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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Preaching: Old and New

by Scott M. Gibson

When it comes to preaching, as in any facet of theological study, one is compelled to discern the theological presuppositions behind the sermon, behind the exegesis, in order to discover the preacher's hermeneutic. The hermeneutical lens through which the preacher preaches can come from any number of perspectives. The history of preaching itself reveals the role of the preacher's hermeneutic as demonstrated in sermon construction and the communication of the sermon. These hermeneutical perspectives can be seen in, for example but not limited to, literal, allegorical, typological, kerygmatic, psychological, and theological preaching.

In this edition of the *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, we will explore the question: What is the New Homiletic? The articles presented will reveal a general agreement in the definition of the New Homiletic. However, each author explores different aspects of this significant theological influence in homiletics. As Evangelicals we are confronted to explore and understand this significant theological force. Over the last three decades the impact of the New Homiletic has grown. Not only has it had an impact in non-Evangelical circles, but has found its way – for good or for ill – into the thinking and practice of Evangelical homiletics.

The first article is by Shawn D. Radford explores Fred B. Craddock's role in the development of the New Homiletic. In the second article, I attempt to define the New Homiletic, while in the next article Kerry L. Bender puts additional perspective on it. The last article by Casey C. Barton examines the relationship between Mark Ellingsen and Charles Campbell and the differences in their "two-world" view. Finally, Cornelius Plantinga explores the theological nuances associated with the New Homiletic.

All of the articles in this edition interact with the New Homiletic and what it means to engage in evaluating its strengths and weaknesses – something Evangelicals are called to do.

In addition to the articles, readers will enjoy a classic sermon, “The First Hymn,” by F.W. Boreham. The book review section follows.

Thank you for your continued support of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.

The New Homiletic within Non-Christendom

by Shawn D. Radford

(editor's note: Shawn D. Radford is assistant professor of Homiletics and Supervised Ministry at Taylor Seminary, Edmonton, Alberta.)

Abstract

Fred B. Craddock elevated the roles of the listeners in the preaching event, giving birth to the New Homiletic. Nevertheless, Craddock's understanding of the roles of the listeners has inherent benefits and risks for preaching. As non-Christendom becomes a more prominent cultural milieu for listeners in the United States, the benefits of the New Homiletic decrease as the risks increase. Accordingly, Craddock's understanding of the roles of the listeners will need to be modified in non-Christendom so that the listeners are more likely to hear the voice of God and become mature Christ-followers.

The Resulting Character of the Church

Fred B. Craddock's understanding of the roles of the listeners in the preaching event has not only shaped the New Homiletic, but it has also incited a renewal of preaching in the North American church.[1] Eslinger claims, "Fred Craddock remains a pioneer in the emergence of 'the new homiletics.' . . . Through his publications, lectures, and preaching, Craddock has a central place in the renewal of preaching in our day."[2] Several homileticians have incorporated Craddock's emphasis on the listener's roles into their homiletical theory, resulting in a variety of sermon forms and a renewed focus on the listeners' roles in the preaching event. "This recent 'move toward the listeners,' as it is called, has been heralded as a new discovery and a valuable contribution to the shape of homiletics in North America."[3] Although it is evident that this move toward the listeners is not new within the history of the church,[4] its impact on the nature of the contemporary church is significant.

The New Homiletic once again has turned the attention of preachers to the listeners. Through the "synergistic interplay of theological and cultural forces,"[5] preaching has shifted toward obtaining a hearing by concentrating on the form, the "how" of sermons.[6] The emphasis of sermons on teaching and persuading in the first half of the twentieth century has been thrust aside in favor of creating an experience that delights the listeners.[7] "The rewards," Long suggests "have been great. We have seen the scales fall from our congregations' eyes and have felt the hearers sitting up a bit straighter and more alert in the pews."[8]

For many, the New Homiletic functioned as a "needed corrective to a preaching tradition that had turned the sermon into an academic lecture and the worship service into an arena for debate."[9] The predictability of the sermon and authoritarian demeanor of the preacher did not communicate well in a culture that demanded more participation in decision-making processes. The New Homiletic, with its turn to the listeners, its recognition of the eventfulness of the sermon, its awareness of the revelatory quality of biblical genres, and its focus on inductive movement, provided several alternatives to a preaching tradition that was looked upon as passé. "Preachers who had struggled with their congregations' boredom at the predictable sermon form found new life in the sermon when they attempted to 'do what the text does' rather than distil the idea from the text."[10]

The New Homiletic is not only a turn to the listeners, but it is also a turn to the Scriptures. New Homileticians generally emphasize the importance of the biblical text, regarding it as the primary source of the sermon's content and form. Craddock maintains, "The Scriptures are normative in the life of the church. To sever preaching from that norm either by neglect or intent would be to cut the church off from its primary source of nourishment and discipline."[11] Therefore, the preacher is to lead the congregation in an "experience" of the text including its aesthetic and affective dimensions.[12] In order to do so, the preacher needs to be able to

identify with the concrete experiences of the lives of the listeners and to recognize the implications of various biblical genres for the sermon form. "The deductive, three-point sermon is supplemented (if not completely displaced) by a variety of new forms, many of them related to the forms of the biblical literature itself."[13] Many preachers realize that the form of the sermon actually shapes the listener's faith; therefore, the Bible is not only a source for what is preached, but also how one preaches.[14]

Furthermore, the New Homiletic has highlighted the importance of narrative as a mode of revelation. Averil Cameron observes, "Christianity [is] a religion with a story," and the stories in Scripture create a dialogue that is characterized by its stories.[15] The narrative emphasis recaptures the holistic character of preaching, which speaks to the intellect as well as the emotions, and results in many preachers retelling the biblical story. David Larsen contends that the contemporary interest in narrative preaching results in many preachers exhibiting an excitement for the text of Scripture.[16] Larsen observes, "Some critics and preachers who do not believe in any external or historical referent for the biblical text seem more excited and enthusiastic about the text than some of us stodgy advocates of a historical inerrant Scripture."[17]

Despite the contributions of the New Homiletic, Charles Campbell asserts, "one can hardly argue that these developments have resulted in a more vital and faithful church."[18] Perhaps the reason lies in the haste with which preachers embrace practicality over theology.[19] Zink-Sawyer questions whether out of the pursuit of popular appeal, homileticians lose their theological integrity, unable to identify the theological motivations and implications of their preaching.[20] Careful consideration must be given to why one chooses to engage in a new practice and what one hopes to accomplish. Otherwise, one's preaching might "degenerate into mere entertainment or an attempt at the kind of intimacy with a congregation that only comes through faithful pastoral care."[21] Thompson concludes that New Homileticians "have focused on technique to the neglect of a clear understanding of the aims of

preaching" which "has serious limitations for the preacher whose work extends into the indefinite future and aims at something larger than the entertainment of the audience each week."[22] So much emphasis is given to the "how" of preaching that the "what" or content of preaching is minimized. One central point of debate focuses on the purpose of being relevant in preaching. Zink-Sawyer states, "We can be relevant in order to confirm congregational complacencies and meet our listeners in their comfortable places of pride and prejudice. Or we can be relevant to provoke transformation according to the vision of Christian obedience set forth in the gospel."[23]

The New Homiletic is not only a turn to the Scriptures but, conversely, it has undermined the authority of Scripture in the church.[24] Craddock's inductive approach grows out of his conviction that the preacher can no longer "presuppose the general recognition of his authority as a clergyman, or the authority of his institution, or the authority of Scripture."[25] Instead of beginning with the Scripture, Craddock encourages preachers to begin with the particulars of human experience. Although Craddock devotes special attention to the biblical text in *As One Without Authority*,[26] subsequent development and interpretation of Craddock's homiletic has led some preachers further away from the biblical text than even Craddock would warrant.[27] Randolph observes that the church is in danger of trivializing the Christian message. Randolph remarks, "Never has the church had more media of communications at its command and seldom has it been so uncertain of the message it has to communicate."[28]

Nevertheless, as Zink-Sawyer demonstrates, increased attention to the listener does not necessitate that other elements in preaching must be surrendered in the process. "Preaching is not some kind of 'zero-sum' game in which there must be winners and losers, in which one participant must relinquish something so that the other participant can gain something."[29] Nevertheless, the New Homiletic's curtailing of authority outside of the listener has resulted in preaching that is more concerned to create an

"experience of the gospel" for the listener than it is with conveying biblical content.[30] Thus, the authority of the sermon shifts from the biblical text to the listener.[31]
The New Homiletic also stresses an individualistic orientation within the church. The purpose of an experiential journey in which the preacher and listeners participate in dialogue that is spontaneous and open-ended is to allow listeners the freedom to experience the sermon for themselves, to feel their own feelings, and to think their own thoughts.[32] Each listener is responsible to draw his or her own conclusions, which Craddock believes is central to the "priesthood of all believers."[33] Therefore, the church, rather than being one body made up of many members, is a loosely connected group of individuals who all draw their own conclusions from the sermon, independently from the contributions and counsel of the corporate body.

This individualistic orientation of the New Homiletic can result in a stagnant church whose members are spiritually immature. C. Ellis Nelson maintains that a Christian's faith matures "when life experiences are interpreted in the light of the Christian tradition in order to understand and do the will of God amid ongoing events in which that person is involved. Because a congregation is part of the body of Christ, it is the place where individuals receive guidance, as they work out the meaning of their experiences, and support as they attempt to follow the leading of God's Spirit."[34] Nelson believes that the church's conversation, discipleship, and spiritual nurturing are necessary to create an environment for faith to grow and mature. Although experience is significant, it needs to be interpreted in the light of God's Word and the spiritual guidance of Spirit-filled believers.

A steady diet of New Homiletic preaching may also result in a church that is delighted but is also spiritually ignorant. Thompson notes, "Because faith seeks understanding, the sermon has always been the occasion for deeper instruction in the faith."[35] Craddock

himself notes the importance of content for the viability and growth of the church. Craddock states, "Where there is no substance, no articulated faith, the church is undernourished, and an undernourished church, when it is hit with something new, rushes to the bulwark with the only weapons it can gather in a moment and that is cliché, feeling, prejudice, and quickly purchased slogans."[36] Yet, it is the evaluation of Richard Thulin and David Randolph that the content of preaching has suffered much. Randolph writes that he and Thulin have "become alarmed about the lack of substance in much contemporary preaching."[37] Although the New Homiletic has attempted to keep the subject matter of preaching married to the concrete experiences of the listeners, Randolph bemoans the loss of the Christian message.[38] Long states, "Many people in the pews simply lack enough biblical knowledge to place biblical texts into any meaningful context and, thus, listen to Scripture episodically."[39] People need some background into the text's literary and historical contexts if they are to engage in a meaningful dialogue with the text and make informed decisions based on their experience of the text.

Therefore, the New Homiletic's emphasis on narrative as the primary, and sometimes the only, mode of discourse for preaching can result "in a reduced or distorted rendering of human life and divine revelation."[40] Although experience is significant and may have the capacity to shape community, it requires interpretation within the broader framework of the teaching of Scripture.[41] Long comments, "One of the flaws of the storytelling movement has been to privilege the narrative genre in Scripture and otherwise. It seems to me that what we've got in the Bible is a collection of genres, each of which is called for because the richness of the gospel cannot be spoken in a single voice. Narrative voice is very important, but it [is] not the only voice."[42] Narrative preaching requires other forms of sermons that carry with them their own intentions and emphases. "Stories can entertain and engender audience involvement, but ultimately they require interpretation and commentary."[43]

The New Homiletic, by nature of the listener's roles as beginning, participating in, and completing the dialogue of the sermon, may result in a church where the voice of God cannot be heard over the chatter of the so-called listeners. Rather than God and His Word being the focus in the sermon, the New Homiletic puts the emphasis on the experience of the listener, bringing with it the danger of "theological relationalism." Campbell warns that theological relationalism "dares to make no claims for God apart from the experience of human beings. Human experience becomes the focus of the sermon, rather than God in Jesus Christ, whose identity is rendered in the biblical narrative."[44] Therefore, the New Homiletic may falsely limit God to being too dependent on the listener's experience resulting in preaching that is limited in content by what can be evoked from human experience detached from God.[45]

Evaluation of Craddock's Roles of the Listeners in Non-Christendom

Randolph and Craddock, the pioneers of the New Homiletic, both acknowledge that there has been a change of listener in recent years. Randolph, in his thirtieth anniversary edition of *The Renewal of Preaching*, writes, "The Church of Christendom is past. The day when the Christian church enjoyed a privileged position is long gone. The culture no longer supports Christianity and its values. . . . We live in a post Christendom church."[46] In the 1991 Sprunt Lectures at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, Craddock stresses the significance of listeners being grounded in Scripture and the church's traditions; however, he then acknowledges that listeners do not have the foundational knowledge of the Bible that was present within Christendom.[47]

Other homileticians concur that there has been a change of listener from Christendom to non-Christendom. Craig Loscalzo remarks, "We can no longer assume that our preaching takes place within a more or less 'Christian culture.'"[48] Thompson describes the

situation more fully: "Today we preach to the children of those listeners whom we were attempting to address with revitalized sermons a generation ago. These children, however, have grown up in a post-Christian culture that is not familiar with the Bible. Unlike their parents, whose familiarity with the Christian faith produced the boredom the new homiletics sought to overcome, many Christians today do not know the basics of the Christian message. This change in the cultural situation is crucial to recognize, and it creates special challenges for preachers at the beginning of the new millennium."[49]

The situation is not the same today as it was when Craddock fashioned his understanding of the roles of the listeners in the preaching event. As Thomas Long succinctly states, "There is a lack of information and it is in the Christian land."[50] Consequently, preachers who have been influenced by and rely, to some degree, on Craddock's understanding of the roles of the listeners need to take into consideration the implications of Craddock's thought where there is a change of listener from Christendom to non-Christendom.[51]

Preachers today stand before listeners who do not know the content of the Christian faith. Long observes that contemporary listeners lack biblical awareness and thus the capacity of listeners to employ theological language has been damaged.[52] Therefore, although experience is still crucial to the preaching event, it needs interpretation in the light of the Christian faith. Even "Christians need to know something about the language, categories, and claims of the Christian tradition in order for their faith to mature."[53] Contemporary listeners need to be taught.[54] That is not to suggest that preaching revert to a pedestrian dissemination of information; rather, the situation today calls for preaching that will bring the Word of God to bear on the concrete experiences of the listeners' lives.[55]

Within this call for instruction and guidance, Craddock's

understanding of the role of the listener as a partner in the dialogue and movement of the sermon needs to be modified.[56] The nature of oral communication requires that the listeners be actively involved in contributing to the dialogue of the sermon. Yet, to admit partnership in the sermon does not necessarily imply that all partners are equal; rather, it means that all partners are listened to and respected.[57] Although indirectness and open-endedness can be strengths in a sermon, intended to increase the involvement of the listener, they can also be perils due to the possibility that listeners may view their personal experiences as more authoritative than the biblical text. Campbell notes, "With inductive preaching's emphasis on human experience and individual response, the danger always exists that the biblical text will become secondary and the real authority will become the experience of individual hearers, which both precedes and verifies the message of scripture."[58] Therefore, the listener, while participating as a partner alongside the preacher in an experiential journey of the biblical text, also stands with the preacher beneath the authority of the biblical text. It is from this posture that the experiences of the preacher and listener truly can be interpreted and understood.

Although Craddock believes that listeners who hear the Word for the first time can recognize it due to the *imago Dei*, he states, "The best listeners are the most informed on the subject. The more informed, the better the listener."[59] Furthermore, Craddock encourages preachers to draw from the reservoir of their listeners' biblical knowledge and experiences. However, if the reservoir of the listeners' biblical knowledge continues to dry up in non-Christendom, the preacher will be left with little else other than the listeners' experiences from which to draw. The challenge in non-Christendom is no longer to figure out how to communicate the gospel to those who have heard it before and are bored, but to learn "how to proclaim the gospel to those who have not heard and to initiate them into the Christian faith."[60] In 2003, in an interview with Michael Duduit, Craddock stated, "I think where we are now is to take a break from 'How do we do it?' and ask ourselves, 'What

are we saying?' I think in every field you have a cycle of change of method over content, then you move to content, or you accent content and then realize nobody's listening, and you say, 'We've got to think of a way to do this.' We are, in my judgment, now at a point of needing to give more attention to what we are saying."[61] Seven years earlier, Long submitted, "We may be moving now to the point where we have congregations who are delighted but don't know anything. They do not have the conceptual framework to be competent as Christians so the crisis is not necessarily boredom anymore it's competence. And so the teaching and persuasion may need to come back into the fore; however, not forgetting what we have learned in the period of delight so that we will not move back into the heavy pedantic, didactic sort of, 'Let me tell you the gospel truth,' but we can teach using the narrative and inductive insights that we have learned."[62] In other words, prior to being able to implement Craddock's role of the listener as a contributor to the content and movement of the sermon in non-Christendom, the basic knowledge of the Christian faith will have to be taught and narratives will need to share the spotlight of the preaching event with non-narrative application.[63]

One other cautionary note should be heeded about the roles of the listeners in non-Christendom. Underlying Craddock's role of the listener as one who completes the sermon is an optimistic trust in the perceptiveness of the listeners.[64] Craddock remarks that incompleteness and a lack of exhaustiveness in the sermon "requires a humility and a trust most [preachers] lack [namely,] to risk not having this control, to be willing to participate in sharing a matter that is bigger than speaker and hearer and which they can only explore together in wonder, humility, and gratitude."[65] Craddock's belief that the mystery of God cannot and should not be compacted into a single sermon, as if "the preacher had walked all the way around God and had taken pictures,"[66] is commendable. However, if "the guarantee that the word will not be lost between [the preacher] and congregation"[67] is determined by the perceptivity of the listener, then in non-Christendom, even more

than in Christendom, the "guarantee" is dubious. Only the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the preacher and listener can ensure that the Word is truly heard by all. "In the end, not even the most careful, prayerful preacher can determine precisely what is heard by [one's] listeners. And that is, perhaps, the first and most important caveat to remember as contemporary preachers. For the homiletical task in which we engage is not our own; it is, instead, the work of God: the mysterious, grace-filled, unrelenting work of God."[68] The trust of the preacher and listener should not be placed in their own abilities to hear and proclaim the Word, but in the work of the Spirit of God. In the preaching event, neither the preacher nor the listener has the first or last word, God does.

Conclusion

The prominence Craddock gave to the roles of the listeners in the sermon resulted in a New Homiletic that brought some much-needed correctives to preaching; however, too much dependence upon the listeners in the sermon has inherent risks, particularly when there is a change of listener from Christendom to non-Christendom. The New Homiletic's tendency to minimize biblical content in the sermon and to focus on the listeners' individual experiences may result in a church that is delighted but spiritually unconscious. After all, if the dialogue between the listeners and the biblical text begins with the listeners and the sermon also concludes with the listeners, it is likely that the listeners will hear their own voices, not the voice of God. When the listeners' experiences become the source of the sermon's content, on par with the Scripture itself, as well as the litmus test for the relevance of the sermon, the Word of God is surely to be drowned out by the chatter of those who claim to hear. This contemporary illusion of hearing is equally as perilous as the illusion of hearing within Christendom that Craddock tackles.

Therefore, although contemporary preachers ought to consider Craddock's understanding of the roles of the listeners, they would

be wise to discern the principles of the preacher-listener relationship that do not vary when there is either a change of the preacher or of the listener. After all, "The preaching event is always greater than the sum of its parts, for nothing less than the Holy Spirit is at work through even our most meagre efforts. More emphasis on the responsibility of the preacher, more attentiveness to the text, more awareness of the listeners, and more dependence on the grace of God can work together to enhance the effectiveness of preaching and not diminish the worth of any one element."[69]

Notes

1. Randolph observes several signs of renewal including an increase of scholarship in the field, a growing number of practitioners of preaching that are "characterized by the quality of interaction between the preacher and hearers in a context of worship, congregation[,] and community," as well as preaching's increased force in inspiring social change. David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching in the 21st Century* (Babylon, NY: Hanging Gardens Press, 1998), 1-2.
2. Richard L. Eslinger, *The Web of Preaching: New Options in Homiletical Method* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 47. Eslinger believes the renewal of preaching is evident from the increase in the volume of books being published, their quality, as well as their diversity of content. Furthermore, he offers that theological schools that a few decades ago had reduced their homiletical departments are now expanding their faculty positions and course offerings.
3. Beverly Zink-Sawyer, "The Word Purely Preached and Heard: The Listeners and the Homiletic Endeavor," *Interpretation* 51, no. 4 (October 1997): 342.
4. Zink-Sawyer has demonstrated that throughout the history of preaching, pulpit proclamation has been shaped by the weight attributed to the various elements in the preaching event, including the listeners. Ibid., see especially pages 343-50.
5. Zink-Sawyer, 350.
6. Craddock believes that the preaching cycle is like a pendulum, swinging back and forth between content and form. Fred B. Craddock, "From Classroom to Pulpit: Interviews with Fred Craddock and Walter Brueggemann," interview by Michael Duduit, *Preaching* 18, no. 6 (May-June, 2003): 16; and Fred B. Craddock, Telephone interview by author, 13 August 2003, Cherry Log, GA.
7. Thomas G. Long, *The Possibilities and Perils of Narrative Preaching*, Northcutt Lectures 2001 (Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), sound cassette. Not all homileticians surrendered the teaching and persuading components of their preaching in favor of creating experiences that delight the listeners. For example, see Samuel T. Logan, ed., *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century* (Phillipsburg, NY: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1986). Contributors include J. I. Packer, R. C. Sproul, and Sinclair B. Ferguson, among others.
8. Thomas G. Long, "When the Preacher is a Teacher," *Journal for Preachers* 16, no. 2 (Lent 1993): 21.
9. James W. Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 9.
10. Thompson, 8.
11. Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 27. Therefore, Craddock argues that the best textbook on preaching is the Bible. Fred B. Craddock, *How the Word Sounds*, Cole Lectures, 1981 (Nashville: Vanderbilt Seminary), sound cassette.
12. Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Essays on Inductive Preaching* (Enid, OK: Phillips University Press, 1971), 52.

13. Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 121.
14. For example, Leander Keck argues one must be sensitive to the genre of the text in order to "preach the Bible biblically." Leander Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978), 105-24.
15. Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 89.
16. David L. Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old, Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1995), 24.
17. Larsen, 25.
18. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 121.
19. Craddock himself admits that his motivation for using narrative "developed practically and then developed theologically." Fred B. Craddock, *Theological Fellowship Chapel*, 1987 (Fort Worth: Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary), sound cassette.
20. Zink-Sawyer, 354. Campbell claims, "Serious theological reflection has been sorely lacking." Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 121.
21. Zink-Sawyer, 354.
22. Thompson, 11.
23. Zink-Sawyer, 356. She concludes, "What we do once we have engaged our listeners is even more important than engaging them in the first place." Ibid. Zink-Sawyer fails to defend her position.
24. This is the basic affirmation of John R. Brokhoff in *As One With Authority: The Ministry of Preaching* (Wilmore, KY: Birstol Books, 1989).
25. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 14.
26. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 119-39.
27. David M. Greenhaw, "As One With Authority: Rehabilitating Concepts for Preaching," in *Intersections: Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Eslinger (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 108. In the freedom of the New Homiletic to turn and focus on the listeners' experiences, it appears that some have turned their backs on the Word rather than bringing the two together in conversation with one another. For a detailed study of how Craddock treats authority in his homiletic, see Grant Irven Lovejoy, "A Critical Evaluation of the Nature and Role of Authority in the Homiletical Thought of Fred B. Craddock, Edmund A. Steimle, and David G. Buttrick" (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991).
28. David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching in the 21st Century* (Babylon, NY: Hanging Gardens Press, 1998), 2.
29. Zink-Sawyer, 355.
30. See Robert Reid, 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* 21, no. 2 (March 1998): 1-7.
31. Ronald J. Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 52.
32. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 150.
33. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 67. Theologian Robert McAfee Brown notes that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is meant to serve as a "corrective to understandings of grace focused on individual 'religious experience.'" Therefore, Craddock's view actually represents what Brown identifies as a "widespread misunderstanding of the doctrine." Brown asserts that the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers means that every person is to be a priest to every other person, not to serve oneself as priest. Robert McAfee Brown, *The Spirit of Protestantism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 94-5. Campbell demonstrates how Craddock's reliance on the new hermeneutic would reinforce individualistic emphases in Craddock's homiletic. See Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 133-4. Campbell concludes, "Although Craddock's work does contain some tensions and does suggest some possible correctives to this orientation, the personal experience of the individual hearer remains as Craddock's most basic

concern in his most influential works." Ibid., 135.

34. C. Ellis Nelson, *How Faith Matures* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 18.
35. Thompson, 12.
36. Fred B. Craddock, *New Testament Theology as Pastoral Task*, Newscope Lecture Series, 1988 (Atlanta: Candler School of Theology), sound cassette.
37. Randolph, *Renewal of Preaching in the 21st Century*, 3.
38. Randolph, *Renewal of Preaching in the 21st Century*, 3. Randolph asserts, "At the moment what many preachers are serving us is McGospel: theological fast food with crispy nuggets of lectionary tidbits served on a sugary bun. This will not feed the spiritual hunger today or tomorrow." Ibid.
39. Thomas G. Long, "When the Preacher is a Teacher," *Journal for Preachers* 16, no. 2 (Lent 1993): 25.
40. Richard Lischer, "The Limits of Story," *Interpretation* 38 (1984): 26.
41. See Arthur Van Seters, "Dilemmas in Preaching Doctrine: Theology's Public Voice," *Journal for Preachers* 20 (1997): 34. See also Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1990), 7-11, in which McGrath argues for the necessity of doctrine for informing narrative.
42. Long, "Witness of Preaching," 105-6.
43. Thompson, 13.
44. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 141.
45. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 142.
46. Randolph, *Renewal of Preaching in the 21st Century*, 4.
47. Fred B. Craddock, *The Sermon as Twice Told Tale*, Sprunt Lectures 1991 (Richmond, VA: Union Theological Seminary), sound cassette. Craddock stated, "It's a false assumption now to assume that everyone has a certain basic knowledge." Ibid. In 2003, Craddock noted that an increasing number of listeners that once were a part of the congregation are moving into the category of listener he identified as the "audience." Craddock, telephone interview.
48. Craig Loscalzo, "Apologizing for God: Apologetic Preaching to a Postmodern World," *Review and Expositor* 93, no. 3 (Summer 1996): 414. Loscalzo continues, "The great narratives of Judeo-Christian belief, the pivotal stories of the Bible's characters, the epoch of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, either are not known or do not carry the meaning-making significance they did to previous generations." Ibid. New Testament scholar N. T. Wright also believes that listeners in America are largely shaped by the values of a pagan culture, not Christendom. See N. T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 94.
49. Thompson, 1.
50. Long, *Possibilities and Perils of Narrative Preaching*, sound cassette. This is a play on the thesis of Craddock's *Overhearing the Gospel*, which Craddock borrowed from Søren Kierkegäard. Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1978).
51. The listener in the contemporary pew is more representative of Craddock's category of audience than congregation. One must remember that according to Craddock, even the listeners who are not a part of Christendom are marked by the *imago Dei* and, therefore, have the capacity to hear the voice of God within the preaching event.
52. Long, "When the Preacher is a Teacher," 22. Long states, "Except for a few narratives from the Bible that retain some wider cultural currency—the stories of Adam and Eve, David and Goliath, and the Lukan account of the nativity, for example—the biblical materials have largely faded from the memory of many congregations (there are exceptions to this rule, of course). . . . When pressed to describe the most urgent and profound realities of their lives, many now reach more readily for the language of therapy rather than the language of theology." Long, 22.
53. Long, "When the Preacher is a Teacher," 22-3.
54. Craddock states, "We must enlarge our teaching ministry. . . . Preach and teach from the same text." Fred B. Craddock, "Twice Told Tale," sound cassette.
55. Don Kitsler and contributors argue that essential to preaching is the exposition of the Word of God in light of the concrete experiences of the listeners. Don Kitsler, ed., *Feed My Sheep: A Passionate Plea for Preaching* (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 2002). This demands that preachers feed people the Word of God by providing instruction and guidance, applying

"the divine truth to the whole range of the [listeners'] personal experiences as well as in [their] relationships with family, the church, and the world around [them]." Joel R. Beeke, "Lasting Power of Reformed Experiential Preaching," in *Feed My Sheep*, 95-6.

56. Craddock indicates that the change of listener from Christendom to non-Christendom requires that the roles of the listeners be "modified." Craddock submits that sermons should not be left "as open-ended in non-Christendom as in Christendom" and that preachers should suggest a possible conclusion to the listeners, rather than totally leaving the listeners to fashion their own conclusions to the sermon. Craddock, telephone interview.
57. Ronald J. Allen, Barbara Shires Blaisdell, and Scott Black Johnston, *Theology for Preaching: Authority, Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), 48. Blaisdell notes, "Too often in the church and in the pulpit (in liberal and conservative pulpits alike) scripture is used to cut off conversation and trump the argument." Ibid. Craddock believes that preachers ought to respect the listeners' mental capacity for understanding what is being said, appetites and capacities for living fully, freedom to exercise decisions about their own existence, and the privacy of the listeners. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 92-3.
58. Charles L. Campbell, "Inductive Preaching," in *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, ed. William H. Willimon and Richard Lischer (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1995), 271.
59. Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching and the Nod of Recognition*, Frankman S. Hickman Lecture, 1984 (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School), sound cassette. Craddock recently stated, "You've got to have some dough in the tray before you cut out biscuits. You don't just walk in and start cutting biscuits. You've got to have a lot of substance that doesn't appear in any one sermon, but is the stuff out of which all your sermons come." Fred B. Craddock, "From Classroom to Pulpit," 18. Craddock went so far as to encourage direct teaching as an integral part of the sermon to contemporary listeners. Craddock states, "Non-Christendom requires that preachers speak more to the listeners, telling them." Craddock, telephone interview.
60. Thompson, 10. Thompson forecasts, "Consequently, preaching will be both evangelistic and pastoral. It will announce the good news, shape the corporate memory, and teach communities how to live faithfully in a non-Christian culture." Ibid.
61. Craddock, "From Classroom to Pulpit," 16.
62. Long, *Possibilities and Perils*, sound cassette. Long also comments that there is a danger in leaving sermons, especially narrative sermons, too open-ended.
63. Long recognizes the need to respect narrative and non-narrative by answering the question, "If that story is true, how should we live?" Long, *Possibilities and Perils*, sound cassette.
64. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 65. Craddock notes that this role of the listener needs modification in non-Christendom. Craddock suggests that preachers can no longer assume the listeners have "a certain base knowledge. . . . We need to do more direct teaching, not leaving it as open-ended but still respecting and allowing the listeners to participate." Craddock, telephone interview. Nevertheless, Craddock maintains his overly optimistic view of the listeners. Craddock asserts but fails to defend his anthropology, which claims there is something within listeners, a "faint recollection of Eden," that enables them to recognize the Word of God when they hear it.
65. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64. The risks associated with allowing the listeners to complete the sermon, even when those listeners do not come with the basic knowledge of the Christian faith, is "a risk that one just has to live with." Craddock, telephone interview.
66. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64.
67. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64.
68. Zink-Sawyer, 356.
69. Zink-Sawyer, 355.

Defining The New Homiletic

by Scott M. Gibson

(editor's note: This is an expanded essay of an article that appears in The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching, *edited by Haddon W. Robinson and Craig Brian Larson [Zondervan, 2005], 476-481.)*

The New Homiletic and the New Hermeneutic

The New Homiletic is new in that it is a turning away from the old traditional preaching and the kerygmatic preaching of Karl Barth. The first concentrated on the *transmission* of an idea, while the second focused on *mediation*.[1]

The New Homiletic has its roots in the hermeneutical work of Gerhard Ebeling and Ernst Fuchs. For them, the alleged separation between the theology of the pulpit and the people in the pews was a threat to preaching. Both writers insisted on practical relevance in today's world.[2] "How does language, particularly the language of the Bible, hit home (*treffen*) to the modern listener? How may its words reach through the preacher's own understanding that when they are repeated they will be *the listeners* words? How may the word of God become a living word which is heard anew?"[3]

The emphasis on practical application as opposed to a biblical proposition has connection with the work of Rudolf Bultmann who asserted that the risen Christ comes to listeners in the words of preaching and calls men and women to faith. The desire was for the gospel to speak anew to the listener, to speak a new world into existence. Along with philosopher Martin Heidegger, Bultmann held that language itself is an interpretation and therefore cannot be understood in reference to ancient texts as somehow embodying objective truth. Understanding is existential, involving a "hermeneutical circle" in which the self and the text come together in daily life.[4] This means that the preacher does not simply restate the text but says it in a new way for the new situation because the

language of the text can at times obscure the meaning of the text. One need not paraphrase the text into the present, but one must interpret the text and the present situation and then attempt to merge these two "horizons" in what Fuchs called a "language-event."[5] Ebling used the term "Word-event."[6]

Both Fuchs and Ebeling had been pastors for several years where relevance and effectiveness in preaching was tested. Fuch's central question was "What do we have to do at our desks, if we want later to set the text in front of us in the pulpit?" Therefore, the key question in the new hermeneutic was, "How does the New Testament speak to us anew?"[7]

The connection between the new hermeneutic and the new homiletic cannot be overstated. Ebeling and Fuchs gained inspiration from Rudolf Bultmann's perspective that people today can understand the Bible as a Word addressed to *them*. They were also influenced by the work of Friedrich Schleiermacher and German philosopher Wilhem Dilthey, father of modern hermeneutics. Schleiermacher strove to interpret the Bible and Plato in terms that would be meaningful to modern people.[8] As philosopher Heinz Kimmerle observes: "the work of Schleiermacher constitutes a turning in the history of hermeneutics. Till then hermeneutics was supposed to support, secure, and clarify an already classical understanding [of the Bible as theological hermeneutics; of classical antiquity as philological hermeneutics.] In the thinking of Schleiermacher, hermeneutics achieves the qualitatively different function of first of all *making understanding possible*, and deliberately *initiating understanding* in each individual case."[9]

The new hermeneutic concentrates on the interpretation of the word of God, and its newness is further expressed in the way reality and language are understood.[10] The impact upon homiletics is profound. The New Homiletic introduces a new way of listening to the Bible, a new way of understanding reality and the expression of this new reality in practical situations, and it provides a new way of understanding preaching. The central concern is not what a sermon

is, but what a sermon *does*.[11] The shift is made from traditional homiletics based on determining the original meaning of the text to sermon as speech-event which discloses its meaning through its relationship to its context, to the faith, and to the listener and community. The sermon is seen as an event or experience.

Like the new hermeneutic advocates, the New Homiletic has given much attention to the parables. Ebeling was interested in the person of Christ and observed Jesus' ability to arouse in his followers the certainty to meet all of life's situations.

David James Randolph coined the term "new homiletic" and formalized the teachings of Ebeling and Fuchs in his landmark book, *The Renewal of Preaching*.[12] He defines the new homiletic as follows: "Preaching is the event in which the biblical text is interpreted in order that its meaning will come to expression in the concrete situation of the hearers."[13] Randolph further remarks, "the sermon is becoming understood as *event*, and event means encounter, engagement, and dialogue: the end of "monologue" in the pulpit. Preaching as a one-man affair is a thing of the past, to be replaced by that kind of participatory experience in which those present know themselves involved, even though only one man may be vocalizing at the time. The sermon is being understood as event, and the consequences of this are beginning to be understood in a new way."[14]

Some of the key advocates of the New Homiletic — with similarities and differences — include Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Eugene Lowry, Charles Rice, Edmund Steimle, Morris Niedenthal, Richard Jensen, Lucy Rose, Thomas Troeger, and Henry Mitchell. A few are highlighted below.

Following Randolph was Fred Craddock whose 1971 book, *As One Without Authority*, further expanded the possibilities of the New Homiletic. Craddock's background in New Testament was influenced by Bultmann.[15] On a sabbatical at Tubingen he studied under Ebeling. Later he was put onto the writings of Soren Kierkegaard.[16]

Like Ebeling and Fuchs, Craddock's concern was "not of understanding language but understanding through language."[17] Instead, he further states: "In this encounter with the text, the Word of God is not simply the content of the tradition, nor an application of that content to present issues, but rather the Word of God is the address of God to the hearer who sits before the text open to its becoming the Word of God. Most importantly, God's Word is *God's Word* to the reader/listener, not a word about God gleaned from the documents."[18] Preaching is an experienced event.

For Craddock, the preacher and the listeners are co-creators of the sermonic experience. More important than imparting knowledge, the sermon seeks to affect an experience by cultivating the surprise of the gospel through the preacher's ability to embed the experience in the familiar world of the congregation.

Craddock's shadow in the field of homiletics runs long. His emphasis on induction, plot, and movement in the sermon has inspired preachers in their conception and practice of sermon structure.

David Buttrick advocates the phenomenological approach.[19] Buttrick's concern is that which happens when language in a sermon interacts with the consciousness of listeners. Buttrick asserts, "Homiletics can emerge from the objective/subjective split in which it has been trapped — either objectively rational or subjectively romantic — by moving toward the notion of consciousness where objective and subjective meet."[20] His sermon style consists of a sequence of five or six plotted ideational units culminating in a conclusion. This sequencing is called movement.

Like other New Homiletics advocates who embrace movement, Eugene Lowry emphasizes what he calls "the homiletical plot."[21] Lowry also views the sermon as an experience. He comments, "As evocative event, the sermon's sequence follows the logic of listening, not just the consistency of conceptual categories."[22] His intention is the ordering of experience within a narrative plot.

These representative examples of the New Homiletic strategically do not announce a conclusion. Instead, there is an intentional delay of the preacher's meaning. As Randolph underscored, "Preaching is understood not as the packaging of a product but as the evocation of an event."[23] These preachers rely on plot, induction, experience, imagination, performative language, metaphor, story, narrative — but evocation of an event or encounter is key.

The influence of the New Homiletic in later twentieth century and early twenty-first century preaching is wide spread. Although there are different expressions of the New Homiletic, the common feature is sermon as experience.

Presuppositions of the New Homiletic

1. The Interpreter and the Text. The interpreter realizes that he/she comes to the text with presuppositions. The text is not considered to be the object with the interpreter as the subject. Instead, the interpreter is himself the object of interpretation. The text then is spoken into and creates the community of faith. The center of authority does not lie in the text but with the listener or listeners in the context of community. Authority, then, is not located in a particular place but rather in the relationship between the preacher, the text, and the congregation.

Some advocates of the New Homiletic appear to dispense altogether with the use of the biblical text: "we must not say that preaching from scripture is requisite for sermons to be the Word of God."[24] Certainly there are varying views of authority within the New Homiletic. This perspective leads to the second presupposition.

2. The Superiority of the Self. The emphasis on application has caused a shift from the objective use of the Bible to the subjective. Craddock argues, "It is, therefore, pointless to speak of the Gospel as Truth in and of itself; the Gospel is *Truth for us*."[25] As one observer astutely wrote: "The belief that preaching, created by the living Word of Scripture, may itself under God's sovereign grace become

God's Word can only be sustained by an existential impression and response which is *auto-pistic* or self-validating."[26] In light of the first two points, the final presupposition is as follows.

3. The Authority of Experience. Whereas in classical homiletics the preacher brought the meaning and application of the text to the congregation, in the New Homiletic the listeners and preacher together create the experience of meaning. One advocate of the New Homiletic boldly states: "One of the reasons we must alert our eyes to keener sight and feel the bodily weight of truth is that if we do not ground our sermons in the actuality of experience, the authority of what we say will be suspect. Appeals to the Bible or tradition do not carry sufficient weight in themselves."[27]

Yet, there are those in the movement who are not afraid to critique it. One New Homiletician reflects on the new hermeneutic and observes, "the movement came and went with startling dispatch. Probably the fatal flaw was a lurking assumption — namely, that the gospel addresses human beings in their existential self-awareness."[28] Another comments: "the real question comes: Is Word-event really happening? What appeared to be a most promising homiletical theory has not produced, in spite of all the scholarly care that has gone into its formulation, a significant new movement in preaching."[29]

The emphasis on experience certainly raises questions about the movement's dependence upon the modern liberal paradigm and presuppositions.

What Evangelical Preachers Can Gain from the New Homiletic

1. The emphasis on language and the evocative nature of it cannot be overstated. The interest in language prominently featured in the New Homiletic gives rise to the limitations of literary criticism. If one embraces literary criticism's emphasis on the multivalence of texts, preachers may be uncertain about controls in interpretation while one attempts to keep interpretation in line with the text itself.

In addition, the new hermeneutic manifests a one-sided view of the nature of language and places emphasis on language that is imperatival, conative, and directive as opposed to the language of description or information.

Evangelicals can benefit from this shift concerning the use of language in the sermon — the language of the biblical text and the language used while preaching the sermon. Being aware of the nature of the language of the text and its mood as reflected in the sermon will enhance one's preaching.

However, the thoughtful preacher must be aware that behind the emphasis on language in preaching advocated by the New Homiletic is a presupposition about the nature of Scripture. No longer is the Bible considered to be the objective authority. Instead, inspiration is shifted to the actual preaching/hearing of the spoken word. Whereas Evangelicals regard the Bible as the revelation from God, the God-inspired book, advocates of the New Homiletic emphasize the preached word as event/experience with the listener encountering God in the spoken word. This understanding raises serious questions about the nature of inspiration and biblical revelation. In addition, this perspective limits sermonic language as primarily a symbolic expression of experience.

2. The conception that a sermon is a movement or is a plot or "plotted," is another valuable contribution. This way of looking at sermon design allows the preacher flexibility and variety that otherwise might not be considered when constructing a sermon. Related to movement is induction. Induction is arguably the way in which the parables and some sermons chronicled in the New Testament were preached. Keeping inductive sermon structure in mind — especially when the passage selected is inductive — will keep the preacher from habitually preaching deductively shaped sermons. This insight from the New Homiletic gives preachers the opportunity to explore different sermon shapes.

Much has been made in the New Homiletic about the narrative or

"storied" nature of the gospel. The difficulty here is that advocates tend to underplay the non-narrative passages of scripture "to narrow the communcational range of preaching to a single method." The narrative form may not be the best way to preach a given text.

3. The concern for the listener is another consideration the New Homiletic asserts from which all preachers can benefit. The listener is crucial to preaching. The New Homiletic has made preachers aware of the importance of connecting with one's listeners and being aware of the importance of application.

In tandem with language and the misplaced emphasis on inspiration, concern for the listener can cause imbalance and a misdirected focus for the preacher.

4. The attention to the affective experience of the audience is well represented in the advocates of the New Homiletic. Evangelicals would not disagree that the listener experiences a sermon. The contention is that the weight of preaching for the New Homiletic is placed upon the actual, affective experience of the listener. Although the experiential encounter is important, especially since the listener is called upon for a response, the preaching does not become any more or any less authoritative. In addition to the issue of inspiration, this raises questions about the role and work of the Holy Spirit.

Little is mentioned in New Homiletics literature about the Holy Spirit in preaching. The responsibility seems to rest on the preacher to replicate the text or even "regenerate the impact" of a biblical text so that it actually becomes the Word of God once again in the new situation.

Of equal concern is the New Homiletic's emphasis on what the sermon may do in the experience of the listening congregation. Instead of the sermon conveying the content of the text and/or doctrine, or biblical teaching, the emphasis is on experience. For the New Homiletician, what is important is not what a sermon is but what it does.

What we see here is a shift away from the truth of the biblical text to the experience of the text — possibly and most likely away from the intended idea. This hermeneutical shift from interpretation that seeks to identify the text's idea has now moved to examination of the text for its literary form, movement, and structure. The responsibility of the preacher has moved from teacher of truth to director of happenings. One sympathetic to the New Homiletic has warned, "There is a deep theological danger in measuring preaching by its capacity to generate religious experience."[30]

What is more, approaches to interpretation — literary criticism, reader-response criticism, womanist criticism, liberation theology, and postmodern ideologies have entered the hermeneutical forum further complicating the preaching task.

The difficulty here is that if one embraced the presuppositions of the New Homiletic, there is no guarantee that what one wants to create in one's listeners actually will occur. Here the preacher acts as a director of a play, making sure the script is read but he is not confident how the play will end but can only hope that the atmosphere is one in which the listeners will have an encounter with God. The preacher has diagnostic responsibility for how and what to preach. But the listeners are actors who expect — or not expect — that they will meet God. Not only is there the tendency to make God dependent on human experience, but there is a naive confidence in homiletical method to bring about transforming experiential events. For Evangelicals, the caution is that the focus of the sermon becomes human experience rather than the God of the authoritative biblical text and what the text teaches.

One critic of the New Homiletic observed: "In their focus on discrete experiential Word-events, contemporary homileticians have neglected the intimate relationship between preaching, polity, and discipleship."[31] To be sure, the new hermeneutic in the New Homiletic has essentially lost biblical meaning because of the over emphasis on self-understanding.

Conclusion

Through a complicated theory of language the New Homiletic has shifted the focus of homiletics from the traditional understanding of the preacher preaching from the authoritative Bible to the experiential event of hearing the text in the life of the listener. There is much to appreciate from the methodologies and concerns expressed in the New Homiletic. However, preachers cannot nor should they not naively or uncritically accept the New Homiletic — or its practices — at face value.

Notes

1. See: Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 31.
2. Gehard Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation: A Discussion with Rudolf Bultmann* (London: Collins, 1966), 15.
3. Anthony C. Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic," in *A Guide to Contemporary Hermeneutics: Major Trends in Biblical Interpretation*, ed., Donald K. McKim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 78.
4. Thiselton, 90.
5. Ernst Fuchs, *Studies of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM, 1964), 196.
6. Gehard Ebeling, *Theology and Proclamation: A Discussion with Rudolf Bultmann* (London: Collins, 1966), 28-29.
7. Fuchs, 8;196-206.
8. David James Randolph, *The Renewal of Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 17.
9. Thiselton, 82.
10. Gehard Ebeling, *The Problem of Historicity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 15.
11. Randolph, 19.
12. Randolph, 19.
13. Randolph, 1.
14. Randolph, 14.
15. Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 42.
16. Fred B. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching, a paper presented by Fred B. Craddock for the Societas Homiletica meeting at Stetson University, August 20-23, 1990," 6-14.
17. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 42.
18. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 114.
19. David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
20. David Buttrick, "On Doing Homiletics Today," in *Intersections: Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Eslinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994): 88-104.
21. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1980).
22. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 59.
23. Randolph, 19.
24. Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 458.
25. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 71.
26. Yandall Woodfin, "The Theology of Preaching: A Search for the Authentic," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 23 (1970): 411.
27. Thomas H. Troeger, *Imagining a Sermon* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990), 122.
28. Buttrick, "On Doing Homiletics Today," 101.
29. John E. Skoglund, "Towards a New Homiletic," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 60 (Fall 1967): 57.
30. Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 30.
31. Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 145.

What Is The New Homiletic?

by Kerry L. Bender

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Introduction

When I was a child, I heard a story about three blind men; it is a story that I can only assume is fictitious. In it the three blind men were told to examine an elephant and then give a report on what an elephant is. The first man approached the elephant and grabbed onto one of the elephant's enormous legs. As he stood there hugging the elephant's leg he said, "An elephant is like a great tree." The second who had stumbled up to the side of the elephant spread his arms as wide as he could but could find no end, and he responded by saying, "No, no! An elephant is not like a tree but like a long wall that is warm and fleshy." The third man had happened to come upon the trunk of the elephant; he was perplexed by the comments of his two comrades and said, "I have no idea what you are examining. An elephant is not like a tree or a wall, but it is like a thick hose or a great snake." And so the three blind men left the tree-wall-snake arguing and perplexed; none of them convinced that they knew exactly what an elephant was, but sure that the other two did not know either.

As I write this essay on "What is the new homiletic?," I must confess that I feel a little like a blind man describing an elephant. The topic is large, and its topography is diverse. It is made up of numerous scholars and apparently countless practitioners, each of them making up a unique aspect of the whole. Because of this I want to make clear what this paper will not attempt to do. This paper is not intended to be the final word or even a comprehensive word concerning the new homiletic. Rather it is a report of those aspects of the new homiletic into which I have "bumped." While it

is true that I have attempted to not simply grab onto a single leg, or side, or trunk of this "elephant" but have rather attempted to read from those who are held in high regard by others in the new homiletic, I also realize that any one paper could not do justice to explain the whole of the new homiletic.

With this limitation in mind, I would still argue that there are key attributes that comprise some of the defining characteristics of the new homiletic that enables one to look at it and say, "Ah, yes. There is the elephant. I see it now." However, like most things, in order to understand it as a whole, one must first understand a bit of its history and its parts. Therefore, this essay will begin by addressing the history of the new homiletic and attempting to answer the question, "Why?" – "Why is there a new homiletic?" The second section will address the question, "Who?" – "Who makes up the new homiletic, who are its proponents, and who are its practitioners?"[1] Finally, this essay will argue for a key attribute with some defining characteristics that enable one to better answer, "What?" – "What is the new homiletic?" Following this there will be a brief conclusion presenting some critiques and summing up what has been discussed.

Why the New Homiletic?

The phrase, "new homiletic," implies that there was an "old homiletic" and that there was something wrong with it. While there never really was a school of thought that referred to itself or was referred to by others as the "old homiletic," there is certainly a feeling among those of the new homiletic that there was something wrong with the old way of doing things. Therefore, in order to understand "*Why* the new homiletic," one must first try to understand "*Why not* the old homiletic."[2]

Fred Craddock opened his 1971 seminal work on homiletics, *As One Without Authority*, with these words:

> We are all aware that in countless courts of opinion, the verdict on preaching has been rendered and the

> sentence passed. All this slim volume asks is a stay of execution until one other witness be heard.[3]

Like many others, Craddock realized there was a problem with preaching. It was no longer held in the high regard that it had been in previous generations. But why? What had happened? The answer to this question is a complicated one. However, much of it revolves around two foci, which in this instance are related closely – authority and method.

In the generations leading up to the publication of *As One Without Authority*, authorities of every stripe were called into question. Religious authority joined the ranks of other authorities to be challenged. Political authority was questioned, parental authority was more openly questioned than ever before, and educational authority was called into question as well. So seriously did the field of education take this questioning that it developed new models of educational practice. Students were no longer to be seen as passive receptacles of information but as active members in the educational process. The gap between teacher and student needed to be closed. However, this gap was not only evident between classroom lectern and desk; it was also evident between the church pulpit and the pew, and the gap seemed to be growing. The cause of this growing gap was in part due to dissatisfaction with the traditional "homiletical marriage."

Thomas Long states, "Once upon a time, homiletics . . . and rhetoric . . . were a happily married couple."[4] However, Long continues, it was a marriage of convenience that was doomed to fail.[5] Its failure was due in large part to its authoritative method. The idea of this marriage was that the preacher had something to say and that rhetoric showed the preacher how best to say it in a way in which the congregation would "get" it. In this model, the preacher is "the community's primary authority figure, answer-person, or authoritative interpreter of Scripture and life."[6] The sermon is seen as a proposition or a set of propositions that the preacher is proclaiming from a biblical text to the congregation. Rose writes that the words associated with this

method are *transmit, convince, inform, explain,* and *communicate*.[7] And the congregation is seen as passive receptors of that week's divine truth from the mouth of the preacher.
Therefore, the two foci – authority and method – which were to provide the answer for why the old homiletic had fallen out of favor are not only closely related as initially stated but actually blend into one another. It is the method, or the form that the method takes, that places the authority squarely in the pulpit and leaves those in the pews to be merely passive receivers. This led to deep dissatisfaction with the old homiletic. However, as Lucy Atkinson Rose and Thomas Long describe, there was yet another step before the new homiletic was to come on the scene. Long states that rhetoric was sick onto death "[t]hen, Karl Barth unplugged the respirator."[8]

Long argues quite convincingly that the way Barth and his theological program succeeded in "pulling the plug" on rhetoric was arguing that hope for humanity "lay not within the human condition, but utterly beyond it."[9] Therefore, preaching could not rely upon the devices of rhetoric to convey the gospel because humanity was deaf to the gospel regardless of how well it was presented. Neither was the preacher to be concerned with the felt needs of the congregation.[10] The job of the preacher was to simply proclaim the gospel and in doing so faithfully, God would come and speak His Word anew – this theory is known as kerygmatic preaching. Therefore, it is not merely proclamation that occurs on Sunday morning, but an actual meeting with God through His Word – a Word event.

There is much for which Kerygmatic preaching should be commended such as its firm conviction that God still speaks today and the active role of scripture in preaching. However, the gap between pulpit and pew remained, and in some ways it widened the gap rather than bridged it. The perception of this method was that the preacher was not simply the theological authority, as he/she was in the old homiletic, but the actual mouthpiece of God, and the person in the pew was not simply a passive recipient but actually a

hostile recipient of the Word of God whose concerns the preacher should ignore in the preparation and preaching of the sermon.[11] Although there are still some who hold to this method, its widespread popularity was short lived.
Traversing within this wilderness of homiletical theories, many preachers were looking for something. Therefore, it is little wonder that Craddock's *As One Without Authority* "struck such a responsive cord."[12] Many preachers heard his plea to be heard before the sentence was carried out; from that plea, many argue, new life was breathed into preaching, and the new homiletic was born. But why does it look the way it does? In other words, who were its parents?

If one were to look back a couple of generations on the family tree, one would find the theology of Rudolph Bultmann which influenced the new hermeneutic, and this in turn becomes the parent of the new homiletic. Of primary concern to the new hermeneutic is finding a way for the gospel to speak anew to the reader – to speak a new world into existence. However, unlike kerygmatic preaching, this method requires the preacher not to simply restate the text but to say it in a new way for a new situation because the language of the text can at times hide the meaning of the text. In other words, "[t]he same word can be said to another time only by being said differently."[13] It is not enough to simply paraphrase the text into modern terms. Rather, one must interpret the text and the present situation and then attempt to merge these two horizons in what Ernst Fuchs calls a "language-event."[14]

The preacher accomplishes the merging of these two horizons by allowing each to interpret the other. In other words, one must admit that no one comes to the biblical text innocently or without presuppositions and that everyone must first allow the text to interpret the interpreter. To explain further, the text is not object and the interpreter subject, but rather the text is to be the subject first and the interpreter is the object. Therefore, one must allow the text to interpret whether or not the pre-suppositions that the interpreter brings to the text are correct, modify them if necessary, and then use them to interpret the text only to once again interpret

the presuppositions that were originally used. This concept is referred to as the hermeneutic circle:

> But this is achieved…only when, firstly the interpreter's subjectivity is fully engaged at a more-than-cognitive level; and when, secondly, the text, and the truth of the text, *actively* grasps *him* as its object.[15]

Therefore, meaning is found not only in the text but also in the experience of the interpreter. To be more precise, meaning is found in the ongoing give-and-take relationship of these two as they interpret one another. Because of this, the meaning within a particular text is not a static proposition but a living, growing, and transforming "event."

However, this event is not meant solely for an individual, rather the text is to be spoken into community. Additionally, it does not only speak into the community but actually creates the community by gathering the people into a common "word- or language-event." Thiselton writes, "But Heidegger, followed by Fuchs, insists that language can achieve this 'gathering' only when man accepts the role of *listener*, rather than that of subject scrutinizing 'object.'"[16] Therefore, the new hermeneutic believes that the creative power of language not only speaks about but also to brings about community and life itself. "In language, Being itself is at stake, not just our use of words to discuss Being."[17]

One can see in this brief overview of the new hermeneutic three important characteristics. First of all, the meaning of the text is, at times, hidden by the actual language of the text; therefore, the text must be spoken in new language for the new situation. Secondly, the interpreter needs to realize that one does not come to the text without presuppositions, and the text is not to be seen as the object with the interpreter as subject, but rather the interpreter is him/herself the object of interpretation. Therefore, the meaning from the text is derived from this ongoing mutual interpretation of

human experience and text. And finally, the text is spoken into and creates the community of faith. The influence of these three aspects of the new hermeneutic on the new homiletic will be reviewed in the final section of this paper.

Therefore, in response to the "old homiletic" and kerygmatic preaching, the new homiletic is born from the new hermeneutic. For many it was and continues to be a welcomed addition to the homiletic family. However, it has been a fast growing child with varied characteristics and temperaments, and quite possibly, it already has progeny of its own.

Who Makes Up the New Homiletic?

The rationale for asking, "Who makes up the new homiletic?" is not to give an exhaustive list of everyone who may fall under the umbrella of the new homiletic, but rather it is to point out some of the differences and peculiarities of those who are under the umbrella. Or to revert back to the image of the elephant – it is not to give a complete anatomy of the elephant but to point out some of the differences concerning unusual appendages and characteristics that can be found on an elephant.

One of the quickest ways to point out some of these differences is to speak of the types or models of sermons. Eugene Lowry argues that there are "six identifiable types or models – all related and all different."[18] They are as follows: the inductive sermon proposed by Fred Craddock, the story sermon advocated by Richard Jensen, Charles Rice, Edmund Steimle, and Morris Niedenthal, the narrative sermon used by Lowery himself, the transconscious African American sermon receiving its name from Henry Mitchell, the phenomenological move sermon of David Buttrick, and the conversational-episodal sermon advocated by Lucy Rose.[19] At least some initial differences can be assumed from simply examining the names given to each method.[20]

However, these preachers differ on more than just sermon type or model. Their theology, especially as related to biblical text, differs radically as well. One example of theological differences is in the location of the authority of the sermon. If preaching were done appropriately according to Craddock, "the text and not the speaker would be the center of authority."[21] For the preacher must "implement the belief that the authority lies not in the speaker or the listener but in the message."[22] However, for many within the new homiletic, the center of authority does not lie within the text itself but with the hearer or hearers; both the transformational power and authority belong to the community.[23] Authority then is not located in a particular place but rather in a relationship between preacher, text, and congregation.

Another marked difference between Craddock and others within the new homiletic is the importance of using a biblical text and the communication of that text. For Craddock, "The sermon remains a conversation between the congregation and the biblical text."[24] However, for David Buttrick, Edward Farley, Lucy Rose, and others, the use of a biblical text is optional and at times counterproductive to the sermon. What is of the utmost importance is not a particular text but that the gospel is proclaimed – and this can be done equally well if not better without the use of one of the four Gospels or some other text: "[W]e refuse to reduce or narrow gospel to a single text, set of texts, or even theme."[25] While a biblical text can be used from time to time, "we must not say that preaching from scripture is requisite for sermons to be the Word of God."[26]

These differing views on authority and the use of biblical text also affect what one is attempting to do in a sermon. Therefore, for Craddock, "If the message says and does what the preacher intends, a high percentage of those who heard the sermon should be able to state fairly clearly what the theme was."[27] What is this theme for Craddock? He states:

> In my own treatment of inductive preaching, the sermon has a thematic center, a governing

> consideration, an affirmation clearly known to the preacher throughout the designing of the sermon. This affirmation is a statement of a message of the biblical text to this particular audience.[28]

One must be clear here that Craddock is not arguing for a proposition clearly stated but rather a governing theme that controls the development, content, and proclamation of the sermon. At times this theme may not even be explicitly stated; however, if the sermon is developed and preached well, the congregation will realize what the message from the biblical text is. However, for Rose the inductive sermon invites "the congregation to work out their own meanings in a give-and-take with the Spirit." She continues, "The worshippers need not take the particular journey presented by the preacher."[29]

Due to these differences, and others that Rose spells out in *Sharing the Word*, she argues that she is indebted to the new homiletic, which she refers to as "transformational preaching," but that she is a category onto herself. She criticizes the new homiletic for not going far enough and states that within it the gap between preacher and congregation remains. The problem as she sees it is that "the preacher remains in the privileged position of the one who has already experienced the transformation that the congregation now needs to experience."[30] For her, the preacher and congregation are to feel more of an affinity. Therefore, it would appear that Rose would believe that her conversational preaching would be the progeny of the new homiletic; closely related but of a new generation and going farther than "mom" and "dad."

However, it seems that Lowry would be correct in keeping Rose under the umbrella of the new homiletic:

> Again, Lucy Rose, whose categories we are utilizing, would have difficulty in my choice of using only three of her four categories. Not that she doesn't have a sense of affinity with *transformative* kind of

> preaching. Indeed, she had named herself as within such a group in a previous writing. Yet she no longer wants to focus on transforming. "Mutual edification" is a better way to speak of her category of *conversational* preaching. My sense is that were we to use another label for transformative preaching, such as the new homiletic, her views would feel at home – with more in common than not.[31]

However, what is it that makes Rose's preaching, or Craddock's, or Buttrick's, or anyone's preaching for that matter, part of the new homiletic? If there can be differences in style and even wide differences concerning authority and the use of scripture, what is it that makes the new homiletic the new homiletic?

What is the New Homiletic?

It bears repeating at the beginning of this final section that in some ways this question has been answered already. The new homiletic is a reaction to the old homiletic and the child of the new hermeneutic as well as the theology that surrounds this hermeneutic.[32] It is also a mixture of varying methods, styles, and even theologies as discussed in the previous section. But can anything else be said about the new homiletic? What are its defining characteristics? What is it that one can look at and say, "Ah, yes. There is the elephant. I see it now"?

The key to determining what defines the new homiletic can best be seen in the purpose of the sermon and in how this purpose is carried out. For the new homiletic, that purpose in its simplest form is to evoke a life transforming experience or event for the congregation. However, how this purpose is accomplished is not an easy thing to pin down. As was mentioned in the previous section, a variety of methods and styles are used to evoke this transforming experience:

> The "power of performative language to shape human consciousness" (or to evoke a new

> orientation) is central to some versions of this kind of preaching. Variables such as metaphor, plot, induction, experience, and imagination are commonly discussed with this understanding of the preaching act. Evocation is key.[33]

It is here that the review of new hermeneutic in the previous section can help us understand the new homiletic more clearly.

For the new hermeneutic and, therefore, for the new homiletic, "what is central is the recognized irreplaceable value of human speech in laying hold of and bringing to expression Life itself."[34] It is the belief in this creative power of the sermon to bring about a new world or language-event that motivates the purpose of the sermon. This can be accomplished because the language of the Bible is a living thing that is to interpret and be interpreted by our experience. The old homiletic method of interpretation – literary, historical, textual, and form criticism – revealed much about the biblical times and characters but "the immediacy in preaching was lost."[35] However, this does not need to be the case any longer, "thanks to the epoch-making work of Rudolf Bultmann. By existentially interpreting the New Testament, the texts could now be shared with immediacy and with the conviction that the *Gospel* was being preached . . .."[36]

Therefore, one can see the same important characteristics in the new homiletic that were discussed earlier in the new hermeneutic. First of all, the preacher must preach the message of the text anew for a new generation through an ongoing interpretive dialogue between text and interpreter. As stated before, for some in the new homiletic camp this can be, and at times should be, done without the use of a biblical text because the language of the text itself can actually hide the meaning of the text.

Secondly, the *Gospel* of any text can only be spoken when the preacher allows the text to speak to him/her first; in other words,

the text must first be allowed to interpret the interpreter. The meaning of the text is then derived from the ongoing conversation of the text and experience. Therefore, the preacher needs to be the primary listener of the text. In other words, the text must first preach to the preacher; however, the preacher is not only to be the listener of the text but also to the situation of the congregation. This concept is closely related to the final characteristic that will be discussed here.

The final conviction that the new homiletic and the new hermeneutic hold in common is one of the most defining. It is the belief that the spoken word is never an isolated event. In other words, the language-event always takes place within the setting of community. As Craddock states, "[the spoken word] presupposes that which it also creates: community."[37] Therefore, the preacher is to put him/herself into the shoes of the congregation when writing the sermon. The preacher must allow his experience to be interpreted not only by the text but also by the joint experience of the congregation as well. In this way the sermon is not an isolated or personal event but rather a word-event that speaks from as well as to the community of believers in order to create the community through a transformational event.[38]

Conclusion

There is much about the new homiletic that is attractive to me as a student of preaching. On top of this list is the belief that God still speaks today through words. Although I may disagree with some in the new homiletic about how this happens, I can happily affirm with them that God still speaks. I also appreciate the active role of the congregation within the new homiletic. However, I would not go as far as Rose does with her assertion that the congregation seems to be given not merely equal precedence but greater precedence than scripture.

Within the new homiletic, one can also find a willingness to call the

preaching task into question. I find this refreshing. We do not preach simply because that is what has been done in the past or because somebody is willing to pay us. No, we preach because we believe it is the right thing to do – it works. Not because of the preacher but because there is something going on in the sermon that is greater than the preacher. This constant re-evaluation keeps preaching fresh.

I am also impressed by the genuine humility with which many within the new homiletic write, especially Craddock.[39] Craddock makes it clear that as preachers we can no longer "presuppose the general recognition of [our] authority as a clergyman, or the authority of [our] institution, or the authority of Scripture."[40] However, for Craddock this does not mean that one has to acknowledge a complete loss of authority in Scripture as a cold hard fact, but rather one can still hold onto the authority of Scripture as a foundational conviction.[41]

I do have serious concerns, however, concerning what this conviction looks like. What does it mean for Scripture to be an authority for Craddock and others in the new homiletic? What does it mean for Scripture to be true? I think that part of the problem when asking these questions of the new homiletic is quite simply that the new homiletic is too big and its supporters too varied to find a single unified answer to these questions within the new homiletic.

It is true that most within the new homiletic would call into question a static propositional understanding of truth in the scriptures. Craddock argues that we can believe in a static propositional understanding of truth in the Bible independent of humanity, but little good it will do us because this type of theology cannot be employed as a working principle in preaching.[42] "It is, therefore, pointless to speak of the Gospel as Truth in and of itself; the Gospel is *Truth for us*."[43] There is something very appealing in the simple logic of this argument. However, the danger seems to be

in carrying this to "illogical" extremes. For Buttrick, this means that though we may be able to discover the original meaning of a text that meaning is not true for us *now*: "Our question is not so much what did the text mean? But what does the text prompt us to preach *now*?"[44]

Lucy Atkinson Rose goes even further; for her, this questioning of scriptural authority and truth causes her to deny any truth at all except for eschatological truth:

> Contemporary insights into the limitations of language and realizations that old formulations of truth or the Word have excluded many people from the formative theological and homiletical conversations have convinced me that no "truth" is objective, absolute, ontological, or archetypal. The only way I can speak of "truth" is eschatologically. The Day will come when we will understand, but until that Day we live by faith and hope, not by sure knowledge, clear facts, or unambiguous truth.[45]

Although I would have to agree with the fact that far too often people have been left out of the theological and homiletical conversations, this would not lead me to believe that there is no "truth." I am unable to see the cause and effect. The fact that people have been excluded, often because of race or gender, is certainly tragic. However, denying truth on this basis seems equally tragic. Likewise I have to admit that now we as Christians do live by faith and hope seeing as though through a glass as Paul states in 1 Corinthians 13; however, that does not mean that we are unable to hold certain things to be true. Certainly, we cannot know all things, but does that mean we can know no truth – not even through the power of hope and faith? And if it is *true* that we cannot know truth, how is Rose able to be certain about an eschatological truth? Is not this statement about an eschatological truth and a "coming Day" a statement of an absolute truth?

While I disagree with the uncertainty over biblical truth, I do think it is fair to state that absolute truth concerning truth, as well as other areas, in the new homiletic is an uncertainty due to the vastness and differing opinions of those under the umbrella of the new homiletic. At the end of the day, that which should be so obvious to spot and describe, a movement the size of the new homiletic, is a rather elusive elephant.

To spot it one must be able to recognize from whence it came. In other words, one should be able to see that it is in part a reaction against the old homiletic and kerygmatic preaching and that it is born out of the new hermeneutic. Secondly, in order to spot the whole, it is necessary to be acquainted with at least some of its specific and unique parts – those who find shelter under the umbrella of the new homiletic. And finally, when one is looking for what the new homiletic is, one should pay particular attention to the purpose of the sermon and how that purpose is carried out.
I realize that this does not give a complete anatomy of the elephant; however, I do believe that if one is able to recognize from where it came, what are its parts, and what is its purpose one will be able to recognize the new homiletic when they see it and say, "Ah, yes. There is the elephant. I see it now."

Notes

1. As stated earlier this will not be a comprehensive list of proponents and practitioners, but a sampling of some within the New homiletic.
2. Throughout this paper when the "old homiletic" is used it is referring to what Lucy Atkinson Rose refers to in *Sharing the Word* as the "Traditional Theory."
3. Fred Craddock, *As One Without Authority* (Enid, OK: Phillips University, 1971), 1.
4. Thomas G. Long, "How Shall They Hear?" in *Listening to the Word*, eds. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 172.
5. Long, 172-173.
6. Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 1997), 22.
7. Rose, 15.
8. Long, 173.
9. Long, 174.
10. This is a severe oversimplification of kerygmatic preaching – not all kerygmatic preaching would ignore the needs of the parishioners. However, it is fair to state that there is a propensity in kerygmatic preaching to ignore the felt needs of the congregation in favor of a straightforward pronouncement of the gospel.
11. See Lucy Atkinson Rose's comments in *Sharing the Word* for a fuller critique of this theory of

preaching.

12. Long, 179.
13. A.C. Thiselton, "The New Hermeneutic" in *New Testament Interpretation,* ed. I. Howard Marshall (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 309.
14. Thiselton, 312.
15. Thiselton, 317-318.
16. Thiselton, 319.
17. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 36.
18. Eugene L. Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 21.
19. Lowry, 22-28.
20. For a fuller examination of each of these methods it is well worth reading Lowry. It is also worth noting that there are obviously other advocates for each of these methods and much cross-pollination between methods. For example, Craddock would also use the story sermon or narrative sermon. And Rose would utilize a variety of the first five methods in carrying out her conversational-episodal sermon.
21. Fred B. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching, a paper prepared by Fred B. Craddock for the Societas Homiletica meeting at Stetson University, August 20-23, 1990," 10.
22. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching,"16.
23. Rose, 97.
24. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching," 12.
25. Edward Farley, "Toward a New Paradigm for Preaching" in *Preaching as a Theological Task* eds. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996).
26. David Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 458.
27. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching," 13.
28. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching," 12.
29. Rose, 6.
30. Rose, 78.
31. Lowry, 31-32.
32. We will need to return to this relationship between the new hermeneutic and the new homiletic in a moment.
33. Lowry, 31.
34. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 37.
35. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 40.
36. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 41.
37. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 43.
38. For a fuller explanation of interpreting or exegeting the congregation see *Preaching as Local Theology and Fold Art* by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997). She also does an excellent job in explaining how preaching both represents and creates local theology.
39. Unfortunately, not everyone in the new homiletic shares Craddock's humility.
40. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*,14.
41. Craddock, "Inductive Preaching," 16.
42. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 70.
43. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 71 (italics original).
44. Buttrick, 273.
45. Rose, 5.

Building a Bridge or Widening the Divide? A Critique of the "Two-World" Paradigm in Mark Ellingsen and Charles Campbell

by Casey C. Barton

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Introduction

There has arisen a tendency in homiletical texts and discussions to divide the world into at least two realms. With reference to the Bible and to the unique narrative world it depicts, the reader of said homiletical texts is referred to the "biblical world." In citing life as lived in a contemporary context the "world" is said to be that of the homiletical listener, or, the "contemporary world." One major task of preaching then becomes that of bridging these two worlds, of traversing this chasm with words, images, and illustrations in order that the listener might relate the world in which he or she currently lives to the biblical world. In this manner the biblical text is hopefully made relevant to a life lived millennia after its writing.

The recognition that the contextual setting of the biblical text is qualitatively different from life lived in the twenty-first century is a necessary one. Indeed, preachers cannot, in any communicatively credible manner, ignore the differences between the historical and cultural contexts of biblical times and lands, and modern North American congregations. In this sense the identification of different life settings is a welcome and necessary insight for contemporary homiletics.[1]

However, the issue becomes blurred when this two-world metaphor is pushed to extremes, obscuring the fundamental relationship between the so-called "biblical" and "contemporary" worlds. Such

is the case with the two homileticians under study here, Mark Ellingsen[2] and Charles Campbell.[3] In their interest to preserve the biblical narrative's integrity by either making it a self-contained "world" which is not accessible to scientific critique or historical study (Ellingsen), or by allowing the biblical narrative to consume the listener's (Campbell), the post-liberal homiletic which emerges begins to suffer from similar inadequacies to those homiletical systems which it critiques.

The two-worlds paradigm as framed by Ellingsen and Campbell focuses on the "other-worldliness" of the Biblical narrative to the detriment of its "this-worldliness" quality, producing a "biblical world" almost totally removed from the "contemporary world." Eliminating this dichotomy and shifting the emphasis to the contemporary setting as a continuation and relative improvisation of the biblical narrative can achieve a more biblically consistent paradigm.

This essay will first seek to give a brief overview of the positions of both Ellingsen and Campbell with regards to their ideas about the biblical and contemporary worlds. While the basic premises of Ellingsen and Campbell will be agreed with in regards to narrative worlds and the primacy of the biblical world, two major issues arise in their practical applications of this paradigm. Specifically, it will be shown that in Ellingsen and Campbell's homiletical practices the biblical world becomes intangible to the contemporary listener, and that the listener's world gets completely lost in the exchange. Finally, a proposal will be made to rejoin the two worlds, thereby preserving a relative continuity between the Bible and the contemporary church.

The Two-Worlds Paradigm in Ellingsen and Campbell

Karl Barth stated that what is encountered in the Bible is a "strange new world."[4] Drawing upon the insights of theologian Hans Frei on this subject, both Ellingsen and Campbell appropriate the assertion of Barth in similar ways. While Campbell is more interested in the

primacy of the unsubstitutable character of Jesus Christ for proclamation, Ellingsen is concerned to protect the integrity of the Bible's narrative by casting it as a literary work.

Mark Ellingsen: *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative*

Relying on Barth's declaration of the "strange new world" which confronts the reader in the Bible, Ellingsen notes that this world "seems so foreign, so inimical to the world as we know it, that the critical consciousness implanted in our psyche by Western technological culture inevitably leads us to wonder if the events it reports are really true or meaningful for us in the late twentieth century."[5] It is in this context that contemporary preaching occurs, and in this context that Ellingsen is concerned to protect the biblical narrative's integrity.

Ellingsen critiques didactic preaching characteristic of nineteenth century pulpits as a product of the church's attempt to confront scientific and critical historical thinking. He comments that the three-point form of preaching "abandons the biblical world and its literary forms. Instead of an actual presentation of that world, one receives from this model sermons 'about biblical topics.'"[6]Alternatively, the theological and homiletical task must be to re-present this strange world in its fullness: "the task of preaching is to tell the Bible's stories about that world."[7]

For Ellingsen, because of the modern Western critical consciousness, the historicity of the biblical accounts can no longer be asserted in any intellectually credible manner. As an alternative he opts to view the nature of the biblical narrative as primarily literary, presenting a complete narrative world that cannot be critiqued by modern science or critical history. This does not necessarily mean that he views the stories as "untrue," but that he views these issues as of secondary importance.[8]

By viewing the Bible primarily as literature Ellingsen hopes to avoid the uncertainty in interpretation that comes with affirming that it is

historically referential. Through his reliance on American New Criticism, Ellingsen is concerned to arrive at a text's "normative, literal meaning," that is "not contingent upon the interpreter's perspectives."[9] His solution is to cast the Bible as history-like literature, or "realistic narrative."

The homiletical effect of viewing the Bible as a "realistic narrative" is that "an attempt should be made via these texts to draw hearer's or readers into the biblical world, to identify one's contemporaries and their situation with the original audience or authors of the texts."[10] With Frei, Ellingsen affirms that the biblical world becomes the real world, "the world in which we should really live."[11] The claim of the biblical world on the reader or listener is "tyrannical," and "intends to overcome the reality of readers."[12] This plays out practically for Ellingsen in literally identifying his listeners with the characters in the text. He writes, "It is not sufficient to say that we are like Peter, Matthew, or John, and so we ought to start living like them."[13] Instead, the preacher must cast the listener *as* Peter, Matthew, or John. Only when the listener sees him or herself as the character and within the biblical world has the sermon accomplished its task.

Therefore, Ellingsen is concerned to protect the integrity of the Bible's narrative world by casting it as a literary world. It is a world which, precisely because it is literary in character, is untouched by modern science and historical criticism. This world is accessible through the biblical narratives and should be viewed as the "real world" by its readers. Biblical preaching becomes effective when it casts listeners as the characters in the Bible stories.

Charles Campbell: *Preaching Jesus*

Campbell's homiletical procedure relies more centrally on his insistence that the preacher must present the unsubstitutable character of Jesus Christ than on the two-worlds paradigm. However, Campbell does devote an entire chapter in his study to critiquing those homileticians in the New Homiletic who have

themselves relied on this paradigm. Further, Campbell's insistence on Christology as central to preaching relies on the proper identification of the biblical world as the real world which absorbs the contemporary world.

Campbell is not as occupied as Ellingsen with the issue of historicity, or of making the biblical narrative "intellectually credible" to modern Western consciousness. Campbell only discusses history or historicity with regards to Frei's approach to faith and history.[14] While not outright rejecting some sort of historicity of the biblical narrative, Frei thought it a fruitless endeavour to attempt to prove the biblical narrative as historically referential. Instead, Frei sought to interpret the Bible from a literary standpoint, an "internal logic of Christian belief through a literary analysis of the gospel narratives."[15] In this sense, while the unique event of the resurrection cannot be proven historically, it cannot be denied according to the internal logic of Christian faith. In other words, for Frei, the Bible does not "mean" because the events it depicts have historical referents, though they may. The Bible's meaning arises from studying it as a literary work.

In dealing specifically with the two-worlds paradigm as utilized in the New Homiletic, Campbell makes the observation that "there has been too little careful discussion about how these 'two stories' are brought together – or about whether this framework is the best way to pose the issue."[16] In an effort to examine this lacuna in homiletical studies, Campbell looks to some of the main figures of the New Homiletic in order to critique the way these categories function within their systems. In each case Campbell asserts that the particular homiletician comes down on the inappropriate side of what Frei deemed the "great reversal" in hermeneutics. This directional flow begins with universal human experience and then seeks to conform the particular Christian story to these broader categories. In Campbell's analysis and speaking in terms of Frei's theology, for these homiletical figures (Charles Rice, Fred Craddock, Edmund Steimle, and Eugene Lowry) "the world absorbs the biblical story, rather than the biblical story absorbing the

world."[17]Campbell concludes his critique with the summary statement:

In narrative homiletics, as represented by Lowry, Rice, Craddock, and Stemile, the "great reversal" of liberal theology continues in subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The world absorbs the Bible, rather than Scripture absorbing the world; Christology becomes the function of an independently generated soteriology.[18]

Although Campbell questioned whether this two-world framework was the best way to pose the situation, he offers no explicit alternative. He only insists that the flow must be reversed, that the preacher must begin with the biblical world, giving the biblical story pre-eminence over the contemporary world and thus allowing the biblical story to absorb the listener's. Shifting the focus of sermon content to the character of Jesus Christ, Campbell concludes about narrative preaching that "narrative is important because it is the vehicle through which the gospels render the identity of Jesus of Nazareth, who has been raised from the dead and seeks today to form a people who follow his way."[19]

Practically Campbell's position is similar to Ellingsen's homiletic. While not as explicit in his explanation, Campbell is still concerned to draw the listener into the biblical story. Two sermons are compared, one by Wayne Bradley Robinson, and one by Walter Bruggemann. The observation is made that Robinson's sermon simply uses Jesus as a cipher for universal human experience. This is antithetical to Frei's post-liberal theology in that for Frei, Jesus is uncompromisingly "a unique agent enacting a unique mission."[20] Bruggemann's sermon, however, has more of what Campbell is looking for in narrative homiletics. According to Campbell, Bruggemann's tactic is one of "dramatic re-enactment" in which:

He does not invite the hearers to "find their stories" in the biblical story – as if the hearers knew what their stories were apart from Scripture. Rather, he suggests that the biblical story may in fact redescribe the hearers' stories. . . Bruggemann "does not suggest, as is often said in our day, that believers find their stories in the Bible,

but rather that they make the story of the Bible their own."[21]

While this is not identical to Ellingsen's suggestion that the preacher tell the listener that he or she is actually the character in the story, it does have quite similar implications. As the listener enters into the biblical narrative, and makes that narrative her or his own, the listener becomes a part of Jesus' story.[22] In this manner, according to Campbell, the unique character of Jesus is preserved as the hearer's world is absorbed into the biblical world.

Problems Inherent in the Two-World Paradigm

The particularities of both Ellingsen's and Campbell's homiletical assimilation of the two-worlds paradigm leave them open to criticism on at least two levels. First, construing the biblical narrative as Ellingsen and Campbell do, the biblical world ironically becomes nearly intangible to the reader of the text or listener to the sermon. Secondly, the desire for an absolute absorption of the contemporary world into the biblical world loses the listener in the biblical world with little regard to the actual world in which he or she lives.

The Intangibility of the Biblical World

Ellingsen's insistence on making the biblical narrative intellectually credible to a Western consciousness raises the first issue in the two-world paradigm as exemplified by him and Campbell. Although Ellingsen claims to make provision for historical events in the biblical account, the bottom line is that the Bible comes out to be a literary narrative much like "any piece of contemporary literature."[23] In Ellingsen's terms:

Thus, even if a text is historically improbable it still has its own credibility as a meaningful piece of literature. . . . As long as the biblical account is analyzed as a kind of aesthetic object, one may just as easily identify with it, be transformed by its meaning, as one would with any piece of contemporary literature.[24]

This removes the biblical world to a place safe from all tangible contact with the contemporary world in the name of safeguarding it from modern science. In this scheme, the uniqueness of the biblical narrative is lost, access to the biblical world is granted only through the storied reality of the text which eliminates access to Jesus or to God's work in "real life," and a disregard for the created world is fostered.

The first problem contributing to the intangibility of the biblical world is that the biblical narrative forfeits any claim to uniqueness as it is placed on par with all literary works. If the biblical narrative is fit into the category of literary work, and compared on that basis to all other literary works, there is nothing that makes it different from novels such as Melville's *Moby Dick* or Tolkein's *The Lord of the Rings*. Given that one can be transformed by this book's meaning just as one might by "any piece of contemporary literature," a critically thinking reader might ask why allegiance should be given to this book, to this narrative. The Bible may make tyrannical claims upon the reader's life, but the question must be asked as to whether there is any reason to privilege this book's claims as over against the claims of any other book? Ellingsen comments on one of Martin Luther's sermons that in his re-telling of the biblical text, "Even if it did not happen just the way the Bible says it did, Luther's comments place us on holy ground."[25] One might respond, "What makes *this* particular ground holy?" This two-world dichotomy makes the biblical narrative all too common as an ordinary work of literature. In this sense, it might be said that the biblical "world" is not so much made intangible as it is made uninteresting.

A second problem emerges as one realizes that in Ellingsen's attempt to make the strange world of the Bible palatable to modern sensibilities he has retreated into the storied world of the text, which, functionally gives the reader access to that world only through the pages of the narrative (or that narrative preached). In essence, when the book is shut, so is the portal to the biblical world. It is a distant world that never touches the real flesh and blood

world of the contemporary reader.

Similar issues are apparent in Campbell's work. David Lose has alluded to this facet of Campbell's homiletic saying that because of his appropriation of Frei's theology, Campbell must "locate God's act of salvation unfailingly in the storied reality rendered by the biblical narrative."[26] The biblical narrative then takes on a

...functional, if not structural, importance because it is the one thing able to *render* Jesus' identity and therefore provides the only direct access to his presence. Neither word nor sacrament nor church has this ability, only narrative. Ultimately, the hearer is confronted with the startling possibility that *God is at work in no place outside the narrative*![27]

The divide between the listener's reality and that depicted in the biblical narrative widens, and the reader is further removed from the work of God in the world.

A third issue which contributes to the increasing divide placed between readers and the biblical world is that in the systems of Campbell and Ellingsen a disregard for the created world is fostered. Lose argues of Campbell's homiletic, and the same could be said of Ellingsen's, that "it denies the ability of the ordinary, created reality and world to bear the identity and presence of the eternal Christ."[28]

The Listener's World is Lost to the Biblical World

The complete loss of the listener's world in its absorption into the biblical narrative is another concern which surfaces. While here it is affirmed that the biblical narrative should become in some sense normative for the reader of the text or listener to the sermon, the language in which this is phrased and the manner in which it is appropriated in the two-world dichotomy becomes troubling. Ellingsen's insistence on making the listener a character in the biblical narrative fails to respect the unique character of the individual in the contemporary situation and the uniqueness of the

biblical text. Campbell's program of world absorption functions in quite a similar manner.

Although he continually disavows any tie with allegorical interpretation or preaching, Ellingsen's program of literally making the sermon audience characters in the biblical stories represents a decidedly allegorical paradigm. The preacher is encouraged to substitute the characters in the narrative with the individuals of her or his congregation; essentially identifying the listener *as* Mark, John, or even the dry bones of Ezekiel's vision.[29] In fact, the one-to-one correspondence of biblical character to sermonic listener can be described as nothing less than allegorical. In such a situation, the listener may object that he or she is not, in actuality, Mark or John but rather an individual, unique, even "unsubstitutable" person who lives a very real life in the world of today. In this sense the individuality and uniqueness of the contemporary hearer is lost. Rather than being equipped to live a meaningful life in today's world the listener may feel an overwhelming sense of adequacy if only he or she lived in the storied reality accessible through the biblical text.

Lose detects a similar problem in Campbell's work. He poignantly asks:

> ...what happens to the world of the hearer, the world that she or he is invited to leave behind for, or at best bring along into, the storied, biblical world? This question becomes more immediately important as we realize that this is the world not only into which the hearer was born, but in which she continues to live, work, hope, dream, struggle, love, and die.[30]

As in the above critique, Lose sees this as a "subtle but consistent depreciation of the created and temporal world in which we live."[31] Because Campbell has as his intention to draw people out of their world and into the biblical one, Lose argues that the sermonic flow is functionally, contrary to Campbell's claims, from this world to the biblical world. This is counter to the directional flow of God's act in

the Incarnation, which is from God to the created world in direct action. This is vividly stated in the observation that "when the fourth evangelist climaxes his mighty hymn to God's Word, he does not conclude, 'And the Word created a new world and invited us into it,' but rather, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.'"[32]
In Campbell this issue is seen practically by returning to his evaluation of Bruggemann's sermon. Campbell voices his approval of Bruggemann's re-enactment of the narrative, specifically referring to the conclusion drawn that the woman in the biblical narrative has "become a key character in *the story of Jesus*."[33] For the same reasons Campbell celebrates Bruggemann's appeal to the hearer to, "Listen to her story as a tale about your own life and our life."[34] The two communicative devices are, however, decidedly different. In the first comment, while the woman in the narrative may become a character in Jesus' story, she retains her own character and identity, changed as that identity may be. In the latter comment, the unique character of the listener is disregarded as he or she is invited to, in essence, become the woman in the story. There is a profound, if subtle, difference.[35]

In light of these issues, how might the situation be remedied? Is it possible to affirm Campbell's critique of traditional narrative homiletics, and yet not fall into the problems associated with the two-worlds paradigm as outlined above? Can one affirm that the biblical narrative must be in some manner unique and authoritative in the contemporary context, affirm its tangibility in that same context, while at the same time respect the particularities of the contemporary listener/congregation? The final section will attempt to address these issues.

A Proposal for Continuity and Improvisation

The claim is made here that the manner in which the so-called biblical and contemporary worlds have been separated in contemporary theology and homiletics, especially as presented in Ellingsen and Campbell (but by no means limited to them), is

unnecessary and, though it may afford solutions to some problems, it simultaneously produces new ones. Moreover, this division is internally inconsistent with the biblical narratives themselves. The proposal is to remove this division, thereby restoring continuity between the biblical world and the contemporary one, in essence viewing them as the same world. As a result, the task of the preacher becomes one of leading the community of God's people in an informed and critical improvisation of the biblical narrative in contemporary time.

Restoring Continuity to the Biblical and Contemporary Worlds

While Erich Auerbach is consistently cited in contemporary post-liberal theology and in the homiletical systems of Ellingsen and Campbell, some of his observations are conveniently ignored. Specifically, Auerbach's oft quoted statement that "the Bible's claim to truth is . . . tyrannical. . . . it insists that it is the only real world," is used to identify the separation of the biblical world from the real world in eighteenth and nineteenth century hermeneutics, noting that during that time the contemporary world took precedence over the biblical one.[36] Instead of seeking to correct this reversal by removing the divide, Ellingsen and Campbell seek to reverse the reversal and make the biblical world normative. This seems like a logical turn, however, it leads to the problems discussed above.

What is ignored, either implicitly (Campbell) or explicitly (Ellingsen), is Auerbach's observation of the biblical text's claim to historicity as well as the effects of the biblical stories on the interpretation of the real world. The full quotation sheds light on Auerbach's concerns:

The world of the Scripture stories is not satisfied with claiming to be a historically true reality – it insists that it is the only real world, is destined for autocracy. All other scenes, issues, and ordinances have no right to appear independently of it, and it is promised that all of them, this history of all mankind, will be given their due place within its frame, will be subordinated to it. The Scripture stories do

not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please us and enchant us – they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.[37]

Indeed, it is telling that in Ellingsen's reproduction of the above quotation the words, "claiming to be a historically true reality," are replaced with an ellipsis.[38]
Auerbach does not merely assert that the biblical narrative overcomes the reader's world, but that it does so precisely in the context of the real world in which the reader lives. In fact, Auerbach comments on the realistic character of the biblical stories that "the sublime influence of God here reaches so deeply into the everyday that the two realms of the sublime and the everyday are not only actually unseparated but basically inseparable."[39] In Auerbach's assertion that the Bible makes a tyrannical claim on the reader's reality he did not necessarily mean that the reader is subsumed into the storied narrated reality, but rather that the narrated reality makes a claim to be a representation, the only true representation, of the reader's reality. The implication is clear: the real, contemporary world is the very world in which the biblical narrative claims to have taken place. In this sense it should be affirmed with Ellingsen and Campbell that the biblical narrative does indeed portray a world. However, the world portrayed in the Scripture stories should not be cast as incontiguous with or separate from the contemporary world.

Viewing the biblical world in continuity with the contemporary world affords the added benefit of being more biblically consistent. Lose referred above to the direction of the Incarnation, highlighting the evangelist's witness that the "Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Similarly, the opening words of John's first epistle situate the work of God as taking place directly in this world: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched – this we proclaim concerning the Word of life," (1 John 1.1).

In this same vein it should be recognized that the very structure of

the biblical narrative points to such a view of fuller continuity between the biblical and contemporary worlds. The church literally fits into the biblical story between the Ascension of Jesus (Acts 1), and his Return (parts of Paul and Revelation).[40] It is in the shape of the biblical narrative as a whole and its continuity with contemporary life that New Testament scholar N. T. Wright comes to see the Bible as both relevant and authoritative. He draws an analogy with an imagined Shakespearian play:
Suppose there exists a Shakespeare play whose fifth act has been lost. The first four acts provide, let us suppose, such a wealth of characterization, such a crescendo of excitement within the plot, that it is generally agreed that the play ought to be staged. Nevertheless, it is felt inappropriate actually to write the fifth act once and for all: it would be to freeze the play into one form and commit Shakespeare as it were to being prospectively responsible for work not in fact his own. Better, it might be felt, to give the key parts to highly trained, sensitive and experienced Shakespearian actors, who would immerse themselves in the first four acts, and in the language and culture of Shakespeare and his time, *and who would then be told to work out a fifth act for themselves*.[41]

Wright carries the analogy, contending that the first four acts would be the authoritative text upon which any objections to the improvised fifth act could be based. Connection with the biblical narrative is then made explicit, proposing that it is possible to view:

> . . . the five acts as follows: (1) Creation; (2) Fall; (3) Israel; (4) Jesus. The New Testament would then form the first scene in the fifth act, giving hints as well (Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 15; parts of the Apocalypse) of how the play is supposed to end. The church would then live under the 'authority' of the extant story, being required to offer something between an improvisation and an actual performance of the final act.[42]

In this sense the Bible holds a normative, and even primary, position in the life of the Christian community in that it gives the church the

story from which the trajectory of its life is drawn, as well as the goal toward which it proceeds. Rather than forcing the reader or listener into an alien world, Scripture gives "the fully authoritative four acts, and the start of the fifth, which [sets] us free to become the church afresh in each generation."[43]

A homiletic based upon this sense of continuity will not ask the listener to abandon his or her own world, but will of necessity invite the listener to recognize the biblical story as his or her own story.[44] This homiletic will not require that the hearers become characters in a closed narrative reality contained within the pages of the Bible, but will affirm their place as unique characters in the same reality as yet unfinished. Rather than the so-called biblical world being closed off when the book is closed, that world becomes one in which the book cannot be shut; it becomes a drama performed in a theatre in which the viewer is an active participant and, though she may try, from which she cannot leave. Lose alludes to this type of homiletical movement in his discussion of Luther's preaching which, moving from biblical narrative to congregation, always sought to create faith in hearers to "see God at work in their lives and world."[45]

Potential Benefits of a Homiletic of Continuity

The potential benefits of such a theology for preaching are manifold. First, as indicated above, the biblical world becomes freely and immediately accessible. Rather than the divide between text and listener becoming wider, the reader of the text or listener to the sermon actually lives in the continuing story of the biblical narrative. A second benefit is that historicity need not be jettisoned, affirming God's work in the real life of the reader or hearer. Objections to this will be addressed below. Thirdly, because the preacher affirms that the story occurred in time and space, that it is essentially a non-fictional story, the Bible's uniqueness as a piece of literature is preserved and it can be viewed as fundamentally different from other works of literature.

In reference to Lose's charge that Campbell's homiletic represents a

lack of appreciation for the world as creation, by removing the divide and restoring a historical continuity, the locus of God's action as the created world is affirmed. Finally, the listener is empowered to live a Christian life in his or her own flesh and blood world as he or she is equipped through the sermon to carry on the story in a consistent and improvised fashion. This last point introduces an immediate ethical aspect to the paradigm, namely that the believer who would formulate her or his world-view in this manner is then required to live in a manner consistent with the proper conduct of God's people in the world as revealed in the "first four acts," of the narrative.[46]

Continuity and the Problem of Historicity

One major objection that can be foreseen as arising in response to this proposal is that it can be accused of relying on a pre-critical view of history and historicity. Ellingsen's claim that the biblical narrative can have no historical credibility to a modern Western consciousness poses a serious challenge to a homiletic which would rely on historical continuity between the biblical and contemporary worlds. Countering this charge would be the claim that the modern Western consciousness has been, according to Amos Wilder, conditioned by a "reductionist approach to history."[47] Wilder goes on to comment:

Although [the biblical writers'] horizons and perspectives on time were not ours we should recognize that the earliest witnesses to the Gospel events and the authors of our Gospels and other writings had a crucial concern with what we call history and a life or death stake in the reality of the transactions...which they reported. If their "world" had what seem to us fictional and surreal features their scenarios and modes of narration were nevertheless dictated by their experience and were all the more faithful to their heightened theatre of observation.[48]

Instead of asking biblical authors' to conform to our view of history, it might be more beneficial and literarily honest to read their

historical accounts on their terms.[49]

Further, to discount miracles and resurrection because they cannot be historically verified is counter to the mystical nature of the biblical narrative itself. Jesus proclaimed the coming of a mystical Kingdom, a realm of existence with an other-worldly quality governed by his omnipotent Father. In such an inbreaking of the Kingdom of God into the history of humanity it seems that mystical and mysterious acts might be expected, and certainly not discounted. While Ellingsen claims that this leaves the Bible open to scientific and historical criticism, in fact, the other-worldly character of the Kingdom of God protects the acts of Jesus from such scrutiny. If the miracles, including the Resurrection, belong to the realm of God's Kingdom broken into the world and possess the mystical and mysterious marks of that Kingdom, these acts do not belong to and are not at home in the realms of scientific reason or historical sensibilities.[50]

Conclusion

This essay has proposed that the division of the world into two parts, a biblical and a contemporary one, is a problematic framework upon which to base one's homiletical practice. The identification by Hans Frei of the privileging of the contemporary context and the modern consciousness over and against the biblical narrative has been an important observation in recent theological and homiletical study. However, the popular attempt to resolve this reversal of priority has resulted in a divided reality which may help to solve the issue of biblical priority, but at the same time creates new problems. Specifically, in perpetuating this division, the homiletical practice of both Mark Ellingsen and Charles Campbell come to suffer from serious deficiencies; namely, that the so-called biblical world is so removed from human experience that it becomes relatively intangible, and that the listener's particular identity and world are completely lost into the storied reality of the Bible.

Converse to the popular practice of furthering this division the

proposal made here is to remove it, thereby restoring continuity between the biblical and contemporary worlds. An alternate framework was set forth, that of viewing the biblical narrative as an unfinished drama, with the present day hearer playing his or her own unique role within the community of God's people in the world. This paradigm was examined with regard to some of its potential benefits, as well as with reference to the perpetual matter of continuity and historicity.

Rather than imposing foreign categories upon the biblical narrative, it is when the Bible is allowed to be the Bible "in all its historical oddness and otherness," that preachers will be able to communicate its story in a more accessible and genuinely reality altering way.[51]

Notes

1. John Stott could be considered a representative of this particular use of the "two-worlds" metaphor from the standpoint of Evangelical homiletics, as could Paul Wilson from his unique place within the New Homiletic. See John Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); and Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999).
2. Mark Ellingsen, *The Integrity of Biblical Narrative: Story in Theology and Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990).
3. Charles L. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
4. Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), 28-50. Cited in Ellingsen, *Integrity*, 18.
5. Ellingsen, *Integrity*, 18.
6. Ellingsen, 18-19.
7. Ellingsen ,19.
8. Ellingsen, 28-29.
9. Ellingsen, 28-29.
10. Ellingsen, 22.
11. Ellingsen , 44.
12. Ellingsen, 44.
13. Ellingsen , 46.
14. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 9-28.
15. Campbell, 18.
16. Campbell, 147.
17. Campbell, 147.
18. Campbell, 165.
19. Campbell, 190.
20. Campbell, 196.
21. Campbell, 197.
22. Campbell, 199.
23. Ellingsen, *Integrity*, 68.
24. Ellingsen, 68.
25. Ellingsen, 50.
26. David J. Lose, "Narrative Proclamation in a Postliberal Homiletic," *Homiletic* 23:1

(Summer 1998), 8.
27. Lose, 8. Emphasis original.
28. Lose, 9.
29. Ellingsen, *Integrity*, 97-101.
30. Lose, "Narrative and Proclamation," 8.
31. Lose, 8.
32. Lose, 8.
33. Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 199. Emphasis original.
34. Campbell, 197.
35. Bruggemann is likely using the imagery as metaphor, and not actually stating that the listener *is* the woman. However, Campbell's use of Bruggemann seems to point to this type of application.
36. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003), 14-15. Cited in Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 37-38; and Ellingsen, *Integrity*, 36-37.
37. Auerbach, 14-15.
38. Ellingsen, *Integrity*, 36.
39. Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 22-23.
40. It should be admitted that the order of the biblical books is a later construction of the early church. However, this is the shape of revelation as understood by the community of God's people through the history of the church.

41. N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 18. Emphasis original.
42. Wright, 19.
43. Wright, 26.
44. In fairness, this is what Bruggemann does end up doing in one of the two comments discussed above. He observes that the "woman has become a part of Jesus' story."
45. Lose, "Narrative and Proclamation," 10.
46. This improvised character of Christian life resonates with what Campbell calls "preaching as linguistic improvisation." Campbell takes Frei's characterization of Christianity as a cultural-linguistic system that must be learned by its adherents and frames it for homiletics. Much the same thing is meant here, though it is relayed in different terms. Rather than the preacher teaching the language of the community, the preacher recites the community's story in the real world. See Campbell, *Preaching Jesus*, 231-241.
47. Amos N. Wilder, *The Bible and the Literary Critic* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), 91.
48. Wilder, 90-91.
49. In keeping with Ellingsen and Campbell's concern to interpret the text on its own terms, the view proposed in this paper does not claim historicity for those biblical texts that inherently make no such claims or possess no such qualities. For instance, because one insists on historical continuity does not necessarily lead one to hold to a literal "seven-day" creation. The first chapters of Genesis can be viewed as a poetic representation of God's act in creating the universe. The major thrust of the text is that God created, not necessarily that God created in seven 24-hour days. Genre sensitivity must be exercised in biblical interpretation and proclamation. For a poetic interpretation of the creation account see Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: The Opening Chapters of Genesis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1984).
50. For instance see Wilder, *The Bible and the Literary Critic*, 138.
51. Wright, "How Can the Bible be Authoritative?," 23.

Dancing the Edge of Mystery:
The new homiletics celebrates pilgrimage, not propositions

by Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.

(editor's note: Dr. Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., is president at Calvin Theological Seminary. This article is reprinted with permission of the author. The article first appeared in Books & Culture, *September/October 1999, Vol. 5, No. 5, Page 16-19. Our thanks to Dr. Plantinga.)*

Every Sunday they do it again: four or five hundred thousand ministers stand before listeners and preach a sermon to them in the English language. If the sermon works — if it "takes" — a primary cause will be the secret ministry of the Holy Spirit, moving mysteriously through a congregation and inspiring Scripture all over again as it's preached. Part of the mystery is that the Spirit blows where it wills, and with peculiar results. As every preacher knows, a nicely crafted sermon sometimes falls flat. People listen to it with mild interest, and then they go home. On other Sundays a preacher will walk to the pulpit with a sermon that has been only roughly framed up in her mind. The preacher has been busy all week with weddings, funerals, and youth retreats, and on Sunday morning she isn't ready to preach. Miraculously, her rough sermon arises in its might and gathers people to God.

Strange things happen when a minister preaches. After the service, people thank the preacher for things she didn't say, or for things she did say but hadn't understood as well as the listener had. Our words can be "wiser than we are," said Ben Belitt, and never more so than when the Spirit of God is in the building. On such occasions, as Barbara Brown Taylor (1993) writes, "something happens between the preacher's lips and the congregation's ears that is beyond prediction or explanation."
But the unpredictability of the preaching event gives no one license to wing it. Faithful preachers work hard on their sermons,

understanding that although a fruitful result may be God's gift, hard work is the preacher's calling. To help with this calling, authors write books that address every conceivable facet of preaching. Leona Tisdale (1997) writes of the preacher's calling to exegete not only Scripture, but also her congregation, so that her preaching achieves a genuinely local character. Never letting go of the universal gospel, the preacher must theologically and artistically customize her presentation of it to fit these people at this particular time in their history. In fact, the preacher's goal is to become the congregation's ethnographer to such an extent that if one Sunday morning she stirs up old ghosts or tamps down new fears she knows exactly what she is doing.

Other recent authors ponder how to preach to particular sections of an audience, such as the elderly, whose hard-earned wisdom may be losing ground to a muddle-headedness that threatens to overtake it (David G. Buttrick in Carl, 1997). Looking at an audience two generations younger, William Willimon, dean of the chapel at Duke, reflects on preaching to college students who are the children of divorce or neglect. Many are children of absentee parents who never anchored them in faith or in virtue, who perhaps never even spoke seriously of these things. Such students now live off their disinheritance, and they sometimes show it by blending detachment and longing. Generally speaking, today's college students don't vote or follow the news from Kosovo ("or wherever"), but they do cleave to their friends. Some of them also believe in angels. Some get drunk a lot. One of Willimon's friends, a rabbi, remarked to him that a good number of college students — children of the children of the sixties — are looking for their parents (Willimon in Callen, 1995).

Besides thinking of her audience, the preacher must also consider her message. Will she preach the goodness of creation? Will she move behind sin and grace to preach nature, sin, and grace? And will she develop an artist's eye for God's goodness in places where nobody is looking for it (English, 1996)? On the other side of the page, how about the Bible's "texts of terror"? Should a minister preach the Bible, including its hard texts, or preach the gospel

(Hilkert, 1997)? Do the hard texts sometimes set us up for hearing the gospel? How will the preacher handle passages such as the terrible ending of Psalm 137 that seem to work against the message of Jesus?

Several of the recent books urge preachers to emphasize particular biblical themes. Thus Walter J. Burghardt (1996) argues that, properly understood, social justice is the Bible's big idea and that preaching it therefore counts as an act of mere Christianity, not liberal politics. Burghardt makes his case in a book he has entitled Preaching the Just Word. Here just is a Catholic adjective, not an evangelical adverb, with the result that, in Burghardt theology, "just sharing" has little to do with spiritual "schmoozing" and much to do with softening our hard hearts, opening our closed hands, and making common cause with people God loves, especially "the bedeviled and the bewildered." Citing Isaiah, Jesus, and Chrysostom ("the poor are a venerable altar on which we must heap our offerings"), Burghardt encourages preachers to present biblical justice as God's shalom, the webbing together of God and all creation in harmony, fulfillment, and delight. When we see justice in this big "covenantal" framework, says Burghardt, we will quit calculating what people deserve and start imagining what they need. He adds that we should particularly imagine what children need, and people with aids, and prisoners on death row. We should think of the elderly: "There they sit in the nursing home, watching and waiting, waiting for someone they carried in their womb to visit and 'watch one hour' with them." All along, we should think beyond the lives of human beings and get enthusiastic about the flourishing of the whole creation. The earth is the Lord's, after all, and so God makes covenant in Genesis 9 not just with Noah, but also with "every living creature." Accordingly, we ought to undertake earth-keeping sheerly as a matter of justice.

Though Burghardt says little about the sovereign grace of God in the establishment of shalom and much about human responsibility in this project; though his book therefore moves naturally toward the imperative mood, its tone is passionate, not shrill. The author

doesn't lobby for particular political solutions to complex social problems, and he reminds preachers that their expertise typically lies elsewhere. When he comes to the church's most agonizing issues, such as the nature of her hospitality to gay and persons, Burghardt proposes humility. He proposes that ministers listen long and preach short. In sum, what Walter Burghardt wants is biblically passionate preachers who can kindle a flame of love in listeners who might otherwise think of compassion as a moral handout, or social justice as a euphemism for "rerouting hard-earned money to loafers." If preachers and listeners will keep an eye on biblical shalom, they should be able to see why social injustice is a disaster, and why glory shines from such a basic kindness as helping a refugee get access to a telephone.

Recent books discuss the preacher's audience, message, and social location. They discuss biblical theology, hermeneutics, and how to define a preachable text. They debate whether the contemporary habit of preaching from the common lectionary has had the happy effect of forcing preachers to handle some of the Bible's less fingerprinted passages, or whether lectionary preaching has yielded boring sermons by preachers who couldn't find anything lively to do with an assigned text. One book (Norrington, 1996) wonders whether we ought to have sermons at all, arguing that modern Christians take preaching much more seriously than did the prophets and apostles.

But to read a stack of books by some of the acknowledged masters homiletics is to discover that the hottest is sues in the discipline center on sermon design. For the last quarter-century, prominent writers have united to reject "deductive" or "discursive" or "propositional" de signs, as well as a formal style of rhetoric that often goes with them. According to these writers, such approaches represent the lost cause of the "old homiletics," which is now being replaced in the "new homiletics" with various "inductive" approaches that give sermons a more narrative and colloquial sound, especially when their rhetoric matches their design.

The Way it Used to Be

What did a sermon sound like when seminaries still taught the old homiletics and preachers still designed sermons in sonata form — that is, with a statement, development, and recapitulation of a theme, finished off with a practical application to the lives of believers?

As a boy in the early 1950s I be longed to a church whose minister wore a tailcoat when he preached. Dressed in a cutaway coat and striped trousers, our minister would stand in his pulpit and deliver sermons as stiff as his collar. These sermons typically began not with a story from history or an observation of current events, but with a businesslike statement of the preacher's theme and of the three "points" or subdivisions by which he proposed to develop it. Like many of his colleagues, our minister would often start in this way no matter what biblical literature he was preaching. Thus a sermon on the parable of the Prodigal Son might have begun as follows:

> Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ: my theme this morning is the Justification of Guilty Sinners. Three points, beloved, under the head of God's sovereign justification: firstly, its origin in the divine decree; secondly, its forensic realization in the satisfaction of Christ's righteousness; thirdly, its vindication in the eschatological glorification of the elect in life eternal. Firstly, then, its origin in the divine decree. . . .

A heavy-duty sermon of this kind, thick with its Latinate language and dogmatic purpose, would partially eclipse Jesus' story of a man who had two sons. Instead of drawing us into the story, and then moving us along inside it, our minister would use the story to illustrate some doctrinal truths he had brought to it from the Canons of Dort or from the Systematic Theology of Louis Berkhof, and he would perform this task with a good deal of theological zest. (Berkhof, by the way, sat at the end of a row on the south side of our church, benignly absorbing his own theology as it was preached to

him.) In general, our preacher's aim in those days was not to tell stories, but to teach Reformed doctrine, which he did with such gusto that when men from our congregation hunted deer in November with their Baptist buddies, they would sit in the woods arguing with the Baptists over the meaning and member ship of the covenant of grace. (Everybody agreed that deer weren't in it.)

Sunday after Sunday our minister proclaimed Reformed doctrine with "a mighty clarity." He did this until he came to a juncture in the system where two of the doctrines clashed, at which point he would declare a mystery and strongly recommend that we adore it. Along the way, he sought to sharpen our understanding of Reformed doctrine, and of its advantages, by exposing the errors of non-Reformed Christians and especially of Catholics, who, for some reason known only in Rome, stubbornly conflated justification and sanctification.

When I was in the third grade, I thought a sermon was simply another piece of heavy weather that children had to endure. While the minister filled the sanctuary with his whences and thences and wherefores, a boy of eight could doodle on a bulletin, or make a fan out of it, or just sit there, waiting for the sermon to subside. What made matters tricky was that our minister liked to divide his three points into subpoints, and then gather up the subpoints in a sort of coda at the end of each point, with the result that he kept raising and dashing the hopes of us youngsters. We would hear such phrases as "In summary, I say to you, be loved," or "to whom be glory forever and ever," and our hopes would rise like a Mannheim rocket. Surely the morning sermon had nearly blown itself out! But then our minister would pause, reach for his glass of water, and say, "And, now, for my second point. . . ."

At the end of the century it is hard to find homiletic events of the kind I've just described. Nobody preaches in a tailcoat anymore, or in language to match. In deed, in some church settings the language has loosened up so much ("Lord, just help us, Lord, to just plug in to where you're at") that we yearn for middle ground between the

kind of language that goes with tailcoats and the kind that goes with tank tops. Perhaps good pulpit language ought to find a level I'll call "upscale casual" or, maybe, "L. L. Bean colloquial." This language possesses a quality that the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of Vatican II describes as "noble simplicity," and we can find it in the sermons of such accomplished preachers as Barbara Brown Taylor, Eugene Peterson, and Deborah Block.

A couple of sharply written books (Jacks, 1996; Eslinger, 1996) advise preachers on the kind of pulpit language and sermon strategy that fit a contemporary narrative style. Robert Jacks tells preachers how to write for the ear, not the eye. He wants them to prepare sermons that speak naturally, using stories, dialogue, and sentence fragments just as a person would in good conversation. Looking for noble simplicity, Jacks cautions preachers against teen-speak ("I'm, like, 'Awesome!' and he goes, 'Whoa!'") and also against an essay like formality expressed not only by the use of whence or thence, but also by the use of so innocent a conjunction as for. According to Jacks, we might not notice the awkward formality of this conjunction in a preached sentence such as "Let us trust God, for we know God's love is true" till we compare it with ordinary speech, in which none of us says "Let's go to Gagliano's tonight, dear, for we know their cannelloni is delicious." The preacher who writes for the ear also remembers that congregations can't hear commas. Thus, to save his congregation confusion, the preacher should avoid such sentences as "Jesus Christ, says the New Testament, died for you." Congregations can't hear certain consonants very well either. Thus, no risky locutions such as "half-asked questions."

In *Pitfalls in Preaching*, Richard Eslinger places his theory of preaching within the new homiletics, and then offers preachers one savvy counsel after another, including the judgment that the sermon, like the road to Emmaus, ought to lead to the Communion table. Following David Buttrick, Eslinger also offers linguistic advice based upon his conviction that congregations don't hear individual items in a string, not even a short string. Hence the preacher ought to delete "doublets" such as "justice and peace" and talk about one

thing at a time. Moreover, in the interest of pulpit etiquette and general wisdom, the preacher should observe such commandments as these:

*Don't top a biblical story with a better one from Annie Dillard;

*Don't obstruct the flow of your sermon with an illustration so big that it becomes an embolism;

*Don't presume to read Jesus' mind, and especially not if you read banalities there ("The little boy Jesus sat on a sand dune outside his native hamlet of Nazareth wondering why all men weren't brothers");

*Don't manipulate congregants by asking them to raise their hands in order to answer your questions;

*Don't tell stories about yourself all the time, and certainly not ones in which you win big or lose big. Stories of the preacher's triumphs sound self-important, and stories of his failures distract a congregation with anxieties (Is our preacher ok? Does he need to go to that detox center again?).

But beyond their interest in a sermon's language, books in the new homiletics focus especially upon a sermon's form and dynamics. In doing so, they reject most of what my boyhood preacher assumed as normal. To begin, many books in homiletics of the last 25 years reject sermon designs in which the preacher announces a theme up-front and then sets out to develop and apply it. This old method (perhaps it goes back to Luther) was practiced until, say, 1960 not only by Western Michigan Calvinists but also by all kinds of other Protestant ministers, including liberal ones who used it to teach liberal doctrines.

Recent books disapprove. "Deductive" preaching of this kind, says Fred Craddock in a pioneering book of 1971, works against the way we live. According to Craddock we live inductively, moving from particular experiences to the general truths that we learn from them.

That's why wisdom is so hard to teach to a youngster. You might teach her a proverb such as "the more you talk, the less they'll listen," but chances are a youngster will still have to learn it the hard way, just as the author of the proverb did. Similarly, says Craddock, a sermon with a natural flow will move from particular observations or experiences toward some kind of conclusion, and maybe not a tidy one. According to the new homiletics of such writers as Craddock, Lowry (1997), David Buttrick (1994), Richard Eslinger, and Lucy Atkinson Rose (1997), sermons should therefore sound less like essays and more like odysseys. They should sound like stories, poems, parables, "plotted narratives," or even conversations, and thus follow the shape of the nondiscursive genres of Scripture; that is, the ones that do not proceed by arguing for a thesis. In a much-discussed option, David Buttrick wants a sermon to zig and zag as a human consciousness does when reacting to a significant event.

In any case, sermons designed according to the new homiletics always move, and not by argument or by application of a thesis. Instead, the sermons tell us what happened, and what happened next, and who said or did what to make things happen. They also suggest what it felt like to experience the things that happened. Otherwise put, sermons constructed according to the new homiletics display a dynamic sequence of linked "frames" or scenes that reminds us more of a film than of a still photo (Buttrick, Eslinger, and Wilson, 1999).

Accordingly, the new books want the preacher to end with her conclusion, not begin with it. As Eugene L. Lowry explains to preachers, if you announce your conclusion at the outset you spoil your sermon's suspense as surely as if you begin a joke with its punch line. Better, says Lowry, to follow the ancient wisdom of storytellers and conceal your conclusion by means of a "strategic delay." Make people wonder and make them wait. Play a string of seventh-chords and, like Bach in the C major prelude of The Well-Tempered Clavier, resolve them only at the end. That is, follow the prophets and Jesus by telling stories whose meaning doesn't come clear right

away. Thus, in 2 Samuel 12 the prophet Nathan tells King David a short story of a rich man with "many flocks and herds" and a poor man whose "one little ewe lamb" drank from his cup and nestled in his bosom until it had become "like a daughter to him." Garnishing the account with such gemutlich details, Nathan sets up the king for righteous anger at the point in the story when the rich man steals and kills the poor man's single lamb so as to spare his own stock. Nathan deliberately incites indignation in the kind heart of his sinful king (compartmentalizing is no modern invention) before he finally sticks the king with the point of his story: "You are the man."

Black preaching has practiced the new homiletics for decades, but with its own acoustics. Kenneth Woodward (1997) writes that black preaching is "a highly relational folk art that can't be duplicated in a white church, even by blacks," and that black preaching does not travel well because it needs the black congregation, rich in its stores of cultural wisdom and expectation, to join in duet with the preacher. In the "call and response" of black preaching, a congregation pushes the preacher through valleys ("Help him, Jesus!"), along some detours ("Take your time!"), up the mountainside ("Don't be afraid!"), higher and higher till the preacher reaches his peak ("Say it! Say it now!"). None of this would work without the strategic delay. Imagine our loss if Martin Luther King, Jr., had stood before the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963, and had begun his speech with the triumphant hope of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last, free at last; thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

With the strategic delay, says William B. McClain (1990), classic black preaching presents an unmistakable trajectory:

Start low; go slow;
Go high; strike fire.
Sit down.

The Eloquence of the Provisional

According to Eugene Lowry, what's crucial in a sermon is its

dynamic tension and resolution — what Lowry calls the move "from scratch to itch." In Lowry's scheme, the preacher starts with characters or a situation in which she spots trouble, or ambiguity, or discrepancy. The preacher then notes certain complicating factors in this situation ("the plot thickens"). At a climactic point she suddenly shifts the account (the "turn" or the "gasp," as in Nathan's accusatory disclosure), and then resolves the main tension into a new situation that usually involves the growth of the main participants. And, of course, "the main participants" include listeners.

But even at the end — that is, when the sermon resolves its conflict, or discloses its secret, or scratches its itch — we will not find ourselves in perfect repose. The reason is that the new situation resolves something for us, but not everything. We still itch a little. And this is by the preacher's design. The preacher's hope is not to tidy everything up at the end and send us home with a packaged truth or two. Indeed, Lowry insists that the aim in preaching is not primarily to expose and apply biblical or doctrinal propositions (propositions are suspect or even verboten within the new homiletics), but rather to "evoke an event" or stimulate an encounter by making "gestures towards the ineffable with the finest words that can be used" (Browne, quoted approvingly in Lowry). The preacher's task is to deliver the sermon, but the preacher's goal is to proclaim the Word of God so as to generate a transforming encounter with the mystery of God. Whether a sermon will reach its goal is unpredictable. As Lowry has it, "preaching is an offering intended to evoke an event that cannot be coerced into being." To avoid coercion, the preacher must shy away from a frontal approach to truth — the approach, Lowry imagines, of biblical literalists who believe in propositional revelation. Instead, the preacher must come at the mystery of God sideways, making full use of "analogy, metaphoric tease, and the 'tensiveness' of parabolic thought." By this in direct approach, says Lowry, borrowing his phrasing from Buttrick, the preacher may "dance the edge of mystery." Otherwise stated, in the event of preaching and listening we may find ourselves "so close to the heart of some

matter" that "we dare to move toward the *eloquence of the provisional*" (Lowry's italics).
Readers may find themselves struck by the potentially misty quality of sermons designed in this way. After hearing one of these sermons, could you bring the gist of it home to your spouse who was sick with the flu? Moreover, do sermons of a poetic temperament fit all kinds of biblical literature? Could someone effectively preach a big social justice text by dancing the edge of mystery? The biblical prophets often approached their topic with all the subtlety of a sledge hammer. Should they have danced around it more? When we ourselves preach against racism, should we gesture toward the ineffable or speak out very plainly?

I should add at once that while Lowry winces at any attempt to proclaim "the right propositions," he also rejects what he calls irrationalism. He rejects doctrineless relativism. He rejects any homiletic position that wholly dispenses with truth claims. But he insists that the preacher must find ways to combine aesthetic, ethical, and visionary modes of expression with more rational and explanatory ones, so that when the gospel truth comes home it does so in a dynamic and evocative way.

Fair enough, and readers who are familiar with the sermons of, say, Frederick Buechner know what Lowry has in mind. In "The Magnificent Defeat," for instance, Buechner shows us Jacob at Peniel, wrestling with God till dawn:

> The darkness has faded just enough so that for the first time he can dimly see his opponent's face. And what he sees is something more terrible than the face of death — the face of love. It is vast and strong, half ruined with suffering and fierce with joy, the face a man flees down all the darkness of his days until at last he cries out, "I will not let you go until you bless me."

Thousands of young preachers have tried to imitate such virtuosity, and without much luck. Buechner is almost inimitable, and bad

Buechner imitations are very bad sermons, full of mystifying wisps and vapors. But Buechner's own sermons, for all their suggestiveness, usually deliver real freight. In fact, alarmingly enough, a Buechner sermon usually delivers a proposition or two. And so in the sermon about Jacob, the author ends with an unmistakable message: God, our "beloved enemy," defeats our old self, and by this magnificent defeat gives us victory.

There they are, a pair of declarations, and, in a book published shortly before her untimely death, Lucy Atkinson Rose rejects them. According to her theory, sermons ought to resemble conversations as much as possible, and especially open-ended ones. Indeed, she regrets that as recently as 1984 the regnant homiletical theory was that "a sermon should contain a message or an idea." In her view — more extreme than Lowry's — preachers should not deliver messages. They should not make claims. Rose rejects both "propositions," by which she means the main claims in the theme-and-points type of sermons, and also what is "propositional," by which she means "truth that is ex pressed in a statement." If I understand her, Rose rejects any use of assertions, claims, declarations, or statements — that is, the kind of thing that could be true or false. Traditional preaching that makes a claim or contains a message has been superseded, says Rose, and properly so. She concedes that traditional preaching "does still work for some people" and should therefore not be wholly excluded, but she worries that the use of truth claims within sermons might signal the preacher's hierarchical assumption of objectivity and certainty. Such a preacher assumes he possesses truth and that his congregation doesn't. He thinks his job is to "transmit" this truth and their job is to believe it. But such an assertive posture, says Rose, privileges the preacher and silences or excludes certain listeners, especially women. Alternatively, such assertiveness on the part of a preacher may cause women to become dependent upon the preacher.

Rose also worries that sermons employing statements might strive for clarity of thought and expression, and that this attempt might

exhibit an assertive edge all by itself — as if the preacher were to shake a bony finger in people's faces and say, "Let me make one thing perfectly clear."

To soften matters, and bring the preacher and congregation into dialogue where neither is privileged, Rose recommends the use of "poetic, evocative language" within sermons and a nonassertive conversational style in which no conclusion is sought. With such an approach, the preacher no longer declares anything but rather "invites to the sermonic round table the experiences, thoughts, and wagers of all those present and even of those absent." We might say the preacher proposes to the congregation in a respectful, gently interrogative fashion, and the congregation proposes back to the preacher — perhaps in a postsermon adult forum, or the like. When the preacher proceeds in this way, distinguishing proposals from propositions and meshing old words of Scripture with new words of contemporary experience, then the sermon's words will "dance from our deeps to the surface and back, from our centers to the periphery and back, inviting Mystery to be part of our always-too-small stories."

Five comments: First, along with Rose we should sense danger when a human being undertakes to speak for God. The "folly of preaching" includes the danger of tyranny. With this in mind, we naturally recoil from ignorant assertiveness, coercive assertiveness, macho assertiveness, and other homiletic oppressions. Preachers who are full of themselves instead of the Spirit of God sometimes patronize or even assault their congregations, pushing people around, making up their minds for them, accusing them while excusing themselves. Arrogance is an ugly sin, and pulpit arrogance is a particularly ugly sin. "The corruption of the best is the worst," and Rose is right to post warnings in this regard.

But, second, does the recognition of such danger require the elimination of all assertions from sermons? What if the preacher's assertions are sensitive, inclusive, pastorally mature? What if they are biblical and true ("love is patient")? Wouldn't these qualities allay a number of Rose's concerns? Consider two summary

propositions with which Barbara Brown Taylor concludes a sermon on the parable of the laborers in the vineyard: “God is generous, and when we begrudge that generosity, it is only because we have forgotten where we stand.” Is it really conceivable that there is something amiss in the sheer form of these declarations, and that Taylor should have converted them into, say, questions?

Third, it looks like we’re stuck with propositional expressions or statements in sermons, regardless of anybody’s hesitancy about them (Rose isn’t alone here). Mainly, it’s awfully hard to get anything said in a sermon — or in the monthly report of your checking ac count — if nobody may use any statements at all. Imagine a sermon without a single statement. Imagine a whole sermon that consists entirely of questions, commands, optatives, and ejaculations. Wouldn’t a sermon of this kind taste too much like clam chowder without the clams? Maybe a preacher could try to split the difference between the forbidden declarative mood, on the one hand, and the permitted interrogative mood, on the other, by raising her inflection at the ends of statements in the recently popular fashion (“Hi, my name is Tiffany? And I’ll be your server tonight?”). But without the option of using any real assertions the preacher might still find herself hamstrung:

> Elijah was a prophet of the Lord? And the prophets of Baal weren’t? Are you listening, folks? Please listen now! Would that some of us had been there to see God send fire on that soggy altar! Holy smoke!

A few rounds of this, and people might feel a bit cranky.

Fourth comment: Besides incidental claims (“Jacob left Beersheba and went toward Haran”), the Scriptures are full of summary propositions, and it is hard to imagine why a sermon would go wrong by following Scripture in using some of them. Biblical authors use such propositions to start an epic (“In the be ginning, God created the heavens and the earth”), or to refocus a letter at its midpoint (“God has committed to us the ministry of

reconciliation"), or to climax a hymn ("The greatest of these is love"), or to congeal centuries of experience in a proverb ("Pride goes before destruction"). Biblical authors use summary propositions to do such things all the time. Would it not be perfectly natural for contemporary preachers to follow suit? In fact, for discursive texts, maybe a preacher should try the old theme-and-points approach, employing it with noble simplicity. Good doctrinal preaching gives ministry some spine. One of the strengths of a confessional tradition is that it disciplines the preacher's reading of biblical texts with wisdom distilled from millions of the faithful. The preacher needn't succumb to his own whims or sentimentalities in preaching the power and love of God out of Scripture. He can declare what the whole church declares: "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth; and in Jesus Christ his only Son, our Lord."

But (fifth comment) whether a preacher discloses her theme early or late (and Lowry persuades me that late is generally better), it's important to insist, I think, that the mere statement of a theme cannot sensibly be called presumptuous. After all, the preacher is only trying to say in other words what the text says. She is trying to transmit not her own thoughts, cooked up from scratch, but those of Scripture, which is her community's book. She's especially trying to preach the gospel out of Scripture, which is her community's message for the world. In any case, she stands under the claim of the gospel just as her congregants do. As Thomas G. Long (1989) has it, she is "the one whom the congregation sends on their behalf, week after week, to the scripture," authorizing her to bear witness to what she finds there. If this arrangement involves hierarchy, then the hierarch is God, who speaks in Scripture, not the preacher, who testifies to what she has seen and heard. By such testimony God chooses to speak to us, and especially to our hearts. As Jonathan Edwards wrote, the reason we preach Scripture instead of merely reading it is that we want the Word of God to start our hearts again.

In a rich and finely balanced book — one of the best of the recent

ones — Paul Scott Wilson (1999) endorses many of the new approaches to preaching, but he also holds out for some old ones. For example, he wants dynamic, film like movement in a sermon, but he also wants sermons to confine themselves to one clearly stated theme, representing "one main path through the heart of a text." He welcomes stories within sermons, but he also wants a theological frame to hold our stories and to keep them from wandering. He encourages the use of imagination in preaching, but not unbridled imagination that just "lets the horses out of the corral."

In a refreshing feature of his book, Wilson strongly recommends to ministers that they preach about God. Gesture toward the ineffable, as necessary, but speak of God. Respect God's mystery and our finitude, but preach about God. Admit our sin, our corruption, and the corruption of our knowledge of God, but do preach what we know of God: God's mercy, God's wisdom, God's Messiah, God's Spirit, God's enthusiasm for losers and nobodies. After all, as Wilson re minds us, the Bible's big story is not human sin, but God's redeeming grace centered in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and the preacher must find excellent ways to tell this story and preach this gospel.

Yes, indeed, and Wilson offers a big book to help. He offers a scheme (his "four pages" of trouble, old and new, and God's address to each), a global focus, and a wide range of homiletic wisdom, including thoughtful ambivalence about the preacher's role in addressing perennial dilemmas. At minimum, the compassionate preacher will acknowledge the dilemmas Christians face every day. He will acknowledge, for example, that Christians may have to choose between simple jobs, in which they may keep their purity, and high-impact jobs, in which they have a chance to make a major contribution to the kingdom of God, but in which they may also have to get dirty once in a while. (Perhaps here is a place to respect Rose's desire for sermons that help a congregation focus its conversations, and that resist the temptation to seek early closure on these conversations.)

In any case, Wilson's book and another beautifully wrought work by Charles L. Bartow (1997) remind the reader that preaching is at least a craft, requiring an eye for raw materials, a knack for shaping them, a dissatisfaction with poor work, and a painstaking readiness to improve it. But preaching is worth the trouble only if, beyond craftsmanship, it is a divine ministry, a divine address, a form of God's speaking. Properly understood, a preached and heard sermon may then become a means of grace to us who, like Jeremiah's King Zedekiah, secretly wonder whether there is "a word from the Lord" and especially a word of grace.

I think we have to concede that while we wonder about this word, we probably want it less than we think. The reason is that a word of judgment may sting us, but, as Dostoevsky knew, a word of grace may devastate us. A word of grace may cause in us a self-knowledge we cannot endure until our self is changed.

And so the preacher has to take care what she says and — drawing upon all available wisdom — how she says it. Fortunately, these days she has a lot of books to help her.

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The First Hymn

by F.W. Boreham

(editor's note: F.W. Boreham [1871-1959] was a Baptist pastor born in England who spent most of his life in New Zealand and Australia.)

Hymn Number One: that is my subject today. I do not mean *Hymn Number One* in any particular collection; but *Hymn Number One* in the archives and minstrelsy of the Church Universal. It is the only hymn sung by Christians of the apostolic age of which we have any record or quotation. And here it is. The rhyme, if it ever possessed rhyme, has been lost in the process of translation; but the lilt and the cadence still remain.

Without controversy great
Is the mystery of godliness;
God was manifest in the flesh,
He was justified in the Spirit
He was seen of Angels,
He was preached unto the Gentiles;
He was believed on in the world,
He was received up into Glory.

It is pleasant to think, whilst we know little or nothing of what was said and done in those sacred but secret assemblies of the hunted and persecuted Church, one of the songs that they loved to sing has been preserved to us. That fact in itself is intensely significant. For it is invariably the song that lingers. We know nothing of what the Wise Men *said;* but we all know what the angels *sang.* We have no record of the discussions at the inn; but we treasure every syllable of Mary's beautiful *Magnificat.* When Luther was journeying towards the Diet of Worms, at which he made his epoch-making stand for truth and righteousness, he suddenly caught sight of the bell-towers of the city in the distance. He rose like one inspired and chanted the monumental song whose words and music he had

composed two days before:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing,
Our Helper He amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
Doth seek to work his woe;
His craft and power are great,
And armed with cruel hate —
On earth is not his equal.

Nobody nowadays reads Luther's writings, but we all sing Luther's hymn. It was the most natural thing in the world that Charles Wesley and his songs should arise side by side with John Wesley and his sermons. Yet none but the Methodist students now read John Wesley's sermons — and even they do not always read them from choice — but we all sing Charles Wesley's hymns. Moody's sermons are forgotten; but Sankey's hymns echo round the world.

When, in the year A. D. 103, the Emperor Trajan became interested in the gossip that he was hearing about the Christians, he asked his friend, the Younger Pliny, to inquire and report. Pliny, at the close of his investigations, assured his royal master that he could find nothing particularly objectionable in the behaviour and customs of the strange sect. Their morals seemed to be perfectly pure: the only trouble was that some of their opinions were at variance with those of the authorities. The thing that most intrigued and puzzled him was their peculiar habit of meeting together at some secretly-appointed rendezvous before the first streaks of dawn illumined the eastern sky, and singing together antiphonally a hymn to Christ as God. In light of that report of Pliny to Trajan, it is interesting to glance again at this fragment of song embedded in the New Testament. For nothing can be more certain than the fact that we have here one of the identical verses that, in the days of their bitterest persecution, the early Christians sang.

I have been reading the story of Johann Heinrich Van Dannecker, one of the very greatest of German sculptors. In early life Dannecker conceived the idea that he had not long to live; but felt that, before dying, he should like to give the world a masterpiece that would be treasured forever. It was for this reason that he became a sculptor; he fancied that a noble statue stood a better chance of living through the ages than any other work of which human hands were capable. Setting to work early, he quickly achieved fame. His Mars, his Ceres, his Bacchus, his Sappho, his Hector, his Psych and his Ariadne are still among the adornments of the great European capitals. But Dannecker was not satisfied. None of these impressed him as bearing the stamp of immortality. He therefore gave himself to contemplation — and to prayer. One evening, as he pondered his New Testament, he came upon this fragment of a primitive hymn:

Without controversy great
Is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifest in the flesh,
He was justified in the Spirit
He was seen of Angels,
He was preached unto the Gentiles;
He was believed on in the world,
He was received up into Glory.

Fascinated, he read the lines again and again. If only he could catch their spirit and express it in eloquent marble! He would try! He prayed for grace and guidance: his entire personality and genius were sublimely consecrated to the exalted task.

He completed at length his *first* cast of his statue of the Divine Christ. He invited a group of children to visit his studio and to inspect his work. They gazed admiringly at the stately figure and then one boy exclaimed: “He must have been a very great man!” Dannecker was bitterly disappointed. The sense of greatness was not the impression that he had aspired to convey. He thanked the

children and dismissed them.

Having set to work afresh and completed his *second* cast, he sent for a fresh group of children to visit him. This time they smiled appreciatively and felt magnetically drawn to the lovely figure on the pedestal. It was a girl who broke the silence. “He must have been a very good man!” she exclaimed. Dannecker was less displeased than before; but he was by no means satisfied. He had decided to make a third attempt.

The *third* cast having been completed, he again sent for a batch of children. He scrutinized their faces as they entered the studio. This time, to his secret delight, the boys snatched off their caps as they caught sight of the statue, whilst one of the girls fell on her knees. Dannecker felt that at last he had expressed the adoration that was in his heart. He completed his work; and the statue — one of the most famous in the world — is, to this day, the pride of the native city of Stuttgart.

Whilst Europe was still ringing with his fame, Napoleon summoned Dannecker to Paris. “You must,” said the Emperor, “make me a statue of Venus for the Louvre!” “Sire,” replied the sculptor, “the man who, receiving a divine vision, makes it the theme of his loftiest achievement, would commit an unspeakable sacrilege if he were then to devote his powers to the carving of a pagan goddess. My art has been consecrated by my work!” It was said of him that the consecration and intensity with which he applied himself to his statue of the Christ undermined his health, but transfigured his personality.

I caught myself this morning admiring a pretty little painting entitled *A Bundle of Contradictions.* It represents a young couple engrossed in the contemplation of their baby’s face. The title is singularly felicitous. Every baby is a bundle of contradictions. He is so speechless and yet so eloquent; so helpless and yet so mighty; so little and yet so lordly; so troublesome and yet so dear. Now if all

this be true of any baby, how much more must it be true of the divine Baby celebrated in this early hymn? And this brings me back to the Emperor Trajan and the philosopher Pliny.

For did we take adequate notice of Pliny's declaration that, when the early Christians met before dawn to sing their hymn to Christ as God, they sang their hymn responsively, alternatively, antiphonally, one group of voices taking one part and another group another? This strikes me as particularly interesting. We are inclined to think that the introduction of ornate and decorative church music is a modern development. But Pliny assures us that it was practised by Christians who had been contemporaries of the Apostles. One group would sing: *O Lord open Thou our lips,* and another would answer: *And our mouth shall shew forth Thy praise.*

First Group — *O God, make speed to save us.* Second Group — *O Lord, make haste to help us.* First Group — *Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost;* Second Group — *As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be.* First Group — *Praise ye the Lord.* Second Group — *The Lord's Name be praised.* And so on.

Now, in the light of all this, let us glance at the hymn quoted by Paul. The whole idea of the hymn is its emphasis upon the fact that the Babe of Bethlehem was a divine bundle of divine contradictions. The entire assembly would sing the introductory line — *Without controversy great is the mystery of godliness.* Then followed the three antiphonies.

First Group — *God was manifest in the flesh.* Second Group — *Yet He was justified in the Spirit.* First Group — *He was adored of Angels;* Second Group — *Yet He was preached unto Gentiles.* First Group — *He was spiritually received among men;* Second Group — *Yet He was physically received among spirits.*

In his *Trail and Death of Jesus Christ,* Dr. James Stalker points out that whenever, in the New Testament, a beam of our Lord's divine

dignity is allowed to shine out and dazzle us, it is never long before there ensures some incident which reminds us that He is bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh; and, contrariwise, when He does anything which impressively brings home to us His intense humanity, there always follows something to remind us that He is Very God of Very God. Thus —

He was born a tiny babe in Bethlehem — He was as *human* as that! Yet angels filled the air with heavenly song — He was as *divine* as that!

He rested, tired and thirsty, on Samaria's well — He was as *human* as that! Yet He told the woman whom He found there that she had but to ask and He would give her the water of life everlasting — He was as *divine* as that!

He slept, exhausted, in the bow of a boat — He was as *human* as that! Yet, when He rose and rebuked the angry waves, the crouched like dogs at His feet — He was as *divine* as that!

He wept with the sisters beside the tomb at Bethany — He was as *human* as that! Yet He cried 'Lazarus, come forth!' and he that was dead left the sepulchre — He was as *divine* as that!

This hymn is constructed to magnify the same exalted theme, to celebrate the glittering contradictions of the Son of God. It begins by declaring that Almighty God was manifested, exhibited, displayed in the flesh! He assumed flesh — flesh that my eyes can see, flesh that my ears can hear, flesh that my fingers can touch! God visible; God audible; God tangible!

And not only so. But the thought of my flesh associates itself with the thought of my frailty. My flesh and my sin are inextricably intermingled. And He assumed them both. He became flesh of my flesh that He might bear my sin in His own fleshly body up to the tree, there making an end of the accursed thing for ever. In some

divine way of His own, He took the horrid pestilence from me without Himself being infected by it. That is the significance of the responsive clause: *He was justified in the Spirit.* He became sin for me: took my guilt upon Himself: yet did it in a way that all heaven could applaud. *He was manifest in the flesh* and yet vindicated by highest heaven: *He was justified in the Spirit.*
He was seen of Angels yet preached unto Gentiles. A Jew could conceive of nothing more exalted than an angel: nothing more degraded than a Gentile. But here is the second of these sublime contradictions, antiphonally celebrated. In the person of His son, Almighty God was adored by the loftiest and yet freely offered to the lowliest.

And most amazing of all, He was spiritually received in a world of men and physically received in a world of spirits. *Believed on in the world and received up into glory!* Mortal men open their hearts to Him and He actually dwells within them: yet, bearing the wounds of His Crucifixion, His physical body ascends to the right hand of the majesty on high!

Here, then, are the dazzling contradictions that the early Church could only express in a glorious burst of antiphonal song. Eternal god was manifest in mortal flesh, yet vindicated by cherubim and seraphim, by angels and archangels. He was worshipped by highest Heaven, yet offered to lowest earth. He was spiritually welcomed into the lives of men, yet physically welcomed in the heights of heaven.

"Sir," said a poor bedraggled woman who, in her desperation, turned to Daniel Webster for sympathy and understanding, "sir, do you really believe in Jesus Christ?"

"I do, indeed," answered Webster. "There is nothing on earth or in heaven of which I am more sure!"

"But do you *understand* Him?" she inquired.

“My good woman,” Webster replied, “of course I don’t! How could I believe in Him if I could understand Him? I want no Saviour that my poor finite mind can comprehend; I need a superhuman Saviour!”

That is precisely what this very first hymn is struggling to express:

Without controversy great
Is the mystery of godliness;
God was manifest in the flesh,
He was justified in the Spirit
He was seen of Angels,
He was preached unto the Gentiles;
He was believed on in the world,
He was received up into Glory.

Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

A History of Preaching. By O. C. Edwards, Jr. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004, 0-687-03864-2, 879 pp. hardback, with vol. 2 on CD-ROM, 664 pp. $65.00.

O. C. Edwards, Jr. is an Episcopal priest, historian, and recently retired professor of homiletics, president and dean of Seabury-Western Theological Seminary. He worked on this *magnum opus* for eighteen years. It is a must-have volume for every teacher of homiletics and for any serious student of preaching. The purpose of the Edwards offering is "to understand movements in the history of preaching" (I, 185).

Several differences between this history and earlier ones are worth noting. Edwards passes over Eastern preaching after the time of Augustine and Ambrose until the Reformation, and he limits his history almost entirely to preaching in English. He gives more attention to teachers and textbooks of homiletics than earlier works, and Edwards tends to favor Anglican/Episcopal traditions.

Volume 1 traces the twenty centuries of history in thirty-two chapters. Part I is "Homiletical Origins." Five chapters begin with the earliest Christian preaching. Edwards locates this not in the preaching of Jesus and the apostles but in *The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians*, although in fact this is not an epistle, not by Clement, and not to the Corinthians. Origen introduced the homily, which would dominate preaching for a thousand years. The Cappadocian Fathers brought classical rhetoric to the preaching task. Chrysostom, Theodore, Cyril, and Ambrose are "catechetical preachers." Augustine completed the marriage of Christian proclamation to Greco-Roman rhetoric and used allegory to interpret Scripture.

The Middle Ages of Part II were not at all "Dark Ages" but "an era of great vitality." Here we meet a few Latin preachers and learn that "homiliaries" are collections of homilies arranged to follow the lectionary. Hrabanus Maurus provides an example of preaching under Charlemagne's reform. Alan of Lille authored one of the earliest textbooks on *The Art of Preaching* providing a lens into the "renaissance of the eleventh and twelfth centuries." Bernard of Clairvaux represents monastic preaching, and Hildegard of Bingen is an early feminine voice. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there was an "explosion of preaching" including Meister Eckhart, John Tauler, and John Wyclif.

Part III moves through the Renaissance (Erasmus and the Humanists) to the Reformation of Luther, Melancthon, Calvin and others. French Catholics also saw their preaching reformed, especially as preaching orders emerged. From here on, the Edwards narrative is limited to preaching in English.
Part IV, The Modern Era, dates from the restoration of the English monarchy.

Nine preachers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries represent "The Restoration of the Age of Reason" (chap. 17). Wesley and Spurgeon represent "The Recovery of Feeling" (chap.17). Seven more chapters in Part IV survey the Puritans in America, the Great Awakening (Jonathan Edwards), the Second Great Awakening (Asbury, Cartwright, and Finney), African American Preaching (John Jasper), women in the pulpit, Victorian preachers (Newman, Robertson, Emerson, Parker, Bushnell, Beecher, and Brooks). Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch represent the Social Gospel movement. Also Broadus earns a few pages.

Part V, The Century of Change, brings us to the twentieth century. Edwards gives special attention to African American preachers (chaps. 20 and 28), women preachers (chaps. 21 and 30), and various trends of the last century. These include Fosdick's emphasis on pastoral counseling through preaching and Craddock's inductive preaching. He devotes a chapter to preaching as an element of worship with special attention to the Roman Catholic liturgy and the Anglican/Episcopal experience (chap. 27). Another chapter looks at preaching on social justice issues (chap. 29). Here his focus is on William Sloan Coffin, Jr. (b. 1924) as "the best known exemplar of this [prophetic] homiletical trend." Edwards analyses Coffin's homiletical method in a sermon calling for unconditional acceptance of homosexuality.

Other homiletical emphases of our times earn space in the closing chapters: Liberation Theology, Billy Graham, the televangelists, Bill Hybels and the megachurches, David Buttrick's "phenomenological" homiletic, and narrative preaching as represented by Steimle, Niedenthal, and Rice.

There is a single, small "Appendix on Pietism" which causes one to wonder why it did not find a place in the main text. In six pages, it sketches Spener, Franke and Zinzendorf.

The endnotes are not easy to use. They seem to have been written as footnotes and then printed at the end of each chapter. This requires a lot of flipping back and forth between text and notes. In spite of Abingdon's reputation for excellence in publishing, a number of proofreading errors slipped into print and a few factual mistakes, e.g., "The Roman Catholic and Southern Baptist Churches do not ordain women" (Vol. 1, 770). Some Southern Baptist *churches do* and most don't.

Vol. 2 is on CD-ROM and supplies examples of sermons and other documents such as early instruction in homiletics. If both volumes were in print edition they would require more than 1,500 pages. Undoubtedly this format made this expensive work affordable to more readers, but a print edition would be welcome. The CD-ROM includes a digital version of volume 1 also. Adobe Acrobat's portable document file (pdf) makes both volumes easy to search. The collection of

primary sources in vol. 2 supports the history and is flagged in bold print through vol. 1 so they are easily found. Each document is prefaced with a well-written introduction (usually one or two paragraphs) succinctly placing it in its homiletical and historical context. Unlike the endnotes of vol. 1, this resource is easy to use. In addition to representative sermons, the reader will find other important documents such as Fosdick's famous article for *Harper's Magazine* (July 1928), "What Is the Matter with Preaching?" and a chapter from Tom Troegger's *Imagining a Sermon*, (Abingdon, 1990). The digital volume includes its own Scripture index and subject index separate from the indexes in the print edition of vol. 1.

Edwards, with his impressive scholarship and expressive writing style puts us all deeply in his debt for this remarkable two-volume history. May his retirement years be even more fruitful!

Austin B. Tucker Shreveport, LA

Making Room At The Table. By Brain K. Blount and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, editors. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001, 0-664-22202-1, 188 pp., $17.95, paperback.

This book is a collection of essays written by members of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary addressing the sometimes messy issues of culture and worship in the church. The book has a fitting title because the Church of Jesus Christ consists of the "called-out ones" from every nation, tongue, and tribe. To have equal access to the Table of our Lord, to be accepted and appreciated as a person of value within the community of faith regardless of our ethnic, cultural, or national origin is a Kingdom value that should be the standard of the church.

The book is organized in three sections: Biblical Foundations for Multi-cultural Worship; Theological Foundations for Multicultural Worship; and Toward Multicultural Worship Today. The goal of the work is "that we might envision new ways for diverse cultures to gather, converse, and celebrate at Table together as one community in Christ without in the process forsaking their own unique identities or leaving behind the bounty that they uniquely contribute to the feast." Issues of multiculturalism are not new as a unique phenomenon of the contemporary world; in fact, significant struggles over issues that are cultural in nature are as evident in the first century church as they are today.

Unfortunately, although the book's focus is excellent, the hermeneutical approaches used to analyze and discuss specific biblical texts is at times weak. For instance, the opening chapter uses the story of Hannah and Eli to argue that women may express their spirituality differently in worship than men ("Women

and Worship in the Old Testament"). The writer suggests that Eli's negative response to Hannah's praying in the sanctuary was due to his understanding that proper worship was connected to the assumptions of the male priesthood. Thus "the story serves as a model for how we might think about multicultural worship practices: not in terms of whether they are familiar to us, but whether they emerge as a faithful response to the power of God's working in people's lives" (12). The author seems to have missed the point of the story which is an indictment of Eli's poor spiritual leadership and discernment. It is not a comparison of male and female worship.

The most helpful chapter in this section is entitled "Multicultural Worship" by Donald H. Juel who raises the question of how all who have put on Christ through baptism live and worship together in unity. What are the implications for the church if, in Christ, there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female? He suggests that a true multicultural community is not one where "otherness" is obliterated, but rather where the richness of individual gifts is celebrated.

Another interesting, insightful chapter, "The Linguistic Inculturation of the Gospel" by Peter Paris, tells how American slave communities retranslated the gospel into their own linguistic idiom and contributed new forms of worship i.e., the spirituals. In this process, African American Christians laid a foundation of a theology that would enable them to resist oppression.

The most helpful section of the book is Toward Multicultural Worship Today. Kendra Creasy Dean presents insightful analysis on youth culture as a context for worship. In her chapter on "Moshing For Jesus," she quotes a young person aged 11 who states, "Worshiping God is fun and all. The only thing that makes people think its boring is church." Young people go to church to feel moved, to feel changed, to feel God, to feel something; in other words, to them worship needs to be a "happening." Dean also states that worship in an adolescent context must operate within the culture's primary idiom and the idiom of adolescents shaped by global post modernity is immediacy, a crucial issue for the contemporary church.

The book ends with a very helpful critique of the current worship wars in "Navigating the Contemporary Worship Narrows" by Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. Her analysis of the current state of the so-called worship wars is well written, insightful, even-handed and includes some wise counsel on how to help God's people experience worship with "deep souls"—worship that is concerned both with the glory of God and the edification of the worshiper, worship that is genuinely Trinitarian in nature, and worship that addresses the whole person (heart, mind, soul, and strength).

Cultural issues are indeed critical to the church today. One of the cardinal tenets of multiculturalism is that all cultures are equally valid. As a Christian I can affirm

that culture is a creation and gift of God to humanity. But don't all cultures need to be redeemed? Isn't God creating a new culture—the kingdom culture—through Christ? What should that look like? Isn't the vision and promise of the marriage feast of the Lamb in Revelation multicultural in the best sense of that word? Some discussion in these areas would have been helpful.

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Envisioning the Word: The Use of Visual Images in Preaching, with CD-ROM. By Richard A. Jensen. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005, 0-8006-3729-1, 155 pp., $20.00, paperback.

Richard A. Jensen is Axel Jacob and Gerde Maria Carlson Professor of Homiletics Emeritus at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago. He has written previously (*Thinking in Story,* 1993) on issues that overlap with the focus of this book.

With this volume Dr. Jensen has served contemporary homiletics well by providing a scholarly and balanced work that considers the relationship and the tension between presenting truth in image and presenting truth in word. At the outset he establishes this tension by asking questions that acknowledge many of the extra-verbal practices currently being used by preachers to aid in the communication of sermons: "What shall we make of this trend (or fad)? Is the church creatively adapting itself to the communication forms of our culture, or are we selling our soul to the latest cultural idolatry?" (p. ix) Current homileticians either are, or should be, grappling with well-reasoned answers to these questions.

Jensen begins to answer the questions by presenting both philosophical and theological arguments for and against the use of visual images in the presentation of Christian truth. In Part I, "Seeing Salvation," he addresses three issues related to the acceptability of using visual images in preaching: 1. the use of art in the life of the Christian community; 2. the historical battle against the use of images in the church; and 3. and the philosophical debate over the relative merits of words and images. In Part II, "The Visualizing Process," he offers practical ideas on how to use visual images in preaching. Part II draws from the ideas and endeavors of ten pastors (as well as from the students in his "Thinking in Picture" seminary course) who have thought about and experimented with the use of visual images.

Jensen's presentation in Chapter Two on the history of iconoclasm (the rejection of the use of artistic images in the church) is most helpful. It shows how old this argument is, and how those who resist the use of visual aids in preaching are part of a long line of Christian thinkers who prize the power of language and who

eschew the representation of truth through visual symbols. His response to the iconoclasts, using the thoughts of John of Damascus (676-749) and biblical examples, is both convincing and balanced. The author's case could have been strengthened by appealing to the object lessons used by Old Testament prophets, but his support for the use of visuals is substantial nonetheless. In the end Jensen does not appeal for the use of visualization to *replace* the verbal presentation of truth. He affirms, "Complementarity is again the order of the new day" (74).

The practical insights of Part II (chapters 4 and 5) are ample, widely varied, and helpful. They even list some websites that are especially helpful for those who would wish to begin or increase their use of visuals in their sermons.

Jensen does deal with the assertions of respected homileticians who maintain that modern technologies may improve the communication of *information* but not *persuasion* (see Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, 2nd edition, Baker, 2005, p. 171). That is an assertion worthy of greater scrutiny, but Jensen's arguments—historical, theological, philosophical, and practical—combine to represent a compelling rationale for a balanced utilization of both verbal and visual elements in the presentation of Christian truth.

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Luther's Rhetoric: Strategies and Style From the Invocavit Sermons. By Neil Leroux. St. Louis: Concordia Academic Press, 2002, 0-7586-0002-x, 240 pp. $25.99, paperback.

Luther was a master preacher which makes the lack of academic work on Luther's rhetorical practices absolutely astonishing. Neil Leroux's work seeks to address this lacuna through a study of Luther's eight Invocavit sermons. It might seem that the selection of only eight sermons needlessly truncates an effort to understand Luther as preacher, but the choice makes sense for at least two reasons; focusing on a short series of sermons gives ample opportunity to deal with them in depth, and this particular series of sermons, because of the intense, even violent historical circumstances, reveals Luther's masterful use of rhetoric in a highly sensitive setting.

Radical reform threatened to repudiate the Reformation. On Christmas Day, 1521, Karlstadt entered the City Church in layman's clothes, preached a sermon, and celebrated the Mass in German, making no reference to the sacrifice of the Mass, offering communion to all who desired, whether or not they had confessed. In short, the Roman Mass was abolished and an evangelical Mass was set in its place. Already rioting had intimidated priests and many of the laity. Pieces of art were defaced and many images destroyed. Wittenberg was teetering on the edge

of chaos. Into this situation Luther needed to win his divided audience, reassert his authority, and gain adherence to his theses. Leroux shows the rhetorical steps Luther used to achieve his end.

In Chapter One Leroux explores modern concepts of rhetorical form, how an argument advances, and some important devices used to make that happen. Chapter Two provides historical and theoretical backgrounds for understanding the sermons. Chapters Three through Six describe in detail the flow of argument and Luther's use of rhetorical devices. Chapter Seven gives attention to a treatise that represents a reworking of material in the sermons and concludes with general comments that can be drawn from the study.

One of the benefits of Leroux's work is his insistence that content and style cannot be separated. "Rather than being irrelevant or in opposition to content, form and content are inseparable; form becomes part of, is the 'body' of, the (dis- or pre-embodied) content" (21-22). The interplay between the rhetor building an argument and the expectation of the hearer becomes the fertile ground of stylistic progression. Style, in this view, is not mere ornamentation but a constitutive element of content.

Leroux, however, is at his best as he does his close reading of the text. In sermon one, Luther's major task was to identify with his audience and have the audience identify with him. Luther did this carefully, even crafting the modalities of the verbs used. Luther delayed dealing with the objectionable part of the Wittenbergers actions until later when he engaged audience objection: "You say it was right according to the Scriptures. I agree, but what becomes of order?" Here Luther allows that there is something good in what they have done while simultaneously revealing the error of forcing weak consciences. "Take note of these two things, 'must' and 'free.'" Luther shows the harm done when a "must" is made out of what is certainly a matter of that which is "free."

For all of that, Luther maintained solidarity with the Wittenbergers. He did not spank his audience. Certainly the voice of the law is sounded, but there is also ample and pointed presentation of the gospel. The subtlety of the use of this dialectic is at the heart of Luther's rhetorical mastery.

One question that could be put to Leroux's work is this: why dedicate so much space to modern rhetorical critical theory instead of dealing with sixteenth-century rhetorical practice? Isn't it necessary to understand Luther in his own time before applying modern insights to his work? What is the nature of sixteenth-century rhetoric? Was there more than one theoretical school? Could it be that Luther sees himself a part of a rhetorical tradition, one that finds its home in monasticism as opposed to humanism?
These questions aside, Leroux's study is a good entrance into the rhetorical world

of Luther shedding new light on the strategies and style of the Invocavit Sermons. Reading the sermons by themselves (included as an appendix) gives great joy, reading them with Leroux as guide will enhance the value and utility of these important rhetorical and theological gems.

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Preaching from the Soul: Insistent Observations on the Sacred Art. By J. Ellsworth Kalas. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003, 0-687-06630-1, 150 pp., $16.00, paperback.

Dr. Kalas' premise is simple: any preaching worth hearing must come via the preacher's soul. In reaction to tedious, overly cognitive, and meandering sermons, the author calls for nothing less than a piece of the preacher to be disseminated in the sermon. In essence, he begs for sermons that move people, not just emotionally, but in toward action and decision. Viewing the culture as inherently persuasive, Kalas wants preachers, as the guardians of the gift of language, to counter the relentless "evangelizing" of the advertisers with openly persuasive sermons.

After the initial celebration of soulful preaching, Kalas settles down to insider tips for a more effective homiletic. Arguing for the value of a good title as both an organizational and promotional tool, the author utilizes forty of so years of practical experience (rather than any explicit rhetorical or homiletic theory) to ground his observations. Especially helpful are his chapters on the role of introductions and conclusions. An introduction, he says, is motivated by the same impulse that drives a person to introduce two friends to each other: a love of both and a desire that they meet. In homiletics, the two friends are the text and the congregation. Kalas maintains an approachable and non-academic style with the short chapters flying by without much effort.

Is the book is successful in its goal of promoting soulful preaching? At one level, yes. Kalas does what he can to get the preacher more in love with the text and more passionate about its connection to the world. But one might ask whether soul preaching, like Blues music, can ever really be taught. It would seem that the kind of soul that drives a sermon cannot be lifted from a book, however ambitiously the book celebrates that high standard. One could wish for more inquiry into how "soul" is generated and a little less technique. The amount of repetition suggests the book is a collection of previously written essays. For example, four times in four chapters to avoid internet stories. But the clever chapter titles reinforce Kalas' point on the importance of titles. Invented words like "tangibilitate" and metaphors like "Strip-Mining a Text" keep the reader involved.

In the end, the work proves helpful to anyone laboring weekly to deliver soul in a sermon. Kalas approaches the topic less like Master and more like Fellow-Learner which makes his didactic brew easy to swallow. Chapter 14, "You Can't Win Them All," is worth the price of the book for any preacher discouraged with faltering efforts to be weekly (and weakly) brilliant.

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Nobody's Perfect, But You Have to Be: The Power of Personal Integrity in Effective Preaching. By Dean Shriver. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005, 0-8010-9182-9, 143 pp., $12.99, paperback.

In *Nobody's Perfect, But You Have to Be*, Dean Shriver examines the issue of personal integrity in the life of a preacher. Using a three-pronged approach, Shriver devotes the first section of his book to the issue of why personal integrity is such a necessity in the life of preachers; namely, because personal integrity preaches louder and wins more souls to Christ than any sermon does. In the second section, Shriver offers a practical definition of personal integrity, and looks at seven character traits (e.g., humility, courage, being true to the Word, and temperance) which should accompany the preacher's life. In the third section of his book, Shriver explores three specific ways in which personal integrity can be increased: spiritual disciples, expository preaching, and extended tenure in the same pastorate.

Although the reader may be tempted to pass over this book in favor of something "fresh" or "culturally relevant," that would be a mistake. Dean's Shriver's examination of personal integrity shows the modern preacher why this topic has never been more needful. Shriver has taken a sound biblical approach and joined it with excellent practical wisdom and insight to create a book which addresses the issues facing today's pastors. His discussion of topics such as personal purity in body and mind, temperance with respect to food consumption, contentment in a materialistic world, and longevity in the same ministry, are timely.

One of Shriver's strengths is his ability to write with powerful and well crafted sentences. Throughout this book, his way with words leaves one reaching for the highlighter. Although at times there is a tendency for *Nobody's Perfect* to seem formulaic in structure, in general, this is an excellent work which will instruct the young seminarian and remind the seasoned pastor of the need to maintain personal integrity.

Louis DeLuca

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Wholly Scripture: Preaching Biblical Themes. By Ronald J. Allen. St. Louis: Chalice, 2004, 0-8272-4247-6, 134 pp., $18.99, paperback.

Ronald J. Allen argues that modern preaching has been impoverished, because preachers have neglected to pay attention to biblical themes, motifs that develop across several parts of the Bible. Following the motif's theological thread as it weaves its way through the Scriptures can protect the preacher from theological parochialism, a one-sidedness that overemphasizes one theme to the exclusion of others. Preaching motifs also offers a remedy for the common problem of theological illiteracy within the congregation.

Allen's point is well taken. As every good exegete knows, the preacher's understanding of a passage should be the result of a careful analysis that takes into account multiple levels of context. The text is informed by its immediate context, the broader context, other writings by the same author, and by the Bible as a whole. No single passage offers a comprehensive statement of the Bible's key theological themes and different authors may sometimes look at the same theological truth from different angles. The perspectives of Paul and James on the relationship between faith and works offers a good example of this (Rom. 4:1–3; James 2:20–24).

Biblical conservatives understand these perspectives to be different facets of the same theology of grace and not as different theologies in conflict with one another. Those who accept the presuppositions of higher criticism see such passages as evidence of a fundamental theological dispute in the early church. Allen shares the assumptions of higher criticism and believes that it is the preacher's obligation, not only to expose the congregation to these different points of view, but to critique the text itself. "To be sure," Allen writes, "a preacher must acknowledge when a passage in the Second Testament [i.e. the New Testament] is presented as rejecting an aspect of the older one. In this latter case, a preacher may need to critique the text or theme in the Second Testament as theologically inappropriate" (127).

Consequently, conservative expositors will find much to dislike about Allen's book. Because the author believes that the Bible speaks with multiple and sometimes conflicting theological points of view, he asks the preacher and the congregation to sit in judgment on the Scriptures. Allen believes that these differing theological viewpoints must be "brought into dialogue" with one another (32). The church, then, decides which to accept and which to reject. "A sermon can trace multiple expressions of a theme" Allen explains. "When aware of different perspectives, the community can then enter into a conversation with them to name which perspectives are more or less helpful"(26).

Allen seems to have a high view of preaching and the place that theology has in

its execution. Unfortunately, at least in the opinion of this reviewer, this is offset by his low view of the Bible. This is the fatal flaw in what might otherwise have been a helpful book.

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A Primer for Pastors: A Handbook for Strengthening Ministerial Skills. By Austin B. Tucker. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004, 0-8254-3886-1, 221 pp., $12.99, paperback.

This text offers practical suggestions for a wide gamut of responsibilities in pastoral ministry. The author is an experienced pastor (more than thirty years) and taught at three Southern Baptist seminaries and Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary before coming to his present position at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Fifteen chapters cover most of the basics: first pastorate, pastoral visitation, counseling, preaching, teaching, evangelism, problem solving, leadership, weddings and funerals, baptism and the Lord's Supper, as well as other issues ranging from the bivocational pastor and ethics to the pastor's stewardship of time and his personal life. Each chapter averages 10 – 15 pages, surveys the nature of the work, and includes practical suggestions for the sensible, loving, and effective fulfillment of those particular duties.

The guidelines are by no means exhaustive, but rather provide an introductory survey. The author has not aimed at anything particularly novel or surprising. This is like the "starter home" for the recently married, helping the young pastor to get off to a healthy start. It will probably seem very basic to experienced pastors, but may help call them back to some of the work that has been neglected or overlooked in his own service.

There were three areas I found less than totally satisfactory. The first was in the dimension of worship. It was a surprise to me that something as important and critical to the health of the church (not to mention a potential source of major conflict) did not merit a chapter of its own. Planning and leading worship should be near the top of the list of critically important pastoral skills and duties.

The second was in the wide range of educational ministries in the local church. I would like to have seen an overview of these ministries (children and youth, Sunday School, VBS and camp, home groups, etc.) that would equip the pastor to understand them and lend his support to their establishment in the local church.

The third was in the area of expository preaching. Readers of the *JEHS* will want more attention to this subject. In contrast, a whole chapter is devoted to

"problem-solving preaching," using Harry Emerson Fosdick as one of his models. This publication may prove to be most useful as a text for an introductory college or seminary course in pastoral ministry. Subsequent courses in preaching, counseling, worship, and leadership will add essential details not possible in this short volume. It is in this role that I would recommend its use.

As a Baptist minister and professor, Tucker slants his instruction to those in his own circles (for example he deals with "ordinances," not "sacraments"), but he acknowledges this and it does not hinder the discerning reader from other denominational families from finding helpful counsel.

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The Homiletic of All Believers. A Conversational Approach to Proclamation and Preaching. By O. Wesley Allen. Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2005, 0-664-22860-7, 161 pp., $17.95, paperback.

Wesley Allen, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Lexington Theological Seminary, pursues "preaching as conversation" in this work and presents it as an approach fit for postmodern times. Allen builds on the work of others who have explored the conversational analogy, but also pushes the discussion further with some contributions of his own.

The book is divided into two parts, a theoretical preamble and then a practical case study as to how his approach might take shape in the context of preaching through Advent. These two sections are meant to complement each other – the second being the practical expression of the first. However, the reader does not necessarily have to agree with all or many of Allen's theoretical assumptions in the first part in order to benefit from the preaching plan found in the last part.

Allen begins by describing the contemporary currents of postmodernity and how a conversational homiletic fits well with the widespread suspicion of authority and pluralism that is part of this package. He bemoans the fact that his forebears in mainline Protestantism were so captivated by rationalism and that evangelicals (whom he dismisses as "fundamentalists," thus excluding us from the conversation) are still lost somewhere in pre-modern authoritarianism. Both of these are seen as dated and irrelevant to postmodern realities. With this as background, the conversational circle is seen as a relevant approach to preaching to postmoderns.

The preaching task is grounded in ecclesiology, according to Allen. This is a very helpful emphasis in theory, but much depends upon how the Church is

understood. Allen's ecclesiology assumes "(1) a view of the church as a community of theological, political, historical, spiritual, ritual and existential conversation and (2) a view of preaching in which the pulpit is placed on the edge of the community's conversation circle and the preacher's is one voice among many in a matrix of congregational conversations" (16). In essence the church is an egalitarian meaning-making community where every voice contributes to the conversation with the desired end of mutual or communal conversion. Every voice is valued since God is omnipresent and through sacramental imagination everyone can contribute to the dialogue. Even though this approach implies its own metanarrative (anathema to postmoderns), Allen defends it as one communal metanarrative among others. The locus of authority in Allen's eccelesiology has moved from the traditional emphasis on Scripture to the individual believer in community. Such a view makes the words and will of God dependant upon the consensus of sinful souls. The radical effects of sin do not receive attention in Allen's ecclesiology. His fear of outdated absolutism has led Allen little choice but to adopt a polite utopian relativism.

Anyone offering a homiletic tuned to "the times" runs the risk of cultural accommodation. It is difficult to be relevant and maintain a prophetic voice. Allen suffers from such a dilemma but seems unaware of it. He simply assumes he can do both with his conversational approach. Note the following juxtaposition:

All of these nurtured, changed, and new conversation circles can overlap and connect into a matrix of conversations that over time will transform the postmodern church into a vital community of give-and-take proclamation *that is appropriate to the age in which we find ourselves.* Indeed, such a matrix of conversations will not only empower individuals to engage and struggle with the Christian tradition in their own meaning-making process but will shape the way the community (as a group of believers in but not of the world) understands its broad institutional mission as the body of Christ, *struggling to transform the world instead of being conformed by it* (35, italics mine).

Unless "the Christian tradition" (to use Allen's own words) has the authority to critique even the prevailing epistemology, how can the body of Christ "transform the world instead of being conformed to it"?

Allen's conversational homiletic follows his conversational ecclesiology. The following excerpts summarize his views:

In this postmodern understanding of the church, proclamation is not the sole responsibility or possession of the preacher. Indeed, the good news is proclaimed in a give-and-take fashion; everyone proclaims his or her knowledge, experience, and interpretation of God-in-Christ, and everyone listens as others proclaim. The result of this form of conversational proclamation is mutual turning, or con-

version (38,39).
To be relevant to today's postmodern world, however, biblical preaching must do more than just try to say what the Bible says. Indeed, biblical preaching must be more than an expository "updating" or "translating" of the ancient Bible for the modern era. The preacher should no longer simply hold the Bible in one hand and the newspaper in the other but should read the newspaper through a *biblical lens.* Scripture should no longer be viewed as the subject matter for the sermonic photograph [an image Allen employs to describe how one might portray God's work in the world]. Instead, for Christians, the canon is the chosen lens by which God's presence in the world and the implications of that divine presence are viewed by the preacher and offered to the congregation (50).

In this homiletic, the role of the preacher changes drastically. Allen even hints that the preacher might be optional when he writes, "While the congregation's proclamatory conversations could go on without preaching, a great gift to the conversation would be lost if the pulpit were left empty" (40). So what is the preacher's role in a conversational homiletic? The preacher is the one educated (no mention is made of the preacher's calling) to bring the past significance of a Christian vocabulary to bear on the current congregational conversations about God. The preacher becomes God's grammarian. Such a homiletic flows naturally from Allen's proposed ecclesiology.

Allen is concerned that too much emphasis is placed on a single sermon and so he transitions from more theoretical matters to suggesting a way in which each sermon might be timely but also contribute to an ongoing preaching ministry. His point is well taken. The remainder of the book is a case study of how his approach to overlapping tasks in sermon preparation might be practiced. He has chosen the four weeks of Advent and demonstrates how to work on different aspects of these sermons at the same time so they encourage continuity in one's preaching ministry. This was a helpful and practical part of the book.

In sum, Allen's acceptance of postmodernism causes serious difficulties, but the book has some laudable aspects as well. The idea of building a homiletic upon ecclesiology is helpful (but not entirely novel) as is the need to view one's preaching ministry in cumulative terms rather than placing undue emphasis upon a single sermon. The case study is a practical contribution to readers who want to see how any proposal "preaches."

However, the book's basic premise is built on shaky ground. Granted that preachers must take their contemporary audiences seriously, the conversation metaphor as applied by Allen seems to make preaching captive to the prevailing zeitgeist. The plausibility of the approach is questionable in many church contexts. Even assuming that all his assumptions are correct, the conversational metaphor might work in smaller, stable church populations, but is probably unwieldy in larger churches. When does conversation become cacophony?

Furthermore, Allen draws extensively from educational theorists in developing the conversational motif. Does this do justice to the Church in general and preaching in particular? Perhaps other venues within church life, not the pulpit, are more amenable to the give-and-take approach. Can the pulpit be relevant to this age without adopting a conversational approach? It is a bit reductionistic to force the pulpit into such a mold.

Even though Allen's book is thought provoking and does have some practical import, he falls prey to what he decries in his forebears—a rather uncritical acceptance of the current epistemological paradigm.

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Listening to Listeners: Homiletical Case Studies. By John S. McClure, Ronald J. Allen, Dale P. Andrews, L. Susan Bond, Dan P. Moseley, and G. Lee Ramsey, Jr. St. Louis: Chalice, 2004, 0-8272-0500-7, 195 pp., $24.99, paperback.

Most pastors rarely get significant feedback from their listeners concerning the effects of sermons. This book seeks to remedy this apparent defect by providing qualitative research into how particular people listen to sermons and how preachers can benefit from that data. It is the first of "a four-volume series of homiletical resources designed to help preachers understand the factors that influence how sermons are heard and perceived, and how preachers can use this information to preach more effective sermons" (back cover).

Supported by a grant from the Lilly Endowment, the six contributors are professors from four Midwest theological institutions. They used a specific questionnaire, included for anyone's use in Appendix B, as the format for interviewing over 260 people in 28 churches. Those churches are also located in the Midwest, with Indianapolis at the center and reaching out to Chicago, St. Louis, Louisville, and Columbus. They are described in Appendix C as being African-American and Caucasian, of various denominations from evangelical to liberal, of sizes ranging from 40 to over 10,000, and in rural to urban settings. The fact that the churches are limited in their ethnic composition and geographical location makes it difficult to extrapolate the data to groups or areas which do not share cultural similarities with those churches. The book's authors recognize this limitation and occasionally suggest caution because of it.

Chapter 1 sets forth the basics of the interviewing process. The open-ended questions focus on the Aristotelian categories of rhetoric: ethos, logos, and pathos. To these is added a fourth category: embodiment. This is more than mere "delivery;" it is how "the sermon comes alive through the complete self of the preacher" (14).

Chapters 2-6 each present a partially edited transcript of an interview with one listener from a particular church. A contributing author provides parallel interpretive comments interacting with the listener's answers focusing primarily on how the four rhetorical categories are perceived by the listener in sermon effectiveness. Each of the chapters then presents summary observations on how people listen for preaching and for theology, concluding with thought provoking questions designed to confront the reader with challenges for preaching.

In these chapters the reader finds both the significant strength of the volume and its greatest weakness. Its strength is found in the detailed information and evaluation provided by each listener and the chapter author's evaluative comments. Its weakness is found in the extremely narrow perspective of judging a preacher's effectiveness, or lack thereof, on the basis of one listener. Although the authors profess awareness of this limitation, they nonetheless base their evaluative comments on these limited examples.

Chapter 7 provides a slightly broader sample since it uses the interview of a group of five church members. Since the church itself, however, "identifies with the liberal theological tradition and with liberal social causes" (103), evangelical readers will still find deficiency in the material.

Chapter 8 summarizes pertinent insights the authors discovered both in doing the process of interviewing and in evaluating how the four rhetorical categories function in the way listeners hear sermons. Listeners are much more astute than preachers may imagine.

Chapter 9 demonstrates how the authors approached the interviews. It also shows how the principles followed can be used by other pastors, or congregations, to attain similar information in their own settings. In many ways, this is the most valuable chapter of the book. Preachers are encouraged to implement the principles so that they actually listen to their listeners.

This book is valuable for the stimulation it gives to preachers to evaluate consciously the effects of sermons on congregational listeners. It also provides positive tools to assist preachers who desire to question their listening congregations about their own effectiveness.

A matter that surprised, and disappointed, this reviewer is the substantial number of grammatical errors in the book. Many of these are seen in the transcribed answers of those interviewed, and may be excused because of the desire to show spontaneous response (for example, "everybody don't think that way," 26). Too many others, however, are in those parts of the book where the authors speak with their own voices. Some of these errors can be found on pp. 101, 187, 192, 193.

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View From the Pew. By Lora-Ellen McKinney. Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2004, 0-8170-1459-4, 110 pp., $13.00 paperback.

View from the Pew, written by the daughter of respected African American pastor Rev. Dr. Samuel Berry McKinney, provides a unique assessment of the required ingredients for successful pastoral ministry from the perspective of a lay-worshiper. An easy read, this text is arranged into ten brief chapters, with some accompanying notes. While written for a nondenominational audience, this text and its applications are more applicable to African American pastoral ministry and church life.

McKinney, who holds a Ph.D. in psychology, is the daughter of a third-generation preacher. She readily admits her lack of training in homiletics, but asserts that her years of church attendance and exposure to great preachers provides her with a "wealth of information to share with preachers that I think can enhance the ways that they preach, administer, and pastor (xxi)." With that in mind, she provides a checklist of ten issues that she believes will benefit any pastor's ministry. Each chapter deals with one of these issues and provides information designed to help pastors understand how lay-people view these issues within the church.

Chapter One, "Be prepared to preach," urges pastors to spend the time necessary to prepare and deliver messages that will truly connect with the congregation. Chapter Two, "Celebrate the centrality of Christ," encourages pastors to remember that while they may fill an office, Christ is the head of the Church. Chapter Three, "Preach God's word, not your words," challenges pastors to stay focused on the text, and as a result preach messages that through both their content and length will value both the integrity of the Scriptures and the schedules of the hearers. Chapter Four, "Be a shepherd, not a showman," urges pastors to cultivate the kind of humility that views ministry as a calling, not a personal ego-trip. Chapter Five, "Do the vision thing," calls pastors to see the big picture of kingdom ministry and lead the people of God to discover it.

Chapter Six, "Expose the pastor in you," urges pastors to cultivate an authentic concern for the laity, which will ultimately move them from being preachers to being pastors. Chapter Seven, "Connect the head and the heart," reminds pastors that there must never be a disconnect between intellectual exercise and emotional involvement in preaching. Chapter Eight, "Stand on the shoulders of the saints," encourages pastors to take the time to understand the history of their churches and to publicly appreciate the ministries of those who have preceded them. Chapter Nine, "View yourself from the pew," urges pastors to take the time to understand how people really see them, and in so doing maximize their strengths and improve their weaknesses. Chapter Ten, "Be satisfied," calls pastors to be content with the calling, giftedness, and arenas of ministry that God has given them.

View from the Pew provides some helpful insights into the way laypeople view pastors and pastoral ministry. First, this work places a strong emphasis upon the necessity of earning the right to be called pastor. While recognizing the high place of preaching within worship, it reminds pastors that there is a real difference between preachers and pastors. Pastors are those who preach within the context of shared human experience and invest in the lives of people. Second, it urges pastors to consider that leadership within a church fellowship always involves the synchronizing of the past with the present. Third, it reminds pastors that there is place for emotion within worship and preaching. An appropriate transparency on the part of pastors will help the people connect at many levels and hasten the acceptance of the message and its messenger.

Despite its benefits, this work does have some drawbacks. First, while it contains good quotations from accepted mainstream homileticians, it reveals the author's religious tradition and theological bias, by neglecting accepted conservative homileticians. Second, in most instances it fails to provide any biblical evidence to support the author's claims, choosing rather to rely on the teaching of homileticians. While much of that teaching is of value, this work would have been greatly strengthened, and would have had perhaps a greater potential to influence pastors, had she argued first from Scripture. Finally, despite the author's stated intentions, this work appears at times to be an attempted corrective of those aspects of preaching or pastoral ministry which laypeople dislike.

View from the Pew provides a unique perspective for assessing pastoral ministry, primarily within the African American community. It may have value for the homiletician as a unique work within the genre, but for many pastor, take a pass on this one and invest your book dollars elsewhere.

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Preaching Romans. By Bruce E. Shields. St. Louis: Chalice, 2004; 978-0-827229-8, 145 pp., $ 18.99, paperback.

As the preface says, and the introduction reaffirms (4), Dr. Shields (Russell F. and Marian J. Blowers Professor of Christian Ministries at Emmanuel School of Religion) writes "with the busy preacher in mind." The introduction supplies a general approach to the letter including some insights on preaching epistles, some historical anecdotes, and a bibliography that surprisingly omits the best commentaries on Romans. Part 1, "Major Issues or Themes of Romans" (19—95) contains short essays: "What Romans Says about . . . Preaching, Creation, Sin, Justification/Righteousness, Eschatology Law/Torah Ethics and Christian Relationships." Part 2, "Sermons on Challenging Texts in Romans" (89—137) tackles seven of those texts (1:18—3:26; 4:1-25; 5:1—11; 8:1—17; 8:18-39; 10:1—21; 12:1-2). Here the format is 4-5 pages of introductory material on each

text followed by bullet point sermons or sermons written in few paragraphs. The final chapter is a personal testimony to the value of studying and preaching Romans.

I warmed to the emphases and heart of the author, especially when I read statements such as, “We are reminded that the success of the preaching of the gospel comes not from our expertise as preachers. If we are responsible ministers of the word, we will be the best communicators possible. However, the ultimate outcome is by another means, ‘the word of Christ’” (31). “The busy pastor” will be significantly better off reading this book before attempting to preach Romans than jumping in without any feel for the text as a whole. If “busy pastors” are not going to dig into the Greek text for themselves or delve into the many solid technical and popular commentaries available, Shields’ book will point them toward a reverent, gospel-honoring handling of Romans. Doubtless the author knows his intended readers (and their anticipated listeners), but I don’t think he gives either group enough credit. For instance, in the introduction to the sermon on Romans 5:1-11, Shields states:

> Justification is Paul’s umbrella term for what we usually refer to as salvation. As we saw in chapter 4, this was a legal (courtroom) term for Paul. In 3:24—25, he listed redemption and atonement. Here, in chapter 5, he adds peace, access, hope, love, salvation, and reconciliation. These terms provide plenty of grist for the sermon mill though the preacher should be careful not to sound too theological with them (102).

Both the hasty definition of justification and the warning about sounding too theological may not be patronizing, but they come closer than wise preachers want to come. Surely part of preaching is using the Bible’s rich theological words and helping our listeners understand them so that they can think more theologically, not less so. Indeed, I found myself wishing that more of the helpful content in the introductions to each sermon was included in the sermon itself. Romans *is* a glorious book; preachers need to be challenged to dig into it deeply and preach it thoughtfully.

By way of evaluation, in my opinion, pastors who are accustomed to reading the introductions of good recent commentaries will find Shields’ introduction less helpful than they need and want. The thematic essays will remind the preacher of things to keep in mind when preaching the book. Good commentary introductions supply this, though Professor Shields says more than most of them do. The sermons themselves (Part 2) will feel decidedly thin to readers who appreciate the gospel logic Professor Shields is eager for his readers to grasp.

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Preaching with Conviction: Connecting with Postmodern Listeners. By Kenton C. Anderson. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001, 0-8254-2020-2, 160 pp., $11.99, paperback.

This book presents a "novel" approach to preaching. It does not merely set forth its subject in a didactic manner, leading the reader through formal and orderly steps of sermon construction and delivery oriented to postmodern listeners. Rather, Anderson develops his thoughts in the form of a novel, with the principal character being a discouraged pastor seeking to regain confidence in his own preaching and develop a method for effectively communicating to his postmodern audience. Other important characters include the pastor's brother (a TV news reporter), a police officer, the city's mayor, and a councilman.

While the book presents the pastor's homiletical struggles and search for an effective preaching ministry for his contemporary listeners, the story also introduces a crime and its solution. The conflict-resolution motif, therefore, is two-fold: the pastor's homiletical challenge and the triumph of justice over wrong. Anderson's writing style is creative, engaging and clear.

As a preacher and homiletics professor, I read preaching books for instruction, stimulation, challenge, and confirmation. As an avid reader of mystery and adventure novels, I enjoy the intrigue and excitement of a well-written novel. Herein is where I find both the strength and weakness of this book. Its strength is found in that the novel format keeps the reader interested, even entertained, in the "mystery" (this word relates both to the crime solution and the sermon example in the book) developed through its pages. Its weakness, however, is that readers are required to "shift gears" in their thinking, frequently switching from effective sermon development for the postmodern mind to the crime drama and back again, occasionally creating a desire that one or the other would continue to conclusion. Perhaps my problem is that I do not myself fit well into the postmodern mold, which tends to have no absolutes, be pluralistic and tolerant of all views, to let pragmatism dominate thinking, and to be experientially oriented.

A few minor matters of format occasionally hinder the flow of thought. These are mere inconveniences, however, and do not distract from the impact of the book.

The "integrative model for preaching" which Anderson develops around the four stages of discovery, construction, assimilation, and delivery is worthy of any preacher's consideration. His practical application of theoretical principles to concrete development is succinct and pertinent. Those of us who are in an older generation may need to be confronted with, and challenged by, the current mindset of many contemporary listeners of our preaching. Those in a younger generation may need to be instructed to understand better why they think the way

they do. Anderson effectively calls our attention to the problems and offers a definitive and constructive approach to solve them.

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Preaching with Integrity. By Kenton C. Anderson. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003, 0-8254-2021-0, 144 pp., $10.99, paperback.

Preaching with Integrity is Anderson's follow up volume to his previous book in this same series, *Preaching with Conviction,* a 'homiletical whodunit' cast in narrative format that introduced his integrative preaching model. Now in this second volume Anderson addresses the issue of moral integrity in the life of the preacher and takes the opportunity to fine tune the integrative preaching model. While he maintains the narrative format, Anderson changes approaches slightly in that this story is structured around the preaching model rather than having the model developed in the course of the plot. The result is that the integrity of the narrative is kept more intact and there are fewer theoretical intrusions into the story. The "pure" teaching parts of the book are reserved for the last two chapters. This is an improvement over the previous volume.

The over-arching theme of moral integrity unifies the story. The role of the preacher's humanity in the preaching task is not only an indispensable but a timely part of the preaching ministry. Anderson's attention to this issue both bolsters his integrative preaching model and benefits all who know that training preachers is more than a preoccupation with homiletical technique. The protagonist from the previous volume, Pastor Jack Newman returns to his major role in this story as well. Some of the rest of the cast of characters are also to be found: Jack's TV reporter brother Tom; Tom's lovely assistant Terri Jones (whose role definitely develops this time around); and Henry Ellis, the former pastor and dedicated lay leader in Jack's congregation. A few new faces appear in this story: Jack's wife, Fran; Stewart Rylie, Jack's district supervisor; and the Newman's friends, Chris and Chloe Ellis (Chris is the son of Henry Ellis and Jack's friend since seminary).

The plot line weaves the issue of moral integrity between an actual earthquake, the relationships among the characters and a sermon preached by Newman from Hebrews 12:28-29 on receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken (the irony is obviously intended). Without spoiling the story for those who haven't read it yet, Jack and Fran Newman are devastated by the news of the marital collapse experienced by their friends Chris and Chloe due to Chris' sexual indiscretion in ministry. As the Newmans are involved with their friends' problems, they have problems of their own, including dealing with a destructive earthquake, personal injury, and sexual temptation. The relationship between Jack and his brother Tom

is an interesting sub plot in the story, especially since both are faced with temptation in relation to the same person. The rest of the cast seem minor in importance with Stewart Rylie serving as a mechanism through which discussions about preaching are introduced into the plot. The story is not simplistic or necessarily predictable and does not stoop to lurid detail. Anderson demonstrates considerable story telling talent in spinning this tale.

Following the narrative, Anderson turns his attention to two final chapters of teaching material. In Chapter 5 he takes the sermon preached in the narrative and interprets it in light of his integrative preaching model. This is helpful review of the process and gives running commentary that explains the salient features of integrative preaching. As an approach to preaching, the integrative model has much to offer in terms of a broad conceptualization of the preaching task in our current era. Anderson does not deal with the specifics involved in each aspect of his model (e.g. how one goes into the intricacies of exegeting a given text), but supplies a sufficient conceptual framework into which each preacher or teacher of preachers could fill in the blanks according to personal practice or preference. The final chapter is a short attempt at an anthropology of preaching (a complement to his theology for preaching in his first volume).

Preaching with Integrity was interesting reading in that it combined the power of story with the treatment of an important issue in preaching. Granted, the issue of pastoral morality is broader than sexual ethics (sermon plagiarism received a passing comment in the story), but it almost begs the question to try to treat too many issues in the course of one relatively short story. The "pull" of Pastor Newman's experience is blunted a bit since his greatest temptation comes in the context of the upheaval of an earthquake. The dynamics of a crisis situation are far different from those of more "mundane" times which seem to be more damaging to the moral integrity of many pastors.

However, in sum, this is an enjoyable and helpful little volume. If Anderson has another homiletical issue or plot line up his sleeve, I, for one, would welcome the next episode in the continuing exploits of Pastor Jack Newman.

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Preaching Parables to Postmoderns. By Bryan C. Stiller. Philadelphia: Fortress, 2005, 0-8006-3713-5, 200 pp., $17.00, paperback.

I was intrigued and hopeful when I saw the title of this recent release, but I was ultimately disappointed. Let me explain: I believe that postmodernity may soon engender a renaissance of the use of parables for expository preaching. This form of communication suits a culture that values story, irony, mystery, artistry, and

participation. As Stiller states, "For all generations, the parabolic form has been a powerful tool in communicating the message of Jesus to any culture and people. Today it has increased suitability. The postmodern mind is remarkably open to this form of thinking" (30). The first two chapters of *Preaching Parables to Postmoderns* make this simple but cogent argument by briefly summarizing postmodernity and then by briefly describing the generic characteristics of parables.

Unfortunately, after setting the table in chapters 1 and 2, *Preaching Parables* does not load the table with what could be a banquet. Chapter 3 examines ten parables, displaying exegetical insights and homiletical suggestions, but the insights and suggestions are often bland, or to use Stiller's metaphor as he discusses each parable's "unique preaching window to postmoderns," most of those windows provide little light. For example, the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), offers this window: "Postmodern culture has been in part defined by democracy and its offspring, human rights. As postmoderns listen and read this parable, labor/management issues of fairness and equity become most evident" (55). Why is fairness on the job a "unique preaching window to postmoderns"? Another example of a window that affords only modest illumination is Stiller's handling of the Rich Fool (Luke 12:13-34): "The baby boom generation is aging, and with that aging comes a consciousness of mortality even though issues such as personal wealth seem to cloud it out" (99). True enough, but hardly unique to postmodernism. Better is the window on the Prodigal Son (but still not entirely "unique"): "Postmoderns, in their antipathy to symbols of power, are attracted to expressions of love in which the mighty choose to set aside their authority for the good of another" (110).

Chapter 4 is composed of four model sermons meant to exemplify the principles of the previous chapters, but once again, I could not discern how these messages were "uniquely adapted" to postmoderns. While the sermons are relatively engaging and clear, they do not maximize qualities you might expect such as irony, openness, participation, or dialogue.

The book concludes with an impressive bibliography and an index of biblical references.

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Experiential Storytelling: (Re)Discovering Narrative to Communicate God's Message. By Mark Miller. Grand Rapids: Emergent YS, 2003, 0-310-25514-7, 157 pp., $14.99, paperback.

With winsome enthusiasm, Mark Miller urges us to unleash the "sleeping giant of creativity" (51) in our churches to enable participants (not just "listeners") to

experience God's story. His thesis seems to be, "In today's increasingly participatory climate, the message itself is moving toward the interactive. Adding to the recipe of exposition and narrative preaching, then, comes the collaborative experience" (85).

Miller is Executive Pastor of NewSong Church in Cleveland, and founder of The Jesus Journey, "an experiential retreat that makes the story of the Bible accessible to postmoderns" (jacket). In six breezy chapters, the author demonstrates that we now live in an age of experience and story (chapters 1 and 2), urges the Church to reclaim creative use of the arts (chapter 3), argues that we should augment traditional preaching by "imagining the 'sermon'" (chapter 4), teaches how to employ all the senses in storytelling (chapter 5), and illustrates with examples, most extensively with his own Jesus Journey (chapter 6). The Lord has enlightened and touched thousands of people through The Jesus Journey, and Mark Miller describes the philosophy behind it as well as many of the procedures for using it.

Miller's stance is sincere, but his stance also tends toward oversimplification and hyperbole: "A sermon tells people what to think. A story forces people to do the thinking for themselves" (41). Well . . . homileticians understand his point, but we wish for more nuance. Miller writes with verve, but his verve bypasses issues which readers of *JEHS* are likely to raise: Can experiential storytelling be used when preaching from genres with minimal narrative framework? Can experiential storytelling be used to *explain* concepts? This book itself does not utilize participatory storytelling; it is explanatory and hortatory, *not* an "experience." Does Miller deconstruct his own exhortation? I don't think so. Apparently, "experience" is good for some functions of discourse, but not good for others. I'd like to see more nuancing along those lines.

Readers of *JEHS* might take offense at his broadsides against traditional preaching, even though he claims that "there is a time and a place for traditional preaching" (113). The cluster of terms which surround "sermon" include "monotony" (14), "numbing," "top-down monologue," and "passive" (15). The traditional sermon is "making less sense all the time" (81). It comes across as a "tool from the era of conquest . . . like a one-sided battle in the age of the Crusades" (80). In contrast, experiential storytelling is "democratic," (81) "personal" (33), "beautiful," "engaging" (26), and trusts the Holy Spirit (41).

The book will take you only two to three hours to read with its wide margins and absence of citation. If you can overlook the author's rhetorical stance that dichotomizes propositions and narratives, listening and doing, sermons and experiences, you will be inspired and equipped to increase the experiential quality of your expository communication.

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The Supremacy of God in Preaching, Revised Edition. John Piper. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004, 0-8010-6504-6, 121 pp, $ 12.99, paperback.

This revision of a 1990 classic is clearly laid out in two parts, "Part 1: Why God Should Be Supreme in Preaching," and "Part 2: How to Make God Supreme in Preaching: Guidance from the Ministry of Jonathan Edwards." The first part articulates in four short chapters the goal, ground, gift, and gravity-and-gladness of preaching. Part 2 surveys in chapters five, six, and seven, respectively, the life, theology, and preaching of Jonathan Edwards. That final seventh chapter reveals what is already obvious, namely, that John Piper considers Edwards's preaching as directly exemplary for us today. He writes, "I have tried to capture the essence of Edwards's preaching in ten characteristics. But I am so convinced of the value of the characteristics for our own day that I am going to call them ten characteristics of good preaching and present them as challenges to you, not just as facts about Edwards." The first of these challenges, "Stir up holy affections," is what Piper's own preaching does and, not incidentally, what he has achieved in this book. Convinced as he is that the affections are "the spring of behavior" (85), he aims to transform these affections in his writing and challenges us to do the same in our preaching. Especially helpful in this task is chapter four on gravity and gladness in preaching. Its thesis in a sentence is: "*Gladness and gravity should be woven together in the life and preaching of a pastor in such a way as to sober the careless soul and sweeten the burdens of the saints*" (55). After a particularly searching discussion on the contemporary tendency toward levity in preaching, Piper offers seven practical suggestions for cultivating gladness and gravity in preaching. They include such wisdom as this: "*Read books that were written by men or women who bleed Bible when you prick them and who are blood-earnest about the truths they discuss.*" The other suggestions are just as solid.

For a number of years I have assigned beginning students of preaching to read the first edition of this book for inspiration. Reading the revised edition has affirmed the value of that assignment because it addresses the affectional side of preaching in a way that only an actual example can. By taking Edwards as an example, Piper shows how the scholar (Edwards is regarded by historian Ira D. Gruber and others as one of the three greatest intellects in American history) can also be a greatly-used preacher. No doubt some would complain that Edwards's example is not to be copied in the twenty-first century pulpit, but to object is perhaps to reveal the very fixation with style and technique that enervates so much of our preaching. Edwards is a good model precisely because he challenges us to reconsider fundamental assumptions that shape our approaches to preaching and teaching preaching. Piper's challenges from Edwards's example push us below the surface.

In addition to challenging us to stir up holy affections he counsels preachers to enlighten the mind, employ analogies and images, use threat and warning, and probe the workings of the heart. I warmly commend this revised edition to you and (if teaching is your calling) to those you teach.

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Preaching and Homiletical Theory. By Paul Scott Wilson. St. Louis: Chalice, 2004, 0-8272-2981-x, 184pp., $19.99, paperback.

I wish I had this book ten years ago. It would have helped to have this while I was writing my dissertation. *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* by Paul Scott Wilson is an excellent survey of the homiletical terrain both past and present. Wilson, a key figure in the Academy of Homiletics, is not an evangelical, but he respects them. Haddon Robinson, Bryan Chapell, and other important homileticians from the evangelical camp are well and fairly represented in the overall mix.

The book is written in three sections, focusing on the use of the Bible in preaching, theologies of preaching, and ethical approaches to homiletics. The first chapter opens with the words, "Our starting place is the Bible," to which members of EHS will readily agree. Wilson affirms the authority of Scripture over the life and preaching of the church. He is, however, a little critical of evangelical homileticians for what he perceives to be a lack of emphasis upon exegesis in their recent publications – perhaps, he says, "because the authority of scripture is less tested there" (29). Certainly, the evangelical approach to Scripture is a settled question in contrast to the mainline camps that Wilson references.

The theological section of the book looks both at theoretical ways of thinking about the task of preaching as well as methods and formulas that spring from these various theologies. Wilson covers a large territory in his presentation, which is what makes the book so valuable. We are not going to agree with every thinker he presents, but we will be helped to know something about most of them. Homileticians as diverse as Eugene Lowry, Lucy Rose Atkinson, John Bisagno, William Willimon, Harold Bryson, and dozens more are featured.

The final section is where the book gets more adventurous. Wilson describes various postmodern approaches, including those attempts to bring a greater focus on justice issues in the sermon. Many of the authors Wilson describes exceed my own theological comfort. But Wilson's approach is more of the even-handed reporter than advocate on these points.

The book concludes with several challenges Wilson sees for the future of

preaching, many of which are insightful and important (156-57). These include the sense that excellence needs to replace adequacy as a norm in homiletics and a desire that preachers offer both the gospel *and* ethics rather than choosing between the two. I was particularly pleased with his call that preachers shift their emphasis to "preaching the gospel and away from preaching pericopes *per se*" (157). This is not to say that we shouldn't preach biblical texts, but that we first must preach the gospel from these texts.

Finally, I appreciated Wilson's last recommendation, that we need "a paradigm shift" to return God to the center of scripture" (157). "The Bible may be read," he says, "using many rich and rewarding lenses, but the most important lens for the church is the Bible as revelation." Whether this marks a "return" or simply an affirmation, it is welcome, as is the book itself.

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Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition. By Hershael W. York and Bert Decker. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2003. 0-8054-2623-, 275 pp., $21.99, hardback.

Hershael York and Bert Decker have teamed up for a follow-up endeavor to an earlier publication, *Speaking with Bold Assurance*. York is a New Testament scholar and professor of preaching at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary while Decker is known as an innovator and public figure in the communications industry. This unusual collaboration has resulted in a text worth reading and pondering.

Arranged in three primary sections, the book is sensible and easy to follow. Part I includes four chapters revolving around "The Text;" Part II deals with "The Sermon;" and Part III discusses "Delivery." The first two parts each contain about eighty pages of text divided into five chapters. The third part is a slightly briefer with four chapters totaling about sixty pages. The book also has an introduction and conclusion, a few pages of endnotes, and closes with a sample sermon modeling the methodology discussed previously.

The strengths of this fine book are too numerous to cover completely. To begin with, most of the text was written by York and reflects the thinking and convictions of an experienced preacher and teacher making this book highly useful in a classroom situation.

I appreciate the authors' agenda being made abundantly clear in the introduction. They claim that if the "potent principles" in the book are followed, the reader will learn thirteen specific skills and attitudes including: understanding the meaning of the biblical text, determining the main point and application of a passage, creating

and organizing ideas, thinking on the perceptual level, making one's point, thinking on your feet, overcoming stage fright, avoiding intimidation, and several other learning objectives (xi).
The book is highly practical, yet based on sound biblical scholarship. Most readers of volumes on preaching want more than theory and platitudes. They want some "hands-on-help" in knowing how to move from a text to a finished sermon and then how to present it in a compelling way. This is especially true of students, but true of others as well.

The definitions and explanations of what constitutes expository preaching were quite strong. The authors affirm the importance of this approach and take great care to describe exposition thoroughly including the notion that true exposition is more than clearly explaining a text. It is also applying the text. Preaching only "factoid" sermons is rightly called preaching "a sermon that even the devil agrees with" (12). Further, the authors do not fall into the trap of specifying text length but mention that this might vary from a sentence to an entire book of the Bible.

Preaching with Bold Assurance is a well-written book, clearly structured and plainly written with adequate examples. There is seldom any doubt about what the authors intend to communicate. In this regard, the sample sermon that concludes the volume is exceptionally well done in the opinion of this reviewer. It is both an outstanding sermon and an excellent model of previously discussed concepts.

Weaknesses in the book are few. One such issue was a brief dismissal of inductive preaching by offering only a caricature implying that all inductive preaching intends to encourage listeners to infer the meaning and application of the text for themselves (15). The authors either don't understand that inductive preaching *can* make the main point of a passage clear or they are simply inconsistent in their use of induction. A few pages earlier, for example, the story told by Nathan to David is rightly lauded as a model of powerful *emotional* effectiveness (10). But this emotional effect is the product of an inductive narrative, a story with the punch line at the end. Similarly, York offers a wonderful bit of inductive process in an example of a sermon introduction on tithing (27). He also suggests that expository preaching can utilize many forms, even dramatic narrative, which, in the opinion of this reviewer, is inherently inductive (34).

Whether a student, a novice, an experienced preacher, or even a teacher of preaching, the reader of *Preaching with Bold Assurance* will find a great deal of helpful information, inspiration, and motivation. While parts of the book serve as a helpful review or clarifying discussion of some issues connected with preaching, other parts challenge the discerning reader to dig deeper and work harder in the task of sermon preparation and preaching. This is a worthwhile addition to the library of anyone involved in the ministry of preaching.

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John Wesley: A Biography. By Stephen Tomkins. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, 0-8028-2499-4, 208 pp., $20.00, paperback.

Stephen Tomkins' lively if slightly eccentric biography of the founder of Methodism marks three centuries since John Wesley's birth. Tomkins draws heavily from Wesley's correspondence and journals so that—as Tomkins notes—the work often features what Wesley wanted to project about his ministry. Yet Tomkins also displays Wesley's foibles and personal complexity along with his successes. The biography emphasizes Wesley's family heritage and his unique personal values as crucial foundations for what followed. He was the son of a sharp-edged Anglican minister and a strong-minded mother. His own moralistic zeal appeared early on, eventually birthing and supporting the Methodist movement that prospered despite both church and public hostility. Tomkins traces how Wesley's bold ideals were balanced by his pragmatism. The reformer drew from the enlightenment rationalism of his era and grafted it into the pietistic fervor of earlier Puritanism. In the end he produced a well-ordered and tightly supervised "method" of spiritual devotion that did much to reshape the profile of British and American Protestant Christianity. Tomkins features the chain of important relationships in Wesley's life and ministry: his parents, his brother Charles, George Whitefield, and a number of the women—including his wife in their famously troubled marriage—who collectively formed the fabric of Wesley's life. Indeed, a sturdy thematic ribbon that runs through the work is Wesley's set of sometimes odd and morally ambiguous relationships with women.

As will be evident by now, this book is not a hagiography. While Tompkins clearly appreciates Wesley's courage, energy and vision, he also offers a number of judgments—some acerbic—about Wesley's character and conduct. These, along with a couple of self-aware insertions by Tompkins, create the eccentric ripples in an otherwise steady narrative flow. A few additional quibbles can be added. If the strength of the book is in its tracing more relational connections than one expects in a brief introductory biography, its limitation is that it fails to say enough about the historical-theological context of Wesley's work. For instance, some scholars are now reconsidering an enduring view that Wesley was more of an activist than a theologian, a debate that Tomkins doesn't engage. In a related issue, Wesley's connections with his early disciple and later colleague, Whitefield, stirred significant private debates over God's election and human free-will. These all invite more attention than Tomkins' passing comments offer us. Without more notice of Wesley's theology we gain only a middle-distance exposure to the reformer's motives. Even in some of his important personal views that shifted over time—especially his changing perceptions of the Aldersgate "conversion"—questions about some of the related shifts in his anthropology, doctrine of the

Spirit, and still other concerns are left dangling. At an applied level, too, Wesley's autocratic leadership is often noted in the work, yet some of the balancing features in Wesley's approach—such as his careful work in assigning the annual preaching itineraries for his lay-preachers (which did much to empower subordinate leaders)—might have been offered as a balancing perspective.

But any criticisms about omissions do not keep us from endorsing the book for what it does offer: an inviting "close-up" view of this complex and powerful figure who did much to shape present-day evangelicalism.

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Principle Preaching: How to Create and Deliver Sermons for Life Applications. By John R. Bisagno. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2002, 0-8054-2545-7, 200 pp., $14.99.

John Bisagno's book is a collection of sermons framed on the foundation of *principle preaching*. Principle preaching, according to Bisagno, is "drawing life application principles from the Bible and preaching them as the outline of the sermon" (3). The distinguishing mark of principle preaching is that the principles drawn from the biblical text rather than becoming a part of each point's development *are* the main points of the sermon. The advantage of principle preaching, according to the author, stems from the essentials of principles: their memorable functionality and universal applicability. People remember principles while they remain true for all people and all times. The bulk of the book comprises 57 sermons based on the characters found in the Old and New Testament. The sermons contain many helpful truths and insights. The book has much devotional content to commend it.

Bisagno views principle preaching as a *method* of sermon preparation and delivery rather than a homiletic philosophy. In other words, there is no conviction that this approach to framing sermons is based on something inherent to the Bible or indispensable to communication. In the absence of a sound theological or philosophical argument for why we should adopt principle preaching, our only compulsion for ascribing to this preaching method is its effectiveness. However, if effectiveness is to serve as the key criterion for our choice why not abandon principles in favor of stories? After all most people will remember a story before they can remember a set of principles.

The book assumes the readers' acquaintance with Rick Warren's method of preaching principles. The author assumes the validity of this approach applying it to his sermon development. What remains unexplained is the essential nature of

biblical principles. Bisagno does not explain what qualifies as a biblical principle. He oscillates between principles that express truth about God, failing to fulfill the function of being life-applicable and principles which tell us what to do without the inclusion of the necessary theological truth. The former principles tell us something about God leaving us wandering about our side of the equation. The latter anthropocentric principles leave us with a long list of mores which, if taken by themselves, might as well have come from a self-help book, or a Dear Abby column. In the end, we are left guessing as to what meets the criteria of a principle as biblical truth.

The study of the sermons is of little help in illuminating the reader's skill in extracting the principles from the biblical passages. In the absence of a clear definition of what we are to look for in the text, we may not disagree with the principles drawn by the author, but we are left wondering why these and not others should be the principles intended by the sacred author. In the final analysis, the book as a case study leaves an inquiring preacher with some critical questions while providing a good starting point for further reflection on the principle value of preaching principles.

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Teaching that Transforms: Worship as the Heart of Christian Education. By Debra Dean Murphy. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004, 1-58743-067-3, 255 pp., $18.00, paperback.

In *Teaching that Transforms*, Debra Dean Murphy offers both a critique of recent practices in Christian religious education and a vision of Christian formation that is liturgical at its very heart. Her critique forcefully finds its mark. The alternative vision of Christian education that she offers, on the other hand, seems helpful but incomplete.

Murphy's critique focuses on the "Religious Education" movement that has dominated much of mainline church educational practice since early in the 20th century and, in particular, the influence of three leaders within that movement—Gabriel Moran, Thomas Groome, and Mary Boys. As a minister in a mainline church herself, Murphy engages these three with great personal interest. In her introductory chapter, Murphy outlines the struggle of the ministry of Christian education to "find itself" in these days. The chapter is as relevant to ministers in the evangelical "Christian Education" movement as it is to mainliners. The next three chapters—one each devoted to the influence of the aforementioned leaders—may seem less significant for readers from other traditions, but there is much worthwhile reading here. Murphy is relentless in her attack on the

movement's uncritical embrace of the assumptions, values and visions of modernity. The pertinence and wisdom of her arguments reaches far beyond mainline churches. Evangelicals, in their own ways, have far too often fallen into the same or similar snares.

Part Two of the book—chapters four through eight—contain Murphy's alternative pedagogical vision. She flatly rejects the "schooling" model that, she argues, religious educators unwisely adopted from their secular counterparts. In its place, she puts forth a vision of Christian education that is centered on the worship of the church. She argues (and this reviewer could not agree more) that the biblical word *catechesis* is to be preferred over *Christian education* to describe the teaching task of the Church. She argues further (and this reviewer agrees only in part) that the liturgy of the gathered community is the central stage for all catechesis.

Murphy wisely calls for educational and formative efforts that reach beyond the classroom and "formal education," and she draws proper attention to the longstanding understanding of the Church that worship is the most powerfully formative ministry available to us in helping others become like Jesus. If heard well, Murphy's words could help call pastors back to servant-leadership in two critical ministry arenas which they have too often abandoned—worship and teaching.

But Murphy's emphasis on the liturgy as the catechetical center seems overstated. She writes, "In a very real way, there is, for Christians and for the practices of Christian catechesis, nothing outside the liturgy" (113). This stance is both unwise and unfaithful to the historical tradition of catechesis that she so cherishes. To be sure, catechesis was never *primarily* a cognitive enterprise aiming at *mere* transmission of doctrine. And yes, the liturgy of the church was central to the formation of ancient Christians-in-the-making. But there was also a critically important cognitive and doctrinal role in the ancient catechumenate, especially in those eras when catechesis flourished most—during the first four centuries of the Church and during the height of the Reformation.

Preachers should be challenged by Murphy's insistence that the Church's most formative moments occur during the worship service. They may be less excited by the vision of the sermon she seems to cast—one in which the sermon's value as proclamation or instruction seems less significant than its value as a liturgical element. And while all Christian educators can profit from Murphy's reminder of the power of informal education, one hopes that they will not be tempted to put any less energy on the formal teaching ministry that is also critical to the task of making disciples for Jesus Christ.

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Voicing the Vision: Imagination and Prophetic Preaching. By Linda L. Clader Harrisburg: Morehouse, 2003, 0-8192-1932-0, 176 pp., $16.95 paperback.

One of Linda Clader's chief aims in writing *Voicing the Vision* is to help individual preachers "find their own, authentic 'voice' in preaching" (vi). For Clader, effective preaching appears to be more of a *process* inspired by the Spirit than a *skill* to be mastered (6). Thus the message embodied in a sermon is a gift received from the Spirit and passed on to the congregation via the preacher's imagination. She uses the word "inspiration" to refer to the moment the preacher receives the gift, and "imagination" to refer to the moment the gift is offered to listeners, though she maintains that, "these two moments are not distinct" (6).

Clader emphasizes the idea of the Spirit from John 3:8 as a breath or "wind" that "blows where it pleases." However, this image appears to be offered at the expense of other key descriptors for the Spirit such as the paraclete of John 14. Clader uses the impersonal pronoun "it" throughout the book to refer to the Spirit. She describes the Spirit as follows, "Neither an entity you can look at directly nor simply a vague, impersonal force, the Spirit is the wonderful mystery that gives life, moves prophets, and makes church" (4). Although the Spirit in her descriptions may act as an agent to accomplish things, it's not necessarily an agent with the attributes of full personhood.

Much of the book is about developing habits, and positioning oneself to receive inspiration for preaching. Clader seeks to raise preachers' consciousness with respect to what they see, hear, smell, and feel. Then she suggests they find connections between the seemingly disparate data in a way that makes sense of it all. She writes, "Our task, then, is to find ways to open our eyes and our hearts further to how an infinite number of apparently unrelated bits of data can reveal God and carry the message of the gospel" (17).

In chapter two she underscores the importance of keeping the Sabbath, suggesting that "we might try different balances between active play and simple rest" (11). She also maintains the need for "Becoming a Willing Amateur" (12). By "Amateur" she "means lover . . . . Somebody who dabbles, plays, tries out something that they love" (16). Clader wants preachers to move away from their emphasis on performance. She writes, "We must recognize that we do not "own" our art as preachers. Instead we do what we can to listen to God and to speak to people in love and invite them to play with us in God's presence" (17). "Play" as a method of opening a preacher to the Spirit for inspiration and imagination is a recurring theme throughout the book.

As a way to describe preaching, Clader tells a story about how she learned to sing harmonies while her sister sang the melodies to hymns and popular songs. Now, even when she is alone, she finds herself singing harmonies to imagined melodies. She compares harmonizing songs to her sermon preparation. "As I review my own preaching, I realize the result of my particular process of preparation often seems like humming the harmony. Often I don't stick closely to the biblical text, and I almost never explicate the meaning, verse by verse. But that doesn't mean I'm throwing the text out the window. I am trying to be true to the melody as I discern it in the various readings, prayers, and hymns chosen for a particular occasion" (100).

Throughout the book she includes sermons to illustrate the methods she advocates. Some of her sermons leave the reader wondering what biblical text she was imagining as she wrote them. One notable exception comes in her sermon on the Syrian Phonecian woman from Mark 7. She begins with a vivid description of the biblical scene, but gradually takes increasing license. Her application at the end of her message is pure eisigesis. She describes her intent in the following way: "This narrative form offered a helpful approach to what could be construed as a prophetic proclamation—that God or Jesus doesn't really mind much whether we are Christians or not, so long as we love and serve one another" (120).

Some of Clader's insights are a refreshing corrective to mechanical methods of sermon preparation and delivery. Certainly, preachers need the Holy Spirit to work through them at every stage of sermon development. However, the Spirit who gave us the biblical text should retain the right to be heard in his own authentic voice even when the message is transmitted through a preacher's voice. The book has a few helpful insights, but comes up short on taking the biblical text seriously.

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Just Preaching: Prophetic Voices for Economic Justice. By Andre Resner, Editor. St. Louis: Chalice, 2003, 0827217153. 234 pp., $29.99, paperback.

Just Preaching takes seriously the biblical claim to call for economic justice. This interfaith work seeks to instruct and inspire preachers in developing effective sermons that mobilize their congregations to respond to immediate needs of low-income people and address underlying causes of poverty.

The compendium is divided into eight parts. Each part begins with one or two introductory essays written by a scholar or an accomplished practitioner and includes two or three model sermons from leading preachers focused on that topic. The essayists and preachers include African Americans, Latin Americans, European Americans, women, men, Roman Catholics, Protestants, rabbis, local

pastors, leaders of agencies, and teachers in colleges and seminaries. The essays and sermons provide compelling information about a topic. The topics addressed are: economics and the just word; motivations for just preaching; God's stake in just preaching; poverty and homelessness in the United States; children, poverty and the just word; the voice of the poor; preaching the just word in privileged (affluent) contexts; and just preaching is not church as usual (that is, preaching that persuades the congregation to action). Included are two appendices that offer resources for further congregational development. The first is information concerning Faith Promise, an interfaith, nonprofit organization. The second gives a description of Just Neighbors, an educational and motivational program.

On the whole the differences of faith traditions do not hinder the purpose of the book to provide guidance and model sermons that influence the preacher and the congregation to acts of service and justice. For some readers this feature may even yield insight into an other's approach to their faith. However, the criticism of traditional preaching in Chapter Two will meet some objections. For example, the method of exegesis for the typical evangelical homiletician is not the historical-critical, as advocated in this chapter, but some form of the historical-grammatical. While all agree that "one's unacknowledged presuppositions and prejudices are perhaps the greatest danger to hearing the text" and that complete detached scientific objectivity is impossible, yet the assertion that "all exegesis for preaching is essentially eisegesis" (12) invites debate. Along with this, the author states "that exegesis for preaching is an inherently different enterprise than exegesis for other purposes" (12). In some traditions these practices may be championed, but those traditions which hold a high view of Scripture will reject them.

The volume also offers a practical seven-step outline for preparing a sermon on an aspect of economic justice: (1) identify and name a problem in one's sociocultural situation; (2) analyze it from sociocultural, political, theological, biblical and ecclesial perspectives; (3) bring to the conversation key texts from faith and cultural traditions; (4) compassionately probe the personal issues involved with the real people who are affected by the injustices observed; (5) narrow the focus for the sermon to one issue and one set of texts that best collaborate for the sermon's focus and function; (6) build the sermon, using appropriate rhetorical and homiletical tools; and (7) test the sermon, using the appropriate theological tools.

If you or your church struggles with consumerism, or if you have been captured by Jesus' emancipation proclamation and are looking for instruction, inspiration and models to practice what he preached, then this book is for you. Get it. Live it. Give it.

Jay Held

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Old Testament Words: Reflections for Preaching. By Mary Donovan Turner. St. Louis: Chalice, 2003, 0-8272-2724-0, 147 pp., $19.99, paperback.

Words—lawyers live and die by their words. Why then do some lawyers fail to communicate clearly in important documents dealing with the legal and temporal matters of their clients? Why too do some preachers fail to captivate their audiences with the eternal truths that flow from the text of Scripture? Perhaps part of the answer is that some lawyers and some preachers do not understand the precise lexical and functional definitions of the terms that they use. Mary Donovan Turner seeks to address that problem, at least for preachers of the Old Testament text. Turner offers insight into 38 Hebrew terms that are, as she states, "the 'building blocks' of the many theologies the Old Testament holds" (2). She begins each of the 38 chapters with the writing of the Hebrew word, followed by a phonetic transliteration of that word, for ease of reading. Then, in approximately three pages of discussion, Turner provides a combination of the following (though not all in every chapter): basic definitions, examples of usage in Scripture, personal/theological insight, and illustrations from Jewish tradition (often in the form of rabbinic stories). Near the end of her book, in a chapter titled, "Study Questions," Turner poses a brief series of questions relative to each of the 38 Hebrew words. She then concludes her work with an "Index of Biblical Citations" and a cross-referencing of the words to *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance.*

The strengths of the book are manifold, three of which are presented here: (1) Turner's recognition of the complex nature of words; (2) Turner's insightful explanation of the meaning, usage, or application of given words; and (3) Turner's constant drive to find a linkage between the ancient text and the contemporary believer. First, Turner reveals the complex nature of a given word, thereby reminding the reader that simplistic assumptions do not necessarily correctly capture the biblical meaning of a term. Furthermore, she draws attention to the fact that no one Hebrew word, by itself, expresses the full range of the theology associated with that idea, e.g., the word "aph" (her phonetic spelling), that is translated as "anger," is only one of many expressions that the Old Testament uses to unfold the concept of "anger" (16). Second, by means of analysis and comparison and contrast, Turner reveals not-easily-discovered truths about such words as those translated "ashes" (19-22); "fire" (26); "to cease or rest" (105-106); "to return" (107-112); and "instruction, teaching, law" (120-121). The frustration for the reader is that Turner does not develop her ideas more fully (due to space limitations?) or that she does not reveal the thought processes by which she moved from text analysis to interpretation. Third, Turner frequently draws attention to the fact that 21st century ideas regarding a given biblical term do not always intersect with the thoughts of the ancient writers. She then helps the reader to identify linkages between text interpretation and contemporary living.

As is the case with all human-generated texts, *Old Testament Words* contains

opportunities for improvement. There is no clearly stated justification for the selection of the specific terms being studied (a fact that Turner acknowledges, 2-3). There are no suggestions as to how these word studies could or should be incorporated into a sermon. In addition, there is no identification of key passages for each word and, quite often, there are no Scripture references by which the reader can track down the sources of specific statements. Unfortunately, too little space is dedicated to an in-depth analysis of any of the words – a reality the reader should anticipate upon noting the word "Reflections" in the title of the book. The book, moreover, even though its primary focus is on Hebrew words, rarely addresses Hebrew grammar or syntax, which often form the basis for the definitions of words. The book's one foray into Hebrew grammar sadly blurs the distinction between linguistic gender and physical gender (95). Furthermore, there is a tendency in the book, at times, to favor reader response over authorial intent as its hermeneutical principle.

Overall, Turner writes in a clear, concise manner that is easily understood, even by those who have little or no knowledge of the Old Testament or of the Hebrew language. Scholars who have easy access to Hebrew language tools, however, are not likely to benefit greatly by this book, except when they encounter Turner's insightful analysis of selected terms. For the vast majority of preachers who have not yet become Old Testament scholars, the book could provide a starting point for the study of selected biblical terms –terms that could provide illustrative material for or even form the basis of any number of sermons.

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Preaching Verse by Verse. By Ronald J. Allen and Gilbert L. Bartholomew. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000, 0-664-25804-2, 144 pp., $15.99, paperback.

Aristotle judged that any rhetorical situation has three essential components: the speaker, the subject, and the audience. He concluded that of the three, the audience was the most influential. Evangelicals reading *Preaching Verse by Verse* should keep that sentiment in mind. The authors' target audience was the preacher in the theologically moderate to liberal camp, someone serving in an established denominational pulpit. It is unlikely that this text will sound at all familiar to the expositional preacher who has been trained in a conservative, evangelical seminary. Allen, Associate Professor of Preaching and New Testament at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, and Bartholomew, a pastor for twenty-five years, have offered up their version of verse-by-verse preaching in an effort to reproduce what conservatives have accomplished through expository preaching.

According to the authors, verse-by-verse preaching is essentially "a running commentary on the text" or "continuous exposition" (vii). The definition sounds familiar, but their approach reveals a serious flaw. While recognizing several benefits of verse-by-verse preaching, including the observation that in growing congregations having a "high percentage of relatively young members with a high degree of commitment to the mission of the church and who believe that they are maturing in faith . . . the preaching takes the form of verse by verse exposition of a biblical text" (2), the authors seem to overlook the obvious: that preachers in conservative pulpits have an unyielding commitment to the accuracy and authority of the Bible. It is not possible for this reviewer to comprehend how Allen and Bartholomew can anticipate the positive results of verse-by-verse preaching when, at the same time, they argue that "a few biblical texts are so theologically and morally problematic that the preacher is called to preach against them" with the result that the preacher may need "to correct the witness of a text" (10). The secret of growing churches will not be found in a style of preaching, but in a commitment to the Scripture's accuracy and authority. However, this book was not written for evangelicals. It had a different audience in mind.

That said, *Preaching Verse by Verse* provides helpful advise for preachers of any theological position. The cautions concerning running commentary on pages 11-12 ring true. The brief history of verse-by-verse preaching demonstrates the long tradition of this kind of exposition. As may be expected, the contemporary examples of verse-by-verse preachers may not be well known to evangelicals. Contemporary evangelicals have been completely overlooked, a consequence of the intended audience.

Chapter Three on "Preparation" is a mixed bag. Much of the material rests on sound principles of exegesis (see steps 1-7). But a lack of respect for the Scriptures surfaces at steps 8 and 9. When the authors argue that the preacher must determine whether the text is "appropriate to the gospel, intelligible, and morally plausible" (39), they expose their low view of the Bible. "The preacher needs to help the congregation clarify those parts that are authoritative and those parts that are not" (39). When "the four Gospels portray the Jewish community in caricature for the purpose of downgrading Judaism and justifying the growing divide between the church and the synagogue . . . it is inappropriate to the gospel because it denies God's unconditional love to the Jewish people, and it does not seek justice for them" (39). How verse-by-verse preaching can bring revival to churches where the pulpits so misunderstand and misrepresent the theological message of the Gospels remains a mystery to this reviewer.

Still, much of the authors' interpretation of exemplary passages is very good, both in method and conclusion. However, while the exposition usually demonstrates an accurate and insightful understanding of the various texts, there is an assumption that readers will have the training and skills to work at a similar level. This

reviewer believes that very few readers will be able to reproduce the kind of exposition exemplified. Most will think, "I wish I could do that."

Chapter four offers five examples of verse-by-verse preaching. Two of the messages, both by Allen, are exegetically and theologically sound with thoughtful exposition and relevant application. Allen's second message is the only one of the five that comes close to what most evangelicals would recognize as verse-by-verse exposition. Bartholomew's two messages fall short. The first follows the exemplary method and the second so generalizes the message that the biblical author's pointed truth is blunted. The message by Linda Lee Milavec employs a feminist reading that offers psychological comfort to the disenfranchised.

While they may not be worth the price of the book, the examples and strategies for "Keeping the Sermon Interesting," chapter 5, provide helpful and trustworthy advice for any preacher. The final chapter, addressing when to use the verse-by-verse approach, will contribute little to the evangelical expositor's understanding.

I might recommend this book to a classic liberal preacher. Allen and Bartholomew may motivate him/her to consider developing a sermon that attends to the verses of a biblical unit. I would recommend this book to an evangelical only to exemplify how liberal preachers are representing what we call expositional preaching.

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Preaching Judges. By Joseph R. Jeter, Jr. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2003, 0-8272-2977-1, 144 pp., $13.29, paperback.

Jeter sets the tone for his volume in its introduction: "When scholars ignore the language of the people, the people ignore scholars. Preachers are often caught in the middle, standing with one foot in the academy and the other in the church, one in reason and the other in faith, and it is often hard for them to keep their balance" (4). If his goal is to achieve this balance, then he has accomplished the task fairly well.

In Chapter One, he answers why we should even preach from Judges: because of the persistence of Scripture itself; because of our need for more interpretive light; because of its in-between nature; because its characters are like us; because of its female characters; because of it's characterization of God; and because of its great stories.

In Chapter Two he also deals with the militaristic nature of the book, which may be helpful for those of us who find ourselves preaching in a pacifistic church setting. Chapter Four (dealing with Judges 4-5) speaks of Deborah, of whom he

makes the point that she was "the only biblical woman who did not attain that designation by being the mother of a famous son" (51).
Chapter Five deals with Gideon, whom Jeter calls a "model of fear" (71). Jeter characterizes Gideon not only as a "sniveling little guy whose fear requires the continual testing of God" but also that Gideon was "the best that God could find, for this time, for this place, for this people" (73). He makes the interesting point that Gideon "is the only judge to whom God speaks directly" (78). Jeter also declares something not often heard in today's church growth environment: that God can use groups that shrink as well as those that grow. As one who ministers in an increasingly mobile American church culture, this was refreshing to read.

In his commentary on 9:8-13, Jeter speaks to the imperfect choices in leadership positions, and, speaking of better candidates, that "there are times when the alternatives force us out of our comfort zone for the common good" (85).

Jeter's treatment of Samson in Chapter Eight is well done. Samson is seen as both "a mirror of the disintegration of Israel," and "a symbol of the tension, theological and personal, between love and vengeance" (103). He states that Samson never really learns from his mistakes, and that Judges, more than anything, is really a book about leadership.

Chapter Nine deals with Judges 17-18, Micah and the Danites. Interestingly, the author points out that most of the recent work on Judges has been done by feminists and conservatives. He ends his work in Chapter Ten, which addresses Judges 19-21, and asks whether or not faith community can learn from bad as well as good news.

In summary, Jeter gives the rationale for Judges-based sermons by suggesting that the book if full of timeless stories which "provide for an examination of our relationships with God and one another" (143), and "that as difficult as the relationship between God and God's people during that time and as horrible as some of the experiences were that they shared together, the relationship survived. So can ours" (144).

Jeter's book is worth the reading. He writes like a preacher. While some readers who are further to the right than Jeter may take exception to some of the commentary, the insights are indeed thought provoking and grist for the preaching mill.

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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.

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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 (September 1981): 77-78.

c. Avoid the use of op. cit.
Dewey 111.

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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."

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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."

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