



Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

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

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

1. We believe the Bible to be the inspired, the only infallible, authoritative Word of God.
2. We believe that there is one God, eternally existent in three persons: Father, Son and Holy Spirit.
3. We believe in the deity of our Lord Jesus Christ, in His virgin birth, in His sinless life, in His miracles, in His vicarious and atoning death through His shed blood, in His bodily resurrection, in His ascension to the right hand of the Father, and in His personal return in power and glory.
4. We believe that for the salvation of lost and sinful people, regeneration by the Holy Spirit is absolutely essential.
5. We believe in the present ministry of the Holy Spirit by whose indwelling the Christian is enabled to live a godly life.
6. We believe in the resurrection of both the saved and the lost; they that are saved unto the resurrection of life and they that are lost unto the resurrection of damnation.
7. We believe in the spiritual unity of believers in our Lord Jesus Christ.

Pointers on Preaching

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by Scott M. Gibson

Pointers are reminders, tips of information for ready listeners or readers. For preachers the word “point” speaks to the elements that go into the structure of the sermon. These points provide the framework for communication.

But as preachers we are not immune from the need of repetition of important, sage or even stimulating ideas. These promptings help us to keep our focus and stay on course.

Both Greg Scharf and Matthew D. Kim respond to the question posed by the editor, “What do you consider to be the major challenges to preaching today?” Their thoughtful reflections will stimulate readers as we consider what it means to do what we do—preach with a biblical and theological commitment in a shifting culture—and teach others to do so as well.

Evangelical Homiletics Society member Adrian Lane of Australia engages readers in considering what it means to train preachers for the purpose of training others. He reminds readers of the importance of a homiletical preparation that includes the Word, the preacher, the sermon and congregation.

The next article, “Application as Improvisation,” by Abraham Kuruvilla is a thoughtful exploration into biblical application that suggests the improvisation of the text can be similar to the approach used by musicians or actors. Kuruvilla reminds readers that application is rooted to the text and to the context to which the preacher is preaching.

Michael A. Milton investigates the implications of textual criticism and the canonical issues raised by preaching on passages in which textual variants exist. Milton provides some pastoral questions,

too, that will cause readers to consider what might be the most appropriate approach to addressing such matters. For Milton, he suggests, “preaching from the footnotes,” which he explains in this provoking article.

The matter of theology and preaching is addressed in the next article by Chuck Fuller. Here Fuller looks at the preaching and writing of Fred B. Craddock and delves into the implications of Craddock’s homiletic, which is a good reminder for Evangelical homileticians to consider.

The final article by Jere L. Phillips deals with what it means to preach to congregations undergoing conflict. His article is a helpful prompting to those who desire a biblical and practical homiletic in challenging situations like churches engaged in discord.

The sermon is a classic by New Zealander, F. W. Boreham, one which readers are sure to enjoy. Notice the skill of Boreham as he weaves the story of the birth of Jesus Christ. The sermon is followed by a healthy sampling of book reviews.

The hope is that these articles will serve as reminders to our readers to stay the course in the on going development of scholarship in Evangelical homiletics.

Forum on the Challenges to Preaching Today

Challenges to Preaching Today: What and Why

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By Greg Scharf

(editor's note: Greg Scharf is chair of the Pastoral Theology Department at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, Illinois.)

Introduction

The title reflects a perennial question. In 1928 Harry Emerson Fosdick classically asked “What’s the Matter with Preaching?” Mike Graves assembled a group of homiletical worthies to revisit that question in 2004.¹ Our aim is more limited and worded more positively: What are three *significant challenges* in homiletics today—and why? I am inclined to follow the lead of Chesterton who when asked what was wrong with the world replied, “I am. Sincerely, G.K. Chesterton” To be only slightly more specific, the three most significant challenges to preaching today, as I see them, are captured in three things I am (and you my readers probably are too): a preacher, a listener to sermons, and a church member. Allow me to elaborate, taking the three in reverse order since churches that think wrongly about themselves spawn preachers and listeners who do the same and act on what they think.

The challenge of deficient ecclesiologies.

When we think of the church in the early twenty-first century, many of us in North America evaluate what we see pragmatically. We ask what is *working* and what is not. We often set goals and objectives and add or (sometimes) subtract programs based on those measurable goals. Church leaders find it easy to view parishioners as consumers, not surprisingly because many parishioners act like consumers. These deeply ingrained concepts bedevil not only flagrantly heretical churches that purvey “prosperity teaching” but also relatively orthodox congregations. Even so-called “missional”

churches can define their purpose much too narrowly. With this thinking in our bloodstream, it is very easy to view preaching as merely a means to suspect ends: get people in the door and keep them happy; create an ethos; get on with the task. Preaching becomes, in effect, a program. This fundamentally horizontal thinking badly skews evaluation. Instead of valuing substance we reward style; instead of fostering depth, we prize popularity. Instead of offering the pulpit to fledgling preachers whom we seek to equip, we syndicate proven “producers”—defined, that is, by our questionable standards.

All church leaders must continually filter the philosophical and theological air we breathe. We are deeply influenced by our culture(s) and our Christian and evangelical subcultures. Of course we cannot step out of them even if we wanted to do so. Nevertheless, we should keep testing all things by Scripture so we can hold fast to what is good. For instance, to take just one example, multi-site ministry—by which I mean the practice of video-casting sermons in remote locations to other congregations (gatherings) of the same local fellowship—confessedly favors the popular preacher whose gifts can be “leveraged” to attract and hold people who respond favorably to that preacher’s pulpit ministry. When a church structures itself to privilege a single preacher broadcasting to multiple locations, its leaders are operating on the basis of a faulty ecclesiology. They should ask, at a minimum, Is the message adequately conveyed when the preacher can not see the people to whom he is speaking? Has God not given enough preaching gifts to provide for a preacher in each *congregation* of worshippers? Are the parishioners able to know the preacher well enough that his life can reinforce his verbal message? There are many questionable ecclesiologies; this is one that I think needs to be more adequately critiqued now.

The challenge of too demanding and too *undemanding* listeners.

In churches that are built around consumers, it is natural for listeners

to think that “the customer is always right” and consequently to make themselves the arbiter of what constitutes a good sermon. We so easily weigh sermons on the basis of our own perceived personal profit, or worse, our individual enjoyment. This standard is a two-edged sword. Such listeners can, on the one hand, expect preachers to meet their personal preferences, and thus ask the impossible of the preacher, since of course their preferences do not coincide exactly with those of fellow worshippers. On the other hand, when meeting the listener’s perceived needs is the standard, parishioners can ask not too much of the preacher but too little. Intellectually, spiritually, and emotionally challenging sermons may be just what the congregation needs but which listeners do not want—because of the effort required to benefit from them—and therefore do not insist upon. Hearers who do not expect intellectual rigor, disciplined candor, and spiritual reality in the pulpit are likely to get cognitive sloth, inappropriate self disclosure, and phoniness. Sadly, listeners too often set the tone of preaching by what they approve or disapprove and how they vote with their feet. Ironically, listeners who idolize the preacher can be more destructive to his soul than those who criticize or demonize him.

The challenge of preachers who exalt audience analysis.

In my taxonomy of what makes for good preaching, the order is significant. I reckon that the four indispensable criteria are 1. Faithfulness, 2. Clarity, 3. Sensitivity to the listeners’ situation, and 4. God’s anointing. They build on one another. Faithfulness to Scripture (in multiple ways I won’t develop here) is basic and foundational. If the preacher lacks it, no amount of clarity, sensitivity or anointing will make up for its absence. Yet a message may be faithful but if it is not clear, like the indistinct bugle of 1 Cor. 14:8 (ESV), it calls no one to battle. But even a sermon that is faithful *and* clear does little good unless it addresses real hearers, the ones who are actually there and whose situation has been fairly assessed. Finally, a message that is faithful, clear, and sensitive to the listeners is the kind of sermon the Lord might stoop to bless, to anoint, to empower. It is, in short, the kind of sermon through which God delights to speak. Without

that touch from God's hand, the other ingredients fall short of their intended purposes; they are necessary, but not sufficient for good preaching. But given a deficient ecclesiology that fosters audience-driven sermons, preachers routinely and understandably grant the third criteria, audience analysis, pride of place that is self defeating. Audience analysis is indispensable, as I have argued above. But when it sets the agenda for a message *at the expense of letting Scripture do so*, that is, at the expense of genuine faithfulness, the outcome is not edifying but ultimately is destructive. The dynamic is not unlike the patient deciding what medication he thinks will treat his self-diagnosed ills and then changing doctors until he finds one who will prescribe what he wants. In the same way, a consumer mind-set sabotages the pastor-parishioner relationship. Instead of speaking from God and for God, the preacher who exalts audience analysis reduces the authority of the pulpit; it becomes little more than an echo chamber. He commandeers the pulpit to achieve lesser goals, goals that are in the final analysis derived from the felt needs of the listeners. In extreme cases an entire hermeneutic may be devised to make the text say what the preacher wants it to say, that is, what the listeners want to hear. This becomes a vicious cycle. In Micah's day (cf. 3:5-7) prophets told people what they wanted to hear and as a consequence the Lord no longer revealed himself or his plans to them. Wanting the approval of their hearers, these false prophets ultimately received well-deserved disgrace and shame. Preachers have always faced the same temptation. Nearly fifty years ago C.E.B. Cranfield wrote, "It is a pathetic feature of contemporary Church life that there are still plenty in the pews who clamor for shorter and lighter sermons and bright and easy services and not a few in the pulpits prepared to pander to popular taste. There's a vicious circle: superficial congregations make superficial pastors, and superficial pastors make superficial congregations."² In my mind, this temptation still rises to the level of the top three challenges we face today. We preachers have become masters of the audience-driven sermon.

Thankfully, these three intertwined challenges have in common a biblical remedy: faith. When we trust God to speak through his

word, to give sufficient numbers of gifted preachers to his church, to illuminate our eyes as we study his word, to answer our prayers when we ask him what our text has to do with our listeners, to unstop deaf ears when people listen to his word preached, and to use his word do sanctify his people, everything changes. Our criteria for success assume their rightful places, or perhaps drop entirely from our lists. There are without a doubt, many other matters to which we need to attend, but, in my judgment, evangelical ecclesiology needs *semper reformanda*. As that happens, our expectations as leaders, preachers, and listeners will be corrected, our practices and habits will follow, and God will be honored.

Notes

1. Mike Graves, ed., *What's the Matter with Preaching Today?* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004).
2. C. E. B. Cranfield, *I and II Peter and Jude: Introduction and Commentary* (London: SCM, 1960), 47.

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Zeke Pipher, Dr. Jeff Arthur

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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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Three Homiletical Challenges for the 21st Century

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by Matthew D. Kim

(editor's note: Matthew D. Kim is senior pastor of Logos Central Chapel in Denver, Colorado. He received his Ph.D. in practical theology from the University of Edinburgh and is the author of Preaching to Second Generation Korean Americans: Towards a Possible Selves Contextual Homiletic (Peter Lang) and a forthcoming book My First Year in Ministry: 7 Lessons for Students and Pastors published by Chalice Press).

In this preaching forum, we've been asked to identify what we consider to be three major challenges for the field of homiletics in our time. As a pastor who serves in the local church, I'd like to approach this topic from the perspective of a preacher and the obstacles I encounter on a regular basis.

Religious Pluralism: Our Theological Challenge

A couple months ago I had lunch with one of my church members. He's a bright, likeable, enthusiastic professor at a local university. He and his wife had been attending our church for several months, and it was a fitting time to get better acquainted. It was our first time meeting beyond church walls. The conversation was chipper and light, and it was obvious that we both shared a passion for learning and intellectual stimulation.

Our discussion somehow gravitated towards the subject of theology, and we stumbled upon the person of Jesus Christ. He shared with me how he had much reverence and appreciation for Jesus, but he simply couldn't accept that Jesus Christ was the only way for salvation. In his mind, all religions were similar and led ultimately to the same destination. This individual came from a unique religious background. He identified himself as a Christian. His mother is a Roman Catholic, while his father is a Hindu from India.

On the topic of religious affiliation, he presented me with this analogy. Everybody enjoys different brands of soda. Some people like Pepsi products. Others prefer Coke. And still others fancy root beer from a local brewery. At the end of the day, however, each has a penchant for soda despite his or her personal preference. In the same way, he believed that all religions led down the same path whether we prefer Jesus, Buddha, Allah, or other religious flavors.

He asked me what I thought about the exclusivity of Christ. It was a delicate subject, but the truth needed to be conveyed. After briefly describing the character of God, I proceeded to share with him how Jesus of Nazareth made several “I am” claims. In particular, I concentrated on John 14:6 where Jesus says, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” Rather than focusing on the deficiencies of lesser gods, I emphasized the truth of Scripture that salvation comes only through faith in the person and work of Jesus. And I ended that portion of our dialogue stating clearly that I do believe in the exclusivity of Christ.

From his response it seemed he was taken aback by my forthrightness, but I think he respected the fact that I had clear convictions about my beliefs. I went on to communicate the gospel story of God’s plan of redeeming the world through his Son. After our lunch, I was mildly concerned that my candor would deter him from returning to church, but it hasn’t. I’ll be having lunch with him again soon and our friendly banter continues.

How we handle religious pluralism and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ from the pulpit is a significant challenge in the church today. Whether it’s visible to the naked eye or not, there are members of our congregations who struggle intensely with this concept of salvation through Jesus Christ alone. They have family members and close friends who are not on the same religious page or have no religious affinity at all, and it distresses them. They don’t want to believe that their loved ones are headed for eternal separation from God. It’s more comforting to believe we’re all going to the same place. When we watch certain television preachers, we see this

theological, homiletical hurdle in action. Some noted preaching personalities are quite hesitant to state boldly that faith in Jesus Christ alone is essential to our salvation.

We don't have to shove Jesus down people's throats from the pulpit, but as preachers we must preach Christ and him alone. In addition, we should become more conversant with other world religions. It's the world in which we live. By studying and knowing other religious systems and traditions, we gain a hearing from those on the outskirts looking in. They want to be confident that their pastor knows what she's talking about and that he can articulate the truth of the Christian faith in light of these other religious flavors.

Visionary Preaching: Our Theoretical Challenge

Increasingly, I have wrestled with this question: what's the purpose of preaching every Sunday? We spend 10-20 hours per week preparing a message from God that, in the words of Jesus, will be scattered onto all types of soil. Bluntly speaking, I've been sensing that the fertile soil is not as ripe as it used to be. And it wasn't all that fertile to begin with even in Jesus' day. But we press on anyway.

So, why do we do it? Why do we shed blood, sweat, and tears over a sermon that will at best be retained at a 5% level? Isn't that sobering? I've become convinced that one of the salient, driving purposes of preaching is to give parishioners a lucid vision of what their lives can be like as Jesus' disciples. In short, it's called visionary preaching.

When I became the senior pastor of my church three years ago, I met with the leaders individually over a meal. After engaging in some small talk, I asked each of them if they had a vision for their lives. Each person responded equally in myriad ways, "I've never been asked that question by a pastor nor have I given it much thought."

The same is probably true for the ecclesial masses. As I look out at the sea of faces each week, it's evident that people today lack a vision for their lives. They're busy working 50-70 hours per week,

paying bills, raising children, and taking care of aging parents, and their eyes glaze over when we rebuke them every Sunday and make them feel guilty for all of the ways they've failed God.

But, what if preachers gave congregants a weekly or monthly goal, a real vision, for what they can achieve in the day to day? What if preaching became more about living with God's vision for them rather than merely scolding sinners about their visceral sins? Not to say that we don't instruct and correct our members on holy living, but sometimes preachers like to climb on top of our soap boxes and swathe the guilt on thick every single time.

Preaching with vision gives us and our people something positive and concrete to strive for each week. Perhaps we can focus on evangelism one Sunday and challenge people to share their testimony with a neighbor they've lived next to for years. That's a clear, reachable vision. Maybe we can encourage giving of our time and resources by encouraging our parishioners to mentor an at-risk child in the community or support a hungry orphan overseas. You're thinking that's what I do in every sermon!

Yet, what I'm advocating is a paradigm shift in how we view the art of preaching. It's helping pastors think about preaching theoretically as a vision casting discipline rather than simply indoctrination or giving reproach. It's seeing preaching as facilitating a visionary life – a life that God has called each person towards. If we see preaching in this way, we focus less on why congregants mess up all the time and assist them in overcoming their sin issues covertly, because they have a road map for their earthly existence.

Personality and Preaching: Our Practical Challenge

A final struggle I perceive in homiletics today is on a practical level with respect to Phillips Brooks' venerable understanding of preaching and personality. In this age of media overload and sermon accessibility, preachers have placed prime value on replication than authenticity. That is, we're more interested in sounding like

successful pastor across the street than being comfortable with the person God has created us to be.

As a young pastor, the temptation is real to mimic the latest trends and fads in evangelicalism as well as celebrated preachers. If pastor so-and-so is popular and all the rage, then we want to emulate that person and, in doing so, bolster our own preaching reputation. The more we compare ourselves with other pastors the more we discredit God our creator and do a disservice to his church. What makes us effective preachers and communicators is not reproducing the content and delivery style of eminent preachers, but rather to share from our hearts the lessons God has taught us that week through his word.

Passionate and heartfelt messages go further than we may think. I was having breakfast with one of our leaders at a recent church retreat. We brought in an up-and-coming speaker and author in the evangelical world as our guest preacher for the weekend event. The leader began to laud the guest speaker for his gifts in communicating God's word. I nodded in agreement. "That's why I invited him," I said. And to this, she replied, "While he is very gifted, I like your sermons better, because you preach from your heart." While a number of people may recognize the name of our capable guest speaker, people haven't heard of Matthew D. Kim. And yet, there is an overwhelming sense of gratification that comes in realizing that your beloved congregants are being blessed by you and your weekly sermons.

In teaching homiletics, we often elevate the sermonic technique or philosophy designed by an esteemed preacher/homiletician. We want our students to preach like Rev. Dr. X and craft their messages exactly like him or her. And while this is necessary for standardizing our preaching programs, are we not contributing in some way to this mindset that we must sound like Pastor X to be an effectual preacher?

What I mean is that our preaching students need coaching. Like sheep, they need to be led. Each seminarian or pastor we mentor

should develop a unique preaching style that is befitting to that individual even if it prescribes to a certain homiletical technique or philosophy. Students are often left confused. Show them how to preach a homiletical philosophy but stay true to who they are as preachers. By doing so, the student and pastor will preach more freely and not feel like they're required to compromise their personality in the sermonic process.

The challenges in homiletics today are too numerous to mention in this short forum on preaching. However, these are three significant challenges I have witnessed from the pastor's study. Whether we preach God's word weekly or teach others to do the same, pray for much boldness, creativity, and personality to draw people to faith in Jesus Christ and thereby expand the kingdom of God.

Training the Trainers of Tomorrow's Preachers: Towards a Transferable Homiletical Pedagogy

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by Adrian Lane

(editor's note: Adrian Lane is Lecturer in Ministry Skills and Church History at Ridley Theological College in Melbourne, Australia.)

Abstract

This paper urges preachers to train others, multiplicatively. A training framework based on the homiletical quadrilateral of Word, preacher, sermon and congregation is provided. Requisite competencies are then identified for trainers, whether serving in seminary, congregational or parachurch contexts. These competencies include skills in self-understanding, gift recognition, character formation, theological reflection and the development of creativity, as well as technical skills for the production of the sermon. The paper argues for named intentionality in the training process so that students are likewise equipped to train others.

Introduction

In 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul commands his “son” Timothy to entrust “the things you heard me say...to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others”.¹ Four generations of preachers and teachers are on view, as Paul charges Timothy to commit the gospel—“the good deposit”—to faithful elders who will instruct others.² Moreover, an essential quality in their preaching and teaching is highlighted: its transferability.

Teachers of preachers work hard at handing down to their students all that has been passed on to them. But to what extent do we equip students for *teaching others*? Changing the focus from training preachers in the discipline and practice of homiletics to training preachers who can train others in the discipline and practice of homiletics enlarges and affects the training task considerably. It

also changes its perspective. Whereas previously the perspective focussed on the student at hand, now the focus moves to those whom the student trains. Will they have learnt, from your student, how to pass on “the good deposit...to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others?”

This paper urges all those who have been given the privilege and responsibility of training preachers to do so with the generational multiplication of 2 Timothy 2:2 intentionally named. Indeed, all preachers are encouraged to work towards implementing Paul’s command. With this command in mind, a training framework is suggested and some core competencies for trainers identified. If a necessary part of the discipline and practice of homiletics is the ability to train others, then these competencies will be, by definition, competencies all trainers will seek to pass on to their students.³

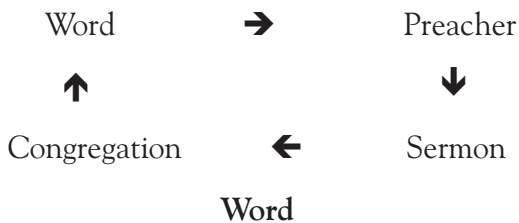
A Call to Train Preachers to Train

At a recent Preaching Conference in Australia, a coaching track designed to equip preachers for training others was offered. Veteran conferees commented this was the first time such a track had been provided at any conference they had attended. However, they also expressed a lack of confidence in taking on a training role. Reasons abound as to why preachers may be hesitant to take on such roles. Lack of vision, opportunity and expertise come to mind. The highly personal nature of preaching as a creative spiritual work may also mean some practitioners feel diffident, even presumptuous, in assuming the role of teacher. As preachers mature, paradoxically they also become increasingly aware of their own inadequacies, so that one seasoned and highly competent preacher expressed the view that he would feel like a “faker” were he to take on a training task. Nonetheless, these reasons do not dismiss the Scriptural injunction. Further, they point to a serious limitation in the training of these preachers: that it had only them in mind. It was terminal. Its aim, successfully achieved, was to produce good preachers. But these preachers did not have the confidence nor competence to train others, let alone train others to train.

This has major implications for those who teach preachers in the seminary context. Yet it seems unnecessarily restrictive and expensive to limit the training of preachers to the seminary. Such a view constrains the development of ministries of the Word and does not make good use of the giftedness of those in the field. Those exploring their gifts in preaching, those preaching in congregations that cannot afford a seminary trained pastor, such as rural ministries, those in circumstances of rapid church growth, and those who for some reason cannot attend seminary are just some who will need training, at least initially, in congregational, jurisdictional or parachurch contexts.⁴ This is not to undermine the essential role of the seminary in forming and training men and women for various ministries of the Word, but to recognize its place amongst a broader array of training settings. All teachers of preachers—whatever the context—are urged to teach in such a way that students grow in character and gain knowledge, frameworks and skills that are identified and transferable to others.

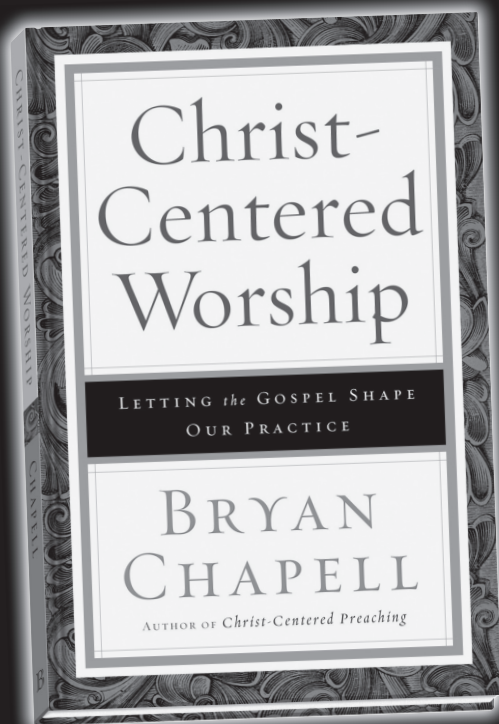
A Training Framework

The homiletical quadrilateral below provides one easily accessible framework for training. It reminds us of the various elements in homiletical practice. Due attention to each of these elements will prevent undue focus on some elements to the detriment of others.⁵



Firstly, the *Word* needs to be known.^{6 7} Exegetical and hermeneutical skills within a good understanding of Biblical Theology are the fundamental tools of the preacher. Knowledge of how this Word has been understood and systematised theologically over church history is also key, especially in avoiding and warning against error. Finally,

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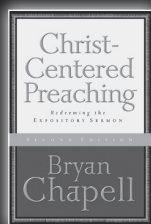
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knowing how this Word has been applied ethically and pastorally in the past will significantly assist contemporary application.

Preacher

However, knowledge of the Word in the context of Biblical, Historical, Systematic and Pastoral Theology is not the whole story. God's Word is conveyed through a *preacher*, and unless that preacher bears testimony to submitting to that Word, allowing that Word to do its creative, transformative work, the preaching moment will be at best a Religious Studies lesson. Character is crucial. Some may argue that it is no business of the trainer to be concerned with character. Yet this is where the Biblical understanding of ministry is so thoroughly different from the world's model of professional service. For Jesus, Peter and Paul, the character of those they were training was primary.⁸ Character witnesses to the content of the sermon. A technically perfect sermon is utterly destroyed by poor character. Worse, poor character brings the Word into disrepute. More commonly, an exegetically or rhetorically brilliant sermon may be spiritually vacuous because the preacher has continued to sit over the text, dissecting it, rather than allowing the text to interact with his or her character, getting 'under one's skin,' 'into one's soul,' so that the sermon becomes living water, welling up from a refreshed spring.⁹ Preachers must know *God* and have a dynamic relationship with Him, being led by the Holy Spirit as they deliberate over how to bring His Word to each particular situation.¹⁰ Preachers also need to know *themselves*, understanding their biases, temptations and limitations, and ensuring that the sermon is first preached prayerfully to oneself. Preachers then need to learn how to pray for, love and speak to *others*. Praying for one's listeners often melts any residual bitterness and facilitates genuine, gentle love. Appropriately expressing this love for one's hearers will greatly encourage.¹¹ Moreover, an intentional decision to love will enable the conveying of difficult truths. Otherwise the sermon's application may be unrealistic, insensitive or even cruel, lacking grace and asking listeners to respond in ways that are beyond them. It is interesting to note that the word-related gifts in Ephesians 4:11

are best understood as the persons themselves, whereas Romans 12:6-8 distinguishes between the persons and their gifts. This ambiguity is significant pedagogically: trainers develop not just a gift, but a person.¹²

Congregation

Thirdly, sermons are for *congregations*, at a unique place and time. Like the preacher, each congregation has its own culture, its own strengths and weaknesses as it seeks to serve God - corporately, and as individuals. Furthermore, each congregation is located in a wider society and is called to witness as God's people in that society, reaching out with the good news. This means that the minister of the Word needs competencies in thinking theologically so as to be able to relate the Word not just to the human heart, but to the congregation and the society in which listeners live. This thinking takes time. It requires the hard work of learning the issues listeners are wrestling with, and the even harder work of discerning how God's Word interacts with those issues. More than that, part of the minister's task will be training listeners in these skills themselves, given that the sermon's listeners will be living in all manner of different worlds throughout the week.

Sermon

Fourthly, the preacher will need to learn skills in effectively communicating the Word and its implications for contemporary discipleship through the *sermon*. Such skills include the ability to preach clearly and succinctly, in a manner that recognises the congregation's learning style and maturity. They include the ability to speak holistically to mind, heart and will. Relevance, sensitivity and engagement will be pertinent issues, as will numerous technical issues, such as structure and delivery.

Some Core Competencies for Trainers

If preachers are to learn in these four areas of Word, preacher, congregation and sermon, then those training them will require

certain core competencies. These core competencies will need to be plainly identified to students so that students, in turn, gain the ability to train others. Given the foundational nature of this ministry it is surprising how little has been written about the training task. It is almost as though knowledge of the Word automatically qualifies one to teach others in it. Furthermore, what has been written has tended to focus on skills, rather than the more complex character and relational issues.¹³ Below I have sought to identify some of these core competencies, at an introductory level, to stimulate further thought and discussion.

Prayerfulness

Fundamentally, a *reflective and careful prayerfulness* focussed on the training task is a necessity. Trainee preachers will be vulnerable in their confidence as they explore their calling and giftedness. Any ministry of the Word will face opposition, both from within a congregation and from without.¹⁴ It is a ministry that occasions trouble. Gentleness, boldness and assurance in one's vocation as a preacher are constant requirements. This necessitates thoughtful discernment and guidance from the trainer, who must be guided by prayer and love. The all-too-enthusiastic trainer may place inappropriate burdens and expectations on young (and not-so-young) Christians. On the other hand, the all-too-sensitive trainer may accede too quickly to a new preacher's loss of confidence, rather than gently encouraging perseverance.

Self-awareness, understanding and acceptance

Related to the above, a high level of *self-awareness, self-understanding and self-acceptance* on the part of trainers is also required. Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of one's own preaching style and being able to name these maturely, without false modesty or defensiveness, will assist in modelling and teaching aspects of the preaching task. It will also help foster a healthy attitude between trainer and student, moderating the ever-present temptations for students to ape their teachers and for teachers to implicitly expect students to preach with the same strengths and style. Giving

students opportunity, models and resources to develop their own style within clear boundaries of Biblical faithfulness needs to be a conscious and deliberate effort. Incidentally, careful intentionality here in affirming different gifts will defuse competitiveness, either with the trainer or with other trainees.

Good self-understanding and acceptance requires more than being able to name and live with one's own preaching style. Understanding how one responds to different personalities and ministry styles, and how one is perceived in the training context is also important. The preaching teacher is always looking for development in students. This necessitates change, and students react in various ways to the call for change. The call for change may involve technical aspects in producing the sermon, but may also include aspects related to character, such as tardiness or perfectionism. Defensiveness will be a natural first response in many students, so engendering an open and supportive learning culture and community will be a prerequisite before applied learning occurs. Trainers therefore have to be alert to their own defensiveness and be able to live with the emotional vicissitudes of trainees as they struggle with the frustrations and delights of learning to minister the Word.

Gift recognition

Trainers will obviously need the ability to *perceive and encourage incipient giftedness*. All Christians should regularly be given a vision for God's harvest, and regularly reminded of the foundational and transformative ministry of the Word. Some will offer to try their gifts in this area, but for most it will not be until a Christian leader provides them with an opportunity to give a talk or a Bible Study that their gifts will begin to be tested. Prayerful wisdom will be especially needed here. Giving opportunities to explore gifts must be accompanied by a freedom and willingness to accept the Spirit's leading. It may be for further development. However, it may be for ministry in other areas. The trainer's belief in a person's giftedness is very powerful. On one hand, it can serve as a goad to a lifetime of fruitful ministry, a great boost in building confidence. On the other

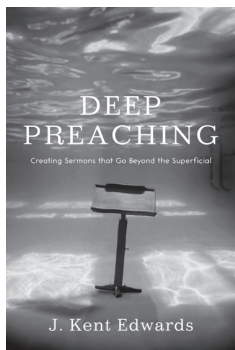
hand, affirmation of those without the necessary gifts for long-term ministry will only lead to a constantly frustrating and discouraging disconnect between the perception of others and self-perception. Moreover, congregations will suffer badly from preachers who simply cannot fulfil the task. Yet discouraging those who do indeed have incipient Word ministry gifts will rob the church of valuable and urgently needed ministries. Love for God and His people must be the motivation in this work of envisioning, recruiting, training, testing and 'believing in' ministers of His Word. Temptations to build an empire or a following must be avoided. Trainees quickly learn whether love is genuine or for self-centered or programmatic ends.

Ability to train character

More generally, trainers of preachers will need abilities in helping preachers *grow in character*. Trainers naturally focus on skills, so issues related to character are easily neglected. Furthermore, training character is in many ways more difficult and complex, fraught with more dangers than training skills. This commitment to character training thus needs to be named early in the training process to emphasise its prerequisite nature and to avoid misunderstanding at a later stage, when it may be more directly applied. Hopefully the training of character is part of a broader program of discipleship, where others are involved collegially. In these contexts, boundaries of responsibility and accountability in relation to various trainers need to be clearly articulated and maintained.

It is often difficult to know when and how to raise issues of character, and discernment is required in the question of timeliness. Many issues can best be dealt with by systematic teaching, as part of a syllabus. This can include set readings, such as Stott's classic call to godliness.¹⁵ In a class context, interviews and open-ended questions and discussion about character development can be very helpful. Clearly structured formal criteria for learning arrangements and set work also provide useful opportunities for accountability and feedback. If attendance is not satisfactory or tardy, or work is late or not within guidelines, character issues may be implicated.

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These circumstances provide occasion for sensitively raising issues, such as over-commitment, perfectionism, or a lack of confidence, motivation or discipline. Where trainees are learning as part of a group, members of the group will sometimes raise character issues, but this needs to be monitored as realistically as possible, as some will be quick to see the speck in others' eyes! Often it is the out-of-class conversation that provides the moment for care, and trainers should be alert to veiled requests for help. Time is of great value, as it not only gives the space to assess recurring problems but also gives room for growth. Many character issues resolve themselves naturally over time in the context of a prayerful, supportive, loving community that is systematically wrestling with the training tasks.

Self-revelation skills

Training in character will require appropriate *self-revelation skills* on the part of the trainer. This is not so the trainer becomes the focus or so that their form of spirituality or ministry becomes prescriptive. Rather, it is so that trainees see at least one mature model of a preacher who has learned to trust, discern and work with the Holy Spirit in the preaching task. It is also so that trainees have appropriate expectations - of themselves, of their work and of their listeners - and so that they gain some understanding of the spiritual battles involved in ministering the Word.

Ability to train theological thinking

It has already been noted that one of the preacher's roles is to help listeners develop skills in understanding the Scriptures and theological thinking. The trainer of preachers thus not only needs to ensure that students have skills in the careful handling of the Scriptures and the ability to think theologically, but also the skills to *help others think Biblically and theologically*. This is no mean feat, and goes right to the heart of Word ministry from an evangelical and Reformed perspective. Most of us are happy to let others interpret the Scriptures and do the theological thinking for us. We like the sermon or Bible Study to be complete, not open-ended. Most of us prefer to have questions answered, rather than raised. Of course,

there is a sizeable and appropriate place for this work to be done by the preacher - after all, they have been trained, set aside and supported for this very purpose. However, if it is always and only done by the preacher, congregations are left vulnerable in those situations not addressed by the preacher, and to preachers who are not faithful.

Often preachers are thinking theologically without realising it. Determining a sermonic sentence or the “Big Idea”, in Robinson’s terms, is a theological task, since it calls for assessment of the key homiletical point in a passage.¹⁶ Organising the main points of a sermon and their relationship should in the first instance be a theological task, before a communication one. For example, are the ideas consequential or in parallel? Often when students are having trouble with sermonic structure the issue is not so much one of communication as being able to think theologically in a careful and logical manner. Thinking through contemporary illustration and application is also more often a theological than communication skill. Illustrations may not work due to the mixed theological messages conveyed. Poor application usually means time has not been taken by the preacher to consider theologically the implications of the Biblical text. By showing listeners one’s theological working, and even involving them in it, before, during or after the sermon, the preacher helps train listeners to think theologically. Similarly, by demonstrating to the student preacher the theological nature of the preaching process, with specific examples, the preaching teacher models this process of training others in theological thinking. Such a process takes time, especially with individuals who have poor theological thinking skills, and is significantly helped by a broader theological community.¹⁷

Communication skills

Of course the trainer of preachers will also need competencies for training in *communication*. Many teachers focus the bulk of their efforts here. However, care has to be taken to ensure development in the other three elements of the homiletical quadrilateral above:

that is, character (preacher); exegetical, hermeneutical and theological thinking skills (Word); and interaction with audience issues (congregation). Trainers may be tempted to teach only those communication methods they themselves are currently using, or were taught. This may not take into account individual creativity and giftedness, the variety of genres in the Biblical literature, and the differing natures of congregations and audiences. A trainer will need to decide if it is appropriate to teach one standard method for preparing and delivering the sermon, offering other methodologies only after this has been mastered; or whether trainees will best be served by more eclectic or responsive approaches. The advantage of teaching a standard method is that all students gain a default practice and language for the discipline, and the trainer can monitor whether basic skills, such as exegeting a text and being able to deliver typical deductive, inductive and narrative sermons have been mastered. The disadvantage with this approach is that some trainees may feel creatively constrained.¹⁸

One tool trainers may find helpful is the use of a “Homiletical Round-Table”. Students are asked to imagine various writers on preaching, such as Chapell, Stott, Lowry and Robinson, together with one of the writers in Biblical Theology, such as Dumbrell or Goldsworthy, sitting at a round table. What would each have to say about preaching this text or theme? The Biblical Theologian will be asking how the passage fits into the wider Biblical revelation;¹⁹ Chapell will be looking for the “Fallen Condition Focus”;²⁰ Stott may ask how the passage relates to the newspaper;²¹ Lowry will be interested in the flow of the sermon and its narrative elements, especially the reversal;²² and Robinson would ask for the sermon sentence or the “Big Idea”. This Round-Table plainly requires good understanding of each of the authors used. It recognises the contribution of each to the ministry of the Word. It also recognises that each is not the final word, thus giving freedom to preachers to communicate in their own style and voice, drawing on the frameworks of others.

Developing creativity

Encouraging and developing an individual's *creativity, style and voice*²³ is a constant challenge. This is especially the case when training a group, as groups so easily, usually unconsciously, set norms and expectations. Some students, notably those practising other creative arts, intuitively sense the creative aspects of preaching. Others, especially those from more structured backgrounds, often have trouble, and may be wedded to one particular style, usually formulaic. Naturally there are boundaries related to Biblical faithfulness, time and audience factors. Sometimes temporary boundaries will be set for pedagogical reasons, in order to develop distinct skills. These restrictions, such as strictly limiting sermons to a set time and requiring a full oral text in oral format usually produce a higher quality result, much like limiting an exhibition of photographs to black and white, or a prescribed number.²⁴ However, care needs to be taken to ensure that boundaries are not too tight, as this may mean students produce a style of work that is not authentic, or that they have no intention of adopting. On the other hand, when boundaries are too loose and not sufficiently comprehensive, trainers may never know whether students can teach and preach the Word of God faithfully in its various genres to various audiences, and students may not develop the abilities to do so. Exposing students to a range of sermonic styles and giving opportunity for students to preach from different Biblical genres will help them develop a quiver of resources, particularly a variety of sermon shapes. A good pedagogical exercise is for students to preach the same passage using a range of styles, such as Schlafer's argument, story and image styles.²⁵ This helps trainees develop facility, discernment and confidence. Preaching through a Biblical book as part of a team also exposes students to different treatments of the same genre.

Technical skills, or developing a toolkit

In order for individuals to develop their own style and gain a range of homiletical resources, training in each of the *technical components*

of a sermon will be required. These include skills in determining a sermon sentence, story or image; structures and shapes; escalation, tension, climax and reversal; headlines and endlines; introductions and conclusions; illustration; application; word choice; and delivery. Delivery will include voice, gesture, and issues related to emotion and manner.²⁶ Learning sensitivity to an audience's demographic and circumstances, in the light of the calendar and ecclesiastical years will also be important, as these factors have implications both for content and presentation.

Using training contexts optimally

Trainers of preachers will naturally need ability in *the use and development of training contexts*. Developing a class or cohort will mean helping students learn to *give* gracious, supportive and well-defined feedback to each other. Creating a cohort with these abilities requires prayer, time and guidance. Some students, especially those from certain cultural backgrounds, find it difficult to make unfavourable comments about their peers' work. Others can only speak of what they consider to be problems. Similarly, helping students *receive* both affirmative and critical comments with a mature, non-defensive attitude requires pastoral sensitivity. Issues in the giving and receiving of both positive and critical feedback are often paradigmatic of broader character and formational matters. Video review provides an ideal opportunity for learning, notably in the areas of voice and gesture, but due to its more intimate and powerful nature requires especial sensitivity. In all contexts, the trainer will need to be aware of "readiness to learn" issues, mindful that students will be at different places in their growth.²⁷

Training others to train

A final requisite for trainers is competency in *teaching others to train*. Just as preachers can preach very ably without being able to name the skills employed so that others can intentionally learn, so some trainers can train intuitively without being able to name the skills involved. While this equips the next generation of preachers, it will not necessarily produce a multiplying work, which moves

out exponentially and is passed down the generations. Usually this ability to name and pass on training skills only comes after considerable experience, self-reflection and interaction with other teachers. However, more attention and resources need to be given to the multiplicative aspects of homiletical pedagogy. Often a single conversation or article aptly synthesises what may otherwise take years to formulate.

Back to the Beginning: Making a Start

I remember when I first began driving. It was overwhelming. I could learn one task, but then to combine it with others, and then add in other drivers on the road, seemed impossible. The task of training preachers may seem similarly difficult, let alone training them to train others. However, whatever one's circumstances, make a start. While these training competencies obviously apply to those teaching in the seminary context, they equally apply to those in congregational and parachurch settings, where there can also be excellent training through individual or small group tuition. Seek out those with incipient preaching gifts. In some places, lack of preaching opportunities can be a real impediment to development. However, unless opportunities can be found, congregations are effectively being parasitic on others for their future ministers and may be missing opportunities for gospel outreach. Like driving, it will only be through practice that skills in preaching and teaching preaching are developed.

Teaching others to preach is a sophisticated task. One of the reasons it may appear daunting is that much of the discipline has been taught and learnt intuitively. This introductory article is a hesitant first step to unravelling and naming some of the necessary components and competencies, with multiplication in view, so that more will train others in this crucial ministry, train them well, and train them in such a way that they cannot but help train others to train.

Notes

1. Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version. Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Bible Publishers.
2. See 2 Timothy 1:8-14, especially verses 11-14. 2 Timothy 2:8-9, 14-15 and 24-26 are also pertinent.
3. This article is based on a paper originally presented at the Xpose Preaching Conference in Melbourne, Australia on 5 and 6 October, 2007, at the Australian College of Theology Ministry and Practice Departmental Meeting (Victoria) on 12 November, 2007, and at the Australasian Academy of Homiletics, Sydney, 17 April, 2009.
4. Such as university, schools or camping ministries.
5. This quadrilateral was initially brought to my attention by Eugene Lowry in 1999. Its original source is unknown.
6. I use Word here in its general sense of Scripture, mindful that the inscripturated Word is but one form of the Word of the living Trinitarian God, and that its use is often intended to communicate multilayered meanings. For a fuller treatment of the nature of the inscripturated Word and its relationship to preaching, see Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1996), especially 15-17 and 112-123.
7. In this paper, the *ministry* of the Word is understood as a ministry exercised in various forms and contexts, to believers and unbelievers alike, as prioritised by Peter in Acts 6:2 and as exemplified by Paul in his *apologia* of his ministry to the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:18-35, especially 20-21 and 24-31). Particular focus will be given to public proclamational evangelism, preaching and teaching. Amongst other fruits, this ministry brings about a new creation (Jas 1:18, Rom 10:13-15), reconciles (2 Cor 5:19), sanctifies (Jn 17:17), and judges (2 Cor 5:19). See also Adam, chapter 4.
8. 1 Peter 5:1-11; Acts 20:28.
9. Jn 4:14; 7:38; Jas 3:11-12.
10. See 2 Tim 2:14-15, 24-25.
11. Bruce Allder comments, "The present emphasis on the hermeneutic of Scripture to the exclusion of care may be producing in training preachers a concept of the sermon which is inadequate as an instrument for the caring aspect of worship." See Bruce G. Allder, "Preaching in Context," Paper presented at the Australasian Academy of Homiletics, Sydney, 2007, 9.

12. In Donald Howard, "What's it all about?" in Donald Howard (Ed.), *Preach or Perish: Reaching the hearts and minds of the world today* (Sydney: Private, 2008), 1-11, Howard quotes Quayle (without reference), "It is no trouble to preach but a vast trouble to construct a preacher...The sermon is the preacher up to date." (4)
13. Notable exceptions to this include David J. Lose, "Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice" in Thomas G. Long and Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (Eds), *Teaching Preaching as a Christian Practice: A New Approach to Homiletical Pedagogy* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 61-74, and Allen Demond, "Beyond Explanation: Pedagogy and Epistemology in Preaching," *Homiletics* 27:1 (Summer 2002): 1-12. With reference to the work of Donald Schon, Demond explores the nature of the training relationship, focusing on the "Aha" moment of learning. See also Edward Farley, "Can Preaching Be Taught," *Theology Today* 62:2 (July 2005): 171-180 and Charles Boyd, "The Art of Sermon Coaching," *Preaching* 16:5 (March-April 2001): 58-62. For a helpful summary of the late 20th century pedagogical literature and practice in mainline North American seminaries, as represented in the Academy of Homiletics, see Thomas G. Long, "A New Focus for Teaching Preaching" in Long and Tisdale, 3-17.
14. Acts 20:29-31
15. See John R. W. Stott, *I Believe in Preaching* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1982), 262-337.
16. See Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 33-44 and 97-99.
17. See Allan Harkness, "De-schooling the Theological Seminary: An Appropriate Paradigm for Effective Ministerial Formation," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 4:3 (October 2001): 141-154 and James Motl, "Homiletics and Integrating the Seminary Curriculum," *Worship* 64:1 (January 1990): 24-30.
18. For Lucy Hogan's comments on this question, see Lucy Hogan, "Creation of Form" in Long and Tisdale, 144-145.
19. See, for example, William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation, Revised Edition* (Exeter: Paternoster, 2002) and G. Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000).
20. See Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 40-44.
21. See Stott, 137-144.

22. See Eugene Lowry, *The Homiletical Plot: The Sermon as Narrative Art Form (Expanded Edition)* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001). See also Adrian Lane, "Please, No More Boring Sermons! An Introduction to the Application of Narrative to Homiletics" in Keith Weller (Ed.), *Please! No more boring sermons!* (Melbourne: Acorn, 2007), 79-92.
23. In this paragraph I use voice to refer to an individual's unique form of expression, including the instrument producing sound!
24. See Adrian Lane, "Training for the Sound of the Sermon: Orality and the use of an Oral Text in Oral Format," *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 6:2 (September 2006): 77-94.
25. I first participated in this exercise in a class taught by Eugene Lowry, using the styles as described by David Schlafer, *Surviving the Sermon* (Cambridge: Cowley, 1992), 59-76 and Eugene Lowry, *The Sermon: Dancing the Edge of Mystery* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997), 73-74, 84-88 and 108-111.
26. See Murray A. Capill, *Preaching with Spiritual Vigour: Including Lessons from the Life and Practice of Richard Baxter* (Fearn: Christian Focus, 2003), especially chapters 5, 6 and 7.
27. For a more extensive discussion of the various modes in which to train skills in the seminary context, such as plenary meetings and small practicum groups, see Barbara K. Lundblad, "Designing the Introductory Course in Preaching" in Long and Tisdale, 207-222. For more specific discussion of methods of evaluation, see Daniel E. Harris, "Methods of Assessment" in Long and Tisdale, 191-204, Adrian Lane, "Some Principles and Methods of Sermon Evaluation used in the Introduction to Homiletics Class," Paper presented at the Australasian Academy of Homiletics, Sydney, 2002, 1-12, and Peter Davis, "Sermon Evaluation," Paper presented at the Australasian Academy of Homiletics, Sydney, 2009.

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Application as Improvisation

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by Abraham Kuruwilla

(editor's note: Abraham Kuruwilla is assistant professor of pastoral ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.)

Abstract

Christian ethics is an exercise in applying biblical texts, an activity that is at the core of preaching. This paper proposes that application of Scripture is akin to improvisation, both musical and dramatic: an endeavor characterized by fidelity (sustaining theological identity with, and bearing the authority of, the pericope it is derived from), and by novelty (respecting the specific situation of, and thus being relevant to, a particular audience). It is by the faithful offering of such “improvised” applications, integrally related both to the text and to the circumstances of listeners, that the homiletician enables the people of God to meet the ethical demands of God.

Introduction

Application is “the life and soul of a sermon, whereby these sacred truths [of Scripture] are brought home to a Man’s particular conscience and occasions, and the affections engaged [*sic*] unto any truth or duty.”¹ James 1:22–25 emphasizes the importance of application: “prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves”; the one who applies the text is “an effectual doer ... blessed in what he does.” It is not enough to *know*; one must also *be*. Only in personal appropriation or application does the text accomplish its meaning; therefore, Gadamer could assert that application was an integral part of the hermeneutical process.² It is the culmination of the enterprise 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. What is historical and distant (the text) is, in preaching, made contemporary and near

(praxis). Such application that is promulgated in preaching, if it is to be deemed valid, must carry the authority of the inspired text, as well as be relevant for congregational praxis. Therefore, the core issue for preachers of the Bible has always been the determination of application that is faithful to the textual intention and fitting for the listening audience. Since pericopes are the basic textual elements of the church's weekly rendezvous with the Word of God, and the fundamental units of the canonical text handled in the formal gatherings of the people of God, deriving valid application from pericopes becomes the cardinal task of the homiletician.³

Preaching as Theology in Translation

The expositor's arduous struggle to bridge the gap between ancient Scripture and contemporary listeners—what Ricoeur called “distanciation” between the world of inscription and the world of interpretation—has previously been compared to the transaction of translation.⁴ It was proposed that *pericopal theology* is the translational bridge between the ancient text and contemporary world. It is by means of this entity that sermons can manifest the authority of their source texts by respecting the constant component thereof; pericopal theology also provides the basis for generating relevant sermonic application for target audiences by being conceptually general enough to encompass their varying circumstances and situations.⁵ Thus there is a twofold aspect to homiletical “translation”: the exposition of pericopal theology from the text, and the delineation of how the latter may be applied in real life. The first move leads meaning *from* the biblical text (text to theology) with authority, the second directs meaning *to* the situations of listeners (theology to praxis) with relevance.⁶ It is this second half of the undertaking that will be the focus of this paper.

Here it is proposed that *improvisation* is a fruitful metaphor to think of this second movement, the intersection of pericopal theology with the faith and practice of God's people—how exactly the theology of the pericope helps shape the lives of hearers of sermons for the glory of God. In so actualizing theology into the discrete

and specific circumstances of believers, the values of the cosmos are gradually subverted, and those of God's world are progressively established in the life of the community. This is part of what it means to acknowledge, "Thy kingdom come."

Preaching as Theology in Improvisation

From the early days of the church, the narrative of Scripture was envisaged as a single, universal, and ongoing story, the continuing relevance of which was to be explicated by preachers to audiences in each generation. Thus the Bible has always been read by the church with an underlying assumption of the immediate contemporaneity of the ancient text to every listener, in every era, in every place. There is, indeed, a philosophical basis for this enduring contemporaneity. The consolidation of heterogeneous writings into the single normative canon of Scripture created a new reading frame for its component texts.⁷ The canon, thereby, redeployed these writings as parts of a new literary whole in a fresh hermeneutical context. Such a hermeneutical shift prompted by the canon renders the moral and ethical will of God accessible for future generations, a move that is consummated by the preaching of Scripture. Thus the canon is potentially relevant for every believer, in every generation, everywhere. Chrysostom declared that what was written in the Bible was written "for us" and, therefore, worthy of diligent attention. In like manner, asserting the universality of the canon's relevance and readership, Gregory the Great asked rhetorically: "For what is sacred Scripture but a kind of epistle of Almighty God to His creature?"⁸ Of course, the Bible itself consistently affirms the relevance of its message for future generations: Deut 29:14–15; 2 Kgs 22–23; Neh 7:73b–8:18; Ps 78:5–6; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 9:10; 10:6, 11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; etc.

Improvisation is Contextualization

Application of Scripture was to be the culmination of the move from text to praxis for all God's people in any period of time, anywhere. Therefore, the concern of interpreters, both ancient and modern, has not simply been the reconstruction of the *Sitz im Leben*

of the text, but also the elucidation of its *Sitz in unserem Leben*, its situation in *our* life, in the situation of current readers and hearers of the text.⁹ This is the process of deriving valid application.

In the hermeneutical process of translating the text to derive application, the preacher essentially contextualizes the theology of the pericope into the faith and practice of that particular local community of God. Such an application of theology, then, “is less a matter of *indoctrination* than it is of *exdoctrination*: the living out of Christian teaching.”¹⁰ It is therefore crucial that the specific application so generated from pericopal theology be valid—both legitimately drawn from the text, and relevantly moved towards the audience. While the preacher is governed by the ancient script of Scripture, this *verbum Dei minister* (“minister of the Word of God”) is also beholden to the contemporary community to make this unchangeable and unchanging text relevant for the changeable and changing circumstances of God’s people. Here is where the metaphor of *improvisation* comes in handy, for the essence of this activity is the paradoxical alliance of *fidelity* and *novelty*.

Fidelity and Novelty Characterize Improvisation

As the end of the Gospels and the beginning of Acts make clear (Matt 28:18–20; Acts 1:8), God desires to involve his people in his magnificent work, the ongoing drama of creation and redemption. Believers are to undertake their own “improvisations” that demonstrate faithfulness to the past and newness towards the future—not the aping of deeds once done, nor the repetition of words once uttered, but a re-articulation and re-presentation of the ongoing saga with *fidelity* and *novelty*.

Application, while indebted to the text, is thus not an attempt to repeat what is in the text or to regenerate in the present the historical event that stands behind the text. “Rather, creativity must be involved as we seek to mediate, translate, interpret its meaning—the meaning in front of the text—into our own horizon.”¹¹ *Fidelity* to what has gone on before is essential, for the church remains under the authority of the text of Scripture and

seeks to be faithful to it in its application. On the other hand, *novelty* is also called for in the fresh context of current auditors, as the church contextualizes an ancient text to its own modern setting. Fidelity and novelty are at the heart of application; these two elements are also the *sine quibus non* of improvisation. Verbatim and unimaginative imitation of what transpired in the previous acts of the drama is inadequate and inappropriate in the new context of the present troupe of performers; instead, a “novel” reading of the unchangeable text has to occur in a changed context in order to maintain fidelity to that normative divine discourse. This is what it means to improvise (from the Latin, *improvisus*, “unforeseen”)—to perform without previous preparation, on the spur of the moment, from whatever materials are readily available. The specific situations of future readers were never foreseen by the ancient writers; these situations call for creativity in those unique moments; and the available material (the text of Scripture) must be used, as well. In short, “[e]thics cannot be simply about rehearsing and repeating the same script and story over and over again, albeit on a fresh stage with new players. . . . Improvisation means a community formed in the right habits trusting itself to embody its tradition in new and challenging circumstances; and this is exactly what the church is called to do.”¹² It is the dual polarity of fidelity and novelty that give this preaching movement the character of improvisation.

Of particular interest is the paradigmatic phenomenon of improvisation in music, especially in jazz. Musicians performing this genre recognize “jazz standards” as providing authoritative instructions for improvising. Such operations are not *totally* spontaneous, for to be the performance of a jazz standard, the improvisation has to be in accord with a given set of guidelines embodied by that standard. Young and Matheson discuss what they call the “canonical model” of such tacit rules that constitute a jazz standard: introduction, head (statement of the melody), improvisations, recapitulation of the head, and ending. According to the model, two jazz performances are discrete instances of the same standard if their heads utilize the same melody and their

improvisations are grounded on the chord patterns of the head (the same “theology?”), while yet being obviously very different from each other. Indeed, many of these performances are based on *The Real Book*, a set of unauthorized, but ubiquitous, volumes, scoring the melody and chord changes of an exhaustive listing of jazz standards. All paginated identically (chapter and verse?) and coming in editions to suit B-flat, E-flat, and C instruments (multiple translations/versions?), these tomes, in a sense, form the “canon” of jazz.¹³ The analogies are evident: *fidelity* to the standard (as outlined in the jazz “Bible”) and *novelty* in each new specific musical situation characterize the exciting phenomenon that jazz improvisation is. These twin features, fidelity and novelty, anchor the specific performance in the past and simultaneously unfurl its sails towards the future. To bring the analogy back to the homiletical endeavor of the church, “[i]f the Christian story is drama, then ethics, the embodiment of that story, is appropriately regarded as performance.”¹⁴ One may thus conceive of preaching as a performance maintaining fidelity with the text (thus having authority), while at the same time providing application congruent with the specific situation of current listeners (thus having relevance).

Variety and Identity in Improvisation

In sum, the translational task of the preacher, like that of the jazz musician or performer, is to delve into the past and suggest in the present how the past may be creatively applied in the future—an act of improvisation. Keith Johnstone’s analogy is apt: “The improviser has to be like a man walking backwards.”¹⁵ This is one who, with eyes on the past (the canonical Scriptures), must be guided by it. Yet the improviser, it must be remembered, is also headed “forwards,” away from the past of the text, translating it into the future of hearers. The situation of the latter must also be an important parameter for the improvising translator. Thus, when the same text is “translated” into different contexts to produce discrete improvisations (applications) on the same theme (theology), the same pericopal theology is being

brought to bear upon those different reading situations in order to generate faithful applications appropriate for each unique context. Such applications, though governed by the same pericopal theology, may—and, indeed, should—look different, for each reader, hearer, congregation, and context is different. However, insofar as these different applications fall within the bounds of the same pericopal theology, they are but variations on a single theme, and therefore all such improvisations remain faithful to the text.

Thus, the validity of the latter half of the translational movement (from theology to praxis) is maintained insofar as the particular application is encompassed within the breadth of the theology of the pericope. In other words, the language of the Bible allows for a whole field of possible future meanings in the generality of pericopal theology such that all applications subsumed by that theology may be considered legitimate extensions of the meaning of that pericope, the continuation of the biblical story into the life of the current body of believers.¹⁶

This means that fidelity in improvisation involves sustaining a sort of identity between application and the textual sense, a preservation of some kind of correspondence between text and praxis. This congruence is not superimposable identity—slavish imitation, the repetition of the past—but, rather a skilful translation, an improvisation for the future. One is mimicry, the other is musicianship; one is passive, the other demands training and a developed sensibility for what is fitting in which situation, a transaction best directed, in biblical exposition, by those who “by practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil” (Heb 5:14). It requires of the preacher attentiveness to new contexts of interpretation, sensitivity to the unfolding continuities of the work, and responsibility for, and accountability to, the particular community of co-performers, fellow-improvisers, and auditors.¹⁷ However, the creativity of the expositor in generating such applications must be exercised with due respect for the original work, lest “[t]he license to create-to-preserve quickly becomes indistinguishable from the license simply to create.”¹⁸ Application,

therefore, is not an act of creation *ex nihilo*, but rather a recreation—an “improvisation” on the text in the fresh context of current hearers. Scripture is the plenary source, the authoritative playbook of action, with each pericope contributing specific instructions for the “performance” of the segment of the canonical world it projects. Fitting, valid, and legitimate application is generated from the text by an improvisation characterized by fidelity and novelty. It is in the maintenance of fidelity and novelty that the intermediary entity of pericopal theology plays such a crucial governing role in the preaching transaction.

The entire operation, from text to theology and from theology to praxis is, therefore, the task of the church in every age, and pericopal theology is the authoritative guide for this faithful-yet-new performance of the text in unprecedented situations. It is pericopal theology that ensures the bi-directional congruity in this move towards application—backward congruity to the word of Scripture that maintains the *authority* of the text (fidelity), and forward congruity to the world of the hearer that manifests the *relevance* of the text (novelty). In this latter move, the particular cares of the day are to be diligently considered by the preacher in order that the theology of the pericope may be couched in the concrete. This is the argot of translation—the re-expression of an ancient text in the language and circumstances of contemporary time, without which the antiquarian interest is simply a futile endeavor “to massage the dead.”¹⁹ The preacher must therefore grapple with both the canon of God and the concerns of mankind, and employ pericopal theology as a mediator between the two, maintaining the dialectic of improvisation between fidelity and novelty, sameness and change. Not only must the sermon expound the pericopal theology, it must also express applications that are specific and concrete, tailored to the congregation to whom the message is delivered. “[T]o make a general principle worth anything, you must give it a body; you must show in what way and how far it would be applied actually in an actual system.”²⁰ Otherwise the ethical demands of a God who calls his people to be like him in his holiness can never be met.

Improvisation in Practice

Of note is the fact that such an understanding of textual hermeneutics pertains not only to religious literature but to legal literature as well—ancient texts that both homiletician and jurist, respectively, seek to apply to their contemporary eras.

Improvisation in Legal Hermeneutics

It has oft been observed that interpretation of legal texts, such as the *U.S. Constitution*, is akin to translation, “a bringing into the present a text of the past,” a straddling of two worlds simultaneously.²¹ The continuing life of a binding legal or religious classic depends on an ongoing translation into new circumstances; like the Scriptures, a constitution, too, is “intended to endure for ages to come, and, consequently, to be adapted to the various *crises* of human affairs.”²² The similarities between the hermeneutics of law and Scripture are therefore considerable: the literature of both fields exists to be actualized in specific situations in subsequent time, one to serve the execution of justice through pronouncing verdicts, the other to serve the exercise of faith through preaching sermons. Generating “application” by improvisation is also the task of the judge who moves from the text of law to judicial philosophy and thence to the adjudication of the case currently at the bar. The homiletician, on the other hand, generates application by moving from text of Scripture to pericopal theology before arriving at specific exhortations for the congregation currently in the pews. “This implies that the text, whether law or gospel, if it is to be understood properly—i.e., according to the claim it makes—must be understood at every moment, in every concrete situation, in a new and different way.”²³ Of particular interest, then, is this congruence between discerning application in legal and scriptural interpretation; a comparison illuminates with greater clarity the importance of this final component of the move from text to praxis in the hermeneutical endeavors of both disciplines.

Legal literature is replete with examples of such a movement from

textual sense to future application. The passage of time introduces new conditions and contingencies, and, therefore, legal (and religious) classics are constructed (and construed) to be perennially relevant. Textual distanciation renders necessary the translational movement of improvisation to generate applications in situations and circumstances unforeseen at the event of original inscription. For instance, the U.S. *Constitution* empowers Congress “[t]o raise and support armies,” “[t]o provide and maintain a navy,” and “[t]o make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces” (article I, section 8, clauses 12 and 13). As written, this edict is silent about any support for an air force. However, despite the absence of any explicit reference in the *Constitution* to this branch of the armed forces, the U.S. government continues to raise and support, provide and maintain, and govern and regulate an air force. Presumably, the concrete terms “army” and “navy” in that late eighteenth-century document were construed as comprehensive ones signifying the broad categories they attempted to particularize, namely, all manner of national defense undertakings. The “theology” of the declaration was, clearly, to designate *any conceivable military force* as worthy of establishment and maintenance by Congress; such an intention would necessarily include “improvisations” such as an air force or, potentially, even a space force as future applications. A translation that moves in this fashion from textual sense to application via “theology” is essential for the interpretation of any canonical text that is intended to be applied in the future. No such corpus can be expected to bear the burden of explicitly expressing *all* possible future applications.²⁴ In the Christian canon, it is the theology of the pericope that implicitly bears every legitimate option of improvised application of that particular text, and thus oversees what may be considered valid application of that particular pericope of Scripture. The original words of texts such as the *Constitution* or the Bible establish the direction of meaning of what is written therein, and this trajectory (judicial philosophy for the former; pericopal theology for the latter) functions as the standard by which the validity of all subsequent interpretive endeavors must be gauged.²⁵ Thus, in biblical hermeneutics, the theology of the

pericope becomes the arbiter of the legitimacy of praxis proclaimed and urged by the preacher.

Improvisation in Biblical Hermeneutics

The terminus of application renders possible the transformation of the lives of God's people according to the will of God. It is therefore critical that this move be performed in a manner that guarantees the validity of application. When applications are specific instances subsumed by the theology of the pericope, such improvisations on the text with fidelity are, for that reason, authoritative. When applications are appropriate for the specific circumstances of the community being preached to, such improvisations bearing novelty and respecting the situations of the auditors are, for that reason, relevant. Application that is both authoritative and relevant is valid.

A brief analysis of 1 Pet 2:17d will suffice to illustrate the scope of "improvisation" in biblical interpretation. This verse enjoins Christians to "honor the king." What exactly is meant by the "king" (*basileus*)? Clearly, its historical context obliges one to fix its referent as the Roman emperor in the mid-first century CE—in particular, the individual Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (37–68 CE; reign: 54–68 CE).²⁶ How might one apply it today? Even if one concludes that regents other than Nero were "meant," could one conceivably apply this command to "honor the king" while subsisting within polities not involving crowned male monarchs? Does one need to honor the queen? What about presidents, prime ministers, headmen, warlords, juntas in dictatorships, primates in theocracies, etc.? In the particular case of 1 Pet 2:17d, the context provides the interpreter with a ready answer.²⁷

First Peter 2:13–3:7 is considered a *Haustafel*, a household duty code, a list of the obligations of members of a household, one to another. However, there is not that symmetry as is found in the *Haustafeln* of Eph 5:22–6:9 and Col 3:18–4:1. Only half of each of the pairs is intact here: wives, not husbands (the men do get a mention, but only in a single verse, 1 Pet 3:7); and slaves, not masters; children and parents are not addressed at all. However, in this 1 Peter code, a new

directive, the obligation of Christians to those *outside* the believing community is introduced—to the emperor and those in authority; upon this directive the rest of the duties of the *Haustafel* are built. This responsibility might have been at the root of its very asymmetry, for the list thereby emphasizes its outward gaze: Peter assumes the situation of Christian subjects under pagan rulers, Christian wives living with non-Christian husbands, and Christian slaves serving unbelieving masters. This would also explain the omission of parental and filial responsibilities, for in such relationships there rarely is the imbalance of belief confronting unbelief.²⁸

The seeming difficulty of 2:17d is easily solved, seeing that 2:13 plainly exhorts believers to submit themselves to *every* human institution for the Lord's sake, adding, for emphasis, "whether to a king as the one in authority, or to governors as sent by him." Conceivably, Peter would have appended an "etcetera" to his list of two examples of "human institutions."²⁹ When Peter requires submission "for the Lord's sake" (*dia ton kurion*), he is also anticipating the paradigmatic behavior of Jesus in the face of opposition from the rulers of the realm—the Jewish religious leaders and the Procurator of Judea (2:21–25); thus, implicitly, the list of potential potentates to whom honor is owed has been enlarged. The latent expansion by Peter could be read thus: "If Jesus was submissive to Pilate *et al.*, then so must all of you, to Nero *et al.*"³⁰ The apostle is "improvising" on an established principle. Such an improvised extrapolation continues in 2:17d: paralleling "honor *all* people" (2:17a), the directive to respect the king makes this ruler "an example of the particular stations and people to be given deference by the Christians."³¹ In other words, from the pericope itself, it becomes obvious that the king is but one in a series of civic authorities, all of whom as representatives of the heavenly sovereign are owed honor. The inclusion of every stripe of human government within the semantic field of *basileus*, whether Pharaoh, Tsar, Kaiser, or Shah, is an interpretive act of improvisation on the fundamental essential: "all God-established human authority" constitutes the theology of the text. Every specific ruler ("improvisation") that falls

within the bounds of “all God-established authority” (pericopal theology) is a valid application of that text.

Conclusion

The move from text to application is made possible by the intermediary of pericopal theology; improvising upon this theology, an endeavor undertaken with fidelity and novelty, valid application is generated. Applications subsumed by pericopal theology demonstrate fidelity to the text of Scripture under consideration; the novelty of improvisation is reflected in the relevance of application to the specifics of auditors’ contexts. The preacher thus serves as the conscience of application for the community of God, with the dual responsibility to understand what God has said (text), and to generate valid application (praxis) in order that God’s people may be aligned to the will of God for the glory of God. The task of the homiletician is therefore one of great moment and consequence for the church. John R. W. Stott charged preachers with this solemn duty:³²

Our bridges ... must be firmly anchored on both sides of the chasm, by refusing either to compromise the divine content of the message or to ignore the human context in which it has to be spoken. We have to plunge fearlessly into both worlds, ancient and modern, biblical and contemporary, and to listen attentively to both. For only then shall we understand what each is saying, and so discern the Spirit’s message to the present generation.

Thus the preacher is the mediator between the text and church (or between script and actors); it is this one’s task to interpret the text for the community and to propose how the text may be applied in a faithful manner. Combining canonical script analysis and contextual situation analysis, the sermon bridges text and praxis via pericopal theology. It is the fidelity and novelty with which improvisation is undertaken that renders an application true to the Scriptures and relevant to the congregation. In the faithful performance of such improvised applications, the community of God will have met the

ethical demands of this holy One who, in His Word, has deigned to call humanity to be like Him.

Notes

1. John Wilkins, *Ecclesiastes, or A discourse concerning the Gift of Preaching As it falls under the Rules of Art: Shewing The most proper Rules and Directions, for Method, Invention, Books, Expressions, whereby a Minister may be furnished with such abilities as may make him a Workman that needs not to be ashamed* (3rd ed.; London: Samuel Gellibrand, 1651), 19.
2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (2nd rev. ed.; trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall; London: Continuum, 2004), 307. So also Paul Ricoeur: “This goal [of appropriation] is attained only insofar as interpretation actualizes the meaning of the text for the present reader” (*Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* [ed. and trans. John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981], 85, 159).
3. “Pericope,” here, demarcates a segment of Scripture, irrespective of genre, that forms the biblical basis of a sermon.
4. See Abraham Kuruvilla, “Preaching as Translation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* (2009, forthcoming); Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 147.
5. Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (LNTS [JSNTS] 393; London: T. & T. Clark [2009]), 157–190, develops in detail the concept of pericopal theology.
6. “The honest rhetorician therefore has two things in mind: a vision of how matters should go ideally and ethically and a consideration of the special circumstances of his auditors. Toward both of these he has a responsibility” (Richard M. Weaver, *Language is Sermonic: Richard M. Weaver on the Nature of Rhetoric* [eds. Richard L. Johannesen, Rennard Strickland, and Ralph T. Eubanks; Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1970], 211).
7. Or, as Wittgenstein might say, a “playground” (*Spielraum*) for those language-games. See Max Black, “Wittgenstein’s Language-Games,” in *Ludwig Wittgenstein: Critical Assessments* (2 vols.; ed. Stuart Shanker; London: Croom Helm, 1986), I: 83 (74–88).
8. Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim* 2:2; Gregory the Great, *Epistula ad Theodorum medicum*.

9. N. T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 27–28. Expository application was always a fixture of synagogue worship. Philo observed that on the Sabbath, a day of learning for all, Scripture is read and "some of those who are very learned explain to them what is of great importance and use, lessons by which the whole of their lives may be improved" (*On the Special Laws* 2.15.62). This Jewish orientation of reading for application was retained in the homiletical practice of the church. Justin Martyr's description of a second-century worship service in Rome noted that, after the reading of the Gospels, "the presider verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things" (*First Apology* 67).
10. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 400.
11. David Tracy, "Creativity in the Interpretation of Religion: The Question of Radical Pluralism," *New Literary History* 15 (1984): 298.
12. Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2004), 12.
13. See James O. Young and Carl Matheson, "The Metaphysics of Jazz," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 58 (2000): 125–133. Incidentally, there are recent legal versions of *The Real Book* as well (3 vols.; Milwaukee, Wis.: Hal Leonard, 2006).
14. Wells, *Improvisation*, 59. "I believe Christian communities interpret by acting out, embodying, creating the events called for by Scripture. Our understanding of Scripture comes to fullness within our performance of it" (Shannon Craigo-Snell, "Command Performance: Rethinking Performance Interpretation in the Context of *Divine Discourse*," *Modern Theology* 16 [2000]: 475–494).
15. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1981), 116.
16. See Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 46–51, for the delineation of the three-fold "meaning" of the text: original textual sense, pericopal theology, and valid application.
17. Titus 2:1 appropriately urges that a church leader is to "speak what is fitting for sound doctrine." In the same vein, Thucydides lauded Themistocles: "[He] was of all men the best able to extemporize the right thing to be done" (*autoschediazēin ta deonta*)—improvisation upon principle (*History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.138.3). For a discussion of the philosophical nature of this "identity" between text and praxis, see Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis*, 50–51, 176–180.
18. Lawrence Lessig, "Fidelity in Translation," *Texas Law Review* 71 (1992–1993): 1206.

19. Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 16.
20. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Use of Law Schools," in *Speeches by Oliver Wendell Holmes* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1934), 34–35; this oration is dated Nov 5, 1886. On the other hand, the tendency to preach exclusively at the level of systematic and biblical theology, at a level of generality removed from the immediacy of both text and listener, creates a situation where the sequential preaching of contiguous pericopes often tend to have similar thrusts, making *lectio continua* on a weekly basis virtually impossible to sustain without repetition of sermonic/applicational goals. 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.
21. James Boyd White, "Judicial Criticism," in *Interpreting Law and Literature: A Hermeneutic Reader* (eds. Sanford Levinson and Steven Mailloux; Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 403.
22. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, U.S. 17 (4 Wheat.) (1819): 415 (italics original). "In the application of a constitution, therefore, our contemplation cannot be only of what has been but of what may be" (U.S. Supreme Court Justice Joseph McKenna, *Weems v. United States*, U.S. 217 [1910]: 373).
23. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 307–308, 325–326, 328.
24. "A constitution, to contain an accurate detail of all the subdivisions of which its great powers will admit, and of all the means by which they may be carried into execution, would partake of the prolixity of a legal code, and could scarcely be embraced by the human mind" (Marshall, *McCulloch v. Maryland*, 407).
25. The interpreter's goal is "never ... to copy what is said, but to place himself in the direction of what is said (i.e., in its meaning) in order to carry over what is to be said into the direction of his own saying" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics* [trans. and ed. David E. Linge; Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1976], 68).
26. John 19:15; Acts 17:7; and Rev 17:9 (as well as Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 5.13.6) indicate the Roman emperor as the specific referent of *basileus*.
27. This text was chosen for that specific reason—the ease of a solution. It, therefore, serves well as a concise illustration of the point about improvisation. Needless to say, not all texts can be improvised upon this easily!
28. J. Ramsey Michaels, *1 Peter* (WBC 49; Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1988), 122–123.

29. "Human institution" is the best rendition of the Greek phrase that literally reads "human creation."
30. Jews, for the most part, were respectful to their Roman rulers, even sacrificing and praying for them (see Philo, *Embassy* 23.157; Josephus, *Jewish Wars* 2.10.4; and *Against Apion* 2.6). Christ, too, adjured his followers to abide by this pattern (Matt 22:21).
31. Barth L. Campbell, *Honor, Shame, and the Rhetoric of 1 Peter* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1998), 120.
32. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 145. "[T]ruth and timeliness together make the full preacher"—fidelity to the text and novelty towards audience (Phillips Brooks, *Lectures on Preaching, Delivered before the Divinity School of Yale College in January and February, 1877* [New York: E. P. Dutton, 1877], 220–221).

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Preaching from the Footnotes
The Challenge of Textual Criticism
in Expository Preaching

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by Michael A. Milton

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Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the pastoral ramifications of textual criticism and canonical questions and their impact on the primary pastoral task of expository preaching of the Word of God on the Lord's Day in a local church. The thesis of this paper will be that rather than complicating the task of preaching, admitting textual variants and canonical questions and carefully crafting a sermon that acknowledges them, will bring a richer, fuller and more faithful message from God's Word to God's people. It is in this way that I shall advocate an appropriate "preaching from the footnotes." I do not mean by that phrase that the preacher should base a Biblical sermon on human words that are used to explain a textual variant, for instance, but that the insights or controversies raised by these modern scribal notes must not be ignored in the preparation of the sermon. Indeed, I will argue that there is a sound rationale for preaching from the footnotes for those notes, that is the textual variants that belie a struggle within the Church over time to arrive at what is and what is not in the canon. And thus the textual variants deserve a thoughtful homiletical response before the people of God.

In order to explore this theme, the presenter will use two of the most well known "problem texts" to see how to "preach from the footnotes:" Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 as sermon case studies. Following an admission of the challenges that must be addressed, and then a consideration of the possibilities involved

with expository preaching and textual criticism, the presenter will then submit some preliminary issues involved with “preaching from the footnotes,” and a response that might be employed, using the two famous texts, to exposit these critical texts faithfully (I intend) and humbly (I hope), with loyalty to the inerrancy and infallibility of God’s Word, acknowledgement of the of textual variants, and concern for bringing Christ’s message for Christ’s flock.

Delimitations

First, I present this paper as a preacher and a pastoral theologian, not a New Testament theologian. My interests in this paper are localized in pastoral theology. But as a preacher and a pastor, are we not truly all New Testament theologians or Old Testament theologians, or Biblical theologians when we approach the Scriptures? Indeed I think that we must be. The minister of the Gospel in the local parish setting is the divinely appointed messenger of the Sacred Words of God and through all of the tools at his disposal; he must bring the Word of the Lord to the world. But it is happily admitted that there are those who have invested the gifts of time and talent to study and become well acquainted with the issues surrounding textual concerns. And for these chosen few we are all thankful. So let me be clear that this paper is under the heading of pastoral theology.

I have presented several papers on historical theology or pastoral theology, but was motivated to take this on as a preacher and pastor struggling with the scholarship of others on the subject and trying to make sense of it as I stand in the pulpit (and prepare others to do the same) on the Lord’s Day and look over a congregation that includes people I know: a single mothers trying to figure out to rear a 15-year-old fatherless son, a retired couple whose dreams of travel have been high jacked by an MRI report, and a middle aged businessman who has now left his wife for another woman. And the other woman is in your church and the wife is in the hospital for an overdose. And all of this is swirling about as your mother-in-law is dying. I am afraid that cases are not the product of a preacher’s

imagination or something this presenter made up to catch your attention in this paper, but are the real-life results of a fallen world which this presenter has encountered on many Sunday mornings, often all on the same morning. Thus I prepare this paper for those who will minister to them in the name of Jesus Christ as well as to think critically as those who will teach them.

Second, let me say that I also advocate expository preaching as mining and bringing out and applying the eternal truths of the Word of God. I believe the most helpful way to do this is by bringing the people through large sections of the Word of God and that the normal way to do this is through sequential exposition of Books or chapters or other major sections of the Holy Scripture. Conducting such a preaching ministry will inevitably bring the preacher face to face with textual variants and textual critique that works its way into the footnotes of our English translations. Thus, I am concerned about how to preach the Word of God in this milieu, that includes hungry sheep looking up to receive a “Word from God”¹ for their lives and a preacher facing that flock of Christ, and God-seekers, as he also faces the footnotes.

Third, for the sake of interaction with the reader (whom I assume is a preacher of the Word or a theological student who aspires to that office), I would offer a homiletical “immanence” in certain parts of the paper, rather than an academic “transcendence” and thus some of the language in the paper intentionally assumes a colloquial tone.

Admitting the Challenges of Textual Criticism and Expository Preaching

The paper now turns to practical application of the matter of preaching from the footnotes.

It is Easter morning in your congregation. And you are preaching. Is there any greater time to preach than when the pews are filled with the devoted disciples of Jesus waiting to hear more from God about the resurrection of Jesus? And is there any greater evangelistic opportunity that this day when the “Easter Sunday

Christians” gather for their annual pilgrimage to honor the faith that still lingers in their cultural memory? And here you are, now, about to complete your series on Mark! And you have come to Mark 16:9. And you know that if you tell your people to open up their Bibles for the Easter sermon today they are going to find a whole lot of footnotes on that page of their Bible! What to do? As countless Bible preachers have done, I have faced that very scenario I described. How about preaching a series through John and, well you know what I am about to say. You come to John 7:53-8:11. And your congregation sees, not just the footnote, but they see, in their new ESV pew Bible, these words: “The earliest manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11.”²

Or is this really more difficult for the preacher than even preaching the end of Mark on Easter Sunday? For so many of the saints of God have latched on to the beautiful, enigmatic picture of the Savior scribbling something in the sand, of the Lord standing up to the moralist scribes and Pharisees and declaring those cherished words: “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.”

Your people have been freed from the guilt of sin by trusting in this One who stood up for the woman caught in adultery. They have believed in the Christ of John’s Gospel who said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more.”

The footnotes do not help you, it seems. For there you read:

Some manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38; with variations in the text.³

Your people are not usually New Testament professors nor are they particularly interested necessarily in textual criticism, much less well versed in this theological science.

As a preacher and one committed to expository preaching, I have faced down these textual variant footnotes that I think of as gigantic

icebergs, floating under the surface of your entire sermon, poised to pry open the very body of your sermon and leave you fiddling your finest sermon all the while the people are mentally jumping off the sinking ship! What do we do?

We must first admit the footnotes. The people see them. You see them. So to move through the preaching of the woman caught in adultery without admitting the obvious textual elephant in the room would be homiletically, perhaps pastorally, negligent. The rest of this paper rests on this one simple but dangerous step (dangerous if you do not follow in your explanation).

Second we need to have studied the footnotes. Perhaps in the case study I will present you already know the insights and discussions, but there are many more. But in terms of our case study, the pastor would want to have reviewed the technical commentaries, monographs, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* articles, and the more technical commentaries. But that would not be enough. One needs to see how other great preachers have handled it. So you consult Calvin and Stott, Augustine and Luther, Kistemaker and Morris, Moo and Knight, as well as preachers like, say, Boice and Hughes. In doing so you will be able to get the full gamut of interpretive insights, controversies, studies and perhaps even consensus.

Third, the preacher must now preach the text. That may seem like a rather embarrassingly obvious point to add in the mix, but here is what I mean. And it is here that I would make an assertion that might not find your agreement (which is the joy of doing textual criticism in the context of expository preaching!). But I write as one who believes that the minister is an incarnational repository of the Church's sacred words, which includes liturgy, hymnody, family stories of great preachers (all Christians should hear at some time, "As Spurgeon said...") and casuistry but surely begins and ends with Scripture. No matter the controversies, the text is there. It may be disputed, but for some reason or another, the Church collectively through the centuries decided it should be there. It is more destructive to the work of the Church to gloss over the

treasured contents of this repository than to decide to get rid of what has held the attention of the Church since the early centuries after the ascension of Jesus.

For those New Testament professors who smell a simpleton church historian and pastoral theologian tinkering in things over his head (I will not argue that point), I do assure you that I am not arguing for the majority text. I am arguing for the majority *time*. The Church has held that the Scriptures we are looking at, the woman caught in adultery and the end of Mark, were authentic events in the life of our Lord.⁴ In the case of John 7:53-8:11 we know that while the account is not in the earliest manuscripts, the very event in the life of our Lord is recounted in a letter from a church father. The suspicious end of Mark in the majority texts, redacted as it may be, passes the text of apostolic plausibility and more than that describes the miraculous events that occurred during the apostolic period of the Church. So I advocate a default to the majority text for preaching, but not a disregard for the variants from the ancient manuscripts. The issues must be explained. But then the text must be preached.

Fourth, the way the text is handled, in such a soup of controversy, before the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, would be quite different than the way I might preach it to congregants in a church in the mountains of North Carolina. It is not that one group is more erudite than the other, but more interested in the variants and possessing stronger opinions about the matter. Thus, an exegesis of the auditors, to the degree that one can do that, must be done. One key to preachers is, again, never to underestimate the scholarship of the people in the pew. This is actually a pat on the back of the pastor who was before you who taught them the whole counsel of God.

Fifth, I would yield on this one point: There are those who would decide not to preach on the variants, like John 8 and the end of Mark. To these preachers I would say: “preach the text in that old Protestant hermeneutical approach of interpreting the harder with

the more perspicacious (and whatever you have decided in your textual criticism workshop you are faced with the strong force of Western Church tradition and the fact that footnotes will not make the majority text evidences go away; translation: John 7:53-8:11 and the end of Mark are there whether you like it or not!). Therefore, if such a preacher were to heed my pastoral counsel (no other authority than that), go ahead and conduct your exegetical spadework on the variants, discover and craft the exegetical statement of the pericope in question. Then, having done so, making sure from others, as you stand on the shoulders of giants, that you are within the boundaries of trusted, faithful historic interpretation, read and read and re read the text, pray the text, and then exposit the text for your people^{3/4}systematically. And I mean to say that at this point with a major variant, like the one we will look at, with your hesitation checking your spirit and convicting your mind, admit that the text is there and preach the expository truths you find in it from other passages. In this way you will not harm the consciences of sincere believers, perhaps even some retired pastors or young pastors in the congregation, who do not see things your way and, in fact, cannot get over the fact that the text, despite the footnote, is staring them in the face.

Sixth: The rationale for preaching from the footnotes is established “in time.” If a particular textual variant has the *benefit* of years, centuries, of having been received as “Scripture” it deserves to be preached. For those who would argue that *tradition*, which is really the issue at hand, cannot be on the same level as canon, I would respond by saying that the tradition being addressed is in fact a tradition of a given text being a part of that canon. Thus, Christian charity itself would require even the most unconvinced New Testament scholar would have to allow for the reality, like it or not, of a footnote, that is a variant, being seen as canon by a large number of fellow believers in the Church through time. This is as much of a matter of theological humility as it is theological precision. But if this rationale were to be followed, could we not also say, “the preacher can preach from any other inspired word, say

the Apocrypha, or a story from church history? The answer is no. The Church, in time (and I refer to Protestantism in the majority, and admit the former example is used by some in the Roman and the Protestant churches), has not received either as inspired canon. One is dealing with those texts, which have been considered canon, and thus worthy of exegetical work in the study and expository treatment in the pulpit.

Are these texts the Word of God? If they have been considered such by the Church through the ages, and the texts do not contradict received sacred text, and indeed contain, at least, the seed of the truth found in other clearly canonical places, then the Word of God is embedded within the (possibly redacted or added) text and is worthy of being the subject of the *kerygma*.

This is not an argument for inspiration and authority of a non canonical text, but for preaching in a way that acknowledges the variants, seeks common ground with the authoritative, non contested text (where common ground between a variant and Holy Scripture may be located [and has been located when we look by “standing on the shoulders of giants” in church history]).

Consideration of the Possibilities of Preaching from the Footnotes

Negative

Consider the negative possibilities from expository preaching and textual criticism footnotes. I begin with the dangerous possibilities and move, then, to the constructive possibilities.

First, there is the danger of avoiding the footnotes. To do so is to commit a common homiletic and pastoral blunder of not addressing the obvious. If a sparrow flies into the sanctuary on a Sunday morning, at around the second point of the sermon, the preacher who continues his message without addressing the obvious flutter of little wings above the congregation, will not enjoy a congregation who hears his third point. Jesus preached and noticed the obvious

and used those things to teach, or to illustrate His teaching. And so must we as we approach the footnotes dealing with textural criticism. To ignore the footnotes is to invite tension into the sermon and upstage the *kerygma* event.

Second, over-emphasis in the sermon will detract from the exposition of the Word of God (even if you are doing it from a more systematic way and only using the textual variant as a starting point to go to other Scriptures). As in most exegesis, a significant amount of work in the study must remain there. You display what you are able to establish the intent and meaning of the text. The common man (who heard Jesus gladly) is not interested in the operating system but in the application software. Too much emphasis will, sadly, divert attention from Jesus to you and the perception that you are strutting your exegetical stuff before the people.

Third, one must be aware that taking strong public stands on one side or the other, in regard to the variant, will also demean the sacred treasure of the Church of Jesus which has held (at least in the case of our two studies) these texts to be a part, albeit a footnoted part, of the tradition of the Church, if not the very Word of God. I would argue that there is a place for letting your convictions be made known about this or another text, but it is in your pastoral letters to the congregation in which you can teach them in more depth about the concerns you might have.

Fourth, it must be stated that undue focus on the credibility of a text, particularly a text held close to the heart of the Church through history, like at least one or perhaps both of the case studies I offer, can lead to a possible doubting of (1) the Bible; and/or (2) the Preacher (that is, you). As one approaches the textual variant, this must be kept in mind and approached with pastoral wisdom.

Fifth, too much focus on the “footnotes” can create a sense in the mind of the auditors that only “professional New Testament critics” can truly handle the Bible, or even worse, only theologians can “read” the Bible for all its worth.

Sixth, the “footnotes” of textual criticism can instill a Gnostic-like awe over the whole work of reading and interpreting the Scriptures.

The theologian or pastor who routinely (is it ever routine?) handles the “footnotes” may consider any or all of these caveats and possibilities nonsense. But the presenter would humbly submit that in some congregations in the Christian Church, not saying the Apostles’ Creed in the right place in the liturgy can create murmuring in the body. Suggesting that the woman caught in adultery and forgiven by Jesus is simply extra Biblical redactor material offered in later years of the early Church to account for an event that was mentioned in a first century letter and thus might have or might not have happened in the life of Jesus is paramount to rioting in the pews (as well as injuring your pastoral relationship possibly beyond healing).

Positive

Thinking more constructively or positively here are some further considerations.

First, a fearless approach to the footnotes on the textual variants which all of the people can see in their own Bibles can foster a desire for the people to want to understand how the canon of Scripture came to be. Rather than thinking that some counsel met in 325 AD and just came up with it all, as some no doubt suppose, the pastor may lead his people to see that the work of canonical authenticity involved apostolic consensus and transmission of the Gospel, recognition of the presence of the Holy Spirit, and, of course, textual proofs.

Second, by alerting the people to the presence of variants one takes away the rhetorical snipe by the atheistic ideas the people may pick up in popular culture. Rather than “fearing the footnotes” the auditor may learn to dig deeper in his or her own walk in the Word. One will see, as all evangelical scholars would agree, that no variant is at systematic theological odds with the rest of the Word of God and no variant, however questionable, redefines the inerrancy and

infallibility of the Word of God, though it may question what is in and what is out.

Third, by dealing with the textual variant, which they see, your honest handling of the text may engender trust in their pastor. This is not showboating (hang around a real New Testament scholar and get humbled before doing this will help). It is demonstrating a faithful and pastorally fearless approach to the questions surrounding the text (often critiqued wrongly by atheists and others in popular culture) all whilst honoring the inerrancy and infallibility of the Scriptures. Perhaps this will give someone in your congregation hope that they, too, can live in the tension of an anti supernatural world that disdains an idea of revelation and faith in the God who did reveal Himself and His plan of salvation in His Word.

Fourth, it may just be that some will come to appreciate the miracle of the Word which they hold in their hands and which they hear read publicly in worship services each Lord's Day. Textual criticism in the hands of a wise pastor-scholar does not automatically trigger alarm for the faith of the saints, but may call them into a deeper, fuller walk with the God who through His Spirit breathing forth His Word through ordinary men brought this "Word from Another World" into time and space, and flesh and thought.

Preliminary Issues in Preaching from the Footnotes

Having now proposed that the matter must be addressed, a natural question in the mind of the homilician is, "Where?" Assuming for the sake of this argument, that there is a reading and then a prayer for illumination and then the sermon, then the exegetical commentary on the "footnote" might best occur in one of three places: the introduction to the reading or the introductory "chain" (thinking of Chapell's *Christ Centered Preaching* model of the introductory chain) the sermon or in the explanation of the text under one of the divisions of the sermon body. I would argue that the decision for placement first of all depends upon the textual variant or other textual critical footnote. If, as in John 8 and the end of Mark, the footnotes are most pronounced and, one might

say, more intimidating to the reader steeped in the tradition of the Scriptures, then one must address the question as soon as possible. Therefore, it would seem logical to “preach from the footnote” in the Introduction to the Reading, or perhaps in the exegetical link in the Introduction chain. Alternatively, if the footnote is less obtuse, no perhaps not any less critical, one might allow the explanation of the footnote to wait, or even to forego it altogether.⁵

The matter of “how long” is also an issue that must be addressed. This depends in part on the placement of the “footnote” issue. Wherever it goes, its length must satisfy the goal of explaining the matter without causing it to become the focus of the sermon or even a larger section of the sermon (though I could imagine a message on “You Can Trust Your Bible” and using a variant or other “footnote” to show how God’

Two Case Studies in Preaching from the Footnotes

Incorporating the concerns and considerations heretofore discussed, including the issue of placement, the presented offers two possible ways of preaching from the footnotes for both of our critically disputed texts. Again this is not an exhaustive study of commentary offerings, nor an in-depth study of the comparative texts, but a humble attempt to faithfully exposit the text supposing that, as a result of sequential expository preaching, the preacher has arrived at John 7:53-8:11 and Mark 16:9-10 respectfully.

In each case there will be a sermon fragment, with the concern for the preacher’s interaction with the footnote, a narrative explaining rationale for the choices, and then some concluding thoughts.

Sermon Case Study One: Preaching from the Footnotes in John 7:53-8:11

In the last message, we saw how Jesus’ claims created division among the people (in John 7:40-52). And we saw that He still does.

The growing tension in John concerning the antagonism of the chief priests and Pharisees and the adulation of the people over the

ministry of Jesus forms a backdrop for what we will come to today. John often began new chapters with a story. In this chapter there is the story of the woman caught in adultery. And then we see Jesus as the Light of the World.

But there is something we must see before going into this portion of God's Word.

There is a footnote in most of your Bibles as we come to Chapter Eight of John. It must not be overlooked. Bible publishers have rightly included this footnote because, as it says in my own Bible, "The earliest manuscripts do not include John 7:53-8:11." What does that mean? Well it means what is says in that six of the oldest and most reliable manuscripts do not contain this account. So the footnote is appropriate. But does it mean that this didn't happen? No. In fact, the event goes back, according to church historian Eusebius,⁶ to one Papias, who died not long after 100 AD. He received the story through oral history from at least one of the apostles and said that he knew a story "of a woman who was accused of many sins before the Lord." who received, by his own words, oral history from the apostles themselves. More evidence came in the Third Century, from a document called *The Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* 2.24:

And when the elders had set another woman which had sinned before Him, and had left the sentence to Him, and were gone out, our Lord, the Searcher of the hearts, inquiring of her whether the elders had condemned her, and being answered No, He said unto her: 'Go thy way, therefore, for neither do I condemn thee.'⁷

Could it be that Augustine was right when he said that the account is true but was withheld because the Church feared that adulteress women could use it as a proof text to condone their infidelity?⁸ Entire books have been published with that one proposition.⁹

Could it be another of the "Synoptic conflict stories" inserted into John to indeed provide more synopses? Perhaps we are no better

than the two scribes who approached this passage and I quote from:

Albanian National Archive (ANA) 15, an 11th–12th century minuscule manuscript...contains the four gospels. At John 7:52, the scribe simply continued on to write John 8:12. A later scribe, incensed at what he thought was an oversight, took a piece of paper and carelessly stitched it into the front of the next parchment leaf (using only five stitches!) and scribbled the passage on it!¹⁰

James Montgomery Boice stands with Calvin in pointing out the textual variant and then advocating the preaching of it. Perhaps William Hendriksen puts it best:

Our final conclusion then is this: though it cannot now be proved that the story formed an integral part of the Fourth Gospel, neither is it possible to establish the opposite with any degree of finality. We believe, moreover, that what is here recorded really took place, and contains nothing that is in conflict with the apostolic spirit. Hence, instead of removing this section from the Bible it should be retained and used for our benefit. Ministers should not be afraid to base sermons upon it! On the other hand all the facts concerning the textual evidence should be made known!¹¹

So I have done due diligence to that footnote. For some this text is “an edifying extra-biblical story about Jesus.”¹² But the grace and beauty and the strength and power of Jesus and his grace in this text leave no doubt that this is God’s Word to us this morning.

Reflections on the Approach

This approach is not without difficulty. First of all it is long. But it may be argued that as Hendriksen says nothing should be withheld. Indeed, Boice in this commentary on John, largely taken from his messages on John, do contain some amount of detail on the matter

before he turns to preaching the passage. There is also the problem of introducing this much and no more. It might be argued that a sentence or two would have sufficed since this much introduces questions that are not answered. Thus, something as simple as the following:

We now come to John chapter 8, actually in the majority of manuscripts, chapter 7:53-8.11. This portion of John is not in the earliest manuscripts though the story is documented in reliable early church literature. Whether it was originally in John's Gospel or not, many, including Calvin, have urged its authenticity and deserving to be included in the canon of Scripture. While there are those who do not think the textual evidence would support its inclusion, no evangelical or Catholic, for that matter, disputes the apostolic flavor of this passage and how God has used its beautiful object lesson in history to transform human lives. What was that lesson? That is the sermon today. As we read....

***Sermon Case Study Two: Preaching from the Footnotes
in Mark 16:9-20***

If the first case was difficult the second is more so. And so one might begin as follows:

This morning we conclude our messages from the Gospel of Mark. Mark, we have seen, moves like an impressionistic painter, laying short but thick loaded colors of Gospel "paint" onto the canvas of the Word. But how did he stop his masterpiece? Indeed, how did God choose to complete it?

Mark 16:9-20 is one of the most disputed passages in the Scriptures. The pastor who prepares to preach from this section of the Bible is faced with textual criticism that is in majority agreement that the ending is not Markan in its origin. Beyond that rather common assertion there are great differences, which give the preacher pause. Did Mark end with 16:8? Is there a missing last page never found that accounted for a scribe in the third century patching up the remnant with his own ending (based on other inspired text, of course)? Was Mark simply cut off in his writing? Is there an

alternative manuscript ending that exists to be received as the right one?¹³ There are certainly those out there, but are they original? And how about the majority text that do give credence to the ending? Dr. Bruce Metzger shows in his work, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* an overwhelming case for the ending of Mark to be a redactor (or redactors) who was, nevertheless, faithful to the Scriptures. But while Dr. Metzger maintains his firm opinion, based on the evidence before him, that 16:9-20 is not original to Mark, he writes this:

At the same time, however out of deference to the evident antiquity of the longer ending and its importance in the textual tradition of the Gospel, the Committee decided to include verses 9-20 as part of the text....¹⁴

There have also been those who have argued for 16:9-20 as Markan though these voices are largely left behind in the nineteenth century now¹⁵. But this we can say without reservation: the ending of Mark in no way contradicts the death, burial, resurrection, ascension and coronation of our Lord Jesus Christ. And His Church did go forth with unusual power and supernatural protection.

And perhaps we can sum up all of those verses, which find harmony in the rest of Scripture, with this studied opinion of the Westminster divines. They said of this and all of the other parts of Scripture that they were...

...immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as in all controversies of religion the Church is finally to appeal unto them.¹⁶

Now, I have gone on quite a bit. But I want you to know that as I preach this morning, I will admit the questions about the text, but I will not refrain from introducing our reading this morning with these words, "This is the Word of the Lord..."

Reflections on the Approach

The introduction is likely too long. But depending on the goals of the preacher and his congregation this may be appropriate. Even here, of course, nothing approaching a New Testament technical paper is being presented! This is the bare bone. But the introduction does admit the problem approach it with concern for the faith of the hearer in the Word of God, as well as allowing them to see that God's Word is not only written but preserved through time for us today, as the Confession of Faith says.

A shorter comment in the introduction to the reading might be:

We come to one of the most debated texts in the entire Bible: Mark 16:9-20. Though an overwhelming majority of text keeps this ending in tact, the oldest and some scholars say the more reliable do not. But no one, even the famous Dr. Bruce Metzger who studied so much on the subject and who was of the opinion that the ending was written by someone who followed Mark, nevertheless, did not believe that it should be removed. Mark 16:9-20 is preserved for us today because there is truth here that God wants us to hear.

Thus, a reading from the Gospel according to St. Mark, chapter sixteen, and beginning with verse 9 and reading through the end.

Hear the Scriptures as they are read....

Conclusion

I have sought to encourage interaction with the "footnotes" caused by textual criticism and simple recognition of significant textual variants. I have sought to encourage a frank and open admission of the footnote, consideration of the problems and positives possibly associated with the footnotes, addressed some issues in preaching the footnotes, and offered examples of handling two difficult texts. The rationale for considering the variants as subjects to be addressed in the sermon is theological humility which admits that other Christians, for many years, have considered the variant as something more: canon. The preacher, at this point, is confronted

with a problem, which will require a Theological-historical-Biblical and pastoral response. This paper does not seek to say what is and what is not canon. The paper seeks to present arguments and reasons why the preacher should not ignore what reliable “others” have seen as canon.

I remember having a conversation about this with the late D. James Kennedy. I asked him what was the most challenging thing he has ever done in the ministry. He did not hesitate in his response: “Preaching next Sunday’s sermon.”

And into that high calling, that sacred work, and that singularly wondrous moment when the preacher stands between God and man with the Word of God in human hands and hopefully in his mind and heart as well, that one can be sure that he is not alone. For in that moment, however difficult, the author of the Word has said,

“I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5b ESV).

And there are no footnotes there.

Notes

1. Crossway Bibles, *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments*, ESV Compact Thinline ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles, 2003).
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. On John 7:53-811 a broad sampling of opinions on this includes John Calvin writing: “It is quite clear that this story was unknown to the ancient Greek Churches. Hence some conjecture that it was inserted from another place. But it has always been received by the Latin churches and is found in many Greek manuscripts and contains nothing unworthy of the apostolic spirit; so there is no reason why we should refuse to make use of it.” John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 1-10* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1959). C.K. Barrett, while commentating that it would appear

that 7:53-811 is not original to John (p. 589) adds, “it is probably ancient” and points to Eusebius’ record of Papias’ story which is contained in the ‘Gospel According to the Hebrews (H.E. III, xxxix, 16].” C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978). Again, Morris who says “The textual evidence makes it impossible to hold that this section is an authentic part of the Gospel” (882) also says, “But if we cannot feel that this is part of John’s Gospel we can feel that the story is true to the character of Jesus. Throughout the history of the church it has been held that, whoever wrote it, this little story is authentic.” And he footnotes (footnote 6) the *Apostolic Constitutions*, ii. 24. Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981). And While Blomberg agrees with the opinion of most scholars who cannot call it Johannine, he yet confesses “The incident passes the double similarity and dissimilarity test with flying colours.” Craig Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John’s Gospel: Issues & Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

5. This is possible too. If this is not an exegetical paper being prepared for a judicatory but a message for God’s people and God-fearers on a Sunday morning, for instance, there may be no good reason for the preacher to explain Ecclesiastes 10:12 as saying that “The words of a wise man’s mouth win him ‘favor’” might actually be better put, “The words of a wise man’s mouth are gracious.” This is not unimportant. And no variation in the Word of God should be taken lightly. But the expository truth of the text, which is shaped by this exegesis, is not particularly harmed and no one reading the footnote would, normally, be alarmed. Even here, though, the preacher might use this variant on translation or nuance of the Hebrew in some good way. The point is that some footnotes are more homiletically impacting than others!
6. Eusebius Pamphilus, “The Ecclesiastical History of Eusebius Pamphilus, Bishop of Cesarea,” (260-340).
7. L. Joseph Kreitzer and Deborah W. Rooke, *Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8.11)*, *Biblical Seminar*; 74 (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).
8. See William Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1988).
9. Kreitzer and Rooke, *Ciphers in the Sand: Interpretations of the Woman Taken in Adultery (John 7:53-8:11)*.
10. Daniel B. Wallace, “Greek New Testament Manuscripts Discovered in Albania,” (Bible.org, 2007).
11. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John*.
12. See Gary M. Burge, *John : The NIV Application Commentary : From Biblical*

Text ... To Contemporary Life, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Pub. House, 2000).

13. That ending is “But they reported briefly to Peter [and] those around [him] all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself also sent out through them, from east even to west, the sacred and imperishable preached message of eternal salvation. Amen.”
14. See Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Canon of the New Testament : Its Origin, Development, and Significance* (Oxford [Oxfordshire]; New York: Clarendon Press; Oxford University Press, 1987). This may be found at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/endmark.html> (accessed November 18, 2008).
15. Frederick Henry Ambrose Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, fourth ed., vol. 2 (London: George Bell and Sons, 1894).
16. Westminster Confession, Chap. I, Sect. VIII, in Archibald Alexander Hodge, *The Confession of Faith* (Edinburgh ; Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1958).

Preaching as Democratic Dialogue:

Revelation, Hermeneutics and Anthropology in the Homiletic of Fred B. Craddock

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by Chuck Fuller

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Introduction

Although his advisors in seminary believed he lacked the necessary skills to be a homiletician, many hail Fred Craddock as “a patriarch among those who have struggled for the renewal of preaching.”¹ From 1979 until retiring in 1993, Craddock was Bandy Professor of Preaching and New Testament at the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. He holds a Doctor of Philosophy in New Testament from Vanderbilt University, and is an ordained minister in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).² His first book, *As One Without Authority*, published in 1971, essentially birthed the New Homiletic, a paradigm for preaching which has as its main focus the experience of the listener.³ In fact, in terms of twentieth-century homiletics, David Bartlett claims that anyone “writing the history of preaching and of teaching preaching . . . will need to attend to Craddock’s plea for inductive preaching and to his book’s influence on our work.”⁴ After writing *As One Without Authority*, Craddock authored two other significant homiletics texts. *Overhearing the Gospel*, published in 1978, builds on Kierkegaard’s method of indirect persuasion in order to reinvigorate the task of preaching to those who have “heard it all before.”⁵ In 1985, Craddock published a full-orbed textbook entitled *Preaching*, which presents a slightly less dogmatic emphasis on induction and a somewhat more conservative relationship between text and listener.⁶ Craddock has also authored multiple lectionary guides, and as a New Testament

scholar he has written several biblical commentaries and a volume concerning Christ's preexistence.

As his homiletical writings bear witness, Craddock's appeal for inductive, experiential preaching flows from more than the simple interest of the listener. He quite readily admits the "inseparable relation of theology and preaching."⁷ Craddock writes, "How one communicates is a theological commentary on the minister's view of the ministry, the church, the Word of God, sin, salvation, faith, works, love, and hope."⁸ He additionally claims, "When a man preaches, his method of communication, the movement of his sermon, reflects his hermeneutical principles, his view of the authority of Scripture . . . and especially his doctrine of man."⁹ In citing these three factors, namely hermeneutics, revelation, and anthropology, Craddock unveils the major components in his homiletic. Understanding the manner in which Craddock arrives at his distinctly inductive homiletic, therefore, requires a deeper query into the way that Craddock formulates and orders these three components. The present work pursues such a query, and proposes that Craddock's neo-orthodox view of revelation leads to an event-oriented hermeneutic that results in an anthropocentric homiletic. In addition to offering a brief overview of Craddock's homiletic, this paper proceeds by placing Craddock in his theological context, delineating his position on the Word of God and Scripture, exhibiting how these factors shape his hermeneutic, and assessing his resulting homiletic.

Overview of Craddock's Listener-Centered Homiletic

For Craddock, the traditional deductive approach to homiletics is too authoritative and leaves too little room for interaction between the preacher and listener. In speaking of the deductive method, he says, "There is no democracy here, no dialogue, no listening by the speaker, no contributing by the hearer. If the congregation is on the team, it is as javelin catcher."¹⁰ Craddock finds two fundamental flaws in the traditional deductive approach. First, moving from universals to the particulars of life flows in a direction opposite of

the way people listen and live. He claims:

The plain fact of the matter is that we are seeking to communicate with people whose experiences are concrete. Everyone lives inductively, not deductively. No farmer deals with the problem of calfhood, only with the calf. The woman in the kitchen is not occupied with the culinary arts in general but with a particular roast or cake. The wood craftsman is hardly able to discuss intelligently the topic of “chairness,” but he is a master with a chair. We will speak of the sun rising and setting long after everyone knows better. The minister says “all men are mortal” and meets drowsy agreement; he announces that “Mr. Brown’s son is dying” and the church becomes the church.¹¹

Second, as Richard Eslinger points out, Craddock believes that deductive sermons often misuse Scripture by imposing an unnatural and foreign structure on the text.¹² Craddock loathes the shift toward Aristotelian logic in the early centuries of church history. “It is a very real question,” he writes, “whether the later decision to use the forms of a Greek logical discourse did not of itself radically affect the nature of the message, the type of audience to which it would appeal, and eventually the constituency of the church.”¹³

Against the deductive approach, Craddock believes that inductive movement in a sermon allows the listeners to make the same journey in encountering the message as the preacher in studying the text.¹⁴ For him, beginning with the particulars of human existence instead of biblical universals is more congruent to the way people actually live, and also affirms the priesthood of every believer in that it respects the abilities of the listeners to draw their own conclusions.¹⁵ Craddock acknowledges the inherent dangers of giving this conclusive privilege to the listeners, saying, “He who sees himself as a bearer of the light of democracy and freedom must occasionally shudder at the realization that he is helping make room for the riot of excesses that freedom makes possible.”¹⁶ Yet, he maintains that inductive movement “respects the hearer as

not only capable of but deserving the right to participate in that movement and arrive at a conclusion that is his own, not just the speaker's."¹⁷ The listener, if denied "the room to say No, is thereby denied the room to say Yes."¹⁸

For Craddock, the goal of preaching is not depositing biblical information or controlling a specific response, but leading listeners to experience the Word of God and allowing them to respond on their own.¹⁹ "The sole purpose," he asserts, "is to engage the hearer in the pursuit of an issue or an idea so that he will think his own thoughts and experience his own feelings in the presence of Christ and in the light of the Gospel."²⁰ Without question, therefore, Craddock thoroughly adheres to a listener-oriented homiletic. He maintains

Sermons are not speeches for all occasions but are rather addresses prepared for one group at one particular time and place. . . . In other words, the listeners participate in the sermon before it is born. The listeners speak to the preacher before the preacher speaks to them; the minister listens before saying anything. Otherwise, the sermon is without a point of contact, whatever may be the general truth of its content.²¹

According to Craddock, the sermon is a dialogue of "democratic sharing" in which the "listeners are given room to accept the responsibility for their own believing and doing."²² Ultimately, he believes that "preaching increases in power when it is dialogical, when speaker and listener share in the proclamation of the Word."²³ Robert Reid rightly identifies this approach and the whole paradigm of the New Homiletic as "a radical shift away from the rationalistic and propositional logics of argumentation as the basis of sermon invention and arrangement."²⁴ Jettisoned of the structures and strictures of Aristotelian rhetoric, Craddock follows a more sophisticated strategy, asserting that sermons "should proceed in such a way as to give the listener something to think, feel, decide, and do during the preaching."²⁵

Craddock's Thought in Historical and Theological Context

Like theologians, homileticians are children of their time, and Craddock is no exception. In an era when biblical scholarship became increasingly frustrated with the Enlightenment-driven historical-critical method, the middle part of the twentieth century gave rise to a new emphasis on narrative in theology, hermeneutics, and biblical criticism. Avoiding the hermeneutical problems that can surface when the standards of empirical and scientific verification are imposed on the biblical text, narrative theologians generally affirm the “truth” of the Bible, but only in terms of practicality and effect, and not in terms of metaphysical or

historical facts.²⁶ Although narrative theology attempts to rescue the Bible from the Enlightenment, it ultimately finds its root in Enlightenment thought. Donald Bloesch correctly observes, “Here one can discern the influence of Kant’s claim that practical reason rather than theoretical reason places us in contact with reality.”²⁷ Therefore, in narrative theology, “the Bible is no longer a record of the mighty deeds of God but a collection of stories that throw light on the universal human predicament.”²⁸

Consequently, as David Allen alleges, “Whatever happens in theology usually happens in homiletics about ten to twenty years later.”²⁹ Beginning with Karl Barth’s radical separation of the Bible from personal revelation, Allen traces the roots of the New Homiletic through Jacques Derrida’s deconstructionism, Paul Ricoeur’s emphasis on metaphor and narrative, and on to Hans Frei’s advocacy of a literary-critical approach to the Bible.³⁰ He claims:

Thus, partly as a result of the labors of Barth, Ricoeur, and Frei, the Jacobean blessing sought by the New Homiletic seems to have been given in the form of narrative preaching. Like its father, narrative theology, and its mother, narrative hermeneutics, narrative homiletics maintains a strong family resemblance.

There can be little doubt that narrative theology and narrative hermeneutics function as the foundation for narrative homiletics.³¹

Reaching back much further, Reid believes the New Homiletic finds its ultimate ground in a pre-Aristotelian form of rhetoric. He asserts, "The New Homiletic represents a recovery of a premodern approach to making argument in the Isocratean, sophistical tradition of rhetoric rather than the Aristotelian tradition of philosophical rhetoric."³²

Specifically, Craddock employs narrative theology and sophistic rhetoric out of concern that the historical-critical method creates too great a distance between the Bible and the pulpit. Post-Reformation critical scholarship turned much attention toward the Bible, but, according to Craddock, "moved it farther and farther from those with whom it was shared in lesson and sermon."³³ However, because of the movement toward narrative in rhetoric and literary criticism, he asserts:

The distance between the modern pulpit and the ancient text, a distance of which historical critical methods made us so aware, no longer seems so frightening and non-negotiable. . . . These and other methods do not replace the historical critical approach but rather supplement it. We can no more return to pre-critical biblical study than we can live as though this were the eighteenth century, but neither is the text honored nor the church served by regarding historical criticism the last and only word in biblical study."³⁴

For Craddock, the work of narrative theologians like Amos Wilder, Ernst Fuchs, and Robert Funk brings a fresh immediacy to the text, as it demonstrates the "inseparable relation of the Gospel and the forms of its communication."³⁵

The most notable influences on Craddock's theological and philosophical formation come not only from narrative theologians, but also from existential thinkers. In many places, Craddock directly credits the works of Martin Heidegger, Søren Kierkegaard, and Gerhard Ebeling for their contributions to his thinking. Heidegger endeavored to move the meaning of language away from logical propositions and toward an expression of being.³⁶ Although his ideas are not necessarily theological or even Christian, Craddock credits Heidegger for reviving the power of the spoken word and rescuing language from being "smothered under the small heading of verificational analysis."³⁷ Craddock recognizes that Heidegger's theory is perhaps far too mystical for most Christians, but he nonetheless embraces the idea that language itself constitutes being. It is from Heidegger's work that Craddock concludes, "In short, man is a conversation."³⁸

Simply reading the introduction of *Overhearing the Gospel* reveals the profound influence of Kierkegaard on Craddock's theory. The entire book is an extensive phrase-by-phrase exposition of Kierkegaard's assessment: "There is no lack of information in Christian land; something else is lacking, and this is a something which the one man cannot directly communicate to the other."³⁹ Kierkegaard's existentialist theory of indirect communication serves not only as the thesis of Craddock's book, but also as the basic apologetic for Craddock's inductive approach.⁴⁰ Indebted to Kierkegaard, Craddock repeatedly argues that "overhearing," or listening indirectly to the conversations in the text, is the most appropriate way to interpret and present the Bible.⁴¹ Indeed, it seems that Kierkegaard holds such sway over Craddock that he comes to view the Bible itself as indirect communication, and contends that it must be communicated to others in like manner.⁴²

Just as Heidegger shapes Craddock's theory of language and Kierkegaard dominates his theory of communication, so Ebeling greatly affects Craddock's outlook on revelation and hermeneutics. Ebeling, in an article that aims to refine the hermeneutic of neo-orthodoxy, argues that Barth's groundbreaking characterization of

God's personal revelation as an event is accurate but incomplete, because the Word cannot become an event in proclamation until it is first a movement from text to proclamation.⁴³ Hermeneutics, therefore, takes on the task of helping such movement happen rightly.⁴⁴ For Ebeling, the goal of understanding "is not understanding *of* language, but understanding *through* language," and so "the word itself has a hermeneutical function."⁴⁵ An extrinsic hermeneutic only becomes necessary when something hinders the word event, and even then its use is only "to let the word perform its own hermeneutical function."⁴⁶ It seems Ebeling seminally summarizes all of Craddock's work in two sentences: "Words produce understanding only by appealing to experience and leading to experience. Only where word has already taken place can word take place."⁴⁷

Craddock's Formulation of Revelation and Scripture

In light of his context and the influences on his thought, Craddock's views on revelation and Scripture understandably fall outside the bounds of conservative evangelical doctrine and lean heavily toward twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy. In navigating a new path between the opposing authorities of revelation and reason, neo-orthodoxy cunningly redefines revelation by casting it in terms of personal experience instead of proposition.⁴⁸ Karl Barth's classic blueprint bears repeating:

In the Bible we meet with human words written in human speech, and in these words, and therefore by means of them, we hear of the lordship of the triune God. Therefore when we have to do with the Bible, we have to do primarily with this means, with these words, with the witness which as such is not itself revelation, but only . . . the witness to it.⁴⁹

Craddock's own formulation of revelation falls well within this vein, affecting both his location of the Word of God and his doctrine of Scripture.

The Word of God as a Communicative Event

Craddock noticeably separates the Word of God from Scripture. He honors Barth and Bultmann for taking down the “paper pope” of post-Reformation biblical scholarship, and echoes a neo-orthodox view of revelation when he declares, “The Word of God is an event, a happening in history.”⁵⁰ However, he goes a bit further than traditional neo-orthodoxy, ultimately following Ebeling’s more conversational model. Craddock notes:

[T]o say the Scripture is the Word of God or that Scripture *contains* the Word of God is to identify the Word of God too completely with only one partner in the dialog. Word, whether it be of God or of man, is properly understood as communication, and it is rather meaningless to discuss word in terms of *one* person. Equally meaningless is a discussion of Word of God fixed at one pole, the Bible, apart from the other, the church. Just as sound is vibrations received, so word is a spoken-heard phenomenon. The Word of God, if it is to be located, is to be located in movement, in conversation, in communication between Scripture and church.”⁵¹

For Craddock, then, the Word of God is not a set of propositions but a communicative event that occurs in the exchange between speaker and listener.⁵² He asserts, “It is in the sharing that the Word has its existence.”⁵³ While he stresses God as the originator of the Word, he still embraces the notion that an experiential concept of the Word puts listener and speaker, human and God, on equal footing. Craddock claims:

If the biblical text or the Word of God is objective and man the hearer is subjective, then obviously man is secondary, for the Word is the Word even if spoken into an empty room or into the wind. But that is a contradiction of what word is. Whether one views word as call (Buber), event (Heidegger), or engagement (Sarte), at least two persons are essential to the transaction, and neither is secondary. . .

. It is, therefore, pointless to speak of the Gospel as Truth in and of itself; the Gospel is *Truth for us*.⁵⁴

Craddock finds support for his conversational approach to the Word in the Bible itself. First, in creation, the Word of God brought order from chaos, yet man participated in the creative event by naming the animals.⁵⁵ Second, Jesus never wrote and Paul only wrote with reluctance when he could not be personally present, so “Paul understood that the Word was not just a certain content of meaning but an act, from person to person, which did something, which effected change.”⁵⁶

In his later book, *Preaching*, Craddock draws a closer connection between the Word of God and the biblical text, but subtly maintains the distinction. His confession that “The Scriptures, we believe, record the revelation of God,” only follows a prior assertion that revelation “is not simply about grace but is itself an act of grace.”⁵⁷ Therefore, in context it appears that Craddock is not necessarily arguing for the text itself as revelation, but rather that the text records the revelatory events in history.⁵⁸ He recognizes the canon’s authority over the community of faith, but still cleverly declares, “The Word comes through interpreting the Word.”⁵⁹

Scripture as a Vehicle for Divine Communication

In a model that largely divests the Word of God of any propositional content and defines the Word of God as a communicative event, Scripture serves as a mere mediating vehicle through which God speaks in the present time. For Craddock, the Bible is not a historic, final spoken word but a contemporary, organic speaking word. It is a text that has a past and a future.⁶⁰ Scripture is “a living voice in the congregation,” and “moves forward into our world and addresses us here and now.”⁶¹ He says, “The church has a closed canon but serves a living and leading God. . . . A closed canon does not mean a silent God.”⁶² Accordingly, while Craddock nowhere lays down a technical definition of inspiration, his comments on inspiration follow in this flow of “forward movement.”⁶³ Because 2 Timothy

3:16 speaks of the profitability of Scripture as well as its inspiration, he asserts, “From this passage one could argue that the accent on inspiration has more to do with getting the Word *off* the page than on it, more to do with the Spirit’s work in keeping the past words present, active, and functioning in the community.”⁶⁴

In Craddock’s mind, the Bible’s authority comes not from its inspiration, but from its relationship with the church. The Reformation’s cry for *sola Scriptura* was not an attempt to put the Bible over the church, but simply to return the two to an equal footing.⁶⁵ “Whenever the relationship between the community and the Book becomes unhealthy because either the church or the Bible has become dominant,” he contends, “errors and distortions follow.”⁶⁶ Craddock, in two ways, explains how this balanced relationship lends authority to Scripture. First, he claims, “The Bible is the church’s book.”⁶⁷ In the formation of the Bible, the church “functioned as writer, collector, and preserver,” and made the “informal and formal decisions involved in the selection . . . of the contents of the canon.”⁶⁸ Therefore, when the church canonized the texts it “made” them authoritative.⁶⁹ Second, the “Bible is the church’s Scripture,” and as such it is “normative for shaping the life, beliefs, and mission of the church.”⁷⁰ Craddock holds, “To say these texts are canon is to say they are the authoritative rule by which to measure belief and conduct; to say they are Scripture is to say they are living documents, addressing believers in every age and place with a word that is fresh and appropriate as well as authoritative.”⁷¹

Craddock’s Hermeneutic for Preaching

When revelation is separated from Scripture and stripped of propositional content, as it is in Craddock’s theology, then all things pertaining to God come in terms of communication and experience, as they are in Craddock’s homiletic. In this manner, he upholds the “inseparable relation” between his theology and his preaching.⁷² Indeed, in Craddock’s scheme, since revelation has no objective quality and all the emphasis falls on a conversational exchange of ideas, his hermeneutic *is* his theology *and* his homiletic,

as everything folds into a theory of communication. It remains, nonetheless, important to observe how his definition of the Word of God, his approach to interpretation, and his concept of the role of Scripture in preaching all play out in shaping his homiletical model.

The Word of God in Preaching

In Craddock's thought, the very nature of God's Word requires it to be spoken, so the Word returns to its "oral/aural" immediacy through preaching.⁷³ Craddock knits, therefore, a close but carefully nuanced relationship between preaching and the Word of God. He explains:

Preaching is both words and the Word. To deny any relationship between one's own words and the Word of God, whether due to one's notion of proper humility or to an abdication of the authority and responsibility of ministry, is to rob preaching of its place and purpose. From such a perspective, a silent pulpit would be the logical and honest conclusion. On the other hand, to identify one's own words with the Word of God is to assume for ourselves God's role in preaching. Neither one's own strong convictions on a matter nor the scaffolding of many verses of Scripture can justify the claim. Nor is it the case that a changed tone of voice provides the flag by which the Word of God can be identified among many human words. Rather, the preacher takes the words provided by culture and tradition, selects from among them those that have the qualities of clarity, vitality, and appropriateness, arranges them so as to convey the truth and evoke interest, pronounces them according to the best accepted usage, and offers them to God in the sermon. It is God who fashions words into the Word.⁷⁴

Before God can transform a preacher's into the Word, however, the preacher must assume a posture for hearing. "God's self-disclosure has not been obvious to everyone," Craddock avows, and even the revelation of Jesus Christ was not "overwhelmingly self-evident,"

because Jesus was God “veiled in flesh.”⁷⁵ Hearing is, consequently, an act of faith. The preacher who sees Jesus as the Christ and hears the Word has “chosen, has taken a risk, has said yes in a world of nos [*sic*]. . . . [He] has leaned forward, heard the whisper, and trusted it to be the voice of God.”⁷⁶ Interestingly, Craddock does not directly link such hearing to studying the text, although he does cite many biblical examples of experiencing the Word by faith.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, once heard, the Word must be spoken, for the “Word of God *at the ear* is a whisper; *at the mouth* it is a shout.”⁷⁸

Interpretation as Translation and Overhearing

In moving from text to sermon, Craddock acknowledges “a great gulf fixed” between the ancient text and modern people due to the distance in time, space, language, historical circumstances, and worldview.⁷⁹ However, he sees a woeful inadequacy in the traditional attempts to bridge the gulf. He purports:

When reading the history of interpretation Scripture, one is permitted to smile but not to laugh at allegory, symbolism, typology, and levels of meaning, for these were sincere efforts to hold the Scripture as Scripture while insisting that the congregation deserved some relevant word for its own situation. Perhaps equally sincere but no more worthy of the popularity they enjoy are the exegetical methods common today: selection, elimination, reduction to general truths, modernizing biblical characters through popular jargon, or archaizing the present by calling congregations to “go back to old Jericho for a few minutes this morning.” The preacher is not Moses or Paul and the people before him are not Israelites or Corinthians. To pretend such for homiletical purposes has about as much net gain as is enjoyed by the young man who unconsciously addresses his date as Linda when her name is Judy.⁸⁰

For Craddock, then, the typical move from exegesis to preaching underestimates the role of listeners. Indeed, in *Preaching*, Craddock

intentionally begins his discourse on interpretation with the listeners, although he does not object to those who prefer to start with the text.⁸¹ He campaigns for the preacher's responsibility to interpret "*Scripture for the congregation*" and "lead them into the experience of hearing the message of *Scripture for their situations*."⁸² In Craddock's mind, hermeneutics serves to "bring forward" the text into the lives of those in the congregation.⁸³

Presenting this listener-centered method of bridging the hermeneutical gulf leads Craddock to recognize several common interpretative techniques, including interpretation by direct transfer, allegory, typology, authorial intent, and theme, but he is particularly fond of a model he calls "translation."⁸⁴ He argues that, in interpreting by translation:

The task of the interpreter is not to transform, explain, apply, or otherwise build bridges from the text to the listeners. Rather, the task is to release the text upon the listener's ear by translating into the language of the listener. . . . Who could say nay to such a method, to the fresh and trusting act of introducing the text and the listener to each other and walking away? There is no room here for imperialistic moves on the part of the interpreter; only a clearing of the way for the moment of recognition to occur. Here there is no forced steerage of text and listener in each other's direction with instructions on who says what to whom. The text that has a surplus of meaning, as the history of interpretation and preaching amply testifies, is permitted to be multivalent, to address the different listeners in their own different needs and circumstances. After all, is not the real event in preaching the creation of new meaning at the point of intersection between text and listener rather than in the carting of information from one to the other? Every preacher knows from experience what literary critics tell us, that a text has a life of its own, transcending our explanations, resisting our paraphrases, and breaking through the corrals of our thorough outlines. Then why not

allow our procedures to give full rein to the text; after all, the parishioners have been asking all along for more Bible in our sermons. There seems to be no interpretive method more congenial to the belief that the Word can and will create its own audience if its primary language is not replaced by our secondary and tertiary discussions, explanations, and applications.⁸⁵

This “translation” model, offered in *Preaching*, expands upon what Craddock says about hermeneutics in his earlier book, *As One Without Authority*, in which he asserts:

The Word of God is not interpreted; it interprets. Here a radical reversal in the direction of traditional hermeneutics occurs. The goal of biblical study is to allow God to address man through the medium of the text.⁸⁶

Clearly, this great “reversal” away from traditional hermeneutics corresponds with his concept of Scripture as a vehicle for delivering a Word of God event. For Craddock, interpreting the text must go beyond the discovery of authorial intent, because part of the authority of the text is its “ability to speak a clear word to a variety of situations beyond the author’s own context or intention.”⁸⁷

Furthermore, Craddock’s hermeneutic of “translation” facilitates his homiletic of “overhearing,” because the relationship between text and listener is “more than one of confrontation and decision.”⁸⁸ Craddock explains “overhearing” by way of example when he writes of Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthian church,

The Corinthians must decide what constitutes authentic apostolic ministry. The reader would do well not to jump into this text hastily, defending Paul or scourging the Corinthians. Stand back and listen to both sides; weigh the issues; be drawn in slowly, only after reviewing the nature of Christian ministry and the ways of God in the world. The parties in Corinth are addressing each other; we are in the perfect position to overhear.⁸⁹

For Craddock, overhearing helps a person understand a text more fully and without pretension, but also has several additional advantages. First, the listener is “permitted to hear the responsibility for his own participation,” because “permission to draw conclusions about life is a demand to do so.”⁹⁰ Second, overhearing is non-threatening in that the listener is “set free to think, to feel, to resolve.”⁹¹ Third, because confrontation is sometimes imposed on a non-confrontational text, overhearing can be a “more honest handling of the Scriptures.”⁹² Fourth, Craddock believes that overhearing can be quite persuasive, because “we arrive at conclusions, we do not accept them at the outset.”⁹³

Indeed, Craddock believes the nature of the Bible itself begs for a hermeneutic and homiletic of “overhearing.” In *Overhearing the Gospel*, Craddock explains how the Bible communicates indirectly with the church in four ways.⁹⁴ First, the Bible “addresses the community of faith and is not a collection of theological and ethical arguments to persuade atheists or adherents of other religions.” Second, the Bible generally does not “repeat a story verbatim and from that story draw lessons and exhortations appropriate to the particular audience.” Instead, the stories serve as “vehicles of God’s revelation.” Third, the Bible addresses particular situations and cares little about “harmonizing each message with all its other messages on that topic.” Fourth, the Bible presents its message “in vivid images, analogies, and metaphors.” Again, in this concept of overhearing it is easy to detect Craddock’s position on Word of God as experience and Scripture as a vehicle. In a homiletic of overhearing, the desire is for the text to have full immediacy to say whatever it wants it to say to the listener, and the listener has the full opportunity to experience the speech in a pure and unmodified way.

The Role of Scripture in Preaching

Craddock plainly rejects topical preaching and urges preachers to wrestle seriously with the text of the Bible.⁹⁵ He maintains, “Preaching should be nourished, informed, disciplined, and

authorized by Scripture.”⁹⁶ The Bible, though, should not only provide the content of preaching, but its form as well. He claims, “Whoever goes to the Bible in search of *what* to preach but does not linger long enough to learn *how* to preach has left its pages too soon.”⁹⁷ For him, the forms of preaching ought to be as varied as the forms of biblical literature.⁹⁸ When the preacher “begins to ask himself why the Gospel should always be impaled on Aristotelian logic, when his muscles twitch and his nerves tingle to mount the pulpit not with three points but with the Gospel as narrative or parable or poem or myth or song in spite of the heavy recollection of his training in homiletics, then perhaps the preacher stands at the threshold of new pulpit power.”⁹⁹ In matching the form of the sermon with the form of the text, the preacher fully allows the vehicular movement of the text and avoids being “unbiblical” in the sense of failing “to achieve what the text achieves.”¹⁰⁰

In order to fulfill the purpose of the text and facilitate its forward movement, the preacher must usefully employ all of the “nourishing and enriching” functions of biblical literature, which can be discovered by observing the way biblical narratives use other parts of Scripture.¹⁰¹ First, the biblical authors often use previously written Scripture to create a congenial context for hearing an account, “thereby weaving the fabric of trust essential for communication.”¹⁰² Second, the authors often use allusion, pointing back to previous events in such a way as not to disrupt their own narrative, but to tie together the old and new.¹⁰³ Third, by repeating sounds, words, phrases, or ideas, “The refrain unites a group and enables them to take ownership of a message or a conviction.”¹⁰⁴ In urging preachers to employ these functions in a sermon, Craddock yet again reveals his basic conviction about revelation. He claims that using these functions as the biblical authors used them is important, because “how a message sounds to a listener is a theological concern . . . the word of God is located not on a page nor on the lips, but at the ear.”¹⁰⁵

Assessment and Conclusion

If Craddock's claim is true that "effective preaching calls for a method consistent with one's theology," then by that standard Craddock can be rendered effective, because his homiletic maintains a remarkable consistency with his theology. Peter Adam rightly notes the unmistakable relationship between revelation and preaching by affirming a "direct link between a theology of Scripture and a theology of preaching because both depend on a prior theology of revelation."¹⁰⁶ Craddock's homiletic, therefore, gives a prime example of what happens to preaching when a neo-orthodox approach to revelation and Scripture renders its logical consequences on hermeneutics. Largely shredded of any propositional content, Craddock's doctrine of revelation and Scripture folds into a theory of conversational communication and a hermeneutic of experience. Therefore, Craddock essentially forces himself to start his homiletic not deductively from the truth of Scripture, but inductively with the subjective particulars of human life.¹⁰⁷ With the Word of God defined as an event and Scripture defined as a vehicle, the goal of preaching becomes the experience of the listener. Without any objective measure of truth, all of the authority for meaning transfers away from the biblical author and onto the interaction between speaker and listener.¹⁰⁸ As proclamation reduces to conversation, neo-orthodox theology bestows a thoroughly anthropocentric pulpit. It seems Craddock would not deny this point, for he says that preachers should "resist the temptation to tyranny of ideas rather than democratic sharing."¹⁰⁹

It is beyond the scope of this work to delineate the deficiencies of the narrative theology and the neo-orthodox position on revelation that so heavily influence Craddock's thought, but it is necessary to make three observations about his resulting inductive approach to preaching. First, as David Larsen discerns, the philosophical shift away from deductive argument came not from a commitment to faith but doubt.¹¹⁰ He points out that even if induction is more in tune with contemporary thought, it still does not escape the radical distrust of postmodernism, because in the postmodern mindset, even

those doing serious induction are “simply deducing conclusions from within their own pre-existing theoretical framework.”¹¹¹ Therefore, a “primary focus on ‘inductive experience’ is not the answer” for bringing people to faith.¹¹²

Second, by insisting on the personal and eventful nature of revelation, Craddock principally exaggerates the narrative quality of the Bible, improperly overlooks its propositional features, and fails to offer an acceptable method for preaching didactic texts. In an article appearing in *Interpretation*, Craddock attempts to demonstrate a method for preaching a didactic text, namely 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, but he completely misses the point of the passage.¹¹³ Allen rightfully questions this overemphasis on narrative form when he asks:

Cannot the revelation of God be both propositional and personal at the same time without reducing to a static “propositionalism” or evaporating into an esoteric encounter . . . that has no cognitive content? . . . Can we not respect the narrative structure of Scripture without neglecting other discourse genres or placing them on a procrustean bed of narrative?¹¹⁴

By reducing everything to narrative and induction, Craddock makes an error similar to those he accuses of impaling all biblical literature on Aristotelian logic.¹¹⁵

Third, while Craddock’s homiletic may seem to be more in step with modern listeners, it is sadly out of step with a biblical concept of preaching. In a diatribe of rhetorical questions, Larsen asks, “Isn’t biblical preaching an argument from the revealed universals of Scripture? . . . Isn’t any sermon which assumes biblical authority essentially deductive as soon as the inspired text is read?”¹¹⁶ Even David Greenshaw, a proponent of the New Homiletic, says:

The gospel cannot be proclaimed without authority. To preach the gospel of Jesus Christ, it is necessary to articulate claims on our lives boldly and announce what is new because of what God is doing. To do this, the preacher must move

beyond the opacity of the particular to the clarity of the universal. It will not do to speak only of particulars, of what is true for me or true for this pericope. To preach, one must speak a truth than can transcend a particular setting.¹¹⁷

Like Larsen, Greenshaw argues that a biblical concept of preaching must include some notion of deduction. Indeed, it is rather difficult to imagine that the apostle Paul had Craddock's inductive and indirect method in mind when he told Timothy to "preach the word . . . reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction" (2 Tim 4:2).

Ultimately, while Craddock's homiletic demonstrates undeniable consistency with his theology, evangelicals must not sanction his model. Induction is not so much the problem, for inductive sermons can be genuinely expository and firmly rooted in the authority of Scripture. However, with Craddock's theological and hermeneutical structures in view, it remains hard to imagine how evangelicals could fully endorse Craddock's homiletic and simultaneously uphold a high view of Scripture and an author-centered hermeneutic. As his approach to revelation and hermeneutics succumbs to neo-orthodoxy, his entire model collapses into an anthropocentric theory of communication, turning upside down the biblical and normative perspective on preaching. Preachers should speak because God has spoken and what God has spoken, reflecting man's submission to God and not God's conversational equality with man.

Notes

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3. David L. Bartlett, "Texts Shaping Sermons," in *Listening to the Word: Essays in Honor of Fred B. Craddock*, ed. Gail R. O'Day and Thomas G. Long (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), 147.
4. Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 25-27.
5. Mark Anthony Howell, "Hermeneutical Bridges and Homiletical Methods: A Comparative Analysis of the New Homiletic and Expository Preaching Theory 1970-1995" (Ph.D. diss., Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1999), 51.
6. Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1979), 39.
7. *Ibid.*, 52-53.
8. *Ibid.*, 3.
9. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 55.
10. *Ibid.*, 60.
11. Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 96.
12. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 153.
13. *Ibid.*, 57.
14. *Ibid.*, 60-65; Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 39.
15. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 17.
16. *Ibid.*, 62.
17. *Ibid.*, 66.
18. *Ibid.*, 157; Reid, "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic," 7; Lucy Rose, "The Parameters of Narrative Preaching," in *Journeys Toward Narrative Preaching*, ed. Wayne Bradley Robinson (New York: Pilgrim, 1990), 35.
19. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 157.
20. *Ibid.*, 25.
21. *Ibid.*, 64-67; Craddock, *Preaching*, 39; Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 116.
22. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 19.
23. Reid, "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic," 7
24. Craddock, *Preaching*, 25.
25. Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration & Interpretation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 209.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 213.
28. David L. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads: Homiletics and Biblical Authority," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 43 (2000): 498.
29. *Ibid.*, 492-509.
30. *Ibid.*, 511.

31. Reid, "Postmodernism and the Function of the New Homiletic," 10.
32. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 39-40.
33. Fred B. Craddock, "The Sermon and the Uses of Scripture," *Theology Today* 42, no. 1 (April 1985): 8.
34. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 44-45.
35. P.H. DeVries, "Martin Heidegger," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 503-04.
36. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 36.
37. *Ibid.*, 37.
38. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 9.
39. Reid, "Preaching as the Creation of an Experience," 2.
40. Fred B. Craddock, "Recent New Testament Interpretation and Preaching," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 66, no. 1 (October 1973): 79-81; Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 137-40.
41. *Ibid.*, 65-70.
42. Gerhard Ebeling, "Word of God and Hermeneutic," in *The New Hermeneutic*, vol. 2 of *New Frontiers in Theology*, ed. James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb, Jr. (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 85-88.
43. *Ibid.*, 88.
44. *Ibid.*, 93-94.
45. *Ibid.*, 94.
46. *Ibid.*, 96.
47. David Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads," 490-94.
48. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, vol. 1, *The Doctrine of the Word of God*, pt. 2, trans. G. T. Thomson and Harold Knight (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 463.
49. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 35, 39-40.
50. *Ibid.*, 39, 133; See also Gerhard Ebeling, *Word and Faith*, trans. James W. Leitch (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1963), 312-13.
51. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 35.
52. *Ibid.*, 71.
53. *Ibid.*, 70-71.
54. *Ibid.*, 35.
55. *Ibid.*, 45.
56. Craddock, *Preaching*, 55-56.
57. Craddock seems ambiguous on this point in *Preaching*. In contrast to his earlier works, perhaps he is accommodating or allowing for the identification of Scripture with the Word, but he does not say it expressly. Craddock, *Preaching*, 55-57, 127-29.
58. *Ibid.*, 128.

59. Fred B. Craddock, "Recent New Testament Interpretation and Preaching," 76.
60. Craddock, *Preaching*, 27; Fred B. Craddock et al., *Preaching the New Common Lectionary: Year A, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986), 8.
61. Craddock, *Preaching*, 128.
62. In Craddock's commentary on 2 Peter 1:20-21, he offers only a hint of the doctrine of inspiration. He writes, "Prophecies in scripture are not of human origin but came by the prompting of the Holy Spirit. . . . God's Spirit pushed them beyond their natural reticence to speak the truth appropriate to the occasion." See *First and Second Peter and Jude*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1995), 108.
63. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 73-74. See also Craddock, "Recent New Testament Interpretation," 78.
64. Fred B. Craddock, *The Gospels*, Interpreting Biblical Texts, ed. Lloyd Bailey and Victor Furnish (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981), 15.
65. Ibid.
66. Ibid.
67. Ibid.; Craddock, *Preaching*, 129.
68. Ibid., 28.
69. Craddock, *The Gospels*, 16; Craddock, *Preaching*, 27.
70. Ibid., 128.
71. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 39.
72. Eslinger, *A New Hearing*, 100.
73. Craddock, *Preaching*, 18-19.
74. Ibid., 55-57.
75. Ibid., 57.
76. Ibid., 55-60.
77. Ibid., 60.
78. Ibid., 125.
79. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 122.
80. Craddock, *Preaching*, 84-86.
81. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 126-28.
82. Craddock, "Recent New Testament Interpretation," 78.
83. Craddock, *Preaching*, 137-50.
84. Ibid., 147-49.
85. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 42.
86. Craddock, *The Gospels*, 21-22. In *Preaching*, Craddock claims that authorial intent cannot be the "sole canon by which to interpret a text," for "no single interpretation, even that which was intended by the author, exhausts all the meaning of a text." Craddock, *Preaching*, 115.

87. Craddock, "Recent New Testament Interpretation," 79.
88. Ibid., 80.
89. Ibid., 81.
90. Ibid.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid.
93. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel*, 65-70.
94. Ibid., 99-100; Howell, 46
95. Craddock, *Preaching*, 16.
96. Ibid.
97. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 53.
98. Ibid., 45.
99. Craddock, *Preaching*, 28.
100. Craddock, "The Sermon and the Uses of Scripture," 9-10.
101. Ibid., 10-11.
102. Ibid., 11-12.
103. Ibid., 12.
104. Ibid., 14.
105. Peter Adam, *Speaking God's Words: A Practical Theology of Preaching* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 92.
106. Howell, 184.
107. Howell, 186, 196.
108. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 64.
109. David L. Larsen, "The Disastrous Drift from Deduction," *Preaching* 19, no. 5 (March-April 2004): 16.
110. Ibid.
111. Ibid.
112. Craddock's sermon leads one to believe that Paul is arguing against "sloganism" in the Corinthian church. However, the thrust of the passage is the lordship of Christ and that eating or not certain foods has no affect on one's relationship with him. Fred B. Craddock, "Occasion-Text-Sermon: A Case Study," *Interpretation* 35 (January 1981): 59-71.
113. Allen, "A Tale of Two Roads," 514.
114. Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.
115. Larsen, "The Disastrous Drift from Deduction," 16.
116. David M. Greenshaw, "As One *with* Authority: Rehabilitating Concepts for Preaching," in *Intersections: Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*, ed. Richard L. Eslinger (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 105.

Preaching to Heal Conflicted Congregational Communities

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by Jere L. Phillips

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Abstract

Preaching often creates conflict. It also can help heal conflict. Congregational communities experience mass conflict (disagreements that affect the entire congregation), group conflict (between two or more interest groups), individual conflicts (between two or more individuals but not involving groups), and marital conflict. While conflict resolution must involve pastoral care, counseling, intervention and mediation, the pulpit can powerfully pull people together. This paper outlines specific ways preaching can help heal conflicted congregational communities.

Introduction

Perhaps the best question regarding conflict was offered by Rodney King of Los Angeles fame, who asked, "Can't we all just get along?" Pastors and congregations across the country might respond, "Amen!" Yet, interestingly, the very people who decry conflict seem unable to break free from it. The people who identify themselves as followers of the Prince of Peace lack peace. Believers, who claim the fruit of the Holy Spirit, have trouble experiencing or expressing love, joy, and peace.

Consider the nature of the congregational community and its difficulties in resolving relational difficulties. How can people learn to forgive and be reconciled to one another? While pastors play many roles in leading God's people, their position as preachers provides a strong base from which they can help heal conflicted congregations.

The Congregation as Community

God first referred to Israel as a congregation when He initiated the Passover (Exodus 12:3). Previously, Israel was a family, then a group of tribes. Later it would become a nation, but its highest identity was as a congregation – a community of faith that came together to worship and serve the Lord.¹

For people gathered for such a holy purpose, believers often fail to fulfill their potential. Instead, their reputation is often one of fighting, backbiting, arguing, and other forms of conflict. James Hopewell noted: “Despite our aspirations, congregations are not timeless havens of congenial views or values. By congregating, human beings are implicated in plot, in a corporate historicity that links us to a specific past that thickens and unfolds a particular present, and that holds out a future open to transformation.”²

Part of the reason for congregational conflicts may lie in the fact that they are often more like a typical family. Paul Minear observed the images used to describe the church: God is our Father; we are His sons and daughters; the church is a household of faith. To become part of the Father’s family, we are adopted through being born again. As such, we are heirs with an inheritance as the children of God. We call one another “brother” or “sister.”³

Unfortunately, families fight. Some families are dysfunctional (as are some congregations), but family squabbles are also part of the normal functioning of groups of people who interact in close proximity, who are interdependent for their collective purpose, and who simply are people, with the same difficulties human beings have had since the beginning. The key to having a healthy family, or a healthy congregation, involves the nature, duration, and resolution of the conflict.

Gilbert Rendle observed: “The fact is that many local congregations, which once spoke openly about themselves as ‘family’ and now casually refer to themselves as communities, are likely to exhibit behavior that is a poor example of either family or community.”⁴

In support of this assessment, Alfred Poirier cited a study by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research, claiming that “75 percent of congregations reported some level of conflict in the past five years.”⁵

Forty years in vocational Christian work have taught me to expect conflict of various levels among Christian people. Still, I grieve over God’s people when they act ungodly. Instead of living in a way that glorifies their Father, many believers behave like three-year-olds fighting in the backyard sandbox. Rendle contended:

Many of our congregations are plagued with uncivil behavior. Some experience it daily. For others, it simmers beneath a polite surface waiting to break through with the slightest provocation. Where one would hope to find dialogue, there is instead competitive debate. Where one would hope to see an honest owning of feelings, there are instead anonymous communications. Where one would hope that leaders would deal with clear opinions and facts, there is instead rumor and hearsay.⁶

Fighting within the Christian family often results in what Ron Susek called a “wounded congregation.” Susek observed that such congregations are characterized by a strain on relationships and family ties, embarrassment over the social stigma of a besmirched reputation, grief and guilt over pain experienced, lost momentum, and children who reject the church altogether as a direct result of the congregation’s violation of biblical authority.⁷

Effects of Conflict

The pain a congregational community inflicts on itself includes several dimensions:

Effects on the Body: The congregation suffers multiple hurt whenever its members engage in conflict. From individual distress to corporate distrust, a wounded congregation loses, in part, its sense

of community. Susek noted the theological nature of the effects of conflict on the church, including confusion about the nature of the church; fear from misunderstanding God's apparent absence ("Why did God let this happen?"); insecurity ("loss of confidence in God and one another"); disappointment in the pastor and other leaders; anger; guilt (did we do something to deserve this); discouragement and despair—all leading to "collective paralysis."⁸

Discouragement and despair can set in like gangrene. One church I helped was looking for a pastor. The two sides of an internal power struggle were so entrenched in their positions that no candidate could rally the 75% positive vote needed for election. One member of the pastor search committee cried as she asked: "Who would want to be our pastor?"

Effects on the Head – Churches need to understand that ultimately at stake is the reputation of Christ. If He is the Head of the Body, then the Body's behavior reflects on Him. Jesus said, "By this shall all men know you are my disciples, that you love one for another" (John 13:35). Conversely, when believers fight each other, the world has reason to doubt the relationship of the church and its Head, and may claim justification for rejecting Christ.

Effects on the Lost – Having arrived at a golf course by myself, I was placed with three other golfers whom I did not know. Trying to be a faithful witness, as we made our way around the course, I asked them about spiritual interests. When one of the players inquired about my church affiliation, he replied, "Oh, I know about you all. You fight all the time." With little to say in defense of the church, I tried to focus the person's attention on Christ, Whom no one can disparage. Unfortunately, those outside of the church tie the reputation of the church closely to that of its Lord. A corollary effect of church conflict is the lack of church growth. Nobody likes being around a family that fights. The lost often stay that way because they see little to be gained from a conflicted congregation.

Causes of Conflict

Conflict resolution experts Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus employ Tannenbaum and Schmidt's groupings of causes for church conflict. They note that most people fight over facts, means, ends, or values.⁹ Who shot John? How did they shoot John? For what purpose was John shot? Was it a good or bad thing that someone shot John?

Poirier adds these problems among the genesis of conflict: "Divided allegiances, authority issues, boundary making, and personal affairs."¹⁰

Susek contributes the following as common causes of conflict: "Culturally learned resistance to authority, rapid church growth, marketing Jesus (creating a mindset of wanting whatever helps market the church more effectively), freedom and form clash, systemic problems, culture clashing, wounded people, and the hidden agendas of multiple staff." However, Susek wisely observed that the ultimate culprit is "the condition of the human heart," which is fallen and sinful.¹¹

Types of Conflict

No single solution exists for conflict, because it manifests itself in many ways, as noted below:

Intrapersonal: Newton Maloney asserted that "conflicts exist inside people, not between them."¹² James agreed: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you" (James: 4:1)? Because conflict is an internal matter, peace must also begin within individuals before it can occur between individuals.

Interpersonal: Problems occur between people in all walks of life; the church is no exception. Sometimes personalities by their nature conflict with one another, although the Creator intended them to complement each other. Some people are task oriented, while others enjoy relationships. Some individuals are outgoing and aggressive, while others are more relaxed and responsive.

Instead of appreciating the differences and using them to complete the community, people can become annoyed with one another's uniqueness.

Interpersonal conflict that involves only two or three people should rarely be addressed from the pulpit, especially if the minister is party to the problem. Only a coward attacks others from the seeming safety of the sacred desk. Scripture is clear that interpersonal conflict resolution begins with a personal approach between the parties involved. However, the pastor can teach, exhort, and rebuke as he preaches, preparing the way for resolution.

Marital: People who are attracted by the powerful emotion of love can be repelled by just as powerful emotions. When couples have problems, they rarely want other people at church to know about their difficulties, much less become involved in them. However, marital conflict often flows over into congregation as the husband and wife seek allies, supporters, and comfort.

Corporate: Because the church is organized, people experience conflict between organizational groups. Affecting the basic fabric of the church ministry, corporate conflict often revolves around the personalities and agendas of staff or lay leaders. Task issues quickly become personality focused, intensifying the tension.

The Role of the Pastor

The pastor is shepherd, preacher, administrator, counselor, prophet, priest—in addition to other roles. Dealing with conflict, pastors can be mediators, moderators, counselors, and spiritual coaches. Unfortunately, some pastors are so afraid of conflict that they avoid it, ignore it, and even polish up the resume so they can run away from it. They believe they are called to preach and to offer comfort and care, but dislike anything that even resembles problems. Poirier challenges the pastor: “Do you see peacemaking as a fundamental character of the pastoral calling? Or do you view the conflicts ... as amoral intrusions, keeping you from the important moral matters of preaching the gospel? Do you find yourself grumbling about

conflicts in the church as annoying detours keeping you from your ‘real calling?’”¹³

Pastors cannot pick and choose their ministries to a congregation. They cannot immerse themselves in the activities that they enjoy, while ignoring the more difficult, messy tasks of ministry. Richard Baxter echoed the voice of Jesus to unwilling shepherds:

Did I die for them, and wilt not thou look after them? Were they worth my blood and are they not worth thy labor? Did I come down from heaven to earth, to seek and to save that which was lost; and wilt thou not go to the next door, or street, or village to seek them? ... Have I done and suffered so much for their salvation; and was I willing to make thee a co-worker with me, and wilt thou refuse that little that lieth upon thy hands?¹⁴

God not only has reconciled us to Himself through the blood of His Son, He has given us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19-20). No one can have a shepherd’s heart without accepting this ministry of bringing peace to God’s people. The basis of reconciliation is not merely finding mutual goals, accomplishing compromise, or helping people to like one another. The only ground for reconciliation is that which reconciles us to God – the blood of Jesus Christ (Col. 1:19-20).

Approaches

Personalization – To use the pulpit effectively in peacemaking, the pastor must be incarnational. Whether in the pulpit or out in the parish, the preacher begins with his own relationship with the Prince of Peace as displayed in his personality and behavior. As Paul wrote to his son in the ministry: “The bishop (pastor) must ... given to hospitality, ... no striker, ... but patient, not a brawler” (1 Tim. 3:2-3). A man of God must flee the lusts and nature of the flesh while pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness (1 Tim 6:11). The only fight he engages is the fight of faith (1 Tim.

6:12). The pastor's goal is not merely to live in peace, avoid stress, and grow the church, but (as Ken Sande noted) to glorify God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Additionally, the pastor must relate incarnationally to all parties, bringing them together to Christ. He realizes: "I'm not the issue, but I can be the channel of Christ's love." During intervention with several conflicted churches as an intentional interim pastor, I found that I could relate to people on all sides of various issues, providing a bridge for them to rediscover one another. One key is not playing favorites, but standing against error on all sides—a dangerous, but often necessary precipice.

Prophetic Preaching – Sometimes, the preacher must use bold statements to get the attention of a conflicted congregation. While serving as intentional interim pastor of a deeply divided church, I discovered that part of the problem lay in a barrage of blogs certain members were firing at others over the Internet. After two weeks of building foundational relationships, I addressed the issue directly from the pulpit and declared, "The blogging ends now." Applause broke out across the audience in affirmation and agreement. The prophet of God must speak boldly against sin in any form, especially when that sin harms the Bride of Christ.

At the same time shepherds must beware of personal attacks. The previous pastor may have been the source of current conflict, but it is improper to remind the people: "Elvis has left the building." Instead, preachers can teach/preach biblical injunctions regarding conflict resolution and Christian behavior.

Beware of siding with one group against the other. A staff minister at one conflicted church used the pulpit to draw a line in the sand. He brought twelve leaders of the church onto the stage, had them link arms, and then held up a rock while challenging anyone from the congregation to throw the rocks of accusation against this formidable group. His action was bold, but counterproductive to conflict resolution.

Pastoral Preaching – As undershepherds, pastors can use the pastoral pulpit to guide and encourage people to return to that Great Shepherd of the Sheep. We must remind them who and whose they are. Rendel remarked: “...congregations seem to have defaulted to the standards and the behaviors of the culture rather than claimed and followed the standards and behaviors of their own faith.”¹⁵ Pastors must bring churches back out of the world and into the realm of the Kingdom in which they are responsible to glorify the Lord.

Principles for Preaching that Heals

Determine Your Goal: In his vital work *The Peacemaker*, Ken Sande quotes Justice Antonin Scalia in asking whether one’s goal is vindication, vengeance, or peace.¹⁶ Sande urges believers to follow Christ’s command to “love one another” as He had loved them (John 13:34). If our goal is to express Christ’s love even, as we have experienced Christ’s love, we will not seek personal gain but will desire the best for others. Preachers can help congregants consider their agendas within a conflict in light of God’s love. Texts such as 1 Corinthians 13 easily come to mind for this purpose.

Lead People to Pray: Paul promised the Philippians that “the peace of God which passes all understanding will guard your hearts and minds...” (Phil. 4:7) How is that possible? The previous verse puts the promise within the context of not being anxious about anything, but praying about everything (Phil. 4:6). By preaching about prayer and leading people to pray, we can help congregants bring their heartaches to the cross. As they find inner peace, they can better seek inter-relational peace.

Build on Congregational Strengths: Preachers may employ numerous motivational appeals while preaching to heal their congregations. In his insightful book *Firestorm*, Ron Susek points to four “pillars of strength” that the pastor must balance in his ministry. The reconciling pastor can also use these four emphases in preaching to help heal a hurting congregation:

Truth: Presenting Christ in *concept* and *communication* (teaching what and whom we believe).

Relationship: Presenting Christ in *companionship* (building bonds of trust).

Rendle advocates helping congregation create a covenant (ground rules of behavior and cooperation). Pastor can use pulpit to remind people of their covenant relationships with God and one another.

Integrity: Presenting Christ in *character and conduct* (practical holiness).

Mission: Presenting Christ in *conquest* (vision – purpose with a plan).¹⁷

Correct Aberrant Theology: The pulpit, like few other venues, offers the opportunity to help a congregation to develop a biblical theology that is foundational to its life and ministry. People in conflict have a disrupted doctrinal base. Their pain has caused them to doubt many of the fundamental facts of their fellowship. Susek advises pastors to use their pulpit ministry to “build an adequate theology that brings perspective and answers to many questions.”¹⁸

Learn to “Live Loved.” In a telephone interview, Dallas Demmitt related how in his advancing years he was learning to “live loved.” Well known for his lessons about discovery listening, Demmitt has been helping people discover how to be loved in order to love.¹⁹ Preach on the love Christ has for the congregation and you may help the congregation learn both to love Christ and one another.

Encourage Communication: Most conflict escalates when communication shuts down. When people feel they are no longer being heard or no longer care what the other parties think, they close the channels that make reconciliation possible. From the pulpit,

pastors can model and encourage open, honest communication. At the same time, they can remind members that godly communication exhibits love (Eph. 4:15). Share the wisdom of God's Word applied to healing communication: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1). Other helpful texts include Proverbs 10:1; 13:3; James 1:19; 3:5-10; and 4: 11.

Find Forgiveness: When the Apostle Paul wanted members of the Colossian church to forgive one another, he reminded them that God, for Christ's sake, had forgiven them. Only by finding forgiveness can we forgive others. One reason is that we cannot receive forgiveness until we admit to having sinned. Withholding forgiveness of others often is the result of focusing on their wrongdoing, while disregarding our own. People who have confronted their own sin are more likely to be kind and compassionate about others' sin. Forgiven people have experienced God's grace and tend to share His grace more freely. Preach about sin, but also preach about grace and forgiveness. Sometimes, preachers may find occasion to be confessional (within proper limits) so others might join in their experience of God's grace.

Renew Repentance: Discounting sin does not aid reconciliation, but rather hinders it. Without genuine contrition over wrongdoing, people leave little ground for belief in their desire for resolution. Preachers cannot succeed at reducing tension by minimizing the sins of either party in a conflict. Instead, the pastor must hold out the Scriptures that relate to specific issues at hand and then depend on the Holy Spirit to do what only He can do – convict hearers of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8). When people truly confront the reality of personal sin, they have only two choices – to repent and return to God or to try to flee His presence. Reconciling pastors proclaim the value of repentance toward God and one another.

Develop Believers' Identity as Christ's disciples: Pastors can use numerous biblical passages to help their listeners rediscover their true identity as disciples of Jesus. Preaching on John 13:35, we can help Christians

remember that the community does not recognize them as Christians simply because they are members of a church. Only by their mutual love can they claim to be the sons of God (see Mat. 5:9).

Make Peacemakers: Poirier noted that Paul's letters are "peacemaking letters"²⁰ and that "God purposes peace."²¹ Help people grow as disciples of the Prince of Peace by learning to make peace with one another. Peace with others is not possible unless one is at peace with God and with one's self. Sande observed: "Internal peace is a by-product of righteousness"²² (Rom. 5:1-2; Is.32:17). As believers become disciples, walking with Christ, they desire greater expression of His righteousness within their lives, naturally leading to repentance, confession, restitution, and reconciliation – first with God and then with others. Help them discover their roles and responsibility in peacemaking: "Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification" (Rom. 14:19).

Offer a Common Direction: Fred Wood advised me: "Sometimes the people need the tonic of a great task." Sometimes, focusing on the problems is not the most effective route to reconciliation. Instead, preachers can help people discover what they have in common. On what can they agree? While mediating a church conflict in Florida, I challenged the people to find a common direction. What five priorities would God have them pursue for the coming twelve months? As they worked through that question, based on the biblical foundations offered from the pulpit each Sunday, they eventually arrived at a point where they could declare a truce. As they then pursued their mutual goals, they rediscovered the joy of God's service and eventually reconciled for His glory.

Practical Suggestions

- ◆ Pray. Insure that the message originates from God, not the preacher's frustration.
- ◆ Consider the people as well as passage. Think about how you present the Truth to the flesh and blood personalities in your pews.

- ◆ Love people. Demonstrate your genuine care between Sundays as well as during the sermon.
- ◆ Focus on bringing people first to Christ. As they draw close to Him, they will get closer to each other.
- ◆ Recognize there are times to go through the front door and times for the side door. Inductive preaching with an authoritative conclusion often can accomplish what confrontation cannot. (I do not advocate the weak approach of Craddock and cannot accept his position that preachers speak “as one without authority.” However, by using the inductive method of presenting authoritative truth, as Peter did at Pentecost, preachers can bring their people along the same path of discovery that they have walked, arriving at the “aha” moment of biblical application in the conclusion.)
- ◆ Preach expositively. The Word of God, not the word of a man, is the only tool powerful enough to break through the emotional barriers of a conflicted congregation. “Preach the Word!”
- ◆ Use warm worship to soften people’s hearts. Remember that most worship wars can be avoided if all people are allowed to worship in the music and style most appealing to them and to God. Also, teach people that worship involves much more than music, but prayer, preaching, giving, serving and other expressions.

Useful Texts

Nearly every scriptural pericope has potential for preaching to heal conflicted congregations. Some of the most obvious texts include the following:

- ◆ Psalms 34:14: Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.
- ◆ Psalms 133:1-3: Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity! *It is* like the precious

ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, *even* Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, *and as the dew* that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, *even* life for evermore.

- ◆ Prov 12:20: Deceit *is* in the heart of them that imagine evil: but to the counselors of peace *is* joy.
- ◆ Matt 5:9: Blessed *are* the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.
- ◆ Mark 9:50: Salt *is* good: but if the salt has lost his saltness, wherewith will ye season it? Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another.
- ◆ Romans 12:18: If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.
- ◆ Romans 14:17-19: For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. For he that in these things serves Christ *is* acceptable to God, and approved of men. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.
- ◆ 1 Cor. 14:33: For God is not *the author* of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.
- ◆ 2 Cor 13:11: Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.
- ◆ Gal 5:22-26: But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, Meekness, temperance: against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.

- ◆ Eph. 4: 1-3: I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
- ◆ Heb 12:14-15: Follow peace with all *men*, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble *you*, and thereby many be defiled.

Notes

1. According to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, the Hebrew word in Exodus 12 is *hdu* ('edah), translated *synagogue* in the Septuagint. The only time *congregation* is used in the New Testament is as a translation of *sunagwgh* (*sunagoge*). (Acts 13:43)
2. James Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), quoted by Gary Dorsey in *Congregation* (New York: Penguin Press, 1995), 13.
3. Paul S. Minear quoted by Alfred Poirier, *The Peace Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 103.
4. Gilbert R. Rendle, *Behavioral Covenants in Congregations* (The Alban Institute: 1999), vii.
5. Alfred Poirier, *The Peace Making Pastor* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 9.
6. Gilbert R. Rendle, vii.
7. Ron Susek, *Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 184-185.
8. Susek, 219-223.
9. Speed Leas and Paul Kittlaus, *Church Fights: Managing Conflict in the Local Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 32-33. Reference is to Warren Schmidt and Robert Tannenbaum, "The Management of Differences," in *Leadership and Organization* (McGraw Hill, 1961), 101-118.
10. Poirier, 30.
11. Susek, 90-105.
12. H. Newton Maloney, *Win-Win Relationships* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1995), 1.
13. Poirier, 72.

14. Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (London: Epworth Press, 1955) original 1636, 121-122.
15. Rendel, 19.
16. Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), 47.
17. Susek, 70.
18. Susek, 223.
19. Dallas and Nancy Demmitt, *Can You Hear Me Now?* (Cook Communications, 2003).
20. Poirier, 78.
21. Poirier, 172
22. Sande, 39.

The Lost Chronicles of Suf-Abbas

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by F. W. Boreham

(editor's note: F.W. Boreham [1871-1959] was a Baptist pastor born in England who spent most of his life in New Zealand and Australia. This classic Christmas sermon-essay is from Arrows of Desire: A Book of Essays, published in London and copy written by the Epworth Press, 1951, pages 74-81. Used by permission of Methodist Publishing House.)

Introduction

Who would suspect that this tall and handsome figure, robed in the glowing and colourful draperies of the East, and talking fluently in their own tongues to the Orientals that swarm about him, is, in reality, no Asiatic at all?

I

In the bustling courtyard of a big, box-like hostelry in Ispahan, this electric personality moves among merchants, officials and slaves with the air of a man who is accustomed to having his every command instantly obeyed.

His voice, though savouring slightly of shrillness, is vibrant with self-confidence and sharp with authority. His orders ring out like pistol shots.

History knows this man as Marco Polo, the renowned traveller of Venice. Glance at him again. He is in earnest, and even excited, conversation with the innkeeper.

"If," he exclaims, decisively, "if I have to search through every town from Baghdad to Samark and, and even if it costs me my last camel and my last roll of silk, I will find the lost chronicles of Sufi-Abbas, the astrologer, and bring to light the missing links in the story!"

The story that he had in mind was, of course, the story of the Three

Wise Men. By studying carefully such records as had come to hand, and by talking with Eastern scholars in their palmshaded gardens and bustling bazaars, Marco Polo had unearthed many of the graphic details of the intriguing tale, but some essential fragments still eluded him.

II

In March 1272—the month of the devastating earthquake at Yaradhaifa, an old priest at Persepolis—a wizened little creature with a long, grizzly beard, who wore fantastic yellow robes and was almost blind as a result of some horrible disease that disfigured his entire countenance—told him that much of the information that he sought was to be found in the chronicles of Sufi-Abbas, the astrologer of Carmana.

“Then, cost the journey what it may, I will find it!” cried Marco Polo eagerly; and, surely enough, less than a year later, among the flotsam and jetsam offered for sale by a disreputable old dealer at Singara, not far from the banks of the Tigris, he unearthed the faded and tattered roll of parchments for which he had so diligently sought.

It is characteristic of Marco Polo that, having secured the grimy document on which he had set such extraordinary value, he took little or no further interest in it. He never co-ordinated the literary morsels that he had with such pains collected; and, since the scrolls that he gathered were soon afterwards scattered or destroyed, the world is very little the wiser as a result of his researches. But, in his later days, he often discussed the matter with his daughters, Fantina, Bellela and Moreta; these, in turn, repeated the story to their children; and, little by little, the graceful tradition that they unfolded took to itself a definite shape.

III

Marco Polo discovered, so these ladies averred, that the Three Wise Men were three kings, differing the one from the other as sharply and as strikingly as any three individuals could possibly do. In

scarcely one respect did any member of the imposing trio resemble either of his companions.

Gaspar, King of hoary Tarshish, was young and tall, straight as an arrow, and black as ebony.

Balthazar, King of ancient Chaldea, was middle-aged and bearded, of medium height, and olive-skinned.

Melchior, King of Nubia, was very old, of short stature, withered, infirm, and bent.

If the story, as Fantina, the eldest daughter of Marco Polo, passed it on to her offspring, is to be believed, the travellers had not gone far before ill-fortune overtook them. Gaspar's camel trod upon a viper in the thick undergrowth on the fringe of the desert.¹ The reptile fastened upon the tender part of the animal's foot; in an hour or two the limb was too swollen and inflamed to permit of further progress; and, in the grey of the following dawn, the camel died.

What was to be done? Balthazar and Melchior were as grieved and as troubled as was Gaspar himself. But they pointed out that the star would not stand still in the sky because a snake had killed a camel among the sands. Somebody must follow the celestial guide. Better that two should find the new king than that all three should bewhelmed in failure and disappointment.

Gaspar sorrowfully agreed. "Anyway," he added, his black face brightening with a brave smile, "I am young and strong; I am accustomed to walking long distances. I will follow the trail of your camels, and, it may be that, in spite of my loss, I, too, may find the King!"

Balthazar and Melchior thereupon bade him a sad farewell and set off by themselves, leaving Gaspar to follow, as best he could, on foot. But, when that day's sun set in splendour over the western horizon, they looked for the star, but for some time failed to discern it. It had become so faint that they had to strain their eyes to detect it. And the next night it vanished altogether.

Mortified and disgusted, they abandoned the quest and started on their return journey. In due course, they met Gaspar struggling cheerfully on. He was surprised to see them, and still more astonished when they told their tale.

“Lost the star!” he cried incredulously. “Why, nonsense! There it is!” And there, surely enough, it was!

They then resolved to journey together, sharing the benefit of the two surviving camels. Sometimes two of them mounted the stronger camel; sometimes Gaspar rode and Balthazar walked beside him; sometimes Balthazar rode the camel while Gaspar resumed his weary trudge; and now and again even Melchior, aged and infirm as he was, insisted on hobbling along on foot while the two younger men rested. But, however they disposed themselves, the star shone brightly on until, in due course, it brought them to the inn in which the young Child lay.

And so these pilgrim kings learned that they who follow the star become, in virtue of that circumstance, members one of another. The sorrows of one become the sorrows of all: the privileges of one become the privileges of all. Those who think only of themselves, and who display no sympathy with a less fortunate companion, soon lose the heavenly vision. But when each bravely shares the afflictions of those who have been overtaken by disaster, the star blazes like an oriflamme in the western sky.

IV

It was quite a different experience that intrigued Bellela, Marco Polo's second daughter, and that she most stressed in relating the story to her children. It seems that, whilst resting amidst the shades of a green and hospitable oasis, the three pilgrims began to speculate, as was natural, concerning the appearance of Him to whom their celestial guide was leading them. They agreed that He would be stately and regal and grand, noble in bearing and wise in speech. But of what colour?

Gaspar felt certain that he would be black. “Long before any of your paler civilizations began,” he claimed, “there dwelt, far back among the forests of the south, black nations of infinite power and inscrutable wisdom. One of these days when the world is wide open, and when the secrets of its remote past are clearly read, humanity will discover with astonishment that vast empires were erected by men of dusky skin whilst the rest of the world was buried in slumber and stagnation. I believe,” he concluded, “that He to whom the star is leading us has come to restore to our peoples their ancient glory!”

Balthazar brushed aside Gaspar’s theory with impatience. He was sure that the Divine One to whom they were being led would have a skin of olive-coloured hue. “Everybody knows,” he insisted, “that all the world’s most famous dreamers and sages and poets have dwelt in the East. And if, of late, the prophetic fires have died down, it is only that they may blaze up again with richer splendour than ever in this Heavenly Prophet to whom we are being guided.”

“All that you say is true,” exclaimed old Melchior in quiet and unimpassioned tones, “and yet I feel that you must both be disappointed. Perhaps because my eyes are so soon to close for ever, I seem to scan the years that are coming more clearly than you do. And, looking down the avenue of the centuries-to-be, I see that the white races are to rise to a grandeur and an authority that they have never yet known. And, somehow, I feel that this thing that is just about to happen is the crisis of human destiny, the turning-point of the ages! I believe that we are being led to the Creator of a new era—and a white one!”

From quiet reasoning and abstract speculation they soon passed to heated argument and angry contention. Each claimed, for his own section of mankind, virtues and achievements to which the others could never pretend; and each poured upon the others the vials of bitter contempt and withering derision. But, whilst they argued, the shadows lengthened and the dusk fell.

“I have no patience with either of you!” cried Gaspar fiercely, springing to his feet. “I am sick of your absurdities! I am going to resume the journey. You can come or stay as you will; it is nothing to me!” The others flung their taunts after him; but, they, too, moved toward the camels.

When they were ready to start, however, they each made separately a discovery that filled all three with consternation and dismay. Where was the star? There was no sign of it! And without it how could they proceed?

The catastrophe that had overtaken them filled their hearts with fellow-feeling and with sympathy for one another. In this new situation, they forgot the cruel words that each had spoken, and, secretly ashamed of all that had been said in the course of their wordy warfare, each went out of his way to show kindness and consideration to the others. And as, in their hearts, a new and fonder comradeship was born, the star gradually reappeared in the heavens. They saluted it with gladness, and followed it in peace and mutual goodwill until, in due course, it brought them to the little inn at Bethlehem.

V

But Moreta, the youngest of Marco Polo’s daughters, fastened upon a very different aspect of the great adventure, and made the most of it in telling the tale to her children. For, just as the three kings differed in age, in colour, and in outward appearance, so they differed also in relation to their secret thoughts, emotions and aspirations.

Gaspar, the youthful King of Tarshish, set out on his quest hoping that the star would lead him to a king. The world, he felt, wanted a master, a sovereign, a ruler, a lord. And, longing for such a lord, Gaspar took with him a tribute of gold, a royal gift.

Balthazar, the mature King of Chaldea, hoped that the star would lead him to a God. He had lived long enough to realize that behind the seen lies the unseen. And middle age sometimes becomes

conscious, at least for a moment, of the dangerous condition into which it has drifted. Balthazar had some such consciousness. Whenever he sought to probe the mysteries of the invisible, his mind became confused. What is God? Where is God? Oh, that I knew where I might find Him!" And, thirsting for God as the hart thirsts for the water-brooks, longing for God as blind men long for light, Balthazar answered the challenge of the star. And he took with him a tribute of incense—frankincense—with which to worship.

And Melchior, the aged King of Nubia, longed for a Saviour. After the fashion of old men, his mind dwelt in the years that were past. And he felt—felt increasingly—that those years were sadly stained, their record tragically smudged. And soon, he realized, he must pass into the great unknown with much of guilt upon his conscience. Was there no priest by whom his iniquity could be absolved, no sacrifice by which his transgression could be removed, no fountain in which his soul could be eternally cleansed? And, hoping fervently that the star might lead him to a Saviour—a Saviour who, he instinctively felt, must of necessity be a sufferer—he took with him his gift of myrrh.

VI

And so they came to Bethlehem. And when they saw that the star had but led them to a Baby in a woman's arms, all three were at first overwhelmed with chagrin and dismay. But as they sat and pondered this strange happening they heard Mary, after the fashion of mothers, singing to her Child. And all three listened.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord!" she sang. "The Lord!" exclaimed Gaspar. "Then I have found my Sovereign, my Monarch, my King, my Lord!" And he offered his gold. But Mary sang on.

"And my spirit hath rejoiced in God . . ." she continued. "In God!" cried Balthazar, his face lighting up. "Then I have found Him—the God for whom my spirit hungered!" And he presented his incense to the Babe. But not even yet had Mary finished her song.

“My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour!” “My Saviour!” echoed Melchior. “My Saviour!” And he offered his vase of myrrh.

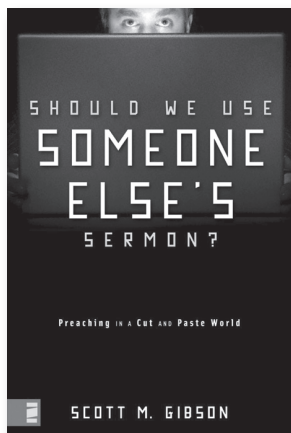
And so Gaspar found in Jesus the King of his desire. And Balthazar found in Jesus the God he had so passionately sought. And Melchior found in Jesus the Saviour for whom his very soul was aching.

Every man finds in Jesus exactly what he most needs. That is the essence of this Christmas story, and that is the essence of the everlasting gospel.

Notes

1. The author seems to remember having heard a story, closely resembling this, being given as a children's address many years ago. His best efforts have, however, failed to trace it. If, by presenting it in its present form, he has inadvertently infringed any copyright, he expresses his sincere regret and will, on having his attention drawn to the matter make appropriate acknowledgements.

Resources That Will Shape Your Preaching



With easy access to sermons on the Internet, plus pressure to deliver the next sermon with little time to prepare, no wonder some pastors have resorted to plagiarizing.

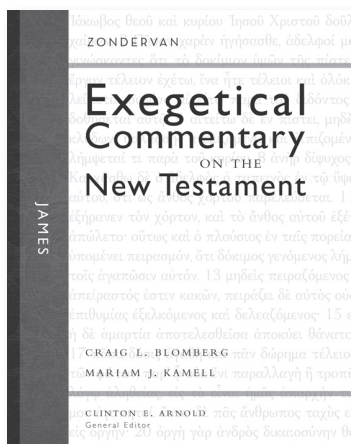
Some pastors have been caught in the act and dismissed from their churches. Is this fair? Is this stealing? How can you recognize it? How can it be prevented?

Scott M. Gibson explains the problem, explores its ethical implications, and gives advice on how to avoid it or deal with it. The book includes study questions and a concluding case study.

9780310286738, Softcover, 128 pages, \$14.99

Designed for the pastor and Bible teacher, the Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament examines the biblical text in its original environment. Notable evangelical scholars carefully attend to grammatical detail, literary context, rhetorical flow, theological nuance, and historical setting in their interpretation.

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The general editor for this enterprising series is Clinton E. Arnold. The inaugural volume, James, is written by Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam Kamell.

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~•~•~•~ *Book Reviews* ~•~•~•~

Preach the Word: Essays on Expository Preaching: In Honor of R. Kent Hughes. Edited by Leland Ryken and Todd A. Wilson. Wheaton: Crossway, 2007, 1581349262, xiii + 287 pp., \$22.00 hard cover.

A stellar array of writers is featured in this *festschrift*, including D. A. Carson, Wayne Grudem, Phillip Jensen, Duane Litfin, John MacArthur, and J. I. Packer. A brief critique of selected essays from the book follows.

Leland Ryken declares that “all biblical exposition is literary analysis” (39). If “evangelical hermeneutics has championed the idea of authorial intention,” then “it stands to reason that biblical writers intended that expositors do something with the literary dimension of their writing” (52). The reader will also appreciate Ryken’s advocacy of keeping preaching rooted in human experience and relevant to daily life. “Many (perhaps most) expository preachers are so captivated by theological abstraction and (even more) by the interlocking story of salvation history that pervades the Bible that the orientation of their sermons is to whisk us away from the everyday world to a world of theological abstraction” (50). Amen!

Here’s a recommendation from Wayne Grudem for seeing the “Big Picture” of the Bible: “The entire Old Testament leads up to [Christ] and points to him, and the entire New Testament flows from him. Therefore, we should always ask, ‘What does this text tell [sic] us about the greatness of Christ?’” (69). While one can have no issue with the sentiment that God’s ultimate revelation of Himself was the *Logos incarnatus*, one is unsure about the necessity of “always” seeing Christ in every text. Besides, Grudem also asks the interpreter to “read every passage of the Bible with a salvation history timeline in our minds” (71). One worries that such a reading, if one is preaching contiguous pericopes, will result in monotonous repetition of themes. For those engaged in preaching pericope by pericope, such an exclusive focus on systematic or biblical theology is inadequate; the specific theology of the pericope under consideration must not be forsaken (editor’s note: see the reviewer’s article in this issue of *JEHS*).

John MacArthur calls for “expository faithfulness” that is the result of diligent investigation of the text (77). The trifold basics of Bible study are emphasized—observation, interpretation, and application (81–85). After providing some guidelines for undertaking this exercise, he concludes: “put together an exegetical outline and add illustrations” (88). Needless to say, I doubt if many of the readers of this *Journal* would agree that a sermon outline should be *exegetical*, rather than *homiletical*. And, following MacArthur, Bruce Winter makes exactly that point in the first sentence of his essay: “[P]reaching that ‘simply exegetes’ the biblical text is not sufficient to secure God’s intention of personal transformation through the Word of God” (93). Right on!

Duane Litfin’s burden in this book is to consider whether the *kerygma* Paul labels “foolishness” in 1 Cor 1:18 refers to the *content* or the *form* of apostolic preaching

(108). Acknowledging that the majority of interpreters weigh in on the side of *content*, Litfin argues that “it also delineates something important about its form, about its mode of communication” (110). This may be true, but Rom. 16:25; 1 Cor. 15:4; 2 Tim. 4:17; Titus 1:3; etc., seem to give more weight to content rather than form. And, in context, 1 Cor. 1:18 and 1:23 seem to be clearly relating foolishness to the content of the preaching (so also 1 Cor. 2:14). Litfin cites 1 Cor. 2:2: “I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.” But that, too, sounds like fixity of *content*, not of form. Guidance on Paul’s *form* is probably better located in 1 Cor. 9:22. He desired to be *all* things to *all* people so that by *all* means some might be saved. Clearly, a degree of freedom in the choice of rhetorical form is thereby suggested.

Peter Jensen rightly asserts that “[i]t takes an entire seminary to produce a preacher” (209). He notes that this is not a new idea, for “[i]n an earlier day it was the clear aim of Protestant seminaries to graduate preachers” (210). This is certainly a creditable intention, but the goals of seminaries today are multifarious and not just limited to preacher-production. Neither is becoming a preacher necessarily the vocational goal of every seminary student these days. The point, nonetheless, is well taken: a collaborative inter-departmental effort is essential if seminaries are to serve the church. Moreover, Jensen declares, the quality of a preacher should not be determined in the homiletics class, but rather in and through the entirety of seminary life and curriculum (218–9). Indeed! The spiritual effectiveness of a pastor is more than preaching ability, no question.

Overall, the book provides fodder for thought on a variety of topics related to preaching. While not much is new, there are elements in each essay worth interacting with and reflecting upon. The preacher will find this collection useful.

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Setting Words on Fire: Putting God at the Centre of the Sermon. By Paul Scott Wilson. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2008, 978-0-687-64718-7, 293 pp., \$27.00 paper.

Several months ago I enjoyed a lunch with Paul Scott Wilson. We spent a good deal of our time discussing his work on proclamation in preaching. It was with delight, then, that I found that his thoughts had found their way into print.

Wilson, professor of homiletics at Emmanuel College of the University of Toronto, is concerned that preaching offer more than mere instruction. “Solid teaching is essential in every sermon,” he says (1). But teaching does not describe “the full range that may be needed for proclamation.” “Teaching provides information that listeners can use to shape their thoughts and actions. Teaching gives people ways to think about the faith, God, and daily life” (1).

Proclamation, on the other hand, can include teaching, but it goes further. “Proclamation,” Wilson says, “is an impassioned utterance that introduces

people to God, makes faith a possibility, and allows them to be shaped by God's Word" (1).

Given these definitions, some might wonder how biblical preaching could describe anything other than what Wilson calls proclamation. I have long held, for example, that a good working definition of preaching itself is "helping people hear from God." That phrase could stand as short-hand for Wilson's "proclamation." Yet even I would have to admit that there are many who pass off preaching that is little more than instruction. Yet is this really preaching? While it is possible to conceive of proclamation without propositional teaching, it seems foolish to imagine preaching that neglects a sense of proclamation.

While proclamation is the broad theme of Wilson's book, it would be unfair to characterize the book in such narrow terms. In fact, the book offers an overview of the entire preaching process, richly defined by research into the literature of theology and homiletics, and by a great many examples, some of which are offered in audio form in a CD bundled with the book.

The first section of the book describes how we might become better teachers. The second section looks specifically about the nature of the gospel, a key feature of most of Wilson's work. The third section of the book helps the preacher think about how to become better proclaimers. The fourth section offers a look at several troublesome themes and genre with respect to proclamation (condemnation, lament, stern exhortation). Finally, Wilson offers chapters on more hopeful genres for proclamation (testimony, prayer, exhortation, doxology). All in all, this is a handy follow-up to Wilson's *The Practice of Preaching* and *The Four Pages of the Sermon*.

As I read the book, it became clear that Wilson was not writing for card-carrying evangelicals. An evangelical himself, Wilson works within a denomination and college that is coming from a different set of presuppositions than would most readers of *JEHS*. Many of the sources cited will be unfamiliar to those coming from a more traditionally evangelical background. Such readers will profit from the exposure to some of these voices. Wilson's description of the New Homiletic will be particularly helpful to those less familiar with that homiletic history.

Preaching must proclaim. That God still speaks is the reason that we preach. Wilson's affirmation of this core sense of the sermon is welcomed by us all.

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Púlpito: An Introduction to Hispanic Preaching. By Justo L. Gonzalez and Pablo A. Jimenez. Nashville, TN, Abingdon Press, 2005. 0-687-08850-X, 140 pp., \$19.00 paper.

This book is a unique contribution, a seminal work coming from a cross-cultural angle. The authors provide a succinct treatment of homiletic theory and practice

from a Hispanic perspective. As such, it represents a valuable resource to delve into to develop insights that inform, enrich, and expand the readers understanding of the theory and practice of preaching. The introductory chapter deals with a review of the existing literature in the field, drawing from Latin American sources as well as from those of Hispanics in the USA. The chapters that follow deal with issues surrounding the pulpit itself—building a Hispanic homiletic theory in terms of its basis, the place of the Bible speaking in a new way to a new situation, following a theology of affirmation, solidarity, and eschatological subversion.

As a whole, the content of the book departs from a platform that presents the Bible as a liberating text, aimed with an alternative, subversive and political way of addressing topical aspects of liberation and empowerment of Hispanics subject to vicissitudes of negative nature. An eschatological dimension of hope is given, born out of present, painful, oppressive contingencies surrounding the Hispanic people's predicament in USA. As a practical complement to their theological and theoretical considerations, the authors introduce several sermons written and preached by men and women who are considered to be key scholars and leaders of the Hispanic *diaspora* in USA. The choice of sermons buttresses the emphasis of Hispanic hermeneutics and homiletics, emphasizing experiential, existential, and participatory interpretations—a “bottom-up” theological perspective that framed within a cultural milieu, defined as being subject to oppression, marginalization, discrimination and prejudice. Women are presented as belonging to the pulpit, blending liberation, feminist, and *mujerista* theologies along the common “Galilean journey” (a metaphorical reference applicable to the Hispanic experience of marginalization, *mestizaje* and struggles for acceptance in the mainstream of life in USA). From the authors' perspective, the aim of preaching is empowering the Hispanics in their struggles to conquer their adversities within a dominant cultural context, and to preserve their cultural identity. In terms of definition, the generic label “Hispanic” used in the book refers broadly to those of Hispanic origin living in the USA. Such population is hardly homogeneous in terms of race, ethnicity, religious preferences and practices, socioeconomic or educational levels. The same can be said of the ministerial or pastoral leaders occupying the pulpits of such heterogeneous communities, ranging widely among themselves across such variables.

The scholarly thrust and tone of the book appears to be an impressionistic rendering depicting a segmented view of the preaching field, representing the outlook of scholars, preachers and leaders of both mainline persuasions and Roman Catholic backgrounds. The representative samples are drawn from the strong voices from such populations. They speak well, loud, and clear. Yet, the absence of representation of the vast majority of Hispanic preachers in the USA (Charismatics, Pentecostals, Assemblies of God, and Fundamentalists) is noticeable, due to the fact that such constituencies have not traditionally been given to disseminate scholarly publications of theoretical nature, and whose theology, hermeneutics and homiletics do not necessarily fit the descriptions

presented in this book. The authors' account—excellent, informative and provocative as is, may be compared to the visible part of an iceberg, which can be pictured and defined in descriptive, analytical, critical and prescriptive terms. Yet, the major portion of such reality still lies under the scope of the investigators who cannot appeal to non-existing sources, being unable to tap into the totality of the vast domain of the Hispanic preaching in USA. Drawing from what is known and accessible, the book is presented in challenging fashion by Gonzales and Jimenez as an excellent source to provoke readers to love and good works, as to expand their horizon beyond ethnocentrism, cultural encapsulation and customary ways of perceiving and defining theological, hermeneutic and homiletic reality.

Pablo Polischuk

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Steeped in the Holy: Preaching as Spiritual Practice. By Raewynne J. Whiteley. Plymouth (UK): Cowley Publications, 2008, 978-1-56101-301-2, 151 pp., \$19.95 paper.

Raewynne J. Whiteley seeks to reconnect the disconnect for many preachers between their preaching and their spiritual lives. Sermons are church work; prayers are soul work. While theoretically related, in practice they speed down the line on parallel, then increasingly divergent, tracks. Whiteley aims to “reconceive . . . preaching, not as a discrete task in itself but as an expression of our ongoing relationship with God” (p. ix) and to explore preaching “as it is integrally related to the life and practices of the soul.” (2). After a brief introductory chapter, she proceeds to explore the homiletical implications for six classic elements of the spiritual life, followed by two representative sermons touching on the theme of each chapter: Sacrament, Scripture, Hospitality, Play, Prayer, Embodiment.

By far the strongest and most intriguing chapter—and perhaps not coincidentally the one Whiteley acknowledges as most directly drawn from her doctoral work—is chapter two: “Food for the Soul: Sacrament.” While Whiteley speaks from her Anglican context, one does not have to embrace fully a “high” sacramental theology to benefit from her insights, since her view of preaching is as “high” as her view of the Eucharist. Indeed, she sees the mystery of the Lord’s Supper as an occasion for a divine/human encounter that illumines how preachers can claim to speak for God: “The divine doesn’t displace the human, but works through it” (16). A sermon is sacramental in being an essential means of grace, which “provokes and strengthens faith . . . an audible sign of an inaudible grace” (12-13) to reframe for the ear the classic visual definition of a sacrament.

Although the other chapters are a bit more uneven, Whiteley’s writing remains engaging and refreshingly clear, not only soaring poetical in many descriptions, but providing helpful pedestrian bullet-pointed lists to put theory into practice. She commends *lectio divina* as a means through receptive and relational listening to move preachers from “tourists” or “scientists” in the Biblical world

to “immigrants” who can help their listeners emigrate as well. Her discussion of hospitality as an image for creating sermonic “space” that invites engaged response instead of uncritical obedience or passive entertainment leads to an insightful analysis of how a variety of sermonic structures—deductive, inductive, and narrative—are all needed to achieve this end.

Whiteley encourages playfulness to inject creativity and liveliness in preaching and preachers! Her words about prayer expose the inherent contradictions of homiletical justifications for neglecting piety: “Spending time with God is essential for our life as preachers. If we don’t know God, then how can we speak of and for God? What distinguishes preaching from other forms of speech is, fundamentally, its character as speech that is simultaneously divine and human” (112).

The weakest parts of this book are the sermons accompanying each chapter. On their own, some of these are excellent. Although Whiteley is more of a narrative than an expository preacher, almost all of these messages have a clearly identifiable “Big Idea.” Despite her awareness of the limitations of narrative preaching—providing some insightful critique of its tendencies to not feed deep spiritual hunger with Scriptural meat or to allow story to overshadow text—all the sermons follow more of a narrative than an inductive or deductive form. Sometimes the relationship between sermons and the substance of the chapters to which they are appended seems tenuous. The most glaring example of confusing selection is the almost verbatim repetition of a sermon entitled “Empty Hands” after chapter two on sacrament, which is alternately called “Take, Eat” after chapter six on prayer.

Nonetheless, *Steeped in the Holy* insightfully presses home an important challenge for preachers to integrate their homiletical and spiritual practices. While this book is not the last word on this issue, it is a stimulating good word that invites preachers and professors not only to add their own voices to the conversation, but to commit their own souls to the Lord, to heed Paul’s warning: “lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway” (1Corinthians 9:27—KJV).

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Healing Relationships: A Preaching Model. By Dan Moseley. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2009, 978-0-827214-55-2, 149 pp., \$16.99, paper.

Moseley writes as “a practitioner of preaching for practitioners of preaching,” (vii). From his 30 years of serving as a minister in churches and now as a professor of practical ministry at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, he intersperses six sermons preached at the Chautauqua Institution (under the title of *The Reluctant Pilgrim*—a series of sermons depicting various Biblical people on

their faith journey) with reflections about the nature of preaching.

Specifically, he reflects on how the words used in sermons not only help the listener to worship and obey God, but also facilitate relationships, first with the people of the Biblical story, but then with other listeners in the pew. And, from those relationships formed from hearing sermons come individual change, inner transformation occurs, and healing of the soul. The result is peace at the core of one's being. How preaching affects community is described and illustrated.

Throughout the book, Moseley reflects on how relationships formed from the communal experience of listening to sermons contributed to his own inner healing following the tragic death of his wife to cancer. His thesis is that words help shape relationships that actually bear fruit in healing the wounds of the soul.

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Sharper than a Two-Edged Sword: Preaching, Teaching, and Living the Bible. Edited by Michael Root and James J. Buckley. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2008, 978-0-8028-6271-6, 103 pp., \$16.00, paper.

In May 2006, Duke Divinity School and the Center of Catholic Evangelical Theology co-sponsored a symposium on "preaching, teaching, and living the Bible." The conference led to *Sharper than a Two-Edged Sword*, a published collection of the lectures on how to think through the Bible theologically and contextualize the story of redemption in our modern society. The contributors do not deal with preaching exclusively but cover broader areas such as: theology, exegesis, hermeneutics, and biblical narrative. It seems like the audience includes homileticians, but is broad enough to include laypeople as well. The book seems to be addressed to anyone who handles the Scriptures, whether they are clergy or laity, leaders or followers, wise or unlearned. The greatest strength of this book is its clear emphasis on the primacy of the Word to preaching, teaching, and leading the Church forward. The authors speak with a unified voice as to their passion for the Word of God despite their theological differences and varied backgrounds. Although it becomes clear to the reader that not all of the contributors share an evangelical view on inerrancy, it is also clear that they love the Bible and believe that it should be central in churches. All the authors appear to share in a common conviction that the Bible is the way back to revitalization and renewal in the Church. The book offers a refreshing alternative to theological or homiletical works that have little to say about the Word's primary role in the Church.

Unfortunately, the weaknesses of this book seem to outweigh its strengths, at least for preachers. It is primarily a book about hermeneutics and not about homiletics. It has very little to offer pastors on the theology, philosophy, or methodology of preaching. Thus, its appeal to homileticians is fairly minimal. Although books on hermeneutics have their place in the preacher's arsenal, there are better resources than *Sharper than a Two-Edged Sword*. One of the chapters by Ellen F.

Davis on learning how to teach Old Testament stories (chapter 4) offers at least one bright spot in the collection because it reminds the reader that stories must be handled and taught differently than other genres. However, her chapter is about learning to read Old Testament stories and not about learning to preach them. Even the book's best chapter offers very little on preaching.

A second weakness of the book is that it reads like a collection of lectures rather than a published work. Colloquialisms and tangential anecdotes distract. Some chapters are better than others in this regard, but it seems to be a recurring problem throughout the book. Personal anecdotes have a place in a published work on preaching only if they're relevant and shed light on the aim of the chapter. Many of the stories and colloquialisms simply detract from the task at hand.

This book may serve a purpose for the scholar interested primarily in studying hermeneutics. Perhaps one can also justify giving it as a resource to a lay leader in the congregation in order to help him or her understand the importance and centrality of the Word to the Church's mission. However, for the homiletics professor or the busy pastor, there are better books to read than this one. *Sharper than a Two-Edged Sword* would better serve a different audience besides those who read this journal.

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Determining the Form, Elements of Preaching series. By O. Wesley Allen, Jr. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008, 978-0-8006-0444-8, 84 pp., \$12.00, paper.

This slender volume is a tidy and clear presentation of seven options for organization of a sermon, plus some introductory comments about form in general and the need for unity, movement, and climax in every sermon. Using the same passage to illustrate each form, 1 Kings 19:1-15a, Allen displays what the form would sound like if arranged by:

- Propositional Lesson.
- Exegesis-Interpretation-Application.
- Verse-by-verse.
- Four pages.
- Valley.
- New Hearing.
- Negative to Positive.

Many characteristics are common to many of these forms, with the basic logic of Problem-Solution, or as Allen says, "Itch to Scratch," dominating.

The author critiques each form with the balanced wisdom of a theologian

and practitioner. A welcome emphasis is an attempt to rejuvenate forms often denigrated, namely propositional and verse-by-verse preaching. If you teach homiletics, and have trouble (as I do) teaching the skills of arrangement, this slender volume may offer help. If you preach regularly and are in a rut, these brief 84 pages can help you maintain your own voice while still preaching with variety.

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Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching. By Ronald E. Osborn. St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1999, 0827214286, 486 pp., \$39.95, paper

Limiting his focus to the first three centuries of church history, Osborn seeks to more adequately document the discursive environment pervasive in both the Jewish and Greco-Roman communicative environments. His work is most helpful in demonstrating the Jewish roots of what became the Christian sermon, illustrating the oral rabbinic patterns in exposition of a sacred text. For any preacher unaware of the role of Greek rhetoric in early preaching, his refreshing overview of key rhetorical theorists provides concise back ground. The Christian sermon, Osborn concludes, must trace its genealogy back to both Greek and Jewish parents, and the author does a through job in the tracing. The book is comprised of 5 sections, each with a helpful self-contained summary:

Part 1: The Context of Oratory (The Greco-Roman Setting of Early Preaching).

Part 2: People of the Word (Jewish Preaching in Hellenistic Times).

Part 3: Preacher of Good News (Jesus of Nazareth).

Part 4: Witnesses of Jesus Christ (The First Christian Preachers).

Part 5: Advocates of an Illicit Faith (Preachers of the Second and Third Centuries).

Though acknowledging the primarily oral culture of this time period, the book relies necessarily on period literary documents for speculation about the oral art of preaching. In consequence, it reads at times more like a general church history text, or a history of thought, than a history of preaching in particular. It focuses more on the zeitgeist blowing in those early centuries, and resulting content of early sermons, than it does on early sermon construction and delivery. The difficulty is almost unavoidable since we do not have anything close to homiletic manuals until Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* in the 4th century. Osborn acknowledges that sermons of this period were not written in advance and were delivered *ex tempore*. But he does not spend time thinking about what must have been necessary in the preacher, in preparation, and in the congregation to preach in this manner. Nevertheless, his observations about the role of ecstatic preaching in 2nd century Montanism is helpful in understanding the evolution of

preaching from the spontaneous toward the structured.

Readers who disagree with the presuppositions of modern critical scholarship will need to wade through those implications almost any time the book consults Scripture. This makes it especially difficult in the analysis of Jesus as a preacher since the author cannot be sure what Jesus actually said, nor what the gospel writers actually wrote. Readers interested in women's studies will find an ally in the book's unfailing documentation of female participation in preaching from the earliest times. Yet the lengths it goes to draw out these instances seem strained at times, and ironically patronizing.

Overall, the book makes a solid contribution to our understanding of the dynamics that forged early sermonic forms. Readers will come away with a better sense of how preaching came to occupy such a central place in early ecclesiastic praxis.

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Preaching Prophetically When the News Disturbs: Interpreting the Media. By Audrey Borschel. St. Louis: Chalice, 2009, 978-0-827230-09-5, x + 182 pp., \$19.99, paper.

We are bombarded with what Audrey Borschel calls “news that disturbs.” We turn on the television, scan the newspaper headlines, or browse the web, and we are confronted with story after story of terrorism, global warming, natural disasters, poverty, and the like. How should preachers respond to these stories, which may affect us at the local level or be national or international in scope? That’s the question Borschel, a pastor in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), raises in *Preaching Prophetically When the News Disturbs*. Her goal is to encourage preachers to address from their pulpits the different moral and ethical issues raised in the news. To do this she says preachers need to keep abreast of the news, interact with multiple news sources and media outlets to help control bias, interpret news disseminations accurately, and then present it to their congregations through the lens of the gospel. If all of that sounds challenging, it is; and that’s where this book seeks to help.

Following a brief introduction, chapter one considers the relationship between preaching and disturbing news, arguing that prophetic preaching is integral to pastoral care. In chapter two Borschel surveys the business side of the news. This chapter is particularly helpful for the non-specialist. She dispels any naïve views that readers might have that the news is unbiased, as she carefully demonstrates the reality that “commerce drive[s] the industry” (45).

In chapter three Borschel argues that preachers need to be media-literate and she provides a variety of tools to help the discerning news media consumer become conversant with the news they read, watch, and hear. Chapter four is divided into

two parts. In the first half Borschel offers ideas on how preachers can prepare themselves and their congregations to interpret news that disturbs in light of the gospel. In the second half she focuses on the task of preaching itself, arguing that “when the news that disturbs is very close to the congregation, listeners will be expecting a healing word and encouragement in the midst of chaos” (87). Borschel conceives of the preacher as a mediator between the news and the good news.

Chapter five, which offers several suggestions on what preachers can learn from journalists is, perhaps, the most helpful chapter in the book. The subject matter makes good sense. Preachers preach the gospel, which is and literally means good news; journalists report the news. Borschel examines several prominent journalists working today (including Nicholas Kristof, Paul Krugman, and others) and draws ideas from their work.

Chapter six is a description of a workshop that Borschel conducted with a small group of clergy and seminary students on the subject of preaching and disturbing news. The book concludes with six appendixes, which include a sketch of the role liberation theology has played in responding to some of today’s disturbing news; the survey questions used in the workshop described in chapter six; and four sample sermons.

Preaching Prophetically When the News Disturbs is a unique book. Among its strengths is the reminder that preachers engage in pastoral care when they preach on social issues. Prophetic preaching is not, therefore, something different than pastoral preaching. The former is best understood as a subset of the latter. Another strong point of the book is the numerous ideas and suggestions for engaging with disturbing news. Undoubtedly, some will be discarded, but still others may be profitably adopted. As noted already, Borschel’s chapter (five) on lessons preachers might glean from journalists is particularly worthwhile reading. Still, this book is not without its faults. My primary criticism is that in not devoting any significant space to the importance of evangelism, revival, and the necessary role they play in prophetic preaching and calling people to social action, Borschel misses the mark. If preachers do not aim first of all to bring hearers to a knowledge of the saving work of Christ, and the necessity of that work, I wonder what lasting social change can actually be accomplished. This is a sad and glaring omission.

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We Have Heard That God Is with You: Preaching the Old Testament. By Rein Bos. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008, 978-0-8028-0770-0, 384 pp., \$28.00, paper.

In *We Have Heard That God Is with You*, Rein Bos attempts to provide preachers

with a set of four “hermeneutical keys” with which to interpret and to proclaim the Old Testament. Laying the foundations in Chapter 1, Bos reviews various ways—from Paul to Barth—that theologians have interpreted the Old Testament, including allegory, typology, promise and fulfillment, and salvation history, ultimately finding fault with each model. Chapter 2 offers a view of biblical theology that rejects the idea of redemptive-historical progression, which advocates *sensus plenior* within loose interpretive boundaries, and which argues for interpretation of the Old Testament based upon a fourfold pattern: the Israelite sense of the text, the Christological sense, the ecclesiastical sense, and the eschatological sense. Chapter 3 expands upon these four keys and the book ends with several examples. Sadly, however, Bos’ unbiblical presuppositions torpedo this effort from the outset, and many other books on preaching the Old Testament from an evangelical perspective are more fruitful than *We Have Heard That God Is with You*.

Bos proceeds from three presuppositions, each of which is incompatible with an evangelical view of Scripture. First, and perhaps the most heterodox to evangelical ears, Bos implicitly assumes that the New Testament authors were no more inspired in their use of the Old Testament than are contemporary preachers. While he accurately traces examples of the New Testament’s use of promise and fulfillment, typology, and salvation history to interpret the Old Testament, he nevertheless suggests that these hermeneutical keys are inadequate or even improper, and that ultimately they denigrate the significance of the Old Testament for contemporary Jews. Bos therefore does not view the New Testament as the divinely inspired and authoritative interpretation of the Old Testament, and that pre-commitment shapes all that follows.

The second presupposition that pervades *We Have Heard* is Bos’ unbiblical understanding of what the New Testament means when it speaks of “Israel.” Venturing one hundred seventy pages into his book before offering a definition, Bos notes that “Israel” can refer to an ethnic group, a religious system, a geographic area, and to a nation in the Middle East, either ancient or modern. After offering this insight, however, Bos states, “When I use the expression ‘Israel’ in the present study, these four elements are echoing around in one way or another. The present Israel is accordingly included” (170). Such a definition cannot be sustained in light of Scripture. In *Romans* 9:6-8 Paul teaches, “Not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but ‘Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.’ This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.” Likewise, in *Galatians* 3:16 Paul writes, “The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, ‘And to offsprings,’ referring to many, but referring to one, ‘And to your offspring,’ who is Christ,” and he continues in *Galatians* 3:29, writing, “If you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.” Paul defines Israel as all those who are descended from Abraham by faith and not by flesh. The true Israel,

according to a divinely inspired New Testament author and apostle, is comprised of all those, New Testament and Old Testament, who are “in Christ.”

Bos’ inclusion of the modern nation of Israel in his definition of the “Israel” that the New Testament address leads him to embrace a bizarre view of how the Old and New Testaments relate to one another. Combining portions of covenant theology, dispensationalism, and Jewish Zionism, Bos repudiates redemptive-historical progression, and suggests that the promises made to Old Testament Israel were made with the ethnically Jewish people, and subsequently with whatever nation their descendants have formed in the Middle East. Ignoring Paul’s teaching that God’s covenant with Old Testament Israel was only and always made with those Israelites who, like Abraham, were “in Christ” by faith, Bos envisions a contemporary significance for the Old Testament for modern ethnic Jews, as though the promises of salvation remain true for them *apart from* faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus is evidently not strictly necessary for salvation if you happen to be ethnically Jewish. Bos seems more driven by a desire to craft a hermeneutic that is inoffensive to non-believing Jews, frequently citing the necessity of forming a “post-holocaust” hermeneutic, than he is in dealing with Paul’s teaching about the fulfillment of the covenants and promises of the Old Testament in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Unfortunately, there is little of value to commend this book to the readership of the *JEHS*. Whether you come from a covenantal or dispensational perspective, or are Arminian or Reformed, you would be better served by Walter Kaiser’s *Preaching and Teaching from the Old Testament*, Graeme Goldsworthy’s *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture*, or Sydney Greidanus’ *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*.

Russell St. John

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Preaching with Balance: Achieving and Maintaining Biblical Priorities in Preaching. By Donald L. Hamilton. Christian Focus Publications, Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-Shire, IV20 1TW, Scotland, 2007, 1-84550-265-5, 415 pp., \$19.95, paper.

Donald Hamilton’s book calls preachers to balance in the proclamation of God’s Word while refusing to equate balance with mediocrity. Biblical balance, in Hamilton’s view, demands that those aspiring to speak for God must continually endeavor to hold in tension the whole spectrum of God’s voice couched in the biblical theology, while striving to frame God’s truth on the continuum of the human experience. Balance, in the full homiletic sense, is dynamic rather than static. It is a process intended to deepen and broaden our horizons while retaining our truth stance.

Hamilton’s book seeks to outline the scale of balance in both the content and form of preaching. Homiletic balance begins with a firm grasp of the center of biblical

theology while remaining sensitive to the co-centric span of biblical theology. Balance in the preacher's view of God must serve as a pivot point for establishing the integrity of the preacher's personal perspective balancing personality and character; aptitude and attitude, skill and education. Hamilton next examines the need for balance in biblical variety. The Word of God is a collection of varied literary genres which need to be exemplified in preaching variety. The balance in the purpose of preaching maps out the destinations which sermons require ranging from evangelistic sermons; through edification and pastoral preaching; to prophetic proclamation. The last two chapters delve into some helpful reflection on the elements of content and form in preaching.

Hamilton's book reaches both ends of the homiletic spectrum: it can serve as a primer for the beginner and as a corrective for the advanced preacher. The book lives by what it preaches. It offers a balanced view of the essential elements of the proclamation of God's Word. The discussion is studded with practical examples and insights from the masters. The pastoral character of the book is varied in its content and form holding the reader's attention while avoiding the pitfalls of a single vantage point. The book is of much value to the novice in painting a big picture of the biblical call to preach. It serves as a sound reminder to the stalwarts for the need to avoid mediocrity and the status quo.

Having commended the book's balanced stance, it must be admitted that in its attempt to balance every facet of the preaching process, the book tends toward the pragmatic. The pragmatic focus of the book results in a merely methodological discussion in places where a philosophical inquiry might argue against balance. For instance, on the assumption that the sermon must derive from biblical content and reflect biblical form, it could be argued that any homiletic method which fails these two commitments must be discarded in the process of sermon preparation. This would mean that some of the methods used yesterday and today ought not to be recommended as legitimate in view of prior theological and philosophical commitments. In this sense, Hamilton's book is more descriptive than prescriptive. While it informs concerning the spectrum of the options, it fails to provide adequate warrant for their employment.

All in all, we should be grateful to Hamilton for adding this volume to the balance of homiletic literature. His book could be a useful tool in preparing young men and women for the right handling of God's Word in the pulpits. The book is also a much needed jolt to the seasoned preacher in our human tendency toward narrow mindedness and narrow heartedness.

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Performance in Preaching: Bringing the Sermon to Life. Edited by Jana Childers and Clayton J. Schmit. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008, ISBN 9780801036132, 256 pp., companion dvd, \$24.99, paper.

This book explores preaching through the lens of “performance studies.” Calling a sermon a “performance” need not make us cringe with specters of overblown or mechanical elocution. Rather, performance studies is an eclectic (some would say amorphous) academic area. It has roots in “oral interpretation” and “speech,” but brings rhetoric, anthropology, sociology, theology, and other disciplines to bear on the understanding of human communication. The eclecticism of the discipline is evident in this edited volume which ranges from insightful caution about seeing preaching as performance (Marguerite Shuster, Paul Scott Wilson) to extremely detailed instruction about the use of the body in preaching (Todd Farelly) to exploration of the musical qualities of preaching (Clayton Schmit, William Turner). The eclecticism is also evident in that the edited volume does not seem to cohere under a single thesis or even consensus, except perhaps the general consensus that preaching is a performance and that performance is a highly significant aspect of proclaiming the gospel. Another quality of the book helps grant it some unity, and that is its dedication to Charles Bartow whose “trajectory of thought and theology has plotted a path that we . . . have been blessed to follow” (dedication page). Most, if not all, of the essays cite Bartow. A DVD accompanies *Performance in Preaching*, appropriate to a work which values orality. The DVD contains instruction in oral interpretation techniques, lectures, and performances by some of the contributors. This book is a pastiche of ideas; some are rich and some are thin, like too little butter spread over too much toast, but it should be on the reading list of anyone exploring the performative aspects of homiletics. An excellent bibliography aids that quest.

Jeffrey Arthurs

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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

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2. Manuscripts should be double-spaced. This includes the text, indented (block) quotations, notes, and bibliography. This form makes for easier editing.
3. Neither the text, nor selected sentences, nor subheads should be typed all-caps.
4. Notes should be placed at the **end** of the manuscript, **not** at the foot of the page. Notes should be reasonably close to the style advocated in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* 3rd edition (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1988) by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert. That style is basically as follows for research papers:

a. From a book:

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

b. From a periodical:

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

c. Avoid the use of op. cit.

Dewey 111.

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

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Manuscripts should be sent to the attention of the General Editor. Send as an email attachment to the General. Send to: sgibson@gcts.edu

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