been burned to

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[1] M. Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 1.

[2] Ronald Wright, *A Short History of Progress* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2004) see especially, 6-9, 107-08, 120-21, 123-32. Wright sketches the collapse of the civilizations Sumer, Easter Island, the Aztecs, Inca, Maya, Cherokee and Iroquois, and the end of the Roman, British and Soviet Union empires. The aboriginal nations in this list were previously explored in Wright's earlier work, *Stolen Continents: The 'New World' Through Indian Eyes* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 1992). This is not to say that globalization might not also benefit the world.

[3] Ronald J. Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: A Biblical Study* (New York: Paulist Press, 1978). In the 1980's Charles Elliott gave a lecture in Vancouver about how many people feel trapped by issues like poverty. His image was of being snared in the twin jaws of a bear-trap: guilt and powerlessness. It was this that impels us, he said, to "pray for the coming of God's Kingdom." See his *Praying the Kingdom: Towards a Political Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985), 1-2.

[4] *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology and Practice*, Arthur Van Seters, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988).

the ground because the people were living (as they had for generations) in the area of oilfields which produced a million dollars a day in government revenue (which, in turn, the government spent on its military). The full impact of these economic arrangements - which were not just local but global - are well beyond my capacity to describe adequately.

Such recollections reflect a profoundly distorted economics but they do not mean that we can simply demonize all market arrangements.[5] Our oldest son, David, started up a company in Vancouver to bring organic goods to people's homes. It was a risky experiment in which he invited our own financial support, limited though it was. As he expanded and bought out other companies, he became the largest purchaser of organic goods in the province of British Columbia. In the process he has given a tremendous boost to organic farmers who are personally advertised on his website.

I begin with these reflections because I admit that exploring the subject of preaching on economics is highly charged personally[6] and very challenging theoretically[7]. One way or another, this may be the case for many preachers and their listeners. But such experiences, even with empirical studies of who benefits and who doesn't from the economy, do not provide *the key* to faithful proclamation on economic matters. In making this comment I do not want to underestimate the impact that sharing experience can be in a sermon. Chuck Campbell illustrates this in response to a sermon he heard that juxtaposed the luxury of a couple eating at a Mexican cafe with the pathetic exploitation by others of some begging for a morsel. It changed, he said, the way he viewed special meals. Subliminal "powers" were exposed.[8]

As I have also implied already, the communicational impasse in preaching on economics is significantly and profoundly influenced by the economic frameworks that shape our reading of experience. In the clash between worldviews rooted in the Gospel versus those that reign in society Tom Troeger speaks of *landscapes of the heart*.[9] In *Finally Comes the Poet*, Walter Brueggemann explores "preaching as a poetic construal of an alternative world."[10] But how is this to be done? Most preachers feel incompetent, particularly in front of listeners who spend much of their lives in the world of business.[11]

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[5] William Schweiker, states, "To demonize capitalism is to miss the deeper problem inherent in economic life as such." This deeper problem is how to protect a sense of the worth of human persons. See his, "Responsibility in the world of Mammon: Theology, justice, and transnational corporations," *Religion and the Powers of the Common Life*, Max L. Stackhouse ed. with Peter J. Paris (Harrisville, PA: Trinity Press International, vol. 1, 2000), 108-09.

[6] I identify with Nora Tisdale's gutsy sermon on loving one's enemies in the wake of her experience of 9/11, "The Gospel we don't want to hear (or preach)," *Journal for Preachers* 23/3 (Easter, 2000), 23-30.

[7] I have discussed some of these in *Preaching and Ethics* (St. Louis: Chalis Press, 2004) and in a forthcoming piece, "Globalization" for *The New Interpreters Bible Handbook of Preaching*, Paul Wilson, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, forthcoming).

[8] Charles L. Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 115-16. Campbell sees exposing as preparatory for envisioning an alternative world rooted in the Gospel.

[9] Thomas H. Troeger, "The social power of myth as the key to preaching on social issues," *Preaching as a Social Act*, 205-34.

[10] Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 6.

[11] Cf. J. Philip Wogaman, *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press), 61, and John C. Knapp, "Bridging Christian ethics and economic life: Where pastors

Campbell seeks to provide an alternative vision through an extensive exposition of "Jesus and the Powers" in which he explores biblical texts, primarily from the Gospels.[12] This sustained engagement with the ministry of Jesus, his passion and resurrection, becomes a kind of "luminous web" (to borrow a phrase from Barbara Brown Taylor) that gradually moves the recipient to a new understanding. Somewhat in line with Campbell's approach, I propose to use theology per se as a key to preaching on economics, and particularly a theology of the Trinity. Here I am thinking not of theology philosophically argued, but the doctrine of the Trinity rooted in the biblical text.[13]

**Trinitarian theology as homiletical lens**

Why choose the doctrine of God as homiletical lens? Let me refer to two theologians: Katherine Tanner and Douglas Meeks. Constructive Christian Theology, says Tanner, can perform sociocultural criticism to challenge historically conditioned taken-for-granted economic orthodoxies. It can make a startling contribution to expand Western social imagination "when Christian views of economy are not limited to explicit commentary on property and possession...and not restricted either to familiar debates surrounding Christian norms like agape and their implications for social relations." Rather, theology can be most effective "when basic Christian notions of God and God's relations to the world are themselves viewed as economic in nature."[14]

In the opinion of Meeks, how Christians think about God in relation to economy is at the very core of the church's difficulty in grappling responsibly with economics. It is not just that God needs to be linked with this area of life and society, but the particular conception of God that is most faithful to the Gospel. While certain notions of God, he says, have been criticized in connection with matters of race, sexuality, the environment and democracy, "not enough attention has been paid to how God concepts...relate to the deepest assumptions of the market society."[15]

Meek goes on to explore three possible God-economy correlations.

- First, he notes **the monistic conception of God** as absolute owner/ruler (modeled after the emperor who was the ultimate property owner). Such a view emphasizes dominance – this God is self-sufficient and has no need of creation; God is utterly free (which fits nicely with notion of personal choice in terms of the logic of market economics).

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and laity disconnect," *Journal for Preachers* 28/2 (Lent 2005), 47-54. Knapp notes that at least some business people would welcome input on economics from their pastor but can't find it! (53).

[12] Campbell, *The Word Before the Powers*, chapter 3. For another expression of this biblical approach to preaching that is particularly concerned about global economics, see Brian Walsh and Sylvia C. Keesmaat, *Colossians Remixed: Subverting the Empire* (Downers Grove, ILL: Intervarsity Press, 2004).

[13] William Stringfellow, in *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973), reminds us that "the biblical witness affords no simplistic moral theology." (55) For a most creative philosophical treatment of theology and economy, see Stephen H. Webb, *The Gifting of God: A Trinitarian Ethics of Excess* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

[14] Katherine Tanner, "Economies of grace," *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life*, William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes, eds. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004), 356. Cf., Schweiker, "Responsibility in the world of Mammon, 135.

[15] Meeks, *God the Economist*, 1.

- A second correlation arises **when God is replaced by the economy** - which happens when economic systems are presented as though they have an infinite capacity. Then God is reduced to being a cipher of the regulatory principles of the system and the "invisible hand" that grounds human freedom to pursue perceived needs and felt desires.
- His third correlation has to do with **God as Trinity** revealing a kind of logic "that creates access to livelihood by the gifting of God's righteousness, which is God's power for life" and "challenges utopian and ideological depictions of exchange and production" Trinity names who God truly is and this has obvious implications for human beings created in God's image.[16]

Meeks is building on the work of Jürgen Moltmann. Before outlining Moltmann's understanding of the Trinity it is helpful to remind ourselves of his theological approach. In *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, Moltmann says he is not propounding a theoretical system but "a contribution to theology." Systems, he says, seek to present an integrated whole and do not offer themselves for discussion; they tend to save readers from thinking critically. A 'dogmatic' approach tends to enforce ideas on the reader or listener rather than encourage recipients to formulate their own ideas. This does not mean, however, that for Moltmann these "contributions" are not logical and intensive. They are, but they are also contextual (and, therefore, partial). The truth is to be found in free and unhindered dialogue. The truth is what ought to bring about assent.[17] Free dialogue means that teachers become a circle of brothers and sisters; students become friends. I would add, preachers seek first to be servants of the Word - witnessing to the truth and inviting listeners to participate in an open exploration of the truth.

To discover a biblical understanding of the Trinity, Moltmann begins with the history of Jesus, the Son, who is the revealer of the Trinity. The account of the baptism of Jesus in Mark begins to disclose a trinitarian understanding of God. The voice from heaven announces that he is the *beloved* Son, the one who is especially dear, the *only* Son (as in Isaac, Heb. 11:17) who alone knows the Father (Matth. 11:27). The mutual knowing of the Father and the Son is an exclusive knowing and love of like for like. Elsewhere, Jesus speaks to God as *Abba* (not an Israelite tradition of address). In so doing he does not stress the fatherly lordship of God, but an unheard of intimacy which stamps his proclamation of the reign of God as one of messianic joy particularly for the poor, the sick and suffering. His proclamation of the *Basileia tou Theou* reveals God as the merciful Father and a reign of parental compassion (Isa. 49:15 and Ps. 103:13). In Paul, the messianic call of Jesus begins with the sending of the Son by the Father (Gal 4:4 and Rom. 8:3-4).[18]

Moltmann also gives extensive attention to the death and resurrection of Jesus in order to elucidate further trinitarian relationships and concludes:
- The Father gives up his own Son to death in its most absolute sense - for us.

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[16] Meeks, *God the Economist*, 66-73.
[17] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God,* Margaret Kohl, trans. (San Francisco: Harper & Row Pub., 1981), xi-xiii.
[18] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the* Kingdom, 65-76. In connection with the baptism of Jesus Brian Blount notes that Jesus is *invaded* by the Spirit. The preposition *eis* is used when one would expect *epi* (Mark 1:10). This means, he adds, that the "Spirit of God takes hold of and *possesses* Jesus." Brian K. Blount and Gary W. Charles, *Preaching Mark in Two Voices* (Louisville Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 31.

- The Son gives up himself for us.
- The common sacrifice of the Father and the Son comes about through the Holy Spirit, who joins and unites the Son in his forsakenness with the Father.
- The Father raises the Son through the Spirit.
- The Father reveals the Son through the Spirit.
- The Son is enthroned as Lord of God's Kingdom through the Spirit.
- The Father raises the dead Son through the life-giving Spirit.
- The Father enthrones the Son, as the lord of his Kingdom.
- The risen Son sends the creative Spirit from the Father, to renew heaven and earth.[19]

In this litany we begin to discern the profound interrelatedness of the persons of the Trinity. This functionality is what we mean by the social doctrine of the Trinity. Moltmann goes on to comment on the order of the members of the Trinity.

- In the sending, delivering up and resurrection of Christ the sequence is Father/Spirit/Son.
- In the lordship of Christ and the sending of the Spirit the sequence is Father/Son/Spirit.
- In the eschatological consummation and glorification the sequence is Spirit/Son/Father.[20]

This variable order reminds us that there is no hierarchy in this Trinity. All members are equal; all give and receive. In this regard it is particularly important to understand that "God the Father is the Father of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ.....It is in respect of this Son that God must be called 'Father.' His fatherhood is defined by relationship to this Son, and by the relationship of this Son to him."[21]

John of Damascus spoke of the *perichoresis* of the Trinity which sees the relationship between Father, Son and Spirit as a *circulatory interpenetration*: "the Father exists in the Son, the Son in the Father and both of them in the Spirit, just as the Spirit exists in both the Father and the Son. By virtue of their eternal love they live in one another to such an extent, that they are one." "The trinitarian persons form their own unity by themselves in the circulation of divine life."[22]

The unity of the Trinity is no longer seen in the homogeneous divine subject (in which monarchical, hierarchical and patriarchal notions dominated) but in the *perichoresis* of Father, Son and Spirit and has far-reaching consequences for the doctrine of the *imago dei* (the image of God in human beings) and the conception of a creation that corresponds to God. To view the trinune God as community or fellowship "issues an invitation to his community and makes himself a model for a just and livable community of the world of nature and human beings." Accordingly, the 'communion of the Holy Spirit' guarantees the unity of the church, and not monarchical centralism. This social understanding of the Trinity provides an authentic social program in which "personality, sociality and nature are brought into equilibrium and people are becoming capable of surviving with one another and nature."[23]

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[19] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 65-89
[20] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 94
[21] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 163.
[22] Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, 174-75
[23] Jürgen Moltmann, *History and the Triune God: Contributions to Trinitarian Theology*, John Bowden, trans. (New York: Crossroad, 1992), xi-xiii. "It was only with the development of the early church's christology from the New Testament christology of the Son that the need arose to develop the doctrine of the Trinity in the conception of God,

On Trinity Sunday last June I decided to attempt a sermon on the social doctrine of the Trinity in relation to economy, an experience that led me to consider writing this paper. I had wrestled with much of the material I have summarized above. [Obviously, sermons require exploring aspects of a theme theologically far beyond what ends up in the final act of preaching!] I had chosen John 17:20-26 as my text. When Jesus prays "As you, Father, are in me and I am in you" (v. 20), he is conveying *perichoresis*. Trinitarian unity points beyond knowing and willing to mutual indwelling. Father and Son are not *one* but *at one*, and in this sense they are united.[24] Then Jesus continues by including the church (i.e., those who would believe through the witness of his disciples): "may they also be in us." The unity of the Trinity is one that is open and inviting to human beings and to the world. One implication of this is that we need to move beyond the traditional circular and triangular symbols for the Trinity because they evoke a closed rather than open Trinity.[25]

**Connecting theology and ethics for economics**

So far I have been trying (with considerable help from Moltmann!) to explore how God is revealed in Scripture as Trinity. This simple way of putting the matter for homiletics should not be underestimated. Referring to God in our preaching is not enough; it is too vague. Listeners need to know how Scripture forms and re-forms our conceptions of God. But having done that, how do we explore how God is related to us and our world? We need to connect theology and ethics in our preaching.[26]

Elsewhere I have tried to spell out the move from theology to ethics - from what we believe to who we are and how we act. Ethical method for preaching is rooted in our deepest convictions.[27] This is implied in Miroslav Volf's comment, that a "genuinely Christian reflection on social issues must be rooted in the self-giving of the Trinity."[28] So let me try to spell this out more concretely with the help, once again, of Douglas Meeks.[29]

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because otherwise the unity of Jesus the Son with the Father and the Father with the Son cannot be expressed." 83. Cf. Stephen Webb's comment, "The Trinity is the structure of an extravagant overflowing that breaks through the boundaries of self-interest and concern." Perichoresis is "the notion that each divine person coheres in the other in a vital and compelling fashion. This dynamic and reciprocal interpenetration allows God's involvement in the world to be both unified and plural. The Trinity, then, represents the possibility of a society of individuals who are both free and connected through acts of excessive and mutual giving." *The Gifting of God*, 128.

[24] Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 85.

[25] Moltmann, *History and the Triune God*, 85-87. See also Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 128.

[26] William Stringfellow in *An Ethic for Christians and Other Aliens in a Strange Land* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1973), reminds us in this connection that "the biblical witness affords no simplistic version of social ethics." Rather, "the singular, straightforward issue of ethics...is how to live humanly during the Fall." (55) My attempt here is to try to discover what this human reality ought to be.

[27] See especially chapter two of *Preaching and Ethics*.

[28] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 25.

[29] See Meeks, *God the Economist*, 109-23. Stephen Webb offers an appreciative summary of Meeks' position but sees a more complex relationship between trinitarian giving and economic exchange, *The Gifting of God*, 133-37.

A trinitarian God is not a self-sufficient individual but a community of persons, each distinctive but together united in *self-giving*, to each other and to the world. Self-giving is the very essence of the social doctrine of the Trinity and therefore of trinitarian economy. This is neither individualistic nor collectivist but a dialectic of mutual coherence. These are not exchange relationships but expressions of the bonding love of a community of persons committed first to the wellbeing of each other. Personality and sociality support each other. Each person is who they are in relation to each other. This models the biblical notion of *koinōnia*. The economy of the household (*koinōnia*) precedes the definition of property. As a result, the earliest phase of the church, after the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, exemplified an economy of reciprocity and redistribution and led to more equally divided abundance. (Acts 2 and 4) Property should always have a social function for the benefit of the community and ownership includes responsibility.

The way God possesses flows from God's trinitarian relationships. God is not maker and owner as much as creator and liberator because God's actions with reference to our world and humankind are marked by suffering and self-giving. God's 'ownership' is not grounded in self-possession but in self-giving. (cf., Romans 8:32) God's way of owning through self-giving creates freedom from possessiveness. One can enjoy possessions without being possessed by a false sense of ownership because property is understood relationally as gift. Gifts always have to be on the move - so accumulating (arresting the movement) diminishes the gift character of property.

In market economies the exchange of commodities aims at stasis. To pay for something is to exchange money for something of equal value so that neither buyer not seller owes the other anything. Consumer goods are to be consumed by their owners without bearing on the relationship between buyer and seller. Gift-giving, on the other hand, is all about relationship. It involves movement and implies response. In the economy of God, gift is *charis* (meaning both gift and grace) and reveals generosity which, in turn, creates movement. God's generosity obligates and empowers our lives and allows us to relinquish our possessions for the sake of the economy of the *basileia* of God.

All of this brings us to the notion of freedom in relation to economy. A trinitarian understanding of God sees God's freedom not in free choice, but in God's love. God limits God's self by communicating and acting in ways consistent with a unity of mutual love. The essential character of property, arising from the notion of God's freedom, focuses not on ownership and the freedom to act as one wishes, but on use or service for the sake of the well-being of all and of the rest of creation.

In this analysis of God in relation to economy Meeks has been very concrete in clarifying how a biblical notion economy contrasts with market economics. Much contemporary preaching may articulate a biblical vision but often does not contrast this with what is going on in our world. So I appreciate what Meeks is attempting. My problem, however, is that Meeks gives the impression that market economics *as such* is to be rejected. Schweiker, on the other hand, focuses on the weakness and failures of market economics, especially its inclination toward commodifying everything, including human beings.[30] If Meeks overstates the case, does Schweiker go far enough? This is a difficult judgment. Either way, I would stress the importance of pursuing a

[30] Schweiker, "Responsibility in the world of Mammon, 121-27.

positive alternative economic vision to inspire listeners to imaging creative ways for communities engage economically. For this, I turn again to Katherine Tanner.

Tanner propounds what she calls "an economy of grace." She derives this specifically from a trinitarian understanding of God's self-giving (or 'gift-giving' to use her language). Through this gifting God creates, relates covenantally, and redeems. This "can be viewed as a complex, multi-staged economy for distributing goods, one that abides by principles at odds with those characteristic of capitalist commodity exchange." These principles are **unconditional giving, universal inclusion and noncompetitive possession**.[31]

**Unconditional giving,** obviously, reflects God's own giving. The whole of what creatures are is God's free gift. God is the initiator of covenant (a choice not based on some superiority), and our redemption is to meet our needs and incapacities. The gift of union with Christ is maintained by God in spite of the fact that our lives do not reflect God's gift giving. God gives without measure because we are in constant need; our sins interrupt reception of God's gifts but do not stop God from giving. The cross saves us from a debt economy – Christ does not pay our debt for God's giving is unconditional. As in the Jubilee tradition, debts are forgiven rather than paid; debtors are freed from enslavement without the requirement of payment; land is returned to the original owners in spite of the history of how it was lost.[32]

This exposes the ideology of deserving in our economic relations according to which some claim they deserve what they have and dismiss others as undeserving. It also undercuts notions of commodity exchange and debtor/creditor relations.

The unconditionality of God's giving implies the universal distribution of God's gifts. U**niversal inclusion** goes back to the universality of God's creating and is implicit in the New Testament's doctrine of redemption. In Christ all can be redeemed: rich and poor, Jew and non-Jew, the suffering and the fortunate, the good and the bad, because God gives simply to those in need (which includes all of us). But more, as we have observed with reference to the prayer of Jesus in John 17, the Trinity itself is open and breaches the boundaries of closed communities.

Economically, the gifting of God challenges gifts as the exclusive possession of particular persons. All have the right to life and the goods of life, including the right of appropriation according to their livelihood and these cannot be infringed upon by the exclusive claims of others.[33] Accordingly, the very idea of private property is challenged.

Finally an economy of grace points to **noncompetitive relations**. By *noncompetitive* we mean that giving to others does not come at one's own expense. Competition, a prime virtue in contemporary economics, means that someone has to lose in order for someone else to win. Gift relations are not exchanges but a sharing based on nonexclusive 'owning.' When property is seen as gift then property is what is shared in common according to need. This sense of 'owning' property depends on mutuality – we are owned by others only by way of their giving to us for our own good – rather than by restricting us, taking from us, to do with as they will.

[31] Tanner, "Economies of grace," 370.
[32] Tanner, "Economies of grace," 371-74.
[33] Tanner, "Economies of grace," 374-76.

We define ourselves to include others within our sense of who we are because we are constituted by God in relation to others. We have a communal, not an individualistic identity. Nonexclusive possession only works when giving and having are noncompetitive. We give as those who have received and do not hold back as though what we have is simply our own. In giving to others we are not self-evacuated as though giving is at odds with having. A community of mutual fulfillment would mean sharing gifts in a way that also includes receiving them. A teacher has the gift of learning; shares it and receives back from learners the gift of further discovery.

Because we have been united with Christ, we define ourselves to include others as those constituted by God in relation to others. God's claim on us comes through giving, namely the giving of life and the means to its fulfillment. This is the way of the Trinity: by giving the Father 'owns' the Son, or the Son is the Father's own Son. We are God's children by way of God's grace and belong to each other in community through mutual giving and receiving. The Father, the Son and the Spirit give to one another without suffering loss – each continues to have what has been given. We too have, but not exclusively; our having is for sharing.[34]

**The homiletical challenge**

If theology is the fundamental the key to preaching on economics (as I have tried to argue), why is it still so difficult - even with incisive theological insights - to translate this into preaching? And, for those of us who teach preaching, what more do we need to explore?

Obviously, economy according to the Trinity is flat out countercultural. Much current economic thinking assumes the values of private ownership, pervasive scarcity, competition, exchange relationships, accumulation of wealth, the inherent goodness of growth, expansion at the cheapest cost, and the commodifiablity of virtually anything. To some degree or another, our culture pulls us in the direction of these characteristics. These hallmarks (and others) may be open to some criticism here and there, but try to challenge them as such, and it is a different matter. We also forget that all economic theories are human constructs.[35] So pastors are tempted to remain vague or just avoid spelling out the economic implications of their sermon texts.

In his own inimitable way, Will Willimon has confronted the problem when he states, "*To be a preacher is to be called to love God more than the congregation*."[36] We are, as preachers, first to be servants of the Word. In our present context, if our commitment is to God the Trinity, then we have no option but to be faithful in witnessing to God's economy. The truth is that many listeners long to have the Gospel *fully* preached and to see it concretely related to their lives and their everyday world. In doing so preachers do not stand overagainst the congregation; rather, they invite their listeners to be shaped by the Word as a performative (empowering) act. In so doing

[34] Tanner, "Economies of grace," 378-81.
[35] Cf. Meeks, *God the Economist*, 48-49. Interestingly, Ronald Wright, in his *A Short History of Progress,* describes a number of non-market economies that I would say closely resemble the characteristics of an economy of grace.
[36] William H. Willimon, "Pastors who won't be preachers: Against homiletical accommodation to a culture of contentment," Journal for Preachers 29/4 (Pentecost, 2006), 37. William Sloan Coffin once wrote that many pastors avoid preaching on controversial issues because they have a deep need to be liked – Passion for the Possible: A Message to U.S. Churches (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 87.

the final emphasis is not on Law but Gospel, not on trouble but grace.[37] Of course, we should also remind ourselves that a single sermon, even rooted deeply in theology derived from the biblical text, is seldom enough. An ocean liner the size of the economy turns very slowly! Similarly, the unfolding of the doctrine of the Trinity is itself a demanding, though most rewarding, task. Obviously, theological work like this needs to be made accessible and concrete when it comes to the actual sermon. But speaking about God and God's ways is the very heart of preaching – as it was for Jesus.

The disciples listened to the preaching of Jesus for years before they began to grasp the central thrust of his message about Messiah and the reign of God. His conception of these (as Luke 9 makes clear) was that Jesus' talk of a suffering Messiah was overwhelmingly countercultural. Until the full disclosure of the cross and resurrection the disciples didn't even begin to grasp it.

Paul also underscores the radicality of following the way of the cross. In Galatians 2:20 he says that he no longer lives; Christ lives in him and now his new life is sheer gift. He seems to be echoing the perichoresis language of John 17. So, as preacher, focuses on Christ crucified, without any accommodation to human wisdom, and, he seeks to be guided by the Spirit of truth. (I Corinthians 2:2-13)

Which bring me to the need for homiletics to pay more attention to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Michael Welker urges that we not underestimate the empowering work of the Spirit. "The experience of the power of the Spirit is reflected...in every good proclamation. It is the experience of a power which enables persons...to have experiences of commonality...that do not originate with themselves."[38] This would seem to dovetail with Katherine Tanner's description of an economy of grace. It also sounds like the effects of the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost which created a community in which believers "had all things in common" - selling and distributing according to need. (Acts 2:44-45)

In the end preaching that flows from our experience of God the Trinity is a spiritual event which means that teaching such preaching is also a spiritual, communal, unconditional, inclusive and non-competitive time of mutual learning and discovery. I have discovered that students, given permission and opportunity, have an immense amount to teach each other and myself as teacher when they experience the act of class preaching as truly one of shared discovery of the Gospel for our lives, the church and the world. The prime objective is to help one another to be servants of the Word and to love the Word more than we love ourselves and each other. In the process we create an economy of grace that can truly face the formidable challenge of the economies that shape (and often destroy) so much in our world.

[37] Cf., Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (Louisville: Chalice Press, 2004), chapter 6.
[38] Michael Welker, God the Spirit (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 1994), 234.

# 'THE LARGE AND BOUNDLESS CHAMBER'
## Long-Term Memory and the Future of Contemporary Preaching

Joseph M. Webb

> Great is this force of Memory, excessive great, O my God; a large and boundless chamber! Who ever sounded the depths thereof? A wonderful admiration surprises me, amazement seizes me upon this. And men go abroad to admire the heights of mountains, the mighty billows of the sea, the broad tides of rivers, the expanse of the ocean, and the circuits of the stars, and pass themselves by.
>
> Augustine, Confessions

Over the past fifteen or so years I have spent a great deal of time studying the dynamics and importance of human memory as it figures in preaching. Most of the work has focused on the relationship between memory and the process of preaching without notes. In doing so, though, I have been acutely conscious of dealing with only one half of the process of human memory—that half we know as short-term memory. How, in other words, can a preacher easily, reliably, and quickly commit to memory a basic outline for the sermon's presentation, and do so regularly on a weekly basis. This, we now know, is well within the reach of any preacher willing to embrace the basic disciplines of short-term memory.

For the past couple of years, then, I have turned attention to the other half of the memory equation, usually called "long-term memory." Frankly, I had no idea when I started work on long-term memory that its role would be as important to the preaching task as it is. In a profound way, it is probably more important to what the preacher does, or might well do in the future, than short-term memory. In this brief paper, I want to lay some background about what researchers tell us about long-term memory—and then indicate what, for me, was the unexpected relevance of it to what preachers do in preparing and presenting sermons.

1.

Long-term memory involves the accumulated memories of our lives, not something that we set out to learn this week for an exam—or a sermon. When we talk about "remembering" this or that, or "do you remember?" we usually have long-term memory in mind. St. Augustine was right: our long-term memory is a "large and boundless chamber" the depths of which are difficult to fathom.[1]

The philosophers of long-term memory work on the really tough questions, often setting them up for empirical research. Their questions include things like: How do we know about such a thing as "pastness" at all? Or, where does an awareness of temporal sequence in our heads

[1] Numerous scholars of memory point out how far-reaching and unwieldy research in long-term memory is, which no doubt accounts for why this is still a largely unexplored discipline. See, for example, Elizabeth and Robert Bjork, eds., Memory (San Diego: Academic Press, 1996). They emphasize that one of the biggest puzzles of all is how we go about forgetting in long-term memory.

come from? Or, how do we distinguish "actual" past happenings from "imaginary" ones, "real events" in the past from "make believe" ones.[2] Researchers, on the other hand, tend to work on more practical matters. These involve such things as how and why we remember some things from our pasts and not others, and what happens when we try to call up long remembered or partially remembered things from our pasts.

As Augustine's extended paean to memory in his Confessions indicates, the Greeks not only appreciated memory's power and reach, but also valued it as an essential ingredient in their arts of rhetoric and oratory. Still, it was not until the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and largely with the rise of the psychological sciences, that the systematic study of human memory began. Among those interested in it, two made particularly important contributions. One was Herman Ebbinghaus, whose classic monograph titled, simply, Memory,[3] was published in 1885; the other was William James, whose monumental study, The Varieties of Religious Experience,[4] still almost submerges his highly influential studies of memory. Both Ebbinghaus and James were in a sense pre-scientific students of memory, though James is usually credited with some of the seminal distinctions still in use today—including the distinction between short- and long-term memory as two entirely different structures of memory; James is also credited with the designation of a separate category of memory for motor learning, or the behavioral "memories" that we know as "habits."

Despite such breakthroughs, it was not until the 1960s and early 70s that scientific work began in earnest, and in a variety of disciplines, on the nature of memory. One of the most important researchers of this era is a Canadian psychologist named Endel Tulving. Tulving began with James' category of long-term memory and devised another ground-breaking distinction, one that was picked up and echoed by other scholars using slightly different language. Tulving said there are two fundamental types of long-term memory, one he called, somewhat misleadingly, "semantic memory" and the other "episodic memory."[5] Another researcher, uncomfortable with Tulving's language, referred to the same things as "propositional memory" and "imagistic memory," though those categories are not much better than Tulving's.[6] Other terms are also sometimes used to talk about Tulving's distinction.

While Tulving's "semantic" and "imagistic" categories are the most important of recent research, they are not the only two categories of long-term memory to have appeared, however. One researcher talks about "procedural memory,"[7] or the ability to learn and then effortlessly remember "how to do things." It has also become commonplace to talk about what one researcher named "flashbulb memories;" this refers to those long-term memories that become tied in our minds to a particular time, place, and event, those memories, in other words, that have

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[2] There are a several insightful books from the past few decades that are rich in ideas and directions for thinking. Among the best in my judgment is Brian Smith, Memory (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1966).

[3] Out of print for years, a new paperback edition was issued by Dover Press in 1987.

[4] James work on religious experience is widely available; his writings and studies of long-term memory are found scattered throughout his work on psychology.

[5] Tulving's work is also easy to find. Often he teams with a colleague or student for important work. Among his seminar works is Elements of Episodic Memory, published by Oxford University Press in paperback in 1985.

[6] See Smith for a discussion of alternative language.

[7] Thomas Butler, ed., Memory: History, Culture, and the Mind (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 42, 43.

a distinctive trauma, whether personal or collective, tied to them. Learning that President Kennedy was assassinated, or first hearing of 9/11, as well as being told as a child that one's parents were divorcing, are all examples of "flashbulb memories."[8]

Tulving's dual categories, however, are the most fruitful ones with which to begin a study of this material for our purposes in preaching, though acknowledging that the field is larger than appears here is appropriate.

2.

First, "semantic memory." The word "semantic" is not used here to refer to language or language usage, which is the misleading part. The term is used to indicate all of those materials—and they are strikingly vast, really—that each of us has "learned," school-like, over the years. We are taught almost from the beginning of life. From the moment that consciousness begins to form, we are learning—picking up things from others, absorbing, digesting, listening, testing, filing "information" away, out of school as well as in school.

In school, what we learned was more organized, disciplined. We studied subjects and blocks of material at every grade level. We took tests. We were pressed to relate facts, concepts and idea to each other; we discovered that what we learned as a body of material in one area became formative for what we would assemble in another area. We learned and, it turned out, we could file away in our heads and remember at least some things far beyond a test. We found ourselves very interested (for a variety of reasons) in some of those materials along the way, and we remembered them particularly well; even years later, they can still stand out in our memories when we dig again for them. Other things were more tangential to our interests, and drifted into the more obscure parts of our remembered pasts. We came to realize, though, that the better organized the materials were that were presented to us, the better we tended to remember them over time.[9]

By and large, this school-based "learned information" was not in any way first-hand to our experience, as important as it might have become to our lives. Moreover, much of the material we learned—as researchers are keen to point out—we learned without any reference to where we learned it. Most of this remembering—of history, math, science, music, etc.—was, and still is, learned and remembered abstractly. When we left school, the learning of "information" continued, though mostly on our own, or on our job. Even last week and the week before, in reading or doing research for a lesson or a sermon, we continue to generate and "learn" new information for ourselves. As in school days, some of it will stay with us into the future in some form in our long-term memory.

3.

[8] For an excellent discussion, see William F. Brewer's article, "What Is Recollective Memory?" in David C. Rubin, ed., Remembering Our Past (Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[9] There are a number of excellent studies of these long-term learning/memory processes. For those interested, see Charles N. Cofer, ed., The Structure of Human Memory (San Francisco: W. H. Freedom & Co., 1976, and Gillian Cohen, Memory in the Real World (Hove/London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1989.

Tulving's other kind of long-term memory, the one he called "episodic," refers to those countless personally-experienced events of our lives—again from the very beginning of our growing up all the way through our maturational and aging process. We remember the past as we lived it and experienced it day upon day, week upon week. We do not remember everything—that we know for sure. But again researchers tell us that we would be amazed at how much of all of those past personal "events" find their way into our long-term memories.

I remember my brother and I being taken on a trip from Illinois to Washington DC by our parents. While I don't remember what year it was or how old I was—I could find out, I think, though that would depend on the memory of my brother or our mother, though they may not remember when either. I remember the long driving, and talk of "the boring Pennsylvania Turnpike," but I don't remember the make or model of the car we were in. I didn't know about "motels" then, but I remember that we stayed in what our dad called "rooming houses," regular houses, really, with flashing signs out front. I remember hunting for them, often long after dark, and I remember an awkwardness about having to sleep on the floor in the same room with mom and dad on the bed. Now, in retrospect, I wonder if my brother remembers all that the same way I do; it is not at all likely that he does. I vaguely remember the enormous city, too, though not specifically. What I really do remember is being terrified at the top of the Empire State Building. I remember learning for the first time that I was deathly afraid of heights, petrified of looking down. I don't remember very much else about the city, and I have no memory of what we did while we were there, besides go to the top of that building. I remember distinctly, though, that the building swayed, really swayed, while we were at the top of it, and I was quire beside myself with fear.

What does a memory, or set of memories, like that tell us about the nature of long-term memory, as researchers analyze it? Let me summarize a lot of material with a couple of important, and rather striking findings.

The first thing we know from researchers is that these "episodic" or "imagistic" memories are not just things or events filed away in the mind or brain someplace, things that can be brought out at will. To bring memories of the past into being, we have to "construct" them. As in my memory of that trip to New York City as a child, I remember it in bits and pieces, not as an uninterrupted, overall event. Some things, usually traumatic things, stand out, but the "rest of the story" I have to fill in. As James L. McGaugh put it in a recent book:

> Remembering events, whether ordinary or significant, is not simply a matter of locating the otherwise perfectly preserved memory stories at some place(s) in the brain and retrieving it intact . . . The terms 'remembering,' 'recollecting,' and 'recalling' quite literally reflect what we much do when we experience or discuss a particular memory. We must 're-member,' 're-collect,' and 're-construct' as we 're-call'; and, because of the massive interconnectedness of the records of our personal experiences and general knowledge, it is often, if not usually, quite difficult to retain and remember experiences with great accuracy.[10]

[10] James L. Mc Graugh, Memory and Emotion: The Making of Lasting Memories (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 116.

He adds that we do remember some parts of events and even a few distinct details, particularly details that affect us deeply, but that when we recall those "events" we are forced to draw on the general knowledge we have picked up about similar events as well. And, in our remembering, what we re-call and what we fill in "are not always (if ever) clearly distinguished."[11] David Myers puts it concisely and strikingly: Long-term memories "are not copies of experiences that remain on deposit in a memory bank. Rather like scientists reconstructing dinosaurs from bone fragments we construct memories as we withdraw them from storage."[12] Or, in Thomas Butler's formulation, the memory system abstracts out one or two features of a long-term memory and files it away "in such a way that under the proper emotional conditions, its acts synecdochically, restoring the whole," whether fully accurate or not.

Second, no matter how "invented" or "constructed" out long-term memories might be, researchers point out that they invariably seem correct—no, downright truthful—to us. Even the parts that we candidly sense that we are "filling in" seem very real to us. We intuitively believe that what we remember is "what happened." As David Rubin puts it, "we do believe that our own autobiographical memories are true even in cases when we know from independent evidence that they are not."[13] While that statement may be a bit exaggerated, anyone who has ever spun a story of "back when I was young" for one's friends knows the disarming validity of what Rubin says. We remember the "core" of something, something that, in truth, happened; but when we want to tell it to somebody else, with the core in tact, we construct the details whether we actually member them or not.

What this amounts to is that we seem to know from an early age that it is the details which we invariably supply to our core memories that turn them into exciting, meaningful, tellable stories. When we share our memories, we share them as stories—it appears that we have no choice but to do that. As humans, we are, by nature, storytellers. In remembering events we construct stories. The stories we tell, moreover, are true to us, very true to us. They really happened, for us, as we remember them. Granted, we would never insist that every detail in our remembered story is true. But the story we tell us true—we would insist on that. We are not "making things up." We are telling "what happened," as we re-call it. If pressed we could admit that we don't actually remember all of the details of our memory; still we would insist on the "truth" of what we are telling. We would stand by our memory, our story.[14]

Third, most of our long-term memories, however far back they go, have both a private and a public side. I remember, let us say, that I was a high-school newspaper photographer with a big graphlex camera positioned in the end zone during the state final football game the night old Lincoln High, my school, won the state championship. I remember the score. I remember shooting a masterpiece picture from that end zone as Bob Goebel came dashing across the goal line with the winning touchdown. My memories of that event may spin on as I tell a wonderful story. But—I would need to be careful about the story I remember, there we other people there, and there are newspaper records of the details of that night. My story could easily become

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[11] McGraugh, 116.

[12] David G. Myers, Intuition: Its Powers and Perils (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 69.

[13] Rubin, 4.

[14] This point was originally made in some detail by Frederic Bartlett's classic book, Remembering, first published in 1932, reissued by The University Press in 1964.

fanciful. A lot of other people were there that night. Others were actually around me, if I was standing in the end zone shooting pictures with that big graphflex. If I did what I say I remember doing, then there should be a picture of mine in the newspaper someplace that someone could actually look up. One of the dangers of sharing our long-term memories with others, of telling wonderful stories of things we "remember" doing, lies in making sure that our exciting story, our memory, can be "verified" by a public verification of what we tell. That is, one might say I remember graduating from such and such a place at a particular time and I can tell you a story about it—but does the public record verify or disprove the "truth" of my memory?[15]

Finally, it is well known that our minds work not with what is really around us in the present, but by our perceptions of the situations, circumstances, and people that make up our lives.[16] What long-term memory researchers are now telling is that our memories of our pasts function in the very same way. That is, that our long-term memories are not about "what happened in our pasts," but about our perceptions of what happened in our pasts. We could even say, at the risk of getting tangled up, that our memories are really our perceptions of our past perceptions. It would be useful to find time to untangle that. For now, though, let's describe our past memories as our perceptions of what happened. This is why my brother John and I can remember being part of the very same events in our childhood, but remember them in entirely different ways. It is the nature of long-term memory.

4.

I need to stop in order to do two things. First, I want to indicate the direction in which, for me at least, this discussion of long-term memory, in both of Tulving's forms, actually points. Second, I want to connect, however briefly, each of these kinds of long-term memory to that direction or envisioned goal; in doing that, I want to try to make long-term memory as relevant as I can to the future of Christian preaching.

A growing understanding of human long-term memory leads the study of homiletics in a provocative and unexpected direction—one that, in my judgment, is actually most welcome given the nature of today's contemporary worship environments. It is necessary to say, though, that it is into an area that has literally been anathema to homileticians and teachers of preaching for years. It points to the possibility of, and the need for, learning (and teaching) how to preach in an impromptu manner.

Most know what speaking impromptu means. It is not the same, in fact, as extemporaneous speaking or preaching. Extemporaneous preaching or speaking refers to speaking without notes, or with minimal notes; i.e., speaking without manuscript. Impromptu speaking, on the other hand, means to speak, literally, without advance preparation as well as without notes. Ironically, that well-known public speaking organization to which I once belonged, Toastmasters International, believes enough in the importance of learning to speak impromptu that it holds a practice session on impromptu public speaking at every meeting. A

[15] For an excellent discussion of both the meaning and implications of this public and private side of long-term memories, see Smith.

[16] I have explored this sociological understanding of communication thoroughly in my book, Preaching and the Challenge of Pluralism (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1998).

large bowl is (or at least was) filled with slips of paper carrying speaking topics and each member would draw a topic from the bowl and then, after a few minutes of reflection, speak impromptu for five minutes or so on that topic.

5.

We in the Academy now are part of a generation of preachers and homileticians for whom the idea of impromptu preaching induces shivers and cold sweats. That should come as something of a surprise, however, when one adds up the number of times during the typical church week that a preacher is called on to speak, sometimes quite substantively, in an impromptu manner. While no homiletician that I know—including myself—would advocate that sermons should regularly be delivered without adequate, even thorough, preparation, there are times when speaking impromptu as part of a sermon, or as a substitute for a prepared sermon, is not only justified but downright necessary. Hence, it is not an inappropriate topic to raise among teachers of preachers.

The fact is that it is not a new idea by any means. In his old but still splendid book on preaching, John Broadus reminded us that Augustine "was occasionally directed" on the day he was to preach "to the choice of a subject by the passage which the 'praelector' had selected for reading;" moreover, Broadus said that Augustine "was sometimes urged by some impression of the moment, to give his sermon a different turn from what he had originally proposed." Even the great Chrysostom reported, Broadus added, "that his subject was frequently suggested to him by something he met with on his way to church, or which suddenly occurred during divine service."[17]

I have no idea, either, how many homileticians will be surprised to learn how heartily another great preacher of the not-too-distant past advocated the art of impromptu preaching. In his book called, simply, Letters to My Students, Charles H. Spurgeon includes a chapter titled "The Faculty of Impromptu Speech." In it Spurgeon wrote that "this power is extremely useful, and in most cases is, with a little diligence, to be acquired." He defined it as we have here—as speaking without immediate advance preparation, distinguished from "extemporaneous" preaching, or the advance preparation of ideas but not words. Spurgeon added:

> The power of impromptu speech is invaluable, because it enables a man [or woman] on the spur of the moment, in an emergency, to deliver himself [herself] with propriety. These emergencies will arise. Accidents will occur in the best regulated assemblies. Singular events may turn the premeditated current of your thoughts quite aside. You will see clearly that the subject selected would be inopportune, and you will . . . drift into something else without demur.[18]

I have called attention in other places to Drew Hanson's book on Martin Luther King's famous 1963 "I Have a Dream" speech. The book is a study of the speech, and points out that even though King prepared and read from the podium that day a manuscript that he had

[17] John A. Broadus, A Treatise on the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1898), 434.

[18] C. H. Spurgeon, Lectures to My Students (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1954), 144.

prepared, he did not read it all. In fact, two paragraphs from the end of it, King was unhappy with the reaction of the massive crowd. He stopped reading, and for the next fifteen minutes, all the way to the end of his words, King spoke completely impromptu; he spoke words that he had not in any way prepared or planned to say that day. He knew when and how to speak impromptu when he needed to—and the rest, as far as that speech is concerned, is history.[19]

Last year, James Forbes preached a sermon—without notes—in the opening session of this Academy of Homiletics. It was the brilliant sermon we would expect from him; but then he did something unexpected. He took a break from his sermon, telling his audience that he wanted to talk about his experiences with Katrina and New Orleans. I may be wrong, though I have not been able to confirm whether I am or not; but my sense, then and now, was that Dr. Forbes preached the last fifteen minutes of his sermon impromptu—speaking of things he had not directly prepared, but that were weighing heavily upon him.

Those are not uncommon experiences for any preacher. One is well-prepared, but something happens, and the preacher feels a need to take the sermon in a different, unplanned, direction. To do that, however, requires the impromptu. At the last minute, an invited guest speaker does not show up for a special occasion. What should the preacher do? Call it off, or just cross out any sermon at all? Get a sermon out of a nearby book or file that may have nothing to do with the occasion at hand? Or undertake to speak himself or herself—impromptu?

That last idea is invariably the best one. It is a normal Sunday morning, and as the service time nears word comes that two of the congregation's most faithful members have been killed en route to the service in an automobile accident. What to do again? Proceed as though nothing has happened when it comes to the sermon? Or respond in a way that is appropriate to a tragic even that affects everyone? The best thing of all would be to set aside the prepared sermon and speak impromptu in a way that addresses the day's grief. These are only a few of the possible situations that call for skill in impromptu preaching—and the number of impromptu needs becomes even greater when one adds in all of the possible scenarios that arise from the spontaneous character of today's contemporary worship formats.

6.

What, then, is the connection between long-term memory and impromptu speaking or preaching? Probably the most important one is that the presence and cultivation of our long-term memory means that impromptu preaching, despite its definition, is <u>never done without preparation</u>. It is, though, that the preparation for such speaking or preaching is done in a way that we have seldom, as serious homileticians, even considered, let alone taken seriously. To explain, it is necessary to return to the two major kinds of long-term memory. First, Tulving's "semantic memory," or the kind represented by materials that we learn and hold onto over time, school-type materials. From this vantage point, for one to learn and be ready to preach impromptu at any time would mean becoming an ongoing student of theological and theologically-related materials, biblical materials and so on—materials of our profession that we collect, learn, and that our minds retain over time.

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[19] Drew Hanson, <u>The Dream: Martin Luther King and the Speech That Inspired a Nation</u> (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

I have compared this process to two things. First, it is like preparing to write those old doctoral exams we all took. One must master some domain of knowledge; and anything in that domain, in a sense, is fair game. So how does one study? Months before the exams must be written, one finds a way to divide up the area of specialization into an extensive number of topics; materials are collected under those topics and one by one are mastered. Since we do not know what the questions themselves will be, we learn as best we can comprehensively, so that no matter what the question is, the materials that we have learned can be molded to meet any question that comes. On a less rigorous, but no less disciplined fashion, we remain, long after seminary, that same kind of student of theology, Bible, history and culture. We read. We organize. We remember a lot.

The second thing I compare this to is a presidential press conference, the kind we have all seen on television. Let's say that the preacher will meet the congregation from time to time not to preach but to carry on a "press conference" with the members. Congregation members come armed with questions about anything they have a real concern about—about theology, about church life and polity, about what is going on in the world that they should be up on, about why there are so many different church bodies—on an on, serious questions. The preacher is expected, as the president is when quizzed by reporters, to listen, and give informed, spontaneous answers to everything he (she?) is asked—in fact, let's say the preacher's job depends on how well this all is done. The demand here is for a high level of impromptu public speaking—preaching, let us say, if in a remarkably different form.

How is the preacher to prepare for such an occasion or series of occasions? What we know is how the President, whoever it is, has prepared for years for press conferences. He keeps up to date with a series of looseleaf binders full of materials—"answers," really, to every conceivable question that might arise. Before every press conference, he studies those binders of material. He learns how he will tend to answer a question on a given topic, however someone might phrase the question. In doing so, he gets himself ready for an hour of impromptu public speaking.[20]

7.

Finally, a few words about the other of Tulving's long-term memory, the "episodic" kind, the kind that is personal to every one of us—the kind, moreover, that invariably comes out as a story when we "re-call" something from our past. What this boils down to is facing squarely the fact that every single one of us, every preacher, has a thousand stories from growing up, stories that arise from his or her long-term memory. The trick is learning how to cultivate them, how to make records of them in spiral bound notebooks, and how to review them periodically so that they could be available to us whenever we might need something in an impromptu speaking or preaching situation.

[20] Spurgeon writes, "If a man would speak without present study, he must usually study much.," and, "Store your minds very richly, and then, like merchants with crowded warehouses, you will have goods ready for your customers, and having arranged your good things upon the shelved of your mind, you will be able to hand them down at any time without the laborious process of going to market, shorting, folding, and preparing." 145.

Granted, there is no space here to talk about the actual use of our personal stories, since they do require special understanding and care when we use them as part of our preaching. My brother and I have recently completed a book on the nature of personal stories for preaching which looks in great detail at both the problems and the opportunities for mining and use one's own stories, drawn from long-term memory, in developing good sermons, even impromptu ones. Our own stories easily become new parables for conveying biblical truth—parables modeled after biblical ones. Such stories can also be used as guides and motivations for how to live, or told as a basis for building or strengthening community within a church fellowship. We describe at least ten excellent uses for personal stories—all the while explaining how the preacher can remove the egotism from these kinds of materials in the sermon.

For some, what I discuss here is out of the homiletical boundaries—advocating impromptu preaching in given circumstances. And yet the whole topic of long-term memory points exactly in this direction. The pulpit of the future, as can already be seen, must find ways of being more open, more fluid, more spontaneous, and more genuinely authentic, arising more than ever not just from tradition and Scripture—but from the life of the preacher. The revolution in worship, and in preaching, well under way already, is a still a long way from being concluded.

**Preach the Text or Preach the Gospel?**

Paul Scott Wilson

Anyone who has been to the Grand Canyon in Arizona knows that one comes upon it suddenly, the ground just drops away and some considerable distance across it continues on again. One might say that there is a Grand Canyon in homiletics today, though there has been almost no discussion of it. The terrain on both sides of the divide is similar but the divide is real and has large implications for the sermon, starting with the theme sentence. The divide is over this question: do we preach the text or do we preach the gospel?—The answer is both, but what is the difference?[1]

Preachers will answer both ways and good arguments are on both sides. To say that we preach the text is natural because most teachers in biblical studies assume this stance. The unit of scripture or pericope is the source of the sermon and determines its direction. What the text communicates at its literal or plain level to its own people is what the sermon tries to communicate to listeners today. One seeks the Word of God in the intention of the original writer against the historical and cultural background of the time. The Bible says, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Having found the message in a biblical text through exegesis, one is ready to preach. The operating assumption here is that the word one finds in the text is the gospel. However, in the practical reality of today's sermons, one cannot be confident that this is in fact the case.

The terrain on the preach-the-gospel side of the divide is much the same. Those who represent that position agree with their preach-the-text colleagues on most points and procedures, especially on starting with the text. They would agree that the bald way the above question is framed, Do we preach the text or the gospel? implies 'either/or' when the right answer is 'both/and', we preach the text and the gospel. However, those who argue preach-the-gospel disagree that the message one finds in a text is necessarily the gospel. It may be, but it may not be. Not every text immediately yields the gospel, and as Calvin noted, one needs the Holy Spirit to read it rightly. Every approach is a lens, a perspective, and the same is true for the gospel.

Scholars in neither camp believe that there is one objective meaning of a text and even the gospel meaning of a text is an interpretation. Still, the preach-the-gospel argument runs, when the text does not directly yield the gospel it needs to be treated as an essential lens to it, a portal if you like, that offers a way to read the larger Christian story so that the gospel comes into focus through it. Seen another way, the biblical texts are treasured windows through which the light of the gospel is projected upon and into the lives of the hearers.

Both positions are steeped in historical-critical and literary thought, yet preach-the-text is resistant to making God a deliberate focus where God may not be directly mentioned in a text. A theological purpose of the text is often sought, yet no safeguards ensure it. The great Scottish

[1] This paper is compiled from various places in the second edition of Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press) that is to appear in June, 2007.

preacher of the 1900s, James S. Stewart's had a theological test of a sermon for a congregation: "Did they, or did they not, meet God today?"[2] What does one preach when a text like the Good Samaritan does not mention God, as is true of many texts? Is Christ only to be mentioned when a text mentions Christ? Many experienced preach-the-text preachers in fact instinctively arrive at God, but there is nothing in their explicit exegetical or homiletical methods or sermon forms to ensure that they do or, more important, to instruct the student how to do this. Advocates of preach-the-gospel developed the kind of detailed theological exegetical method recommended earlier as a means to compensate for what was missing.

Edward Farley is one scholar who encourages preachers not to think narrowly about preaching a text or unit of Scripture, but to concentrate on the theological task of preaching the gospel and to allow it to set the themes of the sermon.[3] James F. Kay and David Buttrick agree and have written papers that are among the best recent theological treatments of preaching.[4]

The point here is plain, Christ commissioned the church to preach the gospel. Preachers must preach individual texts and often they do not contain the gospel, yet all texts in their own particularities can serve as windows to and from it. The texts are essential and vital starting points for biblical preaching; they are the means whereby preachers arrive at the gospel. Not all sermons based on the Bible are biblical, and many biblical sermons are not the gospel. Preaching is no better than the instruments one uses to guide its formation. If preachers do not look for God in texts, they may not find God. If they do not find God, how can they know they have found God's word? Without a focus on God one can have no grace. Without a focus on grace one can have no gospel. Without a focus on gospel one cannot live up to the commission Christ gave to preach it. If preachers do not in some way seek the gospel, it may not be discerned.

## Hermeneutical Method

The Grand Canyon in biblical preaching represents an important divide in current homiletical thought. Traditional biblical exegesis is essential; its limitations however are apparent in sermons that do not arrive at the gospel. Of course God can still use sermons on biblical history, ideas, characters, events and images yet they are likely to have only modest success in fanning the glowing embers of congregational faith if that is all they focus upon.

A basic requirement for a hermeneutical method is that it account for how the word of God in a previous age is the word of God today. Historical criticism can be argued never to have met this requirement. It tempts preachers to preach the text as history, without the gospel, yet in doing so preachers ironically ignore a historical truth: scripture is composed of texts that are not only of history but also of faith. In the 1950s at Union Seminary, Paul Scherer stated the matter in brilliant simplicity:

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[2] James S. Stewart, *Heralds of God* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), 31.
[3] Edward Farley, "Preaching the Bible and Gospel," *Theology Today*, 51:1 (April 1994): 90-104; and "Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching" in Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, eds., *Preaching as a Theological Task*, 165-175,
[4] *See* James F. Kay, "The Word of the Cross at the Turn of the Ages," *Interpretation*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 1999), 44-56; and David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), esp. his first two chapters, Preaching and Bible, and Preaching and Church.

> Do you realize that the Bible does not primarily invite us to any knowledge about God?..We are invited to meet God. That's what the Gospel is about. Nothing else…. If you want to try an experiment, take any page and strip it of God, as we strip our lives, down to the bone, with that infinite mind away somewhere, and that eternal heart just a grand perhaps. And all of a sudden you'll be right back in the world that you know all too well, where a sower sowing his seed is just a sower sowing his seed, nothing more than that, where laborers stand idle in the market place, and where nothing is a parable because God hasn't anything to do with any of it, and the whole place is stale, flat and unprofitable, and makes you sick.
>
> The difference between us and these more stalwart souls of the Bible was simply this: that when they looked at the world they saw Him, when they listened to the Babel of the world's voices they heard His voice. Everywhere in their days there was something God wanted them to do….[5]

In other words, until preachers read their texts theologically, looking for God, viewing individuals in the Bible as people of faith and doubt for whom salvation is a possibility, the texts are not being read as they were historically intended to be read, which is the goal of historical critical readings.

Still, awareness of this great divide in homiletics is not great, if one is to judge from the academic literature. There may be good reasons for this seeming silence. First, awareness of the problem is relatively recent; homiletics has been shifting from propositional preaching to the New Homiletic and attention has been focused on all of the implications of this. The focus has been on how communication is made, however, not on the theological nature of the message. Second, historical critical method is still the best means of getting deep into a biblical text in its historical setting to discover what it says, even if something more is often needed by way of getting to what also matters, namely theological criticism. Third, some students might erroneously take any criticism of exegetical method by their teachers as justification not to practice it.

Finally, teachers of historical criticism seem not to comment on its weaknesses as a hermeneutical approach. Perhaps they are not aware of it or matters of the Word of God are beyond the boundaries of their discipline. They may have a different understanding of gospel than the one understood here. Or they may equate God's word from a text with the gospel, perhaps because many texts have an obvious gospel component. With those other biblical texts that may be in the majority, either preachers may have learned at some intuitive or other unstated level to compensate, or they have come to accept the status quo as normal, thus they may see no need to correct the basic approach. Truth be told, no homiletical method is failsafe, and something important can be learned from most approaches.

Both preach-the-text and preach-the-gospel are presented here because in fact, one needs to preach the text to preach the gospel. Students will be better preachers for knowing the strong arguments on both sides. Here we make the case for preaching the gospel as the much-needed

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[5] Paul E. Scherer, "The Perils of the Christian Life," in *Great Preaching Today: a Collection of 25 Sermons Delivered at the Chicago Sunday Evening Club,* Alton M. Motter, ed. (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1955), 190-92.

next stage of homiletical development beyond the New Homiletic. It involves one's entire approach to preaching.

The Theme Sentence

The difference between the two biblical stances can be quickly demonstrated in relation to a theme sentence for the sermon. Most writers today think of the theme sentence in double-barreled ways,[6] in other words, two related statements take the place of the former notion of a theme sentence. Tom Long and Fred Craddock are in the preach-the-text school and advocate that sermon direction comes from the preacher answering two questions, What is the text saying? and, What is the text doing? As Craddock says,

> This question [i.e. What is the text doing?] is not only identifying the nature and function of the text but is also providing an early guideline for the sermon to come. After all, the preacher will want to be clear not only about what is being said in the sermon but also about what is being done in the sermon. And just as one's message is informed by what the text is saying, the sermon's function is informed by what the text is doing. If, for example, one were to state as *what the text is saying*, 'Every Christian is a charismatic,' and as *what the text is doing*, 'Encouraging those believers who felt second-class,' then content and tone and purpose of the sermon have come into focus."[7]

Long argues that this double variation of the traditional theme sentence makes the sermon eventful and avoids the propositional dominance of an idea-centered approach. Texts not only have a message, they have a rhetorical intention; they make a claim and seek an effect.[8] This is in line with the New Homiletic shift in preaching emphasis from what the sermon says to what it does. A bridge connects the historical text and the sermon, and the preacher is to carry over from the text what it says and does.[9]

The strength of this approach is obvious. The event captured in this approach is the event of the text, "the eventfulness of the text is expressed in the claim of the text, which then guides

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[6] *See* Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), esp. 15. Haddon Robinson uses, What am I talking about ? and What am I saying about it? These are perhaps the closest today to the traditional propositional theme sentence approach. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd edition (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001 [1980]), 41; *see* 33-50.

[7] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 123. My italics.

[8] See for instance, Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, 2nd edition (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 106-116, esp. 107.

[9] Michael J. Quicke is critical of the bridge as an overall image or model of the sermon (a 180 degree model) because it misleads preachers "into thinking that *they* bear all the responsibility to connect the two poles." He wants a bigger, Trinitarian picture. Michael J. Quicke, *360 Degree Preaching; Hearing, Speaking and Living the Word* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; & Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoser Publishing, 2003), 48. Nancy Lamers Gross is also critical of the bridge metaphor, for a different reason, it implies a rigid progression from the text to the sermons when the pattern is more like swinging back and forth. See her, *If You Cannot Preach Like Paul…* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 74-76, 83, 114-115. Charles L. Campbell may well be arguing against the notion of bridges when he calls for the meaning of texts to be found within the logic and language of the texts themselves, never straying too far from the world of the text. His important argument centers on Jesus Christ. *Charles L. Campbell: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1997).

the eventfulness of the sermon."[10] "[S]omething happens between text and people; a claim is made, a voice is heard, a textual will is exerted, and the sermon will be a bearing witness to this event."[11] This approach gives to the text rhetorical freedom to determine the direction of the sermon.

By comparison, those who stress 'preach the gospel' treat the sermon first and foremost as God's event, not the text's. This approach also uses a double-barreled adaptation of a theme sentence. It asks, What is God doing in or behind the text? (i.e., in the larger story if God is not directly mentioned) and, What is God doing today? The answer to the first is designated the major concern of the text because the preacher will treat it as though it is the main route to the heart of the text's original meaning (in fact there are other possibilities). The answer to the second is designated as the major concern of the sermon because the preacher uses that as the main bridge across which to transport the significance of the text today.

This approach ensures that the sermon will deal with the text in responsible ways and will also teach about God and God's relationship to humanity and creation. God will be the center. Jana Childers says that some years ago she freed herself of the enormous burden to come up with something original in every sermon. She discovered, "it is more important to say something timely than something original….God was not expecting a fresh new insight every time I preached…. [The congregation] didn't need me to invent new spiritual gadgets for them; they needed to hear the connection made between their worlds and God's…. The purpose of a theme sentence is to help you keep your focus, not advertise the erudition of your sermon."[12]

Focusing on God ensures that the sermon can foster a relationship with the triune God. It ensures the eventfulness of the sermon by focusing on an action of God. Without this it is easy to imply that God is remote and abstract, indifferent, impersonal, passive or apparently irrelevant; propositions can become dominant. In cases in which God does not seem to be the subject of the text, this approach helps the preacher still to find God. The text remains one's primary authority for preaching yet Christ's mandate to preach the gospel determines the sermon direction. In short, this approach understands the gospel to be the rhetorical purpose of the text.

What is God doing in or behind the text? Texts have many meanings or senses and each lens that a preacher uses yields other meanings; this one we may call the God sense of the text. Preachers face a problem however: a God focus is ensured but does this in itself ensure that the gospel will be proclaimed? No, it does not. One can say many things about God without ever getting to the gospel. Indeed one can teach many things about even the gospel and still stop short of performing the gospel, allowing it to be transformative in the lives of listeners. However, an essential place to start is in ensuring that the theme sentence will have a gospel focus by focusing on God's grace.

[10] Long, 108.
[11] Long, 97.
[12] Jana Childers, "A Shameless Path," in Jana Childers, ed., *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 42-43.

PREACHING AS THE GOSPEL

In order for preaching to establish a relationship with the triune God and for it to be an event of God's encounter it needs to proclaim the gospel. Christ commissioned the church to preach the gospel, and God's promise to meet us in the sermon can be said to be dependent upon that. The Word of God needs to be preached, not some other word. What is the gospel? This seemingly obvious question now needs deliberate focus because we live in a postmodern era and all assumptions are challenged. Such questioning provides a fresh opportunity for preachers to reexamine what they do.

The gospel is literally good news. It centers on God in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, an announcement or proclaiming of the saving acts that God has done, is doing and will do. The gospel is contained in the Bible and the ancient creeds of the church are an attempt to state it, as are many prayers, hymns and songs. The gospel can be summarized, but one needs the entire Bible to communicate it adequately. It is not narrowly confined to the New Testament, the good news is found wherever God acts with saving power, there is one God in both Testaments, yet the character of that saving power is fully disclosed in Christ. The gospel is not identical to the Bible; God's Word needs to be sought in Scripture (some readings are not the church's). As Luther said, the Bible is the manger in which Christ is laid; if one seeks the gospel in Scripture one avoids making an idol of the Bible.

The gospel is centered in Jesus Christ, yet not narrowly so to the exclusion of the other persons of the Trinity, as can seem to be the case in some worship settings where Jesus alone is mentioned, where prayers are addressed to Jesus rather than to God in the name of Christ and through the Holy Spirit. Where Christomonism reigns, Jesus may become a kind of idol.

The gospel is a scandal. It is perhaps natural to avoid the scandal or stumbling block of the resurrection. Paul identifies the problem when he says, "but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block [*skandalon*] to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (1 Corinthians 1:23). It is an embarassment to the postmodern mind that we need a Savior, that this Savior happened to come as a male, that he ate with sinners, that he refused to defend himself, that he died the death of a common criminal, that he died for us, that he rose from the dead, that he sits at the right hand of God, and that he will come again at the end of time, that we drink his blood and eat his body to our salvation. In a casual conversation recently about the future of the church, someone suggested that it needs to put less emphasis on Jesus and more on other things, like the *Bahavaghita*, in order to attract youth. The church could try any number of innovative practices, yet Paul said, "We have nothing but Christ to preach and if Christ did not rise from the dead then we are fools indeed.

The gospel is an announcement of a new age. Something happened on the cross. The world is different. What died with Jesus on the cross was the power of the old ways of violence and degradation, abuse and humiliation, injustice and greed. They rule no more. While we are yet at what James F. Kay calls the "turn of the age", [13] and while even our preaching still has one foot in that old age, the other foot is firmly planted in the new creation. Proclamation of the

[13] James F. Kay, "The Word of the Cross at the Turn of the Ages," *Interpretation*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 1999), 44-56.

gospel is like midnight on New Year's Eve at Times Square every Sunday. Preaching not only heralds the death of the old age, in preaching the cross it ushers in the new. That make the power of the cross not just a past event but a now event in preaching.

Kay, drawing on Paul, puts the matter well: "If the turn of the ages has taken place in the cross and continues to take place in the work of the cross, then what is required of preachers are not simply illustrations from history and nature, but illustrations that place history and nature, indeed all of life, into the crisis of the cross." By crisis of the cross he means see things new: "What assumptions of the old world are called into question by the new?"[14] Thus every image, story, and experience in the sermon needs to be viewed from this two-world perspective.

Preaching the gospel means to preach God's future, to picture in sermons the new age with vivid images of a world reconciled in God's love. David Buttrick argues that eschatology ought not just inform preaching, but assist preachers in preaching boldly about social injustice in the present. As he says, "Let us paint images of the new creation on an age that seems tumbling down. Although the age may well tumble, our images are painted on the eternal mystery of God and, therefore, sure."[15]

Finally, one may think of the gospel as the doorway to faith. There may be no better place for people to stand or stumble in their faith journeys than at the empty tomb asking, Is the One put to death on a cross as testified in Scripture the same One whom I have met today? Is Jesus of Nazareth dead or alive? If he is dead he remains the Jesus of history, but if he is alive he is acknowledged as the Christ of faith. If the answer is yes, a God who works other seemingly lesser miracles need be no real stumbling block. If the answer seems no, the matter rests between the individual and God and love remains.

The Gospel Has Form

Because of the centrality of the resurrection for the good news, does this mean that every sermon will bring the same news, like endless deliveries of yesterday's newspaper? Yes and no: yes in that Christian preaching is Christ-centered and the cross has saving power. No in that preaching texts vary and how the gospel is proclaimed in relationship to specific occasions will vary widely from week to week. Listeners also vary in their needs and this too adds variety; Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., and Ronald J. Allen, speak of "one gospel, many ears".[16]

Homileticians made a key discovery in recent decades: the gospel is not just content, it has a form and effect. It is the story of what happened at the turn of time in the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. The good news continues to happen whenever we preach these events. Stories have structure and can be told in various ways but the key elements remain the same. Psalms, hymns, parables, letters—they all have basic structural and stylistic features that mark them as separate genres. The same is true of gospel, it is a genre. It may be told and retold in many different ways, from the perspective offered by individual biblical texts,

[14] Ibid., 50
[15] David Buttrick, *Preaching the New and the Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 141.
[16] Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., and Ronald J. Allen, *One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Different Listeners in the Congregation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002).

but the basic story, the underlying movement, the final outcome remains the same. A new age has dawned that exists alongside the remnants of the old, yet the end is already in sight.

The scholarly battle has already been won that determined the meaning of a text is affected by its form: form, content and rhetorical effect are intimately related. Another issue remains. Homileticians have now claimed that the same arguments that were applied to literary genres of the Bible apply to the gospel genre at the heart of the faith. The gospel has a form, its movement from crucifixion to resurrection is related to its content, and these contribute toward its rhetorical and spiritual effect. To deny that the gospel has a form can only be at the expense of communicating the gospel effectively. Gerhard O. Forde was getting at the form of the gospel when he said the preacher's words "have the form of the cross, presuppose it, drive inexorably to it, and flow from it…cut[ting] in upon our lives to end the old and begin the new."[17] Because the gospel has content, form and effect, the implications for the sermon are large.

It became clear that to preach the gospel is not just a matter of adding some gospel words to a sermon, the way people add pepper to soup to enhance flavor. Gospel is not just a surface matter of sprinkling a few references to Christ here and there. The sermon needs something of the bold plot, movement, and shape of the gospel, not to mention language, imagery and emotion of the cross and empty tomb. It needs some of the cross's way of putting the old norms to death as well as some of the resurrection's way of inaugurating a new era.

Sermons have many varieties of exterior form. Most of them function well as potential vehicles for the gospel and most of them can be employed to display a movement from trouble to grace, because most of them are concerned with exterior form. The argument made here is that content form and effect of the gospel provide the sermon with deep structure, a grammar and movement. In other words, to preach the gospel does not reduce the number of sermon forms available, it enhances what each is able to express. This is said with one exception—the single exposition/application format tends to predispose the sermon to either trouble or grace, not both, thus at least in its overall structure it seems to have least gospel potential.

Some preachers may resist the idea that the gospel is polar, that it is cruciform and that something of this form needs to be present in its communication. Since biblical form is a necessary part of a text's meaning, it follows that the form of the gospel is important for it as well. Scholars can be committed both to preach the gospel and to respect the integration of form, content and rhetorical effect of biblical texts, yet still deny that the gospel has a form. However, one cannot safely presume that the gospel is present when one preaches a text. When we make this assumption we need to discuss gospel in a significant manner, explain what we mean by it, show in what ways it operates in our homiletic, indicate how it is present in any of the forms we use or recommend, and give guidance to help students get to the gospel in their preaching. Instead nearly all of us teaching homiletics have been silent on these matters: we have been schooled in preach-the-text and are more complacent than we should be in matters of preach-the-gospel.

[17] Gerhard O. Forde, *Theology is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 15.

Beyond Preach-The-Text

The problem of preaching the gospel also arises with the contemporary understanding of preach-the-text that treats texts as though they are isolated units or pericopes cut off from the larger story.[18] Other ages had different understandings of text and they had their own flaws. However the problem is larger even than this and it has to do with the offense of the cross at the center of the faith. Mary Donovan Turner speaks for some seminaries when she laments, "Who among our community talks openly about the resurrection?" It seems to be connected with "evangelistic zeal and fervor".[19] James F. Kay wonders if "without a saving cross, would the Christian message still be Christian?"[20]

Arguably only in the last century or so has preaching the gospel been diminished as an objective of critical scholarly endeavor in biblical departments. Preach-the-text became the dominant twentieth-century emphasis and the New Homiletic christened it if only by uncritical assumptions concerning it. While its ongoing strengths are plainly evident in rendering a trustworthy text understood against the backdrop of its own times, its theological limitations only gradually became clear: the gospel was often missed. Or rather the gospel was hit and miss: sermons in the New Homiletic might proclaim the gospel, but this as a practice was rarely discussed; it was not named as the preaching goal, and methodology was not developed for obtaining it.

Using the gospel as a lens to read texts is one of the least discussed practices in contemporary homiletics yet it is one of the most important and vital steps for preachers to learn. There is not space in this paper to explore it but a full gospel hermeneutic is needed that has three critical dimensions: a) seek the gospel in the text itself; b) bring the text to the cross and resurrection to see how the meaning of the text is altered in light of Easter; and c) bring the larger gospel story to the text to discover echoes[21] of it there.

For all of the continuing centrality of historical criticism for the pulpit, and for all of the ongoing need for preachers to do careful exegesis for the pulpit, preaching has perhaps been too closely wedded to biblical studies to depart from it significantly. In any case, preachers need to learn from the New Homiletic and move ahead. One important step is to reclaim in a contemporary way some of the theological ground of past preachers, without making their mistakes. If preaching is to be for renewal, liberation and transformation what may be needed is a new ability to proclaim the gospel.

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[18] *See* Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory*, 53-54.
[19] Mary Donovan Turner, "Not Silent," in Jana Childers, ed., *Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process* (St. Louis, Chalice, 2001), 173.
[20] James F. Kay, "The Word of the Cross at the Turn of the Ages," *Interpretation*, Vol. 53, No. 1 (January 1999), 45.
[21] *See* David Bartlett *Between the Bible and the Church: New Methods for Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 17-24, 64-72. For the most thorough recent treatment of typology *see* Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ From the Old Testament: a Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmanns, 1999), esp., 90-97; 249-61.