130 Essex Street
South Hamilton, MA 01982

The Journal of the
Evangelical Homiletics Society

The Journal of the
Evangelical Homiletics Society

Volume 4 Number 2 September 2004

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.

Subscriptions and back issues: *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* is published periodically for $20.00 per year. The Journal is published by the Evangelical Homiletics Society. For subscription and advertising information, please contact: Endel Lee, Managing Editor, *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Box 30, 3939 Gentilly Boulevard, New Orleans, LA 70126.

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

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

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

ISSN 1534-7478

evangelicalhomiletics.com

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We are Committed to the Sermon

by Scott M. Gibson

We spend a lot of time talking about, studying, examining, probing, and evaluating something that happens for a short amount of time mostly on Sunday mornings – the sermon. Some call it "twenty minutes to raise the dead." Others say that sermons are snoozers. Sometimes short sermons are sarcastically called sermonettes. These sermonettes are said to make Christianettes.

In spite of these more dower perspectives on preaching, we are scholars and preachers who are committed to the sermon. We think preaching is important. Preaching changes lives. Preaching is the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Preaching makes a difference.

Our commitment to the sermon is strong enough to take it seriously. We have taken the sermon sincerely to the extent that we have established an organization with the purpose to advance the cause of Biblical preaching. We have put our stake into the ground for the sermon.

The earnestness with which we take preaching is represented in this journal and the other initiatives of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. For one, the Annual Meeting is a valuable venue for those interested in preaching. Plenary sessions that stimulate one's thinking, papers that challenge our practice and perspectives, worship that feeds our souls, and relationships that encourage our common commitment help us in our work to develop our calling and ministries and also to strengthen those with whom we work and serve.

The journal is another venue for intellectual and spiritual

stimulation in our area of interest – preaching. Articles, a sermon, and book reviews comprise the content of the journal. Through these pages readers are encouraged to become the best professor and preacher they can be.

In this edition of the journal Daniel Sheard examines the relational exchange between the preacher and the listener. His study will stimulate readers to examine this aspect of preaching.

The second article by John V. Tornfelt takes a fresh look at the challenge of preaching with authority in a culture that rejects authority. He helps readers consider the influences upon listeners and preachers in the struggle with authority.

Similarly, Walter C. Kaiser looks at why preachers have shifted from an authoritative stance in their preaching as represented by making points. He looks at the root causes of the shift from authorial intent to experience.

The sermon is by Kenton C. Anderson, past president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. The sermon from 2 Corinthians 2:14-17 was Dr. Anderson's presidential sermon delivered at the 2003 Annual Meeting. He reminds preachers why we are committed to preaching.

Finally, the book reviews will provide readers with more books to read and recommend to the libraries of our colleges and seminaries. Please contact the book review editor, Jeff Arthurs, to suggest books for review.

We are committed to preaching. We have sunk our souls into the sermon. We want nothing more than that God's Church might be strengthened through our efforts.

Thank you for your commitment to the sermon. Our hope is that the Evangelical Homiletics Society will strengthen you in your work for the Gospel.

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.

Copyright Permission

Copyright is waived where reproduction of material from this Journal is required for classroom use by students. Please contact the General Editor for other inquires regarding copyright permission.

Advertising and Subscriptions

Please contact Endel Lee, Managing Editor, for all advertising and subscription inquiries. Subscription to the Journal is $20.00 per year. Back issues can be requested by contacting the Managing Editor.

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

Preaching in the *Hear* and Now: The Circumstantial Quality of the Preaching Engagement

by Daniel Sheard

(editor's note: Daniel Sheard is a Doctor of Philosophy candidate at Spurgeon's College, London, England. He currently serves as the Strategy Coordinator to French Europeans of Martinique with the Middle America and Caribbean Region of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention.)

Abstract

Looking at the oral nature of preaching, the author probes the ramifications of defining the sermon as a circumstantial meeting of the preacher, the hearers, and their God. When preaching is defined as an interpersonal engagement, delivery objectives turn toward the need to foster relational exchange. Preparatory energies become focused toward emotional capture in the immediate, and the message ultimately becomes a localized encounter in the *hear* and now.

Introduction
Enlarging the Definition of Preaching to Include Engagement[1]

Once upon a time some unsuspecting Jewish servants were sent out as a lynch mob to round up Jesus. They had difficulty fulfilling their task, because in their words, "Never man spake like this man."[2]

Spoken word delivered in the power of the Spirit by the Master of metaphor Himself left the mobsters verbally captured. Their concluding words echo Christian consensus about Jesus and

represent the communicative pinnacle to which most preachers of the gospel desire to rise, the point where one can say that the audience is awestruck and entranced by the message and God's use of the messenger. The church leader searches for the door through which he might find approaches to preaching that are so captivating that his message rivets the listener's attention by its simplicity and wonder. Preachers want what Jesus had, namely, that "the common people heard him gladly."[iii]

However, this simple attraction and engagement is difficult to find today. The reason, I believe, is that most sermonic paradigms have not begun with oral assumptions about the nature of words, with the fluid and metaphoric nature of language, but with text-based and text-centered orientations that are essentially framed in high levels of literacy and the reading/writing habits of preachers.[4]

Preaching as Circumstantial Delivery[5]

Preaching is a relational action. It is a meeting of people with their God, a relationship in perpetual construction, a communicative exchange always in the present, always delivered, never fully prepared. It is founded upon communicative expectations and exchange between speaker and hearer. The preacher seizes an audience in a particular place at a particular moment, and the two experience an "encounter"[6] in the immediate, definable here as a circumstantial embrace. The speaker anticipates an emotional meeting ahead of time by forecasting the listeners' cognitive, affective, and behavioral reactions (e.g. decision, consent, disagreement) to a given idea.

Engagement demands that the preacher recognize listener autonomy. Audiences are active during the listening process and practice prediction, deciphering, anticipation, interpretation, clarification, disagreement, rhetorical questioning, etc. So while

there may be advanced preparation for engagement by a speaker who wants to foster encounter, the reality is that preaching is ultimately vulnerable to listener response.

The consequences of this idea are several. First, sermon preparation changes significantly. The speaker is obligated not only to prepare his communicative idea, but also to prepare his thinking to verbally take hold of people. Second, engagement changes delivery mechanics. The speaker recognizes that his delivery is not primarily concerned with communicating an idea but addresses ideological and emotional capture. It does this by taking advantage of auditors' listening habits. Third, the speaker's expectations are altered. He no longer hopes that the people will just understand his concept, but that God will use him and his message to build a relationship in the immediate. Engagement asks, "Are we meeting together — God, the listener, and I?"

In seeing preaching as a liaison rather than a monologue or a dialog, engagement introduces the aspect of relationship and emotion. The speaker seeks more than ideological or dialogical connection. He wants personal involvement with the listener. Consequently, the preacher alters his method and content to produce this rapport.

By highlighting emotional exchange, the focus shifts from an informationally oriented delivery to a relational one, from an explanation to an invitation, from a textual clarification to a hermeneutical encounter.

This reality also changes the way preaching should be taught. Pedagogy must be constructed around relational exchange and not information transfer. Historically, teaching preaching has often revolved around the organization of material. By contrast, engagement revolves around constructing encounter. Moreover, the ideological sense of the text, something traditionally viewed

as paramount in expositional method, gives way to the emotive export and practical relevance of biblical material. Information yields to motivation and obedience.

An engagement model recognizes that relational exchange is subject to communication factors that are not based in the speaker or his words. Connection is largely a byproduct of certain *listener-centered dynamics*, namely: the correspondence of spoken words with listener experience, the association of ideas with the material world, the coping of the listener with ideological or emotional tension, the listener's anticipation of the resolution of plot, and the desire for disclosure.

When a preacher accepts the idea that communication is always circumstantial, the nature of the sermonic task changes. The sermon is no longer a bundle of prepared ideas shared with listeners, but includes a series of verbal invitations to experience Christ. The fundamental element in the delivery context is an audience that desires encounter. Consequently, the need for engagement should shape the sermon itself.

A preaching model that takes advantage of emerging, circumstantial material requires: first, a strong anticipation of listener expectations; second, speaker freedom to recreate the sermon at the moment of delivery; and third, skills to interpret and adapt to what is happening in all the different contexts within the setting. Preaching is no longer simply about the transmission of textual meaning. "Preaching the word" involves improving relationship with God. The task of the preacher evolves into orchestrating a connection, an engagement.

Preachers who see the sermon as circumstantial engagement view their task from the vantage point of the auditor and construct a message that has *relational cadence*. This means that speaking is framed not only to facilitate listener decoding, but also position the listener to respond to interpersonal clues.

The preacher adopts a delivery mindset that involves interpreting a text or idea *to someone*, not simply *for someone*. A preacher who communicates *to someone* treats the listener like an individual who needs to meet God in the midst of whatever informational exchange takes place. The value is in the meeting, the engagement.

Re-conceiving the Preaching Engagement

Preaching has been historically viewed as a process of preparation-delivery-reception. Our theological vernacular unwittingly betrays the modern concept of the sermon. In the English speaking West, sermons are *prepared* by means of textual analysis, summary, and written outlining. Preachers then *deliver* the product already *prepared*. Lastly, that delivered product is *heard* or received by a relatively passive listener.

I would like to redefine the "sermon," or "preaching" more exactly, as an *inventive* (i.e. creative) poetic process delivered with verbal *engagement* in a delivery context. Engagement demands speaker sensitivity to both contextual variables and audience needs. The speaker is not *delivering* a sermon, but engaging people in the immediate.

It is my contention that all sermons are constructed the moment they are delivered, regardless of whether or not they are prepared in advance. This is because sermons are oral, not written. They are spoken by a preacher and heard by people.

Creating a sermon is an oral exercise, and any type of preparation, whether written or memorized, is only preparatory for delivery when the sermon is actually constructed (spoken). Rosenberg's treatise on folk preachers approaches this concept when he says, "for the spiritual preacher the moment of composition is the performance."[7] For me, this definition is applicable for all preachers, not just the spontaneous folk preacher.

Traditionally, preaching is conceived and executed as a step-by-step exercise and not as a process model where there is constant revision to delivery ideas. Because of the preacher's conditioning with respect to sermon preparation, he arrives with a prepared outline or text and basically delivers what was conceived in advance with little change based on the immediate circumstances. He views his task as one of idea preparation-delivery. It should be, however, preparation-observation-revision-engagement-revision-engagement. Often, a preacher's ability and openness in preparing for engagement or for reading the contextual setting at the very moment of delivery is minimal.

From the moment a speaker decides he will deliver a sermon until the time he opens his mouth, he makes choices. Most often, these choices are about *what* he wants to say and *how* he wants to say it. Unfortunately, he is not trained to ask himself questions about engagement: What do I need to say or do so that these people cannot escape an encounter with God? Will the audience be able to decode this message and still pay attention? What environmental realities can I integrate into the message to make it more living and present?

Conservative evangelical preachers often conceive of preaching preparation as the *management of sermonic material beforehand*. However, engagement involves more than message management. It is an interactive process. It is not simply speaking. It is first assessing, synthesizing, and embracing the hearing community. The type of theologizing required as a base for engagement springs from a proper view of the local context.[8] At the core of contextualization[9] is the necessity to focus "on the role that circumstances play in shaping one's response to the gospel."[10] The attention given to cultural adaptation has historically been referred to by the terms: "localization," "contextualization," indigenization," and "inculturation,"[11] and what was developed at the grass roots level was referred to as "indigenous theology," "ethnotheology," "contextual theology," and "local theology."[12]

Ultimately, to properly put an idea into an experiential or relational form requires localization. The verbal utterance, whether figured or discursive, must obtain its shape from the pool of local signifiers. In a similar way, the interpretation of the message by listeners is defined by the community's sense of language and how they might interpret words from within their cultural setting.[13]

Contrastingly, abstraction militates against engagement. The skill of abstraction is mastered by very few, and the principle-to-example bridge commonly used in some churches, where people extrapolate concrete application from propositions, is not traversed by many. Usually, advanced stages of literacy increase a capacity for abstraction because thinking skills are refined and modified by a print-orientation. Printed literature changes the way people think. McLuhan says, "the alphabet is an aggressive and militant absorber and transformer of cultures."[14] People who are more accustomed to objectifying truth in a reading process have an easier time following a sermon sequenced by propositions.

The reality is that the preacher is often among the most literate and adept at abstraction within the four walls of the church. He is operating out of what Richard Jensen calls "Gutenberg hermeneutics" and "Gutenberg homiletics."[15] Most hearers, by contrast, are functioning out of experiences, images, and relationships.

The delivery philosophy of the educated preacher can create enormous distance between him and the congregation because of his tendency to neglect the simplicity of the common person. Abstract principle tends to translate into a transcendent theology when in fact most listeners want to meet God in the immanence of the moment.

The wise preacher who desires to engage people, intentionally works against his tendency to use abstraction. A consistent

immersion in print media by the preacher can deform his perception of those who have to listen to his message. Consequently, he regularly reminds himself that messages become more relevant when they are tied to the physical world and the circumstantial environment.

Redefining Preaching

Definitions of preaching should be descriptive of the act of engagement, not explanatory statements about the premeditated structuring or verbal arrangement of the words as seen in an inscribed, text form. Text-based definitions of the sermon proceed from certain views of literacy and fail to adequately recognize that preaching is encounter.

In addition, preaching is not written words, but the spoken sound to people. It contains intonation, intention, hesitation, emotive subtlety, volume, pitch, accentuation, slurring, sequencing, and a host of other non-written elements.

Yet in spite of these realities, literacy controls how many traditionally define preaching. The societal memory of the history of Christian preaching as a text-based methodology, makes it difficult to describe preaching any other way. Churchgoing people assume that delivering a sermon is explaining meanings discovered through textual/exegetical method. While I assume that preaching is the delivery of a message based on the biblical text, I also assume that literacy has destroyed the unique relational aspects of purer orality in the immediate. The ever-present historical memory of text-oriented Christianity imposes an extraordinary influence on preaching form. Since theologians have employed text-based deductive methods for two thousand years, preaching definitions are sometimes unconsciously linked to certain forms of organizationally defined delivery.

To take this idea even further, the vocabulary that defines preaching has evolved around word arrangement and structures of logic. Sermons are often defined as being inductive, deductive, narrative, expository, or doctrinal. It is entirely possible, however, to invent other preaching categories that are not based in sermonic structure itself but in circumstantial factors. One might ask: Is the preaching verbally interactive preaching, networked/multi-speaker preaching, contextually nuanced preaching, figured-participatory preaching, audience-ignored preaching, or listener response generated preaching? Grammatically speaking, the word "preach" is a verb, denoting an action. Preaching should not be defined by the logical arrangement the words display when they are written down before or after the fact.

George Whalley in his book *Poetic Process* makes the assumption that "art never assumes the propositional form."[16] If this is true, most sermons are not art. Jesus, by contrast, often spoke without propositions. His narrative artistry is a tropical model of oral, sermonic discourse. From a textual standpoint, scholars define most of it as parable or similitude. However, it can also be defined as engagement discourse, confrontational metaphor, disclosure narrative, or concealing delivery

Scholarship chooses not to define parabolic stories and sayings according to their situational purpose, because there is a great risk of falling into the vacuum of intention. The problem of intention revolves around the so-called irrelevance of authorial intent. The intentional fallacy implies that regardless of the purpose of the speaker, ultimately, meaning is constructed in the mind of the listener. Consequently, one cannot define with any certainty the performative aspects of speech, what Jesus' intended outcome was when He preached. Moreover, there is always a multiplicity of purposes in any given biblical text. As a result, sermonic systems have rested on the certainty of definitions that are historically proven, that are organizationally classifiable, and that are shown to be neat.

When one defines preaching as "circumstantial discourse,"[17] a sort of fusion of "poetic process" and delivery environment, there are unique definitional problems.[18] There is a renewed need for a taxonomy of sermonic mode. Sermons as they are now being practiced in the current flood of narrative methods, need a precise as well as broad classification system. The term "narrative sermon" is not adequate to describe the circumstantial aspect of sermonic discourse. We are not helped by the fact that the borders between the narrative genre itself and other genres are not clear.[19]

The engagement sermon enters categorically into the adjoining genres of orality, namely the figurative world outside literary narrative or sequentially outlined delivery. Within that adjacent world are poetic sermons such as the chanted sermon of the Afro-American, the extended tropical form of the parabolic sermon, the role-play, the extended similitude, a protracted riddle sermon, a narrative synecdochic example, metonymic sermon,[20] extended personifications/mimicking, dramatized allegory, prophetic/poetic discourse, visionary/apocalyptic deliveries, extended ironies or hyperboles, "anecdotal tales,"[21] sermons for one person (with the rest of the audience looking on),[22] or a host of other possibilities that are, could be, and should be developed.

Preaching in the *Hear* and Now

Preachers who aspire to communicate well seek engagement, that simultaneous and mystical resonance of their words, divine truth, and revelatory surprise in the understanding of the listener. When the preacher's message rings true with both the listener's experience and the voice of God, they vibrate together like a harmonic. That is engagement, a personal meeting in the *hear* and now.

This model clarifies the nature of preaching as a relational discipline and not an informational task. It involves a vibrant,

personal call to encounter the living Christ along with the speaker.[23] This communal idea of exchange draws attention to both the unavoidable obligation of the preacher to engineer an assembly of the hearer with her God as well as the potentially intimate interaction of speaker and audience.

The physical setting becomes central to this model of preaching, and consequently, the aspect of immediacy in delivery narrows the interchange aspect of preaching to one of "apocalyptic" engagement.[24] The importance of the circumstantial quality of the meeting comes to the forefront of the preacher's communicative task because the encounter is localized. It is not simply auditory and cognitive exchange but is also a physical and material meeting of people with their God in a hall, in a home, or under a tree.

Notes

1. While the word 'engagement' can imply receptor involvement or listener "*negotiation*" with the message, my use of the term describes the speaker's intentional goal of interpersonal contact (Stewart M. Hoover, "Religion, Media and Identity: Theory and Method in Audience Research on Religion and Media," *Mediating Religion: Conversations in Media, Religion and Culture*, ed. Jolyon Mitchell and Sophia Marriage (London: T & T Clark, 2003), 14, 19 [italics his]).
2. John 7:46.
3. Mark 12:37.
4. Implicit in this supposition is the belief that sermons are often logically arranged according to text-based notions of sequence and not according to oral/auditory notions of deciphering and just plain public interest. Preachers have moved away from the "primacy of speech" and the reality that "speaking is universal, writing is not" (Ronald Wardhaugh, *The Contexts of Language* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1976), 23).
5. The term "circumstantial discourse" is the way in which Paul Zumthor describes the performance milieu of oral poetry (Paul Zumthor, *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*, Kathryn Murphy-Judy, trans., "Foreword" by Walter J. Ong (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 117.
6. C. Clifton Black, "Four Stations en Route to a Parabolic Homiletic," *Interpretation* 54 (2000): 388.
7. Bruce Rosenberg, *The Art of the American Folk Preacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 47. The term "spiritual preacher" in this sentence is a technical term to describe a preacher that practices "spontaneous oral composition" while relying "solely" on the Holy Spirit for content (Rosenberg 4ff, 110).
8. See Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985) and Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1992). Consistent in the works on contextualization from a missiological perspective is the near complete absence of a preaching form that adequately permits localization. The consequence is that there is a *theoretical* model for contextualization but not a *practical* model for verbal delivery.

9. The problem of contextualization was introduced "in 1972 with the publication of the Theological Education Fund . . . report entitled *Ministry in Context*" and addressed the importance of "contextualizing the gospel" (Krikor Haleblian, "The Problem of Contextualization," *Missiology* 11.1 (1983): 95). Contextualization involves the "complex relationship between message, context, and meaning" for which there are historically two important models: the "translational model" of dynamic equivalence and the "semiotic model" (Haleblian 104-108). Later, other models were developed: the "anthropological model," the "praxis model," the "synthetic model," the "transcendental model," (Bevans vii-viii), and the "adaptation model" (Schreiter 9). In dealing with the issues of contextualizing through metaphoric preaching, see for example Okota Longelo's *La contexualisation du message chretien dans les milieux negro-africain chez les Tetela en particulier: Le cas du marriage coutumier a christianiser*, (Th.D diss., Universität ?übingen, 1989) and Louis J. Luzbetak, S.V.D, "Unity in Diversity: Ethnotheological Sensitivity in Cross-Cultural Evangelism," *Missiology* 4.2 (1976): 207-16. Renck's *Contextualization of Christianity and Christianization of Language* contains a masterful discussion of the historical breadth of what he calls "adaptation," and particularly the Lutheran struggle to locally metaphorize Christian theology in the highlands of Papua New Guinea (Günther Renck, *Contextualization of Christianity and Christianization of Language: A Case Study from the Highlands of Papua New Guinea*, (Verlag der Ev. Luth. Mission Erlagen, 1990). In the oralization of their catechism, it became necessary to transform the preaching method into narration and ultimately develop an oral theology (Renck 88, 173). On the similar topic of the nature of contextual meaning, Herman Parret draws the important distinction between the talking about the term *context* in a theory of meaning as opposed to the many uses of the term in constructing a theory of *understanding* (Herman Parret, *Contexts of Understanding*, Belgian National Science Foundation (Amsterdam: John Benjamins B. V., 1980), 76). B. Siertsema makes a similar argument, when he says that "a word is mostly used in a larger whole as part of a longer utterance which in its turn is embedded in a concrete situation. Word, group, phrase, sentence and the wider context, as well as the situation, limit and restrict the many possible interpretations of a word at a certain moment . . ." "Language and World View (Semantics for Theologians)," *Bible Translator* 20 (1969): 9.
10. Schreiter 1.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid. 5-6.
13. Schreiter's discussion of semiotics and its value for *understanding* contextual culture is valuable at the level of comprehension but does little to help the preacher "localize" his speech (Schreiter 49ff).
14. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 48.
15. Richard A. Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-literate Age* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Co., Inc., 1995), 7.
16. George Whalley, *Poetic Process* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1953), 3.
17. Zumthor 117.
18. "Poetic process" is universal across the disciplines with only differences in "medium" (Whalley xxix).
19. The "artificially draw[n] lines within the unlimited field of narrative discourses . . . are simultaneously self-defining and yet ceaselessly moving. Modal distinctions between prose and verse . . ., between the spoken and the sung, lead nowhere" (Zumthor 36-37). Epic and narrative poetry are good examples of genre fusions (V. H. Collins, *A Book of Narrative Verse* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), xi). This openness of definition permits the production of preaching forms that do not have to be categorized by genre or to fall within rigid figure labels. Zumthor believes that the unifying factor in oral poetic forms is that they are all "mimetic" (Zumthor 39).
20. I can see the utility of constructing a narrative sermon in which a character is representative

of a greater whole (part for whole). The preacher could develop and execute an extended synecdochic parable or allegory or make some kind of metonymic substitution in name where the principle character, for example, represents someone or something greater than himself.

21. Zumthor 65.
22. Ibid. 184.
23. Col. 1:27-28; 2 Cor. 4:5; Gal. 1:16; Phil. 1:15-21; John 5:39-47.
24. Brian K. Blount's "Preaching the Kingdom: Mark's Apocalyptic Call for Prophetic Engagement," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 15 (1994): 33. Blount correctly identifies the eschatological sense of the preaching task by highlighting the *urgency* of kingdom proclamation.

Preaching with Authority When You Don't Have It

by John V. Tornfelt

Abstract

The authority which preachers were granted in previous generations has gradually disappeared. Pluralism, hermeneutical shifts, and the impact of visual communication has contributed to this demise, leaving them to wonder how much authority they have. Proclaiming God's Word with a new authority can be accomplished in the twenty-first century when pastoral responsiveness is demonstrated and appropriate communication skills are utilized.

Introduction

"Question Authority." Though I saw this bumper sticker for the first time several years ago, it reappears every so often while driving on the interstate or walking through a parking lot. After not seeing one for some time, I recently came across another one and figured the owner had never removed it from his car. But it wasn't faded or scratched. It looked new. "Question Authority" was back. Or maybe, it never left. As I watch the evening news, issues of authority continue to present themselves and I'm surprised revised stickers have not appeared advocating "Question Authority More Than Ever," or perhaps, "Defy Authority."

Am I being facetious? Certainly. But I'm not off base because authority is being questioned, challenged or defied by people from all walks of life. Whenever authoritative leadership is exercised in families, schools or government, rather than acquiesce it is not unusual for people to respond by saying "wait a minute" or "I disagree." Authority is not perceived as something to embrace but to cast doubt upon or confront when

deemed necessary. Throughout history, leaders have used their authority for numerous reasons and in many instances, for self-serving and destructive purposes. As a result, it can be seen as limiting, oppressive, dehumanizing and an unjust exercise of power because it is understood that no person, group or tradition can speak authoritatively for all people.

"Question Authority" is heard in our churches as well. Congregations have fallen victim which should not come as a surprise when leaders behave in sinful ways. Peruse a recent edition of *Christianity Today* and you should not be shocked to find a report of a major denomination in the midst of conflict, sexual abuse on the mission field, or the mishandling of church finances. You wonder how churches which affirm God's authority can have such tarnishing incidents. "Hypocrites" is the shrill cry of the outsider. You can understand why people are not eager to join our ranks. Should you expect someone to embrace what you are not practicing yourself?

However, the questioning of authority characterizes churches even when holiness, integrity and faithfulness are evident. Leaders are doing their jobs with excellence and zeal. Ministry is being accomplished. Lives are being transformed. Heaven is rejoicing and you would think earth would be too. Still, leaders are having their authority tested. Instead of confidence and support, there are questions, challenges and scrutiny. In previous generations, a certain authority was inherently granted to clergy. However that authority has been slowly shrinking to the size of congregational expectations. The winds of cultural change are not only blowing outside our churches but have made their way into the house of the Lord.

Before we start wringing our hands in fretfulness and dismay, let's not forget history has a way of repeating itself. This questioning of authority is nothing new. The Corinthian church was squabbling over apostolic authority and Paul had to plead

with them so as to avoid greater divisions within their ranks. In 1 Corinthians he writes: "One of you says, 'I follow Paul'; another, 'I follow Apollos'; another, 'I follow Cephas'; still another, 'I follow Christ.'" Paul does not claim any personal authority in this conflict and instead points to the cross to underscore their folly and declares, "we preach Christ crucified."

Questioning Authority

Where does this questioning of authority leave men and women as they stand in their pulpits? They are in unfamiliar places because the security of being recognized as a person of influence has been ebbing away. David Buttrick aptly describes the situation:

> Traditional Protestantism rests on a working model of authority involving Word and Spirit, but the synthesis of Word and Spirit has collapsed, torn apart by cultural splits between reason and feeling, between so-called objective and subjective truth. No wonder we struggle in a crisis of authority! Of course, Catholics are facing many of the same problems in discussions of the role of tradition. Let us be emphatic: We wrestle not with particular notions of "authority," but with the whole authority model per se.[1]

Likewise, Fred Craddock states in *As One Without Authority* that "no longer can the preacher presuppose the general recognition of her authority as a clergy, or the authority of her institution, or the authority of scripture."[2] So if you think people are listening on the basis of ministerial position, you are naively mistaken. The authority which may have been granted in another generation has been replaced by questioning, suspicion and in some instances, disrespect. Instead of attentively sitting with Bibles open, waiting to hear what you have to say, people may be slouching in the pew with arms crossed against their chests.

Doubts and skeptical comments are swirling inside their heads. As Will Willimon states, "American culture now determines the boundaries of the church's speech."[3] It is a new day in which to preach! Craddock believes understanding this new context is critical and states that "unless recognized by the minister and met with a new format, his sermons will at best seem museum pieces"[4] Consequently, you should remind yourself the next time you take your place behind the pulpit on a Sunday morning that you are not necessarily standing with the authority of yesterday.

Against this backdrop, we are called to preach, convinced the gospel is "the power of God for salvation of everyone who believes" (Romans 1:18). But how? Can it be done in this juncture in history? What authority do we actually have? Must we compromise our preaching? Does it need to be reduced to a pious dribbling of thoughts so as to not offend anyone? Or are we just supposed to express our doubts, musings and questions in the hope that a responsive chord is struck and someone might happen to have a transformational experience?

I believe biblical authority is foundational to preaching. But my conviction is not necessarily shared by the people who sit in our pews on Sunday mornings. Do I want men and women to trust in the authority of God's Word? Absolutely. Is it my desire that individuals listen with open minds and hearts for their spiritual welfare rather than challenge what is spoken? Again, yes. But not everyone is at the same place. While confidence in Scripture is at the core of my life, I dare not assume the same with my listeners. Nor should I take for granted that people respect my authority (or it has been given in the first place). Declarations such as, "The Bible tells us," or "The Lord said" does not improve anyone's listening skills but may work against me, causing others to perceive me as a threat rather than someone worth hearing. Even careful exegesis and impassioned preaching may be counter-productive when perceived as pulpit

bullying.
As a servant of God's kingdom, I am committed to the authority of the Scriptures and submit to its clarity as well as its mystery. When preparing to preach, I rejoice in the Word's timelessness and power. But in the back of my mind I am still asking, "How much authority do I really have?" In Matthew 28, Christ said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me" (v.18). His words are my marching orders and He has promised me the ability to carry them out (v.20). But how much authority is mine? While the Lord has all authority, I only have some. Just how much authority in an anti-authority world is the question.

The Demise of Authority

What dynamics have contributed to this gradual demise of authority? What developments have led to this challenging environment? Three streams of influence are at the core of the crumpling – pervasive pluralism, hermeneutical uncertainties, and the power of visual communication. Though these influences should not dictate how clergy craft and deliver their sermons, neither can they be ignored. To proclaim God's Word in the twenty-first century with sustaining effectiveness necessitates accounting for these dynamics.

Pervasive Pluralism

Over the years, I have been involved in conversations with individuals who bemoan the changes in our society. The comfort of a Christianized society is eroding before their eyes. They feel strangely irrelevant in a world they believe ought to be their own. They recognize that people no longer sense an obligation to belong to a religious community or that they are even supposed to believe in God. When I share my thoughts of pluralism becoming more pervasive in the future, they nod in agreement but remain displeased.

But pluralism is nothing new. It has existed for centuries. God's people have frequently found themselves in diverse settings, and not surprisingly, doing well in many instances. When called, Abraham was promised that he would be blessed and his name made great among the nations. The Israelites were surrounded by numerous gods while enslaved in Egypt. Unfortunately, Moses had to continue to deal with these deities during the Exodus because instead of leaving them behind, the Israelites brought them along. Elijah confronted the priests of Baal and prophets of Asherah on Mt. Carmel when he called down fire from heaven. While in Babylon, Daniel stood firm while surrounded by a plurality of gods. Peter confessed his allegiance to Jesus against the backdrop of Roman polytheism. At the Areopagus, Paul openly preached to the Greeks with their deities surrounding him. And so for the people of God to find themselves situated in a pluralistic setting (and prospering) is not without precedent.

Accompanying this rise of pluralism has been what Peter Berger refers to as "a concomitant loss of commonality and/or 'reality.'"[5] What was once considered to be real is not necessarily viewed in the same way. Historically, the established groups of society (i.e. churches) existed as monopolies and were legitimized by their ability to exercise some degree of societal control. But as Berger writes with Thomas Luckmann, pluralism has helped "undermine the change-resistant efficacy of traditional definitions of reality."[6] Reality, as we have known it, has changed and will only continue to change. Christianity is not as dominant as in previous generations. Ronald Cram offers that we live not in the world of Christianity but "Christianities" which have "become just one sect among many, without a position of privilege or prominence."[7] Furthermore, with the increased immigration of people from around the world with different worldviews and value systems which clash with the established order, it is not difficult to foresee the continued collapse of the hegemonic

systems of the past.[8]

So what is pluralism? Assigned a wide range of meanings, it is a philosophical perspective which emphasizes diversity rather than homogeneity, differences instead of sameness, and multiplicity over unity. Nicholas Rescher defines it as "the doctrine that any substantial question admits of a variety of plausible but mutually conflicting responses."[9] For Os Guinness, pluralism is "a process by which the number of options in the private sphere of modern society rapidly multiplies at all levels, especially at the level of worldview, faith, and ideologies."[10] Advocates contend there is no reality "out there" and even if there is such a reality, it cannot be known or experienced because reality is always perspectival and subjective. Truth can only be known from one's vantage point and is limited by previous understandings and personal experiences. Such socially constructed perspectives and ideologies are nearly impossible to harmonize and as Berger and Luckmann contend "encourage both skepticism and innovation and (are) thus inherently subversive of the taken-for-granted reality of the traditional status quo."[11]

This widely-encompassing system offers a major challenge to preaching because it contends "any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is necessarily wrong."[12] This understanding embraces positions united in their rejection of not only objective truth but even its possibility. "The only absolute creed is the creed of pluralism. No religion has the right to pronounce itself right or true, and the others false, or even (in the majority view) relatively inferior."[13] In a society such as ours with innumerable voices, a plethora of worldviews is inevitable. As awkward and problematic as it may be to live alongside of one another, tolerance is not simply preferable but essential.[14]

Historically when our nation seemed not as diverse, the dominant culture was still quite tolerant. Acceptance was given

to different people groups even though it was perhaps done grudgingly. The thinking was along the lines that as Americans we should tolerate immigrants and diverse social groups with their strange ways for reasons that are beneficial for everyone. Justice may or may not have entered the equation. Tolerance was offered because the advantages were perceived to outweigh the disadvantages. As a result, the edges of the status quo got smudged so as to include people who were considered more "other" than "us." Over time, movements at the fringes of society have grown and multiplied so that the "others" are now considered mainstream and diversity has become a way of life. With the continued global influx of people, the establishment has had to bend even more. This development is welcomed by many, resisted by some, and begrudgingly accepted by others. Regardless, pluralism is the reality and tolerance is deemed a price worth paying, especially if the alternative is intolerance.[15]

Unfortunately, this shift does not end with acceptance. Tolerance has taken on new meaning. Whereas it once meant respecting the differences that exist between people, tolerance has evolved to mean "a dogmatic abdication of truth-claims and a moralistic adherence to moral relativism – departure from either of which is stigmatized as intolerance."[16] In other words, if I am to be truly tolerant then I must jettison my convictions about God's truth.

This shift should lead us to ask if tolerance has gone too far. Is there a limit? After all, is not Christianity about truth that is grounded in history? Meic Pearse states:

> Where the old tolerance allowed hard differences on religion and morality to rub shoulders and compete freely in the public square, the new variety wishes to lock them all indoors as matters of private judgment; the public square must be given over to indistinctness. If the old tolerance was, at least, a

> real value, the new, intolerant "tolerance" might better be described as an antivalue; it is a disposition of hostility to any suggestion that one thing is "better" than another, or even that any way of life needs protected space from its alternatives.[17]

The implications are frightening. It means people, including the ones sitting in our pews, will not believe the exclusivity of the gospel. They will not recognize pseudo-spiritualities or be offended by anti-Christian ideas. Donald Carson comments: "No matter how wacky, no matter how flimsy their intellectual credentials, no matter how subjective and uncontrolled, no matter how blatantly self-centered, no matter how obviously their gods have been manufactured to foster human self-promotion, the media will treat them with fascination and even a degree of respect."[18] Sadly, people's thinking will indiscriminately flow with the crowd. They will not be discerning enough to recognize the foolishness but tolerant to the point of amalgamating spurious and heretical ideas with orthodox doctrine.

Not only is tolerance advocated in pluralistic settings but openness is expected. In order for the quest for truth to continue, openness must prevail. To this point, Allan Bloom comments:

> Openness – and the relativism that makes it the only plausible stance in the face of various claims to truth and various ways of life and kinds of human beings – is the great insight of our times. The true believer is the real danger. The study of history and of culture teaches that the entire world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not think you are right

at all.[19]

With such openness, there is no possibility of making a truth-claim because if you venture to offer one, you are no longer open. Openness is hostile to assertive claims. Anyone who affirms the absolute nature of God's truth is looked at with disbelief and bafflement. As a result, I may feel intimidated to make a biblically-grounded statement (and do so with conviction). I can be made to feel as if I've come from another universe by the ways people respond. It isn't that I do not have well-examined and deeply-held beliefs but I am out of sync with a world advocating tolerance (and not tolerating anyone who sounds the least bit closed minded and intolerant).

George Hunsberger states:

> Christians imagining any form of direct public assertion of the Christian message do not have to be told that it will meet with a cloud of questions about its legitimacy. Besides pushing them toward silence, the atmosphere erodes the strength of their own inner conviction that the Bible's account of things can be taken to be a valid option for construing the world.[20]

In other words, I may be uncomfortable believing with the certainty as I did in the past because as Fred Craddock states "those who speak with strong conviction on a topic are suspected of the heresy of premature finality."[21] I can still believe (and I do) but common sense tells me to be tentative. Any claim to factuality needs to be qualified or tempered and perhaps, is best held as a private opinion. If I find myself thinking this way, I am cowering to pluralism's pressure to be tolerant and open. And if so, can I preach with any sense of authority?

Hermeneutical Quagmire

A second challenge to our authority in preaching is hermeneutical. As a field of study, there are numerous theories.

Johnson Liem writes:

> Theories of how to interpret texts abound in today's world. They can be inspiring yet frustrating. Inspiring, because they give you a base to work from, yet frustrating because we are suffering from theory overload syndrome. Another danger is that theory has displaced the study of literature itself and ends up becoming an exercise in ventriloquilism! Without our realizing it, instead of theories becoming our servants, they have become our masters. Theories currently advanced seem to raise more questions than provide answers and more problems than solutions. In the end they claim too much but fail to deliver what they promised just like historical criticism.[22]

Consequently, preachers who desire to be faithful in their proclamation can feel as if they are plodding through a hermeneutical quagmire. Without question, discovering the meaning of a passage can be very demanding. Hermeneutics is complex. It is an art, science and spiritual activity. Where one begins and another one ends is not easily discerned. Questions abound and simplistic answers are not sufficient. For instance, who "produces" the text? Is it the author? Is the Holy Spirit responsible as 2 Timothy 3:16 suggests? How about the reader or the faith community itself? If so, what is the relationship between the author and reader(s)? Or perhaps, does the text independently "produce" meaning?

History is a reminder that variety has characterized hermeneutical approaches. Interpretations have run the spectrum from orthodox to heretical. They have been spurious, interesting and laughable. During medieval times when hermeneutics was characterized by allegory, passages were thought to contain potentially as many as four meanings with some being far-fetched and improbable. With this profusion of

misleading meanings, it is understandable why the Reformation scholars rejected the allegorical approach and employed the *sola scriptura* principle to guide their hermeneutics. Of this shift, Martin Luther remarked: "No violence is to be done to the words of God, whether by man or angel; but they are to be retained in their simplest meaning wherever possible, and to be understood in their grammatical and literal sense unless the context plainly forbids, lest we give our adversaries occasion to make a mockery of all the Scriptures."[23]

The Reformers' emphasis on the clarity and understandability of the Bible led to the idea that not only did the Word of God have a plain sense but anyone could grasp the basic meanings. In His graciousness, God accommodated to human capacities and whatever limitations existed, they were not insurmountable. So with their Bibles in hand and as John Calvin would contend "the inward testimony of the Spirit," interpretation was possible for everyone.[24]

With the rise of higher criticism during the 19th century, the Bible's authority was increasingly being questioned. Rather than statements being taken at face value and considered as trustworthy, scholars called for the reconstruction of the actual events. What were the facts behind the recorded data? They argued what happened is not necessarily what is recorded. Biblical texts are reflections of the writers' interpretations of events or what they understood someone to have said. During the 20th century, scholars continued in this quest and argued the accounts are true, partially accurate, questionable or erroneous. The need was for interpreters to get behind the reported world of the text to the actual occurrences and words. Today, liberal scholars continue to engage in Bultmann-like searches to demythologize the stories and make them more realistic and acceptable. Their research may appear oppositional to an evangelical approach but not necessarily because they share a common goal of discovering the meaning of the text by entering

the worlds of such characters as Abraham, Moses, Isaiah, Jesus and Paul. Though their conclusions may differ widely, their intentions can appear much the same.

Knowing the mind and heart of God is at the heart of preaching. Understanding the reasons behind a narrative, poem, prophecy or epistle is crucial to the task. What was the context? Who was involved? How did the events unfold? What was the author seeking to achieve with his audience? Hermeneutics is a discipline which must be done with integrity, diligence, wisdom and sensitivity to Spirit of God. However the hermeneutical quagmire is thick because culture is shifting or as a postmodernist might say, we do not know things quite like we used to know them. Whereas the hermeneutics of modernity believed that ideas could be known, contemporary approaches reflect the pervasiveness of pluralism. Individuals are more willing to be inconclusive and are not especially concerned about authorial intent. With this type of hermeneutic, there is not necessarily a point to ascertain but several points worthy of consideration. Patrick Slattery writes:

> Historical, textual, artistic, and autobiographical interpretation in the postmodern era all acknowledge a double-edged dimension of clarity and ambiguity in hermeneutics. However, unlike modern empiricists who demand unbiased certainty and scientific proof, postmodern scholars celebrate the irony of interpretation by recognizing that ambiguity is integral to the human condition and the natural world. Postmodern hermeneutics affirms the primacy of subjective understanding over objective knowledge and conceives of understanding as an ontological (study of being) problem rather than an epistemological (study of knowledge) problem.[25]

This approach is not author-centered but reader-focused.[26] Though a writer's words have value, the emphasis has shifted to

the readers who are to "mingle" themselves with a text. In so doing, readers are capable of producing their own meanings. Instead of our being transformed by God's Word, Anthony Thiselton states texts "suffer transformation at the hands of readers and reading communities."[27] He says: "Readers may misunderstand, and thereby misuse them; they may blunt their edge and domesticate them; or they may consciously or unconsciously transform them into devices for maintaining and confirming prejudices or beliefs which are imposed on others in the name of the text."[28]

The significance of this shift cannot be over-emphasized. It takes the authority of God's Word and places it in the hands of the interpreter or faith community. But is this shift warranted? Is it valid to some extent? From one perspective, this shift should be welcomed because the words of the author can become the reader's words. As a message had an impact on its recipients in the past, it should create a similar response today. When prophets declared their messages, they expected responses consistent with their words. As Paul addressed problems in the churches, he was not making suggestions but calling for godly obedience. Clearly, he expected them to act according to his instructions.[29] Quite simply, there was correspondence of meaning.

Regarding this relationship, Kevin Vanhoozer writes:

> "Understanding" is still the end of the interpretive process, though the means to that end involve active reader participation. Reading is . . essentially an obedient activity. Its aim is to let the author and the text manipulate the reader so that he or she gradually comes to experience and adopt the ideology (the worldview) of the text. Again, the emphasis is squarely on understanding, on discovering and embracing the ideology of the text.[30]

But as Thiselton wrote, biblical texts are being altered or "suffer transformation" by their readers to mean things their authors never had in mind. As E.D. Hirsch states: "Unless there is a powerful overriding value in disregarding the author's intention (i.e. original meaning), we who interpret as a vocation should not disregard it. Mere individual preferences would not be such an overriding value, nor would be the mere preferences of many persons."[31] He continues:

> To treat an author's words merely as grist for one's own mill is ethically analogous to using another man merely for one's own purposes. I do not say such ruthlessness of interpretation is never justifiable in principle, but I cannot imagine an occasion where it would be justifiable in the professional practice of interpretation. The peculiarly modern anarchy of every man for himself in matters of interpretation may sound like the ultimate victory of the Protestant spirit. Actually, such anarchy is the direct consequence of transgressing the fundamental ethical norms of speech and its interpretation.[32]

This anti-authorial approach is reflected in the writings of Jacques Derrida who states a text is "no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network a fabric of traces, referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces."[33] Dana Fewell and David Gunn offer a similar deconstructionist position when they write: "Meaning is not something out there in the text waiting to be discovered. Meaning is always, in the last analysis, the reader's creation, and readers, like texts, come in an infinite variety."[34] In regard to postmodern education, William Doll writes: "Meaning is not extracted from the text; it is created by our dialogue with the text. Thus, the difference

between the author's historical situation and our own is a necessary and productive difference."[35]

Walter Brueggemann reflects this approach also and states the Bible "requires and insists upon human interpretation, which is inescapably subjective, necessarily provisional and inevitably disputatious."[36] Then he proposes an interpretive rule that "all of our interpretations need to be regarded, at the most, as having only tentative authority. This will enable us to make our best, and most insistent claims, but then regularly relinquish our pet interpretations and, together with our partners in dispute, fall back in joy into the inherent apostolic claims that outdistance all of our too familiar and too partisan interpretations."[37]

Craddock seemingly wants to join the reader-focused chorus and remarks that with inductive preaching "the listener completes the sermon."[38] He writes:

> Now it is customary to say that the congregation completes the sermon, but usually what this means is that the preacher has told the people what has to be done and then they are to implement it. What is here suggested, however, is that the participation of the hearer is essential, not just in the post-benediction implementation but in the completion of the thought, movement and decision-making within the sermon itself. The process calls for an incompleteness, a lack of exhaustiveness in the sermon. It requires of the preacher that he resist the temptation to tyranny of ideas rather than democratic sharing.[39]

Within this challenging hermeneutical context, how are men and women who are committed to the authority of God's Word supposed to preach? Does this epistemological shift undermine their preaching? William Larkin correctly asks:

> . . .how can evangelicals intelligibly and effectively express and commend the message of a Bible which

> claims to speak eternal and universal truth? When the reigning paradigm says the interpreter is decisive for the "weaving" of meaning, how are evangelicals, who have always affirmed authorial intent, recoverable from texts as the locus of meaning, going to describe the interpreter's relation to the production of meaning? Within an epistemological framework, which sees interpretation as a participatory "give and take" between text and interpreter, how do evangelicals, known for their commitment to Scripture as the primary authority, practice a hermeneutic which will permit the Bible to exercise its full authority?[40]

The hermeneutical quagmire only gets deeper with Paul Ricoeur who takes a mediating position between the objectivism of authorial-intent and the subjectivism of reader-response and calls for the autonomy of the text. "Writing renders the text autonomous with respect to the intention of the author. What the text signifies no longer coincides with what the author meant; henceforth, textual meaning and psychological meaning have different destinies."[41] In other words, the mere activity of writing about an idea or describing an event alters the author's intent. Ricoeur states: "With writing, the verbal meaning of the text no longer coincides with the mental meaning or intention of the text. This intention is both fulfilled and abolished by the text, which is no longer the voice of someone present. The text is mute."[42] As a result, he proposes: "The sense of the text is not behind the text, but in front of it. It is not something hidden, but something disclosed. What has to be understood is not the initial situation of discourse, but what points towards a possible world . . understanding has less than ever to do with the author and his situation."[43]

In seeking to understand a text's meaning, Ricoeur distinguishes two types of hermeneutics that imply distinct, even opposing

stances toward the text. In *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, he writes of the reader approaching the text with great respect and trying to listen conscientiously to discern its message. This approach he terms "a hermeneutics of restoration." Subsequently, as a reader utilizes a second hermeneutic, he or she is able to come to the same text but with suspicion and attempt to demystify its claims so as to arrive at the truest meaning. Ricoeur refers to this approach as "a hermeneutics of suspicion."[44]

But why this double hermeneutic? Ricoeur insists: "The reader is absent from the act of writing; the writer is absent from the act of reading. The text thus produces a double eclipse of the reader and the writer. It (text) thereby replaces the relation of dialogue, which directly connects the voice of one to the hearing of the other."[45] And what is the result of this dual approach? There is a surplus of meaning. There is not one meaning or message in a text but several which Ricoeur refers to as a "principle of plenitude." So when preaching, our sermons "should exploit the layers and possibilities of the surplus of meaning in texts as much as possible to help hearers in their various interests and needs, in a way that people can identify themselves with different persons…"[46]

In this Ricoeur is attempting to free the Bible from fundamentalist, objectivizing interpretations as well as culture-bound, subjectivizing ones by asking the reader to listen attentively to what the Bible states. His remarks have merit because human knowledge is limited and perspectival. However, interest-free reading is not entirely feasible because everyone filters information through existing beliefs. Understandings are formed in unrecognized, uncriticized and powerful ways. We can read the Bible with a rigidity and spiritual smugness that tends to freeze passages in their historical context. But when texts are approached with a degree of suspicion, it may force us to delve into them in fresh ways so as to more fully grasp the author's intention. In so doing, we

may be surprised by our pre-understandings and biases, and startled out of complacency.

However, Ricoeur's belief in a text's autonomy and insistence on openness must be questioned. If a passage is open to a reader's understanding, then is one response as good as the next? Does it mean that readers determine the meaning? Furthermore, the Bible calls for historically grounded and informed responses. When God's truth is being considered, people cannot be allowed to establish meanings based simply on their interactions with the text. Because words mean something to one person, it does not follow that the same words mean the same thing to another person. In *Divine Discourse*, Nicholas Wolterstorff gets at the heart of the matter. "The issue is whether one's conclusions are correct, whether they are true – whether the discourser did in fact, by authoring or presenting this text, say what one claims that he said."[47] In essence, history cannot be dismissed because of distance. If the facts are undeniably true, they are to be embraced and applied regardless of time or circumstances. Any reader's response cannot be arbitrary. The text controls the response, not vice versa.

In summary, we live in a world of hermeneutical uncertainty which as Larkin contends leaves us with the challenge to frame "a meaningful and convincing concept of biblical authority in an age which has no certainty to which that concept can be lashed." And he offers "it must be done to a generation weary and wary of authoritarianism, in fact a generation definitely unwilling to submit to any authority which it has not first corrected according to its own liberation agenda."[48]

Visual Communication

A third challenge to our authority in preaching is the impact of visual communication. Whereas pre-modern history can be described as aural/oral and modernity as literate, postmodernity has been termed the electronic age in that it is an era which is

dominated by images.[49] Emery Tang describes the situation:

> Ours is a post-literate world, which means that the printed word no longer monopolizes communications. This is in fact an image-saturated culture a visual age in which photography, television, comic books, and the motion picture holds sway. Without taking undue pains to prove it, I am safe to say that all of the communications media are pervasive in their consequences, whether personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical or social; that they leave no aspect of us untouched, unaffected or unaltered.[50]

One could argue Tang's comment is outdated, in that communications are beyond post-literate, and we have passed into a world where we are continually gazing at digitally formed images. Through advanced information processing, we have created a "'hyperreality' . . (which) looms larger than life, a brilliant improvement over the mundane natural order of things."[51] Through advanced information processing, we have been allowed "to overcome and displace the naturally occurring world insofar as we are able to produce an artificial universe that is more brilliant, pliable and rich."[52] Quentin Schultze may be closer to the truth regarding visual imagery when he states it has become "the primary language of our day (which) draws together people of all ages, races, genders and classes."[53] Regardless of the nuances in their understandings, the reality is that images are powerful. Images are not just a way of communicating thoughts but a means of actually shaping them. And images challenge the authority of our words.

Consider the power of images. They are bright and dim, stunning and subtle, conspicuous and cleverly concealed. Drive down Main Street, glance through a magazine, watch a video, or stroll through the shopping mall and your senses are bombarded

with image-laden messages, the effectiveness of which is seemingly becoming more powerful over time.
In his discussion of sermon development, David Buttrick uses an analogy from the film industry. He writes:

> In an earlier era, movie directors worked with a fixed-location camera and moved actors around in front of the lens. Once upon a time the procedure was considered reality, but now when we view old films on late-night TV, they seem stilted and quite unreal. Today directors use a camera on a moving boom so that camera angles change, lenses widen or narrow, distances vary, imitating the actual way we perceive reality. Moreover, directors match the complexity of human consciousness by filming daydreams, memories, apprehensions, and the like. Thus, with different lenses and shifting camera angles, film makers give us an awesome sense of the real. While modern cinematography may have influenced our modes of perception, more likely it has followed from alterations in human consciousness.[54]

Marshall McLuhan predicted in the 1960s that we would be saturated with these sensations which would then "reshape personal lives as well as restructure social interdependence."[55] Perhaps more than we realize, his words are being fulfilled. The image manipulations of the media tell us what to think, feel and do. The result, Larkin fears, is people becoming even more indifferent to authority and opting for "laid back 'surface' lives of depthlessness . . governed by simulated images about reality."[56] And what was of greatest concern to McLuhan is that any medium had "the power of imposing its own assumptions on the unwary."[57]

But how is it that visual communication is able to have such far-reaching influence? How is it that images are so obviously and

insidiously powerful? Could it be as Pierre Babin suggests we have stopped thinking? He writes:

> A certain kind of thinking is losing ground: thinking that stresses precise ideas, exact wording and rigorous knowledge. Young people today prefer evocative and symbolic language to precise formulations of faith. This preference makes them at home with the new language of audio-visuals.[58]

Michael Warren adds that messages coming from images are more acceptable because "they fit in with a culturally produced ethos, with a way of life and habit of thought that has emerged among people over time."[59] Messages are received because "the production and communication of images themselves helped create the very ethos that makes them acceptable, partly because the suggestive power of the visual images is compounded by the mimetic tendency in all persons."[60] Visual communication has created a new reality has become the lens through which we receive our new information.

However we are not discerning enough to recognize the extent of influence. We are unable to filter the good from the bad, the righteous from the unrighteous, the healthy from the harmful. As Schultze states, we are not image-savvy. "We must contend with an image-saturated yet largely image-ignorant society. Our lives are image-intense, and undoubtedly movies and commercials have an enormous impact on young and old alike. But at the same time we are not very astute about how images communicate."[61] Instead of filtering messages, we are absorbing. When we should be at odds with the assumptions and values of certain images, we are not discerning enough to respond appropriately and consequently, images have come to be our new authority.

Consider the power of images.[62] Drive by an automobile dealership to take a look at the new models. You have seen them on several television commercials but you want to see them for yourself. They are bright, shiny and sleek. You are enticed and

begin to rationalize why you should have one. Your mind and heart have been captured. Only the reality of the sticker on the window stops you! Or perhaps a cereal commercial flashes across the screen and though you are not told its nutritional value, trim physiques and bright smiles communicate it would be good to pick up a box the next time you are shopping. Though you are not salivating in the aisles, you are headed for the cereals and are not too concerned about the carbohydrates. And during a hotly contested political election, you are inundated with commercials filled with images to get you to vote for a candidate (or against his opponent). What does the candidate stand for? You are not sure but the message is obvious. You are being manipulated by images and "sold" a candidate without him articulating his stance on a political issue.[63]

What is the result of the visualization process? In what ways does it have an impact on preachers who are so dependent on words? First, Ellul contends words are being "humiliated." They are losing their commanding presence. Knowledge is not something obtained by laboring over texts or through active dialogue but gleaned through polished and unobtrusive images. Paradoxically, these images are ambiguous and clear. They are obvious and extremely subtle. Ellul writes in *The Humiliation of the Word*:

> Thus the image contains within itself a deep contradiction. It is not ambiguous: it is coherent, reliable and inclusive; but it is insignificant. It can have innumerable meanings, depending on culture, learning, or the intervention of some other dimension. For this reason I must learn to see, before looking at the image. After seeing it, I must learn to interpret it. The image is clear, but this clarity does not imply certainty or comprehension.[64]

Our understanding of images is highly subjective. One person interprets the image one way, another might construe it differently. Images signify what we want. Consequently, meanings can be as numerous and diverse as the audience because "images leave the viewer, not with carefully crafted ideas and precepts but with impressions (which) function to allow the viewer to construct one's own interpretation."[65]

Second, we should not be naïve because images are not innocent but can be quite biased. Image makers can create or structure their communication so people will be led to see what they want. Piguet and Morel observe: "The structure of a picture is the result of the producer's selection of technical means to portray specific elements of reality. In the final analysis, structure is 'what has been chosen for us to see.' It is objective fulfillment of a personal plan or design."[66] What is the result? Ultimately, as Walter Ong states, it will lead to a "transformation of consciousness."[67]

Not only are people being humiliated and manipulated by images as Babin suggests they are being destructured. The process takes place imperceptibly but irresistibly and they become "fragmented" people. Piguet and Morel state: "We crumble into fragments because everything we see on television, everything we hear on the radio, and everything we read in magazines comes to us piece by piece, without any logical connections – an advertisement, a song, a catastrophe, a report, or the pope's blessing."[68]

Accompanying the destructuring and fragmenting, Babin believes another consequence is externalization. Through images, the media exercises its authority and causes us to conform to societal or group norms. In a print-dominated world, the situation was significantly different. Sequential thinking, mental engagement, and a sustained attention span were more common. For instance, a person would read in private and

would be alone with himself and his thoughts. In contrast, visual presentations offer little room for being with oneself. Information comes rapidly and "with minimal effort on the part of the viewer, who becomes part of the communal mass mind."[69] Consequently, we become "deaf to the voice speaking in our innermost depths. We live 'outside' ourselves. Being 'in' has replaced 'being.' In the language of Jesus, we have gained the world but have lost our soul."[70]

This shift toward visual communications has an impact on people's ability to listen to verbal communications. Historically, preachers have depended on such rhetorical devices as repetition, allusions to the Bible, and exhortations. Though such means remain useful, Thomas Troeger states, they lack "what television has conditioned the congregation to expect: immediacy, vividness, and a fast-paced plot."[71] This knowledge-through-imagery development should be alarming to clergy. Truth and misinformation, Scriptural and unbiblical ideas can be spread with ease. Engaging the mind is not required to shape thinking, feelings and actions.

But of greatest concern is the potential of abandoning God's Word. Again, Ellul states:

> In this connection the most unthinkable reversal takes place: when all of Christianity is based only on the word, and the word is accepted as the Word of God than can be expressed only by the human word corresponding to it, then the contempt and abandonment of this human word inevitably signifies abandonment and contempt for the Word of God. By allying itself with images, Christianity gains (perhaps!) efficacy, but destroys itself, its foundation, and its content. In reality nothing is left to say – not because the word is false but became images have emptied it of meaning.[72]

In response, how should preachers deal with the preponderance of images? Can we begin to compete with their power? In this regard, John Stott states:

> We have a colossal task on our hands if we hope to counteract the baneful tendencies of much television. We can no longer assume that people either want to listen to sermons, or indeed are able to listen. When they are accustomed to the swiftly moving images of the screen, how can we expect them to give their attention to one person talking, no frills, no light relief and nothing else to look at?[73]

In light of these shifting realities, I am convinced biblical preaching is not only possible but essential for the people in our churches and a world in need of a truth-filled message. I concur with Scott Gibson who writes: "The Bible is self-authenticating. By the power of the Word through the Holy Spirit these God-breathed words change the lives of men and women. If we preach it, we will not be put to shame."[74]

Can it be done is not the question. The issue is how are we to go about our task? How are we to preach to a generation "unwilling to submit to any authority which it has not first corrected according to its own agenda?"[75] Appropriately responding is more than a challenge but integral to our mission.

Notes

1. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 243.
2. Fred B. Craddock, *As One without Authority* (rev.) (St. Louis: Chalice, 2001), 14.
3. William H. Willimon, *Peculiar Speech: Preaching to the Baptized* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 50.
4. Craddock, 15.
5. Peter Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday), 135.
6. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 125.
7. Ronald H. Cram, "The Future of Christian Religious Education in the Era of Shrinking Transcendence," *Religious Education* 96:2 (2001): 170.
8. In *The Sacred Canopy*, Peter Berger states religious ex-monopolies can no longer take for granted the allegiance of their client populations. Since allegiance is voluntary and less certain, traditions which previously could be authoritatively imposed must now be "marketed" and "sold" to a clientele that is no longer constrained to "buy." See 127-153.
9. Nicholas Rescher, *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (Oxford: Clarendon

Press, 1993), 79.
10. Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 93.
11. Berger and Luckmann, 125.
12. D.A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 19.
13. Ibid.
14. I am not suggesting pluralism is without value. In many instances, it should be celebrated for the richness it offers society. God brings diverse people together for redemptive purposes as evidenced in the first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3).
15. For an insightful glimpse into the changing global and national demographics, see "Does Your Church Understand the World We Live In?" by Todd M. Johnson in *Ockenga Connections*, 9:2 (2004): 3.
16. Meic Pearse, *Why the Rest Hates the West: Understanding the Roots of Global Rage* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004).
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid. 32-33.
19. Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Impoverished the Soul's of Today's Students* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 26.
20. George Hunsberger, *Catalyst*, 30:4, (April 2004).
21. Craddock 11.
22. Johnson Liem, "Contemporary Hermeneutics: Bane or Boon? *Evangel*, 20:3 (2002): 70.
23. Martin Luther, *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church, Works of Martin Luther 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 189.
24. John Calvin, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986), 1.7.4.
25. Patrick Slattery *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era* (New York: Garland, 1995), 105-106.
26. A seminal work on authorial intent and reader response is W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy," *Sewanee Review*, 54 (1946). The article argues the intent of the author is irrelevant and the meaning of a text is assigned by the reader.
27. Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 31.
28. Ibid.
29. Regarding the relationship of authorial intent and divine authorship, see Michael A. Bullmore, "Re-examining Author's Intent: The Nature of Scripture, Exegesis and the Preaching Task," Unpublished paper presented at the Evangelical Homiletics Society, October 1996.
30. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "The Reader in New Testament Interpretation," in *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*, ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 307.
31. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1976), 90.
32. Ibid. 91.
33. Jacques Derrida, *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Rutledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), 84.
34. David M. Gunn and Danna Nolan Fewell (*Narrative in the Hebrew Bible*, Oxford: Oxford University, 1993), xi.
35. William E. Doll, Jr., *A Post-modern Perspective on Curriculum* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993), 135.
36. Walter Brueggemann, "Biblical Authority," *Christian Century*, 118:1 (2001), 16.
37. Ibid.
38. Craddock 64.
39. Ibid.
40. William J. Larkin, "Culture, Scripture's Meaning, and Biblical Authority: Critical

Hermeneutics for the 90's," *Bulletin of Biblical Research* 2 (1992): 173.

41. Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1981), 139.
42. Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University, 1976), 75.
43. Ibid. 87.
44. See Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1970), 20-36.
45. Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 147.
46. Gijsbert D.J. Dingemans, "A Hearer in the Pew: Homiletical Reflections and Suggestions," in *Preaching as a Theological Task: World, Gospel, Scripture*, eds. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 44.
47. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Divine Discourse: Philosophical Reflections on the Claim that God Speaks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University), 1995, 181.
48. Larkin 177.
49. For an overview of the history of communication, see Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981).
50. Emery Tang, "Understanding the Listener as a Movie-Goer," *Preaching*, 2:5 (1967): 28.
51. J. Richard Middleton and Brian J. Walsh, *Truth Is Stranger Than It Used to Be: Biblical Faith in a Postmodern Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 38.
52. Ibid.
53. Quentin J. Schultze, *High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 19.
54. Buttrick, 55.
55. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 9.
56. Larkin, "Approaches to and Images of Biblical Authority for the Postmodern Mind," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 8 (1998): 131.
57. McLuhan 15.
58. Pierre Babin, "Is Audio-Visual Language Apt to Express Faith," in *The Audio-Visual Man*, ed. Babin, (Dayton, OH: Pflaum, 1970), 42.
59. Michael Warren, "Images and the Structuring of Experience," *Religious Education*, 82:2 (1987): 247.
60. Ibid.
61. Schultze 20-21.
62. In my comments regarding visual communication, I am not implying the medium of television is so bad that there is no redemptive value in it. Much of what is presented should be harshly criticized. But there is a great deal that is enjoyable and beneficial. My concern is the indiscriminate viewing and subsequent shaping of culture by this medium.
63. For additional reading, see Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985).
64. Ellul 8.
65. Graham Johnston, *Preaching to a Postmodern World: A Guide to Reaching Twenty-first-Century Listeners* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 48.
66. Pierre Piguet and Bernard Morel, "How to Read a Picture" in *The Audio-Visual Man*, ed. Pierre Babin, (Dayton, OH: Pflaum, 1970), 110.
67. For insights into the relationship of orality and the impact of printing, see Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Methuen, 1982).
68. Pierre Babin, *The New Era in Religious Communication* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 42.
69. Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 81.
70. Ibid. 45.
71. Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 40.
72. Ellul, 202-203.
73. John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 75.
74. Scott M. Gibson, "Biblical Preaching in an Anti-authority Age" in *Preaching to a Shifting Culture: 12 Perspectives on Communicating that Connects* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 226.

The Modern Aversion from Authorial Intentionality and from "Making Points" in a Sermon

by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.

(editor's note: Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. is president and the Colman M. Mockler Distinguished Professor of Old Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA.)

Abstract

The meaning of the text is obscured when preachers do not take into consideration the meaning the author intended. This article explores the homiletical implications of experience over authorial intent.

Introduction

Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass* provides us with one of the most down to earth places to begin our discussion of determining what anyone means when they speak, much less to determine what the Bible means when it speaks. The oft-repeated story goes like this:

> "…..There's glory for you!" [said Humpty Dumpty].
> "I don't know what you mean by `glory'," Alice said.
> Humpty Dumpty smiled contemptuously. "Of course you don't – till I tell You. I mean't 'there's a nice knock-down argument for you!'"
> "But `glory' doesn't mean a `nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.
> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less."
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is master – that's all."
Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them –
particularly verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot! Impenetrability! That's what I say!"
"Would you tell me, please," said Alice, "what that means?"
"Now you talk like a reasonable child," said Humpty Dumpty, looking very much pleased . "I meant by `impenetrability' that we have had enough of that subject, and it would be just as well if you'd mention what you mean to do next, as I suppose you don't intend to stop here all the rest of your life."
"That's a great deal to make one word mean," Alice said in a thoughtful tone.
"When I make a word do a lot of work like that," said Humpty Dumpty, "I always pay it extra."[1]

I. The Search for Meaning[2]

Given the huge success of the views of postmodernism, many of our Christian laity (not to mention our Christian scholars!) fall into the same type of multi-valence assigned to the meanings of Scripture as did Humpty Dumpty. For we need today exactly what Alice needed to cool Humpty Dumpty's arrogant relativism.

Here is the basic point: The meaning of any literary work must be determined by the author of that work. This was the thesis of E.D. Hirsch's startling contribution in 1967 in which he claimed that the meaning of a work was "determined" by its author, not by its readers or by some new combination of the two. Hirsch advised:

> Verbal meaning is what ever someone has willed to convey by a particular sequence of linguistic sings and which can be conveyed (shared) by means of linguistic signs.[3]

The price that Humpty Dumpty must pay is that poor Alice is lost and left without any sense or meaning of what is being said. But that is the price which we as modern exegetes of Scripture must pay if we are going to insist that meaning is only personal, subjective, and in addition to that, it is constantly changing. In other words, if I am only going to hear what a text "means to me" and "what turns me on," regardless if I can locate that meaning explicitly in the text or not, then the price I must pay is that communication will become impossible for me and all others who share my theory of meaning. Not only will God's word grow silent, but so will everything else in the creation grow silent until the only thing that remains and exists for sure according to my way of living and thinking is me and myself – a solipsism that locks me in to my lonely self!

II. Evangelical Praxis and Theory

Evangelicals must not think that they are exempt from this postmodern disease, for all too often it shows up in such wonderful settings as a small group Bible Study. Now this never happened among any of the evangelicals you know, but just think of what takes place among believers in Jesus Christ. (Somehow it always seems better to attribute this problem to others rather than to ourselves!)

Let me play out for you a typical evangelical small group Bible Study – not here, remember, but in other places far away from us (!) that we now share as a prayer request for you to consider. First, the group must get into a circle – they always seem to do do, so there must be a verse in the Bible that exhorts us to do that! The leader of the group sits in the chair the most distant

from the door – that is how you know who is going to lead this session. Now, to be sure, it is called a Study, but the truth is that few, if any, really have the time to put any study into this Scriptural text. Therefore, it is best if none of the group studies, including the leader, so it will be all the more democratic!!

"What shall we study?" asks the leader in as cheerful and hopeful a voice as possible. No one would ever suggest the Oooollldddd Testament, since that has since been transcended by the New, according to the best popular wisdom available, so someone ventures the name of Mark's gospel. "Good," encourages the leader, "Let's all find Mark – say Mark 4: 35 - 41"

After allowing five or more minutes to pass as everyone learns how to use the table of contents in their Bibles, for an increasing number of Christians have very little acquaintance with the Bible, the leader brightly begins with these words: "Let us read around the circle, each taking a verse, but allowing us time to say what each one of us gets out of each verse.

Then, turning to his or her right (95% of the times it goes to the right first of all, since many are right-handed), the leader urges, "Sally, would you read verse one." Sally does so with only three mistakes, which is not bad given our high view of inspiration. As she finishes, the leader with great fervor and excitement exclaims, "Who gets anything out of this text? Does this turn you on? What's your bag? Tell me what you got out of this verse?"

A period of one or two minutes of silence ensues. This is the time for evangelical humility. But then everyone knows who will speak first. Jim just can't let silences continue. He always was a mother's helper and once again he plunges in to help the leader. While he is gifted with words, it does not appear that his mouth and his brain or completed wired together. He starts to say, "Well, I don't know about you, but — what I get out of this

is that the disciples are out on the Sea of Galilee just like all of us are in this "boat" of the Church and we too are getting drenched with the storms of life. There is all this stuff falling on us: big spending, big government, taxes, and the like. And I think we all ought to put in our oar to help the "boat," i.e., the Church get to the other side of this storm we all face."

Now while Jim is declaring all of this, heads start to bob up and down around the circle meaning that they either agree or they wish Jim would hurry up and end this test of everyone's endurance. So, what is the leader going to say? He can't say in today's political correctness, "Wow, that reeketh!" (to attempt to use the Old English of the King James Version). Nor can he say, "Fabulous, that is terrific," for both would be a lie. So he says instead, "That's ….interesting!" Who said Hegel would never get into the common thought of the people. Never mind the thesis or antithesis, just go for the synthesis!

But the leader must ask, "Who else gets anything out of this verse?" A timid answer comes opposite to where Jim is sitting, "Well, I didn't *exactly* get what Jim got out of it. I got something totally different. I thought the "boat" was our safety net and that no matter how tough the storm, we can ride it out if only Jesus would come along walking on the water as he does in another passage. That's what it means to me." And the leader declared that that too was interesting."

But where is the author in all of this? And which of all the meanings that will or can be set forth are "valid"? Is there any place for truth in this whole discussion? Or is it too antiquarian to raise that point in a post-modern culture?

Part of our problem is that "meaning" in English can have so many different senses: Meaning can refer to the *referent*, which identifies the person, object or subject being discussed. Meaning can also refer to *value*, such as "this course means more to me than I can tell you." Meaning also can be

entailment, "this means war." Meaning can refer as well to *significance*, which names a relationship between what the author meant and another contemporary situation, person or idea. Finally, as used here, meaning is *intention*, which is the stable object of knowledge intended by the author in his or her particular grouping of words in a text.

When this debate over whether we will follow the author of a text or the reader of that text to the situation of preaching the word of God, some very interesting things begin to appear. For example, if we were to ask how this post-modern switch to the reader as the decider of what is or is not being communicated, or even the possibility that something other than what the author meant now is what it means for me, really affects the field of preaching and homiletics. The assumption by many contemporary readers of the Bible is that the each of us sets our own meaning agenda. Since the number of meanings for any text, according to this post-modern view, is almost infinite, or at least as multiple as the number of people who read it. No one can claim that any one of those meanings is authoritative or the valid meaning that God wished us to receive. Truth is in the eye of the reader and not in the meaning intended by the author as found in the use of words found in that text!

III. The Birth of the New Homiletic

The birth of the "new homiletic," as it soon began to be labeled, in 1971 probably began with Fred B. Craddock's book *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching*. His point was that so-called discursive, deductive, or propositional preaching that elicited "points" from the text was dead; it should be replaced by a more inductive approach that created an "experience" in the listener.

Seven years later Craddock gave us *Overhearing the Gospel,* which placed the audience rather than the text as the driving

force in a sermon. As David L. Allen put it,[4] "The sermon [according to this new view] is a communication event in which the audience, with the help of the preacher, creates or discovers `meaning' and is led to a new way of seeing the world which the gospel creates."[5] This conclusion was likewise endorsed by Tom Long[6] who stated that in the past preaching had sought to offer meaning in a propositional way, but that today the audience and the preacher together create the experience of meaning. The result has been a low view of Biblical authority coupled with a rejection of propositional communication from God.

For instance, over the past several decades, narrative was thought to be the universal experience of human existence, so a rush was on for narrative preaching, narrative theology, and narrative hermeneutics. Unfortunately for this use of narrative, it was a narrative that bracketed out the question of whether this event ever happened or not: its historicality was stripped from its story. This later move was the work of Hans Frei in his monumental work, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative*. We were urged to enter the world of the narrative in the Bible by our own world and our own experience rather than the world of the time of the author and his text.

The shift that Craddock had signaled was continued by David Buttrick in his *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*.[7] The goal of preaching was not to make clear what God had communicated to the prophets and apostles who had claimed they had stood in his council to hear his truth, but instead it was to evoke an experience in the listener that was newly created by this dynamic and interaction between the preacher and the listener with the text merely providing the catalyst that provoked this experience.

The alleged overthrow of the tyranny of the text of Scripture in favor of a post-modern evocation of a creative new meaning for the text has been declared a done deed according to many, but

not by those who still want to hear a word from God. Is there no more "Thus says the Lord" for a generation where God has rarely broken the silence according to some? Is God able to act, but unable to speak? Can we not connect the text with its referents to the past with all of its historical and cultural allusions and yet still have room for a contemporary application to our times? Cannot the revelation of God be at once propositional and personal without its being reduced merely to static declarations of deductive content that remain dead and inert without contemporary relevance?

Our conclusion circles back to where we began: in order to interpret the text, we must come to terms with what the author meant by what he had written in the text. Meaning cannot be vested in a text abstracted from its author, a narrative that is divorced from its history or its canon, or left to an interpreter's projections that are autocratically inserted over the text of Scripture. Meaning must be attached to the author's own truth-intention as signaled by his use of grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. Scripture was meant to be understood by those who read it. It also wanted us to come to know what God desired us to know about himself and his will. All that helps this process ought to be welcomed.

Scripture can be put in terms that Alice can understand. The Church must not assume the autocratic posture of Humpty Dumpty – even if we always do pay extra when we make the words do a lot of work. Verbal meanings will always be connected with authorial truth-intention or we will indeed pay extra for refusing to agree – communication itself will cease. And there will be no word from God for a waiting generation.

IV. The Modern Aversion from "Making Points" in Sermons

With the new emphasis on giving prior attention to the various

genre from which a sermon takes its text, as already seen, there has been a tendency to downplay propositions and points in sermons in favor of simply telling the story, or letting the unique literary form stand alone without any direct attempts to apply that text or to give it a contemporary application. Can this be raised up as the new standard for preaching?

In my most recent book, I came to this conclusion:

> I have no trouble affirming that there is as a wide a breadth of preaching. As there are literary types in Scripture. I am not so sure, however, that using all of those various types will in every case lead us away from "making points," or from didactic aspects of the ministry. After all, all Scripture, argued Paul, was given for a number of different purposes (2 Tim. 3: 14 – 17), but all contribute to either introducing us to faith in Christ or building us up and challenging all of us to grow as believers.[8]

This problem of making contemporary applications is particularly important when it comes to preaching from the Old Testament. Can we continue to use the Old Testament in our modern times, or should we, if we use it at all, limit our references to that part of the canon by letting it stay in the literary wraps in which it was originally given with no attempt to elicit principals, truths, teachings, applications, or contemporary relevancies from these old texts and multiple genres?

William L. Holladay graphically stated this problem:

> Does God communicate to us through these old words, and if so, how are we to hear that communication? Can we untie the boat marked "Isaiah" from its moorings in the eighth century B.C. and take it down the lake to a mooring in the twentieth [or the twenty-first] century A.D. and still recognize it as "Isaiah"? How might this be done?[9]

But that is precisely what must be done! The way it is to be done is to give priority to the literary form in which it is found as the key to understanding what it was that the author was attempting to say. Next, we must rely on the author's use of that genre, grammar, syntax and context to guide us to the message that was being relayed from the God who had spoken to that author. All other substitutes will only leave our ship marooned on the shoals of subjectivity and uncertainty.

While there are numerous methods in which the teaching of a passage can be brought to light, it is not an option for the preacher to bypass this step. The gospel cannot be created *de novo*. Of course the text can simply be repeated or restated in modern terms, but can one call that repetition or restatement preaching? Is that nothing more than a reading of the text?

Conclusion

While there are excesses to be avoided in over-principalizing the text, the goal of focusing in on the point or the big idea that the text is trying to make is not a homiletical luxury; it is endemic to the task assigned to us. Only by adopting some form of the new homiletic with its post-modern base will we then give up the task as preachers of "making points."

Notes

1. This citation from Lewis Carroll appears in a number of hermeneutics books. For example, E. D. Hirsch, *The Aims of Interpretation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 51-52; Perry B. Yoder, *Toward Understanding the Bible* (Newton, KS.: 1978), p. 1; and James D. Strauss, "Hermeneutics, Intentionality and Authoritative Scripture, *A Journal for Christian Studies* 6 (1986-87): 39-40.
2. For a further discussion of these points, see the conversation of these two point of view in Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. and Moises Silva, *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994, especially pp. 26 – 46, "the Meaning of Meaning."
3. E.D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 31.
4. For the general thrust of what immediately follows, I am indebted to the fine essay by David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: The New Homiletic and Biblical Authority," *Preaching* 18 (September – October, 2002): 32.
5. Allen pointed to Robert Reed, Jeffrey Bullock and David Fleer, "Preaching as the Creation

of an Experience: The Not-So-Rational Revolution of the New Homiletic," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 18:1 (1995): 1-9.
6. Thomas Long, "And How Shall They Hear? The Listener in Contemporary Preaching," *Listening to the Word: Studies in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*. Eds. G.R. O'Day and T. Long (Nashville: TN.: Abingdon, 1993): 167 – 188.
7. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
8. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Preaching and Teaching From the Old Testament: A Guide for the Church*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003, p. 84.
9. William L. Holladay, *Long Ago God Spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today*. Minneapolis, MN.: Fortress, 1995, p. 186.

Preaching Stinks: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17

by Kenton C. Anderson

(editor's note: Kenton C. Anderson is dean and assistant professor of preaching at ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University, Langley, BC, and is a past president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Dr Anderson delivered the following sermon at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society on October 18, 2003.)

Preaching stinks

It is obvious to everybody else. We might as well admit it to ourselves. We preachers, we stink.

We recently had a painter in our house. It is impolite for me to say it, but the man smelled terrible. The foul, pungent aroma he emitted overwhelmed even the smell of fresh paint, lingering in the room long after he had vacated. He was a decent painter, and a nice enough fellow*, but he stunk*.

I have been thinking that this is what a lot of people think about us preachers. We stink. We're nice people and we can put our words together, but a person ought to keep one's distance. People are tuned to detect a preacher, they can smell us coming. When we're present they hold their nose. When we leave, our preacher scent lingers. Imagine people with their aerosol sprays of pine and lilac, seeking to banish our trace and remove our stink. The preacher is unwelcome in a world with a nose for something less demanding, less convicted, less *preachy*.

Paul himself didn't always come out smelling like a rose. No doubt, there were times he thought, "this really stinks." He plants a church in Corinth and everything is wonderful till people start sinning like people do and the whole thing turns to

rot. So Paul's got to be the preacher. He writes 1 Corinthians, laying down the law and calling people to account. It's not a pleasant job. It stinks, in fact, but hey, he's the preacher. Now he's anxious, wondering how the Corinthians will respond. Impatient, he's off to Macedonia, hoping to catch up with Titus who ought to be coming back from Corinth by now. It was good news, this time, but still most often, it stinks…

Preachers don't quit preaching because some people think they stink

Yeah, we stink. But it is not necessarily a bad thing. You could learn to like this smell. Let's look and see what the text can tell us.

1. *We preachers carry a distinctive smell*. Verse 14 says that in Christ, God spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. I think it is interesting to notice that knowledge has a fragrance. I think, perhaps, of the smell of a musty bookshelf, or my fourth grade teacher's *Chanel*. But then, that's really not it. Paul's talking about our identity, a little bit of which we leave wherever we go like our fingerprint or our DNA. I'm always amazed whenever I watch the program *CSI* how they are able to identify a person who is no longer there. I remember one episode where a bloodhound tracked a criminal even after he got into a cab and traveled across town. It seemed a little far-fetched – but hey, it's television, it's got to be true, doesn't it? The point is that when you know Christ he becomes your identity, your scent. Good or bad, wherever you go you leave his fragrance.

2. *How we smell depends on who is doing the smelling*. Verse 15 says that we are the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To one we are the fragrance of life. To the other we stink like death. It all depends what we've developed a nose for. I wonder what Paul smelled like? I

remember when I was young I used to use an old leather King James Bible that I inherited from somebody in the family. I remember that whenever the preacher got particularly boring I would turn to the maps in the back of the Bible. I especially liked the map that laid out the missionary journeys of Paul. You know the one with the red line that represented his first missionary journey, and the green line that traced his second, and the yellow line that followed the footsteps of his third journey, and everywhere he went he left the scent of Jesus Christ. Some of those places they ran him out of town and others they welcomed him and responded powerfully to him. I wonder, what made the difference? Was it, perhaps, that when he preached in the towns that welcomed him he was using the principles in Haddon Robinson's book and in the towns he was chased out from he was using the principles in my book? Did he get up early in the morning and have a vital time of devotions in the one and barely crawl out of bed and rush unprepared into the towns that wanted his scalp? No, I don't think so. In fact, I don't think that it had much to do with Paul at all. He simply preached the Word, bearing the scent of Jesus Christ and in some of these towns he stunk like death and in others he smelled like everlasting life. It all depended upon who was doing the smelling.

3. *We simply keep on preaching no matter how we smell*. We don't peddle the gospel for profit and that is a good thing. It would be a pretty difficult sell. Who could be sufficient for such a thing (v.17). If we were in sales, we would have to something about the fact that our product smelled bad to so many. Bad smells don't smell well and so we would have to find a way to pretty it up. We would have to mask the odor, or soft-peddle it somehow. Good thing we are not in sales. We don't have to sell the gospel, we just have to preach it. We simply offer up what God has given us and we do it with sincerity. If some people think we stink, we'll leave it with God knowing that he is sovereign and will lead us to eventual triumph. Preachers don't quit preaching just because some people think they stink.

Nobody wants to stink

It is not pleasant to think about the fact that when we fulfill our calling, it will be so unappreciated. I hate thinking about the fact that I could pour out my heart to preach the gospel and people will walk away thinking that I stink. I had that, don't you? I would prefer that people like me. I think we all do. We all want to be appreciated. More than that, we want the gospel to be appreciated. We don't want to stink.

We believe that if we stink it is because there is something wrong. If we are driving in our car and we notice a bad smell, we immediately go into alert mode. We stop the car. We open the windows. We check under the hood, because if it smells bad it must be bad. All bad smells must be banished and so we invest huge amounts of money and time in the attempt to mask our natural odor. I used to own a retail store and I know that the first rule of retail is that you give your best space to the thing that brings you the most profit. You can go into department stores in any part of the world and what is the first thing you see? All of the prime real floor space is given to selling perfume. We invest huge amounts trying to correct our natural smell. That is not a bad thing when it comes to our physical body odor. Some of us might want to pay a little more attention to this. Some of the rest of us might appreciate it. The problem occurs when we think we have to mask the fragrance of Christ to those who think we smell like death.

This past summer I attended my 25th high school reunion. I was nervous because I wasn't sure how to tell them what I do for a living. That, of course, is always the first question, especially among men, "What do you do?" Now I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It is just that if I confessed I was a preacher, it could end the conversation before it even got started. I could tell them I was a professor, but that would only lead them to ask, "What do you teach?" I could say "homiletics," but that would only be a stalling tactic because they would invariably ask, "What's that?"

"Communications," I could say. Or, I could play it straight which is what I decided I would do. I decided I would be honest. I told them I was a preacher and to some I stunk like death. They turned up their nose and turned away and sought out someone who smelled better to them. But there were some who had a nose for me. There is one in particular who might yet learn to love the smell of Jesus. We're still talking.

I don't like to stink. None of us do, but I'm learning from Paul that…

One person's stink is another's salvation

What smells horrible to one smells like heaven to another. There is a perfume called *Heaven* for sale at the GapI actually brought some of this with me. Here, let me show you what heaven smells like (sprays a little into the crowd). . "….notes of jasmine, tree moss, and musk, … a romantic floral fragrance..." I had imagined heaven might smell different, but no worries. I know heaven smells like Jesus and that's enough for me. Hear me: if you smell like Jesus, you smell wonderful to those who have been saved. If you are in this world, bearing the scent of Jesus Christ, living his values, speaking his words, spreading his scent, you smell fantastic.

So my suggestion is that we train our noses to appreciate the scent of Jesus and that we begin to make that smell our own. Peter Mayle writes in *Encore Provence* about a school where they train blind children to distinguish and appreciate the finer smells so that they can work in the perfume industry. Apparently, it is a cultivated talent. We will want to enroll in such a school. I'm talking about the school of prayer and the school of Scripture. We will want to take time in Jesus' presence, training ourselves to appreciate his fragrance. Blind to all else, we will learn his scent and make it our own.

Then will keep preaching, understanding that it won't smell right to everyone. Not yet anyway. To some it smells like death and well it might. The gospel we preach describes the death of God's son Jesus. Smell the freshly milled timber fashioned as a cross, the sweat rolling off the soldier's bicep, the sharp scent of blood squirting from penetrating nails, the cold stench of death.

Now smell the freshness of a sunny Sunday daybreak, the dewy morning newness, the fragrant burial spices in the air. The disappointed women having trouble seeing through their tears first sense his presence with their noses. Can you smell Jesus? Do you recognize the smell of hope?

This we preach, confident in the God who called us. Some will think we stink. We could try to mask it like the drunk who sucks a candy as if to fool his wife. Or we could pour our preaching out like perfume over the feet of Jesus. To some it is the smell of death, but to others it is the fragrance of everlasting life.

~ • ~ • ~ • ~ Book Reviews ~ • ~ • ~ • ~

(editor's note: Special thanks to Patrick Lowthian for doing a longer article on four books which explore the theme of spiritual formation.)

Biblical Spirituality: Discovering the Real Connection Between the Bible and Life. By David L. Larsen. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001, 0-8254-3099-2, 304 pp., $13.99 paperback.
The Life You've Always Wanted: Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People. By John Ortberg. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 0-310-24695-4, 269 pp., $18.99 hardcover.
Messy Spirituality: God's Annoying Love for Imperfect People. By Michael Yaconelli. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002, 0-310-23533-2, 141 pp., $14.99 hardcover.
Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life. By Simon Chan. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998, 0-8308-1542-2, 300 pp., $17.60 paperback.

When we preach, we preach to souls. We toil in the mysterious realm of the spiritual. While surgeons take into their hands the human body, preachers hold in their hands the human soul. As the surgeon needs an intimate knowledge of the human body, the preacher needs an intimate knowledge of the human soul and how it is formed spiritually. Reviewed here are four books on the spiritual life.

In *Biblical Spirituality*, David Larsen explores the classic categories of systematic theology "in ways that apply sound theology to the quest for the authentic spiritual experience that is found in Christianity" (10). What Larsen says about the ascension of Christ, that it "carries practical implications for the daily life of the believer in Christ" (132), could be said for all Christian doctrine.

The author has obviously collected quotations throughout his life, which makes the book a goldmine of support material for any preacher, and the one-page statement on the spiritual life entitled "The New Life in God" (11) is a masterpiece that ought to stand the test of time.

I wonder, though, who the intended audience is. Its use of systematic theology is too basic for most pastors, but its style and language would not appeal to anyone in my church.

In contrast, John Ortberg's *The Life You've Always Wanted* connects so well with real life that I am using it with some men in the church I pastor. Having recently read the dense works of Dallas Willard, I rejoiced to find that Ortberg himself calls his book "Dallas for Dummies." *The Life You've*

Always Wanted is practical, down to earth, and full of well told stories. Ortberg takes everyday activities (such as standing in line at the grocery store or bathing our children) and relates them to the spiritual life.

The strength of Ortberg's book is its refreshing take on the often laborious subject of spiritual disciplines. His chapter titles reflect his perspective: the chapter on celebration is called "A 'Dee Dah Day'"; servanthood is "Appropriate Smallness"; secrecy is "A Life of Freedom."

According to Ortberg, spiritual disciplines are like calisthenics for the soul: their purpose is to *train* me for the life Jesus wants me to live. When done rightly, spiritual disciplines don't just make me into the person who does things Jesus would have done, but who *wants* to do those things. That is real transformation.

Another refreshing book is the late Michael Yaconelli's *Messy Spirituality*. A sample of quotations reveals Yaconelli's tone: "My life is a mess" (10). "I pastor the slowest growing church in America" (77). "I don't believe in spiritual growth" (88).

He asks, "Is there a spirituality for the rest of us who are not secluded in a monastery, who don't have it all together and probably never will? The answer is yes!" (12). He goes on to describe "messy spirituality" as having "the audacity to suggest that messiness is the workshop of authentic spirituality, the greenhouse of faith, the place where the real Jesus meets the real us" (15). Through powerful stories Yaconelli shows us this "real Jesus" who loves and redeems sinners.

Yaconelli's book resonated deeply with me. Each Wednesday night at our church, seventy kids come out of the woodwork of our town for "Kid's Connection." By the world's standards they are riffraff (a favorite Yaconelli word), losers, unfinished and ugly. They are rejected, lonely, hurt, and struggling. Yaconelli reminded me that Jesus loves them relentlessly; he came to earth for such as these. He wishes to extend grace and salvation to them through our church. Yaconelli understands this kind of ministry. His own church in Yreka, California prided itself on being a "church for people who don't like church."

Yaconelli is familiar with the daily lives of the people in the pews. They feel ashamed because they don't read their Bibles every day, struggle at prayer, and dislike their co-workers. They battle sin. This book offers relief for those who have tried to live a life for God but always feel they are letting God down. To them, *Messy Spirituality* says, "Jesus came to redeem people just like you. Don't give up. Keep walking with him." Many of our people need to hear that.

Simon Chan's *Spiritual Theology* is the flip side of *Messy Spirituality*, a successful attempt to think deeply, scholarly and theologically about the spiritual life. It asks "what kind of life does the Christian story give rise to?" (16), then proceeds to answer the question.

According to Chan, "Spiritual theology builds on the findings of systematic theology and draws out their practical implications . . . thus spiritual theology stands between systematic theology and Christian praxis" (19, 20).

The first part of the book reflects on the implications of Christian doctrines for the sake of the Christian life. The second part "discusses the spiritual exercises by which the Christian life conceived in part one is to be actualized" (10). In his treatment on meditation (ch. 8) he reminds us to heed Paul's rejoinder to devote ourselves to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim. 4:13). A look at friendship in chapter nine offers a scholarly perspective on a foundational part of ministry.

Chan's book provides insight into non-western culture (especially Asian), reminding us that contextualization of the spiritual life is essential, especially when the world is at our doorstep.

Chan and Larsen both do a fine job of making Christian doctrine relevant to everyday life. If want to think deeply and theologically about the spiritual life, either book will do. Yaconelli's book also presents a theology of the spiritual life, but he comes to different (but orthodox) conclusions which we all need to be reminded of. Ortberg's book models excellent communication and serves as a wonderful tool for helping others understand those practices that make up the life of Jesus' disciples.

Patrick Lowthian

First Baptist Church
Crestline, CA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church. By Lucy Atkinson Rose. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997, 0-664-25658-9, 158pp., $19.99, paper.

For Lucy Rose, preaching is a conversation. Many of us understand that preaching ought to be conversation*al*, but Rose is arguing for more than just a relaxed style of delivery. She wants the sermon to be a communal, shared experience, like a family gathered around the table for Thanksgiving dinner. Preaching, in her mind, is co-created and unpredictable, allowing room for

even the most marginalized voices to be heard. Rose like to think of the sermon as a proposal, or even as a wager. This may sound uncertain, but Rose just might be willing to stake her life on it (101).

The most helpful aspect of this book is the education it provides in the recent history of Christian preaching. The first chapter describes the history and practice of traditional preaching in the John Broadus vein. Evangelicals, most of whom would still find their home in this vein, will be disturbed by Rose's eventual dismissal of this approach. For Rose, the primary problem is that traditional preaching creates a gap between the preacher and the congregation. Furthermore, traditionalists see the preacher as a Bible answer man, but for Rose the Bible is not the repository of answers, but a place to experience possibilities. The Bible's message cannot be reduced to "timeless truths" or scriptural treasure hunts, she says (65).

She also critiques the Kerygmatic theory of preaching (Barth, Dodd). The primary problem with this approach is the conviction these preachers have that God will actually speak. This contradicts Rose's experience. God doesn't always speak when we preach, she seems to say, and so we need another theory (50).

Rose next introduces the so-called "transformational" voices of people like Fred Craddock and Eugene Lowry. Rose is much happier with these, appropriating inductive and narrative aspects into her own preaching form. But for Rose, even these theorists are too confident about transformation. Preaching does a poor job of changing lives, she says (84). Preaching only transforms some of the time (85).

Rose's own "proposal" is less ambitious, though, she would say, more meaningful. The first order of business is to eliminate "the gap." "The preacher and the congregation ought to stand together as explorers " (90). Preaching ought "to gather the community of faith around the Word where the central conversations of the people of God are fostered and refocused week after week" (93). "Preaching is about tentative interpretations, proposals that invite counterproposals, and the preacher's wagers as genuine convictions placed in conversation with the wagers of others" (100).

All this sounds familiar, but to her credit, Rose does offer one of the more logically consistent postmodern homiletics available. For that alone, she is worth reading. Whether it qualifies as biblical preaching is something evangelicals will question.

Kenton C. Anderson ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University
Langley, BC

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Weaving the Sermon: Preaching in a Feminist Perspective. By Christine M. Smith. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989, 0-664-25031-9, 164 pp., $19.95 paperback.

Christine M. Smith is Professor of Preaching at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, New Brighton, Minnesota. *Weaving the Sermon* is an ideologically driven critique of traditional homiletics. The author organizes her material around a central metaphor of weaving. She wants to transform preaching by unraveling traditional assumptions about authority and theological content. With the leftover strands she re-weaves a new radical feminist homiletic—one that substantially redefines authority, theology, christology, and biblical hermeneutics.

Chapter Two employs highlights from women's psychology to emphasize gender differences: "While men, particularly white men, appear to have autonomy, individuality, and detachment as integral focus points in their development and growth, women appear to have at the heart of their development qualities of affiliation and attachment" (24). Consequently, men pursue self-enhancement at the expense of relatedness. Smith muses, "Perhaps female experience may shed new light on how human beings might balance the goals of self-enhancement and relatedness so that they are interwoven dimensions of relational life instead of competing visions" (29-30).

In chapter three, Smith attempts to overturn traditional sources of authority for preaching. She envisions a new paradigm of authority based upon "mutuality" and "solidarity". She writes, "Mutuality and solidarity are clearly nonauthoritarian, nonhierarchical qualities of human relatedness and interaction" (54). "Preaching from a feminist perspective asserts that greatest mutuality is achieved and experienced among equals. Thus, in preaching, the truths of the entire community need to be honored, expressed, and sought out if true mutuality is at the heart of faith sharing" (56). In her new paradigm preachers are no longer set apart from or by the faith community. Spiritual giftedness, careful study, and divine call are at best of secondary importance. Expressing the "truths" of the community replaces an accurate exposition of the biblical text as the chief aim in preaching. The preacher, the text, and universal truth appear to be lost in the process.

Chapter four is a bold attempt to replace Christ and Scripture with a feminist critique as the starting point of Christian faith and practice. "Feminist theology begins with women's experience of marginalization and then seeks to weave that experience through theological categories, . . . biblical hermeneutics, . . . and the practice of Christian ministry" (60).

As she begins her section on christology, Smith acknowledges that "there are many . . . Christian feminists who feel no tension between traditional christological thought and their own theology" (79). However, her new feminist christology is concerned with how Jesus of Nazareth, a male, can be considered a normative model for all humanity (80). She attempts to unseat orthodox christology in two principle steps.

First, she asserts that orthodox christology unduly glorifies sacrifice. "Sacrifice should never be seen as a virtue to be idolized or romanticized . . . . The emphasis on sacrifice in orthodox christology has been particularly damaging and disempowering to women" (83). Readers may question whether her characterization of an orthodox view of Christ's sacrifice is fair.

Second, she challenges orthodox understandings of Jesus' divinity. In her new christology, Jesus is a metaphor—a parable of God. "When we declare that Jesus is a parable of God, we also are affirming that Jesus is not God, for metaphors and parables point to similarities and dissimilarities, not to literal identification" (85). In her view, this opens the door for us to see how we too can be parables of God.

Finally, Smith believes that it is important to evaluate the Scriptures using a hermeneutics of suspicion, which underlies her hermeneutics of proclamation. "A feminist hermeneutics of proclamation must evaluate everything that is proclaimed from the biblical text in a commitment to eradicate messages that perpetuate oppression" (97). "A feminist hermeneutics of proclamation . . . does not give final and ultimate authority to the biblical text alone. Rather, the ultimate authority becomes whether the biblical text is liberating and redemptive" (98).

Smith's critique of traditional homiletics is radical and comprehensive. She proposes a carefully constructed and imaginative feminist homiletic to take its place. But, a careful reading of Smith's radical new vision of christology and biblical hermeneutics should lead her readers to ask whether it is possible to remove Christ from the center of Christianity and consider the leftovers to be truly Christian.

Although we join Smith in denouncing the abuse and marginalization of women, we do not need to marginalize the person and work of Christ in the process. Moreover, the hermeneutics of suspicion grows out of a questionable nineteenth century view of human nature and society. We can work toward a more equitable society without embracing her radical reading of Scripture via a hermeneutics of suspicion.

Kenneth W. Smith
First Baptist Church
Stoneham, MA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Birthing the Sermon: Women Preachers on the Creative Process. By Jana Childers, ed., St. Louis: Chalice, 2001, 0-8272-0230-X, 207 pp., $24.99 paperback.

The twelve female contributors to this volume are either preachers or teachers of preaching. They reflect diverse geographic regions, races, marital statuses, sexual orientations, denominations, and theologies. Each person offers a well-written recitation of her own sermon preparation process followed by a sermon that is the fruit of those labors. Though some are self-confessedly less disciplined than others (56), most describe practices that are good reminders, if not necessarily new insights. For instance, Mary Graves writes, "I have found that making social plans on Saturday night is a mistake, and I generally avoid doing so. I need to pour all my attention into worship and preaching the next morning" (89). Or, Margaret Moers Wenig, the one rabbi in the group, observes, "As my sermons improve, my congregants' expectations increase. The bar is constantly raised" (185). Most utilize a lectionary so the discussion of text selection will be most helpful to those who are similarly constrained. For male readers like myself one benefit is that we encounter a feminine, and mainly right-brain approach (103) to preparation which usually begins with what Mary Donovan Turner calls "my own encounter with the text" (172). In some cases, this seems to be little more than free association; in others, it is more rigorous exegesis. In most instances, the congregation's perspective is brought into the process relatively early, deliberately so by Barbara K. Lundblad (123). Ms. Wenig described a week when her parishioners taught her that "more than anything else, my congregants needed their rabbi *to give voice* to what was on their minds" (186). Jana Childers writes that "it is important to listen to what your congregation asks for" (43). Barbara Brown Taylor writes, "The congregation plays a huge role in my preaching, both as I am writing and as I am speaking" (162). Most see preaching as dialogical and cede to the congregation significant say in the content of the sermon.

Partly because of this and certainly sometimes because of a weak view of Scripture, several of the messages did not strike me as an attempt to faithfully convey the content of the text and elicit the response it seeks. Some of the writers (18, 68) prefaced their descriptions of the preparation process with straightforward acknowledgements of their *a priori* agendas. Not all of these were conspicuously biblical.

How then would I recommend this book be used? Some preachers and student preachers who are women may find the tips, wisdom, and examples easy to receive because they come from women. As with anything any of us

write, readers will want to test all things and hold fast to that which is good. Any preacher, female or male, will learn or recall some valuable practices and helpful insights that can enrich the sermon preparation process. And I think they will be encouraged by the candor of these writers, if not necessarily their theological commitments. Those of us who tend to be left-brain and not too creative will perhaps be challenged to develop some habits that could serve us well.

Greg R. Scharf Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
Deerfield, IL

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Preaching in Two Voices. By Suzan D. Johnson Cook and William D. Watley. Judson: Valley Forge, 1992, 081701173, 118pp., $13.00 paperback.

This book contains a compilation of eight sermons from two African-American pastors, one female and one male. Cook and Watley select eight different women from the life of Christ and preach on them, each from her or his own perspective.

For preachers and students of preaching this book quickly demonstrates how the same passage can be preached in two ways. From interpretation through application we see two ways to handle texts. For example, the number of personal illustrations each preacher uses varies greatly. Listeners learn only a small amount about Watley and his personal life, but readers learn much about Cook as we hear the text *through* a woman's life. By the end of a typical sermon by Cook, the listener has been brought into the preacher's world and introduced all around, with minimal time spent in the text itself. In fact, that is a weakness in this volume. Cook's sermons lack scriptural basis. Although sound biblical principles are taught in her sermons, those sermons usually do not stem from the text given. She makes many assumptions about a text with little time spent explaining or defending those assumptions.

In contrast, Watley uses a great deal of creative detail showing his audience who this woman was and how his listeners can relate to her. He does this by explaining background to draw the audience into biblical woman's world. Even while uncovering the background or context of a passage he still weaves application throughout the sermon. He also spices his sermons with dialogue to keep the audience intrigued. His sermons are a refreshing look at the women in Jesus' life.

Overall this book helps us preach about the women in Jesus' ministry. Furthermore, the contrast of styles is interesting and can show how one passage can be preached in at least two ways.

Jennie Martone, Th.M.

Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary South Hamilton, MA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

L. Susan Bond, *Contemporary African American Preaching: Diversity in Theory and Style*. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003. 0-8272-0489-2. 154 pages, $29.99, paper.

A study of preaching in America is incomplete without serious attention being given to the preaching that takes place in the African American church, a major influence in our society which has exerted a profound influence on the wider preaching community.

Contemporary African American Preaching is not a book about the broad topic of African American preaching so much as it is a study of several key preachers and homileticians who have been significant influences on the preaching within that community. As Bond points out in her introduction, "This is an introductory work on contemporary homiletic theory among African American academic homileticians." Within those parameters, she does an able job.

Evangelical readers will recognize that Bond (a Vanderbilt Divinity School professor) writes from a more liberal theological perspective. Indeed, her discussion of preaching and the challenge of language is a reflection of the theoretical quicksand from which New Homiletics devotees attempt to do their work. For example, "If language is as loaded and ambiguous as we have claimed, how could anything like absolute truth be borne in it? At best, Truth with a capital *T* is always partial and subject to human distortion. Language may have the ability to disclose some truth, but it always masks or hides some truth as well."

Nevertheless, Bond provides an interesting and helpful discussion of several key homileticians within the African American community: Samuel D. Proctor, Gardner C, Taylor, James Earl Massey, James A. Forbes, Jr., Henry H. Mitchell, and a chapter on "African American Women and Womanists."

Each chapter provides some biographical information on the preacher being considered, then offers an analysis of that person's thought and approach within a series of categories: their view of the nature of the gospel; the purpose of preaching; the relationship between preaching and scripture; the relationship between testaments; the nature and purpose of faith communities; racial orientation and African American studies; preaching and language studies; and homiletic method. In her chapter on "African American Preaching and Homiletic Theory," Bond discusses each of these categories at some length.

The discussion of these major homiletical figures focuses primarily on their writing about homiletics, rather than their actual sermons, though Bond does make reference to statements and phrases in a number of sermons. Her analysis of their work is engaging and generally fair to the subjects, though at times it is clearly colored by her own theological commitments. For example, she seems somewhat surprised that James Earl Massey takes a literal approach to the resurrection. Having noted Massey's emphasis on the cross in preaching, she goes on observe:

The primary mandate for preaching the resurrection is that it is part of the apostolic witness and something that the early church believed in. The fact that it seems incredible should humble contemporary Christians, says Massey. "Supernaturalism is a distinct element in the New Testament accounts. Attempts to tidy up the New Testament by removing such particularities are by necessity ill-fated: the particularities are related to him." The claim may seem a bit odd, since Massey takes great pains to argue how credible such a notion would have been to the early believers, and in fact, to the ancient Greco-Roman world, as if their untroubled belief were a mandate for ours. Massey seems to ask us to suspend belief more rigorously than the apostolic community was required to do. (68)

In the final chapter Bond deals with African American female homileticians who will, she believes, "shape the future of homiletics, both black and white, male and female, in ways that are yet to be discerned." Two pioneers in this area – Ella Pearson Mitchell and Leontine T.C. Kelly – receive intensive treatment, followed by a survey of other female scholars who have stepped onto the scene and are making their voices heard within the academe.

Students of preaching will find *Contemporary African American Preaching* an interesting and helpful introduction to these important contributors to our work.

Michael Duduit *Preaching Magazine* and American Academy of Ministry
Franklin, TN

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

The Heart of Black Preaching. By Cleophus J. LaRue. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000, 0-664-25847-6, 260 pp., $19.95, paper.

In his book *The Heart of Black Preaching*, Cleophus J. LaRue insightfully answers two questions: "What makes Black preaching tick?" and, "What makes Black preaching great?" LaRue answers the first question by

carefully analyzing sermons from the great Black preachers of the 19th century (chapter 2) and the 20th century (chapter 3). He goes a step further than most writers in this genre by looking at Black preaching through an historical lens before offering a contemporary analysis. Thus, the reader learns a great deal about the roots of Black preaching and sees contemporary parallels because of the author's careful attention to history. LaRue partially answers the second question by providing an illuminating analysis of Black preaching's uniquely biblical hermeneutic. After acknowledging the considerable diversity in Black preaching and in the Black church in general, LaRue carefully analyzes the genre in chapter 1 by examining the characteristics, dynamics, communal nature, and subject matter of Black preaching. Chapter 1 is one of the book's strongest assets because it addresses the mindset of the preacher and the audience as well as the style and substance of the sermon. It is the book's best chapter. Chapter 4 addresses the broader themes and sociocultural context of Black sermons. It takes the reader inside the psyche of the Black layperson and the Black community to demonstrate why certain themes are central to Black preaching, themes such as liberation, impartiality, love, and the sovereign power of God. The last one hundred pages of the book is a rich storehouse of representative sermons from the great Black preachers of the 19th and 21st century that makes it a helpful reference book in the library of any preacher.

If you have interest in history of preaching or in discovering the stories and sermons of Black preachers from the late 19th century, or if you would like to glean some homiletical gems from your contemporaries, then read *The Heart of Black Preaching*. LaRue is an excellent writer and the book is accessible to those who are inside or outside the Black preaching tradition.

Jared Alcántara, Th. M. candidate
University of Edinburgh
Edinburgh, UK

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Preaching Mark in Two Voices by Brian K. Blount and Gary W. Charles. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 0-664-22393-1, 273 pp., $24.95 paperback.

"The Bible," Leland Ryken has observed, "is overwhelmingly literary in its form. The one thing that it is *not* is what we so often picture it as being—a theological outline with proof texts attached."

Blount and Charles agree with Ryken. Their book is a helpful study in the process of moving from exegetical analysis to proclamation, while being sensitive to the literary nature of the biblical text. This is the book's greatest strength. For some readers, it may also be its primary weakness.

There are times when the authors' careful attention to the language of the text seems to have the curious effect of deemphasizing the literal and historical significance of the biblical writer's words. The factual nature of the Gospel events is less important to them than the significance of the language used to describe those events. In his sermon on Mark 4:1-41, where Jesus calms the storm at sea, Charles notes: "Mark tells this story, and another like it two chapters later, because it is true. He leaves its factual merit to the curiosities of the Jesus Seminar or to the conservative guardians of Christianity. What Mark refuses to leave open to debate is the truth of the story he tells."

Setting aside the question of factuality frees Blount and Charles to focus on the literary significance of the text. This approach highlights the analogical power of the Gospel stories. Unfortunately, it also implicitly devalues the literal meaning of the text. Like the interpreters of the Alexandrian school of old, these authors relegate the literal sense of the passage to least important. Expository preaching is grounded in historical, grammatical, and literary exegesis. Blount and Charles' sermons are rooted primarily in the last two.

By focusing on the literary nature of Mark's Gospel, Blount and Charles do enable us to see the events through new eyes. Their sermons display the power of exegesis to unlock vivid images and analogies that can then be incorporated into the sermon. These, in turn, provide insight into the metaphorical significance of our own experiences. In short, they help us to see ourselves in the Gospel.

Because the authors come from different backgrounds, their exegesis and sermons provide a good example of the place of the preacher in the hermeneutical spiral. Brian Blount's exegesis and sermons are informed by his experiences as an African American whose context is "decidedly biracial and therefore always bicultural." Gary Charles's perspective is impacted by his experience as a white male serving in "an historic, predominately white, well-educated, prosperous congregation situated in a Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C." Together, they blend their voices in an antiphonal harmony that will impress, help, and probably disturb anyone who has set heart and hand to the challenge of preaching the good news of Mark's gospel.

John Koessler

Moody Bible Institute
Chicago, IL

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

A Matter of Life and Death: Preaching at Funerals. By Charles Hoffacker. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge Publications, 2002, 1-56101-215-7, 112 pp.,

$12.95, paper.

Charles Hoffacker, an Episcopalian pastor from Port Huron, Michigan, provides a process of putting together a funeral sermon. These sermons are to be special and unique. He rightly states, "Every funeral is different, because every life is different, uniquely precious" (4). The funeral sermon is to "a normal, integral part of the service" (10). The congregation is important and certainly the background of the person who has died is strategic in composing the sermon. Hoffacker suggests one use "a number of art forms" in sermon construction (11). He places most emphasis on finding the "key." "This key helps mourners recognize grace in the unique life of the deceased. It helps the preacher proclaim good news in the face of this particular death . . . . The key is an image, a phrase, a story, a personal characteristic, a vocation or avocation, or some other feature that is connected with, or at least can be connected with the life of the deceased. It is the obvious centerpiece of the sermon" (18-19).

Building a sermon from Mr. Hoffacker's book is anything but easy. The "key" is a helpful device, but the steps toward full sermon manuscript are not mapped out in the chapters. The chapters appear to be more "talking about" funeral sermons than "talking readers through" the steps in funeral sermon construction. The sample sermons in the back of the book provide some insight but there's a large jump from finding the "key" to the actual sermon.

The book is more descriptive than prescriptive. There is a distinct lack of footnotes and the research suggested by the author tends to be anecdotal rather than studied. Specific examples throughout the book would help the reader to understand the process of putting together the kind of sermon he suggests. In addition, strengthening the samples at the end of the book would help, too. Finally, although employing the "key" is helpful, at times the scriptural emphasis in the sermons is lost. Granted, preaching funeral sermons is a challenge, and preaching biblical funeral sermons is even more difficult. Charles Hoffacker stimulates our thinking and practice in this area. The book's helpfulness is in the questions it raises as we prepare to preach funerals.

Scott M. Gibson Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary South Hamilton, MA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Christian Hope, Christian Practice. A Funeral Guide. By Ian Markham and Giles Legood. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2004, 1-56563-923-5, 152pp.,

$14.94, paperback.

Professor Ian Markham and Anglican priest Giles Legood have collaborated to produce this funeral guide designed for "Christians who want to think about the theology and practicalities of their funeral plans" (1). The guide also serves a secondary purpose in being a resource pastors may recommend to concerned congregants. The basic rationale of the book is not to promote morbidity or a preoccupation with death but to allow believers to be prepared for their own deaths. In their words, "A prepared life, aware of the certainty that everyone we value will one day cease to be, is a life that appreciates the present moment much more" (5,6). With this in mind the authors have produced a funeral handbook so a believer might "pick and choose" the most helpful and applicable parts.

Using a readable writing style, Markham and Legood move from the theoretical and theological aspects of the issues surrounding one's death and funeral to practical matters relating to the details surrounding death and planning the funeral. Chapter 1 deals with aspects of coping with death concluding with helpful prayers for those dealing with death. Chapter 2 summarizes the history of funerals including the more contemporary trends used by funeral directors and the global trend toward cremation. Euthanasia and palliative care are discussed briefly.

Chapter 3 proved to be the most controversial. Entitled "Christianity and Death," the authors cover some of the theological ground around the issues of death and personal eschatology. Two areas are most noteworthy. The first is the authors' view of the afterlife of pets. Arguing for a more thorough doctrine of the redemption of creation, the authors note observe that "redemption at the end of time seems confined to humankind. In questioning such a view the writers of this book cannot help but wonder why God bothered with animals and plants and the rest of creation if the end result involves their exclusion. Surely we should expect the scale of redemption to be at least equivalent to that of creation" (47). So, the worried soul who ponders the eternal destiny of his/her cat may be assured of eternal feline fellowship – probably without the bother of the litter box! A bit speculative, perhaps, but maybe a comfort to people who are very attached to their pets. The second issue is more substantive. In dealing with the doctrine of hell, the authors downplay the traditional view of eternal punishment for the wicked. A few quotations from this section will represent their view: "An eternity of punishment seems disproportionate for a lifetime of wickedness, even if one has been exceptionally wicked. Beside this, the Christian good news (the gospel) is about Christ dying for the whole world so that the whole world is redeemed . . . . Instead we, like many Christians, see hell as a state of selfishness and loneliness that we create for ourselves . . . . It is possible

that when we die some of us, perhaps most of us, will still have barriers that will need destroying. This is the problematic area that the doctrine of purgatory set out to resolve (49,50). Can false comfort be real comfort? This chapter alone would give evangelical pastors serious reservations as to the appropriateness of placing this book in a congregant's hands.

Chapter 4 does a good job of answering four "myths" about death – some excellent pastoral advice.

Chapters 5 to 9 deal with practical matters surrounding one's death: from financial concerns to help in choosing a funeral director and planning the funeral service. Much of the advice is helpful and geared to life in America, even though the authors seem more comfortable in a British context. Chapter 8 gives suggestions for music, readings and prayers for the funeral service. The book concludes with a list of helpful addresses and a glossary of related terms.

Since this book is designed as a handbook, or as the authors state, "a conversation partner" (136), the reader may use what is helpful and leave the rest. The practical parts of the book indicate a formal or liturgical background (complete with Scripture readings from the Apocrypha and suggestions for funeral music which may be somewhat removed from those raised on gospel songs or even contemporary worship songs). Despite their best efforts to translate the book into the American context (complete with references to Oprah and The Simpsons!), certain Anglicisms appear throughout and are especially obvious in the glossary. In terms of format, typographical errors are minimal and the wide margins are helpful in a handbook format for facilitating reader response.

There is much to commend this book, but due to the content in Chapter 3, I would hesitate to give this book to a congregant without an opportunity for continued discussion.

Blayne A. Banting

Briercrest College and Seminary
Caronport, SK

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

High-Tech Worship? Using Presentational Technologies Wisely. By Quentin J. Schultze. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004, 0-8010-6480-5, 112 pp., $10.99 paper.

With wisdom and balance typical of all his writings, Quentin Schultze

teaches us how to use computer and video technologies in worship services. He also teaches us when to avoid those technologies. He is neither a technophile nor a technophobe. Like all communication media, Schultze argues, the latest innovations have strengths and weaknesses. It will take you just a couple of hours to read this book, and those hours will be well invested. I highly recommend this book for worship pastors and teaching pastors.

One of the most striking features of the book is its blend of theory and praxis. Based on a simple but sound theology of worship (Chapter 2), Schultze offers practical advice with confidence. Much of that advice is conveniently summarized in 18 lists such as "Three potential problems in worship presentations" (65), "Causes of presentational distraction and awkwardness" (66), how to "Position a screen in a sanctuary" (68), and "Typical costs of presentational technologies" (79). Two lists demonstrate Schultze's balanced tone: "Possible advantages to using screens for singing" (54), and "Possible disadvantages to using screens for singing" (55).

This book grew out of personal experience as the author and his wife visited a different church each week during a nine-month sabbatical. During those months Schultze saw many uses of media that concerned him, as well as some uses that gave him hope. Yet the book is based on more than just anecdotal evidence. An appendix presents six tables of statistics discovered by a survey of 895 congregations conducted by the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship. The tables summarize issues like what motivates churches to use visual media (105), and what percentage of churches in various traditions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Mainline, and Evangelical) reject the use of media (106).

The book is clearly and efficiently written, humble yet authoritative in tone, and full of wisdom. It only costs $10.99. Buy it, and pass it around to your church leaders and staff.

Jeffrey Arthurs
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, MA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

360-Degree Preaching: Hearing, Speaking, and Living the Word. By Michael J. Quicke. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003, 1-84227-247-0, 240 pp., $16.99 paperback.

Many books on preaching seek to instruct us, but few these days try to inspire us. Even fewer succeed at it. But Michael Quicke has written a book that does

both. In *360 Degree Preaching*, he challenges a popular metaphor for preaching, suggests a better alternative, and encourages preachers. The result is a book that takes seriously the challenges of preaching in the 21st century but faces them with a hopefulness rooted in God's character and activity.

Quicke critiques the bridge-building analogy often associated with John Stott, arguing that the bridge analogy (a 180 degree arc) is inadequate because it does not account for all the factors involved in preaching. It is too simple—and rather closed. What is worse, it could leave the impression that preachers are the key to the outcome. Quicke suggests completing the circle, so to speak, by making explicit the influence of God (Father, Son and Spirit) and Scripture in preaching and by acknowledging the role of the hearers as well. The 360 degree diagram has lines indicating influence flowing in a variety of directions because "a model of preaching . . . needs to be more open and untidy to accommodate the various factors that help to empower the preaching event within the grace of the Triune God."

Though he challenges Stott's bridge analogy, Quicke follows Stott by emphasizing the theological grounds for preaching. He reminds us that God desires to speak to people, delights to do so through preaching, and continues to use sermons to transform individuals and congregations. What else could rescue preachers from the fatigue and bewilderment that sometimes afflict us in a rapidly-changing culture in which old ways are up for grabs and the influence of Christianity seems to be slipping away? Quicke does an excellent job of reminding us of the efficacy of preaching.

Initially, Quicke's 360 degree diagram seems to clash with his second dominant image for preaching, namely, swimming. Swimming? A metaphor for preaching? It seems odd at first but comes to make sense as Quicke unpacks it in the second half of his book. He is not comparing preaching to doing laps in the local pool; instead, he envisions swimming in a river, which itself propels the swimmer along. The river is the connection between the 360 degree diagram and the swimming metaphor. Both emphasize that God's powerfully transforming activity—preceding, surrounding, and following our human activity in preaching—is the larger context for thinking about what preaching is and how we should do it. In this way Quicke draws together issues of spirituality, character, and ministry in his philosophy of preaching. Sermon preparation is not merely making a speech based on the Bible, but is an expression of the life of the Spirit through the preacher.

Like any teacher of preaching, Quicke knows the importance of giving students a method to follow. He does so in this book, but he skillfully avoids the trap of treating sermon preparation as simply a matter of method. Along the way, Quicke surveys the current options in homiletical method. It is

evident that he is conversant with the key works in his field and related fields. He offers helpful taxonomies of preaching. Thankfully, instead of just pitting them against one another as exclusive alternatives, he shows how each of them draws on certain cultural or theological insights. Recognizing lessons to be learned from a variety of models, he seeks to create a sermon preparation process flexible enough to retain the wisdom of the ages while adapting to the realities of today. In that connection, Quicke sides with those who argue that electronic forms of communication are going to be an inevitable part of 21st century preaching. He contends that multi-sensory encounter with the word, much of it dependent on electronics and developed by collaborative worship teams, will become standard procedure in the churches that engage the multi-media culture.

Quicke includes a sample sermon that illustrates his sermon preparation method and the outcome of it. It provides a fitting conclusion to a fine book.

Grant Lovejoy

International Missions Board,
Southern Baptist Convention
Richmond, VA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Preaching Hard Texts of the Old Testament. By Elizabeth Achtemeier. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, 1-56563-333-4, 192 pp., $14.95, paperback.

Elizabeth Achtemeier, retired seminary professor and ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA), has once again challenged pastors to courageously use what amounts to three-fourths of the Bible in our preaching. This time she has chosen thirty-one Old Testament passages that pose unusual difficulties for the preacher from all three sections of the Old Testament.

The texts chosen are indeed those that would pose problems for contemporary hearers and speakers. Despite the necessary brevity of each explanation and the suggested sermon form, almost every explanation is a triumph for sound exegesis and thoughtful homiletical analysis.

Dr. Achtemeier begins her book with a short introduction that properly claims that the issue of problem passages usually is not the Bible's fault, but ours. When we approach the Old Testament as being primitive, legalistic, outdated, or superseded by the New Testament, such stereotypes must be declared as "ignorant assessments" of our own devising. No wonder the Old Testament

is avoided like the plague if any or all of these ideas have infected our thinking about the earlier part of the canon.
So, what sets great preaching of the OT apart from mediocre practice? Professor Achtemeier hits the nail on the head by affirming "great preachers talk mostly about God and not about human problems" (1). But this is not the God that Marcion depicted in the second century A.D., for his God loved but never judged anyone.

Evangelicals will bristle every once in a when a sprinkle of Source Critical comments appear in the limited footnotes. Thus, the Pastoral letters of First and Second Timothy and Titus are declared "Pauline pseudepigrapha" (16, n. 1), and the book of Deuteronomy is the "product of the seventh century B.C.," while Deuteronomy 34 "was added, probably about 550 B.C." (55, n. 1). But none of this detracts from the excellence of the interpretations and suggested sermon forms. Instead of resorting to the New Testament as a crutch to reinterpret the Old Testament text, thereby escaping the problem in an eisegetical move so often employed in pulpits of our day, Achtemeier holds closely, to the text at hand in the Old Testament.

Once in a while I disagreed with a conclusion (which is to be expected, I suppose). For example, I doubt if God told Hosea to marry a harlot. At other times I wanted to add a little more interpretation such as the instance where Uzzah was killed for reaching out to steady the falling Ark of God. Surely Achtemeier's emphasis on the Ark as surrounded by the holiness of God is correct; but I would add that as a Levite, Uzzah should have known that transporting the Ark of the Covenant on a cart was improper, for it was to be carried on the shoulders of those set aside among the Levites to do so.

I highly recommend this book to pastors and teachers of homiletics and the Old Testament. It is a wonderful addition to books teaching us how to handle texts that seem difficult in our eyes and to our day.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary South Hamilton, MA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

One Gospel, Many Ears: Preaching for Differing Listeners in the Congregations. By Joseph R. Jeter, Jr., and Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice, 2002, 0-8272-2716-7, 197 pp., $26.99 paper.

This books deals with the difficult but crucial matter of audience analysis and adaptation. The authors describe the characteristics of the following listeners and suggest how to adapt to them:

Generations (Builders, Silent Generation, Boomers, Generation 13)—Chapter 2.
Mental Processes (using Fowler's six stages of "Faith Development Theory," the Myers-Briggs Indicators, and Neuro Lingusitic Programming—auditory, visual, kinesthetic)—Chapter 3.
Gender (patterns of knowing in women, men, and "GLBTQA"—gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, questioning, and asexual)—Chapter 4.
Multiculturalism—Chapter 5.
"The Least of These" (strangers, older adults, children, the poor, those with physical and mental disabilities)—Chapter 6.
Theological conservatives and liberals—Chapter 7.

The book includes endnotes and a chart that helps preachers visualize and target the categories above.

The strength of this volume is its concise but well-documented summary of the categories listed above. As a secondary source, this book will help you understand the primary writings of some major thinkers. For example, the authors summarize liberal and conservative theologies concisely and even-handedly. Though both authors "tend toward the liberal end of the theological spectrum" (150), but they describe the entire spectrum with objectivity.

The challenge the book faces arises from the subject itself. As a teacher of audience analysis and adaptation, I recognize how daunting the task is. Jeter and Allen are right that "a pastor reading this book could easily feel overwhelmed by the number of categories in a congregation and the call to develop sermons that connect with each of them" (175). In public communication we cast a broad net. Audiences are not homogeneous. The authors do a good job of contrasting listeners *within* the categories, but in reality each listener is a member of *many* categories. A single listener may be a poor-female-liberal-Boomer-stage two-kinesthetic-silent-learner. Analysis of and adaptation to each listener is impossible in busy parish ministry.

How then are preachers to adapt? Jeter and Allen say we should "conscientiously integrate material that pertains to particular groups into particular sermons" (175), and "the wise pastor will spend some time every week stepping out of his or her world an into the worlds of the people" (175). Thus Jeter and Allen exhort us to do audience analysis *intentionally* the way gifted pastors do it *intuitively*—by listening, visiting, and experiencing their people's worlds, and then allowing those activities to shape their preaching. This book helps pastors listen better, but nothing can replace the listening.

Jeffrey Arthurs
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary South Hamilton, MA

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Preaching and Practical Ministry. By Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis, MO: 2001, 0-8272-2972-0, 149 pp., $19.99 paperback.

Under the editorship of Paul Scott Wilson, Chalice Press is producing a series of volumes titled "Preaching and Its Partners." The intent of the series, in which at least five books have already been published, is to explore "the interaction of preaching and other theological disciplines in a way that will help preachers and students of preaching to fully integrate the sermon into the life of the church and the range of Christian scholarship" (back cover). The series links preaching and related disciplines such as worship, ethics, and textual considerations. The purpose of the series is both clear and important to serious preachers and teachers of preachers.

Prolific author Ronald J. Allen was tapped to write *Preaching and Practical Ministry*. Allen is the long-time professor of Preaching and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis. He states in his Introduction that "preaching has its deepest effect in a congregation when it draws its breath in positive connection with other things that happen in the Christian community" (1). He fears the opposite sometimes occurs—the positive effect of preaching suffers—when preaching is disconnected from other matters in the church's experience. He sets out, then, to examine the role of preaching in the larger life of the congregation from a systems perspective. He does so to emphasize that the ministries of the local church should not be compartmentalized for they should have an influence on one another. This is true of preaching as well as other ministries.

The initial chapter offers an explanation of what the author means by "systems thinking" in regard to the local church. Subsequent chapters deal with preaching in relationship to Christian education, pastoral care, leadership, missions, and spirituality. Each chapter follows the general format of discussing the topic from an historical perspective, including biblical history, looking at contemporary concepts of the topic, and then discussing how the ministry of preaching might contribute to the enrichment of that topic in the life of the church.

Allen has a fine sense of history and he often brings this into play in his writings. He does that in this present volume, and the result is that the reader is treated to a healthy dose of perspective often ignored with today's emphasis on the *now*. He does not hesitate to embrace traditional ministry methods when he believes they are needed today. For example, he includes a brief section on making home "calls," a practice thought by many

contemporary ministers to be a quaint practice of days gone by. He recognizes the difficulties of doing this, especially in urban settings, but still advocates its importance for pastoral care and nurture (58).

The discerning reader will note that Allen's theology determines the nature of the church's role in the areas discussed. While evangelicals may disagree with many of his theological positions, he is consistent in applying them to ministry practices and objectives and this is as it should be. This is seen, for instance, in the chapter on missions. He sees the *missio dei* in a way that primarily emphasizes social justice and societal well-being rather than conversion. He holds that since God is all-loving and omnipresent, he is at work through the church and other human agencies "to help the world become a cosmic community of love and justice" (103). He does give limited attention to "conversion," but it seems to be limited to changing the understandings of those who find other religions inadequate to their personal needs, or to pointing out areas of social deficiency. For Allen, the idea of spiritual rebirth (John 3) seems foreign to the concept of missions.

Unfortunately, Allen also seems to suffer from what might be called "theological parochialism." While he is fully aware of church life and ministry practice in his own and other mainline denominations, he seems to ignore evangelical movements and values. At least he seldom discusses them in a positive way. For example, he lauds David Buttrick's suggestion that the church should practice both in-church preaching and out-church preaching (112), the latter being primarily informal lay-witnessing in day-to-day encounters. He seems to regard this as a novel concept and concludes that "few laity are currently able to give an account of Christian hope." He continues, "As the long-standing denominations shrink in membership, the evangelistic potential of Christians personally interacting with non-Christians shrinks" (112). Such a statement ignores the fact that evangelicalism continues to grow and that the pool of out-church preachers is not decreasing. It further ignores the fact that much effort continues to be given among evangelicals to the training of lay persons for "out-church preaching." He is either uninformed of this or sees it as unimportant.

In spite of the above criticisms, *Preaching and Practical Ministry* is an interesting, well-written mixture of stimulating thinking and practical instruction. I recommend it both to pastors and teachers of preaching for both groups have the opportunity to emphasize the importance of the integration of preaching with the total ministry of the church. Perhaps in the future someone will contribute a similar volume from an evangelical perspective. If so, the author should strive to employ the same scholarship and consistency exhibited by Ronald Allen in the present book.

Donald L. Hamilton
Columbia Biblical Seminary
Columbia, South Carolina

~ • ~ • ~ • ~

Going Public with the Gospel: Reviving Evangelistic Proclamation. By Lon Allison and Mark Anderson. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2003, 0-8308-1365-9, 180 pp., $13.00 paperback.

The church must publicly proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ. A simple statement and yet a bygone conviction that barely takes center stage in our churches, let alone in any other facet of life. Lon Allison and Mark Anderson, partners and co-authors in evangelism, lay a simple yet convincing argument for proclaiming Christ publicly.

The book is well-structured in three sections: The power and history of public proclamation of Jesus Christ; the unfortunate realities of the evangelist's empty office and forgotten message; and finally, a well-crafted collage of issues in evangelistic ministry. Each section oozes with the experiences and testimonies of the authors who have given their lives to preaching Jesus Christ.

Allison and Anderson vividly portray the power of speech—specifically, gospel speech. Their argument begins with a theological understanding how words relate to the inspired Word. Each page of Section One is saturated with solid exegesis in both the Old and New Testaments. The authors refuse to apologize for what they know to be God's ordained and chosen vessel to bring lost souls into His loving arms. This vessel is preaching. The prophets proclaimed. Jesus and His disciples proclaimed. The authors argue we are to continue proclaiming in obedience to the Great Commission.

The plight in evangelistic preaching is not ignorance of God's command but rather a refusal to obey it. The authors lament the missing evangelist and the lost gospel in Section Two. Where are the evangelists? Staggering statistics reveal that pastors don't see themselves gifted with evangelism. Therefore, the church isn't preaching publicly. To help remedy this, they recommend a sermon structure that covers creation, rebellion, God's love, our cost, and eternal reward and punishment.

The case for public proclamation concludes with snapshots of cultural relevance, signs and wonders, spiritual warfare and evangelistic follow-up which the authors call "preservation." These controversial areas conjure myriad emotions among Christians and leave the reader informed yet

Subscription

__ Please enter my subscription for one year. I have enclosed $20.00 ($25.00 for over seas airmail).

__ Please send a gift subscription to the friend named below. I have enclosed $20.00 ($25.00 for over seas airmail).

__ Please send me_____copies of this issue. I have enclosed $5.00 each for the first twenty copies and $3.00 for each copy thereafter.

__ Please send me copies of the following issues:

2001	__ December 1:1	
2002	__ June 2:1	__ December 2:2
2003	__ June 3:1	__ December 3:2
2004	__ March 4:1	__ September 4:2

I have enclosed $5.00 each for the first twenty copies and $3.00 for each copy thereafter.

Name/Institution: _____

Address: _____

State/Province: _____

Zip/Postal Code: _____

Please send the completed form and check
(made payable to "The Evangelical Homiletics Society,"
noting on the memo line "JEHS") to
Dr. Endel Lee
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
3939 Gentilly Boulevard, Box 30
New Orleans, LA 70126

Thank you for your subscription.

To join the Evangelical Homiletics Society, please consult our website:
evangelicalhomiletics.com