130 Essex Street
South Hamilton, MA 01982

The Journal of the
Evangelical Homiletics Society

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Volume 3 Number 2 December 2003

Contents

Manuscripts: Though most articles and book reviews are assigned, submissions are welcome. They must by typed and double-spaced. A copy of the article on computer disc must also accompany the submission. The disc may be IBM or MAC compatible. Please include a self-addressed and stamped envelope to: Scott M. Gibson, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 130 Essex Street, South Hamilton, MA 10982. Letters to the editor are also welcome. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

Publishers should send catalogs and review copies of their books to Scott M. Gibson to the address located above.

Subscriptions and back issues: *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* is published periodically for $20.00 per year. The Journal is published by the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Please contact: *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 130 Essex Street, South Hamilton, MA 01982.

Please note: Although the articles in *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* reflect the general concerns of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, some details in the articles may not reflect the position of the Editorial Board.

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society
130 Essex Street
South Hamilton, MA 01982

ISSN 1534-7478

evangelicalhomiletics.com

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.

A Mind-set for Preaching

by Scott M. Gibson

Members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society are men and women whose minds are set on preaching. We aspire to preach well and to teach our students to preach well. All of us, professors and pastors, want to model good preaching. The purpose of our 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."

The journal is one way our organization attempts to fulfill its purpose. Each edition features articles, a sermon, and book reviews. The articles in this edition focus on preaching sermons which appreciate the genre from which the sermon comes. Kenneth W. Smith's article does just that. Smith presented his paper at the most recent meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society in Langley, BC. Readers will be challenged by Smith's insights and will gain appreciation for genre-sensitive exegesis and homiletics.

As is stated in my editor's note, Kenneth W. Smith is the first recipient of the Keith Willhite Award for the most outstanding paper given at the annual meeting of the society. The Keith Willhite Award was established this year by the executive of the society in memory and in honor of Dr. Keith Willhite, co-founder and second president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.

The second article is by Timothy J. Ralston and explores the nature of preaching and spiritual formation, a theme of the annual meeting a couple years ago. Ralston's thorough study analyzes the various categories of spiritual formation and applies them to how preachers prepare to preach — and preach.

Another way our purpose is fulfilled is by the sermons we preach, hear, and read. Erwin W. Lutzer's sermon from the October 2002 annual meeting — "Living Between Two Worlds" — is a clear, challenging, and helpful word. Notice Dr. Lutzer's clear sermon structure, too!

Of course, the journal concludes with a number of book reviews. The books reviewed help us as professors and practitioners as we stretch our minds with what is being discussed in the world of homiletics. Enjoy.

Beginning next year, readers will notice several changes in the journal. The changes will not be in format, but in staffing. The executive committee of the Evangelical Homiletics Society has approved a restructuring of the journal. First, Endel Lee of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary will come on board as the Managing Editor. Dr. Lee will assist with the business aspects of the publication. Second, Dr. Jeffrey Arthurs of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary will become the Book Review Editor. I'll remain as the General Editor. More details on staffing will be given in the next issue.

As per the next issue, the publication dates will change as well. As of 2004, the *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* will be published in March and September. With the help of Endel Lee and Jeff Arthurs, I hope we can publish the journal in a timely manner — and continue to accomplish our purpose.

Thank you for your support and for your mind-set to preach God's wonderful Word.

Preaching the Psalms with Respect for Their Inspired Design

by Kenneth W. Smith

(editor's note: Kenneth W. Smith holds the Master of Divinity and the Doctor of Ministry in Preaching degrees from Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. This article was presented as a paper at the October 2003 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting in Langley, BC. Smith was awarded the Keith Willhite Award for the most outstanding paper given at the meeting. The award was established this year in memory of Keith Willhite, co-founder of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.)

Abstract

Under the Holy Spirit's inspiration, the psalmists wrote with poetic power and artifice. The Psalms impact hearers more deeply in part because of the literary devices that the psalmists employ. This paper demonstrates the use of literary devices that may enhance a sermon's impact on its audience.

> Poetry is essential… because poetry is original speech. The word is creative: it brings into being what was not there beforeæperception, relationship, belief. Out of the silent abyss a sound is formed: people hear what was not heard before and are changed by the sound from loneliness into love. Out of the blank abyss a picture is formed by means of metaphor: people see what they did not see before and are changed by the image from anonymity into love. Words create. God's word creates; our words can participate in the creation.[1]

Introduction

The Psalms possess tremendous power to impact their readers and listeners. They reach past the surface concerns and emotional defenses of our daily lives and open our hearts toward God. Depending upon which psalm is in view, a given psalm may comfort our hearts, lift our feelings toward God, convict our consciences of sin, or arouse us out of our complacency. This phenomenon is no accident. From beginning to end—from the process of composition to the time of our reading and reflection upon a psalm—God's Spirit takes an active role in the process. Each psalm is carefully shaped by both its divine and human authors to address us in specific ways. Allender and Longman claim that:

> No section of the Bible teaches us the language of the soul better than the Psalms, which reflect the movement of the human heart in rich, evocative, and startling language. In a voice that disrupts, invites, and reveals, the psalmist draws us to the voice of God.[2]

God's Spirit prepared the biblical authors to write and he prepares our hearts and minds to read and understand. We cannot uncover the mysteries of the Spirit's inner workings as God reveals himself to contemporary believers when they read or listen to a particular psalm. Much of what goes on when a person *receives* a message from God's word lies beyond human understanding. However, we may be able to look behind the veil to discern some of the Spirit's work on the other end of God's self-revealing work. It is possible to analyze the Psalms themselves to discern the particular means by which God has acted to *transmit* his word to readers and listeners. Yet, Tremper Longman cautions that:

> The trick is to learn how to read poetry in a way that respects its original, heart-targeted intention

> without doing so much analysis that we suck the life out of it.[3]

With Longman's concern duly noted, our aim as preachers should still be to uncover the methods by which the psalmists employed tools from a carefully prepared poetic genre in order to shape and transmit God's word. A carefully executed poetic and rhetorical analysis is important with a psalm intended for use as a preaching text. Just as each psalm is designed in specific ways to maximize its impact on readers and listeners, our sermons can be similarly crafted.

It is true that we must approach sermon design with great care, lest we succumb to the temptation to manipulate our listeners' emotions. Our primary goal is not to produce an emotional response in our hearers. Rather, we should aim to communicate and apply God's word accurately and effectively to listeners' lives.

However, an attempt to reproduce some of a psalm's built-in rhetorical effects does not undermine the text's accuracy. To the contrary, we need to ask ourselves why so many sermons actually empty the preaching text of its own innate poetic and rhetorical character. If a psalm from which we intend to preach has within it the power to comfort or convict, challenge, provoke, reassure, or to bow or lift a listener's heart and mind in praise toward an awesome God, then shouldn't a sermon on that same psalm produce a similar effect?

Different types of literature call for different homiletical approaches. Rather than utilize a one-size-fits-all sermon form to preach from the Psalms (not to mention for texts drawn from other literary genres of the Bible), why not seek to work in concert with the psalmists themselves? We would do well to mimic some of the effects of a psalm in our sermon by use of rhetorical devices and strategies that are inherent in the genre of Hebrew poetry.

Thomas Long makes the case for carefully examining the rhetorical dynamics of a biblical text. He maintains that it is possible to design our sermons to "say and do what the text says and does in its setting."[4]

Obviously, we will not be able to carry over one hundred percent of a psalm's poetic power into our sermons. If that were our goal, we would only have to read the psalm to our congregation and sit down. Sermons have become a form unto themselves, with their own purposes and rhetorical strategies. Lives have been touched by sermons in which little attention has been paid to the use of poetic rhetorical devices.

However, new developments in the area of rhetorical criticism have supplied us with a new appreciation and awareness of the inspiration and ingenuity with which the biblical psalmists conducted their craft. If we continue to stuff the Psalms into traditional didactic sermon forms, we will be much like the proverbial father assembling his child's bicycle on Christmas Eve without following the directions. Our sermons will have many leftover parts for which we can find no use. And—although our sermon will be functional—it will probably never move with the power and grace that it might have had.

Rhetorical analysis should not replace exegesis. Rather, it should supplement our exegetical study of a psalm and build upon it. Exegesis answers the question, "what is the psalmist saying?" Rhetorical analysis answers the questions, "how did the psalmist say it, and what specifically causes this psalm to affect me the way it does?" Exegesis reads what a given line says. Rhetorical criticism seeks to uncover from the same line(s) how the text may be affecting readers or listeners while they are receiving the contents of the message.[5] Once again, some aspects of the Spirit's work upon the minds and hearts of recipients lies beyond our understanding, although the text itself may contain a few clues.

The process of analyzing a psalm rhetorically and utilizing our findings in our sermon design will be our primary concern throughout the remainder of this paper. We will suggest a useful list of questions for performing a rhetorical analysis on a psalm. Then we will apply the questions to Psalms 8 and 32. We will offer a list of suggestions for enriching our preaching from the Psalms in general, and we will note possible homiletical strategies for preaching from these two psalms in particular.

Our list of questions is by no means exhaustive. Nor are our suggested homiletical strategies the only way, or even the best way of designing a sermon on one of these psalms. However, we believe that our questions and strategies comprise a legitimate approach to preaching from these psalms. By advancing such an approach, we are attempting to take seriously the means by which the biblical psalmists sought to reach past listener's daily distractions and defenses to lift their hearts in worship toward God.

Performing a Rhetorical Analysis on the Psalms

When we began research for our thesis on how to preach from the Psalms in a genre-sensitive manner, we hoped to find a single key that would unlock the secret behind the beauty and power of poetry in general, and the Psalter in particular. It seemed to us that poetic discourse often soars far above plain discourse in terms of the relative effects produced within listeners. We wanted to understand why "four score and seven years ago, our forefathers brought forth…" touches us in a way that "eighty-seven years ago our ancestors instituted…" does not. We theorized that if we could grasp the reason why the former soars while the latter merely plods along in the same general direction, then we could develop a simple formula that would vitalize our preaching on any given psalm.

We never found a master key. What we found instead was an entire key ring with different shaped keys that would unlock

different types of locks. We came to recognize that there are different types of psalms, just as there are different types of locks. What makes one psalm affect us deeply often differs from what makes another psalm affect us. Preachers who wish to unlock the rhetorical power of a psalm and carry some of that power over into their sermons will need to carry a full key chain. Sometimes they will have to try several keys in a lock before they find just the right one.

The reason for this is that a multitude of rhetorical strategies is employed throughout the Psalter. Which strategy is used and to what degree in a given psalm makes a great difference in terms of the impact that a psalm may have upon readers and listeners. Therefore, as we apply the following questions to a given psalm, it is important to note that one question may be more useful than another as we perform a rhetorical analysis upon the psalm.

Moving from Text to Sermon

Questions to Ask about a Psalm

1. To what genre does this psalm belong?[6] How is it similar to other psalms of the same genre? How, if at all, does it differ?

2. What mood(s), subject matter, and intended effects are usually characteristic of a psalm of this type? Does this psalm remain true to type in these ways?

3. How well does this psalm follow the usual structural patterns of psalms of this type? Does the author introduce any innovations that alter the psalm's rhetorical impact?

4. Are the psalm's contents arranged inductively or deductively? What evidence points in this direction?

5. What is the rhetorical effect of this psalm? What feelings does it produce in me as a reader? How does the psalmist achieve these effects?

6. What is the psalm's emotional topography? Where are the highs, lows, and level places emotionally? What is the psalmist saying when the psalm hits these different levels of emotion?

7. What is the psalmist's point of view in time or space? How does the psalmist's point of view contribute to the psalm's message and effect? Is there a spatial or temporal movement within this psalm? If so, what effect does this produce?[7]

8. What is the psalm's narrative plot, if any?[8]

9. What are the key images in the psalm? What makes them key? How does the psalmist develop the images? What effects do they produce?

10. How, if at all, does the psalmist build tension into the psalm? How does he relieve it?

11. What kind of language does the psalmist use? Is it concrete or abstract? What effect does it have?

12. What poetic devices does the psalmist employ in this psalm? These may include such things as imagery, metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, shifting or unusual tenses, presence or absence of refrains, and the like. What effects do these produce?[9]

13. What are some of the intensifying features, if any, within this psalm?

14. What is the psalmist attempting to do in or through this psalm? What does he want the reader to think, feel, believe, or do as a result of reading this psalm?[10]

Performing a Rhetorical Analysis on Psalm 8

With these questions in hand, we are now prepared to analyze Psalm 8. This psalm is a hymn celebrating the greatness of God as Creator of all things and is quoted by the author of Hebrews who identifies "the son of man" in verse 4 of the psalm as Jesus. In our view, it would be better to preach two sermons, one on Psalm 8 and the other on Hebrews 2, rather than to preach one complex and lengthy sermon on the two texts paired together. The analysis that follows deals primarily with Psalm 8 as it functioned in its original literary context..

Moving from Text to Sermon

Psalm 8

1. To what genre does this psalm belong? How is it similar to other psalms of the same genre? How, if at all, does it differ?

   Psalm 8 is a hymn. The purpose of a hymn is to give praise to God for something. In this case God is to be praised for his work as Creator and for his ongoing care of his creatures, especially human beings. The psalmist opens the song with words of praise uttered directly to God. This psalm differs from many other hymns in that the psalmist's opening words are addressed to God directly rather than to other worshippers, as is the case with other hymns such as Psalms 95, 96, 100, etc.[11]

2. What mood(s), subject matter, and intended effects are usually characteristic of a psalm of this type? Does this psalm remain true to type in these ways?

   Hymns typically convey a joyous mood. This psalm celebrates God's work as Creator of the world. By casting his eye toward the heavens, the psalmist paints a picture of the grandeur and vastness of God and his handiwork. Then, in the middle of the psalm, he shifts the focus down to how small and insignificant we are by comparison. He does this with a question, "What is man

that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" Humanity is elevated to a place of prominence in the next verse in language that calls to mind the theology of creation in Genesis 1.

3. How well does this psalm follow the usual structural patterns of psalms of this type? Does the author introduce any innovations that alter the psalm's rhetorical impact?

   Hymns typically open and close with words of praise. The body of the hymn offers reasons for praise. Psalm 8 contains both of these features. The opening and closing verses operate as a type of refrain. The strategic placement of a question in the middle of the psalm deepens the sense of wonder and awe at the glory of God's power and the intimacy of his concern for us.

4. Are the psalm's contents arranged inductively or deductively? What evidence points in this direction?

   The psalm has a deductive feeling because the psalmist opens the hymn with words of praise. He presents the desired response from listeners at the outset and supports the call for worship with reasons to do so. This contrasts with psalms such as Psalm 130, which has an inductive feeling because it opens with the words, "Out of the depths I cry to you."

5. What is the rhetorical effect of this psalm? What feelings does it produce in me as a reader? How does the psalmist achieve these effects?

   The psalm makes me feel small by comparison to the grandeur of the night time sky. I have a similar feeling when I stand looking at the ocean and think about the vastness and power that it contains. The psalmist achieves the effect by sharply shifting the focus from the heavens to human beings.

6. What is the psalm's emotional topography? Where are the highs, lows, and level places emotionally? What is the

psalmist saying when the psalm hits these different levels of emotion?

The psalm opens in a major key, shifts momentarily to a minor key via the question posed in verse 4, and shifts back to a major key with the answer to his question in verse 5.

7. What is the psalmist's point of view in time or space? How does the psalmist's point of view contribute to the psalm's message and effect? Is there a spatial or temporal movement within this psalm? If so, what effect does this produce?

It's as if the psalmist is standing outside on a starlit night, gazing upward to the heavens and musing about the greatness of the one that is above the heavens. At some point during his meditation it is possible, although not certain, that he hears a baby cry (something calls to his mind the image of a very young child). His focus shifts from the grandeur of the heavens downward to the smallness and the seeming insignificance of the human race. Yet, the psalmist is aware of humanity's elevated position by God's design. He says that humanity is "lower than the heavenly beings, yet crowned with glory and honor…ruler over the works of [God's] hands…" At this point, the psalmist appears to have a panoramic view of the creatures that inhabit the land, sea, and sky.

8. What is the psalm's narrative plot, if any?

Narrative plot appears to contribute less to the rhetorical effect of this psalm than to many other psalms. What plot there is has to do mostly with creation.

9. What key images are in the psalm? What makes them key? How does the psalmist develop the images? What effect do they produce?

Suckling infants, enemies and avengers, God placing the sun, moon and stars in the heavens, human beings, heavenly beings, flocks, herds, birds, and fish are all present in this brief hymn.

The purpose behind the inclusion of suckling infants, enemies, and avengers seems somewhat unclear. Their mention does seem to add a note of sublimity. The juxtaposition of humanity against the vastness of the rest of creation inspires a sense of awe and quiet reflection.

10. How, if at all, does the psalmist build tension into the psalm? How does he relieve it?

    The only significant tension comes in the middle of the psalm with the psalmist's age-old question about the significance of humanity in the larger scheme of things. He relieves the tension immediately in the next verse by answering his own question.

11. What kind of language does the psalmist use? Is it concrete or abstract? What effect does it have?

    The psalmist uses language and develops themes that call to mind the opening chapters of Genesis. The psalmist uses concrete and specific words rather than abstract ones.

12. What poetic devices does the psalmist employ in this psalm? These may include such things as imagery, metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, shifting or unusual tenses, presence or absence of refrains, and the like. What effect do these produce?

    The psalmist does not employ many of the poetic devices found commonly throughout the Psalter. For instance, he does not use metaphors, similes, or hyperbole. He does use refrains, but only at the beginning and end of the psalm. These are comprised of praise given in the form of direct address to God. He also uses highly visual and concrete imagery, and jumps freely from one image to another.

13. What are some of the intensifying features, if any, within this psalm?

In a couple of places, the psalmist begins with a general term and then amplifies the term by mentioning a few specific terms that fit under it. The word "heavens" is amplified by "work of your fingers," " moon," and "stars." "Everything under his feet" is amplified by "flocks and herds," "birds of the air," and "fish of the sea."

14. What is the psalmist attempting to do in or through this psalm? What does he want the reader to think, feel, believe, or do as a result of reading this psalm?

    The psalmist wants worshippers to praise God for the glory of his handiwork. He also wants worshippers to come away from singing the psalm with a combination of humility and feelings of exultation at our unique standing in this vast universe.

Some Possible Ways to Preach from Psalm 8

Psalm 8 is one of a small group of psalms that is devoted to the topic of creation. We are interested especially in how the psalm functions rhetorically. What effect does the psalm produce on the listener, and how does the psalmist achieve that effect? How may we carry over some of this rhetorical impact to a contemporary audience? What moves will we make? What kinds of illustrations would be compatible with the biblical text?

One of the striking things about this particular psalm is the sharp rhetorical turn that the psalmist makes in the middle of the psalm. He begins in verses 1 and 3 by using broad brush-strokes to paint a verbal picture of God's creation of the universe. God's glory is depicted by the vastness of the heavens in which he has placed the moon and stars. In verse 4, the psalmist makes a sudden rhetorical turn. Without warning, he shifts to a question, "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" The sharp juxtaposition of this question with the glory of God displayed in the heavens is the key to understanding and preaching the entire psalm.

A preacher could begin the sermon by heightening the effects of the grandeur of the creation. There are a number of ways to do this. A personal approach would require a preacher to describe an experience of the feeling that the psalmist captures in the opening verses, "When I was a child I once tried to count the stars…." Another approach might be to expand upon the psalmist's observations with an illustration from science, "If only the psalmist had had a telescope to survey the night sky…." This could be followed by a description of currently known facts about the size of the universe, the number of galaxies and stars, and the like. The efforts of the preacher at this point would be directed toward intensifying the feeling of awe at the majesty of the creation. The more this feeling of awe comes across in the sermon, the more effective will be the transition into the next major move of the sermon.

The transition to the next move could be facilitated by posing the psalmist's question, "Is it any wonder that the psalmist asked, 'What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?' How small and seemingly insignificant we feel when we compare ourselves with the heavens!" At this point in the message, our feeling of insignificance could be heightened with a quote from an author such as Carl Sagan:

> As long as there have been humans we have searched for our place in the cosmos. Where are we? Who are we? We find that we live on an insignificant planet of a humdrum star lost in a galaxy tucked away in some forgotten corner of a universe in which there are far more galaxies than people.[12]

The effect of the illustration could be further heightened by repeating the adjectives and nouns from the quote, "insignificant planet, humdrum star, forgotten corner of the universe." Are we really "insignificant" and "forgotten"? The preacher could offer an illustration on feelings of insignificance using salient quotes,

studies that have been done concerning people's sense of insignificance, or a story from everyday life.

In order to stay with the emotional and thematic contours of this particular psalm, the next move should be devoted to restoring a biblical view of human dignity, as the psalmist does in verses 5–8. The move could be heightened by an illustration from science about the extraordinarily precise conditions required of a universe that is capable of sustaining life. Renowned astrophysicist Martin Rees offers the following startling information about the size of our universe:

> The very hugeness of our universe, which seems at first to signify how unimportant we are in the cosmic scheme, is actually entailed by our existence! This is not to say that there couldn't have been a smaller universe, only that we could not have existed in it.[13]

A list of other helpful details that pertain to the fine-tuning of our universe includes such things as the force of gravity, the tilt of the earth, the earth's near ideal positioning in orbit around just the right size star, the size of our universe, and the like. All of these could help to intensify listeners' sense of wonder and awe at the majesty of God's wisdom and love as he called into being a world of which we are the crown and glory of his handiwork.

Because Psalm 8 has a special place in the New Testamentæthe author of Hebrews cites part of the psalm in reference to the person and work of Christæthe preacher may wish to include a move in the sermon that deals with Christ's incarnation and atoning work. What stronger support is there for the degree of God's love for us than what we find in the central message of the Gospelæthat he loved us enough to send his Son into the world to become one of us, and to offer himself in our place as an atoning sacrifice for sin?

Psalm 8 in its original context does not make direct reference to Christ. However, the author of Hebrews clearly identifies Christ with the "son of man" of verse 4 in the psalm. Verse 2 of Psalm 8æa verse that is somewhat difficult to interpret from the context of the rest of the psalm aloneæintroduces the topic of the enmity between God and humans. This opens the door to preaching on the incarnation and atonement without necessarily offering a full treatment of Hebrews 2 in the sermon.

For those preachers who wish to pair Psalm 8 with Hebrews 2 in a sermon, it might be advisable to preach two sermons. The first would be comprised of a full treatment of Psalm 8 as it functioned in its original context. The second sermon would focus more on Hebrews 2, but make major reference to Psalm 8 as well.

The suggestions offered here are far from being the only good way to preach on this psalm. But the approach they represent has several advantages. It remains faithful to the meaning embodied in the psalmist's words. It takes seriously the obstacles that the more ardent naturalistic scientists have attempted to erect against a theistic under-standing of the cosmos. And it reassures those listeners who wonder how a God who is busy running such a huge universe could possibly care for them. If the cosmos were not the way it is, they could not be here to ask the question!

Performing a Rhetorical Analysis on Psalm 32

The author of Psalm 32 used a highly innovative technique to produce the rhetorical effects of the psalm. He blended elements from three different types of psalm. The result is a hybrid psalm that is cross-pollinated with characteristics of penitential, wisdom, and individual thanksgiving psalms. This alters the point of view and the mood of the psalm, making it highly unusual among the penitential psalms.

Moving from Text to Sermon

Psalm 32

1. To what genre does this psalm belong? How is it similar to other psalms of the same genre? How, if at all, does it differ?

   Psalm 32 is a mixed type. It has elements from wisdom psalms as well as penitential psalms.[14]

2. What mood(s), subject matter, and intended effects are usually characteristic of a psalm of this type? Does this psalm remain true to type in these ways?

   Penitential psalms usually have an intense feeling of sadness and anxiety. Any feeling of hope is usually oriented toward the future. This psalm, by contrast, has a feeling of confidence and assurance. The anxiety and sorrow are relegated to the past. It is the only penitential psalm of its kind. Its confident mood derives from the wisdom elements it possesses.

3. How well does this psalm follow the usual structural patterns of psalms of this type? Does the author introduce any innovations that alter the psalm's rhetorical impact?

   It deviates significantly from both penitential psalms and wisdom psalms, moving back and forth between them. This blending of elements from different psalm types is highly innovative. Such an approach significantly alters the mood and point of view when Psalm 32 is compared to other penitential psalms.

4. Are the psalm's contents arranged inductively or deductively? What evidence points in this direction?

   The overall feeling of the psalm is deductive in arrangement. This is achieved by making a strong general assertion in the opening lines.

5. What is the rhetorical effect of this psalm? What feelings does it produce in me as a reader? How does the psalmist achieve these effects?

   The psalm's overall effect is one of hope, confidence, and anticipation of forgiveness. It achieves a feeling of identification with me as a reader by offering a personal testimony of movement from guilt to forgiveness. It ends with a feeling of being instructed by one who is older and wiser.

6. What is the psalm's emotional topography? Where are the highs, lows, and level places emotionally? What is the psalmist saying when the psalm hits these different levels of emotion?

   The psalm begins on an even keel with a positive assertion in verses1–2. The psalm dips down to an emotional low in verses 3–4. There is a decidedly upward shift toward more positive feelings in verse 5, which acts like a hinge or turning point. In verses 6–10 the psalm levels out, resembling verses 1–2 in tone. It ends in verse 11 on an elevated note of praise.

7. What is the psalmist's point of view in time or space? How does the psalmist's point of view contribute to the psalm's message and effect? Is there a spatial or temporal movement within this psalm? If so, what effect does this produce?

   Point of view is one of the most striking features in this penitential psalm. The psalm deals with unconfessed sin in an unusual way by looking at it as a past problem that the psalmist has resolved by confession. The psalmist avoids elevating himself above the listener by recounting his own past failure. Yet he helps the sinner from a superior position by use of the past tense and by borrowing wisdom elements from another psalm type.

8. What is the psalm's narrative plot, if any?

   Past unconfessed sin confession acceptance of forgiveness counselor to others present and future hope

9. What are the key images in the psalm? What makes them key? How does the psalmist develop the images? What effects do they produce?

   The images include such things as an apparent courtroom scene (by use of the word "impute iniquity"), a body that wears out, constant groaning, juices pressed out from the heavy hand of the Lord upon him, like the dryness of the heat of summer, flood waters, a hiding place, a horse, and a mule. Some of these images contribute a feeling of tension often found in laments and penitential psalms. Others create a lighter, more detached mood characteristic of wisdom literature.

10. How, if at all, does the psalmist build tension into the psalm? How does he relieve it?

    The psalmist builds tension by recounting the terrible physical consequences of wasting away and drying out, like the remains of a pressed olive left in the olive press on a hot day after the olive oil has been drained away.

11. What kind of language does the psalmist use? Is it concrete or abstract? What effect does it have?

    Vivid, concrete words characterize the heart of the psalm. The psalm's language paints a vivid picture of the horrors of sin and its consequences. Unrepentant sinners are compared with insensible horses and stubborn mules.

12. What poetic devices does the psalmist employ in this psalm? These may include such things as imagery, metaphors, similes, personification, hyperbole, apostrophe, shifting or unusual tenses, presence or absence of refrains, and the like. 13. What effect do these produce?

    Formulaic sayings of a wisdom psalm at the beginning and near the end of the psalm; vivid imagery of wearing out and drying up; similes, metaphors, personal testimony, innovative use of tenses; movement from general to particular to general again.

13. What are some of the intensifying features, if any, within this psalm?

    Movement from general (verses 1–2) to particular (verses 3–4) expressions
    "acknowledged" (general) to "did not hide" (stronger)

    Movement from weaker (or more neutral) to stronger expressions
    hiding place preserved surrounded by…deliverance
    instruct counsel
    horse mule

14. What is the psalmist attempting to do in or through this psalm? What does he want the reader to think, feel, believe, or do as a result of reading this psalm?

    By recounting his own personal experience, the psalmist creates a sense of identification with the listener. By offering advice as one who has already overcome the problem that is still a present reality in the listener's life, the psalmist wins the listener's trust that the words of the psalm offer definite help. The psalmist wants the listener to learn from his wiser brother in the faith. He wants to end on a note of confidence and praise.

Some Possible Ways to Preach from Psalm 32

Psalm 32 is more complicated than many of the other psalms. It demonstrates features from three different psalm types. In terms of subject matter, Psalm 32 is a penitential psalm. However, the formula of a wisdom psalm is plainly evident in verses 1–2 and 8–10. Verses 3–7 fit the pattern of an individual psalm of thanksgiving. Clearly Psalm 32 exhibits features of all three types, and should therefore be classified as a mixed type.

The blending of penitential elements with wisdom and thanksgiving elements accomplishes two things of particular importance. First, it reveals the purpose of the psalm. Psalm 32 was written to instruct the reader on how to find forgiveness

from God. Complete forgiveness is promised. The concept of forgiveness is amplified by the author's use of three of the most significant Hebrew words for both sin and forgiveness respectively. When someone is truly forgiven by God, their "transgressions" are "carried away," their "missing of the mark" is "covered over," and the "twisting effects of guilt" are erased from their permanent record and thus are "no longer reckoned against them."

Second, the blending of elements from different psalm types helps to produce one of the psalm's most striking effects—its extraordinary point of view. In each of the other six penitential psalms (Psalms 6, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143), the psalmists write from a different vantage point. Either they cry out *before* a crisis begins in order to ward off God's judgement for sin, or they cry out *during* a crisis in order to be delivered from consequences of some sinful act. Psalm 32 is different. Its author writes from the point of view of a person whose crisis has been resolved. Although the author had been in distress previously as a result of unconfessed sin, he has now moved beyond distress to a place of peace and forgiveness. The author's unusual viewpoint changes the entire mood of Psalm 32. Instead of the sadness, fear, and longing for deliverance that usually pervade penitential psalms, Psalm 32 is filled with thanksgiving, confidence, and happiness. The overall attitude of Psalm 32 is one of praise rather than lament.

The psalmist creates another important effect by use of his unusual point of view. He gains credibility for himself and the advice he will soon offer. His personal credibility will rest ultimately on his *identification* with the reader's painful experience with unconfessed sin. In other words, the psalmist's persuasiveness with the reader is enhanced by an experience they share in common. They are fellow travelers, yet the psalmist is better prepared to be the navigator. He is able to point the way because he has already scouted out the road ahead and

has now returned to assist the reader along the way to peace and forgiveness.

The psalmist learned first through his own mistake what not to do with his sin. In the second strophe, we learn that there was a time in the author's life when he did not deal with his sin in the way that God wanted him to—namely through confession. With lively language and vivid imagery, the psalmist describes the pain that resulted from his ineffective attempt to hide his sin from God. Many readers would be able to identify with the psalmist's experience of pain in body and spirit.

Yet, his failure is followed immediately by victory when he finally confessed his sin. His confession replaced his earlier attempt to cover over his sin—something that only God can do effectively! Now, because he has successfully turned back from the wrong path through confession and repentance and has traveled a ways down the right path toward forgiveness, he is qualified to tell the reader which path to take. Authority for his advice grows from the fact that in the end he successfully overcame his sin and its painful results through confession. The narrator of Psalm 32 is much more able than the narrator of Psalm 51 to assist wayward sinners because the latter is still in need of rescue himself.

The psalm does not convey a sense of tension until verses 3–4. Here the psalmist generates tension by recounting a time of anxiety and distress resulting from his silence about his sin. He utilizes potent imagery to describe the state he was in physically and emotionally from holding onto his guilt. His "bones wasted away" and his "life's juices were drained away as in the heat of summer."

The tension is short-lived. The author releases it in verse 5 when he recounts the relief he experienced after he acknowledged his sin to God. Because he no longer attempted to cover up his sin,

the Lord becomes his hiding place, protecting him in times of trouble. He addresses God in verses 6 and 7, but he appears to want the reader to listen in and understand the importance of praying to God "while [he] may be found." This adds a note of tension back into the psalm because the phrase implies that a time may come when it is too late to pray.

Wisdom elements appear near the end of the psalm. The reader is instructed not to become like horses or mules, which need to be led around with a bit and bridle. The consequences of not maintaining a healthy relationship with God are a loss of freedom and blessing. The person who does not internalize God's commandments and ways has no understanding. An individual who uses their freedom irresponsibly will have to be brought under control as horses and mules need to be controlled by bit and bridle.

There are a few key ways by which a preacher can carry over some of the effects of this psalm into a sermon. The first would be to retain the psalmist's point of view toward both the subject of sin and his or her listeners. The psalmist takes the role of fellow traveler with the reader. And, although the psalmist is well aware of the destruction that sin can bring to a person's life, he is also aware of an effective means to free oneself from its power. A preacher should assume the same role of a traveling companion who has passed over the route before and thus knows the way to go. Preaching from the same vantage point as the psalmist will contribute a good deal to mimicking the mood and the effects of Psalm 32.

There are a couple of ways to reproduce the psalmist's point of view in a sermon. First, a preacher can bring to light the psalmist's experience with sin, as well as his attitude toward his audience, and identify with him by saying something like the following:

> The psalmist is like a wise friend writing advice to you this morning—hard earned words of wisdom from his own failure to deal with his sin as God requires. Although at first he attempted to cover over his sin by himself, it did not work. The psalmist learned by painful experience that only God can cover over our offences. The good news is that he eventually did turn it over to God and in return he received true and complete forgiveness. This morning, I want to share with you God's way of dealing effectively with your sin and failure. I am not more righteous than you are. Like the psalmist, I too have sometimes had to learn how to deal with my failures the hard way. I've learned from my own experience that the advice of the psalmist is as true and helpful today as it was when he first penned the words of the psalm.

Second, a preacher can mimic the psalmist's point of view by telling of a first hand experience that parallels the experience of the psalmist. If this approach is preferred, a preacher should exercise care not to overwhelm listeners with details that are too personal. Moreover, the illustration should fit the pattern of the psalm. The preacher could describe an experience with unresolved guilt that at one time ate away at his or her conscience, but has since been dealt with in a godly way through confession and repentance.

A second way to carry over some of the psalm's effects into the sermon is to build tension by discussing the effects of mishandled sin. The imagery of the psalm is vibrant when the psalmist describes the extreme dryness he experienced as a result of trying to hide his sin from God. The tension in the psalm is built entirely around the pressure he felt before he confessed whatever it was that he did to offend God. Perhaps an

illustration about the role of stress in producing illness would be helpful.

Another way to build tension into the sermon is to tell a story about a contemporary person who has shared the psalmist's experience. There are plenty of biographies about people who have made their way through secret struggles. Some books written by Christian counselors also have material that could be useful. A well-told story from real life can do a great deal to capture people's attention and reinforce their confidence in the message of the psalmist in Psalm 32.

When the preacher progresses to the next move, where he or she seeks to relieve the listener's tension by offering a solution, it is important to bring the listeners to a Christ-centered solution. The psalmist was on the right path. Confession is an important spiritual discipline. However, the psalmist lived at a time before the full light of the gospel was revealed in and through God's Son. The assurance that comes through the realization that Christ has canceled our debt surpasses anything the psalmist could have known, as wise as he was.

It is important to help listeners understand that God can forgive them no matter how bad their sin has been. Some listeners may be sitting there thinking to themselves, "if you really knew me, if you only knew how awful my sins have been, then you would see that God could never forgive me." These feelings need to be surfaced and effectively addressed. Somehow the cross needs to be brought to bear on listeners' shame and guilt. It may also be helpful to assure listeners that three major categories of sin are mentioned in this psalm. This should be followed by an attempt to paint for listeners a picture of forgiveness through the three concepts of forgiveness mentioned by the psalmist in the opening verses.

There are tremendous truths contained within this psalm. If

listeners grasp the willingness of God to forgive their sin if only they will entrust themselves to him, then the sermon, like the psalm, will have done its job.

Techniques for Preserving a Psalm's Poetic Effects When Moving from Psalm to Sermon

1. Carefully select a sermon structure similar to the psalm's structure in order to preserve some of the psalm's original rhetorical impact (you may choose an entirely different structure for your sermon, but be aware of what effect your change will have on the psalm as it is filtered through the sermon).

2. Decide whether an inductive sermon or a deductive sermon is to be preferred when preaching from this psalm.

3. As a general rule, a sermon on a psalm should be arranged in moves rather than points on a traditional sermon outline.

4. Build tension (if applicable) into your sermon in a way that mimics or respects the author's efforts to build tension and release it.

5. Consider whether or not you want to help your listeners slow down and muse over one of the author's images, similes, metaphors and the like. How will you develop key images in your sermon? Do you want to intensify some of their effects, keep them the same, or tone them down?

6. Select appropriate illustrative materials in order to work in concert with the rhetorical effects that the psalmist achieved.

7. Carefully select the mood in which you will develop and deliver your sermon on a particular psalm. Do you want to echo the author's mood or create a new one?

8. Decide carefully on what point of view you will take within the various moves of the sermon.

9. Be sure to use a lot of concrete, specific words in your sermon. Consider using parallelism as a way to restate your major ideas. For example: God loves sinners; sinners are the apple of God's eye. Or, God is a God of forgiveness; he covers over our sins and deletes our debts from our permanent record.

10. Consider whether the psalm would benefit from being paired with another passage of Scripture. For instance, should a sermon on Psalm 19 be linked with other passages that tie in the psalm's relationship to the work of Christ?

Conclusion

The Psalms have enjoyed a special place of honor in the lives of God's people for thousands of years. In spite of that fact, many preachers avoid preaching from the Psalter. There may be a number of reasons why preachers are reluctant to use passages from the book of Psalms as preaching texts. In places, the Psalms can be difficult to interpret. Moreover, many psalms are challenging to handle homiletically. They sometimes raise controversial topics. Studying their intricate poetic patterns can be time consuming.

Yet, in spite of all of the challenges to preaching from the Psalter, the Psalms are nevertheless a gold mine of songs and prayers, brimming over with visions of God that cannot be found in most other places. It is our hope that we have removed at least a few of the obstacles for some who until now have been reticent about preaching from the Treasury of David. The divine and human authors collaborated to pour forth speech that would reach past our defenses and daily concerns to bring God's word to the deepest recesses of our hearts. Our congregations deserve

to have an opportunity to hear sermons from the Psalms that will attempt to do no less.

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Notes

1. Eugene Peterson, *Living the Message* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), quoted in Tremper Longman III, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1997), 136.

2. Dan B. Allender and Tremper Longman III, *The Cry of the Soul: How Our Emotions Reveal Our Deepest Questions About God* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1994), 31.
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4. Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 24–34.
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6. Long, 24–34.
7. For a helpful discussion on establishing a point of view in sermons see: David Buttrick, *Homiletic* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 55–68.
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"Back to the Future": Classical Categories of Exegesis, Application and Authority for Preaching and Spiritual Formation

by Timothy J. Ralston

(editor's note: Timothy J. Ralston is Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX.)

Abstract

A recovery of the ancient categories of *lectio continua (lectio semi-continua), lectio selecta* and *lectio divina* provide a helpful taxonomy to understand (a) the hermeneutic approach to the Biblical text by the preacher, (b) the relative authority of the message preached and (c) the corresponding role of the application made within the sermon for the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities.

Introduction

"So, what did you think of the sermon?"

This question dominates students leaving a campus chapel, colleagues socializing at a conference, and saints savoring "roast preacher." It seeks an evaluation of the experience, either the speaker or the message or both. But such a simple question exposes a weakness in the modern taxonomy of preaching. Rarely is one sermon perfect on all counts. So we want to affirm one or more aspects of the message, perhaps the speaker's skill as a communicator (presence and delivery), the speaker's approach to the biblical text (interpretation), or the consequent authority of the speaker's relevance (application) - but not all aspects. But an overly generous attitude that fails to distinguish between these aspects abdicates our biblical responsibilities and a too critical reply can engender a critical attitude that indiscriminately devalues all aspects of the event. The current

renewal of interest in preaching has brought communication theory, varying approaches to the determination of meaning, different structural strategies for its delivery, and new proposals for the application process. In a time when individual interpretations and applications have led to numerous excesses among Christians, one of the most acute questions for both preacher and congregation has become the authority for the application of the scriptures by the one who purports to teach.
At another place and time, the issue did not exist, at least not as it does today. Then Christians had a well-accepted set of categories by which to define the relative authority of the message that they heard. In the older Christian traditions, these categories continue to be used, although within the framework of spiritual formation. This paper proposes, therefore, that returning to an ancient and widely accepted nomenclature, performing a journey "back to the future," offers a valuable taxonomy for modern homiletic analysis, one that allows us to (a) distinguish messages vis-à-vis the role assumed by the biblical text within them, (b) appreciate the relative authority of the speaker's proposed application derived from the biblical text used and (c) affirm the unique contribution of each use of the text in preaching for the spiritual formation of its hearers as individuals and communities of faith.

The Concept of Lectio

Traditionally Christians have recognized two directions for engaging with the biblical text: the corporate and the personal. The former is characterized by the search for a biblical text's unique transcendent (objective) truth that will be binding upon all its hearers. The latter is characterized by one's personal intuitive insight for the immediate needs of divine intimacy and obedience. Each way possesses a unique understanding of the process whereby the biblical text is applied and thereby derives a corresponding significance for the individual and the community. The technical term for this engagement is *lectio,*

from the Latin "to read." But *lectio is* more than 'reading' in our English sense. Magrassi explains:

> It is hard to find in our language a single term to convey the meaning of *lectio*. "Reading" is inadequate since that word refers to something too superficial and too uninvolved. The term "study" is no better since it *[lectio]* refers to something much more involved. Although it *[lectio]* is an intellectual activity, it is too easily identified with scientific research or knowledge. In no way did the ancients intend to create for themselves through *lectio* a body of knowledge – not even theological or scriptural.[1]

In essence, to read the text at any of the different levels according to this tradition involves one with the scripture in such a way that it forms Christian experience, analogous to the Old Testament prophetic concept of knowledge.[2] We would speak of this as the personal application of the Bible that forms Christian character and provides wisdom for living. As Pennington notes:

> We come to *lectio* not so much seeking ideas, concepts, insights, or even motivating graces; we come to lectio seeking God himself and nothing less than God. We come seeking the experience of the presence of the living God, to be with him and to allow him to be with us in whatever way he wishes.[3]

Over the centuries these different approaches to the biblical text were classified as *lectio continua* (and *semi-continua), lectio selecta* and *lectio divina* (also referred to as *lectio sacra)*. However, any attempt to prepare a synthetic treatment of these concepts faces a significant difficulty: *lectio divina* as a personal spiritual exercise dominates the literature with little attention

paid to the corporate exercises of *continua* or *selecta*. The relationship between these three forms, their relative place, method and authority, are rarely defined or discussed. Although all three categories are not discussed in the context of homiletics or spiritual formation, this taxonomy does provide a convenient and accurate means to evaluate the relative biblical accuracy, corresponding applicational authority, and spiritual formation strategy for a given sermon.

Lectio Continua

The ancient concept of *lectio continua* ("reading continuously") treats each biblical text within complete literary units (books) according to the language, structure and assumptions of the original author and audience.[4] Each reading continues from the conclusion of the preceding passage until the entire unit has been heard. This method was the standard for scripture readings on ordinary (i.e. non-festival) Sabbaths in Jewish synagogue lectionaries prior to the Christian era. The extent to which the early Christian communities adopted the systematic Jewish practice is not clear, although reading cycles (and their collection into lectionaries) were already underway by the early second century C.E.[5] were formalized and continued through the Protestant Reformation, and flowered among the Puritans as the primary means of Biblical exposition.[6]

While no single sermon may comprehend an entire biblical section or even one book, *lectio continua* approaches each text as part of its larger biblical unit to understand it in the same way as its original audience. While historical grammatical exegesis and the critical disciplines are foundational to this way of reading, the goal is not merely to teach the content of the biblical text under scrutiny, but to expound this biblical text in such a way that its implications for its new hearers becomes evident and their lives are transformed by obedience.[7]

Historically when *lectio continua* occurs within the context of Christian worship, each new reading resumes with the biblical text at the point where the previous reading ended. The text read publicly forms the foundation and substance for the message to be delivered in that service. Since the meaning of the text is controlled by historical-grammatical-theological exegesis and biblical-theological context, both the understanding of a text's original meaning and the biblical principles behind its operation in the lives of its new audience should remain the same despite differences in audience context. All applications of the text made in accordance with these principles will, therefore, possess similar authority despite any superficial difference in circumstance. Consequently, the authority of *lectio continua* as a public rite transcends all differences in audience.[8] Ideally the principle of *lectio continua* lies at the heart of all scripture reading[9] but even more so for modern readers who have access to the tools and products of modern biblical scholarship for the determination of textual meaning.[10]

Lectio Selecta

A second approach to Christian interaction with the scriptures is *lectio Selecta* (reading from selected texts). Similar to the practice of the Jewish synagogues where selections from the Torah and Prophets are linked, biblical texts from distinct sections of the biblical canon (Old and New Testaments) are read in the context of the same rite, often because of a common theological theme or motif held in common by the texts. The reader seeks to understand the unity of the scriptures through the exposition of biblical themes across the canon of scripture.

Ideally each text is approached first through historical-grammatical-contextual exegesis. Then the common biblical-theological themes present in each text are correlated to discover the canonical significance of this theology for the modern reader within the community of faith who represents a climax in the

progress of revelation and the meaning in these texts. Practically the theological arrangement of texts in lectio selecta does not always lend itself to the strict contextual meaning. On the one hand, in the progress of revelation earlier texts do not treat themes as fully as later texts. Meanings contained within later texts are often presumed within the earlier ones. On the other hand, confessional constraints can influence an expositor's fidelity to a preexisting theological system of canonical understanding (a 'rule of faith' as a hermeneutical guide). The preacher may desire to treat each text with expositional integrity but, with the practical limits imposed by liturgical time, the individual exposition of texts chosen from disparate places in the biblical canon and the subsequent development of a biblical-theological synthesis between these texts can be overwhelming.[11] Therefore, when biblical texts employed in lectio selecta are linked in the sermon, their individual meanings are subsumed by their canonical-theological context (established through a lectionary). Since the church designs the lectionary arrangement of the texts according to its own theological understanding and purposes, philosophically and practically the message deduced through these textual links represent the hermeneutical biases of an ecclesiological authority.

This in part explains why the church historically presumed the right to dictate the meaning and significance of the text read in public worship, requiring that the preacher's message through the texts conform to the confession under which the sermon was preached. The authority of the message preached to the community of faith was limited by its conformity to the community's confession or dogma. This demonstrates a vital distinction between lectio continua and lectio selecta. The former begins with the text and assumes the authority of the text over the theology of the interpreter; the latter begins with canonical theology or the interpreter's theological tradition and elevates this as the control over application of the text. By

virtue of its transcendent meaning, the authority of application rooted in lectio continua is universal. Application under the conditions of lectio selecta, however, holds lesser authority inasmuch as its applicational significance is often limited by the agreement of the audience with the ecclesial or theological framework of the preacher (or the community he represents). Only to the extent that this theological significance is truly canonical does an application derived from lectio selecta possess authority equal to that derived through lectio continua.[12]

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina (also known as *lectio sacra* or 'sacred reading') represents a third method for approaching the biblical text. The terms first come to us in patristic literature of the fourth and fifth centuries from the pens of such notables as Jerome, Ambrose, and Augustine and is extolled through the centuries by prominent church figures like Cyprian, Origen, Gregory, and Alcuin.[13] During this period its practice usually required a context in which extended contemplation was possible. Hence it flourished largely as a monastic discipline. The twelfth century, however, marked a turning point in its practice as the focus of the church shifted from the monastic emphasis on spiritual practice to the scholastic emphasis on academic inquiry and the new mendicant (non-cloistered) monastic orders appeared. As more and more biblical, spiritual and liturgical texts became available in the vernacular for popular consumption, the practice of sacred reading of the text gradually extended into all degrees of the laity as well.[14] Consequently, by the thirteenth century "even the term *lectio divina* becomes less frequent and disappears entirely from some contexts."[15] After the Reformation, various Protestant groups recognized the value of *lectio divina* and proceeded to advocate and regulate its practice.[16] John Wesley articulated the classic medieval procedure of *lectio divina* for Methodism by incorporating the

practice within the broader framework of one's spiritual interaction with all forms of Christian literature.[17]

Lectio divina's advocates encouraged Bible reading with an affective goal – the momentary application of the text, "not to acquire [biblical] knowledge (unless selfknowledge) but to 'excite' penitence and a greater love of God,"[18] an extension of God's sovereign work of inspiration to every individual,[19] creating a *"living* Word ... animated by the Spirit of life."[20] Called a "unique and extraordinary experience,[21] it assumes that the text's significance to the reader will be controlled by elements operating in addition to and above exegesis or theology,[22] namely the reader's spiritually informed intuition concerning its immediate role in his or her life.[23] While ideally such a meaning will be congruent with the products of exegesis, practically this is not always possible – or even desirable! In fact, the product of *lectio divina* cannot be limited to the bounds of significance or application created by exegesis: "One listens to a section of scripture not as a lesson in biblical history, not as an exercise in critical scholarship (although for those trained in exegesis such questions and viewpoints inevitably run through the mind). One listens to hear the voice of God. That voice is heard in an individual way, according to the measure of the understanding of each."[24]

In summary, *lectio divina is* accessible to all because it requires no exegetical expertise and only the most limited biblical-theological understanding. It functions as a devotional activity in which neither *lectio continua* nor *lectio selecta will* be performed in their proper sense.[25] Therefore, unlike the products of *lectio continua* or *lectio selecta,* the message of lectio *divina* speaks only to the momentary situation of the reader with the corresponding limitation of application authority.[26] Consequently, the Word experienced in *lectio divina is* understood as distinct from the Word as received in the Liturgy of the Word (i.e. *lectio selecta* or even *continua).*[27]

This three-fold classification provides a window to understand the relative means by which the scriptures function in spiritual formation. *Lectio continua will* be authoritative for all Christians' ethics and behavior, possessing the broadest significance for spiritual formation, regardless of confession or circumstance. *Lectio selecta* has a more limited potential for individual formation since it occurs only within community liturgical-theological contexts, re-enforcing the theological ethical norms of the community. *Lectio divina in* preaching has no intrinsic authority for the community or its individuals, but such as individuals attribute to it through respect for the preacher as an authority or by identification with the circumstances of the preacher's intuition.

Lectio and Evangelical Preaching

Listening to modern Evangelical preaching, one hears all three hermeneutical approaches employed to apply the biblical text (although they are rarely equated with their ancient counterparts). A comparison of *lectio continua* with the consensus definitions of expository preaching reveals a startling similarity.[28] Both emphasize the fundamental role of historical-grammatical-contextual exegesis for determining the meaning of the biblical text and the central place of this meaning in the preacher's message. Both aspire to the inculcation of authoritative biblical principles in the believer's life as the basis for Christian conduct. Consequently, although rarely designated by its ancient name, *lectio continua* has enjoyed an esteemed place and active pursuit in expository preaching among modern American Evangelicals. Often it assumes *lectio semi-continua* in the form of expositions through extended scriptural passages appropriate to seasonal themes (e.g. Christmas, Easter, etc.) or other extended subsets of the Biblical books.[29]

Many Evangelical messages also illustrate the principles of *lectio selecta*. This hermeneutic appears under one of two

names. In topical preaching two or more biblical texts are called upon to offer their contributions to a more comprehensive (theological) statement. At least one element under discussion is present in each text and each text makes a distinct contribution to the formulation of the whole. Topical theological sermons include theological statements, biographical studies, and lexical (word) studies. Under the label "textual preaching," a single biblical text becomes the means whereby a theological concept can be presented because of its appearance in the text (whether or not that concept is central to the exegesis). The preacher may refer to other texts supportive of his thesis, thereby creating an *ad hoc* version of *lectio selecta* (devoid of the formal introduction of these texts) or may simply choose to ignore the context in the theological focus of the message. However, both types of Evangelical *lectio selecta* choose points legitimately drawn from the text(s) which do not violate the context. Two common examples are the so-called "Romans Road" presentation of the Gospel and the "Four Spiritual Laws" (in which, however, at least one text is used without due regard for its contextual meaning). A "biographical sermon," one that traces the life of a biblical character for its spiritual lessons, also follows the principle of *lectio selecta*.

Evangelical *lectio selecta* experiences the same problems of application as its ancient counterpart. Superficial textual relationships are created lacking theological substance; theological themes consist of (or degenerate into) mere 'word studies' or a confessional commentary without regard for contextual issues. As with its ancient counterpart, the authority of the message application is limited to the conferred authority of the preacher's theology, both as a historical phenomenon (creedal or confessional conformity) and as an audience commitment (theological congruence between preacher and audience).

And what about *lectio divina?* It dominates modern Evangelical devotional practices. Preachers urge us to "read the Word every

day, not to get a sermon, but to get a message for yourself"[30] and devotional literature assures us that God "can speak to us from any place in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16) ... when he uses our thoughts and informs us through our minds as we consider what He says in His Word.[31] Many editions of the Bible add textual notes to focus the relevance for a particular social group or suggest imaginative exercises that facilitate an engagement with the text.[32] Similarly sermons also follow a *lectio divina* hermeneutic when the text's significance is based on sentiment or action is urged on the basis of the preacher's *ethos*. Such sermons are little more than 'pastoral advice' to the audience. The authority of the message (such as it is) depends solely on the audience's willingness to defer to the speaker's preferences and prejudices concerning the matter at hand. (Since both the textual meaning of the text and its theological significance are absent from such messages, perhaps it would be more honest to set aside any reference to a biblical text in such sermons and admit openly to the congregation that the message merely represents the accumulated wisdom of the speaker as 'sparked' by a spiritual thought about the Bible.)

The distinctions between the three basic forms of *lectio* and their modern significance for applicational authority in preaching can be summarized as follows:

Ancient Form	*Lectio Continua*	*Lectio Selecta*	*Lectio Divina*
Context for the Text's Meaning & Significance	Biblical context (historical-grammatical exegesis)	Theological context (confessional-theological significance)	Individual context (personal intuition and reflection)
Sermon Type Preacher's Authority	Expository "Thus saith YHWH..."	Topical "We believe..."	Devotional "My good advice..."
Application Authority	Universal - a shared Biblical commitment	Ecclesiastical - a shared theological matrix	Personal - a shared need, intuition & circumstance
Corresponding Authority Limits	None	Some	Most
Spiritual Formation Value for Preaching	Most valuable	Limited value	Least valuable

Classifying Modern Examples of Lectio[33]

To study the relative effects of each form of *lectio* upon the application of a biblical text, consider the three ways of treating Judges 6:36-40 (Gideon's fleece) with the corresponding applications.

1. Approached through *lectio continua,* the biblical-theological context of Judges and Gideon's behavior shows that the two fleeces represent an act of resistance to God's will. The application should encourage us of God's patience but warn us against tempting Him. This possesses universal authority since (a) it can be validated directly by contextual exegesis and (b) it conforms with a biblical pattern concerning human response to God's revealed will.

2. Approached through *lectio selecta,* the Common Lectionary links this text with Eph 4:11-16 (how Christ equips his church through spiritually-gifted individuals in order to bring about His purpose), John 14:1-7 (how 'abiding' in Christ results in the accomplishment of God's purposes) and Psalm 136:1-4,23-26 (the psalmist acknowledging God's greatness and His covenantal provision to His own).[34] Now the story appears as part of the broader matrix of God's preparation and encouragement of those who serve him. It joins a broader story of God's work to help us perform His will, a meaning tangential to but distinct from the warning derived through *lectio continua*. This application has limited authority since it uses the Gideon cycle only as an example of the means whereby God selects and equips human beings to accomplish His purposes.

3. Approaching the text through *lectio divina,* popular spirituality often speaks of "laying out a fleece" as a

> means for determining God's will. This sense of the passage stands in contradiction to the context. While emotionally encouraging and concrete in image, its role as an authoritative example cannot be justified by contextual exegesis, biblical pattern or confessional direction as a means for eliciting God's will. While Christian individuals have received divine guidance through such means, the pattern represents nothing more than the pastoral advice of one Christian to another to which the listener has no obligation.

Rarely are the options so apparent. Instead a listener hears only one application and must decide on its authority without recourse to alternative perspectives. Consider these examples. A sermon on the story of Jephtha (Judges 11) concludes that it teaches the priority of keeping one's promises.[35] The astute exegete recognizes that in context Jephtha's keeping his vow produced tragedy at several levels: the loss of his daughter, his only child, and hence of any heritage in Israel as well as disobedience to the explicit requirements of the Old Testament Law concerning such sacrifices. Clearly Jephtha's ignorance of the law and rashness in wording his vow place his act in an unfavorable light. However, the principle of faithfulness to one's word is established elsewhere in the Old Testament. Therefore, while the message application violates the principles of *lectio continua,* one might classify the message application as *lectio selecta:* the biblical principle of faithful promise keeping gives the message some authority beyond the individual.

A sermon based on Paul's admonition to Timothy (1 Timothy 4:12) advocates wearing suitable apparel that conforms to a school's dress code, urges complimentary make-up for the women, and admonishes all to practice personal hygiene.[36] Unfortunately the context clearly defines that Paul's focus allows for none of these matters. Clearly this is not *lectio continua*. When one attempts to correlate this message

theologically, one finds biblical teaching that emphasizes Christians not look to externals for spiritual reality, nor is there creedal or confessional requirement. The application fails the test of *lectio selecta*. Therefore, the behavior presented by the preacher represents *lectio divina,* a personal judgment based on sound advice for successful modern social interactions. It carries no greater authority than what the listener desires to attribute to the speaker as a Christian leader. The listener is not obligated to obey the injunction.

In a message on Jesus' miracle at the wedding feast at Cana (John 2:1-11), the speaker finds Jesus' miraculous creation of an alcoholic beverage for social consumption at a public event to be reckless (if not wrong as contributing to public intoxication) and concludes that Jesus' example encourages Christians to "do what you need to do and don't worry about the consequences."[37] The explicit biblical-theological significance of the passage as a sign in Johannine theology that identifies Jesus' fulfillment of messianic expectation has been ignored *(lectio continua)*. The speaker's admonition itself violates teachings elsewhere of Christian responsibility for behavior *(lectio selecta)*. Hence the message might be classified as another example of *lectio divina,* obedience being optional for the hearer (which option is only strengthened since the message violates explicit biblical injunctions to personal and community responsibility elsewhere to the contrary).

Lectio and Spiritual Formation

In each of the cases described above, an understanding of the classical categories of interaction with scripture *(lectio continua, lectio selecta, lectio divina)* proves helpful in classifying the use of the biblical text by the preacher and the relative authority of the application urged by the preacher upon the audience. But it should also be obvious that the recovery of this terminology would prove equally helpful for the

understanding and classification of the different postures assumed by a preacher vis-a-vis the scriptures in the spiritual formation of the congregation.

Because of its transcendent authority, that addresses both individuals and communities without distinction, *lectio continua* offers the widest opportunity for the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities. Assuming equal competence and spirituality in method, well-prepared, concrete applications of the principle ensure the transferability of the biblical truth itself while giving room for application of that truth according to contextual demands. Ideally this method contributes to the unity (not homogeneity) of the church, thereby fulfilling the goal of ecclesial unity in Christ, which is the biblical evidence of successful spiritual formation.

As a subset, *lectio selecta* addresses the Christian community according to broader standards of faith and practice. It provides the framework necessary for participation in the life of the church and finds its most obvious place within the corporate worship gatherings of the church. To this end its greatest value for spiritual formation lies within community life, rather than the acts of individuals in relative isolation.

Since the authority sphere of *lectio divina* has been defined according to the individual experiencing it firsthand, this hermeneutical method possesses value only for the spiritual formation of that individual. While the immediacy of its application and corresponding sentimental appeal often makes it attractive to a larger audience, its potential to ignore (and perhaps even contradict) the product of *lectio continua* and/or *lectio selecta* renders it impotent as a means to nurture communities and potentially damaging when universalized to address the spiritual formation of individuals who may not share the circumstances of the speaker to whom the text originally "spoke." Often a substitution of authority occurs, the *ethos* of

the preacher and his view (interpretation) of the text replacing the text as an objective authority to be read and understood by all.[38]

Summary

The categories *lectio continua, lectio semi-continua, lectio selecta* and *lectio divina* describe hermeneutical approaches to the application of scripture. Consequently these categories provide a helpful means to classify the hermeneutical validity of an application presented in a sermon and, by implication, the relative authority of the ethic derived from one's interaction with a biblical text. They also offer a well accepted taxonomy to understand the differing use of the Bible in the spiritual formation of individuals and Christian communities. Therefore, they represent valuable categories worthy of recovery and adoption for evaluating sermons.

Perhaps I state the obvious. I hope so. Most (if not all) Evangelicals express a genuine commitment to the ideal of *lectio continua,* that which we believe lies at the heart of preaching in the tradition of *sola scriptura*. Often, however, our preaching hermeneutic, even that which designates itself as "expository," displays more of the characteristics of *lectio selecta* or *lectio divina*. Unfortunately few appreciate the difference and most aren't aware of the problem.

The Holy Spirit is not limited by the poverty of a method, but the weakness of our application to reflect the results of authoritative exegesis must surely detract from the simplicity of the Bible's authority as it speaks to human need. Ultimately, anything less than *lectio continua* in preaching undermines a local church's ability to form the lives of its members according to scripture and to engage with other Christian communities in obedience to our Lord's requirement of unity in faith and witness – the measure of true Christian maturity and the measure of success in our effort toward the spiritual formation of the Body of Christ.

Notes

1. Mariano Magrassi, *Praying the Bible: An Introduction to Lectio Divina* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 17.
2. S.v. "[dy" by Jack P. Lewis in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament,* vol. 1 (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 367.
3. M. Basil Pennington, *Lectio Divina: Renewing the Ancient Practice of Praying the Scriptures* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1998), 27.
4. Speaking of this, Dietrich Bonhoffer writes that "Brief verses cannot and should not take the place of reading Scripture as a whole ... Holy Scripture does not consist of individual passages; it is a unit and is intended to be used as such." Dietrich Bonhoffer, *Life Together,* trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), 50-51.
5. S.v. "Lectionary" by R.H. Fuller in *The New Westminster Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship,* J.G. Davies, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 297-98.
6. David Hatten Jussely, "The Puritan Use of the Lectio Continua in Sermon Invention (1640-1700)" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern Mississippi, 1997).
7. Philip H. Pfatteicher, *Liturgical Spirituality* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press, 1997), 42.
8. Modern discussions also speak of *lectio semi-continua,* the treatment of longer biblical texts over several sessions but not proceeding to offer an exposition of the entire biblical unit (book). It represents a subset of *Lectio continua,* a concession to the demands of modern lectionary arrangements or seasonal requirements. For convenience both *lectio continua* and *lectio semi-continua* are treated as the same thing since both assume the same hermeneutic.
9. Fuller, xvii-xxxi.
10. E. Hagman, "Introduction", in Magrassi, vii, speaks of the other ways of reading scripture and notes that "Today's advances in biblical studies have become increasingly known to non-specialists. In our reading of scripture, they enable us to adhere to the literal sense, careful to situate the sacred texts in their original historical-religious contexts."
11. Recently a third issue has surfaced: the limited canonical understanding of the expositor (the preacher's limited training and understanding) result in superficial linking of texts through situations, symbols, etc. This explains how the New Hermeneutic /Homiletic operates within the constraints of the lectionary, further complicated by the minimalist biblical-theological training provided to seminarians and the proliferation of lectionary preaching aids that direct the preacher to meanings outside the biblical-theological context. This method and its rationale was argued by Gail Ramshaw, Ph.D., to the Homiletics working group at the annual meeting of the North American Academy of Liturgy (January, 1999).
12. A similar danger is noted by David L. Larsen, *The Anatomy of Preaching: Identifying the Issues In Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1989), 32.
13. Magrassi, 15-16, offers a brief survey of such citations. For a more comprehensive list of usage among the fathers, see H. de Labac, *Exegese Medievale: les quatre sens de l'Ecriture,* part 1, vol. 1 (Paris, 1959), 82-84.
14. John A. Alford, "Rolle's English Psalter and Lectio Divina." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 77:3 (Fall, 1995): 48-59, demonstrates how this functioned with an English psalter translated from the Vulgate for the explicit purpose of providing the non-scholarly with a means to perform the discipline of *lectio divina*.
15. Ivan Illich, *In the Vineyard of the Text: A Commentary to Hugh of St. Victor's Didascalion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 95.
16. Gary Bert Gates, "Bible Reading As Communion With God: A Historical Study of Monastic Lectio Divina, Denoting Its Influence Upon Puritan Meditation and Proposing Its Applicability for the Christian Today" (Th.M. thesis, Regent College, 1995).
17. John Wesley, "Introduction" to *An Abridgement of Thomas a Kempis' Treatise of the Imitation of Christ in The Works of the Reverend John Wesley, A.M.* (New York: B. Waugh and T. Mason, 1835), 517.
18. Alford, 47.

19. "For [the patristic fathers], inspiration is not just something that acted once on the sacred writers, resulting in the inspired texts. It is an ongoing and ever-present influence at work within the books themselves, which are and remain inspired" (Magrassi, 27).
20. Ibid., 29.
21. Hagman, vii.
22. Michael Casey, *Sacred Reading: The Ancient Art of Lectio Divina* (Ligouri, MO: Ligouri/Triumph, 1996), 54, writes "Lectio and study are not to be identified, although they may sometimes overlap. ...it is necessary only to envisage lectio divina as that dealing with the text that begins where the study leaves off."
23. "These intuitions are given to us at the precise moment that the reading penetrates our hearts. Once again, they cannot be identified with the conclusions of some other research that pursues other aims for another purpose. It is important to distinguish between these two levels," Ghislaine Salvail, *At the Crossroads of the Scriptures: An Introduction to Lectio Divina,* trans. Paul C. Duggan (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1994), 15-16. Similarly Pennington, 27, argues "it is important, that in lectio we do not try to contract the Word we receive to the dimensions of our already-held concepts and ideas [i.e. derived from the study of the biblical text]." Magrassi states "we do not mean to exclude the appropriate role of study, and normally, the need for it. All we are saying is that its role with regard to Lectio divina is introductory. It prepares us for the vital assimilation that take place only in prayer" (72) and "Study is concerned with scientific certitude; lectio wishes to nourish spiritual experience. Study takes place on the objective and detached level of investigation; lectio takes place in the contemplative atmosphere of prayer. Professional exegetes strive to prescind from personal feelings. Spiritual persons... do not proceed by way of specific analytic technique, but trust the intuitions of their grace-filled soul" (73-74).
24. Pfatteicher, 42.
25. Magrassi, 8-9, notes that "...the medievals would say that in the liturgy the Word reveals mainly its allegorical dimension (which refer to the mystery of Christ and the Church) and its anagogical dimension (which refers to the final consummation). In personal reading it reveals its anthropological dimension (which refers to the individual's spiritual life)."
26. Interestingly Salvail (a Roman Catholic) speaks of the independent authority granted to the believer through the sanctified intuition: "we affirm with Peter that every believer is a priest, prophet, king and saint, and that these four characteristics are essential for anyone undertaking *lectio divina"* (21). This distinction between forms of "reading" (studying) the Bible explains the intention of the Second Vatican Council. It did not authorize lay performance of *lectio continua/selecta* of the biblical text (whose product would then be binding upon the church), but *lectio d i v i n a* as a devotional experience born from the intuition of the reader. By definition, the product of such study has no dogmatic significance. Consequently Protestant Evangelical assumptions concerning "personal Bible study methods" as the basis for determining the transcendent truth of a biblical passage (and thereby its binding authority upon all believers) must be considered distinct from this traditional teaching concerning one's engagement with the scriptures.
27. Pennington, 19-30. This is not to imply that that hermeneutic of *lectio d i v i n a* has not been applied to preaching, but that such an application of the method was considered exceptional. See Cyril Dmjevic, "Doing Lectio Out Loud: A Benedictine Approach to Preaching" (M.Div. Thesis, Mount Angel Seminary, Spring 2000).
28. Consider the follow sample definitions of expository preaching: "the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of interpretation and declared through effective means of communication to inform minds, instruct hearts, and influence behavior toward godliness" from Ramesh Richard, *Scripture Sculpture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1995), 17; "persuasively and urgently communicating the exact and full meaning of the text of scripture in terms of contemporary culture, with the specific goal of helping people to understand and obey the truth of God" as offered by the Congress on Biblical Exposition at the National Convention in Anaheim, California (March, 1986). See Brian Bird, "Biblical Exposition: Becoming a Lost Art?"

Christianity Today 30:7 (April 18, 1986): 34; "the communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers" from Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 20. Longer discussions containing similar elements without such a concise summary can be found in Keith Willhite and Scott Gibson, eds., *The Big Idea of Biblical Preaching: Connecting the Bible to People* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1998), 13-22; Walter Leifeld, *N e w Testament Exposition: From Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1984), 6-7; Merrill F. Unger, *Principles of Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1955), 33; Reginald H. Fuller, *Preaching the Lectionary: The Word of God for the Church Today* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984), xviii. Surely the best, most succinct and scholarly presentation of the hermeneutical method that exemplifies the ideal of *lectio continua,* preserving the authority of the biblical text within a new contextual application, is offered by Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991):463-486.

29. Some studies do continue to use the classic terminology: Hughes Oliphant Old, "Preaching by the Book: Using the Lectio Continua Approach in Sermon Preparation." *Reformed Worship* 8 (1988): 24-25; John P. Burgess, "Shaping A Congregation Through Lectio Continua." *Reformed Liturgy and Music* 30 (1996):1: 3-6.
30. John F. Walvoord, message in chapel (8/31/2000), Dallas Theological Seminary.
31. Peter V. Deison, *The Priority of Knowing God: Taking Time With God When There is No Time* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 1990), 21.
32. Unfortunately, this strategy is contrary to the traditional strategy of *lectio d i v i n a* in which the text is brought to the reader (thereby suggesting that the text brings truth to the reader apart from the reader's expectation and requiring the reader's obedience to its demands) rather than suggesting that the reader comes to the text seeking what he or she desires and expecting the text to supply it.
33. Each of these examples represent actual case studies of message application presented in evangelical contexts.
34. This is the only element of the Gideon cycle included in the three-year cycle of the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The entire cycle is absent from the current edition of the *Catholic Lectionary* (as designed for Sunday reading).
35. Richard Allen Farmer, "A Question Posed to a Glad Warrior" (Chapel message, Dallas Theological Seminary, January 15, 1999).
36. C. Swindoll, "Pay Close Attention to Your Appearance" (Chapel message, Dallas Theological Seminary, March 18, 1999).
37. Untitled Vespers message, Cathedral of San Fernando, San Antonio, Texas (January 3, 1999).
38. In fact, this phenomenon represents what occurs within the process of developing communities that appear cult-like, such as are common in America today. The community gathered around the leader is expected to express obedience to the leader's special application of the Biblical text, often with disastrous consequences.

Living Between Two Worlds: II Corinthians 4:16-18

by Erwin W. Lutzer

(editor's note: Erwin Lutzer is pastor of Moody Church, Chicago. Dr. Lutzer preached this sermon at the October 2002 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL. Thanks to Dr. Lutzer for permission to publish his sermon.)

The September terrorist attack toppled man-made conceptions of God. A television special on the tragedy revealed the attitudes of many:

A father who lost a son, said, "I go to church to ask God, why?…But God had nothing to do with this… this was the devil, not God."

A woman who lost her husband related, "I talked to God for 35 years…I would ask Him to bless me and my friends, to heal the sick. Now I can't bring myself to talk with Him anymore. I feel so abandoned…I know he still exists; some day I will have to forgive, but I can't do that now, I'm not ready."

An angry man confessed, "I cursed God, I dammed him.. I'm losing respect for him…I believe in the trinity, but I believe in the son, not the father…I have no love for God after 9/11; I can't accept it…It's too barbaric, the way lives are taken…I now think of God as a Barbarian…I think I'm a good Christian, but I have a different view of God now...I had to replace my image of him."

Listen to this man, "After 9/11 the face of God to me is a blank slate. God could not be counted upon, as I thought he could. All his attributes have been stripped away—I was left with faith, but faith in what?"

I conclude with the words of an atheist, "It is harder for me than for those who believe in God; as an atheist all that I have is the belief in the innate goodness of humans and if I don't have that, I don't have anything."

The clash of faith and reality is not new. For our generation the struggle surfaced with 9/11 but for others it is Kosovo, or Rwanda or the holocaust. The question is: how can we go on believing with so few explanations? How do we manage to hold unto our faith in the face of horrendous injustice and evil? How do we preach a God of compassion when we see humans cry to God in terror but He appears to turn a deaf ear?

My intention is not to give a theodicy, that is a defense of God in the face of evil. My task is more modest: it is to show how a belief in the world to come changes our perspective of this evil world. If you were standing at the Eiffel Tower in Paris as my wife and I did last year, you would discover that up close—say three feet away—all that you see is a mangled, badly painted pile of steel and rivets. But if you stand back—say a thousand feet—you see symmetry, careful engineering and a grand purpose.

In this message we shall look at life through two lenses: the microscope, where all the ugly details appear and the telescope, the long-range point of view. We will discover that we can better understand this hurting world if we can see time in light of eternity.

We will look at this present world with its heartaches and disappointments and then step back and look at the world to come. We are poised between two worlds and we derive our strength from the one to come.

In II Corinthians 4: 16-18 Paul makes three contrasts between these two different worlds. He tells us that we need not "lose

heart" for our faith enables us draw resources from the invisible purposes of God and the sure knowledge that eternity awaits. Our suffering will be made up to us in a blaze of coming glory. And that assurance carries us through today.

The Contrasts

After a lengthy discourse on hardship, Paul concludes, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes, not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (II Cor. 4: 16-18).

The Inner vs. the Outer Man

"Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day." All of us are born with an expiration date. Our journey to the grave is inevitable, visible and irreversible. Death is the culmination of a process; whether we die at the age of 100, or die in a terrorist attack at the age of 25, the inevitability of our demise stares us in the face.

That people can be killed in a building hit by an airplane is proof of our mortality. Of course we recoil when the timetable of death is speeded up; we are rightfully angry when evil men take the lives of the helpless and innocent. But we must remember that not even terrorism can increase death; it hastens it, but in the end we all will be there. We're born with bodies that are not meant to last.

Tom Howard says that when we face death we are like a hen before a cobra, incapable of doing anything at all in the presence of the very thing that seems to call for the most drastic and decisive action. "There is, in fact, nothing we can do" he writes,

“Say what we will dance how we will, we will soon enough be a heap of ruined feathers and bones, indistinguishable from the rest of the ruins that lie about. It will not appear to matter in the slightest whether we met the enemy with equanimity, shrieks, or trumped-up gaiety, there we will be.”

The outer man hastens to the grave, but the inner man, the soul is “being renewed day by day.” We are being renewed in strength and character; we are being renewed in faith. Our soul is being prepared for the presence of God; our inner being is being changed from one degree of glory to another.

Viewed at close range, death appears tragic. No discernable permanent good can come from a world where people die randomly, tearing families apart and leaving children without mothers and fathers. But if we step back see the larger picture, we know that the inner man—the eternal soul—is being fitted for heaven.

I’m told that two different kinds of people drift into senility. First, there are those who become stubborn, obstinate, angry and disagreeable, they might swear, saying words their family never heard from them before. Some caregivers contend that this is the real person, but when they were fully in control of their faculties, they had enough self respect to maintain a modicum of decency and friendliness. They could keep their real self under wraps. But with their mask gone, there is now nothing left except the real person, unvarnished, untouched and without hypocrisy.

On the other hand I have met those who become sweet in their senility. They smile, talk about the Lord and in short, bless those who come their way. Often they maintain a sense of humor, and adjust to their surroundings with submissive tranquility. Their “inner man” is being renewed day by day.

We have been inspired by some who, though weary in body, have shown us that there is more to a personhood than wrinkles and decay. This is why Jesus could say, "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10: 28).

Remember Luther's words:

The body they may kill
God's truth abideth still
His kingdom is forever.

We must differentiate between the body and the soul. One is perishing and the other is being fitted for eternity. The treasure shines in the earthen vessel giving the assurance of a world to come.

Present Suffering and Future Glory

The second contrast is between present suffering and future glory. "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far out-weighs them all" (v.17). The imagery is of a scale that we've all seen in market places. You put a one pound weight on one side, and when it balances, you know that you have an equal weight on the other side. Paul says if you put all of your troubles on one side of the scale, and then put the eternal weight of glory on the other side, the scale will go plunk!! The "eternal weight of glory" so outweighs our momentary troubles, that there is, quite literally, no comparison.

This was written by a man who endured many hardships. There was the personal suffering of a health issue—the thorn in the flesh. Then there was the relational suffering of friends leaving him; in fact a friend of his "did him much harm." He also experienced economic suffering; he had to make tents to survive. He lists more than 31 occasions of personal hardship in

II Corinthians 11: 23-33. Yet he says this suffering is like putting a fly on one side of the scale and an elephant on the other.

What is this eternal weight of glory? C.S. Lewis points out that it is not "fame" as we think of it; that would be selfish. But the glory is that God will delight in us like an artist who delights in his work. The delight we will have in knowing that we are a joy to God will bring uncontrollable and continual joy. Thus we experience the purpose for which we were created.

Compare that to the thirty years we struggled with arthritis; or the pain of a divorce or the betrayal of a friend. Or the loneliness of widowhood. All that will be as light as a feather in comparison to being like Christ, for "we shall see Him as he is."

I think Paul would also want us to understand that afflictions increase our desire for glory. We as a church have adopted a refugee camp in Southern Africa were people are dying from malnutrition. Most of the women have lost their husbands in a blood civil war. Their children wander along the dirt paths, looking for something to do and something to eat. There are about 800 believers in the camp who talk about heaven more than we do. For these who are thus afflicted, the more attractive glory becomes.

An elderly woman who longed for death, admonished her children who were intent on using modern medicine to help her eek out a week or two more of painful existence, "Don't interfere with my glorification." Affliction produces a desire for glory.

Also Paul seems to imply that the more suffering, the more glory. Some will receive a glory that in a hundred million ways will make up for the pain that they have had to endure on earth. Life is not fair; but when we consider the eternal weight of glory, we will discover that everything will be equalized; God

will make up for every sleepless night. The glory is just around the corner.

The Seen vs. the Unseen

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal" (v.18). The World Trade Center Towers were temporal. Yes, they were destroyed at the hand of wicked men, but even quite apart from that, destruction lay in their distant future. No wonder Peter wrote, "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming" (II Peter 11, 12).

Look around you. Everything will some day go "Poof" and be gone. Therefore Paul asks us to do what seems to be contradictory. We are to look at what is unseen; we are to gaze at what we can't see! Like Abraham we look for a city whose builder and maker is God. Visualize a measuring tape from earth to the farthest star. Our lives are a hairline on this continuum.

What exists in the unseen world? God; angels; demons; heaven; hell. Love will exist forever as well as truth and justice. And we will exist forever. C.S. Lewis reminded us that everyone we encounter is an eternal being—someday, every person will be a being of indescribable beauty or a being of horror and corruption. The souls and resurrected bodies of all men and women are indestructible.

We've all been critical of someone about whom it is said that he is "so heavenly minded, he is no earthly good." Paul might not join us in such a criticism. Only the heavenly minded are fit to live on this earth. Heaven makes earth bearable.

We must glance at earth and gaze on heaven.

One fourth of July a friend invited my wife and me to join him on his boat off the harbor of Lake Michigan. He assured us that we could see the fireworks better a half mile off shore. But as the boat began to bob in the water, I became nauseated. He gave me this bit of advice. "Fix your eyes on something that is stable and you will feel better." So stared at the famous John Hancock Building in downtown Chicago, and sure enough the nausea subsided.

When life causes us to go up and down like a yo-yo, the worst thing we can do is to look at everything around us that is in flux. We can't be stabilized by earth, but we can regain our equilibrium with the promise of heaven. This life has to be interpreted in light of the next.

The Rabbi (quoted above) who complained that he no longer believes in a God of fairness, a God who rewards and punishes, must also be reminded that there is another world coming. God does not settle all of his accounts in this life. Heaven is a comforting doctrine, but so is hell. For in the presence of God every wrong shall be addressed and every earthly court case retried. Throughout all of eternity we will sing "Just and true are your ways, O King of saints."

We do not have to win in this life if we believe that there is another world coming. We do not have to settle every account for someday God will take up our cause. Meanwhile, we gaze heavenward and know that our redemption is near.

In Victor Frankl's classic, *Man's Search For Meaning* he says that in the concentration camps he learned that if a man has a reason to live—if he has a *what*, he can put up with any *how*. We believe that we have a *what*, a reason to live; more important, we believe that our reason to live is derived from the sure knowledge that there is a grand new world coming.

Let us take a hard look at this world. Let us do all we can to promote justice and truth. Let us also share the good news that for those who believe in Jesus, the trials of life "are not worthy to be compared to the glory that shall be revealed in us.'

We live between two worlds, knowing the best is yet to come.

~•~•~•~ Book Reviews ~•~•~•~

Public Reading of Scripture: A Handbook. By Clayton J. Schmit. Nashville: Abingdon, 2002, 0-687-04537-1, 111 pp., paper.

Public Reading is a tidy handbook on how to read the Bible aloud in worship services. Five short chapters take the reader from exhortation (we should consider it an honor to bear the good news), through preparation (how to study the text using basic Bible study methods), to techniques for oral interpretation (phrasing, eye contact, gestures, etc.) The readers of *JEHS* are likely to find the final two chapters on oral interpretation to be the most helpful, perhaps because we are not the audience Schmit addresses. His primary audience is lay readers (called "lectors"). Thus, *Public Reading* discusses some subjects which are of limited value for pastors such as how to study the Bible (Chapter 3). Two short appendices close the book—"Creative Approaches to Scripture Reading," and "Annotated Bibliography." The first appendix gives some great ideas for group reading, combining music with the reading, and incorporating visual elements such as dance and sign language.

If you are looking for a book to give your lay readers, I recommend this handbook. If you're looking for a book to improve your own reading, I recommend more advanced manuals.

Jeffrey Arthurs Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, MA

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Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church. By Walter C. Kaiser Jr. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 0-8010-2610-5, 222 pp., paperback.

Walter Kaiser's, *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, lives up to its claim of being a guide for the Church. Few Evangelical scholars can rival Kaiser's heart for Christ's Church. Few have worked harder to provide guidance for the church en route to the 21st Century. You can feel the pulse of the author's heartbeat on every page of the book. In a church increasingly taking its cues for communication from the felt needs of its audience, Kaiser is calling us back to the future by calling us to the faithful preaching of God's whole counsel. He urges us to help God's people hear from God by helping us to listen to the first 39 books of the Bible.

The book develops in stages through an analysis of key literary genres of the Old Testament, followed by a process of synthesis seeking to express timeless truths through timely preaching. The work covers narrative, prophetic, wisdom, laments, torah, praise and the apocalyptic literature. The task of analysis focuses on identifying the defining characteristics of biblical genres and supplying a succinct and coherent map of the distinguishing traits of each literary form. The aim is to enable the biblical student to extricate the exegetical content of passages and books without a loss of the intended meaning. The synthesis focuses on reshaping the biblical truth for today's audience without a loss of the intended impact.

While Kaiser is at his best carving inroads through the thick of the exegetical analyses, the homiletic synthesis aimed at sermon preparation suffers from a rigid approach to homiletics. It is rather surprising to note that the recognition of the vast variety of the literary genres in the Scriptures does not alter the form of Kaiser's sermons. The sermons at the end of every chapter, while rich in biblical truth, seem constrained by a homiletic straitjacket. The impact of the sermons is crippled by their uniformity. In this regard, the book may be a disappointment to the preacher but a valuable asset to the teacher. Above all, this book coming from the hand of a trusted friend, can help all of us help the Church to hear from our God—again.

Lech Bekesza

Cobble Hill Baptist Church
Cobble Hill, BC, Canada

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Speaking Jesus: Homiletic Theology and the Sermon on the Mount. By David Buttrick. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002, 0-664-22602-7, 230 pp., $19.95, paperback.

David Buttrick of Vanderbilt Divinity School is best known for his 1987 blockbuster, *Homiletic*. In the past dozen years, he has written a series of five books on "listening to the speaking of Jesus." This work is the fifth in the series and is offered as a companion volume to *Speaking Parables*, two years earlier.

At the Brookmeade United Church of Christ in Nashville where the former Presbyterian Buttrick is now a member, he taught a six-week course on the Sermon on the Mount. Then he revisited the series at the (Episcopal) College of Preachers adjacent to the Washington National Cathedral. Out of these studies the present work grew.

Part One of the two-part book addressees some basic questions. Chapter 1 looks at the history, sources, interpretation, and problems posed by the Sermon on the Mount. Who was Matthew? The apostle by that name? "Most unlikely." The authorship of Luke is likewise uncertain; he "might have been a Syrian, could have been named 'Luke.'" How should a preacher interpret the Sermon on the Mount today? Not with Schweitzer's "interim ethic." "The *manana* idealism of the Sermon on the Mount is simply bizarre in a world such as ours"(p. 22).

Chapter 2 takes up another issue. Do we have the actual words of Jesus? Buttrick concludes we do not: "A gist is our best hope" (p. 28). Chapter 3 seeks to determine the Sermon's relevance for today. That depends very much on the preacher's ability to build the hermeneutical bridge between the *then* and the *now*.

Part Two (chapters 4-11) comprises three-fourths of the whole and is a commentary on the Sermon. There is a thoughtful excursus on "the Antitheses and Homiletic Theology." It explores problems for preachers such as how to handle the Law of God appropriately. Should we interpret Jesus as handing out a new Law to drive us to despair as Reinhold Niebuhr suggested? Buttrick proposes that Jesus is preaching a new world order to come; the present Christian community is a kind of advance guard. The antithetical framework ("You have heard. . .but I say to you. . ."), is meant to be counter cultural. The ethic is not a personal ethic, however, but "words to a congregation."

In each section, Buttrick offers his own translation of the text and looks at "redactions and rhetoric, with some explication of meaning." For each pericope there is a section he labels "Homiletic Theology." He tells us that "preachers may begin with Scripture, but the Bible in and of itself is insufficient" (p. 2). He wants the preacher to review the interpretation of others, to grasp issues "within theological wisdom," and then with imagination butt heads with the contemporary mind set and "think out strategies theologically" (p. 2).

In the end this is a homiletical study of the Sermon. Tom Long appropriately calls it a "preacher's commentary." It combines analysis of the text as a diligent preacher would do in his study with sermon ideas as Buttrick would do in the pulpit. There are a couple of sermons by Buttrick, one on "Love Your Enemies" and one on anxiety ("Look at the Birds"). Anyone who reads Buttrick knows that his sermons are not organized with divisions or points but "moves." To help a preacher learn this homiletical method, the author follows each sermon with an explanation of these "moves" and how each fits into the sermon plan.

Buttrick raises many of the right questions for a preacher in proclaiming the Sermon on the Mount. For example, how do we honor Matthew's ethical emphasis without tumbling into a works theology? His questions are very good—sometimes better than his answers. "What about the idea of God's election? . . . Matthew's concerns are simply not theological . . .[not addressing God's Sovereignty but] urging ethical courage."

Buttrick is learning to cut down on his documentation in his mature years. Most of these chapters have less than thirty endnotes—some not nearly that many. Still he includes an ample bibliography, indexes of scriptural references, of names and of subjects. Evangelicals may not always find Buttrick's perspective comfortable, but anyone planning a series of expositions through the Sermon on the Mount will find this work helpful. Anyone teaching evangelical preachers to do exposition will find David Buttrick consistently strong on research but not as helpful on hermeneutics or homiletics.

Austin B. Tucker Bossier Parish Community College
Shreveport, LA

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Preaching from the Pew: A Message for the Church. By Patricia G. Brown. Louisville: Geneva Press, 1998, 0-664-50019-6, 155 pp., paperback.

Brown was the 1997 moderator of the 209th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). The book consists of a series of sermons and meditations written and presented by her, along with some well-written prayers. Her book gives insight into the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A), and focuses on issues of concern within the denomination such as poverty, oppression, racism, sexism, displacement, unemployment, and marital discord. The volume is made more valuable by the fact that Ms. Brown opens her heart and allows readers to see her subjective response to difficulties like raising a handicapped child or confronting racism.

One of the sermons is entitled "Living in the Discomfort Zone." In this message, Ms. Brown discusses her son Ivan who has both brain damage and cerebral palsy. The author tells us that, at first, she felt sorry for herself in dealing with a handicapped child: "Why had God placed this yoke upon her shoulders?" Initially she felt alone, thinking that others could not possibly understand the burden she carried. Yet, in time, she learned that we cannot understand God's comfort without facing situations that take us beyond our comfort zone. Subsequently, Brown helped establish a grassroots support group that became the "Mothers of Special Children." She writes, "It was out

of my own aloneness that I could understand the feelings of others and offer assistance" (p. 12). In large part, she indicates, life is about the business of relinquishing control and trusting the Lord to be faithful to us in all of our circumstances.

Ms. Brown gives insight into some of the struggles faced by the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A). The denomination, for example, is struggling within itself over the issue of ordaining practicing homosexuals for ministry. Some have even spoken of possible division within the Presbyterian Church over this issue. Presbyterians, she indicates, do not look to a bishop or a pope for advice on difficult questions. Rather, "We believe the will of God will manifest itself through the will of the body [the church]" (p. 38). She raises the question: "Can the presbytery survive further tugs on the already weakened fibers of our sense of community?" (p. 39). Ms. Brown acknowledges the decline in the total membership of the Presbyterian Church. She encourages Presbyterians not to fight over what she calls "opinions": "But who are we to decide that someone else's behavior is sinful? Who are we to decide that their 'sinful' behavior—which has no harmful bearing on us—should be punished?" (p. 51).

The author's comments on race relationships in America constitute the most intriguing part of the book—particularly her own story. Ms. Brown tells of her childhood experiences after the 1954 Supreme Court decision which ordered integrated public schools (*Brown vs. The Board of Education*). She was one of the first black children to attend an all-white junior high school in Baltimore, Maryland. Many of the white students determined to make her life miserable, even insisting that she sit in the back of the classroom. Racial slurs were common, but one teacher became her friend and advocate: "Miss Green [her maiden name], I want you to come and sit in the front row. I want you to sit in the front because you are going to help us make history this day. If it wasn't for your bravery, this day would be just like any other" (p. 120). As a high school student, Ms. Brown was active in the Civil Rights Movement. She was arrested in May 1963 for blocking a fire exit at a segregated A & S cafeteria; she spent several days in jail. The scourge of racism becomes real when seen through the eyes of Ms. Brown.

The book gives an excellent perspective on the Presbyterian Church; it's worth taking the time to read.

David Enyart

Johnson Bible College
Knoxville, TN

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Preaching is Believing: the Sermon As Theological Reflection. By Ronald J. Allen. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, 0-664-22330-3, 162 pp., $14.95 paperback.

In 1993, the results of the Baylor University survey on the "Dimensions of Effective Preaching" listed the category of "theological/orthodox" among the seven desirable characteristics of effective preaching. It explained that "this involves the preaching of sermons which are expressed doctrinally 'within the parameters of the Christian faith.'" In the decade since, hundreds of books dealing with preaching have been published. Yet, a quick perusal of recent titles indicates that only a small percentage deals primarily with doctrinal preaching.

Into this partial vacuum steps prolific author Ronald J. Allen, long-time professor of Preaching and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. Allen is a firm believer in the necessity of strong theological preaching and states up front that "*Preaching Is Believing* and calls for sermons to help congregations move toward . . . theological clarity" (p. 1).

To accomplish this, the author identifies systematic theology as a pastoral resource in chapter 1 and then in chapter 2 offers an apologetic on why the Church needs systematic theology today. While some preachers might think that theological preaching is boring and irrelevant, Allen is of the opinion that "systematic theology not only helps the Christian community clarify its beliefs, but also helps the community discern how to act in the world, for theology empowers mission" (p. 8). The author offers six reasons why preaching needs to give systematic theology more emphasis, reasons that can be embraced by preachers from a wide variety of theological persuasions. Much of the strength of this volume is found in these first two chapters, especially chapter 2.

Allen identifies his own theology as "revisionary" with an orientation toward process (relational) theology (p.3). Even though he attempts to remain neutral in discussing various theological positions, it is readily apparent that his methodology and theological conclusions place him outside orthodoxy. In terms of method, Allen sees theology as being in a constant state of flux as various voices are heard, including "the diversity of voices in the Bible, in Christian tradition, and in the contemporary church." He continues: "The Christian tradition is less a deposit that is transferred from the vaults of faith from one generation to another, and more the record of the process of coming to understandings of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, the church, and the world for each new era" (p. 27). Allen sees many theologies being advocated

in the Bible. "For instance, the Second Testament contains diverse understandings of Jesus Christ" (p.27). He explains the diversity of theologies found in the Bible in terms of source criticism: the Elohists, the Yahwists, the Deuteronomists, the Priestly documents, Wisdom literature, Apocalypticism, Hellenistic Judaism, and other voices. He summarizes: "While the books and passages within each of these eight classifications share certain general characteristics, each is also distinct" (pp. 39-43). He prefaces this section by saying "that we never simply 'preach the Bible,' for the Bible is not a singular, unified theological document" (p. 38).

In practice, this kind of methodology results in a theological system whose authority lies in the subjective opinions of the interpreter. As a result, it is understandable that orthodox beliefs such as the incarnation (p. 72), the nature of Christ (p. 77), the ascension (p. 114), and the second coming of Christ (p. 94) can be explained away. Likewise, conclusions dealing with ethical issues such as capital punishment (p. 17) and homosexuality (p. 75) can be reached by devaluing the witness of Scripture in favor of other criteria. Allen seems to recognize this weakness: Theology "can be so captivated by the Zeitgeist that it revises Christian tradition only to make that tradition acceptable to contemporary ideas and mores . . . . Preachers sometimes mindlessly revise Christian tradition on the basis of nothing more than the latest whims of pop culture, or their own feelings" (p. 130, 132). Still, he offers no objective means to avoid arbitrary revision.

In spite of what I consider to be weaknesses in theological method, I found Allen's book to be helpful in thinking through this matter of preaching theologically. In addition to the strong worth of chapter 2 mentioned previously, chapters 5 and 6 are also quite beneficial. Allen offers practical suggestions on how to preach theology in a lively, attractive manner. He also reminds us of the value of the Church Year calendar for doctrinal preaching. Many evangelicals, especially those of us in the free church tradition, pay relatively little attention to this calendar or the lectionaries available to augment its usage. We are the poorer for this.

Preaching Is Believing is an interesting, well-written mixture of stimulating thinking and practical instruction, as well as some questionable theological methodology. I recommend it especially to teachers of preaching for they have the opportunity to emphasize the importance of theological reflection in contemporary preaching.

Donald L. Hamilton
Columbia Biblical Seminary
Columbia, South Carolina

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Power in the Pulpit. Edited by Cleophus J. LaRue. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002, 0-664-22481-4, 191 pp., $22.95 paperback.

Books on homiletical methodology are always welcome additions to the libraries of serious preachers. When methods are discussed by those actively engaged in the preparation of new sermons on a weekly basis rather than those who deal in theory, we tend to take special notice. *Power in the Pulpit* is one such volume that calls our attention to the craft of sermon-making. Rather than simply being the reflections of a single preacher, however, it presents the preparation processes of a dozen preachers. Furthermore, these preachers are African-Americans. This gives the book an additional benefit both for readers within the black community as well as others.

Editor Cleophus LaRue has assembled twelve outstanding representatives of black preaching in this country. Nine men and three women contributors include notables such as Gardner Taylor, Zan Holmes, and Cheryl Sanders. These persons first discuss their methods of sermon preparation, including their passions and motivations in preaching. Following this, they present a sermon that illustrates their approaches to preaching. Thus the book consists of an introduction by the editor followed by twelve chapters, each consisting of a presentation of homiletical method and an accompanying sermon. Both parts of each chapter are interesting reading that is both informative and inspiring.

The introduction by the editor offers a (too) brief history of black preaching in America. I found the material fascinating and wanted more. LaRue briefly informs the reader of the process by which the chapters were contributed. He also discusses the eleven characteristics held in common by the contributors. This was quite helpful in that they represent a range of theological and cultural diversity, discrediting the notion that preaching in the black community is monolithic. Finally, LaRue gives an excellent threefold purpose statement for the book: "(1) it provides in-depth reflection on the sermon-preparation methods of some of America's most effective preachers; (2) it gives pastors and students a how-to-manual directly from the hands of those who are most likely to influence their preaching; and (3) it makes available to the broader culture the distinctive sermon-crafting abilities of some of the most able and celebrated black preachers on the contemporary scene" (p. 10). I would add an additional purpose: the book provides the reader with the opportunity to "step into the study" and get acquainted with individuals whom we probably will not have the opportunity to meet in person. In this regard, the book is an enriching experience.

As can be expected in a book of this type, there is a "mixed bag" in the twelve chapters. Opinions of Scripture seem to vary as do other theological

presuppositions. There is also a considerable amount of homiletical variety. While some might consider this to be a weakness, I see it as a strength. As a result of the variety, I'm more familiar with a broader spectrum of black preaching than I would be if each chapter presented similar approaches and sermon styles. Overall, I found the sermons to be excellent and the processes and rationale behind each of them substantive.

This book is sure to capture and maintain attention regardless of the reader's race. There is much to learn from active practitioners, especially those who are obviously passionate and articulate about their calling and craft. This is a book that delivers on its promises.

Donald L. Hamilton
Columbia Biblical Seminary
Columbia, South Carolina

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Korean Preaching: An Interpretation. By Jung Young Lee. Nashville: Abingdon, 1997, 0-687-00442-X, 150 pp., paperback.

This is the first book to be published in the English language that addresses the topic of preaching in the Korean immigrant church context. Although the late Jung Young Lee taught Systematic Theology at Drew Theological Seminary in Madison, New Jersey, specializing in East Asian spirituality, this book reflects his extensive pulpit ministry experience which spanned both Korean and white American congregations in the Midwest. This book is not meant to be an academic study of Korean preaching in America, but rather it provides a thorough commentary on Lee's personal experiences with and visions for Korean American ministry and preaching.

In this book, Lee sets out to contextualize preaching for first generation Korean immigrants. In his attempt to do so, Lee offers Korean American pastors a context specific homiletical paradigm that seeks to "bring together the living faith of Christianity" with "the historical heritage of those other religions which have been foundational for Korean culture" (29). More specifically, in Chapter 2 "Understanding the Korean Congregation Through History and Culture," Lee encourages first generation Korean preachers to understand their ethnic contexts by studying the history and culture of the Korean people. He not only describes the Eastern religions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism in a lucid manner, but also articulates how each of these traditional Korean religions has shaped Korean consciousness.

A most interesting but contentious chapter is Chapter 4 regarding the "Distinctive Characteristics of Korean Preaching." This chapter is interesting because Lee conveys his ideal visions for what Korean preaching

should aim to be. For instance, borrowing from Thomas Long's commitment that preaching is "witness to the Word" (64), Lee argues that true preaching involves self-disclosure through sharing personal experiences with the congregation. This chapter is simultaneously contentious because Lee puts forward austere criticisms of Korean preachers as a whole. To illustrate, he maintains that many Korean preachers in America give sermons that are "uncritically exegetical" in that their sermons lack proper biblical exegesis. Interestingly, Lee concludes this chapter by suggesting that Korean preachers should endeavor to be more inductive and contextual in their sermons rather than deductive and propositional.

In Chapter 6, "Korean Preaching in Transition," Lee asserts that the future of Korean preaching in America will rely heavily upon Korean preachers' ability to "Americanize" their Korean immigrant congregants. By this, Lee contends that Korean preachers should not treat their parishioners as people "still living in Korea" but instead as "permanent dwellers" in the United States. He asserts that the transition of Korean preaching will also require the empowerment of second (and future) generation Korean American pastors by granting them full autonomy to shepherd their second (and subsequent) generation Korean American congregations instead of the present and pervasive hierarchical Korean church structure which hampers church dynamics.

Theologically speaking, Lee's syncretistic homiletical paradigm which integrates Christianity with Korean religious and cultural traditions remains in serious danger of compromising the Christian faith by embracing pluralism. As Lee states, "My suggestion, then, is to preach conversion and total commitment to the Christian faith without exclusivism. In other words, our preaching should aim at our complete commitment, with openness to other faiths" (77). However, I would argue that Lee's description of how traditional Eastern faiths has shaped the Korean worldview is relevant and should not be discarded when exegeting Korean ethnic contexts.

Overall, this book is an insightful and indispensable resource for the Korean American Christian community, Korean American preachers, homiletics teachers of Korean American seminarians, and all those involved with Korean American ministry and preaching which takes "cultural and ethnic contexts seriously" (15). *Korean Preaching* contributes significantly to homiletic scholarship by filling this void concerning the ministry of preaching within the Korean immigrant community in America.

Matthew D. Kim, Ph.D. Candidate Christian Ethics and Practical Theology
University of Edinburgh, Scotland

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Reformed Worship. By Howard L. Rice and James C. Huffstutler. Louisville: Geneva, 2001, 0-664-50147-8, 233 pp, $24.95 paperback.

For too many years, it has been common to find ministers who look at a Sunday morning service as "Part One: the Preliminaries," followed by "Part Two: the Sermon." From this perspective, little attention has been given to other elements of worship beyond the preaching of the word. The structure of the service frequently received little attention from the minister. It tended to be put together week by week in "cut and paste" fashion, with the secretary inserting the new hymn numbers and musical selections from the music director along with the minister's sermon title and scripture lesson, all with an unthinking attitude.

In recent years, the liturgical renewal and contemporary worship movements have made healthy improvements. Worship is treated as something bigger than merely the preliminaries and the sermon. But even these two movements frequently fail to achieve all that could be accomplished. There is the danger of the liturgical renewal movement will enrich the worship order based primarily on aesthetics, and there is the danger of the contemporary worship movement marching under the banner of pragmatism, seeking to imitate what the successful church down the street is doing.

With books like *Reformed Worship*, further improvements can be achieved by looking seriously at two factors that ought to be primary in the establishment of a liturgy, even in non-liturgical churches where the non-liturgy has become the liturgy! Those factors are Scripture and history. It is easy to give lip service to the statement that worship ought to be designed in accordance with Scriptural teaching, but not all who claim to do so can give evidence that they have, in fact, done so. Similarly, every worship order reflects tradition in the sense that it tends to perpetuate what has been done. But in few instances can worship planners (whether ministers or lay members) articulate the historical backgrounds in their denomination which have informed and continue to influence the shape and sense of their worship today.

For those in the Reformed tradition, Rice and Huffstutler have provided a text that illuminates both Scripture and history as essential factors in designing worship. The result is that with their model, "Reformed worship," just like Reformed theology, takes on unique characteristics that make it recognizable and distinct from generic Protestant worship. This is accomplished initially in their first three chapters: (1) "The Characteristics of Reformed Worship," (2) "From the New Testament to the Reformation," and (3) "From the Reformation to Today.

These sections in *Reformed Worship* would be improved by a more deliberate focus on "The Regulative Principle of Worship," a critical matter which prompted worship wars in the Puritan era just as does today. The Reformed conviction that only what Scripture authorizes may be incorporated into worship differs considerably from the Lutheran approach (permitting whatever is not specifically forbidden) and the Anglican/Catholic approach (permitting whatever the church authorizes). While Calvin's view was not identical to that of the Westminster divines (enshrined in the Westminster Confession of Faith), there has always been a strong insistence in the Reformed faith that the Bible is to be the guide in the structure and performance of worship.

The remaining eleven chapters in the book move progressively through the practice of corporate worship with practical suggestions for the improvement and enrichment of services. These include chapters on baptism, the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Day, music, prayer, weddings, and Easter. While some may find these sections to include too much "high church" ceremony, the suggestions will certainly prompt readers to considers ways to do worship in their churches more creatively and at the same time Biblically.

Lawrence C. Roff
Knox Theological Seminary
Fort Lauderdale, FL

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Preaching Mark. By Robert Stephen Reid. St. Louis: Chalice, 1999, 0-8272-2958-5, 199 pp, $19.99, paperback.

Dr. Reid's preface traces his quarter-century love affair with Mark's gospel from an Inter Varsity Mark manuscript study, through seminary, pastoral ministry and doctoral studies in rhetoric. In the Introduction he clearly articulates his starting point– that Mark, like other New Testament writers, used existing forms of persuasion to address audiences who "intuitively understood and gave credence to such strategies of reasoning." (2) His purpose "is to offer a visualization and analysis of Mark's use of a culturally legitimate way of structuring his argument" (3). Assuming that Mark's gospel is, in the technical sense, a *finished* document (4, 180) and the validity of extended chiasm, he uses these to recover "the rhetoric of Mark's compositional strategy," (8) and sees them as the glue that holds together the nineteen narrative complexes in the gospel. According the Reid, these strategies are intentional and therefore useful in recovering Mark's voice so that our preaching may be aligned with his intentions. Using "Zahava McKeon's phrase *fictive argument* to describe the notion that narrative can embody argument beyond that of its story" (15), Reid schematizes each of

the nineteen complexes as follows: a visual lay-out of the text with marginal outline of its contents, a discussion of its rhetorical shape, thoughts on its central motif, and, in seven cases, a homily accompanied by the preacher's compositional comments. The conclusion reaffirms what is implicit in the introduction, *viz*., "arriving at intention is controlled by the exigency of audience expectation as dictated by the rhetoric of what counted as a *finished* narrative design."

This volume is concisely written, clear and candid, acknowledging, for instance, the place of assumptions (11, 181). One statement about assumptions reveals a weakness of the book. "I do not begin to assume that the arrangement of either the individual episodes or the relationship between the episodes offered here is the official or the *intended* form" (Emphasis added). This runs counter to the premise that form conveys intention. If the author is tentative in his conclusions after twenty-five years of focused study, how helpful is his approach for the busy pastor? Yet, Reid sees this volume as answering Stephen Farris's call for studies that make narrative criticism more accessible to the average preacher (13). Others may conclude that he has succeeded. Though challenged by a careful application of this methodology to Mark's gospel, I think it will be a rare pastor who uses its insights while simultaneously affirming the perspicuity of Scripture and its accessibility to lay people.

Greg R. Scharf
Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, Illinois

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Index of Biblical Images: Similes, Metaphors, and Symbols in Scripture. By Warren W. Wiersbe. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2000, 0-8010-9107-1, 127 pp., soft cover.

Index of Biblical Images is a handy reference tool for preachers and teachers, useful in locating and comparing passages containing the same or similar biblical images.

The book is essentially an alphabetical listing of biblical images. An example of entries found under the letter "F" include: *face, feather, feast, feet, figs, finger, fire, firstfruits, fish, flies, flint, flock, flood*. All these words invoke images that are clear and understandable. Each entry is followed by Scripture references directing the reader to verses where the image can be found.

Especially helpful are the subheadings found under the entries, which correspond to the ways the image is used. For the entry *face*, for instance, subheadings can be found for *banishment, reverence, resistance, acceptance, shame, and grief*. These subheadings refer to the Scriptural context and associated meaning of the particular image.

One of the challenges of a book of this nature is knowing how much to include. The Bible is replete with word pictures; one cannot possibly include them all. Wiersbe does well to focus on major ones, while still including a sufficient number of minor ones, so as to produce an index that is adequately thorough without being overwhelming.

One helpful addition to the book would be a brief discussion on the nature of imagery and how the author defines it. Such a discussion would help clarify why a few entries in the book seem to defy classification as an image (such as *account/impute*), while others beg for the inclusion of corresponding entries (like *Eve*, since there exists an entry for *Adam*). Likewise, the subtitle of the book—*Similes, Metaphors, and Symbols*—invites explanation, but is nowhere to be found. What *are* similes, a metaphors and symbols? All too often schools and seminaries neglect the teaching of important literary devices and parts of speech such as these, making the job of the preacher harder.

In spite of these weaknesses, the book is a valuable tool for preachers and Bible teachers alike. In trying to understand a particular biblical image, one can use the index to look up other passages that contain the image, and thus identify ways in which the biblical authors have utilized the image elsewhere. This intended use follows the basic hermeneutical principle of comparing Scripture with Scripture, allowing the preacher or Bible teacher to arrive at an interpretation that is both coherent and consistent with the whole counsel of God.

This book also stands as a reminder that God chose to speak to his people through pictures. There are some homiletical critics who frown upon the use of illustrations and images in the preaching task. A book of this nature appears to argue otherwise, demonstrating that the Bible itself relies heavily upon images in order to illustrate and communicate effectively God's truth. Certainly preachers today are doing no differently when they wield illustrative material correctly.

If anything, one might be able to argue that a book of this nature encourages preachers to rely less upon *extra-biblical* images, since so many biblical images are available to them. Certainly, when images are encountered in the Scriptures, we do ourselves a disservice not to avail ourselves of the rich

meaning they contain. And with so many Scriptural images at our disposal, it would seem that preachers have plenty to work with and develop, without relying so heavily or unnecessarily on images from outside the text.

We live in a modern world dominated by images. Wiersbe's book suggests that the ancient world was not much different in this respect. Images help bring good teaching to life. Good preachers will avail themselves of these images, and will utilize Wiersbe's book in the process.

Stephen J. Sebastian New Ipswich Congregational Church
New Ipswich, NH

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Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Preaching. Edited by Scott M. Gibson. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999, 0-8010-9092-X, 158 pp., $16.95 hardback.

For more than forty years, Haddon Robinson has been an advocate for expository preaching. He has instructed fledgling seminarians and veteran preachers alike on how to communicate the Word of God with authority and relevancy. Few individuals have cast as long a shadow as Robinson in the world of evangelical homiletics, not only by his preaching and teaching but through his writings. His most well known book, *Biblical Preaching*, has become a standard in numerous seminaries. And now thanks to Scott Gibson's editorial efforts, there is opportunity for this shadow to extend further through *Making a Difference in Preaching,* a volume in which Robinson offers practical insights regarding this foundational task of the church.

The book is a compilation of thirteen articles which had been published over the years for various journals and magazines. Though I had previously read most of the material, I still found Robinson's insights refreshingly helpful. A certain timelessness characterizes his thoughts. With much being written about the need to be communicatively relevant in a postmodern world, his approach is trans-generational and appropriate for preachers in a variety of contexts.

The text is divided into three major sections, each part having several chapters. Some of those chapters alone are worth the price of book. In the first section, "The Preacher," personal aspects in the life of the minister are discussed. I especially appreciated, "What Authority Do We Have Anymore?" in which Robinson contends preachers can have considerable influence but it cannot be assumed. Rather, authority is earned as they

display integrity, articulate the thoughts of their audience, admit the complexity of the issues, and apply the message to their own life. When preachers do these things, they can speak with authority. People are willing to listen because they sense the proclamation flows from internal convictions.

In the second section, "The Preacher and Preaching," "Blending Bible Content and Application" is a helpful chapter for anyone trying to find the balance between information and life application. Robinson states: "The basic principle is to give as much biblical information as the people need to understand the passage, and no more. Then move on to your application" (87). Personalization of the message is essential if the biblical content is to be real in the listeners' lives.

The third section, "The Preacher and People," urges preachers to be intentional in their thinking about the people to whom they speak. "Who am I actually preaching to?" should be a question which controls the homiletical process. In the chapter "Preaching to Everyone in Particular" Robinson argues that listeners should feel preachers respect them and are their ally. Men and women sense this personal connection as preachers illustrate broadly and use experiences from a wide cross-section of life. Robinson also believes that good illustrations should transcend individual experiences. People from all walks of life are able to identify with your stories. But in other instances, preachers must get out of their own comfort zones and think in terms of the life situations of their congregants. When done well, individuals recognize the preacher's empathy and care. And people will also believe you are preaching to them by your delivery style. While more authoritative approaches may have been accepted in previous generations, conversational modes of delivery are more appreciated by contemporary listeners.

I highly recommend *Making a Difference in Preaching*. A quick read with numerous ideas and plenty of valuable insights, it will enable men and women to be more sensitive and capable in their preaching.

John V. Tornfelt
Evangelical School of Theology
Myerstown, PA

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The Master's Perspective on Pastoral Ministry. Richard L. Mayhue and Robert L. Thomas, gen. eds. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2002, 0-8254-3183-2, 282 pp., $13.99, paperback.

As volume 3 of *The Master's Perspective Series*, this book is aptly named in that it serves in many ways as an *apologia* for how pastoral ministry is approached and framed at The Master's Seminary and College. And, of the 12 chapters, nine are authored by seven faculty members at The Master's schools. Also, all of the chapters have appeared in print in some form in other books or journals.

The quality of the chapters is quite mixed. Although the reader will find helpful comments about the dynamics of pastoral ministry today in the book, there are also areas where evangelicals will likely debate the positions of the authors, paraticularly in some of the chapters which provide rather simplistic approaches to complex issues. For example, one of the chapters dealing with pastoral counseling states that biblical resources are the only "sufficient" aid to help people. Counselors who faithfully uphold the authority of Scripture in their lives and their counseling will likely be frustrated at a simplistic approach in which there is no discussion of complex psychological problems, such as schizophrenia or other psychoses, where additional resources may also be used by God to bring wholeness to an individual.

I found two chapters quite helpful—one that surveyed the history of pastoral ministry from Biblical times to the present, and one that addressed the prayer life of the pastor. But, even those chapters ended with what might be perceived as self-serving in referring to individuals at The Master's schools as good examples of a particular subject mentioned in the chapter.

The book also includes a chapter on "The Religious Life of Theological Students" by Benjamin B. Warfield which serves as the opening chapter to set the stage for what follows. The chapter is a good reminder of substantive issues in pastoral ministry

Kenneth L. Swetland Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, MA

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