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Evangelical Homiletics Society

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

Publishers should send catalogs and review copies of their books to Jeffrey D. Arthurs to the address located above.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Preaching

*by Scott M. Gibson*

This edition of the *Journal* continues the observance of the tenth anniversary year for the Evangelical Homiletics Society. The matter of preaching is what we are about. The articles and book reviews continue the vision of a society that advances the cause of biblical preaching.

The fall 2006 anniversary annual meeting at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary hosted Dr. Dennis Hollinger as the plenary speaker. The two plenary addresses he delivered are included in the pages of this edition. Hollinger challenged attendees to consider the shifting world in which we preach and to become more holistic in our preaching. His written addresses will stimulate preachers as they consider what it means to preach today.

The Keith Willhite Award, voted by members of the society at the annual meeting (October 2006) as being the outstanding paper presented, was given to J. Kent Edwards on the topic "Stories are for Adults: Equipping Preachers to Communicate Biblical Narratives to Adult Audiences." Edwards' article challenges our thinking on what it means to preach biblical narratives. The Keith Willhite Award is given in memory of the late co-founder and second president of the Society, Dr. Keith Willhite.

The final article is by Glenn Watson. His insights on the sermon in light of cinematic elements as compared to biblical narrative will help preachers consider fresh ways to preach the Bible.

The sermon in this edition, "The Strange Agony of Excellent Preaching," was given by F. Bryan Wilkerson at the annual meeting. Wilkerson, senior pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts, preached the sermon with preachers in mind. His understanding of the preaching task and its challenges will encourage any preacher who reads this sermon.

The articles and sermon are followed by a fine collection of book reviews. The variety of the books included, as well as the insights of the reviewers, allow readers a look into the important books on preaching of the day.

For us, preaching is not a negative term. Instead, preaching brings life, for we proclaim—and teach others to proclaim—God's Word through preaching. Preaching is what we try to do well—with the help of our God and to His Glory. The Evangelical Homiletics Society aims to advance the cause of biblical preaching. As we reflect on ten years of existence, we can say with confidence that we continue to be in the process of accomplishing this goal.

## *Stories are for Adults: Equipping Preachers to Communicate Biblical Narratives to Adult Audiences*

*by J. Kent Edwards*

*(editor's note: the article by J. Kent Edwards was recognized by the Society with the Keith Willhite Award at the October 2006 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting held at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts. The Willhite Award is given in recognition of the outstanding paper presented at each year's meeting. The award is in memory of co-founder, Keith Willhite. Dr. J. Kent Edwards is Associate Professor of Preaching and Leadership and Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, La Mirada, California.)*

### *Abstract*

The use of narrative passages of scripture need not be limited to "Bible stories for children." This paper will argue that the unique learning characteristics of adult learners contained in D.A. Kolb's "experiential learning cycle," make biblical narratives especially valuable for preaching to adult audiences. This paper also suggests that students trained to employ this writer's "Story Shaping" homiletical methodology, will be equipped to proclaim effectively the stories of scripture to adults.

### Introduction

Every parent and grandparent understands the universal attraction that stories have for children. Every day and all across the globe youngsters ask the adults in their lives: "will you read me a story?" Early childhood educators have long recognized that a child's predilection for narrative can be harnessed as a learning tool. Wise parents—and Sunday school teachers—have used stories to teach children. Christian education in the evangelical church has long—and wisely—capitalized upon Children's innate love for stories to instruct them about the person and work of God. We teach children Bible stories because they love stories. But children are not the only ones interested in stories.

Stories burst generational boundaries. All age groups enjoy a good story. The healthy sales of airport novels, movie tickets, DVD rentals, and cable TV packages testify to the intergenerational appeal of narrative. Every marketer in America knows that adults enjoy stories. But what many do not realize is that stories have the potential to be far more than just brain candy for adults. Stories can also be used as an effective educational vehicle.

## The Value of Stories for Mature Learners

There is a growing recognition today of the instructional value of stories for mature learners. The once undervalued story is being increasingly viewed as an effective educational tool. The growing respect for teaching adults through story can be seen in at least two areas: the business world and the counseling office.

The business community is using stories to teach business principles. Spencer Johnson, M.D. has written ten international bestselling books including three number one bestsellers. No business book has been better received, however, than his parabolic book, *Who Moved my Cheese?* This simple story sold over 10 million copies in the first two years of its release. Amazon.com declared that *Who Moved my Cheese?* was its number one all–time bestselling book. The influence of Johnson's narrative based approach to business leadership is not limited to North America. *The New York Times Book Review* reported in a 2005 article that *Who Moved my Cheese?* is China's all time bestselling translated work with official sales of over two million copies to date. In Japan, *Who Moved my Cheese?* sold over 4,500,000 copies to become the number one bestselling book in Japan's history by a non-Japanese author.[1] All around the world, the adult business community has resonated with the simple story of Johnson's book.

The counseling community also recognizes the educational value of stories. Books such as *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends,*[2] *Story Re-Visions: Narrative Therapy in a Postmodern World*[3] and *Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities*[4] all encourage therapists to help their clients view their lives as stories. This narrative approach

assists hurting people to view their lives as a grand story and, in the process, understand how their life story was shaped in the past and how they can be re-shaped in the future. Christian counselor John Trent encourages a similar process in his book *LifeMapping*.[5] These authors and therapists believe that stories are an appropriate and beneficial vehicles for adults to gain an increased understanding of their lives and environments. Adults are being taught how to live healthy lives through the use of stories. Adults learn from stories. To understand why stories are such an effective teaching tool for adults, it is necessary to understand how adults learn.

## How Adults Learn

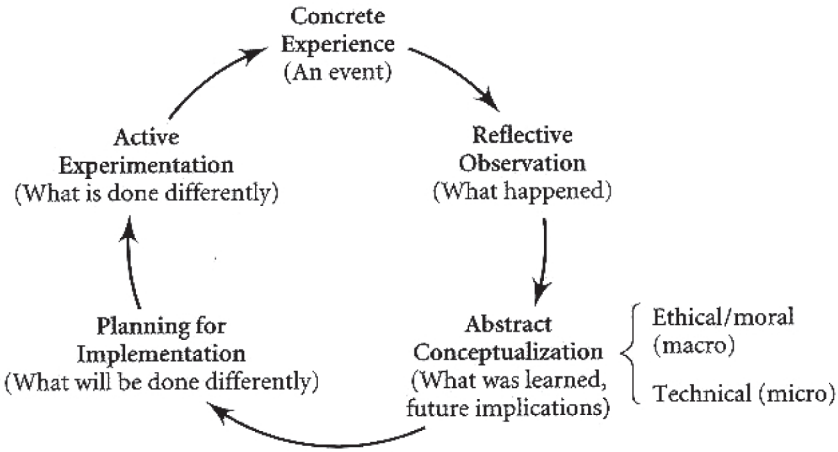
Of all adult learning theorists in print today, perhaps none is as highly regarded as Malcolm S. Knowles. Knowles' groundbreaking book *The Adult Learner*[6] pointed out that "traditionally, we have known more about how animals learn than about how children learn; and we know much more about how children learn than about how adults learn."[7] Knowles set out to correct this problem by distinguishing between "pedagogy" the art and science of how children learn and "andragogy" the art and science of helping adults learn. This educator considered

it a mistake for an instructor to treat adult learners as large children. Knowles spent his professional life arguing that teachers should recognize adults as unique learners and alter the learning experience accordingly. In what way are adult learners unique? Knowles principles for adult learning could be summarized as follows:

1. A need for relevance. Adults need to know why they need to learn something. An understanding of the practical application of what is being learned is essential.
2. A readiness to learn. Adults come ready to take what they learn and immediately apply it to life.
3. A need for engagement. Adults want to be self-directed learners who are active participants in their learning experiences. Adults are not willing to memorize passively and regurgitate content that some "expert" says that they should know.

4. An appreciation of prior life experience. Adult learners want their life experiences recognized and resourced for learning.
5. Internally motivated. Adults value education because of how it will positively impact their quality of life. External motivators become less important.

In his book *Experiential Learning*,[8] David A Kolb outlined a theory of education that addresses the unique needs of the adult learner identified by Knowles. Kolb developed a simple and effective approach to andragogy that is relevant to everyone involved in the teaching of adults. An approach outlined in the diagram below.[9]




Kolb's model for adult education is an appropriate andrological response to the characteristics of adult learners outlined by Knowles. In the above model, the teacher begins with a concrete event in the life of the student. For the adult learner, this approach immediately establishes relevance and creates a situation in which the student is motivated to learn the material. In addition, this problem centered starting point affirms the adult learners past experiences and explains why it is in the learner's best interest to engage fully in the learning process. This "case-study" approach to education is a highly effective adult education model that is currently being utilized by some of the most respected adult-oriented educational institutions today.

One of the highest profile academic institutions to utilize Kolb's andrological teaching methodology is the Harvard Business School. According to their web site: "About 80 percent of the classes in the MBA program are taught via the case method, a practical approach to learning where students work under the guidance of a faculty member to address real business problems in all their innate complexity and ambiguity."[10]

Case study education typically begins with a story. The instructor uses narrative to describe an actual or true to life situation and encourages the students to identify the relevant issues and suggest a resolution to be applied to the problem. Narrative is a powerful educational tool for the adult learner. This is especially true when the narrative used by the instructor is drawn directly out of or is obviously related to the experience of the student. By examining the narrative of a concrete "slice of life," the student can follow Kolb's cycle and engage in reflective observation, identify what concepts were learned through the event, plan what to do differently as a result of the lessons learned, and then implement those lessons.

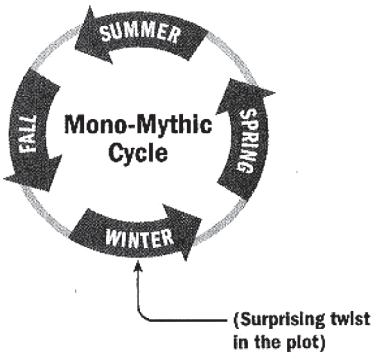
## Preaching "Story Shaping" Sermons to Adults

Those of us who preach to adults can learn a great deal from adult educational theorists. When we preach we want those listening to us to learn and apply God's word to their lives. In order to accomplish this objective with adults, we would be wise to include narrative sermons from the narrative portions of Scripture in our preaching repertoire. The stories of scripture have the potential to be relevant, enjoyable and educationally significant for the adult listener. How can we preachers ensure that the narrative sermons we preach reach their potential? How can we release the full benefit of the Bible's narrative literature for our adult listeners?

While there are a number of effective, genre sensitive homiletical forms available to the contemporary preacher, I have found that many narrative homiletical forms have a limited usefulness. You can, for example, only preach so many first-person sermons in a year. I have

found, however, that a homiletical form I have called "Life Shaping"[11] to be a highly effective "meat and potatoes" homiletical approach for the preaching of biblical narratives. "Life Shaping" sermons can be used on a regular basis and retain their ability to educate adults while maintaining a high level of interest. As you will see, this homiletical approach applies Knowles' andrological observations in a Kolb-compatible format.

The first step in preaching a "Story Shaping" sermon is to interpret a biblical narrative from a literary perspective. Preachers who do not understand the literary dynamics of how the biblical writer fashioned his biblical story, will not understand the theological point the original author was making in the story, or how to harness the literary power of the original story in their sermons. While scores of books have been written on the literary dynamics of biblical narrative, perhaps the most important factor is the shape of the story. As I have argued elsewhere, the mono-mythic cycle is a helpful tool that preachers can use to determine a story's shape.[12]



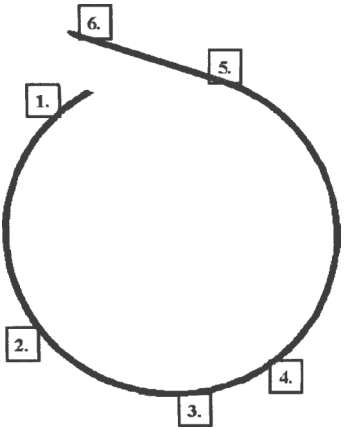

Since conflict is inherently interesting, stories start with an inciting event. Something goes wrong with the summertime perfection we would all prefer. Stories spend most of their time exploring the increasing complications that occur as negative events unfold. As far as the protagonist is concerned, life is getting colder and colder—worse and worse. While a few biblical stories end in winter (these are called tragedies) most don't. The vast majority of biblical narratives enjoy a sudden reversal—a surprising twist in the plot that starts to return life

back to the bliss of summer. Stories do not have points. They make a single point. This point is revealed in the surprising twist—the moment of "aha" when the solution to the problem is revealed.

The point of a biblical story is always a theological point. We learn something about God and how to live in response to him when we understand a biblical story. The narrative literature of the Bible is concretized theology. The stories of Scripture examine abstract theological truths through the lens of real life situations. Properly understood, biblical narratives discuss theology in an adult learner oriented "case study" approach.

"Story Shaping" sermons are an attempt to harness the natural advantages of narrative literature for the benefit of the adult listener. As the diagram below indicates, this sermon form shamelessly piggybacks upon the structure of the biblical narrative while intentionally intertwining the lives of the listeners with the problem faced by the biblical protagonist. If this is done successfully, the problem of the biblical protagonist becomes the problem of the contemporary listener. As a result, the listener looks with interest at the critical choice made by the biblical protagonist makes to resolve their ancient problem—and decides whether to follow the protagonists' example in their own contemporary situation.

**Story Shaping**



"Story Shaping" is a homiletical attempt to reshape the story of our listener's lives with the lives of the biblical narratives. Here is how it works:

**1. Personal identification with biblical character**

Your sermon begins in the "summer" of the narrative. Your goal in this portion of your sermon is to help your audience identify with the biblical character. Build bridges between the biblical character and your audience. You want your listeners to discover the ways in which their lives are linked to the lives of the biblical character. It may be helpful to ask yourself:

- Who is this person?
- Where do they live?
- What is their background, education level, profession and social standing?
- In what ways are they like my audience?

**2. Cultivate the awareness that characters in stories (biblical and contemporary) can and must make choices.**

As you relate the "fall" difficulties being faced by the biblical character, show the parallel pressures in the life of your congregation. Biblical characters were real people. You want your congregation to "feel" the same tension and pressure that the biblical hero felt leading up to her/his decision. Harness this pressure to help your audience to recognize that we cannot avoid making choices. The following questions will help clarify your thoughts.

- Is the biblical character a victim or a victimizer? Of whom / what?
- Does the character display a sense of powerlessness?
- Have you (or someone you know) ever felt the same way?

Take time to go through the biblical story scene by scene outlining the parallels between protagonists story and the life story of the listeners.

As you do, be sure to preserve the inherent tension of the story. If there is no tension/conflict in your sermon there will be no interest. If there is no interest there will be no life change.

**3. Help your congregation to understand *what* the biblical character decided and *why* they made these choices.**

At this point, you are in the winter of the biblical story. Things have become unbearable and the character has chosen to act. You are at the bottom of the mono-mythic circle, the climax of the emotion. Here you are looking for the biblical character's psychological motivation. What would have made this decision difficult?

- When did the character finally choose to act?
- Why not earlier or later?
- What decision did the character make?
- Why did the character finally choose to act?
- What factors motivated the character to act the way that he she did? (e.g. social, physical, spiritual, etc.)

**4. Emotional identification with the consequences that biblical character faced as a result of their choices**

At phase four, the diagram above curves upward. It assumes that you are preaching a biblical story that has a happy ending. These "comedic" stories are best used to show audiences how godly decisions result in restored lives.

But while many biblical stories end as positively as Daniel's, this is not a universally true. Characters such as Samson, Saul, and Absalom did not make God-honoring decisions. The lesson of their lives is negative. We are not to imitate their decisions.

Regardless of whether the biblical narrative you are preaching ends up or down, however, help your congregation slip into the sandals of the biblical character that just made the decision. God-honoring decisions have a real and often immediate impact upon the life story of

the decision maker. Allow your congregation to see this.

- What happened to the character when the choice was made?
- What happened to those around the character? (friends, family, members of the community)
- If the character could have gone back in time and re-written their life story, do you think that he/she would have make a different decision?
- Have you ever faced / made a similar decision to the biblical character? Did you face similar consequences? Why?
- Would the consequences experienced by the biblical character likely follow a similar decision today? Why?

**5. Decide whether to emulate (parrot) or avoid the choices and consequences endured by the biblical characters**

Let your congregation have a good look at the benefits of the God-honoring choices. Allow them to gaze on the ripple effect that those decisions had on their family, friends and community and then bring them to the point of decision. Exhort your congregation to learn from the mistakes and successes of the heroes of Scripture.

- What is holding you back from making a God-honoring decision today?
- What are the pressures you face to imitate / reject the decision of the biblical character?
- How will your life be changed by your choice? What will happen to *your* story?
- How would the stories of *others* (e.g. your family, friends, church community) respond to and be affected by your decision to imitate the biblical character?

**6. Alter behavior in accordance with the decision.**

As a caring pastor, you know many of the issues with which the people in your congregation are struggling. Give them specific examples of what the application of this passage might look like in their lives.

Concretely outline how their actions might he different as a result of their choice. Challenge them to implement the lessons from this text into their lives immediately and to tell someone about their decision to do so.[13]

The "Story Shaping" sermon form does not make six different points. It proceeds through six stages to make sure that the listeners understand the single theological point of the narrative passage, and how that point influences the life story of the listener. As you make your way through the sermon you will weave in and out of the ancient and modern worlds—explaining the text so that your listeners appreciate the depth of the problem the biblical protagonist faced, and explaining how your listeners will face very similar tensions in their lives. You want to do your best to stitch these worlds together into a seamless and unified sermon.

**Advantages of Story Shaping Sermons**

"Story Shaping" sermons have many advantages for the adult listeners. First, because they are stories, adults enjoy listening to them. We pay good money to listen to a good story! Second, because they are delivered in the third person, and the vast majority of biblical narratives are written in the third person, they are inherently more compatible with the narratives of Scripture. Thirdly, because they are delivered in the third person, they are considered more appropriate in a greater number of venues than less traditional sermon forms. Even the most traditional settings in which I have preached have enjoyed "Story Shaping" sermons. Fourthly, "Story Shaping" sermons address Malcolm Knowles' characteristics of the adult learner:

1. A need for relevance. As the listeners identify with the issue of the biblical protagonist, the understanding of the practical relevance of the message is obvious and compelling.
2. A readiness to learn. Since the relevance of the sermon is clear, adults are eager to learn.
3. A need for engagement. As adults re-live the experience of the protagonist and wrestle with the decision to make, their desire

to be self-directed learners is satisfied. Adults are not being asked to passively memorize and regurgitate content that some "expert" says that they should know. They are figuring out how to make their way through life.

4. An appreciation of prior life experience. In order to apply envelop the adult learner in "Story Shaping" sermon, preachers are forced to recognize and resource the life experiences of their audience.
5. Internally motivated. Adults value education because of how it will positively impact their quality of life. With this homiletic form, the listener is forced to examine how the lives of biblical protagonists were benefited or harmed by his/her choices. The link between application of theological truth and quality of life is obvious.

A fifth advantage that "Story Shaping" sermons have for the adult listener is their correspondence to David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model. If Kolb is correct that experience is the best source for adult learning, then "Story Shaping" sermons are an ideal way to help adults learn the truths of Scripture. As Kolb's model suggests, this sermon begins with a "Concrete Experience," a historical event found in Scripture that is then related to similar concrete experiences in the lives of the adult listeners. As the preacher and listeners examine the biblical account scene by scene, they are engaging in what Kolb referred to as "Reflective Observation." The question being asked here is "what happened?" When the "Story Shaping" preacher identifies the theological truth contained in the surprising twist in the plot (the moment of "aha") Kolb's "Abstract Conceptualization" has occurred. The preacher and listener identify together what was learned and begin to think about the future applications of this theological principle. When the preacher moves towards challenging listeners to decide whether they will emulate or eschew the principle revealed in the actions of the protagonist they are moving into Kolb's "Planning for Implementation," what will be done differently stage of learning. While the final stage of the learning cycle, "Active Experimentation" or what is actually done differently can usually only be achieved outside of the sermon setting, the "Story Shaping" sermon has made a significant contribution to the transformation of the lives of the adult listeners.

## Conclusion

"Story Shaping" sermons are theological case studies. These messages present real-life situations very similar to our own presented by the preacher for adult learners to analyze and learn from. They harness one of the best adult educational models available today.

Children may like stories, but the stories of Scripture need not and should not be limited to the very young. Stories are a valuable tool for the instruction and spiritual transformation of adult learners. In the opinion of this writer, the "Story Shaping" homiletical form is an interesting and educationally effective way to communicate the narrative portions of Scripture. This homiletical form has the potential to be a highly effective tool for the proclamation of the biblical narratives. Teaching "Story Shaping" in our classes could benefit our students and the churches they serve.

### Notes

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Craig Brian Larson, Editor of PreachingToday.com, of Christianity Today

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## *Preaching to the Head, Heart and Hands: A Holistic Paradigm for Proclaiming and Hearing the Word*

*by Dennis Hollinger*

*(editor's note: Dr. Dennis Hollinger is President and Professor of Christian Ethics at Evangelical School of Theology, Myerstown, Pennsylvania. This article was part of Dr. Hollinger's presentation at the October 2006 annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts.)*

### Introduction

There have been various ways to sort out the diversity of Christian expressions down through the centuries. In order to examine that diversity social scientists have often resorted to ideal types as a heuristic device that enables understanding and comparison. Ideal types as a sociological construct have their roots in the work of Max Weber and Ernst Troeltsch. As they and fellow sociologists have put it, ideal types are not identical to reality, but are mental constructs to help us understand the complexities and varieties of reality. Thus, one strand or expression of religion never fits perfectly into a given type.

One typology frequently used to examine Christian history goes back to Weber and Troeltsch and focused primarily on the Church's relationship to the world. The church-sect typology essentially examined those Christian groups that were at home in the world (Church type) and those that were not at home in the contours of society (sect type). It was this typology that led H. Richard Niebuhr to a richer analysis in *Christ and Culture.*

Another way that some have examined the Church is through its polity, or forms of church governance. Here we look to three standard types with a fair amount of variation within each: Episcopal polity (power flowing from the top down); Presbyterian polity (power diffused in some kind of shared governance with a balance of powers); and congregational polity (power residing in the local membership).

Various analyses of the church have also focused on theology. The simplest typology has been liberal to conservative continuum. Those theologies in direct adherence to the orthodox creeds, or to the major tenets of a particular movement's origins are labeled conservative. Those theologies that accentuate the need for innovation to bring theology in line with the current cultural assumptions are labeled liberal. Within this continuum there are of course many variations.

For some time I have felt that there is another way we can look at the diversity of the church. It is a typology that focuses on what Christians or church movements perceive to be the heart or most salient feature of Christian life. I first wrote about his typology nearly 20 years ago, and most recently in *Head, Heart and Hands: Bringing Together Christian Thought, Passion and Action.*[1] I believe that one of the best ways to perceive the variations within Christian history and in the current landscape, is through this construct. Moreover, it has direct significance for our reflections on preaching. At the heart of these three types is a presupposition regarding anthropology—that is, the most important dimension of the human self. Thus, the construct of head, heart and hands.

For some Christians, churches and movements the most important dimension of Christian life is the mind. It unlocks the key to spirituality, mission, theology, and everyday Christian experience. For these folks preaching is primarily the passing on of cognitive information to motivate Christian life and actions. For others it is the affections or passion, which is the key to the Christian life. For these believers preaching is primarily the attempt to move the emotions and affections God-ward. And for still others action is the key to Christianity in both its essence and in its expressions. For these Christians preaching is primarily the attempt to elicit particular human behaviors.

The Christian faith is, I believe, rooted in transcendence. That is, our faith in Christ, our directives for Christian living from the Bible, our own personal spiritual experiences, and our mission to the world, all have their ultimate foundation from beyond this world. They are grounded in the triune God of the universe and made known through

divine revelation. Nonetheless, our faith is experienced, understood and lived out within the framework of a fallen world, in specific cultures, and within the limits of our own finite, fallen selves. Thus we understand, experience, and express transcendent faith in ways that to some degree reflect our environment and our own personalities.

As a result, individual believers, churches, and Christian movements frequently accentuate one dimension of faith over others. With this backdrop in mind, I want to do two things this essay: First, look at the history of Christianity through the lens of head, heart and hands, giving attention to the way it demonstrated itself in preaching; and Second, turn to a more theological reflection and suggest that taken alone, thought, passion, or action render a fragmented faith that only further engenders a fragmented self and a fragmented church. Thus, we need to preach to all three dimensions, recognizing that each plays a role in the development and sustaining of the others. It is in the joyous consort of our whole selves that we begin to experience God's designs for our lives.

But to understand where we need to be and how we get there, it is helpful to understand these types individually. Although few individuals, churches, preachers or movements are ever purely of the head, heart or hands, we have a tendency to accentuate one and at the expense of the others. We have a tendency in our preaching to be oriented towards one over the others. And our congregants generally hear the sermon primarily though one of the three orientations.

### *Faith of the Head*

Many Christians have understood their faith to be primarily a cognitive enterprise. Christianity, for these folks, is a set of beliefs, doctrines, and ethical understandings—a worldview to which one adheres. In turn this worldview is then the fountainhead of feelings and actions. Most faith of the head types do not avoid affections and expressions of mercy, justice and witness, but believe the key to them is the mind.

From the faith of the head perspective conversion is seen primarily as a

transformation of thinking. The Christian life is a growth in knowledge, mediated through the Word. Mastery of the Bible and theology are the most important elements in spiritual development. The main purpose of preaching is to impart biblical ideas and principles. Hearers of this type "almost universally agree that a major purpose of preaching is to communicate information and ideas that help them interpret the significant of the Bible and the gospel for life. These listeners seek encounter with ideas."[2] After parishioners understand they can then feel and do.

Underlying a faith of the head is the assumption that the mind, the *ratio*, is the center of human personality; that thinking is the essence of human nature. This approach, therefore, assumes that if we have our thinking straight in beliefs about God, the Bible, salvation, ethics and the like, everything else will fall naturally into place. The human mind is the key to transforming the inner self, motivating right human action, and influencing the world. Thus, one reads the Bible not to be moved to action or inward affections, but first to gain understanding. Worship of this type is primarily cognitive in that the music, liturgy and sermons all focus on mental understandings of divine realities. As, one author, attempting to correct evangelical negligence of the mind, put it, "That the mind is the crucial component in the spiritual journey cannot be...denied."[3] Thus, for preaching, cognitive understanding takes priority.

Adherents to the faith of the head in many ways reflect the famous rationalist dictum of 17th century philosopher René Descartes: "I *think* therefore I am." Thinking is the seat of our passions, inclinations, and behavior. It is the salient feature of our lives and the crucial element in Christian expression. And of course one can seemingly find good biblical affirmation for such an approach:

> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:2).

> Always be ready to make your defense [*apologia*, a reasoned defense] to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you (I Peter 3:15).

There is a long history of this approach in the Christian church and in Christian preaching. Often it has appeared in reaction to emotional or activistic excesses; sometimes it has emerged in response to the intellectual challenges of the larger world. Here are some examples of faith focused primarily on the mind.

**Medieval Scholasticism**

Perhaps the clearest example of a faith of the head was the scholastic movement in the 12th-15th centuries. Attempting to give precise philosophical and theological definition to Christianity, these theologians understood the faith primarily as a rational endeavor through which humans could understand the truths of God. Scholasticism was often practiced in the medieval monasteries, which were committed to an inner devotional life as well. But many of the theologians in the movement were primarily oriented towards a faith of the mind, with specific attention to method in both theology and preaching.

The period from 800 to 1200 A.D. is generally assumed to be the lowest ebb for preaching in the history of Christendom. With the scholastics, at the end of this period, preaching underwent revitalization in both its importance and in new methods. But as one historian of preaching put it, the preaching of the scholastics "addresses itself to the intellect rather than to the heart or conscience, and to the intellect of the Schools rather than to the common intelligence and reason."[4]

**Protestant Scholasticism**

After the Reformation, Protestants also developed their own scholasticism in the late 16th-17th centuries. Leaders of the Reformation like Luther and Calvin had given significant attention to theology, spirituality, and to Christian ethics and action. But many

of their followers in the Lutheran and Reformed strands of the church tended to focus almost exclusively on theology as they developed "a confessional orthodoxy more strictly defined in its doctrinal boundaries than the theology of the early Reformers."[5] Increasingly in the post-Reformation era these thinkers and many lay people in the church identified Christianity primarily "with doctrinal and sacramental correctness."[6] They assumed that orthodoxy was sufficient to maintain vital Christian thought and life, and their preaching focused largely on biblical and theological concepts, set forth in systematic, rational forms.

Protestant scholasticism was not restricted to the centuries immediately following the Reformation. For example, in the nineteenth century Charles Hodge of Princeton Theological Seminary attempted to show that theology was akin to the natural sciences. He wrote, "The Bible is to the theologian what nature is to the man of science. It is his storehouse of facts; and his method of ascertaining what the Bible teaches, is the same as that which the natural philosopher adapts to ascertain what nature teaches."[7] Aspects of scholasticism are currently found in some of the confessional movements within Lutheranism and the Reformed Tradition.

**Liberalism (Modernism)**

A faith of the head, however, has not been limited to theological orthodoxy, for nineteenth and early twentieth centuries liberalism (or modernism) had one strand that was highly rationalistic. While some strands of liberalism were more romantic and heart oriented in their accomodation of faith to the modern impulses (Schliermacher tradtion), others attempted a rational harmonizing of Christian thought to modern ideals in philosophy and the sciences (Ritschl and Harnack). The common stereotype is that liberals focused on ethics and action, but some were content with a faith of the mind, arguing that classical Christianity must be expressed in new categories that modern humanity could accept. These new categories often minimized transcendence and the supernatural, as they accepted in the tradition only what was palatable to the modern mind. Preaching

was an attempt to connect the faith to thought, with the assumption that Christian ideas needed to fundamentally change.

**Fundamentalism**

In reaction to rationalistic, liberal theology (and other strands of modernism as well), parts of fundamentalism in the early twentieth century reflected a faith of the head. While the movement often fostered a strong anti-intellectual stance with regards to knowledge in the world, the movement had a tendency towards a rationalistic orthodoxy as the key to battling unorthodox theology. Fundamentalist leaders were separatists from the culture and from other suspect church leaders and movements, but they assumed that the watershed battles of the faith would be won and lost in the minds, not the hearts or the hands of people. In their preaching, ideas, not images or emotions carried the sermon, as they strongly affirmed that right thinking was the most salient need of the church.

This head-oriented legacy of fundamentalism deeply impacted later 20th century evangelicalism, at least in some quarters. Seminary education, for example, usually focused primarily on biblical studies, theology, apologetics, and pastoral functions, with little attention to spiritual formation, ethics, or cultural context. I have personally had friends who told me that in their ordination process they were pressed heavily on matters of theology, with little examination of their spiritual state, relational capabilities, leadership qualities, or emotionally stability. The assumption seemed to be that right exegesis and theology, and an ability to articulate them, would take care of everything in ministry and the life of the church. In the contemporary evangelical scene the landscape is far more diverse and fragmented than several decades ago, but many still see the mind as the key to authentic faith. For these believers preaching is foundationally a cognitive enterprise.

**Faith of the Heart**

Advocates for a faith of the heart see Christianity primarily in terms of feelings, passion, affections, and deep spiritual experiences. Faith

is understood as an inward, mystical, or emotional encounter with the living God. In this view conversion is a shattering of the soul. The believer encounters God in a deeply personal, living, dynamic fashion so that feelings and inclinations of the heart are forever changed. Christian growth is perceived as an increasing awareness of the presence of God and an unleashing of divine power within. The primary goal of preaching in this type is a stirring of the inner self to motivate Christian living and witness.

Here one reads the Bible, not for cognitive understandings, but to have one's heart warmed and moved by God. Even the interpretation and proclamation of the Bible often banks more on the immediate, inner directions of the Holy Spirit with minimal attention to hermeneutical principles that are tested over time by the Church. Worship, in this type, is primarily emotive with a view of music, liturgy and the sermon all aiming to move the affections God-ward. And a sermon without emotion is deemed to be empty, lifeless and of little spiritual value.

The underlying assumption of a faith of the heart is that affection and emotion are the most significant features of personhood. The locus of Christian expression is primarily inward, for it is the heart that affects our mind and our deeds. In this paradigm, Descartes' dictum would change to: "I *feel*, therefore I am." If believers could only have their hearts enflamed by the power and presence of God they would be different people, the church would change, and the world would be transformed. As one recent work on spirituality puts it, "The nature of the faith to which Jesus calls and that our times demand is a religion of the heart."[8] The task of the preacher is not primarily to impart knowledge but passion for God. One parishioner when asked to recall the impact of sermons put it this way, "I can think of times when I was uplifted. I can think of times when I cried. I can think of times…when I was inspired. But what it was that inspired me, I don't know."[9]

And of course the heart folks can find plenty of biblical ammunition:

> The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts; so I am helped, and my heart exults (Ps. 28:7).

> I will give them one heart, and put a new spirit within them; I will remove the heart of stone from their flesh and give them a heart of flesh, so that they may follow my statutes and keep my ordinances and obey them (Ezekiel 11:19-21).
>
> They [the disciples] said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" (Luke 24:32).

There is a long history of the heart approach to faith and preaching in the Christian Church. It has often emerged in response to a cold orthodoxy or an action-oriented faith that lacked vital spirituality.

**Mysticism**

One of the classical examples is medieval mysticism. Mysticism in general is the inner, spiritual quest for union with the divine, sought primarily through non-cognitive processes such as the purging of physical desire, purification of the will and inward illumination.

In the Medieval Church mystics were often at the opposite spectrum from the scholastics in how they perceived Christian faith and spiritual life. As to preaching, "If the Scholastics were light without heat, the Mystics were heat without light."[10] The primary means to experiencing divine realities was not through the mind, but through intuition and an inward absorption of transcendence. Most agreed that the inner journey to God was to be found primarily in the depths of the inner self. Writing in the midst of various upheavals in medieval culture such as the Crusades, religious and political conflict, and the plague, the mystics looked away from the external world to the inner world to find new apprehensions of God and personal solace.

The mystical absorption of God from within is well captured by the Spanish mystic St. Teresa of Avila: "One sees nothing, either within or without, but while seeing nothing the soul understands quite clearly

who it is and where it is and sometimes even what he means to tell it. How and by what means it understands it does not know."[11] For most mystics the body and rational thought were denigrated in favor of the soul's direct absorption of God's presence and ways. As a result preaching was not strongly emphasized by many of the mystics.

**Pietism**

Another faith of the heart movement was Pietism in the 17th-18th centuries. Beginning in Germany with leaders such as Philipp Spener and August Franke, Pietism was a reaction against Lutheran scholasticism, and its perceived cold intellectualism and dead orthodoxy. Whereas Luther, and particularly the Protestant scholastics, had emphasized the more objective side of salvation, the Pietists emphasized the subjective side with its focus on personal repentance and faith, growth in personal holiness, and a daily appropriation of God's grace within. For the early Pietist leaders "the true criteria of authentic Christianity were orthopathy (right feelings) and orthopraxy (right living) along with orthodoxy (right believing)." But they also argued that "right experience and right living would inevitably lead to right believing."[12]

Johann Arndt, often revered as the precursor of Pietism with his widely read book *True Christianity*, portrayed the sentiments of many in the movement: "This is true repentance when the heart internally through sorrow and regret is broken down, destroyed, laid low, and by faith and forgiveness of sin is made, holy, consoled, purified, changed and made better so that an external improvement in life follows."[13] Most Pietists believed that the orthodoxies of the day simply could not engender that kind of inner, personalized faith. While the early leaders of the movement emphasized the role of the mind along with the heart, the movement as whole tended to downplay biblical and theological depth in preaching with a primary focus on inner passion.

**Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements**

A more recent example of a faith of the heart is the Pentecostal/ Charismatic movements of the past century. Both the traditional

Pentecostal strand—as well as the more recent Charismatic formulations—focus on "the empowering charisms or gifts of the Spirit and the nurturing fruit of the Spirit. This Spirit-empowered way of living addresses the deep yearning for the immediacy of God's presence among his people."[14]

The modern Pentecostal movement began in the early part of the twentieth century with Holiness preachers such as Charles Parham and W.J. Seymour, who sought to replicate the Pentecostal experience of the early church. The movement spawned numerous denominations, had a significant missionary zeal, but was sometimes wracked by theological controversies, most notably over the doctrine of the trinity.

By the 1960's the pentecostal experience was moving beyond the traditional denominations and influencing mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic bodies. Today the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements together constitute the second largest family of Christian churches (following Roman Catholicism), and is the fastest growing religious movement in the world with 250 million adherents.

Above all, the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements stress an immediate, spontaneous leading and empowerment of God, most visible through a "baptism of the Holy Spirit" and speaking in tongues. Adherents are by no means of one mind in all theological matters, even pertaining to these most notable features. But they all stress the inward work of the Spirit as the key to outward expressions. As one leader put it, "When we speak in tongues, we communicate directly from our spirit to God."[15]

Spontaneity is highly valued in the movement, for it demonstrates the immediate leading of God within the spirit of a human being. Thus as one writer describes the more traditional Pentecostal style of preaching:

> The fundamental precept of Pentecostal worship was that the Holy Spirit alone should direct the order and conduct of a service. Prepared speeches, rehearsal

> and formality were censured as hindrances to the free operation of the Spirit. Often no speaker would be designated beforehand—with the expectation that the Holy Spirit would make the appointment at the proper time. Sermons were to be delivered extemporaneously..., as the Spirit—not the note cards—gave the utterance.[16]

Today in segments of the movements such spontaneity is sometimes balanced by emphasis on preparation and education, but clearly the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is the most visible contemporary expression of a faith of the heart. It has clearly had an impact upon the wider church, particularly in the current "praise and worship" movement, with its emphasis in passion, spontaneity, and the immediacy of God's presence. These same features in preaching have influenced parts of the wider church as well.

### Faith of the Hands

In contrast to a primary emphasis on the mind or the heart, advocates for a faith of the hands stress that the pivotal element in Christian experience is action—it is a faith of doing. Christianity at its core is not about beliefs, doctrines, mystical experiences or inward feelings, though these all may have their place. Rather, the essence of true faith is an outward expression of divine realities, particularly in witness, service, justice and acts of mercy. While faith is a decision of the will, it is demonstrated as an outward reflection of the living Christ. It is a lived faith, in contrast to a believed or felt faith, and the goal of preaching is to motivate action.

A faith of the hands does not deny the head and the heart but emphasizes that human action is the starting point in Christian responsibility and the most significant sign of genuine relationship with God. It is moreover the catalyst for personal beliefs and inward sentiments, and thus has a way of actually developing and nurturing Christian faith. In the process of doing, according to faith of the hands proponents, hearts are curiously transformed and thinking solidified.

The underlying assumption of this approach is that the essence of human nature is *homo faber*, the person as doer or maker. In this perspective action is the lens into the human soul and the best evidence of our worldview. Since actions best exemplify our humanness, Descartes dictum would be, "I *act*, therefore I am."

There is of course much biblical warrant for a faith of the hands:

> For we are what he has made us, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand to be our way of life (Eph. 2:10).
>
> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead (James 2:14-7).
>
> Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20a).

Throughout the history of the church this type has been manifest in two main subgroups: those who emphasize *proclamation* of the gospel—evangelism, and those who emphasize *presence*--actions of mercy, justice and service. Some have managed to keep these two domains of word and deed together, but often they have been distinct or polarized agendas in the church's mission to the world. Both, however, represent an activist faith of doing, and in both strands preaching is focused primarily on eliciting certain forms of action.

**Ministries of Proclamation**

The emphasis on proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ is one of

the expressions of a faith of the hands. For this strand the most important task in life is to proclaim the good news of Christ's death and resurrection for human sin, and to invite them to salvation.

This form of activism is readily seen in parts of the modern mission movement beginning in the 18th century and reaching its apex in the later part of the 19th century. "When in 1792 a self-educated teacher, shoemaker, and pastor wrote *An Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens*, an utter explosion of missionary zeal resulted, and the 'means' that he wrote about stimulated the founding of countless mission societies."[17] This book became the catalyst and guide for the modern mission movement, and through it William Carey came to be known as the "Father of Protestant Missions." Carey had a vision that the gospel must be preached to the ends of the earth, for obedience to the great commission was at the heart of responsibility to God.

The modern mission movement was not without its theologians and those who attended to inward spirituality, but many who heeded the call agreed with Carey that the most important task in the world is proclaiming the gospel to those who had never heard.

A faith of the hands through proclamation or word has also been evident in many evangelists of the past several centuries. One of the best known was Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899). Moody was converted in Boston at age 17 while working in his uncle's shoe store. He moved to Chicago and became a very successful shoe salesman, while simultaneously beginning to minister in the Chicago slums. Eventually he began to preach and in the last several decades of the 1800s Moody drew enormous crowds in England, Scotland and Ireland as well as the major cities throughout the United States.

D.L. Moody never had formal theological training and tended to be skeptical of theological education with its emphasis on the mind. He was an activist who brought new strategies of management into his evangelistic campaigns. For Moody there was too little time to debate theological minutiae or await mystical visions; the priority task

of evangelism was to be done now. As Moody put it, "I look on this world as a wrecked vessel. God has given me a life-boat, and said to me, 'Moody, save all you can.'… This world is getting darker and darker; its ruin is coming nearer and nearer. If you have any friends in this wreck unsaved, you had better not lose time in getting them off."[18] Such was a faith of the hands with a powerful impact upon an activistic, pragmatic evangelicalism of the nineteenth century.

**Ministries of Presence**

The second form of a faith of the hands stresses Christian presence—actions of mercy, justice, and service—particularly addressing the social and physical needs of humanity, and the structural arrangements of society. Throughout Christian history ministries of presence have been evident in a variety of people and movements.

One of the best-known adherents to a faith of the hands was Francis of Assisi (Italy) in the early 13th century. Francis grew up in the home of a wealthy merchant and lived a carefree life, void of spiritual commitments. Through imprisonment and illness Francis had a life-changing encounter with God that eventually led him to a ministry of preaching and charity, characterized by a life of simplicity. He devoted much of his life to leading a small group of followers who cared for the outcasts and lepers of society. A faith of the hands was so important to Francis of Assisi, that he purportedly encouraged his followers to, "Preach the gospel at all times, and if necessary use words."

The Anabaptist movement is another expression of a faith of the hands through presence. At the time of the Reformation a number of leaders wanted the Reformation to be pushed further with their emphasis on a believer's church marked by adult baptism, discipleship, service and a rejection of the use of violence. While piety and evangelism have sometimes been marks of Anabaptism, the primary focus has been service towards both those within and those outside the church. In the past half-century some strands of Anabaptism have moved beyond acts of mercy to emphasize justice and peacemaking within the larger society.

One of the most influential examples of a faith of the hands was the social gospel movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the midst of sweeping social and cultural changes a number of theologians and pastors began to apply the teachings of Jesus to the social realities around them, most notably the economic world. At the heart of their teaching and preaching was a belief that the kingdom of God (understood as a set of principles embodied in and taught by Jesus) could become a possibility within history. The social gospelers emphasized that God not only wants to save individuals (an emphasis that was often neglected in the movement), but wants to transform the social structures.

One of the best known theologians of the social gospel movement was Walter Rauschenbusch, a Baptist minister who pastored in Hell's Kitchen on New York City's west side. For Rauschenbusch, "Christianizing the social order means bringing it into harmony with the ethical convictions which we identify with Christ,"[19] and as he saw it, that was the primary goal of preaching.

A more recent rendition is liberation theology which flourished in the last several decades of the twentieth century. Articulating a theology based on the exodus (i.e. liberation) motif of the Old Testament, and drawing on Marxist social analysis, liberationists emphasized that God was on the side of the poor and oppressed in a unique way, and thus any valid faith must embody a quest for social liberation.

Liberation theology is not only a mandate for social change; it is also a new method for doing theology. The starting point of this theology is praxis, a unity of theory and practice in the concrete situations of society. One does not begin theology by reflecting on the Bible, God, salvation or the kingdom, but rather by confronting the realities of this world, most notably social oppression. The goal of preaching is to elicit such actions within an unjust world.

### Theological Reflection for Preaching

Faith expressions dominated by either the head, heart, or hands have

been the norm throughout much of the Church's history. Much preaching throughout Christian history has followed the same pattern, and most who hear preaching do so through the lens of one of the three. Ronald Allen in *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship/Content/Feeling* documents the study of 263 people and how they hear sermons. This study, with some resemblance to my own analysis, finds "that a listener typically hears a sermon through one of three settings that affect how the listener perceives the message: ethos, logos, or pathos." The study goes on to find that, "Even more significant for understanding listening…one setting was not just more important than others, but that the listener tends to process the others [settings] through the perspective through which they listen to the sermon."[20] That is, even if the sermon is pathos oriented (appealing to emotion), the logos listener will hear the sermon through the setting of reason.

What do we make of all of this? Many of the individuals and movements just discussed have made significant contributions to the life of our faith, for which we give thanks. From them we have gleaned new understandings, practices, and emphases. But taken alone a faith of the head, heart, or hands is deeply flawed, for each represents a fragmented faith with imbalances and inadequacies that we ought not to replicate.

What is needed in our time (as is true for all times) is a whole faith for the whole person. Thought, passion, and action need to be present in our lives and in the life of any church or movement. Head, heart and hands, thus need to be at the core of our emphasis and approach to preaching and need to be part of the listening process. But there is more to the story. Not only do we need attention to the mind, affections, and actions, but we should also allow them to nurture each other. When they join in symphonic concert together, we recognize that the head, heart, and hands are not three distinct parts, but three interacting dimensions of our whole being.

I am not just attempting to argue that we need theology (the head), spirituality (the heart), and mission (the hands). Such a portrayal misses the depth and significance of what I am attempting, and would

continue in many ways to segment the three dimensions.

Rather, what I invite us to consider is that the head, heart and hands need each other in the sense that they nurture each other, and each is integral to the expression of the others. We get our Christian heads on straight not merely by thinking good thoughts, but also by hearts attuned to God and in actions that reflect the glory and purposes of God. We develop sensitive hearts to the Lord not just by powerful inward experiences, but by solid biblical/theological thinking and actions that themselves cultivate our passions. And we engender actions of witness, justice and mercy not merely by doing, but by a profound spirituality of the heart and by a biblical biblical/theological thinking that can guide and sustain our steps. While each of us may have a natural tendency towards one emphasis, we need to bring head, heart, and hands together in mutual reinforcement.

What does this mean for preaching? We need, I believe, preaching that simultaneously appeals to the mind, to our passions, and to our actions. We tend to isolate these appeals from each other, placing them in different sermons for specific occasions. While clearly there is a place for sermons that tend in one direction or the other, we would more readily produce whole Christians with a steady diet of holistic preaching. Perhaps we would then begin to transform hearers of our sermons into people who can hear with head, heart and hands.

Preaching to the mind will of course make the content of God's Word central. But while exposition of given texts is essential in transforming minds, we cannot overlook the role of a Christian world view and the larger over-arching drama of Scripture in which to place that exposition. Moreover, speaking to the minds will incorporate cultural analysis, theological particularities, ethical discussions and a clear delineation of the way in which biblical thought intersects with our world.

Preaching to the heart is far more than appealing to emotion. The language of the heart in the Bible incorporates four primary emphases: will, affections, patterns of emotion, and deep-seated understandings.

We appeal to the heart through image, symbol, story, personal vulnerability, as well as passion in our own delivery.

Preaching to the hands is the attempt to provide motivation and concrete guidance for witness and service within the world. Action is motivated by feeling and thinking, but it is also engendered by a clear sense of what our actions can do. When parishioners see the transforming power of the gospel in our preaching they will be more motivated to personally share it. When people can see concrete expressions of mercy, justice and service they will move beyond knowing and feeling to being doers of the Word.

But all three (head, heart, and hands) must go together. We must embody all three in our sermons and we must create all three dimensions within our hearers. After all Jesus summed up the whole law as loving God with heart, soul, and mind, and loving our neighbors as ourselves. In our teaching of homiletics may we develop students who have the intellectual rigor of scholastics, the passion of pietists, and the actions of evangelists and social activists. If we do, our churches may never be the same.

**Notes**

1. Much of this paper is an adaptation of chapter 1 of this book, Dennis Hollinger, *Head, Heart and Hands: Bringing Together Christian Thought, Passion and Action* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005).
2. Ronald J. Allen, *Hearing the Sermon: Relationship/Content/Feeling* (St. Louis: Chalice, 2004), 45.
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4. John Kerr, *Lectures on the History of Preaching* (New York: Armstrong & Son, 1893), 125.
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6. Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity , 1999), 476.
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9. Allen, 75.
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12. Olson, 477.
13. Johann Arndt, "True Christianity" in *Pietism*, Christian Classics, ed. Thomas Halbrooks (Nashville: Broadman, 1981), 165.
14. Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998), 99.

15. Quoted in Donald Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit: Works and Gifts* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000), 195.
16. Roger Robbins, "Pentecostal Movement," in *The Dictionary of Christianity in America*, eds. Daniel Reid, Robert Linder, Bruce Shelley, and Harry Stout (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1990), 887.
17. Foster, 199.
18. Dwight L. Moody, *New Sermons* (New York: Goodspeed, 1880), 535.
19. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), 125.
20. Allen, 5, 11.

## *The World in Which We Preach: The Shifting Context of Homiletics*[1]

*by Dennis Hollinger*

*(editor's note: Dr. Dennis Hollinger is President and Professor of Christian Ethics at Evangelical School of Theology, Myerstown, Pennsylvania. This article was part of Dr. Hollinger's presentation at the October 2006 annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts.)*

### Introduction

The context of preaching has changed. Of course this is nothing new. Historical processes, sociological realities, and human thinking are constantly changing and as such call for continual assessment of the context in which we preach the gospel and God's Word.

What is different about today's shifts is the enormity of those shifts and the vast significance of their ramifications for communications in general and preaching in particular. It is a world in which knowledge is expanding so fast that we can hardly keep pace. Consider these facts:

- Scientific information doubles every 12 years (with the human genome project I suspect that time is shorter)
- General information doubles every two-and-a half years
- One weekday edition of the *New York Times* includes more information than the average person encountered in an entire lifetime in 17th century England.[2]

But more significant than the expansion of knowledge and information, is the way in which that knowledge and information comes to humans and is processed by them. Not only does the medium impact the message, but the medium can impact the thought processes of those who hear the message.

In the midst of such a context the challenge for the church is immense. So immense, that at times we are tempted to flee from or defy our context with ardent passion. We are tempted to only preach against the temper of our times. But we do well to recall that "the times" the church has faced in the past always presented believers and congregations not just with challenge, but also opportunity. And the changing patterns of the twenty-first century present us with both challenge and opportunity as well. There are several patterns or movements which I believe we need to grasp if we, like the sons of Issachar in the Old Testament (I Chronicles 12:32), are to understand the times, and know what we should do in the preaching process. We will examine three major sociological shifts of recent years that have a bearing on the communication process. Many will want to describe these shifts as part of the movement from modern to post-modern or modern to hyper-modern. But, however, we label the mega-shifts of our time, we need to give attention to the particular shifts taking place in how we communicate and how we process what is communicated.

## From Monolithic to Pluralistic

One of the primary trends of our era is a movement from monolithic reality to pluralistic reality. Our world is no longer defined or dominated by one primary force or ideal whether that is a nation, empire, ideology, religion or culture. The world is increasingly pluralistic and it has impacted the way we think and receive information.

One dimension of pluralism is the existence of differing nationalities, ethnic groups, cultures and religions living side by side in a given society. In the mobile societies of today that is only escalating. But there is something more profound that occurs in such contexts, for pluralism means the existence of discrepant worldviews, ideologies, moral sentiments and cognitive frameworks. The people with whom we work, live, and rub shoulders daily, do not put their world together in the same way. We simply cannot expect that our society in the 21st century will have anything close to a shared vision about life, values, the good society, or faith. Pluralism means that there are competing views of reality and discrepant worldviews existing within given communities and whole societies. And as the Christian message

is proclaimed by preachers on a Sunday morning, we can no longer assume a monolithic framework in the hearers, the congregation. People in the pew (or the chairs) are receiving the message through a plethora of cognitive constructs, not one over-arching construct.

One result of pluralism in the modern and now postmodern world is that Christendom has come to an end in the Western world. No longer is there a religious culture that pervades Western societies and is shared by all or even most members of those societies. And the same is happening around the world, even as many long for the good old days and seek to bring them back. The end of Christendom does not mean that religion has disappeared as some prophets of secularization predicted. Rather it is a particular form of secularization in which religion plays a role primarily in the private sphere, but has less significance for the public spheres of life. One of the primary reasons that religion looses its social significance is the pluralistic religious landscape.

Ronald Enroth notes: "North American society has become a spiritual supermarket, offering something for everyone—the careful shopper as well as the impulse buyer." This means a significant shift from the homogenous religious expressions of the past, "for those experiencing spiritual hunger, today's world offers a catalog of offerings including UFO cults, neopagan groups, New Age gurus, Eastern mystics, and self-improvement programs, along with a confusing array of Christian-sounding groups."[3]

The broad assortment of worldviews and religions is fueled not only by migration patterns around the world, but also by a growing spiritual vacuum that the modern world has generated. In surveys on religiosity in American there is a ubiquitous theme that emerges. People indicate that they are not particularly religious (referring to institutional religion), but are deeply spiritual. "The people of the New Spirituality are disillusioned with the West's secular worldview and disenchanted with traditional…religion. As a result, they have chosen not Christianity but a confusing swirl of beliefs and practices that form an alternate spirituality to Christianity."[4]

In such a context churches are no longer bastions of homogenous safety set apart from the fragmenting pluralism of the surrounding culture. There are significant varieties of churches and often fragmentation within given churches. We are, moreover, now in a post-denominational society in which we can no longer assume that denominational distinctives will provide the glue holding churches together. As we preach we do so in a pluralistic milieu, even in our evangelical churches.

For some the pluralism of our times is a great threat to the church; for others it is the panacea to all that's wrong with the world. I'd rather put it this way: this cultural trend presents the church and the preacher with both opportunities and challenges.

### *Opportunities*

Clearly, pluralism presents us with greater opportunities for evangelism than ever before. The growing range of nations, cultures, races and ethnic groups at our front door mean incredible opportunity to live and share the gospel; to carry out the great commission of making disciples of all the nations. Missions in the past meant taking the gospel to far off places, and that will still have a significant role, though the face of it is changing. For example, there are now 1500 foreign missionaries in England, and most of them are from Africa and Asia. It may well be that the growing internationalization of communities around the world, will also mean that the mission fields are now right around us.

Pluralism also tends to breed a sense of social and personal dislocation, as people are cut off from their moorings. We must assume that large numbers of parishioners hearing our messages feel and experience the pangs and dissonance which sometimes comes with the pluralistic milieu. Such is a *kairos* moment for introducing people to Christ, the hope for the entire world. Pluralism brings great opportunity in carrying out the great commission and enabling people to find biblical roots in a rootless world.

Furthermore, pluralism creates greater opportunity to experience the richness of the body of Christ. The growing pluralism means that

we now have significant opportunity to learn from brothers and sisters around the world; of having our biblical understandings and theological commitments sharpened, refined, and deepened by the plethora of people groups that share our communities and churches. We have increased opportunity to enhance our forms of and approaches to preaching through contacts with a broad range of international Christians.

### *Challenges*

But there are some challenges, and acute ones, that come with pluralism. One is clearly the potential loss of truth. Pluralism tends to create a climate in which truth is either defined as "my truth," or banished from a culture's vocabulary all together. We face a situation described by Daniel's prophecy (8:12), "It prospered in everything it did, and truth was thrown to the ground." Pluralism creates a psychological or cognitive disposition against truth claims, as we live in the midst of a broad array of reality-defining movements and ideologies. We are increasingly facing a world in which people are nervous about truth, perceiving truth claims in preaching and teaching to be imperialistic. Thus many people today view Jesus' statement "I am the way the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father, but by me," (Jn. 14:6) as an explicit form of exclusivism and power broking.

Closely related, pluralism has a powerful impetus towards universalism, the notion that all roads equally lead to God. No doubt one of the greatest challenges to orthodoxy in the 21st century will be this issue, for pluralism creates an emotional and cognitive pre-disposition towards it. An article on American spirituality in *Newsweek* magazine noted:

> Along with diversity has come a degree of inclusiveness that would have scandalized an earlier generation. According to the Newseek/Beliefnet Poll, eight in ten Americans—including 68% of evangelicals—believe that more than one faith can be a path to salvation.[5]

Such inclusiveness is a challenge for the future, not just because it

potentially undermines Christian mission, but because it contradicts the statements of Jesus and his unique authority.

In the face of such challenges from pluralism we may be prone to preach in an absolutistic fashion. That is, we may be tempted to go beyond the reality of absolutes, universals, and constants, to an absolutism in which we define everything in faith and life as if it were as certain and final as the holy trinity, the deity of Christ, the inspiration and authority of Scripture, or salvation by God's grace through faith in Christ. When the human mind is challenged by uncertainties and ambiguities, one temptation is to harden all reality into either-or categories that leave minimal room for mystery and "seeing through a glass darkly."

Some preachers unwittingly succumb to this temptation by treating every text as if it were a discursive, airtight, rendition of reality in bold, rational, certain terms. The problem is not every biblical text is discursive, airtight, either-or, immune from human ambiguities and questions. To force biblical texts such as psalms of lament, parables or apocalyptic literature into a cognitive framework of absolute clarity on every dimension of life is to do injustice to the power and reality of God's written Word. When the psalmist cried out in Psalm 22:1, "My God my God, why have you forsaken me?" and Jesus quotes this psalm from the cross in the midst of his deep human agony, clearly this is not a panacea for absolutism in the face of pluralistic uncertainty. Rather, it is an invitation to cry out in pain in order that we might journey to the one who is absolute in the midst of our own ambiguities, uncertainties and anguish.

Pluralism thus presents us with both opportunity and challenge in the pulpit. To capitulate to either an anything goes plurality or to a rigid, either-or absolutism in every sphere of life, is to capitulate to the world around us. In many respects we face a world that is not unlike the world of the first century into which Jesus came and the church was launched. They too faced a pluralism of ideas, religions, morals and civic commitments. Through boldness and humility, commitments to truth and love, and through proclamation and incarnation, they turned the world upside down.

## From Word to Image

A second major shift in our times is the move from word to image as a means of communication. Some suggest we are becoming a pre-literate society despite all of our communication technologies.

Before the printing press in the 15th century the Western world for a millennium had become to a significant degree pre-literate, at least among the populace. The communication of ideas for the masses was not connected to the printed page, but was conveyed largely through images and symbols. In the church it was not the Word that reigned supreme, but rather symbols such as the architectural forms of gothic cathedrals and stained glass windows. It was the era of sacraments, understood as common, ever-day realities which pointed to and participated in transcendent realities. Thus Christian education of the common folk relied primarily on symbols to transmit the teachings of the church and Christian faith.

With the Renaissance, Reformation, and latter the Enlightenment, the printed word became the primary vehicle of knowledge and experience. The masses were becoming literate, the Bible was translated into the vernacular language of the day, and reality was described and shaped more and more by the printed page. Linear forms of reasoning replaced narrative and image, and preaching gained precedence over sacrament among most Protestants. In the modern world the word became the most significant idiom for moving the masses and shaping culture and society.

But in our present age we are returning to the era of the icon. What is it after all that we call those little symbols on our computers? They are icons—images that get at some kind of reality that we hope gets the job done for us. Few of us look at the word oriented menus on our computers, and heaven help up if we have to look up the help menu.

When we analyze contemporary advertising there is frequently far more appeal through symbol or image than through words. Information about a product is replaced by an image or an ethos surrounding the

product. A good example is the Nike "swoosh." Rarely does the name Nike appear in advertisements and little information is conveyed about the products. The image carries the advertisement, for when you see the "swoosh" you know what is stands for, not in terms of what Nike shoes can do, but the image they convey.

Increasingly we are a visual culture in which reason and ideas are displaced with images, feelings and ethos. A carefully reasoned argument no longer carries the day; now the day is won by images that grab you in the gut rather than in the mind. Thus, as people gather on a Sunday morning (or Saturday night) at church, they come from a week of being inundated by images into a setting focused significantly on words, rational discourse and linear thinking. For some, especially our younger people, the dissonance between these two worlds is immense. What does this mean for preaching? Once again it presents us with both opportunities and challenges.

### *Opportunities*

The shift from word to image is enabling the church to recover the non-rational dimensions of the faith. Segments of evangelical Christianity for much of the twentieth century were one-sidedly rationalistic in their orientation. If we knew the contents of the Bible, had our theology down pat, and knew what God wanted us to do, all would be well. Spiritual vitality, personal and congregational growth, good marriages, and righteous living were deemed to follow right knowledge, which came largely through preaching and teaching. When I was in seminary I received a wonderful educationB of the mind. And I appreciated it. But you could have been as far from God as imaginable in your heart, and there was no mechanism in place to detect it. As long as you answered the knowledge questions—theology, apologetics, and Bible, and could communicate them—you moved forward towards ministry and ordination.

The move from word to image is awakening the church, and hopefully our evangelical seminaries to the reality that word alone is insufficient. Mind alone will not produce godly and gifted pastors, missionaries,

teachers, and counselors. This shift is stirring us to the reality that we need far more than knowledge and rationality in our preaching, as important as they are.[6]

This change is reminding us of the role of ritual, image, symbol, and if you will "sacrament" for Christian faith and life. Take the Lord's Supper. Many Christians have seen a minimal role for the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist in their theology and their understanding of the Christian life. Some churches and traditions practice this sacrament or ordinance only a few times a year. Many have had a theology of Communion that is primarily cognitive in orientation—namely, that it merely engenders a rational reflection on Christ and his work on the cross. But in the past few years Christians around the world are coming to understand the Lord's Supper in new ways, or better old ways. They are going back to the early church when it was practiced with frequent regularity and was seen as a means of God's imparting grace; not saving grace, but growing grace. We may again be discovering in evangelical circles that Word and sacrament go together.

We are also, I hope, beginning to discover that in our preaching there is a vital role for image. On the one hand image is important in the language of preaching, as we seek to engender the imaginative, evocative, heart-beating dimension of communication along with the cognitive content. Moreover, we can use graphic symbols and imagery through modern technology to enhance the meaning, power and ethos of the biblical text. Powerpoint is no substitute for the Word. But we do well to remember that the saints of old had their power point images as well: symbolic altars, tabernacle, temple, symbols on foreheads and doorposts, blood, meals, cross, water, towel and basin, bread, and cup.

### *Challenges*

But just as the movement from word to image means opportunity, simultaneously it presents us with some very serious challenges in contemporary preaching. One challenge is clearly the loss of biblical knowledge. As our culture moves towards becoming image oriented and in some ways pre-literate, we are becoming less and less biblically

and theologically literate. According to one study 12% of Americans think Joan of Arc was Noah's wife; 4 of 10 born again Christians are unable to name the 4 gospels; and only half of those who say that they are "born again" read the Bible during the week. Jay Leno sometimes does his man on the street interviews. One night he asked questions about the Bible. One interview with two college students asked if they could name one of the 10 Commandments. The co-ed thought a moment and replied, "freedom of speech." To another young man Leno asked, "Who according to the Bible was eaten by a whale"? The response: "Pinocchio."[7]

If these stats and scenarios are anything close to reality, we are in a desperate situation. We simply cannot grow spiritually without the Word and its proclamation. Certainly we can teach the Word of God using visual image, drama, and symbols, for the Bible itself contains them. But the proclamation and teaching of the Bible is essential for personal and corporate spiritual growth. Without the Word the Church is in significant trouble.

Second, the move from word to image threatens us with unorthodox beliefs and unethical commitments. Theology and ethical reflection are important for Christians and must have a place in our preaching, as we will not be able to be a vital church in the 21st century without them. We cannot stay true to the faith by image alone. And while preaching on theology and ethics can employ image and symbol, they do take some hard, cognitive reflection.

Some sociological studies seem to indicate that so-called born-again Christians are moving away from orthodox theology or playing down its importance. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, sociologists at the University of North Carolina, have tracked the thinking of Americans teens and concluded that even those from evangelical backgrounds have a deist and therapeutic cast to their religious beliefs.[8] Increasingly, we are finding students in Christian colleges who believe in reincarnation, and have not the foggiest notion why it would be problematic for a Christian. And when it comes to ethics, Leonard Sweet puts it this way, "What were once seen as stone tablets coming down from the mountain are now seen as sand castles built along the seashore."[9]

Image alone will not build a solid Christian worldview to help us navigate our way in a complex world. Images, icons, and appeal to emotion should certainly play a vital role in spiritual development, church revitalization, and biblical proclamation. But if employed disproportionately or uncritically, they can also lead us away from truth into a superficial, pragmatic faith the deviates from God's Word. And so like the Old Testament people of Issachar, in our preaching we need to know the image-oriented times in which we live; in it we must find both opportunity and challenge.

**Religiosity to Spirituality**
**(or external to internal; objective to subjective focus)**

In recent American sociology of religion studies, one thing stands clear—people are down on religion but high on spirituality. Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University in his study of spirituality in America says that the most significant change in recent years is a "growing awareness that spirituality and organized religion are different, and indeed, might run in opposite directions."[10] Tom Beaudoin in *Virtual faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* says the most often heard phrase from Gen Xers was, "If you want to talk about church, I'm not very interested." They'd go on to say "I still think people can be spiritual or religious without going to churches or synagogues…. Do you think it really makes a difference to God?"[11]

People are down on institutionalized religion, traditional church, traditional forms of religious authority, and not infrequently theological and ethical commitments of the tradition. Until the 1980s the church or organized religion led all other societal institutions in terms of confidence. About two of three named the church as an institution in which they had great trust. But by 1997 the church ranked third behind the military and police, with only 56% having confidence in the church or organized religion.[12] As a result many people are gravitating towards an individualized spirituality embodying an amalgam of varying and contradictory beliefs and commitments. In the midst of this shift preaching is sometimes seen as an anachronism; at other times it acquiesces to the mood of the times.

Another way of describing this trend is a cognitive shift from external perceptions of reality to internal perceptions; or a move from objective reality to subjective reality. In classical forms of communication there was an assumption that reality existed, we could adequately (not perfectly) described that reality, experience it personally, and communicate it to others. Thus, if I visited a particular place that was known for its beauty and serenity, I could not only experience the reality of its external qualities, but I could describe them and communicate them, albeit always through the lens of my own personality and context.

Today reality has given way to what Thomas de Zengotita has called mediation. In his book *Mediated: How The Media Shapes Your World And The Way you Live In It*, de Zengotita argues that the contemporary media (TV, Internet, movies), shapes a reality within us that is distinct from the reality external to us. For example news coverage comes to us today as if we were actually there at the event. "Reams of coverage, endless coverage, amazing coverage—in a way more compelling than if you had been there physically, because virtually you were there from so many different perspectives." As a result he notes we have a sort of "God's eye view. This is a sort of flattery so pervasive, so fundamental to the very nature of representation, that is has escaped notice, though it ultimately accounts for the much-remarked narcissism of our age. The flattered self is a mediated self…that goes with being incessantly addressed."[13]

De Zengotita contends that "we have been consigned to a new plane of being engendered by mediating representations of fabulous quality and inescapable ubiquity, a place where everything is addressed to us, everything is for us, and nothing is beyond us anymore."[14] The more we experience this virtual reality constantly bombarding us and yet shaped by us, the more we experience cognitive overload, or what he calls "the blob." Thus we learn to tune out the information, allowing only reality we want, when we want it and how we want it. We access only what moves us, and what will fit with our own internal configuration of things. With this cognitive overload or blob, "When you hear statistics about AIDS in Africa for the 349th time, or see your

927th picture of a weeping fireman or an oil-drenched seabird, you can't help but become fundamentally indifferent—unless it happens to be 'your issue.'"[15]

The world in which we preach is thus a mediated world in which daily reality is strongly controlled by the receiver. Information and events come to us in ways that have been designed to enmesh us in their own reality, but in such a way that it becomes "my reality." Thus the objective and external realities of biblical faith do not exist as realities to which we must conform our thinking and our lives, but realities that we shape to fit our needs and desires. Hence, is the spiritualistic mood of our times. We live in an era of the subjective, the internal, the mediated—a world in which we are in control, including our spiritual sentiments and commitments. As with the other trends I see both opportunities and challenges in these momentous shifts.

### *Opportunities*

The shift from religiosity to spirituality, or external to internal, has certainly generated a renewed emphasis on spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines. Christians are now giving renewed attention to the interior dimension of the self in its commitment to Jesus Christ. Evangelical Christians are reading the spiritual classics and finding great richness for their souls. Dallas Willard's books have been an important corrective to some excesses in spirituality and have helped evangelicals develop a theology of spirituality and paths to spiritual growth. Richard Foster's books have helped us discover the rich tradition of the spiritual disciplines. Evangelical Christians are recovering a wealth of guidance and motivation in the spiritual classics from the early and medieval churches. We are coming to see that it is not only what we believe and what we do that counts, but who we are in the deepest recesses of our very being. Contemplation, prayer, fasting, and other spiritual disciplines are making a comeback, and the larger cultural interest in spirituality and the internal dimensions of life has no doubt played a role in this retrieval.

Of course the interest in spirituality can be highly individualistic,

with individual believers appropriating spiritual formation and the disciplines as lone rangers. We do well to set these endeavors in the context of the church, so that they are community oriented and do not venture off into narcissistic, self-centered pursuits.

This cultural shift also brings opportunity for new methods and forms which can move us beyond the "way we've always done it." Religiosity as tied to traditional patterns and institutional forms has often been an impediment to real, dynamic faith. And this shift helps us move beyond such fossilization. It frees us to new modes of worship, new styles of preaching, new forms of Christian education, new strategies in Christian mission, and new approaches in Christian counseling.

### *Challenges*

But along with these opportunities there are also challenges in the shift from religiosity to spirituality, from the external to the internal. One of the challenges is loss of wisdom from the past. Anti-institutional spirituality tends to cut people off from the wisdom of the past due to an antipathy towards tradition. The more we can shape our own reality to fit our internal needs and ambitions, the less we need the wisdom of the past or even the wisdom of others in the present.

There is richness in classical hymnody that we ought not to neglect as we embrace new forms of music. There is understanding and guidance in the great theologians and church leaders of the past that we dare not forget in our attempts to be with it and contemporary. There is wisdom in the journeys of denominations that we can not throw to the winds in the midst of a post-denominational culture. We must remind ourselves and contemporary believers that the Church has existed for 2000 years, and we stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. And our parishioners need to understand that. If they are to understand the wisdom of the past, it must find its way into our preaching, even when we employ the narrative, symbolic and non-linear forms of communication.

Another challenge in this shift from religiosity to spirituality is distortion

of orthodox Christian faith. In the smorgasbord of spiritualities there are many heterodox formulations such as the *Celestine Prophecy* by James Redfield, Betty Eadie's *Embraced by the Light*, Neale Donald Walsch's *Conversations with God*, or the prolific interest in angels, which is often accompanied by unbiblical ideas. Christians are reading and embracing some of these forms, which clearly deviate from biblical faith. The Church and wise believers will need to recognize that there is not just one spirituality. The forces of darkness, in the name of spirituality, are clearly at work and we will encounter them in the days ahead. There will be opposition to true spirituality. And we will sometimes face them in the most sophisticated corridors of our society.

Thus, our preaching today must address the internal, the subjective, but always in the context of the objective, the external realities of faith that lie well beyond our innards. We should nurture the spiritual and evoke in our preaching subjective encounters with the living, triune God. But we must keep in mind that this is a God who is both beyond us and with us—a God of transcendence and immanence.

## Conclusion

Monolithic to pluralistic; word to image; religiosity to spirituality (or external to internal), these are some of the many shifts we encounter, as I see it, in 21st century preaching. In the midst of such a context we may be tempted to sell out to the world in our attempts to be relevant and impact the world. Or we may be tempted to run from the world to the safety of our religious enclaves.

Neither extreme will do. In the face of these trends I believe that we need to be neither too optimistic nor too pessimistic and reactionary. The church has always faced a world that was not kind to its savior, beliefs, commitments, experiences and images. We will need to face the challenges squarely with a deep commitment to the truth of the gospel and God's Word. That rootedness is imperative. But we will also need to encounter these challenges with a spirit of understanding, wisdom and love. We will also need to see in them, through the providence of God, real opportunities to serve Christ and his kingdom.

And so like the Old Testament people of Issachar, let us know the times in which we live, and be faithful in the midst of it—faithful to the triune God who alone can sustain for the task. Let us be faithful to his Word, proclaiming it with humility and boldness. And let us pass on the zeal to those who daily are bombarded by the realities of this complex, broken world—the world in which God has placed us for such a time as this.

**Notes**

1. The main contours and in some case substance of this paper first appeared in Dennis Hollinger, "Understanding Our Times: Opportunities and Challenges in the 21st Century," *Evangelical Journal* (2005):
2. Leonard Sweet, *Soul Tsunami: Sink or Swim in New Millennium Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 78, 112.
3. Ronald Enroth, "What is a New Religious Movement," in Ronald Enroth (ed.), *A Guide to New Religious Movements* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2005), 9.
4. Charles Strohmer, *The Gospel and the New Spirituality* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1996), xiii.
5. Jerry Adler, "In Search of the Spiritual," Newsweek and MSNBC, www.msnbc.msn.com/id/9024914/site/newsweek (5 September 2005).
6. See Dennis Hollinger, *Head, Heart & Hands: Bringing together Christian Thought, Passion and Action* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity, 2005).
7. Sweet, 59-60.
8. Christian Smith and Melinda Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford, 2005).
9. Sweet, 133.
10. Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkley: University of California, 1998), 152.
11. Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass , 1998), 51.
12. Princeton Religion Research Center, *Emerging Trends* (September, 1997):1-2.
13. Thomas de Zengotita, *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Your World And the Way You Live In It* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 7.
14. de Zengotita, 11.
15. de Zengotita, 24.

## *The Sermon in Three Acts: The Rhetoric of Cinema and the Art of Narrative Biblical Exposition*

*by Glenn Watson*

*(editor's note: Dr. Glenn Watson teaches homiletics at the Baptist Theological Seminary, Queluz, Portugal.)*

### *Abstract*

How to teach narrative communication to emerging preachers? If "story" is the prime vehicle for persuasion in the post-modern context, the master rhetoricians are screenwriters. This article applies the principles of movie scriptwriting to the structure, flow and persuasive logic of sermons, as a possible model for equipping young preachers to communicate the biblical message effectively to their generation.

### Introduction

Middle-aged homiletics professors and typewriter repairmen have a lot in common in the first decade of the Twenty-First Century. No matter how competent we are at our trade, we are probably in need of some new skills.

When I arrived as a student at seminary in the early 1980's, the professor who had taught my father to preach, twenty-five years before, was still on the campus. Though I never took his class, my preaching professors (contemporaries of my dad) were using the same textbook this fine gentleman and his erudite colleagues had developed a generation before. Their approach was an update of a tradition of over a hundred years in our denomination, which, in turn, stood squarely in the mainstream of the protestant preaching tradition for the past five centuries. It is a heritage for which I am still grateful, and which I endeavor to pass on to my students.

Recent literature however, attests to a dramatic shift in western culture, creating a pedagogical challenge for teachers of preaching. In our tradition, effective proclamation to modern hearers meant accurately

extracting the biblical message, crafting it into pithy propositions and inserting it into a straightforward, clear, and persuasive package, following a well-defined set of rhetorical rules. But our audience has changed. Increasingly, we face hearers predisposed against precept. The sword of our traditional rhetoric clinks harmlessly against shields of a steely post-modernism. Perhaps more accurately, we artfully flay the air, while our hearers simply walk away. Many of us have concluded that we must return to story as a basic form for the sermon. Trade the rules of rhetoric for the rules of poetics. We are a generation of preaching professors who must teach our students to practice our craft very differently from the way we learned it.

As a teacher in Western Europe over the past decade, I have wrestled with this challenge. Many of the fine works in our field over the past twenty years have been invaluable. David Buttrick identified "naming" and "story" as the two kinds of language that shape our understanding, and gave us a phenomenological approach to homiletics that joined the spatial and the linear to shape the preaching event.[1] Eugene Lowry introduced us to the concept of "doing time" in the pulpit and shaping the "homiletical plot,"[2] giving us helpful handles for talking about narrative sermon structure. Richard Jensen, pointing to the post-literate culture in which we live, challenged us to "think in story," and to "stitch stories together" as a way of inviting hearers into the world of the Gospel.[3] Thomas Long[4], Mike Graves[5] and others have called us to sensitivity to the literary forms of the Scriptures, including narrative, and to shape sermons in such a way that they not only say what the text says, but also "do what the text does." These and many others have erected reliable signposts for those who are seeking paths to effective narrative preaching. Questions, however, remain. Is it even possible to teach a preacher to "think in story"? Can good storytellers be made, or must they be born? Can narrative sermons be intentionally rhetorical, having persuasive objectives, leading hearers to significant change in belief, attitude or living? Redefining our homiletic demands a rethinking of our entire conceptual approach to teaching the next generation to preach.
This article outlines one teacher's approach to these practical challenges, looking to the cinema for clues to teaching story. I have begun to spend a Saturday each spring with my second-semester preaching

students, teaching principles of screenwriting, and illustrating them with a scene-by-scene analysis of a film. The concepts and vocabulary learned then provide the framework for discussing narrative sermon structure, and for writing, preaching and evaluating narrative sermons in class. Based on some positive experiences, as well as much trial and error, I offer it as a humble contribution to the ongoing conversation about teaching narrative preaching.

## Advantages

Screenwriters are master storytellers. Their success depends on their ability to shape a story in a way that captures an audience in the first scene, and holds its attention to the "End." So, they have studied the dynamics of story, developing their craft to an artful science. Long before we preaching professors began to stretch our atrophied story muscles, they were teaching their next generations to spin an ever more interesting yarn. Using the cinema as a structural analogy for the sermon helps meet three needs for the teaching of narrative preaching.

First, the movies provide an intuitive point of reference for students who are being exposed to narrative preaching for the first time. When a young preacher from a traditional evangelical background is taught to define the "big idea" of the sermon, to develop point statements, to write introductions and conclusions and to explain, illustrate and apply the text, a lifetime of Sunday mornings provides an immediate cognitive background for every concept. As the student grasps the principles of good deductive preaching, a thousand previously heard sermons come to mind. Some are examples of the principles applied well. Others are examples of the principles applied poorly. But the connection is made and the student has an intuitive basis upon which to build.

When the same student, who has not heard many narrative sermons, encounters the concept of narrative preaching, there is no such point of reference. The professor may try to make them interesting and

vivid, but if the concepts remain in the abstract, the student has greater difficulty imagining and shaping a different form of sermon. Using the cinema as a point of reference helps reduce the problem. Most preaching students today have experienced thousands of stories in the movies and on television. They know some stories work better than others, but they may not know why. When the professor teaches principles of narrative in the context of analyzing the structure and dynamics of a film, the lights come on in students' minds. Every film becomes an example of how a story works, or how an attempt to tell a story has failed. First, students become more critical viewers of films, which is not a bad by-product. Then, as they begin to shape narrative sermons, they have an intuitive reference point from which to begin.

Studying and teaching the basics of the screenwriters' craft also meets the need for a clear set of guidelines for the shaping of a story. Some students are naturally great storytellers. They are poets, musicians and artists. Their right-brain I.Q. is off the charts. For them, the introduction of narrative preaching in homiletics class is liberation. Freed from the bonds of point statements and analytical structure, they soar to heights they never thought possible in the pulpit. With a little coaching and refining, they become excellent narrative preachers.

Other students are filled with angst at the thought of telling a story. They are engineers, mathematicians and scientists. They wake up every morning on the left-brain side of the bed. The classical model of introduction-points-conclusion, and sound analytical logic, is the world in which they most comfortably live. To ask them to "think in story" is to invite them into a place that is strange, insecure and painful. They may admire their creative colleagues, and enjoy secret fantasies in which they are themselves master storytellers, but their sweaty palms, quivering voices and awkward attempts betray them. Without manageable handles for mastering narrative structure, they flee to their deductive comfort zones every time. Are these students (and their future congregations) condemned to nothing but deductive sermons for the rest of their lives? Not necessarily. If their analytical instincts are applied to a set of clear guidelines and steps for story, such as those used by screenwriters, they may yet become good narrative preachers.

Finally, a cinematic approach to teaching story can help secure a rhetorical focus in narrative preaching. I once heard a denominational leader express a perception common to conservative evangelicals: "The problem in the church today is too much narrative preaching from the pulpits, and not enough exposition of God's Word!" We might take issue with the apparent assumptions behind the statement. It is a mistake to assume that biblical exposition cannot take on a narrative shape, that deductive structure guarantees biblical content, or that the absence of points means necessarily that the sermon is pointless. However, there could be a valid warning in the comment. We must take care that, in our enthusiasm for narrative, we do not lose the objective nature of our task or fail to deliver a clear, biblical and compelling message to our hearers.

Screenwriting at its best (or worst, depending on the point being made) proves that it is possible to tell a story and persuade at the same time. Consider the influence of Hollywood on American moral attitudes, cultural trends and worldview. This influence has come about through the ever more effective telling of stories. Screenwriting teacher Robert McKee speaks of "narrative rhetoric" in fascinating terms: "Storytelling is the creative demonstration of truth. A story is the living proof of an idea, the conversion of idea to action. A story's event structure is the means by which you first express, then prove your idea…without explanation."[6] Films that receive the most awards are often those that make the strongest and most persuasive statements. Serious filmmakers approach their task with "something to say." They carefully craft and edit their product to communicate their message persuasively. If our narrative sermons lack rhetorical focus, we might learn some lessons from today's master narrative rhetoricians.

## Parameters

I should pause at this point to define the boundaries of this approach. First, "narrative preaching" does not necessarily mean using stories as illustrations, preaching on biblical narratives or building sermons around true or fictional contemporary stories. All of these might well be included in narrative preaching, but we use the term in Eugene

Lowry's sense of preaching with a "plot form," beginning with a discrepancy or conflict, moving through complication to reversal and, finally, resolution.[7]

Second, while we may discuss ways in which a film could be analogous in structure to a narrative sermon, there are many ways in which a film is not like a sermon at all. A film is an intense, multi-media experience. A sermon, media-enhanced possibilities notwithstanding, is still one person standing before a group of people to speak. There is something sacred about the spoken word, and the relational nature of face-to-face communication, that we regard as fundamental to the essence of preaching. A film is illusion and effect. A sermon is reality—past, present and future. A film aims to entertain. A sermon aims to transform. A film's goal is reached when the word "end" appears on the screen (or perhaps before the movie starts, when the patrons pay for their tickets). The sermon's objective begins when the sermon ends. A film might communicate a truth. A sermon *must* communicate *the* truth. A film lasts about two hours. A sermon, we hope, lasts much less. The development of story in a film may be analogous to the structure of a narrative sermon, but, as with any analogy, there are limits as to how far to take the comparison.

Finally, I would offer three "non-negotiables" for "narrative biblical exposition." First, the message must be biblical, and be demonstrated as such. This means that the sermon should make clear for the hearers that the truth the preacher proclaims is, indeed, based on sound interpretation of the Scriptures. Our narrative sermons should reflect Haddon Robinson's definition of expository preaching, which demands that the concept of the sermon come from a governing text, and that the preacher present enough exegetical information that the hearers could check the interpretation for themselves.[8] Second, the sermon must have an objective. There should be a conscious intent on the part of the preacher to call the hearers to a change in understanding, belief, attitude or behavior, or to meet a clear need. We believe with Miller, that "the sermon is there to facilitate God's work of change in the lives of people."[9] More than education or information, the sermon aims for transformation, which demands intentionality from those who

stand in the pulpit. Third, character counts more than technique. While, as homileticians, we may always search for more relevant and effective forms in which to couch our message, the spiritual, biblical, moral and relational integrity of the preacher is more important than any shape the sermon might take.

## Narrative Dynamics: The Essential Elements of Story

### Protagonist

Every story needs a hero. Film writers look for several key qualities in the central character. The protagonist is the one with the problem to solve. He or she must have a conscious object of desire, as well as the will and credible capacity to achieve it. Perhaps there is also an unconscious object of desire, which grows in importance as the film progresses. Most importantly, the protagonist is a character with whom the audience identifies. In fact, according to one screenwriter, "at some level the audience is the protagonist."[10]

The first question to answer in the process of applying cinematic principles to the sermon is, "Who is the protagonist?" There are several possibilities. It could be a character from a story in the biblical text, or a character from a key illustration. In a confessional mode, the protagonist could be the preacher. Ultimately, however, the protagonist of a narrative sermon is the entire community of preacher and hearers. We explore an issue that represents a need or a desire for all of us. We are willful persons, with the capacity to pursue, if we choose to do so, the object of desire. Like the protagonist in a story of any kind, we are confronted with choices and challenges that test our willingness to continue our quest to the final outcome, and our ability to accept an outcome that is different from what we originally envisioned.

### Controlling Idea

Filmmakers define a single controlling idea that guides the creative process. McKee tells his students to put this idea into a "complete sentence describing how and why life undergoes change from one

condition of existence in the beginning to another at the end."[11] The exercise seems strikingly similar to requiring preaching students to define the thesis statement, or the "big idea," of the sermon! The difference is that, in the narrative framework, the controlling idea is the explanation of life change in the course of the story. This does not mean that it springs from the story. On the contrary, the idea is *a priori*, "the wellspring from which the writer draws all characters, dialogue, subtext, description, action, locations and transitions."[12] While the controlling idea is present in every scene, it is never explicitly stated. Guided by the theme, the writer chooses and crafts each narrative event so as to raise, early on, a single dramatic question in the mind of the audience and maintain the tension of this question throughout the actions of the film.[13] Finally, in the climax and resolution, the question is answered, and the audience intuitively, inevitably and powerfully grasps the message, without the need to state it explicitly. The controlling idea is the rhetorical focal point of any film, and of any narrative sermon.

**Conflict**

If a story were a dance, conflict would be the music. Without conflict, there is no story. The management and development of conflict within a story is one of the areas in which screenwriters have the most to offer to those of us who are trying to master the narrative art.

Conflict is the struggle through which changes take place in the life of the protagonist. These may be changes in fortune, character and/or thinking, but they should represent alternating positive and negative charges in value. Imagine the story of an aspiring young lawyer in a "good, to better, to even better" plot. He wins a challenging case, causing him to receive fame and recognition. He makes partner in his firm, leading to wealth beyond his wildest dreams. His wife and children love him all the more for his success. His kids make the most of their privileged life becoming successful people in their own right. Grateful for all he has received, he dedicates himself to virtuous and generous living, and dies a happy, prosperous and beloved man. This would be a great life for anyone, but it isn't a very interesting story. By

the same token, if he loses his case, loses his job, loses his family and his home and ends up an embittered and corrupt street bum, the "bad, to worse, to even worse" scenario doesn't work much better. Interesting stories move through conflict, with alternating positive and negative changes.

Screenwriters use the concept of a "gap" to guide the flow of conflict in a story. The protagonist faces an obstacle keeping her from the object of desire. Naturally, she chooses the path of least resistance to overcome it. This path, however, instead of removing the obstacle, leads to an even greater obstacle, creating a "gap" between the expected and the actual result. She takes another course of action, which leads to yet another gap, which leads to yet another action. This pattern continues, increasing in intensity, until the climax of the story. The steady flow of attempted resolution with unexpected and antagonistic results keeps the audience on the edge of their seats.

A key measure of a good story is the relative complexity of the conflict. Conflict may be external, internal or relational. A story with only external conflict is an action picture, where the hero withstands wave after wave of attacks from the forces of evil, finally defeating the villain with a magnificent combination of superhuman strength, cunning and fair play. A story made up of only relational conflict is a soap opera, where a never-ending stream of love affairs, betrayed friendships and family feuds keep the characters in a constant state of emotional crisis. A story with only internal conflict is a slow-moving psychological art film that draws small and somewhat disturbed audiences. Each of these would be an example of "simple conflict."

The best stories have a complex blend of all three types of conflict. A young lawyer faces the external conflict of a lost document, which is indispensable to keep his career, and even to keep him out of jail. He has the relational conflict of a boss pressuring him to falsify the document, in order to make the problem go away. He suffers the internal conflict of a man who wants to be a good person, but who must be corrupt to fulfill his career goals. The interplay of various levels of conflict makes for an interesting story, as resolving a gap on

one level opens a gap on another.

Narrative preaching, like film and other forms of story, moves or stalls on the basis of conflict, or narrative tension. The conflict of a sermon might be dissonance created by a paradox of the Faith ("How can Jesus be human *and* divine?"), a question raised by the struggle to reconcile faith and reality ("Why do bad things happen to good people?"), a biblical or exegetical issue to resolve ("What does this parable really mean?"), or any number of other struggles. The nature of our task narrows the possibilities in two important ways. First, if the preaching community is the final protagonist of the narrative sermon, the conflict must concern an issue that matters to us. Second, the question raised by the conflict must be answered by the biblical text.

Sustained tension through delayed answers is what sets narrative or inductive preaching apart from deductive forms. Screenwriters' approach to managing conflict in the story suggests some practical handles for maintaining this narrative tension. Consider, for example, the problem, "Why does prayer go unanswered?" Like the protagonist of a movie, preacher and congregation first explore the course of least resistance for solving the problem. Prayers are unanswered, of course, because of un-confessed sin. Then we consider the example of a righteous saint who slowly died of cancer at a young age, in spite of her prayers for healing. A "gap" opens when we realize the first answer falls short. We turn to a series of typical explanations (a lack of faith, broken relationships, not praying according to "God's will"). Each offers some help, but is insufficient, leaving us with a new gap. We build our search around a key gospel passage on prayer (Luke 11:1.13), where we find the parable of the persistent friend at midnight and the example of fathers who never give stones to sons who ask for bread, all in the context of the promise, "ask and it shall be given unto you." We search in this passage for keys to successful prayer, but all of the obvious answers (persistence, claiming your birthright, believing "really hard," etc.) seem to fall short, as each possible solution (positive charge) is followed by a gap (negative charge). Through this process, the congregation's interest is piqued and tension grows: What will the final answer be? The complexity of the problem gradually reveals the

complexity of the conflict and of our own issues when it comes to prayer. Do we see prayer as simply a way to get what we want from God (external)? Is it a way to draw near to God, to know Him better (relational)? Or is prayer a process through which we ourselves are changed in a fundamental way (internal)? We could approach prayer on any one of these levels, but treating them together, in narrative fashion, helps preacher and congregation to gain a more holistic vision.

This approach has benefits beyond simply holding audience interest. It forces preacher and congregation to look beyond the obvious, the simplistic, the easy answer. It demands honesty to explore real struggles of the life of faith. In the course of the narrative, the preacher lays logical foundations in the hearers' minds and plants seeds of anticipation in their hearts, preparing both minds and hearts to discover and receive the truth. We could well reveal the end at the beginning, but the power of the sermon is in the journey taken, as much as in the destination.

### Narrative Movement: Five Essential Events of the Story

"Plot" is the sequence of events through which a story moves. Aristotle saw two fundamental movements common to all plots: the complication and the *dénouement*.[14] Contemporary fiction writers expand the list to five events. It is no coincidence that these correspond almost precisely to the five movements described by Lowry as the "homiletical plot."[15] They are time-honored and universal—prominent in all narrative genres, from simple storytelling, to literature, to the silver screen. I revisit them here for the purpose of relating the principles of their use in film to the practice of narrative preaching.

**Inciting Incident**

Determining the "point of attack" for the story is not easy for the writer. Character and setting must be established, but wandering in the back-story too long can kill the story before it begins. A critical complication must occur to set the action in motion.[16] Within the first few minutes of a film, something happens to upset the balance of

forces in the protagonist's life. The event is of such consequence that the he or she immediately reacts to restore equilibrium.[17] The inciting incident raises in the minds of the audience the question, "How will this end?" From this point, an "obligatory scene" is projected in their minds, of the climax and resolution that must take place before the end of the movie.

The "point of attack" in a narrative sermon is no less momentous. Unless the preacher shows in the opening moments that something of value to them is at stake, the hearers have no reason to go on the journey. If, however, a problem is raised, an issue exposed or a situation described that affects our lives profoundly, then we will accompany the preacher on the quest for resolution. There is no time to waste. Minimize pleasantries and introductions. Get to the inciting incident, "upset the hearers' equilibrium"[18] and set the sermon in motion.

**Quest**

The narrative event screenwriters sometimes refer to as the "quest" corresponds to Lowry's "Analyzing the Discrepancy," or "Ugh!"[19] The latter description is particularly appropriate, as this is the longest and most difficult movement for the writer as well as for the audience. It amounts to a series of events in which the conflict is developed and explored through multiple attempted resolutions and gaps. The audience begins to see glimpses of the possibility that the objective may be achieved, but each attempt is frustrated. The level of risk and complication rises with each solution. The quest ends in a climax that represents the strongest possibility yet, but it turns out to be only a glimpse of the possible solution, or, most commonly, the mirror opposite of what the final solution will be. Often, through the course of the quest, the objective of the protagonist changes drastically, as the object of desire gives way to an unconscious desire, or a new and more important goal is discovered.[20]

In the "quest" of a narrative sermon, the preacher may explore and expose the shortcomings of the easier answers for the problem at hand. This is also the time to provide, perhaps in piecemeal fashion, the

exegetical information necessary for discovering the ultimate solution. The skilled narrative preacher will drop the necessary hints along the way for resolution, and even lead to what could be perceived as a final climax, without actually revealing what the answer will be. A well-crafted quest will also lead the hearers to begin adjusting their viewpoints and values related to the object of desire. As frequently happens with fictional protagonists, they may discover that the goal they sought in the beginning is inadequate, and must be exchanged for a new one.

**Crisis**

The final three events are closely linked, and usually come in quick succession. In Lajos Egri's words, "In birth pains, there is crisis, and the birth itself, which is the climax. The outcome, whether it is death or life, will be the resolution."[21] The quest finally culminates in the crisis, which is the "obligatory scene" anticipated since the inciting incident. Here, the protagonist faces a dilemma. Confronting the most antagonistic forces of life, he must make one more choice in a final effort to achieve the object of desire. At this point, the choice may mean abandoning the original object of desire in favor of a new one discovered along the way.

The concept of crisis has profound rhetorical significance for the narrative sermon. This is the moment when the preacher culminates all the information, false solutions and fleeting glimpses of the truth that have been explored along the way, in a single moment of clarity for the hearers. The final crucial pieces of the exegetical puzzle are revealed, and the community (protagonist) is confronted with the ultimate choice demanded by the "Word of the Lord." We must choose life or death. More accurately, we must decide which life, and which death, we will choose.

**Climax**

Crisis leads immediately to the climax, where the final choice brings about a complete reversal. The protagonist makes a choice from which

there is no return, and which effects a change so complete and profound that life is irreversibly altered. It is a point of catharsis for the audience, releasing emotions built up through the course of the film.[22]

The importance of catharsis in both film and sermon is a reminder of how closely linked the climax is to all that came before. If we have wandered in an episodic wilderness of the unrelated, uninteresting and/or unimportant, the only emotion hearers will feel in the climax is relief that the sermon is almost over. If, however, we have piqued their interest with an issue that matters to them, stirred their emotions through attempts to resolve an important question and challenged their wills at the point of a clear choice demanded by God's Word, then they are likely to be prepared to move forward, as joint protagonists in the drama of faith, down the path that God's Word has marked. When this is done well, we simultaneously engage mind, will and emotions in a moment of profound catharsis, with astounding and authentic persuasive power.

**Resolution**

No film can end on the climax. The audience needs a moment to regain its composure before the lights come up and it is time to leave the theater. The resolution provides this opportunity by briefly demonstrating the consequences of the change effected in the climax. In the narrative sermon, this is the moment for direct application. If we have done our work well, if God has spoken and if our hearers have chosen life, they are ready to see a clear picture of the next steps to take. The application need not be long, and requires no rational defense or justification. Simply paint the picture of a newly discovered reality and invite them to enter in.

## The Sermon in Three Acts: The Structure of Story

Filmmakers work with several units of narrative movement, of varying dimensions. Beats, scenes, sequences and acts all represent bits of action, culminating in proportionate climaxes, resulting in changes, moving the film towards its conclusion. Given the shorter time frame

of the sermon, the most helpful unit for our purposes is the act. Most films have three acts.

In a typical two-hour film, the first act might last as long as thirty minutes. It presents the key characters and the setting in which the action will take place. Somewhere in the first few minutes of the first act, the inciting incident occurs. The rest of the act deals with first reactions to the conflict created by this incident, and reveals the full implications of what has happened. With the first-act climax, the quest is launched, and we are prepared for the long haul.

The second, and longest, act could last around seventy minutes. It consists primarily of the quest, and includes several sequences in which the protagonist attempts to achieve the object of desire, facing many gaps along the way. Tension builds throughout the act until it ends in a climax so powerful that it could almost be the end of the movie. This ending, however, would stop short of the irreversible change that is essential for any good story to be complete.

The third act is the shortest and most intense. It contains the crisis, the climax and the resolution, often in quick succession. Through dilemma, choice and the portrayal of a new reality, the conflict of the movie is resolved, the controlling idea is made clear and the message is complete.

The three-act structure is not only helpful for narrative sermon structure, it is also the shape of almost any great story, including the biblical story. The gospels, for example, present the birth of Jesus and/or the beginning of his ministry in the first act, continue in the second act with his teaching of the kingdom, miracles and confrontations with the establishment, leading to a climax at the crucifixion. The story almost seems to end there, but the resurrection represents a dramatic turn, creating a crisis of belief and climax for his disciples and leading to resolution through various appearances, teachings and the great commission. Each of the gospel writers fills in the frame differently, in keeping with his objectives, but the structure is essentially the same.

Broadening the scope, the entire Bible could be seen as an epic story in three acts. The first includes the inciting incident, the Fall, and its initial implications through the flood and the tower of Babel. The second act recounts the quest of God for redemption, beginning with Abraham, through a chosen people, with all the gaps involved in slavery, deliverance, conquest, kingdoms, exile, return, prophecies and the life and ministry of Jesus. The third act takes the story to its final resolution, the ultimate reversal of the fall, in the apocalyptic images of Revelation.

One way to think of the three acts of a narrative sermon is to identify them with the broad strokes of the biblical story. The first act of the sermon, which presents the question, the problem or the discrepancy, corresponds to the Fall and portrays that that our reality, life and/or understanding is less than what God intends. The second act explores our quest for God in imperfect ways, even as He acts to meet us, guide us and reveal Himself to us. The third act begins with crisis as some aspect of our lives, nature or desires must die in order for resurrection to take place, and develops the implications of this rebirth, ending in a new and hope-filled vision of life and faith.

The three-act model of Fall-Quest-Redemption provides a framework for narrative preaching that is theologically sound and rhetorically effective. Might a strict adherence to this structure seem as cliché as "three-points-and-a-poem" over time? This is possible, but not likely. The fact that people still pay money every week to view films that are variations of the same three-act structure attests to the endless creative possibilities within a set narrative framework.

## Narrative Technique: The Style of Story

### Dramatized Exposition

When it comes to revealing facts about characters or histories, back-stories or settings, the screenwriter's axiom is, "show don't tell."[23] Exposition in film is a matter of providing the information the audience

needs, in order to understand the characters and their actions. At its best, exposition happens naturally, even imperceptibly. At its worst, awkward dialogue is inserted in which the characters discuss matters that they normally wouldn't, unless they wanted to pass information on to someone they knew was eavesdropping on the conversation. "Show don't tell" means that, if we want to communicate that a key character is a recovering alcoholic who is trying desperately to put his life and family back together, we do not put him on a bus sharing his life story with a total stranger. Rather, we show him at an AA meeting, and at a bank applying for a house loan, and in his car rehearsing a speech to give the judge, as he makes his way to a custody hearing. Dramatized exposition contributes to the flow of the story, instead of interrupting the action to convey information. This skill could also serve a preacher well, who desires to keep the narrative moving, while simultaneously giving the necessary exegetical information the hearers need to connect the message with the biblical text.

**Economy of Word and Deed**

Aristotle taught that, "of all plots and actions, episodic are the worst."[24] An episodic action is one that is unnecessary to the plot, but which is inserted for decoration, or to please an actor who wants a moment to shine upon the stage. Successful filmmakers resist the temptation to include scenes that do not propel the story forward. Extraneous material that is not necessary to the movement, no matter how well performed or beautifully-photographed, ends up on the editing-room floor. Unlike history, drama is not concerned with telling the whole story, but selects instead a significant part of the story. By focusing on the particular, the writer speaks to the universal. In addition to being selective, screenwriters tighten their stories by insisting that each action or scene emerge necessarily from the one before. There are no leaps, no shortcuts, no *Deus ex Machina* solutions. The best screenplays are those in which even the surprise turn seems, in retrospect, to follow a natural cause and effect sequence. Such economy, achieved through selectivity and sequential action, will also make the difference between effective narrative preaching and homiletical wilderness wandering.

### The Element of Surprise

The technique upon which any story literally turns is the reversal. A film will have any number of moments when a surprise turn moves the charge of emotional value from positive to negative or vice versa. The final climax will be the most intense, not necessarily because it is the loudest or most violent, but because it contains the core of meaning implicit in the controlling idea. McKee insists that "meaning produces emotion."[25] The best screenwriters pack the moment of final reversal with the meaning of the film. In some cases, they discover the meaning in the final turn of the plot and rewrite the script from back to front to accommodate. For the narrative preacher, whose meaning was discovered from the start in the Scriptures, the process is the opposite. Either way, the crafting of reversal is the single most significant stylistic task of the storyteller.

## The Cinematic Sermon: A Path to Narrative Preaching

Equipped with a selective taste of the narrative know-how of the cinema, the preaching student may approach sermon preparation with a fresh set of tools for shaping the final product. Still, a well-defined path is helpful for the beginning narrative preacher. The following suggestions are the fruit of several years of experiments in the classroom as well as in the study and the pulpit.

### Begin With the Text

Since narrative *biblical* exposition is the goal, the starting point in preparation is no different from that of a more deductive style. While the sermon may respond to a specific need or question, the answer is sought first and finally in the Scriptures, and ultimately in a single key passage. The student still must do the exegetical work of historical, lexical, grammatical, literary and theological study. However, the intended shape of the sermon will, to a degree, influence the questions asked of the text.

Instead of looking only for answers or precepts to proclaim, the

narrative preacher will tend to focus more on the questions raised by the text, and the tensions provoked by its meaning. Like the deductive preacher, the storyteller will search for the big idea, but will immediately look beyond the concept to imagine the conflict and change it implies. How does this truth challenge us? How might the passage upset the equilibrium of our comfortable complacency, our traditional assumptions, our safe interpretations, our tame renderings of God's will? What would be different in our lives if this truth were radically applied? This thought process not only gives the preacher a head start on application, but it also helps to begin identifying the conflict points which will be crucial to the narrative sermon.

The process of biblical study should yield the controlling idea, and the major sources of narrative tension contained in, or provoked by, the passage. It should also result in a clear understanding of the exegetical material that must be included in the sermon for the controlling idea to be understood as flowing from the text.

**Imagine the Three-Act Structure**

Upon this foundation, the preacher imagines the general structure of the sermon. The first act ("Fall") portrays a world in which the power of the controlling idea is both absent and unknown, and plants the seed of the controlling idea in the minds of the hearers in the form of a narrative question. The second act ("Quest") explores imperfect and human efforts to answer the question or resolve the conflict. The third act ("Redemption") brings the quest to a close in a moment of crisis, in which a final choice must be made, opening the way for climax and resolution as the work of God is experienced in the realization of the controlling idea.

With this structure in mind, the preacher gathers material for the sermon. Stories, statistics, experiences, metaphors and images of any kind are added to the collection of biblical expositional information determined to be essential. The sequence of action, conflict and discovery begins to take shape.

**Compose the Narrative Events**

Next, the preacher crafts the essential events of the narrative sermon. Since the rhetorical force and focus of the sermon depends on the relationship between the inciting incident and the crisis-climax sequence, it is best to begin here. What will be the sermon's "point of attack?" What image, event, experience or exegetical problem will launch the action of the story and plant the narrative question in the brains of the hearers? What will be the pivotal point on which the sermon turns and the tension is resolved? What ultimate choice will form the crisis, opening up the path to this reversal?

Once there is a draft of the inciting incident, the crisis and the climax, the preacher turns to the quest. The key here will be to get from "point A" to "point B" through a series of attempts to resolve the issue at hand, resulting in "gaps" of increasing intensity and leading to a second-act climax which could end the sermon, but only in a partial and imperfect way. Throughout this process, the necessary exegetical pieces are put in place through "dramatic exposition," preparing for the ultimate reversal of the climax. Finally, the resolution is developed, through illustration, exhortation or direct application, painting a new picture of life beyond the discovery and application of the controlling idea.

**Revise and Refine**

Having carefully developed each of the parts of the narrative sermon, the preacher examines the whole to determine whether the final edition actually works. A series of questions might help to spot holes in the structure and flow of the narrative sermon:

- Does the inciting incident raise a question that matters to my hearers and to which I am prepared to give a biblical answer?
- Does the climax answer the question raised in the inciting incident?
- Does movement happen through sustained tension and conflict, alternating positive and negative charges?

- Does each movement or action within the sermon flow naturally from the one before?
- Is each movement within the quest more intense than the one before?
- Is exposition dramatized or explicit?
- Is there any extraneous material—content which, if deleted from the sermon, would not be missed or result in reduced understanding?
- Does the first act climax launch the quest in a clear and decisive way, emphasizing our fallen human needs and longings?
- Does the second-act climax bring the quest to an intense conclusion, as close as humanly possible to the ultimate resolution, without actually getting there?
- Does the crisis raise a dilemma so profound that it amounts to the choice of death, in order to experience resurrection?
- Does the final climax contain a resurrection—a change so profound and God-powered that it can only be the final change, beyond which there is no other?
- Does the resolution paint a vivid picture of life in the new reality, beyond the death and resurrection of the crisis/climax, in which the truth of the controlling idea is radically applied?

## Conclusion

This treatment of basic structural issues is but a superficial glance at the contributions we might glean from the insights of screenwriters, for the teaching of narrative preaching. Multiple types of plots and genres, for example, provide entirely different sets of frameworks for narrative creativity. Insights into the creative process itself may also have applications for equipping narrative preachers. I have found exploring the world of filmmakers to be a stimulating exercise as a preacher and as a teacher. The greatest payoff, however is to see students, who have struggled with narrative, grasp the concepts of story and begin to communicate the Gospel with artful expression and flow, as well as persuasive effectiveness.

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## *The Strange Agony of Excellent Preaching: Luke 4:14-30*

*by F. Bryan Wilkerson*

*(editor's note: F. Bryan Wilkerson is senior pastor of Grace Chapel in Lexington, Massachusetts. The following sermon was delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary on Friday evening, 13 October 2007.)*

### *First Sermons*

First sermons can be formative. Do you remember your first sermon? Not a preaching class sermon, but a real sermon, with real victims?

I remember mine. I preached it at the MacCauley Water Street Mission in the Bowery section of New York City. I was a youth pastor at the time. Once a month our suburban church took responsibility for an evening service at the mission; music, testimony, and a message. It wasn't what you would call a plum assignment. Not quite as prestigious as speaking to the Evangelical Homiletics Society—but equally unnerving. It meant an hour's drive into one of the worst neighborhoods in the city, and speaking to a couple of dozen skid row men who's only reason for being there was to get a hot meal and a warm bed.

I was the new guy on staff, so I got the call. I think it was a kind of initiation. I was a Christian college graduate, but I'd never preached a sermon in my life, and had no intention of ever becoming a preacher. I agonized over that sermon. What did a clean-living, baby-faced suburbanite have to say to a bunch of homeless, hungry, alcoholics?

But I found my way to one of the stories of Jesus healing a leper, and figured I'd found my silver bullet. Think of all the parallels between the leper and these men I'd be speaking to – outcast, unclean, far from God, etc. I was pretty sure I was the first one ever to make this connection! I'd have those men falling on their knees, "Brother, what must we do to be saved?"

I really don't remember what I said. What I do remember is the vacant stares of those hard-bitten men, half-glancing at this young fool of a preacher, thinking he was going to change the world with a Jesus story. I remember my words disappearing into the dank darkness of that place, like light being swallowed up by a black hole. And I remember Charlie Ross, the Director of the Mission coming to me afterward and saying, "*Thanks for the message…but it was kind of short.*" (I figured 15 minutes with a bunch of hungry bums was pushing my luck.) "And you never gave an invitation. How are these men ever going to get saved if you don't give an invitation?"

I went home that night feeling like I'd failed just about everybody—Charlie, those lost men, and Jesus, who's story I was trying to tell.

We all know when we've preached poorly. When nothing happens; when no one's moved. We can tell by the blank expressions, by the awkward handshakes at the door. We know because our spouses talk about everything but the sermon when we sit down for lunch. It's an awful feeling; it can wreck your week.

But how do we know when we've preached well? When is a sermon *excellent*? When it's longer than 15 minutes? When it ends with an invitation, and a couple of raised hands? Do we measure a sermon's effectiveness by the number of CD's we sell? We have a contemporary service at 11:15 on Sundays. Lately they've taken to clapping at the end of the sermon. Is that what people do at the end of an excellent sermon—applaud? Or are they just glad it's over?

You can't always tell what makes for a successful sermon, can you? Sometimes you're sure you've got a killer message on your hands. Your big idea is as clear and luminous as a cloudless moon. You're gonna' start with a bang and quit all over, just like Haddon says. You can't wait for Sunday. Then you preach it, and it falls flatter than Kansas. Nothing. People shake your hand at the door: "Thanks for the message, Pastor. Nice haircut." Other weeks, you're pretty sure you've got nothing. Halfway through the message you *know* you got nothin', and you start praying for the rapture, or at least the fire alarm to go off, anything

to get you out of there. It's miserable. You find out afterwards three people received Christ that day. It's happened to all of us, hasn't it? How do you know when you've preached well?

Why don't we give a listen to the most successful preacher of all. Let's go to the gospels and take a look at what I'm going to call Jesus' first sermon. It's found in Luke 4:14-22:

> Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." All spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips. "Isn't this Joseph's son?" they asked.

### *Jesus' First Sermon*

Technically, this was not Jesus' first sermon. Verses 14-15 make it clear that he has already been teaching and has gained quite a reputation. But notice that Luke has chosen to tell this story at the beginning of his account of the Galilean ministry. We know that the gospel writers arranged their material on purpose. Darrell Bock suggests that Luke places this account here, at the beginning, because it's representative of the kind of preaching Jesus did in this phase of his ministry, and because

it was formative in setting up a pattern of teaching and response that will continue throughout the gospel. So I don't think it's too far off the mark to refer to it as a first sermon, a formative sermon.

Remember now that Jesus is back in his hometown, after being on the road for a while. When he left town, he was a nobody; now, he's a celebrity; crowds and controversy have followed him from town to town in Galilee. But now he's home again. Back among the people he'd grown up with, done business with for thirty years.

It's a mixed bag, isn't it, going home again? Maybe you remember going home after your first semester in college, or visiting the old neighborhood after moving away. On the one hand you're glad to see familiar faces and places; nostalgia tugs at your heart as you recall the good old days. At the same time you can't help but notice that the town seems smaller than you remembered it; the people a bit goofier. You've changed since being away. But they've stood still, it seems. You wonder if you still fit in; if you *want* to fit in?

Who knows what Jesus was thinking as he sat in the synagogue that morning, probably in the same pew he and his family had sat in their whole lives. Surely his heart must have longed for these people to receive his message; these people he'd known and loved for so long. But he also knew how difficult it would be for them. He was probably not surprised when the scroll was handed to him that morning, and he was given the honor of reading and commenting on the Haphtorah. It seems that he chose the text; a real crowd-pleaser—Isaiah 61. It would be like a famous preacher coming to your church and announcing his text was going to be Psalm 23, or Romans 8. Isaiah 61 looked forward to the Messianic age; to the arrival of an anointed One who would inaugurate a new day for Israel; a golden age of peace and prosperity. The text drew upon the language and imagery of the Jubilee Year—when debts were cancelled, when prisoners were released, when people rested from their work and lived off the bountiful goodness of God and the land. The people would have closed their eyes and drank it all in as he read the passage. And there was something about the way he read it—maybe his reverence for the text, the sincerity of his voice—we

don't know exactly, but when he was done, when he rolled up the scroll and sat down in the teaching seat, the text says, "the eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him."

If you're a preacher, it doesn't get any better than this…all eyes on you, no coughing, no rustling papers; people leaning forward to get the next word. And into that expectancy Jesus spoke, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Now surely that wasn't all he said. Luke hasn't provided us with a transcript of the message. But this was his big idea. And he put it right out front, it seems, deductive style. Jesus went on to announce that everything the prophet was foreseeing in this passage was about to come to pass. The age they'd been waiting for had arrived; the year of the Lord's favor was about to begin. And the people ate it up. They were like a bunch of young Calvinists listening to Piper speak on the sovereignty of God! There wasn't a message Jesus could have preached that would have made them happier than this. And it wasn't just what he said, it was the way he said it; with authority, with passion. They were amazed. "All spoke well of him," the text says, "and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his lips."

**Amazed at the Word of God**

Now that's good preaching. You know you've preached well, when people are *amazed* at the words of God. When a long-time believer sees something she never saw before in a familiar passage, when a slumping teenager sits up and pays attention to Song of Solomon, when a struggling Christ-follower hears just what they need to get through the next week, when a seeker is shocked to discover that the Bible actually has something to say to his daily life, that's excellent preaching.

We're doing a series on outreach right now called *People Reaching People*. A couple of weeks ago I was working out of Matthew 9, where Jesus calls Matthew to follow him. I noted that the text said Jesus *looked* at Matthew; looked at him the way he looked at every person, as if they really mattered to God. I surveyed the gospels, noting how Jesus looked at children, and lepers, and beggars, and women, and sinners as if they really mattered; as human beings made in the image of God, unique in

all creation and designed to glorify God in a way no other human being could. He looked at them as if they were of eternal value to God, worth the sacrifice of His one and only Son, that they might spend eternity with Him.

As I was describing the way Jesus looked at people, I suddenly realized how very quiet the room had become. All eyes were on me; there was no coughing, no rustling papers; people were leaning forward in their seats. And I realized how badly people needed to hear those words; to know that *they* mattered; to know that Jesus looked at them with the same love and promise as when he looked at Matthew. It caught me by surprise. I figured everybody knew this. I was simply reminding them so they could share it with their friends, but it turned out that they needed to hear it, too. They didn't know they mattered to God, or maybe they'd forgotten, or maybe they'd begun to doubt it. So when they heard it, from God's Word, they were amazed.

Someone sent me a note later that week; a Grace Chapel regular who had a friend with her that day:

> Thank you for the message you brought to us today… Not only was I completely compelled with the truth of helping people on their journey toward God, but it could not have been more appropriate for my seeking friend Mattie who came with me. She was "the receptionist from work" you described as an illustration in your sermon. She turned to me and said, "Lisa, did you tell him that I was coming today?"

Friends, you and I both know we can't create those kinds of connections between Scripture and hearer; we can't manipulate those kinds of moments with clever outlines and good timing. Those things are out of our hands. But when, by the work of the Spirit, people are amazed by the words of God, we know we've preached well. When people laugh with delight, when they weep with wonder, when they say "aha" or "amen," when they sit in reverent awe, and maybe even when they clap over something they discover in God's Word, that's excellent preaching.

So Jesus' first sermon is looking like a winner. People were impressed. "Not bad for a carpenter's son," they were saying to one another. All Jesus had to do was close in prayer, pronounce the benediction, and send 'em home in time to watch the game.

There was only one problem. Jesus wasn't done yet. He had something else to say to the people of his hometown, and that something wasn't going to go over so well.

**Undone by the Word of God**

Luke 4:23-30 says:

> Jesus said to them, "Surely you will quote this proverb to me: Physician, heal yourself. Do here in your hometown what we have heard that you did in Capernaum." I tell you the truth, he continued, no prophet is accepted in his home town. I assure you that there were many widows in Israel in Elijah's time, when the sky was shut for three and a half years and there was a severe famine throughout the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them, but to a widow in Zaraphath in the region of Sidon. And there were many in Israel with leprosy in the time of Elisha the prophet, yet not one of them was cleansed, only Namaan the Syrian. All the people in the synagogue were furious when they heard this. They got up, drove him out of the town, and took him to the brow of the hill on which the town was built, in order to throw him down the cliff. But he walked right through the crowd and went on his way.

Now, I've preached some bad sermons in my life, but I've never been run out of the pulpit and chased into heavy traffic! What went wrong here? Why didn't Jesus just quit while he was ahead? Everyone would have gone home feeling really good about their morning at church.

But Jesus didn't come to make people feel good. He came to tell them

the truth. And the truth was the good people of Nazareth were not ready to receive His message. They admired his teaching, but they had doubts about *him*. *"Isn't this Joseph's son?"* they said.

Jesus knew what they were thinking. (A good speaker always anticipates the audience's next question.) "Who did this Jesus think he was, anyway? Haven't we known him since he was a kid? Where does he get off making these kinds of pronouncements?" They were fired up about Isaiah 61, but they weren't about to believe that this carpenter's son could bring it to pass. They wanted him to prove it. "Do something, Jesus. Show us a sign. Turn stones into bread." Jesus seizes the moment, and goes right for the jugular. He recalls the days of Elijah.

If you've been around contemporary worship these days you're familiar with the worship song, "Days of Elijah." You know people love that song. As soon as it begins, eyes close, hands go up: "These are the days of Elijah, declaring the Word of the Lord." People love that song. I'm just not sure they understand what they're singing. The days of Elijah were days of great apostasy in Israel; when the Word of the Lord was not welcome, and not believed. The people in those days were so far from God, so dis-believing, that prophets like Elijah and Elisha could not even perform miracles among them; they had to offer them to Gentiles, like the widow of Zarephath and Namaan the Syrian.

Was Jesus accusing the people of Nazareth of being as faithless as the people of Elijah and Elisha's day? Was he suggesting that they were about to forfeit the blessing of God; that the year of the Lord's favor was about to be extended to Gentiles instead? The people were furious, the text says. They were shocked. They were undone. They rose from their seats, chased him out of the pulpit to the edge of town, and tried to shove him off a cliff, because that's what you do with false prophets—you kill them.

Yikes! Is that what happens when you preach poorly? No, that's what happens when you preach well. You know you've preached well when people are undone by the Word of God. When people are found out;

when their defenses are dismantled, their excuses are exposed, and their comfortable lives disturbed. You preach like that, and people aren't always going to like it.

My first year at Grace we needed a capital campaign, so I found myself preaching a high-intensity stewardship series in my first six months in the pulpit. After the first message, which was pretty direct, a 50-something woman named Peggy confronted me in the foyer. In front of a crowd of people she let me have it:

> I've been coming here to Grace for a few months now, and I've really been enjoying it, until today! I've been in the Catholic Church my whole life and I've never heard as much talk about money as I have in this one service. Is that what your church is all about? You're as bad as one of those televangelists? (Ouch—that hurt.) "How long is this going to go on?" she asked. "About 3 more weeks," I said. "Well, you won't see me for three weeks. Or maybe never."

I hate when that happens. I felt sick about it. Here was a seeker, beginning to discover a personal relationship with Christ, perhaps for the first time in her life. And now I'd driven her away. She wasn't the only one. Others were uncomfortable as well, and they told me so in a steady stream of emails. This wasn't how I wanted to begin my ministry at Grace; with a failed capital campaign and people leaving in droves. I agonized over that series. I softened my approach a bit, but stuck with the texts the Lord had put on my heart, and finished out the 4 week series. It was tough going.

When all was said and done, we met and surpassed our goal for the campaign, which was formidable. More importantly, it became a season of significant spiritual growth for the church—driving people to their knees, calling them to commitment, and clarifying our vision for the future. Peggy was true to her word. I didn't see her for the next three weeks. But a couple of months later, she was back. Still angry, but there she was, week after week. And over time, her countenance, her

attitude, and her relationship with Christ was transformed. She's a regular now, and routinely stops by to tell me what God is doing in her life, how thankful she is for the church, and often she has a friend she's brought with her for the very first time.

The Word of God can do that to a person. But sometimes, it has to undo them first. Hebrews tells us that "The Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword; it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart….Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account." If you're not getting some angry emails once in a while, if you don't feel the congregation stiffen up on occasion, if no one ever leaves in a huff, you're probably not preaching well. You know you're preaching well when people are amazed, or undone, by the Word of God.

So how do we do that? As we've said, we can't engineer these kinds of encounters. So how do we equip ourselves and others for excellence in preaching? Here are a few thoughts.

### Get God's Words Right

Get God's words right. If you're going to amaze people, or undo them, you want to be sure it's God Word that's doing the amazing or the undoing. It's tempting to try to do it ourselves. We've got the skills. We know what people want to hear; we know how to draw the "amen" or even the applause. We can always jump on the internet and find a feel-good story to lift their spirits. It's even easier to make them feel bad. Tell some hard-luck missionary stories, cite some statistics about internet porn, sound the alarm about gay marriage, ask them when was the last time they witnessed to a neighbor. Guilt. Anger. Shame. It's some preachers' stock in trade. It gets attention, but it rarely changes anybody.

Only God's Word can do that. So let's get God's Word right. Let's do our homework. Let's put in the hours of prayer, and study, and reflection so that we can rightly divide the word of truth. There are

no shortcuts. I always thought it would get easier as time went by, this preaching thing. I spend as many hours in preparation today as I did 20 years ago. Let's equip our students and mentorees to be excellent exegetes. If they don't acquire the skills and discipline in seminary, they'll never acquire them in the week to week grind of ministry.

Secondly, let's get *our* words right. If we're going to stand in front of people and communicate God's truth, we'd better do it well.

I don't think Jesus was winging it when he sat down to teach the people of Nazareth. I think he'd thought long and hard about what he would say to the people of his own hometown. I think he thought about it when he walked the streets of the town the days before, looking and listening. I think he turned over a variety of texts and stories in his mind as he anticipated the opportunity. My guess is he carefully crafted his opening line, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." Talk about starting with a bang!

We'd better craft our messages, too. We'd better agonize over our words. As I was formulating the big idea for this message, I was floundering for the second word to describe excellent preaching. "Amazed" worked fine for the first movement, but what was the second word? "When people are *furious* at the Word of God?" I'm not sure a steady diet of infuriating preaching is what we're after. "Disturbed?" That wasn't strong enough. How about "appalled?" Amazed and appalled. Yeah, that would work. A—A. That's perfect for the Evangelical Homiletics Society! There's only one problem. It wasn't the right word. I looked it up: "To fill with dismay." That wasn't quite it. I finally landed on "undone:" To dismantle; to disassemble; to take apart—so that it can be put back together. Yeah, that was it: Amazed and Undone by the word of God.

I hope you agonize over your words. I hope you lay in your bed on Saturday night, unable to sleep because that transition just isn't working right. I hope sometimes you get out of bed, fire up the computer, and keep working it till you get it right. Write and re-write and re-write again. And once you've got the words right, learn them so you can look

people in the eye when you deliver them.

God's Word is powerful, there's no doubt about that. But if our words get in the way, if our structure confuses them, if they can't *hear* the Word, it can't change them.

So let's equip our students and mentorees to preach well. Let's give them the tools and the training they need to craft messages that are clear, engaging, and cogent. Let's teach them to exegete the culture as well as the text. To watch TV, listen to the radio, go to the movies, so they can speak the language of the day. Tell them to read good books and the Sunday paper. And tell them to live an interesting life, so they have stories to tell that are their own, not something they lifted from Rick Warren or the web.

Get God's Word right. Get our words right. And finally, let's be amazed and undone ourselves before we step into the pulpit. Exegesis and wordsmithing are not enough; our hearts must be transformed by the Word we preach.

Last fall I was preaching a message on servanthood from Mark 10, playing off the disciples' question, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask." I called the message, "What Have I Done for You Lately?" challenging the entitlement mentality so prevalent in our culture, and even the church. I pointed out that servanthood doesn't come naturally to most of us. When life gets demanding and stressful, we tend to look at the people we live with or work with and say, "What have you done for me lately?"

Now it happened to be a pretty stressful season in the life of our church. Our building project had been delayed, again. The staff was grumpy; the people were complaining. Karen had gone back into the work force that fall, so that made life more complicated at home. As I wrote the words of that section, my own frustrations with life and people came to the surface. Why were they making my life so difficult? Why weren't they being more helpful and sensitive? And then the Lord turned my own words right back at me, "Bryan, what have you done for them

lately?" And I realized, I hadn't done much. I was so consumed by my own workload, so resentful of their inattentiveness to my needs, that I had been anything but a servant to them. I remember putting the pen down, dropping to my knees, and asking God's forgiveness for my own self-centeredness, for my failure to live and model the very ethic I was preaching.

I hope that happens to you sometimes. I hope there are moments in your preparation when you put your head in your hands and weep over your own sin or inadequacy, exposed by the text you are working with. And I hope there are moments when in the midst of your study or writing you throw your hands in the air and burst into praise over some truth you've uncovered, or sigh with wonder at this Word you get to proclaim every week. Excellent preaching springs from a soul that is being transformed by the Word of God.

**Formative Experience**

And so Jesus' first sermon turned out to be a formative experience. The pattern set in motion that day in Nazareth would play out again and again in Jesus' ministry. For a season people would be amazed at his gracious words and deeds. They'd come from far and wide to hear him. But when those words struck too close to home, they would turn on him, and want to kill him. And one day, they did.

That first sermon was a formative one for me, too. I've learned to preach longer than 15 minutes, as you are now well aware. From time to time I even give invitations. But what I remember most about that night was the drive home, haunted by the vacant stares of those lost men, and wanting more than anything to find a way to speak God's Word in a way that people might hear it, and be changed. I didn't realize it at the time, but it was the beginning of birth pangs; something was being born in me that night, a call from God, to preach, and to preach well.

May you, and I, and our students and congregations, be people who are amazed, and undone, by the Word of God.

*A Peculiar Prophet—Will Willimon and the Art of Preaching*. Michael A. Turner and William F. Malabri III eds. Nashville: Abingdon, 2004, 1-687-00061-0, 161 pp., $17.00, paperback.

This book affectionately celebrates and critiques Will Willimon, the widely known preacher and author. Willimon preaches unlike anyone else I know. He disarms, amuses, and devastates by sermons that pay acute attention to shocks in Scripture texts.

The heart of the book has four chapters, each taking a dominant theme in Willimon's life and work that is illustrated by two sermons. These themes sum up the man and his message with typical aphoristic punch. First, theological preaching: "It's about God, not you"; second, referring to his famous co-authored book *Resident Aliens*: "Christianity is weird, odd, peculiar"; third, discipleship: "I can't believe you people actually want to be Christians"; and fourth, conversion and transformation: "Christians are made not born." The selected sermons are classic Willimon, and his Easter sermons are particularly powerful. Not trumpeting his wide reading and smart thinking, he employs dynamic language, theology, story, and wit, often ending abruptly.

Alongside these sermons each chapter has elegant commentary from Fleming Rutledge, Peter Gomes, Tom Long, and Marva Dawn. Strengths are praised and weaknesses gently exposed. Expressing obvious admiration Tom Long nevertheless longs for more grace in the Jesus that Willimon preaches and for more doctrine in his call for discipleship (93). Marva Dawn analyzes his sermon structures and laments "his frequent lack of clear organization" (111).

As a master stroke the two editors, former students of Willimon who write their own appreciation, add two chapters by Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willimon himself. Hauerwas writes as only a friend can. He identifies Willimon's "Southern Con" technique and judges that he "has less philosophical ability than anyone I have ever met." However, this lack apparently provides the key to understanding the effectiveness of his preaching in that Willimon "never explains" a text. "Willimon works to free us from our narcissistic desire to find . . . something relevant to our lives. He reminds us that the "meaning" of the text is that it helps us understand anything at all about a God who should show up as Jesus" (124).

Willimon's own chapter is revealingly humble and perceptive. I warmed even more to him, especially when he ponders whether he should be called a "prophet" in the title. He sums up his four steps of sermon preparation: get grabbed by a biblical text; figure out how to break the news to the congregation; tell them, as engagingly as I am able, what I have heard in the text; quit just in time for God to get hold of them.

Anyone who has appreciated hearing or reading Will Willimon will enjoy this well-written book. For those who do not know him, and may share different theological emphases, the book has many rewarding insights as it engages his different preaching style. On a personal note, reading it brought back memories of my first experience of Will, when I shared a preaching platform with him at Southern Seminary in 1985. Sitting behind him as he went into action (without notes), probing the text, with startling, amusing and, above all, theologically challenging consequences was an unforgettable experience.

Michael Quicke

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*Conversations with Barth on Preaching*. By William H. Willimon. Nashville: Abingdon 2006, 0-687-34161-2, 324 pp, $ 20.00, paperback.

This is an important book. Its writer, William Willimon, now serves as Presiding Bishop of the Birmingham area of the United Methodist Church, though he is better known to many in his former role as Dean of the Chapel at Duke University, and as a popular preacher and prolific author. *Conversations* reveals gifts that are not as readily apparent in his more popular works. In these pages he not only traces Barth's thinking on preaching from the *Church Dogmatics*, *Homiletics*, and other writings in the Barthian corpus, but he also fills in the history of philosophy and modern and postmodern theology in order to put Barth in an intellectual and historical context. He cites many learned critiques of Barth, but his own appraisal is that of one who is indebted Barth and who commends him to those of us who live in the postmodern milieu (97, 115, 263). Indeed, Willimon writes, "Barth gives us preachers a theological means of recovering our nerve" (228). Willimon implicitly (and with some qualifications) endorses Barth's attempt to make preaching a part of dogmatics instead of a kind of rhetoric (156) since he believes that the sermon is "the starting point and goal of dogmatics" (19). "For Barth there is no final word on anything . . . Everything is in motion, in reformation—that is everything that says or writes attempts to honor a living, moving, active God" (159). And that God speaks. For this reason, "Barth felt it absolutely essential to keep the Bible in a position above the church, against the church, the judge of the church rather than its product, in order that the church might be made faithful by some criterion and empowerment other than its own" (29, cf. 245). This citation shows Willimon's willingness to let Barth's ideas critique liberals and traditionalists as well as conservatives and evangelicals. The critique of Frei, Lindbeck and Campbell's linguistic world is especially helpful (217), although Willimon himself seems more comfortable with the concept of the biblical narrative "creating a world" than biblical terminology warrants. God's kingdom is not the product of a linguistic community, a "reality" that ideas create, but rather, I would argue, it is a manifestation of the eternal world which will last when what we see now is gone (2 Cor 4:18). The purpose of Scripture is not to *create* a world but to bring our minds into conformity with the world that exists as God sees it and as He stoops to reveal it to us (2 Cor. 10:5; Rom. 12:1-2).

We evangelicals can salute Barth's aim in *Church Dogmatics*, "to listen to what Scripture is saying and tell you what I hear" (204). And we resonate therefore with the corresponding prerequisite for preaching, *viz*., that "the toughest task of preaching [is] the courage and the discipline to listen. The courage to speak is a gift to those who first summon the humility to listen" (213). Moreover, we agree with the necessity of a call to preaching. "You can't pay someone to preach; a person must be called to preach" (239). But these insights must not lull us into uncritical acceptance of all Barth's ideas, and Willimon offers a range of thoughtful critiques and cautions and cites others who ably assist him in this task.

So, if you are thinking of reading this book, be forewarned. Willimon confessedly mimic's Barth's style (3) using subsections with smaller type to give additional support. The effect is repetitive and confusing, a stream of consciousness. You may have to re-read various already redundant parts to discover who is speaking. Clear summaries and crisply-stated implications are rare. Willimon frequently describes Barth's writing as "maddening" because just when the reader thinks Barth has gone too far he says something contradictory that obviates the reader's concern. This could be said, to some extent, of *Conversations*. For all Barth's exalted view of the *Word of God*, actual citations of *Scripture* are comparatively rare and not without error (68). On the other hand, I expect you will enjoy reading Willimon's homilies (sprinkled along the way in gray boxes) even if you could never imagine preaching anything like them. Willimon is almost tempted to say that "Barth's way of doing theology is more relevant now than when he wrote it" (263). I think this is more likely to be the case for those who have rejected the theological foundations evangelicals hold dear. But even if this *magnum opus* only serves to remind you of the value of having a word from outside our human situation, the effort needed to engage *Conversations* will be worth it.

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*Choosing to Preach.* By Kenton C. Anderson. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006 0-310-26750-1, 287 pp., $24.99, hardback.

It is always good to see a member of our EHS publish a significant book on preaching. Today is a good day. In *Choosing to Preach*, Anderson walks the reader through the important decisions that must be made—and can be made—by preachers as they embark on their weekly journey to the pulpit. As the homiletical journey progresses, Anderson acts like a seasoned botanist giving a tour of the rain forest. Throughout the tour he displays an impressive grasp of a wide scope homiletical literature. Even more impressively, this integration is done easily, confidently and helpfully.

Anderson's style of writing helps makes this tour very enjoyable. The book overflows with so many images, analogies and illustrations that the reader cannot help but "see what he means" as the tour moves forward.

Those EHS members who teach preaching will also appreciate the efforts taken to make this book useful in the classroom. The discussion questions and suggestions of additional print resources embedded within the text are welcome in the classroom. So also is the CD ROM which contains sample sermons, pre-prepared power point slides, etc. All EHS members will appreciate the high view of Scripture that permeates the book.

The primary value of this book is to help preachers avoid homiletical ruts by encouraging them to respectfully consider alternate preaching styles and the assumptions that underlie those styles. The respectful tone that Anderson employs during the discussion of his five categories of preaching (declarative, pragmatic, narrative, visionary and integrative) encourages the reader to actively consider these preaching possibilities. The discussion did, however, leave me wanting to hear the representatives associated with Anderson's styles (MacArthur, Warren, Lowry, Bell) to personally interact with Anderson's characterization of their preaching. I am not sure, for example, that Rob Bell would describe his preaching as being visionary. I think he would say that it fits within Anderson's own definition of expository preaching, but I would have liked to hear his comments.

While I resonated with Anderson's first three homiletical options that are presented in *Choosing to Preach* (Are you going to preach? Are you going to preach the Bible? How will you discern your message from the Bible—inductively or deductively?) I felt somewhat uncomfortable with the fourth option—will we communicate cognitively or affectively? I was not convinced that this final option was critical to the homiletical process. Are cognitive and affective preaching mutually exclusive? Can I do both simultaneously?

As I looked for an answer to the question, "Why and when should I choose one preaching style over another?" I was intrigued by Anderson's statement that: "It might be worth thinking about the genre of the biblical passage. We could perhaps let the form of the sermon match the form of the text. . . . This would be a natural way to integrate forms for different learning styles across time" (254). Reflecting my own bias perhaps, I found myself asking if the single choice to preach the Bible's genres would not automatically result in the kind of refreshing homiletical variety that Anderson wants. I would have enjoyed hearing Anderson expand on the implications of his suggestive comment on genre and how it influences the choices he is asking us to make.

EHS members will enjoy *Choosing to Preach*. Anderson is a first class homiletican with a high view of Scripture and a passion to preach. His newest book will inspire you to think and preach with greater clarity. It doesn't get any better than that.

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*The Four Voices of Preaching: Connecting Purpose and Identity Behind the Pulpit.* By Robert Stephen Reid. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 978-1-58743-132-6, 233 pp., paper, $19.99.

The purpose of this sophisticated analysis is to "propose a communication theory, demonstrable across the practice of homiletics" (95) which will "assist preachers (and those who listen to preachers) to discover the cultural assumptions implicit in their *rhetorical* identity" (201). To those ends the book describes four "voices" in a "matrix" or map that reveals the preacher's assumptions when he/she attempts to persuade. These assumptions deal with the nature of language and the nature of authority. Here is a summary of the four voices:

- *The Teaching Voice*: This preacher believes that language is perspicuous and reality is objective and tends to speak *ex cathedra* as he/she views the sermon as an argument or explanation. Representative groups of this voice are fundamentalists, old liberals, sacramentalists, Mennonites, and Reformed. Representative homileticians are Robinson, Stott, and Chapell (ch. 2).

- *The Encouraging Voice*: This preacher speaks not as an arguer, but as an advocate, attempting to help folk "experience the transforming power of God/Spirit/grace/the holy" (81). Like the teaching voice, the encouraging voice "operates with objectivist assumptions about the nature of reality" (95), but unlike the teaching voice, the appeal to authority is individual rather than corporate. In other words, this voice does not argue from an established doctrine or tradition, but advocates a particular idea or lifestyle so that listeners will make up their own minds and have an encounter with God. Representative styles are therapeutic, invitational, and celebratory which can be seen in much African-American and seeker-targeted preaching. Representative homileticians are Fosdick, Blackwood, H. Grady Davis, Ian Pitt-Watson, and Paul Scott Wilson (ch. 3).

- *The Sage Voice*: This voice adopts an "interpretivist orientation" to language, not an objectivist, and it makes its appeal to a personal sense of truth, not a corporate sense. The wise sage leads the listeners through an affective experience that culminates in the response: "Whoa! What will I do with that?" The primary representatives are the new homileticians who embrace the indirect logics of metaphor, story, parable, and narrative (122): Craddock, Lowry, and Troeger (ch. 4).

- *The Testifying Voice*: Other new homileticians are in this category, those who attempt to persuade based on communal appeals more than personal experience. As with the Sage Voice, meaning is polyvalent and the self is socially constructed, but preachers who speak with a Testifying Voice see themselves as a "guide on the side" not a "sage on the stage" (174). He/she helps communities make sense of themselves in a pluralistic environment by listening to their culture, convictions, and confessional traditions.

Representative homileticians are Buttrick, Allen, Rose, and McClure (ch. 5).

*The Four Voices* is a significant new work in homiletical theory. Reid integrates theology, homiletics, communication theory, and rhetoric. He is acquainted with much North American preaching: liberal, post-liberal, evangelical, seeker, and so forth. He handles each "voice" with respect and demonstrates how to achieve excellence within each voice.

At times this book suggests that Reid's thinking is still in process as seen when the flow of ideas (even within individual sentences) calls for a lot of unpacking. For example: "This is the shift in understanding human acts of communication from epistemologically linear ways of trying to provide an account disclosure of being to the more storied ways of ontology's relocation of human meaning in the *experience* of language" (127). The density of such writing is partially offset by Reid's "matrix," a visual chart which helps readers compare and contrast the four voices. Also offsetting the density are four sample sermons, each from Luke 18:1-8 (the parable of the Unjust Judge) which demonstrate excellence in each voice.

Reid's eventual project is to write a comprehensive anthropology of preaching. Based on this book, I would say that Reid is the person for the job. He wants to help move homiletics past the listener-centered paradigm of the past 40 years to a learner-centered paradigm (222). Knowing how to match one's own "voice" and the expectations of the audience will help us invite listener-learners to live into faith (223).

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*An Essential Guide to Public Speaking: Serving Your Audience With Faith, Skill, and Virtue.* By Quentin Schultze. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 978-0-80103-1519, 111 pp., paper, $12.99.

*JEHS* has never reviewed a public speaking textbook, but this one deserves attention for three reasons: public speaking and preaching have much in common, many of our readers teach public speaking and/or preaching, and this book's stance is unique and refreshing. That stance is summarized in the subtitle—how to *serve* through public discourse. The book consistently uses the terms "servant speaker" and "audience-neighbors" in this theologically, biblically, and rhetorically-grounded handbook. Taking his lead from Augustine, Schultze simplifies the overly-complicated instruction common to most public speaking textbooks which teach students how to control audiences. In contrast, this textbook affirms that effective communication is simply a matter of technique and that speakers should serve, not control. This is not to say that Schultze jettisons technique, but he subordinates it to higher goals—loving God and neighbor.

One of the book's best qualities, its irenic tone, is unfortunately also a mild weakness.

Schultze's primary target of criticism is the closed-minded, pugnacious speaker who lacks discernment. To be sure, this speaker needs to be criticized, but Schultze does not give equal time to the mealy-mouthed, timid speaker who will not speak the truth. Sometimes servants must be prophets.

In 111 easy-to-read pages, Schultze has given a gift to students, preachers, and any who seek to serve audiences through the spoken word. Preachers will benefit by spending a couple of hours reading this book because they will be reminded of basic skills in oral communication, and they will be reminded that sermons are a means of serving God and the audience.

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*Whatever Happened to Delight? Preaching the Gospel in Poetry and Parables*. By J. Barrie Shephard. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006, 0-664-22781-3, 146 pp., $17.95, paperback.

Earlier today, while visiting a town fair, I saw a woman reading poetry to a solitary listener in the middle of a crowd. The sight was striking given that large numbers of people, myself included, were finding their way past and around these two who were taking time to delight in the beauty of language. I'll admit to you that I don't often take the time to contemplate the wonder of words, carefully crafted so as to both inform and delight. My appreciation of poetry is usually limited to lyrics set to music. Pure poetry requires a patience I don't usually pursue.

J. Barrie Shephard would be disappointed in me, particularly given my calling as a preacher. *Whatever Happened to Delight?* is an adaptation of the author's 2003 Beecher Lectures at Yale Divinity School. Shephard's concern is to restore a lost sense of transcendence that ought to be present in the preaching of the Word of God.

"Why is it," he asks, "that so many sermons nowadays have so little genuine joy in them? Why do so many display such an absence of true beauty? Why do they seem to come across less like a treasure hunt, more like an instruction manual, the bylaws of your condominium, or those assembly directions in four languages for whatever you just bought at the Do-It-Yourself store?" (3). Why indeed?

I find myself resonating with Shephard's call for a more delight-ful approach to preaching, though I'm not sure that I fully share his prescription. The author calls for a careful crafting of the language of the sermon, something many of us have stepped back from in order to pursue a more oral, more present-to-the-moment kind of preaching in the listener's presence.

Not that the two are incompatible. Reading the sample sermons at the end of the book encouraged me that Shephard is not so much asking us to become poets, but that we become preachers that know how to tell stories and truths that sound as

good as they say. He is not advocating a stilted stained-glass oratory, but a lively human engagement with the Bible that honors God with words as beautiful as their message.

I could learn something from this.

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*Preaching With All You've Got: Embodying the Word*. By David Day. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006, 1-59856-029-8, 186 pp., $16.95, paperback.

Working from the correct assumption that preaching is the incarnation of biblical truth, David Day teaches how to embody the Word with effective delivery, personal transparency, imaginative storytelling, verbal imagery, case studies, concrete visuals, dialogue, and more. The author not only exhorts us to make our preaching concrete, he also models that virtue. Sprinkled with scores of illustrations and exercises, this book would serve well as a textbook in any homiletics class dealing with the communication aspects of preaching. I plan to use it in a course on creativity. The closest cousin I know to this book is Wayne McDill's *The Moment of Truth.* I recommend that book and this one. It is winsome and helpful. Day writes with a personal, conversational style while at the same time demonstrating wide scholarship. His advice on using "controversial" methods such as movie clips and Power Point is balanced and wise. The only section I scratched my head at was Chapter 13 where Day demonstrates how to use soap operas in sermons. Maybe soaps are different in England, the author's country, but I would like to see preachers cautioned rather than encouraged to place these stories in the spotlight of the pulpit. But overall, *Preaching With All You've Got* is delightful and helpful.

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*Nobody's Perfect:But You Have to Be.* By Dean Shriver. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005. 0-8010-9182-9. 143 pp., $12.99, paperback.

Who among us hasn't faced the daunting reflection of the mirror? We look at our hearts and know, deep within, we have no right to preach. If people only knew the internal battle we face each week, they might hesitate to listen to us. Yet we are called to this task. God has made it clear, this is His will for our lives. And so we preach.

Dean Shriver does an admirable job balancing our imperfection and our intention. He makes it clear that we must never relent in our efforts to live blamelessly. And yet, we must not be discouraged by our inherent humanity. We are to live above reproach; our credibility depends on it. We must not get discouraged; our confidence depends on that.

In three clearly framed sections, Shriver discusses the need for integrity, defines "blameless," and gives practical instruction in how to achieve integrity. Section one lays the groundwork for the discussion. In light of the need for credibility, in light of our call, and in light of the ultimate goal for our lives, developing integrity is imperative.

The middle section, defining integrity, develops eight key characteristics of a blameless life. Shriver admits he has selected these from among the many traits identified in Scripture. He has made a good selection, sufficiently broad to clarify the issue, adequately narrow to treat each with some depth.

The final section gives the practical instructions needed to develop and model integrity in ministry. Shriver advocates the Spiritual Disciplines. He helpfully points out the power of our own exegesis and exposition in the development of Biblical integrity. He concludes by encouraging longevity in ministry as a key to growth in maturity.

While never justifying the correlation of texts relating to elders (1 Timothy 3, Titus 1) with the contemporary role of preacher/pastor, Shriver carefully explains the implications of those texts (and others) for today's preachers. He connects a number of texts dealing with ministry and leadership with the need for integrity in the life of those who speak for God.

The reader will not escape Shriver's passionate call for a life lived with integrity. Nor is it possible to miss the concern for the local church that under girds that passion. Dean Shriver writes from a pastor's heart, believing the credibility of God's word often hinges on how well those who preach it, live it out.

Each chapter contains reflections from great books on preaching, and helpful endnotes provide the reader with the opportunity to pursue these authors further. The appendix adds a brief, but valuable, historical overview of the need for integrity in those who preach. The appendix is a pleasant reminder of how long the church has dealt with this need.

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*Graceful Speech: An Invitation to Preaching*. By Lucy Lind Hogan. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006. 0-664-22877-1, 209 pp., $17.95, paperback.

Lucy Lind Hogan, professor of preaching and worship at Wesley Theological Seminary, conceives of the act of preaching as an invitation to dance with the *perichoresis* of the Trinity. Our pulpit speech, according to Lind Hogan, arises from the round-table pulpit of our communion with the Triune God who invites humanity to join the dance. A preacher is an essential person at God's round table. As we listen to God, we speak to those sitting around us. A preaching moment is the gathering of God's people in praise of the God who fills all of us with life, declaring his saving acts

among his people. The book develops this concept of preaching through the analogy of dance, and the presentation comes to us in three moves.

The exploration of the dance begins with a reflection on the person of the preacher. In the first 4 chapters Hogan explores what it means to be a preacher, from the footing of theology to the preacher's stance and identity. The second part of the book deals with the choreography of the sermon. Here the spotlight falls on the audience and the Bible as the source of the preacher's message, laying out the basic steps of sermon preparation. The last section of the book explores the uniqueness of preaching as an act of oral communication. The last chapter looks toward the future of preaching.

*Graceful Speech* moves swiftly from one subject to the next in a progressive motion that is both theologically informed and humanly sensitive. The female vantage point may help the author capture the relational elements of the preaching act, bringing out motherly tones of naming grace to God's sons and daughters. Lind Hogan writes with sensitivity and pastoral care aimed at nurturing the listeners in the truth of God's word.

Essentially, the book is a primer on preaching. It quickly touches on the essential parts of preaching without pausing to explore many of the technicalities and nuances of the homiletic endeavour. While the book in itself may be insufficient to prepare the students adequately for the preaching act, lacking a precise path from the text to the sermon, it is a welcome companion to the more technical works of homiletics. The book may serve as a welcome help to the mainly masculine vantage point of our pulpits.

Lech Bekesza

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*Preaching with Power: Dynamic Insights from Twenty Top Pastors*. Ed. Michael Duduit. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 0-8010-6630-1, 256 pp., $16.99, paperback.

One of my favorite features of *Preaching* magazine is the interview section featuring pastors, church leaders, and educators who have a vested interest in preaching. In *Preaching With Power*, Michael Duduit, editor of *Preaching*, offers a collection of twenty of those interviews from the previous decade of the magazine. The interviewees constitute a veritable "Who's Who" list of well known preachers, yet they also represent a variety of perspectives and philosophies about preaching and related issues.

Some interviews are conducted with pastors of traditional evangelical churches such as Jerry Falwell, Jim Henry, Adrian Rogers, and Jerry Vines. On the other end of the spectrum are interviews with emerging leaders such as Dan Kimball and Brian McLaren. There is one African-American included, T.D. Jakes. Some, including Bryan Chapell and Haddon Robinson are involved in academic settings. Others such as Rick Warren and James Emery White are identified with the "seeker"

movement. Due to this kind of variety, the reader will be exposed to wide thinking and differences of opinion.

Although each interview deals with a variety of issues related to preaching, the interviewer attempts to focus on a particular topic. The chapter topics include exposition, the public square, hurting people, changing culture, evangelism, church growth, creativity, and many more. They are well chosen in terms of the person being interviewed. It must be said, however, that the selected topics are not always covered in-depth and many interviews are considerably broader than the announced topic.

In spite of the rich diversity represented, one overarching theme is abundantly clear: these persons have a passion for proclaiming the Scriptures. They do it in different ways; they do it in different kinds of settings; they do it with different purposes in mind. But preaching is a priority in their ministries and is treated accordingly in terms of time and effort.

Negatively, while I would not want to eliminate any of the interviews included, it would have been helpful to include two or three additional interviews with minority persons as well as a couple of pastors of smaller churches. This would have added additional kinds of voices for the reader to consider. An unintended message doubtless received by some readers is that only pastors of mega-churches and preachers in the public spotlight have anything worthwhile to say.

One of the strengths of the book is that each chapter stands alone. The reader can enjoy an interview, put the book down, and read another interview a few days later. I recommend the book both for pastors and teachers. The former can read it to help get the creative juices flowing, while the latter can use it to introduce students to a nice variety of insights related to the ministry of preaching.

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*The Teaching Ministry of Congregations.* By Richard R. Osmer. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005, 0-664-22547-0, 347 pp., $29.95, paperback.

In *The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* Richard Osmer, Thomas Synnott Professor of Christian Education at Princeton Theological Seminary, continues his pioneering work in formulating a comprehensive theoretical framework of practical theology and praxis of the teaching ministry in local congregations in light of global Christianity. His previous work in the area was with Friedrich Schweitzer, his German counterpart, in *Religious Education between Modernization and Globalization* (Eerdmans, 2003). Osmer skillfully weaves together four tasks of practical theology—the descriptive-empirical, the normative, the interpretive, and the pragmatic—and articulates them into a heuristic framework. The author offers insightful understanding and analyses of three congregations, each located on a different continent, based upon the in-

depth ethnographies he conducted of each group. In addition, he models with ease what it means to be an interdisciplinary practical theologian as he converses with a wide array of interlocutors, such as Don Browning, James Fowler, Howard Gardner, Richard Hayes, James Loder, Jürgen Moltmann, Wentzel van Huyssteen, and Robert Wuthnow. In the process, Osmer generates a framework for the teaching ministry of congregations, which not only avoids the totalizing tendency of grand-scale models, but functions as a *meta-framework* through which local congregations with all their sociocultural and historical peculiarities are invited to reflect upon and refashion their teaching and formation ministries.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part 1, based upon the presupposition that Paul's letters provide the earliest and most direct route into the teaching ministry of congregations, Osmer ventures into what he calls "situated rational conversations"—conversations between contemporary forms of biblical scholarship that allow for historical, literary, rhetorical, and cultural forms of criticism to take place. He engages in these conversations with selected passages that highlight the centrality of *catechesis, exhortation,* and *discernment* as the normative functions of the teaching ministry of the church. Although the author re-introduces these themes extensively in Part 3 as he demonstrates the integration of the tasks of practical theology, perhaps a more substantial exposition of scriptural passages that explicate the three themes would have accentuated the salience of scriptural engagement of the normative task in practical theology. As it stands, only 30 pages of the book are devoted to the exposition of the selected passages from Paul's writings on the three themes, whereas the development of the descriptive-empirical, the interpretive, and the pragmatic is given more than 200 pages.

Part 2 of the book could have easily been a book on its own. There the author painstakingly provides, what Clifford Geertz calls a *thick description*, and astute analysis of each of the three congregations—one in South Korea, one in South Africa, and another in the United States—in their unique sociocultural milieus and historical perspectives. In these three congregational studies, Osmer carefully delineates both the particularities of the teaching ministries of each congregation as well as the transferable ministry principles, by employing the interpretive frameworks of practices, curriculum, leadership, and pilgrimage. In the process, Osmer models several critical, life-forming virtues of ministry—careful attention to the narratives of congregants, desire to engage varying perspectives of ministry in their (congregations') own terms, alertness to recognize and rectify any unhealthy power differentials, and complete respect for the sanctity of each congregation. Moreover, perhaps in anticipation of those who prefer drawing transferable ministry principles when reading a book such as this one, Osmer organizes the chapters of the Part 2 according to each frame—the practices, the curriculum, the leadership, and the pilgrimage—by using his congregational studies as cases to illustrate the first three frames, while portraying the pilgrimage frame by weaving in the personal narratives collected from the three congregations.

Osmer is at his best in Part 3 when he masterfully integrates four tasks of practical

theology (the descriptive-empirical, the normative, the interpretive, and the pragmatic), four frames of the teaching ministry of congregations (practices, curriculum, leadership, and pilgrimage), and three tasks of the teaching ministry (catechesis, exhortation, and discernment). Utilizing the last century's great Roman Catholic interdisciplinary theologian, Hans Urs von Balthasar's *theo-drama* motif as the point of departure, Osmer envisions his interdisciplinary approach to practical theology in light of Jürgen Moltmann's eschatological orientation of the people of God where the church participates in the unfolding of the Triune God's redemptive drama in space and time. For Osmer, such participation is the outworking of "congregational christopraxis" that is dialogically informed and nurtured by the congregation's faithful teaching ministry through *catechesis, exhortation*, and *discernment*.

*The Teaching Ministry of Congregations* is neither for the faint-hearted nor for the perfunctory professional pastor. It is a complex and multilayered book, precisely because the congregational nature of the church's ministry is to embody the grandeur of the unfolding of the Triune God's gracious redemption in a complex, and ever protean world.

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*Sacred Rhetoric*. By Michael Pasquarello. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 0802820581, 143 pp., $15.00, paperback.

*Sacred Rhetoric* takes an ancient/future approach to homiletics by going backward to gain clarity going forward. Disappointed with modernity's reduction of preaching to technique and skill, Pasquarello seeks to ground preaching in the context of ecclesiastical theology and never separate it from that mooring. In this author's mind, we can't teach preaching as a simple communicative skill, isolated from theology. It is practical theology that grounds the preacher and the preaching.

Starting with Augustine, Pasquarello offers a sampler of this grounded homiletic in ancient, medieval, and modern contexts. Summarizing both *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, he points out that Augustine's praxis assumed a scripturally saturated world view as the starting point of all preaching, a meta-narrative of salvation history that consumes and permeates the preacher and the sermon.

In the monastic world, Pasquarello extends the importance of pastoral character in his examination of Gregory the Great who, like Augustine, privileged the content of the faith over the skills of the presenter. The preacher must not resort to parroting phrases which have no meaning or no skilled application to the situation at hand. St. Benedict's rule prescribes the love of God and contemplation of Scripture as prior to any proclamation or teaching. Like Augustine before him, Bernard of Clairvaux's sermons are intoxicated with Scripture and foster the *lectio divina*, the opening of the heart to hear the voice of Scripture wherein lies the power.

From the medieval world, the author consults Sts. Bonaventure and Aquinas as examples of mendicant monk/preachers who prized poverty, humility, contemplation and service as necessary and obvious preparation for preaching. Erasmus' focus on translating and paraphrasing Scripture betrays his confidence in the actual scriptural language to do the heavy lifting in a sermon. Similarly Latimer's work in bringing the language of Scripture to the common language of the people demonstrates the same conviction.

Pasquarello concludes the survey with numerous citations of Luther and Calvin and their approach to theology first, and then preaching. These Reformers relied on the Spirit's work more than rhetorical flourish to accomplish conviction and persuasion.

Overall the tone of the book is patient and grounded, if not plodding at times. His persistent deviations from homiletic theory into historical theology seem almost purposely contrived to frustrate the unreflective practitioner looking for technique. Pure modernists need not bother themselves with this volume.

But to those who seek continuity and wisdom from our fathers, Pasquarello offers a compelling vision of a disinterested homiletic. This is truth for truth's sake, not a desperate quest for something that "will preach." This is the love of truth first, before it is ever proclaimed. This is the preacher who is first a "living sermon" before he rises to the pulpit. This is the performance of Scripture instead of the dispensing of second-hand platitudes. This is character and patience over charisma and efficiency, and a well-tested challenge to preachers and professors alike.

Dave McClellan
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*View from the Pew: What Preachers Can Learn from Church Members*. By Lora-Ellen McKinney. Valley Forge: Judson, 2004, 0-8170-1459-4, 110 pp., $13.00, paperback.

Many books are presently being published to help preachers understand their listeners. This book is written by Lora-Ellen McKinney, a preacher's kid who understands the world of the parsonage, the pew, and the pulpit. McKinney sets out to help preachers be pastors. *View from the Pew* calls preachers to recognize that their behavior in and out of the pulpit influences the way that God's people hear and act on God's Word (xxv).

The ten chapters of *View from the Pew* focus on ten issues McKinney feels preachers should be mindful of, for they are important to the person in the pew. The ten chapters are "assessment tools" for preachers to measure their behavior "for personal change and spiritual growth" (xxv). The chapters include: (1) Be Prepared to Preach; (2) Celebrate the Centrality of Christ; (3) Preach God's Word, Not Your Words; (4) Be a Shepherd, not a Showman; (5) Do the Vision Thing; (6) Expose the Pastor in You; (7) Connect the Head and the Heart; (8) Stand on the Shoulders of the Saints; (9)

View Yourself from the Pew; (10) Be Satisfied.

The book is a personal reflection from a thoughtful listener on the nature of the preaching ministry and the pastorate in general. Helpful comments by the author underscore her interest and investment in preaching. For example, McKinney considers education to be an important factor in the preparation of any preacher. She comments: "To be an undereducated preacher teaches those in the pews that the gift of schooling provided for us by God is not valued, that the Christian education that could be provided to us is not thought to be essential, and that the preacher does not consider it important to engage in personal Christian learning as a lifelong activity" (11).

Although a perspective from the pew, *View from the Pew* is more of a personal reflection than a studied evaluation. McKinney offers her viewpoint on preaching, which can be valuable, but may not be more than one person's opinion about what preaching ought to be. And for many preachers, that's what they hear from their listeners as they shake hands at the door. The comments, however, should not be dismissed, but certainly evaluated carefully.

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*The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence*. By Richard Lischer, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005, 0-8028-2932-5, 179 pp., $18.00, hardback.

Richard Lischer is James T. and Alice Mead Cleland Professor of Preaching at Duke Divinity School. He is ordained as a pastor in the Lutheran church. He has written numerous books on preaching including the most recent, *The Company of Preachers*. *The End of Words* is based on the Lyman Beecher Lectures he delivered at Yale in 1999.

The book is divided into four chapters: Vocation, Interpretation, Narration, and Reconciliation. The author begins with the demise of language, then turns to the "nurturing tasks" of interpreting Scripture. From there he moves to the task of "re-narrating the story," and finally to disclosing the true end of language which is reconciliation.

The book begins with a description of the death of words. As preachers wrestle with their vocation, they find themselves face-to-face with the current crisis of language. The violence of the 20th and now the 21st centuries has sucked the life out of words. The dominant culture uses words to promote violence and impose its power on others. In addition, technology such as PowerPoint trivializes and devalues words. Preachers find themselves mutating their words to cultural standards. The preacher's vocation, however, calls on the preacher to die to culture's use of words and rise to use words to speak of God and for those who suffer.

In the process of preachers renewing their appreciation for words, they read and

interpret Scripture. They interpret Scripture through the lens of God's faithfulness (67). Preachers also move away from an isolated reading of the text to the reading of the text in the context of the church (75). They do not come up with a new meaning but a new performance of the text, one that enables listeners to perform and live out the text in their daily lives.

Lischer takes issue with those who call on preachers to be less preoccupied with the world that produced Scripture and more preoccupied with the world Scripture produces (52). He likes neither perspective for both perspectives remove Scripture from its native habitat of liturgy, pastoral care, and teaching. For example, a preacher reads Psalms when he or she enters into the hospital room of a patient. Or those in slavery a preacher retells the stories of Exodus. A healthy interpretation of Scripture seriously considers its natural habitat in worship and life.

The preacher moves from interpretation to narration. The way preachers perform what they interpret is through narrative but not the kind of technique-oriented narrative that enamors contemporary homiletics. Rather this is a narrative that retells the biblical story in a way that incorporates the brokenness of life. It connects the biblical narrative with the day-to-day realities of human life in all its earthiness (110). Preachers can accomplish this through providing visual slices of life (a "focal instance" as he calls it) that show listeners what God's grace looks like when it intersects with their lives (111). Preachers can also do this by retelling the biblical story using contemporary expressions and idioms.

The final goal of preaching is reconciliation. That is the end of words. While the first three chapters develop the idea of preaching to solidify our own identity as Christians, the final chapter speaks of embracing others because of who we are. We are different, and our unique identity does not cause us to distance ourselves from others but to include them. The end of words is the reconciliation of humans to one another and to God.

Lischer raises a number of issues in this volume worthy of further reflection. I mention two as an example. One is his observation that PowerPoint presentations "represent a fundamental lack of confidence in the spoken word of God" (24). Technology devalues oral communication (26). As preachers become more fascinated with technology, Lischer's perspective is worth pondering. The other is that Lischer takes issue, at least in part, with the post liberal call to focus on the world Scripture creates. He believes that people are unable to be absorbed into the biblical story because they are either overwhelmed by competing stories or are unacquainted with the biblical story (55). These and other matters addressed in this volume make it a valuable read for preachers and teachers of preaching. It is an important dialogue partner.

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*The Fully Alive Preacher: Recovering from Homiletical Burnout.* By Mike Graves. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006, 0-664-23020-2, 175 pp., $17.95, paperback.

While many books have been written on the theology of preaching and practice of preaching, this book addresses the homiletical burnout found in the lives of many preachers. The content is soothing to the preacher's soul. Graves applies a healing balm for those who have been preaching for an extended period of time. The book's opening sentence addresses a burning question: "*If preaching is intended to enliven the church, why is it killing so many ministers*"? He spends a majority of the book with the second part of the question regarding the killing of ministers and spends the last dealing with the first part of the question: *preaching is intended to enliven the church*.

The book is divided into four general headings addressing each stage of sermon preparation: studying the Scriptures, brainstorming stories, creating sequence, and embodying the sermon. Instead of a technical approach to preaching and more skills, Graves emphasizes renewal through life experiences: those simple pleasures that are often ignored for lack of time.

His thrust is the revitalization of the whole person by introducing what he calls "sacraments" in the sermon process. The sacrament of "napping" and the sacrament of "walking" are part of the *studying the Scripture* stage, just as the sacraments of "reading" and "friends" are integral in the *brainstorming stories* stage. This stage requires creativity and thinking outside the box. He scratches an itch for many who find themselves in a rut, a death sentence for creativity. He then introduces the sacraments of "playing" and "music" in the *creating sequence* stage. The final stage, embodying the sermon focuses on presence versus precision in the delivery process. We are introduced to the sacraments of "movement" and "dessert" in the embodying stage.

Graves offers exercises, reflections, quotations, and brief lessons. The book is readable with a breadth of information that will speak to a preacher's heart, concluding with a time of confession and openness to capture our hearts and reclaim the joy of preaching.

I highly recommend this book for preachers and teachers of preaching. Readers will resonate with Barbara Brown Taylor's word in the foreword: "A book like this reads more like a conversation with an old friend." Experienced preachers and new preachers will embrace the sacraments in the book. *The Fully Alive Preacher* is a vital reminder that preaching encompasses the whole person. Preaching is more than preparing a workable sermon each Sunday. Many will refer to the book to refuel their emotional fuel tanks in the years to come. Graves' grasp of the difficulties of preaching week in and week out are on target and give an injection of new life. When we are fully alive, we are able to reclaim the joy and enliven the church with our preaching!

Lynn Shertzer
Slate Hill Mennonite Church
Camp Hill, PA

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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.

**Managing Editor:**

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

**Editorial Board:**

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

**Frequency of Publication:**

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

**Jury Policy:**

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

**Submission Guidelines**

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

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

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

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

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

   **b.** From a periodical:

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

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

5. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

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

**Abbreviations**

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

**Captalization**

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

**Direct Quotes**

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

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

**Headings**

First-level Heading
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## Notes

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

## Submission and Correspondence

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

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

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