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Manuscripts: Though most articles and book reviews are assigned, submissions are welcome. They must by typed and double-spaced. All articles will be juried to determine suitability for publication. Please send articles to the General Editor, Scott M. Gibson, at sgibson@gcts.edu. Letters to the editor are also welcome. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Comprehending the Preaching Task

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By Scott M. Gibson

The task of the preaching is to understand—the biblical text and one's listeners. Comprehending one's listeners involves probing the wider culture in which one's listeners live. The common complaint of listeners is "the preacher doesn't understand me." In the minds of some listeners preachers appear to be more committed to understanding the text—which is a good thing—than the people to whom they preach.

In this edition of the *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, we are introduced once again to the task of knowing our listeners, the community and the wider community in which we preach.

The presentations by Leith Anderson at the October 2009 Evangelical Homiletics Society annual meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, are provided as the first two articles. Anderson's opening talk provided a contextual framework for the preaching task. The second lecture placed what it means to preach in this framework. Leith Anderson challenges us in our perceptions as to what it means to preach in our culture—the positives and negatives—allowing us to comprehend the realities that face those who preach.

The 2009 Keith Willhite Award was given to Andrew Thompson, a master of theology in preaching student at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary and now is associate pastor at The Chapel in Brunswick, Georgia. Thompson's paper, "Community Oracles: A Model for Applying and Preaching the Prophets," is a thoughtful engagement with biblical genres and preaching.

Next, Kenton C. Anderson considers three challenges occurring in homiletics. He approaches the challenges thoughtfully and

strategically. Readers will be stimulated by Anderson's approach.

Understanding the context of preaching is important. Being aware of how a preacher employs the Bible is an interesting angle taken by Jeffrey Arthurs as he explores Robert Schuler's use of the Bible in preaching. His insights are helpful as we face communicating to a therapeutic culture.

Understanding one's spiritual approach to preaching is a perspective Kent Edwards raises in his article, "Deep Preaching." Edwards challenges preachers to consider their spiritual preparedness as they construct sermons and suggests a paradigm for readers to follow.

In the final article, "The Unfinished Sermon: Involving the Body in Preparation," Dave McClellan suggests that there is more to sermon preparation than private preparation. McClellan's conclusions are stimulating and will challenge any preacher—and, reader, too.

The sermon is by John V. Tornfelt, Vice President for Academic Affairs, dean of the faculty and professor of ministry at Evangelical Theological Seminary in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. At the conclusion of his term as president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Dr. Tornfelt gave the sermon at the October 2009 meeting. Following the sermon are book reviews, a rich resource of reading and healthy critique.

Homileticians are constantly vigilant in their pursuit of understanding the Bible and the people to whom we preach. That is the way is should be.

Theology of Culture and Context of Community

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By Leith Anderson

(editor's note: Leith Anderson is senior pastor of Wooddale Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is also president of the National Association of Evangelicals. This is the first of Dr. Anderson's addresses on preaching and community and the Annual Evangelical Homiletics Society Meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 15-17, 2009.)

Introduction

We once again visited Westminster Abbey in London and read the many memorials to England's most famous politicians, poets, preachers and others. Weary from walking I stopped to lean against one of the memorial inscriptions when a docent immediately ordered me to step away from the aging marble. I stood up straight and turned to read whose marker I had rested on. It recognizes Granville Sharp as a father of abolition in 18th century England.

But I knew his name, not from the history of slave trade but from my college Greek class where I had learned the Granville Sharp Rule. It was actually the first of six Greek grammatical rules put forward by this British thinker and politician although it was by far the most famous. The Granville Sharp Rule states that two substantives joined by *kai* and having the definite article in front of the first substantive means that both substantives refer to the same person(s) or entity. Sharp focused his rule on Christological texts; however, I was most influenced by its application to Ephesians 4:11-13:

> It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be

> built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

This text significantly influenced my theology of ministry. It refers to the often called "equipping gifts" of apostle, prophet, evangelist and…. Are there four or five equipping gifts? Without the Granville Sharp Rule the fourth and fifth are pastor and teacher. With the Granville Sharp Rule there are only four with the last being pastor-teacher. That is because the definite article (*ho*) precedes "pastors" (*poimen*) and "teachers" (*didaskalos*) which are conjoined by *kai*. Shepherding is first. Although shepherding without teaching lacks biblical truth and authority. And, teaching without shepherding lacks relationship, relevance, context and compassion.

Perhaps you are familiar with a book by Edmund Holt Linn. *Preaching as counseling: the unique method of Harry Emerson Fosdick* analyzes the approach of the famous early 20th century liberal preacher.[1] Fosdick never formally studied rhetoric or read many books on preaching. He began not with the sermon but with the people.

Fosdick was a full time professor at Union Theological Seminary, a full time pastor of New York's Riverside Church, the first national radio preacher and author of 47 books. Yet he dedicated hours each week to individual counseling—not only to be helpful to his parishioners but to stay in touch with the needs of people in order to make his sermons relevant to all his listeners.

Fosdick drew crowds of thousands because he was a shepherd who taught. And, his liberal teachings powerfully influenced millions toward his modernist theology. I don't like all he believed and taught but I am impressed with his method.

Personally, I make little mental distinction between pastoring and teaching. They are so intertwined that I can barely distinguish one from the other. To the extent that there is a distinction I would

claim to be a shepherd who preaches not a preacher who shepherds. I am not gifted to be an apostle, prophet or evangelist. I am a pastor-teacher. That is, I am a shepherd of a local congregation in suburban Minneapolis. It is there in the community of Wooddale Church that I have taught the Bible for 33 years. When I teach I pastor and when I pastor I teach. The two are intertwined and inseparable.

All of which is to say that I address you as members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society as a practitioner not a scholar. I am a preacher in community. Sermons are always in the context of a local church with individuals and families, anonymity and friendships, births and funerals, weddings and worship.

Tonight I would like to muse on some theological and philosophical notions that shape how I shepherd and teach. Tomorrow I plan to talk more about the practice of shepherding and preaching in community, which may be more interesting.

To consider how the shepherd-teacher promotes community through preaching let's begin with a theology of culture. I invite you on this thought journey because it is important to me but also because it is important for those who preach to have a good theology of culture and a sense of cultural context. If we don't "get" culture we are unlikely to "get" community. So, here goes. Let's turn ourselves into a theology class.

Theology of Culture

Here is an opening question about your own theology of culture: *Do you consider culture to be the friend or the enemy of the gospel of Jesus Christ?* How we answer this question may shape how we relate church and community and how we preach in the context of our current culture.

Those who answer that culture is the enemy of the gospel will tilt

toward becoming separatists, distancing themselves from an enemy culture. The risk is that separatists can become so disconnected from culture that they become irrelevant and ineffective.

Those who answer that culture is the friend of the gospel will tend to become contextualists, contextualizing the gospel to the culture and the culture to the gospel. The risk is that contextualists will compromise the gospel and eventually become so acculturated that they no longer own or communicate a biblical gospel. So, there are risks with both answers.

In the interest of up front disclosure, I tell you that I am a contextualist who sees culture as the friend of the gospel. Let me explain my theology of culture which leads to contextualism.

First, we need a definition of culture. The Theology and Education Group of the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization met in Willowbank, Bermuda, in January of 1978 to address the issue of culture. The Group issued the Willowbank Report which basically defined culture as "the patterned ways in which people do things together."[2] With my degrees in sociology and theology I think that is a good simple definition both sociologically and theologically.

There is a culture to the Trinity. There are patterned ways in which the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate and do things together. There is a division of labor. The Father sends the Son, the Son glorifies the Father, and the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit. All of this is without sin, of course. There is no sin in the godhead, but there is culture.

God passed culture to his creation. When God created humankind in his likeness this included intellect, emotion and will but also social relationships. God said that it was not good for Adam to be alone[3] because God had created Adam in the divine likeness which essentially includes culture, community and doing things together.

God regularly met with Adam and Eve "in the cool of the day"[4] which was part of the pattern—the culture—of the relationship between God and his human creatures. All of this was pre-fall. Culture without sin.

When sin entered the human experience the image of God was neither erased nor destroyed. We are still in God's likeness even though we are now sinners. It is just that the image of God has been terribly marred by evil. The doctrine of total depravity is not that God's likeness is eradicated but that every part of it has been degraded by sin.

The same may be said of culture. Culture was also polluted by sin but that does not mean that culture is essentially evil. Just as we sometimes distinguish between sin and the sinner we also distinguish between sin and the culture. And, just as redemption through Jesus Christ extends to all of creation it also extends to culture.

The Old Testament prophets were highly culturally relevant. They spoke the language of the people whether it was Hebrew or Aramaic (the book of Daniel), acted out with symbols and object lessons and adapted to the changing chapters of history.

Jonah was commissioned by God to call the people of Nineveh to repentance. He held disdain for them and their culture and took a most circuitous route before delivering God's message. When the Ninevites repented of the sin in their culture Jonah was grieved not delighted because he would not distinguish between their culture and the sin in their culture. His lesson is for all prophets of all ages. It is right to hate the sin but don't forget to love the culture.

The Incarnation is our most powerful teaching in the theology of culture. John takes significant theological risk when he identifies the eternal Son of God by the culturally laden Greek philosophic term logos. And he takes an even greater theological risk when he

identifies the *logos* as the *theos* (a term pagans applied to the gods in their pantheon).

John 1:1 notes: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Thus, the Incarnation was not only into a human body but into a human culture.

Likewise, John 1:14 underscores, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Paraphrases range from "He pitched his tent in our midst" to "He parked his RV in our park." The point is that the incarnate Son of God fully engaged human culture. He spoke one of our languages (Aramaic)—language being a primary expression of culture. He wore our clothes. He ate our food. He lived in one of our families. Jesus fully engaged—contextualized—to one of our cultures and did it without sin.

John 3:16 familiarly says, "God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son." The Greek word for world is *kosmos* which does not so much refer to our physical world as to our world system. In H. Richard Niebuhr's classic *Christ and Culture* he suggests translating *kosmos* as "culture" which would say that God so loved the culture that he gave his one and only Son.

The climax of the New Testament theology of culture is in 1 Corinthians 9. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 reads:

> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.

> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Slavery, freedom, Jews, Gentiles—these are all patterned ways in which people do things together. Paul volunteers to change from his pattern to the pattern of others in order to save some. He is not willing or even suggesting sin but he is offering to contextualize.

All of this is to say that Christians in general and preachers in particular are constantly looking for ways to adapt to culture because culture itself (not the sin in the culture) is a friend of the gospel of Jesus Christ. There are many examples of this biblical contextualization but one of the most obvious is in the contrasting approaches to scripture translation taken by Islam and Christianity. Muslims insist that true believers must learn Arabic and read the Qur'an in its original language—that is, others must adapt to the Arabic culture. Christians insist that true believers translate the Bible into the languages of others—that is, we must adapt to the other culture. This is incarnational and contextual.

There is a story about the CEO of Quality Inns getting a haircut at a Phoenix barbershop. He asked the barber where he goes on vacation and he answered, "Lake Tahoe." Then he asked, "Where do you stay?" The barber said he and his wife stay in the cheapest hotel en route and an expensive hotel when they get there.

The Quality Inns boss thought, "They're not staying in a Quality Inn because we are too expensive when they are on the road and not good enough when they get there." Out of that encounter the company was reconfigured and renamed Choice Hotels with Clarion Hotels on the high end, Quality Inns on the upper mid range, Comfort Inns for the moderate prices and Sleep Inns for the budget traveler. Since then Choice Hotels has become the largest franchise hotel chain in the world. They decided to become

all things to all travelers in order to lodge some. And they did it without compromising their central brand.

There was a very valuable piece of land available near the MSP International Airport—the site once had several of our Minnesota sports stadiums. The Ghermezian brothers from Alberta proposed to build America's largest shopping center. Our Minnesota culture was full of talk and plenty of opposition to tax breaks—it seemed like a bad time to build a shopping mall when malls were in economic meltdown around the nation.

Let's jump ahead. The Mall of America was built. It is the largest shopping-entertainment complex in America with 4.2 million square feet, 520 stores and 40 million visitors per year (more than twice as many as the Magic Kingdom at DisneyWorld). It is so successful that there is an expansion plan to grow to 900 stores at an additional cost of $1.9 billion.

Since it was such a pervasive topic in the culture I wondered if we could have a church service there on the Sunday the mall opened. We called and they agreed (for free!). We set up 400 chairs and had thousands more come and stand.

The sermon was an exposition of Acts 17. There was a saying in the 1st century Roman world that in Athens there were "more gods than men." When St. Paul visited he was sad not happy. He gathered around him the intellectual leaders of the city and pointed to an altar to "the unknown god" and proclaimed Jesus. At the end of the day there were those who believed in Jesus as Savior.

Then I explained that people were coming from all over the nation and world to see the 500 stores of the Mall of America—to have their needs met and their questions answered. Some might be looking for the unknown god of this mall and I will tell you that it is Jesus and you are invited to believe in him today.

A stranger asked me for my notes which I gave away. The next day there was a front page story in the metropolitan newspaper with the text of the sermon. The stranger had been a newspaper reporter. The story was picked up by the wire services and carried in newspapers from coast to coast and border to border. Why? Because it was culturally relevant. The same old Bible story communicated in the culture of the moment.

Afterwards someone asked me the standard church question, "Are we going to do this again next year?" But next year the culture will have changed and we must change to adapt to the new culture.

As Christians we have the opportunity to contextualize to different cultures and reach different groups without compromising our central message of the Good News of Jesus Christ.

By contrast there are those who prefer to preach to a limited audience within the boundaries of their own sub-culture of relationships. And, there are some who focus more on criticizing and condemning the culture than looking for ways to relate and contextualize. They have chosen the Old Testament prophet as their model rather than the New Testament shepherd-teacher.

God-appointed prophets are valuable, necessary, important and few in number. Self-appointed prophets can be numerous and dangerous. Often they come across as bad news preachers.

My hope is that you will equip the next generation of preachers who are shepherd-teachers more than prophets, messengers of good news more than bad news and incarnational contextualists more than sectarian separatists.

Context of Community

So, what does all of this have to do with Christian community?

Our English word for "community" comes from the Latin *communis* which means "common." Community is people living together sharing things in common. The first dictionary definition for community is "fellowship" which fits our Christian vocabulary very well. Our word is *kononia* that appears twenty times in the New Testament starting with Acts 2:42: "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

The Jerusalem church promoted community in culture. The preacher's task is to connect the culture with the community of believers. An example of this is found in Acts 6. The community of the first-century Jerusalem church was divided by the complaint of inadequate benevolence funds for Hellenic widows. It was a cultural issue. The apostles prayed, considered and recognized this as a cultural more than a theological division. They connected culture and community with a solution that respected cultural realities and promoted Christian community. They appointed seven financial managers. All seven had Greek names.

The preacher's theology of culture inevitably comes over into the context of Christian community. The contextual preacher will seek to learn and adapt to the culture of the audience. At its deepest level this relates to cultural patterns of family structure, labor practices, entertainment choices, economic systems and more.

An example relates to a culture's patterns for decision making. Some cultures are highly individualistic while others are largely collective. The preacher who comes from an evangelical sub-culture that values individualism may attempt to impose cultural norms on those in a culture that makes decisions (including salvation) collectively through process.

On a more superficial level the preacher may tell jokes, express loyalty to sports teams and speak in jargon that creates cultural

barriers to effective communication. I was born and raised in metropolitan New York City but I know that my adopted Minnesota culture chooses the Twins and Vikings over the Yankees and the Jets. So, I change my loyalty and communication to adapt to the local community.

The culture is always changing. It is never static. Heraclites used a river as an analogy. You can step into a river and then out of the river but never step back into the same river gain. It is forever past. So it is with culture.

As shepherd-teachers we are always looking for changes in the culture that will help us build community in the church. Today's stunning example is social media. It is already revolutionizing church communication and community. It is so exciting that my pulse rate accelerates thinking about it.

Tomorrow when we move from all this theory to the more practical side we can talk about social media and the church community. For now, let it just be an example of a revolutionary change in the culture that gives a revolutionary opportunity to the church for stronger community and for outreach.

The preacher is called to be both an exegete of scripture and an ethnographer of community. We extract the transcultural truths out of the biblical cultures and then reinsert those truths into the modern and local community cultures.

Many pastors find their greatest success in areas where they were born and raised because they intuitively understand the culture from which they came. They are native speakers of the local cultural dialect. Many are also native speakers of their generation's dialect. Others of us must work hard to study and learn a culture where we are not natives and must acquire the local cultural and generational dialect.

All of this assumes that the preacher is first committed to the truth and authority of the Bible. This is no unanchored relativism or moral ambivalence. The absolutes of God, sin, salvation and righteousness transcend all cultures and are truths that are frequently counter-cultural. In this, the call of the preacher is to teach God's absolute truth in the language and context of the local community with the goal of transforming the community into the likeness of Christ.

Our assignment is to help Christians connect to each other based on the common values of God, Scripture and righteous living. We are constantly reminding them that they share Jesus. We do this in ways that relate to the broader culture of which we are all a part.

At Wooddale Church we teach the biblical priorities of doing community as well as being community. Don't just be together, do something together. Outreach and engagement build community solidarity. Small groups have their prayer, Bible study, dinners out and social service projects. They are tutoring immigrants, volunteering in thrift shops, feeding the hungry, rehabilitating homes and looking for opportunities to serve God and others *together.* It is living out Christian community in the culture.

As a pastor I have an endless supply of stories about Christians living out their faith together. I love to tell those stories because they shape the thinking and behavior of the church.

To illustrate the Christian call to love our neighbors I spoke in a sermon about fast food restaurants that "upsize" orders of French Fries and soft drinks. The encouragement was to upsize our love for others.

After the last service on Sunday afternoon our family went to Wendy's and were waiting in a long line to order. A stranger walked over to me in the line and asked if I was going to upsize my order. She obviously had heard the sermon.

Then she told me her story. She lived in Iowa and went through a terrible divorce. In her words, all she had left was her son and her car. They got into the car and started driving north. On Sunday morning they saw the Wooddale Church steeple and decided to come in. A woman near the door introduced herself and asked the two standard American questions for newcomers: "What's your name? Where do you live?" The visitor answered, "My name is Christine and we live in my car." The woman at the door responded, "Then you come home and live with us."

Christine told me that over the following months Christians in the church community provided housing, found a job for her, helped her buy a condo and gave her thousands of dollars. She said, "It's really true. Christians love other people."

It was the first I had heard of all this. It wasn't a church program; it was church community. Christians spontaneously and organically lived out what the Bible and the church teaches.

Conclusion

We have an experiment in culture and community scheduled for January 2011. The plan is to mobilize the entire church in packing and paying for one million meals to be shipped to hungry people in Africa.

Here is the plan:

1. Recruit leaders from every class, small group, ministry team and other social connection in the church to understand and engage in the project.
2. Publicize throughout the church starting in November 2010.
3. Request that every class and study group in the church from birth to senior adults study biblical teaching on poverty, hunger and Christian compassion during January.
4. Preach two weekends of sermons on poverty, hunger and Christian compassion in January 2011.

5. Schedule meal-packing venues in multiple towns at malls, schools, community centers, businesses and on the Wooddale Church campuses.
6. Encourage groups to pack meals together (including families) and invite neighbors, relatives, coworkers and friends to participate.
7. The expected outcome is teaching of scripture, strengthening of *koinonia*, engaging the broader culture and reaching out to unbelievers who would not come to a church service but will participate in feeding the hungry and be introduced to Christian community as well as providing one million meals to those who are poor and hungry.

The desire is to live out our biblical theology of culture in the context of Christian community.

Notes

1. Edmund Holt Linn, *Preaching as counseling: the unique method of Harry Emerson Fosdick* (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1966).
2. "Lausanne Occasional Paper 2: The Willowbank Report: Consultation on Gospel and Culture," The Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, 1978.
3. Genesis 2:18.
4. Genesis 3:8.

Promoting Community Through Preaching

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By Leith Anderson

(editor's note: Leith Anderson is senior pastor of Wooddale Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He is also president of the National Association of Evangelicals. This is the first of Dr. Anderson's addresses on preaching and community and the Annual Evangelical Homiletics Society Meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, October 15-17, 2009.)

Introductory Considerations

Wooddale Church in suburban Minneapolis has seven weekend services each Saturday night and Sunday. The services have three distinct styles: Traditional Worship Services include singing hymns, a robed choir, orchestra, strings, brass, one of the largest pipe organs in the world,[1] Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer and other traditional elements. Contemporary Worship Services have singers with hand-held microphones, drums, guitars, brass, synthesizer, clapping, dramas, videos and casual dress. The Gathering is the Sunday evening alternative worship service with darkened room, original art, dozens of candles, eclectic music, communion by intinction and dress that favors jeans, shorts, sweat shirts and sandals.

Worshippers of every generation are in each of these services but each style tends to draw more of some generations than others. Traditional services have more from the retirement age generation. Contemporary worship is preferred by Baby Boomers. *The Gathering* draws crowds of teenagers and twenty-somethings.

The sociologist in me couldn't help but notice how each generation chooses where to sit. Now, of course, we are all creatures of habit and gravitate to our usual places at the dining room table, in the car and at church services. However, the traditional generation seems

more territorial than the others. They have their pew and that's where they always sit and many are not happy if someone else takes their place. The Boomers are more flexible and willing to sit in different places as long as it's comfortable. "If I came in time to sit on the end then I'm not moving in because I like to sit on the end." At *The Gathering* I watch Generation Y move up and down aisles and through rows of chairs looking for the right person to sit with.

For the older generation it is about place. For the middle generation it is about comfort. For the younger generation it is about relationships.

We all need and want community but analysts say that relationships are more important to the present younger generation than to their parents and grandparents. While individualism was a high cultural value in the past, teamwork is a high cultural value to today's youth. They grew up playing soccer starting in pre-school. They shared in group study projects at school. They have been taught that being a team player is more important than winning individual praise. They have been shaped by television programs like *Friends* and reality shows based on relationships.

This is a cultural phenomenon well suited to relational evangelism and church community. The old way was believe, behave and belong. The new way is belong, behave and believe.

The question, and my topic assigned for this gathering, is how to promote community through preaching. Some would argue that there is a mistaken presupposition because community is best promoted without preaching. I don't agree with that but do have some presuppositions.

• Preaching is important but not as important as it used to be. An earlier generation assumed that great churches were built on great pulpiteers like Harry Emerson Fosdick at Riverside Church in New York, Harry Ironside at Moody Church in Chicago

or Harold John Ockenga at Park Street Church in Boston. That changed when quality of music and worship started to compete if not trump preaching. Then came megachurches where the quality and variety of programs added to the competition. Today, "community" is a rapidly ascending competitor, especially among those under 40.

Not that preaching isn't important. As I've heard Haddon Robinson say, preachers are like football quarterbacks. It's unlikely to win a championship without a good quarterback but no quarterback is good enough to win without a good team.

One of the many reasons for this shift in the place of preaching is that Christians can easily access sermons on line to download into their iPods but they must go to a local church for a ministry to their special needs son or to join in a small group.

• Preaching is interconnected with community. Effective preaching must be integrated with the church community and effective community must be interconnected with biblical preaching. They are like the lyrical horse & carriage and love & marriage—they belong together.

• All people need community. We are created to be social beings. We need other people and meaningful relationships. One of the worst punishments in a prison is solitary confinement.

• Different expressions of community are culturally defined. Needs and ways of meeting those needs are different in each society and vary by age, education, and socio-economic status in our North American society.

With today's topic in mind I read the Summer 2009 issue of *Leadership Journal*.[2] It is not primarily about preaching but about the integration of younger adults into church communities. I was fascinated by the variety of theories and applications presented.

They were sometimes complementary and often contradictory. Some argue for preaching that is initially emotional while others called for teaching doctrine and others demanded confrontational challenge. There were strong cases for intergenerational worship services and church life while others promoted generation-specific congregations. All seemed to agree that the younger generation is different from any other in history and must have a place at the local ecclesiastical leadership table. It sounded like an echo from the 1950s, 1970s and 1990s.

I think this double decade generational angst is a good thing. Let's just remember that what works in one church community may be disaster in another. Each culture must be read and individually diagnosed before a local prescription is written. Just as we don't want our family physician to diagnose and prescribe for us based on the last medical journal she read so we don't want our pastors to prescribe based on the last church journal read.

• Preaching and community are reshaping with globalization and localization. As important as is the connection of local preaching to the local church we also have globalization of our sermons.

A couple stopped to introduce themselves to me after a church service. They asked a few questions about that day's sermon and then more questions about several sermons over the previous six months. When I asked how long they have come to Wooddale Church they answered, "Today is the first time." They were relocating from Atlanta to Minnesota and had researched churches on the internet as well as viewed and read many of my sermons. They were choosing their church first and then their town and new home.

The services of Wooddale Church are streamed live. The last time I checked there were worshippers on line in 41 states and 17 foreign countries. The system allows them to sign-in, give money, email questions and come visit when they are in Minnesota. It is a

changing definition of community.

At first I was annoyed by churches establishing video venues where the speaker is virtually present but physically absent. It ran against a lot of my notions of pastoring and preaching. Then I thought about Galatians being a "circular epistle" that was originated by Paul but then circulated to multiple services in different churches throughout Asia Minor. Perhaps if Paul had a digital camera and a microphone instead of a quill and parchment he would have sent a circular video instead of a circular epistle.

Such are the realities of preaching in a digital age. However, this does not argue against the expectation that the preacher be an ethnographer and connect to the local community. To the contrary, it raises the bar and requires the preacher to work even harder to be culturally relevant to a part of the community he cannot physically see. (A simple example is that when I preach on Saturday night and the video is shown on Sunday morning I must be cautious not to say "tonight" anywhere in the sermon. I need to dress for the weather forecast and not just the weather conditions. I must know and speak to those who will be connected to that sermon not just those who are present at the moment).

Preaching is reshaped not only by globalization but also by localization. Local economies and the price of gasoline impacts preaching. The higher the price of gas the more likely people will attend a closer church instead of a regional church. If gas prices reach $20 per gallon our local audience may be more on line than on chairs at church. Recent years of high employment and increased affluence have significantly altered church attendance patterns. Twenty years ago the rule of thumb was that in conservative churches the average worshipper attended one out of two weekends and in liberal churches the average worshipper attended one out of three weekends (so a conservative church averaging 300 had a constituency of 600 and a liberal church averaging 300 had a constituency of 900). Those numbers shifted in the new century to

one out of three weeks in conservative churches and one out of four weeks in liberal churches. This alters overall church attendance and giving but also effects preaching in series. In conservative churches about one third of this weekend's worshippers heard last weekend's sermon. We cannot assume much continuity and all sermons must connect to prior content without becoming boring and redundant and communicate as free-standing sermons.

With all this for context let's focus on some specifics for promoting community through preaching.

Promoting Community

Connect the church community to the preaching plan

As churches grow beyond single cell social structures they often "silo-ize" into their own worlds with increasing isolation from the broader church. Broader community and interconnectedness comes from common ground and the shared weekend sermons are at or near the top of the list.

When everyone in the congregation shares the same biblical text, theme and sermon they have increased solidarity. Sermon series add to this strengthening, especially since so many are present less than every weekend. And, the more the sermon is connected to other aspects of the worship service and other parts of church life the more community is strengthened.

At Wooddale Church the annual preaching schedule is the hub for overall community life. I receive ideas and requests for sermons and sermon series from the congregation but especially from elders and pastors. During July I produce an extensive schedule for the coming year with sermon series, text, title and summary for every weekend. In addition this includes a theme for each service, the words of the benediction for each service and coordinated service elements like video, dramas, giveaways and art. For example, when

planning to preach on Acts 2:45 ("Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.") the service schedule included an opportunity for congregants to place money for people's needs on the platform or for those with needs to pick up money from the platform.

Since I preach 40-42 weekends of the year there is also a draft plan of other preachers: a mix of preaching pastors from the Wooddale Church, senior pastors from our daughter churches and prominent outside guest speakers.

At the end of July an electronic draft is vetted by pastors, elders and others who make suggestions, corrections and enhancements.

In the months prior to each service many in the church plan and work together to engage and express the service theme in music, drama, publications, art, small groups, Sunday School classes, posters, websites and more. An example of independent community engagement is the production of special sermon note sheets for grade school children.

Feedback mechanisms include information cards completed by congregants at each service when we receive hundreds of responses, phone calls to newcomers with opportunity for evaluation and a Monday morning critique by pastors.

One of the most effective ministries for connecting the sermon and the community is the weekly FaithStory in all services. These are 5-6 minute oral testimonies by Wooddalers telling their spiritual autobiography as related to the theme of the service and sermon. FaithStory presenters are carefully recruited weeks in advance. They write out their presentation and read it in the service. Almost all are excellent presentations although clearly from non-professional communicators. They can be stunningly candid and transparent telling about abortions, affairs, crimes, addictions and other life issues and how they have dealt with them in the context

of faith and community.

These FaithStories illustrate the text and teaching, add real-life credibility, model how the church deals with difficulty or opportunity and frequently communicate how Christian community actually works. This not only attracts those on the fringes into community relationships but teaches the norms for healthy community life.

FaithStory presenters frequently invite their social networks to help them prepare and to come to the services when they speak. One presenter brought 52 co-workers to church. Another printed formal invitations that were sent to their neighbors. Many have their small group members sit around them. Others print their FaithStory to share with family and friends.

Connection in the process is good but connection of the community to the actual preaching is also possible. At Wooddale Church we have often announced about cell phones: "If you have a cell phone with you today please be sure to turn it on. We especially want all cell phones on during our teaching time. You are invited to text to one another about the sermon and you are also invited to text questions to the number on the screen. Leith will answer as many questions as possible in a Q&A after the sermon and the rest will be answered on the website this week."

The point here is that community is promoted when the community is engaged in the sermon at a level beyond just listening.

Welcome outsiders to the church community and sermon

Within church life we sometimes refer to "preaching to the choir" which assumes that there is a choir and that choir members are all in agreement before a word is spoken. At Wooddale Church we have welcomed unbelievers to sing in the choir. At another Minnesota church unbelieving gay musicians have been welcomed to play in the band. This not only exposes outsiders to biblical

teaching but to the church community. I recently read an email from a musician who was an unbeliever but was drawn into the church community where he played his strings and slowly moved toward Christian faith.

Welcoming outsiders into the community also changes the preaching. When the preacher gets to know outside unbelievers who are among the listeners then the preacher will use different vocabulary, metaphors and illustrations that will further advance connection to the unchurched community.

When a large evangelical seminary received a significant bequest I was engaged as a consultant on how to spend the money. One of my recommendations was that all homiletics classes where students preach include hired unbelievers from the nearby city. My thesis was that this would forever change the way future pastors preached if they were critiqued by untrained, unchurched unbelievers. My recommendation was not adopted; they stuck with audiences and critiques by fellow students and homiletics professors.

Engaging outsiders includes the response and application of sermons. At Wooddale Church we are increasingly emphasizing the call for Christians to be agents of God's kingdom here and now, that God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. This has led to greater emphasis on community-to-community ministry in preaching and programming. Wooddalers have built and rebuilt homes, moved into the city from the suburbs and participate in feeding the homeless, befriending international students, tutoring immigrants and helping the poor.

We would not invite unbelievers and outsiders to teach a Sunday School class but we welcome unbelievers to help with a Habitat house, volunteer in a thrift store or play a part in a dinner theater. While I would like to believe that this is a change that comes from listening to my sermons I know that these community behaviors are changing my sermons.

The point here is reciprocity. Sermons change communities but communities also change sermons. We're not talking about changing revelation but updating relevance so that preaching promotes community.

Incorporate a sociological perspective into hermeneutic

An obvious tactic to promote community through preaching is to preach sermons on community. I have done so and will do so in the future. In a special series for our Sunday night alternative worship services called *The Gathering* I have scheduled a sermon to be preached in dialogue between two of our staff pastors on why community is important to Christians.

As good as sermons on community are I suggest that we systemically incorporate a sociological perspective into our preaching hermeneutic. That is, that we view preaching texts not only in terms of individuals but also in terms of communities and how individuals relate to community.

Consider a somewhat random list of examples:

• When preaching about the disciples of Jesus recognize the importance and influence of their communities of origin in the story of their destinies. Eleven of the twelve disciples were from Galilee. The one who wasn't was Judas.

• The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 was not given to each of us as individual Christians but to all of us as a community of Christians. The fulfillment of the Great Commission is corporate not personal.

• Both the Old and New Covenants were between God and communities. Communion in 1 Corinthians 11 is not just about my covenant relationship with Jesus Christ but about our covenant relationship with Jesus Christ.

• Salvation in Acts 16:31 includes the household (*oikos*) and not just the individual Philippian jailer. God saves communities not just individuals.

• Apollos was a brilliant man, an articulate teacher and possibly (if Luther is correct) the author of the New Testament book of Hebrews. When he was ignorant about Christian baptism he was instructed by Aquila and Priscilla in the contest of the Corinthian Christian community and when he was making a decision about the future he was advised by the brothers of the community (Acts 18:24-28).

• Community is central to most of the Bible's stories and teaching. Jesus was raised in community. Jesus taught in community. Jesus performed miracles in community. The church was established in community. Paul gathered believers into communities of faith wherever he went. Most of the New Testament books were written to and named after communities.

In our highly individualistic American culture we have tended to dismiss the biblical narrative of community in favor of a narrative of individuals. When we alter our hermeneutic and our narrative to emphasize community that clearly promotes community through preaching.

Elevate church community goals

As we increase this sociological hermeneutic we may elevate church community goals. This is different from our typical tactic of challenging individuals to make decisions, grow spiritually or choose New Years Resolutions.
Examples of community goals include Body Evangelism over personal evangelism, multiple mentors and community mentoring over one-to-one discipleship and understanding and exercising spiritual gifts as given by the Holy Spirit primarily to the community and not primarily to the individual.

We are promoting community when we repeatedly call Christians to "we" rather than to "I." This is easily measurable in the simple exercise of counting the sermon's pronouns. Does the preacher mostly say "I," "you" or "we." It was a memorable landmark day when Hawaii's famous priest on Molokai stood at the pulpit of the Leper's Chapel and said for the first time, "We lepers…."

Conclusion

Perhaps you saw the *Time* article "Twittering in Church, with the Pastor's O.K."[3] Examples are given from a handful of churches across America where twittering is promoted as part of the sermon. Tweets are posted on screens. Questions are asked and later answered. Whole social networks inside the room and from school, work and neighborhood are engaged in the sermon topic, in God-talk and resurrection theology.

One of the most interesting lines in the news story said, "If worship is about creating community, Twitter is an undeniably useful tool." Personally, I say worship is about God but I also know that the sermon is a God-given tool for creating community and that community is about social networking and our sermons are working when our people are all a twitter about the Bible we are teaching.

Notes

1. 67th largest pipe organ in the world based on number of ranks (http://www.theatreorgans.com/laird/top.pipe.organs.html)
2. *Leadership Journal*, Summer 2009, Volume 30, Number 3.
3. Bonnie Rochman, "Twittering in Church, with the Pastor's O.K." *Time*, May 3, 2009, http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1895463,00.html

Community Oracles: A Model for Applying and Preaching the Prophets

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By Andrew Thompson

(editor's note: the article by Andrew Thompson was recognized by the Society with the Keith Willhite Award at the October 2009 Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting held at Southwestern Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. The Willhite Award is given to the outstanding paper presented at each year's meeting. The Award is in memory of co-founder, Keith Willhite. Drew Thompson is Teaching Pastor at The Chapel in Brunswick, Georgia. Pastor Thompson is a Th.M. candidate in Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, Massachusetts, graduating in May 2010.)

Abstract

The prophets preached for community, but we rarely use their works that way. The common approach to preaching the prophets focuses on narrative biography (like Jonah or Hosea) or prayer (like Habakkuk). The usual application is individualistic ("Jeremiah prayed and so should you"). This paper will present a "covenant context" model for applying and preaching the prophetic oracles that is communal in approach. Prophets drew on a common past (the Mosaic tradition), preached from a shared identity (the people of God), and envisioned a corresponding future (judgment and salvation). By helping people to draw these same connections to their own place in redemptive history, preachers can follow the prophets' example in order to forge a community through preaching.

Introduction

For many preachers, though the rest of their Bibles may be well-worn, dog-eared, and underlined, the section after the Song of Solomon and prior to Matthew remains in mint condition, gilded

edges still shining. How can we bring this section—the Old Testament prophets—into the pulpit? How can we help our people become familiar with those strange men of Israel and Judah, whose words were like a fire shut in up their bones? What do they have to do with us?

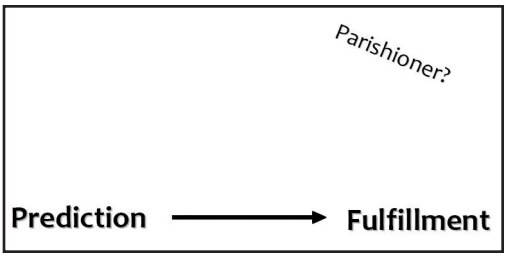

Figure 1

Of course, there are two familiar paths available to anyone who wants to preach from the Old Testament prophets: First, the preacher can trace a prophecy of Scripture and its eventual fulfillment in history (Figure 1). The lesson is usually that the Bible is true, or that God keeps his word, or that he knows all things. But fanciful guesses and speculative end-times scenarios haunt this road. Besides, one often wonders in these types of sermons—where is my audience in this text?

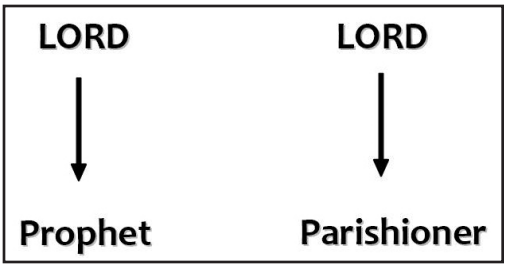

Figure 2

Alternatively (and more commonly), one can focus on the elements in the prophetic corpus that tell a story about the prophet's life. Here the preacher is back on solid ground, in the world of narrative, and all that remains is to draw parallels between the life of the prophet and the life of the parishioner (Figure 2).[1]

Although often utilized, this approach suffers from several disadvantages. In the first place, it is highly individualistic. The Holy Spirit inspired Isaiah to create a masterful account of his calling and God's glory in the temple (Isa 6). Did God do this just to provide a blueprint for how he might call Joe Smith to a

pastorate in Cincinnati? Of course, Isaiah can serve as an example for our lives; but this passage probably has a grander purpose. (Such a misplaced focus also has a corporate version, where sermons draw lessons for a modern nation from ancient Israel.[2]) Secondly, the individual approach can be wildly inconsistent: one applies some details of the narrative (like Jonah's running from God) to modern lives, and omits others (huge storms, giant fish, Assyrian hostility, God's care for livestock, predicted disaster, and miraculous vines and worms) in a manner that seems suspect. Why would some aspects be meaningful today and not others? Finally, this approach drastically limits preaching selection, since most of the prophets' writing is *not* narrative in form. Most sections are what Westermann called "prophetic speech"—oracles from Yahweh to his people Israel, through the mouth of an inspired prophet.[3] In view of these disadvantages, the modern preacher should look for an alternative approach.

This paper will outline another way forward for applying and preaching the prophetic oracles of the Old Testament[4]—a method that draws heavily from the biblical and historical context of the passage in question, but also takes seriously our own place in redemptive history. This route from the prophet to the parishioner is less direct but more secure, and eventually can be more edifying to a modern congregation. By focusing on the *covenant context* of a prophetic speech, preachers can apply such a passage to their own New Covenant community in richly textured ways that are both faithful to the biblical author's intent and helpful in building Christian community. The approach itself will first be described, and then examples will be provided.

Prophetic Oracles

According to Heschel, prophecy is "exegesis of existence from a divine perspective."[5] God's word to a prophet is a commentary from a heavenly point of view on Israel's situation. The prophet can see his nation and his countrymen through God's eyes, and this

radical vision moves him to action. He speaks Yahweh's word to his audience, setting before them God's view of their situation, which is usually radically different from their own. Israel may feel secure, but Yahweh warns of destruction. Or they may be hopeless, and hear his word of comfort and restoration. Brueggemann puts this well in his insightful work: "The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us."[6]

But this revelation from God does not take place in a vacuum! These are not just any people to whom the prophet speaks. They are Israel—Yahweh's own nation by covenant. They are bound to him and to one another in an intricate web of relationships, to which the prophets refer again and again (see Figure 3).[7] To God's people, a prophet offered "a word that connected them to their covenant roots and their future hope."

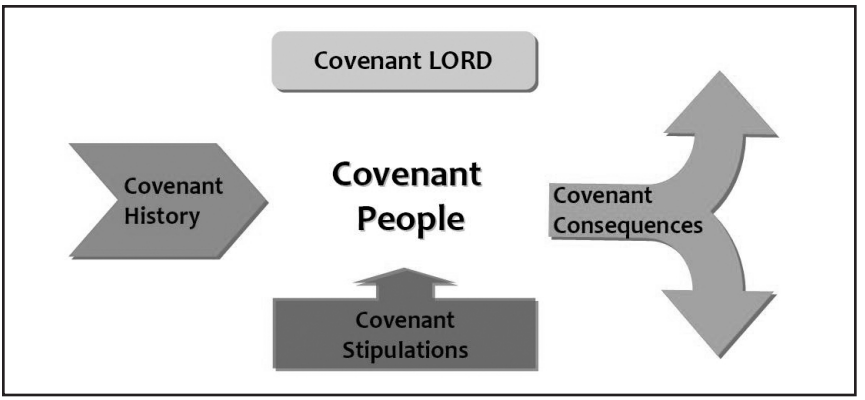

Figure 3

Prophets spoke about Israel's covenant LORD, whose character forms a basis for their relationship (Isa 44:6-8). They talked about their history with him and his faithfulness in the past (Ezek 16:1-14). They reminded Israel of the stipulations of their covenant with God (Hos 10:12), and how they have or have not kept them. And they repeated the dual covenant consequences of blessings for obedience and curses for rebellion (Isa 1:18-20). Often a single

passage will run through several of these phases in turn. In Micah 6, for example, under the guise of a lawsuit against his people, God reminded Judah of how he brought them into the Promised Land (vv. 3-5), discussed the type of response he required (vv. 6-8), observed their faithlessness (vv. 9-12), and warned of curses to come (vv. 13-16).

Figure 3 can apply to any of the several covenant arrangements that were in effect during Israel's history. The Abrahamic, the Mosaic, and the Davidic covenants were the primary arrangements depicted in the Old Testament. Prophets drew on these as appropriate to each situation they faced, since each covenant carried its own stipulations and consequences. Most commonly, a prophet would refer to the shared heritage of the Mosaic Covenant with Israel. He would remind them of God's mighty acts of deliverance in Egypt and at the Red Sea, or of his faithfulness in the conquest of the Promised Land (Amos 2:10). Or he could recall for them some of the Ten Commandments that they had broken (Jer 7:9), and warn them of the covenant curses like foreign conquest (Hab 1:5-11, cf. Deut 28:49), or promise some of the covenant blessings like peace and agricultural prosperity (Ezek 34:25-31, cf. Lev 26:3-5).

This mutually understood covenant context provided the major points of contact between the prophets and their audience—it was the chief source from which the prophets drew for credibility in communication. Their only claim to reliability was that Yahweh had sent them, based on his promises to their nation. For instance, when God spoke to Ezekiel (14:12-23) about famine, wild beasts, sword and pestilence that would destroy Jerusalem, he only brought to the surface the age-old warnings from Deut 28. This prophecy was not novel, nor fanciful, nor should it have been a surprise. Ezekiel simply enforced the terms of the covenant already in place.

In fact the vast majority of prophetic oracles follow this pattern, highlighting one or more of these covenant elements. This was their standard model. They constantly relied on this heritage to

make their points and convey their meaning. The covenant context was their normal frame of reference.[9]

Community Oracles

Critical for contemporary application is the fact that the oracle was not about the individual at all, whether the individual Israelite or the individual prophet. Individuals were indeed called to respond in repentance and faith; yet the scope of the warnings and their consequences were national. *These were community oracles*, directed to a nation, and based on a specific religious heritage.

Two lines of thought support this assertion. First, unlike most other parts of Scripture, prophetic oracles came in the form of a *direct corporate address*. They are not narratives or individual prayers or wise aphorisms, any of which can easily be read individually. The prophets (like most of the NT epistles) spoke directly to a group of people. Therefore interpreting them rightly requires a corporate mindset.

In addition, note that each aspect of Figure 3 relates not to individuals but to Israel as a community. *The covenant LORD is a communal LORD.* God did not make a direct covenant with each Israelite; he instead made it with Abraham, Moses, and David. Individual Israelites at the time of the prophets only participated in these realities as part of the community of descendants of these men. God addressed them as "Israel, my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the offspring of Abraham, my friend" (Isa 41:8); he called himself not "the God of each one of you" but (49 times in Jeremiah alone) "the God of Israel."

The covenant history was a communal history. In the prophets, God did not so much talk of his faithfulness to each Israelite in his individual life as he did of his faithfulness to Moses, to the wilderness wanderers, to the conquering armies, and to King David. It was national and not personal history that mattered. He expected, for

example, priests living in the 5th century B.C. to remember and value his covenant with Levi a millennium earlier (Mal 2:4-9). God's gracious deeds were not so much about individual lives as about the community of faith, of which individuals were members.

The covenant demands were communal demands. As Old Testament scholars have noted,[10] God's requirements in the prophetic texts focused on communal relationships. Yes, God denounced idolatry (Mic 1:7). But he also spoke a great deal about oppression, injustice, unrighteous wealth, deceit, selfish leadership, murder, and adultery—and said that these violations even negated an individual's worship (Isa 1:12-17). A communal focus was built into the content of these oracles. Obedience to God was bound up with love for neighbor.

The covenant consequences were communal consequences. God through his prophets promised good if his people repented and judgment if they rebelled (see, e.g., Isa 1:19-20). As it turned out, they did not repent, and were judged at the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.) and Jerusalem (586 B.C.). But surely not *all* of them were wicked? Or are we to suppose that every wicked person died a violent death during the Assyrian or Babylonian conquests, while every obedient man or woman was spared and sent into exile? No, but God views his people as a body, and their (corporate) sins come home to roost in their (corporate) lives. As unfair as this may sound to our ears, it should highlight for us just how foundational this corporate identity was in their relationship with God. In a passage almost beyond belief (Ezek 18) that reveals just how communal was their mindset, God told Israel that he would ultimately give to each individual what he deserved, and each would die for his own sin. Israel's incredulous response was that "the way of the LORD is not just" (Ezek 18:25). They thought it only right for sons to suffer for the father's sins! These are the same people who loved to say that "the fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (18:2).

So every aspect of Figure 3 was corporate; *the prophetic oracles were community oracles*. They were addressed to a nation, and impacted individuals only as they were members of that larger group.

When one sees the prophets from this perspective, the bridge between then and now becomes clearer.

Beginning to Apply the Prophets

How can preachers, then, bridge the gap between the ancient nation and the modern church? Two critical insights lead the way. The first is from Sidney Greidanus, who notes that in applying biblical passages to our audience, we should ordinarily resist the comparison between the biblical *character* and the modern *audience*, drawing life lessons from the experiences of biblical characters as the main interpretive thrust of a passage.[11] Of course, sometimes this may be what the biblical author intended—to give us a model for moral or immoral behavior and its consequences. The New Testament itself makes such comparisons using Elijah (Jas 5:16-18), Cain (1 John 3:12), and a string of OT heroes of faith (Heb 11).

However, "moral example" stories usually have indicators in the narrative to that effect: commendations of someone's character, rewards or punishments from God, or direct statements about the "point" of the story.[12] In the prophets (aside from Jonah, whose account does teach a lesson about compassion) we do not usually find such indicators. On the contrary: narrative sections are rare, and even when they appear biographical details are limited or absent. Using such passages as templates for individual lives does not normally have sufficient justification in the passage. Take Jeremiah, for example. We have more detail about him as a person than most other prophets. We are also allowed to see his sufferings and his emotional turmoil in the midst of an unsuccessful ministry. But two factors warn us against making his life a pattern for ours: first, his laments and complaints do *not* form the majority of the book! They are at best a minor part, with prayers and stories

scattered throughout, indicating that the lesson of the book lies elsewhere. Also, Jeremiah's life ends in tragedy and failure, with no vindication by God, no fruit from his preaching, and no earthly reward for service. The point of the whole work (including the oracles as well as the biography) seems to be about the tragedy of the fall of Israel because of their hard hearts—that they "did not know how to blush" (6:15), they had forgotten God "days without number" (2:32), and their leaders spoke "peace, peace, when there [was] no peace" (6:15). The tragedy is about Israel, and Jeremiah is one man caught up in the great fall of God's people. He is not, therefore, a model for individuals, but a life that testifies to the magnitude of Israel's demise.

In the prophetic corpus individual detail often serves such a larger purpose. Therefore using those details as a template for our lives may not be justified. A far more fruitful comparison can be made between the biblical *audience* and the contemporary *audience*. In other words, the wise interpreter will not ask, "How are my people like Hosea", but will instead ask, "How are my people like the people to whom Hosea preached?"

The fact of the matter is that Hosea, as a prophet of God, was unique. The preacher may find confusing the separation between what was true *only* about Hosea (e.g., his calling, his character, his ministry, and his marriage) from what can carry over to the modern hearers. Often these choices tend to be arbitrary, based on what *we as preachers* want to say. So we might use Hosea to encourage marital fidelity, but not to justify marriage to prostitutes.

On the other hand, Hosea wrote to people who were, for lack of a more flattering term, common. More to the point, our audience and Hosea's are alike in that *they are audiences* who both hear the word of the LORD and are called to respond. Neither group is necessarily gifted, prophetic, bold, winsome, or persecuted. To completely butcher Paul's original meaning: "Not all are prophets, are they?" (1 Cor 12:29). Comparisons between two audiences will

proceed on much safer grounds than comparisons between prophets and audiences simply because the two groups have so much more in common as God's (generic) people. As we saw above and will see again below, what makes these two groups similar is their covenant relationship with God. *Usually (and especially in the prophets), preachers should compare audience to audience in application.*

The second insight also has to do with the biblical audience. Scholars are discovering that the process of applying the prophets to a different audience has already been started for us. Recent "canonical" approaches pay serious attention to the way in which the Scriptures were arranged for the benefit of later readers.[13]

Amos, for example, did not give all of his recorded prophecies at one moment in time, nor did he necessarily give them in that order. Either Amos himself or a group of his disciples most likely wrote down many of his oracles, and arranged them in the form in which they appear in Scripture. This later form was probably intended for a later audience. This is why, for example, many prophetic books (like Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Micah, Zephaniah, Zechariah, and Malachi) end on a note of redemption and promise. Those endings are not coincidental, but are part of a contextualization process meant to encourage later readers who had perhaps seen some of Yahweh's judgment, and were awaiting his favor and forgiveness. An audience in the Babylonian exile or among the weak remnant in Jerusalem would read these books, gain an understanding of why judgment came upon Israel, and harbor a future hope in God's promises.

The very arrangement of these books (internally as well as in their order in the canon) tells us that though a prophet's message was delivered in one time period to one people, his word *remained relevant for a different audience that lived much later*.

That first move in application should encourage the preacher because it proves that the message of the prophets was relevant

to a broader audience than the original one. In fact, the shared covenant history and covenant relationship with God supply a continuing relevance for later (ancient) readers. Since they are in relationship with the same God on the same terms, God's words to a pre-exilic community remain helpful for those living during or even after the exile. This type of reading starts us on the road to applying the prophets to a contemporary audience.

At the same time, the canonical approach should give a preacher pause, because the message may serve a different purpose for a later audience than for its original hearers. For example, a warning about the destruction of Jerusalem will be heard differently by someone living before 586 B.C. than by someone living after that critical date. For the former, the oracle is an ominous threat. But for the latter it may serve as a reminder of God's longsuffering, his justice, and his mercy in sustaining a remnant of survivors. *This means that the relevance of the prophet's words must be determined by the historical situation of the current audience*. This will be critical as one applies their words to the present day church.

Applying the Prophets to the Church

How do the ancient prophecies apply to the modern Christian? There is no similarity of individual language, culture, or life situation. The similarity, in fact, is hardly *individual* at all. It is corporate: the nation of Israel and the church of Christ share similarities in their covenant relationship with God (see below). *As such, the prophets' words readily apply to the church at large, and to the individual Christian as a member of the church*.

Our New Covenant Context

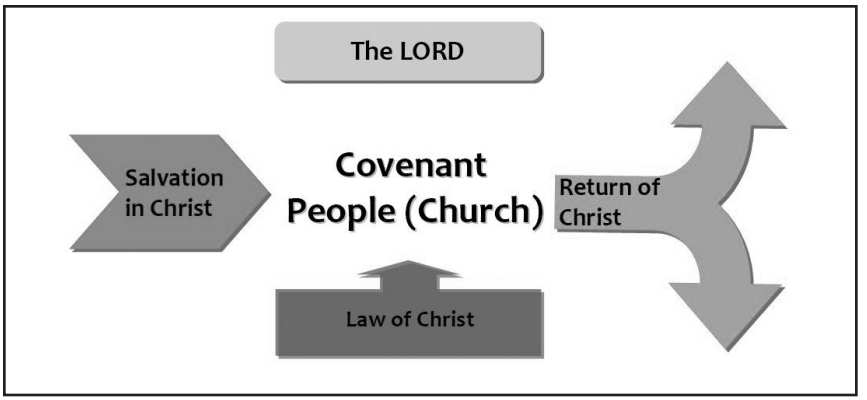

Figure 4

As Figure 4 indicates, New Testament believers also live in covenant with God—what Jeremiah (31:31) called a "new covenant" and Isaiah (54:10) and Ezekiel (37:26) a "covenant of peace". This similarity of situation—living in covenant with the same Lord as Israel did —provides the surest bridge for applying the prophets today. They both (Israel and the church) live under the same covenant LORD, who does not change in his character or affections. They both live in the light of his past deeds for their good (whether the promises to Abraham, the Exodus, the Davidic kings, or the climactic salvation found in the death and resurrection of Christ). They both live under his demands for love and obedience as his people. And they both live in hope that God's promises of ultimate salvation and judgment will be fulfilled. Our hope is the return of Christ, the Second Advent, when he will defeat his enemies and pour out his grace on his church. The church's covenant situation is remarkably similar to Israel's.

And just like Israel, this covenant situation is a *community arrangement*. God loves us as individuals, and we are saved by (individual) faith through grace. But we are Christians because we are all *in Christ*—members of his one body, and members of one another. Just as each element in Figure 3 was corporate, so in Figure 4. God is our Father because we are members of the family

of faith. The salvation he accomplished happened long before we were born, yet applies to the whole church and therefore to us as members. The Law of Christ is for all of us, as are his promises for eternal life. The blood of Christ, the words of Christ, the presence of Christ, applies to each of us only as we are in Christ, and part of this community. This means that the words of the prophets to the OT *community* can best be applied to the NT *community*.

Of course, appropriate application will also take into account the situational differences between Israel and the church. For though our God is the same, the Old and New Covenants differ in some respects. Greidanus notes three kinds of "distance" that preachers should consider in applying ancient Scripture to modern people: culture, levels of revelation, and kingdom history.[15] Cultural differences are omnipresent in Scripture, and need not detain us here. As for levels of revelation, the preacher should take into account that prophets did not always see the full picture of God's work. We have the benefit of God's definitive self-revelation in Christ, and as such, that gives us insight into the events to which the prophets were looking forward. This may change how we preach a prophetic text. For example, in Amos 9:11ff the prophet speaks of God restoring David's fallen "tent" (i.e., his dynasty), that foreign nations like Edom would come and be called by God's name. In Acts 15 James cites this prophecy as being fulfilled by the exaltation of Christ, the Davidic King, and by the church's mission to the Gentiles.

Most important for us are the kingdom history differences. The church is in a different place in the history of redemption, and wise preachers will think hard on the distance between the OT audience and their own. Their Exodus was physical while ours was spiritual. Their Law was of Moses, and ours is of Christ. Their promises of judgment and restoration may have already come to pass, while ours are still future.

Much of what the preacher makes of these differences will depend

upon the theological system to which he or she subscribes. Some will posit far more discontinuity between the covenants, either by drawing a sharp distinction between Israel and the church, or by labeling the old covenant "conditional" (a ministry that produced death) and the new "unconditional" (producing life by the Spirit). Gowan, for example, argues that the prophets were not even demanding repentance, but were only announcing judgment.

From the beginning of their ministry, repentance was no longer an option. If true, this would obviously constitute a major discontinuity with the church's situation. Others may see far more continuity between the two eras in redemptive history. As the examples below will demonstrate, how one understands the redemptive situation in Israel and in the Church will guide the application and preaching from a prophetic oracle.

Relating Their Context to Ours

The prophets present a word from Yahweh to his covenant people, which a preacher hopes to re-contextualize to God's covenant people today. Applying the prophets to the church requires having an eye for the similarities in situation, but also taking into account the redemptive "distance" between their situation and ours (see Figure 5). The Scriptures record a string of covenant arrangements between God and his people, with the parallels discussed above. But each covenant has its own place in redemptive history; ours comes between the cross of Christ and the return of Christ, and as such has unique features that must be reckoned with when seeking

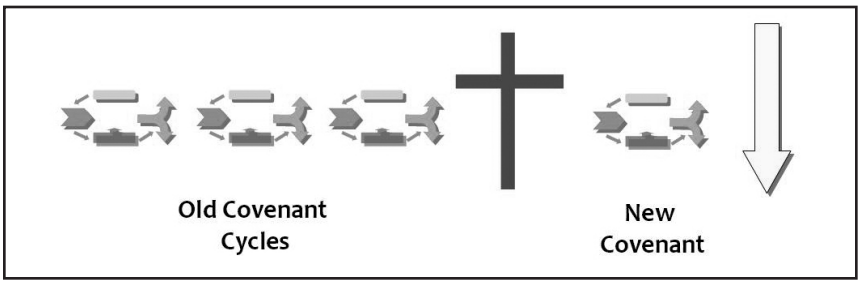

Figure 5

to apply Old Covenant principles in a New Covenant situation.

Several examples follow in which these factors have been taken into account in applying the word of the Israelite prophet to the corporate church. Instead of focusing on a few well-known prophetic texts, a wide range of examples has been selected. This model for application takes each part of the covenant arrangement (God, history, demands and promises) and asks how it relates to the respective aspects of the New Covenant. The application is geared toward the corporate church rather than individuals.

Their LORD is our Lord. The easiest connections to make are when dealing with the oracles that discuss the character of God (which never changes). Here is a case of strict continuity between Israel and the church. For example, Isa 40:12-31 speaks of God's tremendous wisdom and power, displayed in creation and in his sovereign rule over the nations. He is not to be compared with idols or with any power of men. That idea will preach in any church today! However, a sermon will stay true to the purpose of the passage as well as the central idea. Isaiah was addressing weary believers who were looking forward to restoration after judgment. The thrust of the passage is that since God knows all and can do all, he is not ignorant of their situation (v. 27) and can be trusted to deliver them (v. 29). Believers now serve the same God, and also long for a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28), a new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). Since they are God's people, they too can trust in God's knowledge and power to ultimately deliver them.

Their history may be our history. Sometimes the prophets recall God's promises and salvific acts on behalf of his people, and these directly apply to the church. In Jer 33:20ff, God recalls his covenant with Noah and the whole earth (Gen 8:22), establishing a firm pattern of day and night, and reasons from that faithfulness to his faithfulness to have a king and a priest stand before him. That history is our history, since the world also dwells under the same covenant order

of day and night. That means that Christians today can also take comfort in God's faithful ordering of nature, seeing it as a proof of his constancy. They can trust his promise to provide for us a great King and High Priest in Jesus Christ. God in Christ keeps his promises!

Or consider Mic 7:18-20, where the prophet recalls God's promises to show steadfast love to Abraham and Jacob. These promises provide the basis of assurance that their sins will be forgiven. The New Testament is clear that the promises to Abraham are given to those who are in Christ (Gal 3:29). Communally, we are part of the same olive tree (Rom 11:17ff). Their history (that of the patriarchs) is therefore our history and we can (along with Micah) count firmly on God's forgiveness and love, even when confronted by the enormity of our sins.

On the other hand, sometimes the redemptive "distance" between the prophet and the church calls for a more indirect approach. Often, for example, the prophets remember God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt, and through the Red Sea, and to Sinai and the Promised Land. In Hosea 11:1-4, for example, God recalls his deeds of kindness to Israel, and their response of unfaithfulness. Many preachers and theologians would not see the Exodus as "our" history, since that event occurred in the Mosaic period and under the Sinai covenant. However, even in the case of discontinuity, the prophets' words remain relevant. For the New Testament repeatedly applies Exodus imagery and themes to Christ's life and to our own redemption in Christ from sin and death (see, e.g., Matt 2:15, Mark 1:2-3, Rev 15:2-4). Since Christ has indeed redeemed us with mighty acts of judgment and salvation, we have an Exodus of our own to recall and for which we give thanks.

This example from Hosea continues with an announcement of judgment on Israel for her thankless idolatry. Depending on their theological orientation, some preachers would choose to highlight the *discontinuity* between Israel and the Church. We too have been

unfaithful to Christ, but where sin increased, grace increased all the more (Rom 5:20). So the OT judgment has been transformed into NT forgiveness, and the sermon would be a comfort to all of us who fall short of God's standards. Others would find *continuity* more appropriate, and see here a caution for any covenant people of God who take lightly his grace and mercy, especially those who have the most complete revelation in Christ (Heb 10:26-31). This type of sermon would carry over Hosea's harsh tones from Israel to the church, and the sermon would be one of ominous warning.[17]

Their demands may be our demands. Like oracles about God's character, some covenant demands for righteous behavior translate easily. Micah's call (6:8) to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God ring true in any age. Hosea (4:1-14) rails against those guilty of murder, lying, stealing, cursing, and adultery. Jeremiah (22:13-30) condemns King Jehoiachin for injustice and hoarding wealth. Zephaniah (2:1-3) encourages people to seek the LORD, seek righteousness, and seek humility—"perhaps you may be hidden on the day of the anger of the LORD." Any and all of these passages find clear parallels in the lives of our parishioners who are still under the injunction to "be holy, for I am holy" (Lev 11:44, 1 Pet 1:14-16).

On the other hand, Malachi demands tithing, Haggai exhorts his people to build a temple, and Hosea rebukes people for their political alliances with foreign nations. Again, depending on theological perspective, the distance may be too great for a straightforward application. As Haddon Robinson advises,[18] one should move up the ladder of abstraction, deriving increasingly general principles from specific demands, guided by Scriptural principles. So Malachi's tithing may translate to sacrificial and joyful giving (2 Cor 8). Haggai may encourage us to build up the temple of the church (which becomes people and not a building, 1 Pet 2:4-5) or to put God's priorities ahead of our personal comfort (Luke 9:23-24). And Hosea may challenge us to trust in God's power as opposed to man's, and to be careful with whom we associate in that respect

(2 Cor 6:14-18). So the prophetic demands on people may be directly applicable to our situation, or a more general principle can supply the parallel.

Their promises may be our history. At times, what was future for the original audience is now past for us. The promises and warnings that God gave have already come to pass. So when modern readers see God threatening to destroy Jerusalem in Amos 3:11-15, that word is not directly a threat for us, since ancient Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 B.C. Instead, we can think of the oracle as it must have been preserved for the exiles that lived through the destruction of Jerusalem. Amos 3 explains why God's people have suffered so, highlights the seriousness of God's wrath and guarantees the coming of the judgment that he still has in store at the return of Christ.

When Isaiah spoke of a future restoration from exile (43:1-7), which is past from our perspective, we can thank God for keeping his word and caring for the faithful remnant, and we can reflect on how God continues to protect his people in the midst of suffering and trials.

Messianic oracles also fall in this category, since the prophets predicted a Christ who has already come. Yet to be true to the original intent, the focus of the prophecy was not *just* accurate prediction, but the person and work of the coming deliverer. So yes, we should marvel that Jesus was born in Bethlehem, as Micah 5 foretold. But more important than accurate forecasting is that the one in that passage will stand as a Shepherd over God's people, and they will dwell securely under his care. That has meaning for the New Covenant people as well—we dwell under the security of the rod and staff of our Shepherd Jesus Christ.

One should also be aware that some oracles seem to be partially fulfilled, as today we live in the "already but not yet" tension of the new age. We are therefore be able to rejoice in the fulfilled promise of the mountain of the LORD (Isa 2), to which all nations

now stream for knowledge of God—even though the exaltation of God's people is not yet realized physically. Or one can preach from Joel 2:28-32, where God says he will pour out his Spirit freely on his people. This happened at Pentecost, and we can be grateful for God's past action and presence by his Spirit. However, the latter part of this prophecy, that "the sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and awesome day of the LORD comes," has not yet come to pass—we still await the final judgment.

Their promises may be our promises. Finally, what was future to them may still be future to us. Again, our understanding of what these prophecies indicate will depend on our theological leanings. But we can preach from Zechariah 14 about the coming time when God will visit his people, splitting the Mount of Olives in two, saving them from their enemies, and making the entire land "holy to the LORD." Or we can talk about the coming of the Son of Man on the clouds in Daniel 7, when he receives the kingdom from the Ancient of Days. Or we can hope for the day when God's glory and presence return to his people in the rebuilt temple in Ezek 40-48.

It is important to note that one oracle may contain several of these phases, such as Zephaniah 3:1-13. Preaching this passage will require not only a historical awareness of the prophet's life and times, but also a skillful application of the various themes, like God's unchanging character (v. 5), his past acts of judging other nations (v. 6), his demand for obedience (v. 7a), the people's rebellion (vv. 1-4, 7b), God's threatened judgment (v. 8), and his future restoration of all nations, so that they all call upon his name (vv. 9-13). As Zephaniah walks through these several parts of God's covenant relationship, so should the sermon. The preacher can highlight God's righteousness, his power, his expectations, the people's response to those demands, and the consequences for sin. He can also assure his people that God's final plan—to have a humble, obedient people from all nations—is happening and will surely come to pass.

In addition, some passages will have a multifaceted application, where different parts require different treatment. Consider, for example, the book of Joel. The prophet depicts a locust invasion (past for both Israel and us), an actual invasion of an army (future for Israel and past for us), the pouring out of his Spirit after those days (future for Israel and past for us), and the valley of judgment on the day of the LORD (future for Israel and for us). Some of these words point backwards, some to their present, some to their near future, some to the New Covenant mission, and some to the final rule of God on earth (see Figure 6). We should be aware of how each of these elements applies to our own situation. Perhaps a series might be appropriate here, focusing on each element in turn and applying as appropriate.

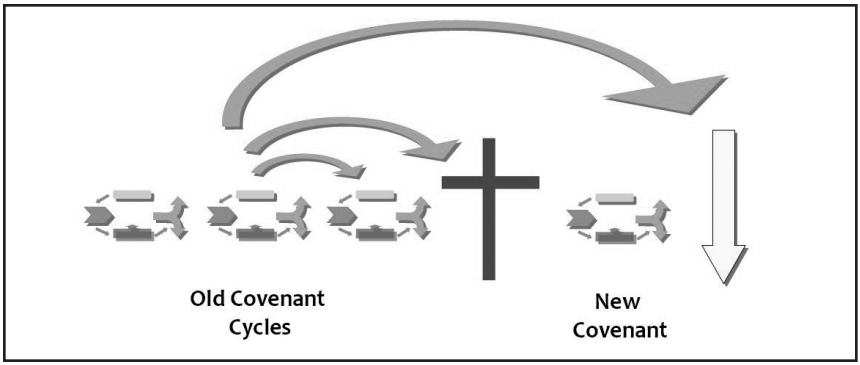

Figure 6

Once again, the basic approach is to rely on the similarities between Israel's relationship to God and our own as a bridge between the ancient and the modern. Transferring from one to the other will then be a matter of reckoning the "distance" between their covenant and ours, and making distinctions as appropriate.

The point of all of these examples is to show how the oracles of the prophets remain relevant for our day. Just like ancient Israel, the church of Christ lives in a covenant relationship with a glorious God, who requires loving obedience and gives sure promises. Instead of drawing tenuous parallels between prophets and individuals in our

church, or between Israel and our nation, this approach relies on the much broader base of a shared communal identity as the people of God.

Three Benefits of this Approach

The first benefit is more *material* to preach from. The vast majority of the OT prophetic passages are oracles, and the vast majority of those oracles fit within this covenant framework. The prophets are constantly reminding God's people of his nature, his deeds, their obligations in light of those deeds, and God's imminent response to their obedience or lack thereof. Bringing the vivid, fiery, emotive words of the prophets into a pulpit can add a depth and texture to a church's faith, and emphasize different aspects of our lives as believers that will enrich the church.

Secondly, this approach brings *consistency* in application. Many of us have preached a sermon about Jeremiah's suffering or Jonah's disobedience or Hosea's failed marriage and afterwards wondered if we got the whole picture. These men may serve as examples to individuals, but is that the totality of what God was saying in that passage? Were we missing something bigger about God, his plans and his purposes in the world? Fitting the prophetic oracles into the broad storyline of the Bible anchors them to this bigger picture. Not that this approach is always easy or transparent, but it reasons from the solid facts of redemption and God's covenant, rather than the sometimes speculative ideas of perceived parallels.

Finally, this model helps to build a community's *identity*. It was argued above that the prophets addressed their people as a community, and that their words apply to the church as a community. Too often our parishioners look into the Bible to find themselves, and to hear God's unique word to them. Of course, God's promises and warnings and declarations do affect our day to day lives, our most minute decisions, and the inner thoughts of our hearts. But (especially in the prophets), they address these realities from the perspective

of being a member of a community that is in relationship with God, and that therefore is bound together inseparably. Sermons from the prophets that emulate their corporate approach will help to counterbalance a hyper-individualism, because they will speak to people through the grid of the Church's covenant relationship with God. As parishioners learn that this wonderful Lord and his gracious promises come to them because they are part of the Church, their membership in it will become more central to their self-understanding.

Additionally, preaching in this way from the prophets sets a person's relationship with God in the context of what God is doing in history. It uses the "prophetic imagination" to let people see their worlds and their lives from God's perspective, under the umbrella of his grand design. This method helps a church to understand where they are in God's larger narrative, what they have in common with Abraham and Moses, and also how they differ. This approach helps them to see themselves not as isolated individuals for whom God has a unique plan, but as members of the body of Christ, called to common purpose and sharing a common identity. God does love me, he does forgive me, he does bless me and guide me—but this happens as a part of his larger plan to reconcile the whole world to himself through his Son (Col 1:20). By drawing parishioners' eyes upward to the bigger realities of God's kingdom, we can help to train their gaze on the *church* (local and global) as the focus of God's work, of which they are but one part.

Three Drawbacks to this Approach

This approach takes seriously the *distance* between a prophet's situation and our own. But precisely because such a sermon addresses those issues of distance, it can degenerate into a boring lecture on redemptive history. Therefore, a preacher will have to work harder to retain listeners' attention while he or she "connects the dots" between then and now; and though it may take longer to arrive at present day concerns, the sermon is not complete

until it addresses contemporary life with a relevant word. Keep in mind that such a sermon may not be appropriate for a less mature audience who has no idea who Moses was in the first place. The prophets assume knowledge of the law and of Israel's history, and if our people do not have it, we may have to educate them before we can preach from the prophets.

Another disadvantage is that most of these oracles are *directed to covenant members*, i.e., believers. Sermons from the prophets are not always designed for the ears of non-Christians. They can sound bizarre, harsh, and even nonsensical to unbelievers. Yet having said that, one would be hard put to find many places in the Bible that *are* explicitly addressed to them. Preachers must constantly find ways to make the content in the Bible, written to Israelites and Christians, applicable to outsiders. This is a challenge for almost any section of Scripture.

Lastly, the major challenge of the prophets is their *monotony*. Even a casual reader will find the same themes over and over again: God's goodness, God's deliverance, God's law, the people's rebellion, God's judgment, God's salvation. Short oracles are stacked together by the dozen, prophecy after prophecy, repeating the same thing, and usually not forming a coherent larger framework. Sometimes the only framework is thematic, placing very similar prophecies side by side resulting in even less variety! This makes for a challenge, for example, to preach through any of the Major Prophets in a series.

In response, the prophets themselves had the same problem. They had only a few things to say, often unpleasant, and a calloused people to whom they must say them. Their solution was not to alter their message but to change their *style*. The prophets are richly varied in rhetorical devices, literary form, tone, and word usage.[21] The preacher who wants to convey the (often unpleasant) message of the prophets will also have to do some hard work to gain and hold people's attention. Greidanus advises:

> Preachers should try to convey to their contemporary audiences the mood and feelings originally evoked by these forms. In the liturgy as well as in the sermon it may be possible to capture the sadness of a funeral dirge or lament or the matter-of-fact atmosphere of a lawsuit or the joy of an oracle of salvation or hymn of joy (eg, Isa 44:23). When the prophecy is in poetry, the sermon can emulate the prophecy's use of concrete imagery. When the prophecy spins out a metaphor, the sermon can follow suit and allow the audience to participate in this new and often surprising vision. Above all, a sermon on prophecy demands a form which, like the prophetic oracle, addresses the audience directly with the word of the Lord, a form which leaves no doubt as to who has broken God's covenant stipulations and what its awful results will be, but also a form which is able to convey the loving-kindness of God and his ultimate redemption.[22]

In addition, remember that these prophetic oracles were not given in one sitting or one setting, but are the accumulated works of a prophet over a lifetime. Most oracles can stand alone, and are suitable for single sermons. While some of the Minor Prophets can be preached straight through, a sermon series composed of passages that demonstrate a variety of themes and tones can be a viable alternative.

Conclusion

The central points advanced above are as follows:

- The usual handling of prophetic texts can be too individually focused, and draws disproportionately from the narrative sections of the prophetic texts.

- The prophets themselves usually preached to groups rather than individuals, and drew on the shared covenantal context of Israel's relationship with God.

- The *covenant context* model advocated centers on the parallels between Israel's covenant relationship with God and the church's, applying the prophets' words to corresponding aspects of the New Covenant relationship.

- Depending on historical context and one's theological understanding, the application may be one of continuity (emulating a prophet's intent) or discontinuity (highlighting the contrast between the OT and NT situations).

- Just as the prophetic oracles addressed to the OT *community* of Israel, they also apply to the NT *community* of the church, and speak to individuals as they are members of that community.

The prophets were not isolated individuals, and neither are we. We are all members of a community that is bound together by thick theological cords. Those cords not only connect us to the present, but by memory they reach back into the past, where God has proven himself in mighty deeds of salvation and judgment. By hope they also stretch into the future, where God will usher in his glorious kingdom in a climactic manner, making all things new. These cords provide the bridge from their time to ours.

The prophets made use of those ties by preaching to a community, for the sake of community. So can we. By paying attention to the redemptive context that surrounded them and also envelopes us, parallels and applications become less fanciful and more grounded in the reality of God's larger redemptive work. As we pay attention to these realities, the word of the prophet addresses not just "me" but "us"—the people of God. Instead of trying to fit God and his work into our own personal story, we find ourselves and those

around us swept up into his grander tale.

Notes

1. For just a few examples of this type of sermon from the prophets, see the following: Walter Brueggemann, "The Secret of Survival: Jeremiah 20:7-13, Matthew 6:1-8", *Journal for Preachers* 26 (2003): 42-47; Beau Hughes, *Into the Storm,* The Village Church [iTunes podcast]: 6/22/08; John Ortberg, *Resisting God*, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church [iTunes podcast]: 11/08/08; Rich Richardson, *Consider God: Habakkuk Part 1*, Sovereign Grace Church [iTunes Podcast]: 6/17/07; V.L. Stanfield, "Preaching Values in Jeremiah", *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 4:1 (1961): 69-80.
2. See Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament* Exegesis, third edition (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 179. For two examples of this type of approach, see Walter Brueggemann, "Bragging About the Right Stuff", *Journal for Preachers* 26 (2003): 27-32; and Donald Ackland, "Preaching from Hosea to a Nation in Crisis", *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 18:1 (1975): 43-55.
3. Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1967), 90ff.
4. We avoid the term "preaching prophetically", both since it can be used to mean anything from rude speech in the pulpit to social action preaching, and also because, depending on the passage, it may not be our duty to emulate the prophet in his speech and form (see below).
5. Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1962), 1:xiv.
6. Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 3.
7. The term "covenant" here acts as a unifying motif for all the aspects of God's relationship with Israel. It does not necessitate a "covenantal" view of theology. See below for a discussion of how theological differences may impact one's use of this model.
8. Timothy R. Sensing, "A Call to Prophetic Preaching", *Restoration Quarterly* 41 no 3 (1999): 139-154.
9. Note that while this holds true for the majority of the prophetic corpus, a different approach is needed for the prophets' oracles against foreign nations, which were not under the same covenant promises. Achtemeier argues that it is these non-covenantal prophecies which most directly apply to modern-day nations like the United States. Elizabeth

Achtemeier, *Preaching From the Old Testament* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 135. Tom Nelson demonstrates this approach from Jeremiah in his sermon *Lord of the Nations*, Denton Bible Church [iTunes podcast]: 12/14/2008.

10. See, e.g., Heschel 1:195-220.
11. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1988), 169-172.
12. See, for example, the "lesson" at the end of Joseph's story (Genesis 50:20), or the moral commentary on the tragedies in Judges (21:25).
13. For two recent treatments of this idea in relation to OT prophets, see John H. Sailhamer, "Preaching from the Prophets", in Scott M. Gibson, ed., *Preaching the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2006), 115-136; and Christopher R. Seitz, *Prophecy and Hermeneutics: Toward a New Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). I rely heavily on their insights in the following discussion.
14. Sailhamer 122ff, is particularly strong on this point.
15. Greidanus 167-8.
16. Donald E. Gowan, *Reclaiming the Old Testament for the Christian Pulpit* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1980), 122-126.
17. I am not minimizing the very significant differences between these perspectives, but am simply saying that this model would work from either perspective. In fact, thinking along the lines of covenant arrangements might be a fruitful avenue for discussion of these important issues.
18. Haddon Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: An Interview with Haddon Robinson", *Leadership* 18 (Fall 1997): 20-27.
19. The following are two additional examples of sermons that follow this basic approach: Al Fasol, "Preaching from Malachi," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 30:1 (1987): 32-34; Timothy M. Pierce, "Micah as a Case Study for Preaching and Teaching the Prophets," *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 46 (2003): 77-94.
20. See Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination.*
21. See, for example, Lessing's insightful article on analyzing and using the rhetorical devices of the prophets. Reed Lessing, "Preaching Like the Prophets: Using Rhetorical Criticism in the Appropriation of Old Testament Prophetic Literature", *Concordia Journal* 28 (2002): 391-408. For two good examples of vivid language that mirrors the prophetic tone of the passage, see Heidi Husted, *Stewards of Just-Us or Justice?* Preaching Today issue 253 [Audio CD]; John Ortberg, *Doing Justice*, Preaching Today issue 253 [Audio CD].
22. Greidanus 260.

Three Significant Challenges for Homiletics Today

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By Kenton C. Anderson

(editor's note: Kenton C. Anderson is Professor of Homiletics at ACTS Seminaries of Trinity Western University and a former president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.)

This is both an exhilarating and a frustrating time to be a homiletician. I find the moment to be energizing because there has never been more openness to explore questions of form and function in the act of preaching. But that very opportunity is at the same time a source of concern for the homileticians like me, who find that the tried and trusted templates of preaching past no longer seem enough. I feel professionally like I did personally when my wife and I were renovating our home. No doubt the improvements would one day actually improve, but for the longest time it seemed we lived in disarray.

When asked to describe three challenges facing homiletics today, my immediate response is, "what, just three?" Forced as I am, however, to narrow my reflection, I would speak of an increased challenge to the nature of *authority* in the preaching task today, a related pressure to give greater place to *dialogue* in our preaching, and in consequence, a perception of a lack of *aspiration* among the young among us who no longer hear the call to preach or find such calls preach compelling.

Challenges to Authority

Preaching, traditionally, could be seen as a transaction that relies upon a tacit agreement between the preacher and the listeners. The listeners agree to give the preacher a respectful and reflective hearing based upon the assumption that the preacher brings an authoritative message. This has not generally been a problem for

preachers who have been able to trade on the inherent authority of their position. Biblical preachers have been able to assume even greater confidence because of the authority of the text of Scripture understood by both listeners and preacher.

This has been a pleasant and productive relationship, but one wonders whether it can hold. Today, the image of an authoritative orator dispensing truth to crowds of submissive listeners seems anachronistic and arrogant to the contemporary mind. Few things jar the sensibilities of people today like the idea that any one person should be able to compel another to a particular view of truth. The idea is absurd to people steeped in the sense that truth must be privatized and individualized.

Of course, this situation has been developing for some time. Most of us have been able to avoid much trouble on this score as long as we have kept our preaching to ourselves. The occasional wedding sermon aside, as long as we have limited our preaching to consenting congregations, we have not had to bear the brunt of this antipathy. We expect to have some difficulty when we take our preaching to the marketplace but inside the church we have usually found ourselves safe.

What is new, I am finding, is that we can no longer assume such safety in the church. The broad cultural distrust of authority has now found its way inside the church. Listeners today seem less willing to accept the preacher's word for its own sake. They may still value the Bible and grant it some level of authority in their lives, but they are becoming more aware of their presumed right to interpret the text for themselves. Preachers who sound too sure of their messages trigger the skepticism gene in the congregational DNA. Preachers regularly find themselves under pressure from listeners who find the messages fit poorly with their own interpretive schemes.

The fact is, I'm not too distressed by this development, even though

I recognize the difficulty that it causes me. It was easier "back in the day" when I could assume a more submissive audience, but that ease was not necessarily good for me, good for the listeners, or good for the gospel. It is not a terrible thing to have listeners engaging preaching reflectively, applying the critical thinking skills that can result in a deepened appropriation of the truth when they finally "get it." This assumes, of course, that they are still listening, and that we haven't chased them away with what they see in us as pride.

The Place of Dialogue

It may be that the challenge to authority is something of an opportunity for us. Many are suggesting, for example that homiletics needs to become much more inclusive, and that preachers ought to become a lot more dialogical. If we could find a way to include listeners in the discovery of truth, we might find a new way forward for the future of preaching.

Doug Pagitt, for one, has been calling us to a different kind of preaching. "Progressional Dialogue" is a more democratic kind of preaching, he suggests. "Preaching isn't simply something a pastor does," he says, "it's a socializing force and a formative practice in a community."[1] Pagitt would have the preacher lead in a process of sermon co-creation that allows the listeners into the process of proclamation.

A new book by Tim Conder and Daniel Rhodes, picks up this call to greater dialogue. In *Free for All*, the pastor authors, re-conceive the nature of interpretation and proclamation, putting the task into the hands of the whole community. "We desperately want to liberate the Scriptures from the prisons of individualism and contesting authorities," they write.[2] Preaching for Conder and Rhodes is a "free for all," a bracing engagement of the text that invites and involves

the wisdom of the gathered congregation in the appreciation that interpretation is not the province only of an authoritative preacher.

Conder and Rhodes quote Justo and Catherine González who see traditional proclamation in racist terms through the metaphor of *The Lone Ranger*. The Lone Ranger's Native American silent partner, Tonto, (whose name actually means "dimwit") existed only as a foil to emphasize the real hero. The Gonzalez' offer this as a lens to think about our preaching. "When our biblical interpretation fails to be challenged by others, either because they *share* our perspective, or because they differ from us, we classify them as 'Tontos' whose perspectives we need not take into account."[3]

These authors raise legitimate questions for contemporary homiletics. There are, unquestionably, pitfalls and dangers in this direction. But there were problems with the traditional approach as well, though we often did not think of them. The idea of a homiletic donnybrook has little appeal to me. I worry about an "everything was right in their own eyes" approach to preaching. I still believe that we need trained and gifted people who can *lead* us in our listening to God's Word.

That said, I have little question that preaching must somehow learn to respect the dignity and perspective of the listener in ways greater than what we have previously managed. Surely we can agree that God does not speak *only* through homiletically trained experts. Perhaps homileticians can help by articulating biblically faithful and reliable ways of dialogical proclamation. We had better, if we care about the future of our task.

Lack of Aspiration for the Task

As a seminary Dean I am deeply aware of the shrinking pool of gifted young people who aspire to the preaching task. I cannot tell

you the last time I spoke to an entering student who could describe a long-standing call to preach. Denominations everywhere are noticing smaller cohorts of people willing to aspire to such a calling.

I suspect that these themes are all related. I shouldn't wonder that there would be fewer candidates as the culture within and without the church lowers its respect for preachers. The call to less authoritative models for preaching creates less impetus to find those individuals who God might be calling.

Even within traditional churches, the discontinuation of Sunday night services and mid-week prayer meetings have made for fewer opportunities to groom the up and coming. I am aware of the fact that my first preaching opportunities were all on Sunday nights. As more of us gather in larger churches, I understand the unwillingness to put novices forward on a Sunday morning. Of course, the consequence is that fewer emerging preachers have opportunity to test themselves in public.

It may be that we have to broaden our view of preaching. Homiletics has typically focused on the Sunday sermon. This is for good reason as this is the most visible and possibly the most significant application of our discipline in any church. However, it would help us to put more careful thought into the various ways that preaching happens in a church.

I tell my students that preaching happens whenever someone called and gifted opens up the Bible with the intent to help people hear the voice of God. Whether this happens at youth group on Friday night, with children in a Sunday morning class, in a living room on Wednesday night, or from a pulpit at the appointed hour, if we are trying to help people reckon with the will and way of God as we find it in his Word, we are preaching.

Homiletics, then, would serve the church by looking for broader

definitions and models for the preaching task. In so doing, we would find a large body of new aspirants willing to consider how God might use them in the proclamation of his Word.

Sustainable Homiletics

Preaching is not over. It may be changing, but it can retain its relevance. Homiletics must sustain its convictions around the self-revelation of God and the authority of his Word. But homiletics must also accept the continuing challenge to shape our models in ways that will be helpful for those who accept the challenge in *this* day. What that exactly means is yet unclear, though I suspect it will be substantive in our work over the next few years.

Notes

1. Doug Pagitt, *Preaching Re-Imagined: The Role of the Sermon in Communities of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 25.
2. Tim Conder and Daniel Rhodes, *Free for All: Rediscovering the Bible in Community* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 14.
3. Justo L. Gonzáles and Catherine G. Gonzáles, "The Neglected Interpreters," in Richard Lischer, *The Company of Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 251, and cited in Conder and Rhodes, op cit., 158.

Robert Schuller's Use of Scripture

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By Jeffrey Arthurs

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Abstract

Robert Schuller interprets the Bible as a manual for the improvement of self-esteem. This essay demonstrates how Schuller's use of Scripture arises from his anthropocentric approach to theology, illustrates his use of Scripture, and offers an appraisal. Schuller's use of Scripture fails for two reasons: He undermines his argument for selfless living by using self-centered appeals; and he is selective which texts he quotes, ignoring those that contradict his theology of self-esteem.

Introduction

In 1955 Rev. Robert Schuller started the country's first "walk-in drive-in church" where attenders could worship in the privacy of their own cars. The church had two members--Rev. and Mrs. Schuller. Since then, Dr. Schuller (who received an honorary doctorate from Asuza Pacific College in 1970) constructed the famous "Crystal Cathedral" in Garden Grove, California and increased the church's membership to more than 10,000. His numerous books and his television ministry, "The Hour of Power," have extended his influence around the world, as has his "Institute for Successful Church Leadership" where more than 20,000 church leaders have attended.

As a Christian minister, Robert Schuller grounds his ministry on the traditional presupposition that the Bible is God's Word, but he

has developed a new framework for interpreting the Bible. This framework is not systematic or extensive enough to be called a hermeneutical system, but Schuller's approach is a new perspective. He calls his interpretive framework the "theology of self-esteem." It is built on the presupposition that God's primary concern is to bolster human self-esteem.

This essay examines how one of America's most famous and influential preachers uses Scripture. I argue that Robert Schuller's anthropocentric approach to Christian theology leads him to interpret the Bible as a manual for the improvement of self-esteem. Although Schuller quotes often from the Bible in all of his books, five of them in particular have the explicit goal of exegeting portions of Scripture. Those five books, in chronological order, are: *God's Way to the Good Life* (which exegetes the Ten Commandments--Exodus 20), *The Future Is Your Friend* (Psalm 23), *Self Esteem, The New Reformation* (The Lord's Prayer—Matthew 6), *The Be-Happy Attitudes* (the Beatitudes—Matthew 5), and *Believe in the God Who Believes in You* (the Ten Commandments, once again).[1]

Section one of this essay argues that Schuller has modified classical Christian theology by adopting an anthropocentric perspective to guide his theology and mission; section two illustrates how that perspective influences Schuller's interpretation of Scripture; and section three offers an appraisal of Schuller's use of Scripture. Edwin Black's theory of the "Second Persona,"[2] and Richard Weaver's hierarchy of argumentation[3] elucidate the appraisal.

Classical Theology and Schuller's Theology

When classical theologians look for a starting place from which to build their epistemology and teleology, they begin with the existence of God. Some classical theologians such as Augustus Strong assume God's existence *a priori* as an intuition written upon the soul.[4] Others such as Thomas Aquinas take a more empirical approach and seek to prove the existence of God from rational

argument.[5] In either case, their starting point is God. Classical theologians also posit that God has revealed himself through the Bible. Furthermore, they claim that God has informed humankind of their nature, purpose, and destiny through the pages of the Bible. The classical system of theology describes human character as it relates to God--he is the sovereign Creator and we are the creatures. Classical theologians have a theocentric world view.

Robert Schuller agrees with some of this, but not all of it. He feels that classical theology's starting point of the existence of God and/or the authority of the Scripture forms a sandy foundation for doing theology in late twentieth-century America because Americans disagree about the nature of God and the trustworthiness of the Bible. Schuller does not approach theology as a theologian, but as a missionary who is trying to dialogue with late twentieth-century America.[6] He argues, "We cannot speak out with a 'Thus saith the Lord' strategy when we are talking to people who couldn't care less about the Lord! We cannot start with 'What does the text say?' if we're talking to persons who aren't about to affirm respect for . . . the text."[7]

In contrast to the classical approach, Schuller argues that a theology should be built on something *everyone* feels the importance of--human needs. The chief need Americans experience, according to Schuller, is low self-esteem. He calls it the "single greatest need facing the human race today."[8] Schuller contrasts his theology of self-esteem with classical theology in this paragraph:

> No theology of salvation, no theology of the church, no theology of Christ, no theology of sin and repentance and regeneration and sanctification and discipleship, can be regarded as authentically Christian if it does not begin with...the right of every person to be treated with honor, dignity, and respect. At the same time, any creed, any biblical interpretation, and any systematic theology that

> assaults and offends the self-esteem of persons is heretically failing to be truly Christian no matter how interlaced...it might be with biblical references.[9]

With human needs as his starting point, Schuller goes on to redefine classical Christian terms to fit the "theology of self-esteem" (his phrase). *Sin* is no longer rebellion against God; it is "any human condition or act that robs God of glory by stripping one of his children of their right to divine dignity."[10] *Hell* is not a literal place of torment for those who reject God; it is "the loss of pride that naturally follows separation from God--the ultimate and unfailing source of our soul's sense of self-respect."[11] *Salvation* is not reconciliation with God and rescue from the consequences of sin; it "means to be permanently lifted from sin (psychological self-abuse . . .) and shame to self-esteem and its God-glorifying human need-meeting, constructive, and creative consequences."[12] *Forgiveness* is "to look into the face of redeeming respect until its glory falls upon you and you are saved from shame to healthy pride."[13] Being *born again* is "an amazing self-image transplant."[14]

By shifting the emphasis in theology from God to humans, Robert Schuller redefines classical Christian theology. His system is anthropocentric, not theocentric. Starting from the assumption that the greatest human need is for psychological refurbishing, he characterizes God as the means to that end. While still using familiar Christian terms, he invests them with meanings that fit his theology of self-esteem. Furthermore, as the next section of this essay demonstrates, this theology leads him to interpret the Bible as a manual for the improvement of self-esteem.

Schuller and the Bible

Robert Schuller often uses the Bible to support his theology of self-esteem, even when the biblical texts have little to do with self-esteem. To be sure, many texts *do* link faith and psychological wholeness, but some texts simply do not. Yet even in texts that are manifestly

theocentric, Schuller finds support for his anthropocentric system. Some of the clearest examples of this use of Scripture are found in *Believe in the God Who Believes in You,* an exegesis of the Ten Commandments.[15] The first commandment states, "You shall have no other gods before me" (Exodus 20:3).[16] This command is not primarily about humans; that is, it is not advice for building self-esteem. It is about God and his charge that humans acknowledge his preeminence, but Schuller's anthropocentric system of theology crowds out the theocentric force of the verse and turns it into a manual for self-improvement. Schuller comments on the verse: "It's time to consider a self-image transplant, which means: Draw a mental image of a God who believes in you, and your self-image will be amazingly transformed. The first commandment . . . is the foundational step. This is a *command meant* to encourage us to believe in the One God who believes in us."[17] Although other verses in the Bible imply that God is "in our corner," this verse says nothing about God "believing in us." Schuller does eisegesis, not exegesis. He imports meaning rather than leads it out.

The second commandment states, "You shall not make for yourselves any carved image or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water beneath the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God" (Exodus 20:4-5). As with the first commandment, this verse is theocentric. It implies that God jealously guards his glory, but the pastor of the Crystal Cathedral claims that the primary significance of this verse relates to our mental health. He argues that a person's mental image of God affects his or her own self-image, so the second commandment exists to help us visualize God not as a "Grim Reaper," "Punishing Politician," or "Duplicitous Politician," for these negatively program "us to believe less of ourselves than we should."[18] In Schuller's hands the verse becomes a manual that shows us how to feel good about ourselves; that is, according to Schuller, in this verse God commands us to form an accurate image of himself *so that* we can experience "healthy, humble, wholesome pride. Self-respect! Self-esteem!"[19]

In Schuller's system of theology even the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal" (Exodus 20:15) is about our self-image. The verse seems to deal with others' rights, but in Schuller's system others' rights are important because they impact our self-esteem. He reasons that one form of stealing is neglect of the poor, and we should not neglect them because such selfishness affects our welfare: "Do you feel useless and unimportant? How generous have you been in sharing your self, your talents, your substance with the less fortunate?"[20] In Schuller's hands, the primary emphasis of the verse, "You shall not steal," centers on the feelings of the one who obeys or disobeys the command, not the rights of our neighbors who have been created in God's image.

In *Self-Esteem, The New Reformation* Schuller locates his theology of self-esteem in a most unlikely text, the Lord's Prayer. This is an unlikely text because the Lord's Prayer is a petition for *God's* will to be done, not our own ("*thy* will be done on earth, just as it is in heaven").[21] It is about *his* glory ("thine be the glory") and the honor of *his* name ("hallowed be thy name"). It is a prayer of repentance ("forgive us our sins") and of selflessness ("just as we forgive those who have sinned against us"), but when the prayer is viewed through the lens of the theology of self-esteem, it becomes a formula for psychological therapy. Schuller states, "The Lord's Prayer is emerging now as a classic, timeless therapy for the universal restlessness in the human mind that deprives persons from feeling really good about themselves."[22] Schuller's interpretation places an anthropocentric twist even on the first statement, "Our Father who art in heaven." The founder of possibility thinking emphasizes how this statement "declares that we--human beings--are premium persons, not peasants or pawns. For we are children of God. We are members of the royal family."[23] Such a thought may be *inferred* from this text, but the context surrounding the Lord's Prayer suggests that Jesus taught the disciples to pray not as a means to improve their self-esteem, but as a means to help them replace their self-centered motives and actions with God-centered ones.

Unlike the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, the Beatitudes link emotional wholeness with obedience to God's ways, but these rhythmic phrases claim that blessings *follow* selflessness. If the blessings motivate selflessness, the motivation is not truly selfless; nevertheless, Schuller turns the Beatitudes into strategies for a happier life. For example, commenting on the verse, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted," Schuller asks: "Are you hurting? How do you come back alive? Think of God first, think of others second, and then put yourself third."[24] In Schuller's hands, the Bible becomes a manual for success, especially for receiving healing from emotional trauma. This interpretation follows naturally from his anthropocentric theology—an oxymoron that is challenged in the final section of this essay.

An Appraisal of Schuller's Use of Scripture

While agreeing with Edwin Black that "moral judgment of a text is a portentous act," I also agree that "there is something acutely unsatisfying about criticism that stops short of appraisal."[25] Schuller's use of Scripture to bolster his theology of self-esteem invites appraisal since he sometimes wrings meanings from texts that are tangential or even contradictory to their context and tone.

To make a fair appraisal the critic should judge discourse by its own standards.[26] Black's theory of the "second persona" offers a method for doing so. The "second persona" is a text's "implied auditor," not necessarily the actual readers or listeners.[27] As a critical tool, the second persona is valuable for at least two reasons: First, it helps critics focus on the discourse alone[28] so that the standard of evaluation arises from the rhetor's own words and strategies. Critics who use the theory of the second persona do close textual reading, not necessarily historical or biographical studies. Second, the second persona reveals the rhetor's ideology which in rhetoric is never a private affair.[29] When a rhetor overtly attempts to persuade auditors to accept his or her world view, he or she compels the auditors to evaluate that world view. Indeed, auditors have an

ethical responsibility to do so. Robert Schuller uses Scripture to persuade readers to live out the implications of his anthropocentric ideology; readers must responsibly evaluate that ideology. In Black's words, the second persona helps critics see "what the rhetor would have his real audience become . . . . This condition makes moral judgment possible."[30]

I offer two appraisals of Schuller's use of Scripture: His methods of reasoning undermine each other, and his use of the Bible is selective and not representative of its entire message on self-esteem and success.

Self-Consuming Reasoning

According to Black, the rhetor's ideology is revealed through the text's "substantive claims" and "stylistic tokens."[31] Schuller's style is certainly worth studying because he is a word-smith of the first order. I have done so in part in another essay,[32] but here I wish to analyze his dominant claim and the reasoning that supports that claim, what Black calls the "best evidence" of ideology.[33]

Schuller claims that the Bible teaches that God's primary concern is for humans to possess robust self-esteem. The pastor of the Crystal Cathedral does not hide this claim under a bushel; he lets it shine from the titles of his books: the Ten Commandments are *God's Way to the Good Life*, and a *Design for Dignity*; and the Beatitudes teach that God wants us to *Be-Happy*.

To bolster this claim, Schuller uses two kinds of reasoning which Richard Weaver calls the "argument from genus" and the "argument from circumstance."[34] The argument from genus is the natural form of reasoning for theism because it is based on the nature of things. Weaver states that "it holds that the highest reality is being, not becoming. It is a quasi-religious metaphysics . . . because it ascribes to the highest reality qualities of stasis, immutability, eternal perdurance."[35] Schuller uses the argument from genus

when he states or implies that God created humans with a need for self-esteem. This is our nature. Animals do not need self-esteem, but humans do, having been made in God's image.[36] In Schuller's world view, "human dignity [is] the ultimate human value."[37]
The second type of argument Schuller uses as he quotes Scripture is the argument from circumstance, a "type of cause-and-effect argument, [which] merely reads the circumstances, accepts them as coercive, and allows them to dictate a decision."[38] This is Schuller's primary form of argumentation. It pervades his books and is set forth most clearly in *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*. There he argues that modern churches are losing members because they have lost sight of human needs. This circumstance demands that the Church engage in a "new reformation." Schuller argues that the Church will die if it continues with business as usual. He states, "No theology will last long nor will it succeed unless it begins with and keeps its focus on satisfying every person's hunger for personal value."[39] The reasoning is *from* circumstances *to* solutions.

Schuller's juxtaposition of metaphysical and circumstantial reasoning is a slice of the American pie because our values are both transcendent and pragmatic.[40] No doubt Schuller's mixture of reasoning helps explain his popularity. By quoting Scripture, Schuller appears to argue from genus, as if he were saying to his readers, "My point of view is God's point of view. My advice is timeless and transcendent." But the theology of self-esteem relies most heavily on the argument from circumstance. The following statement exemplifies the arguments that permeate his books: "The prescription for joyful living is very simple: if you want to be happy, treat people right. If you carry somebody else's burdens, in the process you'll discover the secret of happiness."[41] The argument from circumstance arises from Schuller's anthropocentric ideology. He starts with an exigence--the need for "joyful lives"--and he counsels his readers to use people (use them *kindly*, to be sure) to improve the readers' own self-esteem. The theology of self-esteem argues that obedience to God is a *means* by which we can improve our mental health and temporal circumstances.

The discerning reader must ask: who is on the throne? Is God merely an instrument to be used, or is he the king who must be loved and obeyed because of the immutable order of things? Schuller implies both. His reasoning pulls against itself as it juxtaposes two ways of thinking about God. Put bluntly, he counsels readers to be unselfish for self-centered ends. This reasoning deconstructs itself. In Stanley Fish's phrase, Schuller's discourse is a "self-consuming artifact," a text which appears to argue for one goal, but ends up accomplishing another.[42] Kenneth Burke calls this "business Christianity"[43]—get God/get rich, as when Schuller counsels that "sincere sacrificial service . . . will really make us feel great!"[44]

In contrast to the anthropocentric theology of self-esteem, the Bible's theocentric message is that "feeling great" is a *result* of obedience, not a motive for it. It is a gracious gift, not a guarantee or a right. Schuller's use of Scripture warrants a negative appraisal because the theology of self-esteem persuades readers to view the world, including God and fellow humans, as tools for self-improvement. Schuller fuels narcissism.

Selective Quoting

Schuller's use of Scripture invites a second negative appraisal: He ignores those parts of the Bible that contradict his theology. Perhaps he is aware of this because he distances himself from some Scriptures, even while using others to argue for the theology of self-esteem. He states:

> The sacred Scriptures are our infallible rule for faith and practice. And we have insisted that in and through the Bible, God's eternal truth is communicated. But can anything be above the Scriptures? Yes, the Eternal Word transcends the written Word...Christ is the Lord over the Scriptures;

> the Scriptures are not Lord over Christ…When an apparent contradiction or conflict or confusion exists within the sacred Scriptures, how shall the argument be settled?

Schuller's answer is to examine Christ's teaching. Since Schuller himself sets up this standard, we may use it to evaluate the theology of self-esteem.

Christ's message is balanced. He promotes the values of psychological and spiritual health with statements like "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; but he also warns his followers that preoccupation with self is self-defeating, as in the statement: "He who has found his life shall lose it; and he who has lost his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39). Jesus' message balances the two propositions that "in this world you will have trouble," *and* that his followers should "take courage, for I have overcome this world" (John 16:33). Schuller ignores or misinterprets the portions of Christ's teaching which are not "user-friendly" to modern Americans with our contradictory values of altruism and individualistic self-expression and fulfillment.

Jesus' teaching is consistent with the tone and message of the entire Bible which teaches that God's children experience *shalom* (meaning "peace," in the rich sense of "wholeness" and "health"), but that suffering and doubt are also normal experiences for the person who chooses to follow God. The most poignant illustrations of this are the psalms of lament, as in this cry from Psalm 44:

> For your sake we face death all day long;
> we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.
> Awake, O Lord! Why do you sleep?
> Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever.
> Why do you hide your face
> and forget our misery and oppression? (Psalm 44:22-24)

Since Schuller magnifies Christ's words over the rest of the Bible, we are justified in reminding Schuller that Jesus himself died with a psalm of lament on his lips: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, quoting Psalm 22:1.)

Jesus sets the example for his followers: "I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of Him who sent me" (John 6:38). Paul elaborates: "He made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant . . . . [He] humbled himself and became obedient to death--even death on a cross!" (Philippians 2:7). Schuller ignores such verses or (mis)reads them in such a way as to support his theology of self-esteem. He implies often that salvation ensures a peaceful and trouble free life. Sometimes he goes further than mere implication and makes this claim boldly as in this statement from the *Be-Happy Attitudes*: "If we accept salvation and yield our minds and our hearts to the saving Spirit of Christ, our negative sins and emotions will be drawn out and a healing of mind and body will begin."[45] At best this use of Scripture is selective. At worst it is deceitful. While some passages do emphasize the importance of self-esteem, these must be read in light of the Bible's overarching theocentric focus. A full reading of Christ's teaching reveals that he subordinated his own desires to those of his Father even when that subordination meant pain and humiliation.

This is not to say that Jesus was unconcerned about human needs, but as Larry Crabb has pointed out:

> His response to our problems does not always square with what we find attractive. He tells us to lose ourselves; we'd prefer being true to who we are. He invites us to trust Him through unexplained difficulties; we ask Him to get us out of them. He instructs us to set our affection on higher things than we can see; we frantically search for someone to help us make our lives work in ways we can enjoy

> now...A theology that disrupts little and seeks to help us recover from pain rather than mature through it is, at best, a watered down theology...Relieving pain, though a worthy value, is not the highest one. Too much of the...church refuses to insist on the highest value of God's glory...The result is a user-friendly mentality that can obscure the gospel of Christ with a consumerism that encourages us to think of ourselves, not God, as the real point of life.[46]

Schuller's use of Scripture, including the teachings of Christ, is selective. It provides an uplifting message for those who suffer from low self-esteem, but this essay has argued that the foundation under that message is weak. Ultimately his message deconstructs itself because his use of Scripture lacks exegetical rigor, breadth, and evenhandedness. His anthropocentric world view leads him to see the Bible merely as a manual for the improvement of self-esteem.

Notes

1. Robert H. Schuller, *God's Way to the Good Life* (1963; rpt. New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1974); *The Future is Your Friend* (1964; rpt. New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1974); *Self-Esteem, The New Reformation* (Waco: Word, 1982); *The Be-Happy Attitudes: Eight Positive Attitudes That Can Transform Your Life* (Waco: Word, 1985); *Believe in the God Who Believes in You: The Ten Commandments, A Divine Design for Dignity* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).
2. Edwin Black, "The Second Persona" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 56 (1970): 109-119.
3. Richard Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric* (South Bend, IN: Gateway, 1953).
4. Augustus H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Westwood, NJ: Revell, 1907), 52-70.
5. See Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983), 30-31.
6. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 11-12.
7. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 13.
8. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 19.
9. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 136.

10. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 14.
11. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 14.
12. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 99.
13. Schuller, *Believe in the God,* 83.
14. Schuller, *Believe in the God,* 49.
15. As many Bible commentators have pointed out, the first four commandments deal with our relationship to God, and the last six deal with our relationships with humans. The first set is "vertical" in emphasis, and the second set is "horizontal." Schuller turns even the first set into a manual for improving ourselves, even though they are about God's glory, not ours.
16. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from the Bible are from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Nashville: Holman, 1973).
17. Schuller, *Believe in the God,* 34.
18. Schuller, *Believe in the God,* 41-42.
19. Schuller, *Believe in the God,* 46.
20. Schuller, *God's Way to the Good Life,* 104.
21. The King James Version is used in this paragraph.
22. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 78.
23. Schuller, *Self-Esteem,* 63.
24. Schuller, *Be-Happy Attitudes,* 60.
25. Black, 109.
26. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "The Nature of Criticism in Rhetorical and Communication Studies" *Central States Speech Journal* 30 (1979): 4-13.
27. Black, 111.
28. Black, 112.
29. Black, 112.
30. Black, 113.
31. Black, 112.
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Deep Preaching: Creating Significant Sermons within Community

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By J. Kent Edwards

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Abstract

This paper presents a methodology for creating exegetically sound and spiritually significant sermons. It asserts that in order to preach "deep" sermons, preachers must go beyond exegetical data. Deep preachers will encourage the involvement of the Holy Spirit during the sermon preparation process by leveraging the classic spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer and fasting. The paper will provide concrete suggestions regarding how and when preachers should employ these classic spiritual disciplines and how this can be enhanced within community.

Introduction

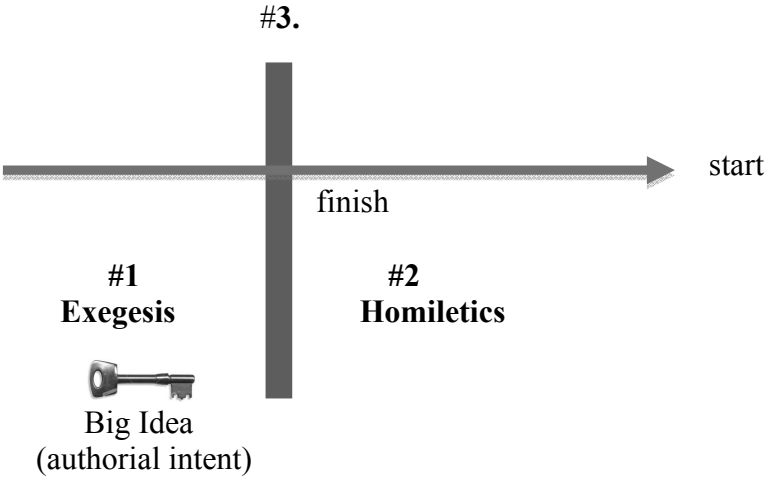
My interest in Deep Preaching arose out of a terrible classroom experience. I was standing at the back of the classroom ensconced in a sound-proof booth listening on headphones to one of my students preach a sermon in one of my "Introduction to Preaching" courses.

As I listened to the message I heard the student follow the "steps to preparing a sermon" that I had outlined earlier in the semester. During these classes I had outlined that the homiletical process has two stages.[1] The first stage is exegesis (#1), and the second stage is homiletics (#2.) Their goal in the exegetical stage, I had explained, was to conduct an exegetical analysis of the biblical text

to determine authorial intent. When they could express the intent in a concise subject and complement form (Big Idea), their work in stage #1 was completed.

The second stage (#2) was the homiletical stage. While the first stage focused on understanding the meaning of the biblical text, the second stage concentrated upon communicating that idea to a contemporary audience. Tasks such as outlining, illustrating, introducing and concluding the sermon were considered in the second stage.

I had also made clear in class that they were to imagine an impenetrable wall (#3) separating these two stages. Exegesis and homiletics needed to remain separate if the integrity of each was to be maintained. To ensure that exegesis was not bent in the service of homiletics and vise versa, the big idea was to be



considered the "key" to unlock the door in the wall and allow them to move from stage one to stage two.

As I listened to the student's sermon I was, at one level, impressed. This was a technically sound message. It was based on a legitimate natural unit of Scripture, had a clear "big idea" that arose legitimately from that unit of Scripture that was reflected in a clear homiletical

outline. What is more, my student was delivering the sermon with a level of polish seldom seen in a beginning student. The realization that the student had done everything I had asked and, according to my syllabus deserved the highest grade possible, made me want to weep. Why?

Because that sermon, despite being well organized and sporting only the soundest of exegesis, was trivial. Superficial. Emotionally vacuous. My student was handling one of the most profound truths in Scripture with the respect typically accorded to a trash container on its way to the curb. What my student was preaching was true, but banal. He had gazed at the truth of Scripture without being overwhelmed by it. He had held the truth in his hands but, unlike Jeremiah, he had not eaten it. He knew God's word externally not internally. The sermon was shallow.

This student's sermon began my quest to understand how to create deep sermons. What follows is some of what I have learned along the way.

Learning from the Holy Spirit

It is clear to me that the deep respect that we conservative evangelicals have for the inerrant and infallible biblical text, can lead us to neglect the Holy Spirit's role as teacher. We are quick to listen to human commentators, but are reluctant to hear what the Holy Spirit has to say. And those of us who teach homiletics are not doing much to reverse this emphasis.

This de-emphasis on the teaching or illuminating role of the Holy Spirit stands in stark contrast to Scripture. Jesus knew that we needed more than a shelf of commentaries and Logos software to properly understand Scripture. This is why he promised his disciples in John 14 that

> I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.[2]

What will the Spirit of Truth do? One of his primary ministries is to reveal the truth of his word. He teaches. The Holy Spirit gives a depth of understanding into the word of God that cannot be achieved by raw human intellect or Pentium computer processing alone:

> I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you.[3]

Jesus realized that, as consistently and as effectively as he taught his followers the Scriptures, much more instruction would be required after his ascension. This is why Jesus told the disciples that the Holy Spirit would pick up where he left off. As Jesus "opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures"[4] on the road to Emmaus, so the Holy Spirit will help us cognitively to extend beyond the capacity of our human exegetical skills.

Computer programs and well-educated pagans are capable of *understanding* the rudimentary elements of a biblical text. They can decline nouns and parse verbs just fine. But it takes the supernatural enabling of the Holy Spirit to *fully comprehend* what God is communicating in holy writ.

As John Calvin pointed out in his *Institutes*:

> The testimony of the Spirit is superior to reason. For as God alone can properly bear witness to his own words, so these words will not obtain full credit in the hearts of men, until they are sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit.… For though [Scripture] in its own majesty has enough to command reverence, nevertheless, it then begins truly to touch us when it is sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.[5]

I agree with Millard J. Erickson that the Holy Spirit assists the believer to comprehend the meaning of the biblical text. Insufficient understanding of God's truth is a consequence of sin. Sin inhibits our ability to fully interpret Scripture. Sin clouds our vision and injects unconscious presuppositions that bias our understanding of Scripture. Only the Spirit can overcome these noetic effects of sin.[6] The Holy Spirit is a necessary component of the biblical interpretive process.

The Apostle Paul certainly realized the importance of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. As undeniably brilliant as he was, Paul knew that even his unaided intellect was insufficient to fully understand what God had revealed in the Bible. Nobody is smart enough to fully understand Scripture alone. This is why Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians:

> The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned.[7]

Spiritual insight is required to fully understand the word of God. And we do not have this apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

Paul knew that in addition to our natural faculties, we need the supernatural faculties of the Holy Spirit to help us with our exegesis. This is why he wrote:

> . . .we speak of God's secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began. None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. However, as it is written:
>
> 'No eye has seen,
> no ear has heard,
> no mind has conceived
> what God has prepared for those who love him'—
> but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit.
>
> The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God. For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. We have not received the spirit of the world but the Spirit who is from God, that we may understand what God has freely given us. This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words.[8]

Paul understood the limitations of human-powered exegesis. He had specialized in it before his dramatic confrontation with the risen Christ. He remembered what it was like to study the Scriptures without the assistance of the Holy Spirit. And he wants none of it. The results of human exegesis practiced by the Pharisees were not pretty, and did not lead to godliness. The fruit of their work in the text was soul-deadening. Exegesis that is done without the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit results in the interpreter manipulating the word rather than allowing God to shape the life

of the interpreter. It ultimately leads people away from God rather than towards him.

It is clear that as he wrote to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul had come to practice a different form of exegesis. Now Paul allows the Spirit to be his teacher. Now he allows the Spirit to instruct him in the Scriptures. It is because of the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit in his intellect Paul can say in 1 Corinthians 2:16, "For who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

Paul also makes it clear that the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is to be enjoyed by more than just the apostles. This is obvious when Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus:

> I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints.[9]

Paul prayed that the Holy Spirit would teach the lay people of this church. The letter he was writing was intended to give them important theological information from which they could gain a level of understanding based on their past training. But Paul knew that they needed more than human ability. This is why he was praying that the Holy Spirit would teach them. He knew that they needed the Spirit of wisdom in order to know God better—in order to know God deeply.

People aided by the Holy Spirit think differently when they study the Bible. They understand the Scriptures in ways that laptop computers and secular linguistic scholars will never know. They are

led into a fuller comprehension of the biblical text by the author of Scripture.

The Holy Spirit helps us comprehend what the Bible Means

The fact that the Holy Spirit is your teacher does not mean you can skip the hard exegetical work in the text that is necessary to determine the authorial intent of the text you will preach. All sermons must be grounded in Scripture. If they aren't, they aren't biblical sermons.

All sermon preparation must begin with a thorough grammatical historical analysis of a natural unit of Scripture in order to determine the main idea that the original human author and the Holy Spirit placed there. The Holy Spirit extends your mental faculties, he does not replace them.

The Holy Spirit will not teach you what the original author did not intend to communicate to his original audience. To be truly biblical, all exegesis must have as its goal the objective truth that is contained in the biblical text. Haddon Robinson is correct when he says, "a text cannot mean what it never meant."

If Moses were listening to a sermon you were preaching from the book of Exodus, he should not be surprised by your exegesis. If Moses is startled by what you say then you are not preaching a biblical sermon. The Holy Spirit will not guide you to an interpretation that he did not intend.

Intimacy with and reliance upon the Holy Spirit will not eliminate the hard exegetical work in the text. Far from it.

But exegetical work alone is inadequate. It is only the first step in the interpretive process. And, as challenging as this first step may be, it is often the easiest step. Deep preaching requires that you

have Holy Spirit assisted insight into the Scriptures you preach. Deep preaching requires more. Much more.

Deep Preaching Homiletic

My attempt to seriously integrate the Holy Spirit's role as teacher into the homiletics process is diagrammed below. At first glance it looks similar to the model I introduced earlier. You will note that the primacy of Scripture is maintained. It does not jettison Scripture in favor of some Gnostic-ish divine knowledge that arrives directly and privately communicated from God to the preacher. It takes J.I Packer's warning of the "insufficiency" of either the Spirit without the Word or the Word without the Spirit very seriously. [10] The "Deep Preaching" model outlined below recognizes the importance of both Scripture and Spirit.

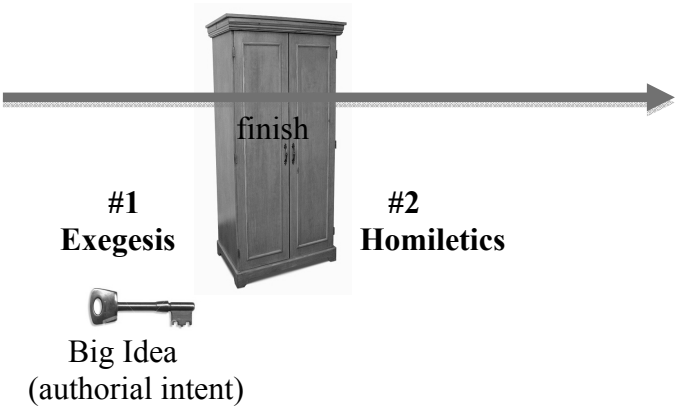
This model also retains the integrity of both the exegetical and homiletical tasks by keeping them separate. The exegetical task remains the first task of the preacher. There is no sidestepping of the grammatical historical interpretation of the biblical text in favor of a "mystical" meaning. The goal of the exegetical process remains the identification of the big idea of the biblical text, and requires rigorous work in the original languages and culture. This big idea must be the same idea that the original author intended to communicate to his original audience. Any big idea that cannot be sustained by rigorous application of the grammatical historical examination of the text should not be preached. We must not say in God's name what God did not say.

The obvious change in the model is that the wall has been replaced with a closet. Why a closet? This metaphor is borrowed from Jesus comments to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount where Jesus, in his comments on spiritual disciplines, tells his disciples that when they pray they are not to be like the hypocrites . . . but "when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door,

pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly."

Deep preaching requires that the preacher take the idea of the biblical text into a place of solitude, and intentionally invite the Holy Spirit to participate. The closet is where the preacher shuts the commentaries and listens to God through the use of the classic spiritual disciplines. Here we take the big idea intended by the original author and spend time with it in meditation, prayer and, when necessary, fasting.

The closet is where the Holy Spirit helps us move beyond our elementary *understanding* of a biblical text into a fuller *comprehension* than we could ever accomplish with unaided human energy and ability. What does the Holy Spirit do with us in the closet?



- "Closet Work" helps us move beyond the grainy black and white picture of a TV circa 1950 to the breathtaking clarity of a digital high-definition image on a studio quality plasma screen. We see what God is saying in the biblical text with far more clarity than ever before.

- "Closet Work" allows the Holy Spirit to do for us what an audio headset does for a visitor to a museum. The

> museum visitors who take advantage of the audio headsets will see the same exhibits as everyone else, but their comprehension of those exhibits will be far better. Because the visitors with the headsets have the added benefit of having the curator of the museum whisper into their ear about the displays they are looking at. Only those who use the headsets will fully appreciate the displays they are looking at. Those who decide to do it on their own will gaze admiringly but uncomprehendingly at the wonders that surround them.

It is during Closet Work that the Holy Spirit whispers in our ears about the wonders of Scripture that surround us. Closet Work gives us a fuller understanding of what we see in the biblical text.

- With our own exegetical resources we stare at the Bible like tourists in downtown Denver looking at the Rocky Mountains. By ourselves all we can see is that there are mountains in the west. But during Closet Work, the Holy Spirit picks us up like a helicopter and takes us to downtown Vail.

The Holy Spirit will never take us to different mountains than what we saw in the Bible. But the Spirit will help us see those mountains with a clarity that we could never have experienced on our own. With the Holy Spirit's help we can fully comprehend what we saw at a distance.

During our Closet Work the Spirit takes us by the hand and gives us a guided tour through his creation. We stroll hand in hand with him through the high meadows, smell the flowers, feel the warmth of the sun, splash in a stream, and taste the ice of a glacier.

As we leave the closet we will say, "On my own I knew that there were Rocky Mountains out there. But I now fully understand these

mountains. The abstract has become real. What was distant has become personal. I am comfortable living here."

Any well-educated pagan can *understand* the grammar of a passage of Scripture. But we need the Holy Spirit in order to *comprehend* what a text means.

A.W. Tozer understood the role that the Holy Spirit plays in helping us fully understand a passage of Scripture. Tozer spoke strongly against the intellectual arrogance of human textualism. Tozer understood textualism as:

> The belief that the human mind is the supreme authority in the judgment of truth . . . it is *confidence in the ability of the human mind to do that which the Bible declares it was never created to do and consequently is incapable of doing . . .*
>
> The inward kernel of truth has the same configuration as the outward shell. The mind can grasp the shell but only the Spirit of God can lay hold of the internal essence. Our great error has been that we have trusted to the shell and have believed we were sound in faith because we were able to explain the external shape of truth as found in the letter of the Word.
>
> From this mortal error fundamentalism is dying.

I'm suggesting that we heed Tozer's warning. That we deliberately utilize the Holy Spirit in our preaching by taking the idea of the biblical text into a place of solitude. Into your spiritual closet, where, alone with God, you use the classic spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer and fasting to invite the Holy Spirit to speak. This is what I call homiletical "Closet Work." And it is a deliberate

break from the modernistic mindset of the past.

The Holy Spirit takes us Deep

The secret of Deep Preaching is the Holy Spirit. The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit certainly made a significant difference in Paul's preaching.

The Spirit deepened Paul's preaching in two different ways. First, he enabled Paul to see deeply into the *content* of the Scripture he was preaching. This is why Paul could comment on his own preaching in 1 Corinthians 2:13-14, "This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words." Paul's sermons were not strung together clichés sung to familiar tunes. Like Jesus teaching, Paul's sermonic material was fresh and authoritative, because God taught him the truths directly.

Secondly, the Holy Spirit also directly influenced the *response* of those who heard Paul's messages. Positively or negatively, few people walked away bored from the Apostle Paul's preaching. The Holy Spirit so worked within the truth of Paul's sermons that people were forced to either completely accept or dramatically reject what they heard. And Paul knew this. He said to those he preached to in Thessalonica that, "our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction."[13]

The unusual power of Paul's sermons stemmed from their unusual source. Unlike most of the preachers of his day, Paul preached what the Holy Spirit taught him from the word of God and watched God use His words to transform lives. Paul says in Colossians 1:28 that "we proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone *with all wisdom*, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ." Paul preached with the confidence of a person who knows that what

they were saying came straight from the mind of Christ.

What is surprising, however, is that the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is not restricted to Apostles. We can all enjoy the mind of Christ in our sermon preparation process. In fact Paul wants every believer, ordained and lay, to enjoy the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. This is especially clear in his letter to the Colossians. He wants these believers to know:

> Since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all *spiritual wisdom and understanding.*[14]

And he exhorts these dear people to:

> Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all *wisdom,* and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.[15]

The illuminating work of the Holy Spirit is available to all believers. Even preachers.

The Apostolic Secret to Deep Preaching

There is no secret to the powerful preaching that the Apostles demonstrated in the early chapters of Acts. The apostles publically announce the modus operandi behind their preaching in Acts 6:2-4:

> It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and *will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word.*[16]

The key to the Apostles consistently deep and effective preaching is stated in Acts 6:4. Here the Apostles plainly declare the ministry priorities that will preserve their powerful preaching. They will eliminate all worthy but distracting tasks in order to free up their schedules for what is most important. They want to give their constant attention[17] to two primary tasks. Their first task is prayer. The second is the word of God.

The meaning of "prayer" in verse four is plain, but take careful note of the phrase translated in the NIV "the ministry of the word." The Greek word behind this English phrase is λόγος (logos). It literally means "word." What are the Apostles, and Luke who recorded their words, saying here? What exactly is this ministry of the word that the Apostles were continually engaged in?

Since the word κηρύσσω is used elsewhere in the book of Acts to refer to the act of preaching,[18] it can, very legitimately, be understood here as a reference to preaching. But κηρύσσω is not a word that is commonly used in Acts to refer to preaching. In fact, when Luke wants to talk specifically about preaching, he usually chooses a word more commonly used to refer to this task.[19]

So why would he use a relatively rare word to talk about preaching here? *Especially* when the reader realizes that the word λόγος is much more commonly used within the book of Acts to refer to Scripture.[20]

What is going on in Acts 6:2-4? Are the Apostles continually devoting themselves to prayer and Scripture? Or to prayer and preaching? The answer is, "yes."

I think that the word προσκαρτερέω was specifically selected for use in Acts 6:4 because it was broad enough to embrace the priority that the Apostles placed in spending time in the Scriptures and the priority that they gave to proclaiming the Scriptures. The

word προσκαρτερέω is broad enough to include both Scripture meditation *and* preaching.

While the Apostles first priority was to be in continual prayer, their second priority was to be people who spent their lives immersed in the word - continually living within the Scriptures – saturating themselves with it—meditating on it—and then preaching out of this abundance.

When Luke tells us in Acts 6:4 is that the apostles were spending their time unceasingly (προσκαρτερέω) in the word (logos), Luke is meshing the discipline of meditation with the task of preaching. The secret of the Apostles powerful preaching lay in their utilization of the classic spiritual disciplines of prayer and meditation.

The Apostles did not come to the Scriptures as sermonizing "professionals" on Friday afternoons trying to pluck a sermon from the pages of Scripture. They were not eagles swooping down out of their natural element trying to get food for their brood by snagging a fish while trying not to get wet. Far from it. Their natural element was the Word of God. They lived in it.

The apostles insisted that the church allow them to devote their days to thinking and praying their way through Scripture. As they did, they combined the irresistible power of the Word of God with the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit, and the result was preaching. This potent combination led to extraordinary preaching. It resulted in Deep Preaching.

It is helpful to note, however, that the truth of Acts 6:2-4 is not orphaned in that text. In fact, *all* of the Apostles employed the homiletical strategy contained in that passage. Even Paul, whose later conversion precluded him from the events of Acts 6:4 utilized its "secret" of homiletical success. In Acts 18:5 we read "When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself

exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ." Once again Luke gives us insight into the apostolic homiletical process.

The phrase translated in Acts 18:5 as "devoted himself exclusively" comes from a single Greek word συνέχω (sunecho) which means to be seized by something. In Luke 22:63 συνέχω is used to describe how Jesus was under constant guard while being blindfolded, mocked and struck after his Gethsemane arrest. συνέχω is used to communicate to the reader that the attention of his captors was intensive and uninterrupted. In the context of Acts 18:5 the word means that "Paul is *dominated / occupied* — by his task as proclaimer of the word."[21]

In fact, this word συνέχω (sunecho) is repeated twice in the same verse. Not only was Paul devoted, but he was devoted, devoted! The repetition of this word underscores the single-minded focus that Paul had. What was Paul so obsessed about? Once again, the apostolic preoccupation was λόγος (word.) Since the inspired writer chooses to use the same ambiguous word he used in Acts 6:4, we are drawn to the same conclusion. One of the reasons why the apostles were able to consistently preach such deep and powerful sermons was because of the devotion they gave to the word of God. They studied and meditated on the word. And they preached the word.

The reason that all of the Apostles were able to preach such consistently deep and effective sermons was because they lived immersed in prayer and the word of God. They mixed these complimentary spiritual disciplines, and sermons erupted from their souls as a consequence.

In this they were following the example of their savior. In Luke 4 Jesus refused to be diverted into a ministry of healing. Despite the pressing needs and demands of the crowds, Jesus established the

parameters of his ministry. "'I must preach . . . because that is why I was sent.' And he kept on preaching."[22] I think that Jesus turned away from the legitimate physical needs of the crowds because—like the disciples—he knew that the disciplines of meditation and prayer were so demanding that it was impossible to focus on both. The call to preach is a call to study. And then to meditate and pray on the truth of Scripture one is looking at in study.

For the preacher, prayer is a divine dialogue that flows out of exegesis. The discussion starts with meditation as we chew on the truth of Scripture. We meditate by muttering questions of the biblical text as we go through our day. And as we wonder, for example, what it means to our life our ministry context and the larger community. It is natural for us to ask the Holy Spirit what he thinks. As we meditate, we enter into a seamless conversation between ourselves and the Holy Spirit. In the quietness of our closet, prayer and meditation are welded together. They are fused by the intensity of our yearning to comprehend the passage we will be preaching.

Meditation and prayer are to be more like twin sisters than distant cousins. The scriptures call us to meditate "day and night." They also insist that we "pray without ceasing." How can we fill our days with both of these activities? By doing them simultaneously.

As the truth of Scripture sets the tempo, we are to sway between these disciplines like a dancer. During this spiritual dance we cling to the Holy Spirit like a bridegroom holding his bride during their wedding dance. We hold the Spirit tight to our chest, moving slowly across the dance floor, rhythmically shifting our weight from meditation to prayer and back again, patiently waiting for the Spirit to lean forward and whisper truth into our ear.

During this dance we edge away from the science of exegesis towards the mind of Christ. Here we seek spiritual wisdom rather than manuscript analysis. Here we weave the deep insights that will make up the fabric of our sermon. And we do so by working the

loom of the spiritual disciplines back and forth between meditation and prayer. We live in the atmosphere of prayer by moving naturally and effortlessly from meditation to prayer and back again.

Tried and True

I am not advocating an unprecedented homiletical methodology that will lead you into dangerous and uncharted territory. Closet work enjoys a long and storied tradition. The Puritans advocated the union of meditation and prayer:

> When you read Scriptures, think how God is speaking to me, and thereby furnishing me with matter to speak to him in Prayer; this passage suits my case, I will improve it in Confession, Petition . . . or Thanksgiving . . . and thus you will arrive to an habit of free-conversing with God;. Reading [Scripture] and Praying are near kin: the one is an help to the other: . . . Be much employed in both.[23]

Unfortunately, the "habit of free-conversing with God" has largely been lost among preachers today. Most of us are content with a brief prayer before we start preparing a sermon - "God help me!" –and when we are finished—"Please bless this mess!"—but not much more this. The way we pray has a direct impact on the way we preach.

If we want to preach with the impact that Martyn Lloyd-Jones had, we would be wise to heed the advice he gave regarding the preachers prayer life. He wrote:

> Above all—and this I regard as most important of all—always respond to every impulse to pray. The impulse to pray may come when you are reading or when you are battling with a text. I would make an

> absolute law of this—always obey such an impulse. Where does it come from? It is the work of the Holy Spirit; it is a part of the meaning of, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure" (Phil 2:12-13).[24]

Charles Spurgeon gave similar advice to the aspiring preachers of his day. He noted:

> Your prayers will be our ablest assistants while your discourses are yet upon the anvil. While other men, like Esau, are hunting for their portion, you, by the aid of prayer, will find the savory meat near at home, and may say in truth what Jacob said so falsely, "The Lord brought it to me." If you can dip your pens into your hearts, appealing in earnestness to the Lord, you will write well; and if you can gather your matter on your knees at the gate of heaven, you will not fail to speak well. Prayer, as a mental exercise, will bring many subjects before the mind, and so help in the selection of a topic, wile as a high spiritual engagement it will cleanse your inner eye that you may see truth in the light of God. Texts will often refuse to reveal their treasures till you open them with the key of prayer.[25]

Sermons that have the strength to touch the deepest recesses of the human heart are forged in a furnace stoked with meditation and prayer. They arise out of what Eugene Peterson calls "contemplative exegesis" and explains why, as a preacher, Peterson came to see that "prayer [is] at the very heart of the vocation I had entered."[26]

The reason why there are so many shallow sermons is because so many sermons are written like term papers. When we spend our sermon preparation time scraping truths out of books we end up preaching an unpalatable mess of information. Sermons are not

academic essays. They are love notes that God pens and asks us to share with his bride. They cannot be preached until we have heard from God himself.

Why do our sermons lack the depth we long for? James answers this age-old preacher question when he says, "you have not because you ask not."[27] Significant sermons grow out of the soil of significant meditation and prayer.

God does not answer questions about his book to those who do not ask. Nor does he assist those who decide to preach in their own power. When preachers do not take prayerful meditation seriously their ministry from the pulpit is seriously diminished. And so are those who sit under their ministry.

Focusing your Closet Work

Knowing the importance of meditation prayer and fasting is not the same as knowing what to do with them. What should we pray and mediate about?

I suggest that you consider the idea of your biblical passage from five different perspectives, by asking five different questions. Each question will challenge you in a different way. Each question will take you deeper into the biblical passage and the idea it contains.

Please keep in mind that as you work through these questions you are *not* writing your sermon. These five questions are intended to give your time with God focus and purpose. The homiletics should not begin until your Closet Work is complete.

Look Backward

Ask: what did God *communicate* in this text? Why was this exegetical idea *necessary* for its original recipients?

Every passage is part of a larger story. Your goal is to determine the story into which this idea needed to be spoken.

a. To whom did the biblical author deliver this message?

b. What problem did it address?

c. Why did they *need* to hear it? How urgent was it? Why?

   Your goal here is to determine what the problem "looked like" in the lives of the original recipients. Visualize the situation that required this biblical truth. See it in your mind. Be sure that the problem you see is tangible. If it is not real in your mind, ask why. What additional information do you need to make it concrete? Is it exegetical? Is it cultural? Go find what you need.

d. Does the antecedent history of the recipients help explain why this instruction was necessary for these people at this time?

e. Are there any cultural factors that would have incubated or accelerated the need for this instruction? Why were the hearts of the original recipients so prone to wander in this direction? Why did God think that *they* specifically needed to be given this idea?

f. What do you think the emotional response of the original recipients of this biblical truth would have been? What was their visceral reaction when they first heard it? Why do you think so?

g. What did the original recipients of this message do with it? Did they heed this word or ignore it? Do we know?

h. How *did* this truth transform, or how *could* have it transformed the recipients life.

Haddon W. Robinson has said that: "something is not true because it is in the Bible; it is in the Bible because it is true." In other words, the truth of Scripture is true to life. And our decision to obey or disobey it determines if our lives flourish or flounder. With this in mind, develop two scenarios.

- What would life have been like for the original recipients if they *had* fully responded to the truth of this passage?

- What would life have been like for the original recipients if they had ignored or disregarded this truth?

i. Is this the only time that this principle is mentioned in Scripture? Have others struggled with this issue throughout biblical history? Who? When? Why? With what outcome?

j. What metaphors best capture the meaning of this passage?

Look Upward

Ask: What is God saying about *Himself* in this text?

God's commands come out of the essence of who he is; they issue out of his moral character.

a. What does this text reveal about God's character? Which of God's attributes does this idea emanate from?

b. Why is the truth of this text necessary? Why would God ask this of his people? Is God being unreasonable? Does he have your best interests at heart? How do you know that?

c. It is very important that you are honest here. Don't succumb to the temptation to use clichés. Don't let yourself use "god talk." You can be and must be but honest with God here. There is nothing you can say that will shock or surprise God. He knows what you are and have been thinking. And you are not the only person who has thought such thoughts. Don't worry about theological orthodoxy. Sin and the temptation to sin does not come from theological orthodoxy. You will not be able to combat or correct your sinful behavior until you understand its theological core.

d. Spend time in God's presence here. Cry out to Him for insight. Ask him to reveal himself to you more fully. Ask him to sweep away all of your lesser ideas of who he is. Your goal here is to see God as he truly is . . . not necessarily as he has been portrayed in church and in the lives and words of fellow Christians. God is holy. He stands apart and separate from everyone and every institution.

Look Inward

Ask: What is God saying to *me* in this text?

Calvin's double knowledge—it is only by knowing God that we can begin to know ourselves.

In what ways am I similar / does my life parallel the original recipients of this book?

a. Are my weaknesses their weaknesses?
b. Are my temptations theirs? Have I succumbed as they did?
c. Has my life been warped as a result?
d. In what ways? With what consequences?
e. When was I more likely to fall into this sin?
f. What habits / practices exist in my life that contribute to this problem?
g. What is it about me that made me vulnerable to this particular attack by the enemy? (i.e. what is the root problem that manifests itself in this sin.)
h. How has my life and ministry suffered as a result of this sin?
i. How have others been affected by this?
j. How could my life and ministry have been enhanced by withstanding this temptation?
k. How will the idea of this text force your life spiritually forward?
l. Picture the different reality that you and your people could be experiencing right now, if you had made different choices.

Walk in this for a time. Allow these questions to penetrate into your soul. Practice the presence of Christ. Allow the Holy Spirit to illuminate your mind with the knowledge of who you really are. The key question you

need to ask yourself is *"What is stopping me from radically applying this truth to my life?"* Why do I refuse to act on it, as I know I should? Why does it have such a hold on my life?

Seek out those who know you best and ask them to show you who you are in light of this text.

Spend time crying out to God in confession and repentance. Ask God for the insight to spot the enemy's strategies in this area. Then beg him for the strength to withstand his attacks.

Look Outward

Ask: What does God want to *accomplish* in this text?

a. In what ways are the people you lead similar to the original audience? Consider the similarities that may exist. Consider factors such as

- Socio-economically – poor or affluent?
- Socially – comfortable family units or widows/orphans?
- Morally – living surrounded by licentiousness? Affluence? Hedonism? Secularism?
- Politically – is your country being led by a someone trying to follow God's direction or by a pagan?

- Spiritually - length of time they have walked with God, the spiritual heritage they may enjoy, the temperature of their spiritual passion (i.e. cool, lukewarm or boiling hot?)

b. Do you think that your people *want* to live in

harmony with the teaching of this text? Why or why not? If they are honest, what would their objections be? *[I recommend that you get a group of people from your congregation and ask them this. Get "feedback in advance" on this.]*

c. What is keeping you and your people from living out this text? Are there structural / organizational barriers?

d. What people in your congregation have lived in obedience to this text? (think of specific people)

e. What people in your congregation have lived in violation of this text? (again, think of specific people)

f. How could this truth transform your people and/or the community that you and your people live and minister? What are the ripple effects that could result from embracing the truth of this text?

Look Forward

Ask: What could *negate* the progress that I have just made through this text?

a. What circumstances could make continued obedience to this truth difficult? (e.g. sudden singleness (divorce/death), financial pressures (economic recession / job loss)

b. What will be the future benefits (individually and corporately) of lived in conformity to this Scripture?

Embrace Community

Why do we consider preaching a competition sport? Doesn't it seem strange that so little genuine community exists among preachers? Especially when we have so much in common?

I have spent my entire pastoral ministry as part of a denomination, but it was only during some of the very early days that I felt emotionally and spiritually connected to other denominational pastors. Everyone seems absorbed in their own churches and careers. Pastors view other pastors as a pride male lion on the savannah would view a younger bachelor lion. As threats trying to take away their pride.

Deep preachers refuse to view other preachers as rivals. They know who they are before God and have no ego to protect; all they want is for God to be glorified. Deep preachers genuinely resonate with John the Baptist that "it is O.K. if my ministry decreases, as long as Jesus' ministry increases." They view other preachers as fellow laborers in the kingdom, and understand that our joint goal is to bring in the harvest for the God we jointly serve. And they are willing to hold the ladder while their colleague picks the fruit.

So why do our sermon preparation alone? Why not try and find other deep preachers in your area and get together with on a regular basis? This could be like one of John Wesley's "Holy Clubs" as you combine a vigorous time of sermon discussion with relentlessly vigorous application of the God's word to your own lives.

If you are interested in starting a contemporary "holy club," I recommend that you establish that the primary purpose of these groups is to do spiritual life together. The secondary purpose of these groups should be sermon assistance. In order to preserve intimacy and allow everyone to participate, I would restrict the size of a group to about half dozen people

Since this group will be working through the five questions of Closet Work, you will be practicing the spiritual disciplines together and holding each other accountable for holy living as you work through biblical passages. Membership in this group will, therefore, require absolute transparency, honesty and confidentiality. Those who won't commit to this should be politely excused from the group.

These "holy clubs" could meet as often as every other week, but I suspect that most pastors will find that monthly meetings work best. I would put on a pot of coffee and set aside an entire morning (8 am - noon) for the meeting. You have a lot of work to do!

When you meet, begin by sharing the exegesis that group members have done in advance on your pre-assigned passages. Depending on how often your group meets, you may have two or four passages to talk about. Regardless of how many passages you plan on working through, be sure that everyone comes with homework done. I would be very firm here and refuse to allow people to attend or participate unless their exegesis is complete. By "complete" I mean that the big idea of every passage scheduled for that morning is written down and ready to be exegetically defended and discussed. This group is not a place where people can avoid hard work in the biblical text. "What does this passage mean to you?" should not be allowed. The world has enough "pooled ignorance;" we don't have to contribute to it.

Start your "holy club" meeting by having people take turns presenting one of the assigned exegetical ideas. Spend some time trying to reach group consensus on your ideas in the context of the give and take of group discussion. If agreement on an idea is not possible, don't get stuck. Just move on. If a member of the group is constantly lost or way off the mark with their ideas, your group has a problem. This may not be the right group for them. Don't allow one person's exegetical struggles to sabotage the work of the entire

group. As the group agrees on exegetical ideas write those ideas on a white board. Now you are ready to start your Closet Work.

Use the summary of the five questions of Closet Work included in the appendix of the book to guide your discussion. When you look backwards, be sure to place your idea in its original historical story. Then be sure you take time metaphoring that idea. Group metaphoring can be very helpful. The process of deciding what metaphors work best and why, will really sharpen people's understanding of the biblical idea.

My hunch is that your group will find the second question, where you look upwards at God, to be the easiest. Not because the question is simple, or because God is, but because it feels safe to look away from our own hearts. For this reason it is important not to let the group spend all of its time here. Deal with it and move on.

The third question is the hardest. Looking inward is not a preacher's preference. We would rather examine other people's lives than our own. But the discussion around "What is God saying to me in this text?" is critical. It is here, and perhaps only here, where the biblical text and our group members will make sure that we are not just "playing preacher." This is where we are "honest to God" and with his people. This is where genuine intimacy can forge 14-carat quality relationships. This is where strangers are transformed into friends. Where threatening lions become friendly allies. Pray, weep and laugh together. Just don't lie. And never, ever break a confidence. This is where Dietrich Bonheoffer's idea of community can become a living reality.[28]

The fourth question, where we ask what God wants to accomplish through this text in the live of others will also be helpful for your discussion but, if you have already received feedback in advance, you will not have to spend too much time here. And be sure that you do not confess other people's sins, or allow your time together

to degenerate into a gripe session. Yes, ministry is tough and our congregants are all sinners; now lets move on.

The fifth question will be very helpful for you to discuss in your "holy club." You will find that those members of your group who have walked with God, and led his people the longest will have some important insights to share. They have been around long enough to see how Satan operates—to learn his *modus operandi*. Some significant teaching and learning can take place here!

End your discussion of the idea of a particular text by talking, in general terms, about how this idea could be preached. The idea is not for all of you to emerge from your "holy club" meeting with identical sermons. You are all different people preaching in different situations to different people . . . so your sermons should all be unique. But it is helpful to bandy around ideas for everyone to consider. You can help each other become more homiletically creative. Together you can encourage the cautious preachers to take necessary risks . . . and caution the impulsive preachers not to be stupid. Everyone will remain responsible for the sermons that they choose to preach, but wouldn't it be wonderful to have a group of trusted preacher friends to bounce your ideas off of?

Deep preachers understand the importance of getting alone with God to do serious Closet Work. But they also value community.

We are to work and pray for God's kingdom to come, not our own. And we are willing to work together for the glory of God.

Your Partners in Preaching

Sermon preparation is not supposed to be a lonely task. God does not ask us to "go it alone." To combat the loneliness of the preachers study God first gives us his Holy Spirit—to constantly reach out to him in dialogical prayer as we meditate day and night on his

word. And, on those occasions when we hit the wall exegetically or homiletically, we can cry out in desperation as we fast.

A further provision that God gives preachers is fellow preachers. The common love that we preachers share for God, God's people and God's word can bind us together into a holy community. Our joint passion for preaching can fuel a deeper passion to know and resemble the God we proclaim. Together we can stir one another on to good works, and deep preaching.

Notes

1. See J. Kent Edwards, *Effective First-Person Biblical Preaching*: *The Steps from Text to Narrative Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005).
2. John 14:16-17.
3. John 16:12-15.
4. Luke 24:45.
5. *Institutes*, 1:7, 4–5.
6. Millard J. Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation : Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993), 44-45.
7. 2 Corinthians 2:14 NIV.
8. 1 Corinthians 2:7-13 NIV.
9. Ephesians 1:17-18 NIV.
10. "Endless possibilities of self-deception and Satanic befoulment open up the moment we lay aside the Word to follow supposedly direct leadings of the Spirit apart from the Word." J.I Packer. "The Holy Spirit and His Work," *International Council on Biblical Inerrancy Update* (August 1985): 3.
11. Matthew 6:6, KJV.
12. A. W. Tozer, *God's Pursuit of Man* (Camp Hill, PA: WingSpread Publishers, 2007),79, 80.
13. 1 Thessalonians 1:5 NIV.
14. Colossians 1:1:9 NIV.
15. Colossians 3:16.
16. Acts 6:2-4 NIV—emphasis mine.
17. The word προσκαρτερέω is used twice in this verse.
18. e.g. Acts 2:41, 4:4, 10:44, 13:15, 14:12, 17:11, 20:2, 7 .
19. Words commonly used for preaching in the book of Acts are κηρύσσω

(kerusso) which is used 8 times, καταγγέλλω (kataggello) which is used 11 times, and ευαγγελιζω (euaggelizo) which is used 15 times and διδάσκω (didasko) which is used 16 times.

20. E.g. Acts 1:1, 4:29, 31, 6:7, 8:4, 14, 25, 11:1, 12:24, 13:5, 7, 44, 46, 48, 49, 14:3, 25, 15:15, 35, 36, 16:6, 32, 17:13, 18:11, 19:10, 20, 20:32.
21. Balz, Horst Robert and Gerhard Schneider, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990-c 1993), S. 3:306.
22. Luke 4:43,44.
23. Roy Walter Williams, The Puritan concept and practice of prayer: Private, family and public. Ph.D. diss., University of London p. 32 as quoted in Stephen Ratliff, The Strategic role of prayer in preaching. Unpublished thesis, Trinity International University, 2000, 18.
24. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1971), 170-171.
25. C. H. Spurgeon, *Lectures to My Students: Complete & Unabridged*, New ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1954), 43.
26. Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 64.
27. James 4:2.
28. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, [1st ed. (New York: Harper, 1954).

The Unfinished Sermon: Involving the Body In Preparation and Delivery

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Abstract

Sermons have long been the exclusive province of the trained professional; their formulation and documentation the very pedigree of a professional clergy class. But while bolstering authority and expertise, the private, finished sermon actually promotes individualism over community. How can we include others in the generation and delivery of a sermon without compromising legitimate Scriptural authority? How participatory does a sermon need to be?

Introduction

Ever since the invention of the printing press, homiletics has been heavily influenced by the communicative dynamics of the printed page. Sermon crafting and delivery became almost synonymous with the skills of penmanship and scribal documentation. Even today the verb most often connected to homiletics is "write." We don't often say, "I'm going to go speak my sermon" or "meditate my sermon." Sermons, since Gutenberg, have been a highly literary enterprise.[1]

This is not a surprise to any student of the history of communication, nor is it entirely lamentable. Literary approaches have greatly assisted a sermon's ability to be preserved, distributed, and, inevitably, sold as a commodity. Without mass literacy, the ideas behind great

sermons would not have had the widespread impact they had in the past and can still command today. Who doesn't have a collection of great sermons on a shelf, and who hasn't benefited from reading another preacher's substantive work?

Nevertheless, the literary shaping of homiletics has also had some unfortunate consequences that together do not typically assist a preacher in the vital task of building community. In this article we will unpack the ingredients of a sermon as a product of literary modernity and then reassemble those same ingredients from the perspective of an older, more oral orientation with an eye toward preaching as a community-building experience.[2]

The Modern Preacher

The modern preacher is laden with the metaphor of the expert. Being the most highly trained and most articulate student of theology among the congregation, the modern preacher is expected to be, and indeed sometimes enjoys the prospect of being, the best. Such a preacher feels a responsibility to take seriously the study of the word of God and to deliver the product of that study accurately and with appropriate authority. But this places him or her on a higher plane than the average layperson who typically defers to pastoral expertise on matters of theology and biblical interpretation.

Such a preacher labors away in privacy. For only in privacy, surrounded with concomitant literary resources, can he responsibly prepare. So prepare he does, working diligently to craft a document that will adequately express the ideas of the passage and their application to contemporary life. But with the privacy comes a subtle sense of secrecy, or at least anticipation. That is, the congregation does not know what is being prepared and must wait until Sunday for the grand unveiling. To see or hear of the sermon before that time would be akin to peeking prematurely behind the homiletic curtain. All good experts work alone.

The Modern Sermon

The modern sermon then, takes on documentary authority. It has been culled from text and reformulated into text. It is word-smithed and polished, organized and outlined. But above all, it is finished. That is, when the final period has been typed or the final sub-point enumerated, there is a sense of completion. It may be Wednesday, or Friday, or Saturday night. But it comes to a point of completion before delivery on Sunday.

Besides being finished, it is external to the preacher. The sermon lives on a hard drive, or a set of note cards, or a hand-written outline. In any event, it can sit on a table or reside in a file. It is out "there," localized in space and time.

The Modern Audience

When Sunday arrives, the expert preacher and the finished sermon meet a passive audience. They are conceived as the recipients of the prior preparation. They gather, ideally anyway, with a sense of curiosity about what the preacher might address today. Of course they have, other than perhaps the scriptural reference of the day's passage, no idea what might be said. They have no expectation that they could or should know. They are not professionals and are inclined to leave such things to professionals, hoping for a delivery that will at least not be tedious and perhaps offer a dash of helpful inspiration. But they do not conceive of themselves as a shaping force or as co-crafters of the sermon. They cannot imagine what that might mean or how they could possibly participate.

This communicative environment can build and sustain a sense of individual expertise and scriptural authority. A sermon series from this orientation can address the subject of community and the importance of community-building endeavors. But it cannot effectively build community itself because it is, in its very nature,

at cross-purposes with community. This environment is designed for something else: authority, accuracy, and predictability. But if homiletics is going to promote community its composition and praxis, it must be reassembled an entirely different way.

The Pre-Modern Option

To think differently about homiletics requires a certain strategic forgetting. We must realize that modern preachers and their congregations are products of a certain period of history. We need not fault ourselves for that, but we must acknowledge it. Preachers did not always prepare and deliver like we do today and congregations did not always follow along in their study bibles. Moderns are sometimes surprised to discover that in the early church, only about 10% of house church congregants could have read and written like we do today.[3] Most were largely or entirely illiterate. In fact, this was the case from the church's founding clear up to the early Renaissance. For most of church history, lay people simply did not have access to and proficiency in, literacy. For most of church history people had no personal Bibles and no ability or even expectation to acquire one. Preaching in these circumstances of limited literacy had to be different.

Without launching into an entire treatise on the history of communication and preaching, it is enough to remember that things were not always done like they have been done since Gutenberg where knowledge and wisdom became virtually equated with textual competence. There is another kind of competence, an oral and communal intelligence, that used to work amazingly well in generations before us. It is that competence, as applied to homiletics, we will attempt to build.

The Pre-Modern Preacher

What if the preacher had no books to study? What then? What

if there were no commentaries and only scant collections of copied texts? What if there was no complete Bible anywhere in the church? What if preachers had to preach without the later standards of literary competence? Or what if they could read and write a little in Latin, but couldn't make much of the Greek papyri on which Paul's letter was copied? What if, in say 200 AD, they were required to ration writing materials and could not practically afford effusive literacy? In short, how did they preach without our dependence upon text since they had to do so for such a long and formative period?

In the primarily oral societies prior to mass literacy, preaching was closer to poetic performance than to writing. There was a collective sense of a delivered body of truth that was owned by the congregation, not one individual. The preacher was not so much the expert, as the bard; [4]rehearsing orally the communal standards and the established body of truth that was ensconced and preserved in sacred text, but not expressed in terms of precise literate standards. Let me be clear. Literacy has always played a vital role in preserving sacred text and does that job admirably. But there is a difference between using literacy to preserve truth and expecting it to build community. Literacy invariably builds individual, not communal understanding of truth. The novel was the first literary device intended to be read privately and individually. Before that, literacy captured truth that had already been expressed orally and communally. The order was speak first, write later. Now we write first, speak later. The difference is hard to overestimate.

If the preacher does not have to maintain an exclusive and expert hold on the truth, the sacred text, instead of the preacher, can become the authority. The preacher can become one of many hearers of the word. Practically, the preacher can deliberately break up the monopoly on sermon preparation and open that process up to others in the congregation (spouse, staff members, elders, other pastors). This is not to say that everyone in the congregation is

equally prepared and competent to interpret scripture. But even the best-trained theologian can learn from the insights of others, especially others who have been trained to look for the right interpretive clues. In this case, the process of sermon preparation becomes synergistically a process of homiletic discipleship. By the time Sunday comes, the preacher has been speaking about the issue of the text for days. He does not wait until the last minute to start converting ideas into fluent speech. In fact there is no conversion at all, since the ideas are processed orally before they are ever annotated. This process of shared sermon preparation not only builds verbal proficiency all week long, but also affirms others in their respective understanding of the text and their value as co-crafters. This is the beginning of a process which can build community and minimize individuality.

The Pre-Modern Sermon

If the modern sermon was finished when it was ensconced in text, the pre-modern sermon runs on a different schedule. Because it relies on the resources in the room where it is being preached, the pre-modern sermon is not finished until it is delivered. Do not confuse this with an unprepared sermon. Ancient rhetorical scholars taught how to organize and prepare without necessarily writing anything down.[5] There was a process whereby a speech or sermon could be organized, crafted, and premeditated without relying on quill and paper. Ancients exploited the powerful resources of memory and could employ narrative structures to keep vast amounts of material on the tip of their tongues.[6] Do not confuse this with memorization which relies on rote sound recall and be done automatically as most of us can recite the pledge of allegiance or John 3:16. True memory requires full engagement of the mind and deep, not cursory, understanding of the subject matter.[7] The sermon was internalized and would not have been conceived as something outside, or on a table. It was clear, but not precise. Grounded, but incomplete. It needed something or

someone to activate it and the actual assembled audience became the catalyst that unleashed it.

The Pre-Modern Audience

Here is where the full potential of the pre-modern sermon comes to fruition as a community-building force. Far from being passive recipients of the sermon's finished points, the pre-modern sermon relies upon actual people to midwife the sermon. The preacher was prepared, no doubt. The content was clear in his mind. The sequence of ideas was natural and organic. The illustrations and applications were ready. But exactly how those ideas were delivered depended, literally, upon the faces of the people in the room.[8]

In other words, only so much can be prepared ahead of time. Anytime we write or speak to ourselves in preparation, we are required to imagine an audience because no one can address no one.[9] We only know what to say by empathetically guessing what the other person needs to hear in that moment. We do not talk to 3 year olds the same way we talk to teens. We know this intuitively and practice it reflexively in everyday speech. To do so in preaching requires us to read faces and digest from those facial cues a complex set of feedback that helps us know *how* to say what we know. We formulate words based on what we are seeing and hearing from others. This is the dynamic process of allowing a live environment to co-create the expression of the sermon. In a smaller way we already talked about how certain people can co-craft the content of the sermon during preparation. But in delivery, that circle widens considerably as we invite those actual faces to help us speak, to decide *how* to say what we have prepared.

The great enemy to a community-building sermon is the finished sermon needing no one save its author. That is the self-contained and generic sermon addressed equally to everyone in the world. That kind of sermon, though true and precise, will reliably fail

to build community. But if a preacher can risk the formulation of syntax in the moment, he will not fail to send a clear if subtle backchannel message: "I speak to you and no others. We share this moment as fellow-hearers of God's word. This moment is unrepeatable because these ingredients will never be gathered in exactly the same way again. We are a unique community."

Objections

Some will object at this point, concluding it is unrealistic to expect a mind to be so agile. Only 1 preacher in 100 could possibly be gifted enough to preach extemporaneously. Then be that 1 preacher. It is really not difficult once we understand how to prepare orally. Remember all preachers used to have to preach this way. They had no other option. So why do we conclude, without ever trying, that we could not possibly preach the way all preachers once did? Have our brains atrophied that much? Can they not be rehabilitated (in the same way we might relearn arithmetic after relying too much on calculators)?

In actual life we are extemporaneous all day. We respond to each person and each event as the situation dictates. We already know how to do this. We already know how to speak from internal resources. If asked to explain the meaning of the cross, must we consult a note card? Do not we know certain things so well that we can draw them out in a variety of settings? And if we do not, should we not? By speaking the sermon all week, fluency forms, ideas crystallize, and stress decreases.

Some will say this is dangerously close to winging it. I concede the point. But winging can occur in literary preaching as well. Is not using an old outline winging it? Is not using somebody else's outline or manuscript winging it? Either method of preparation can be irresponsibly employed. But there is a big difference between extemporaneous speech and spontaneous speech. Spontaneous

speech has no preparation. It unfolds completely in the moment as in some preaching traditions that taught that preparation is sinful dependence on the flesh. The truly godly preacher, they thought, is spontaneous. That is not what is advocated here. Extemporaneous speech requires a tremendous level of preparation and only has the appearance of spontaneity.[10] It is simply a difference kind of preparing. The extemporaneous preacher knows what he will say before he starts. What he does not know, is how he will say it.

Some will say this erodes the authority of the preacher. So be it. It is the word that is supposed to have the authority, not the preacher. But what if it devolves into everybody pooling their ignorance and calling it a sermon? The participation outlined here does not assume everybody has valid thoughts. Scripture does not mean anything and it does not mean everything. It means something. As people participate, they learn good hermeneutics and gain more confidence in their own interpretive skills. They also learn what makes a bad hermeneutic and how to recognize isogesis and other sloppy trends. This not only helpful but necessary if we are to take seriously the Reformation idea that people can read the Bible for themselves. If we reserve all the interpretation for ourselves as professionals, what separates us practically from Catholic praxis? At the very least if we are to adopt the Catholic view of interpretation, we should stop berating them for it. Catholics have a legitimate fear about hermeneutics run amok. Just look at the thousands of denominations. All the more reason to teach lay people good hermeneutics by fostering varying levels of participation.

Some will say we have Bible Studies for that sort of thing. That would be great if the Bible Studies were actual Bible Studies. Too many are simply question and answer formats from a printed curriculum fraught with interpretive bias before the student even begins. You can complete an entire book and never think for yourself or engage the text in a fresh way. The beauty of allowing lay participation at the sermonic level is teaching them to listen to scripture without

a prior grid. Just start with the text. Do we really want laypeople who do not feel competent to read the Bible without a study guide in hand?

Conclusion

It is not comfortable to preach in an unfinished way. It is more risky. Less predictable. We fear looking foolish or unprepared. We need to maintain rhetoric of professional expertise. So we reserve the sermon for ourselves. We use it to display our insight and eloquence. We long to be recognized as competent preachers and enjoy the sense that somebody might actually look forward to hearing us. We want at least one area of ecclesiastical life in which we are unquestionably the best. But if we keep a lock on the private finished sermon, we will sacrifice community-building on the altar of expertise and miss one of the vital and necessary ways to be part of the community instead of above it.

Notes

1. For a thorough analysis of the impact of the printing press see Marshall McLuhan's classic *Gutenberg Galaxy*: *The Making of Typograhic Man*. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1962).
2. For a full description of the communicative dynamics of the primarily oral culture see Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).
3. William Harris *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 61,173.
4. Walter Ong, 46.
5. Quintilian. *Institutes of Oratory*. Ed. Lee Honeycutt. Trans. John Selby Watson. 2006. Iowa State University. 22 March 2007. http://honeyl.public.iastate.edu/quintilian/ 10.6.6.
6. Memory was one of the original 5 canons of Greco-Roman rhetoric (Invention, Arrangement, Style, Memory, and Delivery). http://rhetoric.byu.edu/canons/Canons.htm
7. Quintilian, 12.2.4.
8. Depending on how far one goes back, there may have been a decidedly

spontaneous sense to early Christian preaching linked to the idea of preaching as prophecy. As time went on the spontaneous Hebraic sense of prophecy gave way to a more Greek sense of speaking *ex tempore*, especially after the Montanist crisis of the 2nd century. See Ronald Osborne *Folly of God: The Rise of Christian Preaching* (St. Louis, Chalice Press, 1999), 361.

9. Walter Ong, "The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction," *PMLA* 90:1 (January 1975): 9-21.
10. William Shepherd, *Without a Net: Preaching in the Paperless Pulpit*. (Lima: CSS Publishing, 2004), 20. Shepherd appropriates Ciceronian rhetoric for preaching.

Unfulfilled Dreams

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By John V. Tornfelt

1 Samuel 1:1-20

(editor's note: Dr. John V. Tornfelt is Vice President for Academic Affairs, Dean of the Faculty and Professor of Ministry at Evangelical Theological Seminary in Myerstown, Pennsylvania. The following is the sermon he preached at the October 2009 Annual Meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary as the out-going president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society.)

Hopes. Dreams. Expectations. Most people have them. Education. Relationships. Jobs. Retirement. How about you? Maybe. Maybe not. Perhaps it is more appropriate to say you'ave had dreams but life headed in directions you never anticipated. It can happen to anyone! Let me introduce you to some folks.

While in high school, Stephen learned to sail and enjoyed his weekends boating with some friends out on the Chesapeake Bay. Sailing so captured his interest he wanted to make a career of life on the water and he applied to the United States Naval Academy. While his hopes were initially dashed when he was rejected by the academy, Stephen was excited when he received a full scholarship with the Naval ROTC. Prior to his freshman year in college, he went for a routine physical and was diagnosed with diabetes. And sadly, the scholarship was taken away. Stephens' dream—unfulfilled.

- Brenda married in her early twenties and after working for a few years, stayed home to raise her family. But two years ago, her husband decided he had enough and moved to Florida. So much for her dream of "living happily ever after." With two teenagers at home, she has had to return to work but realizes

that she needs to find another part-time job to pay the bills. Brenda's dream—unfulfilled.

- Vince who after forty years in automobile business, decided to call it quits at age 65. He had been able to make enough money so in retirement he and his wife could enjoy life in a way they had not been able to over the years because of the business. They anticipated traveling and spending time with grandchildren. But within four months his wife suffered a stroke and required heart by-pass surgery. After a series of setbacks, she was able to get around but with limitations. Eventually her health deteriorated to the point Vince had to put his wife into a nursing home where she remained for two years before passing away. Vince's dream—unfulfilled.

Dreams don't always come true. Hopes are fulfilled but only sometimes. Plans and outcomes don't coincide. Disappointments accumulate. Glasses may be half-full but also half-empty. Just ask Hannah.

Hannah's Plight and Prayer

Elkanah had two wives named Peninnah and Hannah. Yes, polygamy is being practiced. Did God approve? I don't think so! Because this simultaneous multiple marital relationship is recorded in Scripture doesn't mean God sanctioned it. The author is merely stating facts about people, places and events, and providing details about a very troubled family.

First, Penninah is making regular visits to the delivery room but Hannah was staying at home. The author tells us "*the Lord closed her womb.*" For unexplained reasons, she faced a "God-allowed infertility" which "*went on for years,*" caused anguish, and led to more than a few tears. Though Hannah had "*prayed much*" she also "*wept much.*" Her inability to have children carried a social stigma. Something, people believed, in her life was displeasing to God.

Second, some people weren't making Hannah's plight any easier.

Peninnah taunted Hannah in unmercifully. It is bad enough when the haves and have-nots must share the same space but Peninnah kept rubbing the hurt into Hannah's face. Your heart goes out to her while wanting to put some duct tape over Peninnah's mouth!

Elkanah tried to bring some comfort to the predicament. I can imagine them having a conversation: "Honey, I hate seeing you upset over this whole thing. At least we have each other." Hannah's response (with a hint of sarcasm in her voice) might have been, "Lucky me."

Eli is a third person. He watches her pray and concludes she has had too much to drink (vv.12-14).

Put yourself in her shoes. How would you respond? Tell them off? Put duct tape their mouths? Perhaps. But while Hannah was greatly saddened and "wept much," an unfulfilled dream with no apparent resolution in sight didn't sever her relationship with God. When others may have cursed God, Hannah remains strong. Rather than capitulate to her emotions, her circumstances drove Hannah to worship and prayer.

One reason behind her prayer was her genuine concern for her fellow Jews. Hannah worshiped and prayed in the midst of great ungodliness. The times in which she was living were decadent. Everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. The nation was adrift and without a moral conscience. But Hannah wanted something different for her people.

But was there another motive for her prayer besides her concern for her people? Yes. As a childless woman in that society she was stigmatized. She was both suspect and rejected. So was there another motive? Yes. Mixed with Hannah's prayers for her people

were Hannah's prayers for Hannah. She appears to be striking a deal with God, bargaining and "telling" God if He opens her womb and enables her to have a child, she will give the child back to Him and the child would come to live and work in Shiloh.

God doesn't usually have the luxury of pure motives when dealing with folks like Hannah. Nor does He have the luxury with us. It sounds like prayers I've offered over the years. While Hannah's motives may be mixed, her prayer also has an unselfish ring as Hannah comes face-to-face with problems more acute than her own sense of rejection. She's still able to affirm God's sovereignty and ability to intervene. Little did she realize God was on the verge of setting in motion a series of events that would be jaw-dropping to everyone.

Several changes took place.

Eli's tune changed. Instead of being critical of Hannah, he offers a blessing (v.17).

The look on Hannah's face changed. Verse 18 indicates that she started smiling again (v.18).

And Hannah's abdomen started to change too. She started to get a little tummy and it wasn't because she was eating too much (vv.19-20).

Can you imagine the scuttlebutt in town as people gathered to draw water from the well? They murmured:

> "Have you heard the news about Hannah?"
> "No, what happened?"
> "You're not going to believe it but she's having a baby?"
> "No, I don't believe it. It can't be. She's been barren for years."

> "Well, it is true. Elkanah told me himself yesterday when I met him down at the market."

You may be saying, "Why hasn't God intervened in this way for me?" "Why have my dreams not turned out?" "Why has my life not amounted to what I anticipated?" Let me suggest several thoughts for you to consider.

God and Your Dreams

First, some dreams are not fulfilled because they are just unrealistic. Every time I play golf, I anticipate (or dream) of shooting in the 70s. While accomplishing it in the past, it has happened once in the last 35 years. In a round of golf this summer with my son, I remember standing on the 18th tee and saying, "If I get a bogey, I'll break 100." Shooting in the 70s – not going to happen.

But we live in a world which encourages big dreams and being successful. We're reminded that our dreams can be realized if we think positively, work diligently, and have enough of the right skills. Someone recently remarked: "I can't believe God hasn't rewarded my business when I have been faithful to Him." I responded: "Maybe your plan isn't possible in today's economy or realistic in an improved economic climate." Even in our churches we can be encouraged to believe if we think strategically, pray diligently, and live righteously, God will respond as we might hope.

And so when we anticipate our futures, it is more than a good idea to consider the wisdom of Proverbs 19:21: "Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails."

Second, other dreams won't be realized because our motives are selfish. It is not wrong to dream and plan for the future. I like to be optimistic about tomorrow. And it is easier with the DJIA near 10,000 again! While your plans differ from mine, we all have

dreams and hopes. But problems arise when our desires get out of control. Was it not the problem with the rich fool in Luke 12 who looked for a brighter tomorrow with bigger barns. If only he had learned to be content and not selfishly kept hoping for more. But is it not easy for us to fall into that trap? Let's face it – at varying levels and in different ways, we're inclined to live for pleasure instead of for the Lord.

From personal experience, I know the tension of wanting matters to turn out my way. I can be preoccupied with myself and turn God into a divine butler whose role is to fulfill what I've determined is best. When praying, I can (politely) ask God to make circumstances go my way. I can pray God will help people think like I think and act as I wish they would act. I can turn things upside-down/inside-out and still say "amen."

A question for you to ponder: "Do hopes and dreams with godly motives and kingdom values grab God's attention more than plans that advance our own causes and interests?" Or, "When we pray about our futures, is God more inclined to listen to one person's requests than to another's?" I'm not sure because millions of prayers may not even be prayers at all. They are wishful thinking. They are selfish demands.

In *Praying to the God You Can Trust*, Leith Anderson tells a story of a prayer of uncommon unselfishness. It occurred in World War II, the night before the Battle of Tarawa. Fifteen soldiers met in a prayer circle. Chaplain Wyeth Willard reported all of them prayed much the same prayer: "Lord, tomorrow we storm the beaches of Tarawa. Officers have told us that this will be a bloody battle. Many of our number will be killed. If it has to be, Lord, let those of us who are Christians be killed. Spare those who don't yet believe so they will have more time to make their decisions for Christ. In Jesus' Name. Amen." If I were running the universe, the prayer of these soldiers would grab my attention. But so would have Hannah's prayer.

Even if her motives were slightly conflicted, as Hannah witnessed the degrading temple practices and saw the blatant self-seeking ways of the priests, she took it heart. She felt great shame for her people and concern for the holiness of God. Hope shifted from her own desperation to a fresh desire for her people. Ronald Wallace writes: "Her personal sorrow about her own childlessness became reoriented. Hannah saw the situation required, above all, a leader, a prophet of God who could be a new deliverer – one who could rebuke the evils of his day, preach truth, and call the nation to repentance."

Third, with certain dreams, God may just be taking His time. Hannah prayed for years God would bring her a child. She lived a long time without a word from heaven. You have to wonder if at times Hannah felt as if she was waiting for nothing, wasting her time with a God who either did not care about her childless condition or was impotent to change things. We don't know. But we do know of another couple who waited for God to respond and who were frustrated by their wait.

Zechariah and Elizabeth had similarly prayed and waited for a child. In Luke 1, we find Zechariah on what is to be the most important day in his life . . offering sacrifice in Holy of Holies. This act represented the rising up to God the prayers/longings of the people. He has waited a lifetime like 20,000 other descendant-priests of Aaron. You can only imagine how many times Zechariah envisioned this opportunity. It was the chance of a lifetime. As he stood in the Holy of Holies, Gabriel appears and says, "Your prayer has been heard." What is Gabriel referring to? What has Zechariah been praying for? One matter he has been praying for is the deliverance of Israel? It has been 400 years of silence, 400 years since the last prophet, 400 years of waiting for the Messiah with the most recent being most difficult under Herod's rule who received a twisted pleasure by making matters miserable for the Israelites.

But mixed with Zechariah's prayers for the Israelites were his prayers for Zechariah. He and Elizabeth were good people, living in faithfulness before the Lord. They were serious saints. Though up in years, they continued to pray. Yet they prayed beyond the possibility of having a child. God didn't answer the first time, second or 999th time. For all their praying, all they received was silence from the One before whom they had walked blamelessly. But in the Holy of Holies, Zechariah received the answer of answers. God was coming through. "Zechariah, your waiting is over." And his response? Disbelief. His personal tragedy has gone on for so long that pessimism has overtaken him. He's certain he will be disappointed again. He is so cynical that even an angel's appearance does not rattle him. Zechariah is frozen to yesterday. So he tells Gabriel: "Not possible. God can't do that." Waiting can do that. But more often times than not, waiting is just part of the plan. God is just taking His time for reasons known only unto Himself.

I remember walking across the Denver Seminary campus in 1978 and saying to myself, "Wouldn't it be great to be able to teach at a place like this?" That dream stayed with me as I entered into ministry—Nigeria, church planting and pastoral ministry. After a very difficult assignment and being out of ministry for a period of time, I thought the dream was dead. But the Lord has a way of coming through and in 1998 I was invited to join the faculty at the Evangelical Theological Seminary. I'm living my dream but it took twenty years. God was just taking His time and getting me ready.

Fourth, new possibilities can arise out of unfulfilled hopes and possibilities that you never thought were possible. Consider the words of 1 Samuel 3:19-21. What does it mean? It means Samuel's words were wise and full of insight, and able to do what they were supposed to accomplish. Samuel did not waste his life or live at cross-purposes with God. As a leader of Israel for forty years, he presided over their feasts, interceded for them before the Lord, and served as judge in practical affairs. In his birth, God accomplished

far more than giving Hannah the status she desperately craved. He brought restoration to the nation of Israel by giving them an opportunity to start over.

Don't underestimate God. Hopes and dreams can turn out in ways that exceed your wildest expectations. After all, He is the God who as Ephesians 3:20 states can do "immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power which is at work in us." And sometimes He does just that.

~•~•~•~Book Reviews~•~•~•~

Unleashing the Word: Rediscovering the Public Reading of Scripture. By Max McLean and Warren Bird. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009, 978-0-3102-9270-8, 173 pp., includes DVD, $24.99.

This short and readable book discusses a potpourri of topics such as: why read Scripture in public, how to prepare your heart and mind for the task, where to place the reading in the flow of a service, how to form a reading team, how to breathe properly, and how to use your voice with skill. It is practical, not theoretical or even heavily theological, although McLean's and Bird's enthusiasm for, and faith in, the Word shine from every page. *Unleashing the Word* should help anyone who wants to upgrade the quantity and quality of public Scripture reading. Because Scripture reading is often better caught than taught, a DVD accompanies the book. This disc has segments where McLean interviews members of his reading team at Redeemer Presbyterian Church (New York City), shows them reading—followed by brief critique by McLean—and also depicts McLean himself in action.

McLean is a professional actor who has had a long, distinguished career as a Scripture reader and oral interpreter of classic Christian literature. As he says more than once in the book, he is sometimes criticized for being too dramatic when he reads, but I did not see this tendency in the DVD recordings, except that there appeared to be an inconsistent accent (British?) that came and went. In McLean's dramatic readings, a separate chapter of the DVD, the accent is more prominent.

The book uses a narrative approach as McLean and Bird root their advice in personal experience. This results in a biographical, practical tone, as we travel with McLean to train in England, join Redeemer Presbyterian Church, read there for the first time, ask permission to form a reading team, and so forth. The narrative approach also results in a somewhat random selection of topics grounded in McLean's experience and preferences. We learn to read following his style—very little bodily action, major emphasis on breathing—his personal method of spiritual and imaginative preparation, etc. So, for a quick, interesting, helpful, but limited handbook, I recommend *Unleashing the Word*.

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Dying to Preach: Embracing the Cross in the Pulpit. By Steven W. Smith. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2009, 978-0-8254-3897-4, 175 pp., $14.99.

In recent years, we have begun to see a resurgence of books and articles on the theology of preaching. These have been written to help preachers realize the importance of the philosophy and motive of preaching, not just its methodologies. In that regard, Steven Smith's book is an important contribution, offering a new way to think about the task of preaching. In an age where the emphasis on preaching is constantly changing, Smith calls for a paradigm shift: to return to the cross and to embrace the task of preaching as, essentially, the task of cross-bearing.

As the title indicates, the book operates under the single premise that every preacher must "die" to preach. Smith's theology of preaching is developed primarily from Paul's ministry to the Corinthians: "death works in us, but life in you" (2 Cor 4:12). For a preacher to die, Smith writes, "he must die to his right to be thought of as a great preacher" (53).

The book is divided into three parts. The first part establishes the author's theology of preaching that suffering for others is essential to the preaching ministry. Dying is necessary that others might live. In the first half of the book, Smith extensively exegetes several passages of Scripture; this seems disproportionate in a book of moderate length. Nevertheless, the exegeses provide important insights to support Smith's proposals and are helpful in understanding the overall scriptural framework under which he operates.

In the second part, Smith explores four implications of what dying in the pulpit looks like; he uses the key words Ignite, Invite, Identify, and Imitate. Although these four categories are helpful to understand what it means to bear the cross in the pulpit and imitate/identify with Christ and his suffering, some of their implications seem repetitive and overlapping. While the idea of suffering and giving up one's right and privilege is compelling, more concrete examples could have been provided to support these four distinctions. For instance, on the subject of bearing the suffering of Christ, Smith talks about carrying out the gospel ministry in remote places in the world. However, little is mentioned about what that suffering and struggle may look like for an "ordinary" preacher in the pulpit.

Finally, Smith explores François Fénelon's seminal book on preaching *Dialogues on Eloquence*. Fénelon was a seventeenth-century French Catholic prelate. Smith uses Fénelon's insights into rhetorical theory to suggest three areas preachers need to respect: the text, the audience and the task of preaching.

As a professor of homiletics, Smith has a high view of Scripture with emphasis on Christocentric exposition. If you are not a strong proponent of the Christ-centered approach, you may find yourself disagreeing. However, one can still appreciate the emphases and heart of the author to retain Scripture, Christ, and the cross as the center of the preaching ministry. Preaching is a glorious task, but with it comes dying to self, dying to the cross, and dying unto Christ. Ultimately, it is an act of sacrifice.

Overall, the book is invaluable for anchoring one's theology of preaching and understanding the task of preaching. *Dying to Preach* is a principle-driven book rather than a how-to manual. Preachers, seminarians, and teachers of preaching will appreciate the reminder that the message of the cross must come from the messenger living by the cross.

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Kairos Preaching: Speaking Gospel to the Situation. By David Schnasa Jacobsen and Robert Allen Kelly. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009, 978-0-8006-6250-9, 186 pp., $18.00.

What does a lectionary preacher do when confronted with situations like weddings and funerals, for example, or when a special sermon on stewardship, national crisis, or issues of injustice is called for? Jacobsen and Kelly, both professors at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary in Ontario, want to help the preacher make the great doctrine of justification by faith the theological touchstone for these off-lectionary times.

As the authors consider how the doctrine of justification is preached into these various special situations, they identify several "commonplaces"—basic theological statements informing each situation—and from those they articulate specific "implications" for preaching on such occasions. Their stated goal is "to give you gospel commonplaces that will aid you in your work of articulating the gospel in different situations of ministry and church life in the world" (7).

In general, this is a book on the theological underpinnings for preaching in these special situations. It does not provide specific help with, say, useful texts or sermon ideas. The work is thoroughly Lutheran in orientation. Luther is quoted often (much more often than Scripture itself), though I wonder how comfortable Luther would be with the authors' ambivalence about Gospel certainties. For example, they write, "We come to the texts with our question, but the texts do not provide answers. Rather, the texts interrogate us. Taken aback by their

boldness, we reformulate our questions" (27). Yes, but I wish they had given us a little more to work with, here. I could not quite grasp the distinction they make when they assert that "the gospel is God's *promise*" but "it can never be the guarantee of a solution." Surely, faith in Jesus Christ is the guaranteed solution to sin, death and hopelessness.

This reluctance to speak a word of certainty was particularly evident in the chapter on funerals. Though the writers start with the presupposition of justification by faith, they are unable to arrive at an assurance of the hope of heaven for the believer. One of their "commonplaces" in this chapter is, "God's revelation in Christ limits what we can claim to know about God and the future." Specifically, they say we cannot know—ever—a soul's eternal destiny. "This is the 'eschatalogical reservation'" (56). They carry this ambivalence forward: "Implication—*We should not presume to say 'someone is in heaven.'*" Jacobsen and Kelly explain, "Though it may not seem so, to say someone is in heaven is as presumptuous as saying that a person is in hell. …We cling to the hope that God's grace will, in the end, win out over sin, death, and evil, but we always need to remember that this is hope in a promise, not resting on a guarantee" (58).

The chapter on preaching for weddings is likewise ambivalent. "At the core of the ambiguity surrounding wedding sermons, is the reality that there is simply no 'biblical' theology of marriage" (67). That is hard to swallow, given Christ's regard for his people as his bride, and marriage as a mirror of the church's relationship with her Lord. The authors claim: "Marriage is about creation and God's preserving of creation through human structures. Most of the time when we perform weddings, we do not act as ministers of the gospel but as agents of God's creating and preserving love that has opened the possibility of life in this world to all creatures." This approach to weddings where preachers are agents of the state rather than ministers of the gospel leads the authors to embrace homosexual marriage as well, without having to deal with biblical texts one way or another.

For evangelical homileticians this book is promising in its premise that preaching in special situations should find theological moorings in the great doctrine of justification by grace alone through faith. But the "commonplaces" and "implications" will often leave the evangelical reader disappointed.

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Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful: A Biblical Vision for Education in the Church. By Gary A. Parrett and S. Steve Kang. Downers Grove: InterVarsity,

2009, 978-0-8308-2587-5, 461 pp., $30.00.

With a keen sense of the biblical priorities in church-based educational ministry, authors Gary Parrett and Steve Kang have carefully crafted a major resource for pastors and lay leaders concerned with the task of teaching the faith. Promising in the Preface to address important questions neglected in the last few decades of evangelical literature on Christian Education, they do not disappoint.

The book's fourteen chapters are organized into what the authors conceive to be the four major parts of the educational enterprise of the church. Two chapters comprise Part 1: Purpose: A Mission to Fulfill—"The Poiema of God," and "Building Up the Body." Against the background of the creation, the fall, and the coming of Christ, chapter 1 uses the book of Ephesians to focus on the church as the recipient and instrument of spiritual reconciliation. Chapter 2 picks up the theme of building up the body of Christ and in the process undertakes to explain why the church teaches. Part 2: Proclamation: A Message to Obey and Teach contains three chapters focusing on the *faith* as the *content* the church teaches, the Gospel as "both the center of our *kerygma* (proclamation) and the heart of our *didache* (teaching)" (99), and a "Congregational Curriculum." Chapter five ends with a three-fold admonition to church leaders: 1) to determine what they consider to be essential content for their congregation; 2) to estimate how many members have had teaching of this content; and 3) to consider what "delivery systems" might be used to maximize the educational ministry. Part 3: People: Of Teachers and Learners explores biblical material about teachers (most notably how parents can best teach their children), "Attitudes and Attributes of Christlike Teachers," and selected social science theories that might enrich our understanding and praxis. In the final section of the book, Part 4: Practices: Strategies for Teaching and Forming, the authors devote five chapters to the processes and practices of educational ministry. Chapters 8 and 9 give an overview of developmental and educational theory. But the effort seems wasted, since there is little guidance for applying the various researchers' insights and there is virtually no critical interaction with the various theories. Chapter 10, "Visions of Christian Teaching," presents and explicates a definition of Christian teaching. To teach is to come alongside another, in the power of the Spirit and in the company of the faithful, to seek an encounter together with the Truth: taking aim to perceive it more clearly, consider it more critically, embrace it more passionately, obey it more faithfully, and embody it with greater integrity (277). Intergenerational life and ministry is the subject of chapter 11. The subject of chapter 12 is clear from its title: "When You Come Together: Worship and Formation."

Finally, chapters 13 and 14 comprise a two-part look at seven "Commitments for a Congregational Curriculum." The authors conclude with two helpful and

practical chapters on the implementation of their curriculum. Rather than taking a cookie-cutter approach, they have delineated important *functions*, for the most part leaving the matter of specific *forms* to the reader—the "take and bake" technique mentioned in the Preface (13).

Readers will appreciate the complete set of indices, the excellent section introductions, the helpful tables and figures, and a set of high quality discussion questions followed by a substantial list of resources for further study capping off every chapter. Extensive footnotes indicate the breadth and depth of the research behind the writing.

An important feature of the book, as an overview of Christian Education, is its view of that ministry as encompassing not only typical activities (Sunday School, elective classes, small groups, etc.), but also preaching. Experienced preachers and teachers of homiletics will not discover groundbreaking insights here, but they will find an integrated view of the church's teaching ministry that includes preaching throughout. The authors sound a clarion call for pastors to take their rightful place as *teachers* of their congregations, not just evangelists or exhorters (158). This preaching and teaching should be *constructive*, "leading people ever deeper in the Gospel," and *destructive*, "taking relentless aim at the false isms, the idols and the evil practices of the age" (350).

Parrett and Kang argue for a holistic Gospel-centered approach to teaching and preaching ministry. This oft-neglected emphasis is especially important, as the authors note, amidst the anti-redemptionism of our day (106). Another example of an underemphasized issue is the spiritual warfare aspect of teaching ministry (42–43, 136–139, 383). It is refreshing to see the authors discussing this issue with the seriousness it deserves.

Teaching the Faith, Forming the Faithful provides an integrated approach to contemporary educational ministry in the church. This book is a must-read for scholars, pastors, and laypeople serious about disciple-making.

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An Unsettling God: The Heart of the Hebrew Bible. Walter Brueggemann. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009, 978-0-8006-6363-6, 212 pp., $22.00.

This offering from Walter Brueggemann is an updated excerpt from his magnum opus *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (1997). Flowing from a recognition that present society is in general crisis and suffering

displacement, Brueggemann attempts "to articulate some of the categories of interpretation and guidelines for life that could make a difference in our present social context. The big idea of this book (that echoes the big idea of the Old Testament) is that the God of ancient Israel (who is the creator of heaven and earth) is *a God of relationship*, who is ready and able to make commitments and who is impinged upon by a variety of 'partners' who make a difference in the life of God" (xi). This "dialogue faith" holds more promise for societal ills than current "remedies," i.e., military power, technology (e.g., for health), or commodity goods (e.g., for loneliness) (xii–xiii). Against these poor substitutes for relatedness, ancient Israel confessed that there was "a holy God who seeks relatedness with appropriate partners" (Israel, the individual person, the nations, creation) (xiii).

In chapter 1 ("YHWH as Dialogical Character"), Brueggemann criticizes two extremes: the vagueness of New Age spirituality and the frozenness of scholasticism's unmoved mover. Rather, Israel testified to a God who risks suffering and enters into meaningful dialogue with his partners, specifically, "command and response, failure and restoration" (9).

Brueggemann expresses awareness that chapter 2 ("Israel as YHWH's Partner") is provocative given the current socio-religious and political climate (xiii). Yet "the canonically construed 'history' of Israel is theologically paradigmatic" (20). Choosing ancient Israel out of love, God's sovereign expectation, articulated through covenant, calls Israel to listen and do justice and to participate in the beauty of holiness. Israel is called to reach beyond itself "for the proper ordering of all creation" (35).

The human person (chapter 3) is wholly viewed through the lens of the Israelite person, with emphasis on covenantal relatedness, not essentialist notions common to biblical anthropology. The primary responsibility of humans is "the use of power for the sake of community in the service of YHWH's will for justice" (72). Individuals in crisis follow the narrative of complaint, petition, and thanksgiving, with the hopeful destiny of being rescued "out of the pit" by the power of God.

Chapter 4 addresses "The Nations as YHWH's Partners." Brueggemann notes that their rejection of YHWH's legitimate governance results in scattering, vexation, alienation, and jeopardy (102). He takes up each superpower (Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia) and traces a pattern whereby the mandate for legitimate power is wrongly absolutized (hybris), resulting in their breaking and eventual rehabilitation. The relevant application is this: "if the theological dimension drops out of international purview, and with it any credible, critical moral dimension, then the world becomes one in which might makes right" (134).

YHWH created an ordered world endowed with power of fertility (chapter 5, "Creation as YHWH's Partner"). He mandates that his regents exercise wisdom and righteousness to maintain creation and worship in order to receive and enhance it. Yet, there exists a force of chaos in life, which is embodied in historical agents with devastating results. Ultimately, YHWH's sovereignty is unchallengeable, and there is hope for renewal in a world beyond.

Chapter 6 ("The Drama of Partnership with YHWH") draws parallels between the patterns exhibited in YHWH's relationship to each partner. With each, one sees a "dramatic movement" from "creation for glad obedience" to "a failed relationship" to "rehabilitation for a new beginning" (164). This contrasts with the "metanarratives currently available in our society" (170): 1) limitless generosity against an ideology of scarcity, which produces cruel competitiveness; 2) a breaking of every "self-arranged pattern of well-being"; 3) hope against despair. These challenge the result of enlightenment thinking and confront classical Christianity's tendency to "give closure to YHWH and to YHWH's relationships with the partners" (175).

This is Brueggemann at his best—a masterful articulation of major Old Testament themes, stripped of the nihilistic epistemological framework for which Brueggemann has been criticized. His countercultural relevance is refreshing, and his treatment of the nations corrects a weakness in many Old Testament theologies. Reading between the lines, especially against the backdrop of his larger work on theology, one could argue with his doctrine of inspiration or how YHWH's dialogue with partners is "potentially transformative" even for God (xii). But the relational, covenantal emphasis of this work directs our reading to follow correctly some of the broad strokes of Scripture.

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Preaching the Atonement. By Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009, 0-664-23328-7, 207 pp., $24.95.

Preaching the Atonement is the second printing of a volume originally published by T. & T. Clark (London) in 2005. Coauthored by Peter Stevenson and Stephen Wright, noted British homileticians, this work discusses the doctrine of the atoning work of Christ. Considering ten different Scripture texts, with one chapter devoted to each passage, four biblical genres are surveyed concerning the atonement: two passages from the Pentateuch, a prophetic text from Isaiah 52, three Gospel pericopes, and four texts from Paul's Epistles. The chapters culminate in a full sermon manuscript and a critique of that sermon by the

authors. Included are sermons by four guest homileticians: David Southall of Spurgeon's College in London, Kent Anderson of Northwest Baptist Seminary in Langley, British Columbia, Katherine Grieb of Virginia Theological Seminary, and David Schlafer, an Episcopal priest in Washington, D.C.

Stevenson and Wright define the doctrine of atonement as "God's act of making humanity one with himself in Christ (xi)." At the outset, they express their commitment to three fundamental principles. The first is that Scripture is "the primary source and resource for preaching" (xi); second, "preaching takes place as a part of the ongoing dialogue between Christian tradition and Scripture" (xii); and third, "preaching is a communicative act which is rightly addressed to a specific congregation against a specific cultural backcloth" (xiii).

With these assumptions in place, the authors make the argument that preachers have flexibility to preach the doctrine of atonement in the way they see fit since its meaning is vast and the contexts in which it is preached are so diverse. Their objective in writing the book is "to explore ways in which Scripture, doctrine and particular preaching occasions may be fused to yield fertile and faithful interpretations of the atonement today" (xiv).

The authors do a marvelous job of explaining the doctrine of atonement employing these particular passages. Many nuggets of wisdom will be garnered with respect to theology and biblical studies on the subject matter. Yet, as preachers and teachers of preaching read through the entire work, they will detect a scarcity of homiletical implications on this important Christian doctrine. While sermons have been provided at the end of each chapter with some ensuing sermonic analysis, the authors would have profited from illuminating in greater detail how to actually preach the atonement (which is the title of their book) and from expounding the myriad challenges a reflective preacher might encounter in this process. Overall, I would recommend the book as a helpful volume, not so much for ministry practitioners and homileticians, but rather for college or seminary professors who are looking for functional literature on the theology of the atonement.

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Reflections on My Call to Preach: Connecting the Dots. By Fred Brenning Craddock. St. Louis, MO: Chalice, 2009, 978-0-8272-3257-0, viii + 117 pp., $19.99.

Fred Craddock, Bandy Distinguished Professor of Preaching and New Testament, Emeritus, at Emory University's Candler School of Theology, has undoubtedly

been one of *the* influences on preaching in the last century. His classics, *As One Without Authority* (1971; reprinted in 1974, 1979, 2001) and *Preaching* (1985), have influenced the trajectory of inductive preaching in pulpits everywhere—preaching intended to persuade the listener into an experience of the sermon rather than to authoritatively prevail upon that one to embrace, passively, the deductive logic and linearity thereof.

Not often does one get to take a look behind the preacher in the pulpit or the author at his desk. However, this account focuses only upon the first eighteen years of Craddock's life. And, despite the subtitle, I admit I found several chapters rather unconnected—the one dealing with the African American midwife who delivered Craddock, the chapters on his mother, siblings, Sunday School experiences; etc. Dots they all were, but the significance of those dots were oft unclear, especially as they related to Craddock's preaching call and life-trajectory.

The essay on his alcoholic father (chapter 5) unveils Craddock's earliest motivation to become a preacher. "With a son, his own namesake, going into the ministry, would not Daddy toss the bottle forever and return to the pew beside my mother? Surely. But I was naïve, knowing nothing about the power of addiction. In my disappointment, I visited with a vocational counselor. He shocked me with the suggestion that maybe my motivation to be minister was not a call from God but my own desire to reform my father" (46). Craddock confesses he has never forgotten the pain and confusion of that session.

One important preaching influence in Craddock's early days at Central Avenue Christian Church in Humboldt, TN, was Brother Foster. "He moved easily and with grace. His voice was strong enough to be heard, but not so strong that one *had* to hear him. He talked as though his listeners wanted to hear, as though they were informed and interested. He stood usually to the side of the pulpit, sometimes down in front of the pulpit. He talked, not at or to, but with the congregation. Nothing about him or his words was intimidating. He seemed to incarnate what might be called the modesty of God" (91). The reader can see the nascent stirrings of *As One Without Authority* in this description.

Craddock's account of the first time he was pressed into preaching at a local church is marvelous. He had thought he would take twelve minutes, but was through in five, including two interruptions from a mentally challenged person asking Bible questions Craddock was unable to answer. "My life was over. I had flunked ministry, Bible, and preaching. … In one night I managed to begin and to end my career in the pulpit" (106). But soon thereafter, at his job in a manufacturing company, a fellow-worker asked him if he had been called to preach. Craddock, after a pause, answered, "Yes!" "What just happened? At a time when I had been trying to say 'No' to God, I said 'Yes' to Floyd. Had Floyd just called me into the ministry?" (108).

Out of that experience came a powerful revelation: "God sometimes calls through one's realization of the needs of people among whom one lives. … Maybe this was the bare bones, no fanfare call I needed to hear: if one is made alive and aware of human need then that in itself is the call. Look out on the world rather than probing within trying to locate the 'gifts and graces' for ministry" (108–109). Wise words, these.

In the end, I wondered about the wisdom of the authorial/editorial decision to limit this book to Craddock's early years; even his spouse of over five-and-a-half decades—surely wielding great influence in the life of the man and the preacher—gets only one brief sentence. All in all, a pleasant read, but this reviewer would have preferred a more focused narrative of what made the *scholar and preacher* rather than what, in the first two decades of Craddock's life, contributed to making the *man*.

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Deep Preaching: Creating Sermons that Go Beyond the Superficial. By Kent Edwards. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2009, 978-0-8054-4695-1, 208 pp., $19.99.

Kent Edwards has made an important contribution to the contemporary literature on preaching. Much of what he has to say has been said by many others, but he puts these well-proven thoughts into a concise and clear format. The first three chapters are a wonderful defense of, and reasons for, preaching from a logical, theological, and historical perspective. This concise summary is well written and delightfully brief. He then follows with chapters 4 and 5 in which he describes the preaching process. These were helpful, but they essentially covered what most preaching professors would deal with in an introductory preaching class. Edwards even employs quotes frequently found in other preaching textbooks, for e.g., Jowett's depiction of clarity in preaching as "a cloudless moon" (74). Chapters 8–10 continue the useful recapitulation of an evangelical homiletical method. He is clear on his explanations and even entertaining with his effective and enjoyable illustrations which come from many disciplines. Edwards' skill as a preacher who loves illustrations is easy to detect; and it does not take away from the ease and effectiveness of his style. If you are looking for a textbook on preaching, this might fit the bill, at least chapters 1–5 and 8–10.

Chapters 6 and 7 stand out as the main contribution to homiletics. Here Edwards gets to the heart of what he wants to say. Toward the beginning of chapter 5 he presents the thesis of the book: "Go into your spiritual closet, where, alone with God you use the classic spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer and fasting to

invite the Holy Spirit to speak" (86). Taken out of context—the context of the chapter and that of the whole book—this "speaking" of the Holy Spirit might be misunderstood to be prompting the kind of preaching student expositors are taught to avoid. But Edwards is clearly exhorting the reader to prepare sermons in such a way that one is dependent upon the supernatural working of God. He gives concrete ways to do this, and this makes his book a must-read for every pastor and every student of preaching.

If you are familiar with the style of exposition as taught by most members of the *Society,* chapters 1–5, and 8–10 will be a helpful reminder of this modus operandi. For the one seeking a better understanding of basic expositional process of preaching, Edwards' book would be a good tutor. *Deep Preaching* is like an Oreo cookie: the magic is in the middle. Chapters 6 and 7 lead us to take the spiritual disciplines into the sermon preparation process. These chapters would have been stronger with the addition of specifics as to how these disciplines actually affect the sermon. I found myself wanting to know exactly how fasting, for instance, changes a sermon.

Deep Preaching, for the most part, is just "good" preaching. Edwards gets "deep" when he discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in the preparation and delivery of the sermon. For the sake of the continued "deepening" of our preaching, hopefully the author will follow up this work with an expansion of chapters 6 and 7.

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Accompany Them with Singing—The Christian Funeral. By Thomas G. Long. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009, 978-0-6642-3319-8, 224 pp., $24.95.

Recent discussions of pastoral leadership often emphasize growth strategies and effective administration, but at the expense of a biblical pastoral theology and its expression. As a result, the church's basic practices often suffer from pastoral ignorance and uncritical cultural assimilation, leaving them unrecognizable as distinctively Christian celebrations. This infection has been strongly felt by modern Christian funeral services. The integration of the biblical theology of death and resurrection with the church's time-honored practices have been obscured by professional caretakers or replaced by corporate sentimentalism.

Thomas Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, offers an antidote with two purposes: a recovery of the theology, history, and praxis of the Christian funeral, particularly within the tensions created by the modern, American culture; and a reform in contemporary Christian funeral practices that have transformed the theological primacy of the historic Christian

rite into mere grief therapy or sentimental evocation of memories. He divides his discussion into two parts: theological and historical backgrounds behind Christian approaches to death and burial, and then offers suggestions for how one ought to mark the passing of a believer. He also includes a brief appendix with direction for difficult funeral situations. The writing is easy to read and well argued, evoking thoughtful pause in the reader. More practical direction might have been appreciated, but other works can supplement the missing detail.

The work, however, has a few shortcomings. First, some readers may chafe at Long's language when speaking of the significance of baptism as the origin for the Christian's journey which suggests its sacramentality, but this may only reveal the reader's functional depreciation of the rite itself. Second, Long personifies Death (capital "D" contrasted to small "d") as the primary enemy vanquished through the work of Christ and against which Christ leads his people (41–46, 172). This language should prove helpful for a modern audience's pre-occupation with the scientific dimensions of death that may diminish its spiritual facets. At the same time, no other enemy is mentioned, which belittles the close biblical relationship between Death, Sin, and the Law (well explained by the apostle Paul), and the greater enemy against which Christ's cosmic warfare is conducted. Third, his brief discussion of the "fully embodied" in heaven as "the people that God has raised from the dead" (135) seems to contradict his discussion of future, bodily resurrection elsewhere in the book (46).

Of greatest concern, however, is his apparent ambivalence toward eternal judgment, that "the overall thrust of the biblical witness seems to encourage a hope for the redemption of all humanity" (54). While he dismisses "a sweet and easy universalism" arising from a "warm and fuzzy, justice-free image of God" (55), he calls readers to place their hope in God as a merciful judge whose acts are tempered by the work of Christ (56). While this offers greater latitude for comfort in situations where the deceased's faith is "questionable" (199), it remains both biblically and theologically suspect. Thankfully this viewpoint appears as a minor player within the work.

Rarely does a book on pastoral care offer such a robust integration of theology and praxis. Long challenges pastors to lead their churches in celebrations of resurrection hope that reflect an orthodox *lex orandi, lex credendi*. He calls for rejection of the modern neo-Platonism that characterizes most Christian funerals, particularly those conducted within free church traditions that eschew the rite's formality.

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The Glory of Preaching: Participating in God's Transformation of the World. By Darrell

W. Johnson. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009, 978-0-8308-3853-0, 278 pp., $ 23.00.

A wag once said that the secret to success in teaching is to find the two best books on your subject and assign the second best to your students. This volume may prove to be the one you keep for yourself! Darrell Johnson is a veteran pastor-teacher serving on the faculty of Regent College; he is also pastor of First Baptist Church of Vancouver, British Columbia. It is clear that his homiletic arises from his study of Scripture and from his own practice of preaching. Johnson not only acknowledges his robustly Reformed orientation (14), he clearly spells out his foundational convictions. "When the living God speaks, something always happens. … When the preacher speaks God's speech, God speaks. … Therefore, when the preacher speaks God's Speech, something always happens" (10). The three parts of the book, *Theoretical Foundations for Participating*, *Human Mechanics of Participating*, and *Theoretical Foundations Again*, work together nicely to keep central what God in Christ is doing in preaching. The tone of the book is almost devotional, but that feel is happily married to careful use of extended Scripture texts. Johnson the preacher shines through the pages: interjected prayer-wishes and concrete examples for consideration combine with a sermonic epilogue on Matt 11:25–30 to heighten the sense that the entire undertaking is a spiritual enterprise.

Johnson is well read. Martin Luther, Lesslie Newbigin, Stanley Jones, John Stott, and James Stewart are drawn from, as also Dale Brunner, Richard Lischer, William Willimon, and N. T. Wright. Insights from orality studies, multicultural experience, gift assessment tools, and post-postmodernism are not merely cited—they have been digested, subordinated to a biblical worldview, and brought to bear on one part or another of the preaching task. The easygoing discussion of the preaching process and the life of a preacher brings fresh insights that will often evoke a silent, or perhaps even an audible, "Yes!"

The subtext of *participation* comes to the fore when Johnson discusses the preaching moment. There, because we preach "in Christ" it is Jesus the Preacher who speaks. "Whenever preachers take a text of the Bible and try to faithfully 'open' it, they are participating in the risen Lord's own opening of the text" (53). And because the Holy Spirit is not our "auxiliary," to use Newbigin's expression (243), but is rather the primary actor in preaching, things happen. Happily, the theology of the book is not relegated to one preliminary section and then promptly forgotten, but suffuses the whole; theology functions as bookends for the wisdom that permeates this work. One instance of that wisdom addressed in chapter 7 is a very useful distinction between *implication* and *application*. Johnson is not playing with words. He goes to the heart of the matter and helpfully critiques a faulty view of discipleship to which, sadly, much of our preaching has

contributed. There are numerous other instances of his down-to-earth wisdom such as the insistence that preachers read from a print copy of the Bible, not merely from their notes or a screen, so that they may be seen to be people of the Book and visibly model its centrality and their dependence upon it.

Probably all of us who teach preaching realize that each has his own way of leading students through the entire process of getting from text to sermon. Johnson offers four basic—often overlapping—steps (107): devotional, exegetical, hermeneutical, and homiletical. For instance, the devotional step purposely comes first and involves *encounter, news, worldview shift, the obedience of faith,* and *enablement*. By including such important expectations along the way, Johnson stretches the undertaking of preaching and the preacher who embraces such an undertaking. As I did, you may find some questionable assertions in the book, but more often than not, I suspect you will add your "Amen!" to what Darrell Johnson has written.

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Preaching the Women of the Bible. By Lisa Wilson Davison. St. Louis: Chalice, 2006, 0-827229-90-7, 138 pp., $13.25.

Davison's stated purpose is to "attempt to give voice to some of the female characters of the Bible, specifically through the spoken word of the sermon" (1). Although she takes several opportunities to underscore the importance of performing an exegetical study of the biblical text, Davison's overarching concern is indeed "to give voice to women." She writes: "Studying the women of the Bible is a necessary and much-needed activity. It is the only way to right the wrongs of sexist interpretations of the Bible and the resulting oppression of women throughout history in culture and the church" (19–20).

She claims that one significant obstacle in her pursuit of this goal is the shortage of meaningful texts about women in the Bible. Moreover, where texts do appear, there is a serious lack of detail about the circumstances of their lives: "When women appear in the Bible, they are often among the "extras" in the story. Sometimes they have supporting roles. Rarely are they the stars" (13). However, her attempt to "give voice" to some of the female characters in these texts often results in a de-centering of the message that the various biblical writers seek to convey.

Davison maintains that: "Nothing substitutes for good exegetical research. … [H]owever, we often are faced with little to no information to exegete" (18). Her solution is to turn to the "tradition of Jewish biblical interpretation" about which

she asserts: "the practice of midrash has been a respected approach to help allow the ancient texts to have more depth, and to provide possible insights into the stories" (18). But turning to ancient rabbinical midrash as a means of interpreting a biblical text is likely to lead contemporary interpreters astray, as they seek to answer questions that the text itself does not raise. Such an approach also lends an air of unearned credibility and authority to ancient non-biblical musings simply by virtue of their antiquity. This will lead inevitably to a further de-centering of the texts' meaning and a stripping away of the text's legitimate authority as it confronts beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that need to be changed.

From chapters 3 to 12, Davison includes a portion of biblical text, an introduction to the issues she deems important in the text, a series of sections entitled "Historical/Cultural Context," "Textual Context," "Insights for the Sermon," and a sample sermon.
In the third chapter Davison chooses the story of Pharaoh's daughter rescuing the baby Moses from the Nile. Davison claims that: "While the story of the exodus from Egypt is vital to understanding the First Testament, no evidence supports its historicity" (23). She contends that this so-called lack of historicity "does not make the stories and the characters any less 'real'—just not 'historical'" (24). Davison appears to see little importance in the question of the historicity of the exodus. Yet the exodus has always functioned as an essential part of the historical preamble in God's promise of covenant faithfulness towards his people, not to mention his call to his people to obedience and faithfulness.

The most disappointing example of Davison's misuse of a biblical text occurs in a chapter entitled "The Queen of Heaven." The selected scripture reading is completely lifted out of its context in Jeremiah 44 and Jeremiah is made to appear to be condoning the very thing he condemns. About midway through the sample sermon, Davison finally refers to the biblical text. Here she underscores her conviction that "the words recorded in chapter 44 have been tainted by the male-dominated religious establishment." She goes: "I wonder what would have happened if Jeremiah had taken the time to talk with these women baking cakes for the Queen of Heaven to find out why they were worshiping in this way and how they understood their deity" (80).

A good book on preaching about the women of the Bible could be of great benefit to preachers and to the churches they serve. *Preaching the Women of the Bible* fails to meet that need because the author's other interests overshadow her commitment to accurately interpret and give voice to the words of the Scriptures themselves.

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Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue. By Abraham Kuruvilla. New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009, 978-0-567-53854-3, 223 pp., $130.00.

Pastors and scholars troubled by the complexities of applying an ancient biblical text to a contemporary audience will find a thorough and thoughtful guide in Kuruvilla's *Text to Praxis*. This book meets a genuine need in homiletics classrooms, because it delves deep into the semantic and theological issues of application, and it emerges with a clear and simple paradigm.

The book (an adaptation of the author's dissertation at the University of Aberdeen) begins with a crash course in linguistics and hermeneutics, based largely on Paul Ricoeur's work. It moves from the general contours of "language-games," to the specific concept of textuality, and finally to an exploration of genre. His argument is that when messages are committed to writing, that process creates a "distanciation" between sender and receiver that obscures communication on one level, but also opens it up on a secondary level, generating a "world in front of the text": a conceptual world that readers are invited to inhabit. Genre, then, becomes the gateway to entering that world in front of the text, because it provides the rules for how to comprehend it.

Kuruvilla spends the next two chapters exploring genre. He extends the discussion beyond a simple analysis of poetry or law or epistle, arguing that the canon itself forms a sort of genre that should influence how we read and interpret it. I found this section tremendously helpful—a welcome expansion of the usual discussions on genre.

Finally, he outlines a process for the application of a pericope. The interpreter must move from the Biblical text to the world in front of that text, discerning the "pericopal theology" inherent in the selection. This "pericopal theology" is an abstracted presentation of the principles inherent in that text; it is a view of the world generated by the specifics of the passage. Finally, the interpreter applies that pericope by inviting listeners to inhabit that world, aligning themselves conceptually and behaviorally with the ideas inherent in the text.

Kuruvilla has given us a refreshing and helpful exploration of the difficult leap from text to praxis. He has managed to produce an openly evangelical work that is both scholarly and applicable to non-evangelical preachers and teachers. The explorations are full of both sound reasoning and stimulating exegetical insights. His clarity of argument and style make a difficult topic comprehensible for those willing to explore the issue in depth.

His pericopal theology approach forms an improvement over more simplistic models of application like the "ladder of abstraction," since it provides a potential framework for thinking through the application of more difficult passages. It will be a substantial investment (both mentally and monetarily) to digest this work. But that investment will stand the preacher in good stead as he or she faces the tricky issues of application in preaching.

On the whole I deeply appreciated the thought and effort Kuruvilla expended on these issues, and careful reflection on his ideas will bear much homiletical fruit. However, his understanding of the preaching event as a "covenant renewal" ceremony modeled on OT texts like Nehemiah 7-8 was neither biblically justified nor crucial to his argument. Ironically, this was not a valid application of a biblical concept to a contemporary audience using pericopal theology, but an example of application based on superficial similarities. Preaching is not a functional or formal renewal of God's covenant with the church. I doubt if there is any such NT ceremony.

Because Kuruvilla covers such a broad swath of issues, trying to span disciplines, at several places his work left me wanting more. For example, he attempts to interact with and integrate insights from the New Hermeneutic, without letting it run amok into subjectivism. However his attempts at such harmonization lack the depth and rigor of the rest of the work.

I would also have appreciated examples that illustrate how to apply more difficult passages. The skilled preacher would probably not have trouble applying his examples, 2 Samuel 11 and Ephesians 5. But how can I use this model to work with texts that are violent, or monotonous, or steeped in Mosaic Law, or bizarre? Gaps remain to be filled, and I hope to hear more of his thoughts in future work.

On balance this book is a challenging read, but worth the challenge. I am grateful for *From Text to Praxis*, since I so often find myself perplexed when it comes to application. This is a work by someone who has thought deeply enough not only to engage the larger issues and answer the questions, but also deeply enough to make those answers clear and helpful for readers.

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Interpreting the Bible. By Mary F. Foskett. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009, 978-0-8006-6354-4, 83 pp., $12.00.
Finding Language and Imagery. By Jennifer L. Lord. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010, 978-0-8006-6353-7, 93 pp., $12.00.

Serving the Word. By Melinda A. Quivik. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009, 978-0-8006-6198-4, 96 pp., $12.00.

These books are part of the new Elements of Preaching series edited by O. Wesley Allen Jr., associate professor of homiletics and worship at Lexington Theological Seminary. The series consists of introductory preaching textbooks written by scholars of diverse ethnic backgrounds and both genders. Its aim is to provide a foundation on which students can develop their own approaches to preaching.

In *Interpreting the Bible*, Foskett discusses the exegetical and hermeneutical considerations necessary for using biblical texts to develop sermons which liberate and inspire their listeners. To create such messages, preachers must study a biblical text and then discern the response of its original and contemporary audiences. In this process, preachers discover that the biblical text contains a number of meanings from which one is chosen. Biblical texts contain multiple meanings because faith communities determine their relevance (36, 56). Furthermore, given a theological method which requires all interpretations to conform to notions of justice and liberation (31), there are times when the biblical author's antiquated view needs to be supplanted by a liberationist reading. The book is a clear and engaging read. Any assessment of its value for preaching courses is largely dependent upon one's theological method and concept of biblical authority.

In *Finding Language and Imagery*, Lord provides a helpful guide for enriching sermons with evocative language. As those choosing to communicate, preachers must realize that using such language is necessary to convey accurately their ideas and motivate effectively their listeners to gospel-centered living. To help preachers understand their paradigm for word choice and move beyond it, Lord discusses six language theories. While they overlap, each theory emphasizes one of the following ideas: preaching (1) communicates ideas, (2) persuades people, (3) tells the truth, (4) provides language structures for assessing the world, (5) interrupts ordinary life, and (6) transforms listeners.

Since the sermon relates to a biblical text and is for the benefit of the audience, evocative language must echo the words of the biblical text and the audience's needs and community events. For skill development, Lord provides exercises for weekly and periodic practice. She also includes a sample sermon with commentary. Since evocative language employs a number of forms and language structures, the final chapter provides mature reflections on eighteen concepts including grammar, humor, inclusive language, self-disclosure, and the use of the active voice.

The book is written for preaching courses in which the goal is to develop

compelling sermons that relate to biblical texts. Some of its exercises and examples, therefore, would prove unhelpful to beginning students of expository preaching. While certainly an enjoyable and fruitful read, it would have been useful to have found guidance for constructing life applications. Reflecting on the sample sermon, it may be that the author prefers that sermons not include concrete scenarios which demonstrate how the sermonic idea applies in ordinary life situations.

In *Serving the Word*, Quivik discusses how the components of a worship service can interrelate to produce a unified whole, centered on Christ and the sermonic text. She identifies four progressive movements to the worship service each grounded in Protestant history. Taking a chapter to discuss each, they are (1) Gathering, or preparation for the reception of Christ and the Scriptures, (2) Word, or the reading and preaching of Scripture, (3) Meal, or response to the Word by way of prayer, communion, offering, and/or other practices, and (4) Sending, or the concluding elements by which the congregation is released to fulfill its mission in the world.
She correctly notes that while the level of consciousness, specific forms, and number of liturgical practices vary, all churches are liturgical. Again following the Reformers, she promotes the sound advice that the order of worship should vary little from week to week to avoid unsettling those who need a strong measure of consistency to sustain their faith. For students and ministers in more liturgical churches, the book is a helpful guide for developing cohesive services in which key themes arise throughout the worship service. For those in less liturgical settings, it is primarily an encouragement to be more thoughtful about the content and order of the worship service.

I could only wish that the book contained a chapter on the need for and benefits of congregational awareness of the worship service's design. Since few congregations reflect on this issue, it seems necessary to alert them to it in order for it to enhance their worship. Nevertheless, I would recommend this book for introductory courses in worship, liturgics, or pastoral ministry.

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The Early Preaching of Karl Barth: Fourteen Sermons with Commentary. By Karl Barth and William H. Willimon. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009, 978-0-664-23367-9, 171 pp., $24.95.
William Willimon has chosen fourteen sermons from Karl Barth's weekly preaching in the parish of Safenwil, Switzerland, where he pastored from 1911 to 1921, in order to demonstrate the development of the young preacher's theological

perspective and homiletical skill prior to his taking his first professorship at Göttingen, Germany. *The Early Preaching of Karl Barth* begins with a brief yet very helpful introduction by Willimon, followed by the fourteen sermons of Barth, with Willimon commenting after each.

The introduction sets the historical and cultural context for Barth's sermons, noting the major influences and concerns into which the young preacher interjected his own influential and interesting thoughts. "Barth's observations . . . enigmatic and paradoxical though they are, are stoked, funded, fueled, and catalyzed by a good idea" (108). The sermons sound profoundly academic with little practical application and must have been difficult, in both content and style, for the plain congregation at Safenwil. Willimon remarks that Barth "clearly cares more about Scripture than for his congregation" (xiv). Yet what makes these early sermons so insightful is that readers can observe the young theologian/preacher's development.

Barth had witnessed the futility of the objective historical approach of nineteenth century criticism during his own theological studies. Then, as he preached week after week in Safenwil, he came to realize that the subjective experiential approach, where the starting point of theology and preaching was anthropological and cultural, also fell short of grasping the essential power of the Word. He eventually settled into a text-centered approach where the sermon idea emerged out of the Bible and where God, as present, active, and powerful, was the impetus and culmination of the sermon. Of this process Willimon comments, "Here is the way theologians ought to be made—hammered Sunday after Sunday on the public, demanding anvil of the pulpit" (x). It is not inconsequential that Barth's classic on Romans emerged out of this "demanding anvil" in August of 1919!
Afflicted, wounded, pessimistic, futile, corrupted, even pious human beings have hope only in that God, who is utterly distant and Wholly Other, has acted and has revealed himself. "God bears this burden of our life and us all with it, while we always fall down under the burden, or helplessly try to get rid of it …. God finally is the victor over the old life and the creator of a new life, while we only know to take the old life as it is and to curse it" (7). Given the hopelessness of the human condition, all that was left, all that was possible, was to believe and receive, to accept God. "What we can do is only to ensure that we are open" (82).

It appears that Barth constantly sought to jolt his contented, self-absorbed congregation out of their comfort zone. "In order to be able to experience something of real help, perhaps all of us must again learn real suffering" (114). Readers may wonder if Barth ever had an affirming thought regarding his flock's spiritual condition. Yet, one will sense the deep concern Barth had regarding the dire situation in which his culture existed: "So much has come between us and God" (41).

Barth's sermons exhibit a combination of doubt, bitter irony, accusation, reversal, antithesis, paradox, metaphor, and the never-ending juxtaposition of either/or. Application is practically non-existent; when present, it is usually obscure, abstract, vague, and subtle. Willimon comments: "It's difficult to imagine that the humble Safenwilers had a clue as to what on earth the preacher was talking about" (54). Still, Barth's sermons are nearly always Christological in their climax. That appears to be enough for him. "Christ has not lived, died, and been resurrected in vain. In heaven and on earth something has changed in our favor and we now have new ground beneath our feet" (60).

Willimon observes that Barth "set out to take the Bible with complete and utter seriousness." Yet he often missed the text badly, using it as a springboard for his theological agenda, and the sermon "less expository" and more "a proto-existential reflection upon a metaphor in Scripture" (9). Few of the fourteen sermons could be classified as expositional. Most are topical-theological, so much so that, "Barth's heavy-handed overlay of his dialectical, crisis theology upon his text tends to smother rather than express the text" (55). Observing that "Barth never argues in his sermons—he asserts" (76), he "announces what God has done" (86)— Willimon laments that "Barth misses some great opportunities to be specific, to allow the sermon to touch down in concrete, current realities" (76). "What God has done, is doing, and will do in Christ" summarizes Barth's emerging theology as he saw beyond the historical and existential perspectives to a Christocentric focus. Studying this volume, not quickly but deliberately—a chapter at a time—will provide a valuable educational experience.

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More Power in the Pulpit: How America's Most Effective Black Preachers Prepare Their Sermons. Edited by Cleophus J. LaRue. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009, 978-0-664-23278-8, 164 pp., $24.95.

This reviewer reads books about preaching with two goals in mind: instruction and inspiration. This volume did not disappoint. My intellectual landscape was broadened and my spiritual devotion, both to the Lord and to the joyful task of preaching, deepened. *More Power in the Pulpit* is Cleophus LaRue's second text of its kind following *Power in the Pulpit* (2002). The format follows that of the previous volume with an introduction by the editor, in which he identifies nine fundamental characteristics of black preaching, followed by ten chapters in which influential African-American preachers present their preaching method and provide an exemplary sermon. The concept of listening to the preaching greats share their sermonic processes and products imitates Richard

Allen Bodey's *Inside the Sermon* and exposes preachers to otherwise inaccessible mentors. Placing decades of practical experience before eager minds and open hearts, this straightforward approach demonstrates what remains the same and what is unique among prominent preachers.

Several recurring themes surface as each preacher offers his/her preparation process. Daily devotions that include prayer, Bible reading, reflection, silence, worship, and journaling enable these preachers to prepare themselves before and during the process of preparing the sermon. This near unanimous affirmation of personal devotional time assumes that the Lord speaks to his preacher in ways that cannot be fathomed and cannot be duplicated by human input, stirring the preacher and surfacing the message out of the Scriptures. Their listening to the voices of many preachers, especially African American ones, played a crucial role in helping these exemplary preachers find their own preaching voice. Most had a father or mother as their preaching mentor and all continue to listen to the voices of a broad spectrum of preachers, perfecting their own style along the way. Other common themes include grounding the sermon in the Bible while also seeking such relevance that life change will be effected, the role of calling or appointment, the struggle with "dry spells," the angst regarding the sermon's and/or preacher's effect whether of apparent failure or success, the benefit of reading widely, the use of the lectionary, the work of the Spirit, the place of celebration, the importance of the manuscript, and the joyful yet serious task of preaching.

The sermons that follow the "method" sections provide numerous insights into preaching in general and black preaching in particular. As theory and praxis are paired, readers can see and evaluate the practical outcome of the preacher's method. A variety of preaching styles are represented. Some sermons are more grounded in the text than others, though none are expositional in the sense that a text is unfolded exegetically and theologically. Most of the sermons develop a single theme extracted from the chosen text, whether or not that theme could be said to be the authorially intended message of the text. Many are based on incidental or existential implications drawn out of the text and woven into a sermon. See, for example, "Words We Cannot Speak" by C. E. McLain and "Wet Feet" by Raquel A. St. Clair. While some sermons allegorize or spiritualize the text to make meaning and application, there is still a sense of respect for the text. These sermons reflect a broad knowledge of biblical and theological truth. Rather than criticize the hermeneutic of these messages, this reviewer seeks to appreciate the perspective out of which the text is used. The result is that these messages have a certain power that works at deep a level, connecting with the whole person in an African-American context. Such work reveals rich, masterful creativity. These are thoughtful sermons, and passionate. Listeners cannot merely sit back hoping to find comfort. They will be confronted and challenged as well. The crafting of words, phrases, metaphors, and images makes these sermons

powerful as well as pleasing. Readers should speak these sermons aloud to catch the beauty and dynamic of the spoken word.

This reviewer wonders how closely each preacher follows his/her own method on a consistent/weekly basis. Most of the prescribed processes seem so comprehensive as to be idealistic. Still, the standard should be set high in a work of this kind. An even more intriguing question is whether these processes and products are reproducible. Some may wish to imitate the poetic beauty and spiritual power of Willette Alyce Burgie-Bryant's "You Are on God's Mind" or the prophetic tone of Otis Moss' "When Thugs Get Saved." Most certainly these voices cannot be imitated, but only incorporated as one seeks his/her own unique voice. That, surely, is the message of this insightful and inspirational volume.

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Preaching from Memory to Hope. By Thomas G. Long. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009, 978-0-6642-3422-5, 152 pp., $19.95.

The goal of *Preaching from Memory to Hope* is "to call for a bold and joyful approach to preaching … that clearly and confidently proclaims God's past, present, and future to a spiritually disoriented age" (xv). The book is organized around preaching the past (the story of God's people), the present (as experienced in the presence of God with his people), and the future (the real promise of a future eschaton). Long drives his arguments into issues much deeper than mere form or style in order to define and evaluate the theological presuppositions motivating recent homiletical trends.

In chapter 1, Long notes that the narrative form has dominated preaching in America for the last half-century. After surfacing the criticisms of the narrative approach by proponents from the evangelical right, the theological middle, and the theological left, he answers their criticisms and concludes that narrative still provides a useful means of communicating the biblical message, reminding the reader that "[i]f we tell stories in sermons … we will need also to step away from those stories and think them through in non-narrative ways, drawing out explicitly the ideas and ethical implications of the stories" (15). The preacher must be more than a storyteller, but also a teacher and a guide leading the congregation into moral/ethical responses (18). This first chapter alone is worth the price of the book.

In chapter 2, readers are moved into present-tense preaching. Long laments the loss of the presence of God in the thinking and experience of both preacher and

congregant. There is little expectation that God will "show up" in the event of the sermon (33). The good news in preaching ought to be "what the God we know in Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit has done, is doing, and will do among us" (34). God is active in the present tense.

Long illustrates how preaching God's presence might be accomplished by drawing on the writings of Paul Ricoeur. Through a recounting of the text, the preacher suggests the potential for order out of life's discord as the "text projects a world of meaning in front of it and beckons us to enter, engage, and be transformed by the encounter with that world" (47). Thus, the congregant reflects on how the presence of God might bring order out of the chaos of life and, ultimately, lives out the invitation to enter "the world in front of the text" in alignment with the story/world of the text, thus unleashing the presence and power of God anew as the sermon is preached. This exposition of God's presence through the lens of Ricoeur provides meaty but absolutely essential substance for those who take both the text and the sermon seriously.

In chapters 3 and 4, Long engages the "new spirituality both in the church and in the culture at large" (xv). He sees great danger in the trend, recognizing the overtones of Gnosticism that "come back to haunt us again." Four themes that undergird contemporary gnosticism are critiqued: 1) humanity is "saved" by knowledge, 2) an antipathy toward incarnation and embodiment, 3) a focus on the "divine spark" within, and 4) an emphasis on present spiritual reality rather than eschatological hope (72–78). New gnosticism's penchant for self-focused validations reveals its anthropomorphic inadequacy. Long then exhorts readers "to reclaim our role as pulpit teachers of the Christian faith," yet to do so with gentleness and hospitality (109). May there be a hearty and faithful "Amen!"

In chapter 5, the author regrets the "veil of embarrassment" that has been thrown over "the language of heaven, hell, Christ's coming, reign, and the final judgment" (112). With the vacuum created by the loss of faith in an eschatological hope, a large portion of the church has turned to the doctrine of present-tense progress based on human engagement rather than divine intervention. A happy marriage, financial security, relational stability, and similar pragmatic and immediate concerns have replaced the anticipation of Christ's return, judgment, and restoration. Long calls for "an eschatology that avoids literalism while insisting that the full disclosure of God is not fully contained in the present tense" (123). While his statements against literalism push back too hard, his exhortation to stay focused on the promised, future consummation is welcome. Yes, God is in the church's future as well as in its past and present. Here is a truth the preacher should live and preach by.

Preaching from Memory to Hope summarizes a number of key influences in and

on preaching during the last fifty years. Any serious student or practitioner of preaching should be aware of these trends. Too often we have failed to remember the shortcomings of the past only to repeat them again and, in so doing, miss the presence and power of God in the world and among his people through the preaching of his transforming Word.

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Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories that Shape Our Lives. By Steve Wilkens and Mark L. Sanford. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009, 978-0-8308-3854-7, 218 pp., $22.00.

Every Sunday, whether conscious of it or not, preachers engage in a conflict between clashing worldviews. The better we are able to recognize and understand the philosophies that form the various worldviews of the people sitting in the pew, the more effectively we will be able to communicate the truth and confront them with the demands of the gospel. Therein lays the great value of *Hidden Worldviews* for preachers. The hidden or "lived" worldviews examined in this book offer a glimpse into the real-life thought processes that shape the lives of the people we preach to on a weekly basis. By unveiling the hidden tapestry of thoughts and philosophies that make up people's lives, Wilkens and Sanford take the worldview conversation out of the academic world and place it in the realm of everyday life.

So much has been written concerning the Christian or biblical worldview over the past two decades that some may question whether a new volume is needed. However, the authors observe that most worldview books assume that "philosophies born and perpetuated in universities represent the greatest challenge to the Christian worldview." Wilkens and Sanford, however, contend that this is wrongheaded. After all, how many times do Christians living in the real world actually encounter committed Marxists or Existentialists? They state: "The reality is that we don't really encounter massive herds of people enticed by the thought systems found in a typical worldview book" (12). Their solution is to examine the worldviews that emerge from culture, that are often hidden in plain sight and could be called "lived worldviews." Rather than approaching worldview issues from a purely academic or intellectual position, Wilkens and Sanford attempt to show that the way people develop their worldview is multidimensional. Because of this, the authors suggest that worldviews are best understood in terms of stories rather than propositions. They note that the major problem with propositional formulas is that they are too neat. Real life is messy and so are the worldviews upon which people base their lives. Stories better capture

this messiness and, therefore, can offer a more accurate evaluation. The authors contend that the story of our lives is the core upon which we base our identity, convictions, values, and actions. With this in mind, they turn to an examination of nine "lived worldviews"—Individualism, Consumerism, Nationalism, Moral Relativism, Scientific Naturalism, The New Age, Postmodern Tribalism, and Salvation by Therapy.

Some will look at the list of "lived worldviews" and be surprised to see such topics as consumerism and nationalism. The authors, however, do a good job of demonstrating how these "lived worldviews" form the core of some people's identity and actions. From a practical standpoint, preachers will recognize that they are confronted almost daily with people who have subscribed to these nine worldviews. Every preacher knows people who have been trapped in the deception of consumerism or who have bought into the concept of moral relativism. In other words, the material in this book will preach. Furthermore, this book will force preachers to examine the hidden elements of their own worldviews. The chapters on "Nationalism and Moral Relativism" in particular will challenge many pastors to rethink how they approach these issues.

The final two chapters alone are worth the price of the book and are immensely helpful to anyone wanting to be able to articulate, teach, or understand the Christian worldview. In the chapter entitled "The Contours of a Christian Worldview" the authors unpack the story of God in five acts. Their narrative approach is not new or unique, but these authors do an exceptional job of showing how the form of a story can be a powerful tool in teaching and understanding the Christian worldview. Those who are accustomed to the propositional approach will be surprised by how comprehensive and detailed the narrative approach can be. This basic outline of God's story could easily be incorporated into individual sermons or expanded to form an entire series. However, the greater benefit would be for preachers to become so engrained by this outline of God's story that it becomes woven into the very fabric of their thinking and speech.

Hidden Worldviews is a well-written and helpful book. Preachers will find a wealth of information that will aid them in identifying and understanding the worldviews of the people sitting in their pews on Sunday mornings. The book will also give insight into how these "hidden" worldviews can be confronted with the gospel of Christ.

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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.

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

Frequency of Publication:

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

Jury Policy:

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

Submission Guidelines

1. Manuscripts should be submitted in electronic form. All four margins should be at least one inch, and each should be consistent throughout. Please indicate the program in which the article is formatted, preferably, Microsoft Word (IBM or MAC).

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

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

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

   a. From a book:

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

   b. From a periodical:

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

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

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

Abbreviations

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

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

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

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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

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

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