The Journal of the
Evangelical Homiletics Society
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Contents

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

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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.

The Task of Preaching

by Scott M. Gibson

Preaching is for the long-term. Everything that goes into preaching—study, critical thinking, creativity, skill of observation, and pastoral sensitivities—is built into a preacher for one's life of ministry.

Preachers struggle to be biblical if they are not committed to the authority of the Bible and dedicated to preaching from it. Too many times a sermon that is preached is in search of a text. But the task of preaching is building one's sermons on the Word of God.

We are a guild of teachers of preaching. We see that the Bible is primary, that we do what we do—preach and teach preaching—because of the incredible message found in that incomparable book, the Bible. We move from the biblical text to today. Sometimes we do it with skill, while at other times we do it with less grace.

The task of preaching begins with the Bible. In this edition of the *Journal* Brandon Cash engages in a comparative study of seminaries that require the biblical languages as a basis for theological education and for the pulpit. Cash challenges preachers who preach the Bible to be committed to the study of if in the original languages, and of its benefits.

From the biblical world readers will move to the media-oriented world of film and homiletics. Casey C. Barton encourages readers to consider the appropriateness of the use of images from the world of film. He examines the Christ-Figure motif in recent movie releases. This thoughtful essay stimulates readers to apply appropriately the intended meaning of the text as we move from the biblical world to the present.

One of the real issues preachers face weekly is the application of biblical truth. Chuck Sackett discusses this process in a clear and helpful way. He wants preachers to be committed to the text and

helps readers work through the process of doing just that while illustrating in our sermons.

At the beginning of this issue is a forum on preaching and publishing. The three participants—Michael Duduit, Paul Engel, and Robert Hosack—come at the matter of preaching and publishing with different perspectives but also share similar concerns. Our readers will benefit from the essays as we consider what we have to say as preachers and scholars that may benefit the academy and the church.

The sermon for this issue is by Augustus Hopkins Strong, a nineteenth-century preacher and seminary professor. His text is Romans 15:13. Following the sermon is a strong book review section. The reviews give our readers a peek into that which has been published in preaching. Our reviewers critically engage with each book and help those of us who have not read a given title the information we need to discern if the book will be useful for us personally, professionally, or in the classroom.

The task of preaching is for the long-term. What is presented in this edition of the *Journal* underscores this reality. Preaching takes work. Preaching takes study of the Bible. Preaching means engaging with the original languages. Preaching means understanding what is going on in popular culture, while not being swallowed up by it. Preaching means we let the text win in our use of illustrations. Preaching means we know what is helpful and necessary in our field and in the church. We develop ourselves as we engage in the task of preaching.

Preaching is for the long-term. It takes commitment and concentration. But we who preach and teach know that it is worth it.

Preaching and Publishing: Reflecting on Two Decades

by Michael Duduit

(editor's note: Dr. Michael Duduit is editor of Preaching *magazine and editor of* Handbook of Contemporary Preaching.*)*

When Scott Gibson invited me to offer some observations on the issue of preaching and publishing, I began to think about more than two decades of involvement in this interaction. Like the boy given a key to the ice cream store, it can be difficult to know where to start.

When *Preaching* magazine was launched in July 1985, there were a handful of publications with somewhat related missions—*Pulpit Digest* and *Proclaim*, for example. At the same time, that was an era when mainstream religious publishers still published books of sermons on a regular basis, though not as regular as in previous generations.

What has happened over the past 22 years? For one thing, other publications came and went. Some of the major ones, like the two mentioned above, ceased publication altogether or moved to the Internet. In fact, the major trend in publishing and preaching today is the move of most such activity to the Internet, through websites, email newsletters, and now podcasts. Today there is little thought of creating print publications similar to Preaching; instead, would-be publishers can launch an online publication with minimal cost and a laptop.

At the same time, those book publishers no longer see a strong market for books of sermons, and such publications only see the light of day on a sporadic basis. The exception to that rule, of

course, is that books of sermons are regularly published and widely sold when the name on the cover is Swindoll, Stanley, Jeremiah and so forth; the key is that, though the books grow out of sermon series, the messages have been "de-sermonized" and transformed into editorial chapters. That's not a bad thing—the biblical content is still being delivered, and perhaps it's not all that different from the days when Spurgeon's sermons went through four or five editorial treatments, to the point that his published messages were often strikingly different than the sermons as originally proclaimed from the pulpit of Metropolitan Tabernacle.

So where do we go from here?

I don't see any short-term trend away from the shift from print to online for preaching resources. It is increasingly expensive to launch and support print publications today, and easy to create an online resource. The big issue is: what kind of content will those resources provide?

Over the past few years, I made a conscious decision with *Preaching* magazine to reduce the emphasis on sermonic content and expand the editorial content focusing on helping the preacher reflect on his calling and craft and/or enhance the use of the tools of that craft. So we have given more pages to interviews, thematic topics, and how-to articles, while giving less to sermons. The reason for that is that recent years have seen the launch of so many sites giving access to sermons, that I felt that a publication like *Preaching* should focus on the kind of resources for preachers that would otherwise not be available. So we have become even more of a "professional journal" and less a repository of sermons.

In fact, we still publish as many sermons as we used to publish; we just do so online. Since the launch of Preaching.com in the early 90's, we have been able to continue to make available outstanding sermons while focusing our increasingly-expensive print pages on a different type of content. We still don't try to compete with sites like SermonCentral.com, which offer access to thousands of

sermons submitted by the preachers themselves; even with our online resources, we have tried to take a more "editorial" approach to the sermons we publish. Even online we have maintained a "publications" paradigm rather than a "file cabinet" paradigm, while recognizing that both are equally valid.

There is a danger to the proliferation of sermon sites, however. Today the church faces an increasing problem with plagiarism, as more and more pastors opt to simply preach the downloaded sermons of others rather than prepare their own sermons for their own congregations. It's not that this is new; there have always been preachers who bought books of sermons from well-known pulpiteers and preached those as their own. The growing danger seems to come from two sources: the increasing availability of such material via the Internet, coupled with an emerging view among young pastors that there is no ethical problem with such use of the sermons of others.

There is not much we can do with the availability of sermons online, but I believe that groups like the Evangelical Homiletics Society have a responsibility to address this issue on behalf of a new generation of pastors and preachers who are being drawn to such practices. We must help them understand both the negative ethical implications and the dangers such use will have in their own ministries. It is time for EHS to publicly address this issue.

On the positive side, the ready availability of so many sermons and resources online offers an abundance of reading for study, for inspiration, and for ideas that we can incorporate into our own preaching. Further, the online access to audio and video means that—unlike past generations which could read their pulpit heroes but rarely see them—you and I can weekly see many of the finest preachers in the world as they preach to their own congregations. Used wisely, such online resources offer a wonderful chance for us to continue our own professional development by learning from other gifted preachers. As those who teach preachers, part of our role is to point them to the best such models.

What is still needed? As editor of *Preaching*, I am always on the lookout for articles that help preachers think seriously about the work we do. For example, the current series we are running on "Preaching and Trinitarian Worship" by Michael Quicke offers preachers a chance to think about their work within a theological context that raises important questions for the church and its worship practices. We also look for great "how-to" articles that help preachers gain new insights and ideas about ways to enhance their own pulpit ministries.

And yes, we are always looking for good sermons—sermons that are biblically-rooted, that effectively communicate a biblical truth to a contemporary audience, and that provide helpful models for others to see how they can better shape their own messages in the future.

No matter what form publishing takes, it appears that preaching will find its place.

Is It Worth Writing? A Publisher's Perspective

by Paul E. Engle

(editor's note: Paul E. Engle is Associate Publisher and Executive Publisher of the Church, Academic, and Reference Resource Team at Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

Imagine being able to walk into a local bookstore and spotting a book you had written—prominently displayed for all to see. The night before you had opened the pages of the newest issue of *Christianity Today* and spotted a display ad for your book. That morning you had received a royalty check in the mail for the thousands of copies of your book that sold in a recent quarter. Such is the dream of many.

In fact an op ed piece in the *New York Times* reported that 81% of Americans feel they have a book in them that they should write! It seems like I've sat next to quite a few of them on airplanes. As soon as they find out I'm a publisher I often hear, "You know, I've always wanted to write a book." They proceed to pour out their story of what they want to say to the world.

The sober truth, however, is that only a finite fraction will ever end up in print. Being a faculty member of a credible academic institution and holding earned graduate degrees certainly can enhance the odds, but it's no guarantee.

For many years, while I served as a pastor and adjunct seminary teacher, the world of publishing was an enigma to me. Sure I had received my share of rejection slips from publishers I felt would love to publish my book which was based on an expository sermon series I had preached. Yes, I had been blessed with having several articles and books published—thanks to the providential circumstances of who the Lord had brought across my path in my early ministry. But stepping inside the walls of a major publisher to begin working as an acquisitions editor opened up a whole new world.

Do Profs Make Good Candidate to Write?

One of the things I learned is that homiletics faculty at the undergraduate and graduate levels can be the best candidates and at the same time the worst candidates to write a book. Let me explain.

Homiletics professors can be the worst candidates to write a book because:

- Being an expert in oral communication doesn't necessarily give one skill in written communication. All-too-often I've seen book proposals and sample chapters obviously originating from oral speech with some of the idiosyncrasies that make it fail to work on the page. Sure it's possible to transition from one style of communication to the other, but some fail to make the mental shift when they sit down at their computer in their local Starbucks. The written page can fail to convey the impact of the preacher's visual presence, gestures, vocal inflections, and force of personality. So the words fall lifelessly on the page inviting the reader to nod off. But this problem can be overcome.

- Serving as a professor can sometimes place one in an artificial environment removed from where the majority of the population who buy books live. Writing to impress one's colleagues and academic peers can build walls that hinder communication. The issues that seem so pressing and significant inside the academy often provoke not so much as a raised eyebrow for typical Christians who are searching on Amazon.com or browsing in their local bookstore. Editors are tempted to groan when they receive a copy of a thick dissertation or a phone call or email from a professor indicating they'd like to write a book based on their dissertation. On rare occasions this works, but only if the author has a good understanding of the significant differences between a dissertation and a publishable book. (See: Beth Luey, *Handbook for Academic Authors*, chapter 3 "Revising a Dissertation.")

On the other hand, faculty can be the best candidates to write a book, and therefore are often courted by publishers during campus visits and

at academic conferences. Why?

- They often have an intellectually viable unique idea or concept that causes an editor to respond, "Aha, now that is a fascinating idea that has possibilities!" Good books begin with a burning idea that is uniquely worth communicating to a sufficiently wide audience. They have a unique twist that grabs attention in a day where approximately 200,000 new books are published in English each year. Jim Collins in the preface of his bestseller *Good to Great* writes: "As I was finishing this manuscript, I went for a run up a steep, rocky trail in Eldorado Springs Canyon, just south of my home in Boulder, Colorado. I had stopped on top of one of my favorite sitting places with a view of the high country still covered in its winter coat of snow, when an odd question popped into my mind: How much would someone have to pay me *not* to publish *Good to Great?* It was an interesting thought experiment, given that I'd just spent the previous five years working on the research project and writing this book. Not that there isn't some number that might entice me to bury it, but by the time I crossed the hundred-million-dollar threshold, it was time to head back down the trail. Even that much couldn't convince me to abandon the project. I am a teacher at heart, As such, it is impossible for me to imagine not sharing what we're learned with students around the world." Can you say the same thing about your book idea?

- They have the opportunity to test out ideas by using them in classrooms and other speaking settings. Sometimes the subject matter that has been taught several times and honed and refined from audience feedback proves to be the grist for a great book. Bouncing ideas off colleagues can add a desirable richness.

- They have the opportunity to gather research and sometimes involve others in extensive surveys.

- They are granted sabbaticals which provide the time and setting

to do the research and writing involved in a publishable book. Few other professions provide this opportunity.

Concrete Suggestions if You Want to Get Published

What advice would I give a professor who wants to publish a book? The answer depends on a number of factors that make it hard to generalize. But nevertheless let me venture to do that and offer several suggestions, hopefully some of which you'll find applicable to your situation:

- Make sure you have a core burning idea and are able to articulate that idea in a brief "elevator speech" of no more than several sentences. If you can't condense your idea into that brief form and make it sound compelling, chances are you're not yet ready to contact a publisher.

- Consider using a dominant metaphor that unifies the chapters and leaves a visual image in the reader's mind. At the same time work to incorporate some narrative into your writing. Replace dry exposition with compelling stories. Perhaps you have heard the Indian parable: "Tell me a fact and I'll learn; Tell me a truth and I'll believe. But tell me a story and it will live in my heart forever."

- Don't send a dissertation or entire manuscript, but rather provide an editor with a brief query or a book proposal containing an outline and sample chapter. Some publishers provide book proposal guides on their website.

- In your proposal make sure you have thought through and spell out the specific audience you are writing for. The more specific you can be, generally the more helpful it will be to the publisher in assessing your project. You can't reach multiple diverse audiences at the same time. Envision who you are writing for, what needs they have that your book is addressing, and why they would be compelled to read what you write. If it's a textbook indicate what kinds of classes might use it and

whether it is a primary or supplemental text.

- Study the competition—either online, in catalogs, or in bookstores and libraries. Make sure you are familiar with related books on the same subject as yours. What makes yours different? Can you learn anything from the competition that will enable you to craft a book that stands out as a purple cow?

- Check out the *Chicago Manual of Style* or *The Christian Writer's Manual of Style* to make sure you are updated on your understanding of form, format, and style issues.

- Test your ideas to see if they work with the targeted market. Getting honest feedback from people who review your tentative table of contents and sample chapters can provide insight on how to revise your material.

- Don't be content with the first draft of a chapter. Over a period of time go back to the chapter again and rewrite it. Some of the principles taught in Strunk and White's classic volume *The Elements of Style* may provide insight. Making sure you use active rather than passive verbs, eliminating unnecessary words and sentences, and avoiding technical terms, can improve your writing.

Conclusion

Is it worth all the effort to try to get a book published? To be honest, not everyone should be an author. But publication often opens up new doors and extends the impact of one's ideas in a way not otherwise possible. Henry David Thoreau observed, "How many a man has dated a new era in his life from the reading of a book." After placing an online order with an e-tailer I received the book in the mail and discovered inside a bookmark bearing this quote by Christopher Morley, "When you sell a man a book, you don't sell him 12 ounces of paper and ink and glue—you sell him a whole new life." Is it worth writing? How would you answer that question?

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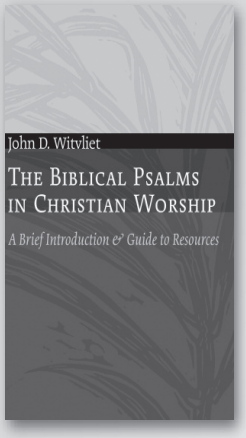

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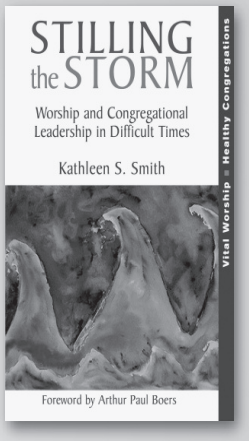

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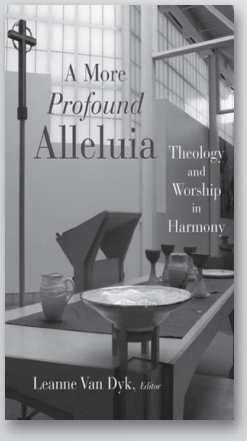

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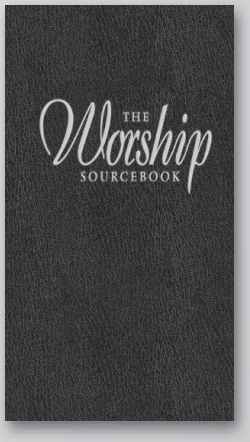

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Preaching for Publication: On Dressing for Success

by Robert N. Hosack

(editor's note: Robert N. Hosack is Senior Acquisitions Editor at Baker Academic/Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan.)

I recently saw a comic that pictured a preacher on stage with a large video screen projection of his image at the pulpit in the background. As he began his message he proclaimed, "My sermon today is about pride."

No doubt, many that regularly proclaim God's Word struggle with such temptations inherent in the preaching art. The comic's message is a reminder of Emerson's sage warning for: "What you do speaks so loud that I cannot hear what you say."

This pastoral pitfall is a temptation that can have broader applications. For the pastor who faces this quandary in public proclamation meets similar issues in exploring the extension of the preached word into the publishing realm. With this in mind, I'd like to suggest several guidelines for those readers considering the apparent "natural" connection between preaching and the printed word.

Dressing for Success: Guidelines to Consider

You'll recall Hans Christian Anderson's classic tale *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Once upon a time there lived an emperor who was quite the average fairy tale ruler, with one exception: he cared too much about his clothes. Fascinated by two swindlers' promise of an invisible outfit that could not be seen by anyone who was either stupid or not fit for their position, the emperor allowed himself to be dressed in the "clothes" for a procession through the village,

never admitting that he was too unfit and stupid to see what he was wearing. He feared that other people would think that he was stupid. Of course, all the townspeople praised the emperor's magnificent clothes—all afraid to admit that they could not see them either, until a small child cried out, "But he has nothing on!"

What can preachers learn from this Danish fairy tale that speaks to the art and craft of writing? First, *don't believe your own press.* While your congregants may praise you for a sermon series that plays in Peoria, don't assume that makes a book in Kalamazoo. The most dangerous thing you can do in preaching is to believe your own press. Stop believing that what your own people receive automatically carries weight in other fellowships or with other leaders. Go someplace where they don't know you. Test the terrains. Listen to real people outside of your networks—outside of your comfort zones. If your words are received there, then maybe, just maybe they might deserve to be translated to the printed page.

Second, *don't believe in the crowds*. Beware the masses; they are not always truthful. Not all crowds (or congregations) are wise. Consider, for example, mobs or crazed investors in a stock market bubble. Watch the advice you are given. Remember the dangers of being damned by faint praise.

Too many sermons are just more of the same old. But if you have a message in your bones from the Lord, this could be a word worth transcribing. Seek discernment; seek wisdom; seek the counsel of a very select few. Is your message/thesis unique, fresh, different, and translatable to the printed page? If the answer that you receive is yes, then the work has just begun. It is now judged worthy, but can it be made good? Grab another cup of coffee, and get back to the keyboard. The evening's just begun. Just remember, not every message is a chapter and not every sermon series makes a book.

Third, *listen to the children.* Make your words available to the next generation. "And a little child shall lead them." Mark your words available to the next generation. When you consider how a sermon

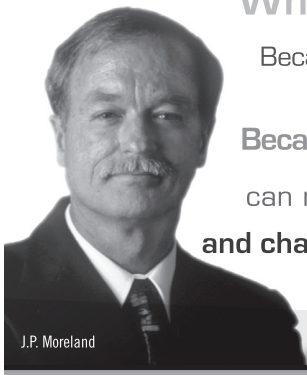
or reflection might be of help or comfort to other congregants or colleagues, remember to speak across the generations. Oldsmobiles may work in some congregations, but a test drive on the writing road will likely demand higher performance vehicles.

Where does the pulpit meet the pen—or the keyboard? The word heard differs from the word read. Don't assume that a written sermon is equal to a written page. When considering these two unique genres, remember that writing for preaching demands one set of guidelines but writing for publication demands quite another set of standards. The two are not strangers, but you must do the hard work of contextualization to make them friends. Otherwise, the message will be "lost in translation."

Finally, *make sure that you have something on*. As Mark Twain reminds us, "Clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society." Don't be caught naked like the emperor—or wearing only pride. It is the undergarment that we all wear—preachers no more than publishers—the invisible clothing. It sticks close to our skin, as such is sin.

Make sure that you have a good, authentic word to say. If you're to venture out from the pulpit, across the medium to the printed page, be certain that you're dressed for the journey. Remember what Woody Allen says, "Ninety percent of life is showing up." The publishing perspiration is in the other ten percent that separates the men from the boys, the ladies from the girls.

So if you have a word from the Lord, dress it for publishing success and as it goes forth let God give the increase.



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can redraw the map of the world. . .

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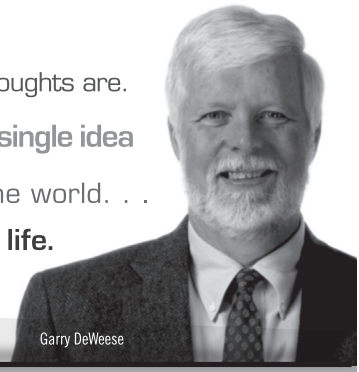

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Toward a Lifetime of Fruitful Preaching: Equipping Preachers to Engage Regularly the Biblical Languages

by Brandon Cash

(editor's note: Brandon Cash is Lead Pastor of Oceanside Christian Fellowship, El Segundo, California and adjunct professor of preaching and leadership at Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, California. This article was presented as a paper at the 2006 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts.)

Abstract

Master of Divinity (hereafter MDiv) course requirements at evangelical seminaries (as opposed to course requirements at non-evangelical seminaries) reveal that evangelical pastors are trained to use the biblical languages. There is the recognition and commitment, and even eagerness on the part of students, to be trained in the use of the biblical languages so that they can handle the Word of God with accuracy and depth. But often when confronted with the demands of pastoral ministry, pastors neglect the use of their biblical languages. This paper will explore how homiletics departments can strategically prepare students for a lifetime practice of engaging the biblical languages so that the preacher is able to handle the Word of God with ever increasing accuracy, depth, humility and confidence.

Introduction

The theme of this year's conference, *Toward Excellence in Equipping Preachers: A Future Focus and a Backward Glance*, immediately brought to mind my seminary experience. While my entire seminary education was preparation for the pastorate, it was my homiletics courses, particularly, that best prepared me for a preaching/teaching ministry. My homiletics courses were the "capstone" of my seminary education.[1]

My experience is not unique. For many or most students seminary is preparation for vocational ministry, and because a majority of those preparing for vocational ministry ultimately desire a preaching/teaching ministry, it follows that most students in our classes, irrespective of what a course catalog may say, view homiletics as their capstones.

At this point in my life I am a full-time pastor who has the occasional opportunity to teach these capstones at Talbot School of Theology, Biola University. My limited experience as a professor has confirmed what I sensed as a student—homiletics courses are viewed by students as the capstone courses. And because they are viewed as such, they have a unique credibility and opportunity to influence students, and by extension influence the Church. I would like to suggest that one of the most strategic applications of this unique credibility is to influence our students to regularly engage the biblical languages. It is one of the most important things we can do to positively influence Christ's Church.

The Unique Emphasis of Evangelical Seminaries

The doctrine of the authority of Scripture has taken a beating over the last one hundred years. Nowhere is this more evident than in the seminaries themselves. MDiv requirements at various seminaries make it obvious that, for many seminaries, the authority of Scripture is an antiquated doctrine. One obvious example is evident in the fact that the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), which is the accrediting body of all North American seminaries, does not require the study of biblical languages in the MDiv program. That this accrediting body, which requires many things in the MDiv curriculum, does not consider the study of biblical languages essential in the training of pastors is indicative of the declining role of Scripture in seminaries and, by extension, churches.[2]

For reference, listed below are the language requirements of six seminaries. Notice the difference between those that are evangelical

(the first three) and those that are not (the last three). This list is by no means exhaustive, but a fair representation of two types of seminaries:

- Talbot School of Theology requires 22 credit-hours of Greek and Hebrew (MDiv)
- Dallas Theological Seminary requires 27 credit-hours of Greek and Hebrew (ThM)
- Trinity Evangelical Divinity School requires 23 credit-hours of Greek and Hebrew (MDiv)
- At Harvard Divinity School "MDiv students must complete three semesters of study (three half-courses) in one language relevant to their program…Many students take this opportunity to learn a scriptural language and to work with the sacred texts of their tradition in the original language. Others choose to study a modern language."[3]
- At Yale Divinity School biblical languages "will be accepted for elective credit," and to be fair, they are encouraged. Nonetheless, they are not required in the MDiv program.[4]
- At Union Theological Seminary, New York City, it is recommended, but not required, that students make a "study of Biblical Hebrew or Biblical Greek early in the student's seminary career."[5]

While evangelical seminaries continue, in theory and practice, to make the biblical languages foundational, many liberal seminaries have made them foundational in theory and optional in practice. Wayne Strickland, a theology professor, has given some thought to the correlation between biblical language requirements and a school's view of Scripture:

> Traditionally, the Biblical languages have been a foundational structure in the complete and adequate training of the ministerial student. Every seminarian was expected to include enough Hebrew and Greek in the course of his studies to be able to accurately exegete the Biblical text. Harvard in its early days

> was exemplary of this classical model with its requirement that the students learn to read the Bible in the originally received languages. The philosophy underlying this emphasis was sound…the reason for including Greek and Hebrew was very practical and necessary. It was believed that Scripture was the key to changing the lives of people. Since the Bible was deposited in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek, they should be mastered in order to give the most accurate understanding of the life-changing book. Systematic and pastoral theology were built upon this foundation in the seminary curriculum.[6]

In addition to the positive correlation between a high view of Scripture and rigorous language requirements, Strickland convincingly shows that there is a negative correlation as well. Using Princeton as an example, Strickland argues that a reduction in the language requirements led to a lower view of Scripture, which ultimately led to a liberal theology. He concludes, "Biblical orthodoxy depends upon men and women who are firmly grounded in exegetical skills such as those provided in a seminary curriculum that adequately stresses the knowledge of Greek and Hebrew…the two (exegetical and practical) should not be inseparable in the pastoral ministry."[7]

By maintaining high standards in biblical language requirements, evangelical seminaries, in theory and practice, communicate a high view of Scripture, which is now more necessary than ever before. As Michael Wilkins noted in his plenary address at the Far West Evangelical Theological Society meeting, "For evangelicals, the biblical languages contain the meaning of Scripture down to their form and semantics. The concursive theory of inspiration recognizes that the Spirit of God guided and superintended the writers of Scripture so that the very words, and all of the words, contain without error the truth that God intended to communicate to humans."[8]

I doubt that anyone in this society needs to be persuaded that there is benefit in knowing the biblical languages. (Haddon Robinson has compared it to the clarity of a DVD;[9] Ramesh Richard has compared it to color television;[10] Steven Mathewson has convincingly shown the benefits in his book on preaching Old Testament narrative.[11]) The question is not so much, "Is there benefit in knowing the languages?" Rather, the question is, "How can homiletics professors encourage and equip students to engage the biblical languages for a lifetime of fruitful preaching?"

Once students leave seminary they are faced with a plethora of choices as to how they will spend their time. Two choices seem particularly dangerous to the hard work of biblical preaching, pragmatism and fads. It takes great conviction and discipline on the part of a young pastor to resist the pull of pragmatism and the fashionable nature of fads. And while it is not the purpose of this paper to lay out a detailed argument against pragmatism or fads, two warnings are appropriate. In regards to pragmatism Ajith Fernando has rightly observed, "…a major shift has taken place in western evangelicalism where truth has been replaced by pragmatism as the major influencer of thought and life. This path is suicidal."[12]

Regarding fads Edward Curtis has accurately noted:

> There is something about a mass movement that, though it repels some people, attracts others and attracts them with their unquestioning agreement. Most of us feel compelled to "jump on the bandwagon" without asking where the bandwagon is going. Western society has made so many sharp turns in the past four hundred years that we have been conditioned to accept change as soon as it seems to be the potential "wave of the future." Some of us even go further and try to predict the next wave before it takes hold of the world, thus putting us (to

> use a cliché) "on the cutting edge."…And why is such faddism a hindrance to spiritual growth? Because spiritual growth is primarily internal, whereas most fads are external; because spiritual growth is hard work, whereas most fads require little or no effort on our part; because spiritual growth is a long process that requires our daily attention, whereas most fads distract us with their promise of instant gratification. And once we have been distracted by such promises and then enjoyed a brief period of gratification, the quick pleasure dies with familiarity, and we have wasted precious years when we could have been cultivating our souls in preparation for the great heavenly reception.[13]

These tugs toward pragmatism and fads lead many well-intentioned pastors to treat the biblical languages like a classic car. They relegate them to the garage and eventually they become more of a burden than a blessing. The longer they sit the more useless they become. Biblical languages are meant to take us somewhere, to be used; if they sit they too become useless. We have to drive this point home in our homiletics classes. Knowledge of the biblical languages is not an end in itself; it is a means to a much greater end, accuracy in proclaiming God's truth to His churches.

If homiletics professors will use their unique credibility to encourage students to regularly engage the biblical languages, the students sent off as biblical preachers will more likely stay biblical preachers and resist the temptation to morph into pragmatists and fad followers.

How to Use this Unique Credibility Strategically

Help Students Engage the Biblical Languages

First, homiletics professors should help students to see what it looks like to regularly engage the biblical languages.

Regularly engaging the biblical languages is not reaching the level of proficiency required for professors and doctoral candidates. The reality is that professors are paid to study so that they can write commentaries that pastors can use. I would argue that one way for the pastor to "regularly engage" the languages—especially the larger chunks of Old Testament narrative passages as opposed to shorter sections of epistolary literature – is to research what the best technical commentaries are and then spend time standing on the shoulders of those scholars. By standing on these scholar's shoulders, pastors are able to look out at the landscape they see and reap the benefits of a lifetime devoted to study and research. In many such instances this type of study forces one to "engage" the original language because of the technical nature of the commentary.

Though one does not need to reach the proficiency level of a professor, there is a level of proficiency that must be attained if technical commentaries, monographs, and journal articles are going to be used effectively. There is a minimum threshold that must be crossed before a pastor will ever be motivated to use these technical resources. If one does not have a basic grasp of Greek and Hebrew many of these commentaries will be inaccessible and a pastor's ability to dive deeply into the text will be hindered.

Two primary experiences have led me to this conviction. First, in my limited teaching experience at Talbot I have repeatedly found that those who have had the language and exegesis courses generally have superior bibliographies; as a rule their grasp of the text and depth of sermon are better, too. Those who interact with the most technical commentaries, monographs, and journal articles are able to utilize the best scholarship.

The second experience that leads me to this conclusion involves a group of pastors with which I fellowship. This is a group of evangelical pastors who gather monthly for prayer, encouragement, and cooperation in community service. At one particular meeting we discussed sermon preparation. I was astounded to find that in a group of roughly 20 pastors, only four regularly used commentaries (three

of the four had received MDiv degrees from evangelical seminaries). As I probed to find out why they were not reading commentaries the consensus was that commentaries were too technical and therefore not useful. The reason they found commentaries too technical was because they had never been forced to learn the biblical languages. Had they been required to learn, early in their ministry, the basics of Greek and Hebrew then reading commentaries would be much less cumbersome.

An example of engaging the Hebrew text: Most pastors are not capable, especially in the usual time allotted for sermon preparation, to open a Hebrew Bible and do a textlinguistic analysis of Genesis 39-48. But, with a basic grasp of Hebrew, they are able to read Robert E. Longacre's textlinguistic analysis of Genesis 39-48 in *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence* and follow his logic and reasoning and make an informed decision about whether or not they agree with his conclusions. In this instance, engaging the biblical language is not total translation, but interacting with a scholar who has spent countless hours studying the Hebrew text. A pastor who doesn't have a basic grasp of Hebrew will find this resource useless. One who has a basic grasp of Hebrew will not just find it useful; they will find it incredibly rewarding as well.

An example of engaging the Greek text: At the end of second Corinthians (13:11) the apostle Paul writes,

Greek: Λοιπόν, ἀδελφοί, χαίρετε, καταρτίζεσθε, παρακαλεῖσθε, τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖτε, εἰρηνεύετε, καὶ ὁ θεὸς τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ εἰρήνης ἔσται μεθ ὑμῶν.

NIV: Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

ESV: *Finally, brothers, rejoice. Aim for restoration, comfort one another, agree with one another, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you.*

NAS: *Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.*

It is obvious that there are differences of opinion among the translators. A pastor who is able to engage the biblical language is able to see (especially with all of the language tools available) why each translation has made a particular decision. He is able to look at the word χαίρετε and decide whether or not translating it as an imperative (ESV, NAS) makes the most sense. He understands the implications of translating something in the middle versus the passive (παρακαλεῖσθε) and he is able to make an informed decision as to which translation makes the most sense. When the people on Sunday morning, some of whom are holding the NIV and some of whom are holding the NAS, hear it communicated clearly, they are able to see why there is a difference and why their pastor believes that one is preferable over the other.

By helping students to see the practical benefits of regularly engaging the languages and by helping them to see that it is a realistic expectation, homiletics professors will be launching students on a trajectory of lifetime learning.

Model Use of Biblical Languages

Second, homiletics professors should model appropriate use of biblical languages in the examples with which we teach.

Homiletics professors should intentionally use sample sermons that highlight the benefits of engaging the biblical languages. Most homiletics professors have a treasure chest filled with great sermons from the various genres. They should be intentional about using a narrative sermon that highlights the insight gained from engaging the Hebrew. They should use a sermon from the epistles that highlights an exegetical insight discovered by engaging the Greek. They should use a sermon from the gospels that wonderfully illustrates how taking the time to engage the Greek text brought

clarity to Matthew's use of a particular word or phrase.

And as they highlight the insights for the students, professors should model the humility pastors should practice as they preach to their people. Too many pastors talking about a Greek word or a Greek tense are like the immature husbands in our churches who use the word "submit" but are clueless as to what it really means to "love" their wives. The ability to engage the biblical languages is not to be used to dominate people, but rather to help people understand and see the truth. Before referencing the original language in a sermon pastors should ask, "Am I doing this because it is absolutely crucial to the understanding of the text or because I want to sound smart?" Most often a reference to another translation is both sufficient to make the case clearly and an encouragement to our people to read more than one translation.

How professors model the use of language skills will have great impact on how preachers proclaim the truth to their congregations.

Require Bibliographies

Third, homiletics professors should require bibliographies that include technical commentaries, monographs, and journal articles.

Though ultimately homiletics professors are concerned with the final product, namely the sermon, homiletics courses are often the last chance for a student to be critiqued on the process. An indispensable part of the process is gaining a thorough understanding of the text. Students have greater access to better resources than ever before. If students are required to interact with technical commentaries, monographs, and journal articles they are forced to see what is available and they will experience, firsthand, the benefits of engaging the biblical languages. The more they experience the benefits of engaging the languages, the more likely they will be to continue this sort of rigorous study and preparation once the demands of vocational ministry hit.

Papers that Reflect on the Exegetical Process

Fourth, homiletics professors should require reflection papers that specifically reflect on the exegetical process, including the use of the biblical languages.

Engaging the original languages will not always produce an "a-ha" moment. But even without the "a-ha" moment there is benefit in lingering over a text in the original language. Most pastors will never be able to read the Bible in the original languages at the same speed with which they read it in their mother tongue. Spending time in the original languages forces one to slow down and think more deeply about what is being read and studied. It is during this reflective study time that one often discovers a valuable nugget. By requiring students to reflect on their exegetical studies, homiletics professors can help them discover the benefit of slowing down and making time for the biblical languages, thus encouraging them to continue the process once it is no longer a requirement.

Help from Homiletics Departments

Fifth, homiletics departments should be a key link between academia and the pastorate by making up-to-date bibliographic information readily available to pastors.

One of the greatest obstacles pastors face in trying to keep up with the latest scholarship is the sheer volume of information available. It is impossible for anyone to stay on top of it, let alone a pastor facing the daily grinds of ministry. Homiletics departments should take on the responsibility of keeping current bibliographies that are readily available for pastors. There are books available that rate commentaries, but these can be dated very quickly and they are not always helpful for a pastor. Homiletics professors are preachers who have relationships with, and access to, scholars in the fields of Old Testament studies, New Testament studies, and Theology. Most pastors do not have this same access. Let us use these relationships and connections wisely for the kingdom by publicizing what we

find out from those with whom we teach.

These are only five suggestions. Undoubtedly there are more. But if homiletics professors were intentional about these five, then more and more pastors would be more motivated to regularly engage the biblical languages.

Engaging the Biblical Languages as a Defense Against Plagiarism

In addition to the obvious benefits of deeper study, one not so obvious benefit of regularly engaging the biblical languages is a reduced likelihood of plagiarism. There seems to be a rising number of pastors who are going to others for their sermons. Good models and good insights that others provide can be invaluable aids in sermon preparation. But they can also lead to plagiarism. If the circles I am associated with are any indication, plagiarism by pastors is on the rise. Continued plagiarism by two pastors, in particular, has led to their forced resignation. There are a number of reasons for this rise in pulpit plagiarism, not the least of which is the availability of other people's sermons. But I believe one contributing factor is a lack of concern for regularly engaging the biblical languages.

A lack of concern for the languages can be a first step in totally relying on others for something that pastors should be doing. When pastors quit engaging the biblical languages they begin to rely solely on the writings of others for their studies. At first the rationale is easy; engaging the languages simply takes too much time. A pastor may feel that he does not have the time because he has to keep up with this ministry opportunity or that counseling session. Pretty soon even reading the commentaries is taking up too much time. This is time that could be spent in "ministry."

So one week, when the crunch is really on, a pastor preaches the gist of someone else's sermon. It goes well, his preparation time is reduced to a couple of hours, and he has all the time he needs to keep up with the latest ministry fad. Sadly, this exception soon becomes the norm. Eventually he is regularly preaching someone

else's sermon and he has lost sight of the fact that God has called him to preach the Word, not someone else's sermons. The pastor forgets that he is transformed as he discovers more about God in his studies. The great puritan preacher, John Owen, recognized this some four hundred years ago when he wrote, "A man preacheth that sermon only well unto others which preacheth itself in his own soul. And he that doth not feed on and thrive in the digestion of the food which he provides for others will scarce make it savoury unto them; yea, he knows not but the food he hath provided may be poison, unless he have really tasted of it himself. If the word do not dwell with power in us, it will not pass with power from us."[14]

If we do not prepare students to regularly engage the biblical languages might we be setting them up for such pitfalls?

Conclusion

Just like there are constant demands on a pastor to use his time wisely, there are constant demands on homiletics professors to use their time wisely. Our ultimate goal is to produce biblical preachers. We should constantly ask ourselves how we can do this most effectively in the limited time we have with students. In this paper I have tried to make a case that a strategic use of our time is to encourage and equip students to regularly engage the biblical languages.

In Haddon Robinson's 1984 presidential address to the Evangelical Theological Society, he closed with these words, "If we cannot be scholarly evangelists, then by God's grace let us determine to be evangelistic scholars."[15] His point was that, too often, there is a distinction made between those who are academic and those who are practical. Homiletics professors have an incredible opportunity to bridge the gap by encouraging preachers to stand on the shoulders of scholars and view the landscape of their learning. By building into our students a commitment to regularly engage the biblical languages we are equipping them to stand on the shoulders of scholars who would otherwise be inaccessible. We are equipping them to more accurately and effectively preach God's Word. And that is what will ultimately change lives for the glory of God.

Notes

1. Technically a "capstone course" is a course offered in the final semester of study, a course that ties together the key learning objectives that faculty expect the student to have learned during their program. Though homiletics courses are not technically the "capstone" courses of most MDiv programs, they function as such because, more than any other course, they tie together the language courses, exegesis courses, hermeneutics courses, and theology courses that make up the majority of an evangelical MDiv program.
2. This was first brought to my attention in an unpublished paper presented by Dr. Michael J. Wilkins at the plenary session of the 2006 Evangelical Theological Society, Far West Region. I was invited to respond to Dr. Wilkins and it was in preparation for that response that I began thinking about the unique role homiletics courses play in the preparation of pastors.
3. Quoting from Harvard Divinity School's online catalog at http://www.hds.harvard.edu/afa/mdiv.html
4. Quoting from Yale Divinity School's online catalog at http://www.yale.edu/bulletin/html/div/programs.html
5. Quoting from Union Theological Seminary's catalog at http://www.uts.columbia.edu/index.php?id=291
6. Wayne Strickland, "Seminary Education: A Philosophical Paradigm Shift in Process," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32:2 (June 1989): 227-228.
7. Strickland 235.
8. Wilkins 1.
9. Haddon Robinson, *Biblical Preaching 2nd Ed.* (Grand Rapids, 2001), 61-62.
10. Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids, 2001), 151-152.
11. Steven Matthewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids, 2002), 227-255.
12. Ajith Fernando, *The Supremacy of Christ* (Wheaton, 1995), 112-113.
13. Edward Curtis and John Brugaletta, *Discovering the Way of Wisdom* (Grand Rapids, 2004), 95-96.
14. John Piper, *Contending for Our All* (Wheaton, 2006), 111.
15. Haddon Robinson, "The Theologian and the Evangelist," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 28:1 (March 1985): 8.

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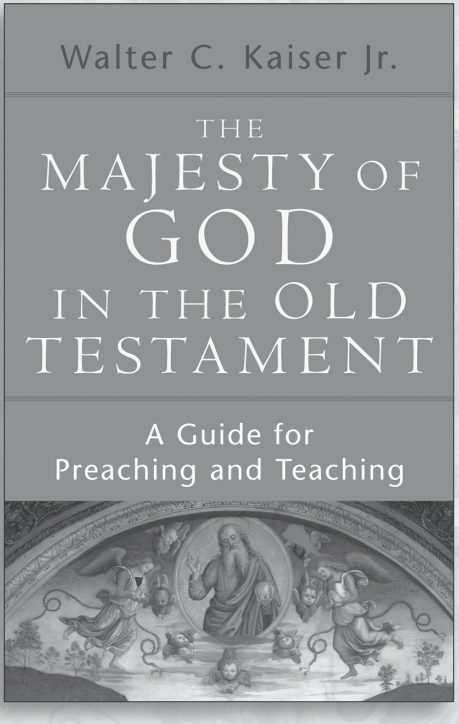

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Preaching in a Media-Narrated World: The "Christ-Figure" in Popular Film and Suggested Implications for Homiletics

by Casey C. Barton

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Introduction

In the field of homiletics writers have suggested that the discipline of preaching exists in a continuous state of flux and adaptation as cultural communication patterns evolve and communication technologies are updated and revised. Fred Craddock has observed that the discipline of communication studies remains a changing field "due to experimentation with new technologies."[1] One common influencing factor of contemporary thought and communication is the saturation of culture with popular media. Media such as television, film and the Internet have saturated Western society for some time and with such rapidity that it has been difficult for the church to keep up.[2] The preacher faces a different situation today than she or he may have even just a few years ago. As popular media influences the manner in which people receive and process information, it demands critical thought from the preacher regarding those factors exuding their influence upon society. While the scope of this essay is not adequate to take up all aspects of popular media's influence on contemporary culture, one facet of cinematic narrative will be considered in particular and then discussed in relation to the practice of homiletics in the current societal situation.

Numerous theological discussions have appeared recently focusing upon the presence of so-called "Christ-figures" in film. The archetypal Christ story is making increasing appearances in popular film in which one character undergoes a type of Passion, Death, Resurrection, sometimes Ascension, and thereby brings redemption to the narrative world and/or its characters. While this aspect of

popular media has been discussed theologically, there has been very little examination of implications of the popular Christ-figure for practical theology in general, or homiletics in particular.

Because of the presence of popularized Christ-figures in contemporary media, and because of media's cultural and religious function in society, it is sensible for the practical theologian to ask: What is the preacher to do with contemporary media's appropriations of the narrative of Christ in its presentation of "Christ-figures"? To explore this question, this essay will first draw on sociological, cinematic, and theological studies in order to examine the relevance of cinema studies for homiletical thought. The focus will then shift to a discussion of the Christ-figure in popular film and in theological discussions. Finally, implications of the popular Christ-figure in contemporary film for homiletics will be offered with specific reference to the film *Cold Mountain* (2003). The preacher must be aware of the "worlds" constructed and offered by popular media, and their similarities to and differences from the narrative world offered in Scripture, which he or she is called to re-present for the church. Additionally, there is the potential for both beneficial and negative aspects of the Christ-figure motif in popular cinematic stories for the practical theology of the church.

The Relevance of Cinema for Homiletical Studies

While some theologians are increasingly incorporating media studies into their theological work, the trend has been slower to materialize in the area of practical theology.[3] The following will attempt to offer two reasons that homiletical studies should incorporate media studies in general, and cinema studies in particular. First, film is explored as not merely entertainment media, but with regards to its cultural and religious functions for those who consume it. Secondly, cinema and homiletics intersect as both are communicative forms that "create worlds."[4]

Film as Cultural and Religious Media

One of the most central reasons for practical theology to look at media such as cinema is the cultural and religious role that such media play in contemporary society. The use of cultural artifacts such as film narratives in order to "construct reality"[5] and make sense of one's world is a function recognized by sociological, cinematic and theological/religious studies of film.

In his book *Film as Social Practice*, sociologist and cultural theorist Graeme Turner contends that:

> Film provides us with pleasure in the spectacle of its representations on the screen, in our recognition of stars, styles, and genres, and in our enjoyment of the event itself. Popular films have a life beyond their theatre runs or their reruns on television; stars, genres, key movies become part of our personal culture, our identity. Film is a social practice for its makers and its audience; in its narratives and meanings we can locate evidence of the ways in which our culture makes sense of itself.[6]

Turner goes on to argue that central to cinema's social function is its narrative structure and mythic nature. Pointing out that narrative is universal of all cultures, he posits that narrative serves an "essential social function."[7] Drawing on the research of sociologist Claude Levi-Strauss, Turner presents this narrative function as mythic, serving to allow men and women to make sense of the world in which they live. Film, Turner argues, fulfils a similar need for contemporary society that mythic narrative did for previous ones.[8] Further, cinematic stories serve to "re-present" the world in a mythic sense:

> Film does not reflect or even record reality; like any other medium of representation it constructs and 're-presents' its pictures of reality by way of

> the codes, conventions, myths, and ideologies of its culture as well by way of the signifying practices of the medium.[9]

Cinematic narratives become embedded in the collective cultural consciousness, functioning to help people to make sense of the world.

This social function of cinema has been recognized within the film industry as well. Screenwriter and teacher of screenwriting Robert McKee addresses this subject in his textbook, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Screenwriting*. Describing the inherent desire for story in cultural communities, and that story is the heart of cinema, McKee observes:

> The world now consumes films, novels, theatre and television in such quantities and with such ravenous hunger that the story arts have become humanity's prime source for inspiration, as it seeks to order chaos and gain insight into life. Our appetite for story is a reflection of the profound human need to grasp the patterns of living, not merely as an intellectual exercise, but within a very personal, emotional experience. In the words of playwright Jean Anouilh, 'Fiction gives life its form.'[10]

Going on in what could be an echo of Horace's *Ars Poetica*, McKee affirms the storyteller's mandate to entertain while instructing. He writes that "all fine films, novels, and plays, through all shades of the comic and tragic, entertain when they give the audience a fresh model of life empowered with an affective meaning."[11]

In addition to the fields of sociology and cinema studies, theological studies have begun to recognize the influence of cinema on contemporary culture. Christopher Deacy, noting that media traditionally considered secular actually performs a religious function

in society, proposes that popular film studies must be accorded a place in contemporary theological studies:

> If the fields of theology and religious studies are thus to take human history and human experience seriously, then such media as television and popular film must be accorded what Michael Paul Gallagher categorizes as 'a privileged witness in today's culture.' . . . in an age in which popular film, in particular, can be seen to be so pervasive, the overwhelming evidence suggests that some of the roles traditionally associated with religious discourse have been displaced by, and transposed through, such media.[12]

Similarly, theological and cultural critic Margaret Miles observes a shift in North American religious authority and experience:

> The point of my study . . . is to acknowledge that the representation and examination of values and moral commitments does not presently occur most pointedly in churches, synagogues, or mosques, but before the eyes of 'congregations' in movie theatres. North Americans – even those with religious affiliations – now gather about cinema and television screens rather than in churches to ponder the moral quandaries of American life.[13]

Movie theatres serve an increasingly influential function in contemporary society.

Adding to the voices of Miles and Deacy, two notable studies on the social influence and use of cinematic media are those of John Lyden and Conrad Ostwalt. Ostwalt's *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* explores the religious function of culturally produced artifacts traditionally viewed as "secular," as well as the secularization of what has traditionally been considered "religious."[14] Lyden's *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals*

makes a convincing case for contemporary North American society's use of film narratives in a religious manner.[15]

These studies taken together make a strong case that film performs a cultural and religious function in contemporary society. This conclusion by itself points to the importance of media studies in general, and film studies in particular, for practical theology. In a direct manner the film and the sermon (as religious communication), perform similar functions.

Cinema, Homiletics, and the Creation of a World

In addition to the similarities in function of both film and sermon there is intersection in the two media's forms. Both cinema and homiletics are involved in the process of creating reality in re-presentation of the world in their particular constructions of the/a world.

In cinema the filmmaker constructs a cinematic world into which the viewer is invited to participate, and hence, make sense of his or her own world. McKee frames the task of the filmmaker in these terms:

> The cinema's master storytellers give us the double-edged encounter we crave. First, the discovery of a world we do not know. No matter how intimate or epic, contemporary or historical, concrete or fantasized, the world of an eminent artist always strikes us as somewhat exotic or strange. Like an explorer parting forest leaves, we step wide-eyed into an untouched society, a cliché-free zone where the ordinary becomes extraordinary. Second, once inside this alien world, we find ourselves. Deep within these characters and their conflicts we discover our own humanity. We go to the movies to enter a new, fascinating world, to inhabit vicariously another human being who at first seems so unlike us and yet at heart *is* like us, to live in a fictional reality

that illuminates our daily reality.[16]

It is this re-creative quality of narrative that gives cinema interest and the ability to persuade. Film and religion scholar S. Brent Plate has claimed that it is at the point of film's ability to re-create narrative worlds that it comes closest in character to religion itself.[17] Plate argues that both film and religious ritual reconnect people with their world through the facilitation of an experience of another world or a fresh experience of their own world.[18] By entering the world of the film and experiencing it "vicariously" through the characters in that world, the viewer is able to place him or herself into the narrative experience presented and learn about his or her own "real" world through this experience.

This description of cinema's form is similar to Walter Brueggemann's homiletical paradigm. Brueggemann suggests that the biblical text interpreted and preached creates "another world of perception, value, and power which permits alternative acts."[19] The sermon's purpose in the church is to "provide a world in which the congregation can live." This world "competes with other offers made by capitalism, by militarism, by psychology of various kinds, by health clubs, by automobiles, by beers," and indeed by cinematic narratives.[20] Elsewhere Brueggemann elaborates on the preacher's task of world-construction:

> [The sermon] is an artistic moment in which the words are concrete but open, close to our life, but moving out to new angles of reality. At the end, there is a breathless waiting: stunned, not sure we have reached the end. Then there is a powerful sense that a world has been rendered in which I may live, a world that is truly home but from which I have been alienated. The speaker must truly be poet . . . to evoke a different world, a new song, a fresh move, a new identity, a resolve about ethics, a being at home.[21]

The world that the preacher offers is a vision of reality as presented by the biblical text.

In the same way that filmmakers attempt to create a world for audience participation and their greater understanding of the "real" world, preaching can be viewed as the creation, or re-visioning, of the world. The preacher presents a vision of the world into which listeners are invited to participate and according to which they are called to live. But which "world" is the preacher to construct? The preacher's task is arguably to cast a vision of the world in accordance with the gospel. It is a vision of the world at odds with that given by the world itself, in varying degrees of contradistinction to the visions of the world cast by capitalism, militarism, beer companies, and the many other producers of cultural narrative, including films. The gospel narrative is that which the Christian preacher takes as True, or, "authoritative."[22] Cultural narratives propose competing truths, or worlds, which either (or most often, both) intersect with or diverge from this True story.

In that one of the primary techniques of both cinema and homiletics is that of re-presenting the world, both can be viewed as having a similar form. This intersection provides another reason for homiletics to pay attention to cinema. Both are involved in the work of "world-construction," and often times present very different visions of the world. And these visions are in competition for influence.

This issue will now be explored in relation to the use of the Christ motif in recent popular cinema, followed by implications of this for homiletics.

The Christ-Figure in Popular Film and the Implications for Homiletics

Much recent literature on theology or religion and cinema has focused on the "Christ-figure" motif of many contemporary films. Definitions of and approaches towards the Christ-figure from this literature will first be discussed followed by an analysis of this motif in one recent film, *Cold Mountain*. Finally, implications for preaching in a media-narrated society will be presented.

Definitions and Approaches in Recent Literature

Looking at the Christ-figure in popular film one must first define what is meant by the term, especially as distinct from what has been labelled the "Jesus-figure."

The Jesus-figure is, simply, a representation of the biblical figure of Jesus on film. This character appears in the biblical epic designed to re-present some aspect of the gospels, usually the life of Jesus. Films of this type include, *The Greatest Story Ever Told*, (1965) with Max von Sydow as Jesus, *The Last Temptation of Christ,* (1988) with Willem Dafoe, or Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004), with Jim Caveziel.

The Christ-figure can be described as any individual within the world of the narrative that exhibits characteristics resembling those of the redeeming Christ in Scripture, such as redemption, empowerment, sacrifice and liberation. Adele Reinhartz notes in identifying Christ-figures that:

> Jesus is not portrayed directly but is represented symbolically or at times allegorically. Christ figures can be identified either by particular actions that link them with Jesus, such as being crucified symbolically (*Pleasantville*, 1988), walking on water (*The Truman Show*, 1998) or wearing a cross (*Nell*, 1994; *Babette's Feast*, 1987). Indeed, any film that has redemption as a major theme . . . is liable to use some Jesus symbolism in connection with the redemptive hero figure.[23]

To avoid identifying just any character in a film with Christ, Peter Malone attempts to place some boundaries on the Christ-figure saying, "The Christ-figure is any purely fictional character who resembles Jesus, significantly and substantially. This emphasis on significance and substance is necessary to avoid trivializing the Christ-figure."[24]

Some have sought to identify, in rigorous detail, the key structural characteristics of the Christ-figure in film.[25] For the purposes of this essay it is sufficient to note that in essence, the Christ-figure in cinema is a character whose narrative follows, in at least key areas such as redemption, sacrificial death, or social liberation, the narrative of Christ's redemptive activity as presented in the gospel narratives. Cinematic narratives which display the Christ motif use characteristics of Christ, as well as the structure of the narrative of Christ, and attribute at least parts of it to a character in the world of the film.

Approaches to and attitudes towards the appearance of Christ-figures have widely varied in theological writings on cinema. Some, such as Anton Kozlovic, have sought to merely identify the existence of this narrative device in popular film.[26] Other authors have celebrated the Christ-figure as a tool for theological reflection. Lloyd Baugh contends that the Christ-figure provides "a more satisfactory approach to the person and event of Jesus Christ," than the Jesus-figure.[27] According to this view the Christ-figure of the film helps to shed light on the identity of Christ, revealing aspects of his character that may not have occurred to the theologian. Malone contends on this point that "the Christ-figure is a way of being led back to the Jesus of the gospels, a way too of clarifying and enhancing our understanding of Jesus-figures."[28]

A more critical approach is taken by theologian Hans Frei.[29] Frei contends that a Christ-figure cannot capture the complexity and uniqueness of the true Christ, simply because he, like all people, is unsubstitutable. Concluding that the Christ-figure as appearing in various pieces of contemporary literature is unavoidably a failure, Frei writes:

> No specific man is another specific man, and if the unsubstitutable story that establishes a man's identity finds a substitute story, even under his name, we have another person instead. The gospel story's specific identity of the Savior is bound to

> be wholly different from any other equally specific savior, and they cannot be grouped into one class. The endeavor to make the one replicate the other and still be a unique, specific individual in his own right is bound to be a failure.[30]

Central to Frei's theology is the unsubstitutable character of Jesus Christ. It is precisely because of this unsubstitutability that representations of Christ will always be a theological failure. However, it should be noted that though Frei takes a critical stance towards the Christ-figure, he still holds that there is the potential for it to be significant for theological reflection. His observations will be discussed further below.

Regardless of the approach taken or the attitude towards the Christ-figure in contemporary cinema, there has been a remarkable lacuna in literature which proposes the significance of such cinematic devices for homiletics, or for practical theology in general.[31] Frei's work, while being the most critical, seems the only exception to this. What follows is an attempt to examine the use of the Christ narrative in one contemporary film, highlighting the significance of this for homiletics.

Cold Mountain, Inman and Christ

Cold Mountain, a Civil War era drama released in 2003, while doing moderately well at the box office, was a critical success.[32] *Cold Mountain* tells the story of a Confederate Civil War solider, Inman (Jude Law), who has become disillusioned with the merits of war and who tries desperately to return home to Cold Mountain, where the woman he loves, Ada (Nicole Kidman), is waiting for him. The structure of the story strongly resembles that of Homer's *Odyssey*, as Inman travels miles and faces various trials and temptations in his journey home.[33] In addition to the similarities to *The Odyssey*, *Cold Mountain* strongly resembles the Christ story of the gospels.

After four years of war and multiple near-death experiences, Inman decides to desert the army in an effort to live what life he has left. As a deserter Inman is considered an outlaw, and is constantly in hiding from the "Home Guard," a group of corrupt men whose charge it is to round up and kill deserters. Along the journey, Inman's story parallels Christ's in a number of ways. On more than one occasion Inman must chastise a corrupt minister (Phillip Seymour Hoffman). In a scene in which Inman is tempted by the "sirens" and then sold to the Home Guard, the one betraying Inman and the minister is referred to as "Judas." Further, director Anthony Minghella describes Inman's journey as one filled with multiple temptations for him to be derailed from his goal.[34] Inman is tempted to give up his mission by hunger and cold, raw lust in the form of the "sirens," and an opportunity for genuine love from a soldier's widow (Natalie Portman). The temptation motif carries some resemblance to Christ's.

His love for Ada and his home of Cold Mountain are the things which keep Inman walking on this dangerous journey. What Inman does not know is that the effects of the war have ravished his hometown, and Ada in particular. The destruction Cold Mountain has seen has mostly been in the form of the local Home Guard, who are eager to take over people's farms, and who torture old women and kill young boys for sport. One of the main characters in the film voices her longing for divine intervention in order to make things right. Ruby Thewes (Renee Zellweger) cries out after finding her friend tortured: "This world won't stand long. God won't let it…stand this way long." This is a world in which things are not as they should be, and the characters long for something or someone to set it right.

It is in his capacity as "redeemer" that Inman most resembles Christ, especially in his sacrificial death and subsequent "resurrection." While Inman is adamant that he is done with killing, it is the next day after his reunion with Ada that he must again take up his gun, this time in order to protect her and those who have become his

family. In the climax of the film Inman, in a standoff with the chief antagonist, tells the young man, "I'm done fighting, I'm sick of it," and gives the man a chance to escape. The man, however, draws his gun provoking Inman to shoot him. In the exchange Inman himself is shot, and falls from his horse. He finally dies, with Ada over him, in a cruciform position with blood coming from his side and covering his hands.

Inman's sacrificial death – Cruciform with blood from side and on hands

Inman's death is to save those he loves, a sacrifice of his life for others. The Christ motif is furthered in the film's conclusion, occurring several years after Inman's death. In the scene Ada appears on the farm, removing the skin of a lamb that has died in the night. She takes the lamb's coat and places it on an orphaned lamb, in order to have the dead lamb's mother think it her own, and therefore preserve its life. The lamb imagery classically parallels Christ.

Orphaned Lamb Being "Clothed" in the Skin of a Dead Lamb

In a voiceover, the viewer is told in words from Ada addressed to the departed Inman:

> This time of year there is so much life everywhere, I find you in all of it as if you were still walking home to me. If you could see us now, this Easter day at Black Cove, you would know that every step of your journey was worth it.

Everything in this scene is constructed to evoke a feeling of life proceeding out of death. It is Easter, the day Christ's resurrection is celebrated in the Christian church. Everyone who had been in danger of death has survived because of Inman's sacrifice. Inman himself is, in a way, resurrected in the life that he has given those

at the table, not least of which is his own daughter, Grace Inman, conceived on Inman and Ada's only night together. The closing scene shows a series of shots of clouds followed by the breaking through of the sun, representing again life out of death. That this occurs on Easter Sunday, coupled with the lamb imagery and Inman's cruciform death, serve to solidify the Christ-imagery in *Cold Mountain.* Inman plays the role of Redeemer in this narrative world, an unmistakable Christ-figure.

Christ-Figure and Christ

While there are similarities between Inman as Christ-figure and Christ, the differences between the two must be highlighted. Most significantly it is notable that in the world of the narrative, Inman's redemptive death serves first to redeem himself from what he perceives as his decent into darkness as a soldier. In this way the character of Inman should be considered a Self-Redeeming Redeemer, as distinct from Christ who was in no need of redemption.

Throughout Inman's journey the viewer gradually learns that Inman considers himself to be, in a sense, ruined. He suffers deep regret for leaving Ada and his willing participation in a war he no longer believes in. He comments at one point about his part in the war: "I could be a killer for days, my feet against the feet of my enemy. And I always killed him, and he never killed me. And I don't know why." When Inman is finally reunited with Ada he confesses to her:

> If you could have seen my inside, or whatever you want to name it, my spirit…that part I fear, I think I'm ruined. They kept trying to put me in the ground, but I wasn't ready. But if I had goodness I lost it. If I had anything tender in me I shot it dead. How could I write to you after what I done, after what I seen?

It is evident from Inman's words that he feels himself to be in need of healing, of some type of redemption.

This redemption comes in his death, and the life that ensues as a result. As Inman lay dying in the snow, with Ada above him, he whispers the words to her, "I came home." In coming home, Inman has made things right again – He has kept his promise to return to Ada, and in a sense has atoned for what he considers senseless killing as a soldier by defeating the last vestiges of the war, the corrupt Home Guard, by his sacrificial death. Whereas he had previously believed that any goodness within himself had been lost, his goodness is truly proved in what one might identify "laying down his life for his friends." In this way, not only is Inman's death redemptive for those who live as a result of it, but it is a self-redeeming death in which he is freed from his past.

The notion of a self-redeeming Redeemer lies in stark contrast to the gospel accounts of Christ. Christian theology holds that Jesus, as the Messiah, was innocent and not in need of atonement or redemption himself, but instead made atonement and offers redemption for humanity. This is borne out in the New Testament in a number of passages such as the account of Jesus' baptism (Matthew 3), and his designation as the "lamb" of God, an allusion to the Old Testament paschal lamb (for instance John 1.29, 36; 1 Corinthians 5.7). A key characteristic of the person of Christ is that he is an innocent person – innocent before humanity, and innocent before God. It is precisely because of his innocence, according to traditional Christology, that he is able to accomplish atonement for sin and offer redemption. This is the central difference between the Christ-figure in Cold Mountain and Jesus.

The difference is significant. The narrative of Cold Mountain uses the Christ motif in order to tell a different story. The structure of the gospel narrative is utilized (in that Inman's life at points parallels Christ's), and the imagery and result of Christ's sacrificial death (cruciform and redeeming) is used in order to tell a substitute narrative. It is a narrative in which a hurt and haunted man is redeemed and redeems others through his sacrificial death. But before his redemption is effective for others, his death atones for his own sins. In essence, another person and situation is substituted

for Christ in the Christ-story. In this respect especially, Frei might contend that Inman as Christ-figure fails theologically, if not literarily as well. Cold Mountain presents a model of redemption which, while borrowing from the narrative which constitutes the person of Christ, is theologically incommensurate with the story from which it borrows its structure and theme.[35]

Implications of the Christ-figure for Contemporary Preaching

To say that Cold Mountain presents a Christ-figure that is theologically incommensurate with the person of Christ is not to say that the filmmakers were trying to retain fidelity to the biblical picture of Christ, or that the film is a "failure" because of this. It is, however, to recognize the use of a biblical motif in the media of contemporary popular culture, and to recognize its divergence from its source in the gospels. This poses implications for the practical theology of the church in general, and contemporary homiletics in particular.

The Narrative of Jesus as Unsubstitutable

In light of the use of Christ-figures in contemporary popular culture, at the very least the preacher should be reminded of the unsubstitutability of the biblical Christ for preaching. In the film Cold Mountain a savior figure is presented who resembles Christ in a number of ways. However, upon further reflection, it is shown that though Inman follows the pattern of Christ's death and in a sense resurrection, in the narrative world of Cold Mountain, a new savior is presented, making Christ a substitutable, or even disposable, savior. Inman as Self-Redeeming Redeemer is substituted for Christ as Redeemer. The Savior figure is to atone for his own sins before his redemption is effective for others. This is the pattern of redemption offered to contemporary culture through this cultural artifact.

What this means for preachers is that, in light of the cultural and religious impact film has in and on contemporary culture, the preacher must be aware of the stories society tells itself in order to

make sense out of life. Present-day society, in the narrative of Cold Mountain, has told itself a story of redemption which relies on the Christ narrative, but which diverges significantly from it. In a society in which the gospel narrative of Christ is merely one redemptive story among many, in essence disposable and substitutable, the preacher must remember that it is the unique and unsubstitutable Christ, presented in the gospels, that she is called to preach. In this way, the sermon competes with the other religious artifacts, such as films like Cold Mountain, that contemporary culture produces and uses to construct reality.

This observation gives way to both beneficial and negative aspects of the Christ-figure for practical theology.

Aspects of the Christ-figure in Film for Practical Theology

Some, such as author and theologian Frederick Buechner, would view appearances of Christ-figures in cultural artifacts as something that facilitates faith. Reflecting on literature he read as a child Buechner affirms that these books prepared him for faith in God later in life. He writes:

> Nothing was more remote from my thought at this period than theological speculation . . . but certain patterns were set, certain rooms were made ready, so that when, years later, I came upon Saint Paul for the first time and heard him say, "God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are," I had a feeling that I knew something of what he was talking about. Something of the divine comedy that we are all of us involved in. Something of grace.[36]

Stories Buechner read as a child in a way prepared him to recognize truth when he encountered it in the Bible.

This is significant for film and homiletics in the sense that redemption narratives in fiction and film can prepare the viewer to recognize the need for redemption as well as the veracity of the gospel when he or she encounters it. A preacher may be able to assume a certain familiarity with the structure of the gospel narrative of redemption because of its general appearance in popular cultural narratives. The general story of redemption as it appears in films such as *Cold Mountain* can, as other stories did for Buechner, pave the way for recognition. When the culture as a whole is telling itself stories of redemption, in light of film's cultural and religious function in society, it may indicate that redemption is a subject that society is interested in, finds a need for, or regards as important.

Frei notes other benefits of the Christ-figure motif as it appears in literature and film, even though he suggests that all Christ-figures are ultimately theological failures. He first argues that the Christ-figure highlights the fact that the person of Christ is Christ not just in his preaching and teaching, but also in the actual events of his life. That the Christ-figure generally borrows from the identifying *events* of Christ's life places emphasis on Christ's life as enacted, not merely his teaching and preaching as is often be the case in theology and preaching.[37] Similar to Buechner's comments, Frei goes on to observe that talk of Christ in any manner at all, "may have significant bearing on the transition of the pilgrim from unbelief to belief (or vice versa)."[38] These stories may (or may not) facilitate faith in the viewer. Further, for the person acquainted with the specific figure of Jesus Christ, the Christ-figure can prove to be a useful tool for reflection upon Christ's identity and work, especially in reflecting upon the divergent qualities the Christ-figure exhibits.[39]

However, in addition to these theologically positive aspects of the Christ-figure in film, there are potential negatives as well. The fact that contemporary stories such as *Cold Mountain* use the Christ motif in order to tell a different story should not be overlooked.

Margaret Miles suggests that "popular films cumulatively – not any one film but the areas of consensus among many films – make the

desires and behaviors repeatedly depicted on the big screen seem both 'natural' and right."[40] To extrapolate this idea beyond desires and behaviors, films have the cumulative power to repeatedly portray Christ as substitutable and ordinary. The trend of popular cinema using the Christ narrative as a cinematic device has the potential to, from a cultural studies point of view, turn the unique event of Christ's redemptive activity into a trivial act routinely viewed in any number of character's stories, in any number of situations, and by any number of celebrities.[41]

The challenge to the preacher in this cultural milieu, then, is to preserve the uniqueness of the gospel narrative of redemption in his or her re-presentation of the Christian narrative from the pulpit. It is for the preacher to discern the relative fidelity of cultural narratives to the gospel narrative, and hold the gospel narrative up to popular culture accordingly. Identifying the dominant culture's self-perception and how this differs from the gospel's perception of reality constitutes a prophetic role for homiletics in contemporary society.[42]

The Necessity for Critical Evaluation

One final observation has to do with the adoption of practices or technologies for homiletical practice. The prevailing use of popular cinema for homiletics has been to adopt it as a means of illustrative material, either by showing a clip from a film, or by describing the clip in words.[43] On a surface viewing of a film that presents a character as a Christ-figure such as *Cold Mountain*, the person of Inman may seem like a useful and culturally relevant illustration of Christ's sacrifice. However, the self-redemptive qualities of the character prove problematic for such a comparison. In this case, the preacher may be contributing to the dilution of Christ's unique character by advocating a story that uses Christ's narrative to tell a competing story. While the similarities between the Christ-figure and Christ may present themselves quite readily, it is even more important to recognize the differences, which often times require a deeper critical evaluation to uncover.

This is not to suggest that film cannot or should not be used in homiletics. It is to say that in the adoption of media, for Christian proclamation in particular, critical evaluation is necessary. More important than a poignant illustration is the preservation of the person of Christ as presented in the gospels.

Conclusion

Popular cultural media play religious and meaning-making roles in contemporary society. Media, such as cinema, offer visions of the way the world is for the viewer to enter in and adopt. What has been proposed here is that popular cultural media be studied in relation to homiletics. In what is increasingly becoming a media-narrated world it is important for the preacher to understand those forces which shape the flow of popular culture and influence a changing epistemology. In an effort to explore this subject, the Christ-figure as a narrative device in contemporary cinema was examined as it appears in one specific film, *Cold Mountain*. In this film the aspects of the narrative of Christ are borrowed at various points in order to tell a *substitute,* and actually *competing,* story of redemption. As the original narrative of Christ gradually fades (or has faded) into the cacophony of competing cultural narratives, it is all the more important for the preacher to recognize the narrative of Christ as unsubstitutable, and to recognize from a homiletical standpoint both the potential positive and negative effects that such media can have on listeners. In this way today's preacher may be able to more effectively communicate the message of Christ that he or she has been called to communicae.

Notes

1. Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 13.
2. It has only been relatively recently that theology has incorporated studies of popular culture, and even then rarely have suggestions for practical theology been made.
3. Consideration of media in practical theology is not, however, altogether absent. See for instance Richard Jensen, *Telling the Story: Variety and Imagination in Preaching* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); idem. *Thinking in Story* (Lima, OH: CSS, 1995); David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987).
4. It should be noted that there are opponents to the task of incorporating media studies into practical theology and homiletics. The scope of this paper does not allow the address of these oppositions directly. Some of these works include: Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves To Death*

(London: Methuen, 1987); William H. Williamon, "Preaching: Entertainment or Exposition?" *Christian Century* 107 (28 February 1990): 204, 206; Michael Budde, *The (Magic) Kingdom of God: Christianity and Global Culture Industries* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1997).

5. A phrase borrowed from Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (New York: Doubleday, 1966) and used by Walter Brueggemann in relation to preaching, "The Social Nature of the Biblical Text for Preaching" in Arthur Van Seters, ed., *Preaching as a Social Act: Theology and Practice* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1988), 127-165.
6. Graeme Turner, *Film as Social Practice, third edition* (London: Routledge, 1999), 3.
7. Turner, 82.
8. Turner, 83.
9. Turner, 152.
10. Robert McKee, *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting* (London: Methuen, 1999), 12.
11. McKee, 12. For the allusion to Horace see, *Ars Poetica*, lines 333-346.
12. Christopher Deacy, *Screen Christologies: Redemption and the Medium of Film* (Cardiff, Wales: University of Wales Press, 2001), 2-3.
13. Margaret Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon, 1996), 25.
14. Conrad Ostwalt, *Secular Steeples: Popular Culture and the Religious Imagination* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2003).
15. John L. Lyden, *Film as Religion: Myths, Morals, and Rituals* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).
16. McKee, *Story*, 4-5.
17. S. Brent Plate, "The Re-Creation of the World: Filming Faith" *Dialog* 42:2 (Summer 2003): 155-160.
18. Plate, 157.
19. Brueggemann, "The Social Nature of the Biblical Text for Preaching," 132.
20. Brueggemann, 143.
21. Walter Brueggemann, *Finally Comes the Poet: Daring Speech for Proclamation* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 9-10.
22. See N.T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.
23. Adele Reinhartz, "Jesus on the Silver Screen," in N.N. Perez, ed., *Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography* (London: Merrell, 2003), 189.
24. Peter Malone, "Jesus on our Screens," in John R. May, ed., *New Image of Religious Film* (Franklin, WI: Sheed & Ward, 2000), 69-70.
25. See for instance Anton Karl Kozlovic's article which identifies no less than 25 characteristics. "The Structural Characteristics of the Cinematic Christ-figure" *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 8 (Fall 2004); <http://www.usask.ca/relst/jrpc/art8-cinematicchrist-print.html>.
26. Kozlovic.
27. Lloyd Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film*, (Kansas City: Sheed & Ward, 1997), 109.
28. Malone, "Jesus on our Screens," 70.
29. While Frei deals mostly with literature, his observations are relevant for film.
30. Hans Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ: The Hermeneutical Bases of Dogmatic Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1997), 129.
31. There have been popular works, such as published sermons or illustration collections, which use the Christ-motif in popular cinema. The majority of these are uncritical and not useful for this study. See for instance J. John and Mark Stibbe, *The Big Picture: Finding the Spiritual Message in Movies* (Milton Keyes, UK: Authentic Lifestyle, 2002); or Craig Brian Larsen and Andrew Zahn, *Movie-Based Illustrations for Preaching and Teaching: 101 Clips to Show or Tell* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).
32. Domestic box office receipts for *Cold Mountain* were 95.6 million (US) dollars, with a worldwide total of 142 million dollars. The film cost an estimated 83 million dollars to create. Critically, *Cold Mountain* was nominated for 8 Golden Globe Awards, with Renee Zellweger winning for Best Supporting Actress. The film was also nominated for 7 Academy Awards, again with Zellweger

winning for Best Supporting Actress. See: <http://www.imdb.com>, <http://worldwideboxoffice.com>.

33. Director Anthony Minghella makes the connection to *The Odyssey* explicit in the director's commentary on the DVD. "Director's Commentary," *Cold Mountain, collector's edition 2-disc set* (Miramax, 2004).
34. "Director's Commentary."
35. Frei discusses the appearance of "Redeemed Redeemers" in ancient Gnostic literature. See *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 108-114.
36. Frederick Buechner, *The Sacred Journey: A Memoir of Early Days* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1982), 18.
37. Frei, *The Identity of Jesus Christ*, 128.
38. Frei, 129.
39. Frei, 129.
40. Miles, *Seeing and Believing*, 27.
41. The Christ-figure motif is utilized in many more films than *Cold Mountain*. See for instance, *Constantine* (2005), *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1975), or *The Matrix* Trilogy (1999, 2003, 2003).
42. Quentin Schultze discusses the potential for popular media itself to play a prophetic role in popular culture. It may, however, be more realistic to think of homiletics playing this role. See, Quentin J. Schultze, *Communicating For Life: Christian Stewardship in Community and Media* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000), 131-134.
43. See for instance, Larsen and Zahn, *Movie Based Illustrations*.

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(MAY 2008)

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"I chose the preaching track for the reputation of its faculty, and I expected great instruction as a result," Zeke states. "What I've gotten here has been so much more—faculty who invest themselves in their students as personal mentors." This outstanding faculty mentoring, in addition to a ministry-friendly schedule, a wide variety of specialized tracks, and an incredible peer-learning environment, makes Gordon-Conwell the ideal place to pursue a doctoral degree.

"Even more, Dr. Arthurs doesn't stop being my mentor once I leave the campus," Zeke notes. "Throughout the year, he listens to my sermons and writes a helpful critique. In my Doctor of Ministry program, I get more than a professor for two weeks, I get a mentor all year."

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by Chuck Sackett

(editor's note: Chuck Sackett is Preaching Minister at Madison Park Christian Church, Quincy, Illinois; Professor at Large at Lincoln Christian Seminary, Lincoln, Illinois, and Adjunct Professor at TCM International Institute, Heiligenkreuz, Austria. The following paper was presented at the Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting held 13-15 October 2005 at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri.)

Abstract

Teachers of preachers rightfully insist the text "wins" when the sermon says and does what the text says and does. In recent years, allowing the text to provide the structure has received needed emphasis. It's time homiletics took another step forward: letting the text win illustratively. Sermons are strengthened when the text provides, suggests, or stimulates the image that carries the message and/or the supporting material used to enhance, validate and illustrate that message.

Introduction

It's just a few minutes before I'm to speak. I'm preaching for a friend's congregation where I've spoken on a number of occasions. The only element of liturgy left is the Lord's Supper. Flashing through my mind is every preacher's nightmare—I've already preached this sermon, here. Foraging through cobwebs I'm trying to recall something—anything—that will tell me I'm wrong. Suddenly I remember Dr. White's response to a story in the sermon. I have preached this here before.

Somehow stories stick and the sermon will be remembered for the story even if not for the message. That being the case, how can the stories (a.k.a., illustrations, metaphors, images) be so textually-driven, that when listeners remember the story, they are drawn back to the text?

Every preacher knows the chorus—"no one remembers my sermons—but I can't use the same illustration twice." Our experience is that people tend to remember the images and stories we use to illustrate our "points," but rarely remember the point itself. We have argued for the past several years that we should "let the text win" in the dominant thought (big idea, point) and structure—at least then people can come back to something of substance, even when they don't remember our sermon.

I'm arguing that if the very images, metaphors and illustrations we use are driven by the text, what people remember will draw them closer to that substantive message than if they simply remember our stories. Nothing benefits the listener more that having their hearts and minds anchored in a biblical text. Every preacher knows the challenge of finding the right image or illustration. Most have made friends with *10,000 Illustrations for Every Occasion* (at least us old guys) or preachingonline.com or preachingtoday.com (this list is nearly endless). But is there a better way? Is there at least a way that makes those tools as potent as possible?

I'm suggesting there is. I'm suggesting that inherent in our study of the text (the exegetical process itself) there are clues to effective images and illustrations that will anchor the text (and not merely the story) in the hearts and memories of our listeners.

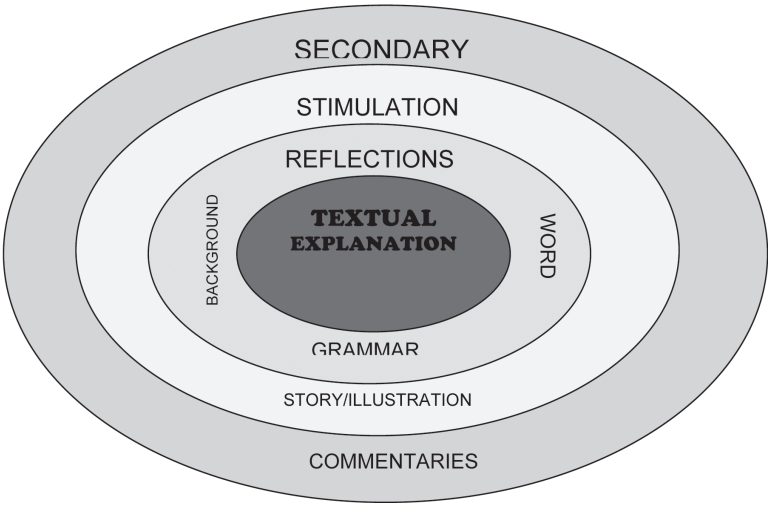
Clues to Effective Images and Illustrations

I envision a series of concentric circles (inner most—the text/explanation; then, reflections on words, grammar, background, etc.; followed by stories/illustrations stimulated by the text; concluding with the material found in secondary sources related to the text) showing a progression of effectiveness—the closer to the middle (the text) the greater the effectiveness of the material (see Figure 1).

The practice of creative reflection and observation (as well as the sleuth's determination) will provide a wealth of useful material for

Figure 1

Concentric Circles
A Model for Developing Illustrations



every sermon. Thus our study will not only assure us (as much as can be expected) of accuracy in interpretation/application, but also adequate and effective supporting material to help that truth be seen, felt and grasped.

Homileticians have reinforced for us the tri-part approach to "supporting material." Every sermon addresses explanation, application and illustration. Explanation attempts to tell us what the text said. Application helps us comprehend what it says. Illustration allows us to see what it looks like.

Sometimes dashed lines separate those three categories. Explanation sometimes comes in the form of an illustration. Application occurs in the simple explanation. Illustration is often application disguised or explanation made interesting. Given this introduction, the following examples are attempts to "explain/apply/illustrate" what I'm driving at.

An Example from Revelation 1:4-6

Revelation 1:4-6 shows us how attention to background information

and context can create an image to carry the sermon. The simplified version: John is exiled on the island of Patmos; the church has lost her preacher and the preacher has lost his church. Random reports of scattered persecution are circulating. Reports are that there has actually been martyrdom. On the other hand, churches are facing the challenge of compromise with the culture. This is a recipe for discouragement, despair. Yet John breaks into doxology. Instead of being discouraged, he responds with an outburst of praise. How does despair become doxology? How does self-pity become sacrificial praise?

Here context provides not only the answer, but the imagery to carry the answer. First, the answer: Revelation begins as any epistle does, admittedly with some additional flare, yet horizontal in nature: "John to the seven churches in Asia, grace and peace…." It's nothing we haven't read before in the letters of the New Testament. But something happens.

As John describes the Trinitarian author (some of the flare) he highlights the concerns faced by the church. He describes God as eternal ("who was and is and is to come") and the Spirit as omnipresent ("seven spirits before His throne" parallels "seven churches"). Then He turns to Jesus. Jesus is the "faithful witness"; in contrast to those who have fled the faith in the face of opposition. He is the "firstborn from among the dead"; giving hope to those who have lost loved ones to the persecution. He is the "ruler of the kings of the earth"; contrary to the Romans and their egotistical emperors.

Having so clearly identified the author of the message, suddenly John turns his attention vertical. His words are no longer aimed at his readers, but instead, pointed toward heaven. He reaches upward with a powerfully Christological doxology, "to Him who…." Something has turned his attention from his circumstances and their power to degenerate into despair, to heaven and its power to elate and encourage. He's seen a fresh vision of Jesus.

So, what does one do when "life tumbles in," becomes more than we can bear? We look at Jesus. We see Him again, for who He is. And a sermon is born. And an image to carry it develops. The possible images include seeing, vision, fresh look, double take, imagine/imagination, picture, transformation, turning the corner or something similar.

The text also provides the "what" we are to see. Three verbs surface in our study to clarify what we should look for. Here are the attributes of Jesus which produce doxology. He is one who "loves, forgives and trusts (my interpretation of "makes us")."

In seeking to "explain, apply and illustrate" the text, research provides the fodder for feeding our creative thoughts. In looking at the grammar we realize we have participles (not something we would necessarily share with the audience). We realize we are not dealing with simple acts, but with characteristics. In other words, Jesus doesn't just "love" under certain circumstances; He is characterized by love. You can't stop Him from loving.

We also note that it's present and active. He loves now, in an ongoing fashion. The question then becomes, how do we capture the implication of the grammar (explanation) in a way that will impact the audience (application) and enable them to experience the wonder of this truth (illustration)? We let the text, and our work with the text, win.

Our temptation is to turn to the immediate—go with the song. After all, "Jesus Loves Me" is a good expression of this verse. With some historical detail we can create a good illustration. We may yet use it. But it's too early to go there. The text still has much more to offer.

Because we always compare translations of the text as part of our study, we realize the King James Version translated this as past tense, "loved us." Here is an opportunity to teach a valuable study method (comparing versions) while highlighting the text (explanation) and

showing its implications creatively (application/illustration). It might sound something like this:

> I'm not a grammarian, nor the son of a grammarian, but I recognize an "s" when I see one. This text says Jesus "loves" us, not "loved" us. For some reason the translators of the King James Version chose a past tense form for this verb. But when we look at several more recent translations we see they all reveal the present tense. But isn't it still just an "s"?
>
> Frankly, some of you would prefer it was a "d," past tense. You believe Jesus "loved" you. Back when you were more innocent; before life took those unexpected, undesirable turns. You know life isn't what you'd hoped. Jesus couldn't possibly love you now, not in these conditions, not under these circumstances, not after what you have done.
>
> Others of you are convinced it should be "will love us," future tense. You have high hopes and big plans. You're going to straighten out your life. Or, life is going to get better. You'll get through the divorce, past the cancer, over the affair, beyond the sin. Then, after life is more like it should be, you may believe Jesus loves you. But not now, not yet.
>
> But look at the text. Look carefully. It's an "s". No doubt about it. John says Jesus loves me, now. He loves me in spite of my decisions, in spite of my circumstances, in spite of the condition of my life. In fact, I can't stop Jesus from loving me. It's in his nature. It reminds you of a Bible verse, doesn't it? "Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ..." (Romans 8:37-39). Or a song you heard in Sunday School, "Jesus loves me, this I know. For the Bible tells me so."

> Believe it. Jesus loves you. And nothing you can do will stop Him. Now, if you're tempted to be discouraged, that should help. When life seems unbearable, take a look at Jesus. Look into His face and note there, love. Jesus' love. He loves you right here, right now.

The second verb might be handled in a similar fashion. It too, is an attribute of Jesus. He is one who forgives. Except this is past tense. He has forgiven (loosed) us "from our sins by His own blood." In this case, the explanation/application might come through concentrating on the connecting words. Here we not only help people experience the impact of this text, but we again teach them hermeneutics. It isn't always the big words that matter. Sometimes it's the little ones, like "our" and "His." Possibly something like this:

> You'll notice in the text two really critical words. But don't look for the big, seminary-sounding words. Look for the little ones. Sometimes they make all the difference. See them? They're in the phrase "loosed us from our sins by His own blood."
>
> The two words are "our" and "His". There are others, too. For example, the word "by." It's a word of agency, telling us how something was done. Forgiveness (loosing us from our sins) was accomplished "by" His blood.
>
> But that's what's so unusual. It was "our" sin. Shouldn't it have been "our" blood? Or, if it was "His" blood, shouldn't it have been "His" sin? That's what's so amazing about Jesus. He looses us from our sin, but He does it by His blood. Amazing.
>
> It demonstrates so clearly how much He loves us. He loves us enough to give His own life for ours. If you arose this morning discouraged, if life wasn't what you

> expected, this should help. Not only does He love you, He died for you.

We might now turn further from the center; i.e., less explanation and more pure illustration. Possibly there is a strong story that illustrates the shedding of blood or some other sacrifice for the sake of others. It could be the story from Iraq of a soldier tossing himself on a bomb inside their tank. He lost his life for the sake of others.

My story is about my daughter and her first accident. She fell off some playground equipment and split her scalp which bled profusely. It was our first major scare and trip to the local emergency room. I played the story off of wanting to see a doctor, a Medical Doctor—MD. I didn't want to see an EMT. After briefly recounting the story, I made this application:

> A few days later I was reading my Bible. I ran across that text in 1 Peter. The one that says, "you were not saved by perishable things, like silver and gold. But by the precious blood of Jesus." And I remember thinking, there are four people in the world I think I'd be willing to die for; my wife and three daughters. But this I know for sure…there is not one person in the world I'd let my daughter die for.
>
> Yet that's just what God did. He let Jesus die for us, in fact, sent Him to die for us. No wonder John, when he had a fresh look at Jesus, turned to heaven in praise instead of to earth in despair.

Letting the Text Win

By "letting the text win" we create illustrations which apply and explain. They help the audience see what the text meant and means. We have an opportunity to teach (implicitly as well as explicitly) good study practices. We free ourselves from the need to scramble each week looking for a "good story." And, when the listener remembers

the story, they just may remember the text.

The practice can be illustrated repeatedly. Every text has its images and its points of connection. Our concern, as teachers of preachers, is how to teach preachers to do this. The following may provide food for discussion.

Not necessarily first in order of importance, but probably first in order of accomplishment: get preachers to be patient. Too many preachers want to hasten to the application/illustration stage. If we can encourage them to keep away from sermon/illustration websites long enough to finish their study of the text, we will have accomplished a great deal. That means convincing many that sermon preparation (i.e., studying the text) has priority over administrivia and other worthwhile activities.

Once that is accomplished, the first in importance may occur. We must teach them to develop an effective method of study. Whether they adopt/adapt Gorman's process, work with Fee and Stuart, "cross the river" with Hayes, they must find something that is "theirs." They need a process they can rely on week after week. This procedure must become second nature to them.

Without belaboring the point, sermon study must include context, background, words, grammar, discourse, genre, canon; i.e., the basics. But it must be more than mere "information gathering." The key word in all this study is "significance." It is never enough to merely parse a verb or discover a fact. The question must be asked, "Why does this matter?"

We should write that question in the margins of every set of notes a student submits. They should be forced to have a solid explanation of why something is important. It's one thing to note that Elijah "went 'east of Israel' and 'was fed by ravens.'" It's quite another to recognize the truth that God has sent him out of the land to be fed by unclean birds as a statement of God's disengagement with His people.

First, we get them to slow down. Second, we get them to actually study. And, as a part of that, we encourage them to ask the question of "significance." Then we will have to help them see connections. How does this information lead to that application? Or, how does this word lead to that metaphor?[1]

In some ways this can't be taught. But it can be demonstrated. Therefore requiring students to listen to sermons and analyze the inductive elements is an invaluable exercise. They should not only recognize them, but attempt to trace them back to their origin in the text. The challenge will be in finding good sermons to use as resources. We must also help them as we critique their sermons. We will need to point out the development as well as the placement of illustrative materials. We'll have to help them see why a particular metaphor might have been a great choice and why others might not have been so helpful.

Conclusion

At a more practical level, students need to learn to be selective in their searches. To use a "textdriven" search before using a "topic-driven" search will help. By looking for "Revelation 1:4-6" in the search the student discovers what others have seen as potential connections to this text. This practice will at least keep them thinking textually.

These steps will help students concentrate on the text. If the preacher concentrates on the text, chances are better that the sermon will reflect the text. If the sermon reflects the text, the odds are greater the listener will be drawn back to the text instead of to the preacher. If the listener remembers the text, the probability is they will begin to be shaped by the text. If the text is allowed to shape the listener, the possibility is enhanced that the listener will look more like the author of the text. For that reason, helping a listener see, feel, and grasp the text is worthwhile.

Notes

1. For help in preventing mistakes in this practice, see Donald A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) and Richard L. Eslinger, *Pitfalls in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996).

by Augustus H. Strong

"The power of the Holy Ghost."
Romans 15:13

(editor's note: Augustus Hopkins Strong, was president and professor of systematic theology, Rochester Theological Seminary, from 1872-1912; born in Rochester, NY August 3, 1836; graduated from Yale 1857; student at Rochester Theological Seminary; pastor of the First Baptist Church Haverhill, MA, 1861-65; First Baptist Church, Cleveland, OH, 1865-72; D.D. Brown University, Yale and Princeton; LL.D., Bucknell and Alfred universities; author of Systematic Theology, Philosophy and Religion, The Great Poets and their Theology, Christ in Creation and Ethical Monism, etc. *Dr. Strong died in 1921.)*

Who is the Holy Spirit?

Who is the Holy Spirit? He is the third person of the blessed Trinity. In opposition to much of the false and pernicious teaching of our day, I emphasize the truth that the Holy Spirit is a person, not an influence—some One, and not some thing. I do not need to tell you that the tripersonality of the divine nature is essential to the life, communion, and blessedness of God. Because God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He is independent of creation; He does not need the universe. The world has had a beginning; it is the work of His sovereignty and grace, but the Holy Spirit is eternal, and before the world was He existed, coequal with the Father and the Son. He is not only a person, but He is that person of the Godhead who comes nearest to us in our needs, who brings the Creator not only to, but into, the creature. He is personal love in its tenderest form, and only when we appreciate the depths of our own ingratitude and His holy shrinking from our sin, can we understand "the love of the Spirit" that bears with our manifold provocations and still persists in His healing and purifying work. As Christ in Gethsemane "began to be

sorrowful and very troubled," so the Holy Spirit is sorrowful and very troubled, at the ignoring, despising, resisting of His work, on the part of those whom He is trying to rescue from sin and to lead out into the activities of the Christian life. Multiply this experience by millions, and conceive how great must be the suffering and sorrow of the third person of the Trinity, as He struggles with the apathy and unbelief of the Church, endeavors to replace the spirit of selfishness by the spirit of missions, and strives to turn the weakness of His people into power!

But tho the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity, He is more than this; He is also the Spirit of the incarnate Christ. We cannot understand this without reflecting upon the nature of the change in Christ Himself when He took upon Him human flesh. Before His incarnation He was the eternal Word of God, the Revealer of God in nature and in history. But when He was born of a virgin, He condensed His glory, so to speak, and manifested Himself within the limits of humanity. What was before abstract and far away now became concrete and near. In Christ we see the Godhead in our own likeness, speaking to us with a brother's voice and feeling for us with a brother's heart. Christ is now Son of man as well as Son of God. And what I wish to say with regard to the Holy Spirit, is, that He is the Spirit, not of the preincarnate but of the incarnate Christ, with just as much more power than He had before as Christ had more power after His incarnation.

The Holy Spirit had wrought in some measure before the incarnation, just as Christ had wrought. But as Christ the Word of God, was abstract and hard to recognize so the Spirit of Christ partook of the same disabilities. The Holy Spirit, who always manifested Christ, could in Old Testament times manifest only the divine side of Christ, because there was as yet no human side to manifest. But when Christ's person had become complete by taking humanity into its divinity and when Christ's work had become complete by taking all our sins and penalties and bearing them for us, then the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, had more to manifest than He ever had before. From being the Spirit of God alone, He became the Spirit of the

God-man, the Spirit of the incarnate Jesus, the revealer through all space and time of the humanity that had been taken up into the divinity.

We can understand now how it can be said in John's Gospel that before the crucifixion and resurrection "the Spirit was not yet given"—or was not yet—"because Jesus was not yet glorified." The proper work of the Holy Spirit is to take of the things of Christ and show them to men. Until Christ 's work was accomplished the Holy Spirit had comparatively little to show. Not only was His influence limited in its degree, but it was also limited in its kind: the Holy Spirit as the revealer of the incarnate Jesus did not as yet exist. We might illustrate this by the pride and joy of the mother in showing off her son: she can exhibit him after he has reached his majority and has education and character, as she never could when he was a babe in arms. One might even say that while she was caring for him in his infancy her time for showing him off had not yet come. The mother was not yet exhibitor. So the Holy Spirit could not exhibit Christ until there was a full-grown Christ to exhibit. While our Lord retained the form of a servant and was subject to the Holy Spirit here on earth, the Holy Spirit could not make Him known, any more than the mother could publish abroad the greatness of her son, before the time of his greatness had come. But when Christ's humiliation was ended and His exaltation had begun, then the Holy Spirit's work could begin also. Only when the Savior was glorified in heaven, could the Spirit glorify Him on earth.

The Holy Spirit and Christ

But we must not separate the Spirit from Christ as if the two were independent of each other like Peter and Paul. The persons are one in essence. As the Father dwells in and reveals Himself through the Son, so the Son dwells in and reveals through the Spirit. As Christ could say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," so the Holy Spirit might say: "He that hath seen me hath seen Christ." In the Holy Spirit we have Christ Himself, no longer far away and unintelligible, but possest of a human soul and touched with the

feeling of our infirmities as He could never be if He had not passed through the temptation and the sorrow of an actual human life. The Holy Spirit is the same incarnate Christ now made omnipresent and omnipotent. You can appreciate how great a truth this is, when you remember the sorrow of the disciples at the taking from them of their Lord. To part with Him, their Teacher and Helper, seemed to them to be the loss of all. How hard it was for them to realize that it was expedient for them that He should go away! Yet it was best for them to lose His visible, bodily presence, because only thus could they have His invisible, spiritual omnipresence. Unless He went away in body, He could not send His Spirit. But if He departed from their eyes, He could come into their hearts. Hence He can say indifferently, "I will send the Comforter," and "I will come unto you," for the Comforter is only Christ in another, more spiritual, more universal form.

It was to educate the disciples to this faith in His invisible presence through the Holy Spirit that Jesus appeared to them so mysteriously in the upper chamber, on the way to Emmaus and by the seaside of Gialilee. A moment ago He seemed absent, but now He is here, stretching out His hands in blessing. Has He come through the solid walls, or through the circumambient air? Ah, not so! The lesson to be learned is rather that He has been here all the while, and now He only manifests His presence. And the disciples do learn the lesson that, while seemingly absent, the Savior is ever present with them—while invisible, by the eye of faith He can be seen. The Holy Spirit is the incarnate Christ not only, but the incarnate Christ spiritualized, freed from all the limitations of space and time, no longer subject to the conditions of His humiliation, but omnipresent and glorified. While here on earth in human flesh He could heal the lepers and feed the hungry and raise the dead and walk the sea; but He could not be in two places at the same time, nor teach Peter in Galilee at the same time that He taught John at Jerusalem. Now, by His Holy Spirit, He can be present with the little knot of believers that worships in Swatow, at the same time that He meets with us here in America. And as the Holy Spirit is the omnipresent Christ, so He is the omnipotent Christ also, with every restraint upon His working removed, except the restraints of infinite wisdom and infinite love.

We begin to see the greatness of the Holy Spirit. And yet we shall not understand how great He is, unless we remember how great this Christ is who works through Him. Jesus said that all power was committed to Him in heaven and in earth. This means nothing less than that nature, with all her elements and laws, is under His control and manifests His will; that history, with all her Vicissitudes, including the rise and fall of empires and civilizations is the working out of His plan; and that the Church, with her witnessing for the truth, her martyrdoms, her love and anguish for men's souls, her struggling after righteousness, is the engine by which He is setting up His kingdom. The incarnate Christ is now on the throne of the universe, and the hand that was nailed to the cross now holds the scepter over all.

The Holy Spirit: The Incarnate and Divine Redeemer

Who, then, is the Holy Spirit? He is the incarnate and divine Redeemer wielding all this infinite power, in the realm of spirit, and for spiritual ends. He is the organ of internal revelation, as Christ is the organ of external revelation. Just so far as Christ does anything for intelligent and moral beings He does it through the Holy Spirit. We can make no exceptions. As the Spirit of God in the beginning brooded over chaos and brought forth forms of life and beauty, so still He works in nature to complete and restore the creation which sin has marred; as He strove with men before the flood, so He strives with them all along the course of time, in every nation and in every conscience giving witness of Christ's law and grace; as with Noah and Abraham and Moses and David and Isaiah. He renewed the heart by presenting the truth made known by the preincarnate Logos, so now He takes the clearer truth of Christ's incarnation and sacrifice and resurrection and makes it the means of establishing the kingdom of God in human hearts. Pentecost could come only after the Passover. The feast of jubilation and first fruits dated back to the other feast when the lamb was slain in every household. So Christ had first to die, before the Holy Spirit could show to John on Patmos the Lamb that had been slain, sitting upon the very throne of God and with all

the crowns of the universe upon His brow. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the divine but incarnate Savior omnipresent and omnipotent to subdue to Himself the hearts of earth's revolted millions and to go forth conquering and to conquer until every spiritual enemy has been put beneath His feet.

If what I have said is true, then I think we shell be obliged greatly to enlarge our ordinary conceptions of the power of the Holy Ghost. I think we cannot confine it, as we sometimes do, to the power exerted in the conversion of the individual, tho that is its most common and impressive exhibition. There is a larger agency of the Spirit in the leavening; of society, the shaping of public opinion, the raising of ethical standards, the quickening of the moral sense throughout whole communities and decades, throughout whole nations and ages. Just as there is a preliminary work in the individual which prepares the way for his regeneration so there is a preliminary work in the masses of mankind that prepares the way for the coming of the kingdom; and this preliminary work is the work of the Holy Spirit, just as much as the work of consummation is.

There are times when financial depression is succeeded by a strange awe and expectation of the coming of God. There are times when the sudden solution of vexed problems of State, when great public deliverances and great public judgments, are recognized even by ungodly men as due to the finger of God. Then it is the Holy Spirit that draws the curtain aside and lets men see the living God behind the wheels. In the movements and enterprises of the Church there is a work of the Holy Spirit quite aside from His enlightening and sanctifying of individuals. At times a multitude of believers, widely separated from each other, seemed moved to pray for the removal of some mountain-like obstacle that prevents the progress of God's cause. Then slavery is abolished, walls of heathen exclusion are broken down, civil reforms are instituted, great revivals of religion and great missionary efforts are inaugurated. And yet it is true that even these broad and general influences upon the heart of humanity and of the Church are connected with renewals of single individuals, like the conversion of Paul and the conversion of Luther, and these turnings

of individuals become the means of turning whole communities.

Regeneration is a spiritual work, in the sense that it takes place in man's spiritual nature, is wrought by a spiritual Being, and makes use of spiritual means and agencies. The Holy Spirit changes men's natures by bringing truth to bear upon them—the truth with regard to their sin, with regard to Christ's salvation, with regard to God's judgment. He convinces of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment. As a flash of lightning shows the nightly wanderer that he is on the edge of a precipice when before he thought himself safe, so the Holy Spirit lights up all the heart's ungodliness and reveals its danger. As the rising sun discloses the glories of an Alpine landscape which the darkness kas hidden and shows snowy mountain and deep blue lake in all their beauty, so the Holy Spirit draws aside the veil of unbelief and enables the lost and helpless to perceive the divine compassion and the infinite sufficiency of Jesus Christ, the Savior of sinners. And then He convinces of judgment also—the certainty and awfulness of God's judgment against sin; the Holy Spirit teaches this, and enables the sinner to renounce sin utterly and thus to make the judgment of God his own.

The Holy Spirit as Lifegiver

So, while Christ is the life, the Holy Spirit is the life-giver. The Holy Spirit presents Christ to the soul, or, if you prefer the phrase, in and through the Holy Spirit, Christ comes to the soul and takes up His abode in it, makes it holy, gives it new views of truth and new power of will. Before the Holy Spirit began His work Christ was outside, and we looked upon Him as a foreign, perhaps even as a distant, Redeemer. After the Holy Spirit has done His work, we have Christ within, the soul of our soul and the life of our life. A union is established between Christ and us, so that none can separate us from Him or from His love. In fact, there is nothing more marked in the New Testament than the way in which He is identified with His body, the Church, unless it is the way in which the Holy Spirit is identified with our spirit. The Holy Spirit so passes into our spirits that we are said to have the spirit of Christ, and it is sometimes difficult to

tell whether our spirit or the divine Spirit is meant, the two are so merged the one in the other. All this renewing and transforming shows what power the Holy Spirit exercises. It is power compared with which the mightiest physical changes sink into insignificance. You can more easily create a world than recreate a soul. Only God can regenerate. It is only God, who causes the light to shine out of darkness at the beginning, who can shed abroad in a sinful soul the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And yet physical images are employed to illustrate the Holy Spirit's power. His agency is compared to that of air, of water, and of fire, at their highest pitch of efficiency. Take the air, that is often so still and apparently impotent about us that we absolutely forget its existence. Would you believe that this air, when stirred, is capable of taking up cattle and carrying them half a mile overfences and trees? Would you believe that this air could absolutely prostrate the strongest houses, and even lay low the largest trees, cutting a clear swath for miles and miles through the forest? Yet the eastern tornado or the western cyclone is nothing but "wild air," as Helen Keller beautifully said. So in the ordinary quiet workings of the Holy Spirit, we get no idea of the mighty effects He is able to produce. The same divine Agent who comforts the sorrowing and speaks in whispers of peace to the heart of a child is able to come like a mighty rushing wind at Pentecost and in a single day convert three thousand unto God.

The agency of the Holy Spirit is compared to that of water. The rain is a symbol of His influence. Sometimes it is the gentle showers that water the mown grass and cause the thirsty field to revive. So the Holy Spirit encourages the believer whose earthly hopes have been cut down. But there are larger manifestations of His power. In this country and latitude we know little of what rain can accomplish. Years ago I was traveling in Palestine and happened to be caught in the last rain of the springtime, just before the long dry season from April to November set in. I had heard of rain coming down in the tropics in sheets and bucketsful, but I had never expected to see anything like it. But there, on the way from Carmel to Caesarea, I had the

experience. The water seemed to descend in masses. Those exposed to it were drenched as if they had been plunged into the sea. Then I understood what the psalmist meant by "the river of God which is full of water": he meant the rain, that came down like floods from heaven. And then I understood the promise of Malachi: "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord, if I will not open the windows of heaven and pour you out a blessing, so that there shall not be room to receive it." The opening of the windows of heaven is an allusion to the deluge of old; and the prophet assures us that, when God's people are faithful and put His promise to the test, the Holy Spirit whose ordinary influences are so gentle will descend like the floods of Noah, so that the fountains of the great deep are broken up, and rivers of blessing flow forth from God's sanctuary, to water the earth.

The agency of the Holy Spirit is compared to fire. The flame kindled in the heart by the blessed Spirit may be so slight and low that a single breath of coldness and opposition may suffice to quench it. But it may also become a consuming blaze that carries everything before it. It is only a match that sets the dry wood burning in the hunter's campfire, but that fire may spread till the whole forest for miles and miles is swept by the roaring flames. A kerosene lamp overturned is a little thing, but Chicago devoured by conflagration is the result—the greatest structures of wood and iron melt and crumble in that heat. So in the common operations of the Holy Spirit we get no conception of what the Spirit can do in melting hard hearts and in bringing to nothing the pride and opposition of men. How often has He swept whole communities with religious anxiety and zeal that could only be compared with fire from heaven! The college revivals, and the great awakenings on a larger scale which this country has witnessed in days gone by, are evidence that the Holy Spirit has a power beyond all our ordinary estimates. Why should we be so slow to believe in His power,

Was Pentecost the limit of His working? What was Pentecost but the feast of first fruits, the bringing in of the first few ripened ears of the mighty harvest, Shall we limit the harvest by the first fruits, or think

that the first ingathering is the greatest possible? Ah, no! Pentecost was but the beginning and the power of the Spirit of God will be fully seen only when a nation is born in a day.

The Holy Spirit and the Work of Missions

There is no measure of the Holy Spirit's power except the greatness of the Holy Spirit Himself. The Holy Spirit is as great as Christ—in fact, He is Christ, not now absent but present, with us and with His Church alway even unto the end of the world, and all things in heaven and earth are given into His hand. And since Christ is God revealed, deity manifested, divinity brought down to our comprehension and engaged in the work of our salvation, the Holy Spirit is this same God in the hearts of believers and pushing the conquests of Christ's kingdom in the world. Wherever God is by His omnipresence, there the Holy Spirit is, to make men will and do according to His will, and whatever God can do by His omnipotence in the spirits of men, that the Holy Spirit can do, to convert the world to Christ. Is the Holy Spirit equal to the work of missions? Ah, the Holy Spirit is God Himself, engaged in this very world. More pervasive than electricity or magnetism His power encircles the globe, and hence the touch of prayer in America can produce results in Africa or in Japan.

He is one, and He is almighty. He can weave together all the prayers and all the labors of the Christian Church into the complex structure of His kingdom, and He can make the least breath of desire, and the widow's mite of contribution, most potent agencies for the salvation of the world. All the wealth of Christendom is His, and He can prompt His people to use it. The storms of war and the oppositions of the nations are only surface movements of the great sea of humanity, beneath which the vast ocean of God's Spirit is ever resting and waiting with power to bring the waves to calm or to drive them with one consent to engulf and overwhelm the shore. And the day shall come when, in answer to His people's prayers and through their very efforts, this ocean-like Spirit shall show His power and the work of a thousand years shall be done in one day. Men may fail and be discouraged, but the mighty Spirit of God shall not fail

nor be discouraged, till He has set judgment in the earth, and the kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ.

"It is the mistake and disaster of the Christian world that effects are sought instead of causes." These weighty words of a recent writer have deeply imprest me. I wish to apply them to the subject of missions. The Holy Spirit is the one and only power in missions, and to expect success in missions while we ignore the Holy Spirit, is to look for an effect without a cause. How evident it is that this great agent, this renewer of hearts, this regenerator of the world, has been largely neglected and ignored! We have been trying to carry on missions without the Spirit of missions. We have trusted our own wisdom, instead of trusting Him. We have invoked earthly helps, instead of invoking the Helper, the Advocate, who has been called to this work by God. And so our zeal has slackened, and our faith has grown weak, and our love has become cold. Neither faith nor love will survive, if hope does not go with them. We cannot do this work ourselves, and when we lose sight of the Holy Spirit, Christian activity dwindles and dies.

The Success of Missions

The success of missions is dependent upon our recognition of the Spirit of missions. The conversion of the world must be preceded by new faith in Him who effects conversion. The Holy Spirit will show His greatest power only when the Church seeks His power. The Spirit of missions is also the Spirit of prayer. How may we secure the power of the Holy Spirit in missions and in prayer? Ah, we cannot pray that He will take to Himself His great power and reign supreme in the world, until we ourselves admit Him to complete dominion in our hearts and lives. So long as we are full of other things that He abhors—our own selfish plans, our impure desires, our worldly ambitions—He will not work in us that mighty praying, that mighty effort, that mighty sacrifice, that alone will save the world. You might put a corked bottle under Niagara, but you could never fill it. The flood of spiritual influence may be descending like Niagara, but the

love of sin may completely prevent it from entering our souls. Let us open our hearts then that we may receive. Let us put away the evil that offends God and prevents Him from doing His work in us. Let us ask for His coming and indwelling. Let us take Him, by the act of our wills, once more to be our Lord.

On his last birthday but one, Livingstone wrote: "My Jesus, my King, my Life, my All, I again dedicate my whole self to Thee!" No wonder that he died on his knees, with his face buried in his hands, praying for the regeneration of Africa. The Spirit of missions is also the Spirit of consecration. He prompts to various kinds of service. He puts it into the heart of one to say: "Here am I, send me!" He moves another to say: "The half of my goods I give, to send the gospel across the sea!" He impels still another to spend days and nights in prayer for the conversion of Madras, or for the spiritual revolutionizing of New York.

We are responsible for the bringing of the world to God, because we have this connection and partnership with the Spirit of God. It is not so much a question of giving as it is a question of receiving.

The Savior even now utters His command as He did in the company of those disciples on the evening of His resurrection. "Receive ye—take ye the Holy Ghost!" He says to each one of us. But we make two misakes with regard to His words. First, they are a command, and not a mere permission; and secondly, it is not a passive receiving, but an active taking that is required of us. Shall we thus take the Holy Spirit—the Spirit of missions, the Spirit of power? May God the Father grant it! May Christ the Son bestow it! May the Holy Spirit Himself vouchsafe it! Then from us, tho of ourselves we are hard and dry as rocks in the desert, shall flow rivers of living water like that which sprang forth at the touch of Moses' rod! Then shall be set in motion divine influences which shall flow like ocean tides around the world, until every land shall be bathed in their flood and the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters cover the sea!

"Haddon Robinson's team at the Center for Preaching understand and teach biblical preaching in a way that has changed my own ministry profoundly for the good. I wouldn't miss an issue of PulpitTalk."

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

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Christian Preaching – A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation. Michael Pasquarello III. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006, 978-0-8010-2760-4, 220 pp., $ 18.99 paperback.

Anticipating some of this book in his *Sacred Rhetoric* (Eerdmans: 2005), Michael Pasquarello brings passion and thoughtfulness to a much-needed Trinitarian theology of preaching. His early distaste at being trapped in the "business of religion," and his rediscovery of the power of John Wesley's writings (among others), combine to set the tone from the outset. Polemics with theology!

He critiques quick-fix contemporary preaching for its dependence on "communication skills, style, techniques, innovative methods, and personality of the preacher" (14). Such preaching has "stopped speaking of God" and, in particular, has no Trinitarian theology. He rightly claims that through most of Christian history the practice of preaching was believed to take place in, with, and through the initiative and activity of the Triune God. He argues for an urgent rediscovery of such preaching, which he defines as "a personally involved, participatory, and embodied form of graced activity that is the Triune God's gift to the church." (10). For the church to live out God's story, preaching must embrace the "Trinitarian grammar of faith," with renewed theological understanding and commitment. In summary: "The great homiletic need is for theological wisdom cultivated by inhabiting the narrative world of the gospel" (11).

After a weighty introduction, seven chapters apply preaching to different practices: theological, traditioned, ecclesial, pastoral, Scriptural, beautiful, pilgrim. Drawing heavily on writings by Irenaeus, Augustine, Luther, and Wesley, Pasquarello also concludes each chapter with a sample sermon of his own that expresses theological truth thoughtfully and accessibly.

On "Theological Practice" he argues for re-theologizing the word as God's triune gift, employing insights from Augustine's *De Doctrina*. "Traditioned Practice" challenges contemporary loss of memory and seeks to recover the church's past "storied practice." "Ecclesial Practice" leans heavily on Martin Luther and John Wesley by stressing the church's role in uniting doctrine with practice. Though caustic about contemporary pragmatists, he calls John Wesley an "ecclesial pragmatist." "Startling acts of personal conversion . . . and numerical growth were not the end or goal, but rather were seen as a concrete, visible witness to gracious beginnings; the love, enjoyment, and happiness of communion with the Triune God" (104). He emphasizes how Wesley trained converts to live by the church's liturgical traditions.

"Pastoral Practice" urges preachers to become "living sermons," recovering "transformed judgment" by contemplation. He commends Augustine's understanding of the Beatitudes as a "journey" from humility to wisdom and to communion with God. "Scriptural Practice" emphasizes Scripture's narrative

nature and invites preachers to "inhabit the narrative world of Scripture so as to speak its language" (150). "Beautiful Practice" is a surprise, drawing on Augustine's writing about God's love re-forming the church into the beauty of Christ. Eschewing utilitarian rhetoric he describes a preaching that "participates in the knowledge and love of God, who crafts beautiful preachers and inspires beautiful preaching" (171). "Pilgrim Practice" stresses the eschatological dimension of the church journey.

By drinking deeply of our theological inheritance, with stimulating quotations and commentary, Michael Pasquarello adds an important book to our libraries. His definition of preaching (above) deserves our full attention, and much of his critique of "modern" preaching hits the target. In my view, it would have added strength to include an emphasis on the missional dimension of Trinitarian theology and, at least, just a hint of some engagement with those homileticians who have written for the contemporary situation with Trinitarian convictions. But this book places us greatly in his debt.

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Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance. By Donald R. Sunukjian. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007, 978-0-8254-3666-6, 375 pp., $29.99, hardback.

This grammar of homiletics deserves to take its place alongside standard evangelical works such as Robinson (*Biblical Preaching*) and Chapell (*Christ-Centered Preaching*). Written in a conversational style with few foot notes, *Invitation* demonstrates that Sunukjian is a master of the craft of preaching. Some of its strengths include the use of simple diagrams, a conversational style, a conservative hermeneutic, and running examples that appear again and again as the chapters move from exegesis through outlining, application, and sample sermons. To my knowledge, this use of running examples is unique among basic homiletics texts, and it works well.

Sunukjian's grounding in the homiletic of his mentor, Haddon Robinson, is evident, but Sunukjian has clarified and extended Robinson in some key issues. One of these is the movement from the text's main idea to the sermon's main idea. Sunukjian adds an intermediary step, missing in Robinson, so that the idea evolves from the text *through theology* to the contemporary world. Another way he extends his mentor's homiletic is with extensive instruction on outlining, clarifying "induction" and "deduction" with helpful examples. Furthermore, Sunukjian's discussion of relevance is the best I have seen because his examples are clear and compelling. Still another extension is Sunukjian's superb instruction on oral clarity (chapter 15).

It goes without saying that a single book cannot be all things to all people, and

this one is no exception. While it will work very well as the core text for a basic class, it will need to be augmented by works which address issues such as the theology of preaching and delivery (which receives only 3 pages). Furthermore, sometimes this book's strength—methodological thoroughness—can overwhelm the reader, especially if the reader is a beginner. One has to learn Sunukjian's terminology and remember prior discussions to gain the most from the book's later examples. I anticipate that I will need to simplify some content, but that will not stop me from requiring this text in my classes. I have already added it to my syllabi.

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The Preached God: Proclamation in Word and Sacrament. By Gerhard O. Forde. Mark C. Mattes and Steven D. Paulson, eds. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007, 978-0-8028-2821-7, 339 pp., $32.00, paperback.

The Preached God, published posthumously, is a collection of essays, lectures, and sermons of Gerhard O. Forde. Forde taught systematic theology at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota for nearly forty years. He is Lutheran through and through.

Forde insists that preachers must *proclaim* rather than merely *explain* the Word. Proclamation is for him the means by which God *elects* lost sinners to salvation. In Forde's view, proclamation operates as a sacrament claiming lost sinners for Christ, and baptism and communion also operate as a form of proclamation (109). The one doing the proclaiming is God's ambassador, not merely *speaking* God's Word, but *doing* his Word to the hearer. Key to Forde's understanding of what actually takes place through proclamation are Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The letter kills the old Adam, but just when the old Adam dies, the Spirit gives life. A new Adam is raised up who now freely chooses to love and serve God (98-99).

The new Adam no longer needs the law. Christ has brought an end to the law, not merely the ceremonial law, but also the moral law. The law ends because the new Adam is freed from the bondage of the will—the desire to oppose God through sin (154-156). God justifies the new Adam—assigning Christ's righteousness to him by giving him the free gift of faith. Now free to love and serve God, the new Adam still struggles for control with the old Adam, who will not die a complete and permanent death until the end of time. Even though the sinner has been justified, the law and the gospel must still be proclaimed and the sacraments administered so that the letter can continually kill the old Adam, and the Spirit can keep raising the new Adam to life through absolution. Someday the old Adam will be vanquished completely. Then Christ will bring an end to the law absolutely.

Forde reminds readers that in no way whatsoever can sinners save or justify themselves. Salvation's source is completely external to the person whom God elects. He notes that Adam and Eve were the first *enthusiasts*, by which he means that they wanted to be gods. Forde believes we are still trying to take God's place by means of modern theology—a "theology of glory" which attempts to tame God by trying to explain away the things God does which would offend modern ears. Forde puts it this way: "Theology . . . tries to bring God to heel, to domesticate him, pull his fangs, and make him a theological house pet. Instead of getting bitten, you just get gummed to death!" (52).

In Forde's view, the best defense against this taming of God is for preachers to retain the "*distinction Luther makes between God-not-preached and God-preached . . . God is hidden* apart from his deeds in Old and New Testaments and *revealed* in them for the salvation of sinners . . . . [Luther] insists . . . the consequences [of not making this distinction] are devastating for theology, ministry, and particularly the proclamation of the church" (33). Only then will we avoid the temptation to explain away what we do not like about God. Forde's insistence on allowing God to be God is truly refreshing.

Evangelical readers will find common ground with Forde in his strong emphasis on justification by grace through faith, and in his deep respect for God. His belief in regenerational baptism will be a major sticking point for many, as will many of his statements about the sacraments. Many of the duties and accomplishments he assigns to the sacraments are viewed by many evangelicals as the work of the Holy Spirit, who receives far less attention throughout the book than the Father and the Son. Forde's treatment of the Spirit's sanctifying work collapses into the doctrine of justification. Of course the two are strongly related, but Scripture does not present the two doctrines as identical.

There are certainly portions of the book that could be highly profitable to homiletics students. However, major portions of the book have to do with internal matters of the author's denomination. It would probably be best to assign selected readings from a copy of the book held on the reserve shelf.

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Preaching and Teaching the Psalms. By James L. Mays, ed. by Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, 0-664-23041-5, 189 pp., $19.95, paperback.

Editors Patrick D. Miller and Gene M. Tucker dish up an assortment of James L. Mays' articles, essays, lectures and sermons to the academy, pastors, and lay people whom they envision reading *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms*. Although Miller and Tucker acknowledge some of the selections may be familiar to those who previously have partaken from Mays' rich teaching career, they also point

out that several of their selections "have never appeared in print" (viii).

James L. Mays is renowned for his expertise in and passion for the psalms, dedicating over fifty years to the study and the teaching of the poetic genre. Nevertheless, Mays acknowledges his taste for the Psalter frequently is not shared by this generation which "[tends] to be doggedly literal and literalistic, accustomed to facts and figures and physical explanations . . . hurried and impatient and trained by television advertising to expect the immediate message" (6). Still, Mays knows the merit for his readers who personally encountering the psalms. Mays resolutely believes "all psalms have a pedagogical potential because they say things about God, world, and self" (82). Therefore, Mays not only escorts his readers through selected psalms in a devotional manner, allowing them to savor the richness of the encounter between God and humanity, but he also uses the psalms to teach about the grand theological motifs: creation, the human condition, and, what he refers to as the "organizing theological metaphor" (71) of the book of Psalms, namely, the reign of God.

Preaching and Teaching the Psalms is presented in three parts. The first and longest section (3-93), "Studying the Psalms," explores the use of psalms as personal and corporate prayers, the historical and current directions of scholarship, and dominant themes, as well as some of the features of Calvin's commentary on the psalms from a contemporary perspective. The second section (97-157), "Interpreting the Psalms," contains six exegetical essays on Psalms 8, 22, 23, 51, 103, 133, and a seventh essay treating Psalms 82, 24, and 98 as a unit around the theme of the Kingdom of God. The final section (161-185), "Preaching the Psalms," is a compilation of sermons by Mays on Psalms 1, 9:19, 13, 51, 98, 100, and 142.

It is interesting to note that only two of the Psalms explored in section two are adopted as the basis for the sermons in section three. In fact, this points to what one might consider the significant weakness of this volume: The implications of modern scholarship and the dominant themes of the Psalms presented in section one as well as the careful and rich exegetical work undertaken in section two are not shown to relate directly to the pithy sermons in section three.

Among the various reasons one might add *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms* to one's personal library is the expertise of the author, one's personal interest in the psalms, or the promise of observing a master communicate the Psalms; however, if one's primary desire is to learn to preach and teach the psalms more effectively, this book will leave the reader with few examples or guidelines.

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Telling God's Story. By John W. Wright. Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2007, 978-0-8308-2740-4, 166 pp., $18.00, paperback.

Proposing that homiletics should be the first and primary goal of Biblical hermeneutics, John Wright argues that preaching functions best when it draws the congregation into the meta-narrative of Scripture, rather than merely applying Scriptural truths to the needs of individuals. To a culture defined by individualized, therapeutic experiences, preaching the promises of God sounds like mere need-fulfillment, and therefore congregants will not experience the formative power of the gospel. Wright argues that, in order to faithfully proclaim God's promises, we must draw Christians out of the world's narrative by redefining their needs and roles according to the narrative of Scripture. Rather than reinforcing the key messages of our culture, this kind of narrative preaching calls into question those messages, as the congregation hears how they are God's people, and how God's people have responded to similar situations in the past.

To address this cultural situation, Wright posits a new way of writing and arranging sermons: his "homiletic rhetoric of turning" (chapter 3) aims to remove the congregation from the narrative world of contemporary culture and place them in the narrative world of Scripture. Interpreting the stories of Scripture typologically, the preacher casts the congregation in the role of the covenant people of God (Israel in the Old Testament, the Church in the New Testament). With Christ as the paradigm of human obedience and divine love, individuals are narratively exhorted to repent (to turn) by reordering their lives around the fundamental priorities of Scripture and the gospel. In this homiletic, the sermon aims to recalibrate the perceptions and expectations of the congregation so that they see their own needs and the needs of the world through the narrative lens of Scripture. Only then can the promises of Scripture be proclaimed and heard in truth without falling into a rhetoric of individualistic, therapeutic Christianity.

Wright offers several examples from his own preaching ministry which show, step-by-step, the progression of sermons produced by his rhetoric of turning. Here, the academic strengths of the book meet with an abundance of practical advice for sermon-crafting and delivery.

Overall, Wright engages a variety of issues on a variety of levels. His claim that homiletics is not the younger, but the older brother to hermeneutics (chapter 1) has far-reaching ramifications for the contemporary preacher, some of which he explores. His critique of the faulty meta-narrative underlying North American Christianity is rich in academic reflection, demonstrates that that meta-narrative is rooted in the history of the United States, and sharply highlights the need for contemporary preachers to recast their congregations' perceptions and expectations of Church and the Christian life. Wright's analysis here is very valuable. The remainder of the book differs in tone and pace, with Wright working through examples from his own sermons. Although less focused than his statement of the problem, these chapters present a thoughtful solution worked out in the midst of pastoral ministry. The sermon samples will doubtless be valuable to those wishing to incorporate a rhetoric of turning into their own preaching. In all, a thought-provoking exploration of how to preach faithfully in

the midst of contemporary culture.

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Preaching the Sermon on the Mount: The World It Imagines. David Fleer and Dave Bland, eds. St. Louis: Chalice, 2007, 978-0-827230-04-0. 177 pp., $19.99, paperback.

The editors state their working assumptions of this volume of essays and sermons: (1) The Sermon on the Mount should not be extracted and treated separately from the Gospel of Matthew as a whole. (2) Matthew's Sermon was written to the Christian "minority community" after A.D. 70 as "a work of resistance" against the cultural status quo of imperial Rome, which was in direct opposition to the "empire of heaven." (3) The Sermon was also written as "a work of imagination" to communicate how Jesus Himself envisioned Christians embodying "God's life-giving ways through an alternative community, one that is identified as inclusive, egalitarian, and merciful" (2).

The editors also clearly have the unstated working assumptions that pacifism and social justice are key themes in the Sermon on the Mount, and that the American evangelical church is called to be an alternative community to the imperial practices of American culture.

In the first two chapters, Warren Carter, professor of New Testament at Saint Paul School of Theology in Kansas City, Missouri, fleshes out the working assumptions by presenting three contexts for the Sermon: narratival, historical, and modern. First, Carter emphasizes that the first four chapters of Matthew are critical for understanding Jesus and his teaching in chapters 5-7; this narratival context must not be ignored. Second, Carter scathingly portrays the historical, imperial Roman context as one of oppressive elitism. Rome is literally the agent of Satan, and "rolling back, repairing imperial damage is the church's mission" (23). Jesus' mission is also cast in these terms. Lastly, Carter identifies the third context as our twenty-first century American culture of consumerism, militarism, individualism, and overcommitedness. Repeatedly Carter states that "good preaching" will recognize these three contexts of the Sermon, and he calls for preachers to proclaim "envisioning sermons" that move God's people to live contrary to our culture.

One significant concern regarding these two chapters is that the relationship between the auditing crowd, who Carter refers to as "the *secondary* audience," and Judaism is not brought into discussions of context. For example, in discussing Matt. 6:2-4 –the section on doing acts of righteousness before others – Carter identifies the Roman custom of "civic good works" as the sole background. Yet surely there is some validity in the traditionally assigned background of trumpet-sounding Pharisees. Certainly, Roman rule affected every area of society, but the

influence of the Jewish context should not be so blithely brushed aside.

In chapter three, Stanley Hauerwas suggests that the Church is not authentic unless it is reflecting the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount, particularly in being nonjudgmental. The only acceptable way to judge is to humbly inspect whether a person's "fruit" matches the qualities listed in the Beatitudes; for to be nonjudgmental is to extending forgiveness, and to extend forgiveness is to love, which is the sum of the Law and Prophets. Hauerwas especially notes that there is not as wide of a gulf between the world and the Church as we may think; the distinction is "not that of realms or levels, but of response . . . . The only advantage [the Church has] is that they are able to acknowledge their sinfulness, and [thus to] . . . . embody, through community, the life of forgiveness" (40).

Richard Hughes' essay "Dare We Live in the World Imagined in the Sermon on the Mount?" tackles head-on conservative American Christian politics (and politicians) and its effects on the American pulpit. Hughes holds up William Stringfellow (1929-1985), David Lipscomb (d. 1917), and the 16th Century Anabaptists as people who embodied the following principles of the kingdom of God: pacifism, embracing and caring for the poor, and viewing themselves as citizens of God's empire above *all* others. This essay will make many evangelicals uncomfortable, even angry. Some will dare to imagine.

Charles Campbell frames the Sermon on the Mount as a discourse of "holy foolishness." To him this "foolishness" refers to "that which subverts the presuppositions, rationalities, and myths of the world [that] . . . prevent us from even imagining any alternatives" (62). Campbell pictures Jesus as a "jester" who uses comedy and hyperbole to counter the "myth of redemptive violence," the ideology that considers retaliatory, violent defeat as the best solution against provocative violence.

The last essay, by story-teller David Dewey, encourages the preacher to *tell* the text and to *heart-learn* the text. Dewey describes the storytelling tradition of Jewish culture and the inherent orality of Scripture, and he emphasizes the deep benefits of reading the text aloud in order to "move the text from 'out there' to 'in here'" (75). His suggestions on how to do so are excellent, and this chapter would provide challenging reading for any homiletics course wishing to address the *living* nature of the text.

The remainder of the book is comprised of 14 "envisioning sermons" preached from the Sermon on the Mount. Each sermon is concretely linked to the concepts presented in the essays. As with any collection, they vary in quality, but "compositional notes" give insight into the preacher's formative thoughts as well as the audience of the sermon.

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Preaching with Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres. By Jeffrey D. Arthurs. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2007, 978-0-8254-2019-1, 238 pp., $15.99, paperback.

Several years ago I embarked upon a project. Having been given a short interim preaching opportunity at a nearby church, I decided to choose a different biblical genre for every sermon text. I wondered what might happen if I gave as much attention to the form of the text as I did to its content. The series turned out to be a wonderful exploration of the biblical terrain, but it would have gone a lot better if I had been able to read Jeff Arthurs' book.

"The form of a text is not simply the husk surrounding the seed;" Arthurs says, "it is the way the authors manage their relationship with their readers (201)." People come from a variety of backgrounds bringing with them an array of preferred learning styles. The biblical writers not only appreciated this fact, but they modeled it, sharing truth by means of an abundance of literary styles. Our preaching should do no less.

This is inarguable. I have long wondered why, in the attempt to exposit faithfully the biblical text, we have felt it necessary to distill the content from the form. It is as if, to use Arthur's metaphor, the textual form was mere chaff to be blown off as worthless. Sure, we have utilized the form for its interpretive value as a means of getting to the core truth of the text. Yet, should not those of us committed to exposition be just as concerned with the manner of communication used by the biblical text as we are with the content of it's communication? Would not the attempt to replicate the form of the text in the form of our preaching be even more faithful to the intent of exposition?

Jeff Arthurs thinks so. His book is more than just an argument for a fully "formed" preaching of God's word. In the tradition of Sidney Greidanus and Thomas Long, the book leads the reader through an exploration of various textual forms, offering guidance and advice in the preaching of those forms. The book, then, serves as more than just a good and helpful read. It is a reference work that can be consulted whenever we preach from a different part of the Bible. I, for one, expect to consult it regularly as I move from proverb to epistle to psalm.

The great thing about genre-enriched preaching is that it doesn't just represent a more faithful approach to exposition. It also makes for more interesting preaching for the listener. Preachers who feel they may be going a little stale will benefit from this reading, perhaps leading to a more holistic and integrated approach to their task.

Arthurs writes well, as one might expect given his subject. He also doesn't overstate his case. One of his opening "9.5 Theses" is that "some things are more important than the topic of this book (15)." The preacher's "ethos" or character is more important, as is the "telos" or theological objective of the sermon. This kind of humility plays well to the reader confronted with the many textbooks on

preaching that are currently in print.

Arthurs, is associate professor of preaching and communication, and dean of the chapel at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Full disclosure: He is also the book review editor for the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and thus, the one who graciously entrusted me with the task of reviewing his own book – a task made easier due to the fact that the book is so good.

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Communicating for a Change. By Andy Stanley and Lane Jones. Sisters: Multnomah Publishers, 2006, 1-59052-514-0, 208 pp., $19.99, hardback.

Andy Stanley, like every preacher, wants to preach in such a way that he is not merely transferring information, but seeing lives change. Stanley is the senior pastor of North Point Community Church, one of the largest and most influential churches in America. As one who regularly speaks to thousands of people, he wants to pass along his perspective on preaching. The heart of his approach is based upon communicating one point throughout his message. While this idea is not groundbreaking, the way Stanley describes and explains the process of creating messages is insightful and challenging.

The book contains two parts. The first half is a parable, cleverly written by another pastor at North Point, Lane Jones. A similar style and characters were used in their previous book, *Seven Practices of Effective Ministry*. Some readers might find the parable distracting. Yet, the parable helps frame the seven imperatives which Stanley explores and explains in the second half of the book. By using the image of a truck driver, these imperatives are clearly understood and illustrated. They are as follows: Determine Your Goal, Pick a Point, Create a Map, Internalize Your Message, Engage Your Audience, Find Your Voice, and Start All Over.

Stanley firmly believes that the goal of all preaching is to bring about life change in the hearer. With this in mind, each of his imperatives serves to reach that goal. He is not so much concerned with teaching people the Bible, as he is concerned about teaching them to live out the truths of the Bible. He mentions, "Preaching for life change requires far less information and more application" (96). This means that all preparation for a message is not finished until you have answered the question, "So What?"

This book is simply central idea preaching repackaged. While his citations are virtually non-existent, much of what Stanley subscribes is similar to Haddon Robinson's, Bryan Chapell's and others' philosophy of preaching. Yet, Stanley cleverly presents that philosophy in a fresh way. He demands that two questions be answered before preaching: What is the one thing I want my audience to know? What do I want them to do about it? (104). Messages may say many life-changing things, but a good sermon needs to focus on one thing and build

everything around it. The second imperative is "Pick a Point," in which one discovers the main point and crafts a single statement that "makes it stick" (110). Helpfully, he offers some examples of his memorable points; for example, "Purity paves the way to intimacy," and "Good people don't go to heaven, forgiven people do" (111). He urges preachers to eliminate all that distracts or takes away from the main point.

The strength of the book is its clear and memorable images. The truck driving parable proves helpful in recalling the various imperatives. Just as the driver knows his destination, the preacher knows the goal. The driver uses a map to figure out the best way to get there, much like a good message is prepared in a way that takes the people to that goal. And the audience is to be engaged, just as the truck driver hitches up the cargo to go with him on the journey. Stanley and Jones creatively present their content in a way that it is clear, convincing, understandable, and memorable.

This book reflects the approach of one effective contemporary communicator. The authors are very passionate and practical, which make for a refreshing read. The lack of depth and bibliography hinder it from being used as a primary textbook in the seminary classroom. Yet, it would serve well as a fresh additional reading, as it is highly practical and is written by a pastor known for his powerful communication skills.

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Creating Stories That Connect: A Pastor's Guide to Storytelling. By D. Bruce Seymour. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007, 978-0-8254-3671-0, 138 pp., $12.99, paper.

I initially picked up this book for some of my ministry students whose goal was to recast the biblical story for today's audience. In serving my own academic interests, I was pleasantly surprised to discover that Seymour gives ample attention to the theoretical foundations of narrative. By way of offering a rationale for the act of storytelling—or better, storymaking—Seymour offers several justifications. First and most obvious is the well-known pedagogy of Jesus, the Great Storymaker. Second, Seymour is very cognizant of the extremely potent social effects of narrative; they are social unifiers, means by which listeners receive hope, sources that inspire, tools of memory, and instruments by which we make sense of our human existence. Third, pastors should employ stories because we all love and desire them. They hold interest.

Taking his primary cue from Jesus, Seymour's goal is to offer the reader tools to create original stories for ministry. Though this is a good and admirable goal, but I wonder if an *original* (that is, fictional) story is always effective. Sometimes we want the point to be made by a story that really happened—some real person who has gone before us and lived the experience purported in the story. If every

story is made-up, how do we know that we have the courage to carry out the moral of the story. Being a big fan of narrative myself, I understand the necessity of story in all forms, but as we look at the larger context of the biblical account, we discover the art of telling stories is by and large based upon historical figures and their experiences. A study showing the strengths and weaknesses of fiction versus historically based stories would have been quite interesting and would have provided the basis for a proposal for the pastoral storyteller/maker.

In equipping the reader with ideas of ways to build an original story, Seymour shows himself to be quite creative. He suggests recasting existing stories like the prodigal son or the rich young ruler with Western cultural nuances. As we consider such a suggestion, we could conjecture that if Jesus the storymaker was among us today, he would certainly use contemporary settings. Other suggestions include building stories out of "what-if" questions we face, expanding already-familiar stories that can bring out new discoveries, and superimposing a biblical story on a real contemporary situation (or vice versa). With great openness, Seymour shares twenty ministry stories that he has created; ten of which are intended for pulpit ministry and ten of which are intended for counseling situations. Admittedly he is not claiming to possess the skill to make them up on the spot but rather to create them in response to a prior situation in order to have them available for the next set of similar circumstances. As is to be expected, some of Seymour's stories work better than others.

There were a few things that I feel the book lacks or is soft on. Though the rabbinic practice of midrash is mentioned briefly, with no serious attention given to this methodology or mindset, to claim that "there is no extant evidence of any teacher prior to Jesus using the short ministry story we call a parable," (51) without supporting evidence is too far a stretch. Another weakness I perceive is that the author cites predominantly secondary sources without due attention given to the literary critics who have made the more significant inroads in the narrative discipline. Again, given that this is a practitioner's guide, I do not expect a thorough theoretical treatment but mention of roles played by psycholinguistics and sociology of knowledge in the art of communication would have been helpful for credibility.

Overall, the book is well laid out and the outline is logical. The language is clear, making for a quick and comprehensible read. It would work well as a supplementary text for the promotion of pastoral preaching and storytelling.

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Preaching Evangelistically: Proclaiming the Saving Message of Jesus. By Al Fasol, Roy Fish, Steve Gaines, and Ralph Douglas West. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2006, 978-0805440577, 148 pages, paperback.

Books on evangelistic preaching are not plentiful, and rarely, if ever, make the best-seller list. All the more reason to appreciate this offering by two distinguished professors at Southwestern Theological Seminary in tandem with two of their former students, now esteemed South Baptist pastors.

Al Fasol, with expertise in the area of preaching, discusses issues in biblical authority and communication; Roy Fish, expert in evangelism, gives practical help with evangelistic invitations; Steve Gaines, pastor of the Bellevue Baptist Church in Memphis, Tennessee, deals with the setting and preparation of the sermon; and Ralph Douglas West, pastor of the Brookhollow Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, talks about selecting the biblical text. The book concludes with three examples of evangelistic sermons, each followed by an analysis.

The presentations are very basic. What may be lacking in profundity and completeness is made up for in the simplicity and warmth of the treatments. Though strong in story and illustration, I felt that better displays of solid expositional preaching could be found. Over all, this is a good read, filled with helpful insights and always uplifting of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

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Unleashing the Word: Preaching with Relevance, Purpose, and Passion. By Adam Hamilton. Nashville: Abingdon, 2003, 0-687-08315-X, 176 pp., $28.00, hardback.

The author has a very high view of preaching. He believes that "we live in a time when people are searching for meaning, looking for hope . . . , and genuinely want to hear a word from God" (10). His insights and encouragements arise from a conviction that most people still long to believe in God, and that He has answers for their struggles and questions.

Believing very strongly in intentional preaching, Hamilton describes how he came to the conviction as a local church pastor that there were five basic things his sermons should accomplish throughout the course of a year—evangelism, discipleship, pastoral care, equipping and sending, and institutional development—in order for his local church to fulfill its articulated vision. He strategically designs a sermon series to accomplish one or more of these stated aims. I applaud that kind of pastoral intentionality.

Concerning the content of his sermons, Pastor Hamilton asserts an admirable ideal, namely, that every sermon he preaches will be the best-researched sermon his congregation will ever hear on the topic or chosen passage of Scripture. His sermon style is part teaching and part preaching and his ambition is that each listener will learn at least one thing from every sermon that they didn't know before. That sounds noble. I hope it is truly life-changing for the majority of his listeners.

His presentation of "Three Critical Ingredients" in chapter four indicates that the author does indeed want to make his sermons more than cerebral encounters with information and ideas. He declares that without these three ingredients today's preachers will struggle to make their preaching effective. They are: 1. Interesting settings and stories, 2. Relevant applications, and 3. Passionate applications. His development of those ideas is brief and largely anecdotal. One facet arising in this chapter that deserves more attention and discussion is Hamilton's commitment toward gaining personal exposure to real-life situations and settings. For example, on different occasions he devoted valuable time spending hours in a bar and in an emergency room in order to observe life first-hand. Church congregations would definitely benefit from a willingness to support their pastors in such activities.

Pastor Hamilton's chapter on "Fishing Expedition Sermons" (chapter seven) is deserving of extensive consideration from those pastors who wish to use their sermons to draw the unchurched into worship services. He talks about the effective use of a Christmas Eve service to draw many who normally wouldn't darken the door of a church. He talks about developing sermon series focusing on controversial issues, difficult life-questions, love, marriage, and sexual matters as drawing-cards for the unchurched. These are issues that hold interest for Christians but, when handled well, can stimulate curiosity and attendance among unbelievers as well. Preachers who wish to conduct 21st century evangelism from the pulpit should give serious consideration to the seeds planted in this chapter.

In chapter nine the author discusses the opportunities given to preachers to accomplish pastoral care by means of the Sunday morning sermon. Providing sermons on issues like depression, suicide, grief, addiction, relationships, and mortality allows the pastor to not only demonstrate compassionate instruction from the Bible but to also warn listeners about the pitfalls of life that await them when they choose to ignore God's word. When used well, sermons on subjects such as these will yield numerous positive results.

In addition to the foregoing, Pastor Hamilton provides a potpourri of ideas and encouragements for preachers such as: ideas for Advent and Christmas, "prophetic" preaching, suggestions for weddings and funerals, and what to do in the face of common mishaps that occur during the preaching time.

Included with the book is a DVD which contains: 4 complete sermons, a capital campaign video, 2 sermon promos, plus 8 files of written materials used to support sermons and sermon series. For those who benefit from concrete examples, this DVD is a great addition to the book and explains the book's rather healthy list price.

Unleashing the Word should prove beneficial for those who have previously studied the basics of homiletics and who have gained at least a modicum of experience in preaching week by week. For those readers who are experienced preachers but could profit from new ideas and insights, this work could also prove to be a breath of fresh air. I commend the author for his creativity and his dedication to

substantive, relevant preaching.

Kenneth E. Bickel

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Preaching and Ethics. By Arthur Van Seters. St. Louis: Chalice, 2004, 0-8272-2976-3,159 pp., $19.99, paperback.

This book on developing a strategy for preaching sermons on ethical issues is written by veteran preacher and seminary professor Arthur Van Seters. Van Seters teaches at Knox College of the Toronto School of Theology, the University of Toronto. Preaching on ethical matters requires considerable reflection. As Van Seters writes, "The ethicist noted the difference that preaching can make in enabling the church to live out its discipleship in faithfulness to Jesus Christ, that is, to be a moral community and engage puzzling ethical dilemmas when they emerge" (1).

At the beginning the author states: "This book seeks to explore the relationship between preaching and ethics to help congregations live out the gospel" (1). In order to accomplish this goal Van Seters presents a model for ethical reflection, or, as he calls it the "Interconnected Ethical Web for Preaching."

The web has Jesus Christ in the center, surrounded by five aspects: "In this interconnected web each aspect of ethical reflection is affected by each of the others. To believe, to trust in Jesus Christ (*faith*), shapes us individually and collectively (*moral character*), and both influence our approach to what we discern as God's requirements (*norms*). These in turn affect how we look at particular moral issues (*situation and context*). How we appeal to such things as experience or scripture (*authority*) bears on our analysis of specific situations that we encounter" (13).

The remainder of the book explores each of the five areas—faith, moral character, norms, situation and context, and authority—and how they move the congregation through the sermon to Jesus Christ. The book concludes with a sample Ethical Web-shaped sermon.

I appreciate Van Seters' desire to engage listeners with the issues of the day—abortion, euthanasia, legal issues, and homosexuality, among others. At the end of the read, however, I felt empty, for all five of the platforms of exploration appear to be variable, soft anvils on which to hammer out truth. Pointing people to Christ is certainly praiseworthy, but, depending on one's view of Christ, even that changes, depending on one's theological perspective.

What particularly disturbed me was the placing of scripture on the same level as all the other variable ways to test out ethical matters. For evangelicals Scripture is the authority, but this book seems to suggest otherwise—more, "an" authority. Also, evangelicals will struggle with Van Seters' use of the Bible. Some of his

suggested conclusions, especially with regard to the practice of homosexuality, are disturbing.

As for the ethical web it is a much-involved process for making ethical decisions and for that matter, sermons. At times I got lost or even caught in the web itself. Each step had sub-steps for consideration. What became a tedious process by Van Seters could have simply been put this way: prepare well for every sermon you preach.

Preaching and Ethics raises some good questions about the way preachers go about wrestling with tough issues. This book, however, tends to make matters more murky.

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The Shape of Preaching: Theory and Practice in Sermon Design. By Dennis M. Cahill. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007, 0-8010-6611-5, 175 pp., $13.99, paper.

It is effortless to recommend this new volume on preaching. Well-written, thoroughly researched, practically helpful, and theologically astute, *The Shape of Preaching* surveys recent developments in homiletic theory and practice. It then provides a concise method for arriving at effective, evangelical sermons in a variety of forms. Part of what makes this work effective (and persuasive) is the underlying awareness of the breadth and depth of research. Awareness of authors and a sense of history permeate each chapter. Credibility is reinforced on nearly every page.

In the preface, Dennis Cahill proposes a conversation between the theory and practice of preaching. He intends to argue for an approach to preaching which will give us greater clarity and ability in preaching sermons that are evangelical.

Chapter One effectively argues that all sermons have form. In a helpful review of recent developments in homiletics, Cahill reminds us of the importance of knowing the theological underpinnings of any new theory of preaching. He concludes the chapter with the premise for which he argues: "All Christian preaching should be gospel preaching. Not that all sermons are evangelistic or that all sermons should be based on New Testament texts, but all sermons should find their focus in the gospel, the story of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Chapter Two surveys the recent history of preaching. In a fair and balanced treatment, deductive sermons are explained and evaluated. An extensive review of the inductive approach correctly assesses its strengths and weaknesses. Cahill then helpfully describes and critiques both narrative and story telling as sub-genres within inductive movement. The chapter ends with an analysis of David Buttrick's *Moves and Structures*.

Theology and ecclesiology form the backdrop for Chapter Three. In what may be a rare find among homiletics texts, Cahill affirms the importance of thinking theologically about sermon forms. He then carefully demonstrates that the preacher's ecclesiology, anthropology, and language theory does (and should) effect sermon forms. The chapter ends with a discussion of the theology of preaching itself.

Chapter Four expands three conclusions concerning the literary forms of the Biblical text and the sermons recorded in Scripture. One, there is no such thing as the right form. Two, the preacher should intentionally use variety. And three, as much as possible, our sermons should be influenced by the literary form of the text.

Chapter Five is the logical "next step." In a review of generational differences and philosophical concerns for orality, Cahill reminds us to take into consideration the specific audience to which we speak. Culture influences the way our listeners hear and therefore must influence the way we preach.

Part Two begins with a healthy reminder of the role of prayer and the unpredictable role of the Holy Spirit in the process of preaching. Then Cahill suggests his process for sermon development: from text to focus, from focus to form, developing the sermon and delivering the sermon. Cahill argues every sermon needs focus (which he defines as the force of combining the homiletical idea and the purpose of the sermon). From there, Chapter Seven recommends a simple but effective process for arriving at that focus. The importance of completing the move from exegetical idea to homiletical idea is reinforced.

In a simple, but surprisingly effective manner, Chapter Eight reviews the importance of form. Then the author suggests a five step process as a means of reaching a usable form. The final paragraph of the chapter could easily be made into a list to place on a preacher's desk as a reminder of what to do in each sermon's development.

Chapter Nine reviews and illustrates the two basic forms—deductive and inductive. Chapter Ten provides an extremely helpful overview of a narrative approach. This chapter is an excellent summary for those who have studied narrative approaches, or would provide a helpful guide for those just beginning that portion of their homiletic journey.

"Preacher's block" strikes all homileticians at some point. Cahill's five step process for developing each movement within the sermon may be worth the price of the book. It provides a suggested ordering of one's thoughts that should always move one through the block into an effective sermon. The chapter concludes with a helpful summary of available supporting materials and the means for moving to the actual sermon. The volume concludes with four brief (too brief?) appendices outlining the key processes developed in the book.

Beginning preachers will find Part Two an effective overview of how to write

a sermon. More experienced preachers will find Part One an outstanding overview and summary of recent developments. In either case, read this book and recommend it to others.

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Preaching the Old Testament. Edited by Scott M. Gibson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006, 0-8010-6623-9, 222 pp., $16.99, paper.

Like taking only one bite of your favorite food and then having to rush off without finishing it, reading Scott M. Gibson's edited work, *Preaching the Old Testament* leaves you "joyfully frustrated." The "joy" comes from the thought-provoking and challenging content of this eleven-chapter standalone volume, written by scholars who are practitioners of the art of preaching. The "frustration" grows from wanting more, that is, from wishing that many of these chapters would be developed into full-length books in their own right.

Gibson's stated goal is to provide "seminary students and pastors [with] the tools they need to preach from the Old Testament," the specific focus being on "what it takes *to prepare* to preach a sermon" (emphasis mine).

Because of the emphasis on "preparation," this book, perhaps, should be understood as a practical hermeneutic for preaching Old Testament truth, rather than as a guidebook designed to help the preacher move from text to message to transformed lives. As a consequence, the book, although offering profound insight into sermon preparation, offers minimal discussion regarding audience analysis, sermon delivery, or audience transformation. A few authors, such as Arthurs (on OT narrative) and Garrett (on the Psalms and Proverbs) do, however, drive the reader through the preparation stage of sermon development to the actual presentation stage, showing the impact that an appropriately-prepared and effectively-delivered Old Testament sermon can have on its audience. Furthermore, because of the book's emphasis on sermon preparation, its title and the titles of many of its chapters should perhaps be revised to reflect that emphasis.

Gibson appears to organize the book into three major sections: foundational considerations (Chapters One and Two); genre-related issues (Chapters Three through Seven); and miscellaneous matters (Chapters Eight through Eleven).

Chapters One and Two, respectively, present various challenges to preaching the OT (Gibson—a brief discussion of the reasons why people avoid preaching from the OT), and growing one's Hebrew skills (Magary—detailed strategies for keeping one's Hebrew language ability fresh and practical).

Chapters Three through Seven (the heart of the book) focus on the major divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures: historical books (Kaminski—assumes that

God's redemptive plan is the central theme of the OT; shifts between a literary approach and an historical approach to the analysis of the text); narratives (Arthurs—gives insight into ancient rhetorical practices – discusses and illustrates plot, character, and setting, as well as the movement from disequilibrium to resolution); Law (Stuart—provides much about the historical backgrounds to the Law, but little about how to prepare to preach the Law); Psalms and Proverbs (Garrett—emphasizes the actual preaching of a given passage based on the structure of the text); and the Prophets (Sailhamer—reminds preachers to interpret the written text of the prophets in order to overcome inadequate thinking about the prophets, seeing them merely as good speakers).

The remaining four chapters are a bit of an enigma within this book–not because they are poorly written, they are not, nor because they do not make a positive contribution to the field of homiletics, they do—but because they generally do not directly advance the stated purpose of the book. Chapter Eight (Laniak) presents valuable information regarding the ancient culture of the text, but minimal guidance on how that ancient culture should inform the development of sermons. The title of Chapter Nine—"Toward the Effective Preaching of New Testament Texts That Cite the Old Testament" (Ciampa)—seems a strange inclusion in a book titled, *Preaching the Old Testament.* The chapter does, however, offer insight into common misconceptions regarding the process of interpretation. The penultimate chapter—"Preaching the Old Testament Today" (Larsen)—focuses much of its attention on the need for preachers to preach from the Old Testament. Although such a chapter belongs in a book on preaching the OT, one wonders why it occurs so late within the book. The final chapter of the book, "Preaching the Old Testament Evangelistically" (Coleman), sets forth Peter's sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2) as an example of how to use the Old Testament in an evangelistic sermon. This chapter, though definitely beneficial, appears as an oddity within Gibson's book, being the only chapter to discuss how to preach the Old Testament for a specific outcome.

Those who have extensive experience preaching Old Testament messages will come away from Gibson's, *Preaching the Old Testament,* with a sense of "joyful frustration" (highly appreciative, but wanting more). Those just beginning their grand journey into the world of Old Testament preaching will be thankful that Gibson has produced this valuable work to help them "leverage the power the Lord has already put into the text" (Arthurs, 79).

Barry C. Davis Camas, WA

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Preaching to Postmoderns: New Perspectives for Proclaiming the Message. By Robert Kysar and Joseph M. Webb. Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006, 978-1-56563-400-8, 239pp., $19.95, paperback.

In *Preaching to Postmoderns,* Robert Kysar and Joseph Webb are concerned with the changing situation of Postmodernity, and preaching within such an environment.

They set out to address the question: "How do we go about the homiletical task with faithfulness when the tectonic plates of how we interpret the Bible, upon which we stand, are shifting?" (xiii). Facing the changing field of biblical hermeneutics, the authors seek to show the importance for the contemporary preacher to be versed in a number of critical hermeneutical methods (xvi). The approach they take is to present a broad overview of different hermeneutical methods, proposing how each might be beneficial for the preacher in her or his development of sermons.

Each chapter of the book addresses a broad interpretative approach to the Bible, and is titled according to the formula: "What difference do _____ _____ criticisms/theories make?" Topics addressed are Historical Criticism, Social-Scientific Theories, Literary Criticisms, Liberation Criticisms, Deconstruction Theories, and the Nature of Meaning. Overall, Kysar and Webb present a good overview of each of these interpretative frameworks, surveying issues of development, identifying differing movements within the frameworks, and asking what contributions these observations might make for the preacher. Each chapter concludes with a sermon, or portion of a sermon, that serves as an example of the adoption of observations made with regard to a particular hermeneutical framework.

While the authors do provide a good overview of differing methods, and there are helpful observations of the contributions of the different theories, the book suffers from a lack of critical engagement with the methods presented. The problem stems from the authors' attempt to merely present each hermeneutical approach with little or no judgment as to the appropriateness or validity of the method. For instance, Reader-Response and Deconstruction Theories are presented, but the question is never asked to what extent these hermeneutical methods are appropriate for the study of Scripture. Related to this is the authors' non-stance on the nature of the biblical text in general: "For some the Bible is a sacred book, for others a literary classic, and for still others an ancient document that contributes to our understanding of the past" (xix). From what position do the authors approach, or view, the biblical text? They never say. This is relevant insofar as one's answer to this question is determinative of how one will interact with given hermeneutical systems. In short, one committed to the Bible as Word of God, and who views authorial-intent as inherently important as an avenue of exegetical inquiry, may find the following conclusions about Reader-Response approaches, for example, to the text troubling: "Probably the easiest literary critical method to adopt and use if reader-response. . . . What may be difficult in this process, however, is our tendency to concentrate on the passage and some truth that lies beyond it and to which it refers, rather than focusing on ourselves as we read. It may even strike us as self-centered to attend to our own feelings and reactions instead of fixing out attention on the words of the passage" (90). Yes, it is difficult for some to elevate personal experience of a text to a place over and against of the text itself. However, for Kysar and Webb, this is just another

approach, equally as valid (if not more so) as Historical-Critical studies. For many, especially in the Evangelical tradition, the issue of appropriateness in adopting this approach is substantial. The lack of critical engagement at this level takes away from the work's helpfulness.

In fairness it should be stated that this is not necessarily the type of critique that the authors set out to accomplish. They state: "Our purpose is not to advocate one critical approach over another but to explore the possibility that preachers can use a variety of interpretative methods to their advantage" (xvi). Indeed, reading this book it is possible to walk away with the impression that each of the interpretative methods presented are equally valid. However, it is hard to understand how, for example, Deconstruction Theories and Historical-Critical devices, are both equally and simultaneously beneficial for the contemporary preacher. At some point, doesn't the adoption of certain approaches result in the exclusion of certain others?

As a presentation of hermeneutical approaches, the book is helpful. However, the reader will need to approach the work with an amount of critical engagement that seeks to understand how a particular hermeneutical method is commensurate or incommensurate with one's fundamental theological commitments.

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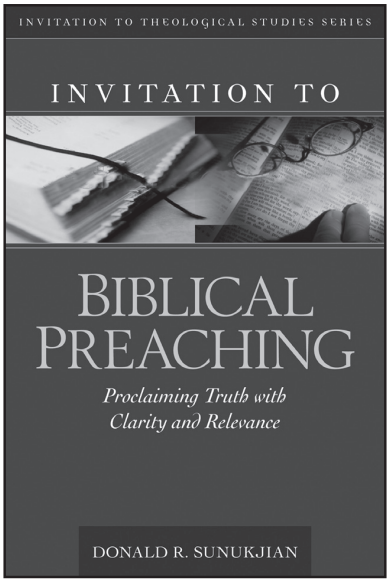

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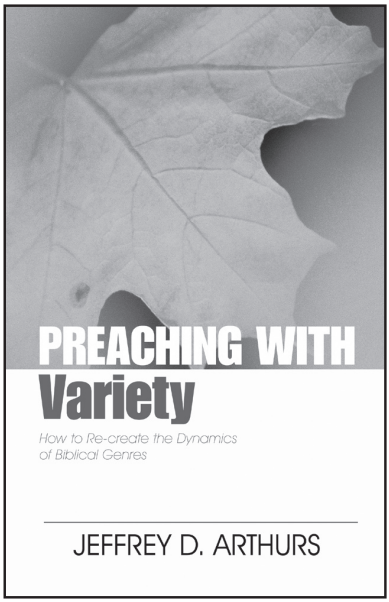

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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

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.

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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.

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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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