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Contents

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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is the publication of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Organized in 1997, the Evangelical Homiletics Society is an academic society established for the exchange of ideas related to the instruction of biblical preaching. The purpose of the Society is to advance the cause of biblical preaching through the promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching; to increase competence for teachers of preaching; to integrate the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology; to make scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics.

Statement of Faith: The Evangelical Homiletics Society affirms the Statement of Faith affirmed by the National Association of Evangelicals. It reads as follows:

1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.

2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

3. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.

4. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.

5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.

6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.

7. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Communicating Christ

by Scott M. Gibson

Welcome to the second issue of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. In this edition readers will be stimulated in their thinking about communicating Christ in the new millennium.

At the fall 2001 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting in New Orleans, Louisiana, Dr. Quentin J. Schultze of Calvin College, spoke to attendees about the challenge of living in the Information Age. His informative presentations are now printed in this issue of the Journal. We are all benefited by Schultze's insights into communication. His extended essay will refresh the mind and memory of readers who attended the conference, and will inform those who were not able to attend.

The second essay is by Wayne E. Shaw. I requested this commentary from Dr. Shaw. He has been involved in various contexts regarding preaching for many years. His personal history is one from which we can all benefit. Dr. Shaw reflects on the importance of theological balance and boundaries. In light of his distinguished career as a teacher of preaching, Shaw provides thoughtful summaries as he considers what it means to maintain balance and boundaries.

This time around we have a sermon by Dr. Calvin Miller. Calvin Miller is Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. Miller delivered this sermon at the second annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society in Dallas, Texas, in 1998. The sermon, "Looking for the Holy Spirit in the Postmodern Sermon," is a refreshing approach to preaching Acts 19:1-7.

The book reviews follow the sermon. Readers will note various books on preaching and other related areas. We have a fine group of reviewers who have honestly and cogently examined the book to which they were assigned. Our intention is to provide readers with thorough and thoughtful book reviews. I suspect readers will gain insight from the reviews published in this edition.

Please send me your letters and article submissions. I appreciate your

constructive comments and encouragement.

Thanks again to the members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, to our subscribers, and to our patrons. We are grateful for your support and prayers and trust that this journal will encourage preachers to communicate Christ, our sovereign Lord and Savior.

(editor's note: Scott M. Gibson is Director of the Center for Preaching and Associate Professor of Preaching and Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.)

Technique Over Virtue: The New Context For Communication In The Information Age

by Quentin J. Schultze

Introduction

The philosopher Heraclitus said that history is like a river flowing through time. We cannot step twice into the same river. [1] Similarly, human communication is always changing because its context is fluid from generation to generation. Of course analogous contexts may recur from time to time, but every cohort must attend to distinctive communication challenges. As innovative media technologies alter the fabric of culture and society, we face new novel challenges communicating well in pulpit and classroom. Frequently we are not even cognizant of the scope and nature of such difficulties.

Developments in communication technology are among the most important reasons for significant contextual changes. New messaging technologies such as the Internet are not culturally or epistemologically neutral; they alter how we commune with each other and how we know things.[2] The context for preaching in the television age, for instance, is not the same as the context that ministers faced during earlier eras. Barry Levinson's wonderful film *Avalon* portrays three generations of Jewish-American immigrants whose undisciplined television viewing subverts holiday celebrations and everyday family discourse; consuming television programming replaces cross-generational communication and contributes to their loss of Jewish identity. Neil Postman argues that television is overwhelmingly predisposed toward amusement.[3] Although he probably overstates his case, Postman rightly argues that the medium does not normally engender dialogue or thoughtful reflection. Television's commercial social institutions aim primarily to maximize audience size for the sake of advertisers. Media shape both our relationships and our knowing.

I believe that the spread of so-called "information technologies," especially the Internet, is now altering the context for communication in the developed world.[4] We live increasingly in a networked, information-saturated society that is recontextualizing our *culture*, our "entire

way of life." [5] The resulting culture includes the emerging ways that people think and feel, how they act (or fail to act), and their everyday customs and sentiments. Communication technologies probably are the most potent agents of cultural change because they directly influence the symbolic environment that we inhabit. In fact, they now are the primary means that some people use to try to alter others' ways of life. The information age is also the era of nearly omnipresent propaganda, from billboards to video movie previews, and from televisions in airport waiting areas to Muzak in stores. Even modern wars are fought with the techniques of propaganda as well with military might.

Today we assume that the media and all other forms of communication are meant to be agents of change. This is why advertising is probably the most characteristic form of communication in consumer societies. We even think of communication itself as a "technique" for influencing others. Such an instrumental understanding of human communication is so pervasive that pastors and teachers adhere to it just as fervently as do advertising copywriters and publicists. The belief in information technologies as instruments for change is *the* context for how we now tend to imagine communication. Communication scholar James W. Carey argues that this kind of "transmission view" *of* communication becomes our model *for* communication. He suggests that we imagine communication as the transmission of messages for the purpose of cultural change rather than as a ritual for sharing and maintaining good ways of life.[6]

In this essay I will first address the moral impoverishment of our technique-oriented understanding of communication in the information age, especially its lack of virtue. Next I will consider three dominant characteristics of the resulting culture of *informationism*: 1) an emphasis on the *is* over the *ought*, 2) a concern with *observation* rather than *intimacy*, and 3) a penchant for *measurement* over *meaning*. Third, I will examine the remarkable power of mediated versions of reality in this informational culture, particularly the growing influence of *symbol brokers* and *high-tech personality cults*. Finally, I will suggest two ways that we can challenge the instrumentalism of informational culture and begin to reclaim a Christian view of communication as "communion." One of our tasks as Christian communicators is to recontextualize human communication as *virtuous being* rather than accepting the modern bias of communication as mere *technical skill.*

Evaporating Virtue

Alexis de Tocqueville's masterful *Democracy in America* is probably the best book ever written about democracy as well as about the United States.[7] The Frenchman conducted research for the two-volume tome in the 1830s as he traveled around early America. He wondered why there was such moral cohesion in a democratic country that promoted individualism. What limited peoples' self-interest, if not a state church and centralized government?

Tocqueville concluded that morality in America flowed from the religiosity of its citizens. He found that women, in particular, were deeply involved in voluntary religious associations, such as churches. Women were thereby the primary carriers of what he called "habits of the heart"—the good social mores that leaven radical individualism and selfishness.[8] Domestically transmitted habits of the heart, he believed, also tamed men's selfishness so that American males would enter civic life on the basis of "self-interest well-understood" — a self-interest softened by empathy for others and by a desire for the common good..[9] Tocqueville concluded that democratic America did not need a state church or any other national moral authority because virtue flowed from the church to the domicile, and then outward to public life.

Tocqueville's argument came from his observations about a society that was considerably different from the one we have inherited. Life is no longer so locally organized and community dependent. For one thing, we have many more bureaucracies in both government and industry. Moreover, developments in transportation and communication have linked us to national and international identities, multiplied our entrée to different cultures and people, and fostered the growth of special-interest groups that often pay little obeisance to the common good.[10] To borrow language from sociologist Kenneth J. Gergen, we are now "saturated" with all kinds of messages from near and far, from both friends and unknown advertisers and filmmakers, spam messengers and informational databases. Communication technologies, he says, "expose us to an enormous range of persons, new forms of relationship, unique circumstances and opportunities, and special intensities of feeling."[11] In short, our self-identities are fragmented and dynamic, while our social relationships are increasingly frequently superficial. Greater messaging power has not rendered our lives any

more coherent; to the contrary, information technologies have fostered greater cultural instability and personal anxiety.

This new society of multiple self-identities and distant associations is a far cry from the United States of Tocqueville's day. We could assess the new context for communication from many angles, but I think *technology* and *morality* are crucial. Americans are so enamored with technology — with the everyday joys and wonders of electronic and digital technologies — that we increasingly separate our moral-religious habits of the heart from our communication practices. Many Americans are still active in voluntary religious associations, but these associations are less and less able to shape their view of communication and their concrete practices of community. The media are subsuming the role of nurturing morality that was once held primarily by local social institutions, from the family to the church and school. The Internet, in particular, is a technological frontier where habits of the heart are hardening, resulting in much incivility and immorality.

The emerging context for communication is what I call *informationism*. This amoral context, represented most clearly by cyberspace, is the new arena where we are replacing the habits of our hearts with instrumental skills, technological capacities and transmission-oriented models of communication. Because of the biases of information technologies, we gain access to information while losing some of our capacity to be a "neighbor" in the fullest, biblical sense of the word. In short, we all are becoming technicians who process messages rather than humans who commune virtuously. We are remaking our communication in the image of information-processing machines. As a result, we are increasingly alienated from the God-designed habits of the heart that should frame our communication.

Christians have long addressed the habits of the heart in terms of *virtues*, or qualities of good character. The four ancient (or *cardinal*) virtues were justice, wisdom, courage and moderation. The three additional theological virtues honored by Christians were faith, hope and love.[12] These seven virtues should comprise the qualities of character evident in our communication with each other. The more that we depend on information technologies to relate to each other, however, the more difficult for us to cultivate virtue. An e-card is not as personal and compassionate as a hug. Instant messaging is not as rich

as conversation. Distance education cannot nurture moral understanding the way mentoring or residential instruction can. If we seek to maintain virtue as a vital part of faithful communication, we have to consider the biases of technologies that might enhance or thwart our efforts.

In the information age, we cultivate communication according to what Jacques Ellul calls *la technique*, the values of efficiency and control.[13] We aim to be efficient and effective handlers of messages—to do as much *messaging* (rapid-fire sending and receiving of discreet messages) as possible within the time available for work and recreation. The problem, of course, is that neither efficient nor potent communication is necessarily good. Often the most virtue-rich communication—that which presumably most pleases God—is instead patient, empathetic and careful (full of care). Such virtuous communication is also on occasion necessarily amateurish and sloppy, as in conversations about complex, confusing or particularly heart-felt topics. Moreover, the virtuous communicator is likely to be more contemplative than assertive or intrusive. Listening is almost inherently virtuous, whereas speaking is much more apt to get us into moral trouble. The rule in one monastery was that people should speak only if they could improve upon the silence — not a bad way to think about virtue over technique in human communication.[14]

Today, however, we reject an intrinsically virtuous view of communication in favor of an instrumental one. We are less interested in nurturing good communication than in practicing powerful communication. The virtuous communicator asks: Will the words that come from my mouth be good enough to please God and serve my neighbor? The modern communicator asks instead an instrumental question: Will my messages create the kind of change I desire? The first is essentially moral, whereas the latter is intrinsically technical. Information technologies are particularly attractive to us because they seem to offer the most messaging power. They appeal to our desire for greater control while weakening our attention to virtuous character.

Communicative control over others is not itself a virtue. When we use the *impact* of our messages on others as a criterion for evaluating the *quality* of our communication, we become propagandists. This kind of instrumentalist paradigm has no place for moral wisdom, only for influ-

ence. Of course seeking to be influential is not inherently wrong, as the great rhetor St. Augustine argues in *On Christian Doctrine*.[15] But neither is influence an adequate moral context for Christian communication. From a Christian perspective, we should not hold up technique as our standard. Yet this is precisely what is happening in the information age. Our communication in the classroom and pulpit alike is being transformed into in the image of society's cyber-systems of efficiency and control.

I call this unvirtuous over-reliance on technique *informationism*. As I will suggest, informationism is *the* principal context for contemporary communication. Today it serves as a quasi-religion, calling us all to embrace uncritically a belief in the value of information itself and to maintain a steady faith in the messaging systems that allow us to send and receive information with greater efficiency and control. We are all invited to believe that faster access to more information will usher in progress and improve the human condition. Indeed, the advertisements for high-tech products and services promise us that by getting wired to information systems we will be able to participate more fully in the progress of the new millennium. This faith in the power of information technology to improve the world leads us to push virtue out of the public sphere and perhaps out of our personal lives as well. In its stead we adopt informationism, which hardens the habits of our hearts.

Three Characteristics of Informationism

One aspect of our growing informationism is the way we tend to value the *is* over the *ought* in communication. An informationist is preoccupied with reports about the here and now, the contemporary and immediate. We see this in the way that people get hooked on listening to the latest news reports on all-news radio, watching 24-hour cable news channels, and accessing the World Wide Web. We think that we are becoming wiser because we can download up-to-the-minute information on a given topic. This emphasis on the is is even redefining spirituality (how *my* spirit feels *now*) and Christian "success" (knowing the *latest* techniques for prayer, church growth, worship, etc.). Top-selling Christian books often tout the newest and supposedly best self-help mechanisms.[16] We want the latest systems for success more than we desire to be persons of virtuous character.

As we embrace the is, we grow disinterested in seeing life in terms of how it *ought* to be lived. We have difficulty seeing that God built into the Creation a moral order that should frame how we live. High-tech society removes from our consciousness the need to seek God's eternal oughts. We are left with oughts that are simply the desires of our hearts at a given time. The result is an information-rich society that lacks moral fabric. Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn said in his Harvard University address, "All of the celebrated technological achievements of progress do not redeem the twentieth century's moral poverty."[17] We witness today moralistic campaigns on particular issues such as abortion, but as a people we are not particularly interested in fostering deeply virtuous ways of life by conforming ourselves to the moral nature of God's will. Instead we are busily adopting and using the latest messaging technologies, as if news reports, public opinion polls or research findings will give our lives adequate moral coherence.

A second characteristic of this unvirtuous informationism is an emphasis on *observation* over *intimacy*. As our messaging escalates, we participate less directly in the world around us. We experience much of life through mediating devices such as the Internet. We become voyeurs of life, promiscuously dipping into one database after another. We might consume a lot of media products, but we are less likely to be involved in deep, meaningful relationships. We grow intimate with technique rather than with persons, including the body of Christ. Perhaps this voyeuristic approach to life especially characterizes young adults in our age. In any case, the lack of intimate relationships is one of the marks of the information age. We tend to seek "knowledge about" rather than "acquaintance with," to paraphrase Robert E. Park and William James.[18]

The Web site SelectSmart.com is a telling example of our lack of intimacy. It promotes "selector centers" where Web users supposedly can determine what they believe about a topic and then select a corresponding way of life. It even allows a Web surfer to choose a belief system. By answering twenty multiple-choice questions about religion, the user supposedly can discover which of various world faiths most closely match his or her implicit beliefs. The user gets to select a religious identity, presumably so that she or he can then go out into the world and be a more self-aware believer. One can imagine the instant results: *Hey, I'm a Buddhist — cool!*

This instant adoption of a religion is ridiculous, of course, but it nevertheless reveals a major aspect of human fallenness in the information age. In the Hebrew and Christian traditions, the idea of "knowing" means being intimate.[19] God made us as His image-bearers so that we could get to know God, other people, the Creation and even ourselves. In our high-tech society, however, people opt out of developing this capacity for intimacy. We desire sexual fulfillment rather than long-term intimacy. After all, people grow bored with the newest "toy," even with lovers. Generally speaking, people do not desire to get to know anyone, including God, particularly well. James M. Houston writes, "We live on the surface of 'things' where our lives are easily described but rarely understood, too busy going nowhere in particular. We live at the edges of other people's lives, too busy to listen…. We are like astronauts, each in our own spacesuit, orbiting the earth." Our comprehension of reality, he says, is "descriptive and speculative, and no longer participatory knowledge in which the observer is personally involved."[20] In other words, we live in technological distance from other persons and from God. We would rather observe life comfortably from the safety of our messaging systems rather than be fully engaged in life's intimacies.

Moreover, as the pool of available information grows and as the extent of our messaging increases, we discover that we have greater difficulty getting to know *anything* or *anyone* well. This is one of the great ironies of our age. Faster access to more people and messages can actually diminish our capacity for intimacy and, therefore, for significant communication. Canadian scholar Harold Adams Innis discovered this phenomenon in his studies of the history of media. He recognized already in 1951, "Enormous improvements in communication have made understanding more difficult." Our "mechanized vernacular," he argued, creates a monopoly of technical ways of knowing that eclipses other ways of knowing, including the moral and religious.[21] Today someone might spend hours daily online or in front a 300-channel satellite TV system, but lack any close friends, languish in a superficial marriage and never hear the intimate call of a personal God.

Mere messaging is not adequate for intimacy — whether intimate knowledge of persons or subjects. Email systems and extensive surfing of the Web, for instance, are not as well-suited as conversation for developing first-hand experience and robust relationships.[22] In fact,

such digital messaging can burn up a lot of the time that we could otherwise dedicate to getting to know the Creation well. As novelist Jerzy Kosinski argued, we are becoming a nation of *videots* — mere observers of rather than participants in life.[23] Jesus shows us instead, writes Eugene H. Peterson, "that creation is something to be lived, not looked at." [24]

A third characteristic of informationism is *measuring* without *meaning*. We love to measure everything. We are enchanted by statistics, from sports data to stock market reports. We love to measure technological progress, such as the greater storage capacity on computer hard drives, faster modem speeds and the number of pages on the Web. One information service, Lexis Nexis, boasts more than 13,050 different databases of over 3.2 billion documents, and adds another 900,000 news stories daily and 6.6 million documents weekly.[25] Such remarkable depositories of information symbolize progress, but they cannot cultivate more virtuous character.

Modern information technologies make it easier for us to find and retrieve information, but if we spend too much time using them, we also will discover that we will lose our grasp of the meaning and purpose of life. Interacting with machines — such as searching databases and surfing the Web — requires very different skills than learning discernment and becoming wise. We can easily gather information, but not age-old wisdom. In order to "get wisdom" we have to seek intimacy with God, God's word and the community of believers.

Whenever we read about numerical progress we ought to ask ourselves two questions: 1) What do the numbers mean? and 2) Who says so? In other words, we have to consider what the information actually means, not just what it symbolizes. Again, this is remarkably ironic. At the same time that we seem to be able to measure just about *everything*, we find little or no lasting meaning in *anything*. Techno-gurus like futurist George Gilder boast about various quantitative "laws" of progress supposedly intrinsic to the "digital revolution." *Moore's Law*, for instance, postulates that computer power doubles every eighteen months, presumably enabling us to collect, distribute and analyze more information in less time.[26] But what is necessarily virtuous about greater processing power? What is the vision of the good life that we will all supposedly be living when we invent at 2 gigahertz microprocessors? Will the increased digital potency improve our relation-

ships with God and neighbor? Will we be wiser, more loving and more moderate? To borrow some of Bruce Springsteen's lyrics, we might find ourselves with more than "57 channels and [still] 'nothing on." [27]

As we become expert measurers, we begin treating the subjects of our communication as abstract, independent and self-sufficient "things." To use the wonderfully suggestive language of Martin Buber, we imagine another person as an "It" rather than a "Thou." [28] We see this danger when managers notify employees via email that they are fired. We also see it at companies that replace all telephone attendants with voice-messaging systems. Online marketers say they are "personalizing" their content when they are actually relying on abstract and impersonal forms of machine-marketing.

Our growing over-reliance on measurement has hindered both the study and practice of communication. In particular, it has led to a *systemic view* of communication that abstractly posits senders, receivers, messages and other "factors" in a closed system. Everything within the closed system is presumably calculable and subject to human control. Our communication practices supposedly resemble what occurs in a test tube when a chemist calculates the process of chemical change. We rationalize away the great joy and mystery of human communication to the point of instrumental absurdity, such as dreary textbooks that shrink human communion to sender-message-receiver diagrams. We squeeze the art and the spirit out of our communication, all the while convincing ourselves that we are becoming better communicators. Finally we put our own quest for power ahead of God's desire that we give up our pretence of control so that the Holy Spirit may dwell more fully within us. [29]

If we posit instead that human communication is vibrant and living — that it is not as *systematic* as much as *organic* — our communication models and practices will look very different. For one thing, we can then acknowledge that God exists not as a detached creator of the "system," but even more mysteriously as a participant in our relationships. Moreover, we can then begin to fathom that as God's image-bearers we are mysteriously more than the sum of our measurable messages. If we include God "in" our model of communication — which is to say that the Holy Spirit is alive and well — we cannot as human beings explain away or completely control our communication. We cannot measure God as a "variable," since it is absurd to conceive

mechanistically of the work of the Holy Spirit as something that humans can manipulate.

From a Christian perspective, human communication is dramatically dynamic, not fully measurable or controllable.[30] We know in our hearts that this is the case, but in the midst of our informationism we fail to contemplate it. We sometimes are reminded of the openness of our communication when we teach or preach. We wonder why an ill-prepared presentation struck a cord with others and precipitated a genuinely good discussion. Where did the grace come from? Other times we are extremely well prepared but, like a boomerang, the message comes back to haunt us. We say that we were "misinterpreted" or "misunderstood" — or that others simply did not "comprehend" us. In any case, we feel like fools. Again, what happened? [31] How could our best efforts and proven techniques be so ineffective, while some of our half-baked practices bear fruit?

Frequently we communicate well because we are virtuous persons, not because we are crafty technicians of messages. In a biblical sense, our communication is meant to foster relationship, not to cultivate abstract messaging. Jesus Christ, as the Word made flesh, did not teach ideas as much as He invited people into intimacy with God. His greatness as a communicator flowed from his intimate knowledge of both the Gospel and the people with whom He interacted. We talk today about "relational" ministry, when in fact all ministry and all good human communication is personal, heart-felt and genuinely respectful of others as God's image bearers. Good communication of this kind emerges among persons who are thankful for the sheer gift of communication and who sincerely care about others.

Ultimately the study and practice of communication is more a God-given art than a humanly devised science, and more a mystery of relationship than a calculation of effect. [32] Moreover, the most virtuous communicators usually admit that their own successes at sharing God's meaning are beyond their own understanding. Truly good communication — rather than merely effective communication — is so relational that we cannot completely analyze it, pick it apart, and measure the elements of success. It is more about meaning than abstraction, more like selfless lovemaking than anything else. Virtuous communication, then, is a matter of intimately knowing and organically sharing.

The systematic emphasis on measurement over meaning can be traced back to the birth of information theory in the 1940s, when some communication researchers looked to physics for a new, presumably more scientific notion of communication. Norbert Weiner's *The Human Use of Human Beings* is one of the earliest and most revealing expressions of informationism. He envisioned people as information processing machines, akin to electronic signaling circuits and ultimately just as regular and predictable. He wrote, "When I give an order to a machine, the situation is not essentially different from that which arises when I give an order to a person." [33] He added, "To live effectively is to live with adequate information. Thus communication and control belong to the essence of man's inner life, even as they belong to his life in society." [34] Weiner even wrote that it is "best to avoid all question-begging epithets such as 'life,' 'soul,' 'vitalism' and the like because humans resemble machines." [35] Rather than addressing the meaningful mystery of relationships, Weiner and other "information theorists" tried to conform the study of human communication to mechanical models of information processing.

We humans cannot fully measure or control meaning, especially the meaning of our existence. God expresses meaning as a light upon Creation and our souls. All meaning ultimately derives from the revealed Word of God, Jesus Christ. We discover this meaning usually as we commune with God, participate in the body of Christ and meditate on God's Word. God is the ultimate referent whose existence evaporates meaninglessness, transforming chaos into cosmos. When we create communication models and practices that deny the ultimate source of meaning itself, we transform our own communication into what Samuel Beckett in *Waiting* for *Godot* calls *quaqua*. [36] We babble meaningless drivel, loops of words and sentences that point us only to ourselves and to our own language, with no ultimate referent and no divine mystery or intimacy.

Informationism invariably leads communicators to adopt a *gospel of cybernetic control*, which erroneously holds that human beings can create meaning and control their own destinies. Broadly speaking, the Enlightenment project throughout history paved the way for informationism, one of the latest manifestations of human arrogance and pride. In the name of trying to make our communication more effective, we can easily slip into a self-delusional infatuation with the mes-

saging techniques at our disposal. Houston suggests that "faith in techne tends to atrophy the spirit of man, so that the exercise of prayer, of personal discipline and of human relationships become increasingly difficult…." [37] This is the spiritually vacuous social context in which we now try to communicate with students and congregations. Saturated with arid information, hoping to discover the most effective techniques, our listeners grow deaf to the joy of meaningful relationships with God and neighbor.

The Influence of Mediated Versions of Reality

Informationism's reductionistic view of human nature and human communication now guides the thinking of most professional communicators. The mass media, in particular, use cybernetic models to conjure up particular versions of reality for us to consume. To put it starkly, the media are not primarily in the entertainment, information or even the persuasion business. Instead, they are largely in the *identity* business, trying to get us to adopt various self-identities expressed in movies, television, cyberspace and other media. This is why the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), after the tragic terrorism involving the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001, went to Hollywood for answers about what evil acts to expect next. Filmmaker Robert Altman said, "The movies set the pattern, and these people [the terrorists] have copied the movies. Nobody would have thought to commit an atrocity like that unless they had seen it in a movie." [38] Perhaps the FBI had a great idea in seeking the advice of Hollywood. But what kind of world are we creating when we look to the entertainment industry to teach us about reality?

In an information society, people naturally tend to adopt mediated versions of reality. I do not say this as a kind of knee-jerk media critic. I am *describing* our condition as informationists, not making a case against the media *per se*. Most of the media long ago gave up the good goal of serving communities and instead adopted the instrumental project of attracting and controlling audiences. The media do so primarily by creating versions of reality in tune with our desires, hopes and prejudices. For example, they offer us images of beautiful people that we might want to look like and evil people that we might enjoy hating. As Ellul argues, mass-mediated efforts to influence audiences today are less predicated on the wholesale alteration of audiences' beliefs than on techniques that confirm audiences predispositions. [39]

Propagandists accept us the way we are in a fallen world and proceed to help us conform to our own misguided image of what we want to become.

The mediated views of reality are now part of the context for nearly all of our communication, not just for our consumption of mediated propaganda. We are increasingly intimate with the media's formulations of reality; we willingly identify ourselves with mass-mediated identities. Moreover, as we adopt new messaging systems we create further opportunities for us to identify with mediated identities concocted by savvy media empires.

Lisa Rogak's *Pretzel Logic,* a fictionalized account of her life, reveals how digital technologies enable us to re-identify ourselves. One day, after booting up the computer that she shared with her husband, she discovered evidence that he had participated in homosexual chat and Web sites. She confronted her husband, who revealed that he was gay. He explained that he viewed their marriage as a kind of convenience and suggested that they ought to stay married while remaining free to have sexual relations with others.[40] They divorced, but Rogak was perplexed enough about what had happened to her husband and her marriage that she wrote the novel as a means of trying to deal with the events. Her case shows how the growing media presence in our lives creates more opportunities for individuals and groups to re-identify themselves. Giving into the media world is increasingly a way of finding an identity.

Cyberspace, in particular, offers us an easy and anonymous route to personal "conversion." We can surf around for a new self. The information age is also the era of "open rhetoric" and the "open self." [41] This is why a biblical term such as "born again" easily loses its cosmic weight today; religious conversion becomes just one more transformation of identity—like changing our hair color or buying a new suit to impress potential employers during a job interview.

The media professionals who offer us identities are *symbol brokers.* [42] They include news reporters, advertising and public relations professionals, indeed nearly all people who create media content. They are brokers because in most cases they do not believe personally in the messages they create. In the Christian tradition, we assume the virtue of *authenticity*, namely, that our actual life reflects what we profess. We

are predisposed to believe that we should do what we believe, as well as believe what we do. In the mediated culture of informationism, this logic of authenticity is no longer the ideal. The digital landscape assumes instead that rhetoric is fluid and that the interpretation of messages is ambiguous.

A preacher addressing a typical congregation has to accept this remarkable fact: most listeners already see themselves as in the midst of personal changes that are redefining their identities. Some of those changes could be marks along the Christian journey. But most of them will be transformations of self-identity fostered by consumerism, therapeutic associations, avocations and the like. In addition, the cues for congregants' changes in personal identity are most likely to come from symbol brokers who write the books, produce the movies or publish the Web sites that offer glimpses of a new self as well as techniques for adopting that self.

The explosion in the number of media outlets and cyber-destinations in recent years enables the entertainment and information industries more efficiently and presumably more effectively to match symbol brokers with audiences. First, there are more choices to allure us. When we had only three commercial television networks, some people complained about "liberal" or "elite" media bias. [43] We now have golf and history channels, children's channels and MTV. Media segmentation offers a remarkable spectrum of life-style identities. Today 300 satellite channels and a billion Web pages offer roads to new identities. But few messages hold our attention for long. Much in the new media seems vacuous and uninteresting. Indeed, the balkanization of the communication landscape does not seem to produce much "content" of real value — little solid information that we *should* know or few virtuous identities that we *should* adopt. Nevertheless, we turn to the media for entertainment, information and ultimately identities.

Second, some of the specialized media might be a bit more open to expressions of truth and virtue, but they, too, are organized increasingly according to consumerism and managed by a few media empires. According to one study, Americans spend over half of their time online at only four Web sites. [44] Journalists and information technology pundits tout a revolution in digital communication that will supposedly enhance democratic freedoms. If we look more closely, however, we discover that many of the alternative voices are the same old

symbol brokers operating in new venues. When media giant Time-Warner merges with cyber-behemoth AOL, the writing is on the wall. The pace at which people have plastered cyberspace with advertising is staggering. Surfing the Web is rapidly becoming a trip through one sales pitch after another, each one offering a product or service, if not a link to a new identity.

The changing context for communication also includes the growing influence of *high-tech personality cults*. In the last ten years the mainstream media have come to rely increasingly on the perspectives of a few dozen experts on cyberspace and information technologies. Symbol brokers, especially journalists and talk-show hosts, depend on these pundits' supposedly prescient insights. The gurus are becoming secular prophets who leverage quasi-religious rhetoric to inspire new believers in the power of cyber-technologies to change the world. In fact, the gurus create, with the help of symbol brokers, their own personality cults that profess a kind of "gnostic" (or secret) knowledge of the meaning of cyberspace as well as the new identities that we can gain with the latest technologies.

One such guru is George Gilder, author of Telecosm: *How Infinite Bandwidth Will Revolutionize Our World*. He claims to reveal the secrets of the emerging "telecosm" that will "banish all the glass and unveil new cathedrals of light and air alone." "Thanks to the magic of light-based digital messaging," he says, we are experiencing a "new canonical abundance." All the leaders of the "world economy are changing course to ride the tides of light." The "conceptual foundation of the new computer age," continues Gilder, are now "reduced to irrelevance" in the face of a "new sphere of cornucopian radiance." He even asserts to explain where the "new promethean light comes from…who is fighting it, who will ride it to victory, and what it all means." [45]

Like other techno-gurus, Gilder divides people into those who are real believers in information technology and those who are not. He even calls debates about the future of cyberspace a "religious war." [46] The non-believers who fail to accept technology as a form of salvation are Gilder's opponents in this war — what Clifford Stoll calls "high-tech heretics." [47] Millions of people become true believers in the revealed truth of these gurus, who deliver their Pollyannaish messages of informational salvation through trade show speeches, in best-selling books,

via broadcast interviews, and on Web sites. During the 1990s one guru after another authored essays and books claiming that the new technologies would enable humankind to triumph over space and time. Symbol brokers, in turn, became so enchanted with this rhetoric of high-tech progress that they repeated the same triumphalistic prognostications over and over again in the media. They told us that the Information Superhighway would revolutionize education, business and democracy — every area of life.[48] According to their rhetoric, high-tech innovation is our social entrée to progress and our personal road to happiness. They failed to inform us, however, that the gurus' new-fangled versions of the gospel of cybernetic control were supporting the gurus' own cottage industries. The technophiles "are going to win because we have a vision of change and redemption," predicts Gilder.[49] Meanwhile, he earns whopping speaking fees and publishes his own investment newsletter.

Cyber-gurus' revelatory language, aped by symbol brokers, captures many people's hopes that new communication technologies will enable them to experience deeper happiness, more wealth, lots of fun and greater freedom and power. This rhetoric particularly appeals to us as fallen people who naively believe in our own power to triumph over the laws of nature, including human nature. Supposedly we can make education more effective and efficient through distance learning, render democracy more participatory and egalitarian through cyber-voting, and gain more choices for quality entertainment. These are largely worthwhile ends, but can cyber-technologies really deliver the goods? What are the problems that technique will solve? Inefficiency? A lack of control? Are these humankinds' most pressing problems? Ultimately the power of the media today stems from their ability to define our problems in ways that encourage us to believe that human techniques can solve them.

In spite of this rhetoric about progress, the cybernetic context for human communication rejects any morally informed concept of the good life. The means of our communication become the ends of our messaging. The media resituate us in a culture predicated increasingly on self-identities that lack a respect for anything beyond the utility of technique. Christian media fall into the same trap. They tell us, partly because we want to believe it, that happiness consists of the endless pursuit of more efficient and effective techniques for every-

thing from prayer to worship and church growth. As a result, students and congregations are not so much interested in becoming wise or in loving God and neighbor as much as they are in acquiring effective religious techniques. Even earning an academic degree becomes the instrumental pursuit of a job rather than the discovery of God's truth, the cultivation of godly relationships and the desire to be more virtuous. If I am correct, we have to face the fact that contemporary cyberculture rejects customs such as neighborliness, friendship and hospitality that have framed the Christian life for two millennia. [50]

Reclaiming a Virtuous Context

Today we tend to assume that by developing more technology we will eventually achieve whatever goals we desire. We believe that instrumental techniques are the answers, regardless of the problems. Even when it comes to church growth, we look for the technique that can produce results. Our mindset is biased toward technical skill rather than spiritual customs and disciplines. "Hauling in truckloads of rationalism and technology from the world," warns Peterson, will not make us more "spiritual." [51] Nor will it make us more virtuous. We cannot responsibly renounce all new communication technologies or prohibit them summarily from worship or education. Heaven knows that there is much potential for good in the opening up of God's Creation through human invention. But today we face a culture of informationism that celebrates instrumental pursuits and is uninterested in distinctly relational and deeply spiritual ones. [52]

One of our main tasks as communicators today, then, is to address contemporary society's over-reliance on technique and its corresponding disinterest in virtue. We have to redefine the context for human communication by reclaiming a Christian view of human identity, thereby challenging the mediated principalities and powers of the day. If we do not do so, our messages will continue to be interpreted as mere self-help exhortations within the gospel of cybernetic control.

As a Christian educator and occasional preacher, I have found that virtue is crucial in this recontextualizing of human communication. I now recognize that I must communicate virtuously as well as teach about virtuous communication. The classroom is one place where I try to be faithful to God and neighbor by sharing the love of Jesus Christ

as reflected in all good relationships and all true knowing. Teaching, then, becomes more a matter of building relationships — among God, students, the Creation and self — than transmitting information to students. My own communication has to transcend the baggage of informationism and the dependence on mediated self-identities that students bring into the classroom. The example that I set with students is not perfunctory or additional, but instead is the relational core of teaching and learning in Christian community. I must be what I profess or I will subvert the entire educational enterprise.

The technologizing of our lives, without the countervailing weight of virtue, attenuates our relationships with God and neighbor. In the information age, we gain novelty and busyness but lose the wisdom carried by past disciples of Jesus Christ — including the wisdom that came with an intimate knowledge of the scriptures. The context of our communication is so instrumental today that it lacks a coherent and compelling sense of the kinds of persons and communities that we should be. Daily "doing" eclipses godly "being." Only by renewing our relationships with God and neighbor can we discern the appropriate role of communication technology in our lives. [53] Righteous communion with God and neighbor can establish the proper context for our use of technique, whereas technique can never establish the right context for our relationships.

Peterson's distinction between *communication* and *communion* is particularly helpful in this move toward virtue. He argues that words can be grouped into two categories: those used for *communication* and those used for *communion*. The latter group would include words that help us tell stories, nurture intimacies and build trust. These words "do not define as much as deepen mystery — entering into the ambiguities, pushing past the safely known into the risky unknown." [54] The language of "communication," on the other hand, is most appropriate for instrumental purposes, such as buying and selling stocks, directing traffic and teaching mathematics. Each category of words has its own rightful place in human affairs, and every profession needs to make sure that it uses the proper kind of language in a given situation. If pastors "approach people as masters of communication," says Peterson, "they will be as out of place as a whore at a wedding. We are not here to sell intimacy. We are here to be intimate." [55] Peterson is not dismissing human communication, but rather is distinguishing between

instrumental and **relational** modes of communication, between those that do not engender intimacy and virtue and those that do.

I would like to suggest two habits we need to foster if we expect to rediscover Christian virtue as part of the intimate context for our "communion" in the information age. First, we must admit to ourselves, to others and to God the *lightness of our informational being.* The information age tends to engender overly instrumental ways of life that are spiritually superficial. Informationism offers us no real meaning, only spiritually weightless forms of messaging. This is why some of the most vacuous relationships exist in Silicon Valley. When the high-tech sector of the United States started declining in 2000, Valley residents began losing jobs. Some of those folks suddenly recognized how meaningless their harried lives really were. One owner of a New York-based online recruiting firm hoped to sell her business in order to move to South Carolina and raise money for a village in Guatemala. "I feel like I've gone from the lottery ticket to starting all over again," she told a reporter. "It's a good time to rethink life." She hoped to relocate to "Normalville" and perhaps even to "get married and have kids." [56] For many, the high-tech slump became an opportunity to reach beyond the lightness of informational for deeper meaning and purpose.

It seems that more people are recognizing both the moral dangers of the information age and its hollow spiritual core. They sense that the race to get wired has no finish line because new technologies always emerge to render the old ones obsolete. We ought to recognize as well that the drive for greater technique, without strong moral customs, always delivers us to greater stress and incoherence. Even the most impressive techniques are never substantial enough to satisfy our souls with deep intimacy. They can give us greater messaging capacity, but they cannot guarantee that we will have time for prayer and contemplation. In this sense, the underlying problems of the information society are age-old issues that take us back to the Garden of Eden. They remind us that fallen human beings tend to fill up their lives with the products of their own doing, without respect for God's intentions. Søren Kierkegaard once said, "We are running after money, status, pleasure. We run with gossip, rumors, foul talk, with lies, fiction, and trivialities. We run now to the east and now to the west, panting on our activistic errands. But we are not running on the racetrack." [57] Today we similarly dash through the information society as if it is the primary race of our lives. We focus on all that we can do, and not on

who we are becoming in the process. The goal of being a godly person slips from our view. We foolishly render ourselves information rich and virtue poor.

As we help people recognize the lightness of their message-saturated lives, we also free them to begin experiencing real communion with God and neighbor. One of our tasks as Christian communicators is helping others identify the lightness in their souls amidst the plethora of information at their disposal. In a sense, such recognition is the place we all must begin, just as the new believer in Jesus Christ must admit his or her sin. The promise of technique keeps us from hearing God's claims on our spiritually weightless lives. Technique is our Tower of Babel, the way we try to make a name for ourselves. In the end, however, the resulting self-identities are hollow to their core. Admitting our egoistic lightness frees us from the tyranny of informationism and opens our hearts to communion with Jesus Christ.

Second, we need to *distrust the prevailing techno-magic*. We ought to be high-tech heretics, not because we are anti-technology, but instead because we discern the utter superficiality of the salvific rhetoric of the gospel of cybernetic control. I am not suggesting that we all should rid ourselves of new communication technologies. I contend instead that we should question the pervasive techno-magic, the idea that new information technologies will necessarily improve our education, preaching, worship and everything else. Most of our communication problems are not technical and cannot be solved with technique. Instead they are primarily relational problems that reflect our lack of intimacy with God and neighbor. Restoring that intimacy is a lifelong process of listening, praying, studying, contemplating, celebrating, worshiping, fellowshipping and the like. Moreover, the process is best carried out organically through such customs as friendship, hospitality and neighborliness. There are no quick fixes, no home run techniques. We do not need more tools or greater efficiency and control as much as we need more saintly role models, caring mentors and strong communities of belief that live virtuously as witnesses to the majesty and mystery of the only real source of power, Jesus Christ.

The Roman Catholic Archbishop of Denver, Charles J. Chaput, once wrote an aptly titled essay, "Fools with Tools are Still Fools." [58] In the biblical sense, a fool is someone who lacks the wisdom of knowing the

real state of the world — a person who is out of touch with cosmic reality as defined and created by God. The fool lacks intimacy with the Lord, and therefore with truth. Information technologies and the new media make it easier for us to be well-tooled fools.

I recently spent a sabbatical year in Florida and visited many churches. I was disheartened to discover what some churches were doing with presentational technologies. At one of them, the congregation's use of Microsoft, PowerPoint, was out of control. During the sermons, bulleted outline points came flying onto the enormous screen at the front of the sanctuary. Congregants were so dazzled that they even nudged each other after every new display of techno-wizardry. I wondered how anyone could focus on the pastor's message, let alone on Jesus Christ. Technique had become a stumbling block to communion. Imitating the cable news channels (probably unconsciously), with their crawling text messages and relentlessly shifting graphics, the church technicians had decided implicitly that the purpose of presentational technology is to direct attention to the screen. These foolish technicians need to question their own faith in high-tech magic. In such a case, the only sane option is to regroup without presentational technology until some wise congregants can determine how to use it to enhance rather than detract from worship. Getting a congregation's attention is not the same as inviting it to friendship with Jesus Christ and one another.

The information age has been so oversold that eventually it had to under-perform. Now we are seeing how superbly it can under-perform. Like earlier technological heartthrobs — radio, television, cable, satellites — the new digital stars will not usher in the kingdom of God. In fact, we have a lot of work to do discerning the rhetoric of the symbol brokers and the high-tech personality cults that have been preaching informationism to us. As disciples of Jesus Christ, we should question the prevailing techno-magic because we know that our Lord expects us to be people of godly virtue — especially persons who embody the fruits of the Spirit — rather than efficiency experts and control freaks.

The context for our communication has shifted to an unvirtuous instrumentalism. As teachers and preachers we now must figure out where we are and where our listeners are. I have argued in this essay that we are lost in the new digital cosmos, to borrow from Walker

Percy's book title. [59] One way that we can determine our location is to put our hearts in the ever-flowing river of life. Christian communicators find the river in the Scriptures, in the virtuous customs of Christian tradition, and ultimately in Jesus Christ. We then can become responsible stewards of the new media in the new context. Otherwise technique will dominate more and more of communication, blocking us from communion with God and friends. Instead of waiting for informationism to redeem our communication, we have to nurture the virtuous relationships that will leaven our own use of technique. To the extent that we commune virtuously rather than merely communicate effectively, we become signposts pointing to the Kingdom of Shalom. As St. Francis of Assisi encouraged believers, we should preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words.

Notes

1. Heraclitus, *Heraclitus: Fragments,* trans. T.M. Robinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 55.

2. Another way of getting a grasp on the "bias" of communication technologies is to recognize two aspects of them. First, they come to us normally embedded in social institutions. When we buy a television set, for instance, we also are" buying" access to particular broadcast stations, networks and other programmers who operate according to established industry practices. Second, we inherit with existing technologies various habits and customs that we employ as we "use" the technologies. We learn implicitly from parents and friends, for instance, how to watch television. We cannot employ technology without also adopting particular (i.e., biased) social arrangements. In the early days of a new technology these are more open to change, but once a technology is tied to particular social practices and the larger social institutions, change is very difficult. At the developed stage we no longer think about whether to "adapt" a technology to our own good purposes in our own ways, but instead we are faced with the choice of whether merely to adopt it wholesale or to reject it wholesale. To reject it is to be labeled by some folks a Luddite. To adopt the technology at that point means to accept most of the corollary social practices; adaptation seems increasingly infeasible because we are locked into standard ways of thinking about and using the technology. In this sense, a technology is no more neutral than a philosophy of life or a religion. For some historical perspective on the non-neutrality of technology, see Carl Mitcham, *Thinking through Technology: The Path Between Engineering and Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 128-130; Langdon Winner, *The Whale and the Reactor: A Search for Limits in an Age of High Technology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986).

3. Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking, 1985). Even if Postman overstates the case against television, he raises important issues that we should address. We need to determine the appropriate place for -television in society, church, and home. We must

consider how to encourage media institutions to create edifying programs, and we must challenge the ways that people uncritically use television in their lives. Media critics such as Postman can help us to formulate questions and to perceive media-related issues that we might otherwise overlook because of our own laziness or our naive enchantment with technology.

4. I am using the term "information technology" to refer to all digital communication, not just to personal computers or to information databases. We live during the "digitalization" of practically all forms of communication, from cell phones to DVDS, cable and satellite television systems, and the Internet.
5. T. S. Eliot, *Notes Toward the Definition of Culture* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1961), 29.
6. James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston:Unwin Hyman, 1989), 13-36.
7. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy In America,* ed. and trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).
8. Ibid., 275.
9. Ibid., 500.
10. One of the best books that addresses the difference between self-interest groups and participatory democracy is Jean Bethke Elshtain, *Democracy on Trial* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995).
11. Kenneth J. Gergen, *The Saturated Self. Dilemmas of Identity in Contemporary Life* (New York: BasicBooks, 1991), 83.
12. Peter Kreeft, *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1992), 59.
13. Jacques Ellul develops this concept in his masterful exposition, The *Technological Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964). The best overview of his life-long preoccupation with technique is a series of interviews with Ellul conducted by Madeleine Garrigou-Lagrange and translated by Lani K. Niles under the title In *Season, Out of Season: An Introduction to the Thought of Jacques Ellul* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982). In those interviews Ellul says that *technique is the* evil of modern society; "it is a paralysis, entropy, repetition, identicalness, unity, duplication," (p. 223).
14. Anthony de Mello, *Taking Flight* (New York: Doubleday Image Books, 1988), 27.
15. For an excellent overview of Augustine's changing views of rhetoric, see: George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 149-160; 45, 72, 144-5.
16. Although I do not have the space here to develop the argument, I believe that the incredible popularity of Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez* might be a telling tale. The book seemed to offer many readers a technique for reciting quick prayers that would supposedly bring success to their lives. At least this is the way that readers could easily interpret the book, regardless of Wilkinson's authorial intent. I noted in a review of Wilkinson's follow-up book that the marketing of his books was also part of the problem. See "Secrets of Success?" *Moody* (September-October 2001), pp. 68-69.
17. Aleksandr 1. Solzhenitsyn, *A World Split Apart: Commencement Address Delivered at Harvard University* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 51
18. Robert E. Park, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man," in *Robert E. Park: On Social Control and Collective Behavior,* ed. Ralph H. Turner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 33.

19. The Hebrew term for intimacy *(yedia or yadah)* means "to know." Genesis 4:1 says, "And Adam *knew* Eve his wife; and she conceived."
20. James M. Houston, *The Heart's Desire: Satisfying the Hunger of the Soul* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1996), 100.
21. Harold Adams Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 31.
22. Of course new media can deliver us to terrific information *about* God, including the online Bibles. And the Holy Spirit can and does work through such technologies to implant the Gospel in human hearts. But relying primarily on communication systems when we can commune with others in-person makes no sense. Imagine doing parenting via technology or living a marriage merely through technology. We must repeatedly ask ourselves if the technology is appropriate for the purpose.
23. Jerzy Kosinski, "A Nation of Videots," interview by David Sohn, in Horace Newcomb, ed. *Television: The Critical View,* 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 351-366.
24. Eugene H. Peterson, *The 1998 J.J. Thiessen Lectures: Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: CMBC Publications, 1999), 45. 25. Lexis Nexis Corporate Communications (corpcomm@lexisnexis.com), email to author, 22 September 2001.
26. George Gilder, *Telecosm: How Infinite Bandwidth Will Revolutionize Our World* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 2.
27. Bruce Springsteen's song goes, "Fifty-seven channels and nothin' on." *Human Touch* Sony, 1992.
28. Martin Buber, *I and Thou,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970).
29. This is the central theme in Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).
30. For an excellent discussion of the world as a closed vs. open system, see James M. Houston, *I Believe in the Creator* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 98.
31. I have noticed that authors I love to read often are abysmal speakers, while great speakers are usually poor writers. Surely some mystery of giftedness is reflected in this lack of cross-media ability. One of the exceptions to the rule is Martin Marty. I discovered that he taught himself an usual speaking method in which he works from outlines without a written text. I began a number of years ago to teach myself the same method - dare I say "technique!" I believe that it grants the Spirit more 11 space" for shaping the process of communication, since the speaker does not know in advance every word that he or she will say. It also includes a real risk of saying something that one will later regret. The deepest communion invariably invites this risk of failure, even of broken relationship. 32. 1 think that in order to recapture some of the "intimacy" of communication we will have to go back to-writings of the Medieval church, particularly the monks who kept alive various contemplative practices and communication habits that were lost within the scholastic tradition of education for clerics. See Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1960). 1 am not suggesting that we all should become monks, but rather that we need to revive some lost customs that would greatly enhance our communion with each other and with our Lord. 33. Norbert Weiner, *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (Garden City: Double Anchor Books, 1954), 16.
34. Ibid., 18.
35. Ibid., 32.

36. Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot* (New York: Grove Press, 1954), 29.
37. Houston, *I Believe in the Creator, 161.*
38. Quoted in "Hollywood 'Inspired U.S. Attacks'," *BBC News* (17 October 2001). Cited 11 December 2001.
Online:http://news.bbc.co.uk/hi/english/entertainment/film/newsid-1604000/1604151.st m .
39. This is one of Jacques Ellul's themes in *Propaganda: The Formation of Men's Attitudes* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965). The instrumental purposes of much modern propaganda, then, are meant to conform us ever more to the misguided identities that we seek and to the wrongful direction of our selfish desires. W e could argue that as fallen creatures ultimately we seek selfish identities that give us the impression of being powerful and effective-to know how to conform the world to our wishes. Thus, instrumental control becomes part of the heart of all ideologies and movements, whether liberal or conservative, ideological or pragmatic. It should not surprise us that in a technological society we tend to see technology as *the* means to gaining such power to control.
40. Lisa Rogak, *Pretzel Logic,* (Grafton, NH: William Hull Publishing, 1999).
41. Richard Lanham argues that the Web's "open rhetoric" is a wonderful means of preserving the "characteristically unstable Western self...." Richard A. Lanham, *The Electronic Word: Democracy, Technology, and the Arts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 25. Many proponents of cyberspace fix their arguments on the capacity of the medium to let a person adopt new, multiple and dynamic identities. See Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997); Richard Holeton, *Composing Cyberspace: Identity, Community, and Knowledge in the Electronic Age* (Boston: McGraw Hill, 1998); and Indra Sinha and Andra Sinha, *The Cybergypsies: A True Tale of Lust, War & Betrayal on the Electronic Frontier* (New York: Scribner, 1999).
42. James W. Carey, "The Communications Revolution," in *James Carey: A Critical Reader,* eds. Eve Stryker Munson and Catherine A. Warren (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 132.
43. See, e.g., R. Robert Lichter and Stanley Rothman, *The Media Elite* (Bethesda, MD: Adler and Adler, 1986).
44. Keith Regan, "Report: Four Web Sites Control Half of Surfing Time," E-*Commerce Times*
(4 June 2001). Cited 5 June 2001.
Online: http://www.ecommer-cetimes.com/perl/printer/10222/.
45. Gilder, *Telecosm, 11.*
46. Quoted in Dinesh D'Souza, *The Virtue of Prosperity: Finding Values in an Age of Techno-Affluence* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), 30.
47. Clifford Stoll, *High-Tech Heretic- Reflections of a Computer Contrarian* (*New* York: Anchor Books, 1999).
48. For critiques of this popular techno-mythology see Thomas S. Valovic, *Digital Mythologies: The Hidden Complexities of the Internet* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000); Schultze, *Habits of the High-Tech Heart.*
49. Quoted in Dinesh D'Souza, *The Virtue of Prosperity, 30.*
50. I am using these terms in biblical senses, not in contemporary senses. Of course, this creates exactly the problem I articulated at the beginning of the essay; the context for these customs has changed so radically that we barely understand the customs in biblical terms. As John 15 says, we are to be friends of Jesus Christ and

friends of each other - persons who sacrifice for our friends as Christ sacrificed for us. Similarly the "neighbor" in a biblical context is a Good Samaritan, not merely someone who lives next door. For an excellent examination of hospitality in Christian customs see Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999). We had best consider the fact that hospitality is one of the customs that evaporates in cyber-culture, where all of the "time-saving" technologies leave us with little time to be hospitable. 51. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Wisdom of Each Other: A Conversation Between Spiritual Friends* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 43. 52. I assume that the Christian life is, first, the gaining of intimacy with God - i.e., knowing God - and, second, intimacy with neighbor. We cannot love someone we do not know, whether God or neighbor. So Christ's command for us to love God wholly and then to love our neighbor as ourselves is also a call for us to live in both fellowship and obedience.

53. For a balanced approach to the concept of "appropriate technology," see Egbert Schuurman and Eugene R. Dykema (eds.), *Responsible Technology: A Christian Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).
54. Eugene H. Peterson, *Subversive Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 179.
55. Ibid., 178.
56. "Dumped Dot-Commers Start Out All Over Again," *USA Today,* 15 March 2001, p. Al.
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(author's note: This essay is based on a lecture given at the Evangelical Homiletics Society Annual Conference in New Orleans, LA on October 18, 2001. Dr. Schultze is

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Reflections on Homiletical Balance and Boundaries for Evangelicals

by Wayne E. Shaw

Introduction

When I attended the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society for the first time in October 2001, a friend whom I had met years ago at the Academy of Homiletics greeted me with, "I wondered how long it would take you to leave them and join us." Then after a moment's reflection, he added, "Or are you planning to attend both groups?" To which I replied, "Yes. Both groups."

That sentiment may turn off some members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society (and perhaps some in the Academy of Homiletics), but both groups have contributed to my ministry in different ways. They are both made up of members who desire to teach preaching supremely well, and I resonate with that. It does mean, however, that with so many varied viewpoints represented, one has to reflect critically—weighing assumptions and choosing carefully what to assimilate into one's homiletical system.

I have been a part of the Academy of Homiletics for well over two decades, and I have seen it grow from a few dozen members to nearly 400. After serving a lengthy term as treasurer, I was elected president during the silver anniversary year, and I was able to voice my concern for world mission with the theme, "Preaching and Globalization." The Academy's warm camaraderie is unique among professional organizations. I have been welcomed, nurtured, challenged, disturbed, and loved by them; and that is appropriate in that diverse group. Anyone who knows homiletical literature is aware of the contribution that members of the Academy of Homiletics have made to our discipline in the last twenty-five years.

Prior to attending my first annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, I had known the organization only through its papers from past years. I was curious whether the Evangelical Homiletics Society as a whole was as reactionary as some of the papers suggested. Instead, I found openness to new ideas, stimulating plena-

ry sessions and workshops, and warm fellowship without any evidence of an "old boy's club" that plagues some organizations. I immediately felt accepted. The meeting was well planned, the plenary sessions were profitable, and the workshops were well attended (though the program was so tightly packed that I went on overload before it was over).

Sometime during the meeting I was asked to write an article about my reflections on our discipline over the last three decades. After a great deal of thought, I chose the title, "Reflections on Homiletical Balance and Boundaries for Evangelicals." Balance and boundaries are important in relation to each other because, without boundaries, balance can mean riding the fence on pivotal issues, but boundaries without balance can be arbitrary, overly narrow, and myopic. By "evangelicals" I mean those with a high view of Scripture who hold that the Bible is the written word of God. Within this framework the following are reflections on some ideas that have mused me in thirty-seven years of teaching homiletics and fifty-one years of preaching the Good News.

The Importance of Theological Balance and Boundaries

We preachers need both a theology of preaching and a theology to preach. We need to know what we are doing when we preach and what to say when we do it. The following themes have provided both balance and boundaries for me. I begin with preaching.

To preach the word of God is to declare Christ as the living word from the Bible as the inscripturated word. We encounter the living Christ through that proclamation. God is our authority and the Bible is his authoritative revelation of his person and his will for our lives. Any note of authority in our message comes from our personal relationship with him and our commitment to his truth revealed in Scripture.

Christian preaching is Christological. "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" and has committed to us "the message of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). It also has a kerygmatic core rooted in the mighty acts of God in Christ out of which everything Christian flows. The center of that core is this: "that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures" (1 Cor. 15: 3, 4).

Connected to that Christological, kerygmatic core are bedrock biblical doctrines. We are to preach, for example, what the Bible teaches about God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—creation, the fall, sin, salvation, the church, baptism and the Lord's Supper, the ministry of all believers, and the final triumph of God over evil in every form. What else is there to preach that will last if we do not preach Christian doctrine? Christian conduct flows out of this new life in Christ, seasoned with grace, and guided by the nurturing disciplines of Scripture, prayer, and commitment to the church as God's community of faith.

Romans is a classic example of how this works itself out. After a brief summary of the kerygma (1:1-17), Paul discusses its doctrinal implications (1:18-11:36), and based on that kerygmatic and doctrinal foundation, he instructs the church how to live as the Christian community in the world (12:1-16:27).

In summary: Done well, preaching doctrinally gives substance and size to the sermon and relates it to vital life issues with what James S. Stewart called "The Romance of Orthodoxy."

The Importance of Hermeneutical Balance and Boundaries

Preaching is a hermeneutical act. If it takes the Bible seriously, it interprets a biblical text or idea for our here-and-now situation. My term for this process is hermiletics—to emphasize the essential unity of the move from text to sermon (not homineutics—to begin with a random sermon idea and then scavenge for an unsuspecting proof-text).

The new homiletic has taught us to ask what a biblical text is doing as well as what it is saying. It recognizes that the text already comes to us consciously shaped for effective communication by the writer, not as a shapeless lump waiting to be formed by us into something meaningful. Recent emphasis on literary genres has brought a fresh sensitivity to our interpretation of preaching texts.

Before we can proclaim what it means for us today, however, we must discover what the writer meant to convey to his readers. Interpreting the Bible always involves the triad of text, writer, and reader. Granted, we as readers always read the text through culturally conditioned lenses, and we have much to gain by learning all we can about the life and

times of the writer, but if we believe that the Bible is God's written word and that ultimately he is its Author, we must make every effort to let the intent of the text win each time we encounter it.

In summary: The purpose of preaching is to resurrect the biblical text, not to crucify it on a cross of our own making.

The Importance of Incarnational Balance and Boundaries

Unlike their older counterparts, contemporary books on homiletics give slight attention to the life and ministry of the preacher. We seem to have left that task to the writers of devotional literature, church leadership, and pastoral theology. But we dare not neglect it because, as Phillips Brooks reminds us, authentic preaching is always divine truth through human personality.

Christian character and professional competency are essentials for Christian leaders who preach effectively. Our devotional life (especially our prayerful interaction with Scripture) and our practice of the fruit of the Spirit as we interact with people help us to preach incarnationally and strengthen us for the rigors of our calling.

Accountability to a mentor in seminary and beyond can prepare us to reflect biblically and theologically on the many issues that confront us in the church today. There is no homiletical substitute for our learning to think theologically about all areas of the preacher's life and calling.

In the preaching room of our seminary is a pew donated by my first congregation. Above it is a plaque reminding us that we have a bench of preaching on which sit the professors of Bible, theology, church history, homiletics, and pastoral theology. Every one of them is vital to preaching. Homileticians need to integrate these disciplines into the preaching task, and seminaries need to view the role of homiletics as a bench, not a chair.

In summary: we are both preacher and preachment. In the words of St. Francis of Assisi, "Preach wherever you go. When necessary, use words."

The Importance of Structural Balance and Boundaries

The last thirty years have witnessed a homiletical revolution labeled the New Homiletic. Most of its guns have been aimed at the traditional deductive sermon with its central idea sentence supported by main points. The new homiletic claims to borrow from Aristotle's Poetic more than his Rhetoric and to draw its sermon shapes from the literary forms of the various biblical texts of the Old and New Testaments rather than from Greek and Roman rhetoric. Chief among these forms have been the inductive sermon popularized by Fred B. Craddock, the narrative sermon represented by Eugene Lowry's homiletical plot, David Buttrick's moves rather than points within a unit of Scripture, and the interactive style of African-American preaching.

This homiletical revolution possesses many strengths. It advocates examining the biblical text carefully as the basis for sermonizing. It emphasizes that there is no one right way to structure a sermon—certainly not by using a narrow, arbitrary homiletic. It stresses the particularities of a text before attempting to generalize. It treats seriously the form as well as the content of the biblical text, stressing that the shape of the text is rarely ever neutral. It recognizes that homiletics is theological as well as rhetorical—a balance of form and content. It takes seriously what it means to communicate the values of the biblical text to a mass media, TV and video, sound bite audience. It also frees the preacher from a homiletical straightjacket to explore new and creative ways of structuring and preaching sermons. The strengths and practitioners of the new homiletic are many.

However, the new homiletic has been around long enough to reveal some of its weaknesses. It began as a method to hold the interest of a biblically literate audience; but over the last thirty years our congregations have shifted from hearers well versed in the Bible to many who have little or no biblical knowledge. Much of our preaching today needs to teach our congregations how to put essential Christian truth into practice, while at the same time, communicating effectively in a variety of ways.

Contemporary homiletical methods are appropriate in-so-far-as their hermeneutical assumptions are consistent with the Bible as the writ-

ten word of God. However, some homileticians today are writing from the relativistic assumptions of the new hermeneutic. Further, the current over-emphasis on narrative texts for preaching ignores the fact that major sections of the Bible are non-narrative. Without the clarity and context of the non-narrative passages, messages based on the narrative passages are often ambiguous and can be as one dimensional as some traditional sermons. Further, the contemporary emphasis on the particularity of a biblical passage often ignores the unity of the Bible, and a preoccupation with the forms of biblical genre can detract from the meaning of the passage. Also, done well, contemporary sermons that are informed by the new homiletic take more work to prepare, not less.

In summary: Contemporary methods can enrich and add variety to our preaching, but only as they are consistent with the Bible as the written word of God.

The Importance of Aesthetic Balance and Boundaries

It was a boon to homileticians when biblical scholars began to emphasize the literary genres of the Bible. The genres and sub-genres often suggest how biblical texts can best be preached. The literary form of the text with its characters, plot, mood, movement, and beauty has a richness and power of its own to move and motivate us. For example, since approximately two-thirds of the Bible is narrative in form, it makes good sense to learn all we can from the literary emphasis of the passage in addition to its historical background and grammatical intent.

Our preaching should engage both the left and right sides of our brain. In fact, without the left side, we could not even talk rationally about the creative, artistic side. Engaging both is necessary for good preaching. The aesthetic emphasis goes too far, however, when it fails to balance the ideational with the creative, the rational with the relational, and the historical with the literary and rhetorical.

In summary: Aesthetics should be the servant of the sermon, not its master.

The Importance of Sociological Balance and Boundaries

Our sociological sensitivity to the dynamics and cultural mores of the societies reflected in the biblical text and in our contemporary congregations will help us to preach with richer insight. It will also help us to decide whether our sermon should be prophetic, evangelistic, pastoral, or a mixture.

We cannot avoid reading the Scriptures through culturally colored glasses; however, to deconstruct the biblical text and to reconstruct it to suit our own purposes comes close to practicing classical heresy. We must always be sensitive to contemporary cultural mores, but our core commitment must be to God's intended message in Scripture. For example, in order to carry out our Lord's Great Commission mandate, we must practice good missiology in our congregational life, including our pulpits. We need to think like a missionary, utilizing theological, linguistic, cultural, ideological, and relational tools in order to be effective.

In summary: To be effective we must contextualize our message wherever we preach without being syncretistic.

Conclusion

This is the legacy I want to leave my students and my colleagues: Be balanced in your preaching within the sound exegetical boundaries of Scripture. Strive for sermons that are hermeneutically sound, theologically based, structurally astute, incarnationally grounded, aesthetically creative, and sociologically attuned.

Preach the Word of God—the Living Word as he is revealed in the Written Word—always preach the Word—always. "When necessary, use words."

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Looking for The Holy Spirit in the Postmodern Sermon

by Calvin Miller

Scripture: Acts 19:1-7
Introduction

I'm a Christian who likes lounging around Acts Chapter Two because I have discovered there is no fire like the fire of God. There's no wind like the breath of heaven. There's nothing that will empower the church like the fire of Acts Two. I know I can never understand the mystery of the Spirit, but I am consumed by a search to find him. Here and there in life I have felt the gales of Acts two; I have seen the flame. And having seen it, I would see it more and more and hear it yet again. For a score of years, I have been dogged by what T.S. Eliot wrote in the Four Quartets. His cry for consuming mystery has become my cry for the vitality of the Spirit.

> The dove descending breaks the air
> With flame of incandescent terror
> Of which the tongues declare
> The One discharge of sin and error.
> The only hope or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre —
> To be redeemed from fire by fire.
>
> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame.
> Which human power cannot remove.
> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.
>
> — T. S. Eliot, from The Four Quartets, pp. 143-144.

Once upon a time there were a group of people in Ephesus who believed themselves to be true Christians. Except for the fact that they were pre-modern, two-thousand years out of sync with our day, and short one very large Christian publishing and media empire, they seem

in some ways to be rather typically suburban. Seeing them superimposed upon our own day and age, they no doubt Kinko-copied their Sunday bulletin, "powerpointed" their 2x and 3x worship choruses and played lots of softball for Jesus. They noticed there was no vitality in their services, but you don't close church doors merely because you're dead do you? Besides there's a lot of things you can buy at the Christian book store to deepen your faith. When you can't get the wind and fire you buy a lot of Jesus junk — WWJD jewelry, pewter angels, art-deco footprints, and rapture-ready-yo-yos to diddle as you read the latest Second-Coming novel. Don't you know we make the God of Isaiah real proud? Lacking first wind, we play with trinkets, always disappointed that there is so little of real life in Christian t-shirts. The only t-shirt I've seen that I really agree with came out after Titanic and said, "It sank. Get over it." I really wish Christian bookstores would start selling books — I miss them so! And maybe put a sign on the door that says, "Store closed to give Christians a chance to get a life!" Maybe they should even put a sign in their window that says, "T-shirts R Us."

Acts 19:1 does not say exactly how Paul met these believers. But I like believing he was probably invited to attend a "Weigh-Down" meeting or a seminar on financing the Christian life, and when he passed the Christian aerobicizers, he felt compelled to ask, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?"

"Well, it's not a very user-friendly question," said one of the twelve-step former business addicts, "but I'll check around."

And so he did. And so the question went out: "Has anyone here received the Holy Spirit since you believed?"

"Is this Spirit orthodox?" asked a man with a clerical collar.

"Is this Holy Spirit workable?" asked a Methodist.

"Does he dance?" asked a Southern Baptist.

"Does it sanction the lectionary?" asked an Episcopalian.

"Is it homophobic?" asked a man with a lapel ribbon.

"Is there an Intervarsity booklet on it?" asked one of the collegians.

"Is it in the Christian Yellow Pages?" probed one of the church businessmen.

"Is it a boy or a girl Spirit?" asked a gender radical.

"Has it been on channel 32?" asked a lady with a beehive platinum hairdo.

"What's the Greek word for it?" asked one of the theologians.

"Where would it fit in the tulip acrostic?" asked a Presbyterian.

In short, "No, we haven't received the Holy Spirit since we believed. In fact, the word Holy Spirit is unfamiliar to us," confessed the confused Ephesians.

The Ephesians are not to be blamed for their confusion. I am much afraid the whole blame must be laid at the feet of Apollos. The glib, smooth, post-modern, power communicator, Apollos. He was the popular communicator of the day. He packed them in and had mastered the homiletic one-liner. It was all but impossible to hear his sermons — the applause was so frequent it unhooked the precepts of his standing-room-only crowd. But, alas, finding the Holy Spirit in his sermons was not easy. They were the church contempo — the church of what's happening now — they labeled their chariots "follow us to exciting Ephesus" — they were the church that rolled on the rock, and rocked with rollers — they were the Xers and mixers, who were busting into the boomers with the new centenarians. They were a couple of doctrines short of a full dogma but they were having a great time.

Sometimes I want to republish the old clichés I have laid by.

I like the little old woman who supposedly asked the guide in Westminster Cathedral, "Has anybody been saved here lately?" The story is probably a late accretion to Baptist Haggadah, but it seems so right on.

I miss Gert Behanna saying on national television, "I ain't what I otta be, I ain't even what I wanna be, and I ain't what I'm gonna be, but Thank God I ain't what I used to be!"

I liked the Jesus of Martin Luther King, who smashed into the Church-jailed Jesus with bus boycotts and full-house sermons, whose battle anthem was a hymn that allowed, "Yes, Lord, I do believe that we shall overcome someday."

I liked the way, way back in the 80's when Jimmy Carter admitted to being born again. It was all so John Three and refreshing.

I will forever remember Mother Theresa lying in state with her bare feet sticking out from under the flag of India, who couldn't receive her Nobel prize without talking about Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit once dominated and empowered the Christian sermon. Now its often hard to find him in worship, once you turn the "PowerPoint" off.

How like Diogenes we have become. We thrust our lanterns into the dark homiletical fissures of post-modernism crying, "We seek The Empowering Spirit, but give us the Spirit of Acts Two if you don't mind. This one dates back past the beginnings of the historical-critical method. And frankly, we like the way he was always doing unexplainable things." For most he is a bit too unpredictable to fit into our "how-to" sermons.

This newer Spirit is tolerant, so tolerant that it is in total agreement with George Bernard Shaw who wrote, "Tolerance is the flabbiest of virtues." Flab is good. It snuggles prickly doctrines into the same padded pews without having our sharper edges inconvenience each other. Flab insulates cold passion 'til it feels warmer. Flab is a doctrinal shock absorber; when varying Christologies bump into each other, flab beats bubble-wrap in protecting the sensitive edges of our once important and individualized views of Jesus.

This spiritual flab is manufactured at several places throughout the kingdom. One large manufacturing center is religious cable. There the various evangelists move between camera angles and select pieces

of red Victorian furniture. They hug, and sing, and pray and talk about the second coming — when the Jesus they have understudied will come again splitting the skies over a sea of satellite dishes.

Another manufacturing center may be the user-friendly world of church growth. Marva Dawn has urged us to "reach out without dumbing down," but it seems we can reach further much faster when we keep the definitions at a minimum. People just play softball better with indefinite definitions of Christ. It takes the "coin" out of our koinonia when you talk too much about self-denial.

I for one am here to lay the guilt of this matter squarely at the feet of Apollos. Who was this shadowy evangelist, whose name and sin have survived the centuries, but not his itinerary or his doctrine? We only know he was very popular. Probably his crowds were bigger than Paul's. Paul appears to have been better at theology than he was, but not as good at communication. Unfortunately, in every century communicators do better than theologians. Ian Pitt-Watson said that the "what" of our preachment is more important than the "how" of our preachment. How true! It is more important, but always less popular. The "how" always gets bigger crowds than the "what." "What" uses nouns and verbs — nouns like atonement, incarnation, and transcendence. "How" uses more adjectives like relevant, applicable, and user-friendly.

Dorothy Sayers turning from Apollos was squarely on Paul's side. She said that the dogma — a major theological noun — is the dance. If so, Paul danced a paradoxical dance in Ephesus. Apollos appeared to be the real dancer, light on his feet with communicative style. But the real question here is: was Apollos really dancing Christianity into the souls of those he mesmerized with his communicative footwork? Paul was less entrancing in the pulpit, but he knew the difference between soteriology and a butter-knife.

It has long been understood that some preachers get through to big crowds with a little truth — see your cable television guide. Others get through to only a few people with a whole lot of truth — see the faculty roster of Regent College, Vancouver. In preaching, some preachers opt for deep and small and others opt for shallow and big. So why not just welcome Apollos into our coffee klatch with a jelly-

roll and a Starbuck's benediction?

Because . . . to go off fervently preaching half a gospel with total interest is to assume that endurance and integrity reside in the crowd count. Up front every religious gathering is to be evaluated by Paul's question, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" No, the size of your love offering is not relevant here, answer the question.

The Ephesians had been ravaged by glitz, but alas they confessed, "We have not so much heard if there be a Holy Ghost." Thus begins the doctrinal repair work. Properly heralded, preaching is the methodology of the kingdom. It is odd, but the Ephesians had heard of Jesus but not the Holy Ghost. But then since the Holy Ghost is Jesus it would appear that they have not all of Jesus that is to be had. Indeed they seem to have been surviving on half-a-Jesus.

This docetic savior seemed to be Jesus. But he hid in the shadows of half truths in the dimly lit minds of the Ephesians, never quite declaring himself. It's odd that Apollos never noticed he was preaching half-a-gospel. Pentecost had come and gone. There had been tongues of flame and rushing wind. Three-thousand people had been converted. The Holy Spirit was moving like a powerful mist of grace across the dry earth. Jesus was on earth, and revival was his method — only Apollos didn't know. After all, he had his programs, his calendar was full, and he was popular. If you go fast enough and if you are popular enough it seems you can go a long way on bad doctrine.

What did Apollos do with so much zeal and so little doctrine?

Maybe he set goals. There's a way to keep everybody busy and never have to consult the Bible. It is like those two Southern Baptist astronauts who crashed on the moon and immediately set a goal of three in Sunday School.

Maybe he formed long-range planning committees. This is an excellent diversion. Get people thinking ten years ahead. If you can keep your members thinking so far away, they will be nearly useless in the present.

There's a footnote in the Living Bible that says that in the Ancient

Syriac, Apollos had called for a constitutional revision. Those are always distracting and will finally get people so dyspeptic that they don't even miss not seeing Jesus at church.

There was as C.S. Lewis referred to it — a lot of hyphenated Christianity. There was the Christ-and-skydiving group, the Christ-and-the-cross-dressers support groups. There was the Christ-and-camping group. There was Christ-and-the-somewhat-deeper-life group, and the Christ-and-the-very-deep-deeper-life group.

But the most probable answer as to why Christ was not in Apollos' sermon was that he was not in Apollos' life. When Christ is really in me, I have the best chance of getting Christ in my sermons. I found I lost my focus on Christ when I began to focus on my troubles, especially those troubles in the ministry. It may be noteworthy that around this Apollinarian heresy, the first church split occurs. Acts 19:9 says that following Paul's teaching of Christ as the center of the faith, that "some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way."

How did he react to this division and split in the church? Well, "Paul . . . left the obstinate and took the true disciples and moved the center of his missionizing to a new location in the hall of Tyrannus."

The Christ-filled heralds are not those making an attempt to talk about Jesus.

Take my friend Joe. He is a Louisiana pastor who in July of 1998 received a piece of hate mail. Nothing unusual in that. Baptist pastors and probably all other kinds constantly receive hate mail. Long ago when I was in high school, if you wrote a letter, after you had put it in the envelope, you licked the flap and then wrote "S.W.A.K." on the bottom of it. If you wrote a letter to someone you didn't like you wrote "S.W.S.A.U." — sealed with spit as usual. Well my friend Joe got one sealed with vitriolic spit, and as Gaston testified in Beauty and the Beast, there are some in life who "are especially good at expectorating."

Joe's letter read: Dear Pastor: Your Sunday sermon was arrogant and presumptive. I was ashamed for the church to have to hear it. In my

opinion, you are no preacher and should resign. Lovingly yours, Jim Bayless.

Joe didn't have on his "What Would Jesus Do" bracelet and so he just got roaring mad, kicked the furniture and things like that. Then he came to his right mind and called his wife and asked her if she would bake a cake as a present for Mr. Bayless. His wife agreed to do it, but the list of ingredients that first came to her mind would have landed her in the Louisiana courts — unless the Judge happened to know him. So she thought, "What would Jesus do?" and she baked him a cake without Strychnine.

She didn't know him all that well and so had misspelled his name. She put a little card on the cake carrier that read, "To Mr. Gayless." The error was honest, if perhaps a bit Freudian. It is only a one-letter flaw exchanging "Gayless" for "Bayless," but enough to send Mr. Bayless scurrying back to the church. He had replaced her note on the cake carrier with one of his own that read, "Not only are you are a poor preacher, but you are also an idiot who cannot even spell his church member's name right. My name is Bayless not Gayless, stupid."

Again my friend Joe was destroyed. He no longer needed a WWJD bracelet, he needed a WWJDN — a "What would Jesus do NOW?" bracelet. It was Wednesday and the children's Awana Group was meeting and so he took the cake and served it to the children. They were all so happy to get it. It was indeed a great cake.

Then Joe passed out paper and pens and little envelopes to all the children. "Would each of you write a note to Mr. Bayless and thank him for sharing his wonderful cake with you. And children that's Mr. B-ayless! B- A- Y- L- E- S- S! Read my lips, children, that B, as in BUH BUH, B as in buffoon, no B as in beautiful."

Now it is no wonder that Joe preaches Jesus. You don't have to look in his sermons for Jesus. Jesus so crowds out every corner of his life, He could never be excluded from his sermons.

I remember a similar time in my early church-planting activities. I also had a Mr. Bayless. One of my deacons, who also seemed not to have heard that there was a Holy Ghost, decided I should be fired. I had

been approached by a Navy recruiter who was trying to get me enlisted in the Navy chaplaincy. I really didn't feel called to the Navy chaplaincy, but I felt even less called to die of poverty, crucified by people who didn't think I was spiritual enough. So, I drove downtown one afternoon. My existence was on the line. I was broken mentally and spiritually, possibly even wept as I drove. For sometime, I circled the recruiting center again and again. Sometimes as I drove around it, I sang "Anchors Aweigh" and some times I sang, "I'll Faithful Be Tho' I Should Die With Thee." I went back without joining the Navy and the church split. I took the true believers to the hall of Tyrannus as it were and in time. . . in time . . . in time, a church was born.

A few times I have dealt with pulpit committees who felt it was God's will to leave the church where I was and join with them to be their leader. I don't remember any of them ever saying, "Come, preach Christ to us." I do remember one dear lady saying, "You know we're Texans and support the Dallas Cowboys — it's God's will you know. So when you come to be our pastor, you must preach fast on game days so we won't have to miss the kick-off."

"But what if God is moving in the service?"

"Son, on game days God primarily moves at the line of scrimmage!"

I remember a lot of sermons that were filled with an agenda. Agendas are not all bad if they at least seem to suggest that the sermon had a clear point to be made, but not all sermons can say that. But oh, how I ache for the sermon's agenda to be the kingdom of God. Jesus ought to be the agenda far more than he is. One wonders if Apollos' sermons were not often given to fund-raising or getting involved in the committee structure of the Ephesian church.

Sermons often ring with manufactured passion. In fact, in Acts 18:25 it says that Apollos preached fervently the way of the Lord, but he knew only the baptism of John. Nothing is more dangerous than souls who are 100% passion preaching only 50% of the truth. Fervor without all the truth. Naiveté and fervency often keep company. My young years were often spent in attending the sermons of Texas evangelists. They were always passionate but I had a hard time linking their passions to good doctrine. I once — and I confessed shame-facedly

that I once believed that everybody who went to heaven was going to be 33 years old. A fervent, traveling evangelist taught our whole church that when we saw Jesus we would be as he was, and since he was 33 when he went to heaven, so would be all who arrived there. The amazing thing was that he taught this odd doctrine with great passion. Evangelists and love offerings were dependent on great passions. So, we wept when they led us in weeping, we laughed when they led us in laughter. They were masters of the human nervous system.

Probably Second Corinthians had already been written then but apparently Apollos had not taken the time to read it. Actually books seem not to have been his forte. But there it was as the King James translators would ultimately divide it up: God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself and has committed unto us the ministry of reconciliation.

It has been seven years since George Barna gave us the picture of what Americans think of American preachers. Only 51% of Evangelicals think they hear excellent preaching. Only 42% of mainline denominationalists think their preacher is excellent. Only 34% of Catholics think so, (What Americans Believe, Regal, 1991).

Ian Pitt-Watson once said, predicatio verbi dei est verbum dei. The preaching of the words of God is the Word of God. Who can deny it? So to stand in a holy moment and speak what God wants said is to wear the prophet's mantle.

I am convinced that while most people don't really know how to articulate what they want out of church, they want Jesus. They want Christ to permeate the sermon because he has already permeated the life of the preacher. So, perhaps the issue of getting Christ in the sermon is not a discipline by which we consciously work at getting Jesus in the word-count. No, it is far simpler than that. It is a matter of the preacher's hunger for Jesus. When the preacher gets hungry for Jesus, the hunger of those who come to church will be automatically sated.

Really?

Can it be that easy?

Yes, but the hunger for more continues. I can hear the society living out their meaningless and permissive morality by T.S. Eliot's dictum: "I've known the mornings and the afternoons, I've measured out my life in coffee spoons."

And in the hunger for something substantial, the Apollinarian School of Homiletics seems to be bringing to pass the chilling words of Amos:

The days are coming, declares the sovereign Lord, when I will send a famine through the land — not a famine for food, or a thirst for water, but a famine for the hearing of the words of the Lord. Many will stagger from sea to sea and wander from North to East, but they will not find it. (Amos 8:11-12)

Conclusion

The one valid question for anybody's church is, "Have you received the Holy Spirit since you believed?" How can we tell that the Holy Spirit is there? Who can describe every aspect of the way he works? Well, in Acts when he first came, his coming seemed to be marked by a kind of madness, all babbling in languages they had never learned and acting in some ways as if they were drunk. Perhaps they were drunk; inebriated by the Spirit. Paul favored such intoxication. "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess but be filled with the Spirit."

Heady inebriation is this: Spirit intoxication. It is a glorious addiction, but one sip and we pneumaholics must have more of the pneuma! For we may not be wholly doctrinal or crisply theological, we are alive and the life is wind and fire. Wind that blows to disorient our propriety. Fire that burns to ashes our need for printed programs and stiff constitutions. One of the evidences that we have is what might be called a glorious chaos!

When I first arrived in the Philippines at the Baguio Seminary, I was walking across the campus and was approached by this native Philippine. He was carrying a clear plastic sack inside of which was a copy of my book The Empowered Leader.

"I bought this book last year," he said, "never knowing we would have a chance to meet."

"Why do you keep it in a sack?," I asked.

"Well," he said, "It's kind of expensive you know. I love this book and I just don't want it to get dirty. I want to keep it clean."

He looked at my book like it was the Codex Sinaiticus. It's hard not to love a man who carries your book around in a plastic bag.

I would learn later that when a poor pastor pays $18.00 for an American book, he is making quite a statement about his priorities.

"I wonder," he said, "if you'd be willing to come and preach to my people. I know they would love to hear you preach?"

"Sure," I said. I really didn't know if it was the will of God but it seemed like the will of God when my new friend was carrying my book around in a plastic sack.

"I thank you very much," he said, "I'm an Ifagao native," he went on, "and I have to ride the bus eight hours to get here to school."

"I'm impressed," I said, "I don't think I've ever met such a dedicated Baptist pastor."

"Me either," he said, "I'm a Pentecostal pastor!"

At first I exulted — a literate Pentecostal! Then I groaned. Could I really preach in a Pentecostal church in the mountains?

We set the date. His sister was a Pentecostal pastor too, so I got the president, Les Hill, of the seminary to agree to preach in her church, and we set off on the long, long drive up into the mountains of Benaue to preach in Pentecostal services. When I walked into their little church, I was struck by the fact that they didn't look Pentecostal. They were all rather short and dark headed, there was not a platinum blond anywhere in the congregation.

I had always thought that the students at Southwestern defined the word poor. But there I got a new definition of poverty. Neither the

pastor nor any of his people had cars. We sang choruses from huge sheets of news print that had been lettered by case markers. I preached on the importance of having a passion for Christ, but the sermon was completely unnecessary — like bringing coals to Newcastle! They seemed unnecessarily active to me, they were so athletic I thought of asking them to come forward and lay their thyroid glands on the altar. They listened well, but inwardly I thought, "Do they really understand." But this I very much understood — The Holy Spirit is God's special gift to the poor, the broken, the needy.

The church was packed.

The pastor had asked me to extend the invitation, although the word extend seemed out of place. We had hardly begun to sing when it seemed to me that they were all coming forward. I've been a Baptist for so long it scared me to see so many of them coming. It seemed they were rushing upon me like the Philistines in Delilah's bedroom.

The thing that amazed me was that I could all but see the flame. I fancied I could hear the roar of wind. Yet they appeared irrational like people full of new wine and then a delicious psychosis. Everywhere there was a sense of confusion and mayhem. I couldn't remember the last time I gave an invitation and there were so many at the altar that I got confused asking them why they had all come.

Pastor Dumia was there helping me try to lead some to Christ, trying to help others with rededications. It was a mess, people were just trying to get to us to pray and finally I had no idea what was going on. Then to complicate things, there were all these sick people wanting prayer. Pastor Dumia said, "I'll counsel the lost, would you take care of the healing?"

"Look, pastor, I'm a Baptist. I don't do healing. When Baptists get sick they take pills, I'm not good at healing."

"Just pray for the sick — that's all you have to do, just pray."

So I did. They all talked kind of funny, and much of the time I was not too sure of what I was praying for. But, I just prayed and tried to look sincere, and they kept saying hallelujah and things like that. I didn't

accomplish any huge miracles of healing and was not asked to join the Benny Hinn team. But one miracle did occur. I saw what Jesus means to poor believers whose only hope lies in the wind and fire — for they have nothing else in this world they want or crave.

In thirty or forty minutes the invitation was over, but I will never forget that overwhelming feeling that there were people all over the place and God was doing things in their lives. Suddenly I understood Acts 19. Ephesus loomed large. I was Apollos in love with something beyond my once poetic Christ! I knew the glory of divine mayhem. The utter chaos of the visitation of God.

I went home that night with fire on my mind, all but singing the words of T.S. Eliot:

> The dove descending breaks the air
> With flame of incandescent terror
> Of which the tongues declare
> The One discharge of sin and error.
> The only hope or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre —
> To be redeemed from fire by fire.
>
> Who then devised the torment? Love.
> Love is the unfamiliar name
> Behind the hands that wove
> The intolerable shirt of flame.
> Which human power cannot remove.
> We only live, only suspire
> Consumed by either fire or fire.
>
> — T. S. Eliot, from The Four Quartets, pp. 143-144.

(editor's note: Calvin Miller is Professor of Divinity at Beeson Divinity School, Birmingham, AL.)

Preaching in the Context of Worship. Edited by David M. Greenhaw and Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice, 2000, 0-8272-2956-9, 145 pp, $16.99, paperback.

Preachers ought to be vitally interested in worship. Worship leaders ought to be vitally interested in preaching. Alas, in too many churches each functions in a world largely separate from the other, working in polite proximity but without significant mutual understanding, appreciation, or cooperation. The result is a service in which worship and preaching are two distinct spheres sharing a common time-event but a tenuous bond.

In churches with traditional worship, whether revivalist or liturgical, musical and textual selections are frequently changed from week to week in merely "cut-and-paste" fashion, without significant attention to their relation to the sermon. Exceptions to this will occur when there is a prominent theme driving both preacher and musicians, a theme like Christmas, Mother's Day, or Pentecost.

That lack of integration has become even more apparent in congregations which have adopted a contemporary worship style. In these locales the first half of the service (usually song medleys) is typically described as "worship," and the second half of the service (Scripture and sermon) is labeled "teaching." It is rare to find a service in which the two halves share any visible relation to each other.

The title of this book holds out the possibility that in its chapters both preachers and worship leaders will find help in achieving those goals in a way that will honor God and benefit those who gather for corporate worship. While readers will find fascinating and helpful insights about preaching here, there is not as much assistance in relating preaching to worship as might have been hoped.

The volume is a collection of ten essays in honor of Charles L. Rice, professor of homiletics for many years at Drew University. All but two of the authors were Ph.D. students of Rice. The two editors are among the contributors. Greenhaw is president and professor of preaching and worship at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis. Allen is pro-

fessor of preaching and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. He is well known in the homiletics community for his previous publications on preaching.

The articles reflect a perspective and context of preaching that will be foreign to many in the evangelical tradition. Most of the chapters assume preaching will take place within the seasons of the church year and from texts drawn from lectionary readings (Shelley Cochran, "The Christian Year and the Revised Common Lectionary"). In some, there are hints of a more sacramental theology (Paul Wilson's "Preaching and the Sacrament of Holy Communion"). In others there are suggestions for experimenting with lay preachers, members of the congregation preaching regularly with the minister preaching only once a month (Douglas Gwyn's "A School of the Prophets: Teaching Congregational Members to Preach").

In recent decades the church has experienced significant worship renewal. This has created a fertile field for greater congregational participation in and understanding of worship. It has also opened the door to greater creativity in the design of worship, utilizing a broader spectrum of musical selections, Biblical readings, prayers and confessions. The introductory chapter in this book (Marian Adell's "Preaching in the Renewal of Worship in the Last Thirty Years") offers such constructive suggestions for improving worship as using laity to lead in prayer, reading Scriptural passages longer than a few verses as a sermon text, and making the Lord's Supper integral to rather than an appendage to the service.

Evaluations inevitably include a degree of subjectivity, and such is apparent in the following two observations. First, evangelical preachers are driven by an overwhelming sense that the sermon is not the preacher's artistic composition of his ideas as much as it is his careful exposition of God's revelation. While these writers may hold such a conviction (certainly none denies it), it does not resonate through the pages of the book with the prominence such a theme deserves.

Second, evangelical worship leaders (who are often the preachers in a given congregation) are driven by an overwhelming sense that worship is not so much the recitation of a liturgy as it is a glorious encounter with the triune God. Again, while none of the writers reject this con-

viction, neither does this theme reverberate through the pages with the power it deserves.

The church today has access to many books on worship. It has access to many books on preaching. It still needs more on the cooperative relationship between the two.

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The Whispered Word: A Theology of Preaching. By Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki. St. Louis: Chalice, 1999, 0-8272-4283-5, 118 pp., $15.99, paperback.

The first 70% of this little volume is a series of lectures (in six chapters) delivered to the pastors of The Three Rivers Annual Conference (Illinois) of The United Methodist Church. The last 30% is a series of seven brief sermons by the same United Methodist minister. Suchocki is also Professor of Theology at Claremont. In this little volume, she first develops her process theology of preaching, then she demonstrates it.

Process Theology suggests that God is everlastingly creative, continuously calling existence into being through an evocative word" (p. 3). The revealed word and the proclaimed word have power to intensify the (hidden) "whispered" word to bring it more to our consciousness. Preaching extends the incarnation of Christ into our time (p. 21). "The Received Word," turns to the process dynamics on the hearer – individually and corporately. Different hearers receive the same sermon as different sermons, yet the many hearers make up one body in organic unity. "Preaching Theologically" is using certain great "themes" or "symbols" of the Christian faith which can be configured into a variety of complementing or conflicting doctrines (p. 39). "Only a dead tradition is impervious to change" (p. 41).

She suggests we are not to read texts slavishly and agree with the theology in every one: "Letting the Sermon Go," calls us to "give away" the finished sermon, "outcome unknown. . . .God will use it as God

will, touching some when they need it with a sense of presence" (p. 64). "The Sermon as Worship," is the final lecture. "To worship God is to bring ourselves before God as we are, with all our emotions, and to see ourselves in the light of the nature of the God we worship" (p. 75).

The writer gives us seven of her own sermons to explicate this theology of preaching. As for content, there is one sermon on each of the seven "symbols" that she believes embody the Christian faith. (1) creation, (2) sin, (3) Jesus Christ (4) new life, (5) community, (6) the work of God in the world, and (7) the hope of everlasting redemption.

Homiletically, all seven examples use an inductive pattern, done well. Three strengths are use of (1) narrative, (2) personal experience, and (3) questions. Narrative treatment is her regular technique for explaining the text. Narrative illustrations are also important to her. Many of her narratives are shared personal experience from her life as a mother and grandmother. Questions draw us along toward the preacher's desired conclusion.

Suchocki's feminism will distract some readers (She prefers the term "Womanist theologian"). Gender-specific pronouns for deity are studiously avoided even if it means correcting John Wesley: "And since [God] is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve God in our neighbor: which [God] receives as if done to [God]self in person. . ." (p. 11). Nevertheless, the little volume is well written in a flowing oral style. It may be useful for students of homiletics as an example of the preaching of a process theologian, an inductive homilitician and a "womanist."

Austin B. Tucker

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Transforming Christian Leadership: 10 Exemplary Church leaders. By Jerry C. Wofford. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999, 0-8010-9093-8, 216 pp., 13.99.

Transforming Christian Leadership by Wofford seeks to encapsulate

both theologically and practically those strategies and elements that would make a leader effective regardless of context. Wofford states that the purpose of the book is to, "clarify five areas of confusion plaguing church leadership today." (p. 15) The areas mentioned are the church leaders lack of "charismatic influence", business and professional people feeling constrained in using their leadership skills honed in the marketplace in the church context, the misunderstanding of leaders concerning their authority in the Church, the role of servant-leadership and finally, the confusion of what it means to be a "successful" church leader.

Wofford addresses these issues by laying a biblical foundation for leadership in chapter one, entitled, "Jesus as a Transforming Leader." Once Wofford lays the foundation biblically he then elicits the expertise of key pastoral leaders from around the country in various contexts and cultures to highlight various aspects of transformational leadership through which the five critical areas of need in leadership are addressed. Chapters 2-10 attempt to give critical keys on "how" to develop both professionally and personally as a transformational leader based upon the experiences of the leaders interviewed as well as biblical principles.

Wofford is to be commended for his insights concerning the critical needs of church leaders today. His emphasis on being an agent of change, serving with charisma, stimulating hearts and minds, being a servant-leader as well as shepherding the flock brings balance to the Pastor as C.E.O. versus Shepherd. One of the strengths of the book are the discussion questions. The questions are well thought out and causes one to reflect upon their own development in the area just studied. The practical "how-to's" are a strength to the book as well.

There are two areas where the book seems to lack strength. At times, it seems to be too formula driven. If one does this then one can be assured of being a Transformational Leader. If not careful then Wofford's approach could take a "one size fits all" direction. There are times when the "process of developing" as a leader is not as well developed. For instance, how does failure fit with becoming a transformational leader or what about "accountability" as a leader to others for personal development? Finally, what is the definition of "transformation"? I saw a description but not a clear definition.

Overall, Wofford is to be commended for putting together a book that gives a solid foundation upon which to build in becoming an effective leader.

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The Tentmaking Pastor: The Joy of Bivocational Ministry. By Dennis W. Bickers. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 0-8010-9099-7, 136 pp., $12.99, paperback.

The Apostle Paul was a preacher of the Gospel. He was also a maker of tents. When he began preaching, Paul did not give up his tentmaking trade, but instead, used it to support his ministry. This dual aspect of Paul's work has given rise to the modern term "tentmaker." A tentmaking pastor is one who works a secular job as well as a paid ministry position. In his book The Tentmaking Pastor: the Joy of Bivocational Ministry, Dennis Bickers explores the benefits of being a tentmaking pastor, and encourages his readers to consider taking a bivocational approach to pastoral ministry in the small church.

The main questions which the author seeks to answer are these: What is bivocational ministry? Why would a pastor or church want to consider a bivocational approach to the pastorate? What are the advantages and disadvantages of bivocational ministry?

A reoccurring theme in the book is that tentmaking pastors tend to stay at churches longer than full-time pastors. The author documents his claims with appropriate supporting material, and outlines the clear advantages that come with longer pastorates. When a pastor stays at a church beyond the typical four year tenure, a sense of trust begins to develop between pastor and people. This trust serves as the basis for progress and stability within the church.

Bickers outlines other reasons in favor of a tentmaking pastor. For example, without a full time salary to pay, a small church has more money to spend on other programs and ministry opportunities. Also, with a tentmaking pastor, greater expectations are placed upon the laypeople to take responsibility for the ministry, creating a healthier, more participatory church environment. Perhaps most attractive for the pastor is the benefit of living more comfortably financially. Tentmaking avoids the undesirable situation where a pastor tries to eke out an existence on a sub-standard salary, which is often the only kind of salary small churches can afford.

The author speaks from experience, relating stories from his own life and ministry. While arguing in favor of a bivocational model of ministry, Bickers also gives adequate consideration to the down side of tentmaking, painting a realistic picture of its challenges. Among those challenges is the time constraints of a tentmaking pastor, which results in the pastor's limited availability, and results also in the potential lack of balance in the pastor's personal life. Appropriately, Bickers devotes an entire chapter to talking about the balance needed in a pastor's life, the challenges of achieving that balance in a bivocational setting, and suggestions on how to do so.

Bickers' book is not academic; instead, his intentions are to explore a practical topic in a practical way. He is successful in addressing both pastors and churches who want to know the pros and cons of bivocational ministry. In the end, he shows how the advantages far outweigh the disadvantages, and encourages his readers to consider taking a bivocational approach to pastoral leadership.

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The Dynamics of Spiritual Formation. By Mel Lawrenz. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 0-8010-9097-0, 173 pp., $11.99, paperback.

Another contribution in the Ministry Dynamics series edited by Warren Wiersbe, this book seeks to make spiritual formation understandable as the heart of a church's ministry, not as an add-on or something extraordinary. The author is the senior associate pastor of Elmbrook Church in suburban Milwaukee; the book reflects his common-sense approach to spiritual formation as the life of the church, not as something mysterious or foreign to what the church is about. His theme is that spiritual formation is "part of the normal Christian life, not the domain of an elite few" (p. 22). Thus, he looks at the normal activities of the Christian life and church ministry æ personal Bible reading, private and public prayer, corporate worship, Christian fellowship, preaching, and living in the world as a Christian æ and points to the formative and maturing elements in each of these activities. The goal of normal church life must be the intentional shaping of souls in the image of Christ through an integrated approach to spiritual growth.

In quoting many Christian saints from the past, the author has chosen to quote secondary sources in most cases. I would have preferred to see the original work cited for easy reference, but I appreciate the quotes which make me want to read the larger works being quoted. An excellent Scripture index is provided at the end of the book.

Experienced and new pastors as well as church leaders will find the book helpful in orienting their thinking to see spiritual formation as the result of the church doing well what God has called it to do.

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Sermons of the Century: Inspiration from 100 Years of Influential Preaching. Edited by Warren W. Wiersbe. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 0-8010-9108-X, 303 pp., $19.99 hardback.

This anthology of twenty-five memorable snapshots of preaching is a fascinating collection from the lecterns of some of the well-known (and not-so-well-known) pulpiteers who proclaimed the Word in the 20th century. Showcasing candidates from a variety of denominations — Congregationalists to Baptists, from Plymouth Brethren to Lutherans, from Presbyterians to the one who founded the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel — a veritable smorgasbord of styles and structures, shapes and forms are discovered in this collection. There are sermons delivered at crusades, broadcast on radio, and preached in church. Herein one finds the flamboyant Sunday, the sedate Fosdick, the crisp British style of Lloyd-Jones and Stott, the picturesque idiom of Moody, the poetry of Marshall, the memorable "Pay Day-Some Day" of Robert Greene Lee, and, rather unusual for an evangelical compilation, a sermon from the Roman Catholic prelate Fulton Sheen. The individual sermons are quite evenly split between evangelistic ones and those dealing with Christian living; both Old and New Testament texts are dealt with in both categories. A quite remarkable sermon by John R. Rice dealing with the theology of remembrance ("And God Remembered . . .") is guaranteed to edify and delight (and, I might add, provoke emulation).

It has oft been noted that black preaching is in a league of its own; I would have loved to have seen more of this cultural genre of rhetoric represented in Wiersbe's work — there are practitioners galore in the 20th century of this form of art: T. D. Jakes (TIME Magazine's "America's Best Preacher" in 2001), Gardner Taylor, Tony Evans . . . . This may well be the most serious omission in this work; Wiersbe's claim to have spanned a "broad spectrum of preachers" is, in this respect, unsubstantiated. Though the limitations of size do restrict the compiler, and though it is patent that no one reader is ever completely satisfied with the list of the preachers included, Wiersbe's admission

that not all would agree with his choices is well taken. I must admit that I did forage (alas in vain) for other non-African-American preachers such as Jack Hayford, Calvin Miller, Stuart Briscoe, Haddon Robinson, and the late W. A. Criswell (modesty may have precluded inclusion of Wiersbe himself, surely one worthy of being in this influential company). Nevertheless, the inclusion of Walter Maier, Clarence Macartney, and Frank Boreham, not exactly household names, nor authors well-represented in a pastor's library, somewhat made up for the absences of the aforementioned.

A feature of Sermons of the Century that will add to one's reading pleasure is the biographic capsules of each preacher provided by Wiersbe. In these sketches I was especially gratified to find bibliographies, albeit small, of other full-length biographies of the preacher under consideration. A helpful textual index of biblical passages utilized in these sermons is also available in the book.

Treasury of the World's Greatest Sermons (Kregel, 1998) and Developing A Christian Imagination: An Interpretive Anthology (Victor Books, 1995) are other sermon collections by Wiersbe that might interest the reader of this work. Wiersbe has also compiled a multi-volume Classic Sermons series (Kregel) on a variety of biblical topics and characters; these works include many of the preachers found in Sermons of the Century.

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Preaching Resurrection. By O. Wesley Allen, Jr. St. Louis, Chalice, 2000, 0-8272-2961-5, 140 pp., $12.00, paperback.

O. Wesley Allen's book, Preaching Resurrection, rises from the ashes of the Easter sermons lying buried in the graveyard of irrelevance. The author contends that while much of the Easter preaching points to the rolled away stone and the empty tomb, it fails to leave the ancient

cemetery. Allen argues that all the air breathed from the pulpits in defense of the historicity of the resurrection fails to resuscitate the cold hearts of today's audience. The goal of the book then is to make the resurrection real for today's Christians by making it evident in the lives of the people today. What we need, according to the author, is for people to see the resurrection playing itself out in our everyday lives.

Allen does not demand that the readers wade in on the debate of the historical veracity of Jesus' resurrection. He assumes the validity of the distinction between the claim that Christ is risen and the claim that Christ was risen. For the author, the historical investigation is not the primary category for theological inquiry. The only prerequisite for accepting the thesis of the book is that of openness to the claim that the resurrection stories have the power to inform our existence today.

Allen's strategy in accomplishing the goal of preaching the resurrection for today's audience begins with a retracing of the unique narratives of each of the four gospels. The theological frameworks construed by the gospel authors serve as a scaffolding for the distinct depictions of the Easter story. The thrust of each Resurrection story is then brought to life for today's hearers in a sermon refocusing a particular aspect of Christian reality and Christian existence.

Each gospel's theology is surveyed with an eye to its distinctive witness to the resurrection. However, the extraction of the theological themes goes well beyond purely descriptive overviews and summaries. Instead, Allen's theological task prescribes a set of glasses for viewing the theology of the gospels. The theological task assumes a postmodern stance, where each gospel is viewed as a byproduct of the needs of a distinct Church community in its historical and socio-political milieu. As a result, each subsequent gospel, starting with Mark, builds its theology in both continuity and discontinuity with the prior gospels. Each Gospel is construed as a reaction to the changing context and the inadequacy of the previous attempt to meet the rising needs of the evolving Church. Allen's vantage point in looking at the gospels' theologies is assumed without much dialogue with the competing claims.

Thus, Mark writes in response to the failed hope of the Jewish revolt and the destruction of the Temple. Mark shapes his gospel as a para-

ble. The narrative of the Easter story, according to Allen, is intended to shift the focus away from the resurrection toward the portrait of Jesus as the crucified Son of God. A theology rooted in the glory of the resurrection could not be built on the rubble of the temple and the ruins of Jerusalem. Matthew, following after Mark, writes long after the deflating conflict. He pens his gospel in a new reality where the church enters into a growing competition with Judaism. In his account of the resurrection he attempts to give a fledgling church a new identity by depicting Jesus as still being a sign of God's presence for his people even after the resurrection. Luke's and John's gospels spring to life from similar, community-sensitive considerations. The overarching persuasion of Allen's theological analysis is the postmodern conviction that each narrative is written for the specific community of faith. In this way the unifying themes of the gospel accounts are submerged in the authors' desires to reshape the truth of the risen Christ to the needs of their communities.

Allen's desire to resuscitate Easter preaching is commendable. His longing for relevance of preaching for today's audience echoes a growing chorus of voices bored to death by preaching reduced to playing with bones and touring ancient cemeteries. However, it seems that in an attempt to remedy this terminal condition, Allen falls into the pit of imposing postmodern assumptions on the biblical witness. His implicit rejection of the possibility of the Spirit's meta-narrative encompassing the four gospels leads him to four competing and at times contradictory theologies. For example, in Mark's gospel, Joseph of Arimathea is meant to be a negative figure burying Jesus more out of his concern for the encroaching Sabbath than his care for the Lord of the Sabbath. Yet, by the time we get to Matthew, the evangelist's efforts redeem Joseph to the stature of one of Jesus' disciples and reverse the shady details of Jesus' burial.

The theology of Allen's book runs away on him precisely because of his explicit refusal to argue for the historicity of the Easter story. He puts the cart of relevance before the horse of biblical veracity. The theology of the Resurrection is flogged by the needs of the church community instead of being driven by the claim that the only way we can assert that Jesus is risen is if we can assert that He was raised from the dead. The common denominator of each Easter account is the empty tomb

and the claim of Jesus being raised from the dead. Why then would we need to propose that the accounts were shaped by the community, instead of assuming that the accounts of that ancient Sunday morning shaped the community of faith. Instead of faith being brought to life by Jesus' resurrection, we are left with the impression that it is our faith that breaths life into otherwise irrelevant accounts.

However, the biggest problem with trying to extract relevance at the price of the biblical truth, is that it puts Allen's whole project into question. If the whole point of the resurrection preaching is simply to help people to see how "the resurrection" repeats itself daily in our living, why bother with the text at all? Why bother laboring through the ancient theologies? Why bother with the resurrection at all? It would be a lot simpler to expound on the theology of the Velveteen Rabbit, where it's our faith that ultimately triumphs over death.

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Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today. By James W. Thompson. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001, 0-664-22294-3, 177 pp., $13.99, paperback.

James Thompson, professor of New Testament at Abilene Christian University, has written a philosophy of preaching, arguing that Paul's preaching to a pre-Christian world should be a model for our preaching to a post-Christian world. Thompson seeks to augment the "new homiletic" with its emphasis on induction and narrative. Thompson values the new homiletic but points out that it is no longer new. The new homiletic grew out of the 1950s when audiences were well instructed in the faith. Today's post-Christian culture with its biblical illiteracy and pagan mythologies is similar to Paul's pre-Christian culture. We need a model of preaching for today. Thompson finds it in Paul's epistles.

In Chapter One the author acknowledges that epistles are not ser-

mons, but they are a "window" and "echo" of Paul's actual preaching ministry (p. 27). This is true because the epistles were composed orally and received aurally, because they make many references to Paul's preaching, and because they carry on his work begun by preaching.

Chapter Two argues that kerygma and paraklesis (evangelistic and pastoral preaching) should not be separated since we speak, just a Paul spoke, to mixed audiences: "As a result of the pluralism of our society, the preacher may never assume that the congregation has already been converted. As Paul's preaching ministry indicates, the announcement of the good news is not intended only for the non-Christian world; the congregation must be reminded regularly of the saving events that are the foundation of its existence" (p. 60).

Chapter Three describes the "shape of Paul's preaching." With balance typical of the whole book, Thompson affirms that Paul used Greco-Roman rhetoric but that his preaching also transcended those strategies and forms. Christian preaching is different from Greco-Roman rhetoric in that it uses a "grammar of faith" to address the ekklesia, not the assembly or law court. This "grammar" is composed of intimate familial terms, doxology, and liturgy even as the preacher speaks with authority. He or she is "heir to the prophetic tradition," not "one without authority" (p. 79). Deductive arrangement and theological terms have a place in preaching to a post-Christian culture.

Chapter Four analyzes 1 Thessalonians as a model of "pastoral preaching." That model suggests that "the needs of the community define the content of preaching. These needs are, however, ultimate needs," not felt needs. "Ultimate needs" are discovered through eschatology (p. 92). Future realities should impact present behavior. For example, based on a vision of what type of community God is forming, Paul commands sexual codes ("abstain from fornication"). Pastoral preaching also attempts to form corporate identity as it turns an "audience into a congregation" (p. 97). Pastoral preaching uses "insider language" (p. 98 ff.). This is theological language such as "election" and parousia. The use of such terms helps listeners place themselves in the grand narrative of creation-fall-redemption. To be sure, Paul explained "insider language," but he didn't avoid it, and according to Thompson neither should we.

Chapter Five uses 1 and 2 Corinthians to examine "preaching and theology." Thompson argues that behavioral standards must always grow from theology and preaching should explicitly link the two. Such preaching may not have immediate outcomes, but it gradually and persistently defines reality so that the community begins to think Christianly and thus act Christianly. By this point in the book, the author has already made this point, so that this chapter may not be necessary.

Chapter Six also repeats the themes of previous chapters as it describes "preaching as remembering": "Paul's preaching reminds us that, in preaching to those who have already heard, we are not forced to say something new each week. In speaking to one congregation, we speak to a variety of listeners. Some . . . have not heard the Christian message before; others have heard, but they did not hear well. Others will forget the Christian message if their memories are not refreshed . . . . [P]reachers should not have an aversion to stating what has been said before" (p. 141).

Chapter Seven is a short summary, and an appendix follows which presents eight sermon sketches to exemplify preaching in the Pauline paradigm.

This book was written by a biblical scholar and theologian who is a practicing preacher. He demonstrates sufficient familiarity with the literature in homiletics and classical rhetoric to make his argument. The current which flows under the argument seems to be concern over the marketing of the church and the dumbing down of the faith. If you share those concerns, you will find yourself nodding frequently. If you do not share those concerns, I think you will still find Preaching Like Paul balanced, biblical, and clear. Thompson believes that the Scriptures equip expository preachers not only with the content of what to preach but also with the program and forms of preaching. Highly recommended.

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Patterns of Preaching: A Sermon Sampler. Edited by Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice, 1998, 0-8272-2953-4, xiv + 252 pp., $24.99, paperback.

Ronald Allen, who teaches homiletics and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, has collected and introduced thirty-four sermons from contemporary preachers, reflective of a variety of ecclesiastical traditions and theological viewpoints and intended especially to exemplify the diversity of preaching paradigms in North American pulpits at the close of the twentieth century.

The contributors of these sermons reflect much of the diversity of North American Protestantism. Denominationally, the reader can sample sermons from Baptists, Episcopalians, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians, although a comparatively high proportion (almost 20%) come from the editor's own tradition, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Theologically, they run the gamut from Reformed evangelical (Bryan Chapell of Covenant Theological Seminary) to process theology (Marjorie Suchocki of Claremont School of Theology). The selection is egalitarian: eighteen of the preachers are male, and sixteen are female. Most are Caucasian (non-Hispanic), but African-American preaching is quite well represented and there is one sermon by a Hispanic. There was none from an Asian American. Most contributors are professors of homiletics in seminaries, including well-known names in recent homiletic literature (e.g., Thomas Long, Henry Mitchell, Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Eugene Lowry, Paul Scott Wilson, and Chapell), although several sermons are by pastors serving local congregations.

The sermons are grouped in four general categories: traditional patterns, contemporary patterns, patterns for subjects, and patterns for theology. A contrast is perceptible between the cognitive and (generally) more expository focus of the "traditional" sermons in the first section (e.g., Puritan plain style, verse-by-verse, problem to celebration, theological quadrilateral), on the one hand, and the narrative orientation of the contemporary patterns in the second, on the other. Some of the latter, not surprisingly, are strongly influenced by media and the arts. Section Three groups occasional sermons (wedding, funeral) with

other topical messages (doctrinal, Christian practice, personal or social issues). The last section shows how sermons molded by diverse theological frameworks, whether evangelical, liberation, postliberal, revisionary (process), or postmodern, reflect their various foundational commitments. Nevertheless the four categories are not mutually exclusive, and many of the sermons in the last two sections could well have appeared earlier as examples of the traditional or contemporary style. The editor introduces each sermon in a page or two, highlighting the distinctive features to be noticed in each message.

In his introduction Allen indicates his concern to relate each sermon to the gospel, which he defines as "the news, revealed to the church through Jesus Christ, of God's unconditional love for each and every entity and of God's will for justice for each and every entity" (ix). "Entity" language suggests process thought, and Allen has indeed coauthored an earlier book exploring the influence of process theology on preaching. Evangelical homileticians will be disappointed to observe that in some of these sermons (though not all) the scandalous particularity of the gospel as Paul summarized it, for example, in 1 Corinthians 15:3 ff., is abstracted into generalities only vaguely recognizable as distinctively Christian, even if some mention is made of Jesus or grace. One wonders whether all these preachers would appreciate William Willimon's emphasis in Preaching to Strangers: "When God came among us, in the flesh, Emmanuel, God didn't hover over the whole world. God came to Bethlehem. God did not appear as an idea or program…. God did not come as some new social strategy. God came as a baby named Jesus" (p. 129). Much less, I suspect, would some of them echo the ancient apostle's resolution to boast in nothing but "the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14).

Related to the diversity of definitions for the gospel exemplified in this collection is the diversity of sources from which the sermons' content and authority are derived. Most, though not all, take one or two biblical texts as their starting point. In some the text's meaning in context is explained and its relevance to listeners shown, whereas in others the original purpose of the passage seems subordinated to the preacher's agenda. Other messages overtly derive their content from a film, a walk on the beach, or a liturgical practice, rather than from Scripture. Those convinced (as I am) that God's written word is the only legiti-

mate source of the preacher's authority (and concerned not only that the Bible is used but also with how it is used) will find themselves mentally arguing with the editor and some of his contributors.

Yet even those contributions with which one may most strongly disagree, theologically and methodologically, nevertheless present "patterns of preaching" that rightly challenge us to rethink our homiletic style as to its effectiveness not only to convey the truth of Christ's gospel but also to impress it upon the hearts of our contemporaries in life-transforming ways.

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The Dynamics of Pastoral Care. By David Wiersbe. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000, 0-8010-9094-6, 156 pp., $13.99, paperback.

When I pick up a book on ministry I immediately look to see how many years the writer has spent in the pastoral ministry. My reason for doing so is simple. I want to know that I'm reading the thoughts and experiences of a fellow pastor actively engaged in the challenge of full-time ministry. The more and varied the experience the greater the credibility I accord the author. Upon picking up David Wiersbe's book I discovered he had over twenty years experience in the pastoral ministry. Furthermore that experience is varied in Suburban, small town and rural settings. In my view it is clear that David Wiersbe writes what he knows concerning the pastoral ministry.

The Dynamics of Pastoral Care is worth a read. However, I found two things in this book of greatest value. First Wiersbe emphasizes the pastor's role as that of shepherd, not manager or executive. He argues that pastors are called to shepherd the people under his or her care. In an age where pastors are urged to be corporate managers, especially in larger congregations, I found this emphasis refreshing. Indeed, I have noticed that more than a few churches have created the position of Executive Pastor. Wiersbe's book gives strong encouragement to pastors to resist that pressure and seek to shepherd rather than manage the people of God. That emphasis cuts delightfully against the man-

agement model of pastoral care.

To that end Wiersbe spends a significant amount of time discussing what it means for a pastor to fulfill the role of shepherd for his people. Without a doubt pastors will spend time on managerial tasks such as personnel matters, preparing worship, meeting with committees and the like. However, pastors manage these tasks so as to shepherd their people. In that sense the managing a pastor must do serves a shepherding end. Wiersbe argues that shepherd, not corporate officer, is the role God expects of those called to the pastorate. To that argument I raise a mighty, "Amen!"

The second emphasis I found helpful is Wiersbe's discussion concerning servant leadership. He argues that being a shepherd means pastors are called to be servant-leaders of their people. Through this emphasis I was reminded that pastors are not called to success, but to obedience and service.

I was impressed enough with these two points that I used the material on shepherding and servant leadership as the basis for devotions with my board of elders. They also found these things helpful as they examined their roles as Elders in the congregation we serve. Pastors, ministry students, and perhaps some seminaries would do well to recapture Wiersbe's emphases upon shepherding and servanthood.

There was, however, one thing about the book I found less helpful. I believe Wiersbe tries to cover too much too fast in this little book. To his defense I must add that he did not intend to write a definitive treatise on pastoral care. Wiersbe says as much in the final pages of his book. However, I believe the book covers such topics as pastoral calls, leading worship, and earning trust too quickly. He discusses them nearly to the point of being shallow. At times these subjects, worthy of chapters in their own right, are quickly covered in the space of a paragraph or two. In such a format they serve better as appetizers than the main course.

On the whole I recommend The Dynamics of Pastoral Care for pastors and those studying for the ministry. I believe the book serves well as a quick read for those serving in ministry and as supplemental reading for pastoral ministry syllabi.

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Old Texts, New Sermons: The Quiet Revolution in Biblical Preaching. By Joseph M. Webb. St. Louis: Chalice, 2000, 0-8272-2711-6, 163 pp., $21.99 paperback.

At the outset, the author warns "these pages present a view of biblical preaching that is not for the faint of homiletical heart" (p. xi). Asserting his view of how language and meaning have changed over the last hundred years, he addresses the question, "What Has Happened to Biblical Text?" under six headings — language is always arbitrary, words are never neutral, language has great power, humans have great power over language, to speak is to act, and language makes absolute truth impossible (how then can this heading be stated as absolutely true?). Foundational to the linguistic revolution of which he writes are Ferdinand de Saussure's philosophy of "constructed" meanings, Kenneth Burke's "terministic screens," and Jacques Derrida's "deconstructionism."

Each of six chapters addresses a different facet of his "reader-response" approach to reading the Bible at three levels: How do I react to the text? What do I bring to the text? And what does the text set off in my mind and emotions? The question, consequently, becomes not "What does the text mean?" but "Why does this person read the text as he or she does?"

The Bible, he says, is important because it "stands at the center of the tradition that has come down to us," but we "can no longer listen to it in an unquestioning and pawnlike fashion" (pp. 15-18, 60). Since every text is interwoven with its social, cultural, political, and religious milieu, it "assumes tentativeness, uncertainty: That is the nature of texts since they always are in response to some situation" (pp. 40, 41). Webb believes that "the gospels are literary creations and little, if anything else, beyond that." "The biblical writings concerning Jesus and the formation of the early church," he adds, "are not literary versions of historical events; they are simply, though profoundly, literary statements of passionate groups of people creating theological stories and

social-ethical patterns by which they shall live" (pp. 90, 91). An example would be: "there is no way to say what any particular parable really means" (p. 113). He turns frequently to the Nag Hammadi library of the Gnostics for help in interpreting the Bible and to the writings of other religions for spiritual insight. His sermon samples address such concerns as pluralism, feminism, religious conflicts, plus acceptance of other Christian groups and other religions.

The future of preaching, he says in the Epilogue, will revolve around four axes. Preaching will provide the means to "rethink and reformulate both the nature and the content of the Christian faith"; to "rework the Bible's role in this new time and place of ours"; to "come to terms with the nature of religion itself in the emerging twenty-first century"; and to explore "the problem of living as an ethical, moral person in an ambiguous and corrupt world" (pp. 156-158).

I often find myself stimulated by reading those with whom I radically disagree, and Old Texts, New Sermons fits that category. Dr. Webb challenged me in several ways. He reminds us that we have sometimes been quick to criticize and slow to love those with whom we disagree. He urges us to speak to questions, for example, which people are asking about space travel, euthanasia, genetic engineering, power, gender, and poverty. He advocates studying New Testament quotations of Old Testament texts in both of their textual situations. He reminds us that we always read the Bible through culturally conditioned eyes, and this should make us less arrogant and more humble about our doctrinal positions. And he is correct in asserting that one's philosophy of language and communication is crucial in how we approach the biblical text.

I am concerned, however, that he assumes his view of language and meaning is the only valid one, as if quoting from de Saussure, Burke, and Derrida, and espousing reader-response deconstructionism settle the issue for any thinking person. Many of us appreciate the contributions of linguistic science without accepting a relativistic view of language. We also appreciate the historical, social, and cultural contexts of the Bible and prize its literary qualities without denying its historical accuracy. And his call to preach more frequently on marginal texts because the main ones are well worn seems a bit overdone in an era when biblical literacy is much lower than in the past. The main themes are still the main themes for a reason.

True to his claim, Dr. Webb's sermons are provocative. He calls his ser-

mons "on the edge" and states that responding to a text is a "profoundly relative matter," but since everything relative must be relative to something fixed, my question is — on the edge of what?

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Interpreting the Gospel: An Introduction to Preaching. By Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice, 1998, 0-8272-1619-X, 304 pp., $23.99, paperback.

"Who are the great preachers of today?" Ronald Allen offers his short list at the end of his impressive Interpreting the Gospel. I was immediately struck by how his list differed from my own. Names like Jana Childers, Leontyne Kelley, and Thomas Troeger would not have been the first to come to my mind. This is not to pass judgment on his choices. It is, however, to notice that Allen functions in a parallel homiletic universe.

As evangelicals, we don't always pay attention to homileticians outside of our own circle. Having drawn closely our standard of homiletic orthodoxy we appear content to ignore those who do not see things exactly our way. What we do know of these "others" can be more in the nature of caricature than insight. It might surprise us to discover that those outside the bounds of classic evangelicalism often tend to view us more fairly than we view them. Their commitment to diversity and respect has led to surprisingly charitable views of our own movement.

Ronald Allen is not entirely comfortable with evangelical homiletics and he is not afraid to say so. We are not open enough to the diversity and plurality that he sees in the Bible itself. Nevertheless, he says he is "deeply impressed by the passion of many evangelical preachers and by their hard work in the biblical languages and in reference books as they make every effort to understand the text (p. 80)." Allen's affirmation of biblical (even expository) preaching would not be out of place in an EHS paper: "Expository preaching needs to be the backbone of regular parish preaching (p. 99)."

Did somebody say "Amen"?

Of course, Allen's sense of how exposition works is broader than what one might find in a text by Bryan Chapell or Haddon Robinson. For Allen, exposition is the process by which the pastor leads the congregation in a conversation in which the community explores the meaning(s) of a biblical passage and the implications of the congregation's encounter with the text (p. 100)." I get the sense that this "conversation" allows for more creativity in reading than what evangelicals would normally understand as appropriate.

That said, I tip my hat to Allen for his comprehensive treatment of the homiletic task. I particularly enjoyed his first chapter, which addressed the various anxieties students of homiletics have to overcome in order to preach. From there, Allen builds his case, arguing for the importance of preaching from a theological and practical framework, taking care to apply his ideas within the context of the church, the larger world, and the preachers' life.

I found his model for sermon preparation to be helpful. Allen offers a long list of steps (27 of them) for sermon building. Evangelicals will find that they are comfortable with Allen's suggestions. Some of them might push us beyond our normal practice, but not without profit to our preaching. He asks us, for instance, how our "understanding of the biblical text, doctrine, practice, or situation (is) enriched by the social sciences, the physical sciences, phenomenology, philosophy, and the arts (p. 140)?" While many evangelical preachers would have to dig awfully deep into their Bible college backgrounds to be able to engage such a question, it wouldn't hurt them to try.

Allen's 11th chapter offers a "Smorgasbord of Patterns of Movement for the Sermon." This chapter, in itself, is worth the price of the book. Describing everything from the "Puritan Plain Style" to Paul Scott Wilson's "Four Pages of the Sermon" the chapter offers a fascinating overview of the options available to preachers today.

Perhaps the chapter was too good, at least for an "introduction to preaching." I wonder whether the first year homiletics student might find more discouragement than encouragement in Allen's prescrip-

tions. Allen opens the door so wide, I'm afraid that a local church preacher might despair of finding a model simple enough to serve in the week by week of pastoral life.

I don't imagine Allen will be showing up as a keynote EHS speaker anytime soon. Still, it wouldn't hurt us to read him.

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Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching. By Ronald E. Osborn. St. Louis: Chalice, 1999, 0-8272-1428-6, 486 pp., $39.99 paperback.

Ronald Osborn has given preachers and teachers a fine work, which, for Evangelicals, will prove, both, instructive and frustrating. Osborn's helpful instruction begins with a fundamental recognition of preaching's primacy in connection, not just to history, but also, to culture. "Students of literature," he says, "may occasionally encounter a preacher of an earlier time, but historians (even members of the guild who deal with religion) tend to lose sight both of preachers and of those who came to hear them." According to Osborn, this absence of recognition betrays the importance of preaching. "Before electronic media," Osborn notes, "before the printing press, public address was the chief mode of disseminating ideas." This chief mode of idea dissemination offers a forum for understanding the impact of religion on culture and of culture on religion. Osborn offers sound advice commenting, "therefore deep mines of sermonic literature from centuries past . . .hide veins of rich ore for students, scholars, and preachers today" (p. xiv).

Setting the stage therefore for a cultural history, Osborn uniquely and interestingly sets his discussion of early Christian preaching into the context of Greco-Roman, Hellenistic, and Hebraic assumptions of

rhetoric that permeated the culture of the New Testament Christian. The reader of Osborn's book will find helpful introductions in these chapters to the primary models and theories of rhetoric for the time, both Biblical and cultural. One also gains an important introduction, not just to the primary preachers of the first century, including the early apologists, but also to the cultural surroundings of these early Christian preachers; a unique contribution that Osborn offers the preacher and teacher of Homiletics.

Osborn's book perhaps becomes most helpful when he discusses the preaching of Jesus and of the Apostle Paul. The reader can glean helpful and penetrating insights into the "portrait," the "message," and the "rhetorical" practice of Jesus and Paul. Therefore, the preacher and teacher of homiletics can gain immediate skills to practice from these chapters in particular. Perhaps, these sections of the book seem the most instructive, because so little is available to the preacher and teacher regarding the sermon theory and practice that the Bible itself exemplifies and demonstrates. Osborn's approach therefore offers, both, a welcomed model and a genuine contribution to homiletic literature.

However, such promise, is unfortunately hindered by explicit hermeneutical assumptions throughout Osborn's book; making this book, not only instructive, but also frustrating to the Evangelical preacher and teacher.

For one example, Osborn's definition of preaching seems identified with any form of verbal communication of the gospel, and takes too little account of the idea of a particular group from among the body of Christ, called by God to preach His word. This weakness may stem from little recognition of the roots of New Testament preaching in the priestly and prophetic calling of the Old Testament. Also, noticeably absent is reference and instruction regarding early Christian preaching in relation to the Holy Spirit and in contrast to the rhetorical culture of the time.

However, it is Osborn's explicit affinity with the hermeneutic of the Jesus Seminar throughout the book, that forces the reader to a study, not just of the history of early Christian preaching and its rhetorical culture, but also to a study of hermeneutics. Osborn, goes so far as to

note the identifying codes of the Jesus Seminar along side of Scripture quotations, so the reader can readily identify whether the Jesus Seminar considered particular Scripture passages as authentic to Jesus or not. Osborn's hermeneutic is made explicit throughout the book, particularly when addressing the preaching of Jesus and of Paul.

Osborn's instructive ability makes this book potentially helpful to those who have already and thoughtfully engaged the hermeneutical landscape regarding Biblical interpretation and homiletic practice. For such an advanced preacher, teacher, or student of evangelical homiletics, Osborn's book offers some helpful insight regarding the cultural history of preaching. For those with limited resources, the sixty-dollar hardback and forty-dollar paperback editions make access to a library-copy desirable and sufficient. However, Osborn's book cannot be recommended for the hermeneutical novice, nor for the beginning or intermediate student of preaching, as its explicit hermeneutical bias, limits the book's ability to operate as a useful textbook for evangelical classes and study related to preaching and its history.

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Thematic Preaching: An Introduction. By Jane Rzepka and Ken Sawyer. St. Louis: Chalice, 2001, 0-8272-3653-0, 232 pp., $26.99 paperback.

Authors Jane Rzepka and Ken Sawyer are Unitarian Universalist ministers who co-teach a preaching course at Harvard Divinity School. The stated purpose of their book is to promote sermons which "make a difference in the lives of the congregants, their institution, and the world; and to create preaching that matters." The book is divided into three sections: 1) "The Art and Craft of Preaching"; 2) "Preaching as Ministry"; and 3) "Issues in Preaching." Section Two is interspersed with sermon examples by a variety of preachers.

The authors lay down an interesting assumption at the beginning of the book. They quote Martin Luther who reasoned that sermons must

be biblical. Otherwise, writes Luther, "the final result will be that everyone preaches his [or her] own whims instead of the gospel and its exposition [and] we shall again have sermons on blue ducks [italics added]." Rzepka and Sawyer assert that they take the side of sermons on "blue ducks" — if such sermons "might minister to the cares, concerns, hopes, and dreams of the people in the pews."

The strength of this book lies in its appeal for sermons that connect with the needs of listeners. Auditors bring "a world of personal history, attitude, emotion, knowledge, and spirituality to every worship service." Sermon ideas germinate in the faithful tending of pastoral duties — hospital calling, counseling, comforting those who grieve, etc. If the sermon is to succeed, it must speak the language of the human heart. Further, preaching does not occur in a vacuum but in a particular historical, geographical, and cultural context. Yet, the effective communicator unceasingly engages with cultural issues, relevant, not just in America, but throughout the world.

The book is peppered with suggestions for effective pulpit communication:

- The delivered sermon should be oral in nature.
- Etymology, statistics, or definitions should not be overused.
- Pulpit plagiarizing is wrong.
- Communicators should minimize the use of the verbs "to be" and "to have" in any of their tenses.
- The message, not the preacher, should be the central focus of the sermon.
- The final shape of the sermon is related to its purpose.

The sermon examples in the book are designed to underscore the author's concerns about need-oriented preaching. These messages reflect universal human themes like forgiveness, community, sympathy, tolerance, the sacredness of the ordinary, and religious identity. For the most part, these sermons show thoughtfulness and sensitivity. One of the model sermons is delivered by a man who describes himself as "a forty-eight-year-old gay male."

From an evangelical perspective, the book seems to make a faulty assumption: Human need and the content of Scripture run in oppo-

site directions. The model sermons, for example, do not quote Scripture or make any effort to connect with the gospel. Their locus of authority seems to lie in the subjectivity of human experience. One wonders how it's possible to preach on "forgiveness," as one of the sermon examples does, and make no reference to Jesus' words on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

The book is not without merit; sometimes we need to give attention to "blue ducks."

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Doing Church. By Aubrey Malphurs. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1999, 0-8254-3187-5, 111 pp., $8.99, paperback.

In his book Doing Church, Aubrey Malphurs demonstrates that he is both a churchman and a theologian. He is comfortable in both the world of the church and the world of the Bible, and he sees that how we approach the latter affects the life of the former.

According to Dr. Malphurs the church in North America is currently in a process of tremendous change. "Congregations across North America," he says, "have jettisoned long-held models (or paradigms) of church ministry for newer ones." We pastors know this to be true. Each week there is a deluge of mail in our boxes vying for our precious attention. They tout the latest conferences which will introduce us to "the new way of doing worship" or teach us how "not to be a church with small groups, but a church of small groups."

In the midst of this change process, when pastors and churches are confronted with hundreds of decisions about how to "do church," the critical question Malphurs asks is: "Where are all these changes taking us? Is the church dangerously perched on some slippery ecclesiological slope and about to slide into heresy?"

According to Malphurs, to guard against sliding into heretical ways of

"doing church" we must conduct our ministry according to the teachings of Scripture. Malphurs acknowledges that evangelicals agree on this principle. What we don't always agree on is how we interpret Scripture, our hermeneutics. What we need, Malphurs posits, is a hermeneutic for church ministry, and he spends the rest of the book giving us his outline for that.

In his outline Malphurs discusses: (1) authorial intent, (2) biblical genres, (3) negative vs. positive hermeneutics, (4) descriptive vs. prescriptive hermeneutics, (5) patterns vs. principles and (6) functions vs. forms in Scripture.

Malphurs is to be applauded for observing that there is a need to address the role of Scripture in how we conduct the church's ministry. As evangelicals, we are thoroughly convinced that without the tether of the Word of God in Scripture keeping us moored to the Word of God in Christ, heretical belief and practice are right around the corner. Like the Israelites, we too are prone to forget God and wander our own way. When we have a tough decision to make in the church, instead of opening our Bibles we often search for our constitutions, our creeds or our books of order and discipline. So the reminder that the Scriptures are our normative guide is a prophetic warning to us. In our preaching, our teaching, our praying, and our "doing church," we must continually return to the Scriptures as our lifeblood. Malphurs conducts a great service to the church in providing this prophetic warning.

Unfortunately, the confusion of Doing Church's audience and its failure to argue its points cause Malphurs' message to lose its effectiveness.

Dr. Malphurs seems to have a problem identifying who the audience for Doing Church is. Its primary audience appears to be pastors. This book can be found in the "pastor's resources" section of your local Christian bookstore, and it is doubtful that laypersons will pick it up. Yet, the book is far too basic for nearly every pastor. Malphurs spends one-fifth of the book introducing the reader to the concepts of authorial intent and biblical genres. These are basic hermeneutical concepts about which most pastors received training in seminary, implicitly if not explicitly. Furthermore, evangelicals (another audience of the

book) don't need to be convinced of the importance of authorial intent. The remaining portions of the book are just as basic.

A basic book on hermeneutics is fine, except when that is not what the book presents itself as. On the surface, Doing Church does not appear nor intend to be a book on basic hermeneutics, but that is what it ends up being. Despite the intriguing questions and prospects offered in the book's introduction, Malphurs offers nothing new or groundbreaking here. As a pastor, I yearn to have an answer to some of the questions Malphurs' raises, but this book did not deliver. Instead, it told me things I already knew.

Along with the elementary issues covered, the writing is elementary and pedantic. Malphurs takes the adage "tell them what you're going to tell them, tell them, then tell them what you've told them" to an exhausting extreme. At nearly every transition the reader is exposed to a summary and outline. In some works this is welcome, but in a basic book of just over one-hundred pages it is merely a waste of reading effort.

Finally, Malphurs simply asserts his positions rather than arguing for them. For example, he advocates the principle that the narrative material in Acts may contain normative principles for the church, but some may not be normative (p. 56-57). He uses the casting of lots to choose Matthias as an example of a non-normative narrative, saying "I don't see a timeless, normative principle in the case of Matthias," and continues, using phrases like "I think that . . ." and "My view is that . . ." He asserts his view, but doesn't argue for it. This tendency towards assertion instead of argument does not allow the well-intentioned reader of Scripture who disagrees with Malphurs to refute him.

How does Malphurs determine which narratives are normative and which are not? We don't know because he does not argue for his view, only asserts. This problem burrows itself into each chapter: How do we know which passages are prescriptive and which are descriptive (ch. 6)? How do we know what early church practices were patterns or principles (ch. 7)? How do we distinguish between forms and functions (ch. 8)? These are valid questions, but go unanswered in this book.

Aubrey Malphurs has raised an important topic which the church

must address in this time of tremendous change: confronted with so many choices and options, how are we to "do church" according to Scripture? Unfortunately, this book is too elementary and too weak to provide an answer worthy of attention.

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Creative Styles of Preaching. By Mark Barger Elliott. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000, 0-664-22296-X, 173 pp., $17.95, paperback.

Mark Barger Elliott, a Presbyterian pastor in Illinois, has written this book based on the concept of Sunday morning worship resembling a family reunion. He observes that the same people meet together to share "the same stories." With this in mind, he offers the premise that "our congregations have grown, or will soon grow, restless with one preaching style," and that "pastors need to learn how to 'shuffle,' to arrive at our Sunday morning reunion with a greater variety of styles and yarns to share" (p. ix).

This purpose of the volume is reiterated in the publisher's note on the back cover: "This useful book on newer preaching styles is designed for students and experienced clergy alike. It consists of nine chapters, each treating a different contemporary approach to preaching . . ." Each of the nine chapters presents "a contemporary approach" in five to eight pages. This brief discussion is followed by two sermons intended to illustrate or model the method just presented. The concept is excellent but the result is less than satisfactory.

The book has a serious flaw that begins to become evident when one glances at the table of contents. The nine chapters are an unusual mixture of topics related to preaching variety; unusual because they are not the same in kind. Four chapters (1, 4, 5, and 8) are geared primarily toward structural issues. Two chapters (3 and 7) relate to the preaching purposes of evangelism and pastoral care. Chapter 2 deals with "African American Preaching," chapter 6 addresses "Preaching

the Literary Forms of the Bible," and chapter 9 is titled "Imaginative Preaching." It is evident that each of these topics is important and deserves discussion. To present them all as homiletical variations, however, seems to ignore their respective essential natures. Furthermore, the overlap caused by this mixing of categories is confusing.

To prepare and preach a sermon on a given literary form, for instance, doesn't address whether or not the sermon will be pastoral or evangelistic or, for that matter, pursue some other purpose. Conversely, a pastoral sermon might take any one of many shapes as might a sermon that has an evangelistic intent. The fact is that every sermon ought to be informed by the literary form of the text regardless of the sermon's purpose. The presentation in this book clouds this issue. One specific example of this unhelpful categorization is that the sermons included in the chapter on literary forms have a fairly strong pastoral overtone. They might have been included in the chapter dealing with pastoral preaching just as easily. Similarly, the sermon by Tony Campolo included in the chapter on evangelistic preaching pays attention to the flow of the text and is just as "biblical" (i.e. expositional) as the two sermons included in the chapter on biblical preaching. It might also be mentioned that the "biblical" sermon by Carol Antablin Miles has a very strong narrative flavor to it, stronger in my judgment than the two model sermons included in the chapter on narrative preaching.

Another weakness in the book is the presentation of the ideas of others without sufficient interaction on the part of the author. In the chapter on topical preaching, Elliott quotes Ronald Allen who differentiates between the gospel and biblical truth because

> . . . the Bible is not the only guide for the Christian life. Furthermore, the Bible is silent on some subjects and can be scarcely used to address others. Occasionally the Bible is not the best guide and, in some few instances, the Bible is actually an unreliable guide (p. 58).

No comment or clarification on this statement is offered by the author. This is but one of many statements in the book that begs for further discussion. Perhaps this is prevented by the book's brevity.

Elliott's volume has some positive contributions to make to the homiletician who is willing to overlook the concerns just discussed. He is quite correct in his presupposition that sermon variety is crucial for today's pulpit. One size does not fit all and this author's appeal for creativity and variety is essential if we're to keep our audiences tuned in to what we say. In view of this presupposition, the book is stimulating and instructive at times.

The book claims to serve as "a travel guide of the homiletical landscape" (p. ix). I concur, at least as far as North America is concerned. Almost every chapter presents the thinking of three or four well-known homileticians. Because of this the book has value as an introduction to pulpit variety.

Finally, the book is provocative at times, causing the reader to dialog with its ideas. In this sense, it may be a useful catalyst in helping preachers think beyond their own homiletical comfort zones.

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Care-full Preaching: From Sermon to Caring Community. By G. Lee Ramsey, Jr. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000, 0-8272-0480-9, 224 pp., $21.99 paperback.

For most clergy, the image of offering pastoral care implies being with people during their times of bewilderment, brokenness, grief, indecision, and uncertainty. So how does a preacher offer pastoral care when preaching? Can people sense their pastor hears the cries of their heart even though he or she is doing all the talking? Undoubtedly, preaching does not always seem to be an effective context for spiritual care to be either offered or received. But in Care-full Preaching: From Sermon to Caring Community, G. Lee Ramsey offers helpful insights on how preaching can facilitate pastoral care within a body of Christians.

Ramsey's thesis is that preaching helps create a pastoral community and true ministry grows out of the community of faith which is shaped through preaching. He writes:

For the preacher to attempt to corner the market on care robs the community of its core purpose and limits the mission of the church. Preachers want to preach the gospel in such a fashion that the congregation develops its own ministry of care, complemented by the pastor to be sure, but not dependent on him or her. In other words, pastoral preaching forms pastoral communities (p. 33).

Rather than being dependent on the minister, Ramsey believes by the power of the Holy Spirit, pastoral care can flow among the people and into the world. The pastor cannot presume to be responsible for all the needs which arise in a faith community. Pastors may play pivotal roles but they are not necessarily the only ones who must attend to such tasks. However, a preacher who has a heart for others and a clear, realistic understanding of their challenges, issues and pain can lead God's people to become more intentionally redemptive in their interactions with one another as well as those who remain outside the Kingdom.

Though I appreciate Ramsey's position that a preacher's words alter or carve out the shape of a congregation and that pastoral care is a "many-peopled" phenomenon, there are several issues to consider in his book. One matter is his encouraging and optimistic belief that people will desire to offer pastoral care to others. Many congregants will heartily and compassionately minister to others because they have been shaped by care-full preaching. The Holy Spirit is in their midst. But other folks will not become caregivers because they are either unable or unwilling. Pastors are well aware of people in their churches who are content to sit idly in their pews and watch. Besides, the experience of most clergy is that people expect her or him to be the caregiver, as demandingly unrealistic as it may be.

Second, Ramsey naively assumes that pastors are capable and inclined to be care-full in their preaching. However, are not more than a few pastors prone to be more academic in their preaching than relational? Oddly, pastors can get a strange case of amnesia, forget to shepherd their flock, and professionalize their role by adopting a Greek model of

education by turning their sanctuaries into classrooms. Further, there is the tendency to be more prophetic than pastoral (or priestly) as well as message-oriented instead of congregationally-focused. Over the years, I have also noticed a tendency of many preachers to speak more about making things righteous in this broken world of ours than to communicate with people who are simply trying to exist out of their own brokenness.

Third, Ramsey's approach does not appear to be especially evangelical in doctrine or expository in methodology but more in the life situation tradition of Harry Emerson Fosdick. Though he contends preaching should be driven by the fact that God has done something startlingly new in Jesus Christ and laments how exhortation and teaching take a backseat in Fosdick's model (p. 15), Ramsey's approach is disappointing in that he does not point the reader to the biblical text to discover the liberating truths of God. Yet, the sermon examples by James Forbes, Fred Craddock, Gina Stewart, Barbara Brown Taylor, and Ramsey are filled with Scriptural accounts and references.

In summary, Ramsey offers a helpful addition to the literature of pastoral care and preaching. He is accurate in reminding preachers of how God shapes His communities through sermons. His thoughts will be beneficial to preachers as they go about their craft of developing sermons. But most importantly, the people of God will be aided and greatly cared for when pastors understand the human condition, are heart-felt in their responses, and biblically grounded in their exposition.

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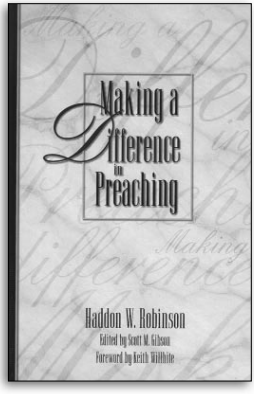

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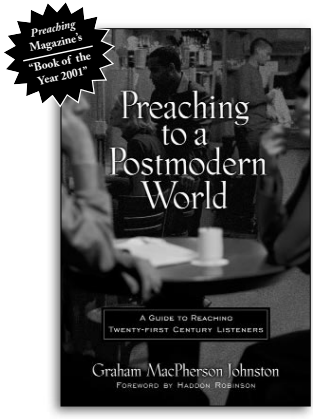

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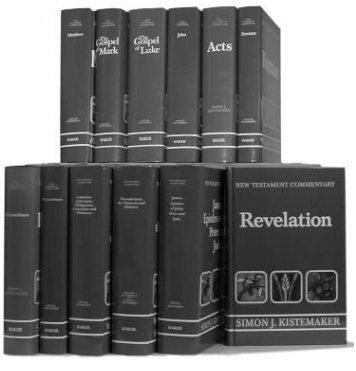

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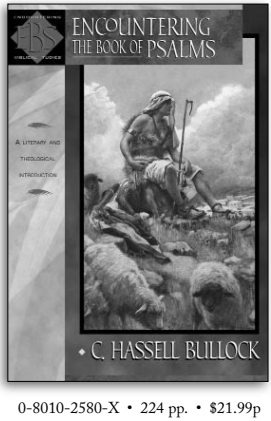

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