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Contents

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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 Pastor and Preaching

by Scott M. Gibson

As president of the Evangelical Theological Society in the mid-1980s, Haddon Robinson delivered the traditional president's address. His title, "The Theologian and the Evangelist," underscored the importance of a balance between these two potentially opposite perspectives—scholarship and evangelism. Robinson concludes, "If we cannot be scholarly evangelists, then by God's grace let us determine to be evangelistic scholars."[1]

There may seem to be a tension between preaching and being in pastoral ministry, at least for those who focus intently on preaching. Of course our preaching is to be pastorally oriented, but sometimes we forget. We concentrate on producing effective sermons and fail to remember the listeners—to whom the sermon is directed—and the Lord under whom our preaching is carried out.

This edition of the *Journal* begins with a forum on the pastor and preaching. Contributors were asked to consider the relationship between preaching and the pastorate. The writers recognized a direct, inseparable connection, which is the way we want it to be. Forum authors include Vic Gordon, David L. Larsen, Chuck Sackett, Ken Swetland, and John Tornfelt. All contributors stimulate our thinking with their viewpoints on this important matter, for that's what it's all about—we preach in order that men and women and boys and girls may know the truth of God's word, and that it may set them free.

Examining the insights from pastors about preaching is the focus of the first article by Kenton C. Anderson. The survey and analysis are interesting and will stimulate readers' thinking about what it means to preach.

In the second article, John Sweetman examines the value of approaching the construction of sermons with a wide palette.

Preachers are not stuck with one way of shaping sermons. Sweetman argues that one can vary sermon shape thereby aiding our listeners pastorally.

Being sensitive to one's listeners is yet another pastoral sensibility. For the third article, John Tornfelt explores the value of preachers understanding the listener's learning style, which may aid in comprehension and application.

The final article is by Gregory Hollifield who underscores the validity of preaching—preaching that is biblical and pastoral. Hollifield is confident that preaching still matters and is important, even in the modern and postmodern era.

The sermon is by G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1949). This classic sermon is timeless as it targets the incarnation of Jesus Christ, a truth that is in need of being emphasized in a confused and crazy world. The sermon is followed by a strong book review section rounding out this edition of the *Journal*.

Preaching is pastoral—at least that's what we want it to be, don't we? Preaching separate and distinct from people and their needs doesn't make sense. And preaching separate and distinct from the Bible is a travesty. We have the responsibility to speak to people from the Bible, a scholarly, pastoral, and evangelistic commission.

Notes

1. Haddon W. Robinson, "The Theologian and the Evangelist," in *Making a Difference in Preaching: Haddon Robinson on Biblical Preaching*, ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 27.

Preaching and Pastoring

by Vic Gordon

(editor's note: Vic Gordon is lead pastor of Beachpoint Church, Fountain Valley, California.)

Preaching and Pastoring. My sense and experience have always been that the God of the Bible has intricately intertwined these two tasks or callings. Certainly, in my own ministry, preaching and pastoring have gone together like hand and glove. How could I pastor without preaching? How could I preach without pastoring? I never preach without pastoring. Neither have I ever pastored, even one on one with only a single encounter, without preaching at least a bit.

This vital connection between preaching and pastoring came home to me with great clarity once when I was asked to pastor without preaching. I'll never forget the experience. It was 1983, and I sat in the presence of an impressive and somewhat intimidating search committee for the position of Chaplain (Campus Pastor) of Wheaton College. President Richard Chase, Vice-President Henry Nelson, the venerated philosophy department chair Arthur Holmes, theologian Alan Johnson, biology professor and future dean Dorothy Chappell and a few others were focused on me for a couple hours as they kindly but firmly grilled me.

A major piece of the interrogation focused on just this issue. Wheaton had a long tradition (and Wheaton has great tradition!) of chaplains who pastored with very little preaching. As we discussed the possibilities of my candidacy, I said that if I was the chaplain I would preach once a week in chapel (at that time, Wheaton had four chapels per week, so this did not seem to me to be an inordinate statement). The committee was clearly taken aback. They made it clear that this had never been the case at Wheaton, and they had some real doubts that it could work. But the search committee, being bright and godly to a person (each would become a respected

colleague and friend in subsequent years), was willing to listen to my case and dialogue with me. My response was basically, "If I wouldn't be able to preach weekly, I'm not the person for this position. I believe biblically one of the central roles of the pastor is preaching to the community he pastors. I would not be able to function as Campus Pastor without a regular preaching ministry." I continued to develop my understanding that every congregation needs at least one person who is called, gifted, trained, committed and commissioned to exegete the text and to exegete the congregation and bring the two together, i.e., bring the text to the congregation and the congregation to the text.[1] Thankfully, at least for me, the committee welcomed this approach, helped me implement it and empowered me to have five delightful and fruitful years of ministry at Wheaton.[2]

I find this deep connection between pastoring and preaching everywhere in Scripture. One of the clearest places is found in Ephesians 4:11. "It was He who gave some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers." Are there five or four gifted leadership roles depicted here? With the majority of commentators, I have long been convinced by the Greek word structure (four "some" [*tous*] occurrences rather than five) that Paul intended only four, the last being "pastor-teacher" or "pastors who teach." Some exegetes argue for five roles, but those who do acknowledge that all pastors teach but not all teachers pastor, and thus the pastor-teacher unity holds.

Preaching or teaching is such a pastoral act. Preaching always has a pastoral purpose. Paul describes the purpose of Christ giving the four leadership gifts to the church as being "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ"(v. 12). The rest of this passage clarifies and expands this pastoral purpose (see vs. 13-16). Preaching shepherds people to the Lord and for the Lord. There are few if any ministry activities that pastor in this fashion as effectively as preaching.

Every week I preach as a pastor. I intentionally see my preaching as

a gift of love to my congregation. I am seeking to pastorally guide them, individually and congregationally, to follow Jesus and be transformed into His likeness. Weekly preaching is the primary way I seek to lead the church to understand and live our vision. How could I pastor without preaching? May I say, at least true to my calling, "What God has joined together let no one separate" (Mt. 19:6).

Notes

1. For further development of this concept, see: Vic Gordon, "The Calling of the Preacher,"*ABE Journal* 6:1 & 2 (March and June 1998): 3-8.
2. I love Wheaton and have the utmost respect, which indeed continues to grow, for the college's profound impact on the church and the world. It was certainly a bittersweet day when God called me away from Wheaton twenty years ago to pastor and preach in a local church setting.

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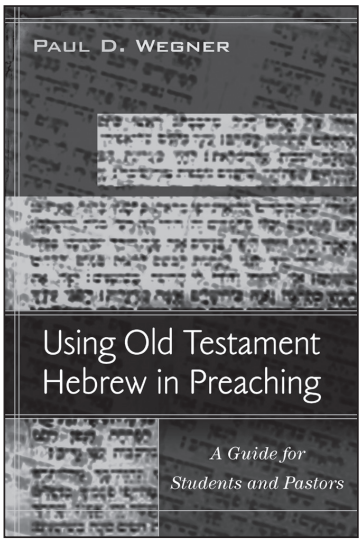

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The Pastor and Preaching Now!

by David L. Larsen

(editor's note: Dr. David L. Larsen is Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.)

Introduction

"Preaching is in an emergency!" insists Walter Brueggemann. Is he correct? This summer I have been determined to take a stethoscopic reading based on my summer doctoral seminar consisting mostly of parish pastors; my continuing intentional interim in Rockford, Illinois; preaching seminars along with both preaching and listening to preaching at Bible Conferences as diverse as "Friends of Israel" week at Winona Lake, Indiana and the 87th annual Cedar Falls Bible Conference in Iowa and points in between. I have listened to the questions preachers are asking. How is preaching going for the average pastor in North America in our time? What is the status of Biblical preaching right now?

The Context for Our Preaching

Since the Fall, humankind has staggered from crisis to crisis. Yet all of those who open Scripture to people right now are well aware that folk are burdened and troubled about an international situation that seems intractable (whether in the Middle East, Darfur, Zimbabwe, etc.). A little lightness from the summer Olympics cannot conceal deep concern about the increasing world dominance of China and the resuscitation of Russia as a world power. The record low American dollar weighs heavily on our missionaries and sending churches and donors.

The American economy occasions grave anxieties with the collapse of the housing market, growing unemployment, a deeply polarized

American electorate. Retiring "boomers" and the chronologically gifted wonder about their "secure futures." Our moral free fall as a nation and the secularization which has led to marked Biblical illiteracy complicate our communicational task. Worship wars continue to waste us and in the third largest city in Illinois a huge mega-church of 10,000 has left many historic churches of diverse size reduced, demoralized and perplexed. Where are we going?

The weekly Biblical messages and pastoral leadership generally are taxed with high expectations as comparisons with mega-churches cast present leadership in smaller churches in an unfavorable light. The resurgence of house churches but adds to the complexity of the ecclesiastical scene. Are seminaries really preparing graduates for what is actually "out there?" New movements like the "emerging churches" and the surge of the prosperity gospel take their toll. Softening of conviction on Scriptural authority, weakening confidence in the substitutionary atonement and findings of the Pew Forum Research group that only 43% of evangelicals are truly convinced that Christ is the only way to salvation leave us all limp. Assaults on linear thinking, divinely revealed premises as part of deductive reasoning and the general denigration of rationality are acutely distressing. This is the context for our preaching. I find that many pastors, especially the younger pastors (but some veterans as well) are exasperated and frustrated. They want to reach the people where they are. But it is heavy sledding anyway you look at it. What else is new?

Confliction Over the Text

The evangelical premise has always been that the Scriptures have a word from God for all times and all persons. We have been stronger on content (what does it say?) than on application (what does it mean for us today?). We have trumpeted the exegesis of the text. A few to the left and to the right have depreciated application (as even being dangerous and heresy-prone). Today I find more widespread doubts about classical expository preaching as lacking unity and trapping us into the text. So deep-set are these doubts that we

are seeing some move from text-driven, text-derived preaching to audience centered, need-driven, problem-solving preaching. The danger of subordinating the text to application (although sincerely meant and pastorally motivated) is that we become moralistic—we provide an ethical imperative without the spiritual engine-force of the Triune God to make the possible become the real. Doctrine wilts—pragmatism prevails.

The present confliction over the text raises real questions about the money and time spent on the Biblical languages in many of our training schools. The text becomes a motto, a point of departure, a launching pad for good advice in place of the Good News. The grave peril here is the horizontalization of preaching (becoming anthropocentric) and the psychologization of preaching. Preachers desperately want to be Biblical but they want to be relevant. In one evangelical denominational district, half of the pastors have given up any serious exegesis of the text. They feel somewhat supported by the taxonomic chaos in homiletics in which some have eloquently argued that all that is necessary is to take the lead thought the text and this qualifies the sermon as expository. Some of my younger preachers particularly feel an oppressive sameness in their preaching and they are on the prowl for new forms. One pastor in our state read in a popular preaching magazine of a mega-church guru who preached a series of sermons from his Ferrari. This young brother drove his Harley up the main aisle on Easter Sunday morning, lost control of it and hit the front pew, in the process of which he had to be taken to the hospital with a severely broken wrist. Not an uplifting Easter Sunday morning. Any means to the end? Is entertainment evangelism an oxymoron? Is it true that what we win them with is what we win them to?

The issue is the text—shall we limit our canon to the narrative genre? Do you build doctrine from narrative or do you illustrate doctrine from narrative? How can one wisely and helpfully preach apocalyptic from Scripture when there are so many screwballs doing ridiculous things in the name of eschatology and when there is so much controversy? The day of the long and interminable series is

over—but can we not break up the series and inject mini-series of greatly contrasting contours in order to sustain interest? Ours is not a day of great preaching but must we settle for the mediocre? These are the recurrent issues I find surfacing in my very unscientific survey of pastors who want to preach well.

The Course Before Us

Of course there are aspects of preaching and worship which are subject to change. *Time* magazine recently featured changes being made in the display of its invaluable artifacts by the venerable Louvre in Paris, "the world's favorite museum" (August 11, 2008, 50ff). We can't just hunker down in a stubborn mind-set which is impervious to the need for contextualization in our culture as surely as in some remote and primitive overseas locale. But notwithstanding our being labeled "enlightenment" by Bebbington and Noll, we cling resolutely to some values which are pre-modern: our Bibles, the basic Christology and soteriology set forth in the New Testament. Certainly there have come refinements as we have benefited from Reformation insights and ecclesiologcal and eschatological reflection in recent centuries. The very history of preaching form reflects a dynamic rather than a static matrix. We can't just stand still.

The constant drum-beat to return to ancient liturgy and form (as if one could recover any previous age - the early centuries or the Puritans or any other) is a persistent myth. How quickly they lost *sola gratia* (cf. Thomas Torrance, *The Doctrine of Grace in the Apostolic Fathers*) and got enmeshed in allegorical interpretation. Change is a constant. We need to beware of fads and recognize the cyclical nature of many facets of our task—the organ is apparently coming back and three articles recently have documented the return of theologically rich hymns. Some of my respondents seem willing to throw just about everything overboard—but novelty has its own pitfalls. We do need more passion in evangelical "preachering" (how odd that we evangelicals are today's rationalists). We need more creative, right-brained imagination in our preaching, recognizing that this

requires reading, reading, reading. Introduce some technology if you choose but beware of the triangulation in communication which either turns the sermon-time into circus church and show-time or further over-intellectualizes and de-emotionalizes preaching. The fact is that business, education, and the military are turning back somewhat on power-point (at least in the last one third of the presentation). Pull the plug and go face-to-face, eyeball-to-eyeball for the final thrust and appeal. No single issue seemed more frustrating to my preachers than the dangers of too much or too little of the visual. And don't forget that the preacher (himself or herself) is a rather poignant visual, or ought to be.

Conclusion

We do have the word of life and hope which our generation needs as has been true of every generation in human history. The Gospel is still "the power of God to salvation." Seismic voices come and go over time but the faithful, dedicated local pastor in vital, loving contact with his flock is still the greatest "change agent" as the Word is opened, shared and applied under the unction of the Holy Spirit. Let us not be driven by our doubts or intimidated by the religious headliners. I see that one very dominant voice on the American scene has put his imprint on a series of games and puzzles in Christian bookstores. This is a puzzle to me and my physiognomy will never be on a t-shirt. But really, does that matter? What matters is that I preach the Word of God to my last breath and that has been my bottom line in my summer's interaction with pastors in regard to their preaching. "A different way of doing church" doesn't make the Spirit-empowered sermon obsolete. Not now or ever.

It's Harder to Do than It Is to Talk About

by Chuck Sackett

(editor's note: Chuck Sackett is president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and is pastor of preaching ministries at Madison Park Christian Church, Quincy, Illinois, and is professor at large with Lincoln Christian College and Seminary, Lincoln, Illinois.)

For 25 years I taught preachers what to do. Now I'm trying to do what I've taught. And "it's a lot harder to do than it is to talk about." When I started my first preaching ministry (January 2nd, 1973), delineating "it" was easy. Preach morning and evening, teach Sunday School and Wednesday prayer meeting, go to the hospital, do weddings and funerals and call. And in your spare time, study your Bible for your own growth and development.

When I re-entered full-time preaching (June 1st, 2007—after a 24 year hiatus), everything seemed different. We don't have Sunday evening services; we have two Sunday morning worship experiences so I can't teach a Discipleship Class; the elders make the hospital calls; we have a counselor on staff. It sounds like "it" should be easier. But it isn't.

Even the act of preaching itself seems harder. Preaching often meant presenting a fairly lengthy exposition of the text followed by a period of application. But there was no real effort to get the listener involved. The idea that Scripture had authority was assumed by nearly everyone (including those who grew up outside the church—like me). The preacher was afforded the luxury of being the Bible and life expert.

Today, if the preacher doesn't establish "rapport" within the first few sentences, chances are he will never get the audience with him. Application begins in the introduction and stories keep attention. Exposition must be adorned with elements of beauty and interest.

And any preacher who isn't a pastor doesn't know his people well enough to make that happen.

The days of preaching for weeks from one book of the Bible is being challenged on every hand. If you look at PreachingToday.com for sample series you'll notice they come in four to six week segments. I'm not suggesting I agree with that, nor that there are not examples of successful churches doing longer series, only that the times have changed.

In the slower paced world of the 70's, 12-20 hours of sermon preparation appeared doable. Then I joined the ranks of hurried (harried?) 21st century preachers who speak every week, 48-50 times a year. And I was reminded, "It's harder to do than it is to talk about."

For approximately fifteen years I met with a small group of professors for spiritual formation. We studied together, prayed together, laughed and cried together, celebrated and commiserated. To this band of brothers I owe my spiritual sanity.

Spiritual formation takes time and discipline. Spending time with God requires…spending time. He doesn't coerce. There are no Sunday-morning-like deadlines that require your attention. You don't get scolded if you miss this appointment. You take no risk of losing your job if you don't show up. You are genuinely on your own for this part of your life.

Ministry concerns; sermon preparation and marriage counseling; vision development and staff relationships all command your time and attention. A segment of your day given to Scripture, prayer, meditation, journaling, solitude, silence (you name the discipline) is a luxury you feel you can ill afford…so you move on from the important to the urgent. And in the meantime your soul withers and dies.

Spiritual formation is the heart of who we are and what we do. We spend our time helping people allow God into their lives to form their spirits. We encourage others to make space for God. Yet we so often fail to heed our own advice. And in the meantime, we learn, "It's harder to do than it is to talk about."

The Intersection of Preaching and Pastoring

by Kenneth L. Swetland

(editor's note: Kenneth L. Swetland is Senior Professor of Ministry at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts.)

A number of years ago one of my students said to me, "I have been called to preach the gospel of Christ, not hold the hands of little old ladies." My quick response, given gently but firmly I trust, was, "My dear friend, if you don't hold the hands of little old ladies, they will never hear you preach the gospel."

I understand the excitement of the student in wanting to "get at" preaching and not being so enamored with what he saw as mundane pastoral work. Most of us who are engaged in the awesome task of preaching know something of the joy—and occasionally agony—of hard exegetical work in understanding a Biblical text and grasping (and being grasped by) the point of the passage. I never am disappointed in what stirs in my soul when I encounter Scripture with an open mind, surrounded by the tools of exegesis, and grapple with exegeting a passage in order to preach the text. And, I trust that this stirring is obvious to the hearers of the sermon to their benefit.

But in the process of studying the text, I am always mindful of the situation of the hearers. Studying for my own benefit is one thing, and an important aspect of being obedient to God; but studying for the benefit of my people is also central to the task of preaching.

The heart of pastoral work is knowing one's congregation and believing that their being able to understand and apply Biblical truth to their lives lies in my proclaiming God's word to them in their context. It is this knowing the people and knowing God's word

that John Stott talks about when he uses the phrase "between two worlds." Each is informed by the other, and each gives credibility to the other.

It happens that I enjoy in fairly equal measure both pastoring and preaching, although I know that this is not the case for all ministers. Certainly it was not for the student mentioned above. But, when both are present in one's ministry over the long haul, I am convinced it benefits the congregation in their theological understanding and spiritual lives in their being conformed to Christ. And, I think it brings joy to the heart of the pastor.

A pastor and church leader came to see me several years ago. The pastor wanted my opinion on an idea the leaders were evaluating for the church. The situation was that the pastor was doing an excellent job as a pastor; people loved him and were helped by his caring ministry in their lives. But, he was not a good preacher by his own admission and by the confirmation of the people of the church. They did not want him to leave, however, and so the question they presented to me was whether I thought it was a good idea for someone other than the pastor to do the primary preaching/teaching in the church. There was a man who was active in the church and was willing to do this; he was seminary trained and an excellent preacher but felt called to a so-called "secular job" because he was not keen on the broad work of being a pastor. Both this man and the pastor thought they would work well together as a team, and between the two of them would serve the needs of the congregation in understanding Biblical truth as well as receiving pastoral care. I encouraged them to proceed with the model since it seemed clear they had thought through the issues and had found a creative way as a small church to intersect preaching and pastoring. Of course, this is often done in larger churches, but it can work in smaller churches as well if the man or woman who is called to pastor the church is not skilled in both areas.

Before coming to Gordon-Conwell 36 and ½ years ago, I enjoyed being a pastor at two different churches in very different settings—

one a small church in a seaside community, and the other a medium size church in a major university town. The needs of the two churches could not have been more different in one way, but in other ways, the needs were quite similar: how to worship God individually and corporately, how to walk faithfully with the Lord daily, how to experience the redemptive work of the Holy Spirit in the ups and downs of life. Knowing the people and knowing God's word are the twin tasks of pastor and preacher. It's not hard to bring them together in coherent and integrated ministry in very different contexts.

The 16th century reforming pastor, Richard Baxter, in his *The Reformed Pastor,* stated, "Oh…we must study as hard how to live well as teach well." His passion was to encourage preachers to live righteous lives (which is what he meant by "reformed pastor"), and the challenge remains with us today. Daily living can never be separated from God's truth, and God's truth can never be separated from daily living. They must always intersect. The wise pastor and caring preacher does not separate them.

While on an accreditation visit to a seminary in Costa Rica several years ago, I was struck by the sign over the door of the Pastoral Care Department; the sign was in Spanish but the English translation was clear. It said "Pastoral Accompaniment." This is what the intersection of pastoring and preaching does—it is pastoral accompaniment to people with the word of God both lived and proclaimed.

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Pastor as Preacher

by John V. Tornfelt

(editor's note: John V. Tornfelt is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the Faculty, and Professor of Preaching and Ministry at Evangelical Theological Seminary, Meyerstown, Pennsylvania.)

Have you ever heard someone remark, "Dr. Smith is a tremendous preacher and I just love his sermons. But he's not very warm or approachable. If I had a major problem, I don't know if I'd ask him for advice." Or "Pastor Susan is the best minister we've ever had. She is so compassionate. I only wish her sermons were more exciting." While such remarks are not unusual, they do reflect people's perceptions. And unfortunately, they have caused ferment, frustration, and conflict in many churches.

Undoubtedly, expectations of pastors run high in today's churches. Personal qualities such as integrity, love, and empathy are expected—and rightly so. Parishioners also anticipate such abilities as teaching, evangelism, and administration. And while people may recognize that not all clergy are the same and have unique strengths and weaknesses, their expectations can still be rather unreasonable.

However, self-expectations among clergy can differ significantly. In my conversations with clergy, I often hear statements such as, "My gift is the preaching the Word, not in counseling. It is what God has called me to do." Other men and women have said, "I'm really more of a pastor. I enjoy visiting with people in their homes or hospital." While such insights can be helpful and enable men and women to minister in areas where they are most effective, the implied message is that parishioners should not expect too much with these other responsibilities. But rather than drawing a line which differentiates between responsibilities, we should heed Phillips Brooks' advice: "The work of the preacher and the pastor really belong together, and ought not to be separated."[1]

But how can you express pastoral concern when standing behind a pulpit? Can people sense the cries of people's hearts are being heard when you are twenty-five feet away, standing three feet above them, and doing all the talking? How can preaching and pastoral care be integrated in a way which not only honors God, but infuses life into the church? Let me suggest guidelines which have helped keep my preaching true to the Scriptures and pastorally sensitive to the realities of listeners.

First, remember your calling. Though I'm getting older and occasionally forget details, I must remember that I've been called to shepherd God's people, not just have them listen to my sermons. I enjoy telling students of my first preaching experience in a little country church in Colorado. After the service, my wife and I were invited to have lunch with an elderly couple, Blanche and Harold. Following the meal and still feeling proud of my sermon, I decided to find out what Harold thought. So I asked, "Would you believe that was the first time I ever preached?" Without missing a beat Harold responded, "I believe it." Needless to say, I don't ask that question any more. Why? To protect my ego? Perhaps. But more so because I learned an important lesson that Sunday and that is, the sermon is not about my being heard but ministering to people.

Second, offer encouragement. In my sermon preparation, I ask: "What issues are people discouraged by or struggling with in life? Who is grief-stricken, injured, ridden with shame, or fearful? Which individuals are facing an uncertain medical report or haunted by past abuse?" Everybody is facing something or dealing with someone. Sensitive pastors feel the burdens of doubt and unfulfilled hopes. So in preparing to preach, I view the sermon as a means by which people can find hope and encouragement. Though their concerns and heartaches will not necessarily be resolved by the sermon, it can offer a glimmer of hope or measure of strength to cope. I appreciate Gene Bartlett's words:

> Preaching alone cannot bring the recovery of hope to everyone who has lost it along life's way. It can,

> however, strengthen people's belief that life is essentially meaningful rather than meaningless. It can seek to show some of the ways which a man like Paul came to say, "I am persuaded that neither death nor life can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus."[2]

Third, stimulate discussion among listeners. Reuel Howe writes of the "monological illusion" in which clergy erroneously believe communication occurs whenever individuals are told what they ought to know.[3] While realizing that biblical truth needs to be known, preaching should take people beyond listening and be engaging, stimulating, and dialogical. It should energize existing conversations which are already going on within each person. But preaching should also kindle new discussions. During the 1700s, Jonathan Edwards' sermons stimulated individuals to seek spiritual guidance following the service. Evangelists during the 19th century used the inquiry room for men and women to voice their concerns. Harry Emerson Fosdick measured a sermon's effectiveness by the people prompted to seek his counsel. He wrote: "It was a notable day in my own experience when, feeling that pastoral calling from house to house was not filling the bill, I announced a consultation hour for those who wished privately to talk with me. That first day I found myself facing a suicidal case, with fourteen others awaiting their turn."[4]

Fourth, offer direction. Preaching should provide people with insights in the midst of their searching. While the Word offers an endless supply of truths, preaching must not be characterized by simplistic "how-to" sermons. Life is too complicated. Rather offer godly principles and provide accounts which demonstrate how these ideas have worked for individuals in other contexts. When providing such guidance, be sensitive and don't come across as the "answer man." Because of our theological training, we have plenty of information and experiences to share. Unfortunately, we can offer good answers in inappropriate ways. Our underlying message is, "I'm someone who knows about your questions and has the answers you've been looking for. So listen closely and I'll help you

with your problem." The issue is that when inquiry is not allowed, the search for grace is short-circuited, questioning can be perceived as faithlessness, and ultimately people will remain stuck in their situation and/or dependent on individuals for life direction in the future.

Preaching should assist individuals in their journey. Educators and counselors realize individuals learn more effectively when given opportunity to explore ideas. Their role is to guide men and women in the process, not race ahead, and "haul" people to a conclusion which they have deemed appropriate. This principle applies to our preaching as we invite listeners to search for God in their situations. "Even when we think that we know what they will find, it does little good to tell them: the process more than the outcome is given to our care. Our preaching can be planned and structured accordingly once we have grown sensitive to the difference."[5]

Fifth, help people take responsibility. This rule may seem simplistic but I have repeatedly encountered individuals who have never worked through issues. Preaching should encourage them to address matters, enabling them to become more honest with themselves and consequently, with God. The goal isn't undisciplined expressions of emotions but for people to gain a greater awareness of what is transpiring inside, take responsibility, and move forward. And if they fail to be responsible what happens? Stuffing…where beliefs and emotions are buried further into the soul and become more difficult to access.

I remember speaking with a woman about someone's divorce which had occurred ten years prior. But it took me several minutes to determine that she was actually talking about her situation. Why? Because she repeatedly referred to "Ann" who didn't want the divorce! Though she had grounds for the dissolution and didn't initiate the action, her theological understanding caused her to feel stigmatized. Consequently, she objectified the divorce, stuffed her feelings, and lived in guilt for a decade.

Just remember—when standing in the pulpit, you have the opportunity to address the needs of people. Hopefully, they are waiting to hear a word from the Lord. Undoubtedly, the stakes are high and you can do more harm with your words than imagined. Yet the possibility is significant to be redemptive and bring about much-needed healing. This reality should prompt you to prepare carefully, not only with God's Word in your hands but God's people in your heart.

Notes

1. Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching* (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, 1877), 75.
2. Gene E. Bartlett, "The Preaching and Pastoral Roles," (*Pastoral Psychology* 2(22), 1952): 27.
3. Reuel Howe, *Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), 32.
4. Harry Emerson Fosdick, "Pastoral Counseling and Preaching," (*Pastoral Psychology* 2 (22), 1952): 17.
5. J. Randal Nichols, *The Restoring Word: Preaching as Pastoral Communication* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1987), 26.

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Homiletical Insights Gleaned from the ACTS "Preaching Pastor Survey"

by Kenton C. Anderson

(editor's note: Dr. Kenton Anderson is Associate Professor of Homiletics, ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University in British Columbia.)

Abstract

Every November the national and regional leadership of the six denominations[1] affiliated with the Associated Canadian Theological Schools (ACTS Seminaries) come together to meet with the faculty and discuss some issue of current importance. In the fall of 2007, the subject was preaching. A comprehensive survey of 135 preaching pastors was undertaken. These are some of the implications that were discerned.

Introduction

The ACTS "Preaching Pastor Survey" offers a number of interesting and occasionally surprising insights into the place and practice of preaching in the six denominational constituencies that comprise the Associated Canadian Theological Schools.[1] As the person charged with teaching preaching at ACTS, I have been asked to mine the data and reflect upon my findings. To that end I would observe the following.

Preachers are optimistic

More than half of the surveyed preachers (54.6%) say that they consider their preaching to be "very effective" in satisfying their listeners expectations. The remaining preachers all (45.5%) indicated that they were at least "somewhat effective" in satisfying their expectations. Maybe you have to be an optimist to lead churches and to spend so much time on such a culturally disrespected thing like preaching or perhaps these preachers are not in tune with what

their listeners are thinking. It would be interesting, for instance, to survey these same preacher's congregations to see if they are feeling similar. Regardless, this describes a strong sense of self-confidence in the work that they are doing. Almost half the preachers in the survey (43.6%) claim to be "highly skilled" in biblical exegesis and theological understanding. A further 52.4% claim adequacy in this area. Only 4% claim a lack of exegetical and theological ability. Whether or not this confidence is justified it speaks well to the self-image of these preachers and it validates the significant investment that the preachers seem to be willing to make in the work of their preaching.

Preaching is far from dead

We have been hearing for some time that preaching is anachronistic. It is common to believe that preaching is past its sell-by date and that it must be deeply altered or even jettisoned if we are going to be relevant for the next generation. But this kind of thinking does not seem to be indicated by respondents to this survey. Almost half the survey respondents (44.8%) say that preaching "is the most meaningful thing that I am called to do." A further 53.7% say that it is "one of the most meaningful things that he or she is doing." This is a remarkable finding given the pressure on preachers to focus on leadership, counseling, and so many other aspects of their work. In essence 100% of survey respondents see their preaching as meaningful work. It is not viewed as a mere requirement of the job, but as something that is core to their identity and their productivity. It might also say something about the commitment of the ACTS partner denominations to the Word of God and to its dissemination.

Preachers are willing to invest in their work

The high value given to preaching is reflected further in the evidence of investment in the work made by these preachers. More than 95% of these preachers are spending at least six hours per week in sermon preparation. More than 60% spend more than 13

hours. Almost 20% spent half their work-week (18 hours or more) in preparing to preach. These preachers are reading commentaries (99%), consulting theologians (96%), and "reading culture" (99%). These preachers want to improve in every skill area related to preaching (no aspect of preaching scored less than 28%). They are willing to work at it. 70% would be willing to attend a seminar or short course if it would improve their preaching. 41% would engage a formal course. 18% would enroll in a seminary degree program. The challenge then for us is to find ways to meet this need in a manner that would be perceived as productive by these preachers.

Our approach to preaching is still largely exegetical and didactic

In other words, our approach to preaching hasn't changed much. The last ten years of homiletic discussion among evangelicals has opened the door to an increased interest in pragmatic preaching, narrative preaching, and other less traditional forms, but ACTS denominational preachers are still a very traditional crowd when it comes to sermon form. More than 70% say the form of their preaching is typically exegetical. 36.5% claim that they typically seek to teach listeners by "making an argument" from the text of scripture. Helping listeners solve problems, addressing issues in culture, involving listeners through story are all down the list. This probably reflects our continuing commitment to the exposition of Scripture. The idea that biblical exposition might allow for a greater integration or at least a variety of forms doesn't seem to have sunk in for these preachers, for the most part.

Preachers would rather study culture than confront it

The surveyed preachers describe a strong commitment to a study and awareness of their surrounding culture. 44% consider themselves "students of culture." 53% deliberately "read the culture" in an attempt to bring relevance to their preaching. Only one respondent claimed to have no interest in making an impact or understanding contemporary culture. The effect these preachers

hope to have on the culture, however, is understood largely within the private sphere. Trying to exert power within contemporary culture and speaking prophetically to the culture was described as significantly less important to these preachers than equipping Christians to evangelize and influence within their personal spheres and to encourage these same Christians to faithfully endure the challenges presented by the culture. In other words, these preachers study culture with a view to an indirect engagement with the world, rather than for the purposes of a frontal assault on culture.

Responses from seminary graduates are not significantly different from their peers

Those of us who work within the seminary context might have preferred to discover that seminary graduates show a greater sense of effectiveness than the rest of the sample, but with a few exceptions, the numbers don't seem to be substantially different. While seminary grads are 17% more likely to describe themselves as "highly skilled," they are actually less likely to view themselves as highly effective. 53% of seminary grads rated themselves as "very effective" compared to "55% of the group in general. Of course, almost all of the respondents described a great deal of confidence in their abilities, which may be a more positive way to interpret the findings. Clearly, seminary education is highly valued by the sample. 62% of all respondents say that their formal education has been essential in preparing them to preacher. 33% say that it has been helpful. These numbers will probably surprise some, but shouldn't be shocking to people who think carefully about the complexity of the work that we are talking about.

Younger preachers are not as radical as we might think

This might be the most surprising finding of all. Given the literature about emerging and missional church models crowding our desks in recent years, we might have expected to read dramatic differences in the responses of younger preachers, but this was not the response of these post-boomer preachers. In fact, any substantial differences

seemed to show up in surprising places. 14% of the younger respondents claimed that an understanding of contemporary culture "has had little impact" on the shaping of their understanding of the Bible and theology. This compares with 6% of the greater group. A strong majority (60.7%) of these younger preachers said that "explanation" comprises 75 to 100% of their typical sermon. This compares with 41.6% of the general group. Younger preachers are less likely to say that preaching was the "most meaningful" thing that they do (35.7% compared with 44.8% of the general sample). Not surprisingly they were also less likely to say that they were "very effective" (44.4% compared to 54.6% of the general group). They were also 50% more likely to invest in a formal course of program if it would improve their preaching.

Preaching is still a work done by men

A lot of energy has been expended in the ACTS partner denominations over the last several years on the issue of the qualification of women for pastoral ministry. Each of the six denominations have come to their own conclusions about the matter. Many women have been encouraged to come to seminary and many have been hired by our churches. A healthy portion of each homiletics class at ACTS seminaries is comprised of women. Still, women are not preaching, at least not regularly. Of the 134 survey respondents, only two were female. This is not to make any judgment about the propriety of allowing women to preach. It's simply to say that despite much effort to open doors for women in our churches, the indication is that women still are not perceived as preaching pastors in their churches.

Conclusion

These comments do not speak to everything reported by the numbers, but only the most interesting and thought-provoking implications. Having described these things, I think it worth noting that the *sample size*, while strong, is probably *not large enough* to make such sweeping statements with a strong degree of confidence.

It would be well to test these findings further through interview and experience.

Notes

1. The member denominations of ACTS Seminaries are the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists in Canada, the Evangelical Free Church of Canada, the Mennonite Brethren Conference, the Christian and Missionary Alliance of Canada, the Baptist General Conference of Canada, and the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada.

Towards a Foundational, Flexible, Sermon Structure

by John Sweetman

(editor's note: John Sweetman is principal and lecturer in pastoral studies, leadership and mentoring at Queensland Baptist College of Ministries, Mitchelton, Queensland, Australia.)

Abstract

Since the emergence of the "new homiletic" in the late 1960s, there has been considerable rethinking of sermon structure. The traditional, declarative sermon form based on careful argument and organised by deductive points is now only one of many options.

As well as the classical deductive homiletical form, available options include inductive forms, narrative-plot forms and story forms.[1] To these possibilities could be added numerous other sermon structures promoted by individual authors, including Buttrick's moves,[2] Wilson's four pages,[3] Stanley's one point structure,[4] Webb's improvisational storyboard,[5] and McClellan's sermon mapping.[6]

A multitude of sermon forms can produce complexity for a preacher. Could there be a flexible, foundational structure that can be used to outline a wide range of sermons?

In this article, I will explore the variety of structural options, show that none of these structures can be seen as foundational, and then offer a possible foundational, flexible, sermon structure. I will then illustrate how flexible this structure is by restructuring a range of sermons in this form.

Attempts at classifying sermon structures

Some authors have attempted to organise or classify these varying structural sermon forms. An appropriate classification scheme could be of great benefit to preachers. It would make the choice

between options simpler and clearer. So I will briefly explore a few classification efforts in an attempt to delineate and systematise the range of possible sermon structures.

In an early endeavour to classify newer forms of sermon along with the traditional forms, Hamilton differentiates eight homiletical techniques.[7] Six of these techniques relate to different ways of developing deductive, points-based structures, but Hamilton also includes inductive and narrative structures as separate categories.

Cahill describes the less traditional forms of preaching developed in recent decades as inductive forms, narrative preaching (a variety of inductive form), story preaching (a variety of narrative preaching), and Buttrick's homiletic of moves.[8] While Cahill doesn't claim that these are the only possible sermon forms, his categories do not canvass the wider range of options now available.

Eslinger too focuses on contemporary narrative forms but he explores a broader scope.[9] He uses the image of a web to connect five preaching structures – the African American tradition, the use of inductive and narrative plots championed by Craddock and Lowry, Buttrick's moves and structures, Wilson's four pages, and a homiletics of imagery in which images influence rhetoric. While Eslinger does an excellent job of discussing and critiquing each form, sometimes even contrasting their perspectives, he does not really explain his "web" by showing how the forms interrelate. Eslinger expands the existing array of narrative, structural options, but doesn't provide a wide-ranging, systematic categorisation of sermon structures.

Anderson's work goes a step further.[10] He applies Kolb's four stages in the adult learning process to sermon construction and suggests four broad forms of sermons. Combining Kolb's two styles of receiving information (direct experience and thinking) with his two styles of processing information (reflecting and experimenting), Anderson categorises sermons as declarative (thinking/reflecting), pragmatic (thinking/experimenting), narrative (experience/experimenting),

or visionary (experience/reflecting).[11] He presents John MacArthur (declarative), Rick Warren (pragmatic), Eugene Lowry (narrative), and Rob Bell (visionary) as examples of each style.

Anderson's categories are useful for describing the range of possible sermon structures. By commencing with a construct rather than actual types of sermons, Anderson produces a system that not only is helpful for categorising present forms but may also be able to integrate forms not yet promulgated or even contemplated. Perhaps the "visionary" sermon could be better titled the "image-based" sermon, because Anderson is thinking of listeners grasping images as the sermon proceeds, not contemplating a vision of the future. But preachers looking for a suitable sermon structure are assisted by reviewing their options through the lens of Anderson's four broad categories.

These attempts to classify structures make it apparent that a wide variety of structural forms for sermons exists and that preachers now have a multitude of options when it comes to designing a sermon. Grouping these options into Anderson's four categories provides some clarity on possible sermon forms for a preacher, but familiarity with every form is difficult. It is taxing for a preacher to use a different structure for every sermon. A foundational structure that could be adapted for a wide variety of sermon styles would increase a preacher's flexibility in using a range of sermonic forms.

Possible foundational structures

While many authors opt for a range of sermon structures to suit various biblical genres and audience needs, some promote one particular structure as foundational. I will explore a sample of these structures and ask whether any of them could form a flexible, foundational, sermon structure for a wide range of sermon styles.

Chapell proposes a traditional model of sermon structure based on main points and subpoints.[12] However, he admits that preaching cannot be confined to one form and that his form should best be

used as a starting point that will keep preachers from being left "adrift in a sea of structural possibilities."[13] From this foundational form preachers can develop their own forms "according to their own insights, choices, and informed innovations as led by the Spirit of God."[14] So Chapell's foundational form is not an attempt at a flexible structure for all sermons, but an underpinning for further form developments.

Lowry's well-known "loop" describes the progress of a sermon through five stages of a homiletical plot.[15] In his original 1980 book, Lowry presented his sermon form to preachers as a "new vision of our common task."[16] But in his afterword to the expanded edition, Lowry places his homiletical plot among the many narrative options emerging from the 1970s and 1980s.[17] So while Lowry shed new light on preaching narrative, he doesn't now see his homiletical plot as "the" form for narrative preaching, but one option among many. Homiletical plot is not claimed to be a foundational structure and its restrictive format precludes such a possibility.

Buttrick's homiletic of "moves" has contributed significantly to narrative sermon structure options. He parallels preaching with conversation and argues that preaching should be structured around a series of self-contained, yet connected, moves. This could form quite a flexible structure for constructing sermons, except that Buttrick is very specific about the design of moves. According to Buttrick, each move should last from three to four minutes and should form a unit of thought that commences with an opening statement of several sentences connecting the hearer and establishing the mood, and that concludes with a terse restatement of the main idea.[18] Such a tight structure limits the flexibility of moves and inhibits Buttrick's form from being adaptable enough to accommodate a wide range of preaching styles.

The need for a sermon to be strongly unified around the biblical text, gospel oriented, and focused on the listeners' reception of truth underlies Wilson's conception of a sermon composed of four pages.[19] These pages are seen as four distinct movements within the

construction and preaching of the sermon. A sermon moves from (1) trouble and conflict in the Bible, to (2) trouble in the world, to (3) grace and good news in the Bible, and finally to (4) grace for us and our world. While Wilson accepts that the order of these pages may be varied occasionally, he argues that each page must be present because they all play a vital theological role. Wilson's theological underpinnings for his structure are admirable, but it's the prescriptive nature of each page and its order that limits the flexibility of the form. No matter what the form or genre of the passage, Wilson's structure remains the same. I also suspect that should the four pages become a foundational form, its predictability would eventually diminish audience tension and interest.

After presenting his four categories of sermon structure (declarative, pragmatic, narrative and visionary), Anderson proceeds to offer a form of preaching that integrates all four styles.[20] It combines a logical argument, an underlying mystery, a human story, and a motivating vision. He suggests that these elements could be integrated consecutively (in either one sermon or a series of sermons) or concurrently by mixing the elements together in a single sermon. Anderson's preference is for concurrent integration, but he admits that "concurrent integration is a little more challenging and requires more creativity and intuition."[21] It appears that Anderson's approach (particularly concurrent integration) is not so much a foundational form of sermon structure as a helpful reminder of elements that need to be included in a sermon if the preacher is to communicate effectively with a diverse audience.

Stanley argues that if preachers are to aim for life change among listeners, they have to build the whole sermon around one point from the passage.[22] Stanley presents a five step sermon structure that moves through (1) ME - sharing a dilemma the preacher has faced or is facing; (2) WE - identifying ways in which the audience has struggled with this issue; (3) GOD - delving into the text to see what God says about it; (4) YOU - showing the audience how to respond and challenging them to action; and (5) WE - inspiring the audience with what could happen if they embraced this truth.

Stanley's structure is remarkably similar to that of Lowry's five stages of a homiletical plot. While it is a helpful structure for preaching in narrative form, its lack of flexibility and its imposition of a structure on the text mean that it is not adaptable enough to form a foundational structure.

I could examine many other sermon form options including more recent developments like Webb's improvisational storyboard and McClellan's sermon mapping, but I think that the point has been made. None of these structures appears flexible enough to cater for a wide variety of sermon forms.

Towards a foundational structure

However, while elusive, the quest for a foundational structure remains important. To develop a unique structure for every sermon is a huge undertaking that can exhaust a regular preacher's scarce reserves of time and creativity. It can complicate and lengthen the sermon preparation task. The set forms described above are popular with preachers despite their lack of flexibility, because they provide a straightforward, time-efficient method for developing a sermon.

What criteria then would a flexible, foundational structure have to meet to be effective? I would suggest at least the following characteristics. (1) It would have to accommodate the range of contemporary structures used to construct sermons. This would include propositional, deductive structures as well as narrative, inductive structures; image-based forms as well as informational forms. (2) A truly flexible structure would need to be able to flow with the form and genre of a passage. (3) A flexible structure would need to be appropriate for constructing sermons for all types of audiences.

If a foundational structure is possible, it would most likely originate in one form of preaching, but would prove adaptable enough to be useful for structuring any form of sermon. In some ways, the points-style structure acted as such a foundational structure until

its limitations were exposed by the inductive, narrative approaches of the new homiletic.

The most ubiquitous form of communication in premodern, modern and postmodern society has been the story. A large proportion of the Bible was written as narrative and the sermons in Acts were constructed as narratives. Story has always had special appeal and now dominates contemporary communication. As Robinson says, "We have become a storied culture."[23] Standing even observes, "It seems, therefore, as though God has created us to live in a universe where narrative and stories define who we are."[24]

So if any form is to provide a foundational structure for all sermon construction, it may well be the story form. Let's explore how a story is structured.

Structuring a story in scenes

The basic building block of story construction is the "scene." Scenes can make up the chapters of a book, the scenes of a play, the segments of a movie, or the components of a conversation. So a narrative sermon can be constructed in scenes. The following narrative principles pertain to structuring a sermon in scenes:

1. A story is composed of a number of scenes. All the scenes contribute to the story.
2. Each scene forms a complete unit. It stands by itself. While all the scenes are needed to understand the theme, direction and context of the story, each scene has its own theme that makes sense by itself. This scene theme can be summarised in a sentence.
3. Each scene can have a different form, content and context. There is no common structure for scenes.
4. The story develops and progresses both through the scenes and within each scene. While each scene revolves around a theme, scenes are fluid entities that may not end where they begin.

5. The first scene forms the introduction to the story and the final scene forms the conclusion.
6. The scenes are usually joined by invisible, logical developments that make sense to the listener/viewer/reader. Scenes are sometimes introduced with a transition when the development of the story may not be clear to the audience.
7. Any scene may contain the resolution of the story, but often for the sake of maintaining tension it will be one of the final scenes.
8. The story keeps moving on. There is generally no revision of the story or previous scenes. It is presumed that previous scenes have been absorbed and can be built upon.
9. The story is encapsulated in a summary of the themes of the scenes.

Using these principles, here is a narrative sermon outline of Matthew 2:1-12 constructed in scenes (S1 stands for Scene 1):

S1. Births are intimate celebrations for family and friends
S2. And Jesus' birth was just like that (Luke 2:1-20)
S3. Except for the "wise men" (2:1)
S4. Who travelled to worship Jesus on the strength of a star (2:2-12)
S5. Because they were truth-seekers (2:2)
S6. So come on truth-seekers – focus on Jesus

There are significant similarities between narrative "scenes" and Buttrick's "moves." First, both scenes and moves can be summarised by a sentence. This sentence is the theme around which the scene or move is centred. It is the heart of the scene/move and provides unity. Any information that does not relate to the summarising sentence should be excluded from the scene/move. The scene/move needs to centre on a single, clear idea.

Second, each scene or move can be shaped differently and contain a variety of content. There is no normal way to shape a scene/move. A sermon scene or move could contain exegesis, explanation, illustration, validation, dialogue, commentary, reflection, or any

combination of these in any order. While each scene/move must have a beginning (commencement) and ending (closure) that separate it from the preceding and following scenes/moves, the shape and content of each scene/move may vary dramatically.

However, scenes are far more flexible in timing and structure than moves. A Buttrick move must be between three and four minutes, have about three introductory sentences, and exhibit a tight closure that returns to the initial statement, or at least the initiating idea, at the end of the move.[25] While some scenes may be based on this formula, scenes can be far more flexible in both timing and structure. A scene may last longer than four minutes, and while it needs to be a complete unit, it may not conclude where it started. In other words a scene may move. Generally, Buttrick's moves are a much more regimented way of organising a sermon than the scenes' structure.

Also, scenes will sometimes need transitional statements, but moves don't. According to Buttrick, moves are connected by a variety of invisible, logical jumps, not overt transitions.[26] In a story, however, the need for transitions depends on the context. Movies don't generally use explicit transitions because the change in scene is visually obvious to the audience due to the different setting. On the other hand, written stories often do use transitions as part of the story. Comments like "The next morning" or "On the other side of the city" alert the reader to a change in scene. In a sermon, some scenes will need transitions and others will not, depending on their context.

At first glance, the scenes' structure appears to be as limiting as the points' structure. It seems to turn every sermon into a one-point narrative. Certainly preaching by scenes facilitates, perhaps even encourages, such a structure. But I will now show that the scenes' structure is very flexible. A wide range of sermon styles can be structured in scenes.

Testing the flexibility of the scenes' structure

The flexibility of the scenes' structure will be tested in two ways. First, I will attempt to show that it can be used to structure each of Anderson's four styles of sermons. To do this I will outline four sermons on Psalm 23 in scenes, each in one of Anderson's categories. Second, I will take actual sermons by proponents of other structures, and demonstrate how each can be outlined in scenes.

Anderson categorises sermons as declarative, pragmatic, narrative, or visionary (image-based). Each style of sermon can actually be outlined in scenes. Here is an example of an outline of a sermon, based on Psalm 23, from each category.

A declarative sermon based on Psalm 23 could be outlined as:

S1. It's great to know that we can count on God
S2. In tiring times (1-3a)
S3. In testing times (3b)
S4. In frightening times (4)
S5. And for all time (5-6)
S6. So give him your concerns right now

This is a four-point sermon in which scene 1 is the introduction (where the main idea is announced) and scene 6 is the conclusion. A three-point sermon could similarly be constructed in five scenes.

A pragmatic sermon on Psalm 23, constructed in scenes, might look like this:

S1. Sometimes it feels that God doesn't care
S2. You start to wonder if God may be more concerned about others
S3. But the problem is with us, not with God - he (as shepherd) really does care
S4. So let him guide you (1-3)
S5. And let him protect you (4)
S6. And let him be proud of you (5-6)

In this outline, the first three scenes explore the issue and provide the answer and the final three scenes show how the answer can be put into practice.

The scenes' structure is ideal for outlining narrative sermons. A narrative sermon on Psalm 23 could be structured in the following scenes:

S1. We spend a lot of our life looking after other people, but deep down we dream of having someone to look after us
S2. So we search for someone to look after us, but no-one can do it
S3. Because that's God's job – he's the shepherd (1)
S4. Wherever you're at today, he's looking after you (1-6)
S5. So sit back and lap up his care today

You might recognise signs of Lowry's homiletical plot in this outline. It's a story that raises tension in the first two scenes, announces the main idea in the third, and explores the ramifications in the final two scenes.

A visionary (image-based) sermon on Psalm 23 could be structured in the following scenes:

S1. Shepherding was a tough job in David's day. (1) [with some photos or video, maybe even a live sheep if you're radical]
S2. Why do you think David describes God as a shepherd? [discussion in pairs with feedback]
S3. He says that God is wise like a good shepherd. (1-3)
S4. And God is powerful like a good shepherd. (4-6)
S5. A symbol of both these shepherd characteristics is the shepherd's staff [give out small replicas]
S6. Please write on your staff how God has shepherded you

This outline is based around the imagery of a shepherd and his staff. It includes elements of interaction, symbolic action and personal reflection and probably would be targeted towards a post-modern

audience. The scenes' structure, however, remains an appropriate method of organising the sermon.

I have gone some way towards illustrating the flexibility of the scenes' structure, but the above sermons have all been constructed from scratch in scenes. The real test is whether sermons composed and outlined in other forms can also be outlined in scenes. The following examples have been chosen from sources already mentioned in this article.

Chapell provides an example of an expository, points-based outline based on Romans 8:31-39. His outline is:

I. God's love is greater than sin (31-34)
II. God's love is greater than circumstances (35-37)
III. God's love is greater than Satan (38-39)[27]

This outline can be rearranged into a scenes' outline by adding an introduction and conclusion to the outline and linking the points together:

S1. It's great to know that we are secure in God's love no matter what happens
S2. Because God's love is greater than sin (31-34)
S3. And God's love is greater than circumstances (35-37)
S4. And God's love is greater than Satan's power (38-39)
S5. So nothing will ever separate us from God's love through Jesus (39)

Lowry provides no examples of outlines in *The Homiletical Plot*, but Stanley, who broadly follows the same approach, outlines a sermon on submission in marriage in *Communicating for a Change:*

ME - Sometimes I find myself wondering how to respond to situations in my marriage
WE - I imagine that you have found yourself in situations where you weren't sure what to do either

GOD - The Bible teaches that we are to submit to one another; put the desires and needs of our spouse ahead of our own needs and desires

YOU - Next time you aren't sure what to say or do, ask yourself this question, "How can I put the needs and desires of my spouse ahead of my own in this moment?"

WE - Imagine what would happen in our community if all of us began to model that king of mutual submission before our friends and our neighbours[28]

This outline is already constructed in scenes, but I will nuance the outline to make it tighter:

S1. Sometimes my marriage is tough because we're so different
S2. You know what it's like - it's a struggle
S3. But God tells us to submit to our spouse
S4. So next time you feel the tension rising, give in, put your partner's needs/wishes first
S5. This could have a huge impact our marriages, our church, and even our community

In *Homiletic*, Buttrick provides a basic moves' structure for a narrative sermon on Luke 17:11-19. Here is his outline:

1. The lepers cried, "Have pity!" and we can understand
2. How does Jesus answer? With a commandment, "Go." Isn't that just like God?
3. Well they went: Faith is doing the word of Jesus Christ
4. But if faith is only obedience, it can turn into dead law
5. One came back to worship: Christian worship gives thanks
6. So the Christian life is both obedient faith and worship[29]

This outline highlights the similarities between moves and scenes. Again, I will slightly nuance the scenes, but I'm not sure that I can improve on Buttrick's outline:

S1. The lepers came to Jesus asking for help in their desperate plight (11-13)
S2. But Jesus sent them away to be healed (14)
S3. And they went - now that's faith-filled obedience (14)
S4. But Jesus is looking for more than obedience
S5. You see, one leper came back to say thanks (15-16)
S6. Obedience with thanks - now that's what Jesus looks for (17-19)

Wilson's four page structure can be constructed in scenes by adding a shorter introduction and conclusion (say three minutes each) to the four pages (say six minutes each - Wilson's minimum). Here is an example of a four-page outline of a sermon on Luke 15:11-32 that Wilson provides:

Page one (trouble in the Bible): The son was prodigal with his father's money
Page two (trouble in our world): We waste what we are given
Page three (grace in the Bible): The father is prodigal in his love
Page four (grace in our world): God's love is enough[30]

This is what the outline could look like constructed in scenes:

S1. I've never asked for an inheritance in my life
S2. When the son in this story was given his father's money, he completely wasted it
S3. The trouble is, we're no different
S4. But that didn't stop the dad pouring out his love on his son
S5. You see God never stops loving
S6. God loves you no matter where you've been or what you've done, so come home

Anderson does not provide a specific outline of what he terms an integrative sermon, but he does suggest elements that an integrative sermon on 2 Corinthians 2:12-17 would need to include. I have summarised these elements:

The Human Story: People can smell a preacher coming. Sometimes Paul really stunk
The Underlying Mystery: We tend to mask bad smells, but it's a problem if we mask the fragrance of Christ for those who think it smells awful
The Logical Argument: (1) Preachers carry the smell of Christ. (2) To some we smell beautiful like life and to others we stink like death. (3) We keep preaching no matter how we smell
The Motivating Vision: We confidently preach Jesus no matter what it smells like[31]

These elements could be integrated in a scenes' structure like this:

S1. I have a friend who works at the bakery - you can smell him coming
S2. Christians witnesses are like that - they often smell great, a bit like Christ (14-16)
S3. But not everyone likes the smell, some think it stinks (16)
S4. It's easy to want to mask the smell for those who may be offended by the "stench"
S5. But come on, let's confidently preach Jesus no matter what it smells like to others (17)

Webb suggests that each sermon be constructed like a movie on a storyboard with about eight panels. This is very close to the concept of an eight scene sermon. In the example outline Webb provides, the eight panels for a sermon on Demas (2 Timothy 4:10; Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24) are summarized:

1. The group that Paul attracted
2. Who was this Demas?
3. Demas forsakes Paul
4. Demas's story is my story
5. Paul's two worlds – what?
6. Why Demas's decision?
7. We have to choose too
8. Choose the crown of righteousness[32]

These phrases don't make a lot of sense by themselves, but they are linked on Webb's storyboard to a more complete outline of each panel.

Here's what Webb's sermon could look like in a scenes' structure:

S1. Paul was a charismatic leader who attracted a remarkable group of followers
S2. One of these was Demas who was a good guy (Colossians 4:14; Philemon 24)
S3. But in the end he deserted Paul (and God) because he loved the world (2 Timothy 4:10)
S4. I know what that's like, I've done the same thing
S5. We all have to choose continually which world we're going to live in
S6. And there's plenty of pressure to turn away from God
S7. So today we have to choose again
S8. Let's go for the upward path because we know where it ends (2 Timothy 4:8)

The scenes' structure works well for Webb's outline as long as the scenes are kept short. At three minutes a scene (probably the minimum for an effective scene), this would be a 25 minute sermon.

Conclusion

So how has the scenes' structure measured up against the criteria previously suggested for a flexible, foundational structure? (1) It certainly has accommodated a range of contemporary structures used to construct sermons. This includes propositional, deductive structures as well as narrative, inductive structures, image-based forms as well as informational forms. (2) The Psalm 23 examples suggest that it may be able to flow with the form and genre of a passage. This needs to be investigated further but the potential is promising. (3) While its flexibility in communicating with a range of audiences has not been directly explored, the variety of sermon styles examined indicates a broad range of potential audiences.

The quest for a flexible, foundational preaching structure is tantalising because such a structure would offer preachers the opportunity to experiment with different sermonic styles without having to start from scratch each time. It would provide a familiarity of structure within a rich diversity of approaches to sermon form.

Perhaps the scenes' structure provides this elusive, flexible, foundational structure. It certainly has been proved to be flexible. Further research and reflection will determine whether it can lay claim to being foundational.

Notes

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31. Anderson, 259-260.
32. Webb, 124.

Preaching and Learning Styles: Communicate So People Can Listen

by John V. Tornfelt

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Abstract

To enhance preaching, homileticians have been concerned with communication theory with ample literature available on such issues as the process of communication, sermon structures, congregational awareness, and matters of delivery. One neglected factor has been learning styles which accounts for why people relate well to some sermons and struggle with other ones. Responses are not necessarily related to content but stem from the orientations of listeners.

Educational research indicates numerous factors impact listeners. Models of learning can be grouped into four categories. Personality models are the most stable and form the core of learning styles. Information processing models examine how people tend take in and process information. Social interaction models consider how individual's ability to learn is impacted by various contexts. Instructional preference models deal with people's inclinations as far as teaching methods. For greater effectiveness, preachers should not only be aware of these styles but their own learning preferences.

Introduction

Roger Van Harn writes the concerns of men and women in the pew should be paramount and reminds preachers "the pulpit was made for the pew, not the pew for the pulpit."[1] In referring to Romans 10:13-17 he notes attention is often directed to the pulpit where the preaching occurs. But in so doing, we miss the Apostle Paul's point where he focuses on the hearing of Christ. Van Harn states:

> Because faith comes by hearing, he gives hearing the central place in the church's mission order:
>
> sending – preaching – *hearing* – believing – calling
>
> The whole mission order includes a church order and a salvation order. The church order is composed of sending, preaching, and hearing. The salvation order is composed of hearing, believing, and calling on the name of the Lord. The mission order joins the church order in the event of *hearing*. Hearing stands at the center between preaching and believing. It fulfills the purpose of the sending and makes possible our calling on the name or the Lord.

Regarding the centrality of hearing in mission, Van Harn continues:

> The church must be a sending community, a preaching community, a believing community, and a community that calls on the name of the Lord. But if hearing doesn't happen, the order collapses. What remains may be a religious society that preserves tradition and promotes good causes, but it is not the church of the crucified, risen Lord.[2]

Because hearing stands between preaching (purpose of the church) and believing (experience of salvation) it can be easily overlooked. From personal observation, it is more than overlooked but simply assumed. Preachers can tell themselves, "Of course, my people will want to hear what I have to proclaim because I am speaking for God," perhaps but not necessarily.

But before reprogramming the church for action, it would be wise for preachers to check what people actually hear. They may be surprised. People may be hearing but not listening because congregations and preachers are on different wavelengths. While pastoring, my custom was to stand at the back of the sanctuary and greet people following the worship service. On more than one

occasion, individuals would offer a comment about the sermon but I had no idea what they were talking about. Yet they heard me say it! So did something go awry with the sermon? Possibly but not necessarily other than what you say and how people listen will differ. Though no one is to blame for the apparent miscommunication, it points to my premise that an appreciation for learning styles is significant if men and women are to understand what is spoken and more importantly, what the Lord considers essential.

Pertaining to this relationship, Beverly Zink-Sawyer's comments are appropriate and helpful:

> The powerful cultural forces that have influenced homiletical and liturgical styles over the past few decades have been accompanied by an awareness of the diversity of those individuals who occupy the pews. The awareness is due in part to new educational, sociological, psychological and epistemological theories that have revealed the multifaceted ways in which individuals hear and learn. Educational and communicational theories have deepened our knowledge of unique patterns of thought, giving us terms like left and right brain and concrete and imaginative thinking. The relatively new field of congregational studies has joined sociological methodologies to ecclesiological elements, enabling church leaders to understand better the dynamics inherent in religious communities. Even personality type can influence the way in which different listeners hear a given sermon. An analytical tool such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator that suggests personality preferences can demonstrate the different ways people process information. A judgment concerning the effectiveness of any given sermon will vary according to the interaction of the preacher's own personality preferences, the form and content of the sermon, and the hearer's personality preferences. In the end, we must resign ourselves to

the fact that, no matter how faithful we try to be in shaping textual meaning into appropriate sermonic form, a "sermon preached to seventy-five people is actually transformed by them into seventy-five more-or-less related sermons."[3]

Definitions

Research continues into styles of learning with studies being conducted in the physiological, psychological and sociological dimensions. Though learning styles have yet to be clearly or comprehensively defined, there is still an abundance of literature providing a range of models that help us deal with this mysterious terrain. One reason for the plethora of definitions is that learning is an internal process which you know has taken place only as you are able to observe changes in a person's behavior. For instance, if a woman exhibits different attitudes or conducts herself in new ways, you assume learning has occurred. In trying to ascertain how and why these changes come about, models are created by theoreticians that seek to account for the underlying causes. And so, styles are but hypothetical constructs that help explain the teaching-learning process.

Definitions of learning styles include the following:

- D.H. Kalsbeek describes a learning style as "a person's preferred approach to information processing, idea formation, and decision making; the attitudes and interests that influence what is attended to in a learning situation; and a disposition to seek learning environments compatible with these personal profiles."[4]

- Marlene LeFever understands a style of learning as a way in which "a person sees or perceives things best and then processes or uses what has been seen. Each person's individual learning style is as unique as a signature."[5]

- James Keefe states learning styles reflect "genetic coding, personality development, motivation and environmental adaptation. Style is relatively persistent in the behavior of individual learners. It can change, but it does so gradually and developmentally. Learning style has cognitive, affective and environmental elements. Cognitive elements are internal controls of the information processing system that are trainable for more affective levels of skill. Affective and environmental elements are preferential in nature and can respond to both training and instructional matching strategies."[6]

- David Kolb views a learning style as "the way we process the possibilities of each new emerging event (which) determines the range of choices and decisions we see, the choices and decisions we make, to some extent determine the events we live through, and these events influence our future choices."[7]

- Kenneth and Rita Dunn reflect an inclusive approach and define learning style as "the way each learner begins to concentrate, process, and retain new and difficult information. That interaction occurs differently for everyone…multi-dimensional characteristics to determine what will most likely trigger each student's concentration, maintain it, respond to his or her natural processing style, and cause long-term memory."[8]

- In conjunction with Jeffrey Beaudry and Angela Klavas, Rita Dunn offers another definition in which she considers a learning style as "a biologically and developmentally imposed set of personal characteristics that make the same teaching method effective for some and ineffective for others."[9]

- Robert Sternberg provides another definition (and term, thinking styles, and which is similar but not identical to learning styles). "A style is a preferred way of using one's abilities. It is not in itself an ability but rather a preference. Hence, various styles are not good or bad, only different."[10] He continues stating everyone has a style profile. We demonstrate varying amounts of each style but are not locked into any one specific profile. We have the ability to vary our style as needed in different situations and tasks.[11]

Models of Learning

Because of the wide variety of models, categorization of the research aids our understanding. Lynn Curry categorized learning styles into three levels, likening them to layers of an onion.[12] This metaphor has been expanded by Charles Claxton and Patricia Murrell to four levels.[13]

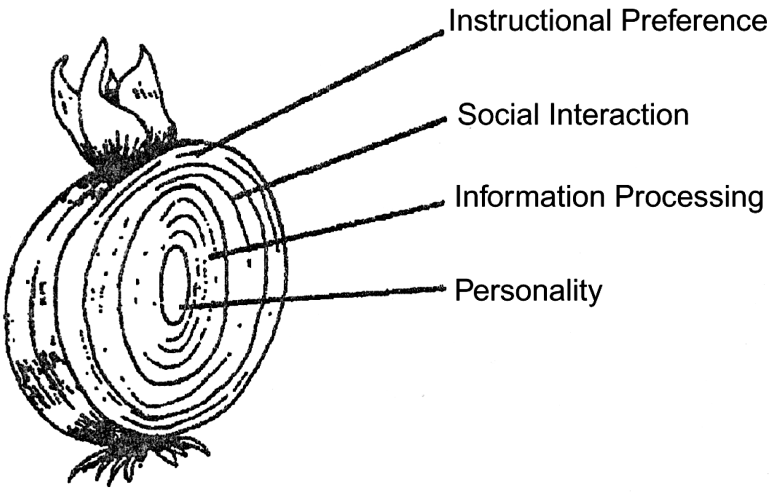

Figure 1

Source: Charles Claxton and Patricia Murrell 1987.

The onion should be understood holistically. Claxton and Murrell write the traits described at the different levels are not discreet (or self-contained) units. Traits at the core (personality) are the most stable and least subject to change. As one moves outwards, traits or preferences are less stable and more susceptible to change. Yet as you move from the core level of personality to the outer levels, the inner set of traits influences the next layer. Hence, personality impacts one's information processing abilities, and a person's social-interaction style affects their instructional/environmental preference.

Before considering the representative styles in Claxton and Murrell, the relationship of learning styles to preaching theory is worth considering. In regard to engineering education, Richard Felder and Linda Silverman have stated:

> Mismatches exist between common learning styles of engineering students and traditional teaching styles of engineering professors. In consequence, students become bored and inattentive in class, do poorly on tests, get discouraged about the courses, the curriculum, and themselves, and in some cases change to other curricula or drop out of school. Professors, confronted by low test grades, unresponsive or hostile classes, poor attendance and dropouts, know something is not working; they may become overly critical of their students (making things even worse) or begin to wonder if they are in the right profession. Most seriously, society loses potentially excellent engineers.[14]

Substituting some words and phrases, Felder and Silverman's assessment can be applied to the field of homiletics. It can be similarly stated (*italics* mine):

> Mismatches exist between common learning styles of *people in the church* and *the preaching style of the pastor.* In consequence, *God's people* become bored and inattentive in *church*, do poorly *in their walk with*

God, get discouraged about *the church, the preaching*, and themselves, and in some cases change to other *ministries* or drop out of *church*. *Preachers*, confronted by *low involvement, unresponsive or hostile boards*, poor attendance and *inactive members*, know something is not working; they may become overly critical of *members* (*making things worse*) or begin to wonder if they are in the right profession (or *calling*). Most seriously, *churches as well as society* loses potentially excellent *pastors (and the message of Christ is not proclaimed)*.

Personality Models

Personality models describe the onion's innermost layer or core of learning styles. The models focus on men and women's deepest personality characteristics and how they view the world.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicators (MBTI)

The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is probably the most common personality method and stems from the work of Isabel Myers who revisited the research of Carl Jung on psychological types. Subsequently, Myers worked with Kathryn Briggs to create the MBTI model that identifies sixteen patterns by which people take in information (perception) and the manner in which they make decisions (judging). Their model states, "The world can be perceived in two distinct ways—sensing or intuition—and people use two distinct and contrasting ways to reach conclusions or make judgments—thinking or feeling. In addition to a person's preference on both mental functions is an accompanying preference for extraversion or introversion, and a preference for attitude toward life which is either judging or perceptive."[15]

MBTI consists of four dichotomous scales and categorizes people as:

1. *Extroverts* (focus on the outer world of people, willingly try out new things) versus *introverts*

(focus on the inner world of ideas and thinking through matters).

2. *Sensors* (practical, detail-oriented, factual, procedural) versus *intuitors* (conceptual, imaginative, interest in meanings and possibilities).

3. *Thinkers* (skeptical, decisions are logical and rule-oriented) versus *feelers* (appreciative, decisions are personal and considerate).

4. *Judgers* (set and follow agendas, seek closure even with incomplete information) versus *perceivers* (adapt with circumstances, resist closure to obtain more data).

How a person rates along these scales indicates tendencies in their personalities as well as engagement with the world. The MBTI model is helpful in recognizing how natural instincts can enhance or limit learning outcomes with individuals.

Ned Herrmann's Brain Dominance Model

A second model involves hemispheric dominance of the brain (or as it is commonly referred to as the right brain – left brain approach). According to Ned Herrmann, the left side of the brain is the seat of language and processes information in linear or sequential ways. As for personality, left brain individuals are considered to be more logical in their thought processing. This side of the brain takes pieces of data, arranges them in a order, and seeks to draw conclusions which are consistent with the data. In contrast, the brain's right side is more visual and processes information intuitively, emotively, randomly and holistically. The brain's right side is inclined to see the big picture before attending to details.[16]

Lisa Verlee Williams has categorized these differences:[17]

Left Hemisphere	Right Hemisphere
interested in component parts	interested in whole and gestalts
detects features and particularities	integrates component parts, organizes them into a whole
analytical/logical	relational, constructional, pattern-seeking, creative
sequential processing, serial processing	simultaneous processing, processing in parallel
Temporal	Spatial
verbal – encoding and decoding speech, mathematics, musical notation	visual – spatial, musical

Most people seem to have a dominant side or thinking preference. While nothing is entirely isolated on one or the other side of the brain, these characteristics are commonly attributed to their respective sides of the brain. When learning is new, difficult or stressful, the brain will automatically shift to its dominant hemisphere.

Herman Witkin's Field Dependence-Independence Theory

In *Personality through Perception*, Herman Witkin developed the field dependent versus field independent approach to learning. Though men and women may have similar intellectual capacities, their ability to use information and the manner in which they process data will differ. From experiments in visual pattern detection, two broad categories of learners have emerged: field-dependent (or field-sensitive) and field-independent.[18]

Individuals who are field-dependent are sensitive to their environment and more likely to be influenced by their surroundings. Strong in interpersonal relationships, happy in group settings, and sensitive to other people's judgments, they prefer mutually-enriching learning contexts. Field-dependent learners are more likely to be obedient to authority, conscious of culturally determined social roles, and anxious to be accepted by other individuals.

Field-independent learners are not influenced as strongly by the environment. More analytical, they are inclined to be task oriented. More globally-oriented, they are likely to look at pieces of the whole or particular aspects of a concept or idea. Field-independent individuals are internally motivated, may prefer to be by themselves, have greater cognitive flexibility, and are strongly influenced by their own judgments.

Implications for Preaching

Personality is a function of the creative action of God in people's lives. Though a myriad of social factors impact personalities, people will be introverts or extroverts, thinkers or feelers, right or left-brain dominant, analytical or relational, and field-dependent or independent because God has created them in these ways. Though uniqueness can be invigorating, puzzling, empowering, or cause for conflict, everyone is fearfully and wonderfully made in God's image (Genesis 1:27; Psalm 139:14). Being in his image implies these differences are very good since these traits have been established by an all-purposeful God. As a result, preachers should expect styles to differ from one pew to the next and seek to minister in responsive ways.

This creational implication is not to imply that personality sets limitations on learning styles. Wilbert J. McKeachie has written: "styles or types…are not little boxes, neatly separated from one another; rather, they represent dimensions along which learners may differ. Each individual is unique, falling at different points along the various continua that the learning style inventories purport to measure."[19] In other words, though every individual has been fashioned by the Lord with a personality and character traits, it does not necessarily mean his or her personality is locked-in" or unchanging nor are their learning abilities. Rather personality indicates preferences, not limitations.

Personality models also point to the preacher's need to value diversity among God's people. The church is a multi-layered, richly-textured community. It is comprised of extroverts and introverts, thinkers

and feelers, sensors and intuitors. Regarding this complexity in the church, David Dickinson comments it is appropriate to view a congregation as an interpretive community, created in response to the mutual reading of texts (Bible, creeds, hymns, etc.). Since there are considerable differences between God's people who share in these expressions of the Christian faith, we dare not turn a blind eye to issues such as gender, generation, ethnicity, education, theology, nationality or level of involvement in the life of the church and how these factors impact learning.

Consequently, preachers should not view their people as single unitary interpretive communities but as being composed of several interpretive communities-in-the-making.[20] In fact, a most positive (and engaging) approach in contemporary preaching is "not to overpower hearers with a superior reading of the Christian story…. To preach in the postmodern era is to collaborate with the several interpretive communities within a congregation in the exercise of interpreting the text."[21] In other words, preaching should take on more of a collaborate look which accounts for and honors a God-based and theologically-intended diversity. At the same time, the task of homileticians must be conducted in such ways that Scripture is upheld as God's sacred text.

Information Processing Models

Information-processing models describe the second layer and consider how individuals engage or interact with the world. They reflect how people gather, sort, store and utilize information for learning.

Gordon Pask's Holist-Serialist Approach

In his work, Gordon Pask has identified two approaches to learning—holistic and serialistic.[22] Nigel Ford has schematized these modes.[23]

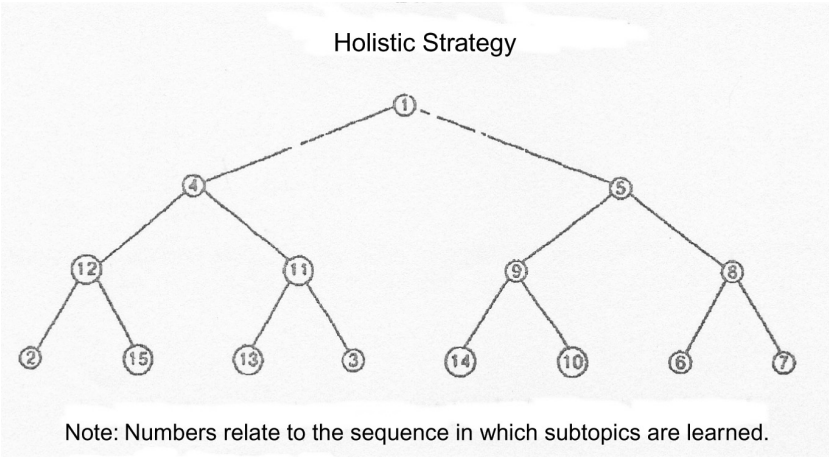

Figure 2

Source: Nigel Ford 1985.

With the holistic approach, a learner uses a broad framework of information into which she or he can fit more detailed information. Taking a more global approach, holists are far likely to make liberal use of "anecdotes, illustrations, and analogies to arrive at a description. They tend to look further ahead than other people when working through a hierarchy of topics, have a wider focus of attention, and try to first build up the 'big picture' before determining where any of the details fit."[24]

A second type are serialists who focus their attention more narrowly on pieces of information and are more likely to progress linearly from one piece to the next. Concerned with details and operational procedures, serialists work step by step through a list of topics and are careful to attend to sequencing and well-defined steps. Working from more of a "bottom-up" approach, their tendency is to work slowly, logically and thoroughly.[25]

David Kolb Experiential Learning Model

Kolb's model recognizes the need to address the different ways individuals process information. In his theory, Kolb deals not only with learning styles but also with the basic questions of personal development, drawing from the writings of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget. He identifies four phases, each entailing different processes and abilities in the accessing of factual information:[26]

1. *Concrete experience (feeling)*: person becomes fully involved in an activity in order to gain firsthand understanding. Characteristically, individual is asking "why" do I need to know this information.

2. *Reflective observation (watching)*: person asks "what" data needs to be known. Learner views experiences impartially or from many different perspectives.

3. *Abstract conceptualization (thinking)*: individual seeks to understand "how" information applies or the generalizability of the data to various situations.

4. *Active experimentation (doing)*: person is more innovative and think of her or his own situation as to where the information applies.[27]

Kolb maintains new information is more meaningful and retained longer when individuals work through all four phases of the

learning cycle. Extending these phases, he identifies four styles:

1. *Convergers* rely on abstract conceptualization and active experimentation. They like to have concrete answers and move quickly to solutions. Convergers are good at defining problems and making decisions.

2. *Divergers* use concrete experience and reflective observation to generate a broad range of ideas. These individuals excel at brainstorming and imagining alternatives.

3. *Assimilators* rely on abstract conceptualization and reflective observation. These men and women like to assimilate a wide range of information and recast it into more concise and logical forms. They are good at planning, developing theories, and creating models.

4. *Accomodators* are best at concrete experiences and active experimentation. They often use trial-and-error or intuitive strategies to solve problems. Accomodators are also inclined to take risks and plunge into problems.[28]

Anthony Gregorc's Style Delineator Approach

Similar to Kolb's understanding, Anthony Gregorc proposed that learning styles emerge from our natural predispositions and people will learn both from their personal experiences (concrete) and abstract thinking (abstract).[29] We either perceive things in ways that are concrete-oriented (from the physical senses) or abstract-oriented (from logical, deductive reasoning). Ordering is making sense out of what we are able to perceive and can be either sequential (organized, systematic) or random (unorganized). Crossing these dualities, concrete-abstract and random-sequential, four learning styles emerge with each style being a duality. Their combinations have been categorized by Cynthia Ulrich Tobias:[30]

Concrete Sequential	*Abstract Sequential*
hardworking	analytical
conventional	objective
accurate	knowledgeable
stable	thorough
dependable	structured
consistent	logical
factual	deliberate
organized	systematic

Abstract Random	*Concrete Random*
sensitive	quick
compassionate	intuitive
perceptive	curious
imaginative	realistic
idealistic	creative
sentimental	innovative
spontaneous	instinctive
flexible	adventurous

Implications for Preaching

Preachers are to be aware of the ways in which people process information. But the likelihood is high that most preachers are under the naïve assumption that people think and learn much as they do. In regard to secular education, Robert Sternberg emphasizes the importance of taking into account people's styles in designing programs and cautions "most instructors are best at teaching people who match their own styles of thinking and learning…and tend to overestimate the extent to which their students share their own styles."[31]

Similar comments can be made in regard to homiletics where preachers need to be cognizant of their own preferences. The temptation is to believe other people process thoughts as they do. If a pastor dwells in the world of concepts or ideas, she or he assumes the same for the people in the pew. Some people may but others will undoubtedly not be so inclined. Though well-intended, such thinking is illusionary and can lead to frustration as people sense the preacher is not on their wavelength.

Leonora Tubbs Tisdale states: "Greater awareness of the congregational knowing modes can help a preacher avoid the consistent use of sermon forms that deny or devalue the predominant ways in which local people come to understanding."[32] She continues:

> It is one thing for the creative pastor to occasionally preach a sermon that "misses" a local congregation through its use of a novel form. It is quite another for the pastor to preach consistently in structures that demean or devalue the predominant ways in which a local congregation comes to deeper knowledge in faith.[33]

Consequently, greater effectiveness in preaching necessitates an appreciation of how individuals process information. The preacher's task is to stretch herself or himself out of her or his comfort zone and utilize forms or styles that may not be natural but appropriate.

Awareness of information processing styles can lead to the crafting of stylistically integrated sermons. Such an equalized approach would involve offering an idea (abstract or simple) and following it with a concrete or life-related example. Preachers can satisfy the multiple learning styles when they offer a concept and follow it with an anecdote, illustration or story. In so doing, they are satisfying the preferences of abstract thinkers (with a biblical principle) and concrete, realistic individuals (with a picture of how this idea is fleshed out in life). By employing a balanced homiletical approach, the information processing styles of various individuals are being satisfied.

Congregations also benefit when preachers are holistic and serialistic in the development of their sermons. Some learners respond well when able to envision the big picture of the sermon. More global in style, they appreciate broad strokes being used to present biblical ideas. Anecdotes and other illustrative material may be preferred in a more inductive approach as these learners are capable of making connections between ideas. They appreciate induction in that it allows them to sense they are accompanying the preacher toward a central truth.

Conversely, serialists focus on details. More analytical and particular in the processing of data, they like to see connection between ideas. Understanding how individual points are related to the whole is important. They may prefer deductive sermons where the central truth is offered early in the message and then explained or supported. "Mapping" at the outset is also appreciated in that it lets them know where you are headed with the message. In addition, outlines in the bulletin or on overhead may be favored by serialist learners in that they demonstrate how the sermon is progressing. Serialists are also appreciative that as new points are being made, transitional statements are utilized to convey the movement.

Social Interaction Models

Social interaction models consider how interpersonal contexts and various social settings alter the strategies learners will utilize to gather information.

William Perry's Stages of Intellectual and Ethical Development

William Perry claimed students went through categories of development (or thinking patterns) during their college years. These categories are:

1. *Dualism*: students tend to divide the world into dichotomies (right/wrong, true/false good/bad). Individuals will view their instructors as being right and their role is to respond back to him or her what they have received. Such individuals can be

frustrated when asked to listen to other people's opinions and are content when instructors are clear in their lectures.

2. *Multiplicity:* individuals have come to realize most knowledge is a matter of opinion and any opinion is knowledgeable. An individual's role is to offer ideas and they may become frustrated when she or he is restricted.

3. *Contextual relativism*: people recognize there are guidelines for choosing an opinion. In this category, individuals realize that the information and context of a situation impact one's final understanding of truth.

4. *Commitment within contextual relativism*: men and women learn to connect their disciplinary skills to new settings. They recognize a need to apply knowledge and skills to settings outside their environment. At this point, an individual may become frustrated when content is being offered without relevant application.[34]

Anthony Grasha's Student Learning Styles Scale

In his research with Sheryl Riechmann, Anthony Grasha identifies three learning styles among students: avoidant-participant, competitive-collaborative, and dependent-independent. Styles were subsequently defined around three environmental dimensions: learner's attitudes toward the learning, views of the instructor and/or peers, and reaction to procedures. Subsequently, Grasha and Riechmann have developed six styles of learning:

1. *Independent* individuals like to think for themselves. Self-confident in their own abilities, they prefer working on their own though they will listen to other people.

2. *Dependent* men and women have little intellectual curiosity and are willing to learn only what is required. Instructors are perceived as sources of structure and support. These individuals tend to look to authoritative figures to be told what to do.

3. *Collaborative* individuals enjoy learning while sharing with other people within a group. They view learning as a mutually enriching venture.

4. *Competitive* learners feel as if they must compete with other individuals. Their reward for learning is to do better than others. Consequently, the environment is understood as one in which they are to vie with individuals and win.

5. *Participant* individuals enjoy learning and see it as their responsibility to get as much as possible out of situation (though they are not inclined to do what is required).

6. *Avoidant* men and women do not participate in the learning and are not especially interested in the material.[35]

Grasha and Riechmann state individuals learn best in settings that meet their social-emotional needs and are attuned to their predominant pattern of behavior. These researchers also propose instructors should develop activities which appropriately match their students so as to deepen their involvement in the learning.

Marcia Baxter-Magolda's Model of Epistemological Reflection

In *Assessing Intellectual Development*, Marcia Baxter-Magolda reconceptualized William Perry's developmental ideas and affirmed that individuals are likely to use their age and gender as well as the social expectations of the setting when learning. Her four stages of knowers are:

1. *Absolute knowers* are common in early years of college students. Like Perry's dualists, they believe teachers have all the right answers and the responsibility of the student is to get it right. Learners appreciate a teacher's efforts to be friendly and open which makes it easier to know what is expected of them.

2. *Transitional knowers* use absolutist strategies in some areas of learning but recognize their capacity for interpretation is important in different areas. They can be encouraged to experiment with their own views but want assurances they are close to being correct.

3. *Independent knowers* are men and women who know how data can be open to interpretation and are cognizant of a need for their own approach to interpreting information, theories and experiences. They appreciate a leader's promotion of independent thinking and exchange of opinions.

4. *Contextual knowers* are comfortable judging or critiquing their knowledge and skill may apply to a new or unique situation. While there is a greater degree of mutuality in the learning, learners are capable of applying concepts to a variety of settings.[36]

Implications for Preaching

Preachers enhance their communication as they are responsive to the life stages of people. Regarding congregational responsiveness, Beverly Zink-Sawyer writes:

> Augustine applied the devices of classical rhetoric to the proclamation of the gospel not for the ultimate goal of eloquence but to enable those who hear to be

> "moved rather than taught, so that they may not be sluggish inputting what they know into practice and so that they may fully accept those things which they acknowledge to be true. Augustine suggested that the speaker-preacher be attentive to the listeners in order to discern the level of comprehension among them. Until the crowd shows by its motion whether it understands, and until it signifies comprehension the matter being discussed should be expressed in a variety of ways.
>
> The ultimate purposes of preaching are "to teach, to delight, and to persuade." In order to accomplish those purposes, Augustine reminded his readers, the speaker-preacher must discern the effectiveness of various styles of speech, for "when one style is maintained too long, it loses the listener. Throughout his homiletical treatise, Augustine revealed a concern for studied, intentional communication of Christian doctrine through the spoken word. Like all perceptive preachers he realized that the translation of biblical meaning into acts of devotion depended upon the active presence of God in the words of the preacher and in the hearts of the hearers. But he realized also the necessity of the preacher's attentiveness to those whose hearts might be moved by the truth of the gospel.[37]

To homiletically respond to stages of life calls for familiarization with developmental psychology, the stages of the family life cycle, and theoreticians such as Jean Piaget (cognitive), Erik Erikson (psycho-social), Lawrence Kohlberg (moral) and James Fowler (faith). Their insights can be quite helpful in understanding and assessing the maturity of people, and consequently, content of sermons will be affected. For instance, one individual's moral development will be at the "eye for an eye" level while others will be seeking to live out the principles of the Sermon on the Mount. Some people's faith

will be child-like while other men and women will have a more complex and integrated faith.

Furthermore, homileticians can enhance their ministries by recognizing learning-dependent people may lack curiosity and consequently, view preachers as authority figures. They are not averse to being told what to think in absolute terms or how a particular issue pertains to them. In contrast, independent learners like to sort through ideas and reach their own conclusions. Though these individuals will not reject clear instruction and direct application of biblical truth, they are able to reflect on the ideas and determine relevancy on their own and/or make pertinent applications in multiple contexts. So when the preacher says, "Now, here is something you may want to think about," the independent or contextual listener will be more responsive. Their commitment to a cause or idea necessitates time for reflection and/or discussion.

At the same time, accommodation to the life stages of learners can be counter-productive to spiritual formation. Though appreciating the role and value of contextualization in preaching, Lenora Tubbs Tisdale offers cautionary advice:

> In contextual proclamation, fittingness in form (as in content) never simply means giving people what they want. It also involves the transformation and expansion of congregational horizons. Thus, the wise pastor will recognize that sermon form in itself has the potential to stretch and transform congregational modes of knowing.
>
> Preaching has the potential not only to influence what people think, but also how they think. Greater attention to congregational modes of knowing can assist the preacher in shaping sermons that are not only more intelligible for a local community of faith, but that are also more transformative of the ways in which people to know and express their own faith.[38]

Instructional Preference Models

These models describe the outermost layers of the onion and deal with people's preferences in teaching methods or instructional approaches.

Rita and Kenneth Dunn's Individual Learning Styles

Rita and Kenneth Dunn have identified stimuli groups or dimensions in a learning environment which impacts a someone's preference or aversion for learning. These factors are as follows:

1. *Environmental.* The environmental group refers to lighting, sound, temperature, and seating arrangement. For instance, some individuals prefer a cool and quiet atmosphere where others cannot focus unless they have music playing and it is warm.

2. *Emotionality.* This group includes motivation, persistence, responsibility, and structure. Some people feel the need to complete one task before they can begin another one, and other individuals are good at multi-tasking, working well at a variety of responsibilities at the same time.

3. *Sociological.* The sociological group represents how individuals learn in association with other people (alone or with peers; with an authoritative adult or with a colleague; learning in a variety of ways or more routinely). For example, some people need to work alone while other individuals are more likely to learn best when working in a group.

4. *Physiological.* The elements in this group are perceptual (auditory, visual, tactual and kinesthetic), intake (eating or not while studying), time (morning, afternoon or evening),

and mobility (sitting still or moving around). For instance, certain individuals work best at night while others are better in the morning.

5. *Psychological.* The group pertains to psychological processing (*i.e.* global or analytical, hemispheric, impulsive or reflective).[39]

According to this model, as leaders gain greater understanding of preferences and aversions, adjustments can be made in the environmental setting to accommodate learners and enhance learning in appropriate and satisfying ways.

John Holland's Environmental Model

John Holland has sought to ascertain correlations between personality and vocational preferences. Six personality types (realist, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising and conventional) emerged from his research. In *Making Vocational Choices*, Holland writes of six environmental models sharing a common set of constructs with personality types. He believes one can predict what will happen when a person is placed in a different setting because environments powerfully influence an individual's opportunity to learn. These settings are:

1. *Realistic*: In realistic surroundings, people are encouraged to see the world in simple, tangible and traditional terms. While encouraging people to understand themselves as having mechanical abilities, it discourages interpersonal relationships. It stimulates people to perform realistic activities and rewards them for the display of conventional goods and values such as money, power and possessions.

2. *Investigative*: This environment is characterized by investigation and observation. It encourages people to see the world in abstract, complex, independent and original ways and to utilize

scientific competencies to investigate biological, cultural and physical phenomena.

3. *Artistic*: An artistic climate is characterized by ambiguous, free, unsystematized activities and competencies. It encourages people to see themselves as expressive, original, intuitive and nonconforming, and to view the world in flexible, unconventional ways.

4. *Social*: This social environment is characterized by sociability and dominated by similar types of men and women. Individuals are encouraged to participate in activities that necessitate such competencies as cooperation, flexibility and helpfulness.

5. *Enterprising*: In enterprising surroundings, individuals are encouraged to see themselves as popular, aggressive, self-confident, sociable and possessing leadership abilities. There can be demands to attain organizational or self-interest goals and in so doing, dominate others.

6. *Conventional*: In this climate, individuals are encouraged to see themselves as conforming and orderly. Conventionality is valued which can lead individuals to feel constricted, simple and dependent on others within the group. As a result, men and women may be controlling and practical with values such as money, position and power being acceptable.[40]

Robert Sternberg's Mental Self-Government Theory

Underlying Robert Sternberg's theory is the idea men and women must organize themselves in ways which correspond to the types of governments and government branches in society - legislative, executive, judicial, monarchic, hierarchic and oligarchic. Thirteen

styles are subsumed under the following categories: functions, forms, levels, scope and leanings.[41]

Functions	
Legislative	Likes to create, invent, design, do things his or her own way, have little assigned structure
Executive	Likes to follow directions, do what he or she is told, be given structure
Judicial	Likes to judge and evaluate people and things.
Forms	
Monarchic	Likes to do one thing at a time devoting to it almost all energy and resources
Hierarchic	Likes to do many things at once, setting priorities to which to do when and how much time and energy to devote to each
Oligarchic	Likes to do many things at once, but has trouble setting priorities
Anarchic	Likes to take a random approach to problems; dislikes systems, guidelines, and practically all constraints.
Levels	
Global	Likes to deal with big picture, generalities abstractions
Local	Likes to deal with details, specifics, concrete examples
Scope	
Internal	Likes to work alone, focus inward, be self-sufficient
External	Like to work with others, focus outward, be interdependent
Leaning	
Liberal	Likes to do things in new ways, defy conventions
Conservative	Likes to do things in tried and true ways, follow conventions

Sternberg comments in regard to the fluidity of styles of learning:

> We all have a style profile, meaning we show varying amounts of each style, but we are not locked into any one profile. We can vary our styles to suit different tasks and situations. For example, the style you need to discern the meaning of a work of literature is not the same one you need to read detailed direction. The style you need to solve an algebra word problem is not the one you need to construct a geometric proof. Styles further vary over the course of a lifetime, and change as a result of the role models we emulate at different points in our lives. We do vary in our flexibility to shift styles, and in the strengths of our preferences. But while we have preferred styles, our styles are fluid, not fixed.[42]

Implications for Preaching

Effective preaching requires an appreciation of individuals' instructional learning preferences. Like other theoreticians advocating the matching of learning and teaching styles in education. S. Ellis favors an approach that calls for having a variety of innate as well as acquired styles.[43] To borrow from the Apostle Paul's desire to become "all things to all men," preachers should be accommodating so that God's words might be heard in the best ways possible by their people. A question that preachers should consider posing to themselves might be, "How can I best convey biblical truth so my people will understand and be prompted to respond in godly ways?"

Regarding classroom settings, Kenneth Henson and Paul Borthwick state: "There is certainly no shortage of avenues through which educators can match teacher styles with learner styles."[44] Opportunities for creativity and imagination abound for secular educators. But as preachers, we are not limited either. Imaginative and creative forms can be utilized in the pulpit to facilitate learning among God's people. Again, Tisdale states: "There is no 'one right

way' for the biblical world and congregational world to meet in sermonic form. Indeed, the very meeting of the two worlds creates new and exciting possibilities for the preacher's craft."[45] Dramas, first person narratives, deductive, inductive, and dialogical sermons are just some of the methods which can be used to satisfy instructional preferences.

Second, preachers need to be aware of the ways in which environmental settings enhance and detract from listening. Do individuals like a formal, perhaps reverent, atmosphere or do they prefer a more light-hearted one filled with personal warmth? Do they want preachers to be authoritative or ones who allows them to sense they are mutually investigating a pertinent topic? Are they interested in ideas and concepts or desirous of a more realistic approach to the faith? Do they want to know what is expected of them when leaving the sanctuary or would they prefer to have opportunity to reflect on the message either by themselves or in conversation with other listeners?

Though men and women may prefer styles of preaching to which they are accustomed (*i.e.* verse-by-verse preaching, messages filled with stories, inductive structures versus deductive), it is conceivable that "a steady diet of such preaching could actually do them more harm than good. It can discourage listeners from "making their own discoveries of faith, or from trusting their own theological voices."[46]

But Henson and Borthwick caution educators to proceed carefully and only after specific goals have been clearly identified.[47] Their words are important because preaching should be done with integrity—without compromise to the literary form or genre of God's text—simply because of the needs of the learning styles of people. While sensitivity to ways of learning is essential, proclamation of biblical truth must always remain paramount.

Lastly, preachers should recognize that as sensitive as they may seek to be, they are not going to be able to satisfy everyone. It is impossible to customize any message for every individual.

Awareness, adjustments and significant alterations in approaches will facilitate the listening possibilities for men and women. Using various methodologies can make a significant difference in people's listening. Yet a lingering dissatisfaction is likely to remain and everyone will not benefit. But because of the efforts of the preacher, a significant number of men and women can be ministered to in unprecedented ways.

Conclusion

The wide variety of learning styles challenges preachers in communicating God's Word. At the same time, awareness also provides them with significant opportunities by which they can facilitate people's ability to listen to their sermons. As preachers are aware of learning styles, they can responsively craft more listener-friendly sermons which are ultimately for the good of their congregations.

When presenting the Word of God, preachers must remind themselves their work is not ordinary but that of shepherds who have been entrusted to care for their flocks. As shepherds are to be diligent and watchful, doing as much as possible to ensure the well-being of their sheep, preachers are to lovingly care for their congregations. Understanding styles of learning and responding with appropriate methods can be instrumental in achieving this objective.

Such preaching dare not simply be utilitarian but must be from the heart. Matters of eternal significance are at stake. This paper is not just an appeal to functionally respond to styles, but a genuine heartfelt call for responsive preaching. It must be from the heart of the man or woman who stands in the pulpit. As Anthony Gregorc states: "Any half-hearted attempts to change automatically short-circuits the process of growth and development."[48]

Furthermore, preaching must ultimately be carried out under the dynamics of the Holy Spirit. The words of a man or woman that have been anointed by the Holy Spirit are a marvelous yet mysterious event to behold. And let us not forget that at the end of

the day, preaching is a work of God who leads people into the truth and brings about spiritual transformation (John 14:26).

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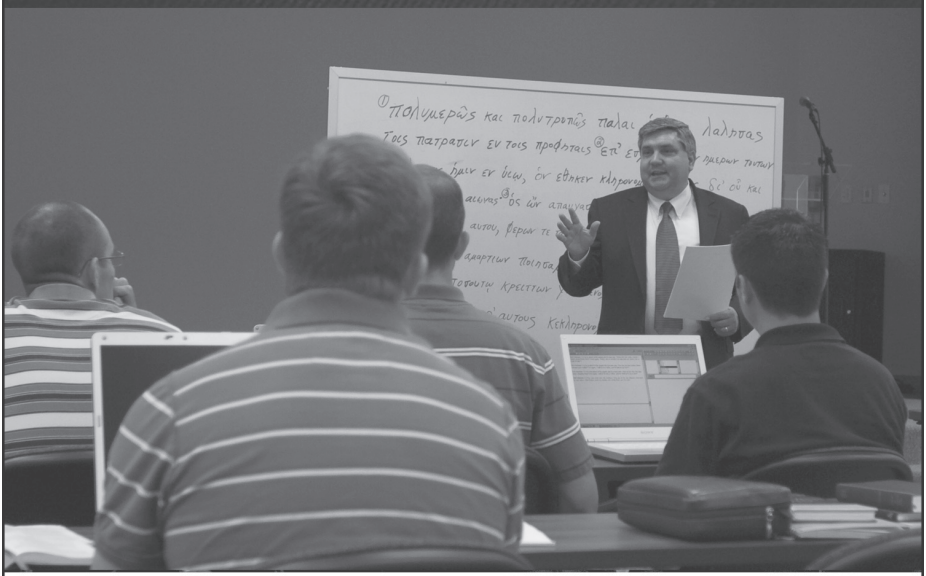

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Preaching Matters: The Matters That Matter

by Gregory K. Hollifield

(editor's note: Greg Hollifield is Chair and Assistant Professor of Bible and Theology at Crichton College in Memphis, Tennessee. This article was a paper presented by Dr. Hollifield at the 2008 Christian Scholars Conference held on the campus of Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee. The paper was generated in response to the question "Does Preaching Matter?")

Abstract

Select Pauline texts written during a premodern era populated with skeptics, cynics, and sophists indicated that preaching mattered as to its message, medium, and methods. These same texts speak to the importance and place of preaching in our postmodern era characterized by growing skepticism, cynicism, and sophism. A survey of these texts, mindsets, and the state of preaching in twenty-first century America should serve to clarify what about preaching still matters and to whom.

Introduction

"Does Preaching Matter?" My answer to this question is a resounding "yes"—preaching matters! I realize that is precisely what you would expect a man with my background to say.

Let me share a bit of my story. I came to faith in Christ two weeks after my fifteenth birthday and felt called by Him into full-time vocational Christian ministry ten months later. Jesus Christ and His commission to preach have been central to my being for twenty-eight years.

Across the years I have earned degrees in Biblical and Pastoral Studies, Bible Exposition, Divinity, and Practical Theology—all in my drive to becoming a better preacher. I have invested thousands of hours and tens of thousands of dollars in books, courses,

conferences, audio and videotapes and magazines during my quest.

I was the pastor of two churches for a total of six years and have been a volunteer chaplain in an inner-city juvenile correctional facility, the largest privately funded facility of its kind in America, for the past twelve years. Today, I chair a Department of Bible and Theology that offers Bachelors degrees in Biblical and Theological Studies and Christian Ministry in order to prepare the next generation of preachers. I put bread on my family's table because of this business of preaching. So, obviously, I believe that "preaching matters!"

I am not alone in this opinion. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones in his classic *Preaching and Preachers* claimed, "The most urgent need in the Christian Church today is true preaching."[1] J. I. Packer once confessed:

> I continue to believe in preaching and ... maintain that there is no substitute for it, and no power or stature or sustained vision or close fellowship with God in the church without it. Also, I constantly maintain that if today's quest for renewal is not, along with its other concerns, a quest for true preaching, it will prove shallow and barren.
>
> Preaching mediates not only God's authority, but also his *presence* and his *power*.... Preaching effects an encounter not simply with truth, but with God himself....
>
> History tells of no significant church growth and expansion that has taken place without preaching.... What history points to, rather, is that all movements of revival, reformation, and missionary outreach seem to have had preaching (vigorous, though on occasion very informal) at their center instructing, energizing, sometimes purging and redirecting, and often spearheading the whole movement. It would seem, then, that preaching is always necessary for a proper sense of mission to be evoked and sustained

anywhere in the church.[2]

Despite the amazing, if not amusing, fact that nine out of ten pastors rated their preaching and teaching as "above average" in a recent Barna poll,[3] Michael Green in the preface to Stott's *Between Two Worlds* charged:

> The standard of preaching in the modern world is deplorable. There are few great preachers. Many clergy do not seem to believe in it any more as a powerful way in which to proclaim the gospel and change the life. This is the age of the sermonette: and sermonettes make Christianettes.[4]

Now that's a statement to ponder. Has there indeed been a devaluation of preaching in the contemporary church? Brian Bernal, published in *The Banner of Truth*, believed so and expressed his concern thusly:

> Evangelicalism seems to desire to operate too much like a Fortune 500 company. We think if we just do this or that—if we go to this seminar, if we just counsel these individuals, if we train everyone properly and apply the laws of economics and the principles of psychology—everything good will follow apace. What has been forgotten, or relegated to an obscure place, is the power of the Word preached. The church is in dire need of reformation, and the application of all the kinds of remedies cited above will not accomplish it. We must turn away from fixing our hope upon such ill-suited means. Until we return to the conviction that the church will be reformed and revived pre-eminently by the power of the Word preached, we spend our labour to no profit.[5]

Similarly, that Charles H. Spurgeon wrote in his autobiography:

> I do not look for any other means of converting men

> beyond the simple preaching of the gospel and the opening of men's ears to hear it. The moment the Church of God shall despise the pulpit, God will despise her. It has been through the ministry that the Lord has always been pleased to revive and bless his Churches.[6]

Thomas Goodwin, once President of Magdalene College, Oxford, made his case for preaching with this, "God had only one Son, and He made Him a preacher."[7] Mark, early in his gospel, recounts, "Jesus came . . . preaching" (1:14).

I have chosen to entitle my reply "Preaching Matters" not only to echo what others more eloquently than I have affirmed, but as a play on words, because there are certain preaching-related matters that matter immensely—matters that ought to be distinguished and duly appreciated. Three Pauline texts bring these matters to the fore. Before exploring them, we do well to account for the philosophical times in which the Apostle wrote, as well as our own.

Paul lived in a premodern world. Prior to the 1600s, people, particularly those of the West, believed in God or some notion of the transcendent. What one believed about this God provided a basis for understanding the world and one's place in it. Anselm's confession, "I believe that I may understand," and his philosophy of "faith seeking understanding" convey well the premodern ethos. Generally, premodern people believed in the objective existence of the physical world, the truthfulness of propositional statements that corresponded with the way things "really were," and a thread of purpose that connected and directed all of history.[8]

Not all people who populated the premodern world held these presuppositions, nor did those who held them do so in a vacuum. Philosophies normally associated with postmodernism were not unknown in premodern times. Before we get ahead of ourselves and come to three of those philosophies specifically, we will to contrast the premodern worldview with the postmodern.

Postmodernity, as the term suggests, followed the modern age in

which man no longer viewed God but self, science, or some such thing as the basis for understanding the world and his place in it. Three hundred subsequent years of exploitation and oppression, ending with the collapse of the Soviet Union, eventually compelled a new generation to conclude that all bases for understanding the world were suspect—whether those bases be divine, human, scientific, psychological, economic, etc. In a postmodern world, reality is suspect, truth is relative, and life is pointless. People who claim to know the truth and claim an exclusivity about the truthfulness of their truth are viewed as intolerant (the unpardonable sin of the twenty-first century!) at best, delusional and dangerous at worst. Skeptics, cynics, and sophists are very much at home in a postmodern world.

The Greek philosopher Pyrrho (365-275 B.C.) is credited with developing the philosophical system known as skepticism. Early skeptics claimed that no criterion for determining truth exists. One's sensations provide only the appearance of a thing without yielding an indubitable knowledge of the thing itself. Because our senses can deceive us into believing what is untrue, no one can say for sure what is true.

Antisthenes (445-360 B.C.) and Diogenes (412-323 B.C.) are credited with originating the philosophical system known as cynicism. Early cynics wished to live like dogs, i.e., without fear of imposed social, religious, and ethical standards. Indifference to worldly things and norms was the ideal. Contact with others was believed to lead inevitably to unhappiness. Rather than seek truth in others, cynics chose to rely on their own individual judgment.

Protagoras (500-411 B.C.) is the name most commonly associated with the philosophy of sophism. Sophists were professional disputers whose allegiance to and willingness to defend a given position could be bought. The majority seem to have been skeptics in matters of religion and ethics but pragmatic enough to keep their opinions, should they have contradicted those of the paying customer, to themselves for sake of gain. Persuasion by all means available was the name of their game.[9]

In sum, (and, admittedly, all that has been said regarding these philosophies is cursory at best) skeptics considered truth to be unknowable; cynics viewed the opinions of others as untrustworthy; sophists, a good many of whom personally sided with the skeptics, respected above all else techniques and the prowess to persuade. Asked whether a thing such as preaching matters, skeptics would have disputed the validity of its message; cynics would have dismissed the authority of its messenger; sophists would have dissected the efficacy of its methods.

Postmoderns who swim in these same philosophical currents continue to voice the same concerns. Paul's comments on preaching therefore, particularly three passages in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians, are as pertinent and counter-cultural to the postmodern world as they were for segments of his premodern world where skepticism, cynicism, and sophism were born.

The Message Preached Matters

> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. …[S]ince in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. (1 Cor. 1:18,21-24)

Experience has taught me that if one scratches a theological liberal deeply enough, he will often find a forsaken fundamentalism buried beneath. The Christian fundamentalist bases his faith upon propositional statements of truth derived from Scripture. His hermeneutic gives shape to those propositions. Because different interpretive methods yield different conclusions, what constitutes

orthodoxy is often determined by the hermeneutic of the majority.

When the faith is reduced to a set of propositions, regardless of the underlying hermeneutic, those espousing that faith often become formulaic in their spiritual outlook and practices. They lapse into a legalism that they readily spot and heartily condemn in first century Pharisees but not as easily so in themselves.

The alternative that more than a few embraced in the waning years of modernity and that is growing in popularity within postmodernity and the emerging church is a suspicion, if not outright rejection, of propositional truth statements. God is a person, enshrouded in mystery, and desirous of relationship, we are told. Relationships, central to the Christian faith, are dynamic. When one attempts to capture that faith in a formula, the mystery evaporates, God is reduced, and the relationship loses life.

Despite the dangers inherent in the attempt to interpret Scripture, I remain in that party that believes trustworthy propositional statements of truth are possible and necessary. I am no "Bibliolater." I respect the Bible, but I do not worship the Bible. Nonetheless, I affirm that God has revealed Himself and His mind in this Book that He inspired. Central to this Book is the person and work of Jesus Christ. Central to His work is His cross. This Christocentric message, which is itself crucicentric, that is, cross-centered, matters immensely.

Paul encountered those in the first century who viewed this message as foolishness. The very people for whom it was immediately intended stumbled over its particulars. Nevertheless, Paul insisted that in this crucicentric-Christocentric message were the power and wisdom of God to save.

The Jewish and Greek worldviews, shaped by their respective cultures, influenced how the people holding those views heard, evaluated, and eventually rejected the message preached. Similarly, the postmodern worldview calls the value of the preached message into question. Several years ago, *The British Weekly* published the following:

> Dear Sir:
>
> It seems ministers feel their sermons are very important and spend a great deal of time preparing them. I have been attending church quite regularly for thirty years, and I have probably heard 3,000 of them. To my consternation, I discovered I cannot remember a single sermon. I wonder if a minister's time might be more profitably spent on something else?

For weeks a storm of editorial responses ensued but finally ended with this letter:

> Dear Sir:
>
> I have been married for thirty years. During that time I have eaten 32,850 meals—mostly my wife's cooking. Suddenly I have discovered I cannot remember the menu of a single meal. And yet…I have the distinct impression that without them, I would have starved to death long ago.[10]

While it is true that one's worldview influences his view of preaching, it is equally true that preaching can shape one's worldview. New England Puritans were so convinced of the importance of preaching for the welfare of church and state that they restricted church membership and voting privileges to the precious remnant of "visible Saints, 'the Elect of God,' who had received unequivocal assurances of salvation by means of sanctifying spiritual rebirth."[11] Only those who sat regularly under the preaching of the Word and had shown evidence of ordering their lives by the same were deemed fit to lead in either church or society. The message preached shaped the individual's worldview, and that worldview, it was believed, influenced the individual's decisions. The shadow of this conviction has reemerged twice in recent American political history during public debates over the presidential candidacies of John F. Kennedy and Mitt Romney. Americans questioned how Kennedy's Catholicism and Romney's Mormonism might affect

their administrations.

The worldview-shaping influence of the preached Word takes time to exert itself. Missiologist James Engel developed his "Scale of Spiritual Decision" based upon what he observed to be the norm as a person or people were regularly exposed to the preached Word.[12] The person without any understanding of the Gospel was placed on the scale at a negative eight. The person who had undergone conversion and was ordering his life's activities by that commitment was placed on the scale at a positive five. Engel's scale suggests that spiritual growth occurs incrementally. It is exposure to the preached Word, to those who embrace it, and the internal work of the Holy Spirit based upon that Word that contribute to one's growth from one stage to the next.

The message preached must be given time to saturate. I once taught two academic years of Greek in one calendar year. The students were bright enough to comprehend what was taught but struggled to demonstrate mastery because the material was not given enough time to saturate. If the salvific effects of preaching upon an individual or society are not immediately visible, it may be because the Word has not had enough time to penetrate and saturate. Then again, there is always the possibility that the Word will never sink-in to make any difference whatsoever. Hearers still have the freedom to reject it. Isaiah's audience rejected his preaching. Ezekiel's audience rejected his preaching. The majority of Jesus' audience rejected His preaching. Their rejection, however, did not negate the truthfulness or value of what was preached. The preached message of Christ still matters for the salvation of the soul and society.

The Medium of Preaching Matters

> How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written,

"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" (Rom. 10:14-15)

On either historical side of Paul's epistle to the Romans lived two of Rome's greatest orators and rhetoricians—Cicero and Quintilian. Cicero lived in the century before Paul's correspondence, and Quintilian studied in Rome during and after the Apostle's epistolary ministry. These Roman masters based many of their thoughts on the subject of rhetoric upon the foundational work of Aristotle who preceded them by three hundred years. All three agreed upon the importance of a speaker's *ethos* for effective persuasion.[13]

Aristotle identified *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* as the three modes of "artistic" proof. These three modes of proof do not exist apart from the speaker; rather, he creates, or brings, these methods of persuasion with him into the speaking event. *Logos* has to do with the speaker's logical arrangement of available materials into an order that will help him to persuade an audience to accept his conclusions when they could decide otherwise. *Ethos* has to do with the perceived moral character, that is, good sense, good character, and good will, of the speaker that persuades an audience less confrontationally. *Pathos* has to do with the influencing of the emotional disposition of an audience toward the case at hand. Of the three, Aristotle believed *ethos* to be the controlling factor in persuasion.[14]

When Paul wrote his foregoing words to the Romans, he did so to a group of people who, for the most part, believed that the messenger, particularly the messenger's character, mattered. Residual cynicism may have caused some to believe otherwise, but they were in the minority.

Ironically, the Apostle spoke of the significance of the preacher in a letter that he wrote. As important as his letters were to the churches of his day and as they remain to the churches of today, Paul was not content to remain at Tarsus and pen his messages to fields abroad. He longed for face-to-face meetings with his audiences (Col. 2:1). When circumstances conspired against him, he often resorted to sending a letter—sometimes in preparation for a visit (for example, Romans) and more often in follow-up (for example, 1

and 2 Thessalonians). Even then, he sent those letters with people whom he trusted to be his face and voice to their recipients.

One might assume that in the present carefully coiffed, camera-ready age, people would view every messenger suspiciously and be less inclined to be swayed by him. Let us consider as a case in point that field of candidates who are currently vying for election to our nation's "bully pulpit." They employ staffs of people to assist in their persuasive efforts. We know this, and one would think that such knowledge would cause us to look beyond their carefully scripted speeches before casting our votes. CBS News correspondent and political analyst Jeff Greenfield would have us to think again. He recently asked, "Today, in a time of webcasts and podcasts, when the media assault us with billions of bits and bytes, could it be that this oldest of political weapons—the spoken word—is still the most powerful? Yes."[15]

Wisconsin professor Stephen Lucas noted that people thought radio would kill the effectiveness of the presidential speech, but it did not. Next, people thought television would kill oratory, but it also failed. Today, experts question whether the internet will do the job. Lucas proceeded to suggest that none of these media either have or will destroy the place of political oratory because "there is no substitute for face-to-face communication between a speaker and audience."[16]

Every semester that I teach homiletics, I spend a couple of precious class hours screening the classic Andy Griffith movie *A Face in the Crowd*. It's the story of a con man whose gift for gab catapults him out of a small town Arkansas jail, to a TV station in Memphis, into the national spotlight as a Will Rogers/Ed Sullivan-type celebrity and pitchman, and ultimately into the role of advisor to a presidential candidate. Only his hubris and a microphone purposely opened by his one-time paramour and manager prevent him from becoming a member of the candidate's forming presidential cabinet. After asking my students to identify what the movie teaches about effective speech, I present them with what I believe are the two most important lessons. One, we must never underestimate the

power of a well-spoken word. Two, we must never overestimate the significance of a well-spoken word. A person may speak powerfully but say nothing significant. Moreover, his ability to speak effectively does not signify anything about the spirituality of the speaker nor the orthodoxy of his speech. Still, the well-spoken word makes an impact.

Phillips Brooks in his 1877 Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching at Yale University famously defined preaching as "the communication of truth by man to men." He subsequently shortened the definition to "truth through personality." [17]

One hundred years later, Haddon Robinson defined expository preaching in his seminal work *Biblical Preaching* as the "communication of a biblical concept, derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary study of a passage in its context, which the Holy Spirit first applies to the personality and experience of the preacher, then through him to his hearers."[18] In both definitions, one of preaching generally and the other of a particular kind of preaching, the message is paramount and the messenger essential.

Paul clearly outlined for his young colleague in First Timothy 3 what kind of man is qualified to pastor and address God's people. In the second chapter of his second epistle to Timothy, Paul appealed to his son in the faith to be a man of unimpeachable character. A thoroughgoing morality was to Paul a fitting adornment to the gospel of Christ (Titus 2:10). Nevertheless, he did not base the efficacy of the message preached upon the morality of the messenger. In Philippians 1 he charged certain unnamed individuals with preaching the gospel out of dubious motives. Rather than condemn them for this or call into question whether such preaching was profitable, Paul rejoiced that the message was going forth, even through such self-seeking messengers.

To suggest that a letter, drama, dance, or any other form of communication might take the place of the preacher would strike many of my African-American students as preposterous. The work of the preacher is still widely respected within the traditional

African-American community. Churches looking for pastors within such a community ask first of a candidate, "Can he deliver the goods? Can he tell the story?" The goods, or the story, to which they refer is the sermon itself. Even in the Hip-Hop generation of the African-American community, Phil Jackson maintained, the preacher is still expected to hit a homerun every Sunday.[19] How to hit that "homerun" is another preaching-related matter that matters immensely.

The Methods of Preaching Matter

> Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Cor. 9:16b-22)

Luke's synopses in Acts of Paul's sermons provide ample evidence that the Apostle altered his homiletic when speaking to different types of audiences. His sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31) particularly demonstrates a thoughtful adaptation of method in order to meet his hearers where they were on matters of cosmology, theology, and teleology.

The subsequent history of preaching shows remarkable diversity

and adaptation in methodology corresponding to contemporary cultural currents. Michael Quicke, in a helpful article on the history of preaching, identified four major types of biblical preaching across the past two millennia: teacher preaching, herald preaching, inductive preaching, and narrative preaching. These types appear in every major period of church history, with certain types more predominant than others in any given period. Quicke concluded:

> In order to be heard and understood, preachers have always needed to relate to contemporary culture. In Jesus' oral culture, the role of narrative was especially important. Classical preaching adopted rhetoric's principles. Later, Reformation preaching took advantage of mass printing and gained previously unthinkable influence.[20]

During the twentieth century preaching underwent multiple adaptations, influenced by the late nineteenth century eschatological and biblical conference movement, the popularity of early twentieth century revivalists like Billy Sunday, the modernist-fundamentalist controversies that culminated in the Scopes Monkey Trial, two World Wars, the advent of the therapeutic revolution, the turbulent sixties and "Jesus freaks" who emerged therein, a resurgent late-century fundamentalism with a political agenda, the rediscovery of the power of story, the Church Growth movement and seeker-sensitive ministries, franchised churches, rapid development and distribution of reasonably priced technologies, generational studies, and research on postmodernity. The changes have come at an increasingly staggering rate. Within as little as twenty years, preaching methods are developed, refined, disseminated to the point of ubiquity, then jettisoned for the next suggested method. Take the use of PowerPoint and video clips as an example. Mega-church pastor Leith Anderson recently wrote:

> [T]he introduction of PowerPoint added a visual aspect for a while, perhaps less so now. We see the use of video clips and other visuals, and increasingly in many churches that reach a younger generation,

participation through various exercises and activities that are connected to preaching.

PowerPoint has been largely a Baby Boomer phenomenon. Younger adults wonder about the validity and credibility of anything perceived to be canned. Authenticity is a critical aspect, especially with younger adults, in the preaching experience. It doesn't seem authentic that a speech is all written out and words appear on the screen at exactly the same time. So PowerPoint is less used with younger adults and becoming more a characteristic of an older generation.

It's a delicate balance here, because to be authentic, things can't come across as too scripted. And yet, a certain amount of scripting is necessary in order to use technology. For example, one of the things we're working with at Wooddale Church is encouraging young adults to use their cell phones to text message questions about the sermon and have those questions appear on the screen. That's participation, that's technology, but it's not prepared questions in advance in a PowerPoint that shows up at exactly the right time. So it's high tech, but it's participatory, not scripted.[21]

Today's preacher can put a sizeable dent into his personal budget just trying to buy all of the new releases containing the latest research and suggestions for preaching. Certain of these writers have become so popular that they have spawned new categories in book catalogs. Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* and years of teaching homiletics led to the formation of the Evangelical Homiletics Society and a number of titles by its membership. The Emergent Church movement has its own literature and views on preaching, including Doug Pagitt's *Preaching Re-Imagined*. The sophists of Paul's day were renowned for their practical handbooks on effective speech. Critics might claim that the only difference between those

men and today's homileticians is the advent of moveable type.

I am not such a critic. I believe that flexibility, adaptability, and a cultivated sensitivity to what connects with a contemporary audience are biblical and right. It is true that Paul claimed in 1 Corinthians 2:4, "My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power," thereby suggesting that the use of "persuasive" techniques is somehow at odds with "a demonstration of the Spirit's power." Nevertheless, only a few chapters later Paul wrote of his willingness to "become all things to all men." I find no contradiction here. I believe that the Apostle's words in 1 Corinthians 2 were intended to distinguish him from the neo-sophists of his day who relied solely on technique for their success. Such individuals would stop at nothing, no matter how low, to win an audience's assent. Paul, on the other hand, relied upon the Spirit's intervention and refused to operate outside the limits established by "Christ's law" (1 Cor. 9:21). Within those confines, he was willing to adapt.

If Paul's letters in any way reflect his homiletic, they demonstrate that he respected the techniques for communication common to his day. His epistle to Philemon, for example, bears the marks of a judicial speech. In it he does more than appeal to Philemon's sense of honor and desire for advantage. He advances a rhetorical argument.[22]

Those of us who train preachers must be mindful of the contexts into which our pupils will return to preach. Some African-American students who train in European-American colleges and seminaries, as one sad example, then return to their communities, have needlessly been forced to struggle to gain a hearing because their methods in proclaiming the Word no longer match the expectations/desires of their listeners. This is more than a matter of race. I once observed a visiting preacher from a traditional but prominent Southern Baptist church deliver a three-point alliterated sermon on the Mephibosheth narrative (2 Sam. 9) to a group of incarcerated juveniles. I knew from experience that Old Testament narratives could hold these youth spellbound, but not on that night. Instead

of creatively retelling the story and developing points of application where appropriate, the speaker used the method that his famous pastor had used every Sunday for thirty years. The results and lack of same—restless shifts, drooping heads, a lack of oral affirmation—were telling.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that preaching still matters, particularly as to its message, medium, and methods, despite its postmodern detractors. I know that Paul thought preaching mattered in his day despite the skeptics, cynics, and sophists who dotted his premodern audiences.

William Pitt was Great Britain's youngest prime minister; he enjoyed a lifelong friendship with famed abolitionist William Wilberforce. When young Wilberforce was torn over whether to serve the Lord as a minister or to continue with his political career, Pitt, as depicted in the movie *Amazing Grace*, asked, "Do you intend to use your beautiful voice to praise the Lord or change the world?"[23] What Pitt failed then to see—as so many of preaching's critics today fail to see—is that preaching can do both. It must do both.

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The Word Became Flesh

by G. Campbell Morgan

"And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ...
full of grace and truth."
John 1:14

(editor's note: George Campbell Morgan [1863-1945] was a distinguished British preacher whose ministry stretched nearly 60 years on both sides of the Atlantic. He served as pastor of several churches in Britain and forged relationships with many schools, churches and conferences in the States, including Biola, Gordon College and Divinity School, with brief pastorates in Cincinnati and Philadelphia. Morgan had lasting friendships with D.L. Moody, F.B. Meyer, and D. Martin Lloyd-Jones. Among his many books, Westminster Pulpit *has been a help to many a preacher.)*

A Revolutionary Advent

Whatever, in the complexity of present-day thought, may be our view of the method of the advent, it is impossible to deny that nigh two thousand years ago that happened which has absolutely and completely revolutionized human thinking and human life. The student of history is always interested in tracing great streams to their sources. The rise and fall of dynasties, great discoveries, revolutions, all of them are important and interesting, and yet in some senses all these things are related directly or in-directly to the one event described in the mystic language of this text.

In this advent of Jesus there was both a crowning and a comprehension of all that was excellent in the past; and the conception and initiation of all the ideas and movements which are lifting humanity ever nearer to God.

We come to this statement of John the mystic, in order to consider what it teaches concerning the fact of the advent; concerning the

revelation resulting from that fact; and finally concerning the values resulting from the revelation.

In order that we may see the simplicity of the statement, I have omitted the parenthesis. It is important. It states a truth concerning the Person Whom we are to consider from a slightly different standpoint. It lies in the heart of this verse by way of explanation and exposition, and yet it may be omitted without doing any violence to the thought. We consider then this simple and sublime statement, "The Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us ... full of grace and truth."

The Fact of the Advent

The statement of fact which this verse contains can only be understood as we remember that in this prologue of the Gospel of John the verse in which the text occurs is intimately connected by way of declaration with the first verse of the chapter. The intervening verses constitute a parenthesis. Consequently we bring these two verses together in order that we may understand the facts declared in our text. I will read them in intimate connection. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us . . . full of grace and truth." This is one continuous statement, and the fact that there is a great descent from the first statement to the second, demonstrates the wisdom of inserting the parenthesis, for this helps us to see how great is the descent.

While the first and second statement present one complete declaration, they nevertheless constitute a perfect balance. The three first statements must be borne in mind as we consider the three second, for the three second need the three first.

There are first three statements; "In the beginning was the Word"; "the Word was with God"; and "the Word was God." There are secondly three statements: "The Word became flesh"; "and dwelt, pitched His tent among us"; and "full of grace and truth." Now if

we take these two series and bring them together, not exactly as one continued statement, but part to part, we shall see that the whole declaration tells how infinite and hidden mysteries came into the realm of finite and revealed things. "In the beginning was the Word" . . . "The Word became flesh." "The Word was with God" . . . "and pitched His tent among us." "The Word was God" . . . "full of grace and truth." Let us attempt an examination of these three couplets.

Taking the first half of the first, every phrase defies us. Every word is beyond our comprehension. "In the beginning"! We may at once reverently declare that the thought transcends the possibility of our understanding or explanation. It is one of those matchless sweeps of inspiration that go beyond all the thinking of man. "In the beginning." I lay my hand on anything in this world, and I begin to ask questions concerning its origin. I begin to track it through long and tedious processes back to the point of its initiation. No man has ever been able to do this successfully. We have never been able to say the final thing concerning origins by the processes of investigation and discovery, but we are always attempting to find them, and rightly so. Man has more than once formulated a philosophy, has more than once suggested a solution, but as surely as he has done so, within a decade, or quarter of a century, his philosophy has passed away, and his solution is found to be false. This phrase takes us behind all the processes, behind the fact of the initiation of all things material and mental, behind all the things of which man can be conscious, and we bow in the presence of the statement, and reverently declare that it transcends us.

Or if I take the other expression, "the Word," I am equally conscious of disability to comprehend its final meaning. I am personally inclined to think we get to the sublimest meaning as we take the simplest, and remember that a word is an expression. A word is that by which one person expresses his thought to another, so that the other may be able to understand it. A word spoken by one person to another is the revelation of something in the mind of the one, that the other did not know, and could only know through that word. A word is a

revelation made, a thought communicated. "The Word was in the beginning," a method of manifestation, a method of speech, that in and of God by which He made something of Himself known to those without Himself, apart from Himself, beyond Himself.

You inquire whether the Word was a Person, and I reply, What do you mean by a person? Until you have defined your term "person" – which by the way never occurs in Scripture – I cannot answer you. If you tell me that man is a person, I say, Yes, undoubtedly he is, but he is finite. Now a finite person is an incomplete person, and therefore not a perfect revelation of what a person is. A perfect Person must be infinite also.

This at least is declared, that in the beginning there was an expression of Deity. But that is not helpful to us, for it was beyond our finite comprehension. "The Word became flesh," that is where the help begins. When the infinite Person – and I do not quite know what that means – becomes a finite Person Whom I can understand, I do pass into some new appreciation of the character and the value, and the fact of the infinite that transcends me. "In the beginning was the Word… And the Word became flesh."

A few words only are necessary concerning the second of these couplets, "And the Word was with God." That which was the method of Divine speech and manifestation was with God, and again I freely confess to you here are terms, finite terms struggling to express infinite meaning, and failing even though they be the words of inspiration. Then I read, "He pitched His tent among men"; and the thing that has baffled me and perplexed me and overwhelmed me in the realm of Deity, which is beyond my comprehension, becomes something I can look at within the realm of human life: "He tabernacled among men."

And then, finally, when I read in the great introductory word, "the Word was God," both with God, and God; both method of Divine expression, and that which expresses itself; again I am overwhelmed, I cannot understand. Again I feel that I have read a simple sentence

that is so full of mystery as to defy absolutely my explanation. Then I read "full of grace and truth," and I have an unveiling of the nature of God, though perhaps no explanation of the method. I have seen One Who is flesh, and pitches His tent by my side, in the valleys where I dwell, upon the mountains to which I climb, in the midst of the life I live; and in the life of this One grace and truth flash and flame in glory. I am told that that is God, and I feel, not that I have been able to encompass all the mystery of Deity by revelation, but that I have been taken through a wicket gate, and my eyes are gazing out upon light such as I had never seen. I have at least been able to look through a veil at that which unveiled would have blinded me: "In the beginning was the Word," and I do not understand it. "The Word became flesh," and it has come within the reach of my hand. "The Word was with God," and I cannot comprehend the meaning of the statement, but the Word "tabernacled among us," pitched His tent near us, and I at least may draw near and behold. "And the Word was God," and there is no more in the statement than there was in all the other things that men had said long before. But "full of grace and truth," and here are two essential facts concerning God which will help me.

The Revelation Resulting From That Fact

Pass over this ground with me again. "In the beginning was the Word" . . . "the Word became flesh." What does this signify? Eternity, the ageless age, coming into time; expressing itself in the language of time, manifesting itself in the method of time. "In the beginning was the Word," the utterance of God; not letters, or syllables or words merely; not a literature which I can commence here, and finish presently, but the Word of God. Not only that which fills the whole fact of space so far as I can imagine it; but "the Word became flesh," and that is, came to a locality; it came to a place to which I can travel; it came to a place to which coming, I can see.

"The Word was in the beginning," the infinite, but it became flesh, the finite. "In the beginning was the Word," the infinite Wisdom, the all-encompassing Wisdom, the Wisdom that lies at the back

of all manifestation, the Wisdom of which the preacher sang long ago in the Proverbs. But "the Word became flesh," that is, Wisdom began to spell itself out in an alphabet.

We sometimes quote the words of Jesus uttered to John in Patmos, as though they were full of dignity. So they were, but they have another tone also. "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last." There is some sense in which in God there is no first, no last; and consequently that is not a figure of completeness intended only to create amazement and wonder. It is the symbol of simplicity, it is the figure of the alphabet. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," the alphabet which the little child may learn. Yet remember that all literature lies within the compass of the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. Do not talk to your children about a thing being as easy as A B C. It is the hardest thing we have to learn. You have forgotten the task, but it was such. You did not know it, but in that task you were beginning to climb up to that literature which you love, and all its vast reaches lay before you. So when the Word became flesh infinite Wisdom expressed itself in an alphabet. That began nineteen centuries ago. There had been attempts before, hieroglyphics before, but at last the mysterious hieroglyphics of the past found the key of interpretation in Alpha and Omega – the Alphabet. We must be little children to begin; but we never arrive at the infinite literature to which it introduces us until we have learned it. The Word, the infinite Wisdom dwelt with God, and was the mighty Workman at His right hand when He created, by whatever process I care nothing. That Wisdom became an alphabet when a baby Boy lay upon His mother's breast in the Judaean country.

But notice the next couplet of contrast. "The Word was with God." There are those who can explain it to me. I cannot. I make no attempt to do it. But I will attempt the next. He "tabernacled among us." This Person Who defies definition-for I do not know the meaning of person, as I have already said - this Person "tabernacled among us," and John of the mystic vision had looked at Him, and warm-hearted Peter had gazed upon Him, and all the rest had seen Him. He "tabernacled among us." Now for the parenthesis a

moment. "We beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father." "We beheld," we saw that which was with God, and the statement overwhelms us. I love the other rendering of that, not accurate translation perhaps, but certainly correct interpretation, He pitched His tent by us, and came to live where we lived. He pitched His tent down by the side of my tent. It is the figure of the Arab nation, and of one who is going to take the same journey with me, and be under the same rule with me. He "tabernacled among us." We are pilgrims through the world, coming out of darkness, and passing toward the darkness. He "tabernacled among us," put His tent down by the side of our tent.

Yet that is not all, and we must interpret this word "tabernacled" by the religious thinking of the man who wrote the words, by John's religious conviction and upbringing. If you do that you will see that this word "tabernacled" has its explanation in the religious mysteries of the past. I go back again to the kindergarten days of religion, to the hieroglyphics of the past, and I find the Tabernacle. You remember how in the Old Testament that word "Tabernacle" is written descriptively in two ways. Sometimes it is called the Tabernacle of witness, and sometimes it is called the Tabernacle of the congregation, and both those are faulty. May I take the same ideas, and express them in other words? The Tent of meeting, rather than the Tabernacle of the congregation. The Tent of testimony, rather than the Tabernacle of witness. That is to say, when in your Old Testament you read that the Tabernacle was the Tabernacle of the congregation, it does not mean that it was the place where men congregated for worship, but that it was the place where God and man met for fellowship. The Tabernacle of meeting was the place, God appointed, where He met with man, and to which man came to meet with Him.

It was the Tent of testimony, which did not mean that it was the place where men proclaimed the truth of God. The Tent of testimony was the place where God spoke to men, and men listened. Now wrote John, who had been brought up in that religion, and to whom that symbolism was always luminous, the Word pitched His tent among

us. That was the Tabernacle for which we had been waiting, toward which we had been looking. He became at once Tent of meeting between God and man, and Tent of testimony through which God spoke to man. And so in this Word, the infinite and incomprehensive mystery of the eternities, Who became finite and comprehensive in time, by becoming flesh, I find my tent of meeting with God. He is all I am, but He is all God is. And when I lay this hand of mine upon His hand, I have touched the hand of a man such as I am; but I have taken hold of the might of God. And when I look into the eyes of the Man Who pitched His tent among Galilean fishermen, I have looked into human eyes all brimming with love, but through them I have looked out into the very heart of the infinite God. He is the Tent of meeting. I find God in Christ, as nowhere else. I cannot find Him in Nature. I see His goings; I hear the thunder of His power; I mark the matchless beauty of the delicate touch of His pencil on the petals of the flowers; but I cannot find Him, I cannot reach Him. But here, as God is my witness, I come to the Christ - warm, sweet, tender, even yet,

"A present help is He
And faith has still its Olivet,
And loves its Galilee."

I feel in my spirit the consciousness of the human Christ; but enwrapping me, all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And because He pitched His tent by me, and pitches it by me still in all sympathy, I have found God, and if you take that away I have lost God. "He tabernacled among us," He pitched His tent by us. It was the Tent of meeting, and it was the Tent of testimony. Through that life God spoke so that I might hear; and to explain that, I must use terms that seem to be contradictory, but the relation of which I am sure you will see. In Christ, the long long silence became speech. But in Christ the thunder became a whisper. Silence became speech. Men had been waiting and longing and listening, climbing mountains for stillness, getting into loneliness to hear. They had heard, but they had never heard. They had heard the thunder of His power, but they had never heard all that they needed to hear. But in Him

Who pitched His tent by the side of the fishermen, they heard. And the long silence and all the loneliness became the sweet speech for which men had waited; and all the thunder that had reverber-ated around the rocky fastness of Sinai became love whispers in the ears of listening individuals when He became flesh. "The Word became flesh, and pitched His tent among us."

"And the Word was God," and again I remit the mystery, "full of grace and truth." All that men saw and heard in Jesus was an unveiling of Deity. The attractiveness of His grace, the awfulness of His truth, were revelations to men of God.

If that is the fact of the incarnation, what is this inclusive revelation that it has brought to us? "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us ... full of grace and truth." Grace. You may express that in another way, in another phrase, in another sentence, of this self-same writer. "God is love," "full of grace." Truth. You may express that also in another way. "God is light," "full of truth." Out of the grace came the redemption. Out of the truth was manifest the righteousness. The supreme revelation that Jesus made to men was not a revelation first of grace, or only of grace; not a revelation first of truth, or only of truth; but a revelation of the relation between "grace" and "truth."

Look at them in separation. Do not rob this word grace of its beauty by reading into it merely the ideas of a human system of theology. We behold him "full of grace," full of tenderness, full of gentleness, full of pity, full of all that winsomeness and attractiveness that made Him dear to children and to needy men, and to sinning souls. We behold Him full of grace, full of grace to children, gathering them into His arms, putting them into the midst of His disciples; full of grace toward the afflicted, for ever-more moved with compassion in the presence of any limitation. No cripple ever crossed the vision of Christ without Christ feeling the pain of all the cripple's limitation. Full of grace toward sinners. Take the New Testament and read it once more, and see if you can find one harsh thing He said to a sinner. Harsh things to oppressors and to sinners in that particular

respect; but to someone taken in an act of sin, overwhelmed with the burden of sin, never an angry word. Full of grace, full of winsomeness, full of beauty. That is human. I am not dealing with all the infinite values of the word grace; but with the simplicity of it as manifested in the life of this man.

But "full of truth," capable of anger, capable of severity, capable of cursing as well as of blessing, with lips that could frame a "Woe" of unutterable terror as well as a "Blessed" of unutterable tenderness. Truth, and truth manifesting itself in anger against all selfishness, all tyranny, all sin. Grace acting in truth, because it is grace. Truth acting in grace, because it is truth. Here is the revelation that surprises. We have put these into two compartments. We often still speak of the grace of God and the righteousness of God as though they were at the poles asunder. They are never separated. They cannot be separated; and in the moment in which you deny truth you deny grace. If there be no severity in God, He is incapable of tenderness. Because there is love there is light, and it is love that will make no peace with the thing that spoils and harms and ruins. Grace and truth always go together. I have referred to His grace as manifested in His welcoming of the children. I have declared that truth could be manifest in anger, and these two things were operating at the same moment. When He said the most beautiful thing that men ever heard concerning little children, there was the tone of anger in His voice. The voice which was brimful of tenderness was vibrant with thunder. The disciples would have kept the children away. Why should He be angry for a small thing like that? It is not a small thing to keep a child away from Christ. It is a misunderstanding of God and the child; and the man who misunderstands God and the child is a curse to society, find him where you will. Jesus was angry, and through the tenderness of the welcome to the bairns throbbed the anger of truth against a false idea of dignity that excluded bairns. That is but illustration of grace and truth acting together, as they did from beginning to end. This was the revelation that came to the world.

The Values Resulting From the Revelation

So finally we see the values of this incarnation, truth concerning God and man, and grace joining men to God. In Him man found God. In Him man finds himself. These were the two things that men had lost; their knowledge of God, and their knowledge of themselves. The great and final word of the teaching of one of the greatest Greek masters, Socrates, was, "Man, know thyself"; but men could not obey him, and Socrates had to say so. He confessed that it was not given to him to do any-thing but teach humanity to ask questions. He said some other teacher must come and answer the questions, and in that word he revealed how much of heaven's light he had in his own soul. This Man came to answer the questions, and man found himself again, and realised the meaning of the mystery of his life, when the Word became flesh, and tabernacled, pitched His tent by the side of him. And that tabernacling meant not merely truth concerning God and man, but triumph for God and man. It was God's highway to accomplish His purposes for man. It was man's highway unto the purposes of God.

Let me say in conclusion that we underrate the infinite value and meaning of this fact of incarnation when we speak of it as something in the past. The incarnation is an abiding fact, not something merely past. At this very hour that same Person is at the centre of the universe of God, the risen, glorified and enthroned Man. And if you tell me that that is to state something that cannot be believed because it transcends the possibility of belief, I tell you that it no more transcends the possibility of belief than does the fact of the historic incarnation. If He came into human flesh, and tabernacled among us, and if while there He could speak of Himself as yet in the bosom of the Father, and as yet being the Word with God, so remember that today He abides for manifestation at the centre of the universe of God, the risen and glorified Man, at once a prophecy and a promise, hearing which we dare believe that at last, He also will perfect us, and we shall see Him, and be with Him, and be like Him.

The Majesty of God in the Old Testament: A Guide for Preaching and Teaching. By Walter C. Kaiser Jr. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. 978-0-8010-3244-8. 176 pp., $16.99 paper.

In his usual magisterial style, Walter Kaiser has added another title to his distinguished collection of books elevating the Old Testament to its rightful place within God's canon, and restoring it to its proper place in our pulpits. Kaiser's zeal for reclaiming the image of God for his church permeates this book as seen in numerous sentences bursting with exclamations. Kaiser's love for the great texts matches his love for God and for His glory. His conviction of the relevance of the Old Testament to the lives of believers today is infectious. It serves as a humbling corrective to the church, which is too often caught up reading today's headlines and bestsellers, while disregarding God's Word of yesterday. While stepping into the twilight of his academic career, this great scholar shows as much spring in his walk with God as he has ever shown before. Kaiser is the embodiment of the Old Testament truth that those who hope in the Lord—by holding on to his Word—will soar on wings like eagles. Walter Kaiser's persistence in lifting up the God of the Old Testament has made him a stand-out in the theologically dwarfed crowd of cultural accommodation.

The book is a study of ten great Old Testament passages depicting God in his splendor. Kaiser's blueprint for the book comes from theology overflowing into anthropology. Each chapter focuses on one of God's attributes. The thumbprint of God left on the page is carefully lifted with all the care of a cautious exegete, and through meticulous attention to the voice of the biblical author. Kaiser is at his best in the process of analysis. His skill in careful dissection of the passage, his attention to the nuances of meaning, his care to the context, and his awareness of the theological pitfalls, make for a fine exhibition of biblical truth. This is vintage Kaiser—a man well aware of today's hermeneutical preferences—who continues to ably argue for the truth of the authorial intent.

Each chapter is followed by a sermon based on the biblical passage. Unfortunately, at this juncture Kaiser's enlightening exegesis is dimmed by his homiletic method. It seems to me that as much as Kaiser continues to take great care in the handling of the *content* of the Old Testament passages, he fails to give equal attention to their *form*. Kaiser's homiletic method is reductive. It is a cookie cutter approach to the text. Consequently, the sermonic form imposed on the variety of biblical texts in their distinct genres hamstrings the truth. The impact of the texts is diminished by the form they are made to serve. Walter Kaiser attempts to marry his method to Haddon Robinson's "big idea" philosophy of biblical communication, but if praxis is the evidence of one's creed, Kaiser's approach to sermon crafting misses the big idea of Robinson's approach. Robinson does not equate the "focal point" of Kaiser's sermons with the big idea of the passage. Consequently, while Robinson's view of biblical text shapes his sermonic form, Kaiser's method

reduces all truths to the same predictable form. While truth is not lost, it is most certainly diminished. And if the desired outcome of the book is to expound the magnificence of the truth about our God, anything that constrains it ought to be at least reviewed; and at best, rectified.

Still, sermonic form notwithstanding, I highly recommend Kaiser's book for its theological insights and helpful exegesis.

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Getting Into Character: The Art of First-Person Narrative Preaching. By Stephen Chapin Garner. Grand Rapids: Baker/Brazos, 2008. 978-1-58743-218-7. 142 pp., $15.99 paper.

Stephen Garner is a pastor with extensive experience as a playwright and actor. This sets *Getting Into Character* apart from similar books written by pastors and homileticians such as Edward's *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*, and Robinson and Robinson's *It's All In How You Tell It*. In ten short chapters Garner gives practical advice on the dramatic aspects of this kind of preaching. In particular, the author has a very good ear for the way people actually speak so that I found the chapter on "Writing Character" the most valuable in the book. Also of value are two chapters with samples monologues. Garner critiques those monologues, and this brings the instruction of previous chapters to life. Also illuminating are the two sermons based on the Prodigal Son, one written by a gifted pastor and the other by a gifted playwright. The playwright's message is the more engaging of the two, but it also lacks the biblical grounding of the pastor's.

While *Getting Into Character* is sure to help preachers with dramatic arts (and this is the purpose of the book), it offers much less help with biblical interpretation. Some of the big ideas Garner finds in biblical narratives are questionable, even though he follows Haddon Robinson's insistence that the sermon communicate the text's main thought. The story of Joseph (husband of Mary) yields this idea: "God grants us dreams that are meant to be pursued for the benefit of others, as much as for ourselves" (61). Historical-redemptive preachers will take strong exception to the exegesis behind most of the monologues. Better is the idea from the story of the scribe who asked Jesus which is the greatest commandment: "Life is not about law, it is about Love. Loving God. Loving neighbor" (135).

I plan to use this book as a supplemental text when I teach narrative preaching, but my primary text will continue to be Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching.*

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The Power of Persuasive Preaching. By Ben J. Katt. St. Louis, Chalice, 2006. 978-0-827229-89-1. 133 pp. $16.99, paper.

The "law of the hammer" rules this book as it is rules most: give a man a hammer, and he will find things to pound. That is, give a person a tool, and that person *will* employ it early and often even if another tool, or no tool, would serve better. Give a person an advanced degree in rhetorical theory (my personal hammer), and when he/she writes a book about preaching, you're likely to hear Aristotle and Burke opining on everything under the sun. Give an author a background in overseas missions, or education in film theory, or experience preaching to postmoderns, and *those* hammers will fall on the various homiletical tasks from exegesis to delivery.

Ben Katt's hammer is "group persuasion" from the world of sales. The author is a businessman, lay preacher, and apparently a highly successful public speaker. Thus this book sounds a lot like a seminar for sales people. For example, the conclusion of the sermon is the "close," and pragmatic goals such as numerical growth drive preaching.

To be sure, the craft of preaching needs plenty of pounding from the hammer of group persuasion, and any pastor or academician will benefit by Katt's reminders of commonsense laws of public presentations: establish rapport early, script your "close" so you know exactly what you are asking people to do, and practice your delivery because it is enormously powerful when urging change. The subject of delivery is actually overemphasized with hyperbolic statements like "tonality is everything" (72).

As an outsider to academic homiletics, Katt has the ability to cut through the rigmarole of our field with statements like: "Speakers must work out their inner conflicts" (28) because they have "no secrets from the audience." This insight is golden, but receives no more than a gentle tap from the hammers most of us employ. Likewise, Katt states, "A preacher must persuasively articulate the nature of humanity's problem and the joy of God's solution. Most ministers cannot. They are sincere in their faith. They are committed to their Christian walk. But they have never persuasively articulated in their words or even their thoughts why the Christian faith provides answers to life's problems" (56). He's right.

Of course, the hammer of group sales needs some theological and pastoral critique, but Katt seems open to this, and readers of *JEHS* should be able to sift and winnow as needed.

Persuasive Preaching is written as a narrative, with a young pastor seeking advice from a successful sales trainer. The genre adds little to the value of the book, feeling wooden and contrived as the mentor lectures his student who asks questions on cue, but neither does the genre lessen the value. A summary at the end gives the book's ideas in outline form.

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Doctrine That Dances: Bringing Doctrinal Preaching and Teaching to Life. By Robert Smith Jr. Nashville: B & H, 2008, 978-080544684-5, 196 pp., $19.99, paper.

Homiletical literature currently in print is impoverished with regard to books devoted exclusively to doctrinal preaching. Happily, Robert Smith Jr. has addressed this deficiency with a significant contribution entitled *Doctrine That Dances.* Smith is professor of Christian preaching at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama.

Smith offers his definition of doctrinal preaching in the first chapter: "The escorting of the hearers into the presence of God for the purpose of transformation" (25). So worded, the definition is not unique to doctrinal preaching but is true of preaching in general. In the next paragraph, Smith elaborates: "Doctrinal preaching is the magnifying of Jesus Christ through the explanation and application of the basic truths of the Christian faith" (25). This gets closer to the special nature of doctrinal preaching which is to proclaim intentionally the foundational truths of the Christian faith.

In chapter two, Smith develops his rationale for doctrinal preaching by means of two metaphors: the exegetical escort and the doxological dancer. The function of the exegetical escort is "to embrace the text of Scripture in order to usher the hearer into the presence of God for the purpose of transformation" (35). The function of the doxological dancer is "to communicate the doctrinal message of the Bible with accuracy and ardor so that the exuberant hearer exults in the exalting of God" (36).

The third chapter includes a salutary emphasis upon the necessity of engaging both head and heart. The bulk of the chapter, however, demonstrates how the various literary genres teach or illustrate doctrine. Dr. Smith presents his diagnosis of preaching in chapter four and surveys biblical examples of exegetical escorts (Ezekiel, Ezra and the Levites, John the Baptist, Andrew, Peter, Phillip, Aquila and Priscilla, Jesus, Gabriel) and eisegetical escorts (Job's friends, Hananiah).

Chapter five is primarily an expansion of the doxological dancer metaphor. Smith assesses astutely the style of doctrinal preaching in relation to the five canons of Greco-Roman criticism. The chapter also includes three practical ways to enhance doctrinal preaching: use theological hymns; serve the text with personal testimony; and resist predictability in sermon arrangement by innovating (117-118). Smith employs all of chapter six to advocate maintaining a healthy balance between transcendence and immanence; Spirit and Word; and Christology and intratrinitarian community.

The last chapter explores how key elements in jazz music can be applied to the preaching event. Two doctrinal sermons are included after the epilogue. Sermon one features the doctrine of grace. Sermon two focuses on the doctrine of providence. Smith writes with insight and passion. His style is vivid and engaging. Yet, more emphasis upon the unique features of doctrinal preaching and less upon those common to preaching in general would enhance this book's

otherwise excellent content.

Homiletics professors who are considering textbook adoptions may want to supplement *Doctrine That Dances* with the following: a list of the foundational doctrines and their related Bible texts; a discussion on the selection of central idea and secondary theme preaching texts; an assessment of the topical doctrinal sermon versus the expository doctrinal sermon; the methodology for constructing a doctrinal sermon series; guidelines for developing a preaching calendar which incorporates the foundational doctrines; and how to use a doctrinal preaching checklist to ensure balanced coverage.

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Preacher in a Hard Hat: A Guide to Preaching for Pastors and Everyone Else. By Jim Schmitmeyer. St. Louis: Chalice, 2006, 0-8272-2985-2, 118 pp., $8.99, paper.

This brief, very readable work is written by a Christian servant who takes preaching seriously because he cares deeply about the needs of his flock. The author is a Roman Catholic priest who embraces a strong commitment to the Word of God and who expresses eloquently the need for preachers of that Word to make vital connections—connections between the Word and real life, and connections between people and their God.

The author also strongly contends that the sermon should be the result of a team effort, a team composed of ministers who know the Word and parishioners who know about life. He, therefore, encourages (from his firsthand experience) the value of establishing what he calls "homily reflection groups" that can help in the process of moving from text to context.

In a further effort to champion preaching that connects well with the flock, the author advocates, explains and provides examples of what it means to be a good listener. He urges preachers to "listen through the noise" so they can gain a better sense of where their flocks are really living, so they can then preach with greater relevance. However, in this endeavor, the author does not encourage preachers to become better preachers simply so their listeners can live life more smoothly. He encourages something far deeper. In his own words: "Because preaching is a central part of our experience of worship, its main purpose is not to instruct Christians in the content of their faith, but to *deepen their recognition* of the presence of Christ in their midst" (21, emphasis his).

The author, thus, deals meaningfully with the question of why preachers preach. He acknowledges that "some preachers view preaching as a tool for teaching the truths of the faith" (54). That is true for most of the preachers I know. And yet, Schmitmeyer asserts that "surveys of those who listen to preaching . . . indicate that this is a secondary need. Rather than an explanation of doctrine, most believers look to preaching for a validation of the fact that God is real and

that life in Christ makes a difference" (54). If Schmitmeyer is correct and we preachers decided to meet that basic need, it would surely lead to changes in the emphases of our preaching.

As further confirmation of his belief that preaching should help listeners deepen their recognition of the presence of Christ in their midst, the author contends that homiletic preaching ought to seek a position of stasis somewhere between heaven and earth. He says, "On the one hand, it requires solid grounding in the day-to-day experience; on the other hand, it inspires a deep longing to transcend the ordinary and experience the sacred" (67). Schmitmeyer acknowledges the human ache for ultimate meaning and therefore suggests that preachers will occasionally need to highlight dramatic scenes that stir the soul and bring preacher and listener alike face-to-face with Christ, whom they can then either accept or reject. Helping listeners lift their eyes toward heaven as a result of carefully crafted preaching fosters the worship that should be occurring during that vital portion of the worship service. Indeed, he asserts that homiletic preaching "will renew, instruct, or unify its listeners in the process of escorting them up the stairway of worship" (105).

Personally, I found Schmitmeyer's contentions and commitments to be seductive and, at times, quite capable of shifting the thoughtful reader's paradigms. Those looking for a "how-to" manual will be disappointed by this work, even though the title might suggest something utilitarian. Those looking for thoughtful contemplations about the real potential of preaching to meet listeners at the point of their needs, will experience a rewarding read.

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Speaking Conflict:Stories of a Controversial Jesus. By David Buttrick. Westminster John Knox: Louisville, 2007, 978-0-664-23089-0, $24.95, paper.

In his latest volume, David Buttrick explores the conflict stories in the Gospel of Mark using a common strategy to explore each story. He begins with his own translation of the text, followed by a brief look at how the other Synoptics treat the same story, and then a more detailed analysis of how Mark treats the controversy. Following this he explores more broadly the "homiletic theology" that underlies the story, offering suggestions for how certain theological themes might relate to contemporary concerns and issues. Buttrick concludes each conflict story with a section entitled "Speaking" or "Preaching the Passage."

In addition, whenever he includes one of his own sermons as an example after his analysis of a story, he also adds a unit called "Discussion" in which he critiques his sermon. Ten sermons are included: three from the 1960s, five from the 1980s, one from 2000, and one from 2001. Buttrick is critical of the structural development of the older sermons. However, they are also dated. It would have been beneficial for him to include more sermons connecting the theological themes of these

passages to contemporary audiences and settings.

Some of the sermons included are good examples of principles, theories, and models Buttrick set forth in *Homiletic* (1987). He continues to hold to some of the conclusions made in that volume regarding his disapproval of self-disclosure (88) and humor (133) as well as the length of introductions (87) and homilies (164). He also retains some of his sarcastic edge. In a sermon addressing the relationship of Caesar and God, taxes and Christians, he remarks, "You've got the Eisenhower Christians who still lust for bigger church buildings, . . . and Christians from the 1980s doting on Hee Haw religion and Ronald Reagan (if there's a difference)!" (148)

This volume contains a good bibliography and three different indices, one of biblical citations, another of personal names, and finally a lengthy subject index. Also included is a list of conflict stories found in the Synoptic Gospels. The book is vintage Buttrick and as such the reader will not be disappointed in its valuable contribution.

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A Guide to Preaching and Leading Worship. By William H. Willimon. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008, 978-0-664-23257-3, 161 pp., $17.95, paper.

As the title suggests, this is a primer on planning for worship and preaching. Willimon is a prolific writer and does not lack for opinions. In his usual concise and catchy but not trite use of language, he outlines suggestions for leaders (both clergy and lay) in their planning and leading of Sunday worship as well as preparing and delivering sermons.

In the first two chapters he addresses his concern for quality worship planning by emphasizing the importance of worship of the One True God in today's fast-paced and consumer-oriented society. Chapter three focuses on public prayer, and to me, was the most valuable chapter in the book ("Public prayer is not private prayer said publicly," 29).

Ideas about how to conduct the Lord's Supper and Baptism are addressed in chapter four. Practical suggestions abound along with good focus on theological issues.

The next three chapters deal with (1) preparing to preach, including basic instruction about how to approach a Biblical text, (2) the delivery of the message itself, and (3) evaluation. The chapter dealing with evaluation provides helpful ideas about how to solicit feedback, and the appendix includes a survey he uses with parishioners to obtain feedback about his preaching.

The final chapter reflects Willimon's passion to involve the whole people of God in planning, leading, and participating in worship. Including God's people other

than the pastor in planning and leading worship is a growing concern for many church leaders, and Willimon speaks convincingly to the issue.

New pastors will likely find the book a significant help in the early days of leading worship and preaching, but experienced pastors will also benefit from it as a basic reminder of what we are doing, why we do it, and how we can do it better. It is a primer, brief and not technical.

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Preaching That Makes The Word Plain: Doing Theology in the Crucible of Life. By William Clair Turner, Jr. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008, 978-1-55635-586-8, 114 pp., $17.00, paper.

"Nothing is more frustrating in attempting to craft the sermon than attempting to write without having something to say" (30). This sentence reflects the purpose of Turner's writing, which is to blend good theological focus with the preached word. From the dual perspective of teaching preaching at Duke University Divinity School and pastoring Mt. Level Missionary Baptist Church in Durham, NC he combines instruction in Biblical exegesis with exegesis of the needs of the hearer of the sermon. He writes with eloquence and passion in his effort to recover the pulpit as the locus of theology for the people.

In chapter one he argues for the importance of theology in exegesis. Chapter two looks at the art and skill of preaching in the context of being led by God's Spirit in crafting the sermon. Chapter three discusses the mechanics of putting the sermon together. Then follow eight brief chapters of sermons he has preached that reflect the material in the first three chapters.

In talking about writing the sermon, Turner uses the words "scribbling" and "scripting." To scribble is not to ignore the hard work of theological exegesis, but is to pause and reflect, to mull, on the Word being exegeted as a means of allowing God's Spirit to teach the preacher. Only from there can the preacher move to scripting the sermon.

In crafting the sermon, Turner talks about "blocks," with block one being exegesis, block two developing the thesis of the text, block three examining the theological nuances of the text, block four analyzing the setting in which the message is to be delivered, and block five actually proclaiming the word. When this methods is followed well, the sermon both "feeds and challenges the mind" (56).

Both beginning and experienced preachers will find the book useful for integrating theology and preaching.

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God's Message, Your Sermon. H. Wayne House and Daniel G. Garland. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 2007, 978-1-4185-2657-3, 406pp., $24.99 paper.

The concept of expository preaching often occupies the thinking of evangelical preachers and teachers, yet the meaning of the concept varies greatly from person to person. Some view it as a verse-by-verse running commentary; some as a sermon series covering a book of the Bible; some as a sermon whose text is at least three or more verses; some as a sermon that offers minute analysis of every phrase and word in the preaching passage. The book under consideration in this review attempts to present, explain, and demonstrate expository preaching that begins with choosing an appropriate passage of Scripture (length is not an issue), doing sound exegetical study, discovering the passage's truths, formulating a thematic statement, and developing the sermon outline. The definition of expository preaching is Haddon Robinson's in *Biblical Preaching* (3).

The co-authors of this volume were influenced by homiletical training at Western Conservative Baptist Seminary under Milton Jones. Jones based his approach to expository preaching on a method developed by Arthur B. Whiting, and this volume is intended to be a presentation of the "Whiting Method," an approach which is a "combination of exegesis and homiletics" (45).

The book is divided into four major sections: Discovering What God Meant By What He Said; Developing the Discovery; Delivering the Development; and Demonstrating the Discovery, Development, and Delivery of What God Meant By What He Said. Each section has two or more chapters that are well researched and clearly written. The overall flow of the book is sensible.

One of the strengths of the book is its strong appeal to be focused on and honest with the Scriptures. John MacArthur sets the tone in the book's Forward by urging preachers not to succumb to the "endless parade of fads and diversions—all claiming to be better means than biblical preaching for stimulating church growth or attracting people" (x). This theme of devoting one's attention to accurate understanding and presentation of biblical truth is maintained throughout the volume.

Another strength of the book is the fourth section. This section contains seven chapters each dealing with different sections of Scripture: the pentateuch, historical narrative, poetic books, Old Testament prophecy, Gospels and Acts, epistles, and Revelation. While this may not be the best way to look at the various parts of the Bible—literary genre would be preferable—the section is packed full of rich insights and gives some preaching suggestions and examples. This is the longest part of the book, comprising almost sixty percent. It is, in the opinion of this reviewer, the most helpful part of the book.

Some weaknesses need to be mentioned. First, in presenting the "Whiting Method," the outcome is a "one size fits all" approach. This is not a good idea

from the listeners' perspective because sameness leads to boredom, from the preacher's perspective because sermon preparation becomes routine and lacks creativity, or from an exegetical perspective because we should not preach on narrative, for example, in the same way we preach from the epistles.

A second area of weakness probably reflects the personal bias of this reviewer. It is not a good idea, in my opinion, to state the main sermon components (thematic statement and the main points) as factual statements. While the facts need to be established in the supporting material, there is a danger of a sermon becoming a lecture if there is not a personal connection with the hearer established in these main components. The numerous examples of sermon outlines in the book almost all consisted of factual, rather than relational, statements. They would make fine lectures, but a personal sense of relevancy is lacking. This can be remedied without losing the necessary sense of biblical authority.

Finally, while I had personally never heard of the "Whiting Method," I found little that I would regard as new. It may well be that in certain theological and ecclesiastical circles where sermons are primarily topical and often distanced from biblical authority, that an exegetical-homiletical approach of this sort needs to be taught and emphasized. On the other hand, many of my fellow evangelical homileticians have approached preaching in this way for a very long time.

Preachers and teachers who have not been committed to an exegetically-based approach to homiletics will certainly find profit in reading and heeding this volume. Others will find a more limited level of usefulness.

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Preaching Matthew by Mike Graves and David M. May, St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007, 978-0827230057, 152 pp., $22.99, paper.

In one of his books, Eugene Peterson tells the story of a middle aged woman who was "unaccountably awakened into a world alive with God and grace and sacrifice." While the primary agent of change was the Holy Spirit, one of the means He used in this work of transformation was her reading of the Gospels. These ancient stories seem deceptively familiar. As well as we may think we know their content, the social context of the gospels is often largely unfamiliar. In *Preaching Matthew*, Graves and May attempt to remedy this problem by using what they call a "socio-rhetorical homiletic" to explain Matthew's message. "As interpreters of the ancient text," they explain, "we are called to be sensitive to the social norms and values of the first-century world" (2).

Graves and May suggest that preachers ask two sets of questions when preparing to preach from Matthews gospel. The first set of questions deals with interpretation. Preachers must ask what the text meant for Matthew's community and what it means for our own. The second set of questions has to do with communication.

What ancient literary conventions did the evangelist use to craft the passage? What homiletical techniques should we use to craft our sermon?

The authors are consistent in addressing these questions as they focus on selected portions from Matthew. Those who choose their sermon texts based on the lectionary will appreciate the way Graves and May note when texts appear in the church year and how they compare to other gospel accounts of the same events. Along the way, the authors also make observations about preaching in general. They pay special attention to the challenge of interpreting Matthew, noting that his gospel incorporates multiple genres.

Not all readers will find the homiletical suggestions included in *Preaching Matthew* to be of help. Each chapter includes a bibliography of sermons on the passages under discussion by notable preachers like Fred Craddock, William Willimon, and Barbara Brown Taylor. The full length sermons by the authors which are included in the book are really short homilies and not expository messages. The suggested applications, for the most part, seem to focus on matters of social justice.

While much of what the authors have to say about this gospel and about preaching in general can be found elsewhere, Graves and May have synthesized this information into a modest little book that can be a helpful supplement to the preacher who is intent upon preaching Matthew.

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What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching? Edited by Mike Graves and David J. Schlafer. St. Louis: Chalice, 2008, 978-0-827242-55-5, viii + 246 pp, $24.00, paper.

One can think of few homileticians more deserving of a festschrift than Eugene Lowry, whose books and articles have been seminal in the homiletical turn to the listener and the narrative preaching movement. In *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* editors Mike Graves and David Schlafer have assembled a set of essays, each compelling in its own right, around the question that makes up its title. The list of contributing authors reads like a who's who in the world of mainline preaching and includes Charles Rice, Richard Eslinger, Fred Craddock, David Buttrick, Robin Meyers, Frank Thomas, and others.

The book is divided into three parts, each consisting of four or five chapters. Each of the essays in Part I pertain to the origin of narrative preaching. In Part II the focus shifts to the contemporary state of narrative preaching. And finally, the essays in Part III suggest directions that narrative preaching might take in the future. (There is irony to this linear past-present-future structure in a book paying tribute to a narrative preacher.) Space does not allow for a full treatment of each of the book's essays, thus a few brief remarks on one chapter per Part and some concluding remarks will have to suffice.

Ronald Allen's chapter, "Theology Undergirding Narrative Preaching," summarizes the various approaches to narrative preaching, considers what happens when listeners hear a story or content woven in a plot-like structure, and makes critical observations. Allen, following the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz, urges preachers to dig beneath the surface when telling stories. Without depth of analysis stories can quickly become trite or maudlin, having little to do with the reality of one's congregation. Allen also reminds preachers about the importance of being well-versed in a variety of sermon styles, as no one form or method is able to fully communicate with all hearers. To my chagrin, however, Allen does not comment on the importance of considering the underlying theology behind the different methodologies that a preacher may choose; there is, for instance, a rich theological reasoning behind, say, Paul Scott Wilson's four pages. Although as a sermonic form it is helpful, it is a deep theology (of law and grace) that actually determines and underlies the form. In an otherwise helpful chapter on theology, Allen's comment on the necessity of sermon forms, though undoubtedly correct, leaps too quickly to the area of praxis.

In "Out of the Loop: The Changing Practice of Preaching," Thomas Long notes that Lowry developed his "loop" (which is really an Aristotelian schema), not simply because he believed it would lead to more interesting sermons, but because of his conviction that listeners understand and make sense of their lives as narratives. Long's question is whether or not this is, in fact, true, or if we are "shifting into a cultural moment when people lack the requisite tools, or maybe the will, to perform this task [of constructing and living in narratives]" (126). Comparing United Methodist mega-church preacher and author Adam Hamilton with Lowry, Long suggests that "Hamilton's homiletical approach is straight out of the 1950s. . . . Only now, instead of three points and a poem, it's six points and a video clip" (128). In other words, listeners shaped by contemporary (Western) culture find life to be "random" and "episodic" (129). In light of our present reality, Long suggests that rather than abandon narrative, preachers "must help people in a fragmented and episodic culture to repair their ability not only to hear the gospel story but also to know what a powerful story is in the first place, how it works, and what possibilities it affords for identity and ethical living" (130). This comment suggests fruitful work yet to be done in the field of homiletics.

Along similar lines, Thomas Troeger suggests, in his chapter, "Improvisations on the Lowry Loop," that preachers must always understand their culture and adapt the form of their sermons to match. Because Lowry's narrative plot is rooted in a particular social context, preachers must not simply employ his methodology *carte blanche*. Instead, we must develop new forms of narrative preaching to communicate to an increasingly globalized world. Troeger suggests that the way forward is through a theology of creativity and imagination. His essay is a helpful and timely reminder for preachers to cultivate their inner poet. (The poem with which Troeger concludes his chapter is a wonderful example of imagination, and a worthy tribute to Lowry.)

When it comes to an edited volume of essays from over a dozen contributors, one does not expect uniformity in quality, and in this regard, *What's the Shape of Narrative Preaching?* both surprises and delights. No doubt, readers of this Journal will not all agree with the assumptions or conclusions of all of the authors, but there is tremendous value in these pages. Without exception, each of the chapters is engaging, challenging, and bursting with ideas and insights on the shape of narrative preaching. It is a fitting festschrift for a most deserving preacher and a valuable addition to the growing narrative preaching corpus in its own right.

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Thinking Theologically: The Preacher as Theologian. By Ronald J. Allen. Elements of Preaching. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008, 978-0-8006-6232-5, viii + 96 pp, $12.00, paper; and *Preaching and Theology*. By James F. Kay. Preaching and Its Partners. St. Louis, Chalice, 2007, 978-0-827229-91-4, x + 170 pp, $19.99, paper.

A quick visit to the preaching section at a local Christian bookstore will turn up numerous books on methodology and form—"how-to manuals." These books help preachers think through important issues, from how to develop a sermon to how to deliver it, important topics, to be sure. The number of books dealing with homiletical theory and theology, on the other hand, is considerably less. But the topic is no less important, for what is a preacher if not a theologian? And what is the substance of preaching if not theology? Beneath all methodological decisions lies theological convictions. These convictions are rarely stated, but they are there, and they are important for preachers to think through and wrestle with. Theology does not simply inform sermonic structure and delivery, but also content. Enter Ronald Allen's *Thinking Theologically* and James Kay's *Preaching as Theology*. Both homileticians are concerned with the marriage of preaching and theology, though they approach the theme in rather different ways.

In *Thinking Theologically*, Allen "surveys the broad range of theological voices found in the church and academy that are available to the preacher in a post-Enlightenment world" (Series editor, O. Wesley Allen, Jr.'s Foreword, viii). There is probably no homiletician more suited to writing this book than Allen. He traces background issues surrounding preaching and theology including theological convictions, historic Christian traditions, and the role of the Enlightenment, before sketching a number of theological movements relevant to the preacher. These sketches treat movements in the Enlightenment tradition (liberal theology, mutual critical correlation, and process theology), movements that react against the Enlightenment (evangelical theology, neoorthodox theology, posliberal theology, and Other theologies), and movements arising from contextual concerns (liberation theologies and ethnic theologies).

Allen hopes that in painting a picture of the different theological options available to them, preachers will not only be introduced to theological traditions other

than their own, but they will be able to situate themselves along the theological spectrum and be prompted to evaluate their attendant strengths and weaknesses (as Allen sees them). To that end, his efforts are very successful, though due to the broad range of theologies that are covered in this short book, Allen has had to be, by necessity, brief in his evaluations of each.

What is lost in thoroughness, however, is made up for in breadth of coverage. For each theology covered in the book, Allen offers an introduction, followed by a discussion of the purposes of preaching in the particular theology; some thoughts on how preachers in the particular theological school might interpret Luke 7:11–17; and questions of a critical nature for those in the theological tradition to ask themselves. Each chapter also includes a brief bibliography of representative readings.

Allen's treatments are fair and insightful throughout. He is appreciative of the many strengths that each of the different theologies has to offer, but also critical at places where he feels they fall short. For instance, he asks evangelicals whether or not the Bible is really "internally self-consistent" (48), or whether, in fact, it is made up of many different (and perhaps contradictory) theologies. He also takes evangelicals to task for declaring God to be "altogether loving, altogether powerful, and altogether just when confronted with a world filled with "underserved suffering" (48). Finally, Allen asks how evangelicals deal with hard texts of the Bible, like the imprecatory psalms. These critical remarks are nothing new, nor are their answers; but the fact remains that they still trouble many outside the evangelical sphere and are worth rethinking.

The great value of *Thinking Theologically* for readers of this Journal is its presentation of alternative theologies as relevant conversation partners and its reminder that our theological assumptions color and shape our interpretation of the Bible.

In contrast to the approach taken by Allen, James Kay, Professor of Homiletics and Liturgics at Princeton Theological Seminary, is more interested in articulating the theological framework that undergirds the task of Christian preaching. Whereas Allen's book is closer to what Kay might describe as "a descriptive 'cookbook' listing in cafeteria style all the current entrées for reader sampling," Kay's purpose in *Preaching and Theology* is to show "how and why theology matters for preaching; and how and why preaching matters for theology" (viii).

According to Kay, there are three frames of reference that inform preaching: theology, rhetoric, and poetics; his criticism is that most contemporary preaching is informed by either rhetoric or poetics, when both of those are properly subservient to theology when it comes to preaching. A guiding statement for Kay that is alluded to frequently in the book comes from a heading in the Second Helvetic Convention: "The Preaching of the Word of God Is the Word of God" (7–8). (His first chapter is, essentially, an exposition on this sentence.)

Throughout *Preaching and Theology* Kay is at pains to raise questions with which

preachers must engage and internalize. Chapter two, for instance, examines the nature of the gospel. "What is the gospel?" is for Kay, a question that every seminary student should be able to answer by the time they graduate, "and to leave seminary unable to give some answer, however halting, would be unworthy of our calling" (131). Other foundational questions such as what is preaching? Who is to preach? Why is preaching necessary? are all treated throughout the course of the book.

These philosophical/theological/theoretical questions—material that should rightfully be covered in an introductory homiletics course—are of particular importance to Kay because contemporary preaching has not given adequate attention to them. He offers a (mild) critique of Eugene Lowry's narrative homiletic, for instance, because it privileges poetics (issues pertaining to form and structure) above both theology and rhetoric, when the proper order ought to be theology > rhetoric > poetics (see p. 67). Kay is also (mildly) critical of Fred Craddock and others who advocate a theme sentence/big idea/propositional truth approach to preaching (88–90). This, in Kay's estimation, is at worst privileging the rhetorical frame of reference above the theological frame, and at best, unclear "as to which is primary and which are subordinate" (91).

Preaching and Theology also gives readers a brief tour of the history of preaching, describing the impact and theologies of figures from Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann to Martin Heidegger and Hans Frei. Kay is fair and balanced in his critique of each of the theologians and philosophers he surveys. Ultimately, he suggests that preaching ought to be seen and understood as promissory narration, which is "an attempt at mutual correction of [the existing] theological proposals [from the New Hermeneutic/New Homiletic and postliberalism] in a way that is more faithful to the gospel" (125). In other words, preaching should always tell God's promise in Christ, though not every individual sermon need articulate all the details of the Christ story.

One of the chief strengths of Kay's work is that he treats what might otherwise be dense material in a clear and lucid fashion. *Preaching and Theology* is an impressively researched and carefully argued book that helps preachers to see when and how preaching can be called God's word and why preachers must preach the gospel. Though scholarly, it is accessible; though thorough, it is succinct.

Both Allen and Kay are concerned that preachers understand how preaching and theology are deeply related and both are alarmed that in contemporary practice, the former is becoming increasingly disconnected from the latter. Allen's approach is to survey different theologies and demonstrate how practitioners from within these different schools might approach the task of preaching. To that end, preachers are reminded that though they may not be conscious of it, their preaching is informed by theology. Kay's approach, on the other hand, is to raise foundational theological and philosophical questions related to the task of proclamation. To that end, he, too, reminds preachers that theology informs preaching, and moreover, that theology (and not rhetoric or poetics) should be

the primary frame of reference by which preaching is informed. Both approaches are important and both books deserve a wide reading. Here's to hoping they point to a (re)turn to theology.

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Your Calling as a Teacher. By Karen B. Tye. St. Louis: Chalice, 2008, 0-827244-14-6, 100 pp., $9.99, paper.

Your Calling as a Teacher is part of Chalice Press' "Your Calling As . . ." series. This volume that addresses the nature and practice of calling as an elder, a deacon, a leader, and a Christian. In this compact and highly accessible work, Karen Tye, professor emerita at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis, aptly provides a synopsis of the teaching ministry of the church. It is an ideal book for all teachers in the church—whether new or veteran—to read annually to be reminded of the high calling of teachers as "Godbearers." For that matter, most pastors and those who have likely had one meagre introductory Christian Education course while at seminary will find this book refreshing and potentially generative in connecting their preaching ministry more closely with various teaching ministries in the church.

The book is divided in two parts: "Called to Be a Teacher" and "Teaching Practices." In Part One, consisting of two chapters, Tye points out in a lucid manner that calling consists of simply "saying yes to God's invitation to join the life of the church" in response to God's invitation for His people to "join in God's life and work in the world." Yet, as Tye points out, one of the ironies of Protestant churches is that despite much emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, most laypeople have readily relinquished God's call as a teacher, deferring largely to those who are ordained. As she invites many of God's people to consider their call as a teacher, Tye is quick to disarm the reader by debunking three age-old myths about teachers and teaching, namely: "Only those who are experts can teach"; "Teachers only work in classrooms"; and "Teachers need lots of students." Instead, Tye contends that good teachers are those who are more passionate about what they are learning than about what they are teaching, thus learning becomes contagious to their students. Good teachers approach teaching as a "matter of an opportunity and intention to be in relationship with others and to offer love, insight, and good news." Moreover, good teachers assess themselves in terms of their commitment to faithfulness and care for their students and God's transforming work. Offering her sage-like wisdom, Tye reminds the reader that teachers, as askers of questions, must disabuse themselves primarily as speakers, especially in a culture where listening has become a euphemism for "waiting to speak." She also reminds teachers to see themselves as story linkers who not only bridge what Karl Barth calls "the strange new world within the Bible" and the modern day and age, but invite their students to see and find themselves in the story.

Part Two of the book then focuses on four aspects of teaching practices which are depicted in the titles of the four chapters: "Knowing Our Students," "Knowing Our Subject Matter," "Creating a Learning Environment," and "Planning and Preparing Lessons." The chapter "Knowing Our Students" by itself is worth the purchase of this book. Tye is at her best as she masterfully describes *the complex nature of being human* (the biological, the psychological, and the cultural aspects of being human and their confluence), *the process of human development* (mainly the human-environment interactions via Jean Piaget's cognitive development theory), and *how people learn* (rudiments of brain functioning as related to human learning, and learning styles via Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory). Perhaps the least developed aspect of the book is the section called "Knowing the Bible" under the chapter heading of "Knowing Our Subject Matter." The thinness of this section is mostly likely due to the fact that she and John Bracke wrote an entire book devoted to the subject in their *Teaching the Bible in the Church.* Quoting Parker Palmer's axiom, Tye maintains that "to teach is to create a space in which the community of truth is practiced," which is the crux of a short chapter on "Creating a Learning Environment." In the last chapter of the book, "Planning and Preparing Lessons", Tye outlines how a lesson plan should be conceptualized, asserting that "discovery, like surprise, favors the well-prepared mind." She calls for precision in planning and flexibility in execution.

The order of the first two chapters in Part Two is worth noting: students before subject matter, a choice which is consistent with her dictum about teaching, "We teach people, not lessons." Here, her overstatement is her concern about the inordinate focus on "propositional knowledge" (i.e., knowing *about)* which many preachers and teachers employ, while neglecting "active knowledge" (that is, the know-how and hands-on experience) and "appropriate knowledge" ("how our students might hear a particular story" according to their age, gender, and other sociocultural situatedness). In sum, if the goal of our teaching and preaching is the transformation toward Jesus Christ, all kinds or ways of knowing must be considered and implemented in teaching.

With a carefully reflected summary and a list of generative questions at the end of each chapter, Tye invites readers to engage with her in exploring the depth, responsibility, and privilege of God's calling for the teachers in the church. For Christ and His Kingdom, we are called to teach and to enable others to teach, creating a safe and hospitable teaching-learning community where the truth is practiced. As we respond to that high calling in obedience, we can all acknowledge "I touch the future—I teach."

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Preaching to a Post-Everything World: Crafting Biblical Sermons That Connect with Our Culture. By Zack Eswine. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008, 978-0-8010-9194-0, 266 pp., $17.99, paper.

Concluding an introduction in which he provides the reader with a primer on post-modern culture, Zack Eswine writes, "Preaching is something of a baton that we are given by God to steward for the next generation." He then asks, "What will be the condition of the preaching that we pass on to them?" (19-20). The rest of his book is his attempt to influence the answer to that question. Divided into three sections, *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* addresses hermeneutical questions for sermon preparation, biblical models for preaching, and specific issues for preaching to a post-modern culture.

In the first section Eswine builds on Bryan Chapell's homiletic, specifically expanding Chapell's *Fallen Condition Focus* (FCF) to include what Eswine terms the *Context of Reality* (COR). Other hermenuetical considerations follow, acronyms and new terminology abound, and the reader finds himself frequently turning back to reference previous concepts. Without prior training in Chapell's method, Eswine's elaborations might be difficult to follow. A careful reading will, however, yield great fruit in the pastor's study. Eswine concludes the first section by exhorting preachers to remember our own brokenness and redemption, suggesting a pattern for preaching that is gracious and winsome, and in which gratitude to Jesus Christ infuses every sermon.

The section that follows is the strength of the book. In exploring biblical models for preaching, Eswine reviews the diversity of communication forms that are found in the Scripture, subsequently exploring the preacher as prophet, priest, and sage. His discussion of these categories reveals that Eswine has thought *deeply* about how to engage the minds, hearts, and daily lives of post-moderns; his unwavering conviction that the Scripture speaks to this and every generation is unmistakable throughout. Especially when exploring the preacher as sage, Eswine betrays a keen insight into the needs of unchurched post-moderns. Arguing that right theology is best learned in community, Eswine writes that "sound doctrine is not devoid of personal experience or personal mistakes" (148). Rather, sage-preaching, by using appropriate self-disclosure, encourages the unchurched to see the preacher not as a self-proclaimed spiritual authority, but as a fellow sojourner. And thus, "Transparency, in community on the basis of the fear of the Lord has the potential to teach [sinners] what they need to change" (148). Such a view of preaching holds great promise for speaking truth into a culture that is increasingly anti-authoritarian, especially in matters of a spiritual nature.

The third section, which addresses particular issues for preaching in a post-modern culture, might aptly be titled, *How Not to Preach Good Truths in a Bad Way*. Eswine addresses the war passages of Scripture, hell, and spiritual powers and principalities, among other topics, urging the preacher to consider carefully *how* he proclaims these truths. While orthodoxy does not change, the ways in which we explain our theology *should* change as generations pass and cultural norms evolve. Eswine understands that the gospel of Jesus Christ offends, but is rightly concerned that we who preach the gospel offer no offense in our manner of preaching.

Preaching to a Post-Everything World is not an introductory homiletics text; it is food for thought for an established preacher. Throughout its pages, Eswine speaks as a man passionately affected by the gospel of God's grace in Jesus Christ. Scripture pours from every page. The introduction alone, with its clear delineation of the challenges the church faces in addressing post-moderns, is worth the price of the book, and Eswine's musings about the preacher as prophet, priest, and sage *shine*. His desire to see the church blessed and Jesus Christ glorified cannot be missed. If preaching is indeed something of a baton that we pass on to the next generation, then those who read *Preaching to a Post-Everything World* will undoubtedly pass on a more biblical, winsome, and culturally engaging baton for having read it.

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Hearing a Film, Seeing a Sermon: Preaching and Popular Movies. By Timothy B. Cargal. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007, 978-0-664-22951-1, 174 pp., $19.95, paper.

In *Hearing a Film, Seeing a Sermon*, Timothy Cargal seeks to bring together Scripture, film, and culture, providing "an introduction to the hermeneutics for interpreting the theology of film and [showing] how these interpretations can be used homiletically" (7). Cargal approaches the task by first making a case for the importance of contemporary popular cinema in reading one's culture, and casting the medium as a vital dialogue partner with homiletics in a cultural setting that is increasingly narrative and media literate. He goes beyond casting cinema as useful material for mining illustrations, providing a quite literate and helpful discussion of film studies and the language of cinema. After suggesting methodologies for bringing film into dialogue with Scripture in the sermon, Cargal provides a number of practical examples. These chapters begin with a theological reading of a film followed by a sermon constructed from the film-text dialogue. Films discussed include: Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; *Bruce Almighty*; *Superman Returns*; *The Return of the King*; and *Pleasantville*, to name a few. Each sermon arises from Cargal's pastoral context, and is one that he has preached before his own congregation.

Cargal's project deserves much praise. While most texts produced recently which seek to incorporate film into homiletics either limit themselves to film as illustrative material, or engage cinema without reference to film studies or literacy in its language, Cargal avoids both of these pitfalls. From the outset it is clear that Cargal's is not a passing interest in movies, but that he has studied the discipline of filmmaking. He is conversant in the language and with major figures in the field. This allows his work to move beyond discussing sermon illustrations obtained in the theatre, and brings a welcome depth to his discussion. Cargal seeks to "enter the film on its own terms" (18) as a work of art, and bring it into dialogue with Scripture as a conversation partner. This contribution to film and homiletical studies is hard to overstate.

Further, while some attempts to bring these two media together have faltered over discussions of principles for the use of film illustrations, Cargal engages and expands these conversations in a very thoughtful and helpful manner. He discussion of film as illustration in conversation with Buttrick's *Homiletic* is quite interesting. It seems clear that his work comes not only from an academic study but also from practical experience in and with his own congregation.

Also particularly helpful is the matrix Cargal provides for bringing film and Scripture into dialogue in sermon preparation. He suggests four ways for a preacher to dialogue with a film in preaching, and each is grounded in homiletical theory. He first engages Buttrick on the matter of using a film as illustration. Secondly, cinematic narrative and Eugene Lowry's homiletical plot are brought together. Thirdly, relying on Paul Scott Wilson's *Four Pages of the Sermon*, Cargal discusses the parallels between trouble and grace in both biblical text and film. Finally, Cargal's own technique seeks to show how some of cinema's own conventions, such as inter-cutting, can elucidate the relationships between film, Scripture, and application (50). This matrix is quite useful for the preacher who wanting to explore the use of film in his or her preaching.

There are a few critical issues that I would raise with Cargal's work, however. In the sermons provided I would appreciate a bit more nuance in some theological conclusions (in the sermon on *The Return of the King*, for example). In this vein, at times it seems as if the sermons can become an oral movie review with moral and/or Scriptural implications. This may be symptomatic of a larger question that needs to be asked: What is the relationship between how a film and how the biblical text is used in the sermon? or, What are these sermons to be "on," a text, a film, or both? Cargal relates film and Scripture as "dialogue partners," but this may lead to some confusing results. While Cargal says that preaching should move beyond using a film as illustrative material (9), practically, at times, it is difficult to see how the film is being used as something other than an illustration of the particular text or principle. Alternatively, at times the text seems to be illustrative of the message that the film is conveying—in which case the film is effectively treated as the preaching text. What are the theological implications of this? Greater clarity with regard to Cargal's method and the relative roles of Scripture and film in the dialogue (Which partner provides a controlling vision of reality? What are sermons to be "on"?) would be appreciated.

Finally, I think that one way forward for homiletic and cinema studies is to look into Cargal's advice: "Preaching may benefit not only from entering into dialogue with films . . . but also by adapting some cinematic techniques to its own oral medium" (38). Cargal has done much in adding to this conversation in homiletical studies, providing a much-needed depth. I can see potential for this area to go further.

I would recommend this book to any preacher interested in preaching and cinema studies, and also for those interested in exploring the relationship between preaching and popular culture. His endnotes are littered, not just with those in

theology and pop culture/cinema studies, but also with essential works in the discipline of film studies. This in itself is a large value.

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Strategic Preaching. By William E. Hull. St. Louis: Chalice, 2006, 0-827234-67-8, 277pp., $32.99, paper.

More than ever before, pastors are being called upon to provide leadership for their congregations. It's not enough simply to teach the Scripture and to shepherd people through the experiences of life and faith. Pastors are expected to inspire and mobilize people to pursue great things for God, both individually and collectively. But as William Hull points out in his Preface, only a small percentage of pastors feel themselves effective in the areas of strategic thinking and organizational advancement. *Strategic Preaching* offers a comprehensive, practical, and focused methodology for infusing pulpit ministry with leadership effectiveness.

The introductory chapters provide a convincing biblical and operational apologetic for an integrated approach to preaching and leadership in the local church. Hull observes that "the problem with many sermons is not that they lack biblical content . . . [but] that they do not seem to be going anywhere." He argues rightly and effectively that every sermon has the potential to advance the congregation's journey toward becoming the people and the church God has uniquely called them to be.

Part I focuses on Preaching. The two chapters on the Hermeneutics of strategic preaching are a bit dense stylistically, e.g. "the criteria of contextuality, intentionality, and potentiality," but helpfully challenge the expositor to look for "textual movement" and to "pay as much attention to modern life as you do to biblical life." Chapters five and six focus on the Homiletics of Strategic Preaching, including both preparation and presentation. Hull elevates the planning of a preaching calendar, showing us how to craft a year-long journey that advances the church's story while still attending to the liturgical, cultural, and congregational realities of the year. He makes a case for the "incremental" nature of preaching; that is, week upon week, year upon year, and reminds us that "clusters" of strategic messages are more likely to effect change than a solitary sermonic masterpiece. Hull also offers practical suggestions for working with worship leaders and involving the congregation in planning and implementing the pulpit ministry.

In Part II the focus shifts to the leadership dimension, appropriately challenging pastors to see themselves as strategic leaders and to be more intentional in fulfilling that responsibility. While some of the content in this section will be familiar to fans of leadership literature, Hull continually presses the application of vision, purpose, and strategy to the weekly activity of the pastor/preacher.

There's a workmanlike style to these chapters, but the diligent reader is rewarded with practical methodologies for incorporating creativity, collaboration, and prayer into pulpit leadership. Hull's approach holds great promise for effectively coordinating the preaching ministry with the other dimensions of the church program; a daunting task that many pastors never even attempt. There are flashes of inspiration, as well, empowering preachers to become "harbingers of hope" who enable listeners to feel "the tug of God's tomorrow."

Strategic Preaching came across my desk after I had already assigned the reading for a doctoral course I was co-teaching on Preaching through Leadership and Communication. The book was a helpful resource for my classroom presentations, and I would make it a primary text for such a class next time around. Throughout the book, the author provides illustrative sermons, case studies, and appendices that could serve as fodder for classroom discussion and as templates for individual application.

A pastoral colleague recently observed that corporate CEO's would salivate at the possibility of communicating vision, values, and strategy to their entire constituency 52 times a year! *Strategic Preaching* encourages and equips pastors to maximize this opportunity by aligning their preaching ministry and their leadership responsibility. While much has been written on the subjects of preaching and leadership respectively, Hull's volume is one of very few that meets pastors at the weekly intersection of these two disciplines.

F. Bryan Wilkerson

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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.

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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.

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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.

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

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

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

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