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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.

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

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

Preaching and Theology

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by Scott M. Gibson

Preachers cannot avoid theology. We preach about God. We teach about God. We study God. Preaching is about theology. And, of course, there are and have been theologies—various perspectives and interpretations of God's Word expressed by men and women throughout the ages. There is a theology of preaching—or, I should say, theologies of preaching.

The October 2008 annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society focused on the theology of preaching. David Wells, Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, gave two stimulating plenary addresses, which are included in this edition of the Journal. Wells explored the topic: The biblical Word in the contemporary world. His call to faithful biblical preaching in these current challenging days is worth thoughtful consideration for teachers of preaching and to preachers.

The 2008 Keith Willhite Award was given to Ken Langley of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Langley's paper, "When Christ Replaces God at the Center of Preaching," is stimulating and thought-provoking. He argues that making God central in preaching achieves the worthy aims of Christocentric preaching without the risks as discussed in his essay.

The following article, "Preaching as Translation via Theology" by Abraham Kuruvilla of Dallas Theological Seminary, explores pericopal theology, which he argues, is the key hermeneutical entity that governs application. Application is key to preaching and Kuruvilla provides a striking approach to understand this task conceptually and practically.

The final article is by Benjamin Phillips of the Houston campus of

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In this article Phillips explores the place of the doctrine of creation in formulation of a theology of preaching. This appealing study will stretch readers as they consider the implications of Dr. Phillips' study.

The sermon is by Chuck Sackett, professor at large at Lincoln Christian College and Seminary, Lincoln, Illinois. Sackett is also preaching minister at Madison Park Christian Church in Quincy, Illinois. At the conclusion of his term as president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Dr. Sackett delivered the sermon at the October 2008 meeting. Following the sermon is the book review section where readers may sample various books reviewed by members of the society.

The theology of preaching is an area that begs further exploration and study by evangelical homileticians. The articles in this edition are a contribution to the on-going scholarship on this important topic. I suspect the October 2008 annual meeting is only the beginning of this society's conversation on the matter of theology and preaching. I look forward to additional contributions by the members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society in the years to come.

The Theology of Preaching: The Biblical Word in the Contemporary World Part I: Biblical Word

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by David F. Wells

(editor's note: Dr. David F. Wells is Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts. This was the first address Dr. Wells presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama.)

Introduction

From church to auditorium and congregation to audience. From pulpit to plexiglass stand and plexiglas stand to barstool. And from preacher to conversationalist.

That is the visual and conceptual journey that many evangelical churches have taken. Why? Is it that they have suddenly discovered that Paul did quite well without the advantage of a pulpit or is it that some of our preachers are experiencing an urgent compulsion to blend into the cultural environment with the hope of having more success with the younger generations?

The prevailing cultural mood now, especially among Gen. Xers and Millenials, is one that is at odds with institutionalized religion, looks askance at all forms of authority, and is most comfortable in a television-talk-show-culture, where there is a premium placed on its performers being interesting, personable, funny, and accessible while offering in this interchange only small bites of something served up, of course, with lots of distraction and humor. For churches walking this road, sermons have often become little more than "audience-centered" commercials for the spiritual life.[1]

It would be hard to find too many people today, besides those adamant about liturgical form, who would insist that preaching has to be done from a pulpit, that the Word of God can be heard nowhere else except from this elevated and focal point in a church. Clearly, in the New Testament churches, much preaching was done without the benefit of either church architecture or its pulpits and this is often the case outside the West today as well.

In fact, I preached my very first sermons, not in churches, but out on the street corners of District Six, a festering and disintegrating ghetto in Cape Town, South Africa, because that is where the people congregated. It was this street culture into which, as budding evangelists, we ventured. It never occurred to us that we should bring a portable pulpit or even a box on which to stand. And subsequently, I have preached and taught in many parts of Africa where churches sometimes meet under trees or against the side of a building, perhaps a mud wall, in places not remotely "churchy" by Western standards. In these circumstances, pulpits would be viewed, to say the least, as quite a curiosity.

So, let it be said at the outset, and let it be said unequivocally, that the preaching of the Word of God is not restricted to delivery from a pulpit.

At the same time, however, this yearning in the evangelical world for preachers to abandon pulpits in order to perch on barstools is speaking volumes about the ways in which evangelical faith is being reconfigured internally. The barstool, I suggest, is really not the innocent innovation which it seems to be but, rather, a symbol of a new internal disposition toward connecting with the audience on their terms even as the pulpit once symbolized the old theological posture before God. The importance of this change has less to do with the pulpit which has been abandoned and more to do with the culturally-driven compulsion to abandon it. It is a profound change which affects how preachers are thinking about their preaching and how congregations are now thinking about what is preached but it is, in fact, the expression of a perennial issue with which the Church

is always wrestling.

My task here is to explore the relation between theology and preaching and that, I am suggesting, is not unrelated to what has been happening on the front end of the church where preacher and audience interface. My theme here is very broad and so may I set about delimiting it in several ways? First, I will briefly touch on the presuppositions of preaching in order to become more focused; second, I will briefly sketch out what that focus needs to be; third, I want to consider a case study from Paul. This consideration of Paul will ground this first lecture and it will form the biblical premise of the second.

The connections between these two lectures is that in the first I will be thinking about the Word of God and in the second about the way it engages contemporary culture. I will, in other words, be straddling two themes that all too often, in practice, are unrelated. Those most theologically aware and most emphatic about the importance of biblical exposition are those who are often most inclined to disregard the cultural setting into which that Word is preached and of which the congregation is a part. They do so on the assumption that the Word of God has the power to apply itself and to unmask the workings of culture simply because it is what it is.

Indeed, no one, on the one hyand, should underestimate what God might do through his Word in the life of the Church but, at the same time, this conviction, which is true in its own right, really should not be used as a way for the preacher to bypass the important business of engaging the worldview in which the congregation lives and engaging it from the viewpoint of God's truth. After all, God gave to the Church both his Word and preachers and teachers of it. The reason is quite simple. If the Word did its work entirely on its own, preachers and teachers would not be necessary. The fact that God has established their necessity in the Church means that they have a vital role in both explicating the truth God has given us and applying it in the life of the Church.

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"I want people to love God and orient their lives around Him," says Zeke Pipher. One of Zeke's first steps after accepting a call to become a senior pastor was to enter a Doctor of Ministry program at Gordon-Conwell. The three annual two-week residencies would allow him to both accept the call to full-time ministry and hone his practical ministry skills.

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On the other hand, those who are most aware of the cultural context are often those who are inclined to slim down what is said from the Word. They do so because they want to connect and they are aware, sometimes very sensitively so, of the gulf that now lies between the biblical Word and the contemporary world. It is the latter, however, which is allowed to establish the context to which the former is then adjusted.

But the result in both cases, though in different ways, is that the Church is left impoverished. In the one case, biblical truth is understood in a highly privatized way, disconnected from the fabric of modernized life in which we all live. In the other, this contemporary fabric which needs to be set in a biblical framework tends to be left untouched or, in the worst type of situation, actually exploited in the interests of Christian success with great harm being done to biblical truth. In these lectures, then, I will be moving from biblical Word to contemporary world and will try to suggest some of the connections which are so often missing today.

The Biblical Word

Presuppositions

It would be difficult to contradict what John Stott has said about the theological foundations for preaching. These foundations, he has argued, are made up of a set of interconnected convictions. These convictions begin with God's character as pure, his providence as active, and his nature as self-revealing. His self-revelation within the world he created and over which he rules, in its saving dimension, is found in Scripture through which he has spoken and by which still speaks. This revelation, illumined by the Holy Spirit, is what creates the Church. It is by this truth that the Church is instructed and nourished, and it is only in this divine revelation that we hear his voice. That being so, the fundamental calling of the pastor is to be a preacher and teacher of this Word and so it is that this Word must be allowed to set the parameters and provide the substance of

what is preached.[2]

If this Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* holds, as I believe it does, then the truth of God's Word, as given to us by God himself through the inspired Scriptures, has to be declared in such a way that its truth takes root in the lives of the congregation. "Expository preaching," writes J.I. Packer, " is the preaching of the man who knows Holy Scripture to be the living Word of the living God, and who desires only that it should be free to speak its own message to sinful men and women; who therefore preaches from a text, and in preaching labors, as the Puritans would say, to 'open' it, or, in Simeon's phrase, to 'bring out of the text what is there'." However, he goes on to say immediately that the sole aim of such preaching is to show its hearers "what the text is saying to them about God and about themselves, and to lead them into what Barth called 'the strange new world in the Bible' in order that they might be met by him who is the Lord of that world."[3] More is required in this than a simple running commentary, verse-by-verse, as Stott has noted. The language of exposition speaks to the biblical content of the sermon, the biblical parameters within which it is constructed, not to the style in which it is delivered. Some, though, misunderstand exposition to be about the style. That is, a sermon is not expositional, they think, unless it is a verse-by-verse, running commentary on a passage. However, the Reformers also believed in the analogia fidei by which they meant that preachers had the responsibility of connecting what is said in a particular passage with truths taught in other parts of Scripture. Undoubtedly, there is room for some variation in the ways in which this is carried out in a sermon, but the overall intent should not be in dispute.[4] Every sermon, using a particular text as its starting point, must aim to bring the listener into the strange world of the Bible, into the fabric of its truth, and if this does not happen, the sermon has misfired.

The Center

The way in which Packer concluded his definition indicated that he was thinking theologically about preaching. Preaching which

is true to its own theological presuppositions is preaching which always rests upon God, is always dependent upon him, and always returns to him as its living center. It is in this way that I, too, am thinking of theology here.[5] This interest can be put quite simply as John Piper does, that "God is the goal of preaching, God is the ground of preaching, and all the mean in between are given by the Spirit of God." [6]

This connection between preaching and theology is, of course, thinking of theology in its strictest sense as being focused in the doctrine of God. The language of theology is used, of course, rather differently in the academic guild today. Here, though, I am thinking about it in much more classical ways, what we encounter first in the early fathers, for example, and which we hear reasserted at the time of the Reformation in Calvin.[7] And in the nineteenth century, it is what we hear in the Scottish theologian, James Denney. Theology, he said, is first and foremost about God but then he goes on to add an important addendum to this central point. In the nature of the case, he says, since everything was made by God and is sustained by him, a doctrine of God "involves a general view of the world through God. It must contain the ideas and the principles which enable us to look at our world as a whole, and to take them into our religion, instead of leaving them outside."[8] Theology, in other words, must also be able to incorporate our whole disordered existence into its understanding and must enable us to understand how to live in ways that reflect what we know of God.[9] I am therefore thinking of theology as a God-centered framework for understanding all of human existence in its relation to God as creator and redeemer, one entered into by the mediatorial work of Christ and given through God's own self-disclosure in the inspired Scriptures.

Expository preaching understood within this framework therefore has as its goal to bring its listeners into the presence of the God by whom the revelation was first given. There is a *God-centeredness* which necessarily grounds and animates all authentic preaching. Without God there is neither creation nor Church, neither providence nor revelation, neither preaching nor belief in what is

preached. Indeed, as I will argue in due course, it is possible, even among those who are most intent on being biblical preachers, to have the right homiletical technique and yet miss the larger Story, life's God-centeredness. When this happens, sermons are preached, maybe even passionately, but all too often, the conscience in their hearers is left untouched, the mind is left unfed, the imagination is left unpurged, and the will is left undisturbed. Sermons are not a performance in their own right but their intention should be to bring their hearers into the moral presence of God.[10]

While the goal of this kind of preaching is to bring its hearers into the presence of God it is also to put its hearers back in their own world from which God is not absent but is the active, sovereign ruler. Preaching is about both God and it is about God's redemptive presence in the world and it is not about the one without the other. I will return to this second aspect, the missional nature of both theology and preaching, in the second lecture.

Yet even before we begin to think more explicitly about how this divinely given truth might be anchored in our own time, we find that the arguments are already taking place before we think about them consciously in our won inernal existence. In ourselves, as in the world, there are always two frameworks of understanding that are in play, indeed in fierce competition. This competition is especially acute in the moment of preaching. It is acute for the preacher who preaches and for the audience who hears. One framework is theocentric and the other is anthropocentric. One is anchored in eternity and the other is rooted only in time. One is fading and the other enduring. One is of and about God and the other is from fallen human nature and about the "world" in Paul's language[11] All biblical preaching, all of the time, will find itself, knowingly or otherwise, working along the seam between these two frameworks. Preaching at its best will be self-consciously anchored in the one and will deliberately, conscientiously, reach into the other because it is only as we understand our own wretchedness, futility, emptiness and perversity that we are ready to understand God's own goodness, grace and glory. It is precisely this seam along

which we will see Paul working in Corinth.

Paul

As novel as the appearance of barstools in the Church may be, I want to suggest that at the heart of the apostle Paul's own ministry as a preacher was this same struggle of frameworks. It is the struggle between what is theocentric and what is anthropocentric. Nothing has changed except the different ways in which this contest is waged.

In order to get at this I will need to walk along the paths laid out by Paul's correspondence to the Corinthians, paths now worn bare by an immense literary traffic. It would be exceedingly presumptuous to think that I could hope to shed any new light on what Paul says but sometimes, after a period of distraction and forgetfulness, the old can seem strikingly different once again! And we are now well into a period of distraction and forgetfulness in the contemporary American Church so, perhaps, it can come home to us once again with some freshness!

It is immediately clear, once we enter I Corinthians that Paul's ministry has been, to say the least, under scrutiny. It all began with a partisan spirit –"each of you says" (I Cor. 1:12)—and then Paul names the figure heads whom they have variously lined up behind and of whom he is one. However, by the time we come to the second epistle, the dispute has apparently blossomed into what seems to have become a full-scale war, all of which is made worse by the intrusion of outsiders. What had begun as improprieties in attitude and behavior has now grown into objectionable theology. Apparently capitalizing on the divisions at Corinth, and the growing dismay with Paul,12 these outsiders came in as "peddlers" of the Word (II Cor. 2:17) and were being underhanded and deceitful (II Cor. 4:2). They ended up preaching a different Christ and a different gospel (II Cor. 11:4). All of this produced a head on collision between Paul and this church in Corinth.

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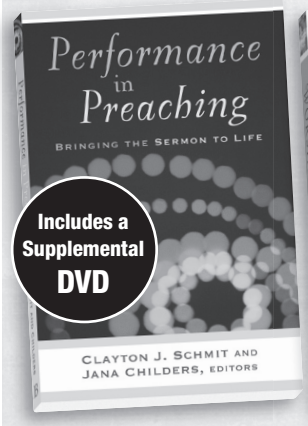

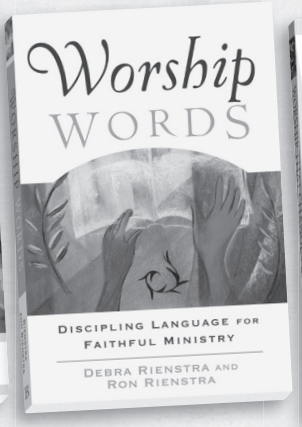

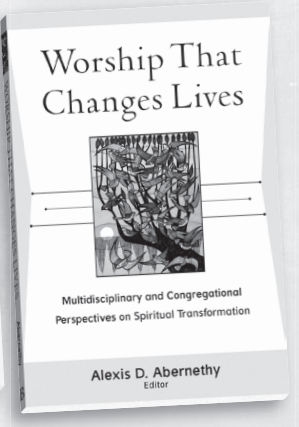

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This dispute has been examined from a variety of angles, many of which are useful, but my focus must remain on Paul's starting point in his own defense. It is found in I Cor. 1:17-2:16 which Gordon Fee pronounces to be "the key theological passage to the whole Corinthians correspondence" and perhaps, he adds, "the whole of the Pauline corpus."[13] Certainly it is central to understanding the issues in dispute in Corinth and, I believe, what is in dispute today.

In this passage, Paul makes two central statements about preaching each of which has echoes in the life of the preacher and shapes what the preacher should see the preaching task to be.

The Stupidity of Preaching

In I Corinthians 1:21, Paul says that the world—fallen human nature in its collective, anthropocentric captivity—does not know God but, nevertheless, "it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe." The "folly of the proclamation" is Paul's exact language and it has raised the intriguing question as to whether it is the *act* of preaching which is foolish or its *content* which, in this context, concerns the saving work of Christ on the Cross .[14] The English translation just cited clarifies the choice for the reader, following a wide scholarly consensus, that what is foolish is what is preached, thereby eliminating one of the two options.

It would be difficult to contradict the fact that in the eyes of unbelievers, the message of how God effected redemption in Christ is, indeed, ridiculous. And more is at stake here than mere incomprehension about the ways of God. The message of the Cross, Neil Richardson says, not only "stands in flat contradiction to the wisdom of this world." [15] but it also, in and with that fact, declares God's *judgment* on all merely human attempts at knowing him on terms prescribed by the unredeemed—or, should we be more polite and say the "unchurched"?-seeker. The wisdom of the Cross and the wisdom of the world are, in fact, two competing, mutually exclusive frameworks for understanding reality. At the center of the one are the ways of God and at the center of the other are

the ways of fallen human understanding and it is the habit of the latter to taunt and ridicule the former and it is the declaration of the latter that this supposed human wisdom is doomed and under judgment.[16] What appears foolish to those caught in the coils of their own egocentricity and antipathy to God, then, is the *content* of what is preached. Of that, there is no doubt. But can we also say, because this is so, that there is nothing seemingly stupid about the actual act of preaching itself?

The answer, I believe, is that while the message of the Cross does indeed seem stupid as judged by the standards of naturalistic reasoning so, too, does the thought that it is by the preaching of this message that God does his redemptive work. And it is this fact which really explains what Paul has to say about preachers.

Let us begin with Paul's own descriptions of himself as a preacher in Corinth. These are eye-catching. He came to them, he says, "not with lofty speech or wisdom" (I Cor. 2:1). The "wisdom" to which he refers here probably had to do with the *content* of what had been preached. He was saying that he had avoided any confusion with what was culturally trendy in Corinth and which rested on some sort of confidence about human reasoning. The reference to "lofty speech" probably had to do with *manner* in which this Word of divine wisdom was made known, that Paul also refused to resort to what was culturally trendy in the way this message was made known.[17] His speech, he adds, was "not in plausible words of wisdom" (I Cor. 2:4). That is, he deliberately avoided the very style and presentation that his Corinthian audiences found so convincing and, indeed, for which they were looking in authentic preachers. That seems to be the context in which to understand the discussion about this competing "wisdom" rather than the preoccupation of exegetes with the nascent Gnosticism which probably was in the air in Corinth, following Bultmann, or with the philosophy derived from Philo and supposedly mediated through the "eloquent" Apollos (Acts 18:24). The result, then, of Paul's preaching style was that the Corinthians did not hear what they were looking for, in a way that they appreciated, so they dismissed Paul as being nothing

but a bumbling amateur—"unskilled in speaking" (II Cor. 11:5), as he says later. Paul concedes that in comparison to the "super-apostles" who were stealing the Corinthians' hearts, apparently by both their claims and, it would seem, the way they expressed those claims, he was a nobody. These competitors knew how to get to the Corinthians, how to impress them, and how to worm their way into the affections of their listeners. Paul refused to do what they were doing and he paid the price for his refusal.

However, we need to understand Paul's statements about lofty language and compelling speeches in the context of the Greco-Roman world in which he said these things. The world which confronted Paul was one in which the rhetorician was at its cultural pinnacle.

Rhetoric had begun in Greece in the fifth century B.C. as city-states and as democracy began to emerge. It was democracy in particular which created the need for skill in the public communication of ideas. This need was answered by the rhetoricians who initially used the techniques of advocacy learned in the court room and adapted them to the public square. These skills became central to the emerging civil life.[18] As a matter of fact, this art of persuasion, "effectively delivered," came to be viewed as "the most characteristic feature of civilized life," George Kennedy writes.[19] This ability came to be seen as a prerequisite of the well-educated person, the indication of fine sensibilities and, indeed, what held society together.[20]

It is also the case, though, that rhetoric underwent change. The skills learned originally in the court room were skills which developed techniques for sifting out probabilities in actual life-situations and they were least at home in probing more abstract truths. The initial union between philosophy and action in time, therefore, became strained and by the second century B.C. a rift began to emerge between philosophers and rhetoricians. The former were in pursuit of ultimates, the realities which lie behind the world perceived through the senses, what does not change amidst life's transience and flux, while the latter were busy trying to fashion out pragmatic

solutions for life. It was toward these ends that the rhetoricians spoke and sought to move their audiences. This rift exposed what was the central weakness of the rhetoricians. Too often, they "emphasized achieving results at the expense of truthfulness" and so the danger always was that they would be viewed as "deceivers and manipulators," in Litfin's words,[21] a danger which has continued to dog their successors down to our present day.

But by the time we enter the New Testament period, a new kind of rhetoric had emerged, the epideictic. This produced orators of show who strutted their abilities before admiring audiences in theaters and other public places. Not infrequently, these engagements were competitions and these contests often provided the entertainment of the day. Speakers learned from handbooks how to compose a speech, moderate its tempo, match pose and gesture to the thoughts being expressed, and verbally joust with their opponents. "Only a person with a highly disciplined training," writes Robert Wilken, "could deliver such a speech, for extempore speech requires close mastery of technique, gifts of memorization, and a storehouse of stock phrases and metaphors, as well as the skills of an actor."[22] But the fine art of speaking was not itself the entire art. Ancient rhetoric aimed at *results*, at being able to move an audience to embrace the ideas being proposed. It was a purpose-driven art. These were not all superficial performers or mere actors. Some, undoubtedly, were mere dilettantes but many were skilled persuaders. They were pragmatists of a high order. They were trained to get results and that was part of the game with the audience. Audiences knew what rhetoric was about and so each performance became a cat-and-mouse game. It was a widely enjoyed form of entertainment of which the Corinthians were connoisseurs.

Pagan religion was part and parcel of this picture in its thoroughly this-worldly preoccupations. It may be a surprise to modern readers to discover that even in the various cults, let alone the more everyday paganism, there was very little interest in matters of an eternal nature. It was all really quite prosaic. These ancients, like so many moderns today, only sought from religion "blessings in the present

such as health, wealth, rescue from peril, or the promise of a good harvest or of a child," writes Ben Witherington.[23] They therefore sought from the gods and goddesses protection, virility, and well-being. It was the benefits of religion, in a self-focused way, that they wanted and they had little interest in religion itself. For run-of-the-mill pagans, in contrast to those in the mystery religions, these benefits were often connected to the public feasts and ceremonies of that world. That is why pagan critics of Christianity so often lamented the fact that Christians would not take part in these feasts and concluded from this that Christians hated mankind.

It is no wonder that when Paul came to these audiences in Corinth, he came, as he tells us, in "fear and much trembling" (I Cor. 2:3). He says a little later that he knew he appeared to them to be an idiot (I Cor. 4:10). Most obviously, the reason was that he did not employ the accepted ways of expressing one's thoughts: "my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom" (I Cor. 2:4) but, beneath this was the fact that his message was, in the deepest and most proper sense, other-worldly.

But could Paul not have humored his audiences a little by adopting their style of reasoning and public presentation? Was he so rough and full of edges that he refused to bend to any of his audiences? Or was Paul such an unpolished, country bumpkin that he was completely out of his depth among the sophisticates of Corinth? Neither of these thoughts fits what we know of Paul. There seems little doubt that he was completely aware of what prevailed in Corinth and what audiences there would expect of him and, in all likelihood, he could have embraced these forms. As a matter of fact, recent Pauline studies have revisited the evidence of rhetorical forms of thought in his own letters.[24] In Corinth, though, he chose not to speak in ways that were conventional and for which his audiences were looking. In this city, he believed that his posture had to be deliberately, overtly, unmistakably counter-cultural if his message was not to be swallowed up by their pragmatic and naturalistic habits of mind.

What we see in Corinthian rhetoric, we should note, has been developed into a high art in our modernized, Western world. Style often trumps substance and appearance threatens to substitute for reality. These substitutions dominate modern consciousness, given the electronically mediated nature of much of our reality. So complete is the triumph which television, the internet, and movies have achieved that moderns now often find reality itself rather boring in comparison to its imaginary or virtual substitute. They often find substance off-putting and no match for what is stylish, trendy, or purely relational. Style and appearance, in this world mediated through our pervasive images, is now everything and everything is now, as a result, being dumbed down.

As Michael Pasquarello has rightly pointed out, these changes in our culture, changes which have also flowed into the Church have combined to produce a deep chasm between content and form and what he calls theology and technology. The preoccupation with "technological methods" is intended to produce messages of relevance, meaning, and purpose for seekers. It has led to a drive to discover "new methods of preaching that will meet listeners' needs and close the perceived gap between such compartmentalized forms of Christianity and the 'real world.'" [25] This kind of preaching which has abandoned the framework of revealed doctrinal truth, is really a new kind of Gnosticism, he charges, because technique has replaced theology, the gospel has become disincarnate, and God has become domesticated, and all because it is not being perceived that the fundamental problem is not cultural but theological. Christian preaching is to encompass the whole of life in its purview, to bring all of it—not simply the pains of the self in its current moment of perplexity—under Christ's lordship. And that means that preaching must always be theology in practice and not simply about various techniques for managing life.

But it is technique principally which is being served up in our churches, business technique and psychological technique, how to manage the outer world and how to get control over the inner world. Does this yearning for technique not parallel what the

Corinthians yearned for in a much earlier time? We are therefore developing a generation of preachers who are minimizing the strangeness of preaching for contemporary audiences, maximizing their connectedness to the congregation, and adopting the tools of pragmatism. It is the appearance of authoritarianism in a preacher that is so delicate a matter in this highly self-oriented age with its matching animus against all forms of authority. Preachers think that the antidote to this mood is to heighten the relational, re-establish their link with the audience by adopting casual dress, casual demeanor on the barstool, intimate conversation, a Starbuck's cup of coffee at hand and, in so doing, they hope to circumvent any perception that the preacher is about to tell them what they should believe or do. There is a compelling cultural undertow that is pulling preachers away from what is undesirable and toward what is now acceptable. We are increasingly dominated by our *culture* when thinking about preaching in the Church, as were the Corinthians, and this compulsion is almost wholly divorced from *theology*.

Paul, it would seem, did not adapt to the dominant cultural form of the day in Corinth, not because he was ignorant of it, and not because he was unable to reproduce it, but because he knew that by adapting to it what he was saying would have been lost on his audience. The cultural environment in which he found himself in Corinth, with its pragmatic bent, its disinterest in truth, its appeal to what was superficial, its naturalistic preoccupations, was an obstacle to his purposes of speaking both of the work of Christ and speaking "in demonstration of the Spirit and power" (I Cor. 2:4) for the Spirit of God can only bless the truth of God. And so he refused to adapt to these cultural forms of communication as a preacher lest his message be mutilated by the misshapen filters of his audiences and thus his calling as a preacher would be jeopardized. After all, his message was not about the common human preoccupations with health, wealth, safety, psychological well-being, and protection. These benefits can be had, in many cases, from mere human techniques. Paul's message was of an entirely different order. It from "above" not from "below," to use the familiar Johannine language but this language has its exact parallels in Paul in terms of "this age" and

the "age to come." A message from "above," expressing the "age to come," required a different kind of presentation from one that was from "below" and was expressing a purely human perspective. It was the nature of his message, at the center of whom was the God of power and grace, that was the basis of his confidence.

The point is that Paul wanted it to be clear that faith is not faith if it is resting on the foundation of pragmatic reasoning and human effort. He wanted Corinthian faith to rest on the foundations of revealed truth, of what God has uniquely done, and what he has revealed he has done, in Christ. To secure this truth, Paul acted counter-culturally as a preacher. There was, indeed, the appearance of stupidity in what he said as there was in how he said it but, in the midst of all of this, strange as it might seem, there was divine authority and power at work.

A Herald, Not a Rhetorician

All appearances to the contrary, Paul was, in fact, a herald (I Cor. 1:23; 9:27; 15:11; II Cor. 1:19; 4:5; 11:4). The form his message took matched its substance as an other-worldly revelation from God which carried God's full authority. Paul the preacher adapted himself in his style and demeanor to what he had to preach, not to what his audiences wanted to see or the kind of address they wanted to hear. He stood fundamentally before God, and only secondarily before his Corinthian audiences. In so doing, it was not just the content of what he preached which offended his audiences but, clearly, the form in which that content arrived.

This figure of the herald was well known in the ancient world, appearing both in our Old Testament narratives, and later in the classical world when the city-states began to emerge. The herald's role had lost some of its social significance by the time Paul was writing. Nevertheless, his reference to himself as a *herald* would not have been entirely lost on his readers. There is, though, an oddity which we need to notice in the language which is used in the

New Testament. While the noun, *herald*, is used only three times (I Tim. 2:27; II Tim. 1:11; II Pet. 2:5), the verb, to herald (preach, proclaim, publish abroad, make known, or announce) is used sixty-one times. Is this simply the Greek disposition for verbs over nouns? Or is this pointing to something else in addition? I think the latter.

In the classical period, the herald was, first and foremost, under the authority of another. He was a servant sent to do the bidding of another, such as the king, commander, or magistrate by whom he was sent. And he typically carried in his hand a scepter, or some other symbol, which was indicative of his derived authority. It was his responsibility to deliver news and official proclamations entirely accurately as these had been given to him. There was no allowance made for him to modify these announcements in any way. So, besides understanding this role, the most important qualification for the task was simply "a loud and clear voice"![26] And in order to be able to fulfill his responsibility, the herald was granted political immunity.

Clearly there are two parallels between this ancient figure of the herald and the preacher and two important differences. The similarities are that the preacher, like the herald, comes in the name of another and with the full authority of the person in whose name he speaks. And like the herald, the preacher is not at liberty to dilute or modify the message in any way.

However, the preacher, unlike the herald, is granted no immunity, as Paul had freshly experienced in Corinth! And, it also seems to be the case that Paul was not thinking of the preacher as filling an office, as did the herald but, rather, he had in mind what the preacher was doing. It is the *activity* of preaching which Paul had in mind, not an ecclesiastical office which the preacher fills, and that is probably why it is the verb which predominates in his writing rather than the noun. It is the apostle's message, what we now have in Scripture, which is sanctioned by divine authority. In the ages which follow, we can conclude, it is not the preacher who has authority but the authority is in the Word which is preached.

The preacher has no intrinsic authority but stands under God's authority. And this, in fact, is a thread that is woven through some of the other images used of the preacher in the New Testament such as, for example, the steward who serves in God household and the servant who does, not his own will, but the one to whom he belongs.[27]

This issue of authority and how that authority is communicated is a defining issue today and it is why P.T. Forsyth declared that "with its preaching Christianity stands or falls."[28] Preaching should not be confused with mere oratory. The preacher today is in line, not with the orator, but with the prophet and apostle and that is why this language of herald is used. For the preacher comes with a revelation, and not simply with a speech. The preacher comes with God's own self-disclosure; the orator came simply with skills that moved an audience. The orator was concerned with the management of life's crises, with the affairs of this life, but the preacher comes to frame those issues in the light of eternity. "Technique," Stott comments, "can make orators; if we want to be preachers, theology is what we need. If our theology is right, then we have all the basic insights we need into what we ought to be doing, and all the incentives we need to induce us to do it faithfully."[29]

The knowledge of God is like all other kinds of knowledge in that there is an Object to be known. But we, the knowing subjects, stand before God in a way that is quite different from the way we stand before one another and before the world. Before others, we stand on the same plane, knowers of ourselves and of them. Before God, everything is different. We know him, not as our equal, but as our sovereign and mighty Lord who is known only as he makes himself known. And the basis of our fellowship with him, as Luther said, is not our own holiness but our sin. It is not our desire to relate to him but our willingness to confess before him.

There is always and everywhere a gravitational pull to bring all of reality, including God himself, into this center of the fallen self where sin and moral disorder are normal and where he can be

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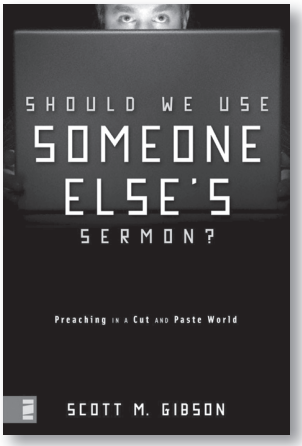

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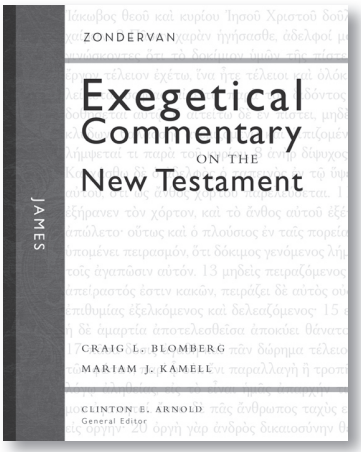

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savingly known, it is imagined, within the parameters of human knowing, what works everywhere else in the world. And there is a gravitational pull exercised by God's grace to lift us into a different sphere where the knowledge of God has to be given, where it is given only through Scripture, and where God's being, character, and purposes are otherwise entirely inaccessible. There is, in other words, a boundary drawn between God and the sinner which forever lies invisible to sinners who always think that they can cross that boundary at will and know God on their own terms. And it is a boundary on the other side of which the triune God remains hidden to sinners until they come in the way he has prescribed and has secured in Christ.

It is, then, the business of the preacher, as Forsyth said, "to make men practically realize a world unseen and spiritual; he has to rouse them not against a common enemy but against their common selves; not against natural obstacles but against spiritual foes; and he has to call out not natural resources but supernatural aids " [30] because natural human resources now all stand under the sign of bankruptcy. All the orator could do was to rally natural resolve and enthusiasm, but the preacher has to call for those very resources and enthusiasms to be redeemed because without that redemption they are doomed. Preaching, then, is always and everywhere theology in practice, redemption in action.

It is theology because it is first and foremost about God. It is about his acts and his power, his act in Christ in particular, his redemption, and it is these things before it can be our message. Our message is not our gift to the world of ourselves, of our church community, of the benefits which can be had for the taking, or of a set of relationships. It is not about Starbucks, fun skits, and personal sharing. It is not the Church we are selling, nor yet ourselves, nor yet any psychological benefits, nor any business management techniques. Our message is not a substitute for what God has done but a declaration of what he has done. We are not to preach this age but *to* preach to this age and *against* this age because we are to speak, as it were, from eternity. We speak as those who know the

One who is eternal and who has crossed his own boundary as only he can do because this boundary can only be crossed from one side and that one side is his side. This he has done and entered into our time, revealing himself by the Spirit in the Word and, in the second person of the godhead, taking on our flesh and bringing his whole self-disclosure to a final climax and decisive moment of completion. As a result of his Word incarnate and written, we can begin to see the world "through God," as Denney put it.

The Bible, then, is "news to the world from foreign parts," as Forsyth put it, but these are foreign parts "which ought not to be so foreign to us as they are." [31] What happens is that the Church is perennially tempted to domesticate those foreign parts, to turn them into places where it feels at ease and untroubled, where it can operate in its own wisdom, with its own techniques and horizons, and where its own habits are normative. So the strangeness of the Bible's message is sometimes lost. Its message then becomes one which is culturally conventional, its sharp edges rounded off, its remoteness reduced to what is so very ordinary and familiar. The result is a Christianity with little cost and little seriousness.

It is one of the great paradoxes of Christian life that the key to a this-worldly engagement is the preservation of an other-worldly mentality. What seems most natural is to think the opposite, that by becoming this-worldly, conventional, ordinary, smooth-edged, in short, by becoming non-theological, the Church will win for itself a hearing in this current age. It is this understanding which is shaping so much evangelical preaching today. Apparently, the Corinthians were thinking along similar lines. But Paul refused to fit in to their cultural conventions and instead placed himself in the way of their scorn and rejection and we should be doing likewise.[32]

The truth is that the kind of preaching which the Corinthians expected and the sort of preaching which has become commonplace in the evangelical world today gives knowledge neither of God nor of ourselves. It produces no awe in his presence and no wisdom in ourselves. It thinks only of this world and cannot think of any

other. It wants all the blessings of faith without being shocked by the core of faith. It wants the comfort of God's promises without the discomfort of God's presence. It wants psychological healing but it refuses to be broken by God's holiness. It wants to be at home in this world and refuses to be a vagrant. It is pragmatic, not theological. It is all about doing, not about being.

Real preaching gives both sight and insight. It is the sight of understanding, of seeing who God is and of understanding our own selves in relation to him. This is wisdom. And it is this wisdom which gives us insight. This wisdom not only enables us to see things but to see through them, to see life for what it really is and that can only happen when we see it from eternity.

Notes

1. An example of this kind of thinking is J. Phillip Hamm, "Television and Commercial Production and the Effect It Has On Preaching: "Everything I Needed to Know About Preaching I learned From Watching TV," (Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary: unpublished D.Min. dissertation, 2006). This dissertation appears to be unaware of how the modernized world, which is now in a postmodern mood, works to change our perceptions and our appetites. Its cultural forms are therefore not always neutral. They cannot be used without discernment and discrimination. In the absence of discernment, this kind of naïve thinking simply stumbles into a union of Christ and culture which was the hallmark of the now defunct liberal theology of an earlier generation. On how surreal television culture can be and how pervasive are its distortions of reality, see for example, Thomas de Zengotita, *Mediated: How the Media Shapes Our World and the way We Live In It*
2. John R.W. Stott, Between *Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1982), 92-134. On the question of the sufficiency of Scripture, see the excellent historical account in Timothy Ward, *Word and Supplement: Speech Acts, Biblical Texts, and the Sufficiency of Scripture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3. J.I. Packer, "Expository Preaching: Charles Simeon and Ourselves," *Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R.Kent Hughes* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2007), 141.

4. Ibid., 125. Martyn Lloyd-Jones likewise rejected the idea that a verse-by-verse, running commentary qualified a sermon to be expository. "True expository preaching," writes Iain Murray in his biography of Lloyd-Jones, "is, therefore *doctrinal* preaching, it is preaching which addresses specific truths from God to man….Such preaching presents a text, then, with that text in sight throughout, there is deduction, argument and appeal, the whole making up a message which bears the authority of Scripture itself." Iain H. Murray, *David Martyn Lloyd-Jones: The Fight of Faith 1939-1981* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1990), 261.
5. My sketch of theology and preaching here in no way exhausts their connections. See, for example, J.I. Packer, "The Preacher as Theologian," *When God's Voice is Heard: Essays on Preaching Presented to Dick Lucas*, ed. Christopher Green and David Jackman (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 79-95; Donald MacLeod, "Preaching and Systematic Theology," *The Preacher and Preaching: Reviving the Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Samuel T. Logan (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1985), 246-72; Andrew Watterson Blackwood, *Doctrinal Preaching for Today: Case Studies of Bible Teachings* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975.
6. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 23. See also his essay, "Preaching as Expository Exultation for the Glory of God," *Preach the Cross* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 103-15. The connections between God and Scripture, ironically, have often been lost in the contemporary Church. John Webster's attempt at reconnecting them along Barthian lines leaves a little to be desired but he is quite correct in his fundamental definition: "revelation is the self-presentation of the triune God, the free work of sovereign mercy in which God wills, establishes and perfects saving fellowship with himself in which humankind comes to know, love and fear him above all things." John Webster, *Holy Scripture: A Dogmatic Sketch* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.
7. In the opening sentences of Calvin's best known work he says that our best wisdom will consist of two parts, "the knowledge of God and of ourselves." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, (Details) I, 1, i-ii) Karl Barth's comments on this opening sentence are to the point: "It is the *miserabilis ruina*, to which the Fall has reduced us, which compels us to lift our eyes upwards. It is the sight of that whole world of wretchedness…which we now discover in man, the feeling of our own ignorance, fatuity, indigence, weakness, even perversity and corruption, which makes us realize that power, goodness, righteousness and truth have their *locus* solely in *Domino*. Before we begin to be dissatisfied with ourselves, we cannot long for Him. The self-satisfied man rests

upon himself and has no need of God…That is why, according to Holy Scripture, man has n knowledge of his lowliness except when he stands terror-struck in presence of the revealed majesty of God." Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God*, trans. G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1956), I, 2, 263). Theology is about the interconnectedness between these two kinds of knowledge: knowledge of God and knowledge of self but it is knowledge of God foundationally and knowledge of self derivatively.

8. James Denney, *Studies in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 1.
9. Despite all of the questions now surrounding the idea of a worldview because of the postmodern ethos which prevails at this time, David Naugle still argues that, from a Christian angle, a worldview is "reasonably straightforward and relatively non-controversial." He goes on to say that "roughly speaking, it refers to a person's interpretation of reality and a basic view of life." This he then defines as: "Worldview in Christian perspective implies the objective existence of the Trinitarian God whose essential character establishes the moral order of the universe and whose word, wisdom, and law define and govern all aspects of created existence." See his *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 260.
10. A century ago, R.W. Dale, the English author who delivered the Lyman Beecher lectures at Yale recounted hearing some preaching while away from home and on vacation. What he recounts continues to this day. The preacher had worked on the biblical text, produced sound exegesis, and a well-crafted sermon with memorable illustrations. However, remarked Dale, it "did not seem to occur to the preacher that there was anyone listening to him. The sermons seemed to have been written simply because he found it pleasant to think and to write about the two texts which suggested them. I could not make out what truth he wanted to make clearer for us; or what neglected duty he wished us to discharge; or what devout affection he intended to quicken; or even what error he intended to expose." R.W. Dale, *Nine Lectures on Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), 22.
11. Running through the Corinthian correspondence, Litfin argues, are a set of contrats which were as difficult for the Corinthians to understand as they were important to Paul that they be maintained. In I Corinthians they are between hey are between God and the "this age" (1:20; 2:6, 2:8; 3:18), or the "world" (1:20; 3:19; 7:31) or "worldy standards (1:26), or the "spirit of the world" (2:12; cf: 7:33) or human "wisdom" (2:5), or "this life" (15:19). See, Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Proclamation: I Corinthians 1-4 and Greco-Roman Rhetoric* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 174-78.

12. "It is our thesis," Duane Litfin writes, "that perceived deficiencies in Paul's preaching, when measured against Greco-Roman eloquence, precipitated many of Paul's difficulties in Corinth. These were the deficiencies which prompted a section of the Corinthian congregation to complain about Paul's preaching and declare their independence from him." Litfin, 187). Litfin has provided a brief summary of his central argument with respect to preaching in his essay, "Swallowing Our Pride: An Essay on the Foolishness of Preaching," *Preach the Word*, 106-126).
13. Gordon D. Fee, "'Another Gospel which You Did Not Embrace': 2 Corinthians 11:4 and the Theology of 1 and 2 Corinthians," *Gospel in Paul: Studies on Corinthians, Galatians and Romans for Richard N. Longenecker* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 122.
14. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 73.
15. Neil Richardson, *Paul's Language about God* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1994), 98.
16. Gunther Bornkamm, *Paul*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 159.
17. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 91.
18. George Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 26.
19. George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric Under the Christian Emperors* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 3.
20. John Poulakis and Takis Poulakis, *Classical Rhetorical Theory* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999), 14.
21. Litfin, *St. Paul's Theology of Preaching*. 32.
22. Robert L. Wilken, *John Chrystostom: Rhetoric and Reality in the Late 4th Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 98.
23. Ben Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans., 1995), 111.
24. A good example is Brian K. Peterson, *Eloquence and the Proclamation of the Gospel in Corinth* (Atlanta: Scholar's, 1997.
25. Michael Pasquarello, *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 46.
26. L.Coenen, "Proclamation," *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (3 vols; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 49.
27. See, for example, John R.W. Stott, *The Preacher's Portrait: Some New Testament Word Pictures* London: Tyndale, 1967.
28. P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1907), 3.
29. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 92.

30. Forsyth, 4-5.
31. Ibid., 11.
32. See the excellent discussion of the ways in which the contemporary church has been compromised in its engagement with contemporary culture especially in terms of the central role the electronic media play in shaping our understanding of reality in Gregory Edwards Reynolds, *The Word is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 278-310.

The Theology of Preaching: The Biblical Word in the Contemporary World Part I: The Contemporary World

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by David F. Wells

(editor's note: Dr. David F. Wells is Distinguished Senior Research Professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts. This was the first address Dr. Wells presented at the 2008 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama.)

Introduction

The Preacher's Preacher

It was P.T. Forsyth who spoke of the Bible as being the preacher's preacher. It is, he also declared, "the preacher's book because it is the preaching book."[1] What he meant was not simply that it was there for the preacher as the quarry is for the stone mason, though that, of course, is entirely true. No sermon is worthy of that name if it is not the preacher's intent to communicate God's self-disclosure in and through the Scripture. Certainly Forsyth had that in mind.

More than that, the preacher must first be preached *to*, must first be addressed by the God of that truth, through the text, before attempting to preach it to others. That, too, should go without saying. The preacher goes back to the Bible to find him to whom the Bible itself constantly goes back. The Bible preaches to the preacher in order that the preacher might preach to others.

While this also seems so self-evident, one has to wonder how many sermons are preached today, Sunday by Sunday, which are little more than words—words patched together, sometimes perilously close to the time of delivery and, worse yet, sometimes borrowed

from others off the internet—words strung together which have bypassed entirely the business of first standing before God in the solemnity of his presence to hear his Word? Sermons are not speeches, nor entertainment, nor are they simply a segment in a liturgy. Nor yet are they just exegesis. Unbelievers can exegete, give speeches, and entertain but unbelievers cannot stand before God and, in this sense, they are not qualified to preach, at least in the Church. Sermons are spiritual moments when God draws near his people through his Word, communicated as it is through all of the fragility and inconsistency of the preacher, but by this means God nevertheless summons the congregation before him, to hear him, to learn from him what it means to be his people. God lives, Luther said, in the preacher's mouth. This, too, is part of the Bible's function as being the preacher's preacher.

There is, though, a third and derivative sense in which Forsyth's expression is also true though I want to think about it in ways that go beyond what he said. The Bible is the story of how God has entered into our world, acted in it, and spoken to it and preaching needs to replicate this incarnate form in its own way.

Both theology and preaching should be missional in their purpose because God, their great subject, is himself on a mission.[2] God revealed himself as he acted in Israel's life, as he spoke through the prophets, and as he acted finally and conclusively in the incarnation, Cross and resurrection. His revelation of himself in this regard is now completed in Scripture, but its implications are the Church's mandate in every succeeding age. And while this begins with its responsibility to herald the gospel, it does not end there. It is the Church's responsibility to nurture in believers the knowledge of God, with all of its psychological, cognitive, and ethical implications, recognizing that they must live in the midst of the world in which all of these implications are contradicted, denied, or perverted.

This means that our knowledge of God's character and ways—which, after all, is what preaching aims to explicate and deepen—

must give us the categories for framing our whole experience and for engaging our world. In Denney's words, our theology must "enable us to look at our world as a whole" instead of dismissing it in a falsely pietistic way. If theology does not enable us to take it into our understanding so that we can live in its midst in a way that is true to our standing as those who know God through Christ's redemptive work, then we will be without ways of understanding its powerful seductions and seeing its damaging effects. It is preaching which has to put feet to this kind of theological understanding in the life of the Church.

It is precisely at this point that a major breakdown is occurring in the American Church. And it is happening in two quite different ways.

On the one hand, out of the best of intentions, some of our preachers are fashioning their message, and themselves, in the image of the generational and cultural niche into which they are wanting to fit their appeal as preachers. Although these efforts are taking many different forms, what they have in common is that these preachers do not understand that our culture is essentially and always hostile to Christian faith, however spiritual its interests may be. In II Cor. 4:4, Paul speaks of the blindness which afflicts unbelievers. Of those who are perishing, Paul says, "the god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."

In the early church, it was typical to think Paul's reference in this text to the "god," who is doing this blinding work as speaking of satan. And, in fact, this is the prevalent view among exegetes today.[3] The god whom this age worships, unknowing as it might be in this act, is satan. However, nowhere else is satan spoken of as a "god." This does provoke the question as to whether there might be an alternative way of seeing this. Exegetically, it is possible to think that the referent here is either God himself (cf: Rom. 9:18) on the grounds that Paul does say that he hardens hearts with the result that people do not believe or, alternatively, that Paul was

thinking of the culture which functions as a substitute for God. In this case, we would be understanding this phrase as an appositional genitive so we would take Paul as referring to "the god who is made up of this age." In other words, "this age" offers a set of alternative loyalties which in combination are a substitute for the true and saving knowledge of God.

The differences in practical outcome, though, are negligible. "This age," what the N.T. equates with this "world," is attractive because we are already blind and refuse to believe (e.g. I Cor. 10:27, 14:23-4, II Cor. 6:14-5). Indeed, our "following the course of this world," as Paul put it (Eph. 2:2), is itself an indication that we are still "dead in the trespasses and sins" (Eph. 2:1) and our unwillingness to believe is, in fact, willful. It is the culture which gives us the immediate justification for not believing. However, behind the culture, and currently pervading it, is the work of the devil. Let us understand that this is why Paul preached. It is this fact that gave him his justification for his work as a preacher. It was to *confront* "this age", not to pattern the Christian faith after it!

What happens when Christian faith is intent on being so relevant that it fashions itself in the conceptual vernacular of its own age is that biblical truth gets diminished, sometimes it is even actively abandoned, but at least it is often hidden. And while the Christianity that results is culturally blended, it also becomes cognitively and spiritually empty.

The target of these preachers is what is perceived to be on the front end of the audience's consciousness and most commonly that is about relationships and the pains of living in this jarring and broken world. Preachers may connect with these pains but, if they have no framework of truth in which to understand them, they will produce in their churches only ciphers who will simply be there waiting to be filled with only the latest cultural disposition. This kind of preaching does not confront "this age."

On the other hand, there are preachers—perhaps especially

expository preachers—whose sermons would appear to be predicated on the assumption that the congregation lives only behind the closed doors of the sanctuary. It is as if it were living on a planet far removed from earth, perhaps in a parallel universe, where its walk with God could be carried on out of all relationship to what we know of life in this culture with its extraordinarily difficult pressures, painful dilemmas, and its temptations which come to us, sometimes openly and blatantly, and sometimes in such splendid disguises that we rarely even recognize them.

If the one kind of sermon wants to make Christian truth public, in the sense that it wants to engage with life as we know it, the other is content for that truth to become private. The one has the world and the other the Word in its sights but what we need, in fact, is to have *both*. Sermons have to be about *both* the Word and the world, not the one without the other and not the one in place of the other. We need both kinds of knowledge and we need them together, the one illuminating the other if we are to be missional as God is in his nature. Christ was God incarnate but his view of the world was never clouded by his humanity, by social convention, or by the expectations of others. To hear him speak, he said, was to hear his Father speak and yet, what was said, was always said into that context in such a way that it connected with the innermost ways in which people thought in that time. That must be our object in preaching, too.[4]

The Church today needs to rediscover this twofold dimension to its existence: on the one hand, knowing what it is to stand before God, listening to his own self-disclosure in his Word, and for God's timeless, holy presence to have registered deeply in its soul so that his truth, the truth of his Word, is again treasured and then declared with *conviction*; on the other hand, that Word must be declared in such a way that it be engages the perplexities, the values, the cognitive horizons, the yearnings, the blindness, the internal habits which are the residue left behind in every person who lives in this modernized, Western culture. It is only as preachers see life from the vantage of eternity that they are ever truly and consistently

contemporary because those who cast themselves in the forms and fashions of the moment are always becoming obsolete. At the same time, this eternal perspective, the view of life which God has given us in his Word, has not run its course if, in fact, it is not engaging, framing, and shaping that life.

The Church's faltering resolve in addressing this twofold dimension is probably what explains two rather ominous developments in its life.

Christianity Leaves the West

First, it is now clear that the Western Church, if we look at the overall picture, is stumbling. Statistically speaking, Christianity is now fleeing the West. Of the Western countries, the United States is doing the best in the sense that Christian believing and church attendance have declined less than they have in the other Western countries. In every other country, Christian faith is in retreat, if not precipitous decline. In Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and even Canada, the Church is just the tattered, almost invisible remnant of what was once an extensive, and in some periods, vigorous Christian presence. To what extent the evangelical sector is an exception to this overall picture is not easy to see but the comparative advantage it seems to have had does seem to be melting away giving us little ground for optimism with respect to the future unless matters change significantly.

The truth is that we in the West have not done well confronting the challenges of modernity. Our preaching has either ignored the culture and so Christian faith has been reduced to what is merely internal and private–reduced, that is, to mere comfort of a therapeutic kind—or, if it has sought to engage the culture, it is the culture which has most often engaged and then transformed that Christian faith. It is this two-sided failure which is the single most important fact that every preacher needs to grasp.

Disaffection Among the Churches

Second, there is growing restiveness, as a result, at the local church level. Again, the extent of this is not easy to gauge exactly. George Barna's advise, that believers in search of a more mature faith should abandon the local church entirely and take to house churches5 should not be dismissed too easily. To some, this suggestion is preposterous but we may not have heard the last word along these lines. Far bigger and more damaging things may be just over the horizon.

The implosion of the marketing enterprise was obviously going to happen and now its time has come. One study has found that many who have been attracted to the marketing megachurches only stay provided that the entertainment is good and the demands which are made are not too great or intrusive which is as sure a sign of the intrusion of the "god of this age" as one is likely to see! This part of the church-going population therefore tends to be quite migratory. Bill Hybels has discovered that many of those who came into Willow Creek never made it out of the obstetrics ward and so millions of dollars, he admits, had been put into programs that have proved useless and have produced considerable dissatisfaction.[6]

From Barna's polling, we also learn that while 45% of Americans claim to be born again, only 9% show even the most minimal signs of Christian seriousness in terms of having a biblical worldview. Furthermore, we have many converts but very little evidence of a lives of convertedness. When born-againers were compared with garden-variety secularists in 2007, there were virtually no discernible differences evident at the level of ethical living and undoubtedly at the heart of this is a drastic decline in biblical knowledge. And whatever preaching these converts were hearing, clearly has done little to develop in them a knowledge of God's character and will for them in this life.

Then there are books like Wayne Jacobsen's *So You Don't Want To Go To Church Anymore*, and David Murrow's *Why Men Hate Going*

to Church. They are part of a literature that seems to be growing and may be indicative of a gathering dissatisfaction with the local church. In her journalistic tour around the ever more diverse evangelical world, Julia Duin observed that "evangelicals, for a variety of reasons, are heading out of church—not all of them and not everywhere, but the trend is undeniable. Sunday mornings at church have become too banal, boring, or painful."[7]

Some of this disaffection no doubt reflects the ill-formed Christian understanding in those who are disaffected and are now beginning to fall off the edge but not all of it can be so easily dismissed. The truth is that church life is, for many people, unreal, disengaged from life as it is experienced today, and devoid of seriousness. While congregations may have to accept some responsibility for this because this is what so many appear to want, preachers are to blame as well and they are principally to blame. When they either do not preach biblical truth or they preach biblical truth in a way that is unrelated to life, they are abdicating from their responsibilities and inviting a further weakening of Christian understanding and resolve. This is why, I would suggest, we now have a runaway best seller like William Young's *The Shack*. In this book, the shack becomes a metaphor for an internal, psychological cavity into which life's jarring experiences had all been stuffed. The book is about how the author slowly comes to terms with these pains, disappointments and contradictions. And, in this sense, it is "real." It is this kind of engagement with life as it really is that so many are yearning to hear. But he is doing so in this book in a way which is unfortunately quirky, not to mention heterodox, because it offers Christian faith as a matter of self-discovery, stripped of doctrinal scaffolding, and available universally through the self. This is, in other words, the face of the old Protestant liberalism showing itself one more time in the life of the Church.

So, what are we then hearing in our churches that enables us to confront life realistically and well?

This question can be explored in many different ways. Having

looked in the first lecture at the starting point of the sermon in Scripture, I now want to think briefly about the conclusion of its trajectory in the contemporary world because, as I have suggested, I believe that today preachers are stumbling on both points of the trajectory.

Although there are numerous grounds for conflict between Christian faith and our contemporary culture, I am here choosing to settle on only three of these, and they are the same three which, a century ago, Forsyth also singled out. Each reflects the way in which the contemporary Church, at least in the West, has succumbed to the "god of this age." These problems are first, triviality; second, uncertainty; and, third, complacency.[8]

Triviality

To suggest that triviality has become a mark of the contemporary evangelical Church may sound unduly harsh. Clearly, there are churches, organizations, and people who are exceptions and for whom Christian truth is a matter of great consequence. In them, eternity has weight in their daily dealings with this world. They are not like water spiders skipping across the surface of a pond. They are not living only with surface appearances, only with changing fashions and fads, and only for pleasurable experience. Their eye is on what does not change, the great and deep things of God, and that is what gives solidity to their own lives.

At the same time, it would be a mistake not to recognize that much of the evangelical world has become trivialized. And it is a trivialization which is part and parcel of the experience which is so typical of modernized societies. Indeed, the trivialization of all reality, even at its core where Good and Evil are separated from each other as polar opposites, is so much a part of the air that we breathe that it would almost be surprising if the Western Church had not been infected by it.

When Forsyth was thinking about this in the Church a century

ago, he said that too often "churches and preachers are choked with a crowd of paltry things kept in place by no sure authority, and dignified by no governing power,"[9] that even in the Church there was preoccupation "with the small and negligible side of the soul,"[10] he said, and that in the beginning, Christ's love "was all help and no enjoyment" but in his day, it had become "all enjoyment and no help."[11]

Paltry preoccupations, things small and negligible, Christian faith considered as useful only for its benefits, had taken their place at the heart of the Church's life and the result was a skinny, emptied out kind of believing, one whose ethical life was much diminished and whose sense of distance from the world around it had all but gone, and in whom claims to conversion did not lead to lives of convertedness. Does this not sound familiar? "Do our hungry souls not tell us faithfully," he asked rhetorically, "that much of our vivid and ingenious talk of statistics of Church attendance, about advanced and popular methods is well, eloquent—but 'tis not true."[12] It smacks of the business world, he said, not the communion of saints, treats symptoms rather than diseases, and it ends up emptying out spiritual reality from the Church's life. The Church then stumbles into unrelieved superficiality. It gives itself only to trivial pursuits. When this happens, it is in profound contradiction to the greatness of our creation in the image of God and it is doing a profound disservice to the yearning of the human spirit for meaning in life which is large enough to comprehend its deep and sometimes ghastly experiences.

A century has passed since Forsyth made those observations, but what he described is now even more obvious in the churches. Forsyth himself did not pursue this matter beyond observing some of the ways in which Christianity had been trivilialized but since the problem has continued it calls for much more reflection and not least by preachers.

In a succession of books over the last fifteen years, I have made the argument that there are three key components to this culture, at

least from a Christian point of view, and each of these trivializes life.

First, modernization produces societies which are commercially-driven, consumer-oriented, linked by products and technology, and this modernization of our societies is global in its reach.[13] What is remarkable is that in its texture, its feel, it is about the same whether it is encountered in Los Angeles, Shanghai, Paris, or Bombay. Because it is taking root everywhere, and is identified with no one in particular, it is a world culture. As such, it is a generic culture. Its "thinness reduces life to clichés—the same clichés everywhere, served up with the same fast food, the same music, the same blue jeans and T-shirts, the same movies, the same consumer impulses, the same news," this "culture of the television age, of asphalt, advertising, uniformity and waste."[14] And I go on to say that "those who feed on it, those who live by it, become generic people who are also thin, who stretch far and wide and belong nowhere in particular. They are, in the deepest sense, the 'homeless' of our modern world."[15]

Second, as people live in this context in which their connections to a moral world outside themselves begins to disintegrate, as they find their families disintegrating, and as they migrate from place to place, job to job, the certainties in their lives fade away and all that remains is simply the reality of their own self. But out of this, the modern person has emerged. In Richard Tarnas' words, this is "a newly self-conscious and autonomous being, skeptical of orthodoxies, rebellious against authority…responsible for his own beliefs and actions…assured of his intellectual capacity to comprehend and control nature….and altogether less dependent on an omnipotent God."[16] This dream of total internal autonomy, however, takes its toll on itself. As all of reality contracts into the self, the self begins to crack. Many writers have spoken of this. They have spoken of the modern self as empty and depleted. And what we end up with, all too often, is a self I have described as being "modern, shallow, changing, hiding and evading"[17] who lives only for itself and, in so doing, lives on the surface of life, a water spider who skips along in a world stripped of depth and suffused only with superficiality.

Third, in this world of technological brilliance and mediated reality, God himself becomes "weightless." The reality of who he is, the consequences of what his holiness demands, slides off the Church like water off a duck's back. It does not penetrate. It does not wrench around the Church's inner life. It does not cut. No, in a consumer context, God is there for us, as is any other product, for our use when we want and in the way that we want. In *No Place for Truth* I observed that when God becomes weightless and Christian faith is framed within a psychologized view of reality, it becomes a small and trivial thing. The Good is reduced to merely having a nice day and Evil to a bad hair day. God's Word is replaced by intuition, righteousness "by a search for happiness, holiness by wholeness, truth by feeling, ethics by feeling good about one's self."[18] The Church contracts into being just the small circle of one's personal friends. The past recedes. God becomes an amiable but unobtrusive presence who, in fact, is simply not on the same moral scale as this world's sinners or this world's Evil. He becomes domesticated and comes to be treated much like a family pet, there for our pleasure and need, there at our convenience, a prop to our inner life as its stretches and rips amidst the pressures which modernity brings to bear on it. These pressures are real, but when God and the self lose their moral reality, when we migrate out of a moral world and into a psychological world, triviality is the inevitable outcome. We see this in our culture and we see it in our churches.

Uncertainty

When Forsyth mourned the loss of certainty in the Church of his day, he was really speaking of the loss of *conviction*, that kind of certainty which is far deeper than simply an idea.

Conviction arises when those ideas are also rooted in a sense of God's transcendent holiness. They are then not just ideas, or doctrines, but truths which are *right*.

Of course it is true that convictions can be misshapen, that passions

can be loosed in the cause of truth and do great damage. It was so during the disastrous Crusades in the Middle Ages and it has been true during many moments of Protestant life subsequently.

However, the misdirection of conviction should not be allowed to invalidate the proper place which conviction has in the life of the Church. It is when the Church is certain that its doctrinal core is true, that these beliefs really matter, that they become convictions. It is when the Church has conviction that it becomes *bold* (cf: Acts 4:13, 4:29, 9:27, 9:29, 14:3, 18:26, 19:8).

It would not be difficult to pursue Forsyth's observation about uncertainty into our contemporary moment with its collapse of truth, the triumph of postmodern relativism, and the disappearance of conviction, all of which have made uncertainty a fashion. Ours is now a culture lost in the superficialities of its postmodern mood. While our culture's past is appropriated artificially in our architecture and in some of our fashions, none of this gives anything more than merely private meaning and that robs us of certainty. We have become the homeless of the modern world, those who belong everywhere and yet nowhere. And all of this is projected, if we wish to see it, in a fresh excrescence of hipsters who have become the one place where all styles and tastes, both past and present, stick for a few moments. It is a subculture, in Douglas Haddow's words, which mirrors "the doomed shallowness of mainstream society."[19]

However, this theme of the "doomed shallowness of mainstream society" has to be followed out in the life of the contemporary Church. If it is the case that trivialization has set in, then one of the components to this is a decline in certainty about Christian truth, a decline in the sense of its importance. It, too, has become weightless.

It is true that the fabric of biblical truth has not always been ripped but it is just as true that it is not always functionally important in the lives of the born-again. Indeed, as Barna reported from a survey done on September 27, 2005, of the seven characteristics of

the spiritual life which he measured and which are indispensable to being spiritual, knowledge of the Bible, in the view of his respondents, was their weakest.

It is also true that we need to make a distinction between the content of a belief and its importance. It is quite possible for people to have an extensive knowledge of the Bible but, at the same time, to live by norms other than those of the Bible and sometimes to do so without any sense of contradiction. Orthodoxy, in other words, can be dead. That happens when the knowledge of the Bible, for one reason or another, has lost its weight, its saliency, its gravity in its connections to how life actually is or is actually being lived. It therefore gives little direction and brings little rebuke. It settles in a person's mind without any sense of the conviction of its importance, its truthfulness, and its relevance to life.

However, what we are apparently seeing today is a situation in which the fabric of biblical orthodoxy has withered away, or been so neglected, that it has disappeared, so that what remains are simply cultural norms and expectations by which lives are being structured. However, since these norms and expectations are always changing, they always produce uncertainty because they are always provisional and passing. They are infused, not by eternity, but by our cultural transience. That, apparently, is the situation in many churches today.

I am inclined to think that Forsyth, who pondered this same reality in his day, put his finger on the real issue when he connected it with a loss in our understanding of the moral otherness, the holiness of God. On February 20, 2006, Barna published his findings on how contemporaries in the Church were understanding holiness. A clear grasp of this moral otherness has now gone. What he found was that the great majority of those who attend church regularly, and read their Bibles with some regularity, nevertheless do not understand what holiness is, do not desire to be holy, are not engaged in such a pursuit, and have no such goal in mind for their lives. The point about this loss is that it reduces all beliefs to being

only beliefs rather than views that are *right*. It is the sense of the rightness of a belief, the sense that that belief corresponds not only to what is eternally valid but what is eternally *right* which is what makes for conviction.

The postmodern erosion of truth and the corresponding disappearance of the holiness of God—in our minds, that is!—are evident everywhere in the culture and they have apparently entered the Church. The consequences are that Christian faith is reduced to hope without doctrine. Sin is reduced to weakness without a moral character, belief to opinion without any conviction about its truthfulness, and morality to social convention which is answerable to no one except those in society. It is no wonder that when the Church becomes uncertain of its beliefs it becomes the Church Hesitant. In the midst of a cultural crisis of enormous proportions today in the West, Christian truth rests so lightly upon the Church that its most common preoccupation appears to be only that of being polite. "Our preaching," mourned Forsyth in his day, "has lost the note of authority…. The minister is more strongly induced to be the friend and comrade of his people than their moral authority and guide. And he is tempted to care more (as the public care more) for the happy touch in his preaching than the great Word."[20]

Complacency

Complacency is the outcome to a faith that has become trivialized and, at the same time, has lost its sense of certainty. There is no doubt that there is much in our postmodern experience which produces complacency but it is also important to understand that this is not simply an attitude. It is a sin, indeed, one of the so-called "deadly sins." What we call complacency today has, down the ages, been called sloth. Sloth is not simply idleness, inertia, or laziness. It is something far more profound and damaging. It is, as Henry Fairlie writes, "a torpor of mind and feeling and spirit…a poisoning of the will; faintheartedness … a lack of real desire for anything, even what is good."[21] It is an indifference to things ultimate and important. It is what is captured so neatly in our current expression,

"whatever…," as if it were a matter of indifference what the truth might be in any situation, that to choose between alternative paths, even where right and wrong were entailed, would have no consequences worth bothering about.

Sloth, if I may borrow Jonathan Rauch's word, is apatheism. This is an attitude which does not care. Theists have different degrees of caring about the fact that God exists but even the most minimal theist cares enough to contradict what atheists say. Atheists care about not believing in the existence of God because that is how they are defining themselves. They are usually hostile to all theists, especially theists who are also Christian, and become "evangelistic" for their non-belief. Secularists, like those in the A.C.L.U., care enough about their desire to see public life cleansed of religious ideas and ideals that they are willing to fight for their view of the world in the courts. But apatheists do not care about anything that is ultimate. They are indifferent. It matters little whether someone is a believer or not or, if so, what kind of believer. This is the distinctive signature of this sin of sloth in its postmodern dress.

The evangelical Church today is breeding its own kind of apatheist, those who are indifferent to other belief systems, other "gospels," and are simply intent on finding solace for their own souls. This is the outcome to the extreme privatization of faith which reduces all of Christian truth to its therapeutic payoff, and hence it is the outcome to culture's obsessive preoccupation with the self. It is a preoccupation with living "entirely by, with, and for oneself"[22] and almost everything in our culture reinforces this perspective. Consequently, God, his Word, and his Christ have value only to the degree that they address the self, comfort the self, heal the self, and make peace with the self. It is this inward gaze, when the eyes never look outward or upward except as they do through the self which produces an emptiness of spirit and a deadness of soul.

One of the tricks which we play on ourselves, however, is that we disguise this condition by throwing ourselves into activity, having "projects,' as we say, even by doing Christian work. But this is all

work in which there is little passion for anything, little yearning for God, for heaven, little sense of what is enduringly right and true, little despair in our souls. Indeed, there is often neither height nor depth in anything. Our prayers for forgiveness are routine, not ragged and painful, our sense of humiliation before God is often no more than the flicker of a passing mood, and the great difference between Good and Evil only passes briefly before our mind when the evening news shows us pictures of murder victims. We are lacking the seriousness of soul, seriousness about sin and salvation and the transcendent goodness and greatness of God before whom we stand. It is only as these truths burn into our souls that Christianity really comes to matter. Pile programs on top of one another in the Church if we will, add a bistro to the church's offerings, a gymnasium, add a travel agency, counseling for this and that affliction, groups for this or that interest, do everything we can to satisfy today's restless consumer, but nothing will hide the fact that where there is complacency, where there is sloth, not only will nothing seem to matter but in the end, nothing will matter.

Trivialization, uncertainty, and complacency are not the only traits of our postmodern culture and not the only sins in the Church but they are failings, nevertheless, to which we must pay careful attention. Other sins are overt and obvious such as adultery, theft, violence, and child abuse. These visible sins we condemn. Trivialization, uncertainty, and complacency, by contrast, are not obvious. They are silent and unobtrusive. They live in disguise. They have taken up their residence in the evangelical Church undetected, as they have in our society. Unnoticed they may be, but it is hard to exaggerate the silent havoc they are wreaking on the way in which biblical believing is today living out its life in America.

Is it not extraordinary, then, that so many biblical preachers are going about their business Sunday by Sunday (or Saturday evening by Saturday evening) as if these sins had not preceded them in the congregation and disturbed the soil into which they are wishing to sow? Do they not understand that, as expositors, they can preach in a way that is faithful to the text but faithless to the congregation

because they will not bring that biblical truth into relation with what, in the contemporary soul, will undo that truth the moment it is heard? It takes no courage to skim the commentaries and piece together a sermon for Sunday morning. It does takes courage, however, to bring the truth thus gathered into such contact with the congregation that it walks away knowing that it has heard from God and heard from him in a way that has entered its soul. The fact is that in the presence of God, trivialization, uncertainty, and complacency simply die.

And was this not the essential insight with which Calvin's *Institutes* begins? There is an intrinsic connection between God and self, between the knowledge of God and our knowledge of ourselves. It is impossible to know God as he is and not see the sins of trivialization, uncertainty, and complacency as the enemies they are. And the reverse is true. Those caught in these sins, however unknowingly, will not take seriously their knowledge of God unless they are changed at a deep level. That is what real preaching does. It gives knowledge of the self even as it imparts knowledge of God. But one has to ask how many sermons are preached, Sunday by Sunday, which may even give some knowledge of a biblical text but which leave people no wiser about themselves than they were when they first arrived in the church?

The evangelical Church today is clearly in an experimental mood. It is also having to reckon with the fact that its back door is being used quite as much as is the front door and that Christianity throughout the West is finding it hard to sustain its character and life. The reasons for all of this, as I have suggested, are complex. Nevertheless, the decline in the importance of preaching during this period of experimentation, the doubtful quality of many of the sermons heard, the confusion in the congregations about why there is preaching in the Church at all, and the willingness of preachers to cater to a consumer climate have much to do, I believe, with the fact that the evangelical Church today is faltering.

I therefore end where Forsyth did a century ago. "If the preachers

have brought preaching down it is the preachers that must save it," he said. "The Church will be what its ministers will make it. "[23]

Notes

1. P.T. Forsyth, *Positive Preaching and the Modern Mind* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1909), 10.
2. The nature of theology as being essentially missional in its structure is something which I have argued in several essays. I am here suggesting that preachers should be thinking of their work in the same way. See "The Nature and Function of Theology," *The Use of the Bible in Theology*, ed. Robert K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 175-99; "An American Theology: The Painful Transition from *Theoria* to *Praxis*," Evangelicalism and Modern America, ed. George Marsden (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 83-93; "Word and World: Biblical Authority and the Quandary of Modernity," *Evangelical affirmations*, ed. Kenneth S. Kantzer (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 153-76; "The Theologian's Craft," *Doing Theology in Today's World: Essays in Honor of Kenneth S. Kantzer*, ed. John Woodbridge and Thomas McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 171-94; and "The Theology of Preaching," *God's Living Word: Essays in Preaching*, ed. Theodore Stylianopoulis (Brookline: Holy Cross, 1983), 57-70.
3. A typical expression of the prevailing view is the following: "Paul calls Satan the god of this age, not to place the devil on a level with God, but to show that Stan is the ruler of this world." Philip Edgcombe Hughes, *Paul's Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 126. See also C.K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), 130. On Paul's understanding of ministry in this letter, see Timothy B. Savage, *Power Through Weakness: Paul's Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
4. I do not mean that preachers must be taking their cues on what they say from what people are thinking. This kind of engagement should be made from the position of truth given in Scripture rather than from the idea that truth needs to be gleaned from the fragments of experience in this world. It is all about declaring the meaning given in Scripture and not about creating meaning. This is said in contradistinction to O. Wesley Allen's argument. He sees Scripture as the lens by which we photograph the presence and actions of God in the world. He thereby transfers inspiration from the biblical text, which he apparently cannot believe, to

contemporary events which he does believe. See his *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2005).

5. George Barna, *Revolution* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2005), 61-7, 106-08, 112-16.
6. Greg L. Hawkins and Cally Parkinson, *Reveal: Where Are You?* (Barrington: Willow Creek Resources, 2007), 4.
7. Julia Duin, *Quitting Church: Why the Faithful are Fleeing and What to do About It* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 21.
8. Forsyth, 161-196.
9. Ibid., 171.
10. Ibid., 170.
11. Ibid., 174.
12. Ibid., 172.
13. I have explored this theme in my essay, "Christian Discipleship in a Postmodern World," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 51:1 (March, 2008): 19-33.
14. David F. Wells, *God in the Wasteland: The Reality of Truth in a World of Fading Dreams* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 9.
15. Ibid., 9-10.
16. Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World View* (New York: Harmony, 1991), 282.
17. David F. Wells, *The Courage To Be Protestant: Truth-lovers, Marketers, and Emergents in the Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 69.
18. David F. Wells, *No Place for Truth: Or, Whatever Happened to evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 183.
19. "Hipster: The Dead End of Western Civilization," *Adbusters*, East and West #79 (29 July, 2008).
20. Forsyth, 181-82.
21. Henry Fairlie, *The Seven Deadly Sins Today* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1979), 113.
22. Ibid., 118.
23. Ibid., 189.

When Christ Replaces God at the Center of Preaching

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by Ken Langley

(editor's note: the article by Ken Langley was recognized by the Society with the Keith Willhite Award at the October 2008 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting held at Beeson Divinity School in Birmingham, Alabama. The Willhite Award is given to the outstanding paper presented at each year's meeting. The Award is in memory of co-founder, Keith Willhite. Dr. Ken Langley is Senior Pastor of Christ Community Church, Zion, Illinois, and is Adjunct Professor of Preaching at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.)

Abstract

Putting Christ, rather than God, at the center of preaching may lead to unintended consequences in theology, homiletics, and church life. It's enough—it's better—for biblical preachers to be theocentric. Making God central in preaching achieves the worthy aims of Christocentric preaching without the risks discussed in this essay.

Introduction

The title of my paper is admittedly provocative. Among the colleagues for whom I write are many who advocate "Christ-centered preaching." None of them want to see Christ "replace" God in our pulpits.

But I wonder if a Christocentric homiletic might be in danger of doing just that, with negative consequences for theology proper, the gospel, hermeneutics, sermons, and church life. The thoughtful advocates of Christ-centered preaching with whom I interact in this paper make a sophisticated case for a hermeneutical-homiletical philosophy in which I find much to affirm. But I'm concerned that

their students and readers may miss some of the subtleties of their argument and that the people in the pew who listen to sermons shaped by a less careful Christocentric homiletic may:

1. fail to honor God the Father as he deserves to be honored
2. misunderstand the gospel
3. learn an inaccurate way of interpreting Scripture
4. grow bored with sermons that all seem to say the same thing
5. practice a privatized or Jesus-only pop spirituality.

These are the dangers I'll address in this essay. And even the nuanced Christocentric approaches of scholars like Sidney Greidanus, Bryan Chapell, Graeme Goldsworthy, and Edmund Clowney are not immune to some of these problems.

Before discussing these concerns, we need to begin by defining "Christ-centered preaching." This is not so easy as might be supposed. Some authors use "theocentric" and "Christocentric" as virtually synonymous, even though they're not.[1] Some writers alternate between "redemptive-historical preaching" and "Christ-centered preaching," even though the former could just as well be construed as "God-centered." At the beginning of his book on the subject, Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "Throughout the ages Christian preachers have struggled with the question of the centrality of Christ and how this affects the way we handle the text of the Bible."[2] Sidney Greidanus adds, "Strange as it may seem, we are not at all clear on what it means to 'preach Christ'."[3]

But Greidanus has done as good a job as anyone at thinking himself clear on this issue, as may be seen is his careful definition of "preaching Christ":

> preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament."[4]

By "authentically," Greidanus signals that he does not want to shoe-horn Jesus into texts in an artificial or allegorizing fashion. By "integrate" he shows that he doesn't want to replace the original meaning of the text with a Christological interpretation but do justice to both. By including "teaching" in the mix, he expands the possibilities for preaching Christ, so that we're not limited to our Lord's passion when we preach Christologically. Greidanus is a thoughtful scholar; his definition tries to rule out some of the sloppy and far-fetched attempts at preaching Christ all too common in church history. Greidanus will be my primary debate partner in this paper because of the care he has put into this definition and his unpacking of it in several books. I don't want to attack a straw man, but interact with thoughtful articulations of Christ-centered preaching.

One thing that's not clear from Greidanus's definition as it stands is whether *all* preaching should preach Christ, whether *every* sermon ought to be Christ-centered. Should his definition read, "preaching *only* sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God's revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament"?

Frequent statements in the literature claim that *all* preaching must be Christ-centered: "Jesus Christ must be at the heart of every sermon you preach"[5] ; and "Until you have found [Christ] in your preaching portion, you are not ready to preach[6]. "Can I preach this sermon . . . without mentioning Jesus? The simple answer . . . is a resounding 'NO!'"[7] "Why would you even want to try to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?"[8] Every sermon should "expound something of the glories of Christ"[9] "There is always a way to Christ and to his cross from every passage in the Old Testament."[10] "One hears sermons," Clowney laments, "in which the name of Christ is not named."[11] He believes that we "who would preach the Word must preach Christ."[12] According to Bryan Chapell, "Paul . . . was always preaching about the person and work of Jesus. This must be the goal of expository preaching."[13] "We cannot faithfully expound any text without demonstrating its

relation to [Christ]."[14] Christ-centered preaching seeks to disclose ". . . where *every* text stands in relation to Christ" and "to show how *each* text manifests God's grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ."[15]

Greidanus quotes with approval M. Reu: "It is necessary that the sermon be Christocentric;" and T. Hoekstra: "A sermon without Christ is no sermon;" and James Stewart: "In every sermon Christ is to be preached."[16] Greidanus used to think that with some texts preachers would have to be satisfied with the broader category of *God*-centered preaching, but he now believes all preaching should be explicitly Christ-centered.[17]

If it were not for this insistence that *every* sermon be Christ-centered, I'd have far less disagreement with those who advocate Christocentric preaching. I'd still argue that theocentric preaching embraces a broader, more adequate theological vision. I'd still argue that Christ can be appropriately exalted in other parts of the worship service and in other dimensions of church life even if the sermon on a given week does not center on him. But I would certainly agree that *many* sermons by the Christian preacher can and should focus on Jesus Christ! The week-in, week-out pulpit work of the pastor will frequently—even when preaching the Old Testament—point to Christ. Greidanus is right that "many roads lead from the Old Testament to Christ."[18] His descriptions of these roads are helpful, and some of his sample expositions of how he himself travels them are quite effective.[19] But insisting that *every* sermon be Christ-centered exacerbates the concerns I discuss in this paper. To those concerns I now turn.

Consequences for Theology Proper

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently result in preachers and listeners failing to honor God the Father as he ought to be honored.

Fred Craddock bluntly writes:

> Some in the Christian community seem content to supplant theology with Christology, but perhaps unaware of the immense price: the dislodging of Christ from salvation history, the loss of continuity with Israel's faith, the separation of creation from redemption (opening the door to every other-worldly heresy hovering around the church), and the reduction of the first item of the Christian creed to the role of preface.[20]

Think about that last phrase. "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth" as mere preface? The long, wonderful story of God's dealings with Adam and Abraham and Sarah and Moses and David and the prophets, and all the rich theology in that narrative as *preface*? Unthinkable. But to listen to all the Jesus talk and Jesus prayers and Jesus songs in some churches, you might think that Jesus' Father can be taken for granted. Or that the Jesus story does not need to be set in a longer story of God's dealings with Israel. Or that faith in Jesus has replaced faith in God. Or that when we confess Jesus as God everyone knows what we mean by "God." Or that if our *Christ*ology is lofty enough and fervent enough *theo*logy is dispensable.

Advocates of Christ-centered preaching have no intention of shrinking our theology of and reverence for God the Father. They want preaching to be both God-glorifying and Christ-exalting. They may agree with R.B Kuiper that since ". . . Christ is God manifest in the flesh, the terms Christocentric preaching and theocentric preaching are interchangeable."[21] Greidanus would not go quite that far, but does say that "Christ-centered preaching is to be God-centered."[22] Clowney, too, wants preaching to be both theocentric and Christocentric.[23] These scholars don't want to marginalize God any more than I want to marginalize Christ. What we differ on is a matter of emphasis. But that doesn't mean our difference

is unimportant. I think it's fair to ask, "What did Christ himself emphasize?"

Mark reports that our Lord began his public ministry "proclaiming the good news of God" (Mark 1:14). Jesus' preaching was concerned with the reign of God (1:15), the will of God (3:34), the "things" of God (8:33), faith in God (11:22), and the love of God (12:30). His parables were mostly about the kingdom of God God's gracious, powerful, already/not yet kingship, a kingship now "near" in the person of his Son.

Although the phrase "the good news of God" does not appear in Matthew or Luke, these evangelists, too, witness to the God-centeredness of Jesus' gospel. Matthew's summary of our Lord's preaching in the Sermon on the Mount is so theocentric, so Father-centric, it can be described in the words of J.I. Packer: "You sum up the whole of New Testament teaching in a single phrase if you speak of it as a revelation of the Fatherhood of the holy Creator".[24] True, Jesus preached with unprecedented personal authority (Matt. 7:28-29). True, he sometimes spoke with staggering confidence in his unique personhood and calling—anyone who could say "All things have been committed to me" (Matt. 11:27) should have "been committed" unless he was who he claimed to be. But Jesus' complete statement was "All things have been committed to me *by my Father*." As Son, he was uniquely qualified to reveal spiritual truth in his preaching, but it was, supremely, the Father he sought to reveal (see the rest of Matthew 11:27).

Luke's Jesus taught that those who are rightly related to him are those and only those who listen to God and obey him (Lk. 8:21; 11:27-28). He commissioned his followers to preach the kingdom of God (9:2, 60; 10:9), and did so himself. The kingdom of God was unquestionably the dominant theme of his proclamation (Lk 4:43).[25]

The kingdom of God is not a prominent theme in John (appearing only in 3:3,5 and twice in 18:36), but the fourth gospel is if anything

more theocentric than the synoptics. Everything Jesus says and does he says and does to glorify the Father (John 5:19; 10:37; 12:28, 49-50; 14:13). He comes from the Father (1:14), returns to the Father (20:17), reveals the Father (1:18), obeys the Father (5:36), and speaks only what the Father tells him (8:38). John's Christology is arguably the "highest" of the four gospels, but no one is clearer than John that the Son is subject to the Father and lives to make him known. If this is the burden of our Lord himself and the evangelists who told his story, should it not be ours as well?

When it comes to the rest of the New Testament, Bultmann thought "the proclaimer became the proclaimed," which Craddock paraphrases, "Jesus came preaching God but the early church preached Jesus Christ."[26] But in Acts and the epistles, it is still God who creates, calls, redeems, sanctifies, guides, gives, commands, empowers, and promises. It is God who sent Christ and God who will send Christ again at the end of history. Robert Brawley pays close attention to the verbs in Luke-Acts and concludes that God is the main actor; the narrative is thoroughly theocentric.[27]

James preached a God-centered message, so God-centered, in fact, and with so little that's explicitly about Christ and justification, Luther didn't like it. Peter's epistle to "God's elect" (1 Pet. 1:1) is all about God choosing (1:2) regenerating (1:3), and shielding (1:5) God's people (2:10). Peter's theocentric language continues throughout the epistle. The last book of the Bible is probably "the revelation of Jesus Christ" in the sense that God gave it *to* Christ to show his servants (Rev.1:1); the content of Revelation is manifestly about God from start to finish.

Even Paul, whose life was so thoroughly revolutionized when he was apprehended by Christ, nonetheless casts a broader theological vision than Christology. He sees redemptive history moving from the creation of the world wherein God's eternal power and divine nature are clearly seen (Rom. 1:20) toward a consummation in which the Son hands over the kingdom to his Father and is subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in

all (1 Cor 15:24, 28). The drama of the Bible, for Paul, begins and ends with God.

True, Paul resolved to know nothing among the Corinthians but "Jesus Christ, and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2), but this message was, he says in the preceding sentence, a "testimony about God" (verse 1). And *why* did Christ willingly endure crucifixion in obedience to his Father's plan (Gal. 1:3-4)? Peter put it this way: "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous that he might bring us to God" (1 Peter 3:18). John Piper unpacks this verse, showing that justification and forgiveness and peace and all the rest that comes to those who trust God's appointed Savior are wonderful gospel *benefits*, but that God himself is the gospel. *God* is the gospel. What makes the gospel good news is that in Christ God has removed all obstacles to our glorifying him and enjoying him forever.[28]

The God-centeredness of prophets and apostles and Jesus himself is reason enough to be God-centered in preaching. Why should we think it insufficient or sub-Christian to say, like the prophets, "Behold your God!" (Isa 40:9), or like the apostles to be "set apart for the gospel of God" (Rom 1:1), or, like Jesus, to proclaim "the good news of God" (Mark 1:14)? What could be more Christ-exalting than to imitate Christ's own thoroughgoing God-centeredness?

Paul Scott Wilson urges preachers to make God the subject of the "sermon-in-a-sentence" and to make sure that the verb in this sentence is an activity of God: "God sheds light," "God knows what you're going through," and so on.[29] Does this mean that God *the Father* is the only one who can act in these sermon sentences? No. Elsewhere Wilson urges preachers to ask of every passage, "What is God (in one of the persons of the Trinity) doing in this biblical text?"[30] So *some* sermons will be Christ-centered: "Christ is the end of the law," "Jesus never fails," "Christ commands us to make disciples," and so on. If the second person of the Trinity is the main actor in the text, then he'll appear as the subject of the sermon's focus sentence and that sermon will be Christocentric. Other

sermons will highlight the role of the third person of the Trinity: "The Spirit makes diverse groups one," "The Spirit empowers every believer for service," and so on. Still other sermons will not specify one person of the Trinity. Wilson's prescription for theological exegesis allows for many Christocentric sermons in the context of a theocentric pulpit ministry.

> A woman who visited our church several years ago said on her way out, "It was nice to hear a sermon about God." I thought at first that she meant she was tired of all the man-centered preaching out there nowadays, but she explained, "Everywhere I go I hear preachers talking about Jesus, but not too many talk about God." That should not be. Christian theology is not "consumed without remainder in Christology."[31]

Consequences for the Gospel

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently result in preachers and listeners distorting the gospel.

Although Christian ministers are called "preachers of the gospel," we do, in fact, preach more than the gospel, unless "gospel" is defined so broadly as to include anything and everything biblical. Our pulpit work is not restricted to the two events in Paul's concise definition of the gospel—Christ died, Christ was raised (1 Cor. 1:1-5). We also preach about money and marriage, parenting and politics, gossip and gluttony, sex and sloth, and a host of other subjects. All these subjects are, of course, preached after Good Friday and Easter; we don't preach "be good, do good" sermons, oblivious to the redemptive initiative of God-in-Christ that precedes all our being and doing. But the themes of preaching are larger than crucifixion and resurrection. The same apostle who wrote "We preach Christ crucified" (1 Cor 1:23), could also say "I have not hesitated to proclaim to you the whole will of God" (Acts 20:27). What did this "whole counsel of God" include? What did Paul cover during his two years in Ephesus? "Anything

that would be helpful to you," he said (Acts 20:20). Presumably, Paul's ministry with this congregation included creation themes as well as redemption themes, wisdom literature as well as Messianic prophecy, *didache* and *paraklesis* as well as *kerygma*.

But even if all Christian preaching is gospel preaching, that is, even if "gospel" is an apt label for the content of every truly Christian sermon, whatever its text or topic, the gospel we preach is the gospel of *God* (Mark 1:14; Rom.1:1; 15:16; 2 Cor. 11:7; 1 Thess. 2:8-9; 1 Peter 4:17). God is its source and subject. God is our Savior (1 Tim.1:1, 2:3, 4:10; 2 Tim 1:8-9; Titus 1:3, 2:10, 3:4; Jude 25). It is God's grace that brings salvation (Titus 2:11). How confident are we that people in the pew understand this?

This vital truth may be lost when sermons seem to set Father and Son over against one another in the gospel story. Though no pastor would ever knowingly encourage such a perverted notion, some people imagine a drama of salvation in which Jesus and God are on opposite sides. The Father—harsh, demanding, and wrathful—is intent on judging us. But Jesus—kind, compassionate, and merciful—comes to the rescue and offers himself as a sacrifice in our stead. Who could blame anyone who thinks that *this* is the gospel for loving Jesus but shrinking from God?

I want to stress the word "inadvertently" in the opening sentence of this section: "Christocentric preaching may *inadvertently* result in preachers and listeners distorting the gospel." Distortion of the gospel is such a serious matter, I want to be very clear that I don't think responsible advocates of Christ-centered preaching do this. I am, however, concerned that some of their disciples and their congregants may not pick up on the nuances of their Christocentric homiletic. Exalting Christ as the center of gospel preaching may inadvertently diminish the Father's role and the Father's glory. We should explicitly exalt *God* as the center of gospel preaching to minimize distortion in listeners' minds.

But, someone might argue, even if we're God-centered when

preaching the gospel from the Old Testament, we should be Christ-centered when preaching from the New. Granted, the Old Testament (and even the gospels) make God central in the story of redemption; but turning to the rest of the New Testament, we find that the message about God has been replaced with a message about Christ.[32] The apostles seldom use Jesus' kingdom of God language; they talk instead about eternal life, the cross, resurrection, and life "in" Christ. As P.T. Forsyth put it: "The Gospel of Christ replaced the Gospel of the Kingdom, because by his death he became the kingdom."[33] But is this really the case?

Space does not permit a discussion of the reasons for a change from kingdom terminology to the more varied, more Gentile-friendly gospel vocabulary we find in the epistles. But two things should be noted: no apostle imagined that he was preaching a different gospel than the one Jesus preached. The rubrics may have differed, and of course the cross and the empty tomb colored everything, but the core content was the same. And in any case, the shift in terminology is relative, not absolute. The kingdom of God has not been forgotten in Acts and the epistles! At the end of Paul's career—at least as far as Luke takes us the apostle to the Gentiles is still preaching the kingdom (Acts 28:31).

In the very next verse in our canon, Paul states that his gospel is the gospel of God (Romans 1:1). Though it's also called the gospel of his Son (1:9) and the gospel of Christ (15:19), the gospel "is not a message which broke *de novo* upon the world with the appearing of Christ and the ministry of the apostles."[34] It is the gospel God had promised beforehand in the Scriptures (Rom. 1:2; Titus 1:2). Unfortunately, some Christians who've heard a lot of Jesus talk without a context in theology are like movie-goers coming late to a film; they've missed essential information.[35]

The gospel in Romans is the power of God for salvation (1:16). In it a righteousness from God is made known, to which the law and prophets had testified (3:21). God presents Christ as an atoning sacrifice (3:25), God credits righteousness (4:24), God demonstrates

his love (5:8), God foreknows, predestines, calls, justifies, and glorifies (8:29-30). People who set Father and Son against each other in the drama of salvation do not understand Paul's gospel, wherein God, no less than Christ, is for us, not sparing his Son but delivering him up for us all (8:31-32). "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever!" (11:33,36)

So this letter to the Romans, where the church has found its clearest exposition of the gospel, is manifestly about God. "*God* is the most important word in this epistle."[36] It seems pointless to ask whether the genitive in Romans 1:1 means "about" God or "from" God. It's both.[37]

What we see in Romans we see elsewhere in the epistles. God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ (2 Cor. 5:19). God made the sinless Christ to be sin for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him (2 Cor.5:21). God elects and adopts (Ephesians 1); God makes the gospel take root and grow in the human heart (1 Cor.3:6); God regenerates (Col.2:13); God works in us to will and to do his good pleasure (Phil.2:13). Christian conversion means turning to God (Gal. 4:8-9; 1 Thess. 1:8-9). Again and again we're told that the gospel is good news about God's love: "When the kindness and love of God appeared, he saved us . . . because of his mercy" (Titus 5:5). The community of love and grace that results from the gospel is called the church of God (1 Cor. 1:2, 10:32, 11:22, 15:9; 2 Cor.1:1; Gal. 1:13; 1 Tim.3:5). James Dunn is surely right: "The Christian gospel has to do first and last and foremost with God.[38]

Presumably, most Christ-centered preachers know this. But do those who listen to them preach know this? Greidanus, careful to set the Jesus story in the one story the Bible tells about God, warns against "Christomonism," in which ". . . for the people in the pew the essential gospel, the revelation and redemptive act of God in Christ has been all but lost. To 'accept Christ as my personal Saviour' apparently has little or nothing to do with God."[39] No

doubt Greidanus avoids such a distortion of the biblical gospel in his own preaching , but he recognizes it as a real possibility. And I'm afraid that the difference between Christomonism, which he criticizes, and Christocentrism, which he advocates, or between Christocentric preaching, which he advocates, and "Jesuscentric preaching," which he does not is pretty subtle. I do not have much confidence in the average listener's ability (or even some homiletics students' ability) to recognize such subtle differences.[40]

It's easy to be misunderstood even when we're not being subtle. If there's a chance that my listeners will think that Jesus is the hero of a story in which God plays the heavy, or that the Father created a problem that the Son has to solve, or that we can come into this play two thirds of the way through without missing something essential, then I want to bend over backwards to make it clear that the gospel is the gospel of God. God will be the main actor in my sermon. He'll be the subject of many of the sermon's sentences. His is the eternal decree, his is the love that drew salvation's plan, his is the initiative in sending the Son, his is the power that raised Christ from the dead and put all things under his feet. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Eph. 3:21).

Consequences for Hermeneutics

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently teach listeners to interpret the Bible incorrectly.

Lay people learn hermeneutics from their pastors' preaching. Whether we like it or not, they learn how to interpret Scripture from how we handle Scripture in the pulpit. So what do we teach listeners about hermeneutics when Jesus makes a surprise appearance in a sermon from Proverbs? Or when it turns out Song of Solomon is not really about marital intimacy but about Christ's love for his church? Or when redemption trumps creation as the theological underpinning of every sermon? Or when Old Testament texts (and some in the New for that matter) are not handled with

integrity because every Sunday the preacher follows Spurgeon's dictum, "make a bee-line to the cross"? Christocentric preaching may inadvertently train people to look past what's plainly there in the text and to look instead for a reference to Christ that may or may not be there.

Greidanus, for one, would argue that we don't look for Christ "instead of" what's there in the text, but both/and—a referent close to the original audience *and* a focus on Christ, authentically integrated.[41] And certainly there are many texts where this is easy to do: typological texts, texts that offer grace we experience most fully in Christ, texts that express hopes that will only be fully realized in Christ, promises, prophecies, Messianic Psalms, foreshadowing, analogies. Greidanus proposes seven possible "roads" from the Old Testament to Christ, each of which could work well with some texts.[42]

But I'm afraid that all too often the plain meaning and burden of a text is nudged aside to make room for a Christocentric reading. A few examples:

1. M.R. DeHann takes Adam's sleeping while God makes him a wife as an allegory of Christ's "sleeping" in the tomb to get a bride for himself.[43]

2. Edmund Clowney takes the story of David dancing before the ark as prefiguring the ascension of Christ.[44]

3. One exposition of Psalm 72 (which is a prayer for good government) says nothing whatsoever about the poem's aspirations for Israel's kings, or how this text might relate to our own time or speak to our hope that leaders will govern in righteousness and justice. The psalm is taken to refer solely to Messiah's reign. Granted, the ideals of Psalm 72 have never been perfectly realized by any human government, so a look forward to Christ's perfect government might be a natural move for concluding a sermon on this text. But to make it all

and only about Christ is to misconstrue the text.[45]

Spurgeon's sermons provide dozens of additional examples. Much as I enjoy reading Spurgeon—and as a preacher I have plenty to learn from him—I would not want my people to learn hermeneutics from his sermons! He'll do anything to get to Christ, often missing the literal sense of a text, using it as a springboard for a sermon on Christ and salvation.[46]

Greidanus is a much more careful exegete than some (including Spurgeon) who share his commitment to Christocentric hermeneutics. But even some of his interpretive moves, propelled by a desire to preach Christ in every text, are questionable. In *Preaching Christ from Genesis* he:

> suggests as a possible road from the tower of Babel story to Christ, the analogy of Christ building his church.[47]

> finds in the acquisition of a burial plot for Sarah an analogy to Christ's preparing a place for us.[48]

> proposes a redemptive-historical path from Rebecca's willingness to leave her family and marry Isaac to Mary's submission to God's will in the nativity narrative.[49]

Though most of Greidanus's homiletical moves from Genesis to Christ are fine, these seem strained. Perhaps in a number of these less persuasive suggestions he's just "thinking out loud" about possibilities (some of which he himself does not take in the expositions that follow). But a preacher following his lead down some of these paths to Christ would, I'm afraid, model a strained way of interpreting biblical narratives. Applying many Old Testament narratives to twenty-first century Christians is a difficult challenge, and Greidanus is surely right that the gap must be bridged theologically. But I agree with Abraham Kuruvilla in his review of *Preaching Christ from Genesis* that Christology is not a

sufficient theological base from which to work on every text. "May not one discern a level of theology that is more specific for, and closer to, the textual details? And could not one make the move to application from *that* theological locus, rather than aiming for a broad and general Christocentric theological approach that does not appear to be driven by the specifics of the text?"[50]

Sometimes Christ-centered preachers include a reference to Christ that's not forced, but isn't strictly necessary either. Clowney, for example, sketches an exposition of the David and Goliath story that includes a move toward Christ that doesn't seem forced or artificial. But neither does it add all that much to the sermon.[51] Clowney's précis keeps the focus on God instead of on David's bravery or our ability to slay giants. God is seen to be at work in this text, replacing faithless Saul with a man after his own heart who will show the watching world that there is a God in Israel. It seems to me that this is a rich, theologically faithful sermon-in-the-making, and that nothing essential is lost if we don't take Clowney's further step of making David prophetic of his Greater Son. I disagree that "It is impossible not to see Christ in this passage."[52]

Augustine felt compelled to interpret Scripture figuratively and allegorically because he was convinced every passage is about Christ.[53] For centuries Christian preachers followed his allegorizing lead. But then the Reformation came, rediscovering (we might say it came *because* of the rediscovery) the plain sense of Scripture. Goldsworthy says that Christ-centered interpretation was a feature of the Reformation period,[54] but it's interesting that John Calvin was satisfied to preach *God* from the Bible, and thought that some who preached Christ from every text did violence to the plain language of the Bible.55 Calvin did not think that even Job's confession, "I know that my Redeemer liveth" required reference to Christ; it was the living God with whom Job had to do, and it was this God who would redeem him and in some way Job could only dimly guess raise him. Some Lutherans criticized Calvin's insistence on the plain meaning of the text. One even called him "Calvin the Judaizer" because when he preached from the Old Testament he

sometimes seemed to be saying no more than a devout Jew would say on the same text.[56]

Calvin's critics anticipated Jay Adams: "If you preach a sermon that would be acceptable to the member of a Jewish synagogue . . . there is something radically wrong with it."[57] I've read a number of Calvin's sermons on the Psalms and there is nothing "radically wrong" with them, even though he feels no obligation to center on Christ if the psalm under consideration is not plainly Christocentric. Calvin is so thoroughly God-entranced and so pastorally insightful, these expositions still nourish the soul of the Christian who cares to read them.

People have a right to expect that a sermon will say what the Bible says. No evangelical preacher would disagree. But if we import Christology into texts, do we not communicate that texts are pretexts for talking about something else? Even if this something else is Christ—the noblest subject conceivable—have we not compromised our commitment to listeners that we will say what the text before us says?

Consequences for Preaching

This entire essay is about the "consequences for preaching" when Christ replaces God at the center of preaching. What I mean, more specifically in this section, is that Christocentric preaching may inadvertently bore listeners because every sermon seems to say the same thing.

I grew up in a church that issued evangelistic invitations at the end of every sermon, every Sunday morning, every Sunday evening. Even as a youngster I sensed that something was wrong with this practice. The abrupt shift from whatever subject the preacher had been talking about to talking about the cross was not rescued by saying, "I've been addressing Christians in this sermon, but if you're not a Christian, you probably won't understand much of it; you need to know Christ first. So here's what I want you to do while

the choir sings, 'Just as I Am'. . . ." Every sermon ended up saying the same thing.

Should our pulpit ministry be evangelistic? Absolutely. Should our preaching lead people to the cross? Of course. Does this mean that every sermon should be evangelistic in the sense that Christ's substitutionary death and the call to repentant faith must be heralded no matter what the text or topic? No. A sermon on Psalm 150, an exuberant burst of praise, does not require a "fallen condition focus" and a turn to Christ as the sinner's only hope. Preaching on the Proverbs 31 woman, or gender roles in the Garden of Eden, or the providence of God in the story of Ruth, and then "making a bee-line to the cross" has a false feel to it.

Chapell faults a sermon he once heard for tacking on an evangelistic invitation rather than developing the redemptive message out of the text.[58] But maybe there wasn't an explicitly redemptive message in that text and the problem is that Christ-centered preaching insists that there *must* be. I'm not sure *why* there must be—why redemption has to be the theme of every sermon, why we must "…place every text within a redemptive context,"[59] or why God's redemptive purpose must be the one aspect of his character that shapes every sermon.

Chapell says, "Because everything that was written is the self-revelation of the God whose mercy endures forever (Ps.136) and in whom there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17), all Scripture possesses an aspect of redemptive hope," inferring that every sermon on every text must therefore expound this redemptive hope.[60] But one could argue just as cogently that "Because everything that was written is the self-revelation of the God who is angry with sinners every day (Ps.7) and in whom there is no shadow of turning (James 1:17), all Scripture possesses an aspect of wrath," and infer that every sermon should therefore expound judgment. Or that because God's kingdom endures forever, every text possesses a kingdom focus and so the kingdom should be expounded in every sermon. Redemption is obviously a prominent theme in Scripture, but so

is the kingdom of God, and so are sovereignty, and holiness, and the self-revelation of the infinite-personal God through his Word. Why should redemption be the privileged theme that governs every sermon? If anything ought to be *the* underpinning of all our preaching, it is God's passion for his glory. Jonathan Edwards ("The End for Which God Created the World") convincingly demonstrates from Scripture that everything else—including the redemption of Israel and the church—is penultimate.

Of course, Christocentric preaching need not be explicitly redemptive in its focus. Christ-centered preaching is not necessarily *cross*-centered preaching.[61] As noted above, Greidanus includes the pre-existence of the Logos and the whole of Jesus' earthly ministry, including his teaching, in his vision of what it means to preach Christ. The preacher is not "required to land with an acrobatic leap at Golgotha in order to make the text and the sermon Christocentric."[62] But my main point is not significantly affected by this distinction: a philosophy of preaching in which every sermon must make an explicit move toward Christ—whether that means his cross or not—is likely to produce a lot of sermons that sound the same.

This has often been a criticism of redemptive-historical preaching—preaching in which the grand sweep of biblical narrative and its climax in Christ governs the sermon.[63] The redemptive-historical preacher does not preach texts, he preaches the gospel *from* texts. Every sermon tells the story of what God in Christ is doing—doing *redemptively*—in history. The result? "Ten thousand thousand are their texts, but all their sermons one!" This quip might better fit clumsy preachers than those who can skillfully move from almost any subject to Christ; but even a seasoned preacher like Greidanus, whom Chapell calls "the dean of redemptive preaching and its finest scholar,"[64] cannot entirely avoid sounding much the same from one Christ-centered sermon to the next. In his review of *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, Kuruvilla notes how many of Greidanus's sermon goals are virtually identical, and worries that a preacher following Greidanus's lead "…is in danger of being

trapped in tedious repetition."[65] I concur with the reviewer that the theology of the Genesis pericopes (and any biblical text) needs to be identified with more adequate specificity.[66] There's more to theology than Christology.

Why not let each text speak its own distinctive word, and let Christology and soteriology find their place—a preeminent place, to be sure!—in the week-in and week-out pulpit work of many months and years? Or in other elements of worship services of which sermons are a part? Insisting that every text, even a text on, say, environmental stewardship or just war, be Christ-centered "… puts the preacher in quite a homiletical stretch, and an unnecessary one. God as creator is the firm and natural ground for such appeals, relieving the sermon of non sequiturs and awkward throat clearings."[67]

Bryan Chapell quotes with approval Spurgeon's advice to a beginning preacher:

> Don't you know, young man, that from every town and every village and every hamlet in England, wherever it may be, there is a road to London? …So from every text in Scripture there is a road toward the great metropolis, Christ. And my dear brother, your business is, when you get to a text, to say, now what is the road to Christ? …I have never found a text that had not got a road to Christ in it, and if ever I do find one…I will go over hedge and ditch but I would get at my Master, for the sermon cannot do any good unless there is a savour of Christ in it.[68]

Let me tweak Spurgeon's metaphor and then critique his use of it. Rather than saying that every text of Scripture *has* a road to Christ, I'd say that every text *is somewhere on* the road to Christ. But, if that is so, why should a preacher feel he has to make the same trip all the way to the end of the road every Sunday? Is it not enough to go a mile or two? Why not take time to observe the delights

by every hedge and ditch? Delights placed there by God himself! These may be missed if the preacher is always saying, "Don't look too closely, we have a destination (the cross) and a deadline (we have to get there before noon today)."

Any number of Spurgeon's sermons could illustrate what I mean. In one, he gives his text as Proverbs 27:10 ("Do not forsake your friend and the friend of your father") and announces his intention to give no lectures on friendship, however valuable that might be, but to talk instead about the "Friend who is the chief and highest of all friends."[69] Certainly people need to know the Friend of Sinners. But they also need to know what Proverbs teaches about human friendship. How is our friend Jesus honored if we pay no attention to what his Father is trying to teach us on this important subject?[70]

Redemptive-historical theologians warn against mining Bible texts for "lessons" and "examples." While I'm not as wary of ethical or "exemplar" preaching as some who carry the banner for redemptive-historical preaching, there is a danger of marginalizing God by talking too much about the human characters in his story. So I will assent, for the sake of argument, to the pleas of Greidanus, Chapell, Clowney and others that sermons be *mainly* about the character and mighty acts of God disclosed in the great narrative of the Bible. Let's just be sure to preach the character and mighty acts of *God*, not only the second person of the Godhead.

There's an old story about a pastor giving a children's sermon. "I'm thinking of one of our forest friends," he says. "Does anyone want to guess who it might be?" No one ventures a guess, so he continues, "This friend is small and gray and has a bushy tail. Now do you know who I mean?" No answer. "This forest friend is shy and scampers up a tree when you get too close." Still no guesses from the silent children. "This friend likes to bury nuts in the ground. Surely you know who I'm talking about now!" Finally one kid pipes up, "I know you want us to say 'Jesus,' but it sounds like a squirrel to me."

Somehow this kid had gotten the idea that every sermon has to be about Jesus.[71]

Consequences for Church Life

Christocentric preaching may inadvertently encourage listeners to practice a privatized or Jesus-only pop spirituality.[72]

Earlier in this paper I cited Fred Craddock's concern that when Christ replaces God at the center of preaching, creation is separated from redemption "…opening the door to every other-worldly heresy hovering around the church…"[73] What Craddock means can be illustrated by a recent article in *Creation Care*. David P. Gushee laments the failure of many Christians to think theologically about the environment because their working theology is "privatistic, other-worldly, and soteriological." The gospel they embrace has little or nothing to do with this world. Their leaders can debate the *ordo salutis* into the wee hours, but can't think theologically about stewardship of the created world. Gushee links this narrow theological vision to the kind of advice he and many other preachers got in seminary, to "preach the gospel in every message through whatever text or issue happens to be before us," a gospel "in which the drama of personal salvation is all that really matters."[74]

I wonder what other subjects preachers avoid because a clear Christological or soteriological connection can't be discerned. Political economy? The sanctity of life? Bio-medical ethics? A God-exalting view of vocation (beyond being a "witness for Christ" in the workplace)? Church life will be pietistic and privatistic indeed unless preachers can inform Christian action in the culture with a comprehensive theological vision, one I believe is better cast by theocentrism than by Christocentrism. "To say that Christian preaching is or should be a proclamation about God is to say something central to who we are, what we are about, and how we regard the world in which we live out our faith, the world God created and loves."[75]

Visiting a church while on vacation last summer, I asked an usher what version of the Bible most people in that congregation used. She smiled, "Oh, it doesn't matter, we're all about *Jesus* here." While I appreciate her attempt to make a guest feel at ease, and though, perhaps, I shouldn't make too much of her singling out the second person of the Trinity for special mention, I am concerned about the Jesus-only spirituality of much contemporary church life. Too many Christians claim to love Jesus even though they scarcely know his Father. Too many groove on "Jesus-is-my-boyfriend music." Too many have shrunk the canon to its "red letter" parts. Piety, prayer, and worship all begin and end with "Jesus, only Jesus." We're all about Jesus here.

Once again, I acknowledge that responsible advocates of Christ-centered preaching will agree with these concerns, and once again, I cite Greidanus as an example. He knows that the New Testament writers "had no thought to present Christ as an alternative to God, as an object sufficient in himself of Christian worship…worship which stops at him and does not pass through him to God, the all in all, at the end of the day falls short of Christian worship."[76] But once again I question whether what's clear to Greidanus is clear to listeners. Too many, I'm afraid, may *hear* "Christ," by which Greidanus means the eternal Logos, the glorious second person of the Trinity, the agent of God in creation who mediates to us knowledge of the Triune God and delights in glorifying the Father, but *think* "Jesus," by which they mean the kinder and gentler deity on whom they prefer to focus their devotion. Americans in particular, with our consumer mentality, feel entitled to pick and choose our beliefs; in our theological marketplace, Jesus looks like a new and improved user-friendly version of God.

Conclusion

There's much with which I agree in Christ-centered preaching. But all the good it intends to achieve for the church can be better achieved by God-centered preaching. I'm glad that Greidanus, Goldsworthy, Chapell, and Clowney frequently and fervently affirm

God-centeredness in preaching. But where they ask us to go beyond that to Christocentric preaching, I'd make the later a subset of the former, letting some sermons be Christ-centered in the context of a God-centered pulpit ministry.

I agree with Greidanus that it's necessary to preach Christ from the Old Testament. I disagree that it's necessary to preach Christ from ever pericope in the Old Testament. His instincts prior to writing *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* were sound: "I thought and taught that with some texts preachers may have to be satisfied with the broader category of *God*-centered preaching."[77]

I agree with Ligon Duncan that we should preach grace from the Old Testament.[78] But we're not Marcionites; it's "grace, grace, *God's* grace, freely bestowed on all who believe." (I note that in the sermon précis Duncan offers as an example of what he means, God is seen as gracious even though the preacher does not explicitly mention Christ. And this is fine.[79])

I agree with Duncan that preachers should "…combat your tendency to choose a canon within the canon by purposing to preach 'the whole counsel of God'—Moses as well as Mark, Jonah as well as John, Psalms as well as Paul, Proverbs as well as Peter, Leviticus as well as Luke, Habakkuk as well as Hebrews, Ruth as well as Revelation."[80] But I would add, let's be sure that when we preach Jonah we really preach Jonah, not John; when we preach Ruth, let's preach Ruth, not Revelation. In Christ-centered preaching there's a temptation to let the New Testament take over and not let the Old Testament be really heard.

I agree with Clowney that "Because Christ is the eternal Logos, God the Son, in every revelation of God *he* also is revealed."[81] But I would not draw the false inference that *only* when Christ is revealed is God revealed. Of course we know God through Christ, but we also know who Christ is from the God story that moves toward him. "After all, faith in God shaped thinking about the life and passion of Jesus just as the life and passion of Jesus shaped faith in God."[82]

I agree that preaching ought not be man-centered or moralistic, and so I agree with Chapell that "A message that merely advocates morality and compassion remains sub-Christian…"[83] But the theology that will sustain better preaching is broader than Christology.

I applaud Goldsworthy's concern that an Ephesians 6:4 sermon on fatherhood not be wrenched from a context of gospel and grace,[84] but I would ask why can't that context be explored over several weeks of preaching instead of short-changing the ethical thrust of this and many other passages to make sure that the gospel context is re-established in every sermon.

I would change Jay Adams's statement, "If you preach a sermon that would be acceptable to the member of a Jewish synagogue… there is something radically wrong with it"[85] to "If you preach *only* sermons that would go over in a synagogue, and never get around to Christ and Calvary, disguising our Lord Jesus even when he is manifestly present in your text, then there is something radically wrong with your preaching."

I agree with those who are tired of the insipid, chatty preaching all too common in our time. But the cure, I think, is theocentrism, not Christocentrism. John Piper pleads for God-besotted "expository exultation" as a cure for thin, man-centered preaching. The serious sermons he longs to hear exalt not only redemption in Christ, but "God's greatness and majesty and holiness."[86]

I agree with Calvin over against Luther, that the sovereign glory of God is a broader theological perspective than justification. Luther, looking for the latter, saw Christ everywhere in the Bible. Calvin saw God everywhere.[87]

I agree with Goldsworthy up to the last word in this sentence: "I can think of no more challenging question for the preacher's self-evaluation than to ask whether the sermon was a faithful exposition

of the way the text testifies to Christ."[88] I'd end the sentence with "God," and commend this (revised) searching question to my homiletics students. I'd also alter his claim, "The Bible is a book about Christ" to "The Bible is a book about the God whom we come to know most fully in Christ."

I appreciate Chapell's clarification in the second edition of his textbook that the preaching he advocates is Christ-centered not because it makes clever mention of Jesus, but because it "discloses an aspect of God's redeeming nature."[90] But I wonder why disclosing God is insufficient, needing to be supplemented in every sermon by "Christ." And I'm not convinced that God's *redeeming* nature is the only aspect of his character worthy of a sermon. Is it really true that Pharisaism inevitably results when *redemptive* themes are not harvested from every text?[91]

I'm glad (and surprised) that Chapell says, "Exposition is Christ-centered when it discloses God's essential nature as our Provider, Deliverer, and Sustainer whether or not Jesus is mentioned by name."[92] I'm glad because the seminary where I teach uses Chapell's book as a foundational text, and even I can honestly endorse Christ-centered preaching if it's defined by this sentence! I'm surprised because the sentence seems to take back a fair amount of what Chapell has said for three hundred pages about God's nature as *Redeemer* being essential to preaching and about the necessity of connecting every passage to the climax of redemptive history in *Christ*.[93]

Greidanus thinks "Christ-centered preaching is not opposed to God-centered preaching. If done well, Christ-centered preaching exposes the very heart of God."[94] But given the risks that Christocentric preaching entails—especially if *not* well done—and given Christ's own preoccupation with exalting his Father, and given the Bible's emphasis on the gospel as the gospel of God, it seems to me that it makes good sense to keep God at the center of preaching.

I agree with Greidanus that preaching should be theological and

not just textual, that sermons should move toward "the center." And so I agree—up to a point—that preachers should "…look for a road from the periphery to the center of the Bible and redemptive history—a road from their text to Jesus Christ.[95] But I would change the name at the end of Greidanus's sentence to "God." God is at the center of the Bible. He is its main character. God is at the heart of redemptive history. His incarnate Son "gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Gal. 1:4-5).

Notes

1. Sidney Greidanus notes that "Christocentric preaching is more than theocentric preaching," and the unpacking of that word "more" is the burden of much of his scholarly effort. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 118.
2. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 2.
3. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 3.
4. Ibid., 10.
5. Jay E Adams, *Preaching With Purpose* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982), 147.
6. Ibid., 152.
7. Goldsworthy, 122.
8. Ibid., 115.
9. Ibid.
10. Ligon Duncan, "Preaching Christ from the Old Testament," in Mark Dever, J. Ligon Duncan III, R. Albert Mohler Jr., C.J. Mahaney, *Preaching the Cross* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2007), 47.
11. Edmund Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979), 74.
12. Ibid., 75.
13. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching*, second edition (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 80.
14. Ibid., 279.
15. Ibid., emphasis added; see, also, p. 275.
16. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 2

17. Ibid. 36-37.
18. Ibid. 203.
19. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).
20. Fred Craddock, "The Gospel of God," in *Preaching as a Theological Task*, eds. Thomas G. Long and Edward Farley (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1996), 75.
21. Douglas B Clawson, "Expounding the Word of God." 2008 web page of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, http://www.opc.org/nh.html?article_id=425.
22. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 178. See also his comments on theocentric interpretation, 230, 286.
23. Clowney, 75.
24. J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973), 182.
25. It is also in Luke's gospel that we find two of the dominical sayings most supportive of Christ-centered preaching, Luke 24:27 and 44. But in these post-resurrection scenes, as in John 5:39, Jesus does not say that every line of every verse of every pericope is about him; he says that every part of Scripture (law, prophets, and writings) testifies of him.
26. Craddock, 75.
27. Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990), 29.
28. John Piper, *God is the Gospel* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005), 205.
29. Paul Scott Wilson, *The Practice of Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 150. Though the suggestion is Wilson's, the specific examples are my own.
30. Paul Scott Wilson, *God Sense* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 69.
31. Craddock, 75.
32. Robert H. Mounce, *The Essential Nature of New Testament Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 52.
33. Ibid.
34. John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959), 3.
35. Craddock, 74.
36. Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 40.
37. Craddock, 73; Murray, 3; Goldsworthy, 82.
38. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 180.
39. Ibid., 178 (citing Edmund Steimle).
40. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*, 118. Nor am I convinced that replacing "Christocentric" with "Christotelic," a term advocated by Peter Enns in a *Westminster Theological Journal* article, gains us much (WTJ, 65 [2003], p. 277).
41. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 228.

42. Ibid., 203-225
43. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 9,10. Greidanus cites other examples of sincere but flawed efforts to preach Christ. So it's possible (and Greidanus models it as well as anyone) to advocate Christ-centered preaching and to avoid some of the more egregious abuses of that hermeneutic. But, as I will say more than once in this paper, the unnecessary perceived need to preach Christ in every sermon from every text will almost inevitably lead to the kinds of faulty sermons Greidanus eschews. And I think he, too, sometimes slips into forced connections between texts and Christ.
44. Clowney, 81.
45. Calvin thought that those who saw only a reference to Christ's kingdom in Psalm 72 did violence to the language of the text (Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 138).
46. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 153-154, 160
47. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 127-128
48. Ibid. 119.
49. Ibid. 234.
50. Abraham Kuruvilla, review of Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, in *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, 8:1 (March 2008): 138.
51. Clowney, 82-84.
52. Ibid., 83.
53. Wilson, *God Sense*, 130.
54. Goldsworthy, 85.
55. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 137, 138.
56. Ibid., 139.
57. Adams, *Preaching with Purpose*, 147
58. Chapell, 281.
59. Ibid., 284.
60. Ibid., 285.
61. Though for Chapell, at least, the two may be synonymous. Commenting on Paul's commitment to know nothing "except Jesus Christ and him crucified," Chapell takes the cross as a synecdoche standing for all of God's redemptive work in Christ (p. 278).
62. Sidney Greidanus, *Sola Scriptura: Problems and Principles in Preaching Historical Texts* (Toronto: Wedge, 1970), 145.
63. "Redemptive-historical preaching" and "Christ-centered preaching" seem at times to be virtually synonymous. Greidanus speaks of the "redemptive-historical Christocentric method" (2007, p. xii). Chapell speaks of "redemptive essentials (i.e., Christ-centeredness)" (p. 275; see, too, pp. 288, 307, 310-311) and says that preachers must identify a

"fallen condition focus" (what's wrong, that Christ came to make right) in every passage of Scripture; then the sermon will "show how each text manifests God's grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ" (p. 279).

64. Chapell, 13.
65. Kuruvilla, 139.
66. I also concur with Kuruvilla that despite reservations about Greidanus's hermeneutical method, *Preaching Christ from Genesis* is a gold mine for preachers.
67. Craddock, 79.
68. Chapell, 288. Greidanus, too, cites this passage in Spurgeon. Assessing the shortcomings of "the Prince of Preachers," he notes Spurgeon's tendency to hop over hedges and ditches to get to Christ, but concludes that "frequently Spurgeon fails to see the right roads to his Master and, instead, travels through the swamp of typologizing and allegorizing." *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 161.
69. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 156, note 180.
70. Greidanus admits that wisdom literature presents a significant challenge to those who would preach Christ from every passage (*Preaching Christ from Genesis*, p. 11, note 26). I think it's an unnecessary challenge. Christological and redemptive themes are not prominent in this part of the Bible.
71. Goldsworthy tells a similar story and acknowledges that Christ-centered preachers have to work hard at making sure listeners don't go "Ho hum, here comes the Jesus bit" (p. xi).
72. It may be a contributing cause of these ills. It's certainly not the sole or main cause.
73. Craddock, 75.
74. David P. Gushee, "New Frontiers in Ecological Theology," in *Creation Care* (Summer 2008): 46.
75. Craddock, 76.
76. Greidanus (quoting James Dunn), *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 180.
77. Ibid., 36
78. Duncan, 56.
79. See, too, sermon outlines, main points, and subpoints proposed by Chapell, where it's God, not just Christ, who loves, justifies, and blesses (Chapell, 131, 137, 153, 157).
80. Duncan, 43-44.
81. Clowney, 76.
82. Craddock, 74.
83. Chapell, 274.

84. Goldsworthy, 20.
85. Adams, 147.
86. John Piper, "Preaching as Expository Exultation for the Glory of God," in Dever, Duncan, Mohler., Mahaney, *Preaching the Cross*, 107.
87. Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, 127.
88. Goldsworthy, 21.
89. Ibid., 19.
90. Chapell, 15.
91. Ibid., 286.
92. Ibid., 303.
93. In the preface to his second edition Chapell clarifies that Christ-centered preaching is a synecdoche for "the entire matrix of God's redemptive work, which finds its culminating expression in Christ's person and work" (Chapell, p.15). This clarification, like Greidanus's careful definition of "preaching Christ," is an improvement on the less nuanced expectation that every sermon will include "the Jesus bit." But Chapell's clarification still seems to make redemption the privileged theological theme in all preaching and its climax in Christ a necessary move in every sermon.
94. Sidney Greidanus, "Reflections on Preaching," *Calvin Theological Seminary Forum* (Spring, 2003): 4.
95. Ibid.

Preaching as Translation via Theology

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by Abraham Kuruvilla

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Abstract

The homiletical understanding is strikingly parallel to the transaction of translation. Both endeavors seek to render a text into a valid product—a new linguistic text in one, sermonic application in the other—that, while demonstrating relevance for a fresh setting, maintains authority of the source text. It will be proposed that the key hermeneutical entity governing the validity of application in the homiletical translation from text to praxis is the theology of the pericope being considered. This entity, pericopal theology, will be defined and its significant role in preaching delineated.

Introduction

Application is the culmination of the exercise of preaching, whereby the biblical text is brought to bear upon the lives of the congregation in a manner that seeks to align the community of God to the will of God, for the glory of God. Therefore, a fundamental issue for homileticians has always been the determination of application that is faithful to the textual intention (i.e., authoritative) and fitting for the listening audience (i.e., relevant). The struggle to bridge the gap between ancient Scripture and contemporary listeners in order to provide valid application is parallel to the transaction of *translation*. This paper will explore the metaphor of translation to demonstrate how the preacher might effectively move from text to praxis by means of thetheology of the particular pericope being handled in the sermonic endeavor.[1] The peculiar nature of texts that necessitates "translation" in the preaching of a biblical pericope will be considered, and a theological means to achieve this end proposed.[2]

Translation and Preaching

The singular property of texts that obliges both the linguistic translator and the biblical preacher to undertake translation is the phenomenon of distanciation; indeed, the goal of both agents is to neutralize distanciation by saying the "same thing" as their respective source texts.

Texts and Distanciation

Texts are unique communication acts, estranged from their authors, their maiden audiences, and the original circumstances of their composition—they have undergone distanciation.[3] Interpretation seeks to counter this distanciation, a task aided by the fact that distanciation does not render the text utterly orphaned: it bears artifacts of the event and context of writing, and traces of the author in its script, medium, content, arrangement, etc. Such residues are essential for interpretation, and are sufficiently present in most texts to establish the writer's purpose. Nevertheless, the physical absence of the writer at the point of the text's reception by the reader ensures that the scenario of dialogue no longer operates in textuality as it does in orality.[4] For a text in another language, it is the translator that becomes the hermeneutic intermediary between text and audience; for the biblical text, the preacher serves that office. The proximity of such a mediator to the audience enables the former to regenerate the message of the text effectively for the latter. This is the role of both translator and preacher—human intermediaries between author and readers/listeners "rendering the communicative action of the script in new situations," for the goal of translation is "to enact the way, the truth, and the life in new settings, to make Christ live within new contexts."[5]

Fidelity in Translation and Preaching

"Translation" is derived from the Latin *trans* ("across") and *latus* ("to carry"). The translator carries a text across a linguistic gap; the preacher, too, seeks "to carry across" the applicational import of a passage of Scripture to a congregation across the communicational

chasm between text and audience. In principle, there is no difference between the translation of a text in a different language and that of a text in a different time; in the case of the Bible, it is both in a different language *and* from a different time. Both textual translation and biblical preaching attempt to demonstrate the relevance of a source text for a new setting. Both seek to render the original into a valid, new product—a text in a different, contemporary language in the one; fresh sermonic application in a different, contemporary context in the other. While there is thus an element of *novelty* in these enterprises of translation and preaching, both also strive to be faithful to the source text, seeking to maintain its authority in the new product—the element of *fidelity*. Translation seeks to be faithful to the source text (to be "author"-itative), while at the same time attempting to render that text accessible to a reader, in the new language and idiom of the latter (to be relevant). In like fashion, generating application to stimulate life-change for the glory of God, the homiletician is charged not only to lead meaning *from* the biblical text with authority, but also to direct meaning *to* the situations of listeners with relevance. Thus "translation" is descriptive of both the linguistic operation and the preaching enterprise.

Saying the "Same Thing"

"A translation…implies that although we are speaking in a different language, we are still saying the *same thing*."[6] Whether linguistic or sermonic, translation is an attempt to say the "same thing" to a contemporary audience, the translated product in either case seeking to be faithful to the source text, thereby bearing its authority. As a consequence of saying the "same thing" as the source text in the new context, the distanciation between author and reader is nullified.

The phenomenon of "false friends" illustrates this eloquently: the meaning of the word "g-i-f-t," for instance, depends, at the very least, on what language the script is in. To disregard the linguistic context of the text "g-i-f-t" written in German (= "poison"), and to read it as English would be thoroughly misleading, if not dangerous.

In order to be understood by an English-speaking audience, *gift* in German must be translated to *poison* in English. Only then will the English reading be faithful to the conceptual core of the German text—"a chemical substance that causes injury, illness, or death." This conceptual core (the "same thing") maintains an equipotent identity in both worlds—that of the author and that of the reader—irrespective of language or context. Such a translation is not an option; it is necessary *in order that* the translated product may remain faithful to the original, saying the same thing as the latter.[7] Across the gulf between the textual world and the readerly world, conceptual identity (the "same thing") has to be faithfully carried: "one…has to posit a transworld identity in order to make a translation of meaning from one world to another."[8] With regard to the interpretation and application of Scripture, Richard Hays declared that "[o]nly historical ignorance or cultural chauvinism could lead us to suppose that no hermeneutical 'translation' is necessary" for a contemporary audience to grasp the ancient biblical text.[9] Fidelity to the original requires that the linguistic, temporal, and contextual changes be taken into account; i.e., translation *must* occur.

David Clark observed that interpreters of Scripture who refuse to change the reading of the normative text in a changed situation (those who resist translation) are *transporters*, naïvely carrying the "untranslated" biblical text into fresh contexts and violating its transworld identity and conceptual core intention. *Transformers*, on the other hand, attempting to be relevant, alter the text, making no attempt at faithfulness to it. R. Judah ben Ila'i sagely remarked: "If one translates a verse literally [a transporter], he is a liar; if he adds thereto [a transformer], he is a blasphemer and a libeler" (b. *Qidd*. 49a). On the other hand, responsible *translators*, unlike transporters and transformers, are those who speak a new language in the new context, thus faithfully proclaiming what is affirmed by the text and its transworld conceptual core.[10] This is to assert that untranslated readings of a text are likely to be readings of infidelity. To say the "same thing" as the original text, then, is not merely to repeat the latter verbatim. The conceptual thrust of the text must be isolated, to which all of that text's translations/applications must align,

if one wants to say the "same thing" as the source. And thereby distanciation, the result of textuality, is counteracted.

The rest of this paper will propose a means to achieve the goal of faithful translation in preaching, that enables the interpreter to say the "same thing," conferring fidelity (and thus authority) to sermonic application.

Theology in Preaching

The core thrust of the text that must be translated, this paper proposes, is the "world in front of the text"—the theology of the pericope being preached.

The "World in Front of the Text"

Paul Ricoeur's notion of the "world in front of the text" provides a helpful category to understand the conceptual thrust of the text.[11] The text is not an end in itself, but the means thereto, an instrument of the author's action of employing language to project a transcending vision—the "world in front of the text". Literary works of any kind are essentially referential phenomena. A Hollywood western movie, for instance, goes beyond panoramic vistas of wild frontiers, horses, outlaws, sheriffs, and the narrative of their interactions. Another implicit, to-be-inferred theme refers to "the way depicted actions embody, instantiate and/or formulate ethical knowledge and values." The film genre of the western, that depicts a particular society in the western United States of the late 19th century, projects a world with the themes of individual rights, responsibilities, and codes of honor in the face of evil. Such a world is projected for all time, not just restricted to the historical era of the narrative; so much so, if that medium/text were inspired, it would be advocating a kind of behavior for all its future audiences, beckoning them to inhabit the projected world with its particular brand of ethics. Thus the text not only tells the reader about what actually happened (what the author *said*), it also projects a "world in front of the text" (what the author *did* with what was said) that

bids the reader inhabit it. Such implied thrusts of texts are always facets of ethical value; they are especially evident in proverbs and maxims. "Birds of a feather flock together" semantically makes a statement about avian social behavior, but also projects a world in which readers, being warned of guilt by association, eschew questionable company.[12]

The determination of the world so projected is thus an integral undertaking of biblical hermeneutics intended to culminate in application. This "world in front of the text" is the core conceptual thrust of a text that, when translated, helps discover application that is faithful to the original source. Indeed, such a notion is appropriate to all categories of texts intended for application at times and places distal to their origin, including, and especially, religious and legal writings.[13] Unlike other utterances, though, the inspired text of Scripture is unique in its subject matter: in, with, and through all that it says, the A/author projects a world that portrays God and the specific details of His relationship with his creation. That world is not necessarily the way the world actually *is*. Rather, it is a world that *should be* and *would be*, were God's people to align themselves to it. The elucidation of the specifics of this "world in front of the text" is therefore an essential transaction in biblical interpretation, for that world, comprising the thrust of the text, provides the platform from which to develop faithful and valid sermonic application (that says the "same thing" as the source text).

The Projected World: An Example

If one considers the imperative, "be not drunk with wine" (Eph 5:18), one might ask what the core conceptual thrust of the text is, that is conveyed by "wine." Would it be acceptable to be drunk with an alcoholic beverage *other than* wine? Distanciation of the text and the resultant change in context call for that imperative to be translated in order to generate valid application—a transaction engaged in by the preacher.

Community governance is in view in the latter half of Ephesians, with guidelines for living embedded in a cascade of contrasts

between the dynamics of the "new self" and the "old self" (4:17–5:14). Drunkenness is paralleled with walking unwisely and being foolish, and is explicitly labeled "dissipation," used elsewhere in the NT only in Titus 1:6 (1:7 mentions addiction to wine) and 1 Pet 4:4 (4:3 has drunkenness). Wine, while its use is not condemned in the NT (see 1 Tim 5:23), is clearly not to be abused (3:3, 8; Titus 1:7; 2:3); inebriation is marked as folly and as a characteristic of those who operate in the lifestyle of the old self. Filling by the Spirit, on the other hand, is a characteristic of the wise, those displaying the lifestyle of the new self.[14] Spiritual filling refers to the abiding presence of God in Christ mediated by the Spirit (note the instrumental use of the Greek preposition *en*, in Eph 5:18) with, in, and among His people. In exhorting the Ephesians to be filled by the Spirit rather than be drunk with wine, Paul is essentially commanding them to become, corporately, the unique temple of God, the dwelling place of God in Christ, by the Spirit (also see 1:23; 3:19; 4:13). Filled in this fashion, the Christian community is to engage in spiritual worship (5:19–20).[15]

The conceptual core of Eph 5:18, then, portrays a world in which believers refrain from drunkenness with *any and all manner of alcoholic beverages capable of rendering one intoxicated*.[16] Translation to the specific world of a specific listener is now possible; the consequences for application are evident: drunkenness is proscribed, whether it be with vodka, whiskey, or any conceivable ethanol-containing concoction. The core thrust of the text, the "world in front of the text," thus forms the basis for "translation" to derive valid application for a contemporary audience.

Pericopal Theology

This paper proposes to call that world projected by the text the *theology of the pericope*, inasmuch as it portrays God and the relationship he intends to have with his people. It is a world where kingdom priorities, principles, and practices are portrayed (in Eph 5:18, it is a world in which God's people refrain from intoxication with alcoholic potions of any kind). Therefore it can rightly be called "theology"—"that skein of thought and language in which

Christians understand themselves, the Bible, God, and their everyday world."[17] The theology of a particular pericope, then, is a specific segment, a quantum, of the larger canonical world; all such individual pericopal segments together compose a holistic understanding of God and His relationship to his people. It is such a world that God graciously invites humanity to inhabit. Thus one might define *pericopal theology* as the theology specific to a particular pericope (the representation of a segment of the plenary world projected by the canon) which, bearing a future-directed intention, functions as the crucial intermediary—the element that enables the preacher to say the "same thing"—in the homiletical move from text to praxis.

Scripture, thus, displays to readers how God relates to His creation, by portraying a world governed by divine priorities, principles, and practices, and offers to the believer the possibility of inhabiting that "world in front of the text" by subscription to God's values and obedience to God's demands—a new way of living: God's way. The biblical canon as a whole projects a composite divine world. However, in the weekly homiletical transaction that moves the church towards inhabiting that world, it is the pericope that remains the most basic textual component handled. As the fundamental textual entity in ecclesial and homiletical use, and as a relatively irreducible scriptural quantum composing a single sense unit, each pericope projects a portion of that broader ideal world projected by the canon. Each pericope demarcates a segment of that plenary vision of God's relationship with His creation, the details of which segment are unique to that text and are derived from its particulars. The cumulative projections of all the individual pericopes of Scripture therefore constitute the integrated, singular, canonical world. And to this world of Scripture, Christians are called to align their lives. Therein lies the utility of the projected world (pericopal theology), for with its future-directed intention, it makes possible valid application in contexts far removed from those of the original utterance or discourse. The preaching endeavor, therefore, must include the explication of this pericopal slice of the canonical world, elucidating what that specific text affirms about God and His relationship to mankind. What the pericope so affirms

in its theology forms the basis of the subsequent homiletical move to derive application. Derived as it is from the text, the theology of the pericope confers fidelity (and thus authority) to the sermonic application that is subsequently derived from this intermediary.[18]

Needless to say, the situation of the audience is an important parameter for the translator-preacher: what specifically is accomplished in readers and hearers varies from era to era, situation to situation, and even from person to person. However, as long as these varied applications fall within the bounds of the same pericopal theology, they are but instances of a single type, spawned from the single conceptual core thrust of the text. Therefore all such applications are saying the "same thing" as the source text; distanciation is conquered, and fidelity to the original maintained.

Pericopal Theology Distinguished

Pericopal theology, in this conception, is neither the imposition of a systematic or confessional grid on textual data, nor the result of an exclusively historical or sociological focus on the subject matter. Rather, it elucidates the textually mediated theological truth of the pericope at hand, attending to the contribution of that particular textual unit to the plenary canonical world displaying God and humanity rightly related to Him. In this, pericopal theology differs from systematic or biblical theology. *Systematic theology* pays attention to the entailments of what is written, drawing conclusions deductively from one text and integrating those with deductions from other texts (for instance, the assertion of the divinity of the Holy Spirit discovered from a number of biblical texts). By its integrative activity, it operates at a more general level than does pericopal theology. Pericopal theology, more inductively derived, is constrained by the specific thrust of that particular pericope. *Biblical theology* falls somewhere in between as it identifies the development of broader biblical themes across the canon.[19] Therefore, its level of operation also tends to be more general than that of pericopal theology. The advantage of the greater degree of specificity that by definition is inherent in pericopal theology is the possibility of moving from pericope to pericope, week by week, for those who

seek to preach in that fashion. On the other hand, with systematic and biblical theology as the basis of sermonic preparation, if one chooses to preach pericope by pericope, clear distinctions between the sermonic aims of successive pericopes become harder to maintain. Operating as systematic and biblical theology does at a level of generality somewhat removed from the immediacy of the text and its details (at least at a level farther than is the locus of pericopal theology), contiguous pericopes will often tend to have similar thrusts, making *lectio continua* on a weekly basis virtually impossible to sustain without repetition of sermonic/applicational goals.[20] However, given the degree of specificity prescribed by pericopal theology, preaching pericope by pericope would not be impeded by this handicap, were one to make the theology of the pericope the bridge to application.

This, of course, is not to declare that sermons and applications constructed upon systematic theology or biblical theology have no place in the homiletical calendar. The goal of this proposal is simply to add another arrow to the preacher's quiver, one that will help those keen on preaching pericope by pericope, progressively unfolding the world projected by the canon. Week by week, and pericope by pericope, as specific portions of Scripture are brought to bear upon the situation of the hearers, the community of God is gradually and increasingly (re)oriented to the will of God as it "inhabits" the canonical world segment by segment.

Conclusion

In employing the metaphor of translation, this paper has explored how the sermon and its application may manifest the authority of the text and maintain fidelity to the original while, at the same time, relevantly translating that text for a particular audience. The theology of the pericope functions as the bridge between text and praxis, between the circumstances of the textual inscription and those of the reading community. As a pericopal segment of the canonical world that displays God and His relationship to his creation, the theology of a particular biblical pericope facilitates the valid and legitimate translation from the "then" to the "now"

with fidelity; it enables the preacher to say the "same thing" as the text. The theology of the pericope is, thus, the ideological locus in which the priorities, principles, and practices of the projected divine world are propounded for appropriation by readers and listeners. Discovering this entity should therefore be an important goal of interpretation of all biblical texts, for it is *via* this critical intermediary that an interpreter can move from text to sermon, from authoritative inscription to relevant application. Scripture is not merely informative, but also transformative; the A/author was projecting a world in such a way that the theological thrust of the pericope would be emphasized, allowing the past to flow over into the present. Sermonic proclamation of a biblical text, therefore, is complete only with the translation of the text, via pericopal theology, to praxis.

Notes

1. While acknowledging its more common connotation of a portion of the Gospels, "pericope" is employed here to demarcate a segment of Scripture, irrespective of genre or length, that forms the textual basis for an individual sermon.
2. Portions of this paper were presented at the Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Birmingham, AL, October 16–18, 2008.
3. See Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (ed. and trans. John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145, 147.
4. It is granted, of course, that authorial distanciation refers only to the alienation of the *human* agency involved in the creation of the text of Scripture. Notwithstanding the constant presence of the Spirit of God (the divine Author of the Bible) with the believing interpreter, it is the remoteness of its *human* authors that essentially necessitates the interpretive enterprise—the engagement of languages, the exploration of historical contexts, the examination of literary and rhetorical aspects of the text, etc.
5. Kevin Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 131.
6. William Hordern, *Introduction (New Directions in Theology Today*, vol. I; London: Lutterworth Press, 1968), 142 (emphasis added).
7. Lawrence Lessig, "Fidelity in Translation," *Texas Law Review* 71 (1992–

1993): 1165–1268.

8. E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Counterfactuals in Interpretation," in *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader* (eds. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux; Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 63.
9. Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament: A Contemporary Introduction to New Testament Ethics* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), 5–6.
10. See David K. Clark, *To Know and Love God* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2003), 53, 56; Hordern, *Introduction*, 141–142; and Lawrence Lessig, "The Limits of Lieber," *Cardozo Law Review* 16 (1995): 2262.
11. Paul Ricoeur, "Philosophical Hermeneutics and Theological Hermeneutics: Ideology, Utopia, and Faith," in *Protocol of the Seventeenth Colloquy*, 4 November 1975 (ed. W. Wuellner; Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies in Hellenistic and Modern Culture, 1976), 1–28; idem, "Naming God," *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 34 (1979): 215–27.
12. Peter Seitel, "Theorizing Genres – Interpreting Works," *New Literary History* 34 (2003): 285–286. For the distinctions between what the author *said*, and what the author *did* with was as said, as it pertains to biblical interpretation, see Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (LNTS 374; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009).
13. With regard to a "classic" legal text, the U.S. Constitution, James Boyd White observes: "What is required in interpreting the Constitution … is something like translation, a bringing into the present a text of the past" ("Judicial Criticism," in *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader* [eds. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux; Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988], 403–404). So also, Lawrence Lessig: "Like the linguistic translator, the judge is faced with a text (say, the Constitution), written in an original or source context (America, late eighteenth century); she too must write a text (a decision, or an opinion) in a different context (America, today); this decision, in its context, is to have the *same meaning* as the original text in its context" ("Fidelity and Constraint," *Fordham Law Review* 65 [1996–1997]: 1371, emphasis original).
14. Interestingly enough, in the book of Acts, the ministry of the Spirit was mistaken for drunkenness (2:4, 13, 15).
15. See Timothy G. Gombis, "Being the Fullness of God in Christ by the Spirit: Ephesians 5:18 in Its Epistolary Setting," *Tyndale Bulletin* 53 (2002): 265, 268; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 379–381; and Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians* (WBC 42; Dallas: Word, 1990), 348.
16. The theology of the whole pericope, Eph 5:15–20, might be summarized thus: Rather than remaining under the control of alcohol—unwise and

foolish—members of the Christian community live wisely, understanding God's will and in a manner befitting the temple of God, controlled by the presence of God in Christ mediated by the Spirit, the consequence of which is spiritual worship.

17. Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 9.
18. While the concept of theology as a bridge between text and sermon has oft been invoked in the past, what exactly that theology comprises and how it might perform its role has not been explicated. See Heinrich Ott, *Theology and Preaching* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1963), 17; John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Leicester, U.K.: InterVarsity, 1981), 43; John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 137; Timothy S. Warren, "A Paradigm for Preaching," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 148 (1991): 463–486; and idem, "The Theological Process in Sermon Preparation," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156 (1999): 336–356.
19. For similar definitions of biblical theology see, among others, B. S. Rosner, "Biblical Theology," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 10; Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 267; Elmer A. Martens, "Tackling Old Testament Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977), 123; and Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel-Centred Hermeneutics: Biblical-Theological Foundations and Principles* (Nottingham: Apollos, 2006), 68, 271.
20. For a critique of such a *modus operandi*, see Abraham Kuruvilla, "Book Review: *Preaching Christ through Genesis*, by Sidney Greidanus," *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 8 (2008): 137–140.

Fiat Lux: *The Doctrine of Creation as the 'Origin' for a High Theology of Preaching*

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by Benjamin B. Phillips

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Abstract

Creation *ex nihilo* is the paradigmatic display of God's speech. This powerful word that created the universe is carried by Christian preaching. The creation/preaching connection provides content to the assertion of preaching's 'word of God' character. It raises critical issues such as transcendence, pride, and the apparent failure of preaching. This linkage also requires interaction with other systematic categories like revelation, pneumatology, harmartiology, soteriology, and eschatology. These considerations make the doctrine of creation well-suited to ground a systematic theology of preaching.

Fiat Lux: The Doctrine of Creation as the 'Origin' for a High Theology of Preaching

"Let there be light" (*fiat lux*) hardly seems to describe the current state of the doctrine of creation, a subject which usually degenerates into narrowly-focused debates over creation and evolution. What hope then can there be that the doctrine of creation will provide a fruitful point of entry for a theology of preaching? Shouldn't we instead start with the doctrine of revelation, or perhaps more narrowly, the doctrine of Scripture? These are, after all, the more traditional places for locating a theology of preaching.

The choice of the doctrine of revelation as the locus for a theology of preaching is especially prominent among those influenced by the Reformed tradition.[1] Yet, others have begun to explore

the possibilities in considering preaching from the perspective of other doctrinal categories, such as ecclesiology (Willamon)[2] and soteriology (Buttrick).[3] Yet the pull of the doctrine of revelation is so strong that even Buttrick thinks it necessary to spend his first chapter decoupling a theology of preaching from bibliology (or at least from a caricature thereof). Given the inescapable significance of the doctrine of revelation for a theology of preaching, what reason is there to seek an alternative starting point? And, if an alternative is to be found, why should it be a doctrine as beleaguered and contentious as creation?

The Christian doctrine of creation prompts far more than a debate about the age of the earth. It extends well beyond discussions of special creation vs. naturalistic evolution—as important as these things are! In fact, the doctrine of creation is one of the fundamental Christian doctrines. It, along with the doctrine of Trinity is decisive for the Christian version of theism—our understanding of the God-world relationship. An approach which begins with the most basic elements of reality (God and the world; paralleling ontology) and their relationship (Creator-creation; paralleling cosmology) grounds a theology of preaching at a more fundamental level than an approach framed primarily by the doctrine of revelation (just as metaphysics grounds epistemology).

The connection of the doctrine of creation and a theology of preaching is both biblically justified and fruitful for the development of a systematic theology of preaching. This starting point raises and helps to answer critical questions for a theology of preaching which are too easily ignored when starting elsewhere. Yet this approach also raises questions which can only be addressed through interaction with the other major categories of systematic theology, thus serving as the integrating point for a systematic theology of preaching. Finally, using the doctrine of creation as the *entrée* into a theology of preaching yields an almost troublingly high view of preaching—one which the contemporary state of evangelical preaching sorely needs.

The Christian Doctrine of Creation

The Nicene Creed begins with the affirmation, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth," paralleling Genesis 1:1 by starting with the identification of God as Creator. Here, "Heaven and earth" is a phrase which encompasses all that is "not-God." Apart from what God has made, God is the only thing which exists. The Christian doctrine of creation unpacks what it means to say that God has created.

The Old Testament uses the word *bara* to indicate that God is the Creator. The God of Israel is the only figure that the Old Testament describes as creating in this manner.[4] Humans, of course, may be said to create things; machines, clothes, works of art, etc. Yet, the physical objects which humanity creates are always created out of material already to hand. By contrast, a description of the material used by God to create the world is conspicuously absent in Scripture. The Old Testament never connects a material to a divine act of creating (*bara*).[5]

The New Testament makes explicit what the Old leaves implicit concerning the material out of which God creates. The book of Hebrews affirms that "what is seen was not made out of things which are visible" (Hebrews 11:3, NASB).[6] The world as we see it was not made out of similarly visible matter, nor even material which can in principle be detected! The teaching of Platonism, popular in the Greco-Roman context of the New Testament, was quite different. Plato taught that a semi-divine Demiurge (craftsman) created the world by shaping a visible mass of pre-existing matter. Hebrews, on the other hand, leads us to the conclusion that the only thing that existed before creation was the Creator.[7]

The core of the Christian doctrine of creation is the idea that God did not use any pre-existing material to form His creation. There was no material distinct from God, existing from eternity independently of God, with which God might create. There was not even an eternal, unformed substance that could have potentially produced a "something."[8] Nor is creation an emanation of God; the world is

not made of the divine substance nor is it divine itself. The idea is most precisely stated *creatio non de deo, sed ex nihilo*—creation not from God, but out of nothing. The divine act of creation is the bringing of things into being when those things were not there before.

The theological implications of *creatio ex nihilo* are immense. The existence of creation is contingent upon the will of the Creator. Ontologically, the existence of creation depends on God's willing it so. Cosmologically, the world has not always existed—creation has an absolute temporal beginning. In contrast, God has always existed. While the world is created, God is not-created. Thus, the existence of creation is contingent; God's existence is necessary. Furthermore, *creatio ex nihilo* points to the freedom of God. His act of creation was not constrained by limitations imposed by the characteristics of a material for creation that God did not bring into existence. God is also free in that despite being self-sufficient in the inner-Trinitarian life, God graciously chose to create a reality that is truly 'other' than Himself. The interesting question for a theology of preaching is, "How did God create?"

The creation account in Genesis 1 describes God creating by commanding that the various parts of creation come into existence. "And God said, 'Let there be…'" (Genesis 1:3-24), is the phrase that drives the whole account forward.[9] Thirteen different times in Genesis 1, God brings something into existence by verbally commanding it to be.[10]

Creation is the result of divine fiat. Outside of Genesis 1, there are at least seven more passages that describe God creating by speaking. Psalms 33:6, Hebrews 11:3 and 2 Peter 3:9 reference the Genesis account when they state that God created by His word. Psalms 33:9, 148:5, Isaiah 48:13, and Romans 4:11 describe God as having "spoke[n]," "commanded," and call[ed]" the world into being. God speaks, and it is. This is nothing less than "creation by speech."

The doctrine of creation shows us that God's speech is inherently powerful. When God speaks, it happens! The Psalms praise God

for the power of His word not only in the act of bringing things into existence, but also in the exercise of God's rule over creation and history.[12] God speaks, and storms winds blow (Psalms 107:25).[13] God speaks, and Egypt suffers plague upon plague (Psalms 105:31-34). In the gospels, Jesus demonstrates His divinity by verbally commanding the obedience of creation. Christ speaks and men are healed of sickness, paralysis, and blindness.[14] Jesus summons the dead, and they come back to life.[15] He commands the storm winds and the waves, and they obey (Matthew 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-25).

Bernhard Anderson summarizes the Biblical description of God's creative word/speech in this way:

> As Israel learned in its historical experience, the word of God is the sovereign power that shapes people's lives and controls the course of history. Yahweh's word is active and dynamic; it is the means by which the divine will is accomplished. … As the rain and the snow descend from heaven and do not return thither until they have made the earth fertile, so the word that goes forth from Yahweh's mouth does not return empty but accomplishes Yahweh's purpose and effects Yahweh's will (Isaiah 55:10-11). … In these instances, it is clear that the word is not a sound or even an idea. God's word is an act, an event, a sovereign command, which accomplishes a result. The creation story affirms that God's word, mighty in history, is also the very power that brought the creation into being.

Fiat Creation and the Problem of Transcendence

The Christian doctrine of creation answers the question of how God created by asserting, "God spoke it." This both raises and addresses the claim that the nature of God and creation is such that we should not (cannot!) think of God as speaking. Creation by divine fiat means that any understanding of the ontological distinction between Creator and creation (divine transcendence)

which precludes God from interacting with creation by speaking is invalid for Christian theology. Any opposition of transcendence and immanence (especially expressed by excluding divine speech) shows a flawed understanding of the Creator-creation relationship because it pits the ontological distinction inherent in the statement '*God* created *the world*' against the means implied in the causal connection 'God *created* the world' (by speech!). The connection between Creator and creation is the word of God. The divine speech is so powerful that when God calls, even that which does not yet exist leaps into being in obedience to His command. For Christian theology, to affirm God's ability to speak is to affirm His ability to act in the world, and *vice versa*.

The transcendence of God entailed by the Creator-creation distinction also raises the problem of the adequacy of human language to bear divine speech. If God and creation are ontologically distinct, then how can words designed to describe finite entities be adequate for describing an infinite being? The question here narrows the focus from divine speech about God's will and ways, acts and purposes in creation to speech about God's own nature. This problem forms the basis for the apophatic approach to theology proper, which asserts that theologians can only say what God is *not*; no positive assertion about the nature of God can be made. The apophatic conclusion would seem to have devastating effect on the project of Christian preaching—at least where it claims to speak of God Himself.

The use of information theory by intelligent design theorists provides a helpful clue as to how the doctrine of fiat creation overcomes the problem of transcendence.[17] Design theorists argue that design may be reliably inferred from the presence of complex specified information in a biological system.[18] We may further note that one of the means by which information can be transmitted is speech. Fiat creation, then, means that God was able, through the divine speech, to call into existence finite realities that could adequately bear the constructive information He desired to impart ("it was good"). The success of the divine speech at conveying information in the act of creating lends plausibility to the assertion

that God can use other finite realities, including human words, to bear adequately the information He desires to transmit.

Yet the objection may be raised that the doctrine of creation merely shows that God can transmit information concerning finite objects into creation, not use the creaturely phenomenon of human language to convey information about an infinite being. The creation account, however, allows us to infer that God created several things beyond what the text directly asserts God to have created. For example, the progression of days in the creation account allows us to infer that God brought time itself into being with creation. More importantly here, the narrative introductions "…and God said," (Genesis 1:3-24), the report of the divine deliberation on creating humanity (Genesis 1:26), and the divine pronouncement of blessing (Genesis 1:24) all imply that God was also the creator of language as such. Indeed, God spoke the very first words heard by human ears (Genesis 1:28-30; 2:16). Human language, then, should be understood as a creation and gift of God, fit to convey information from God to humanity.[19]

Of course, the ability of God to transmit information and His creation of human language entailed in the Christian doctrine of creation does not settle the question of *how* finite human language is successful at describing an infinite being (i.e., the question of whether all language about God is analogical, or whether some is univocal). Nor does the doctrine of creation justify an *analogia entis* approach to understanding analogical language about God. Rather God's creation of language and His communication of information to and through finite realities in the act of creating by fiat points to and undergirds an *analogia fides*. Of course, the Creator-creation distinction continues to hold. We may not conclude that the divine origin and use of language provides finite creatures with exhaustive knowledge of the infinite Creator, nor understanding commensurate with Cartesian certainty. Nevertheless, on this basis of an *analogia fides*, we are rational in holding that human language about God is successful (in some sense) in describing God when God uses it to describe Himself.

The Legitimacy of Connecting the Doctrine of Creation to a Theology of Preaching

> God's revelation begins with a sermon; God preaches and the world is made. 'God said, "Let there be light", and there was light.' Six sermons are preached in a wonderful sequence; the Word of God is proclaimed in heaven's pulpit and all comes to pass; the preaching forms the universe… the Word preached is no empty word; it accomplishes what it pleases and never returns void to him who speaks.[20]

Alan Carefull's lyric description of the creation account in Genesis 1 raises the question of the legitimacy of connecting the concept of fiat creation with the language of preaching. That God creates by speaking, with all that entails about the power of God's speech, does not yet justify the claim that human speech in preaching bears any positive relationship to the divine fiat. The intersection of the doctrine of creation and a Christian theology of preaching, however, is not a matter of mere speculation. It is justified, even required, by Scripture itself.

The Old Testament connects the power of God's word as fiat with the preaching of the prophets. Jeremiah 1:9-10 describes God promising to place His words in the mouth of Jeremiah. As the prophet proclaimed the message of God, it was the Word of God. The result would be the lifting up and casting down of cities and nations. The preaching of Isaiah also had this "word of God" character (Isaiah 55:10-11). God indicated to Isaiah that God's word would not fail, but would accomplish God's purpose for sending it. In context, this applied most immediately to Isaiah's prophetic preaching.

The word of God character of prophetic preaching was not limited to these two major prophets. The phrase "word of the Lord/God" appears over 250 times in the Old Testament to describe the content of a prophetic message (sermon!). The sermons which the prophets preached are simply the "Word of the Lord." Their

sermons did not just convey information, they were tools by which God implemented His will. The word of the prophet was the word of God in that it had God as its source, and was pregnant with divine power.[21]

The New Testament continues and makes more explicit the word of God character of preaching in the ministry of the apostles. Peter affirmed the word of God power at work in preaching when he noted that the preaching of the Gospel ("the living and enduring word of God") had resulted in his readers being "born again" (1 Peter 1:23). Paul described his own preaching, especially in its transformative power, as "the word of God" when he reminded the Thessalonians:

> when you received the word of God which you heard from us, you accepted *it* not *as* the word of men, but *for* what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe (1 Thessalonians 2:13).

In 2 Corinthians 2-4, Paul defended his preaching ministry to the Corinthians. He reminded his readers that he did not "peddle the word of God" but with "sincerity, as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God" (2 Corinthians 2:17). He "use[ed] great boldness in speech" (2 Corinthians 3:12), and did not "preach ourselves, but Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:5). Paul's decision to preach Christ (the Word of God!) rather than human wisdom (preaching ourselves) was founded on a distinction between the Word of God and the words of men. The wisdom of men is foolishness (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:18-25). The Apostolic preaching of "the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God… Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Corinthians 4:4-5) is the word of God. Paul affirmed that in such preaching, one sees the God "who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness'" causing "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" to shine "in our hearts" (2 Corinthians 4:6).[22]

Paul insisted that the power of God's word in preaching is the same as that seen in the original act of creation. Paul alludes to, rather than quotes, the Old Testament here. The dominant scholarly position is that Genesis 1:3 is the basis for Paul's language. Some

scholars have pointed to Isaiah 9:2 as a possible point of connection, given the use of three important terms in both passages ("darkness," "light," and "shine"). However, God is not mentioned in Isaiah 9:2 and it is not He who speaks there.[23] Instead, it appears that Paul is making the same kind of connection between Genesis 1:3 and his preaching of the gospel that one sees implied in Isaiah 9:2.

Where there was no light, light has been summoned into existence by the word of God. Where there was no faith, faith has been summoned into existence by the word of God in the ministry of preaching (Romans 10:13-17). The result is that those reconciled to God in Christ through the preaching of the gospel are a "new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17). 2 Corinthians 4-5 and Romans 10 further indicate that the privilege of bearing this creative, powerful word of God is shared not only by prophets and apostles, but by all those who proclaim the Gospel orally. Not only Paul, but all those who share the ministry of preaching (and indeed, all Christians as they share the Gospel!) are ambassadors through whom God makes His appeal (2 Corinthians 5:20).[24]

The connection between the doctrine of creation and a theology of preaching is neither speculative nor a matter of theological imagination. Scripture itself grounds the connection broadly in the attribution of power to God's speech and the characterization of faithful preaching as demonstrating this same power. Paul makes the connection explicit in 2 Corinthians 4:6 where he sees the power of God's speech in creation at work in the Christian preaching of the Gospel. The result is an extremely high view of Christian preaching as an event where God speaks, and human preachers—earthen vessels though they be (2 Corinthians 4:7)—bear in their preaching the same powerful word of God which called the universe into existence.

Implications for a Theology of Preaching

God can speak in the world, contra classical liberalism, and does in fact speak in Christian preaching. This elevates the act of preaching from mere human communication to an act of God. The sermon

is worthy of high respect from both preachers and listeners, as are preachers themselves as agents of God. Because of the working of God, one can say that "Christ speaks" to those who hear His Word proclaimed.[25] This view allowed Luther to exhort his listeners to believe that when hearing the Word preached, they should not view it as the words of a man, but as the Word of God Himself.[26] Preachers are instruments of Christ, tools that He uses to speak to the present world.[27] Calvin insisted that listeners hear Christ's voice in the preaching of the Gospel,[28] and God works by the voice of the preachers.[29] The key here is that God Himself speaking is the event which makes preaching true Christian proclamation. Barth noted that Christian proclamation is not merely human words about God, though it is surely that as well, it is speech "in which and through which God Himself speaks about Himself."[30]

Calvin used Philip as an example of the way in which God uses human preaching. God chose to speak through Philip and only used the angel to send Philip on his mission. This led Calvin to affirm that "the voice of God sounds in the mouth of men…, while angels hold their peace."[31] He also affirmed that "Christ acts by his ministers in such a manner that he wishes their mouth to be reckoned as his mouth, and their lips as his lips."[32] The nature of preaching makes it an object worthy of great respect.

The Power of Preaching and the Danger of Pride

The claim that preaching involves God Himself speaking is an assertion that is open to perversion by human pride. One potential problem is that of the false prophet—one who would use a high view of preaching to gain acceptance for false teaching. The Reformers, whose theology of preaching was no lower than that proposed here, considered the problem in light of their high view of Scripture.

While Christ commanded his followers to preach and extend the range of the Gospel, Luther made them dependent on Scripture for their message.[33] Scripture was written because of the "infirmity of the human spirit," which readily gives way to heresy, false teaching, and error, "giving the sheep of Christ poison in place of pasture."

The written Word exists to preserve the purity of the preaching and allows the sheep to protect themselves against the wolves, and even "to be their own guides when their false shepherds would not lead them into the green pastures."[34]

Luther argued that preachers must teach the Word of God purely,[35] and as His messengers they must be faithful in delivering God's message as opposed to their own.[36] Human reason was not to be used as the criterion and standard by which ministers should mold the Word of God, nor should one "trifle with Scripture, or juggle the Word of God."[37] Luther judged preachers who proclaimed ideas foreign to Scripture "wolves in sheep's clothing."[38] He saw "no more terrible plague" than preachers who deviate from Scripture.[39] In the end such preachers are "accursed" because they inevitably end up preaching reliance on good works.[40]

Calvin also emphasized the authority of the written Word as the source for oral proclamation and tied the Word of God-character of the proclamation to its fidelity to Scripture.[41] Calvin maintained that if the message preached was that actually given by God in Scripture, then it did not matter that the message came through a messenger— it remains the Word (or message) of God.[42] The critical issue here for Calvin, as for Luther, was that the message must remain pure. Nothing in the message was to come from the imagination of the preacher.[43] Humility before God requires the preacher to restrain his own dreams and inventions; the job is to "give pure and faithful testimony to God."[44] Deviation from this standard always results in "falsehoods, errors, and deceits."[45] Preaching must therefore be faithful to God's Word.[46]

Preachers may not preach themselves (2 Corinthians 4:5), that is to say, preach their own wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18-25). Preaching which may legitimately claim to bear the power of the divine speech can only speak God's words—that is, expose the meaning and significance of what God has said. This ties the Christian preacher tightly and inextricably to the "God-breathed" text of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16). Human speech which falsely claims to be the word of the Lord, being no more than mere human wisdom, stands under

the judgment of God (Deuteronomy 18:20). The assertion of the fiat power of divine speech in preaching, based on the doctrine of creation, must thus be tempered by the doctrine of revelation, especially the doctrine of Scripture.

A second significant problem arising from the twisting of a high view of preaching by human pride is the conversion of the power of God in preaching into a form of magic. Understanding preaching as magic would mean that simply by preaching the Scripture, one forces God to speak and so to act. Barth, however, affirmed that neither the mere intention of preachers to speak about the true God nor the fact that humans use the word "God" in their speech is sufficient to achieve true speaking about God.[47] To say "Word of God," is to confess that the Word is God's. It is under His control, not the control of the preacher. He is the One who decides when and how it will come. The speaking of the Word of God through preaching is a matter of God's will and pleasure, for preaching is only real proclamation when it is God who speaks through the language of the preacher.

Luther affirmed that the critical action here is God's not man's, citing Matthew 10:20, "It is not you that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaks in you."[48] God has indeed linked the presence of Christ with preaching, but not in a way that conveys control to human preachers.[49] Without His presence in the preaching event, preaching would be useless, even if it were doctrinally and rhetorically sound.[50] Calvin could say, "Christ acts by his ministers in such a manner that he wishes their mouth to be reckoned as his mouth, and their lips as his lips."[51] Yet he is careful to reserve to God the authority and credit in preaching.[52] As a result, the impact of the doctrine of creation for a theology of preaching is qualified by the sovereign freedom of God understood concretely in as the freedom of the Holy Spirit in illumining the minds of both the hearer and the preacher for faithful understanding.

The Power of Divine Speech and the "Failure" of Human Preaching

The idea that preachers bear in their preaching the same powerful word of God that called the universe into existence also raises the problem of the apparent weakness and failure of human preaching. The divine word is so powerful that when God calls, even that which does not yet exist comes to exist in obedience to the divine fiat. The natural relation of every "thing" in creation to the word of God is obedience. At a minimum this means that nothing which God wills to exist can fail to exist. Even suicide does not successfully deny God's fiat because death does not result in cessation of existence.

If preaching carries God's speech, and bears the power of God's creative word, then the apparent failure of human preaching is a real problem, for it would seem either that God's word is not infallibly efficacious, or that preaching does not bear God's speech. How is disobedience to the word of God even possible? Just as non-existence is no barrier to the power of God's speech, so too the lack of spiritual life or faith in a person is no barrier to the power of God's word. The question raised here requires a theology of preaching grounded in the doctrine of creation to interact with the doctrines of humanity, sin, and salvation.

In an initial attempt to resolve the problem, one might recall that the decision to speak through preaching remains with God. Just as God is completely free in His decision to create, so too God is free in His decision to speak through preaching.[53] In practice this would mean that God sometimes chooses to speak and sometimes not to speak. Yet the problem is reintroduced and exacerbated by the fact that the same preaching event sometimes produces faith in one person but not in others.

One might also appeal to the relationship between divine and creaturely agency. One version of this relationship points to the idea of divine permission. In this move, God permits the one who hears His word to embrace or refuse faith. Thus, the reaction of the hearer is the controlling factor in whether or not the person hears

and experiences the sermon as having the power of the word of God. Alternatively, one might point to the idea of effectual calling in which God calls some but not others. Here, the decision of God is the controlling factor in whether or not the power of the divine speech is experienced by the hearer. Preaching is the Word of God for those God has called, but is not the Word of God for those He has not called.

Neither answer, however, is ultimately satisfactory. Immediate appeal to the relationship between divine and creaturely agency in this case does not treat the objective fact that preaching carries the power of the divine fiat seriously enough. In the case of appeal to divine permission, the power of the divine speech in preaching is divorced from the creation paradigm because it is made to be dependent upon the object. Though the idea of effectual calling is more consistent with the fiat power of the divine speech, it too—if understood as above—contradicts the Scripture. In Jesus' parable of the sower and the four soils, the seed is cast indiscriminately on all the types of soil (kinds of hearers). In Jesus' interpretation, this seed simply is "the word of God" (Luke 8:11; see also Mark 4:14; Matthew 13:19). Christian preaching, therefore, is the word of God both to those who accept it and those who reject it.

Each of the preceding answers to the apparent failure of human preaching is characterized by a common assumption: that the divine speech is always successful at achieving the will of the Creator *in a way that is positive for the creature to whom it is addressed*. Yet Scripture also indicates that it is "by the word of the Lord" that "the heavens and earth are being reserved for fire" (2 Peter 3:7). Creation has an eschatology that includes both redemption and destruction. The divine speech can convey not only blessings, but also judgment. Rather than understand the divine speech in preaching in terms of divine and creaturely agency, it will be more fruitful to develop an eschatological orientation.

One way to do this would be to point out that in the eschaton, "every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10-11). The

claim here need not be one of universalism. Rather, the power of the divine word carried in preaching is such that while not everyone responds obediently now, one day all will—though not salvifically and only under duress. On this understanding the fiat power of the word of God in Christian preaching is ultimately effective in every case. Unfortunately, it allows a gap between the articulation of the divine speech and the resulting obedience that does not seem to fit with the Genesis account of fiat creation, where that which God calls into existence springs immediately into being.

The gap can be closed, however, by reference to the 'already-not yet' character of biblical eschatology. Christian preaching makes present in proleptic form both eschatological salvation to those who believe and judgment to those who do not believe (see John 3:18). This option offers an account of preaching as divine fiat that is most closely in conjunction with the instantaneous way the divine speech functions in Genesis 1, while also accounting for the different responses of those who hear. The divine word always accomplishes its purpose (Isaiah 55:10-11); tragically, that purpose is sometimes judgment. This answer would be compatible with either a divine permission or effectual calling understanding of how divine and creaturely agency relates in the human response to the word of God (an issue that can then be decided on other grounds).

Conclusion

God created the universe through the power of the divine word. Amazingly, God uses the foolishness of human preaching as a bearer of this divine speech. This assertion raises important questions for a theology of preaching from within the doctrine of creation. It also requires a theology of preaching to interact with nearly all of the other major categories of systematic theology. For these reasons, the doctrine of creation should be the 'origin' for a systematic theology of preaching. Yet the creation-preaching connection raises other important issues which await further development; the way in which the purposes and goals of God for creation are echoed in the goal of God's speech through preaching, and the way in which a theology of preaching which has its 'origin' in the doctrine

of creation intersects Christology.

Notes

1. E.g. Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching*, (Vancouver, BC: Regent College, 1996); Charles Bartow, *God's Human Speech*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).
2. William Willamon, *Peculiar Speech*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).
3. David Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching*, (Louisville: Westminster-John Knox, 1994).
4. Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Creation Theology*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 34; Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Waco: Word, 1987), 14. The term b'r is used in the piel stem in Joshua 17:15, 18 to refer to the cutting of trees and forests. Yet the etymological connection between the word used in Joshua 17:15,18 and the term used for divine creating (for example, Genesis 1:1) is doubtful. At the least it seems the act of creating is a uniquely divine prerogative.
5. Wenham, 14.
6. All Scripture quotations in this article are from the NASB.
7. William Lane, Hebrews 9-13, in *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 47b, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Waco: Word, 1991), 332.
8. Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 38; Robert W. Jensen, "Aspects of a Doctrine of Creation," in *The Doctrine of Creation: Essays in Dogmatics, History and Philosophy*, ed. Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1997), 22.
9. Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 56.
10. The phrase "Let there be…" or a variation on it appears in once each in Genesis 1:3, 11, 15, 24, 26, and twice each in Genesis 1:6, 9, 14, 20.
11. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Continental Commentary*, trans. John Scullion (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 110.
12. Bergman, Lutzman, and Schmidt, c.v. "*Dabhar*" in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* 11 vols. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 3:118.
13. See also Psalms 147:15-18; 148:8.
14. See especially the healing of the Centurion's servant (Matthew 8:5-13), the paralytic (Matthew 9:1-8), and blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52).
15. See especially the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17) and Lazarus (John 11:38-44).
16. Bernhard W. Anderson, *From Creation to New Creation: Old Testament Perspectives*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 29.

17. William A. Dembski, *Intelligent Design: The Bridge Between Science & Theology*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 153-160.
18. Ibid., 159-164.
19. Mark D. Thomson, *A Clear and Present Word: The Clarity of Scripture*, (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 66.
20. Alan Carefull, *The Priest as Preacher* (Birmingham, UK: Additional Curates Society, n.d.), 2; quoted in Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Vancouver: Regent College, 1996), 15.
21. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 3.
22. The aorist verb "he shone" here has the Hebrew causative sense, "he caused to shine." So, Ralph Martin, *2 Corinthians in Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 40, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Waco: Word, 1986), 80.
23. Ibid. also, Peter Balla, "2 Corinthians" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed. G.K. Beale and D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 762-763.
24. Greidanus, 4.
25. Luther, "Day of Christ's Ascent into Heaven: Third Sermon: Mark 16:14-20," in *The Sermons of Martin Luther: The Church Postils*, 8 vols. ed. John Lenker, trans. John Lenker et al., (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995) 3:238-9. (Hereafter cited as *SML*, vol., and page); *D. Martin Luthers Werke*, 61 vols (Weimar: Hermann Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1883-). (Hereafter cited as *WA*, vol., and page.); 21: 407.
26. Luther, "Sunday after Easter: Third Sermon: John 19:20-31, 1540," *SML* 3.397; *WA* 49, 149.
27. Luther, "Second Sunday after Easter: John 10:11-16; 1523," *SML* 3.29; *WA* 12, 538.
28. John Calvin, *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries*, ed. David Torrance and Thomas Torrance, reprint edition (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960-1965). (Hereafter cited as *CNTC*: book, chapter:verse, page), *Ephesians* 5:14, 201-2; *Calvini Opera* 59 vols in *Corpus Reformatorum* vols. 29-88. (Berlin: C. A. Schwetschke und Sohn, 1863-1900), *CO* 51/*CR* 79, 219. (Hereafter *CO*, vol./*CR*, vol., page).
29. Calvin, *CNTC:Acts* 10:44, 317-8, *CO* 48/*CR* 26, 250-1.
30. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God, Volume I/1*. Trans. G.T. Thomson. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1960), §4, pt.1, 106.
31. Calvin, *CNTC:Acts* 8:31, 246-8, *CO* 48/*CR* 26, 191-2.
32. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948), *Isaiah* 11:4, 381; *CO* 36/*CR* 64, 240.

33. Luther, "First Sunday in Advent: Matthew 21:1-9, 1522," *SML* 1.31; *WA* 10 I/2, 34-5.
34. Luther, "Epiphany: Matthew 2:1-12, 1522," *SML* 1.372; *WA* 10 I/1, 627.
35. Luther, "Lectures on Galatians", in *Luther's Works*, 56 vols, vol.1-30, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan and Helmut Lehmann, (St. Louis: Concordia; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1955-1986), 26.206. (Hereafter cited as *LW*, vol., page); *WA* 40 I, 333.
36. Luther, "Christmas Day: Luke 2:1-14," *SML* 1.153; *WA* 10 I/1, 85.
37. Luther, "Sunday after Ascension: 1 Peter 4:7-11," *SML* 7.325; *WA* 21, 420.
38. Luther, "Sermon on the Mount," *LW* 21: 250-2; *WA* 32, 507-8.
39. Luther, "Christmas Day: Luke 2:1-14," *SML* 1.153-4; *WA* 10 I/1, 85.
40. Luther, "Second Sunday in Advent: Luke 21:25-36, 1522," *SML* 1.78; *WA* 10, I/2, 112.
41. A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word: Martin Luther: Doctor of Sacred Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 50; cf. T. H. L. Parker, *The Oracles of God: An Introduction to the Preaching of John Calvin* (London: Lutterworth, 1947), 22.
42. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, trans. James Anderson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948 49), *Psalm* 2:7, 434; *CO* 32/*CR* 60, 258.
43. Calvin, *CNTC:Acts* 1:2, 22-4; *CO* 48/*CR* 76, 2-3.
44. Calvin, *CNTC:John* 3:11, 69-70; *CO* 47/*CR* 75, 60-1.
45. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, trans. John Owen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), *Jeremiah* 14:4, *CO* 38/*CR* 66, 181.
46. Calvin, *CNTC:Titus* 2:1, 368-9; *CO* 52/*CR* 80, 418-9.
47. *CD*, Vol. I/1, §3, pt.1, 52.
48. Luther, "Second Sunday after Easter: Third Sermon: John 10:11-16; 1523," *SML* 3.60-1; *WA* 21, 330.
49. Luther, "Third Sunday in Advent: Matthew 2:2-10," *SML* 1.94; *WA* 10 I/2, 154
50. Luther, "Second Sunday after Easter: Third Sermon: John 10:11-16," *SML* 2.397; *WA* 21, 324.
51. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Isaiah*, *Isaiah* 11:4, 381; CO 36/CR 64, 240.
52. Calvin, *CNTC:Acts* 9:6, 261-2; *CO* 48/*CR* 26, 203-4
53. Barth, *CD*, Vol. I/1, §4, pt.1, 104.

Somebody Cares

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by Chuck Sackett

1 Corinthians 12:25

(editor's note: Dr. Chuck Sackett is professor at large at Lincoln Christian College and Seminary, Lincoln, Illinois and is preaching minister at Madison Park Christian Church in Quincy, Illinois. This is the sermon he preached at the October 2008 Annual Meeting at Beeson Divinity School as the out-going president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. This transcript is taken directly from the recording of this message with only minor alterations.)

I made a transition a year and a half ago from being a full-time seminary preacher/part-time pastor/preacher to now being a full-time pastor/ preacher and a part-time seminary professor. One of the things that I learned is that I'm still teaching people how to preach. I grade sermons. You know how that works: form, content, delivery, does it say what the text says, does it reflect the way the text says it, does it do it right. And, of course, we are the arbiters of whether or not that is correct; we know what makes a sermon right. I don't get to judge the preachers that I'm now teaching how to preach. The world is doing that for me.

I've sat for three days, and suddenly this morning it struck me. I looked at this message and it dawned on me how true it was. There is this sign above the desk, you probably saw it at the Drury Inn where you are, if that's where you stayed: Talk is cheap—really, really cheap. It's their ad for free long distance. But, you see, that's exactly what Kinneman says has been discovered out here in the rest of the world, that talk is cheap—really, really cheap. And the youngest generation among us have said we are too judgmental, too hypocritical, too political, anti- homosexual. That's the way they describe evangelical Christianity. That's their take. That's their judgment. What they have said is talk is cheap, really, really cheap. So our congregation is trying to address that.

I need to put this sermon in context. It's really only partially for you. It is as much a reflection on what we are trying to accomplish in our congregation as anything I have tried to say to anybody anywhere. We are trying to figure out how to teach people to preach, not from the pulpit, but out there, so that their words matter and the world will know that their words matter, because what they do matches what they say. And while I think God has blessed me with an incredibly wonderful opportunity to preach in a remarkable church, I would have to say to you that the world is sometimes right, we aren't what we claim, and it frightens me.

I'm going to violate all of the homiletical rules that you are used to, and I'm going to ask you to look at one phrase in the middle of a text. I'll try to leave it in its context. I'll try not to violate it. I'd like for you to come with me to 1 Corinthians 12. I promise that we will try to look at it in its larger context, but there is one phrase that struck me as I was preparing for a part of our chapel series a year and a half ago at Lincoln. I haven't been able to shake this particular text since.

The verse is buried in all this language about what it means to be a part of the body of Christ over here in the latter part of chapter 12. Verse number 25. We'll come to the first part of the sentence. I just want to call your eyes down to the last phrase in this particular verse. 1 Corinthians 12, verse 25, "But that its parts should have equal concern for each other." The English Standard Version translates that that "they should have the same care."

What I'm suggesting to you, at least initially, is this: The church is the church when everybody knows that somebody cares. It's an interesting word that shows up in this particular text. If you look at a text like this and you do your homework, which I'm sure you do. You sit down at your computer, you call up Logos or Bible Works or some other program, and you do your word study. You discover that this term "one another" occurs at least a hundred times in the New Testament and has thirty-six different verbs associated with it. Twelve times the verb is love one another. And then there are what I think are simply synonyms for a bunch of other ideas: encourage

one another, admonish one another, love one another, care for one another.

These close cousins are related to this word, "show concern" for one another. Our word falls in the category of terms we call auto-antonyms. It's that feature in the English language where we have words that mean opposite of each other. Like bolt, you can run or you can anchor. Like dust, it can be the stuff that you are getting rid of as you dust. We have these words that seem to mean exactly the opposite. We can hold fast and we can run fast. We can worry and we can be concerned. It's the same word.

Jesus uses this word, as you know, in his famous speech in Matthew 6 when he says, "Don't worry, why do you worry, don't worry." And yet Paul will take that exact same word and he will transpose it over in the second chapter of Philippians where he gives us this list of people who are demonstrating what it means to "show concern" for the body. He will say about Timothy, there is nobody else out there like Timothy who has genuine worry, genuine concern, for you. In fact, he will say it about himself. In that great litany in the Second Corinthian correspondence, there is this litany of things that he has gone through that would make any of us think, "Oh, my goodness, how in the world can he endure anything else." But those things are not the biggest issue. The biggest issue is "my worry, my concern for all of God's churches."

Somehow in First Corinthians we are given this word in the midst of a congregation of people who are totally self-absorbed. I mean, just think about the context, the larger context of First Corinthians in which this little word finds its place down here in chapter 12. This is a body of people who are self-promoting, self-indulging, they are sinful, they are selfish, they are segregated, they are everything that you can imagine, and they are saints. That's a paradox for you. But, you see, that's the issue, isn't it? That every Sunday I get the privilege of standing up and talking to self-indulgent, self-promoting, sinful saints who have been asked to have a life that demonstrates that they care about one another, that there is a sermon being lived, not spoken here, but lived as a result of what

is spoken here, out there. And a world looks and says, "Is it really true?" "Is there something about this Christian faith that you keep telling us about that actually makes a difference, that makes those of you who claim it to be different than the rest of the people out here with whom I live?"

Paul would say it in Philippians Chapter 2, Galatians Chapter 6. Peter would say it in First Peter Chapter 1, and it would sound incredibly selfish when he says it. Paul would say it this way. Show great grace to everyone, be concerned about everyone, but especially to the household of faith. I think that when we practice this text of showing concern for one another, of demonstrating great grace to each other, we are doing two things that are incredibly important. One, we are demonstrating exactly what Jesus was talking about when he said, they will know that you are my disciples when you love one another, but we are also practicing what it means to demonstrate that to a lost and dying world. If we can't do it to each other, if we can't demonstrate it on each other, if we can't practice taking care of each other, how will we ever be able to take it out into the streets and demonstrate it to people who aren't like us?

This text, I think, falls in the middle of this wonderful context of First Corinthians Chapter 12, and I think there are some things that we learn about what it means to be caring for people. For example, in verses 12 and 13 he says as this major paragraph begins, "The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all of its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one spirit into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one spirit to drink." You see, when we care for one another, we eliminate the lie of individualism, that this is all about me. This text is not about me. This text is about us. This text is about the body. This text is about how we function together, and you know how hard that is.

Those of you who have much more expertise in small group kinds of functions than I do have run across one of two sets of initials, ECR and EGR, "extra grace required." You've had them in your life, haven't you? Those people who are in your circle and they

just demand extra—well, I know you've had them in your life because I'm with you, and I know that there are times in my life that I demand extra grace. I demand extra care because I'm not the person that I'm supposed to be. And, yet, if we are the body, we give it, don't we? Because we want to bring people away from the lie that it's all about me to the place that they can come to understand that it's all about us. And so we care for one another and we love one another and we encourage one another, because somewhere we have to learn that the world is bigger than the circle I'm standing in. So when we practice caring for each other, we put a lie to the concept of individualism.

But if you look a little further in the text, you come down a bit further to verse 14. "Now the body," he says, "is not made up of one part, but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I'm not a hand I don't belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be a part of the body. And if the ear should say, 'Because I'm not an eye, I do not belong to the body,' it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But, in fact, God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body."

When we care for one another in the context of the body of Christ, we not only put a lie to the concept of being a bunch of individuals. We put the lie to the sense of inferiority that so many people carry in their lives. We are not inferior to one another. Yet, if your experience is like mine, you have run across dozens of people in your journey that just don't feel like they have anything to offer. I remember sitting in the basement of a church member's house. Her husband was the janitor of the church, the custodian, the maintenance engineer. Put whatever name you want on it. Her comment is what struck me so much. As were talking she said, "My husband is just the janitor." Do you hear it? Do you hear it? Just. As if it doesn't matter.

Two years ago I was sitting in the office. Our freshman students at the college had an assignment for one of their courses. They had to interview a church leader, and since most freshman are freshman and they are college students, the concept of actually going out into the church and finding a leader is beyond their comprehension when they are surrounded by so many that the perceive to be church leaders right there on campus and so easily accessible. So a young lady came to my office. "May I interview this for this assignment?" "Well, sure, come on in." And she is this nice young woman and she is sitting in my office and she is asking me all of these prescribed questions and I go through the interview process and I answer them. And she gets up and she is ready to leave, and I say, "No, wait. It's my turn." That's not what she wanted to hear, but she was gracious and she sat back down and we began to talk.

And it wasn't very long until I could sense the emotion in my soul coming to the surface, and I was doing everything I could to prevent myself from just breaking down at the desk because here sitting in front of me was a freshman whose parents had divorced when she was just two or three years old. And it just happened to be at that moment in my life when my own daughter just divorced and my grandson was two or three years old, and it was such a collision of coincidence. And I said, "I've got to ask you a personal question. You don't have to answer it if you don't want to, but I've got to ask it. How did you make it? Why are you sitting here in a Christian college having endured what you endured with the loss of your family?" And she looked at me with tears in her eyes and she said, "My grandparents." I made a commitment that day that my grandson would have a grandfather, and every Tuesday, 4:00 o'clock for the next six years my grandson and I played ball. He thumped me every week. And this spring I had the incredible privilege of helping my grandson identify with the death and resurrection of Jesus as he was immersed into Christ. This girl didn't think she had anything to offer me. She was just the student, and I was the church leader. There is no inferiority in the body of Christ.

Paul doesn't leave that side of the coin down, however. He picks it up and turns it over and lays it down so you can see the other

side. He says in verse 21, "The eye can't say to the hand, 'I don't need you.' The head can't say to the feet, 'I don't need you.' On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresented are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal worry for one another." There it is. "If any part suffers, every part suffers with it; if any part is honored, every part rejoices with it." If we put the lie to individualism, we also put the lie to the spirit of inferiority. And if you don't put the lie to the spirit of inferiority, you are denying what God has created. Did you notice that in the text? These parts are here because God has placed them here in just this way.

But we also put the lie to the spirit of superiority. Because some of us, and I mean us, have sometimes felt as if we didn't need anybody. We do. We do. And if you don't have somebody in your life who is the one who comes along beside you to encourage you in your soul, you are taking great risk, and you are denying the very presence of God in his plan to bring you into a body where you are not superior to care, but that he has placed you in a complex situation where you need other people.

I have to confess to you, Robert [Smith], I'm sorry I didn't ask for permission to say this, but forgive me if I need forgiving. I watched this happen two years ago in Cambridge, an even bigger pulpit than this. In fact, sitting in the balcony you are about at head level with the person standing at the pulpit. And the good brother from California who had come to be the closing speaker at the Congress on Preaching had risen to that pulpit. I got the distinct sense that with jet lag and other things he just wasn't quite able to get where he wanted to go. And I was sitting way over here, and the next thing I know Robert Smith gets up and he starts—it's not just that he talked to him. I'm used to having people talk. I mean, he got up and stood to talk. And pretty soon he got up and he walked

down the aisle to talk. And pretty soon another brother over here got up, and the two of them stood, I mean, as close as this piano to the brother, and they began to talk with him. And he began to get comfortable with what he was doing, and by the time that evening was over we had been incredibly challenged by a word from God from an older, probably a more respected brother who would not have asked, I'm sure, but who was not too good to be helped in a moment and to rise to the occasion because brothers had lifted him. And I can't help but think that there are so many occasions when those of us who don't think we need the help just haven't really looked carefully enough.

So what does it look like to care for one another? I mean, how do you send a congregation of people out into the streets to really demonstrate care—I think I've seen it. I think I've experienced it in my life. Gail and I were young, poor college students trying decide whether or not to go back to school, not wanting to go into debt in order to get out of school, and the next thing I know it's Christmastime. We are debating second semester enrollment. We have some bills that we don't now how we are going to pay, and a fellow student, an older non-traditional married student walked up and handed us an envelope and said, take this home and open it when you get home. And I sat down on the side of the bed and I wept because he had taken the tires off of his car and sold them so that I could pay my bills.

I think I've seen it. I think I saw it when my mother-in-law died. We learned about it on a Sunday morning and by Sunday night there was air fare sitting on our table so the two of us could fly home to be with our family because we could have never afforded to fly on our own. I think I've seen it.

I think I've seen it when my brother Wayne Shaw walked into a married student apartment after I had gone over to inform one of my married students that his teenage daughter had been killed in a car wreck. Wayne walked in—and I don't know if you know this, but Wayne is the proud father of four sons, one of whom died as an infant. When this young father threw his arms around Wayne,

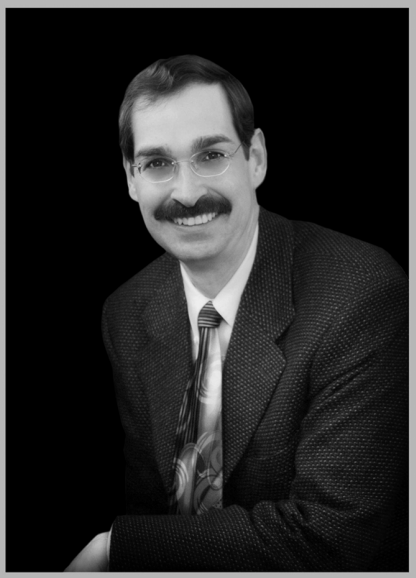
there was a moment of care for one another. I'm confident I've seen it. I'm confident I have experienced it. I'm absolutely confident that I know it when I see it, and I believe the world will know it, too.

And those we are teaching to preach will preach with clarity and with power when they have learned how to care for one another. I know the times that I have missed it. I'll not bore you with that litany of occasions when I've had opportunity to demonstrate it and failed. But at great risk I'll tell you one time when I'm absolutely certain that God in his grace allowed me to participate in caring. I was on my way to a meeting on campus when somebody caught me in the hallway and said, "Did you hear that Tiara's father was killed in a car wreck this morning?" One of our students. It wasn't minutes later that I looked up and there Tiara was walking down the hallway slumped shoulders, hurting. I did the unforgivable, I suppose. I skipped the meeting.

We stood in the hallway and talked for a little bit, and it wasn't very long until with both of our backs against the wall we just kind of slumped to the floor, sat, and cried. And I'll never forget this question as long as I live. "What am I going to do when I get married? Who's going to walk me down the aisle?" And I said, "If you'd let me, I'd be honored." And I did. I have that picture proudly standing with Tiara at her wedding saying it's my honor to give her away. Because, you see, everybody should have the experience of knowing that somebody cares, because the church is never better than when everybody knows that somebody cares.

But that's not quite the end. For, you see, inherent in this text is one slightly bigger picture. We are the body of Christ. And when God chose to be incarnate in the world, he came in the form of a body. We've become that body. And so it is never enough that people just know that somebody cares. It's that when The Somebody cares they have experienced the fact that somebody cares.

May I Help You?



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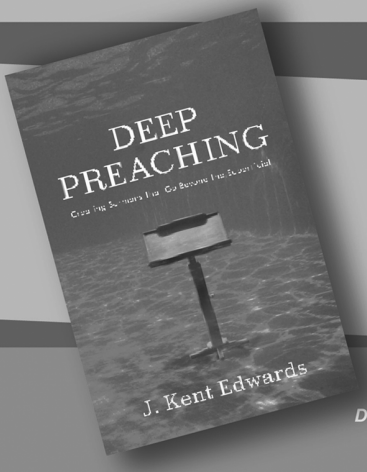

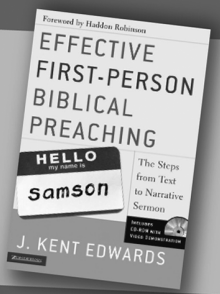

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~•~•~•~ *Book Reviews* ~•~•~•~

We Preach Not Ourselves: Paul on Proclamation. By Michael P. Knowles. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008, 1587432110, 276 pp., $24.99 paper.

This work by Michael Knowles, the G. F. Hurlburt Chair of Preaching at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, is essentially a verse-by-verse commentary on 2 Corinthians 1:1–6:13, with a focus on preaching. He states:

> For some, no doubt, this discussion of Pauline homiletic will prove methodologically inadequate. There are no instructions detailing the correct manner of exegesis, no directions on how to compose a preachable manuscript, and few guidelines on the selection of suitable illustrative material…Most infuriating in this regard is the fact that Paul's ample skill as a theologian, pastor, apostle, and preacher of the gospel seems frequently directed to acknowledging the limitations of merely human endeavor (263).

One couldn't find a better summary! "Paul's theology of Christian proclamation" (10), therefore, sounds too ambitious as a byline for a project that deals with just six chapters of only one Pauline epistle. Nevertheless, this book is an extremely useful tool with which to engage a *part* of Paul's thought on proclamation.

The focus of the book is on Paul's "spirituality" of ministry. According to Knowles, "'Spirituality'…bespeaks a general disposition and outlook oriented to the spiritual realm." It is "the direction of mind and will toward the transcendent God of Israel and of Jesus, above all as enabled *by* Jesus" (13). Inexplicably, there is no substantial discussion of the ministry of the Holy Spirit contributing to such "spirituality." This, despite at least ten references to the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 1:1–6:13. Perhaps the reason for this omission is because Knowles sees Paul as articulating "a *Jesus-centered* spirituality that can best be described as 'cruciform,' a spiritual vision essentially shaped by Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection" (15; emphasis added). That sounds, to me, like an incomplete "spirituality." I was also unclear as to why this kind of "spirituality" was "especially true…for the task of preaching" (15). If anything, in 2 Corinthians, the proclamation ministry of Paul is employed as a paradigm for *all* Christian ministry engagements; such a "spirituality," one would think, is no less applicable to nursery-care or youth ministry.

That being said, the book's recognition of the epistolary emphases on dependence upon God in preaching are helpful: "preaching is first an act of trust directed toward God before it can be an act of persuasion directed to its human audience" (117–118). Knowles is careful "not to obviate the importance of good exegesis, culturally relevant illustrations, logical structure, and persuasive rhetoric." But Paul, utilizing all of these, was "wise enough to know that the effectiveness of his preaching in bringing about conviction, conversion, or spiritual consolation is not dependent on these factors alone" (119). Knowles concludes: "The rhetoric of proclamation by no means seeks to replace divine action in the context

of proclamation, but stands alongside it, working 'together with him.' The dichotomy between 'theology' and 'rhetoric' is thus revealed to be false: insofar as God 'makes his appeal *through* us,' the two are brought into cooperation" (252). Marvelously put! Knowles' point is well taken: ultimately, "cruciform ministry" is "predicated on the gracious sufficiency of God and the otherwise definitive insufficiency of its human instruments" (163). This is the thrust of 2 Corinthians 1:1–6:13 (and of this commentary). For those engaged in ministry enterprises—preaching or otherwise—that is a crux is well worth returning to periodically, if not focusing upon constantly.

Rather than establishing ethics and behavior on the basis of what is enjoined by the text, there is a tendency throughout Knowles' interpretive endeavor to endorse the imitation of Paul. While the text itself does give warrant for adopting Paul's ministerial "spirituality," for Knowles preaching is simply to "do what Paul *did*" and not just "do/say what Paul *said*." For example: "What Paul did, therefore, other preachers seek to do" (22). But how many of Paul's variegated activities (writing in *Koiné*, traveling extensively in Asia Minor, establishing churches, tent-making, etc.) must Christians emulate—just because the apostle did them? This reviewer, at least, would have preferred to have seen the implications for Christian ministry discerned from Paul's teaching *within* the text, rather than from the apostle's implied exertions and attitudes *without* it. It is, after all, the text that is inspired, not any action or state of mind "behind" the text.

One also finds distributed throughout the book statements like these: "In particular, properly 'Christian' preaching focuses on the person of Christ" (13–14); and "[p]reaching … bears witness to God's invitation for hearers to enter into the death and life of Christ" (232); etc. While this Christocentricity is a fairly common emphasis in pulpits everywhere, I submit that the hermeneutics of landing every sermon from every biblical pericope upon Christ and the cross needs to be more rigorously examined for its validity.

These issues notwithstanding, this commentary promises to be beneficial aid to sermon preparation; it will certainly find an accessible spot on my bookshelf where I can reach it when an occasion to preach through 2 Corinthians arises.

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Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy. Edited by Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008, 0664-23254-X, viii + 257 pp., $29.95 paper.

This is a collection of essays by members of the Academy of Homiletics, the product of a two-year consultation on the teaching of preaching. The following review surveys the key articles focusing upon preaching as a *Christian* practice; despite the title, most of the other contributions concern themselves with

elements of preaching in general.

Thomas Long takes us on an informative historical jaunt, howbeit only through the last two centuries. After surveying the trajectory that has taken homileticians from Phillips Brooks's "truth poured out through personality," through Karl Barth's view of the sermon being God's own voice speaking, back full circle to an emphasis on the person of the preacher in Fred Craddock's shift to narrative preaching (7–10), Long asks, "Where should homiletics go next?" (11). He declares, that homiletics should no longer be teacher-centered (recognizing the teacher as the fount of knowledge) or learner-centered (attending to the student's internal development), but rather learn*ing*-centered (focusing upon the practice of preaching itself). "A *practice is a constellation of actions that people have performed over time* [historical focus] *that are common* [community focus], *meaningful* [theological focus], *strategic, and purposeful* [teleological focus]" (12). The emphasis on preaching as a "constellation of actions" rather than as a single act is helpful; it reminds the preacher (and the teacher of preaching) of the "identifiable core of actions" that not only constitutes preaching but also makes up the preacher (15). Thus a moral dimension is integral to the very nature of preaching (28).

James Nieman takes it further, presenting the teaching of preaching, itself, as a practice. "Effective, compelling pedagogy surely utilizes common, meaningful, strategic, purposive actions, like any practice" (35). He is right, but therein also lies a problem—in the phrase "like *any* practice." What then is distinct about a *Christian* practice? For Nieman, preaching is a "Christian practice" because it "deploys actions that Christians have traditionalized in familiar patterns . . . in order to express God's ways for the world known chiefly in Christ Jesus"—a constellation of actions "governed by and contributing to the aims of Christians" (31). It appears that tradition and historicity alone make the practice of preaching Christian. More about the biblical distinctives and the mandate of proclamation that permeates the Scriptures, expressly rendering that activity Christian, would have been welcome.

Touching on John 20:31–31 and Luke 24:13–35, David Lose asserts that the "telos" of preaching cannot be "mere instruction, exhortation, or even kerygmatic announcement, but must always seek to prompt an encounter with the living Christ" (54). Such exhortations that are less than lucid about specifics—frequently encountered in such discussions—are not particularly helpful. Here's another from Lose: Preaching is the "primary means by which to witness, confess, proclaim, and pronounce in such a way as to confront hearers with God's ongoing and immediate work in the resurrected Christ present in the world" (55). Worthy sentiment, but not any clearer, unfortunately.

James Thompson laments that "few homiletics textbooks actually offer guidelines for students in the art of biblical interpretation" (62). He favors a Ricoeurian model: embarking on the "first naïveté" in reading Scripture—the initial hearing of the ancient voice without prejudice or judgment—followed by a disciplined

study of the text. Then comes the Ricoeurian "second naïveté"—asking questions of the text that relate it to the rest of the canon and to the grid of systematic theology before relating it to the readers' circumstances (65–72). While Ricoeur scholars may carp at this simplification, the basic thrust of approaching the text with charity rather than suspicion is sound.

Anna Florence urges preachers to develop "a peculiarly Christian form of imagination" (118; italics removed). "It probably looks like an invitation to go and *live* somewhere. It probably looks like a person (the preacher) who has agreed, for a few transparent moments, to show us what it might look like to actually *accept* that invitation. . . . It has possibility. It has a place where we fit, each one of us. In those moments, the preacher disappears. The focus is on another realm, another place; we leave that sort of sermon saying, 'I saw something completely new today!'" (122). In a sense, then, imaginative preaching is the portrayal of a world that runs by God's demands—a world that could be, were God's people to live by those requirements. Also stimulating was Florence's suggestion: "Go for the subjunctive." This is to ask: "How is it to live *as if* this text were true, both for me and my community?" for by such an exercise of faithful imagination "we may happen upon *new* lands of meaning" (126). The concept of preaching as a projection of such an "eschatological" world is worth investigating further.

Not unexpectedly for a multi-author enterprise, the essays in this book exhibit a measure of unevenness, particularly as each relates to the theme of preaching as a *Christian* practice. For this reviewer, the book served to spur some thought in that direction. Teachers of preaching will, no doubt, find a library copy worth glancing through.

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The Preacher as Storyteller: The Power of Narrative in the Pulpit. By Austin B. Tucker. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008, 978 080544708 8, 218 pp., $24.99 paper.

Adding to the ever-expanding corpus of books on narrative and homiletics, Tucker pitches in with his own advice. *The Preacher as Storyteller* is a thorough exploration of the use of story in sermons, not the shaping of an entire sermon as story. In other words, Tucker discusses sermon illustrations, testimony, the "vision story," parable, and so forth, but only touches on narrative preaching (whether third- or first-person). An added bonus is a chapter on the children's sermon with numerous examples of series that the author has presented to youngsters as well as an exhortation to pastors to not delegate this delightful duty.

The three major sections of the book seem to move from theory to practice to models ("The Basics of Storytelling," "Getting the Story Straight," and "Learning from the Masters"), but I found the internal organization somewhat confusing.

Generously illustrating his assertions with stories, Tucker models what he promotes, but some of his illustrations would be better classified as "example" or "word picture," rather than "story" which implies partial or full development of plot, character, and setting. To be sure, the dividing line between forms of support material is hazy, but the author's helpful emphasis on plot is not always clearly exemplified.

Section 3 (more than 50 pages) presents historical sketches of preachers who used story well—Beecher, Talmage, Spurgeon, Whyte, etc. Unfortunately, the history overshadows analysis of their narrative technique. We learn, for example, that F. B. Meyer invested in ladders to help ex-convicts gain employment as window washers (`170), but not how such facts impacted his use of story. Furthermore, as Tucker readily admits, most of the exemplars were not expositors. We are to borrow their technique but not their theology or hermeneutics.

Helpful exercises conclude each chapter; these are simple enough to be implemented by busy pastors. And a fine annotated bibliography demonstrates Tucker's wide reading and comprehension of narrative theory and practice applied to homiletics.

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Shaping the Claim: Moving from Text to Sermon. By Marvin A. McMickle. Philadelphia: Fortress, 2008, 978 0-8006-0429-5, 86 pp., $12.00 paper.

In this very brief book, McMickle lifts up the importance of the sermon's "claim"—"the essence of what any sermon is about…the central truth or teaching of that sermon. It is a creative and engaging combination of what the biblical text says, how the message is communicated by the preacher, and some direction as regards what the listeners are being asked to do" (6). This is well trod homiletical ground, and McMickle acknowledges as much, but he seeks to extend or clarify the discussion of the sermonic claim by relating the concept to Aristotle's logos, pathos, and ethos (one chapter is given to each). The use of Aristotle is not necessary to the author's case, and he even commandeers the doctrine of ethos so that it no longer relates to the speaker's credibility, but to "how preaching participates in forming the character of those in the pews" (55). The titles of the chapters are sufficient without Aristotle: "What to Preach?" "So What?" and "Now What?" Readers of *JEHS* will likely agree with most of what they read but will not find much that is new; thus the book is best suited for beginning or intermediate students. Those readers are, in fact, the intended audience (vii).

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Preaching John's Gospel: The World It Imagines. By David Fleer and Dave Bland. St. Louis: Chalice, 2008, 978-0-827230-07-1, 168 pp., $19.99 paper.

In *Preaching John's Gospel*, David Fleer and Dave Bland have compiled essays and sermons from an ensemble of well-known preaching scholars and sermon practitioners including: Fred Craddock, Richard Eslinger, Stephen Farris, Richard Hays, Morna Hooker, Thomas Long, Alyce McKenzie, Gail O'Day, and Paul Scott Wilson, among others. It offers six essays on preaching John's gospel and sixteen short sermons which seek to add flesh to the central idea put forward by the essayist.

This volume continues a series of titles edited by Fleer and Bland through Chalice Press on the subject of how preachers can enhance their understanding the biblical author's imaginative perspective as he envisioned his world. Other works in this series include: *Performing the Psalms; Preaching the Sermon on the Mount; and Preaching Mark's Unsettling Messiah*.

In Chapter 1, "The Materiality of John's Symbolic World," Richard Hays contends that one of John's major themes is the material world where Jesus, the incarnation of God, cares for peoples' embodied needs. He demonstrates how John sprays images throughout his gospel related to what he calls *materiality*. For example, he discusses two texts where Jesus nourishes his followers through physical sustenance.

The next two essays, written by Gail O'Day, express the motif of friendship in John's gospel. First, in Chapter 2, "Friendship as the Theological Center of the Gospel of John," she suggests that John wants his audience to view Jesus as the true embodiment of friendship. By friend, O'Day moves beyond the traditional fluffy language propagated by media and holiday cards to one of profound, sacrificial love exhibited by the Christ.

In O'Day's second essay, "The Paraclete as Friend," her *modus operandi* is to demonstrate the unique work of the *parakletos* who carries on Christ's fulfillment of friendship. She states: "The Paraclete is the community's friend in Jesus' absence" (65). Based on five pericopes from the gospel of John concerning the Paraclete, O'Day reveals the promise and powerful outworking of Jesus' co-laborer in the form of the Paraclete.

Moving forward, Thomas Olbright, in the fourth essay, "The Word as Sign," explains the significant connection between Jesus' works and his spoken word. As the *logos*, the word of God, Jesus engenders faith and action simply through his verbal communication.

In Chapter 5, "Believing is Seeing," Gregory Stevenson emphasizes belief as being paramount to John's gospel. Equating belief with sight, Stevenson illustrates with a mixed bag of biblical characters like Nicodemus (John 3), the Samaritan woman (John 4), the crowd (John 6), the Jews (John 8), and the blind man (John 9) how the image of sight is highly consistent with one's ability to believe. Those

without belief are left in darkness.

Lastly, in his essay "Jesus' Voice in John," Thomas Boomershine explores the actual timbre of Jesus' speaking voice. Rather than conveying a haughty Jesus with a deep and imposing voice as we often do in today's culture, the author observes that it is through understanding the audience's reaction to Jesus that we deduce that Jesus most likely possessed a gentle, loving, and inclusive tonal quality.

Although each sermon is creative and informative, two sermons stood apart. Clinton McCann's sermon entitled, "God in the Flesh" from John 1:1-18 attempts to show the ramifications of Jesus Christ choosing to become mortal. He draws insights from New Testament studies, pop culture, television, music, personal experience, and continental theologians to make his point that the incarnate Jesus "invites us simply to love one another as he has loved us (20)."

David Fleer's sermon, "I've Always Liked Nicodemus," based on John 3:1-15 also displays homiletic excellence. In it, Fleer furnishes a contrasting portrait to our usually pessimistic ruling on Nicodemus' inability to believe and understand Jesus' teaching. We see a Nicodemus who is not mulish and thick-headed, but rather a person who is inquisitive, proactive, and full of potential. The sermon is ripe with word pictures and clever phrases.

To close, *Preaching John's Gospel* greatly extends our imagination for how preachers can help their listeners recreate in their mind's eye the world that John imagined. The book is stimulating and at times controversial. In reading it, I often repeated to myself, "I never thought of it that way." At the same time, my major caveat is that some of the conclusions drawn by the authors and preachers come hazardously close to proof-texting as they infer from the text a meaning that the original author may not have intended.

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Choosing the Kingdom: Missional Preaching for the Household of God. By John Addison Dally. Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2008, 978-1-56699-359-3, 131 pp., $ 17.00 paper.

Choosing the Kingdom is one of few books to explore in some length the nature of missional preaching. It is part of the series on "Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations" edited by the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship. "Missional" is a popular new word given currency by books, blogs, and missional church consultants. Mainline churches, emergent church leaders and many innovative evangelicals promote missional concepts as a means of renewal, even as they argue over its definition and implications for Christian living. And even though Dally included the word in the title of his book, he suggests it may be best not to use "missional" in church services.

If "missional" is a new word, "kingdom" is an old one. Dally ties them closely together, asserting that the primary task of missional preachers is to proclaim God's kingdom, God's present reign. Dally hopes to inspire preachers to move beyond the performance of religious duties to engaging people in active participation in the kingdom of God.

The heart of Dally's book is a clarion call to re-imagine the nature of the kingdom of God. He asserts that the kingdom is often misconceived by the church as the afterlife, or eternal life in heaven. Dally views it rather as a "system of earthly government in which God rules directly" in the present, just like any contemporary head of state. By Dally's account, missional preaching calls people to envision the changes that would come in the world around them were God truly acknowledged as being in charge. He asserts that Jesus demonstrated such an approach, announcing the presence of God's kingdom and then demonstrating its power in the midst of society.

Nowhere in Scripture, Dally insists, do we find any mandate to "build," "extend," "establish," or "spread" the kingdom. Rather, we find verbs such as "enter," "receive," "inherit," "wait for," "proclaim," or "preach." The role of preachers, then, is the invite their congregants to receive the kingdom of God as a gift and to join with God to discern its shape in their lives. God sends people into his mission in the world.

Missional sermons invite congregants to ask what the kingdom of God would look like in their own lives, the life of their communities, and the world. The answers to those questions become the focus of the people's response to the sermons. People are released to do things as the church rather than *for* the church. The focus of the church is outward rather than inward.

Dally urges preachers to move away from a preaching model that employs exegesis, illustration and application to a rhythm of proclamation, implication, and invitation. Proclamation announces God's presence and mission in the world. Implication shows how the kingdom may shape in people's lives. Finally, invitation bids hearers to enter the reign of God more fully by adopting a practice, not simply accepting an idea. Missional preaching seeks to form missional communities who develop practices in alignment with the kingdom of God.

Dally does well to link missional preaching with the kingdom of God. His inductive study of references in the synoptic gospels to the kingdom of God is insightful. So is his assertion that the modern church has wrongly institutionalized the message of the kingdom, making it primarily a historical message about Jesus or a moral message about what people can do for the church.

Yet Dally gives little or no attention to the importance of God's enabling grace or the power of the Holy Spirit to enable the work of the kingdom. While it can be imagined, it cannot be done without Christ's empowerment. As Hans Denck was fond of saying, "You cannot truly know Christ unless you follow him, and you cannot truly follow Christ unless you know him." God's gracious presence

through the living Christ makes possible both our salvation and our work in God's mission in the world.

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When God Speaks Through You: How Faith Convictions Shape Preaching and Mission. By Craig A. Satterlee. Herndon: The Alban Institute, 2008, 978-1-56699-353-1, 182 pp., $ 17.00 paper.

This is a book about different ways that preachers preach and different ways that hearers listen. As part of the series on "Vital Worship, Healthy Congregations" edited by the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship, it is a lens through which preachers may view the different ways their sermons enrich the congregation's worship.

Each of Satterlee's main chapters addresses a central question about preaching such as Is Preaching Leadership? How does the Sermon Fit in the Service? What is a Sermon? How Do You Listen to Sermons? Drawing on discussions about preaching with his D.Min. preaching students and their congregants, Satterlee explains a variety of convictions or perspectives that listeners may bring to the focus question for each chapter. At each chapter's end is a list of four to nine questions for group discussion.

Satterlee seeks to engage both pastors and congregants in discussion about preaching. By identifying various ways that people listen to sermons, Satterlee hopes to build bridges between people who have different convictions about preaching. The primary contribution of this book, then, is to provide a systematic means by which preachers and listeners can converse regarding the nature and purpose of preaching. As such, it may be used as a discussion guide by small groups, particularly sermon discussion groups. If the book is used in that way, it would be helpful to have a skilled facilitator or group leader to assure that even reserved members would feel free to share. The purpose of the book is not to teach a correct approach to each focus question, but rather to facilitate the exploration of various perspectives.

Satterlee approaches his task in a systematic, almost mechanical way. For example, he explores five definitions of leadership, six characteristics of Christian worship, six sermon models, eight ways that people listen to sermons, and nine ways to characterize the places that people sit for worship. Perhaps his strongest chapter is his exploration of six ways that people respond to sermons. In various parts of the book, Satterlee writes in a narrative style, exploring various convictions on preaching through the eyes of eight fictional listeners at St. Ambrose Church who join with Pastor Mark, in a sermon discussion group. Through their eyes we can perhaps envision members or our own congregation in conversation with one another.

Although the book reflects the ethos of a mainline denomination, evangelicals can find plenty of resources in its pages. Satterlee's evident concern for the apostolic mission of the church can help to enrich the worship life of any congregation.

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Preaching on Your Feet: Connecting God and the Audience in the Preachable Moment. By Fred R. Lybrand. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008, 978-0-8054-4686-9, 182 pp., $14.99 paper.

There are five generally recognized methods of sermon delivery practiced by preachers: reading from a manuscript, reciting a memorized manuscript, preaching from an extensive outline, preaching with minimal notes, and preaching extemporaneously without notes. The book under consideration presents a fairly convincing argument in favor of the last approach.

Do not be mistaken, however, in thinking that this book promotes "winging it" in the pulpit. Rather, the author clearly explains that "preaching on your feet" requires adequate sermon preparation in terms of study, meditation, and orderly thinking. What is eliminated is the writing of a manuscript or copious notes and the taking of written materials into the pulpit.

Lybrand's arguments are made on the basis of the Bible, history, and general communication principles. In terms of biblical teaching and example, he states "every biblical example of the preacher is an example of preaching on your feet." (68). While acknowledging that the Bible nowhere forbids the use of written sermons, Lybrand sees no indication of biblical support for the practice.

In reviewing history, Lybrand generalizes that "History's famed speakers, both secular and Christian, were individuals who spoke extemporaneously" (56). In terms of secular speaking he cites only Martin Luther King Jr. as an example. This is hardly a convincing argument, however, in that the King speech cited ("I Have a Dream") was, in fact, written out as a manuscript and King follow it during the speech's early minutes. Further, King had memorized some of the themes and phrases from his previous speeches.

From Church history, Lybrand briefly describes the preaching ministries of Chrysostom, Augustine, Luther, Zwingli, Calvin, Cotton Mather, Wesley, Whitefield, John Newton, Spurgeon, Finney, and George Truett. This type of inductive argumentation is interesting but the reviewer can't help but recall many, many other effective preachers who used manuscripts or extended notes. Thus, the opposite point could be argued using this same inductive technique.

The strength of the book is to be found in its practicality. Lybrand offers numerous helpful suggestions scattered throughout the book as to how to prepare to preach on your feet. The focal point of the author's practicality is found in chapter 13 where 21 questions are posed and answered. This chapter is quite helpful in

assisting the reader to better understand Lybrand's reasoning and methodology.

Lybrand argues vigorously that extemporaneous preaching—preaching on your feet—is by far the best approach to sermon delivery. The argument is, in the opinion of this reviewer, somewhat overstated. Still, it must be noted that there are relatively few books on preaching devoted solely to delivery issues. In view of this, Lybrand's contribution to the subject is a helpful addition to the library of preaching instructors and a helpful read for preachers in general.

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Preaching & Reading the Lectionary: A Three-Dimensional Approach to the Liturgical Year. By O. Wesley Allen Jr. St. Louis: Chalice, 2007, 978-0-8272-3006-4, 210 pp., with CD-ROM, $36.99, paper; and *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: A Guide*. By Gail R. O'Day and Charles Hackett. Nashville: Abingdon, 2007, 978-0-687-64624-1, 161 pp., $18.00 paper.

Books promoting careful preaching of the lectionary are printed from time to time. Two such books were published in 2007. *Preaching & Reading the Lectionary: A Three-Dimensional Approach to the Liturgical Year* written by O. Wesley Allen Jr. is to some extent an apologetic for lectionary use. Borrowing from the cumulative nature of television programs, Allen likens the continuity of lectionary preaching to script writing for television series. He posits, "For assimilation of the Christian worldview to occur, individual sermons dealing with narrow topics and specific biblical passages need to stand on their own as an isolated sermon at the same time that they reinforce the glimpses of the broader Christian worldview offered in other sermons" (x).

Allen rightly observes, "The Revised Common Lectionary was primarily designed as a liturgical tool, with homiletics being a secondary concern. For most Protestant pastors, however, it has primarily been used as a homiletical tool, with liturgical import being secondary" (1). This first sentence of the introduction raises perhaps the main issue with which Allen wrestles throughout the book. Although he readily admits the liturgical thrust of the lectionary, the book primarily addresses how to preach it. Allen notes when preachers focus on the layers of the lectionary to the expense of the passage, "The result is too often a sermon that at best preaches on the lectionary instead of scripture, or at worst uses the lections in proof-text fashion to preach a thematic, instead of a biblical sermon" (5).

The writer provides an honest critique of the challenges of preaching from the lectionary—but his primary task is to assist preachers to overcome the challenges. Allen's survey of the lectionary and his suggestions for making lectionary preaching work are helpful and informative.

The book provides a lot of concrete help for the preacher, almost too much

assistance as there may be little for the preacher to do in sermon preparation as a good deal of the work has already been done by Allen. As per preaching from the lectionary, Allen appears not to answer the question, "Why preach from the lectionary?" The assumption seems that preachers will as the book seems to be addressed to those already convinced of lectionary preaching.

As for *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: A Guide* by Gail R. O'Day and Charles Hackett, their approach runs similar to Allen's but from the preface both authors place their cards on the table by telling readers their own presuppositions about preaching from the lectionary. Hackett sees preaching as marking the liturgical place in the church year for the community of faith, while O'Day prefers to start with the specifics of the biblical text.

The book provides an excellent overview of the history of lectionaries and the church year. Further, an additional chapter expounds on interpreting the lectionary—that from the authors' perspecitve there exists a hermeneutic to the lectionary. An apologetic for using the lectionary today is also provided in chapter four. The remainder of the book suggests ways to preach the lectionary in the various cycles of the church year: Incarnational, Paschal and Ordinary Times.

The authors also do a lot of work for the preacher, about which this reviewer is concerned as it leaves little for the preacher to do. In addition, there appears to be an assumption that the four texts for each cycle of the lectionary (A, B and C) always have similarities. This is a notion that might be the case during Advent, but does not appear to be demonstrated in the wider expression of the lectionary. Therefore, meanings of the texts may be forced by the preacher to make them work, rather than being driven by the text itself.

Both *Preaching & Reading the Lectionary: A Three-Dimensional Approach to the Liturgical Year* and *Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary: A Guide* are helpful additions to the resources on preaching the lectionary. The thoughtful reader will note that the presuppositions as to authorship and dating of biblical texts may not reflect his or her own assumptions. Nevertheless both provide approaches that may help the lectionary preacher preach with a fuller appreciation of the heartiness of the lectionary. The book by Allen has a fine critical edge to it, while the book by O'Day and Hackett provides a deeper and richer feel for the lectionary from which non-lectionary preachers will benefit.

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The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching: Increase Attention, Comprehension, and Retention. By Rick Blackwood. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008, 978-0-310-28097-2, 208 pp., $19.99 paper.

Preachers are always thinking about how to make their sermons connect better with their listeners. Rick Blackwood, who pastors Christ Fellowship, a mega-church in Miami, did his Doctor of Education project at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary on just this subject and *The Power of Multisensory Preaching* is the fruit of his labor. His argument is that a sermon that appeals not only to the ears, but also the eyes, and the hands (thus engaging the senses of hearing, sight, and touch) increases a listener's attention, comprehension, and retention of the message, and ultimately, to more "doing" of the Word.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part One, Blackwood argues that a sermon needs to appeal to the multiple senses of people in the congregation. He draws on evidence in neurology, examples in the Bible, and his own experience communicating in different styles to conclude that multisensory teaching (that is, teaching that incorporates verbal, visual, and "interactive" elements) leads to vastly superior results than traditional monosensory teaching (that attends only to the listener's ear). His research is highly convincing, and any skeptic must contend with the evidence that he carefully lays out. As he puts it, "If multisensory communication can make our communication clearer, then common sense says we must consider its usage" (p. 27).

In Part Two, Blackwood tells readers how to create a multisensory sermon. The first step is to start small and keep things simple. In an example of one of his own "simple" multisensory sermons he had a bride and groom dressed in wedding day attire join him on stage, complete with the father-of-the-bride walking her down the aisle while a wedding march played. (Some may find this hokey. Others will rightly ask whether he needed to go to such lengths to illustrate his point that baptism is a public declaration of love.) An even simpler start would be to incorporate a single prop for visual interest.

Blackwood also encourages those venturing into multisensory preaching to keep things manageable; not to go any faster than they are able, given the resources at their disposal. Preachers should also embrace their strengths and avoid their weaknesses. If you are not a good actor and there are not any good actors in your congregation, do not do drama. Lastly, he says, continue learning and developing, which includes being open-minded.

At this stage, Blackwood also encourages bringing people alongside the lead pastor to help in the formation of multisensory sermons. This team should include a teaching team (responsible for sermon series ideas), a design team (in charge of everything from graphic design to sculpting and photography), and an implementation team (who build props and construct stage settings). Here, Blackwood reveals his mega-church context. In most churches, the teaching, design, and implementation teams will all have only one member: the preacher.

Most churches do not have the resources that Blackwood has at his disposal. For instance, in an example of a multisensory sermon that he preached involving "intermediate" elements, his implementation team turned the sanctuary space into a courtroom (154–61). In another "intermediate" example, his crew built a partial boxing ring on the stage (164–70). Despite his claims that preaching multisensory sermons will not require very much additional time on the part of the preacher, his examples leave all but those who shepherd very large and gifted congregations, wondering how much they can really accomplish.

The final part of the book presents examples of multisensory sermons that Blackwood, himself, has preached. For each example he includes the resources he used and a full sermon manuscript, as well as a brief discussion of the multisensory effect it had on his congregation. In fact, the book's epilogue is a case study, of sorts, on the effect one multisensory sermon had in leading a particular individual in his church to a faith decision. Two appendices are also included in the book: the first, detailing his research design and methodology, and the second, showcasing some of the artwork used in one of his sermon series.

The Power of Multisensory Preaching and Teaching is the first book of its kind, to my knowledge, that deals specifically with helping preachers to engage the multiple senses of their listeners. To that end, Blackwood's book is an essential resource. By far, his most helpful contribution is bringing to light the impact that appealing to more than the ear can have in increasing a hearer's attention, comprehension, and retention. He also addresses the most commonly voiced objections against multisensory preaching in a cordial, yet convincing manner, showing that the Bible, far from forbidding multisensory teaching, is filled with examples of it; and that this approach, rather than watering down the gospel or being a mere entertainment gimmick, has the power to excite and engage.

As much as I found this book to be helpful, I do have one chief concern and it is one that underlies the premise of Blackwood's thesis. He says, "As teachers of the Word, our mission is to etch biblical truth into the minds of our congregation. We want them to remember the truths we teach, so they can meditate on it and apply it to their lives" (27). It must be asked, however, whether remembering what's preached is really a preacher's objective. That is, a multisensory sermon may increase attention, comprehension, and retention—and Blackwood has done a masterful job in showing that it does—but are those the things that preachers should be most concerned with, or should we be more concerned with whether or not our sermons lead our congregations to worship, to see Christ more clearly, to love him more deeply? Is a sermon any less powerful if our hearers fail to remember it a week later if, in the moment they heard it they were led to worship God? The heart of my concern is an as-yet-unanswered question in the field of homiletics: what makes a good sermon? And, a corollary: how do we evaluate a sermon? Is it really "audience" attention, comprehension, and retention, or is it something else?

Most readers of this *Journal* who preach on a regular basis will have likely

experimented with one particular multisensory technique, namely, the use of slideware applications like PowerPoint. Unfortunately, readers looking for a sustained discussion of and reflection on these specific technologies will be disappointed. Other than two short pages (136–37) on the use of screens there really is no mention of the use of slides in *The Power of Multisensory Preaching*. However, for the creative and thoughtful preacher, there is still a great deal here that will be of tremendous benefit and I am pleased to highly recommend it.

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Cross Talk: Preaching Redemption Here and Now. By Sally A. Brown. Louisville; London: Westminster John Knox, 2008, 978-0-664-23002-9, viii + 168 pp., $19.95 paper.

In *Cross Talk*, Sally Brown, who is Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at Princeton Theological Seminary, is concerned with what she perceives to be a lack of preaching the cross in the church. She writes out of a mainline context and, to her credit, does issue a warning that "preachers who find preaching about the death of Jesus today unproblematic and straightforward will find this book superfluous at best, wrongheaded at worst. My best hope is that curiosity may prompt a few of them to read on, anyway; but this book is not written mainly for them" (3). Despite the fact that most readers of this *Journal* will likely find themselves among those who do not find a lack (either in the number or the content) of sermons preached on the cross, there is, nevertheless, a good deal of value in what Brown clearly and thoughtfully articulates in this book.

She begins by discussing different factors that have led preachers to keep silent on the cross. The chief problem, she contends, is that preachers have found different atonement theories confusing and lacking in practicality for parishioners. For instance, Brown argues that the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement that most Protestants hold has not empowered or liberated victims of abuse who understand this doctrine as a form of cosmic child abuse. For those who have not heard this sort of argument before Brown helpfully brings this to the preacher's attention; and while many will not want to dismiss this doctrine as Brown does, she does present a prospective contrapuntal that the thoughtful preacher will do well to address in sermons on the cross.

Rather than emphasizing any one atonement theory, Brown favors the use of metaphors for redemption in preaching. "New Testament cross talk is largely unsystematic" (18), she suggests. The biblical authors were not concerned with laying out a systematic theology, but were driven by "pastoral and paraenetic" concerns (30). Thus, preachers must abandon dogmatic theology from the pulpit, which is to say, they must not lecture.

In order to break the silence on the cross preachers must turn their attention

and imagination to all of the different metaphors that the New Testament writers employ for the meaning of the cross. Simply relying on one metaphor, such as the judicial one, will not suffice, Brown argues, because the Bible employs so many. She also urges preachers to keep metaphorical meaning open. "Jesus' death is and is not a sacrifice, is and is not an act of emancipation of captives, is and is not debt payment. Closure of meaning would mean that we insist on a *literal* identity between Jesus' death and sacrifice or debt payment or a military maneuver on behalf of prisoners" (46). However, if metaphorical meaning is left completely open how does one determine the limits and boundaries of interpretation? If we dismiss a systematic theology of the atonement as Brown would have us do, we are left without a standard by which to gauge the validity of the meanings we infer from the biblical metaphors and the end result is a lack of confidence in the integrity and internal consistency of the Bible.

That being said, Brown's contribution, on the whole is a valuable one to a homiletical discussion of the cross. While evangelical readers will undoubtedly cringe at many of her arguments and conclusions, she is to be commended for trying to awaken in her own segment of the church the need for redemptive preaching. Her chapters on how to preach the cross without "underwrit[ing] violence" (91) or leading listeners to apathy toward suffering, for instance, are very helpful in suggesting different metaphors to be explored in sermons on the death of Jesus. She also encourages preachers to imagine new metaphors that will resonate with their particular contexts. Real-life sermon examples from a number of well-respected preachers also add to this book's helpfulness.

While the devaluing of systematic theology for preaching and the outright dismissal of the doctrine of penal substitutionary atonement will lead some prospective readers to avoid *Cross Talk*, I do recommend it to readers of this *Journal* as an insightful look into what another part of the academy, church, and culture is thinking when it comes to the saving significance of Jesus' death.

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Speaking the Truth: Preaching in a Pluralistic Culture. By Samuel Wells. Nashville: Abingdon, 2008, 978-0-687-64689-0, 196 pp., $20.00 paper.

Speaking the Truth is a collection of sermons by Samuel Wells, the current dean of the chapel at Duke University. Wells is a Canadian born, British raised and educated, Anglican pastor-theologian. His theological background as well as his unique role in a university setting is important to keep in mind while one reads this book.

The book begins with a lengthy introduction explaining Wells' understanding of the historical and contemporary stages of the relationship between the church and the university in the United States. This understanding undergirds the

key characteristics of his speaking and preaching in the university setting. His analysis is at the very least a signal for the American church to move beyond the battles of the past and embrace a new chapter in the relationship of the church and the university. He takes his analysis of this relationship further, however, and eventually offers a scathing critique of an America that Wells believes has historically thought of itself as the embodiment of the promises that God had previously made to Israel, neglecting the church and even bypassing the Savior Himself.

Wells moves forward by summarizing the new chapter in American history, and the diminished voice of the church in the university. His proscriptions for speakers and preachers are essentially four: (i) view the university as a *moral project*, an organism with a heart; (ii) identify that this heart lies in *conversation* and the speaker needs to demonstrate that he or she is making the conversation better; (iii) adopt a *dramatic* mode of conversation that allows one to bring together "distant absolutes" with personal fulfillment; (iv) pursue a *teleological* agenda that clearly names the goal the speaker is hoping to accomplish. Hence, Wells states his goal as keeping "the heart of the university listening to the heart of God."

Throughout the sermons that comprise the chapters of this book, the reader sees how Wells crafts his ideas from the basis of these four maxims. The majority of the texts behind the sermons are from the lectionary, and the sermons themselves address issues ranging from the theological—God, faith, the resurrection and the Bible; to the controversial—the atonement, hell, economics and human sexuality. Some of the sermons are very theological in approach, outlining different points of view before pointing the listener in a given direction. Others show Wells as one who masterfully uses the tools of narrative communication, episodal movement, indirect and conversational language, and the art of weaving multiple story lines of the Bible and contemporary life together. These characteristics constitute the strength of this work.

Subscribers to this journal may be concerned with the theological content that is argued for in some of the sermons with regard to the nature and function of hell, the atonement and homosexuality. Further, some readers may be concerned about whether the radical nature of the gospel is compromised in the midst of a variety of theological perspectives rather than proclaimed boldly from the pulpit. Moreover, Wells' context is so unique and his audience at Duke University so diverse, that one wonders how some of his ideas translate to local church communities that gather together under the auspice of at least some level of shared belief.

Speaking the Truth will not appeal to everyone. While it might not be of great interest to local church pastors, those who minister in secular, academic environments as well as those who are concerned with the relationship between postmodernism and homiletics will want to be aware of Samuel Wells' contribution.

Nicholas Gatzke Lake Elmo, Minnesota

John A. Broadus: A Living Legacy. Edited by David S. Dockery and Roger D. Duke. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008, 978-0805447385, 260 pp., $19.99 paper.

John A. Broadus was, in many ways, the father of modern expository preaching. That alone would make his life and work a topic of interest to students of preaching. However, Broadus was far more than a teacher of preaching; his was a fascinating and significant life and career which offers both interesting reading and helpful models for study.

This most recent volume on Brodus , edited by David Dockery and Roger Duke, is not a biography of Broadus; rather it is an anthology of essays offering a variety of different perspectives on the nineteenth-century preacher, professor and seminary president. The contributors include an excellent team of Southern Baptist academics and pastors who share an interest in Broadus' work.

John A. Broadus (1827-1895) was one of the towering figures of homiletics in his own era, as well as one of the pivotal influences in the early development of the Southern Baptist Convention. Charles Spurgeon recognized him as "the greatest of living preachers," a description many contemporary observers might have affixed to Spurgeon himself.

Broadus was a Virginian, a gifted student, and a pastor who also taught at the University of Virginia, his alma mater. In 1859 he became one of the founding faculty members of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Greenville, SC, which moved to Louisville, KY after the Civil War. As a professor, Broadus wrote the *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons*, which became the standard American textbook on homiletics for a century. He was also a gifted preacher who could have been called to one of the great pulpits in the nation, but instead remained at his beloved seminary, which he later served as its second President.

In this outstanding collection, the reader gains a new appreciation for the contribution Broadus made to the study of preaching, as well as to theological education. Essays deal with Broadus' contribution to Southern Baptists, his contributions to the study of preaching, an analysis of Broadus' own preaching style, and much more.

Of particular interest is the article by Mark Overstreet on the recovery of Broadus' "lost" Yale Lectures on Preaching. Broadus is one of only two Southern Baptists ever invited to deliver the Beecher Lectures at Yale; the other, John Claypool, later became an Episcopalian minister and a bishop. Broadus' lectures were never published, and for many years no manuscript or transcription of the lectures was available; many writers assumed that *On the Preparation and Delivery of Sermons* would have reflected much of the content of his Yale lectures, though more recent writers questioned that assumption.

While doing research for his doctoral studies in Southern Seminary's archives, Overstreet came across seven notebooks scattered through other Broadus memorabilia and notes. Studying them, he quickly realized that the notebooks

contained 193 pages of manuscripts composing Broadus' Yale lectures. Only the lecture on "The Minister's Private Life" was not present. In his essay, Overstreet analyzes the content of the various lectures and reflects on the material as indicative of Broadus' homiletical views in his final years. He concludes that, "These addresses served as the pinnacle of his homiletic corpus, and the recovery of these manuscripts allows Broadus' homiletic to be examined and displayed for another generation of expositors."

This collection offers a helpful analysis of the work of one of the most influential figures in the modern history of preaching, and reintroduces Broadus to a new generation that will gain value from better understanding this towering figure of the American pulpit.

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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

History:

The Evangelical Homiletics Society (EHS) convened its inaugural meeting in October of 1997, at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA, at the initiative of Drs. Scott M. Gibson of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and Keith Willhite of Dallas Theological Seminary. Professors Gibson and Willhite desired an academic society for the exchange of ideas related to instruction of biblical preaching.

Specifically, the EHS was formed to advance the cause of Biblical Preaching through:

promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching
increased competence for teachers of preaching
integration of the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology
scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics

The EHS membership consists primarily of homiletics professors from North American seminaries and Bible Colleges who hold to evangelical theology, and thus treat preaching as the preaching of God's inspired Word. The EHS doctrinal statement is that of the National Association of Evangelicals.

Purpose:

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is designed to engage readers with articles dealing with the best research and expertise in preaching. Readers will be introduced to literature in the field of homiletics or related fields with book reviews. Since the target audience of the journal is scholars/practitioners, a sermon will appear in each edition which underscores the commitment of the journal to the practice of preaching.

Vision:

The vision of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is to provide academics and practitioners with a journal that informs and

equips readers to become competent teachers of preaching and excellent preachers.

General Editor:

The General Editor has oversight of the journal. The General Editor selects suitable articles for publication and may solicit article suggestions from the Editorial Board for consideration for publication. The General Editor works cooperatively with the Book Review Editor and the Managing Editor to ensure the timely publication of the journal.

Book Review Editor:

The Book Review Editor is responsible for the Book Review section of the journal. The Book Review Editor contacts publishers for books to review and receives the books from publishers. The Book Review Editor sends books to members of the Society who serve as book reviewers. The reviewers then forward their written reviews to the Book Review Editor in a timely manner. The Book Review Editor works in coordination with the General Editor for the prompt publication of the journal.

Managing Editor:

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

Editorial Board:

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

Frequency of Publication:

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

Jury Policy:

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

Submission Guidelines

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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