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The Journal of the
Evangelical Homiletics Society

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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 Jeffrey D. Arthurs, Book Editor, to the address located above.

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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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

A New Season

by Scott M. Gibson

With this issue *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* begins a new season. We are still in the spring of our existence as a journal. We are new and are learning as we go along. Our aims have been high but the assistance to reach those objectives needed to be strengthened. We are now in the position to do just that.

Beginning with this volume the management team for the journal is expanded. Since we began publication in December 2001, I had the responsibility of editing manuscripts, gathering book reviews, dealing with the financial duties and oversight of subscriptions. The job became too much to handle.

In the fall of 2003 I proposed to the Executive Committee of the Society a plan to make the journal more efficient. They graciously agreed to the plan. I am pleased to convey to you the restructuring of the journal.

First, Jeff Arthurs has agreed to serve as the Book Review Editor. All publishers are to send books to Dr. Arthurs who will then superintend the process for readers to write reviews of the books and to ready the reviews for publication.

Second, Endel Lee kindly consented to an expanded role as Secretary/Treasurer and become the Managing Editor of the journal. Dr. Lee will oversee the business end of the journal.

Third, I will remain as General Editor of the journal, responsible for the compilation of the entire product.

The addition of these fine colleagues excites me and gives me encouragement to take our journal to a higher level. With their help and the assistance of the members of the Society, we will be able to have an impact in the Bible Colleges, seminaries, and churches around the world.

A fuller description of the duties of editors and other information concerning the journal is given in the following descriptive article titled, "The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society." In the future you will see an expanded Editorial Board who will also lend a hand at shaping the journal for a wider readership.

In this edition David and Susan Currie's exploration of an evangelical approach to *Lectio Devina* will stir reader's thinking and challenge our presuppositions to the reading of the Bible.

Greg R. Scharf's study of Jesus' example for preachers in John 14:10 explores the link between Jesus and preachers. Scharf raises the questions, "What is the connection between Jesus' claim to mutual coinherence, his speaking God's words, and God doing his works? To what extent is Jesus' experience exemplary for the Christian preacher? What response do the answers to the questions call for?" The answers Scharf provides to these questions are helpful for any preacher.

The sermon for this issue is by Darrell W. Johnson, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Regent College in Vancouver, B.C. Johnson explores Matthew 11:25-30 and reminds us what the focus of Jesus' ministry was and what ours is called to be. The sermon is followed by a hearty provision of book reviews.

Thank you again for your continued support and patience. Please pray for the ministry of the society and for the journal. Out hope is that our efforts might honor the One about whom we preach.

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

History:

The Evangelical Homiletics Society (EHS) convened its inaugural meeting in October of 1997, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, at the initiative of Drs. Scott M. Gibson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Keith Willhite of Dallas Theological Seminary. Professors Gibson and Willhite desired an academic society for the exchange of ideas related to instruction of biblical preaching.

Specifically, the EHS was formed to advance the cause of Biblical Preaching through:

- promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching
- increased competence for teachers of preaching
- integration of the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology
- scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics

The EHS membership consists primarily of homiletics professors from North American seminaries and Bible Colleges who hold to evangelical theology, and thus treat preaching as the preaching of God's inspired Word. The EHS doctrinal statement is that of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Purpose:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is designed to engage readers with articles dealing with the best research and expertise in preaching. Readers will be introduced to literature in the field of homiletics or related fields with book reviews. Since the target audience of the journal is scholars/practitioners, a sermon will appear in each edition which underscores the commitment of the journal to the practice of preaching.

Vision:

The vision of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is to provide academics and practitioners with a journal that informs and equips readers to become competent teachers of preaching and excellent preachers.

General Editor:

The General Editor has oversight of the journal. The General Editor selects suitable articles for publication and may solicit article suggestions from the Editorial Board for consideration for publication. The General Editor works cooperatively with the Book Review Editor and the Managing Editor to ensure the timely publication of the journal.

Book Review Editor:

The Book Review Editor is responsible for the Book Review section of the journal. The Book Review Editor contacts publishers for books to review and receives the books from publishers. The Book Review Editor sends books to members of the Society who serve as book reviewers. The reviewers then forward their written reviews to the Book Review Editor in a timely manner. The Book Review Editor works in coordination with the General Editor for the prompt publication of the journal.

Managing Editor:

The Managing Editor has oversight of the business matters of the journal. The Managing Editor solicits advertising, coordinates the subscription list and mailing of the journal, and works with the General Editor and Book Review Editor to ensure a timely publication of the journal.

Editorial Board:

The Editorial Board serves in advising the General Editor in the publication of articles for the journal. The Editorial Board serves as a jury for articles considered for publication. The Editorial Board consists of no more than five members. Board members are approved at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and hold a two-year appointment.

Frequency of Publication:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is published twice a year: March and September.

Jury Policy:

Articles submitted to the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society are blind juried by members of the Editorial Board. In addition, the General Editor may ask a scholar who is a specialist to jury particular articles. The General Editor may seek articles for publication from qualified scholars. The General Editor makes the final publication decisions. It is always the General Editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

Submission Guidelines

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in both electronic and hard copy form, printed on a laser or ink jet printer. All four margins should be at least one inch, and each should be consistent throughout. Please indicate the program in which the article is formatted, preferably, Microsoft Word (IBM or MAC).

2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced. This includes the text, indented (block) quotations, notes, and bibliography. This form makes for easier editing.

3. Neither the text, nor selected sentences, nor subheads should be typed all-caps.

4. Notes should be placed at the **end** of the manuscript, **not** at the foot of the page. Notes should be reasonably close to the style advocated in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* 3rd edition (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988) by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert. That style is basically as follows for research papers:

   a. From a book:

   note: 23. John Dewey, *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* (Ann Arbor, 1894), 104.

   b. From a periodical:

   note: 5. Frederick Barthelme, "Architecture," *Kansas Quarterly* 13:3 (Sept. 1981): 77-78.

   c. Avoid the use of op. cit.

   Dewey 111.

5. 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.

6. Manuscripts will be between 1,500 and 3,000 words, unless otherwise determined by the editor.

Abbreviations

Please do not use abbreviations in the text. Only use them for parenthetical references. This includes the names of books of the Bible and common abbreviations such as "e.g." (the full reference, "for example" is preferred in the text). Citations of books, articles, websites are expected. Please do not use "p./pp." for "page(s)," or "f./ff." for "following." Precise page numbers or verse numbers are expected, not "f./ff."

Captalization

Capitalize personal, possessive, objective, and reflexive pronouns (but not relative pronouns) when referring to God: "My, Me, Mine, You, He, His, Him, Himself," but "who, whose, whom."

Direct Quotes

Quotations three or more lines long should be in an indented block. Shorter quotes will be part of the paragraph and placed in quotation marks.

Scripture quotations should be taken from the NIV. If the quotation is from a different version, abbreviate the name in capital letters following the reference. Place the abbreviation in parentheses: (Luke 1:1-5, NASB).

Headings

First-level Heading
These indicate large sections. They are to be centered, in upper and lower case, and separate from the paragraph that follows.

Second-level Heading
These headings are within the First-level section and are to be

flush left, in upper and lower case, and also separate from the paragraph that follows.

Notes

All notes should be endnotes, the same size as the main text with a hard return between each one.

Submission and Correspondence

Manuscripts should be sent to the attention of the General Editor. Send as an email attachment to the General Editor and a hard copy through the post. Send to: sgibson@gcts.edu

Address correspondence to Scott M. Gibson, General Editor, Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, 130 Essex Street, South Hamilton, MA 01982.

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Address correspondence to Endel Lee, Managing Editor, Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, 3939 Gentilly Boulevard, Box 30, New Orleans, LA 70126.

Preaching As *Lectio Divina*: An Evangelical and Expository Approach

by David A. Currie and Susan P. Currie

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Abstract

Drawing from the perspectives of both a preacher and a spiritual director, this paper will argue that preaching should model multiple ways for people to hear God speak through Scripture, tapping the collective wisdom of the whole church, particularly the contemplative tradition. The authors will suggest three primary ways of incorporating *lectio divina* into expository preaching. Prospectively, as a means of allowing God to speak to the preacher more intuitively before employing the classic historical/grammatical interpretive method of sermon preparation, which can then test and reshape the intuitive insights for preaching. Introspectively, as a means of developing occasional first-person sermons that model a Loyolan approach to *lectio divina*, in which the imagination places one in a narrative and explores how a Biblical character experienced God at work, and retrospectively, as a means of applying exegetical insights from the sermon through post-sermon reflection questions facilitating an ongoing listening/response to God.

Introduction

When asked, "Will you teach me how to pray?" Eugene

Peterson answers, "Be at this church nine o'clock on Sunday morning."[1] Peterson's reply reflects the belief that elements of individual spiritual formation like prayer grow out of a larger congregational encounter with God. What holds true for prayer should also hold true for another foundational element of spiritual formation, Bible study.

When asked, "Will you teach me how to study the Bible?" expository preachers of all people should answer, "Be here Sunday morning at nine o'clock." Yet, that is probably not our first response despite our commitment to biblical preaching because evangelicals have tended to overlook the connection between the individual and congregational in spiritual formation.

Whether we acknowledge it explicitly or not, preaching models how people hear and respond to God speaking through Scripture. Preaching is not an isolated event followed by a week of silence. God speaks through his Word in a special way to a congregation by the living voice of the preacher, launching listeners into an ongoing conversation with God. The listening and response initiated in the sermon continues among individuals, families, and small groups as hearers impact with Scripture on their own emulating the approaches to Scripture modeled in the sermons they hear.

The most important purpose of a sermon is that ultimately people both faithfully hear from and respond to the living God. Evangelical preaching has tended to emphasize the hearing from over the responding to, at least subsequent to the initial response of trusting Christ (e.g. closing every sermon with an altar call). However, if authentic biblical faith is an ongoing process, not simply a one time event, a fuller range of responses are needed to nurture mature believers, particularly believers who can nurture their own faith by encountering God in their own study of Scripture.

Expository preaching has sought to counterbalance superficial tendencies in evangelicalism, providing a model of how to interact with Scripture comprehensively. Classic historical/grammatical exegesis helps to discern how God spoke in the past, which informs how God speaks in the present. Sermons help immerse listeners in a biblical passage so that its meaning and application become clear and compelling.

Douglas Stuart characterizes the difference between expository preaching and other popular forms of evangelical preaching as the difference between "jewelry box" preaching and "gas station" preaching. Gas station preaching attempts to fill listeners' spiritual gas tanks as fully as possible by generating as much spiritual energy and excitement as possible. In powering people over the typical ups and downs of the week, the spiritual fuel gauge gets lower and lower until everyone coasts in on fumes with an empty tank the next Sunday morning to get filled up again and repeat the process.[2]

In contrast, jewelry box preaching seeks to mine nuggets of divine truth from Scripture that hearers can put in the jewelry box of their minds. These jewels might not be needed at the time when they are first heard but all the different facets can still be examined and admired. When a need arises, listeners simply open the jewelry box and select a suitable one from among the variety of jewels it contains.

As those committed to this jewelry box approach to preaching, we should avail ourselves of all the riches with which God has blessed his church for encouraging hearing and response to God speaking through the preached Word. Expository preaching flows out of a classic inductive method of biblical interpretation. Instead of deciding what we're going to say and then finding the texts – usually proof texts! – to back it up, we come to a Scripture passage and seek to discern what God said to the

original audience, which then determines what we believe God is saying today. To use Haddon Robinson's nomenclature, we move from exegetical idea to homiletical idea.[3]

The process is similar to the flow of the questions in inductive small group Bible studies: observation questions lead to interpretation questions, and then to application questions. But the flow need not end here. To move even deeper in facilitating spiritual formation, we should add contemplation questions, drawing from an approach to Scripture practiced in the contemplative tradition described as *lectio divina*.

This additional step will help move evangelicals beyond our usual emphases of understanding and obeying God to encountering and adoring God. It is a simple step for expository preachers to take. Their exegetical idea and homiletical idea should naturally suggest a contemplative idea. The insights of *lectio divina* will help hearers appreciate the jewels in the jewelry box all the more letting each jewel shine more brilliantly and enrich more fully the lives of those holding it up to reflect the light of God's word in new ways.

Drawing from the perspectives of both a preacher and a spiritual director, this paper will argue that preaching should model multiple ways for people to hear God speak through Scripture, tapping the collective wisdom of the whole church, particularly the contemplative tradition. The authors will suggest three primary ways of incorporating *lectio divina* into expository preaching: Prospectively, as a means of allowing God to speak to the preacher more intuitively before employing the classic historical/ grammatical interpretive method of sermon preparation, which can then test and reshape the intuitive insights for preaching; introspectively, as a means of developing occasional first-person sermons that model a Loyolan approach to *lectio divina*, in which the imagination places one in a narrative and explores how a biblical character experienced God

at work; and retrospectively as a means of applying exegetical insights from the sermon through post-sermon reflection questions facilitating an ongoing listening/response to God.

What is Lectio Divina?

As Evangelicals we may be suspicious at first of *lectio divina*. Priding ourselves as we do on the distinction between saying, "Listen to the Word of God" and "Listen for the Word of God" at the start of each Sunday morning's Scripture reading, how can we ever let ourselves be a part of a practice that defines itself as listening for God's voice in the reading of Scripture? Furthermore, as scholars who know the importance of understanding the Scriptures in their original language and context, we're understandably uncomfortable with *lectio*'s insistence that we leave our commentaries closed and our lexicons on the shelf when we first come to meditate on a passage of Scripture. Even that word "meditate" may raise red flags.

Rest assured, that *lectio* takes the Word of God seriously, as something so totally "living and active" with God's presence that we approach it with reverence and in silence, willing to listen to God. Despite its Roman Catholic connections, advocates of *lectio divina* reflect a confidence in the power of God to speak through nothing but a naked reading of Scripture that would make an inerrantist blush! It has been practiced in the Church since at least the time of the fourth-century church fathers, was refined and given great importance by the Benedictines in the sixth century, and later adapted by Protestant figures such as John Calvin and many of the Puritans.[4] And even the beyond-suspicion Leighton Ford admits to using *lectio divina* in his prayer life.[5]

Quite simply, *lectio divina* means "divine reading," or "sacred reading" (hence the term *lectio sacra* has been used

interchangeably with *lectio divina* in church writings). Although it can be applied to a meditative reading of any text, in its purest form it refers to a prayerful, deep attentive reading of the Scriptures. It is not a study of the text, but rather an opening of one's deepest self to be encountered by the Spirit of Christ who speaks through the text to our individual hearts and lives. Marjorie Thompson puts it well when she writes, "We are seeking not merely information but formation," and "our task is not so much to master the text of Scripture as to be mastered by the Source of that text." [6]

Lectio can be broken down into four stages. In the first, *Reading*, we read a passage of Scripture with what Mariano Magrassi calls "contemplative calm." He adds, "All haste is excluded. We moderns, when we read, are usually in a hurry. . . But this is deadly when dealing with a Word that holds the mystery of God"[7] And so we read slowly, savoring every word, letting God's word fill our senses so that we indeed feel that we are following the psalmist's advice to "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8).

As particular words or images draw our attention, we move to the second stage of *lectio*, *Meditation*. Here we linger over those words or images, paying attention to where and how we are engaging with them: are they awakening memories, or whispering to current situations in our lives and ministries? Are they pressing upon us with the urgency of a sin we need to deal with? Is God somehow shining His light on something we didn't know was there in our hearts, a hope or desire? We meditate on the passage or word with the conviction that it is the same Spirit who inspired its writing who is now at work in applying it to us, and we listen with care.

As we begin to sense God's voice we respond to him in *Prayer*, the third stage. Thus our prayer is a conversation. Finally we close our time with *Contemplation*, simply resting in God's

presence. Having fed on the word, savored it, and digested it, we let ourselves lie like a weaned child resting in its mother's arms (Psalm 131:2), doing nothing but letting ourselves love God, and knowing the fullness of His love.

It is this meditative, listening approach to reading the Scriptures as active engagement with a God who speaks personally and relevantly to each of us, that can inform our preaching, before, during, and after we stand in the pulpit on Sunday morning.

Prospectively

"Practice what you preach" is a watchword that preachers above everyone else need to abide by! Therefore, *lectio divina* is something that we want to practice ourselves prospectively to prepare for our preaching. This practice can take a variety of forms depending on the personality of the preacher and the circumstances of the sermon.

Lectio divina can be adopted as a spiritual discipline independent of the sermon crafting process. Preachers are often exhorted to avoid substituting preaching exegesis for their own personal encounter with Scripture, and *lectio divina* is one way of facilitating this encounter. It preempts the mental default of expository preachers who tend to immediately begin standing over a passage to dissect it into preachable units instead of first standing under it to hear the living voice of God.

If we seek to speak for God, we must let God have the first word. That means silencing the inner voice that shouts "That'll preach!" as we begin reflecting on a passage so that we can hear the Spirit's still, small voice echoing from the Word. Classic spiritual disciplined related to *lectio* such as silence, reading a passage slowly and repeatedly, reading a passage aloud, and journaling help preachers grow in attending to the Word of God in a way that primarily shapes the soul, not the sermon.

Journal notes may eventually become sermon notes, since what God sys to us may be something that bears passing along. However, such transfers are almost incidental, never the main point of the process. Preachers should be ruthless in resisting the constant temptation to reduce Scripture to sermon material.

Lectio divina is a way of "turning eyes into ears" to use Eugene Peterson's phrase of moving from primarily reading a book to increasingly hearing a person. Preachers more than anyone need to make this shift, lest they become deafened by the mechanics of exegesis.[8] Recapturing the original orality of Scripture is essential for those preparing an oral form of communication such as a sermon. (Remember that even literary forms that were essentially written such as epistles were nonetheless intended for public reading at gatherings of believers.)

Many preachers may already be incorporating elements of *lectio divina* instinctively in their sermon preparations. Something as simple as coming up with a sermon title to capture each preachable unit tin the course of preparing an extended preaching schedule reflects a more intuitive response to scripture, undeflected by the more step-by-step nature of exegesis. Making repeated initial readings of a passage in English one's first exegetical step is compatible with both *lectio divina* and the classic historical-grammatical method. Douglas Stuart[9] and Gordon Fee recommend this approach in their standard texts outlining the exegetical method.[10]

Preaching that is distinctively evangelical and expository examines insights intuitively gleaned from Scripture by testing them with careful exegesis. The results of *lectio divina* may always be refined, augmented, or even rejected on the basis of deeper analysis of the text. However, the process my also work in reverse, with the results of exegesis being shaped by *lectio*.

Expository preachers often struggle with the "poverty of riches" yielded by exegesis. How does one choose the multiple themes and applications any given text suggests? Starting with *lectio divina* opens preachers to allowing God to direct this process, highlighting elements in the exegetical process that they might otherwise have overlooked and shining a spotlight on specific applications of the passage, often first seen in their own lives.

Lectio divina provides a focus for the light of God's Word, bringing greater clarity and sharper insight to the homiletical process. Exegesis serves as a filter, screening out distortions originating primarily in human imagination rather than in divine inspiration, ensuring that the highlights of *lectio divina* reflect not mere human brilliance, but the divine light of the Scriptures.

Intropectively

Sometimes the interplay of *lectio divina* and exegesis may even inform the shape of the sermon, giving voice to a first person narrative. This movement within takes what began prospectively and develops it introspectively, reflecting a Loyolan approach to *lectio*, in which the imagination places one in a narrative and explores how a biblical character experienced God at work in an event.

For example, Ignatius Loyola guides us in reflection upon the Last Supper in his *Spiritual Exercises*:

> Bring to memory the narrative which is here how Christ our Lord sent two Disciples from Bethany to Jerusalem to prepare the Supper and then He Himself went there with the other Disciples, and how, after having eaten the Paschal Lamb, and having supped, He washed their feet and gave His most Holy Body and Precious Blood to His

> Disciples, and made them a discourse, after Judas went to sell his Lord. It will be here to consider the road from Bethany to Jerusalem, whether broad, whether narrow, whether level, etc.: likewise the place of the Supper, whether large, whether small, whether of one kind or whether of another…The first Point is to see the persons of the Supper, and, reflecting on myself, to see to drawing some profit from them. The second, to hear what they are talking about, and likewise to draw some profit from it…The third, to look at what they are doing, and draw some profit (Third Week, First Day, First Contemplation).[11]

Imaginatively painting such a vivid picture of a biblical scene brings God's Word alive. The Scriptural narrative becomes one's own narrative, allowing one to hear as well as see, to feel as well as think. Out of this experience a sense of voice may arise for one of the characters serving as the basis of a first-person style sermon. Instead of talking about a person in the Bible, the preacher talks as that person, encouraging hearers to step into the narrative themselves and share a living encounter with God.

Although the shape and delivery of this kind of sermon departs from a typical expository approach, exegetical preparation will be largely identical. Passages where interpretation is largely dependent upon the historical and cultural background especially lend themselves well to this form of presentation, though it is not limited to the historical books of the Bible. For example, if preaching through Revelation, a contemporary "letter to the church of…" might be presented in the first person, or a dialogue between Epaphroditus and Timothy might interpret Philippians 2:19-30. A sense of voice might even emerge from a parable, such as imagining the response of Andrew as a fisherman to Jesus telling the Parable of the Net

(Matthew 13:47-50).
While first-person preaching can easily become trite and shallow if overused, it can be an effective complement to basic expository preaching when strategically employed. The relationship is like that between a change up and a fastball for a baseball pitcher. The change up fools batters when used sparingly and makes the basic fastball seem faster.

In a similar way, the first-person sermon is a change of pace that engages hearers on different levels, helping them see their own experience in the pages of Scripture. As a result, their appetite is whetted to feast more fully upon the richer explanation and application provided by expository sermons. As post-modernism reduces hearers' receptivity to reasoned argument in favor of narrative, introspectively applying *lectio divina* becomes an increasingly important means of making the timeless message of the Scriptures as accessible as possible to our contemporary culture. Once people are drawn into the story, they are more ready to explore the worldview, and thus to more fully encounter the living God at the center of both,

Retrospectively

Having practiced *lectio divina* ourselves, we can then guide the congregation in its practice of *lectio* as a response to the sermon. The simplest way to do so is to make reflection questions available to the congregation, encouraging them to read them over in the week ahead during their devotional times or even in a small group setting.

Such reflection can begin with people reading the Scripture text over again to themselves, very slowly, out loud if possible. They should prayerfully ask themselves what words or verses or images stand out to them. To what are they drawn? Can they imagine themselves in the text, or see people with whom they are familiar? What are they doing? How are they responding to

Jesus, or to whatever God is doing in the story? What part of the text do they find themselves wanting to ignore, or to argue with? Resistance signals the presence of something worth paying attention to, be it acknowledged sin or even the active presence of the Spirit pulling us towards something.

For people new to this practice, and particularly for those who are analytical by nature, it can take a while to learn how to read the Scriptures this way. Specific questions to meditate on as the text is read would be helpful, as well as being a means of guiding contemplation in directions that God's Spirit might have impressed upon us as we prayerfully tried to match the sermon to the lives of our people. For example, if the sermon text was Psalm 42, the reflection questions could include, "How do you feel that God has forgotten you? When you thirst for a sign of His presence, what would that presence look like? What can you praise God for right now? How could those be signs of God's presence?"

Those of us who are more adventuresome could even try asking some of these questions during a "reflection time" at the close of the sermon. This has the advantage of giving attention to the work of God's Spirit right then and there, and of allowing the entire congregation to try to listen to that work (rather than the faithful few who come back to the text after Sunday morning!) Perhaps both methods could be employed, thus encouraging people in an ongoing practice of listening to God, or, as Paul would call it, praying continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

Conclusion

Having looked at the prospective, introspective and retrospective use of *lectio divina* in preaching, it is helpful to step back and look at this topic in perspective. Webster defines "perspective" as "the capacity to view things in their true relations," "aiding the vision." What is the true relation of the

preached Word to the work of God's Spirit in forming the lives of His people? *Lectio divina* challenges us to this vision for our preaching: to place it in the wider context of listening to the presence and activity of God in the lives of His people. Our approach to preaching should be that of the faithful prophet Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening" (1 Samuel 3:10).

Our listening starts during the days and weeks and months before we sit to work on a sermon. It comes through paying prayerful attention to God's work in the lives of our congregants. Eugene Peterson writes, "Every meeting with another person is a privilege. In pastoral conversation I have chances that many never get as easily or as frequently – chances to spy out suppressed glory, ignored blessing, forgotten grace. I had better not miss them.. . What has God been doing with this person before he or she showed up [here]?"[12] Listening to our people's lives before we start talking to them from the pulpit helps to ensure that what we speak in God's Name does somewhat correspond to what God indeed is already doing in their hearts.

Perhaps the most exciting and simultaneously the most difficult time for us to work on listening is when we're in the middle of preaching the sermon. This is more than simply being aware of when we feel we're losing people, when their posture reveals emotional discomfort, or when they seem to be hanging on our every word! How often, as we lay our notes in front of us and check that the mike is on, do we pray, "Lord, help me to listen to Your Spirit as I speak now"? Are we intentional about listening to promptings from the Holy Spirit, nudges to elaborate on a point, or to throw in a previously unplanned application? Further, can we try to be prayerfully aware of how people might be responding, not so much to our words but to God's Spirit silently piercing their soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Hebrews 4:12).

Virginia Stem Owens writes of how she and her husband engage in this active listening while he preaches: "Beneath it all is a constant watchfulness, a taking note. Even as he stands in the pulpit, he sifts the faces of the congregation for those fine grains, no larger that the dust of pollen, that carry the spore of the trail he's on.

"And I sit among them there, internally knitting them up like Madame Defarge, listening, recording, watching, remembering. Softly, softly. The clues one must go on are often small and fleeting. A millimeter's widening of the eye, a faint contraction of the nostrils, a silent exhalation, the slight upward modulation of the voice. To spy out the reality hidden in appearances requires vigilance, perseverance. It takes everything I've got."[13]

Why do we try to spy on the Spirit's work in the hearts of our hearers? So that we can pray for that work as God continues it, so that w can better sense who may need a follow-up phone call or visit during the week, so that our ministry continues in close correlation with what God is doing rather than in our own strength and flesh and often misguided direction.

It's important that the congregation, also, be given the chance to listen right after the sermon for what God's voice might be saying to them. This could be a silent listening for a minute or so, or the Scripture text could be read again, out loud and slowly. A simple question printed in the bulletin such as, "What seemed, in the sermon or in the Scripture, to speak directly to you? Hold it before God and listen to what He might be trying to say further," can encourage such reflective listening.

For yourself, both immediately after the sermon and later in your study, prayerfully examine what you sensed as you preached. Were there faces that stood out to you? When did you sense emotion, in your listeners and in yourself? What emotions

did you sense, where in the sermon and from whom? When did you sense connection, and when resistance? Ask God to help you notice what He wants you to notice.

As we apply it prospectively, introspectively, and retrospectively, *lectio divina* keeps our preaching in perspective, reflecting the experience of the broader church and holding up God's point of view as foremost. Nothing could be more central to ensuring that our proclamation remains truly evangelical and expository than instilling in both preacher and congregation a greater capacity to view the Scriptures and our lives in their true relations – the relationship between a listening people and the Word, in Whom is light and life, Who continues to speak to us, full of grace and truth.

Notes

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The Spirituality of Jesus as Seen in John 14:10: An Example for Preachers

by Greg R. Scharf

(editor's note: Greg R. Scharf is Associate Professor and Chair of Practical Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL.)

The Spirituality of Jesus in John 14:10

In the upper room the Lord Jesus continues the pattern of self disclosure already evident in John's Gospel. He reveals not only what is immediately ahead – his betrayal and his death on the cross– but also what lies beyond that for his followers. He washes their feet that they might learn to wash one another's feet (13:14).[1] He speaks of his love for them exemplified in the cross that they might love one another (13:34). Yet his combination of sayings concerning their separation from him (13:33) and his going to prepare a place for them (14:2) left them with questions. Simon Peter (13:36), Thomas (14:5), and later Judas (14:22) all ask questions that Jesus answers. Philip makes a request, even a demand: "Lord show us the Father and it is enough for us" (14:8). Jesus' astonishment at Philip's obtuseness does not imply that the Savior is taken by surprise; only that there is no lack of data from which Philip and the others could readily draw the right conclusion. "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father"(14:9). To know Jesus is to know the Father. The deficiency lies not with the exhibit but with the observer. "Do you not believe . . . ?" (10a) For one thing, this is not the first time Jesus has claimed mutual indwelling with the Father. John 10:38 makes the same claim stated in reverse order as does the following verse here (14:12).

Yet these summary statements are only the tip of the iceberg. Over one hundred times in John's Gospel Jesus depicts himself,

or others see him as, coming from, dependent upon him, and doing the work and will of the Father for the Father's glory.[2] "In the Fourth Gospel Christ always speaks of the object of His coming as a 'work' (εργον), and as a work which the Father gave him to do." Scroggie cites 4:34; 5:17, 36; 9:4; 10:25, 32, 37, 38; 14:11, 12; 15:12 and 17:4 to support this assertion, but these references only scratch the surface.[3] Forestell, noting the prominence of the person of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel, affirms that "this emphasis on the person of Jesus is always in relationship to and in dependence upon the Father . . . The paradox of John's presentation of Jesus is that his dependence on the Father in his teaching, his words, his works and his action is as prominent as his equality with the Father."[4]

The picture John paints is of the Father lovingly showing the Son what to do (5:20) and the Son joyfully and submissively doing only what the Father has shown him to do or told him to do (5:19, 30; 14:31). But it is more than a matter of actions. The Father gives life to the Son (5:26). The Father sends the Son (5:37), testifies to him (5:36-37), and seals him (6:27). The Son is the gift of the Father (6:32-35). The Son gets his teaching from the Father (7:16; 8:26, 28; 12:48, 49; 14:10, 24; 15:15; 17:7-8; 18:37) and therefore the Father gets glory for it (7:18, 8:50, 54). The Father's works, when done by the Son, are in themselves sufficient to call for faith (10:38) even when his authoritative words are rejected (14:16). Those who hear and believe the one who sent the Son have eternal life (5:24). Nor is Jesus merely an envoy.[5] The Father is with him (16:32) and gives him authority (17:2).

Jesus does not merely state his mission positively. Often in John's Gospel he tells what he is *not* able to do by himself (5:30, 19; 7:16; 8:28; 12:49,14:10). Jesus could hardly have made it clearer that his ministry was one of doing the Father's will, speaking the Father's words, expecting the Father to work so that people might believe in both the Son and the Father, all to

the Father's glory. Jesus' disavowal of any originality of speech in John 14:10 and profession that God was at work share the same root, viz., "the Father abiding in me . . ." Jesus does everything and says everything in reliance upon the Father, who significantly, is not described here as the Father in Heaven but as the indwelling Father. The work that the Father is doing in Jesus is what enables Jesus to do and say what honors the Father. The verbs used here for Jesus speech may not convey any "appreciable difference."[6] The fact that both λεγω and λαλω are used may be only stylistic, but if "the words" (τα ρηματα) are separate utterances they can hardly be taken to exclude more formal discourses while including less formal discussions and conversations.[7]

The content of Jesus' orations, including what we would label preaching, was governed by his abiding union with the Father. When he spoke, the Father who indwelt him worked. The words and works combined to create faith in his hearers – faith in Jesus as the one who uniquely represents the Father. In John's Gospel, the Son describes his mission primarily in relation to the Father. When he spoke the words the Father gave him and did the works he saw the Father doing, the Father was made known, honored and glorified. That is to say, Jesus did not cast about for a message that would be popular with the masses or look for a strategy that would empower his ministry of seeking and saving the lost. Instead he dwelt in the Father and the Father lived in him supplying direction, message and power so that Jesus said the words and did the works of God. This in a nutshell is the spirituality of Jesus. It is also what led Jesus to the cross. The Father vindicated the Son by the resurrection and ascension. These were outcomes of an eternal relationship that during the incarnation John characterizes as mutual indwelling.

The Example of Jesus in John 14:10

Given that John's clearly-stated purpose in 20:31 is to draw

people to faith in Christ and therefore to life in his Name, any attempt to set forth Jesus as an example to preachers must be argued for and not assumed. Our case begins with a reminder of the purpose of this section within the Fourth Gospel. Bruce Milne argues that a " . . . mission perspective . . . is the key to interpreting this whole 'last discourse' section of the gospel."[8] For our purposes it is sufficient to recall how forward- looking Jesus' remarks are. For instance, as early as 12:23 Jesus speaks of the hour of his glorification and clarifies what he means by the image of a grain of wheat falling into the ground (24). He immediately generalizes what is true of himself and applies it to those who love and serve him (24-25). Then when the voice from heaven affirms Jesus (12:28) the Savior explains, "This voice has not come for my sake but for your sakes" (30). He is self-consciously thinking of those he will soon commission as he was commissioned. In 13:1-17 the foot washing is manifestly instructive and preparatory. Jesus is showing his disciples what to do after his departure. Foot washing was the visual aid of the command of 13:34-35. Jesus' explanation, "I go to prepare a place for you . . . "(14:2) likewise anticipates what lies beyond earthly ministry, namely being with Jesus in heaven. It is placed here to give perspective to the challenges that ministry inevitably brings. John 14:12 underscores what has only been hinted at thus far. Christ's return to the Father by way of the cross and resurrection opens an entirely new era where kingdom realities and values will reign by virtue of Christ's ascended status. Because he has been given a Name above every name, when his followers ask anything in his Name, he is in a position to grant their requests without any possibility of interference (14:12-14). Not only do Jesus' followers have access to prayer but Jesus promises the Holy Spirit whom he requests from the Father. For their part, the disciples will show their love by obedience, keeping Christ's word (14:18-24).

John 14:20 sets forth Jesus as the link between the Father and the believer in terms reminiscent of Jesus' description of his

mutual indwelling with the Father. "I am in the Father and you are in me." The mention in the same breath of Christ's indwelling the Father and the believer indwelling the Son alerts us that the dynamic Christ experienced in ministry is not foreign to what the believer should anticipate and seek. The vine and branches teaching which follows seems calculated to translate the Father and Son's mutual indwelling into what believers can expect. As I. H. Marshall puts it, "This mutual relationship is similar to that which exists between the Father and the Son (John 14:10)."[9] It is as if Jesus wants his followers to be clear that the root of loving obedience and faithfulness to God's word is as relational in their case as it was in his. He is their pattern. They are his followers. What he models is not merely words and works but reliance upon God in whom we dwell and who dwells in us. As the Father was in the Son and the Son in the Father, so Jesus' followers are indwelt by the triune God (14:17, 23) and are to abide in Christ (15:4, 5, 7). The result is fruit, manifested, as in Jesus' case in both word and deed. The disciple's obedience is therefore both fruit and precondition.

Jesus' exemplary role becomes even more specific as the cross looms nearer. In 15:10 he models obedience; in 15:12, love. In 15:18-20, his experience of being hated by the world is an example of what his followers should expect. When in John 17 Jesus prays for those with him, he deliberately includes future generations of followers in his supplication. As he was sent, glorified the Father's Name, saw people believe and was kept in the Father's love, so he expected them to walk the same path. He prays to the Father, "As you sent me in the world, I also have sent them into the world" (17:18). This expectation is amplified in the mini-commissioning of 20:21. The very fact that Jesus prayed is part of his example.[10]

From these observations, I conclude that Jesus was not merely inviting people to believe in him but to follow him in the sort of humble dependence of an ambassador who has no message, no

authority except that of the king he represents. He was modeling and explaining the key to faithfulness: mutual indwelling. The spirituality of Jesus is immediately exemplary for Christian preachers who are called to proclaim the Word of God and long to see God work when they do so.

Someone might object that the example of Jesus was real enough but that it was targeted and applies only to the Eleven, Judas having disqualified himself. Doubtless some of what Jesus says must be restricted to that original circle. Only they, for instance, can receive the Holy Spirit's help in recalling what Jesus said to them on earth (14:26). But arguably what Jesus models for them he models that they might be models for others who, in turn, copy them. Seeing the Father's works and hearing Jesus' explanation of their origin moves and equips his followers to mimic and model such abiding. Jesus equipped followers because of what he saw and heard from the Father. Now he extends to his followers not merely the concept but the example, fleshed out before them so that for them, as for him, seeing might be believing. The fact that Jesus' high-priestly prayer includes future generations reinforces the importance of each generation rooting its ministry in the life of God so that what its spiritual progeny receive is not word only or deed only but reality, rooted in and drawn from the living God within.

If these inferences are valid then Jesus' life of mutual indwelling with the Father is a pattern for all his followers including those called, gifted and ordained to preach. We must now explore what responses this conclusion elicits.

Following Jesus' Example

If what we learn about Jesus from John 14:10 – and the perspective it opens up – is meant to be exemplary for Christ's followers including those called to preach, what response is warranted? If the case has been made that both Jesus' words and

the Father's works in and through him are rooted in their mutual indwelling, then the underlying response of every Christian is to abide in Christ and to let him dwell in him or her. Paul's two great prayers recorded in Eph. 1:15-23 and Eph. 3:14-21 nicely pick up these two sides of the coin. The first asks that we might know what we have *in Christ*; the second that we might experience the power of *Christ in us*. Moreover these emphases complement each other. The first corresponds to justification and affirms what we already have by faith. The second corresponds to sanctification and reminds us of what we grow into by faith. The first without the second leads to complacency; the second without the first leads to discouragement. We may be tempted to think that Jesus' power in ministry was his by virtue of his deity, but Jesus had no secret weapon. God gave him those who became his followers (17:6) and, the uniqueness of Jesus' person and work notwithstanding, the Father is eager to give us people as well (17:20. See also, for instance, Acts 18:10).

Affirming the centrality of abiding in Christ and letting him indwell us is foundational. Beyond that there are several specifics that Jesus' example suggests. If we take John 14:10 as a peephole through which to see John's record of Jesus' exemplary ministry, several of these come to mind.

Sent by God

Jesus was always aware that he was on a mission, indeed that he was sent by God. That awareness dictated his message (4:34; 7:16, 18; 12:49; 14:24). It shaped his sense of identity (5:37, 43; 6:32-35, 51; 7:28-29; 10:36) and makes sense of how his earthly ministry ends. "For a little while longer I am with you, then I go to him who sent me" (7:33. See also 16:5, 28).

The effective Christian preacher needs all three things: a sense of why he or she is here, a clear identity related to that mission, and an expectation of completion, reward and accountability.

The apostle Paul referred often to his calling (Eph. 3:8, Col. 1:23-25, 1 Tim. 1:12, 2 Tim.1:11, etc.). It was a touchstone of his ministry, sanctioning some practices and ruling out others.

Professed Unoriginality of Message

"The sayings I speak to you, from myself I speak not" (14:10b, Young's Literal Translation). On another occasion, the Lord Jesus told his followers not to worry about either how or what they spoke (Matt. 10:19-20). The context concerns how the twelve were to respond when handed over to hostile authorities. Yet even under calmer circumstances, God's messengers are to be no less reliant upon the Spirit of the Father and therefore no more worried about the "what" and "how" of their messages. Diligent in the study of Scripture, yes; worried about what to say, no. Like Jesus we tell people that our message is not our own (14:24; 15:15; 17:7-8). This was certainly the apostle Paul's practice as 1 Thess. 2:13 attests. 1 Cor. 11:1 reminds us that Paul saw himself as both imitator of Christ and model for those who followed Christ because of his own preaching and example. See also 2 Tim. 3:10.

If the faithful Christian preacher does not originate his message, where does it come from? Jesus said, "My teaching is not mine, but him who sent me . . . He who speaks on his own does so to gain honor for himself" (7:16, 18). Or consider 12:49, "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it." God has commanded us to preach His word (2 Tim 4:2). In the context, that injunction evidently means preaching the Bible, using it for the four purposes for which it was written (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Second Helvetic Confession (1566) affirmed that the preaching of the word of God is the word of God.[11] We rely simultaneously upon the objective written Word and upon the subjective guidance of the Holy Spirit who guides us in selecting a preaching portion and discerning its immediate application to our hearers.

Reliance on the Holy Spirit

John 14:16-24 reminds us that it is not enough to speak God's word; we must also keep it. The promised Holy Spirit enables us to see what Jesus is doing (14:19-20). As we keep God's word, we enjoy his unrestricted indwelling (14:23-24). It is God at work in us who, as Paul reminds us in Philippians 2:13, works to enable us to want and to do God's will. So just as in Jesus' case the mutual indwelling of God and us is inseparable from God working when we speak. It is remarkable how often in the Fourth Gospel Jesus speaks of his own obedience. See, for instance, 4:34; 5:19, 30; 6:38; 8:29b; 9:4; 10:25, 36-38; 14:31; 15:10; 17:4; 18:11. Yet his obedience, though deliberate and intentional is uniformly a manifestation of Jesus' love for the Father undertaken so that people might believe that the Father sent him. The Lord Jesus sanctified himself specifically so that his followers might be holy (17:19). Christ's obedience, like ours originates with the Father's love and keeps the way open for the unrestricted indwelling that allows both love and obedience to grow. It is akin to what John Owen referred to as "gospel obedience." "Gospel obedience is the performance of all moral duties in the power and grace of Christ to the glory of God."[12] Spirit-driven obedience authenticates our message just as it did his. Power in preaching is not merely the result of God speaking through us. It happens when God is evidently at work in us. Jesus could challenge Jewish unbelievers, "Which one of you convicts me of sin?" (8:46a). Though it is not an invitation to testify most of us would like to give our hearers, the principle stands. The authenticity of the message is inevitably reinforced or undermined by the life of the speaker.

Micah understood the connection between a word from God and the power of the Spirit when he contrasted the seers and diviners of his day with his own experience:

The seers will be ashamed and
the diviners will be embarrassed.
Indeed they will cover their mouths
Because there is no answer from God.

On the other hand I am filled
with power –
With the Spirit of the Lord–
And with justice and courage
To make known to Jacob his
rebellious act,
Even to Israel his sin.
(Micah 3:7-8)

How much more then will God's works be manifested in these post-ascension days! Christ's return to the Father ushers in the era of the Spirit's indwelling. His work in us and for us enables us to do works greater than Christ's (14:12) because our listeners may also be the dwelling place of God.

Success Defined as Jesus Did

The Savior, like his Old Testament namesake (Josh. 1:8-9) related success to God's presence with him. "Even if I do judge, my judgment is true; for I am not alone *in it*, but I and the Father who sent me" (8:16 [NASB]. See also 8:29; 16:32). Moreover, Jesus spoke with satisfaction of accomplishing what the Father sent him to do, being careful to give the Father credit for the success. His high-priestly prayer is rich with this sort of statement. "I glorified you on earth having accomplished the work you have given me to do. (17:4) "I have manifested your name to the men whom you gave me out of the world; they were yours and you gave them to me and they have kept your word.: (17:6) "As you sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world" (17:18).

We who preach would do well to consider ourselves successful when God is evidently with us speaking his word through our lips and doing his work in and through our lives. The tests of this will be, among other things, the very marks of success Jesus mentions in his prayer. Is God glorified (17:4)? Are the people who follow us keeping God's words (17:6)? Are we sending people out as we were sent (17:18)?

Letting God Validate our Ministries

The great temptation of preachers is to seek human validation for what was meant to be a divine ministry. Human approval of our speaking, measurable results from it, and peer recognition can become the *sine qua non* of feeling our ministries are worthwhile. Not so with Jesus. He lived in an awareness that the Father had set his seal upon him (6:27) and spoke with clarity and confidence whether people received his message or not. By the nature of the case, he had to testify about himself (8:13-17), but it was the Father's testimony to him by his presence and doing his works that validated his ministry (8:18-19, 29). The works that Jesus does repeatedly testify that the Father sent him. He could entrust himself to the Father's judgment (8:50) because he understood what human acceptance meant. "Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me" (6:45. See also 7:17, 12:44, 18:37). The converse is also true and wonderfully liberating. "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God" (8:47. See also 5:43 and 2 Cor. 2:12-17 for the apostle Paul's outworking of this.). The capacity to treat both apparent success and apparent failure as imposters is rooted in knowing that our message is not our own and the works it accomplishes are not our own either (10:25, 38).

Do What We Do for the Reasons Jesus Did What He Did

We have already noted that the words Jesus spoke and the works

the Father did in and through him were rooted in their mutual indwelling and bore fruit in Jesus accomplishing the work for which he was sent. The Savior also makes explicit why he did what he did. His immediate goal was that people might believe in him and therefore in God (11:41-42). But his ultimate motive was the glory of God (7:18; 12:28). The glory he sought for himself he only sought in order to bring glory to the Father (13:31-32; 17:1ff). That glory, significantly, was the glory of the cross.

Conclusion

John 14:10 provides a peephole into John's Gospel and its portrayal of Jesus as an example for Christian preachers. Though John helps us see much more about him, this facet should not be neglected. What Jesus models we will do well to imitate. As those sent by God, we will renounce originality in our speaking, expecting God to work when we speak his words. We will rely upon the indwelling Holy Spirit as Jesus did, crediting the Father abiding in us with both the words and works when they are demonstrably his. We will define success as Jesus did, letting the Father validate our ministries and doing all that we do for the glory of God.

Notes

1. Unless otherwise noted all chapter and verse notations refer to John's Gospel.
2. 3:27, 35; 4:34: 5:19,20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 30, 32, 36, 37, 43; 6:27, 32, 35, 38, 45, 46, 51, 57; 7:16, 18, 28, 29, 53; 8:16, 18, 19, 23, 26, 27, 28, 29, 42, 49, 50, 54, 58; 9:4; 10:25, 29, 30, 32, 33, 36, 38; 11:4, 41, 42; 12:28, 44, 45, 49, 50; 13:3, 20, 31, 32; 14:1, 2, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 20, 23, 24, 26, 28, 31; 15:910, 15, 16, 21, 23, 26; 16:3, 5, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27, 28, 30, 32; 17:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 14, 17, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25; 18:11, 37: 19:7.
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The Main Thing: Matthew 11:25-30

by Darrell W. Johnson

(editor's note: Darrell W. Johnson is Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology at Regent College, Vancouver, BC. He is an ordained Presbyterian Pastor. Professor Johnson preached this sermon at the October 2003 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting at Trinity Western University in Langley, British Columbia, Canada. Thanks to Professor Johnson for permission to publish his sermon.)

I invite you to give your attention this morning to two texts. One is from Stephen Covey, time-management guru. The other is from Saint Matthew, tax-collector-turned-evangelist. I am in no way suggesting that the two texts carry the same weight or are of equal authority!

The text from Stephen Covey is found on page 34 of his book *First Things First*. He writes, "The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

The text from Saint Matthew is found in chapter 11, verses 25-30, of his book. You know text well. I am sure you have preached it often. Through this text we are drawn into the main thing we are to keep the main thing:

> *25 "At that time Jesus answered and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You hid these things from the wise and intelligent and revealed them to babes. 26 Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Your sight. 27 All things have been handed over to Me by My Father; and no one knows the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him.*

28 Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and "you shall find rest for your souls. " 30 For My yoke is easy, and My burden is light."

"Come"

I once saw a poster that said, "God's favorite word is `come'." Yes, Jesus says, "go"... "go make disciples of all the nations". And yes, Jesus says "give ..... give yourselves away for the sake of the city." And yes, Jesus says "serve"...and "sing"...and "heal"...and "preach."

But His favorite word is "come."

"Me"

"To Me."

Underline the pronoun. ME. "Come to Me." Come to a Person.

Jesus does not say, "Come to religion."
Jesus does not say, "Come to church."
Jesus does not say, "Come to ministry."

Jesus does not even say, "Come to the Divine One."
"Come to Me."

He calls us to Himself.

While serving as the Chaplain of the United States Senate, Richard Halverson made an observation illustrating how easy it is to loose touch with the pronoun. He observed that

Christianity began on Palestinian soil as a Relationship with a Person.

It moved on to Greek soil and became a Philosophy.
It moved on to Roman soil and became an Institution.
It moved on to British soil and became a Culture.
It moved on to American soil and became an Enterprise.
Need I elaborate?

Now, Christianity is a Philosophy, the most coherent and all encompassing of all philosophies. Christianity is an Institution, the most redemptive and life giving of all institutions (or it is suppose to be!). Christianity is a Culture, the most inclusive and transformative of all cultures. Christianity is an Enterprise, the grandest imaginable, the enterprise of restoring the entire universe!

But Christianity is essentially a Person.

"Come to Me."

"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

The main thing is a Person.

"Come to Me all who are **weary**."

All who are weary from the brokenness of life.
All who are weary from the suffering in the world.
All who are weary from injustice and pain and sorrow and talk of terrorism and war.

Know anyone like that?

"Come to Me all who are weary and **over-burdened**."

In the English language verbs function in two voices: active and passive. You know that in the Greek language verbs function is three voices: active, passive, and what is called the middle.

Active - “I wash.”
Passive - “I am washed.”
Middle - “I wash myself.”

“All who are over-burdened.”

It is in the middle voice - “over-burdened themselves.” “Come to Me all who have over-burdened themselves.”

Know anyone like that? For the most part excessive weariness is our own doing.

“Come ... and I will give you rest.”

Oh Lord, can it really be?

Literally, “I will rest you.”

Is that not a better way to say it?

Certainly more inviting.

“I will rest you.”

“I will give you rest”, could lead us to think that “rest” can be experienced apart from Jesus, as though “rest” were “a thing” Jesus places in our hands which we can carry off on our oven.

“I will rest you”, suggests the personal involvement of the Rester. “Come to Me and I will rest you.”

“Rest.”

The word takes us back to the beginning.
Genesis 2:3:

“The God blessed the seventh day and
sanctified it, because on it God rested from all

His work."

What does it mean to say, "God rested"?

That God ceased from all activity?

That God shifted into neutral, so to speak?

No.

"God rested," means God entered into the reason for which God created. In the Song of Creation recorded in Genesis 1 we hear the refrain:

"and it was evening and morning."

"It was evening and morning, day one."
"It was evening and morning, day two."
"It was evening and morning, day three."
And day four,
and five,
and six.
But no "it was evening and morning, day seven."
Day seven has no end.
Day seven is why God made the world!

"God rested," means God has entered into the reason God even bothered with creation.

"God rested," means God has entered into the wholeness willed for creation.

"Come to Me all who are weary and over-burdened yourselves…

and I will rest you....

I will lead you into the wholeness for which you were originally

created."
"And you will find rest for your souls."

That is where we need it ... is it not?
In our souls.

Our bodies and brains are weary because our souls are weary. What we need is "soul rest."

"Come to Me ... to Me....to Me....
and I will put your souls at rest."

Please Jesus ... please do it!

How? How does Jesus rest us?

Ready?

"Take My yoke upon you."

What? Taking up a yoke will rest us? It is a startling antedote to weariness, to being over-burdened. The yoke is a symbol for work! For hard work! [See 1 Kings 12:4]. Did not the Prophet Isaiah tell of the day when a Child would be born Who would "break the yoke of the burden" (9:4)?

Taking up a yoke will un-burden my over-burdened soul? Taking up a yoke is what the weary and over-burdened people of the first century least expected!

A hammock, maybe.
Or a La-z-boy recliner.
Or an Alaska Cruise.
But a yoke?

Yokes are placed on animals' shoulders to enable them to carry

more than they were already carrying!
“Come to Me....and I will rest you.

Take My yoke upon you.... and your souls, you inner being, will find rest.”

WHAT GIVES? What is Jesus getting at?

Ready?

Jesus is telling us that we are weary because we are wearing the wrong yokes. Refreshment for the soul comes by “a transfer of yokes,” says George Buttrick.

You see, the question is never, “will I wear a yoke?” The question is always, “whose yoke will I wear?”

Every person wears a yoke; there are no yoke-less human beings.

> The question is never, “will I be a disciple?”
> The question is always, “whose disciple will I be?”
> The question is never, “will I be pressured by a spirit?”
> The question is always, “of all the spirits of the age that pressure me, to which will I yield?”
> The question is never, “will I wear a yoke?”
> The question is always, “whose yoke will I wear?”

Jesus is telling us that we are weary and over-burdened because we are wearing the wrong yokes.

> Switch yokes.
> Take up Mine.
> My yoke is “easy”... and My burden is “light.”

Easy? Light?

Right Jesus. Like, I've read the rest of the Story. Easy? Light?

The billion dollar question is, therefore, WHAT IS JESUS' YOKE? WHAT IS JESUS' BURDEN?

He calls it "**My** yoke."

Meaning, it is something He Himself wears.
Whatever the yoke is, it is something He Himself wears.
That is the key.
The yoke He calls us to wear is something He Himself wears.
Like, "My shirt," something He Himself wears.

MY yoke.
And the men and women around Him could see it...
and could see the difference it made in His life.
"My yoke."

And "My burden."
Again, something He Himself bears.
Whatever it is, it is something He Himself wears.
The men and women around Him could see it too...
and could see the difference it made in His life.

"Take up My yoke ... something I Myself wear."

Turns our He has worn it for all eternity!
He wore it before taking on our flesh and blood.
He wore it the whole of His earthly life... from Bethlehem to Calvary.
He wears it even now.

So, what is it? His new Law? The Rabbis of Jesus' day did refer to the "yoke of the law." So it would be easy to conclude, as I did for many years, that Jesus' yoke is His new law, His new "torah," as articulated in His Sermon on the Mount. But is that what Jesus says? In particular, is that what He says in the Matthew text? No.

Then, what is His yoke, the yoke that refreshes, the yoke He Himself wears?
IT IS HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ONE HE CALLS "FATHER." It is His filial relationship with "Father." How do we know that?

By honoring the way Matthew has remembered Jesus' words. Most of us begin where the greeting cards do, and like I have done this morning, with verse 28 - "Come to Me." But that is not where Matthew begins. He begins at verse 25:

> "At that time, Jesus answered and said, 'I praise You, O Father.'"
> And goes on the express His trust in His Father's wisdom and sovereignty.
> And to express the mystery of the Living God:
> that there is within the Being of the One God a fellowship,
> a community,
> a reciprocity,
> a relational intimacy of knowing and revealing.

> Jesus' call, "Come to Me, take My yoke upon you," emerges out of His prayer,
> "O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I praise You."

> Jesus' call, "take My yoke," emerges out of His worship,
> "I praise You that You hid these things from the wise and

intelligent and revealed them to babes."
Jesus' call emerges out of His praising the Father,
"Yes, Father, for thus it was well pleasing in Your sight."

Jesus' call emerges out of His affirming,
"All things have been handed over to Me by My Father."

Jesus' call emerges out of His declaring,
"No one know the Son, except the Father; nor does anyone know the Father, except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal the Father."

Do you see that?

The picture the test suggested to me most of my life was this:

Jesus calls me to Himself, and then, holding something in His hands, says to me, "here, I've got this yoke for you to wear ... and it will rest you."

The picture the text now suggests to me is this:

Jesus is praying....
Jesus is worshipping....
Jesus is in conversation with the One He calls "Father".
He then turns to us FROM WITHIN THE CONVERSATION,
from within the RELALTIONSHIP,
from within the INTIMACY;
He turns to us and says, "Come."

"Come to Me ... take up the yoke you see Me wearing right now.
See it?
See My yoke?
My yoke is My relationship with my Father.
And I am calling you to join Me in it".

It takes my breath away.

The text begins with Jesus the Son in communion with the Father.

Jesus really likes being in communion with the Father.
Jesus really likes His Father.

A huge understatement!
It is the secret of Jesus' identity and ministry;
we cannot understand Jesus apart from His passion for His Father.

He is praising His Father,
He is delighting in His Father,
He is trusting His Father.

And doing so in a context that would seem to call for everything but praise, delight, trust.
The cities of Chorozin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum were rejecting
His preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom!
Some were accusing Him of being in cahoots with the devil.
Some thought He was out of His mind.
Some wanted to stone Him.

Yet there He is, praising His Father, delighting in His Father, trusting His Father.

And He turns to the disciples, and says, "Come to Me,"
Implying, "come into My praising, into My delighting, into My trusting."

"Take My yoke upon you."

Jesus' yoke is His relationship with His Father.
And His burden?

His burden is pleasing His Father.
Jesus lives to please the Father - nothing less, nothing more.

As we hear Him say in John's Gospel,
"I only do what I see My Father doing,
I only say what I hear My Father saying."

Jesus lives His whole career - if we can use that word of Him - for an Audience of One.

And He calls us to do the same - live for an Audience of One.

Yes, the needs of broken humanity pull at Jesus, at His guts.
But the needs did not set the agenda.
Yes, He cares about what the people around Him are asking of Him.
But the requests do not shape the rhythm of His day-to-day existence.
He does not look for the approval of Scribes and Pharisees, of the Doctors of the Law and Masters of Spirituality.
He does not look for the blessing of the Sadducees and Chief Priests, of the Intelligentsia and Religious Technicians.
He feels no need to please Herod or Pilate; whether the power structures affirm Him or not is not His burden.
He is not driven to please His disciples,
or His brother or sisters,
or even His mother.

"Did you not know I had to be about My Father's business?" Spoken at the age of twelve, the words shaped His whole career. He is driven - if we can use that word of Jesus - to please the Father. Period

"Come to Me all who are weary. Take My yoke upon you. Bear My burden.

And you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy.

And My burden is light."

Easy? Light?

Maybe for You, Jesus.

But for us? Easy for us? Light for us?

Yes, He says. Yes? Yes. Why?

Because it was for this that we were created and are being redeemed! "My yoke is **easy**." The Greek word is *chrestus*, related to the word *Christos*, Christ. The yoke of *Christos* is *chrestus*. *Chrestus* means "kind" when referring to people. It means "well fitting" when referring to things. "My yoke is *chrestus*, well fitting for Me... because My whole identity and existence are in the Father. And well fitting for you… because you were created for and are being redeemed for the same identity and existence."

"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."
The main thing is that RELATIONSHIP at the center of the universe. A relationship between a Father and a Son. A relationship so pulsating with Life that the relationship itself is a Person, a Spirit, the Holy Spirit.

Out of that relationship we were made. FOR that relationship we were made. Long before we came on the scene, the relationship was there. The Triune God was there. Infinitely happy being God. Not lonely. Not needy. And one day - if we can say "day"

before time came into being - the Father says to the Son, "this is too good to keep to Ourselves. Let Us make creatures in Our image to enjoy what We enjoy." So God made us!

And when we were so foolish as to turn away from such a Life.... and ran off on our own....
God did not give up.
God came after us. God came down.
All the way down. In our flesh.

And calls us, "Come....to Me ... and I will bring you back into that for which the Father and I made you."

Isn't this good?

A number of years ago, I "accidentally" [though I suppose a Presbyterian ought not use the word!] stumbled upon a book by the great Scottish theologian Thomas Torrance. One of his lesser know works, *Trinitarian Perspectives*. And I read a line that has turned out to me THE single most important theological discovery of the journey thus far. I suppose I should have gotten it in Seminary thirty-three years ago, but I did not.

On the first page of the book, Torrance writes things like this: "the doctrine of the Trinity is the central dogma of Christian theology, the fundamental grammar of our knowledge of God." Isn't that good? "Because the doctrine of the Trinity gives expression to the fact that God had opened Himself to us... in such a way that we may know Him in the inner relations of His Divine Being, and have communion with Him in His Divine life as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." I am liking what I am reading, so continue. Through the reconciliation worked out at the cross, says Torrance, God "has established an intimate two-way relation between Himself and us and us and Himself, making Himself accessible to us....and giving us entry into the inner fellowship of God's life." Wow! Or "glory", as the Pentecostals say. Then I read this line: "God draws near to us in such a way

as to draw us near to Himself within the circle of His knowing of Himself."

I almost dropped the book! I was stunned. Tears began to flow. I wanted to get up and dance ....and fall down and kneel.

"God draws near to us."

THAT would be wonderful enough. But there is more! "God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to Himself." THAT too would be wonderful enough. I could live the rest of life on that alone. But there is more! "God draws near to us in such a way as to draw us near to Himself within the circle of His knowing of Himself." THAT is what Jesus means by His yoke!

> Jesus' yoke is the circle....the circle of the Trinity's Self knowing.
> And wonders of wonders... Jesus calls us to join Him in it!

Thus can Dallas Willard say, "It is being included in the eternal life of God that heals all wounds and allows us to stop demanding satisfaction. What else matters of a personal nature, once it is clear that you have been included"[1]

"Take My yoke upon you. My yoke is easy ... it fits well." It is the only yoke that fits the human species well.

"And My burden is **light**." Light? Pleasing God the Father is "light"? For You Jesus. But for us? Yes, He says. Infinitely lighter than trying to please our earthly fathers and mothers. Really? Yes!

For what pleases the Father? What pleases the Father is throwing ourselves on the Son. What pleases the Father is throwing ourselves on the finished work of the Son. What pleases the Father is opening ourselves up to the Spirit, and

welcoming the Spirit's companionship and indwelling. "Take My yoke upon you."

> You get so weary because you are wearing the wrong yokes.
>
> You are over-burdened because you are bearing the wrong burdens. Switch yokes ... switch burdens. Wear My yoke... bear My burden. And you will find rest for your souls.

And we are not left to figure out how to do it, how to wear His yoke. In His incarnation, Jesus the Son lives out His relationship with the Father on human terms.

"Learn from Me," He says.

> Meaning, "watch Me live out trust and intimacy."
>
> He models for us what the easy yoke and light burden look like 24/7. In His over-all life-style, in the rhythm of His day and week, Jesus shows us how to enter into and work from the embrace of the Father.

> **"Learn from Me."** It also means, "let Me show you the Father". Jesus is saying to us - or to me, anyway -
>
> "Your problem is that you do not know the Father. I tell you ... you can trust My Father... even when your preaching of the Gospel of the Kingdom is being resisted."
>
> "Come ... enter My praising the Father. Come ... enter My trusting the Father. Come ... join Me in simply doing what I see the Father do... and saying what I hear the Father saying."

Bernard of Clairveux of the twelfth century was right to sing: "O blessed burden that makes all burdens light! O blessed yoke that bears the bearer up!"

"The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing."

"Come to Me,

you who are weary from the harsh realities of life,

and have over-burdened yourselves trying to please everyone else.

Take up My yoke...

join Me in the circle...

enter into My intimacy with the Father. So that you also can live and work

out of a soul at rest."

Notes

1. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering our Hidden Life with God* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), p. 341.

Logos Scholars Library – Series X. Logos Bible Systems. Bellingham, WA, $599.95.

I love books. I own thousands of them. My personal library represents a considerable investment in intellectual firepower. Much of it, however, lies dormant. I have done my best to read the books that I have purchased. I have written notes in the margins and have dutifully filed the fruits of my research. Nevertheless, I must admit my attempts to marshal this plentiful resource tend to be limited by my organic, unreliable brain.

If you are like I am, there is a part of you that wants to resist the opportunity represented by such tools as the *Logos Scholars Library – Series X*. We love the tactile experience of holding a book in our hands and thumbing through the pages. Still, like me, you are probably intrigued by the promise of technology, wondering whether or not the computer could ease your workload.

Perhaps it can. *Series X* of the *Logos Scholars Library* is a comprehensive digital library featuring more than 230 books, Bibles, and other assorted tools conveniently indexed for rapid access and complex search. *Logos* also has 3,000 other books available for purchase at deep discount (with more being added every year) which can be integrated with the system. Imagine, through simple pointing and clicking, being able to have an entire library laid out on your desk with everything bookmarked to the exact page that is relevant to your sermon text. Bible software is coming of age.

Previous users of *Logos* will be pleased to learn that *Series X* includes a new "Biblical Languages Supplement" that allows a researcher to do serious scholarship in the ancient languages. Charting and graphic tools are now available as well.

I found the interface to be logical and intuitive. The program is very large, however, and requires a significant amount of memory. Make sure you check the specifications. I did find instillation to be more difficult than had been promised, though that might have had something to do with my system. I also note that the program is not available to Apple Macintosh users. Mac users can make use of *Logos* by running *Virtual PC* but they will need a lot of RAM and one of the newer processors to allow the program to run at a reasonable speed.

Some of the things I found particularly useful were the morphological search capability and the ability to integrate personal devotional materials. I also

appreciated the opportunity to save my workspace with everything open to the pages exactly as I had left them. *Scholar's Library* is not the only software product available but it is certainly one of the most comprehensive.

I'm not sure I will ever curl up beside the fireplace to read a digital book, but when it comes to the *work* of preaching, this software will be of significant value.

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The Word Before the Powers: An Ethic of Preaching. By Charles L. Campbell. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2002, 0-66422233-1, 206 pp., $22.95 paperback.

Charles Campbell, associate professor of homiletics at Columbia Theological Seminary, argues that Jesus resisted "the powers" of this world through nonviolent acts and preaching and that Christians should do the same. Campbell adds persuasiveness to his case by modeling such resistance—as a volunteer he works extensively with homeless people in Atlanta. *The Word Before the Powers* develops an ethic of preaching by describing not only the content of what is preached but also by the act of preaching itself. Rather than using violence to resist "the powers," Jesus used preaching. Campbell unpacks the implications of this "foolish" and "weak" strategy. This is a very well written book. It is clear, superbly organized, well documented without being pedantic, and fresh.

Arguing from New Testament evidence, Campbell characterizes "the powers" as multiple, both spiritual and material, created by God, and fallen (chapter one). To maintain and expand their spheres, "the powers" use negative sanctions, rewards and promises, isolation and division, demoralization, diversion, public rituals, surveillance, images, and secrecy (chapter two). By the time these qualities are spun together, it seems that nearly everything can be categorized as a "power," and this is one of my few criticisms of the book. The concept of "the powers" needs more definition. The following organizations, ideas, and zeitgeists are a *sampling* of "powers" in Campbell's understanding: hierarchies, terrorism, racism, homophobia, slavery, Madison Avenue, Coca-Cola, capitalism, Nazism, NATO, NRA, and the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. Something qualifies as a "power" if it is part of the "Domination System" which uses coercion,

deception, and violence for control.
To battle "the powers" we must follow Jesus' strategies (chapter three), and Campbell is adamant that these strategies are always non-violent (chapter four); however, non-violence does not imply passivity. We are to resist the powers by exposing them and envisioning life under *God's* rule (chapter six), and we are to preach what we practice and practice what we preach (chapters seven and eight). In Campbell's ethic, anger is a virtue as is truthfulness, patience, and hope.

This book elevates preaching, reminding us that when Jesus and the apostles wanted to turn the world upside down, they used *words*. This book will re-ignite your vision of preaching as well as give you some usable ideas on how to resist "the powers."

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A Matrix of Meanings: Finding God in Pop Culture. By Craig Detweiler and Barry Taylor. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 0-8010-2417-X, 351 pp., paperback, $17.99.

A Matrix of Meanings is Baker's latest addition to their "Engaging Culture" series. Previous contributions to this project, which seeks "to help Christians respond with theological discernment to our contemporary culture" (2), include volumes on film, art, and the environment. *A Matrix of Meanings* deals specifically with pop culture in various forms, seeking to identify what Christians can learn from the cultural environment in which we live.

Authors Detweiler and Taylor are Fuller Seminary graduates with expertise in the areas of music and film, Taylor as a musician/songwriter and Detweiler as a screenwriter/filmmaker. They approach pop culture "first and foremost as fans," and they write "primarily as practitioners, artists involved in the day-to-day process of creating pop culture" (8). Taylor and Detweiler also approach this subject as pastors, "having devoted ourselves to articulating a biblical faith for the twenty-first century. We love Jesus, even if we have our problems with Christianity" (8).

Detweiler and Taylor cover a wide range of subjects, including advertising, celebrities, music, movies, television, fashion, sports, and art. I agree that pop culture must be studied and taken seriously by the Church if we want to be effective in communicating to a postmodern culture in the twenty-first

century. The authors are correct in asserting that the culture in which we live must be listened to if the Church would continue to bring God's word to the world. In fact, that we do not sit outside of pop culture but live within it is a much welcomed change of perspective. The authors write, "We do not sit outside the culture, planning how to approach it. Pop culture *is* our culture, the air that we breathe, for better or for worse" (12). This general premise is the book's greatest strength.

Detweiler and Taylor claim that the culture in which we all now live is "post" everything: Post-national, Post-rational, Post-literal, Post-scientific/technological, Post-sexual, Post-racial, Post-human, Post-traumatic/therapeutic, Post-ethical/institutional, and Post-Christian (31). Their contention is that notions of all these subjects are being radically redefined, and as such, theology must be redefined as well. After in-depth looks at each of the subjects addressed, the authors propose a new way to look at theology, what they call a "Top-10 Theology." In this Top-10 Theology, each of the "post" conditions mentioned above are countered with a stance that the Church must take in order to regain a hearing in the marketplace. According to Detweiler and Taylor, a Top-10 theology will be Diverse, Experiential, Mythological, Mysterious, Embodied, Colorful, Real, Bloody, Humorous, and Loving (296 ff.).

I agree that preachers must listen to pop culture and that the Church must adjust to address what is heard from pop culture. Indeed, it seems that artists such as Eminem have more influence over young people's worldviews than most preachers. Detweiler and Taylor are correct in saying, "There is a conversation about God going on in popular culture that the church is not engaged in and is often unaware of" (23). Nevertheless, *A Matrix of Meanings* suffers from some serious problems—both methodological and theological.

Although the authors devote an entire chapter to explaining their methodology, it remains unclear. While Detweiler and Taylor suggest that their study uses "anthropology, sociology, philosophy, theology, and gut instinct to draw conclusions and work things out" (11), it often feels like gut instinct drives this book.

Claims are often made without elaboration or citation of sources. In addressing bands with Christian messages who make no association with Christianity, the authors write, "This pro-Jesus/anti-church phenomenon goes way beyond a fear of rejection because of an affiliation with the Christian faith . . . . It underscores the need for a rethinking of theology and ecclesiology in the postmodern world" (131). I want to ask, "Why? What

do you mean? Who says so?"
Furthermore, the book is fraught with overstatement. In the Introduction we are told, "People of faith need to become conversant with the new canon, the new literacy, and join the new conversation. Only in this way can we hear Jesus afresh. Only in this way can the Spirit quicken our spirits. Only in this way can we allow God to be fully God" (23). Is this *really* the only way that God can be fully God, or that the Spirit can quicken our spirit? On music we read, "U2 may not care to see itself as a Christian band, but they . . . . may have done more to generate dialogue about Christian faith than all traditional evangelistic efforts put together" (152). Really?

The authors claim that they seek to create a theology "out of" pop culture (10), but this theology is not adequately developed. It is not clear if they are attempting to describe the theology that exists within that culture while still maintaining a robust biblical theology. On one page in the authors' Top-10 Theology we read that theology must be rooted in Scripture (295), but on the next page we are told that "the gospel of Jesus Christ has always been a fluid, living entity . . . . We must rethink, reform, reinvent, and re-imagine the gospel for the times in which we live" (296). Most readers of JEHS will agree with me that it is not the gospel that needs changing as much as our communication of the gospel, informed by the thoughts and trends of pop culture. Whether or not Detweiler and Taylor are implying a change in the gospel message in order to be relevant needs clarification.

At another point in the Top-10 theology is that in a Post-human culture we need to acknowledge and celebrate our difference from machines, namely, that humans are fallible. "One counterintuitive way to keep it real is by *celebrating* our sinfulness. Failing, mistakes, and misjudgments, are essential and endearing aspects of humanity" (313, emphasis original). This logic does not make sense. What separates humans from machines is not fallibility, it is the fact that we are created and loved by God. Anyone who has ever wanted to throw his or her computer out the window knows that it is fallible. Sin is a part of our lives, and that must be acknowledged and dealt with, but it is lamentable, not celebratory. It seems as if Detweiler's and Taylor's idea of creating a theology "out of" pop culture relegates biblical theology to second place.

This book does make contributions to the study of pop culture such as the acknowledgment that advertising, sports, fashion, and celebrities are areas in need of study. Preachers will benefit from reading *A Matrix of Meanings* as an introduction to pop culture studies. Even more though, preachers who listen to pop culture and adjust their preaching accordingly will help congregations hear better the word of God in the world in which they live. *A Matrix of Meanings* is worth reading with critical eyes.

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*Preaching Luke-Act*s. By Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2000, 0-8272-2965-8, 148 pp., $18.99 paperback.

Dr. Allen teaches both preaching and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, and his interest in Luke-Acts from exegetical and homiletic perspectives is evident throughout this contribution to Chalice Press's *Preaching Classic Texts* series. After two introductory chapters dealing with interpretive matters and homiletic strategies, Allen offers five chapters on major Lucan themes: the realm (kingdom) of God, the Holy Spirit, the great reunion of the human community (Gentile mission), the restoration of women, and material wealth and poverty. Each thematic chapter closes with a sermon that exemplifies the fruit of Allen's approach.

Allen affirms the narrative unity of Luke-Acts. With respect to questions of special introduction, he opines that this two volume work was written by a Jewish Christian (not Paul's companion Luke) one to two decades after Jerusalem's fall and the destruction of the second Temple. The author wrote to a church competing with established Judaism for legitimacy as Israel's heir, addressing his defense both to the church's insecure members and to those outside its fellowship. The theology of Luke-Acts was profoundly influenced by the Old Testament (which Allen calls "First Testament" to avoid any supercessionist implication that Christianity replaces Judaism).

Allen addresses his own communion (Disciples of Christ) and other "long-established denominations," which are "beleaguered" by declining memberships and giving. He would bolster their hope through the Lucan theme of "the faithfulness of God." The Evangelical readers of this journal, however, will find his method at cross-purposes with the confident proclamation of Luke's good news that would remedy the Protestant mainline's malaise. Every text and theme in Luke-Acts, writes Allen, must be interrogated as to its appropriateness to the "core of Christian conviction," defined as "God's unconditional love for each and all and God's will for justice for each and all," and as to its intelligibility, credibility, and moral plausibility to people in our culture (18-19). Thus, for example, the feeding of five thousand fails the test of credibility, since it is "not seriously imaginable" today. Yet the story carries a deeper, universalized message about providence in life's "wilderness experiences" (19). Luke's expectation of Jesus' future parousia assumes that God can "intervene in the world in a single, transforming moment"; but Allen's process theology insists that "God cannot act in that way" (63). When a passage in the Lucan corpus denies God's unconditional love to anyone (such as Luke's negative portrayal of

Jewish leaders), "the minister is called to disagree with it," explaining why such attitudes are "not welcome in the Christian household" (20).
One might doubt whether positive guidance about preaching Luke-Acts can be offered by one who takes so superior a stance toward the biblical text. One finds, however, that Allen's surveys of the five themes are, on the whole, helpful in exposing theological strands woven throughout Luke's narrative.

Nevertheless both Allen's interpretation and his homiletic treatment of Luke-Acts are hampered by his distaste for the historical particularity of God's redemptive work as Luke presents it. He is "troubled" that Luke-Acts speaks "as if the Spirit is poured out in extra measure on selected people or groups at selected times"—as, for example, in the Pentecost narrative, when the Spirit comes as the eschatological gift promised through the prophets and awaited by Jesus' disciples. Because God would be "unjust and unloving" if he withheld the Spirit at any time or from anyone, Pentecost, we are told, was not "a time when the Spirit was actually more available than at other times, but…a moment of heightened perception of the Spirit" (81). Thus what Luke presents as a watershed event in the historical inbreaking of God's realm is made relevant to modern audiences by being reduced to a dehistoricized insight into timeless truth.

Likewise Allen's sample sermons differ markedly from the Christ-centered particularity of the apostolic preaching in Acts. The sermon on the realm of God mentions the cross: "Yet the crucifixion of a Jewish person on the edge of the empire becomes an occasion for God to demonstrate the renewal of the world." Whereas the apostles attached unique significance to *this* crucifixion because of the identity of *this* victim—the Christ, Savior, Son, Servant, and Lord whose sufferings justify many—for Allen this death is merely "*an* occasion"—one of many—that exhibits God's renewal of the world: "This turn of events helps us realize that God works through similar people and circumstances…." (67) Those who want to preach *Christ* from Luke-Acts will find little help in Allen's discussion.

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The Passion Driven Sermon: Changing the Way Pastors Preach and Congregations Listen. By Jim Shaddix. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2003, 0-8054-2722-8, 180 pp., $19.99 hardback.

Employing the terminology of Haddon Robinson, *The Passion Driven*

Sermon exudes one "Big Idea" or central message: preaching should grow solely out of "a passion for the glory of God" (4). The author is a seasoned minister with over twenty years of pastoral experience. He is currently Pastor-Teacher of the Edgewater Baptist Church in New Orleans and also serves as Dean of the Chapel and Associate Professor of Preaching at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary. Thus, the book is written in light of his various experiences preaching in the local church and teaching homiletics in the classroom. In this book, Shaddix critiques and challenges several modern misconceptions held by preachers and congregants for what constitutes proper biblical preaching. At the same time, he also seeks to offer a clear solution for a number of contemporary ministerial and homiletical issues.

The book is divided into three sections: "Passion-Driven Scripturology," "Passion-Driven Shepherdology," and "Passion-Driven Sermonology." Each of these parts contains three chapters. In Part 1, Shaddix employs numerous Scriptural passages as platforms to reacquaint preachers with the Apostle Paul's chief commitments regarding the preaching ministry – commitments that seek to glorify God.

In Chapter 1, "The Message of Preaching: God's Word vs. Man's Wisdom," Shaddix draws three main implications from Paul's preaching in Corinth: preachers are to act as reporters, reminders, and reflectors of God's truth. Shaddix illustrates how preachers have fallen into a trap of relying copiously on resources other than the Word of God to create weekly sermons.

Chapter 2, "The Means for Preaching: God's Power vs. Man's Presentation," asserts that pastors have often forgotten about God's power in preaching that is available through the Holy Spirit and have instead routinely supported themselves on the crutches of human eloquence and rhetoric. Shaddix exhorts preachers to bear in mind four p's in preaching: the priority, the preacher, the persuasion, and the proof.

In Chapter 3, "The Motive in Preaching: God's Purpose vs. Man's Pragmatism," preachers are reminded to reconsider their "target" point in preaching, to reflect practically on what congregants will "take-away" from their sermons, and lastly to be wary of common "temptations."

Part 2, "Passion-Driven Shepherdology," is essentially Shaddix's commentary on the current state of the local church. This second section confronts prevalent misplaced expectations which congregants have concerning their pastors and introduces preachers to various philosophical frameworks for preaching that will glorify God when His shepherds are faithful in their tasks.

In Chapter 4, "The Shepherd's Stewardship: Good Stuff or God's Stuff," Shaddix contends that the pulpit has become a medium for preachers to preach sermons that may involve "good stuff" or momentary practical suggestions, but not really convey "God's stuff" or pertinent, life-changing Gospel truth. It is clear from this chapter that Shaddix shuns the pervasive sermon style that attempts to provide easy-fix solutions to people's problems.

In Chapter 5 Shaddix demonstrates through use of various biblical passages that the Scripture in and of itself is fully sufficient for life transformation. He also correctly maintains that without the work of the Holy Spirit preachers are incapable of generating lasting spiritual progress.

In Chapter 6, "The Shepherd's Relevance: Application or Incarnation?," Shaddix's main agenda is to debunk the myth that biblical preaching is all about the application. Instead, he argues that pastors should seek to be relevant through incarnational preaching, that is, by transforming congregants from the "inside out." For Shaddix, transformation does not occur by trying to change behavior but by affecting consciences.

In his third and final section "Passion-Driven Sermonology," Shaddix provides some practical guidelines for glorifying God through the sermonic process which pastors regularly undergo each week.

In Chapter 7, "Preaching as Worship: Biblical Exposition," Shaddix contests the prevalent evangelical view that "worship" refers mainly to a musical praise session. At the same time, he maintains that preaching is a vital element in Christian worship and that the Word of God should be treated by pastors and listeners with reverence, awe, and conviction.

Chapter 8 regards "Preaching with Potency: Textual Integrity." This chapter makes a strong case for the power of Scripture in preaching. In addition, the author discusses the critical function of prayer for the preacher and offers a plea for the Scripture text or printed Word to become a more visible part of worship services.

In Chapter 9, "Preaching for Eternity: Kingdom Relay," the author explains how pastors should pass their batons adeptly and smoothly on to ensuing generations of pastors and listeners. Shaddix's primary point is the desperate need to cultivate biblical literacy within today's congregations. He also urges pastors to remember the faithful servants of previous eras and to hold steadfast to proper biblical exposition.

On the whole, this book possesses various strengths. First, it is written in a lucid, conversational style and is extremely well-organized. Shaddix has

profitably employed alliteration to his credit to title each of the three main parts, the various chapters, and their subheadings. These titles give the book a clear and cogent development of thought. A second strength is that Shaddix has interspersed winsome and useful anecdotes drawn from pop culture, media, his family life, ministry experiences, and teaching moments. I applauded many of his personal anecdotes which revealed his fervent passion for pastoral ministry and preaching. Third, Shaddix has demonstrated the necessity of using Scripture to construct a practical theology for preaching and ministry. The obvious time that he has spent on exegesis to write this book is commendable.

However, a few reservations come to mind. First, while Shaddix relies a great deal on personal opinion and generalization. I think Shaddix could have strengthened a number of arguments by including more references to support positions such as his critique of the seeker-sensitive movement. On a theological note, I was also perplexed by his use of the term "Christ event" when referring to specific moments in Jesus' life. Why does he employ this term and what does it insinuate? Lastly, I felt that *The Passion Driven Sermon* could have been written in a more gender inclusive manner. Shaddix often refers to preachers using only a masculine pronoun. For this reason, I believe this book has potential to be disconcerting for female preachers and other women readers.

Overall, it is difficult to do this book proper justice in a short review. Shaddix covers a lot of territory in this book. It is not only a valid assessment of the state of contemporary preaching, but it also imparts a coherent theology for local church ministry and preaching. The contents of the book are not groundbreaking, but they constitute a valuable reminder for homiletics professors and veteran and novice preachers alike. Moreover, as Shaddix suggests, I would strongly encourage listeners to read it so that they may work out for the first time or perhaps rethink what their preachers' sermons should aim towards. As Shaddix rightly puts it, the goal is the glory of God.

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Preaching that Changes Lives. By Michael Fabarez. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2002, 0-7852-4914-1, 224 pp., $19.99 hardback.

The agenda of this book is clear-cut and stated forthrightly: "It is my prayer

that this book assists you in presenting sermons that are not only accurate, but also life changing" (xv). This general statement becomes a bit more specific a few lines later when Fabarez states his game plan: "To do so, you will need to give attention to life changing application in three primary areas of your ministry: your preparation, your preaching, and your follow-through" (xv). This is actually a description of the three major sections of the book, each consisting of three to five chapters.

These three sections follow two brief introductory chapters that present the author's plea for a proper kind of preaching. Fabarez strongly endorses expository preaching and does an adequate job of explaining what it is without being clever or novel. He has thought through the Bible's own description of preaching, including the various words used by the New Testament writers, especially Paul. Yet he correctly cautions against assuming that the truthful presentation of the Scriptures is sufficient. Rather, Scriptural truth must be presented along with clear and forceful application.

The reader will find that this book presents a sound underlying philosophy of preaching as well as many practical insights and suggestions on how to do it in a significant life-changing way. Two chapters stood out as particularly unique to this reviewer. Chapter 6 dealt with prayer, including the preacher's own praying and the praying of others for the preacher's preparation and presentation. Fabarez presents a diversity of ideas which, while not individually unique, collectively constitute a formidable prayer thrust for the ministry of the Word. Chapter 12 is titled "Preach Periodically about Life-changing Preaching." In it, the author presents some excellent ideas about reminding one's congregation of the importance of preaching and how it can help shape their lives. I found this chapter uniquely challenging and useful and actually incorporated some of its ideas into a sermon I preached a few days later.

There is a good amount of coherence and consistency in this volume. For example, in Chapter 4, Fabarez writes about the importance of studying both the meaning and significance of the text, and in Chapter 7 he suggests that weekly study time reflect this by allowing one day to study meaning, a second day to grapple with significance, and a third day to craft the sermon. Another example of consistency is his discussion of doctrine and application. "True applicational preaching *always* puts doctrine on display. If it does not, then it does not supply adequate reason or basis for directing life" (147). Fabarez warns us against establishing a false dichotomy between teaching and application presenting both as essential parts of the whole.

The author amplifies his arguments with examples and illustrations. He also includes a plethora of citations from a wide diversity of writers and thinkers.

The bibliography at the end of the book is nicely representative of recent scholarship in preaching and related areas.

I'm convinced that this book by Fabarez will be a helpful addition to the library of anyone who preaches. It is also beneficial to those who teach preaching. I highly recommend it.

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The Word Disclosed: Preaching the Gospel of John. By Gail R. O'Day. Revised and expanded. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2002, 0-8272-4245-X, 151 pp., $19.99 paperback.

This brief study by the A. H. Shatford Professor of Homiletics at Emory University's Candler School of Theology helpfully combines four homiletically-directed exegetical explorations of Johannine texts with six sermons that proclaim other passages in the Fourth Gospel. The selection of texts for the four exegetical chapters, which constitute the book's core (106 pages), is dictated by the order of the Revised Common Lectionary (Year A, second, third, fourth, and fifth Sundays in Lent). Thus these chapters interpret four successive narrative texts in the first half of John's Gospel: Jesus' conversations with Nicodemus (John 3) and the Samaritan woman (John 4), his healing of the man born blind (John 9), and his resurrection of Lazarus (John 11). The sermons complement these chapters by expounding texts from John 6, 10, 12, 13, 17, and 20, which appear as readings largely in Years B and C of the lectionary. These sermons not only exemplify how biblical exegesis is translated into preaching, but also expand the scope of texts for which the reader is offered insights.

Dr. O'Day shows herself to be a careful observer of the biblical text and one who is particularly sensitive to the implications of literary structure and context for the meaning of particular passages. At points she critiques the textual boundaries determined by the lectionary because these decisions exclude relevant preceding and following contexts, thereby distorting or reducing the message that a text conveys in the context of the Fourth Gospel. She gives attention to how the Evangelist himself confronts his reader with the person of Jesus through, among other things, the suspense of the narrative process itself; and she argues that preachers ought to follow the same strategy, resisting the temptation to offer hearers the "right" answer prematurely and to over-explain. The preacher should not clarify too soon,

for example, those double-meaning words such as "living water" intentionally selected by John to trace the path from confusion to insight concerning Jesus and his saving work. Nor should preachers "rush" to the resurrection miracle of John 11, skipping too quickly past the perplexed grief of Lazarus' sisters and Jesus' anguished outrage at death, the dark path along which the biblical narrator patiently conducts his readers toward the light of life eternal, as dashed hopes are unexpectedly and deliriously fulfilled after all.

I cannot concur with every interpretation offered in *The Word Disclosed*. Although I grant that in John 3: 4 Nicodemus focuses on the maternal role as he misunderstands Jesus' "birth" metaphor (*gennao*), in light of the prior use of this imagery and verb with masculine/paternal overtones in John 1:12-13 ("sons of God, begotten not from bloods nor the will of the flesh nor the will of a male but from God"), I question whether "the imagery [in John 3] is unambiguously feminine. Must we choose between the (masculine) generation and the (feminine) birth options in interpreting *gennao* in John 3? Is this not another instance of Johannine double entendre? Again, when the final sermon so generalizes "If you retain the sins of any, they are retained" (John 20:23) to mean, "No sin is forgiven if we are determined to retain it" (150), such application obscures the distinctive authority of the apostles as bearers of the gospel sent out by Jesus, just as he was sent with authority by his Father (vs. 21; cf. Matt. 16:19, a parallel not cited by O'Day). Jesus' point is not to discourage grudge-bearing in general, but to designate the apostles as authoritative bearers of the gospel that divides humanity (cf. John 3:18).

Nevertheless, O'Day presents a refreshingly Christ-centered, cross-centered homiletic that pays close attention to the textual nuances of the Fourth Gospel. She recognizes and remedies misunderstandings that arise from our cultural distance from the first century situation ("the Jews" in John are not the Jewish people as a whole, but the dominant authorities within Judaism who opposed Jesus, pp. 73-75). But she resists superficial, "how-to" applications, preferring instead to aim at those deeper, heart-transforming, faith-in-Jesus-inducing objectives that the Gospel itself was first written to achieve.

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Preparing to Preach: A Practical Guide for Beginning Preachers. By Bill D. Whittaker. Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1999, 204 pp., $18.95 paperback.

Bill Whittaker is president of Clear Creek Baptist Bible College in Pineville, Kentucky. A native of Bowling Green, Whittaker received degrees from Western Kentucky University and Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville. He served as pastor of churches in Kentucky, in Florida and in the Philippines. He also served as assistant to the Dean of Student Affairs at Western Kentucky University. During his service in the Philippines, he taught beginning preachers at a Bible institute.

Preparing to Preach is written for beginning preachers. It is divided into seven units with 24 chapters. The author introduces each unit with a brief overview of what it contains. Each chapter ends with suggestions for additional reading. A bibliography is provided, along with a Scripture reference index. The book also includes a brief section with information and photographs about Clear Creek Baptist Bible College and a rather detailed biographical sketch of the author.

Unit 1 explores various definitions of preaching, a survey of New Testament sermons, and the need for biblical preaching today. The second unit deals with the personal preparation of the preacher—his qualifications, his authority, and his failure to prepare adequately. Unit 3 begins the practical instructions for sermon preparation. The first step is arriving at a sermon idea. Then a text is to be selected and studied carefully to properly interpret it.

In unit 4, six chapters deal with how to organize the sermon, including sermon objectives, structure, and suggestions for the introduction and conclusion. The author says the hardest task may well be preparing sermon application and illustration and the use of imagination, which he addresses in unit 5.

Unit 6 is called "Sermon Workshop." It deals with four particular kinds of sermons: evangelistic, doctrinal, ethical, and pastoral. Here the author gives most of the space to sample sermon outlines and development. The final unit includes a chapter on utilizing a preaching plan and one on filing sermon materials and using a computer.

Preparing to Preach has several significant strengths. Beginning preachers will find that it deals with the rather obvious topics that are nonetheless needed by those just getting started with sermon preparation. They are introduced to the need for clear sermon objectives, a thesis, and unity of thought. They are given instruction on how to write sermon divisions and develop effective structure. The material on illustration and application will be helpful in understanding the need for these elements in the sermon.

One of the strengths of the book for young preachers is the use of examples. Some of the chapters are mostly examples of sermon ideas and outlines. However well the writer communicates his methods for sermon preparation, the examples allow the reader to see what he is suggesting.
As to weaknesses, most homileticians will find the book rather predictable. But one must keep in mind that it is not written for homileticians, but for beginning students. The treatment of objectives, structure, use of the text, and application sounds very much like books from several decades ago, such as Brown, Northcutt and Clinard's *Steps to the Sermon*, published in 1963.

Another weakness is the writer's apparent disdain for expository preaching. He explains in Chapter 13 that expository preaching seeks to expose the meaning of the text and apply it to life. He also says an expository sermon usually contains more Scripture, but then he seems to affirm what he says is a common complaint, that "expository sermons are monotonous and boring." He says this complaint is due to the habit of some preachers to read a passage and offer a running commentary on it, usually unrelated to the needs of the people. The author also asserts that expository sermons often suffer from a lack of unity. Such comments as these, weighted against expository preaching, may not serve the beginning preacher well.

Overall, *Preparing to Preach* could be a helpful textbook for beginning students, especially if used in the context of a course in which the various methods were explained in greater detail and demonstrated by the teacher.

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Planting Seeds of Faith. By Virginia H. Loewen. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002, 0-8298-1473-6, 94 pp., $10.00 paperback. *Growing Seeds of Faith*. By Virginia H. Loewen. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002, 0-8298-1488-4, 95 pp., $10.00 paperback.

Churches that set aside special time for children in worship will welcome this valuable resource for pastors and laity who teach children. Congregations that have not included such a time in worship will find these books a good way to begin. Each book has twenty-six sermons written primarily for children from four to eight years old, though they are easily adapted for use with older children. The "Stretching Further" suggestions at the end of each sermon allow the teacher or pastor to challenge children who are more mature or perceptive. This might also be used to tie the children's sermon

into the later, longer, sermon to make it more accessible to both adults and youth.

The uniform format gives a descriptive title and a concise statement of Theme, Scripture, and Preparation notes. Near the end of each message is a feature called the "take-away" giving either an object or suggestion of a way to apply and share the message with others. Again, these suggestions may be adapted for use with whole congregations, particularly in smaller churches.

The five to ten minutes allowed for each message works with these ages. If a teacher or pastor finds a lesson to be more involved than a particular group can receive, the material is flexible enough to be used in part with the balance worked into a later part of the service to keep the attention of children who are present for all of worship as well as to help adults understand key concepts.

For every text and sermon, there is suggested prayer with which to close the time with children. For those who are not comfortable having children repeat a prayer after the teacher, these prayers may be incorporated into the larger service for all to pray in response to the sermon preached primarily for older youth and adults but including the children who are present for worship.

Examples of some of the features of Loewen's work are seen in the sermon on pages 21-22 in *Planting Seeds of Faith* based on Matthew 2:11—"[They wise men] saw the child with Mary, and they knelt down and paid him homage." The reading of the verse is followed by a creative discussion with the children about knees (what they do, what can go wrong with them, how we spell this strange word, how we use our bodies to show how we feel, and finally, why we kneel to pray or bow our heads if we cannot kneel. The children are engaged on every level during this time and are prepared, as in a good sermon for older people, to think about the main idea which is, "When we kneel or bow our heads to pray, we show honor and respect to God." The actions of the wise men are discussed as well as their significance. Then children are told, "When we bow our heads or kneel to pray, we mean that we are not our own bosses; God is the one we obey; God is our ruler." Then they are invited to actually kneel and pray together. The prayer is one that believers of all ages would do well to learn. "Dear God, We thank you for our knees. They let us walk and run and jump. They let us kneel to show that you are our God and king. Help us to obey you. We pray in the name of Jesus. Amen."

The flexibility Loewen has built into this resource is seen in the "Stretching Further" exercise. She suggests reading Philippians 2:10 ("At the name of Jesus, every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.") and discussing this with older children. The "take-away" suggestion involves

kneeling each night to pray, saying to God, "I love you. I honor you. I respect you." This will preach, both to the children gathered around the teacher and to the adults listening in.

The sermon cited above focuses more on an idea reflected in the selected verse, but most sermons in both of Loewen's book have themes more directly based on the chosen verse. The object lessons suggested reflect and communicate the main idea clearly. An example is the sermon on page 47-48 in *Planting Seeds of Faith*. The sermon is based on Colossians 2:13-14. The Theme: "When we are sorry for what we have done wrong and we ask God to forgive us, God erases the record against us. Jesus took our punishment when he died on the cross." Pencil erasers, slate, or chalkboard are used to illustrate and then to be taken home as a reminder of God's forgiveness and how we ask for it. Again, Loewen leads children into the theme by relating the idea of God erasing our sin to things they understand in their world.

Both of these volumes are consistent in the quality of content, clarity of format, and in offering practical suggestions that can be adapted for use in churches of different sizes. Many teachers will find the introductions of her books particularly helpful with their bulleted list of ideas for preparation and delivery. The Table of Contents listing both Sermon Title and Text and the Index referencing objects and ideas make both of these books easy to use. Besides demonstrating a love for and knowledge of God's word, this author shows that she has had experience with real live children like the ones who wiggle and watch and participate with us week after week in our time with them around the Bible.

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Touch the Water, 30 Children's Sermons on Baptism. By Phyllis Vos Wezeman, Anna L. Liechty, and Kenneth R. Wezeman. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2002, 0-8298-1518-X, 94 pp., $10.00 paperback. *Taste the Bread, 30 Children's Sermons on Communion*. By Phyllis Vos Wezeman, Anna L. Liechty, and Kenneth R. Wezeman. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 002, 0-8298-1488-4, 95 pp., $10.00 paperback.

Pastors, parents, and lay teachers of children have long recognized that children are fascinated by the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. These two new resources help answer that interest with sermons for children that explore what these sacraments mean. They are prepared for use with children

from kindergarten through upper-elementary school. The breadth of this target group will require teachers or pastors to adapt the messages to the particular group of children in a given church. This should not be difficult because the authors use object lessons that even young children will notice and find interesting. The most effective use may, however, be with children who are in the older half of this group.
In the Introduction to *Touch the Water*, the authors point out that while there may be differences in how Christians practice baptism, this sacrament helps to define us as followers of Jesus. Each sermon focuses either on something that baptism does for or to the believer or on a challenge that comes with being baptized. It couples this idea with a relevant passage of Scripture. *Taste the Bread* offers a similar collection of sermons exploring Communion, identifying this sacrament as something all Christians share.

Both of these books have a helpful Overview after the Introduction to answer questions about the purpose of the sermons and suggest ways to most effectively use them. Besides sermons that focus on a Bible verse or set of verses, some sermons, labeled Hymn Stories, include suggestions for making or using a teaching tool to help children understand a particular hymn used that day in worship.

Teachers will find helpful information given after the sermon section on age group suggestions to explore baptism and communion respectively. These are given for groups from pre-school through adult. There is also a section of cross-references for Hymn Stories, Scripture, Teaching Tools, and Themes.
Both volumes suggest helpful and effective visual aids as well as suggestions to use something in the sanctuary or a familiar hymn as a teaching aid. For example, a sermon on Christian Unity (13-14 in *Taste the Bread*) uses a sheaf of wheat and cluster of grapes as well as reference to the hymn "One Bread, One Body" to help children begin to think about the body of Christ with its many parts. While the focus is on unity, the sermon also helps children consider the significance of Christ's sacrifice and how communion reminds us of what Jesus did on our behalf.

The sermon "Guided in Life: Christ's Flock" (46-47 in *Touch the Water*), which is based on John 10:14-15, uses the hymn "Savior, Like a Shepherd Lead Us" to help children think about what being a baptized follower of Christ means in terms of who we follow. Older children will understand the reference to the hymn though they might understand better if at least part of the hymn were sung after they had discussed it. The use of a picture of the Good Shepherd will capture the attention of children for a few minutes. Some of the language used will need to be reworked for younger children. They can better understand words like "compiled" and "meaningful" if they are broken down a bit more.

This last example is one of the reasons that some congregations with more children in the youngest age groups may find the messages too abstract for some in the group. Even for these churches, however, these books are an invaluable resource in terms of their suggestions about a way to teach by using things we do and by pointing children to the things around them in the world and in their sanctuaries. Many children are more perceptive than we realize, even at a very young age. These two resources use illustrations and object lessons that are vivid enough for the older children to understand. They may remind the younger ones in later months and years about the significance of a particular hymn, picture, or activity in worship.

A strength of these books is the consistent format built around the following pieces: Passage, Purpose, Preparation, Presentation, and Prayer. For every text and sermon there is suggested prayer with which to close the time with children. As with other quality children's resources, the whole congregation could use the suggested prayers. The power of children praying with adults in response to a sermon presented for the youngest in the congregation can help reinforce the truth that Jesus wants us to come with a simple faith that grows and deepens without losing a childlike trust in Him. In response to the sermon about Jesus, our Shepherd, the authors suggested this prayer: "Dear God, thank you for making us one of your flock. Help us to follow our Good Shepherd who leads us every day of our lives. Amen." What better prayer could we find for a Christian at any age?

In a time when too many children lose interest in church just as they reach an age when we expect them to begin to understand the sacraments, these books can help churches plant seeds in the hearts of our youngest children; images and ideas tied to hymns we sing regularly; and visuals that are a regular part of worship. If, even for a year, adults in a congregation listened in on one of these sermons for children before celebrating the Lord's Supper together and then heard the key text preached, whole families would have a starting point to better understand the sacraments and their importance for our faith, their significance in our worship together, and their relevance to our worship everyday at work, at school, or at home.

In reading through the sermons in these books, I realized that on most Sundays I would have to explain in different words some of the longer phrases. This is easily done to fit a particular group of children. It is much more difficult to think creatively about the sacraments in terms of their relationship to our daily life or to match these concepts with particular passages. This more difficult task has been done well by the authors of *Touch the Water* and *Taste the Bread*. In the Overview section of *Touch the Water*, the authors suggest that this book will provide church leaders with "help for

lessons, whether ideas are needed to celebrate the actual baptism of infants, children, youth, or adults; to mark events such as blessings, confirmations, and dedications; or to explore the seasons of the church year" (9). A similar promise is made in *Taste the Bread* with regard to Communion. However pastors and teachers adapt the sermons in these books for use in different church contexts, they are a valuable resource as we seek to help our children grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. As we help them, we will no doubt learn with them more of the mystery of grace ministered to God's people through the sacraments given to Christ's church.

Margaret Catherine Cook Ryegate and South Ryegate Presbyterian
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A Walk through the Bible in Modern Parables. By Clyde W. Cutrer. Franklin: Providence, 2001, 1-57736-215-2, 148 pp., $14.95 paperback.

Cutrer purposes to help lay readers of the Bible remember its content. He seeks to accomplish this by relating stories, modern parables, which throw light on the Bible's progressive story development. He desires his readers to view the Bible as a complete picture, rather than as a compilation of individual bits and pieces, "how the parts of the Bible relate to the whole" (113). He uses his parabolic stories toward that end. He understands the broad concept of "exodus" as the dominant theme which unifies the whole Bible: "The movement that furnishes the foundation for the Bible story we are following is the Exodus" (109).

The book is purposefully arranged in sixty-four short chapters, of two or three pages each. In this way readers can use it as a tool in their daily devotions. Cutrer writes in relatively short sentences, with simple vocabulary. The book often reads as if he is sitting in the room with you and simply talking to you. Although Cutrer taught religion at Belmont University in Nashville, TN for twenty years, his twenty-four years of pastoral ministry clearly show through the down-to-earth format and approach of the book.

Numerous features of this book are specifically appealing. Cutrer's desire to trace the chronological development of the biblical story of God's relationship with humans through history is commendable. His intention to assist readers to grasp the themes and major concepts of each Bible book is one that I often emphasize in my own teaching. Approaching each Bible book with a contemporary story, which bridges the gap to the ancient account, is a meritorious idea. Periodically reviewing the flow of the biblical

story's development so that the reader maintains continuity is advantageous. All of these concepts are laudatory and appreciated.

Cutrer's book also has significant weaknesses. A significant weakness, for this theologically conservative reviewer, is the author's almost universal acceptance of the results of higher criticism in his approach to Scripture. While Cutrer never specifically mentions JEPD in the Pentateuch, he never asserts Mosaic authorship either. He abandons his subtlety, however, when dealing with other books. For example: Chapter 13 is "Isaiah" and chapter 21 is "2 Isaiah;" Chapter 23 is "Zechariah," but Chapter 34 asserts that Daniel, Joel, and Zech. 9-14 all date to 175-163 B.C.; the Pastoral Epistles "were written later by a disciple of Paul" (121); and "scholars" suggest 1 and 2 Peter are pseudonymous.

The brevity of the chapters often undermines the very thing the author seeks to accomplish. Providing a one-page introductory story followed by a less than one-page overview of the book of Romans, for example, leaves the reader questioning just what that book really says. The same weakness permeates numerous chapters, leaving a too often felt sense of inadequate understanding.

Some printing errors occur: on page seven the preposition "of" is inadvertently omitted from the phrase "one of us," and "appreciate ours guide" (107) should be "appreciate our guide." On page 7 Cutrer refers to an occasion when an audience sang a hymn with "six verses," of which they were to sing "seven," and they concluded singing "all eight verses."

More difficulty is encountered in following his summary statements. Cutrer asserts that an overview of the Old Testament through his first fourteen chapters includes ten parts, and then illustrates that statement by saying these are "two units [that] are connected to seven that follow" (36). In chapter 22, however, he has eleven "building blocks" of the Old Testament which do not parallel his earlier division of ten (p. 53). In chapter 25 he summarizes the Old Testament in five "units" (60), which likewise do not parallel either of the earlier divisions. Rather than aiding reader comprehension, these descriptions create confusion.

While the synthetic approach of this book is one that I appreciate, use, and recommend, this book does not realize its stated goals. Other volumes will be of more help to the student of Scripture.

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Commending the Faith: The Preaching of D. L. Moody. Edited by Garth Rosell. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999, 1-56563-113-7, 263 pp., $16.95 paperback.

Garth Rosell, professor of church history at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has compiled and edited this set of sermons, talks, and prayers by Dwight L. Moody with the intention of having that voice of the 19th century heard again in another millennium.

The fifteen works that comprise this collection are grouped in clusters: sermons on conversion, sermons on the person and work of Christ, sermons on Christian service, talks on Scripture and prayer, and sermons on heaven. Though the span of this volume is broad and provides a good introduction to the public ministry of Moody, the homiletician would be better served with an exclusive focus upon what was clearly Moody's forte—evangelistic preaching. Such a concentration would have been appropriate in these days when there is both a need for preaching of that genre and a corresponding dearth of easily available material exemplifying that style. Nonetheless, there is much in this book that to delight and edify any preacher.

Not all of the sermons on conversion take the listener all the way to the point of trusting Christ as Savior: most move the hearer one step closer—creating a need for forgiveness or acceptance, clarifying the divinity of Jesus Christ, convicting of sin, explaining the atonement, etc. If one wonders why this is so, the answer might lie in Moody's *modus operandi:* rarely were these (or any of his other) sermons preached in isolation; evangelistic campaigns extended several days, and preachers, for the most part, were assured of a consistent audience. The evangelist could take his time developing and shaping his points, homiletically and rhetorically bringing his audience, step by step, to the saving knowledge of Christ, *Deo volente*. Yet, it would have been more profitable for the reader to have had, in one volume, a complete series of such messages, rather than a selection from various crusades that necessarily left some sermons open-ended. One wonders how Moody gave his "altar calls." How did he cast his final appeal for his audience to place their trust in Christ? What was the verbal style of his Spirit-directed persuasion?

Readers will be amazed at the storytelling prowess of this master narrator. Moody moves the emotions, thrills the heart, warns with poignancy, and exhilarates the imagination, all the while edifying the listener with spiritual truth. With pencil in hand, I tallied at least sixty stories from just eight

sermons—and some of them were quite detailed in their telling! There is a masterful recounting of the last hours of Christ in "The Death of Christ," from Moody's *The Way Home*. "I wish I could bring before you in living colors the sufferings and death of Christ," Moody rues, even as he proceeds, from the pulpit, to do exactly that—precisely what Mel Gibson so powerfully achieves with the camera in his *The Passion of the Christ*.
One must note that Moody's homiletical technique is somewhat "topical"—he is not expounding the text, giving full weight to its context, literary and rhetorical style, or to the theology behind the particular narrative text he is handling; instead, for the most part, his is an existential take-off from a single verse, that often fails to do justice to the complexities of the text. Though one might carp at this style, for his audience and for his evangelistic purpose Moody does a remarkable job. One wishes, however, that the sermons directed to believers would have plumbed the depths of the texts he was preaching from—giving the listener the whole counsel of God.

Rosell does us a great service not only in this compilation of sermons—some of which are hard to come by—but also by penning a thorough introduction (24 pages): a synopsis of Moody's life and times are given, but I was more taken by Rosell's brief essay on the "Reasons for Moody's Appeal." Those interested in rhetoric will profit from this depiction of the Aristotelian *ethos* of this great pulpiteer of yesteryear, Dwight Lyman Moody.

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Martin Luther King Jr. in the African American Preaching Tradition. By Valentino Lassiter. Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2001, 0-8298-1433-7, 123 pp., $12.95 paperback.

Martin Luther King Jr. in the African American Preaching Tradition is an excellent, concise yet exhaustive synthesis of the spiritual tradition of powerful African-American preaching from the slave preacher to the powerful oratory of Martin Luther King Jr. Lassiter takes the reader on a journey of the critical elements that make African American preaching so dynamic and unique to the worship experience of the African American church and culture. Regardless of the times, whether during the times of slavery or in our current cultural context, the dynamic preaching of the Word of God remains the center piece of African-American worship. According to Lassiter, whether the singing of a spiritual in slave times or the more contemporary gospel songs of today, getting a "Word from the Lord" gave

hope and sustenance to the people of God in the African-American church.

Lassiter points out in his preface that there are four distinctives (8-9) to African American preaching that have remained the same from slavery to the 20th century, as evidenced most poignantly by the preaching of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.: (1) The God of the African American worship has always been "the unquestionable sustainer of the world …therefore God remains a God of indivisible justice. (2) "The world not only maintains a well defined physical order; but there also exists a permanent moral order as well. 'Right' is always sure to reign over evil." (3) Regardless of the fickle nature of the world and humanity, "the Sustained and Gracious One is yet loving, caring, powerful, and remains in *full* control of the cosmos." (4) Finally, "in all situations, there exists a divine sense of unquestionable ability. This sense of divine jurisdiction is not without an extension of grace and mercy."

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the form of African-American preaching starting with the early Slave preachers by highlighting such distinctives as the Narrative/Story telling approach, the role of imagination, the involvement of repetition, and the rhythm/sermonic musical nature of African-American preaching. Lassiter also points out how the slave preacher not only preached in a way that addressed the evils of the day but celebrated the hope for the future. African-American preachers have always shown that salvation is not ancient history but current events. The African-American preacher tells the oppressed know that salvation is not only for the sweet bye and bye but for the nasty now and now.

Chapters 3 and 4 highlight how Martin Luther King Jr. continued to embody the distinctive marks of African-American preaching in his stirring messages. These chapters are rich with illustrations. Lassiter points out that the power of King's messages directly correlated to the carrying out of the traditions of earlier emphases of African-American preachers. Lassiter also explains in detail King's belief in the centrality of Scripture and the honest grappling with the text. Issues of context and hermeneutics of the Old and New Testament are also addressed. Chapter 5 then gives practical gives powerful reasons and practical suggestions how to continue the tradition in today's current culture.

I found this book to be a good read, well worth putting in one's library. My only objection is a clarification: King was biblical in his preaching but not necessarily expositional. King used the Bible but also used individuals and theologians as his sources of authority. Overall, well worth reading.

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Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching. By Joel B. Green and Michael Pasquarello III, eds. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003, 0-8010-2721-7, 198 pp., paperback.

Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching is a rare book that, on the surface, looks like a winner. It is not often that biblical scholars and homileticians combine their expertise in an effort to help preachers effectively communicate the Scriptures. May these efforts increase! Preachers benefit when disciplines unite. What is more, contemporary preachers are in desperate of homiletical help as they stand to address a largely narrative world as they hold a largely narrative bible. This book looks like it is about to hit a home run. As EHS readers crack open the cover, however, they may be a little disappointed.

I was disappointed to see that the editors chose to define narrative theologically: not to distinguish the biblical genres based on their literary characteristics. "In this reckoning, biblical texts - be they found in a narrative like Matthew's Gospel or a letter like Philemon - are situated contextually within the grand narrative of God's story" (36). The consequence of this theological approach is that all biblical literature is transformed into narrative literature. *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* has four chapters dedicated to helping readers understand and communicate Paul's letters and the book of revelation as narrative. This goes too far. Paul, John and the Holy Spirit did not choose to utilize the narrative genre when they contributed to the New Testament. They chose to use the genres of epistle and apocalyptic literature. Their choices should be respected.

I was also disappointed to find that the contributors to this book seem to deny the historicity of narrative events. To this reviewer, it is difficult to understand the significance of an event that did not actually occur.

What is more, the contributors to *Narrative Reading, Narrative Preaching* repeatedly denied that there was a single fixed meaning to a narrative text. This also seems problematic for the preacher. How can we say what God said if we cannot understand what he intended to say? How can we be sure that we do not end up preaching our own thoughts?

To be sure, the book also contains many positive elements. The chapter on the book of revelation by Charles Campbell is one of the most helpful that this reviewer has ever read on apocalyptic literature. William Willimon's transcripted narrative sermon is fresh, creative, insightful and suggestive. You will benefit by reading it. And Michael Pasquarello's chapter on inhabiting the story provides its readers with helpful insight into the

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