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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.

Constantly Learning

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By Scott M. Gibson

The Evangelical Homiletics Society is an organization committed to expanding understanding in the field of preaching. We engage in study regarding issues in the biblical text that impact preaching. Theological matters also are of interest to the society as we consider the broader realities of theology and homiletics. The history of preaching is also a factor we do not want to neglect in the study of homiletics. Certainly practical matters of how to preach, how to teach others to preach, and the challenge of preaching to varied listeners comes into consideration as we move forward as a research oriented organization. We are constantly learning, growing, engaging in the field of preaching and this edition of the journal underscores our commitment.

This edition of the *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* begins with a guest editorial by Kent Anderson. His observations regarding preaching today will stimulate readers in their journey of learning.

Scott Wenig's article on preaching 2 Samuel 11-12 presents a challenging engagement with the text. Wenig's work with the exegetical and homiletical issues provides readers with interesting insights on preaching the biblical text.

The next piece by Derek Tidball gives some challenging insight on preaching from yet another demanding genre, Leviticus—preaching from the Law. As we confront various kinds of biblical literature we become better exegetes when we come to terms with the clues of each genre. Wenig and Tidball help us toward that end, as does the article by Ronald Satta. The issues may seem rudimentary, but nonetheless serve as a reminder for our task as biblical preachers.

Timothy R. Valentino explores an interesting line of thought. He

investigates whether or not there is an anti-Semitism in the rhetoric of the Book of Acts. He examines the nature of the confrontational language of the preaching in Acts. His study will kindle awareness of the rhetorical nature of the biblical writers.

The final article is by Victor D. Anderson, who explores the matter of preaching and worship. Anderson's research with the church in rural Ethiopia is instructive for a better understanding of preaching and worship. The paper provides solid research and gives practical application of the findings. Anderson's study gives homileticians much to think about—and much from which we can learn.

The sermon is by Steven Smith, based on Revelation 19:11-16. Those in attendance at the Evangelical Homiletics Society meeting at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in 2009 will once again be challenged by Dr. Smith's words. Those who read the sermon will nonetheless be benefitted from this inspiring message.

The book review section once again is a healthy presentation of reviews from various members of the society. We attempt to provide a rich collection of book reviews from which readers can benefit.

We are constantly learning as preachers. As we do, we benefit ourselves, we enrich our students, and we endeavor to help the church, to the glory of God.

The Homiletical Schoolbus

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By Kenton C. Anderson

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

When they were younger, my children would watch a program on PBS called The Magic School Bus. The show featured a group of school children that went on surprising educational adventures to places like the interior of the human body or to the bottom of the sea in their amazing school bus. I've often thought that preachers drive a similar school bus.

In many ways we act like cosmic Holy Land tour bus operators. We pull the bus up to the front of the church as we begin our sermon and invite everyone to find a place inside. We drive back 2000 years to biblical times and take people on a tour with us.

When we get there, we point out all kinds of interesting features. "Here is something to take notice of," we say. "Listen to this conversation over here. Did you notice how he responded to her? Here is something else to notice. We want to be sure to remember all these things upon our return home."

Inevitably, the 30-minute tour comes to an end. The people all get back on the bus and the preacher drives them home again. Just before they exit, the preacher offers one more word of exhortation, to ensure that everyone will remember the lessons learned.

The passengers disembark and return home. There they find a couple of urgent messages on the answering machine. There is a football game to watch. And of course there's the prospect of work the next morning lurking in the background. The homiletical

holiday in the Holy Land seems very distant.

This problem of distance stems, in part, from our concept of preaching. Preachers have long been conditioned to think of their task as creating a bridge to join two distant environments: the contemporary world and the ancient text. The best preaching, it is thought, offers a perfect balance between text and today, taking the people back and forth across the homiletical bridge.

The trip can be exhausting. Worse, our paradigm might be creating some unfortunate thinking in the minds of our listeners. The homiletic school bus approach to preaching will tend to communicate that God did all His speaking in the past – that listening to God requires travelling back to a distant time when God spoke directly and powerfully to His people. Is this what we want to teach? Has God ceased speaking?

God still speaks! Yes, he spoke to Daniel, and Paul, and Zephaniah, but He still speaks to us today, revealing His character and will in wonderful ways. Listeners are not so concerned about what God said (past tense) as they are with what God is saying (present tense). God is alive and his Word is a dynamic presentation of truth through and into history.

So then, my concern is not so much to discern what God might be saying through Paul to the Philippians, but for what God is saying through Paul to the people of my time, my city, and my congregation. Of course, in order to properly discern that I have to understand correctly what God is saying through Paul to those in ancient Philippi. But the intent of our exegesis is to hear what God is *saying*, more than it is to appreciate what it is that he has *said*.

Secondly, the two worlds are not so different. Things haven't changed as much as we often assume. The world is still the world and people are still people. Sure, we may have to explain what a shophar is or who the Hittites were, but these things are easily

described and quickly overcome. The historical nature of Scripture is crucial to its character and its authenticity, but it does not have to be an impediment to communication. Preachers should not worry so much about the distance between text and today. The text is today!

Preaching that communicates with power today will help people hear from God. Such preaching provides a dynamic opportunity for people to hear from God through His Word and through the voice of the preacher. Time travel has its appeal, but our listeners sense that it is little more than entertaining. We need to work to reduce the distance between the text and today. We need to preach so that God is heard for what he says rather than for merely what he has said.

A Different Exegetical and Homiletical Approach to a Prominent Biblical Narrative: Interpreting and Preaching 2 Samuel 11-12

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By Scott Wenig

(editor's note: Dr. Scott Wenig is the Haddon W. Robinson Chair of Biblical Preaching and Associate Professor of Applied Theology at Denver Seminary.)

One of the most famous passages in all of Scripture is 2 Samuel 11-12. There we're told the horribly tragic tale of David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband, Uriah the Hittite. The story shows Israel's greatest king at his absolute worst and, for many reasons, has captured the attention of believers for generations. As Eugene Peterson has insightfully noted, the two names forever linked with David are Goliath and Bathsheba. The defeat of the giant served as an expression of David's great faith but his relationship with Uriah's wife will always function as example of horrendous moral failure.[1]

Not surprisingly, this relatively long narrative has served as homiletical fodder for pastors and preachers through the centuries and continues to do so today.[2] And while not every sermon from this text has followed a consistent path, a significant number of them do. Generally, it goes like this: David was in Jerusalem when he should have been leading the troops to war and consequently found himself tempted by a beautiful woman whom he seduced. She became pregnant and, since she was married, David tried to cover up the affair through a series of deceptive actions. However, her husband was a faithful servant and loyal soldier of the king and so it all came to naught. David proceeded to plot his murder in battle, God watched the whole sordid episode, and then judged the king for his sins. To put all this in the vernacular, David was not

where he should have been and was not doing what he should have been doing so he fell into sexual temptation, adultery and murder and was subsequently punished by God. Therefore what should be preached from this passage is either a) three steps to avoid (sexual) temptation or b) four steps to 'affair-proof' your marriage or c) the pain of playing with the sins of the flesh.[3]

These approaches are all examples of what I call 'proverbial preaching'. Proverbial preaching is the attempt to find 'life lessons' in the text, either good or bad, and then use those to communicate God's will for us in a relevant manner. This homiletical methodology usually works well because it lends itself to clarity and is directly applicable. And I would guess that if we are honest, we have probably all preached this way on any number of biblical texts, be they narratives, parables or even prophecies!

But proverbial preaching often creates as many dilemmas as it solves. For example, while I have read and heard sermons that address the adultery 'piece' of this passage, I have never encountered one entitled 'Five Steps to Avoid Murdering a Beautiful Woman's Husband'. At a more serious and fundamental level, this approach to preaching usually fails to address either the subtleties of the biblical text or the underlying realities of human life. Proverbial sermons on 2 Samuel 11-12 often leave unanswered a whole host of questions. For example:

- How was David able to sin in this way – and apparently get away with it – at least for a time?
- Besides the obvious sins of seduction, adultery, murder, and deceit, is the author trying to communicate anything else about the nature of human depravity?
- How does the content of Nathan's parable and David's reaction to it (12:1-6) reflect on the intent of the text?
- Does God's condemnation of the king in 12:7-12 lend insight into how he views those entrusted with the leadership of

His people?
- Why are we told about David's failure to go to battle (11:1) and then his subsequent victory (12:26-31)?
- And why, when dealing with this narrative, are there hardly ever any sermons that comment on – or even include – 12:26-31?

Fortunately, in the last thirty years there have arisen some different and more nuanced approaches to the study, interpretation and preaching of biblical stories. This was probably first articulated by Robert Alter in *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. [4] He argued persuasively for taking a literary approach to the Bible, specifically as it applied to narrative.[5] By the late 1980s evangelicals had picked up on this methodology and over the past two decades have written extensively along these lines.[6] Collectively, these works show that when approaching a narrative text, it is best to follow certain interpretative guidelines.[7] For the purposes of this article, I have adapted some of these and applied them to 2 Samuel 11:1-12:31. After walking through the exegesis of this text, I will provide what I believe is the author's intent in this story and then give three suggestions on how it might be preached.

The Exegetical Steps for 2 Samuel 11-12

The Unit of Thought

The first element that must be addressed with biblical literature concerns the unit of thought. Old Testament narratives are almost always composed of a major story line composed of different units of thought. Therefore, to interpret accurately a specific story within the larger narrative we must discern its proper beginning and end. A general overview of the books of Samuel reveals that the primary focus of 1 Samuel 16 through 2 Samuel 24 is the life of David.[8] 2 Samuel 11-12 forms a complete narrative unit that fits into this larger story. It begins with David sending Joab and the troops out

to battle at Rabbah (11:1) and ends with his victory at Rabbah over the Ammonites (12:31). The larger context around this passage involves David's incipient conflict with the Ammonites (chapter 10) and the internal conflict and consequential destruction within his own family due to his sin (chapters 13ff). In this particular case, the exact parameters of the narrative (11:1 – 12:31) are crucial for an accurate understanding of the author's intent—but more on that below.

Key Actions, Dialogues/Monologues

A second element that must be investigated revolves around the key actions, dialogues and monologues of the major characters as described by the author. For 2 Samuel 11-12, the following are, in my opinion, the most important. In chapter eleven David is initially engaged in a great deal of action and some specific dialogue related to Bathsheba, i.e. – the seduction, adultery and pregnancy (11:2-5). This is immediately followed with an intentionally deceptive dialogue with Uriah (11:6-13). We are then told about the king's murderous conspiracy to destroy his faithful servant (11:14-25). As can be seen, David is 'acting' on all those around him.

Chapter twelve immediately shifts to God and reveals Him 'acting.' He sends Nathan to David who tells the king a parable about the theft of the poor man's ewe lamb by the rich man (12:1-4). David's response of rage to the injustice is immediately followed by the prophet's condemnation of the king as the guilty party ('You are the man!' 12:5-7a). Nathan then lays out the painful consequences of David's sinful actions (12:7b-14), one of which will be the death of the baby conceived in the affair (12:13-23). But then, ever true to His character, God gracefully provides the couple with Solomon (12:24-25) and the narrative concludes with David's climatic battle and victory over the Ammonites (12:26-31). God's actions towards David and the king's military achievement are *both* crucial to understanding this narrative because they reflect on

David's moral failure as well as the successful fulfillment of his royal responsibilities.

Editorial Comments

Editorial comments are the interpreter/preacher's next major consideration in the reading of any biblical narrative. Standing outside the scene, these comments reveal the author's sense of omniscience.[9] In my view, four editorial comments within this text carry significant interpretative weight. First, there is the comment made in 11:1 'Then it happened in the spring at the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him and all Israel.' The editor wants us to know that it was the king's responsibility to lead the troops into war but, on this occasion, David delegated that to Joab. Second, the last sentence of chapter 11 (v. 27b) reads 'But the thing David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord.' The author is communicating that God was privy to the entire scope of David's sinful behavior. Moreover, he says 'the thing' – not things. The use of the singular should influence our understanding of the author's intent. Third, we're told in 12:15 that 'The Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bore to David.' Here the author is emphasizing God's inevitable bent towards justice, especially when the leaders of His people fail morally. And last, but certainly not least, we're told in 12:29-30 that 'David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah and attacked and captured it. He took the crown from the head of their king - its weight was a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones - and it was placed on David's head. And he took a great quantity of plunder from the city and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brick-making.' In my opinion, *this* editorial comment is not a throwaway line but is of especial importance. It ties together the *entire* narrative by stressing David's climatic victory over the enemies of Israel whereby he fulfilled his ordained role as the representative of God's chosen people. In addition, it reveals that

when the king did his royal duty, victory was achieved and glory was bestowed on him via the enormously valuable crown of gold.

Word Studies

A fourth key aspect of interpretation involves word studies. As some scholars have astutely noted, this can be overdone or done incorrectly.[10] But in Hebrew literature the repetition of words oftentimes conveys special meaning. That is definitely true in this case with the word "send". Robert Chisholm argues:

> In 2 Samuel 11 the narrator uses the verb "send," seven times with David as the subject. David is seemingly all-powerful. He sends people where he wills (vv. 1, 3-4, 12, 27) and by merely sending a message he can accomplish his desires (vv. 6, 14). The repetition of the verb highlights David's sovereignty. But David uses his power to exploit and murder, and God will not sit by idly. He "sends" his prophet Nathan to denounce David's actions (2 Samuel 12:1); God, not David, is the one who is truly sovereign. He announces that David's children will suffer because of their father's sins. From this point on David is a mere pawn in the hands of the divine Judge.[11]

The repeated use of "send" by the author is like a red flag, signaling a major thrust of his overall intent.

Conflict and the Law of Final Stress

The fifth element for our consideration involves conflict. Almost every good story – be it on TV, in a novel or in the Bible – has some element of conflict. That is certainly true here! The major conflict in this text is between God and David over David's evil actions;

the minor, albeit still important, conflict in the story is between Israel and the Ammonites. These two elements lead us to the Law of Final Stress. We see that the conflict between God and David is resolved with David's repentance and the restoration of their relationship. This was specifically demonstrated by God's grace to the king and Bathsheba via the birth of Solomon (Jedidiah—"Loved by the Lord"). The second conflict is resolved with David's victory as recounted in 12:26-31 and punctuated by the striking detail of the Ammonite king's crown of gold being placed on David's head.

Putting Together All the Pieces of the Exegetical Pie

As we collectively view the different elements of this fascinating and complex narrative, it does not seem to be teaching us about how to avoid adultery or how to 'affair proof' our marriages or even about the pain that comes from the sins of the flesh – as important as all those topics are. Instead, it reveals something much more profound and important, especially for pastors, preachers and Christian leaders.[12] *It teaches us—with great skill—about David's abuse and then the proper use of his kingly power and the visible consequences that resulted from each type of action*. This interpretation is rooted primarily in the editorial comments, the use of the word "send," Nathan's parable to David, and the description of his final victory over the Ammonites. The latter two elements are the lynchpins of this interpretation. In the case of the former, a rich man uses his social and economic power to rob a poor man. In the latter, David (finally) uses his military power to defeat the enemies of God's people.

Thus, while David's adultery and murder were truly horrible sins, they were merely the surface expressions of David's internal corruption of the heart. He arrogantly and selfishly used his power to serve himself at great expense to others.[13] It was the abuse of his royal power to seduce Bathsheba and murder her husband that so displeased God (11:27). This is evidenced by the fact that when Nathan confronts David he does not separate out the sins of

seduction, adultery, conspiracy, murder and lying. They are all one big, horrendous package. The reason David was able to get away with all of this – at least for a time - was because, humanly speaking, he had the power to do so.[14] It is his abuse of that power that God condemns. And, as the next phase of David's life shows (chapter 13-18) the consequences of that were horrible.

But despite what the first part of this text teaches and what many evangelicals may believe, power is not bad in and of itself.[15] While it does carry inherent dangers, it can be used to serve others and glorify God. That is why we are given the story of David's victory in 12:26-31. This episode does not merely 'tie up' the narration of military events started in 11:1 but illustrates how the king's power could be used for good. By leveraging it for Israel, David defeated the Ammonites and blessed God's people.

Moving From Exegesis to Homiletics

A Formal Statement of the Exegetical Idea

Given my commitment to the Big Idea method of expository preaching, the formal exegetical idea for 2 Samuel 11-12 is as follows. I have first stated it in the form of a subject and complement and then combined these to express the complete idea.

> Subject: What were the consequences and results of David's abuse and proper use of his kingly power?
>
> Complement: When David abused his kingly power by seducing Bathsheba, murdering Uriah and then covering this up, he was severely disciplined by the Lord (thru the death of the child and the internal destruction of his family); when David properly used his power to defeat the enemies of God's people, he received honor and glory (the crown and the victory over the Ammonites).

> The Exegetical Idea: When David abused his kingly power by seducing Bathsheba, murdering Uriah and then engaging in a conspiratorial cover up, God severely disciplined him; When David properly used his kingly power to defeat the enemies of God's people, God blessed him with honor and glory.

Having spent a considerable amount of time discovering the Exegetical Idea, we must now begin to think about 'how to preach it'. I would like to suggest three different approaches to this challenging task. I will simply label them Approaches One, Two and Three.

Approach One

The first approach is to preach a complete idea that covers the entire narrative. For that, the Preaching Idea, based on the Exegetical Idea, is: *If you abuse power, it will bring God's judgment but if you use it to serve God and others it brings His blessing.* The idea reflects the flow of the narrative but it requires that the preacher do at least three things in the sermon. First, there must be some significant explanation that the core meaning of the text is about power and how it can be used or abused. This is essential because the majority of Christians only know the story from the perspective of David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. Second, given this fairly dramatic difference of interpretation, it must be proved that the narrative primarily addresses how power is used. Third, I would suggest that the idea be applied to the audience in the specific areas of family, work and church and then more generally to other areas of life where people possess power over others (such as coaching). The purpose of the sermon is twofold: initially, to instruct the congregation on the nature of power and secondarily, to challenge the members of the congregation to use their power to serve God and others rather than for personal profit.

A General Outline of Sermon One

Introduction:

The introduction illustrates the issue of power and then develops how we all exercise power even when we're not cognitively aware of that. The need this sermon seeks to create focuses on the nature of power and how it is used. Specifically, the introduction asks 'When it comes to power, how should we use it? Do we abuse it or use it to serve others?'

Movement 1: Telling the Story of David, Bathsheba, Uriah and Nathan (2 Samuel 11:1-12:23)

- Narrate the main events of seduction, adultery, conspiracy and murder
- Emphasize 11:27: God saw what David did and it was evil in His eyes
- Narrate Nathan's confrontation with David and God's judgment on the king for his sin
- Ask: 'Is this story really about adultery, murder and conspiracy or is it about something far more relevant to our everyday lives?'

Movement 2: Stating and then Proving that this is a Story About Power and How It Is Used

- The context of king's 'going off to war' in 11:1
- The regular use of the word 'sent' and 'send' as it relates to David (11:1-27)
- God sends Nathan to confront David who tells him the story of the rich man taking the ewe lamb from the poor man (12:1-8)
- The climax of the story: David's confession of guilt (12:13)
- While our sin(s) may be forgiven there are always consequences to our poor choices.

Movement 3: The Preaching Idea: *If you abuse power, it will bring God's judgment but if you use it to serve God and others it brings His blessing*

- Show how abusing our power brings God's judgment (2 Samuel 12:11-19)
- Show how using our power to serve God and others brings blessing (12:26-31)
- Re-state the PI: *If you abuse power, it will bring God's judgment but if you use it to serve God and others it brings His blessing*

Movement 4: The Application

- What determines the legitimate use of power and its opposite?
    - The key is whether we use our power selfishly or to serve others.
    - For example, are we using our power to serve others in our families, at work, at church or to manipulate them to do what we want?
- Are we using our power to help or to hurt?

Movement 5: Re-state the Preaching Idea and Its Main Application

- Like sex and money, power is a dangerous thing that can be easily abused
- Like sex and money, power can be a blessing if it's used to serve God and others.

Above all else we need to remember: *If you abuse power, it will bring God's judgment but if you use it to serve God and others it brings His blessing*

Approach Two

While it is possible to preach the entire narrative in one sermon

(Approach One) it requires the preacher to cover a lot of ground and fast! Therefore, the second and third approaches may be preferable in terms of developing the idea and managing one's time in the pulpit. Approach Two is primarily focused on the first part of the text, specifically the abuse of power and its negative consequences. For this sermon, the Preaching Idea is *Power can corrupt and absolute power almost always corrupts absolutely.* The idea is a slightly altered version of Lord Acton's famous phrase 'Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.' In similar fashion to Approach One, this message also requires that the preacher provide some significant explanation about the core meaning of the text. Having proved that the author is talking about power, the sermon focuses on its abuse and the horribly attendant consequences of that.

But to prevent discouragement from setting in among the listeners, this message also purposes to emphasize God's grace. Despite the rampant destruction from David's sin, the Lord provided redemption via the birth of Solomon. This message tries to stress that 'Where sin abounded, grace abounded still more!' Fortunately for us, that is the heart of God and the good news of the Gospel.

A General Outline of Sermon Two

Introduction:

The introduction begins by a brief discussion of three of the biggest issues of life: money, sex, and power.[16] It then focuses on the issue of power by showing that, while the members of the congregation have probably heard a lot of sermons on money and perhaps a few on sex they have probably never heard a sermon on power. Yet power is as much a reality of human life as money and sex and so it must be addressed.

Specifically, the introduction creates the need by asking 'Exactly what is power and why do we need to be so careful with it?'

Movement 1: What Power Is and the Reality That We All Possess It

- Definition of power:
- We all possess in some form or another
- Power is a reality of human life but one that must be handled carefully because it is replete with danger.
- The behavior of King David in 2 Samuel 11-12 is a perfect demonstration of that.

Movement 2: An Explanation that this is a Story About the Abuse of Power

- While we usually think this story is about adultery and murder, those horrific actions are merely the surface expressions of David's willful abuse of his royal power.
    1. The context of king's 'going off to war' in 11:1
    2. The regular use of the word 'sent' and 'send' as it relates to David (11:1-27)
    3. God sends Nathan to confront David who then tells him the story of the rich man taking the ewe lamb from the poor man (12:1-8)
    4. The climax of the story: David's confession of guilt (12:13)
- A Key Question: How could a man after God's own heart do such things?

Movement 3: The Preaching Idea: *Power can corrupt and absolute power almost always corrupts absolutely*

- As the king of Israel David not only had power, he had almost absolute power
    - Like all fallen mortals he was prone to leverage this to fulfill his lust
    - Like all fallen mortals he would use this to cover his sin

- The result was adultery, conspiracy and murder.
- State the PI: *Power can corrupt and absolute power almost always corrupts absolutely*
- As with money and sex, God gives power to human beings and takes its abuse very seriously.

Movement 4: The Consequences of Abusing Our Power (11:27-12:19)

- First, there is spiritual corruption
    - David's abuse of his power was evil in God's sight
    - God's Word was despised
    - The enemies of God showed contempt

- Second, people are severely hurt
    - Uriah is murdered
    - Bathsheba's marriage is ruined
    - David is spiritually and morally corrupted
    - The baby dies

- Third, there is (often) long term relational fallout
    - David's family will suffer from chaos and rebellion
    - David's leadership of the nation will be challenged

- Re-State the PI: *Power can corrupt and absolute power almost always corrupts absolutely (with tragic consequences)*

Movement 5: The Need for Accountability

- Because power is a dangerous reality, it needs to be handled carefully and that requires accountability
- Even though it was after the fact, Nathan served as David's accountability so that his corrupted use of power did not continue on indefinitely (2 Samuel 12:1-12).
- Question: Who is the Nathan in your life? And if you don't have one, why not?

- We need accountability because *Power can corrupt and absolute power almost always corrupts absolutely*
- But is there any hope of redemption?

Movement 6: Where Sin Abounded (the abuse of power) Grace Abounded Still More

- After Nathan's confrontation David confessed his sin and God responds accordingly: he was forgiven and not killed (12:13)
    - Both adultery and murdered were punishable by death
    - But David's sin was graciously taken away
- In time God graciously gave David and Bathsheba a new son (12:24-25)
    - He is to be named Jedidiah (loved by the Lord)
- As this portion of the story shows, even the selfish and destructive abuse of one's power can be forgiven and redeemed by God.
- It was in God's gracious act of redemption that He forever demonstrated that power can be used for redemptive, rather than destructive, purposes.
- Philippians 2:5-11 is the classic expression of this: The All-Powerful God became man in Christ and died on a cross to provide salvation for us.

Approach Three

The third homiletical approach draws on the larger context of the book of 2 Samuel as well as the last few verses of chapter 12 for the main idea. In 2 Samuel 1-10 David is particularly sensitive to God's will as to when and how to use his power. In chapters 5-10 he is particularly aware of the need to use his royal power in a way that glorifies God and defeats the enemies of Israel. Biblically speaking, these texts provide a clinic on the ways that leaders, pastors and preachers can use their power to serve God and others. This point is

reinforced by David's actions in 12:26-31. When he finally finishes the battle Joab started, the result is the capture of Rabbah and the defeat of the Ammonites. Consequently, God is gloried and His people are well served.

For the sermon on this text/context the Preaching Idea is *When we use our power to serve God and others, good things happen.* Given that this message would almost certainly be preached the week after Sermon 2, less background on the narrative needs to be given. Instead, the focus of this sermon can be on the proper use of power as demonstrated by David in 2 Samuel 5-10 and 2 Samuel 12:26-31. In addition, one of the main purposes of this sermon is to show the blessings that result from power being leveraged for the glory of God and the good of others.

A General Outline of Sermon Three

Introduction:

I would introduce this sermon with a humorous anecdote from my childhood about my power over the family cat. The point of the anecdote is to emphasize that *everyone* – even the youngest child in the family – possesses power and that it can be exercised for either good or ill.

The introduction then raises the need: How can we leverage our power for good?

While it is clear that King David notoriously abused his power in the sordid tale of his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, we must also take into account his overall track record. There we find a different—and more hopeful story—about how to use our power in a wise and godly manner.

Movement One: Power Can Be Good When It's Used to Serve God (2 Samuel 5, 2 Samuel 12:26-31)

- Explain the larger context of 2 Samuel 5-10 and David's responsibilities as king of Israel
    - He is to serve God and do His will
    - His actions in these chapters reveal that he is almost flawless as he does so
- In 2 Samuel 5 David conquers Jerusalem and defeats the Philistines
    - The result is that God is honored and Israel is made geographically secure
- In 2 Samuel 12:26-31 David captures Rabbah and defeats the Ammonites
    - The writer notes that, as a result, he was anointed with the invaluable crown of the king of Ammon
    - When he used his power to do God's will, he is honored for his work
- Partial Preaching Idea: *When we use our power to pursue God's purposes good things happen.*

Movement Two: Power Can Be Good When It's Used to Serve Others (2 Samuel 9)

- In 2 Samuel 8:15 the author says that 'David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.'
- In the following chapter (9), we see a concrete example of that: he brought the weak and crippled son of Jonathan, Mephibosheth, to his court and treated him like his son.
- Here we observe David using his royal power to serve his people, particularly those in need.
- This is power leveraged for love – and as a result everyone benefits.
- PI: *When we use our power to serve God and others, good things happen.*
- What might that look like for us?

Movement Three: Application: Power Is Given to Serve God and Others

- God has entrusted some (here) with great influence in the home, the community, the church and the state
    - This power needs to be used for His glory to accomplish His will
- God has entrusted most of us with power in various forms
    - The power of our material resources
    - The power of our spiritual gifts
    - The power of our prayers
    - All these need to be leveraged to meet the needs of others.
- PI: *When we use our power to serve God and others, good things happen.*

Movement Four: Proof

- When David used his royal power to conquer Rabbah and defeat the Ammonites he was rewarded with the gold crown and great treasure.
- Our rewards will not look the same; in fact, they will probably be quite different.
    - They may not be material but spiritual, emotional and relational in nature.
    - Our walk with Christ may deepen, our family may be blessed or our sphere of influence may expand.
- PI: *When we use our power to serve God and others, good things happen.*

Summary

In this article I have attempted to lay out the biblical author's intent in the prominent narrative of 2 Samuel 11-12 and then show how it might be preached. By taking both the larger and immediate context into account it reveals that the story is primarily about the abuse and proper use of power. While an exegetical and homiletical approach like this takes more time and energy, the benefits of doing

so are innumerable. When we do our best to reflect accurately the author's intent in Scripture and then preach it in a clear and relevant fashion, the body of Christ is edified and the Lord honored. I believe that the approach given here on 2 Samuel 11-12 moves us a bit closer to that desired destination.

Notes

1. Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over a Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (San Francisco: Harper, 1997), 181-182.
2. For two contemporary examples see Ben Haden, "Consequences of Forgiven Sin," in *The Library of Distinctive Sermons*, ed. Gary W. Klingsporn, (Sisters Oregon: Questar Publishers, 1997), 4: 243-250; Paul Borden, "The High Cost of Lamb," in Steven D. Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 190-199.
3. For some published examples along these lines see Lynn Anderson, *Finding the Heart to Go On* (San Bernardino, CA: Here's Life Publishers, Inc, 1991), 121-134; Gene Getz, *David: God's Man in Faith and Failure* (Glendale: Regal Books, 1978), 130-145; Duffy Robbins, *It's How You Play the Game* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 87-116; Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny: Profiles in Character* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), 179-194.
4. Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
5. *Ibid*., 3-22.
6. Gordon Fee and Doug Stuart began this scholarly pilgrimage in 1981 with the first edition of their excellent work *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 89-106. This has been followed in turn by Leland Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Richard L. Pratt, *He Gave Us Stories: The Bible Student's Guide to Interpreting Old Testament Narratives* (Brentwood, TN: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1990); David Larsen, *Telling the Old, Old Story: The Art of Narrative Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1995); Mathewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*; Jeffrey D. Arthurs, "Preaching the Old Testament Narratives," in *Preaching the Old Testament* ed. Scott M. Gibson (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), 73-85; Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching With Variety: How to Re-create the Dynamics of Biblical Genres* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 62-101.
7. For some helpful guidelines see Matthewson, *The Art of Preaching Old Testament Narrative*, 43-78.
8. Eugene Peterson observes that 1 Samuel 16-31 describes the rivalry of

Saul and David while 2 Samuel 1-24 describes David's life as king. *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 89-267.

9. *Ibid.*, 74-75.
10. Robert B. Chisholm, Jr. *From Exegesis to Exposition: A Practical Guide to Using Biblical Hebrew* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 37-41.
11. *Ibid.*, 50.
12. Walter Brueggemann notes that "…this is not simply a story of sexual lust…it is the telling of the heavy, sorry way of power and freedom, struggling within the elemental reality of God's rule." See: Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 285.
13. Max Lucado is right when he says 'The story of David and Bathsheba is less a story of lust and more a story of power.' in *Facing Your Giants* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2006), 138. In view of the whole narrative I would add that it is also a story about the *abuse* of power.
14. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between power and sexuality that helps to explain David's behavior in 2 Samuel 11 see Peter Rutter, *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, Inc., 1989).
15. For a fascinating and in-depth discussion of this see James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 176-193.
16. A helpful resource is Richard J. Foster, *The Challenge of the Disciplined Life: Christian Reflections on Money, Sex & Power* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985).

Preaching an Unopened Book: Preaching from Leviticus

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By Derek Tidball

(editor's note: Dr. Derek Tidball is visiting scholar at Spurgeon's College, London. Previously he served as principal of the London School of Theology, where he lectured in pastoral theology.)

Introduction

To many Christians the book of Leviticus is unopened and seems to have few attractions. To many preachers it is a challenge they would prefer to duck as they silently collude with the ignorance of their congregations. Yet, Leviticus was among the first books of the Pentateuch, if not the first, to be taught in a Jewish Torah School because it taught how to live distinctively and faithfully as God's elect people among nations that showed no allegiance to him. Truth to tell, our ignorance of the book is not as complete as we assume since, as mentioned below, so much of it is known because of the foundational role it plays in New Testament faith.

Perhaps we need to start, however, by persuading preachers of the value of preaching from Leviticus. Why should we do so?

Why preach from Leviticus?

1. The inspired nature of Leviticus

Preaching 'the whole will of God' (Acts 20:27), rather than a selective part of it, is a doctrinal and faith commitment. Since we affirm that, 'All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that God's people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Tim. 3:16-17), we should preach 'all scripture', and that includes a book

like Leviticus. While admitting that some parts of God's word may be more timely than others, the challenge for the preacher is to study all God's word so as to present it in its totality as useful in building mature belief and behaviour among believers in Christ. To have a canon within the canon, as many preachers have, is a denial of 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

No part of scripture can afford to be neglected. Our age of consumer choice pressurizes the preacher to provide a diet of sermons that are immediately tasty, not to say, titillating, but to succumb to this pressure is a dereliction of our commission. The fact that so many live on a diet of homiletic fast food explains why so many Christians are unhealthy and have a shallow understanding of faith and discipleship. God has given us a full and varied menu with which to feed his people.

2. The foundational nature of Leviticus

A second reason for preaching from Leviticus is because it provides the foundation for so much of the Christian faith. Our understanding of the sacrificial nature of Christ's atonement, which is expounded in Hebrews, although is not limited to that book, goes back to Leviticus. Without Leviticus we have no understanding of the significance of blood sacrifice. The nature of the priesthood, and of Christ's high Priestly ministry, is similarly explained by Leviticus, especially in chapters 8 through 10. The early church spent much time struggling over food regulations and the reinterpreting the meaning of purity. But whole tracks of that debate recorded in Acts and Galatians make no sense apart from Leviticus, whereas an understanding of the Levitical purity rules brings a deeper meaning to how we are to live in purity and holiness now. The Day of Atonement has its own great gospel significance, even if, surprisingly, the New Testament does not make as much of it, (apart from Hebrews 10) as one might expect. The command to 'be holy, because I the Lord your God, am holy' (1 Pet. 1:15) finds

its origin in Leviticus 11:44,45; and 19:2). In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the principle that we should 'love our neighbours as ourselves' is a quotation from Leviticus 19:18.

Remove Leviticus from the canon of Scripture and much of the rest of Scripture would not make sense.

3. The practical nature of Leviticus

The great theme of Leviticus is about how God's people should live faithfully before him in the world. The London preacher of yesteryear, Graham Scroggie, helpfully suggested that while Exodus is about bringing sinners into union with God, Leviticus is about keeping saints in communion with God.[1] Some wrongly suppose it is a handbook for priests but in fact it a book addressed to all the people of God. It is handbook for ordinary disciples, as the repeated command to Moses to 'Speak to the Israelites' underlines.

It is written from a priestly viewpoint and so sees the world as an orderly creation which runs smoothly when in harmony with the holy God and is disturbed when that harmony is disrupted. The opening eight chapters which set out the sacrifices and the middle chapters, 12-15, deal with how to maintain that order and harmony, and, importantly, how to overcome disharmony when it is threatened by sin, by defilement, or by other factors which threaten disorder. Restoring peace and harmony in creation and with God is an intensely practical matter. The purity chapters have many implications for the environment. So too do the moral principles which are set out in chapter. This makes it extraordinarily relevant for a society like ours where environmental issues are high on the agenda.

Chapters 17-26, usually called the Holiness Code, are unerringly immensely practical and immensely contemporary. These chapters cover issues of sexual ethics, family stability, criminal justice, community well-being, marketplace integrity, economic poverty,

racial harmony, treatment of immigrants, approaches to the disabled, issues of health and safety, social capital and a host of other issues which we battle with daily. It would be hard to find another part of scripture that had a more contemporary social and political agenda! In all these areas, the concern is to locate them note in a political framework but to ground them in God and in his gracious call to holiness. So, why is the book left unopened?

Why is Leviticus Neglected?

There are several reasons why Leviticus is neglected, but some are ill-founded.

a. The problem of its style

First, people struggle with its style. There are only two stories in the book and it smacks of being an official or legal document. It seems to be full of laws and regulations. But this is to misunderstand its approach. It is certainly arranged in an orderly manner but that is an asset for the preacher. If we get under the skin of Leviticus, rather than being content with a skim reading of its message, if we are to preach it faithfully. Then we will discover that it is not laying down the law so much as illustrating how the people of God will live because they are his. When we say a Scotsman eats haggis, or a Frenchman speaks French, we are not laying down the law so much as illustrating what it means to be a true Scot or a true Frenchman.

A particular instance of this is found in phrases like 'I am the Lord your God' which, for example, occurs repeatedly in one form or another in Leviticus 19. It is all too easy to read this as if God is wagging his finger and saying, 'I'm the boss. Do what I tell you. Do this or else!' But that is to misinterpret the tone of these verses. In saying this, God is pointing out that he is their covenant God, the God who brought them out of Egypt (e.g., 11:45 and 22:33) and entered into a covenant with them to provide, guide and fight

for them, providing they lived a lifestyle which was appropriate to their calling as his special people. This is not, then, a finger wagging exercise so much as an expression of grace.

b. The problem of its interpretation

Secondly, people struggle with its interpretation, in a number of respects and here the matter is complex and a several different comments need to be made.

Although Leviticus may describe the ideal society, we must face the fact that we no longer live in a theocratic society but are members of secular democracies. The neat imposition of the 'laws' on others is no longer possible or appropriate. The answer of theonomists and reconstructionists is not sustainable. So, what are we to do? I believe Leviticus constructs a paradigm of an ideal society, as Chris Wright has argued in his various writings.[2] It is not an inflexible blueprint frozen in time but a pattern that 'enables us to move from (then) to multiple contexts where situations will be almost infinitely different and still find or apply principles that conform to the paradigm…'[3] As Christians we should use our democratic freedom to argue for the wisdom of the way of life which is revealed here and to model it in our own relationships.

As we seek to interpret Leviticus we should understand the approach it takes to issues rather than slavishly follow its laws literally. Richard Bauckham has pointed out that we misunderstand the way Leviticus functions if we read it as modern statute law. Its purpose 'is to educate the people of God in the will of God for the whole of their life as his people, to create and develop the conscience of the community.'[4] It does this by developing general principles but these are sometimes expressed as explicit general principles and sometimes expressed implicitly in detailed illustrations or commands.[5] To illustrate, the command 'not to reap to the very edges of your field…do not pick up the grapes that have fallen' (19:9-10) is not to be taken literally but is about caring for the poor who have no fields to reap or grapes

to pick. It is a system for providing for the welfare of those who are disadvantaged which is appropriate for small-scale rural face-to-face communities, but it would be an inappropriate of caring for the poor, as Jesus commanded, if we obeyed this literally in a large-scale and complex urban society. Or, take the command to 'Stand up in the presence of the aged…' (19:32). This is a culturally-specific command to show respect to the elderly. Different cultures may show respect to them in different ways. Those who think they have obeyed the command simply by standing up for the elderly, whilst ridiculing them behind their back, clearly misunderstand the way such commands function. They are keeping the letter of the law whilst riding roughshod over its spirit.

It goes without saying that all such commands need to be interpreted in their original context before being re-applied to contemporary society, although not to say it is a foolish omission. Thus the taboo on cutting one's hair and on tattooing one's body (19:27-28) has more to do distancing oneself from the mourning rituals of surrounding nations than with contemporary hair fashions and body art. Christians, of course, instinctively interpret commands like this, which is why many have had no difficulty in getting their haircut but have spoken out vigorously about tattoos! The inconsistency and inadequacy of our interpretations might be overcome if we paid more attention to what the commands meant in their original context.

Another key issue in Leviticus is that it teaches truth through symbolic actions and rituals and makes connections analogically rather than rationally. So, the contemporary preacher, has to ask what the action or law symbolised, rather than read it on a surface level alone. One of the wonderful lessons that becomes apparent is that Leviticus presents God as the Lord of the whole of life. In moving from discussing ritual sacrifices to cooking instructions, from holy objects to mould in our clothing, from family life to economic life, it demonstrates that God is to be the Lord not only

in the Tabernacle but in the kitchen, the bedroom, the board room, and on the building site. Chapter 19 gives the impression of being haphazard as it mixes what we might see as the more spiritual laws with ethical and social laws without distinguishing between them. This, however, is no accident and is a powerful witness to the folly of the sacred/secular divide to which the contemporary church is prey.

Christian preachers need to read Leviticus both in its original context and through the lens of the New Testament, where it is 'fulfilled' (Matt. 5:17). Whilst the old distinction between ritual, civil and ethical laws has its problems, it is still true that 'fulfilment' is found in different ways according to which type of law is under consideration. The sacrificial laws find their ultimate outworking in Jesus, making the earlier rituals anachronistic. The purity rules are re-interpreted and to be seen as concrete illustrations of the need for inner purity rather than slavishly followed (Mark 7:1-23; Acts 19:23-48; Galatians). The ethical commands are mostly endorsed in the New Testament. A number of them receive no explicit mention but many are implied in the list of qualities expected of Christians, such as compassion, humility, forgiveness, integrity and so on. The outworking of these commands, as mentioned above, may well change and even the Sabbath command is not neatly re-enforced in the New Testament as the early Christians move to worship on the day of resurrection. In some case, such as those laws that relate to slavery, there is some movement in scripture and a hermeneutic like that outlined by William Webb in his book *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals,* is necessary.[6]

Does reading Leviticus through New Testament eyes lead us to spiritualize its teaching? Does it provide typological meaning only for the Christian community?[7] In parts it does but to interpret it all purely in spiritual terms is to miss its plain meaning. To fail to relate Leviticus to the issue of real contemporary life and take refuge in some 'blessed thought' type approach is to flunk our duty

as Christian preachers and confirm the picture many already have that the church has nothing serious to say to the modern world. Some years ago when preaching through the book in the church of which I was pastor, I was shocked to be told by several embers of my congregations who had been schooled in another denomination that they thought they knew the book of Leviticus but had never heard a sermon on sex before. They knew how to typologically interpret the High Priest's garments but nothing of the plain ethical teaching of the book. To preach it as they had been accustomed to hearing it is to seriously distort its message.

Preaching Leviticus may not be for the immature preacher, or for the faint-hearted. It requires serious work to be done, not least hermeneutically. But this is our calling as preachers; this is our responsibility as teachers in the church. And fortunately, as the bibliography at the end demonstrates, there are some great tools available to aid us in our task.

Let's be Practical

But, let's be practical. Assuming that the study will be done and the hermeneutical difficulties conquered, how are we to preach it? Should we plough through chapter by chapter spending just over half a year (given there are twenty-seven chapters) instructing our congregations in its truth? Probably not. They might soon weary, even if we manage to maintain our enthusiasm.

When approaching such a book, I find it helpful to have the image of a map in my mind. Maps are produced according to different scales and range from those which give a bird's eye view of a whole country to those which give a details street plan of a particular community. Maps of different scale serve different purposes but all have their usefulness. A detailed street plan of Boston is of little use if you want to plot a route from Boston to Chicago. But a map book of interstate highways is of little use if you want to find the location

of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton! The map needs to be fit for purpose. So our first decision needs to be what we are trying to achieve and, as a result, which scale of map we are going to adopt if we preach on Leviticus. Here we look at a number of possibilities ranging in order from large to small scale.

a. Very large scale

Leviticus is very systematically arranged and it is possible to give an overview of the book along the following lines. Bearing in mind that it is about maintaining fellowship with God, we might review it teaching as follows. Leviticus teaches us about:

Fellowship with God: sacrifice	chs. 1-7
Service for God: priesthood	chs. 8-10
Wholeness before God: purity	chs. 11-15
Forgiveness from God: atonement	chs. 17
Obedience to god: holiness	chs. 17-27.

b. Large scale

When asked what was the most important commandment, Jesus replied, 'The most important one… is this: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with ll your strength." The second is this: "Love your neighbour as your self." There is no commandment greater than these.' (Mark 12:29-31).

There can be no better summary of Leviticus than this. Although slightly simplistic, it is reasonable to say that chapters 1-16 are concerned with loving God and chapters 17-27 with loving one's neighbour. Preaching Leviticus could use this underlying framework.

In doing so, care must be taken to hold both aspects together. It is so easy to overbalance on one side or the other. Much contemporary

Christianity is riddled with secularism and is far more concerned about loving one's neighbour than loving God. Many preachers make a wrong assumption that to love one's neighbour is to love God. But this commits a fundamental error. It is true that one cannot love God without loving one's neighbour. But one can love one's neighbour without loving God, just as I might love them without loving their dog! God requires, and rightly deserves, to be loved for himself in ways which surpass the purely ethical and horizontal dimensions of our lives. Loving God and loving one's neighbour may be inseparable but they are not indistinguishable. We end up in error if we divorce what God has joined, but equally we end up in error if we merge what God hasmade distinctive.

c. Reducing scale

Reducing the scale somewhat, it would be possible to preach a series on a section on Leviticus, such as on the sacrifices, or on the Holiness Code. The headings below give no more than a hint of the approach that may be taken. Care should be exercised to fully understand the passage first and not to jump too quickly from text to contemporary life. The commentaries mentioned in the bibliography will help. Such series might look like this:

Five weeks on 'How to keep fellowship with God':

1. Consecration of self: the burnt offering	1:1-17
2. Dedication of gifts: the grain offering	2:1-16
3. Delectation in God; the peace offering	3:1-17
4. Justification from God: the sin offering	4:1-5:13
5. Reparation for wrong: the guilt offering	5:14-6:7

Ten weeks on 'How to live for God today':

1. How to keep life sacred	ch. 17
2. How to build strong families	ch. 18

3. How to create healthy communities	ch. 19
4. How to handle justice	ch. 20
5. How to cultivate good leaders	ch. 21
6. How to offer acceptable worship	ch. 22
7. How to celebrate	ch. 23
8. How to preserve what is sacred	ch. 24
9. How to treat the poor	ch. 25
10. How to make good choices	ch. 26

d. Small scale

The following examples give an indication of how individual passages, and even on one occasion an individual verse, might be treated.

'How to deepen your friendship with God' 3:1-17
(The peace or fellowship meal)
Meals often symbolise and deepen friendship

1. The voluntary nature of the meal (see 7:11-21)
2. The careful regulation of the meal (friendship with God does not mean 'anything goes'. The significance of the details will need to be spelled out.)
3. The amazing purpose of the meal (God calls us into friendship with him)
4. The anticipated significance of the meal (The Communion service)

Why does sin matter? 4:1-35
(The sin offering)
The sin offering highlights the nature of even unintentional sin. The chapter explains:

1. What sin is
2. Who sin traps
3. Why sin matters
4. How sin is forgiven

Fire from the Lord, 10:1-11
(The death of Nadab and Abihu)
This is an unusual section of Leviticus since it is one of only two narratives. Here judgement falls on two recently consecrated priests. It is perhaps not best preached at an ordination or induction of a minister!

1. The privileges they enjoyed
2. The offences they committed
3. The fire they provoked
4. The warnings they leave

Burn it with fire, 13:47-59
Regulations about clothing spoiled by mildew.

1. The Old Testament regulations: literal details and symbolic meaning
2. The New Testament application (Jude 23)

Don't follow the Egyptians, 18:1-30
The distinctive sexual ethic of God's people: a chapter right on target for contemporary society.

1. The heart of the call
   a. The call to be different (v 3)
   b. The call to be obedient (v 4)
2. The basis of the call
   vv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 21, 30: 'I am the Lord' which speaks of:
   a. The holiness of God (e.g. 19.2)
   b. The grace of God (e.g. 11:45)
   c. The promise of God (v. 5)
   d. The creation of God (vv. 24-28, note connection between holiness and environment.)
3. The content of the call
   It protects the sacredness of marriage and stability of family life by prohibiting:
   a. Incest (vv. 6-19)
   b. Adultery (v. 20)

c. Child sacrifice (v. 21, no longer literal but how else is it practised?)
d. Homosexuality (v 22)
e. Bestiality (v 23)

Note the condemnation of homosexuality is a condemnation of homosexual genital practice not orientation, which is not mentioned. Pastoral sensitivity is required in preaching in this area but setting the prohibition in context rather than extracting it from its surroundings, as is often done, goes a long way to explain why it is forbidden.

Come on and celebrate! 23:1-22
All communities need occasions of celebration. The sacred calendar of Israel not only binds the community together but witnesses to a generous God. Each celebration needs to be interpreted through New Testament eyes:

1. The Sabbath: God rests (v. 3)
2. The Passover: God delivers (vv. 5-8)
3. The Firstfruits: God provides (vv. 9-14)
4. The Feast of Weeks: God reaps (vv. 15-22)

Radical economics, 25:8-55
The Jubilee legislation is one of the most radical, practical and spiritual highlights of the Old Testament.

1. The particular situation
   a. The need for the law (to prevent economic disparity from growing)
   b. The design of the law (at the Jubilee, land returns to its original owners)
   c. The reason for the law (the land belongs to God)
   d. The effect of the law (liberty)
2. The spiritual foundation
   The law is built on a deep understanding of God:
   a. Trust in God's provision (vv. 20-21)

b. Stewardship of God's gift (v. 23)
c. Identification with God's priorities (v. 25, cf. Prov. 14:31)
d. Obedience to God's command (vv. 17, 36, 43)
e. Hope in God's future (vv. 54-55)

3. The Jesus application
   The idea of Jubilee lies behind the ministry of Jesus
   a. Jesus brings release (Luke 4:18-19)
   b. Jesus heralds restoration (Acts 3:21)
4. The practical implication
   This chapter has greatly influenced contemporary moves to reduce third world debt and has many practical implications for our capitalist society.

Stand tall! 26:13
This remarkable gospel verse comes in the middle of an explanation of the covenant.

1. What God did
   a. He judge the oppressor
   b. He delivered the oppressed
   c. He broke the instruments of oppression
2. Why God did it
   'To enable you to walk with heads held high'
   The objective liberation they experienced
   The subjective education they needed (they were still walking with a stoop)
   The total assurance they received
3. Who God is
   'I am the Lord your God'. God uses his personal and covenant name to bring this assurance to them.

Concluding Comments

The difficulties of preaching Leviticus are only a particular example of the difficulties we have of preaching, interpreting and applying

the Old Testament law in general. Recent years have seen much thought given to how we are to handle the law, so we are not lacking in assistance as we study this book. Our task is to follow in the footsteps of Ezra who 'devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord, and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel' (Ezra 7:10). We have the privilege of spending time in the study of God's word and when we do so we will soon be reminded what an immense privilege we have and what rich insights and wisdom study can yield. Far from being a relic, Leviticus is good news for individuals and for society. Individuals and communities desperately need its wisdom and are suffering from the lack of it. Since we have the resources, failure to meet the need makes us at least complicit in, if not culpable for, the decay of society and the captivity in which many people live.

For a book that so many neglect, Leviticus contains some remarkable seminal chapters. It you never preach on anything else whey not preach on:

The ordination of Aaron (ch. 8) and its lessons for spiritual leadership;
The day of atonement (ch. 16) and its message of forgiveness;
The ethics of sex (ch. 18) and its implications for families;
The laws of neighbourliness (ch. 19) and their message for communities;
The year of Jubilee (ch. 25) and its relevance for capitalism.

Let me encourage you to be the teacher God called you to be.

For Further Reading

Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics: How to read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK, 1989). The book covers a number of political chapters in the Bible, one of which is Leviticus 19.

Gary W Demarest, *Leviticus,* The Preacher's Commentary (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1990). A popular and very readable commentary which cannot fail to benefit preachers.

John E. Hartley, *Leviticus,* Word Bible Commentary (Dallas: Word, 1992) A thoroughly scholarly commentary based on the Hebrew text but accessible to those who don't know Hebrew.

Walter Kaiser, 'The Book of Leviticus' in *New Interpreters; Bible,* vol. 1. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994). Excellent commentary by a seasoned Old Testament interpreter.

Allen P. Ross, *Holiness to the Lord: A guide to the exposition of the Book of Leviticus* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002) A skilful and practical guide.

Derek Tidball *The Message of Leviticus,* Bible Speaks Today (Nottingham and Downers Grove: IVP, 2005). Written for the BST series, this is a scholarly exposition of Leviticus written with the needs of preachers in mind.

Gordon Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus,* New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979). In spite of its age it remains the standard work. Wenham has provided an excellent commentary which offers reflections on the text from a Christian viewpoint.

Christopher J. H. Wright, 'Leviticus' in *The New Bible Commentary: Twenty-first Century edition* (Leicester and Downers Grove: IVP, 1994). A succinct but lucid and informed introductory commentary.

_____. *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Leicester: IVP, 2004). Probably the best recent hermeneutical discussion of Old Testament ethics.

Notes

1. Graham Scroggie, *Know Your Bible,* vol. 1 (London: Pickering and Inglis, rev. ed. 1953), 30.
2. Christopher J. H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God,* (Leicester: IVP, 2004).
3. *Ibid.,* 66.
4. Richard Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics, How to Read the Bible Politically* (London: SPCK, 1989), 26.
5. *Ibid*., 24.
6. William Webb, *Slaves, Women and Homosexuals* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2001).
7. On this see, Sidney Greidnus, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 227-277.

Preaching Paul: Preparing Expository Messages from the Pauline Letters

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By Ronald Satta

(editor's note: Dr. Ronald Satta is Professor of Church History, Distance Learning, at Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Lynchburg, VA. and an Associate Faculty member in American history at SUNY Brockport College, Brockport, NY.)

When our children were little, my wife, Carol, and I enjoyed buying toys for their Christmas presents. We would wrap the gifts in brightly-colored paper, all the while envisioning a lovely Christmas morning; a log in the fireplace, soft music coming from the stereo, three excited children playing happily as we sat nearby sipping hot chocolate. Sadly, our idyllic dreams were often shattered by three small words—"some assembly required." The pictures on the toy boxes belied the chaos waiting inside them—pieces, parts, and instructions in four languages. So, on hands and knees with screw drivers and scissors, we began the process of putting it all together.

Many preachers, upon entering their first pastorate, face the same kind of shock and frustration regarding preaching. They have all the right pieces—Bible knowledge, exegetical skills, and an understanding of systematic theology, but "some significant assembly is required" to put sermons together. Faced with the prospect of preparing two or more sermons a week, many pastors feel lots of pressure. This article offers help to ministerial students and young pastors, offering one proven approach to sermon preparation.

Essential Steps in Exposition

Accurate to the text, applicable to life, interesting to the ear—these are key goals for every expositor each time we preach. This section identifies and explains six steps that can help get us to that

goal, leading a preacher from the blank page to the finished sermon. This six-step framework includes: (1) studying the text, (2) stating the theme, (3) developing the outline, (4) illustrating the points, (5) introducing and concluding the sermon, and (6) applying the message.

Step One: Studying the Text

Studying the text begins with carefully reading the book in English. As you read, pose questions to yourself. What is the main point? For what purpose is Paul writing this letter? How does he build his argument? What evidence does Paul use to sustain it? What is the tone of the book and of each chapter? Who is his audience and what do you know about them? What words are repetitive? What do those words mean precisely?

Read the book out loud using different inflections. Try picturing the way in which the original audience might have responded to the letter when they initially received it. Would they have been encouraged, embarrassed, comforted, convicted, challenged, or something else?

Since God revealed his New Testament message in Koine Greek, those wishing to represent His message with integrity should develop facility with that language. Acquiring the skills of exegesis is an arduous but worthwhile investment. Taking such studies seriously during seminary days is the best way to establish a strong foundation for a lifetime of exposition.

Walter Kaiser addresses the importance of the tools of exegesis noting:

> To begin with, let it be stated as a sort of first principle that preparation for preaching is always a movement which must begin with the text of Scripture and

> have as its goal the proclamation of that Word in such a way that it can be heard with all its poignancy and relevancy to the modern situation without dismissing one iota of its original normativeness…. If the text of Scripture is the central concern, then a mastery of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek is a basic requirement.[1]

While endorsing the need for language training, Kaiser goes on to lament the dangers of purely academic preaching which emphasizes grammar and syntax. Indeed, the use of Greek and Hebrew in sermons is something like underwear in dress; important for support but improper to disclose. People don't come to church to learn Greek grammar; they come to hear a message from God. The goal of exegetical study is to discover, as completely and thoroughly as possible, the meaning of the biblical passage so that its message can be faithfully and fully represented to modern concerns.

Correctness of interpretation, as vital as it is, is not an end in itself—it is only a means to an end as Grant and Reed rightly point out, stating, "Accuracy in exegesis is a goal we aim for, but not the prize itself. A great sermon must be more than accurate, but it can never be less."[2] Step two begins the process of organizing that which we have learned.

Step Two: Stating the Theme

Each paragraph in Pauline literature contains one central idea; a theme. A theme is the author's main point, primary assertion, or principle claim; it is the governing idea. It is discovered by combining Paul's subject and complement into one sentence. In simplest terms the subject is defined as what the author is talking about. This may be stated in one word or a short phrase. The complement is what the writer is asserting about that which he is talking about; the complement completes the idea.[3] Once the expositor has Paul's

subject clearly in mind, it is time to find the complement. The question to ask is: what is Paul specifically saying about his subject? State the complement in your own words. Try merging the subject and complement into one concise and memorable sentence.
Finding the theme, stating it succinctly, and making it prominent in a sermon gives force and clarity to the message. Grady Davis speaks to the simple yet profound issue of finding, stating, and sticking with a theme statement:

> It may seem childish to say that every sermon consists of only two things: what is talked about and what is said about it, a subject with one or several predicates. To say it is indeed simple; to act on it must be very difficult, judging by the evidence. A man who has been to college and seminary, a man who has preached for many years, can speak as if he has never heard of this primary fact. Sometimes he proposes a subject and then wanders away from it. Sometimes he drags in many other things that do not belong to the subject. Sometimes he seems to be talking about many subjects at once, indiscriminately. Sometimes he just talks about this and that and the other in such a way as to create the suspicion that he either has no subject at all or, if he feels one looming at the back of his head, does not himself know for sure what it is.[4]

One may state the theme exegetically or homiletically. The exegetical theme is generally longer and stated in past tense language, focusing on the historical audience. The homiletical theme is typically shorter, stated memorably in the present tense and directed toward modern hearers. For instance, the exegetical theme of Philippians 3:4-9 might be "While Paul possessed an impeccable pedigree; he realized that this was insufficient to produce true righteousness, abandoning his trust in human merit in order to be saved by faith

in Christ alone." A homiletical theme of that same passage might read, "Nothing about us, in our background or behavior, can ever make us righteous, only faith in Christ can do that." If a more subtle, less declarative approach was desired, the homiltical theme might be, "True righteousness is never the result of our work, but of God's work for us."

It was Aristotle who argued that beauty was found in unity—the theme sentence provides this essential element of unity to a sermon. Grady Davis offers a helpful observation:

> That the best sermon is the embodiment of a single generative idea is not a rule but an accurate reporting of fact. It is a fact by no means confined to preaching. An idea of this kind has always created the great novel, play, poem, picture, hymn, opera, symphony—any great work of the mind and spirit of man.[5]

Once the theme has been determined and aptly stated, the process of developing the outline may begin. The outline expands and supports the theme statement.

Step Three: Developing the Outline

The theme captures the essence of the entire paragraph, while the points in the outline express the meaning of smaller sections of the passage. In general, the outline should move chronologically with the flow and argument of the paragraph. Good outlines give a sense of progress to our listeners.

The main points, just as the theme, are taken directly from the text. Using key words, phrases, and ideas from the passage, lay out the major movements of the paragraph. Once the major segments of the passage are identified, state the main points just as you did with

the theme, combining the subject of each major movement with the complement. One way to test the accuracy of a theme is to superimpose the main points onto it and ask yourself if they clearly reflect your thematic idea. While some preachers use sub-points, my observation is that they detract from the major points, creating sermons that are a little like pike and perch; too bony for my taste.

As you develop your main points, associate them with a collective or key noun which is announced at the end of the introduction. A key noun is a plural noun under which all the main points of a sermon may be gathered. For instance, a preacher might transition from the introduction to the first point by stating, "Today we will consider three *consequences* of obedience" or "this morning we will discover four *principles* of servanthood." An outline might look like this: (1) the first *consequence* of obedience is peace, (2) the second *consequence* of obedience is productivity, and (3) the third *consequence* of obedience is purity. The key noun knits the points together seamlessly, producing a sense of order and cohesion in the message.[6] The outline supports and sustains the theme statement and provides the skeletal structure for the message. However, Grant and Reed are right when they declare "It's hard to hug a bunch of bones."[7] Step four gives substance to the skeleton.

Step Four: Illustrating the Points

The expositor has studied the text carefully, stated the theme memorably, and established the main points of the passage, coupling them with a key noun. The outline of the sermon has emerged. Now a concerted effort is made to connect our sermons practically to life.

This connection is often established through the use of stories. Illustrations are powerful, as Stephen Brown suggests, writing, "It is said that Sydney Smith, the British clergyman and author who helped found the *Edinburgh Review*, was once praying out loud. A friend overheard him say; 'Now Lord, I'll tell you an anecdote.'"[8]

Brown goes on to draw an insightful conclusion:

> It is possible, I suppose, that the Lord did not want to hear the anecdote or that He was even offended—but I doubt it. You see, when he gave us his book, He did not give us a list of doctrines, a confessional statement, a systematic theology, and an index. That is what we gave Him…. When He gave us his book, He mostly gave us a book of illustrations. Not only that, He created people who like and respond to stories.[9]

There are several times during a sermon at which a preacher should consider illustrating: in the introduction or conclusion, when seeking to explain the practicality of a particular truth, when teaching something that is hard to comprehend, and when people need a break. Illustrations are potent tools, but there are inherent dangers associated with them too.

Perhaps the greatest temptation is to use too many—to preach "skyscraper sermons," one story on another. After all, one reasons, if a single story is good, then more must be even better. Unfortunately, what applies to potato chips does not apply to illustrating. One effective quote, story, or statistic is enough. Let us sharpen our "homiletical killer instinct." Another subtle danger is using a good story that does not really illustrate our point. If a preacher has to explain an illustration, it has failed in its mission. An illustration, like a window, is used to shed natural light.

Getting the facts straight in an illustration is vital. This bore down upon me in an all too personal way one Sunday Morning. I introduced my message by telling a story about two rather obscure baseball players from California. Well, that morning we had a nice family visiting all the way from California, looking for a new church home. Astoundingly, they were personal friends of the two baseball players I had spoken about! Following the sermon, the

wife kindly corrected me on the first name of one of the players I had mentioned; they were next door neighbors! The family never returned to the church.

Step Five: Introducing and Concluding the Sermon

The introduction to the sermon establishes the direction for our message. Therefore, it is important to be well-prepared, clear, and purposeful at the outset. Even highly respected and effective preachers must recapture congregational attention every time we speak, earning the right to be heard each time we step into the pulpit—beginning the moment we open our mouths.

Cicero argued that the introduction achieves three goals: it arouses interest, it secures favor, and it prepares to lead.[10] Good introductions should prompt people to listen to us by revealing a need, raising thought-provoking questions, posing an interesting idea, creating scenarios in need of solutions, etc. Effective introductions establish rapport with our listeners, building bridges by means of a friendly demeanor, sustained eye-contact, and the use of a deliberate, clear speaking voice. As the introduction comes to a close, the people should understand the essence of the sermon.

There are many ways to introduce a sermon: using interesting historical vignettes, citing current events or statistics, referring to personal experiences, posing rhetorical questions, employing striking quotations, telling humorous real-life or fictional stories bearing on the point of the message, etc. The introduction should move along briskly, occupying no more that ten percent of the entire sermon length—with less probably better. Following this rule of thumb, one should be in and out of the opening movement of a thirty minute message in about three minutes.

The conclusion ushers our hearers to a point of reflective closure, crystallizing the theme and calling for a decision. The Baptist

preacher John Broadus was given to say, "Where there is no summons there is no sermon." While preparing the conclusion, step into the role of a lawyer, a prosecuting attorney. Ask yourself, if someone was on trial for obeying the biblical imperatives and principles of this passage, what evidence would you look for in order to find them guilty? Consider the reverse—the kind of evidence you would look for to acquit them of the charges. Some ministers do not prepare formal conclusions. Perhaps they feel it is unspiritual to do so, placing restraints on the Holy Spirit. However, as one sage put it, "the best spontaneity is usually well-planned." It is incumbent upon the messenger of God to usher people to a point of decision regarding the message of the text.

The last step, arguably the most difficult, requires serious reflective work. Indeed, this skill is often the last one a preacher acquires, since our formal training generally concentrates on Bible knowledge. Knowing the biblical text is a vital thing. But knowing people is a different thing, an essential thing in preaching. Step six concerns making that crucial transition from the ancient text to modern man; ushering the timeless truths of Scripture into present time and space, making the Word of God a relevant Word from God.

Step Six: Applying the Points

A respected colleague once asked, "How do you preach every week? I mean, how many times can you tell people to read their Bible and pray?" That question is revealing, indicating that some ordained ministers are puzzled when it comes to applying the Bible to the lives of our hearers. Yet one might argue that this is the main work to be done. This is an interesting dilemma, one to which Kaiser turns:

> A gap of crisis proportion exists between the steps generally outlined in most seminary or biblical training classes in exegesis and the hard realities

> most pastors face every week as they prepare their sermons. Nowhere in the total curriculum of theological studies has the student been more deserted and left to his own devices than in bridging the yawning chasm between understanding the content of Scripture as it was given in the past and proclaiming it with such relevance in the present as to produce faith, life, and bona fide works.[11]

Connecting with People

Our preaching can become increasingly practical as we think about the struggles, challenges, hopes, dreams, and dilemmas that our people face week to week. Thinking reflectively about this helps connect biblical truth with the world our people actually encounter. Keeping some practical life-categories in mind as we plan our application provides us with meaningful outlets at which to direct the principles and precepts we uncover in our study of the Bible.

Hope

How do we nurture hope in our preaching? What hopeful themes emerge from our study of the Sacred Text? Some in the congregation feel hopeless—and indeed, are without hope being without Christ. What word do we have for them?

Fear

People are afraid: afraid of growing old, afraid of losing their job, or their spouse, or their children, afraid of failure, afraid of illness, afraid of their past and afraid of the future. Life often seems overwhelming. What does the Scripture say to us in our fears?

Secrets

Legend has it that Sir Arthur Conan Doyle had a rather twisted sense of humor. On one occasion he allegedly wrote an anonymous note to ten prominent people in London. Each one simply said, "All is discovered; escape while you can." All left town suddenly. Secret sins and guilt are commonplace. God's forgiveness, restoration, love, and discipline are regular themes in Scripture. Don't forget the hidden struggles when preaching.

Bitterness

Life has soured for some people. While everyone has experienced disappointment and hurt at some point, not everyone recovers. Like Ahithophel, they feel justified in their resentment, and unfortunately they too may be headed for self-destruction.[12] There are people in every congregation who have never dealt with their pain—we have much to say here.

Loss

The longer we live, the more likely it is that we will suffer significant, life altering loss. People lose their health, their jobs, their parents, their dreams, and their edge. Our culture worships youth, beauty, strength, and stuff—and all these things we will eventually lose. Despair and depression are often the result. How does the Word of Truth invade such circumstances and dispel the gloom?

Success

Every church has within its walls the driven, those compelled to succeed. Their lives are frequently characterized by a lack of healthy balance and misguided priorities. What does the Word say about time management, priorities, and wise investments? How does God measure success?

These are just a few of the important life-categories to consider when thinking about ways to apply Scripture. Composing your own list is a worthwhile exercise that forces one to think practically. Another helpful step involves considering the kind of application we offer to our listeners. There are two types: principle and codified application.[13]

Principle application is a statement of the relevance of a biblical truth expressed in a broad, general way. For instance, one form of principle application from I Cor 6:19-20 could be "it is important for Christians to take good care of our bodies because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit." Indeed, this is a clear and important applicational theme which emerges from this passage while leaving the details to the hearer.

Codification fills in the details, stating specific actions which might be a consequence of the biblical principle. For instance, a codified list derived from the Corinthian passage might include (1) don't smoke, (2) don't overeat, (3) exercise regularly, (4) maintain your ideal weight, (5) get plenty of sleep etc. Problems with codifying occur when we fail to explain the principle which supports and sustains the code. Unless we assess the way we apply the Bible, we may emphasize codes without making clear the principles from which they are derived. For example, in some Southern congregations smoking is considered perfectly appropriate. Culturally, the South has participated in the tobacco industry since the days of John Rolfe. In our church in upstate New York smoking is generally frowned on, but overeating is encouraged—especially at church functions!

Both of these practices can prove harmful to our health. However, in our community one act is considered sinful and the other sociable. If preachers consistently codify without explaining principle application, a church can quickly adopt a do's and don'ts mentality, fostering a checklist kind of Christianity. When principle application is explained, believers see a number of different codes

that might be accepted as a result of obedience to the principle, comprehending more fully why faithful Christians sometimes differ in their practical commitments.

Once we have worked our way through applicational issues, the sermon is complete. The preacher has worked hard: studying the text carefully, finding and fashioning the theme memorably, developing an outline which supports the theme, illustrating important points, determining how to introduce and conclude, and making the sermon practical and meaningful. The preacher has before him a sermon which is accurate to the text, applicable to life, and interesting to the ear. Indeed, the Word of God has truly become a Word from God.

Notes

1. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 48.
2. Reg Grant and John Reed, *The Power Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 20.
3. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 39-41.
4. Henry Grady Davis, *Design for Preaching* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg, 1958), 25-26.
5. Ibid, 36.
6. The author wishes to thank Erwin Lutzer, Senior Pastor of Moody Church for offering this helpful counsel during a Doctor of Ministry seminar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.
7. Grant and Reed, *Power Sermon,* 116.
8. Stephen Brown, "Illustrating the Sermon," in *Handbook of Contemporary Preaching,* ed. Michael Duduit (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 199-208.
9. Ibid, 199.
10. Larsen, *Anatomy of Preaching,* 74.
11. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology,* 18.
12. Ahithophel was King David's trusted advisor and counselor who turned traitor, assisting Absalom in his attempted coup. Many speculate that this was Bathsheba's grandfather. Having become bitter at David for his indiscretion, he waited patiently for his chance at reprisal. When his

revenge was thwarted, he hung himself. See: 2 Sam 23:34, 11:3, 15:12, 17:1-3, and 17:23.

13. The author wishes to thank Dr. Joseph Stowell for sharing this principle during a Doctor of Ministry seminar at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.

The Homiletical Charge in Acts: Does Luke Reveal an Anti-Semitism?

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By Timothy R. Valentino

(editor's note: Dr. Timothy R. Valentino is the Senior Pastor of Fleetwood Bible Church, Fleetwood, Pennsylvania, and an Affiliate Professor of Pastoral Ministries at Evangelical Theological Seminary, Myerstown, Pennsylvania.)

Introduction

Preachers' rhetoric, like the winter morning frost, can sometimes deliver a nasty bite. Hardly a Sunday morning goes by without explosive pulpiteers discharging their invective pew-ward. In some circles, vituperative preaching is not only tolerated, it is expected. Brimstone, after all, was hewn and brandished by the apostles as well as the prophets. New Testament truth, we are told, cannot always be delivered with syrup.

To some extent, this volcanic approach to sermoncraft derives from specific portions of first-century Christian preaching. One recurring technique in the book of Acts, for example, is the homiletical charge—the bold, direct assertion by an evangelist that one is guilty before God because of his past treatment of, or present disposition toward, Jesus Christ. Such charges typically are characterized by their piercing brevity and the collective—yet carefully targeted—nature of their intended audience. They appear within broader speeches and sermons theologically edited by Luke (e.g., Acts 2:23, 36; 3:13-15; 4:10; 5:30; 7:51-52; 10:39; 13:27-29, 46; 18:6; 28:25-28).

It is easy to see how such texts are vulnerable to abuse. On the one hand, they can serve as the inspiration and justification for all manner of prejudicial stereotyping and *ad hominem* attacks when

ripped from their contexts (e.g., "Jews are Christ killers!"). On the other hand, they can be held in suspicion or even de-canonized by critics who regard them as destructive, insensitive, discriminatory, or inauthentic (e.g., "The New Testament is fundamentally anti-Semitic!"). Neither of these responses is warranted when the passages in question are properly exegeted.

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that the homiletical charge in Acts is simply one evangelistic tool in the apostolic toolbox—and a fully appropriate one in its historical-cultural context. The homiletical charge is clearly *Jewish* in origin and is utilized by *Jewish* preachers in the hearing of *Jewish* skeptics who are temporally and geographically proximate to the crucifixion. Simply stated, salvation—not raw condemnation—is always the goal of such confrontational language. It is always prophetically (and never racially) motivated.

Furthermore, the occasional homiletical charge is best understood not as a weapon of insult, derision, or ethnic aspersion, but as an urgent appeal for the recipients to: (1) accept culpability where appropriate; (2) repent by turning to God and his gracious salvific provision in Christ; and (3) marvel at God's wondrous sovereignty over salvation history despite humanity's feeble attempts to thwart it.

We will pay particular attention to important mitigating factors that usually surround the homiletical charge—factors that blunt the sharp polemical edge of these statements, which often sound overly pointed to our contemporary, non-Eastern ears. Quite significantly, we will notice that the frequency of these statements actually *diminishes* as the book of Acts unfolds. Exploring a few of these charges in their contexts and in conjunction with their mitigating factors will enable us to assess the modern charge of Lucan anti-Semitism and determine how today's preacher might artfully employ this technique without unnecessarily biting or

discriminating against his audience.

Certainly there are times when the Christian herald will offend; the ubiquity of personal wickedness demands it. But a weekly tongue lashing spuriously rooted in a fading ancient hortatory device is just as dangerous as a steady diet of sermonic mush that never confronts evil. Only a proper and judicious use of the homiletical charge will elicit "apostolic" results.

Peter's Pentecost Sermon: The Reconstitution of Faithful Israel

The first homiletical charge to be considered appears in Acts 2:23, where Peter addresses the Pentecost pilgrims who have just assembled to investigate the significance of Spirit-inspired glossolalia among the disciples: "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, *you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men*" (διὰ χειρὸς ἀνόμων προσπήξαντες ἀνείλατε). The charge is repeated later in the same speech in 2:36: "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ, *this Jesus whom you crucified*" (τοῦτον τὸν Ἰησοῦν ὃν ὑμεῖς ἐσταυρώσατε).

Historically, these and similar passages have been marshaled to support the claim that the entire Jewish race should be held responsible for the brutal execution of Christ. While many scholars agree that such a far-reaching conclusion misses the point of the text, some have argued that the text itself is anti-Semitic. J. T. Sanders, for example, ventures to say that Luke-Acts reveals a "fundamental and systematic hostility toward Jews."[1] The narrative, he claims, is anti-Semitic because it never relents in its vicious portrayal of the Jewish people. A few exegetical observations will show this view to be both inadequate and unnecessary.

After dismissing the accusation of drunkenness (2:13), Peter—who

is Jewish—addresses a multi-lingual audience comprising Jerusalem Jews, dispersion Jews, and perhaps even devout proselytes to Judaism (2:5). The religious homogeneity of the crowd leads one to conclude that all subsequent appeals and exhortations in the speech are occasioned not by the group's ethnic composition, but by Peter's assessment of their collective spiritual condition, which for him is determined by their present disposition toward Jesus of Nazareth. Peter speaks as an insider with the same religious heritage as his listeners, not as an outsider playing the race card.

Even if one wishes to question Luke's motive for redacting the Petrine material with the confrontational language of 2:23 and 2:36 intact, it must then be observed that the same Gentile author announces without reservation that God has miraculously poured out his Spirit upon 120 *Jewish* individuals in fulfillment of a *Jewish* prophecy (1:26; 2:4,16). Ethnic indictment simply is not in view here—neither for Peter the preacher nor for Luke the editor. In fact, just the opposite is the case.

David L. Tiede has rightly called the miracle of Pentecost "the reconstitution of faithful Israel."[2] Whereas God's prophetic voice and manifest presence had waned during the intertestamental period, it has now returned with power and great drama to a re-established covenant people through whom salvation and repentance would in time also be proclaimed to the Gentiles. Tiede concludes:

> Acts 2 represents the reception of the apostle's teaching *by the Jews* in Jerusalem (vs. 41f). In spite of very strong statements concerning the obduracy of Israel as providing the occasion for the mission to the Gentiles (cf. 7:51; 13:46; 18:6; 28:23-31), Acts 2 stands as Luke's testimony that faith was found *first* in Jerusalem and that the subsequent mission to Samaria, to the Diaspora, and even to the Gentile world was built upon the continuity of this faith of

believing Israel.[3]

Thus, while Luke's concern about Israel's rejection of Jesus continually shadows the narrative, the point is nevertheless made that future *Gentile* faith in Christ will depend largely upon antecedent *Jewish* faith in Christ. To argue, then, that Luke is anti-Semitic is to overlook the credit he assigns to first-century Jewish believers whose faith in Christ would determine the growth and maturity of the Church as a whole. Jon A. Weatherly rightly insists:

An accurate understanding of Luke's view of the Jews must balance both the positive and negative elements of their portrayal. Luke clearly is concerned to depict the widespread rejection of Jesus and the gospel by Jews. However, he is just as much interested in the Jewish orientation of the church, both in its salvation-historical relationship to biblical Israel and in the Jewish ethnicity of many of its members. Though the Jews as a nation do not accept the Christian gospel, many individual Jews—numbering even in the tens of thousands (Acts 21:20)—do accept it.[4]

Furthermore, the Jews were not alone in their responsibility for the death of Christ. This is clear from Peter's expression "wicked men" or "lawless men [□ν□μων]" in 2:23, a term used by Jews to designate Gentiles who were law-*less*, or without the law. As John B. Polhill writes, "Jesus died on a Roman cross; Gentiles too shared the guilt. Peter carefully balanced all the participants in the drama of Jesus' death—the guilt of Jew and Gentile alike, the triumphal sovereignty of God."[5]

An explanation for the homiletical charges of 2:23 and 2:36 must therefore be rooted in something other than anti-Semitism. Perhaps the language immediately surrounding both charges provides a clue. Having pronounced at least *some* members of his audience guilty of Jesus' crucifixion (and it is not clear from the second-person plurals whether specific people in the group, or the whole group collectively

in conjunction with "lawless" Roman soldiers is intended), Peter declares, "But God raised him up, having loosed the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (2:24). Later in the same sermon he says, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ" (2:36). Thus, on the heels of both homiletical charges is the mitigating factor that God has not only *nullified* the crime against Jesus, he has dramatically *reversed* it. As Michael Green says:

> Such was the apostolic testimony as they rebutted the charge that the cross spelt defeat. God had vindicated his Suffering Servant by exalting him to the highest place in the universe in recognition of his faithfulness unto death, even death on a cross; in consequence he has every right to the title of Kyrios, Lord…Crucifixion does not mean that Jesus was weak and a failure.[6]

A similar reversal took place in the Old Testament, and the apparent echo back to the life of Joseph seems to have been intentional: "As for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Gen. 50:20). Likewise, the crucifixion of Jesus was declared to be completely within the divine foreknowledge and set purposes of God (2:23). While this carries with it no diminution of guilt for those who provoked the injustice, it does suggest that Peter's invocation of the homiletical charge is not to pronounce final judgment on an entire race of people or polemically to exact a pound of flesh from his brethren just to avenge the Lord. After all, he himself had miserably failed Jesus just fifty days earlier, yet he was publicly restored.

Rather, Peter seems to utilize the homiletical charge as a historical touchstone for his audience, illustrating how everyone involved in the crucifixion of Jesus was unwittingly part of salvation history's

New Exodus, just as Joseph's brothers were unaware that they had sold the future Vice-Pharaoh of Egypt into the hands of Midian strangers. And just as Joseph's brothers had eventually received pardon for their sibling betrayal and had reaped the benefits of his exaltation in Egypt, so Peter's audience could now—in coming to grips with their own betrayal of Yahweh's Messiah—experience full assurance of pardon and reap the benefits of Jesus' exaltation to the right hand of God.

In this sense, the entire Pentecost sermon should be understood as having a soteriological goal, both from Peter's perspective and from Luke's. Its purpose is not merely to explain the theological significance of glossolalia or how to be filled with the Holy Spirit or even to assign blame for the crucifixion. Peter employs various devices, including pneumatology, christology, the Old Testament scriptures, recent history, and two blunt homiletical charges in order to elicit an acceptable response to the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus. To a large extent, he succeeded:

> Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' And Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit' (Acts 2:37-38).

The homiletical charge in this sermon is simply one tool in the evangelistic toolbox. In neither 2:23 nor 2:36 is it used as an ethnic insult, for as Peter said, "This promise is to you [Jews] and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him" (2:39).

An Early Evangelistic Formula: "You Killed...God Raised...We Are Witnesses"

Several homiletical charges in the book of Acts seem to follow a definite pattern, which may indicate the existence of an early evangelistic formula that first-century preachers used with some degree of success: "You killed/crucified...God raised/exalted... and we are witnesses." Note the recurrence of these three elements within five of the major speeches:

> The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered up and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, and *you killed* the Author of life, whom *God raised* from the dead. To this *we are witnesses* (Acts 3:13-15).

> Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom *you crucified,* whom *God raised* from the dead, by him this man is standing before you well...Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they wondered; and they recognized that *they had been with Jesus* (Acts 4:10-13).

> The God of our fathers raised Jesus whom *you killed* by hanging him on a tree. *God exalted* him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And *we are witnesses* to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him (Acts 5:30-32).

> How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power; how he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him. And *we are witnesses* to all that he did both in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. *They put him to death* by hanging him on a tree; but *God raised* him on the third day and made him manifest; not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God (Acts 10:38-41).
>
> Though they could charge him with nothing deserving death, yet they asked Pilate to *have him killed.* And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a tomb. But *God raised* him from the dead; and for many days he appeared to those who came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who *are now his witnesses* to the people (Acts 13:28-31).

The importance of eyewitness testimony to the words and works of Jesus cannot be overstated. From the very beginning, the gospel's roots had been firmly planted in the soil of history. To the believing community, Jesus' resurrection was real and verifiable, not merely spiritual or metaphorical. Furthermore, it is apparent from the language in these speeches that the apostles did not regard themselves as simply the *transmitters* of historical facts, but also the qualified *interpreters* of those facts. Michael Green calls the apostles, "people who had lived through the events of Good Friday and Easter, and who [could] bear personal testimony both to their historicity *and to their interpretation.*"[7]

This explains why the speeches and historical narratives in Acts are often weighted by prophetic overtones and why constant appeals are made to the Old Testament canon—another fact that challenges the notion of Lucan anti-Semitism. Jesus comes in fulfillment of

Jewish prophecy. That Luke should occasionally highlight scattered Jewish resistance to the public ministry of Jesus in no way reveals a latent bigotry on his part. As Victor E. Vine notes:

> All of the Gospels would be described as anti-Semitic if one only notices the antagonism towards Jesus which they record, and the consequent condemnation. On this basis a far stronger case could be made for describing the Old Testament prophets as anti-Semitic. But both they and Luke start from the Hebrew religion, and even their condemnations are to be seen as appeals…His challenge is to those who think in Jewish terms. [It is] a mistake to describe Luke's attitude in terms of 'hatred of the Jews' when he is writing *for* and appealing *to* Jews.[8]

One might also note that Luke has preserved in his narrative another important mitigating factor freely conceded by the apostles in their evangelistic appeals: According to Acts 3:17, those responsible for putting Jesus to death acted "without knowledge" (□γνοιαν). While that may sound a bit condescending to the modern ear, Peter is actually softening his charge, claiming that such a costly sin of willful ignorance is nevertheless forgivable (3:19), most likely because Jesus himself had already declared it to be so: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34). As Craig S. Keener notes, "The Old Testament and Judaism regarded willful sin (Num 15:30–31) as far more heinous than sins of ignorance (Num 15:22–29)."[9]

In any event, if the apostles are not merely the reporters of historical facts, but the interpreters as well, what prophetic import do they ascribe to the life, death, and resurrection of Christ? In every passage cited above, the point is effectively made that God himself has dramatically *reversed* the crime against Jesus. The messiah has indeed come, and God has authenticated that fact by undoing the

execution of his anointed Son. While certain Jews (and complicit Gentiles) may have been directly responsible for the crucifixion as such,[10] that fact alone is not the focus of the speeches. In fact, had it been their primary concern to vilify the Jews, the apostles would have sought to avenge their Lord, not offer him again to his malefactors as the exalted, merciful Christ of Israel. Ultimately, the apostles seek faith and repentance, not justice. Thus, the homiletical charges are used here *pleadingly* to evoke a shared conviction about Jesus, not *vindictively* to incite race hatred.

While each of the above passages has its own rich historical-cultural-theological context worthy of examination, it is more important for this study to observe the subtle shift that takes place after the gospel is preached *outside* Jerusalem. When Peter addresses the crowd in Caesarea (10:34-35), and Paul addresses the "men of Israel and Gentiles who worship God" in Pisidian Antioch (13:16-17), the finger-pointing verb of the homiletical charge switches from a second-person plural to a third-person plural (e.g., ἀνείλατε in 2:23 to ἀνεῖλαν in 10:39). This significant transition was made by the apostolic church and should have been made by those evangelists who followed in their footsteps. On the Acts 10 passage, Howard Marshall comments:

> Whereas in earlier sermons Peter had directly addressed the Jews and accused them of putting Jesus to death, this was not possible in a sermon addressed to non-Jews. The death of Jesus at the hands of the Jews is in fact *mentioned in passing*.[11]

We should also note that the incidental "they killed" of 10:39 probably refers back to *specific* perpetrators of the crucifixion—not to the entire nation of Israel itself. Compare Paul's speech in Acts 13, where a third-person plural is again used in v. 28, even though Jews are in attendance (ᾐτήσαντο Πιλᾶτον ἀναιρεθῆναι αὐτόν). Here the Pisidian Jews are not implicated in the death of Jesus

because they had nothing to do with it! In fact, they may have been totally oblivious to the events in Jerusalem (13:42).

The advent of such "distancing" further illustrates that the apostles were more concerned about the significance and benefits of Jesus' sacrifice than the guilt of those who arranged it or approved of it. This reinforces our main contention that Luke intends for the reader to see the homiletical charge as a spiritual *challenge* for those Jews closest to the crucifixion, not as a timeless *indictment* of the whole Jewish race. The further one moves away from the events of circa A.D. 35—both temporally and geographically—the less effective (and appropriate) this homiletical charge would be. In fact, Michael Green has rightly blamed the failure of Jewish evangelism in the first 200 years of Christianity on apostolic successors who erroneously thought:

> blame for the crucifixion [should be] increasingly placed on the Jewish nation as a whole, though in the early days [i.e., the Book of Acts] it was only the responsible leaders who are arraigned in these terms by the apostles. Such a charge does not figure, for instance, in Paul's approach to the Jews in Pisidian Antioch, who could by no stretch of the imagination be held responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus…If ever an evangelistic enterprise taught the lesson that the gospel cannot be preached without love, this was it. The Christian community failed to make it credible that they were the people of the Messiah.[12]

That, of course, was tragic, for it enhanced the appearance of Christian anti-Semitism (an oxymoron if ever there was one). But even the most brutal charge in the book of Acts—Stephen's impassioned speech—is tempered by his final request, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (7:60). Stern polemic for him was a means to a charitable end, and the later church should have taken

its cue from such love.

Stephen's Homiletical Charge: Prophetic Truth Spoken in Love

Stephen's speech in Acts 7 contains one of the most searing homiletical charges in all of the New Testament. This, quite naturally, has given rise to much criticism that his rhetoric is both inflammatory and anti-Semitic. Stephen's speech, however, if seen exegetically in its Jewish setting rather than anachronistically through the lens of subsequent worldwide Jewish persecution, actually reaffirms the best in Israel's tradition. T. L. Donaldson's work on this passage is incisive and reinforces the central thesis of this paper:

> Far from taking a position radically opposed to Judaism, the author of this speech shows great reverence towards and identifies strongly with the people, institutions and events in Israel's history, even recognizing up to a point that Stephen and his hearers share a common heritage. This fraternal note is sounded in the introduction when Stephen addresses his hearers as Ἄνδρες ἀδελφοὶ. He goes on to speak of "our father Abraham" (v.2), and repeatedly refers to "our fathers" in a manner that does not explicitly exclude his listeners...If he begins to speak of "*your* fathers" in vv. 51,52, it is not because he wishes to dissociate himself from Jewish tradition, but because he feels that his hearers have, by their actions, shown themselves to be heirs of that stream of Jewish history that was in opposition to the purposes of God. In addition, Stephen wholeheartedly accepts and affirms the Jewish institutions of the covenant with Abraham (v.8), circumcision (v.8), and the tabernacle (vv. 44f). To

> characterize the polemic of Acts 7 as radically anti-Judaistic is to miss the point.[13]

In all probability, the point is usually lost because of the emotional climax of the address in Acts 7:51-54:

> "You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom *you have now betrayed and murdered,* you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it." Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth against him.

Once again, specific individuals who instigated the crucifixion are probably in view here, not the entire Jewish race. Be that as it may, one can hardly see any difference between this type of confrontational preaching and the various homiletical charges preserved in the Old Testament. Not only is the corporate sense of identity much more prevalent than in the West (e.g., Neh. 1:6-7; Dan. 9:4-15), so is the graphic nature of prophetic discourse.

Consider, for example, the accusation in Jer. 24:2, where the prophet called his Jewish contemporaries "rotten figs, so bad they could not be eaten." Jeremiah did not mince words. But the basis of his criticism was not their ethnicity; it was their immorality. They stood condemned before a holy God not because they were sons of Abraham, but because they were sons of Adam. Likewise, Stephen's homiletical charge is rooted in his audience's past treatment of and present disposition toward Jesus, God's unique Son. In love Stephen warns them—albeit vigorously—not to reject God's only means of salvation. For this one act of bravery (and compassion)

he becomes the first Christian martyr. Ironically, to regard such a typically Jewish hortatory technique as being anti-Semitic in this case may be a thinly veiled form of anti-*Christian* bigotry!

Stephen's underlying conviction is that the gospel is not invalidated by Jewish rejection of it. In fact, given the nation's past treatment of her prophets, Jewish rejection of Jesus actually vindicates him as a true representative of God. Only those who receive Christ as the promised Anointed One, whether Jew or Gentile, truly partake of the covenant promises of the true Israel. Does such exclusivity—even though it is universally offered—amount to racial bigotry? Is such a scheme anti-Semitic? Weatherly concludes:

> Answers will necessarily depend on prior philosophical commitments. Certainly modern notions of 'tolerance' are offended by any claims which negate the validity of a religion. But such religious negation can be entirely independent of the ethnic prejudice which Sanders alleges. Absolute, even exclusivistic, religious conviction is not, and need not produce, racial bigotry.[14]

It might also be argued that the absolute rejection of an exclusive religious claim (e.g., John 14:6) is itself exclusivistic. A community's truth, by definition, excludes all else that it believes to be non-truth. Therefore, Judaism's official rejection of Christ as *the* way to God is a form of exclusion, which according to both Stephen and Jesus himself, has certain moral consequences (e.g., Matt. 10:32-33). These consequences, however, were never meant to be administered by the church. Judgment is *Christ's* prerogative in this era, not that of his followers. Whenever and wherever this line has been crossed, the church has had to reckon with its own set of moral consequences, including the continued suspicion with which many people view Jesus because of the absurdities and brutalities of some of his followers—individuals who inappropriately arm themselves

with a handful of misunderstood and misapplied Bible verses to the detriment to their own cause.

Come Let Us Reason: A Brief Word about Alleged Anti-Semitisms in the NT

Anti-Semitism is a real and present evil. Certainly the Holocaust, and all the sentiments that led up to it and still linger beyond it, represent a catastrophic failure of humanity and a dire warning about the fragility of freedom. One can only weep over the nightmare that was Auschwitz and the horror that was Buchenwald. One can only hang his head in shame while reflecting on the savagery of Treblenka. The massive degradation of one ethnic people was the degradation of us all. Where nominally Christian communities have been accessory to such heinous crimes, immediate restitution should be made with sincere contrition. Dialogue should continue, and reconciliation should be sought. The indelible mark of the 1940s may never be removed from the pages of modern history, but it must never be allowed to duplicate itself.

One way of preventing this from happening it is to get in touch with the *true* message of the New Testament. Treating it as a scapegoat will only perpetuate the hostilities and lead us away from cultural healing. Robert E. Willis, for example, demands that contrition begin with a "categorical rejection of those passages in the church's scriptures that convey anti-Judaic or anti-Semitic images, overtones, innuendoes, and nuances."[15] This is nonsense. In fact, this line of reasoning will guarantee that such atrocities will happen again. Until we take responsibility for our own actions, we cannot come to God on his terms and thus put to death the sin of pride, which is at the root of all evil. Furthermore, Willis' tirade prevents him from seeing that there is no substantial difference between the homiletical charges of the Old Testament and the alleged anti-Semitisms of the New. The hortatory style has simply repeated itself. Therefore, to "sanitize" the New Testament is to insult the Old.

Ultimately, most of the New Testament scriptures were written by loyal Jewish believers who saw the Christian movement as the logical extension of the Hebrew corpus. Purging *their* work would be a true form of anti-Semitism. To those inspired writers, the Old Testament was actually the Jewish seed from which the flower of Christianity had blossomed. While the New Testament reiterates *ad infinitum* that the flower has indeed come, it nowhere disowns its seed. Rather, it invites anyone, who is willing, to verify that the seed and the flower are of the same species. Those in history who have pitted one against the other were likely related to neither.

In defense of those in the first century who uttered their homiletical charges out of sincere concern for the spiritual well-being of their community of origin, the following point must be made: Given the apostles' dawning awareness that Jesus Christ was God incarnate, it is no wonder that they were scandalized by his execution, let alone his continued rejection by much of Israel after the resurrection. One gets the impression from Luke-Acts that the reader is *supposed* to be shocked and offended at Jewish resistance to the gospel. They more than anybody else should have recognized that Jesus was more than just another messianic pretender. That they did not is a dire warning to all who claim to know God. Certainly for Paul, with his history of persecuting the church, and for Peter, with his three-fold denial of Christ in the courtyard, strategic use of the homiletical charge is a form of "tough love" rooted not in self-righteousness but in grace. For these two converted men—and for all of humanity—to look at unbelieving Israel is to look in a mirror!

Therefore, to abridge the New Testament literature is to destroy its didactical impact. Just as the story of the Holocaust cannot be retold without referring to a specific segment of twentieth-century Germany, so the story of Christ crucified cannot be retold without referring to a particular slice of first-century Judaism. Sensitivity is certainly acceptable in the transmission of historical data, but re-writing the script is not. History is too sacred to become the

victim of revisionist good intentions. The homiletical charges in the book of Acts should therefore remain intact, *contra* Willis, *et al.* Ultimately the charges are not anti-Semitic, they are anti-unbelief.

Finally, it must be reasserted that one way of preventing another Holocaust is to get in touch with the heart of New Testament theology. Anti-Semitism and every other form of racial or religious bigotry is completely foreign to the Christian message. It always has been. As Robert Vasholz rightly insists:

> The gospel is for all people. Though we [Christians] seek to persuade others, as those having the truth, it is not because we hate, but because we love. We do not coerce, we woo; we do not malign, we serve; we do not retaliate, we bless; we do not denigrate, we pray. We hear and obey the directive from the Apostle Paul, 'as much as it is possible, do good to all.'[16]

The essence of the New Testament message is love, hope, reconciliation, and the universal offer of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Jewish prophet from Nazareth—and there is nothing anti-Semitic about that.

Conclusion: Modern Applications of the Homiletical Charge

One remaining task of this paper is to suggest a way in which today's Christian preacher might artfully employ the homiletical charge without unnecessarily offending his audience. The previous discussion has demonstrated that the charge in Acts is simply one evangelistic tool among many utilized by the apostles to bring about a desired soteriological response. Salvation—not condemnation—is *always* the goal of such confrontational language. Used wisely and sparingly, the homiletical charge can likewise be an effective

tool today to help bring men and women to a saving knowledge of Christ.

The evidence suggests that key elements of the homiletical charge include: (1) the accusation of widespread spiritual ignorance; (2) the loving confrontation of people because of their heart condition (as opposed to their race); (3) the blunt declaration of human responsibility before a holy God; (4) the prospect of hope and the availability of forgiveness in Christ; and (5) eyewitness testimony to a divine reversal.

Taken together, these elements convey the powerful message that while a person may be guilty before God, Christ can nevertheless bring about a glorious spiritual renewal—even from the scars of one's most painful, self-inflicted wounds—when he turns from his stubborn rebellion against God. These ideas, combined with the observation that the homiletical charge in Acts is not pejorative or racially motivated in any way, should govern our use of the charge in contemporary preaching.

Such ideas figure, for example, in the evangelistic appeals of the 18th-century revivalist George Whitefield. On September 13, 1741, Whitefield preached a sermon in Glasgow, Scotland titled "The Kingdom of God" based on Romans 14:17. His message contains a shocking, yet appropriate and effective homiletical charge. Boldly he thundered to his audience:

> You call yourselves Christians, and would count me uncharitable to call it in question; but I exhort you to let conscience speak out, do not bribe it any longer. Did you ever see yourselves as damned sinners? Did conviction ever fasten upon your hearts? And after you had been made to see your want of Christ, and made to hunger and thirst after righteousness, did you lay hold on Christ by faith? Did you ever close

> with Christ? Was Christ's righteousness ever put upon your naked souls? Was ever a feeling application of His righteousness made to your hearts? Was it, or was it not? If not, you are in a damnable state—you are out of Christ.[17]

In this brief excerpt, Whitefield attempts to hold a mirror up to the crowd in order to confront unbelievers with their true spiritual state. He challenges the audience in passionate terms to take a fresh look at their tightly held assumptions. He speaks bluntly to his listeners using second-person plurals in order to force them to think in terms of their own spiritual need. He sarcastically implores them not to "bribe" their consciences any longer, for eternity is at stake. He urgently warns of damnation for those outside of Christ, yet offers the assurance and hope of applied righteousness to all who, by faith, "close with Christ." And nowhere in his sermon is there a hint of racial animosity or ethnic bigotry. It is an effective homiletical charge delivered with compassion for those to whom it is directed. In fact, Whitefield goes on to say in the same sermon, "I know what it is to have the kingdom of God erected in me. It is God's goodness that such a poor wretch as I am converted."[18] The credibility of his urgent appeal is bolstered by its underlying humility. Whitefield stood in need of God's grace as much as anyone in his audience.

These simple techniques, employed by the apostles themselves and modeled by the great preachers of antiquity, may well enhance the effectiveness of our own preaching today. Modern pulpiteers from all traditions are well advised to turn their invective into invitations and their curses into cures. The results of such vivid proclamation may well be staggering, as it was in the days of the early church when people were gloriously "cut to the heart" unto salvation (Acts 2:37).

As noted before, there are times when the preacher must offend; the

ubiquity of personal wickedness demands it. But a weekly tongue lashing spuriously rooted in a fading ancient hortatory device is just as dangerous as a steady diet of sermonic mush that never confronts evil. Only a proper and judicious use of the homiletical charge will elicit "apostolic" results.

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Notes

1. J. T. Sanders, *The Jews in Luke-Acts* (London: SCM, 1987), xvi. For other scholarly and popular works describing Luke's narrative as anti-Semitic see N. A. Beck, *Mature Christianity: The Recognition and Repudiation of the Anti-Jewish Polemic of the New Testament* (London: Associated University Presses, 1985); J. R. Wilch, "Jewish Guilt for the Death of Jesus—Anti-Judaism in the Acts of the Apostles?" *Lutheran Theological Journal* 19 (1984): 49-58; Robert E. Willis, "A Perennial Outrage: Anti-Semitism in the New Testament," *The Christian Century* 87 (1970): 990-92; and Roy A. Eckhardt, "End to the Jewish-Christian Dialogue," *The Christian Century* 83 (1966): 360-62. For scholarly and popular works repudiating the charge of Lucan anti-Semitism see Jon A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts,* JSNT sup. 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Robert I. Vasholz, "Is the New Testament Anti-Semitic?" *Covenant Seminary Review* 11 (1985): 118-23; Victor E. Vine, "Luke 14:15-24 and Anti-Semitism," *The Expository Times* 102 (1991): 262-63; Geoffrey Bromiley, "Who Says the Bible Is Anti-Semitic?" *Christianity Today* 11 (1967): 548-49; and Paul L. Maier, "Who Killed Jesus?" *Christianity Today* 5 (1990): 17-19.
2. David L. Tiede, "Acts 2:1-47," *Interpretation* 33 (1979) 66.
3. Ibid., 65 (emphasis mine).
4. Jon A. Weatherly, "The Jews in Luke-Acts," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989): 117.
5. John B. Polhill, *Acts*, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 112.
6. Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 94.
7. Ibid., 72 (emphasis mine).
8. Victor E. Vine, "Luke 14:15-24 and Anti-Semitism," *The Expository Times* 102 (1991): 263 (emphasis mine).
9. Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*

(Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), Acts 3:16.

10. Weatherly finds in Luke-Acts a "distinct pattern" of evenhandedness with regard to the issue of who is responsible for Jesus' death: "Luke implicates Pilate, his soldiers, Herod, the Jerusalemites and especially the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem in Jesus' death. For Luke, not all Jews are responsible for Jesus' death, and not all those responsible are Jews." Jon A. Weatherly, *Jewish Responsibility for the Death of Jesus in Luke-Acts,* JSNT sup. 106 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 50.
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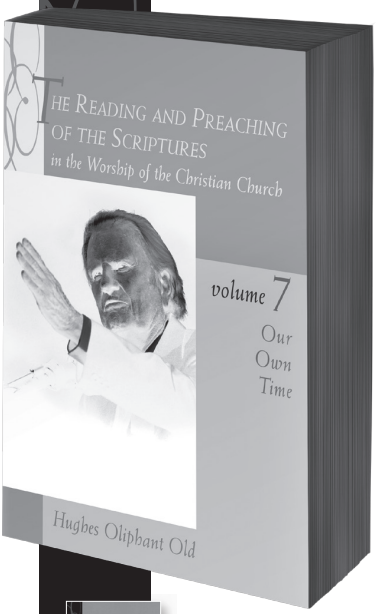

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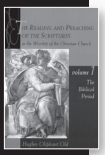

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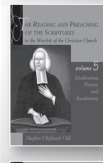
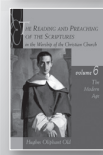

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Learning from African Preachers: Preaching as Worship Experience

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By Victor D. Anderson

(editor's note: Dr. Victor D. Anderson is Associate Professor and Chairman of the Department of Pastoral Ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Texas.)

Abstract

The goal of this paper is to challenge Western Evangelicals to foreground worship in their conception of preaching. The central argument begins with the contention that we unintentionally elevate the teaching and learning elements of preaching and devalue worship. This contention comes into focus as we contrast our own conceptions of preaching with those of others from different cultures, particularly evangelicals from Africa. The paper draws heavily on firsthand doctoral research from rural Ethiopia where preaching is conceived of primarily as a worship experience in which the preacher seeks to produce for the audience a direct encounter with God's presence. The essay concludes by proposing several suggestions that help homileticians re-position worship as a central feature of the preaching task.

Introduction

Imagine this dialogue from Anytown Church of the Bible in Anytown, North America:

> Inquirer: "How was the sermon today?"
> Joe Worshipper: "Uh, It was good."
> Inquirer: "Why was it good?"
> Joe Worshipper: (excitedly) "We dug deep into the text. I learned that…"

Inquirer: "Wow!"
Joe Worshipper: "Yeh! Like, that preacher really knows his stuff!"

On overhearing such an exchange between two of their parishioners, most preachers likely would crack a smile of approval. We are pleased when people enjoy studying the Bible, and we like to help people learn.

Contrast the foregoing dialogue with a similar one from Anytown Church of the Bible in Anytown, Ethiopia:

Inquirer: "How was the sermon today?"
Yosef Worshipper: "Uh, It was good."
Inquirer: "Why was it good?"
Yosef Worshipper: (excitedly) "God was clearly present! I met with God."
Inquirer: "Wow!"
Yosef Worshipper: "Yeh! Like, that preacher really is a godly man."

People in western, theologically conservative churches may well nod approval at the first dialogue and cringe suspiciously at the second. In our western context, a good sermon is one that teaches truth from the Bible and demonstrates its relevance for contemporary life. And by extension, a good preacher is one who helps the audience learn what the Bible says so they can apply it to their lives. Indeed, such was my own standard for sermons and preachers as I lived and worked in North America. However, as I lived in Ethiopia and researched preaching in that context,[1] my views were challenged to accommodate a new perspective – a perspective expressed in the second example above.

In rural Ethiopia, a good sermon is one that ushers the audience into a heightened sense of God's powerful presence at the preaching

event. Further, the good sermon convinces the audience that God will continue to be powerfully present in their lives, prompting a response of submission. It confronts listeners with a reality that God delivers His people from evil, provides for them, and makes demands upon them as present day experiences, not just as history lessons from the biblical text. And by extension, a good preacher is one who consistently helps people have such an encounter with God.

Initially, I found myself nervous about valuing sermons for their effectiveness in connecting people with the presence of God. It seemed too mystical. It was too close to charismatic experience that encroached on my pneumatology. And such sermons simply were not part of my normal experience. But through years of work in Ethiopian contexts, I have moved from discomfort to cautious appreciation for such sermons.

In short, my research in Ethiopian preaching led me to see preaching as more than a passionate teaching of a text-focused main idea with a hope for transformation of the listener. Rather, preaching is to be an encounter with God, an encounter that stimulates a response of worship. The claim of this essay is that within many North American churches: a significant improvement to expository preaching will occur as preachers strive to stimulate a worshipful encounter with God in the preaching event.

To support this claim, the paper proceeds through three arguments. The first section contends that Ethiopian preachers differ from us in their conception of preaching, seeing it as a worshipful encounter with God. The section describes sermons from rural Ethiopia, contrasting them with features of sermons that we might hear from members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. My second section investigates how both conceptions of preaching have been heavily influenced by cultural forces in their respective contexts. As a result, we are challenged to assess our own conceptions as rooted

in western culture and re-shape these conceptions with insights from the African context. Finally, a third section provides several specific ways that our homiletical conceptions and practices might be modified by insights gained from this analysis. My hope is that by the end of this paper, the reader will accept the challenge to re-think his or her own conception of homiletics to reflect a stronger passion for stimulating a worshipful encounter with God in the preaching event.

Contrasting Conceptions of Preaching

Within a North American context, we may assume that expository preaching is a component of a worship experience. The sermon often is set in a worship context; it is preceded by prayers for God's hand to be at work; it contains a call for some kind of worshipful submission to God; it is followed by a worshipful hymn or song that acknowledges a worshipful commitment to God. So worship certainly is not absent in evangelical expository preaching.

Nonetheless, preaching in North American evangelical churches has, perhaps unintentionally, moved worship to a background status. In its place, we elevate instruction, learning, and personal transformation. This subordination of worship may be best substantiated by seeing some of the sharp contrasts between our own preaching and that which occurs in Ethiopia. In this section, we examine two areas of contrast: the goal of preaching and the view of preachers.

Contrasting Goals

Within western evangelical circles, one of the strengths of homiletics is its concern for preachers to explain the biblical text in a way that stimulates personal transformation of the hearer. Words such as "study," "interpret," "teach," "learn," "understand," and "apply" are never far from the discussion. This phenomenon is evident in

definitions of expository preaching from Haddon Robinson and from Ramesh Richard.

> Expository preaching is the communication of a biblical concept derived from and transmitted through a historical, grammatical, and literary *study* of the passage in its context which the Holy Spirit first *applies* to the personality and experience of the preacher, and then through him to his hearers (emphasis added).[2]

Richard, though choosing not to explicitly mention the Holy Spirit, essentially concurs with Robinson regarding the thrust of expository preaching as sourced in the biblical text and targeting personal application.

> Expository Preaching is the contemporization of the central proposition of a biblical text that is derived from proper methods of *interpretation* and declared through effective means of communication to *inform* minds, *instruct* hearts, and *influence* behavior toward godliness (emphasis added).[3]

These excellent definitions of expository preaching serve us well in their affirmations, namely the importance of a central idea from the text and a call for communication that impacts the hearer. In each definition, notice how the emphasized words focus first on study and interpretation of the text and then on application and influence of the hearer. These emphases complement the standard depiction of expository preaching as a bridge-building metaphor from ancient text to contemporary audience.

Perhaps we could characterize this conception of preaching as "logos-centric." The Word (logos) is an object of careful systematic exegetical and theological investigation, and the process of personal

transformation centers on comprehension of this logos. In this conception, preachers teach audiences the meaning of the text so that comprehension will lead to submission. This logos-centric orientation to persuasion naturally emphasizes explanation, and the preaching event focuses primarily, though not exclusively, on lessons to be learned.

While this conception of preaching provides a healthy focus on encountering the Word, it fails to provide any mention of encounter with God. This deficiency is actually the strength of conceptions of preaching in other contexts, particularly African. Notice how the following definition[4] of preaching makes explicit the goal of encountering God through the sermon.

> Ethiopian evangelical preaching is a rhetorical-educational oral communication event wherein a Spirit-filled man of God passionately delivers a biblically-based message to an audience, with the intention of *stimulating listener participation, so that the audience directly encounters God's presence* and responds in the directions advocated in the message (emphasis added).[5]

Notice how the emphases of this definition are not found in the definitions from the North American homileticians. First, the end is an encounter with God. Parishioners attend a preaching event expecting to hear from God. This anticipation often is built prior to the sermon with singing and praying, and it is heightened in the initial remarks of most preachers.[6] The sermon itself is not so much a lesson as it is a theophany. It is not about how God has spoken (revelation as past) but about how God is speaking (revelation as present).[7]

Second, this concept of an audience encountering the presence of God connects well with the definition's emphasis on "stimulating

listener participation." In the African context, listener participation is not primarily a teaching technique to keep students engaged in the lesson. Rather, listener participation is critical to the success of the sermon itself as the presence of God draws near the congregation. It is akin to the nation of Israel gathering around Mount Sinai to hear the thunder, see the smoke, feel the mountain shake, and bow before the presence of God. This is worship. Likewise, physical and verbal participation of the Ethiopian audience in the sermon approximates a dramatic corporate reenactment of God's work. This corporate reenactment provides a sense that God is drawing near to His people.

In contrast to a conception of preaching that is logos-centric, this Ethiopian conception is pathos-centric. Through passionate presentation, these preachers desire to confront listeners with a message from God, making no distinction between localized historical truth, absolute Truth, and contemporary truth. Comprehension of textual meaning is not privileged over apprehension of God Himself. This pathos-centric approach to transformation seeks to help congregants identify with the story event of the text as the preacher demonstrates its living nature in the preaching program. With such an orientation, the preaching program downplays lessons to be learned and emphasizes a feeling to be experienced.[8] This feeling confronts the worshiper with the presence of the living God and His demands upon one's life.

Another way to explain this contrast between the two conceptions of preaching is through the words "comprehension" and "apprehension." As used by learning theorist David Kolb,[9] these two terms refer to two distinct ways that a person engages any experience. Comprehension refers to the process of abstract conceptualization that occurs most frequently through symbolic means like words and pictures. Apprehension, on the other hand, refers to engaging an experience through concrete experience. For example, the former (comprehension) is akin to learning to swim though reading a book

or listening to a description. The latter (apprehension), however, relates to learning to swim by immersing one's self in a body of water. Logos-centric preaching engages listeners in an experience primarily through an abstract conceptualization process that relies on symbols to bring comprehension of God's message. Pathos-centric preaching emphasizes engagement in an immediate concrete experience that relies on direct senses to bring apprehension of God's presence.[10]

Studies of African American churches and of preaching in Malawi add support for the idea or preaching as an encounter with God's presence. In African American churches, preachers utilize dialogical preaching to create an experience of God's presence. This shared experience in turn produces a sense of community amongst worshipers. Tim Sensing's[11] research into preaching in the Black church led him to the observation that sermons of Black preachers are characterized by spontaneity, presentism,[12] associational logic, and poetic logic that reasons through analogy. Mitchell[13] and LaRue[14] found similar patterns in their research of Black preaching. Wendland, studying preaching in Malawi, also discovered a heavy emphasis on preaching as an event that creates an experience of God's presence for the worshiping community.[15]

The argument here is not that one method is better than another. Rather, both comprehension and apprehension play vital roles in a worship experience. The Bible's emphasis on remembrance as an aspect of worship certainly calls for comprehension of God's acts and messages. Likewise, the response of submission (bowing down), a second common aspect of biblical worship invites an acute apprehension of the presence and supremacy of God. Fearful submission is often as much an emotive sense of awe as it is a cognitive act of reasoning. It seems that a complete worship experience requires both modes in preaching.

This section of the paper began with the contention that worship

has taken a subordinate role in preaching of North American evangelical churches. To substantiate the claim, I am examining two areas of contrast between preaching in North America and that which occurs in Ethiopia. The first contrast dealt with the different goals and means in these two kinds of preaching. What has emerged is a clear picture of one form of preaching that tends toward a logos-centric, comprehension-oriented approach and another that tends toward a pathos-centric, apprehension approach. In the next section, we turn to consider contrasting views of the preacher.

Contrasting Views of the Preacher

If we turn our attention again to the definitions of expository preaching offered by Robinson and by Richard, we note the words "study," "inform," and "instruct." The implication is that the preacher primarily functions as a technician of the Word and teacher of it. Indeed, preachers in North American evangelical churches often are subject matter experts with academic degrees to prove their expertise. To gain their degrees, these preachers had to demonstrate competencies in biblical languages, hermeneutics, and theology as well as in preaching. Their employers often expect them to prepare sermons through long hours of study. For preachers in this tradition, credibility depends heavily on academic qualifications and demonstrated expertise in the subject.[16]

Reinforcing this view of the preacher is the behavior of audiences who see their preacher first as a teacher. People in these churches come to study and learn the Bible. They bring their Bibles, their notebooks, and their highlighters. They prefer Powerpoint slides, handouts or both. Some will expect to gain data about the text, others to receive profound advice for life, and others to gain insightful counseling to solve their problems. They want to live skillfully and they expect the preacher to teach them lessons that will assist them in their navigation through life's difficulties.

Certainly there are valuable aspects of viewing the preacher as teacher or technician or expert. But such a conception moves worship to a subordinate position. The point is brought into sharper relief when we see an Ethiopian conception of the preacher.

In the Ethiopian conception, a preacher is viewed as prophet or spiritual representative of God. In the definition offered above, preaching was described as a "communication event wherein a Spirit-filled man of God passionately delivers a biblically-based message." Credibility is granted to a preacher only through his demonstration that he is a Spirit-filled man of God. In this role, he is a leader in worship more than a teacher of lessons.

The Ethiopian worldview assumes ever-present activity of demons, spirits, and the supernatural.[17] As a result, Ethiopians seek a spiritual leader who can help them deal with the unseen forces. Into this world enters a preacher as one whose messages demonstrate his heightened ability to discern spiritual truth and do battle with spiritual forces. Failing to demonstrate such spiritual competencies would call into question the preacher's qualification to discharge his role as a Spirit-filled man of God. In short, there would be no compelling reason to listen to such a preacher.

When it comes to the issue of worship, what is the difference whether a preacher is viewed as teacher or perceived as a spiritual representative of God? Certainly a preacher can assume either role and still move people toward worship. However, such a move may be a longer path for the preacher perceived first as teacher. He must convince people to worship even though he himself is not immediately seen as a worship leader. For the preacher seen as a spiritual representative of God, his task of motivating to worship is presumed and portrayed from the outset of the preaching program. The baseline assumption is that this preacher will lead his congregation into a worship experience.

To this point, the paper has argued that a logos-centric view of preaching inadvertently results in relegating worship to a secondary level. We have seen how this shortcoming is brought into sharper relief as logos-centric preaching is contrasted with the pathos-centric preaching of rural Ethiopia.

What shall we make of this difference between the two views of preaching? Is one view more theologically defensible than the other? Not necessarily. One could certainly demonstrate biblical evidence for a logos-centric view of preaching. The Bible places considerable emphasis on studying the Scripture, explaining the message, and teaching truth. Further, preachers in the Bible frequently were teachers. At the same time, one could marshal similar biblical support for preaching as a pathos-centric communication of a Spirit-filled man to stimulate encounter with God. It is unlikely that we can judge one view of preaching as more biblical than the other. An explanation must come from a different direction. In the next section, the paper seeks to explain these different views not in terms of biblical or theological factors, but as reactions to different cultural forces.

Contrasting Contexts of Preaching

This section argues that the two previously introduced conceptions of preaching have been heavily influenced by cultural forces in their respective contexts. Since this is the case, we are challenged to assess our own conceptions as rooted in Western culture and re-shape these conceptions with insights from the African context. Observations are made in two areas: Process of Change and The Literacy/Orality Distinction.

Process of Change

Within the North American evangelical church, preaching has grown up in the context of modernism and the scientific method,[18]

philosophies that lead to the belief that man can independently change himself and his society. In contrast, preaching in rural Ethiopia has developed in cultures that are pre-modern and relatively untouched by science and realism. These philosophies promote a worldview wherein change occurs not primarily from man's effort but from God's intervention.

This distinction provides an explanation of how the two different conceptions of preaching matured with their respective emphases. The prominence of science and technology provided foundation for views on the mechanisms of change in North America and Europe. Transformation of society and of individuals is seen as within the domain of man's effort. In a modern world, change comes from accurate information applied to a problem in a disciplined and systematic manner. Thus, the fruit of proper study of the Bible, when communicated effectively, informs and instructs people so that they change in a Godward direction. Preaching in the West is flavored by such social and personal engineering. It provides hope that people who apply God's directives can change their life situations.

Contrast this worldview setting with that of pre-modern and pre-critical rural Ethiopia. The Bible is revered as a powerful and mysterious book. Its power is rooted in its spiritual source and in its mystery more than in its meaning. In this low tech society, change comes primarily as the result of spiritual forces external to man. Jardine states the point emphatically:

> The most important feature of all moral reasoning before the modern era was that it assumed that humans have a very limited capacity to change their environment, both natural and social. The central idea in virtually every premodern system of moral reasoning was that people are part of an unchanging natural order, created by God or the gods, and must conform to that unchanging order to live happily.[19]

In such a context, preachers provide hope for change by calling an audience to awareness of and submission to God's presence. In Ethiopia, God Himself must act on behalf of His people in order to bring them to their divinely decreed destiny[20]. Deliverance will not come through man's effort. To maintain this kind of hope in God's intervention, preachers must produce a sense of direct encounter with God during their messages. They cannot simply convey accurate biblical information and demonstrate areas of application.

Literacy/Orality Distinction

Throughout Europe and North America, there is little doubt that literacy and its related technologies have had significant impact on life. In the West, schools and books abound, and the prevalence of technologies for information storage, retrieval, and presentation have fostered societies saturated by informationism. Theological education immerses students in limitless pools of data about the ancient text and contemporary people. Students are taught how to persuade through processes of literacy-based reasoning, primarily in the form of written argument. Then the student is placed in a sterile preaching lab for the scrutiny of his sermon design and delivery. In such a training process, steeped in the technologies of literacy, connections to worship are strained, if they exist at all.

In this context it is no wonder that the preacher is viewed as a scholar-teacher especially adept at the retrieval and dissemination of religious ideas. In evangelical circles, the preacher points people to the written Word, and esteemed parishioners capture his ideas in their notebooks, marveling simultaneously at the preacher, the Bible, and the Author. While this kind of attention to the written Word has many benefits, it also carries the potential danger of failing to move people past the words to submit to the Author who not only *was* present in the past act of inspiration but who also *is* present and active in the preaching event.

In the contrasting case of rural Ethiopia, life is lived primarily in

an oral world. Learning is through oral channels and informal education. Formal literacy-based education is relatively rare, books are minimal, and study time is terribly slim. Few would preach in such a context if they were evaluated on their abilities to study and formulate information from the biblical text. However, preachers are valued as Spirit-filled individuals who proclaim God's Word in such a way that it invites people to an encounter with God. The text is re-enacted, not just explained, and the supremacy of God is never far from view.

In sum, preaching in a literate world is oriented around instruction about the text and its (objective) meaning, including formal demonstration of proofs from the text. In an oral world, however, proclamation of the text and its subjective claims take on higher priority. In the former, a call to submission comes through cognition. In the latter, the call for submission comes through pathos generated by metaphor, identification with biblical narrative, and analogous reasoning. Each orientation to preaching is rooted in the culture in which it is found.

Certainly, many more cultural dynamics could be explored to demonstrate how each view of preaching is deeply rooted in cultural values. One might contend that the respective cultural forces carry as much weight on conceptions of preaching as do biblical and theological values. That being the case, we must welcome evaluation of our biases in preaching from the perspectives of different cultures. In this case, I am suggesting that cultural pressures of the 19th and 20th centuries have influenced western evangelical conceptions of preaching in such a way that its connection to worship has become distant. As we think of homiletics from the standpoint of a culture that is dependent on God for change and is challenged to learn through oral means, we may be able to envision an elevation of worship as a goal of our preaching. It is to such a vision that we now turn.

Moving Worship to the Foreground of Preaching: Five Suggestions

The five suggestions that follow come directly out of my reflections on preaching in an African context. The suggestions are not radical departures from our current practice of preaching in evangelical circles. However, they may provide for homileticians important touchpoints for additional research and discussion.

1. Re-conceive the goal of preaching to include present worship of God.

Our present preaching goals of personal transformation and future application, though admirable, are insufficient. As we re-think definitions of expository preaching, it seems we would be better served to include the concept that preachers seek to create a worship event where people encounter God. Of course, this has its theological challenges because we understand that preachers cannot force such an encounter. In the end, God Himself must break into our preaching and upon the listeners. Yet, we should be able to articulate a goal for the sermon while we acknowledge our inability to control the effect. We do the same for every element of truly spiritual transformation effected by the Holy Spirit.

This suggestion should not be understood as a call to reduce attention on the text, downplay the importance of propositions, or remove goals of application and personal transformation. Rather, it is a refinement to our conception of preaching so that we consciously move beyond present goals and practices that are rooted in a passing cultural climate. As Wilson points out, "Preaching is not just information about God, or communication in God's name, it is about the bestowal of God's power and the reception of God's grace."[21] When these elements of God's power and grace are conscious in the preaching event, worship likely will be close at hand. We need to work on integrating this idea into our

conception of expository preaching.

2. Craft sermons that exalt the supremacy of God and call for submission of the listener.

The uniform witness of the Scripture is that the Trinitarian God is exalted over all that exists. To stimulate worship, this concept must be preached in multiple diverse ways to capture the hearts of listeners and challenge them to submission. This is difficult preaching, for we run dry of pictures and metaphors that will portray the status of our God. It is far easier to challenge a listener to pray, tell the truth, give money, or read the Bible than it is to create for them a new, fresh, terrifying vision of the supremacy of God. It is easy to tell people to go home and worship in their personal quiet time. But it is far more difficult to create space for worship in the midst of a preaching event.

Perhaps one of the first occasions for implementation of this suggestion is in preaching the multiple passages where there is no explicit imperative. It is in these texts where we often have the most obvious opportunity for immediate worship in the preaching event. For example, in preaching from the first half of Pauline epistles, we exalt Christ and call people to believe Him ever more deeply, rather than telling listeners to pray more, serve more, or study more. Additionally, when we preach from a narrative passage, we must not be afraid to dwell on the sovereignty of God and the wonder of Christ, rather than exhort people to keep themselves pure (Da. 1) or engage in evangelism (Jn. 4).

A second way to craft sermons that exalt the supremacy of God and call for submission runs on the level of personal transparency regarding the Spirit's work in the life of the preacher. Preachers who testify to God's sovereign work in their personal lives model for listeners worshipful submission to God. This modeling should function as more than a nice contemporary example illustrating

how the truth "works." Instead, this kind of personal transparency stimulates in the listener an immediate response of worship like that of the preacher. Such transparency provides an avenue for identification that links listeners to the preacher and to one another in a worship experience during the sermon.

3. Provide opportunities for apprehension as well as comprehension of truth.

While comprehension excels in precision of meaning-making, its reliance on abstraction means that it lives primarily in cognition and only remotely in the emotive. Apprehension, on the other hand, draws listeners into concrete experience and particularly touches pathos. But preaching for apprehension is no small challenge. As listeners sit in an auditorium, the best we can usually do is draw on metaphor, picture, music and narrative to appeal to multiple senses and concretize the experience. But such labor is not to be cute or novel in our preaching. It is done with a view of helping people encounter God and fall before Him in worship with all their senses.

At first glance, we might think it impossible to apprehend God in a preaching program where words from a preacher form the primary basis for an audience's experience. Words normally form fodder for comprehension, not apprehension. However, the preacher's words, communicated with deep passion and in a narrative frame, can set the stage for an encounter with God. Kolb himself suggests that words, though usually employed on the comprehension end of the pole can be used to stimulate apprehension:

> Comprehensions of experience can be communicated and thereby transcend time and space. Further, to the extent that the model was accurately constructed (comprehended) from your apprehensions, it allows you to predict and recreate those apprehensions.[22]

4. Build Anticipation for a confrontation with God.

In Ethiopia, I was impressed by the ways in which worship leaders and preachers built anticipation for God to work in the midst of the congregation. There was a genuine faith communicated throughout each service that God was present and active. Direct statements to this effect were repeatedly given. Prayers acknowledged the presence of God and provided space for individual and corporate worship, unhurried by the press of time. As the service went along, the audience seemed to grow in attentiveness to God's Spirit and what the Spirit may be demanding of them.

Perhaps an area for our own consideration is to examine how and for what we build anticipation in our services. Anticipation is built for the next youth activity, potluck supper, or fund raising event. Anticipation may be stimulated for an outreach program, a missions trip, or even a special discipleship program. But how often do we build anticipation for the work of God to be happening in the midst of a preaching program? Certainly, we could learn to create better worship experiences in preaching by raising expectations that encounters with God will occur as the Word is preached. Such anticipation may be built naturally before the sermon, during the sermon's introduction, and at the final challenge to listeners at the end of the sermon.

5. In teaching homiletics, consider assessing how well students create a worshipful atmosphere through their preaching.

Homiletics labs in Bible colleges and seminaries often are sterile places. They are good for assessing sermon design and delivery. But with an audience of critics and recording equipment, any real attempts at worship come across as contrived shams. At best, students are preaching in the lab to learn a skill. At worst, they preach to earn a grade.

To teach students to couple preaching and worship, some of the assessment likely needs to move outside the lab and into the real world. In that setting, the stakes are different. The experience is not limited to demonstrating competence in a method. Rather, it adds the dynamic of real people with real needs for worship. Perhaps those who teach future preachers must design a way to assess this fuller experience of preaching.

Conclusion

Learning is an important thing, but it is not the only thing. Most evangelical homileticians would concur with such a statement. Yet when it comes to preaching, we have slipped into a practice where teaching and learning have assumed a privileged position to everything else.

The paper has argued that this learning goal has crowded out worship as an essential element of preaching. The reality of this situation is evident when we examine our theoretical constructs for preaching and assess how our cultural contexts have led us toward privileging learning over worship.

By stepping outside our own culture, we gain insights that may strengthen our own homiletics. Here is what I learned from African preachers: Preaching can be and should be a worship experience.

Notes

1. From 1991-2006, I served in Ethiopia with SIM, primarily in theological education. Research for a doctoral dissertation focused on preaching in rural Ethiopia. Since 2006, I have returned to the country each summer for preaching and teaching ministries.
2. Haddon W. Robinson, *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 21.
3. Ramesh Richard, *Preparing Expository Sermons: A Seven-Step Method for Biblical Preaching* (GrandRapids: Baker, 2001), 19.

4. This definition represents the conclusions of a grounded-theory research project that examined preaching in rural Ethiopia. As a result, the statement is a researcher's description of preaching rather than a homiletician's prescription of it. As such, the statement is qualitatively different from the kinds of prescriptive definitions by Robinson and Richard cited earlier.
5. Victor D. Anderson, *Implicit Rhetorical Theory of Preachers in Wolaitta Ethiopia with Implications for Homiletics Instruction in Theological Education, Ph.D. Dissertation*, (La Mirada: Biola, 2008), 209.
6. For descriptions and examples of techniques that build anticipation, see Victor Anderson, *Implicit Rhetorical Theory of Preachers in Wolaitta Ethiopia.*
7. In my personal experience, two interactions with Ethiopians underscore the importance of an audience experiencing God in the preaching event. In the first, I was preaching in a rural setting in Ethiopia, relying heavily on my Amharic manuscript so that my words were accurate and appropriate. The manuscript had been crafted with an Ethiopian informant and tested in other preaching situations. On this particular day, after I had been speaking for a few minutes, a note came from the audience to the pulpit, requesting that I speak in English and use a translator. This request was despite the fact that no one in the audience understood English. After the sermon, my informant and I concluded that the request came because of a perceived conflict between a logos-centric sermon and one that was pathos-centric. Parishioners feared that I could not generate passion and summon the presence of God if I was overly focused on the words of my manuscript.
   In the second interaction, I formed a focus group of Ethiopians to give feedback on the audio recording of a sermon from a popular Ethiopian preacher. At a certain confusing point in the sermon, I asked the listeners to explain the preacher's message. None of them could make sense of the point, but they all concluded that it was a good sermon because of the perception of God's presence. For them, bowing before God's presence took precedence over comprehending the speaker's message.
8. In saying that an Ethiopian preacher downplays lessons to be learned, I am not suggesting that these preachers are not teaching. They do teach, and a significant amount of learning may take place. Rather, my observation relates to the relative emphasis of creating a feeling of encounter with God. Creation of this feeling is a relatively higher goal for these preachers than is that of teaching a lesson that will be intellectually stimulating.
9. David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1984).

10. Although not developed in this paper, the contrast between immediate concrete experience and delayed application may provide another angle of exploration. Logos-centric approaches to preaching may tend to position application as that which is taken home and put into practice after the sermon event. Pathos-centric preaching, however, fosters an immediate call for faith and submission before the end of the sermon.
11. Tim Sensing, "African American Preaching," *Journal of the American Academy of Ministry*, 7.1 (2001): 38-53
12. *Presentism* is a technical term wherein there is a direct transference of the historical context to the present one. "The discontinuity between 'then' and 'now' is lost. The dynamic analogy created in the sermon assumes historical continuity between Israel and the community today" (Sensing, "African American Preaching," 44).
13. Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).
14. Cleophus J. LaRue, *The Heart of Black Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster, 2000).
15. Ernst R. Wendland, *Preaching that Grabs the Heart: A Rhetorical-Stylistic Study of the Chichewa Revival Sermons of Shadrack Wame* (Blantyre, Malawi: Christian Literature Association in Malawi, 2000).
16. A clear indicator of the importance of academic accomplishment to establish credibility is seen in the way new preachers are introduced to audiences. It is not uncommon for academic qualifications and marks of expertise to be recited as evidence for credibility. Seldom are remarks made of a preacher's spiritual sensitivities. However, in an Ethiopian context, it is highly unusual to hear introductory comments about a preacher's education or subject matter expertise.
17. Nega Mezlekia, *Notes from the Hyena's Belly* (New York: Picador, 2001).
18. Western culture's preference for scientific method and the advance of higher criticism provided fertile ground for development of logos-centric sermons. Specifically, development of a logos-centric bias of the North American church was promoted in a world where the veracity of the Bible was under critical attack. In this context, preaching became concerned with explaining and defending textual meaning. As the dominant worldview came under the influence of the scientific method, so did study of the Bible and the presentation of this study from the pulpit.
19. Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity can Save Modernity from Itself* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2004), 20.
20. Messay Kebede, *Survival and Modernization in Ethiopia's Enigmatic Present: A Philosophical Discourse* (Lawrenceville: Red Sea Press), 1999.

21. Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St Louis:Chalice Press, 2004), 65.
22. Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 43.

The Second Shepherd
Jesus the Warrior Messiah and its implications on Preaching[1]

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By Steven Smith

Revelation 19:11-16

(editor's note: Dr. Steven Smith is the Dean of the College and Professor of Communication at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He holds the James T. Draper Chair of Pastor Ministry. This is Dr. Smith's sermon preached at the 2009 Evangelical Homiletics Society Annual Meeting held at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.)

I have often felt that my understanding of the book of Revelation was weak.

And so recently I did what a lot of you have done: I decided to commit to preach a series through Revelation in the selfish hope that I would understand it better. However, I only had the opportunity to do a short series, so how do you preach a short series through Revelation?

My dilemma was compounded by the fact that I was never attracted to the book of Revelation. Perhaps this is not a wise confession to make, but so much of what I heard preached from the Revelation seemed like little more than speculation. Perhaps you can identify with that. However, what liberates the study of the book of Revelation is the theme found in the first verse, "The revelation of Jesus Christ…" To love Jesus is obviously to love Him revealed, isn't it? So I just began to isolate these pristine Christological passages—maybe five, perhaps seven, throughout Revelation. And as I got to this last one in Revelation 19, I became gripped with this idea of Jesus as a Warrior Messiah.

What a deep, odd, and provocative picture of Christ.

John, in Revelation 19:11-16, paints a picture of Christ that is unlike any other. In these few moments together, I would like to briefly examine this picture of Christ and then ask the question, *What implication does this picture of Christ have on our preaching ministry?* So with that in mind, let's look at Revelation 19:11. John says:

> And I saw heaven opened and behold a white horse, and he who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and wages war.[2]

Before we get into the text, let me begin with a confession. Since we are all preachers, here at the Evangelical Homiletics Society, let me begin by answering a question that may be on your mind. The answer is, Yes; you should be up here preaching and not me. Maybe you weren't thinking that. Perhaps I'm just projecting myself on you. But to be perfectly honest, this is what I'm thinking when you're up here. Thank you for letting me confess my sin. Wow. What is more intimidating than preaching to preachers, right?

All throughout the book of Revelation, John is given these little tiny glimpses into heaven.[3] However, for the first time all of heaven is opened. It's as if the cargo doors of heaven are flown open and John is able to see exactly what's going on in heaven. Our text answers the question, "What did John see"?

The first thing John sees is a horse. Not a show horse. This is a warhorse. It would have been very clear in the minds of the first century Jewish Christians. They would have immediately connected with the sentiment expressed in Isaiah chapter 63:1 of the one coming back in splendor; an answer to the prayer in Isaiah chapter 64:1, that God would rip open the heavens and come down to bring judgment on their enemies. This is allusion to the Jewish Messiah is also affirmed, I think, by the last part of verse 11 where John says "in righteousness He judges and wages war."

John is of course writing to Jews in the first century. Jewish history is a history of persecution; persecution at the hands of the Philistines, the Egyptians, Assyrians, and the Babylonians. More precisely, John is writing to Jewish-*Christians* who doubly understand persecution as they are now persecuted at the heavy hand of the Roman emperor Domitian. They were living in the hope that God would bring a Messiah figure as was prophesied in Psalm 2 and Isa. 63. And now he's here! John sees him and he's coming to judge rightly, meaning that He's coming to vindicate all of those who have never received proper judgment.

Can you imagine these persecuted first century believers? There huddled up in a house church. Perhaps a young leader takes a scroll, unrolls it, and reads to the church these encouraging words? The Messiah they have waited for will in fact come!

So who is this Warrior-Messiah?

John identifies this Warrior-Messiah. The middle of verse 11 says that He who sat on this horse is called "Faithful and True." This is a direct allusion, I believe, to 1:5 where Christ is the one who is the "true witness". Christ is true, meaning he is faithful to proclaim the Father, and He is a true fulfillment to the prophecies of who He claimed to be; therefore he is the true judge who is able to judge rightly. The Warrior-Messiah is none other than Jesus Christ. So this is the point of the text: *Jesus Christ is the Warrior-Messiah.*

John now describes in graphic detail this Warrior Messiah.

"His eyes are a flame of fire" (v.12a). The Warrior's eyes see everything. Therefore he knows all and He has omniscience. "On his head are many diadems" (12b); not a few diadems like the beast and the dragon,[4] but an unlimited number so that he has complete omniscience. But he also has all sovereignty. He describes him with "a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself" (12c).

It's shocking really how much ink has been spilled in the commentaries trying to figure out what this name is; this name that only He knows. There is the suggestion that this is "the Word of God" coming out of verse 13. There is also the suggestion that it's a reference to the Tetragrammaton; a word that can't be spoken. These views all have merit. However, Rev. 3:12 tells us that Christ will be given a new name, unidentified and mysterious.

In reading chapter 13 and chapter 19, I can't help but think of Philippians chapter 2:9—because of Christ's ultimate humiliation, He has received ultimate exultation; specifically, He has received "a name above every other name". What is that name? Paul doesn't tell us and John doesn't tell us; we know that in the time of the Old Testament to know somebody's name was to wield power over them. So here we see in Philippians 2:9 Christ receiving a name that no one can touch because of His humiliation and exultation. So in v. 12 now we're getting a fuller picture of the Warrior-Messiah. His eyes show us he has all knowledge, his horse shows us he has all power and because of His humiliation and exultation, He has all authority! Therefore, He is in a perfect position to stand above all and judge rightly.

Then John moves from this beautiful, authoritative picture to a very graphic, even disturbing picture of Christ. Look at verse 13. "He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood…". Don't think Calvary here. This isn't Calvary; this is Armageddon. This is not His own blood. This is the blood of His enemies. This is a warrior who has returned from battle and whose victory over his enemies is so pronounced that their blood is splattered on His clothes. It says in the rest of verse 13 that "His name is called the Word of God." This is not a word of communication (John 1:1-5). This is the word of judgment. So the Father wants to speak one-word of judgment, and that word that He is speaking is Jesus.

Look at verse 14: "the armies which are in heaven clothed in fine

linen, white and clean were following him on white horses." I believe that this is a reference to the church, you and me, following Christ on white horses. Did you notice that Christ's robe is splattered in blood but not ours? The armies' robes are clean. If in high school, you get to the end of the fourth quarter of the game, no one says to you, "You played such a great game that your uniform is spotless!" No, the truth is that the guy with the clean uniform is the guy that didn't play.

These armies didn't come to fight. They came to watch. We didn't participate in our spiritual salvation. We won't participate in our physical salvation. I didn't help the Lamb when He was slain and I will not help the lion when He roars. We just came to watch, you see, not to participate.

Please do not get distracted with the question of if what John is seeing is figurative or allegorical. The point that he is trying to make is that Jesus Christ is, indeed, this Warrior Messiah. And by the way, this is not the Jesus of flannel graphs, is it? This is not the Jesus of Sunday school. This is not the Jesus we always pictured.

How do you picture Jesus?

If I were to be honest, when I think of how the people I pastored thought of Christ, I would think that at least three images come to their mind.

The first image that comes to mind is in Bethlehem, baby Jesus: the quiet, perfect little infant snuggled down in the straw, baby Jesus.

The second image that comes to mind is not baby Jesus, Bethlehem, but it's Galilee: hippy Jesus. You know, He's got that long hair and that really nasty beard. Certainly He's tatted up underneath that robe; He's sitting out on that Galilean hillside outside of his Volkswagen bus as Peter quietly strums the acoustic guitar. They

are passing around a really small cigarette while Jesus encourages His disciples to recycle. This is our cultural image of Christ, right, it's hippy Jesus, Galilee.

The third image people have of Christ is Calvary: whipped Jesus; mauled, mutilated flesh, a pristine bloodletting at the hands of his executioners, Calvary, whipped Jesus.

You say, "Is there anything wrong with those images?" Well, I guess there's an allusion of them, certainly historically, it's not that they're wrong. It's just that they're so outdated.

Jesus Christ is not a baby.

Jesus Christ is not a Jewish peasant.

Jesus Christ is not a 33-year-old-Jew hanging naked between two thieves.

That person does not and will not ever exist again. That's who He was. This is who He is. He is the warrior Messiah.

John continues in verse 15, that "from His mouth comes a sharp sword." This is Christ coming back to judge, and He does it with one word of judgment from His mouth.

And He says that "He will trample down the nations"— again, an allusion to Isaiah chapter 63— and then he says in the middle of verse 15 that "He may strike down the nations and He will"—look at this—"rule them with a rod of iron." Now this is a reference to Psalm 2:9 when all the nations mount up against the Lord and His Anointed One. Psalm 2 is the prophecy and Revelation 19 is the fulfillment. The Psalmist says that the Anointed One will strike them with a rod of iron. It's a direct allusion but it's *not* a direct quotation. Psalm 2:9 says "He will *strike* them with a rod of iron"

but Revelation 19:15 says "He will *rule* them with a rod of iron." Obviously, John had the word "strike" at his disposal. He could have used it, but he doesn't use it. The idea wasn't one striking blow. The idea was absolute and complete domination. In fact, it's interesting, verse 15, the word "rule" there— some of you know this— is the Greek word ποιμαίνω (*poimen)*. Does that sound familiar? It the word most often translated "shepherd".

The text is saying that Christ will shepherd them with a rod of iron. What kind of twisted shepherd carries around a staff made out of iron? Well, this is not the staff of wood made for protecting the sheep. This is the rod of iron made for defending the sheep. This is not the staff made for leading the sheep. It is the rod of iron that's made for beating the wolves.

I have to be honest with you, I have never seen this picture of Christ as a violent shepherd in the New Testament. Have you? I just don't think our people think of Him that way. There is an interesting trajectory of the shepherding motif in the New Testament.

Matthew 2:6 describes Christ as the shepherd of God's people; in John 10 Jesus is the good shepherd; and, here is the real picture, in Matthew 26:31, Jesus identifies Zachariah's words as a reference to Himself, "I will strike down the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock shall be scattered". This is the Gospel: Jesus Christ is the stricken shepherd that lays down His life for the sheep. But in Revelation there is another picture—an altogether different picture of a shepherd. There is a second shepherd. The first shepherd was the stricken, but the second shepherd will strike. The first shepherd took the blows for the sheep; the second shepherd will dominate and inflict blows in defense of his sheep.

So what does this image of the Second Shepherd do for our preaching?

Well, first, there is an issue of communication: How do I portray Christ for my people? I wonder how many people get to heaven under my preaching and will be shocked to find out that Jesus is not an effeminate social worker? Now Christ does bring social justice. But if there is any social justice, ultimately He will judge those who have abused His bride.

The Second Shepherd image should influence my communication of Christ but more pointedly, it should influence my imitation of Christ. 1 Peter 5:1-5 inextricably links the shepherding of Christ with our shepherding. In fact, in all of the New Testament, the metaphor of a shepherd is only used for two people: for Christ and for us, the pastor-shepherds. In 1 Peter 5, we have this org chart, right? He is the Chief Shepherd, and underneath the Chief Shepherd, and in imitation of that shepherd, we are to shepherd God's people.

So now this brings us to a question: If I'm to imitate the Chief Shepherd, which one: the stricken shepherd or the striking shepherd? Do I imitate Matt. 26 or Rev. 19?

More pointedly, do I want my preaching to be identified with the stricken shepherd, or do I want my preaching to be identified with the striking, dominating shepherd? I can only answer the question for myself, but I can answer it very accurately: I want my preaching to be identified with the second shepherd, right? Don't you? I mean, I don't want to ever walk out of the pulpit and someone says to me, "Wow, Steven, what an incredible sermon. You sure were dominated. You sure were ruled." That's not what you want to hear, is it? I want to hear the opposite, "Man, you dominated! You got up there and you threw down. Boy, you ruled that text."

You know what I fear? I fear when that in my ambition to be a "good preacher", I start to channel the second shepherd. But Jesus *alone* rules, and Jesus *alone* dominates, and Jesus *alone* consummates God's

own plan. Therefore, when I wield the pulpit to draw attention to myself, ironically I'm using the means of proclamation as a means of taking away, of fighting, God's plan for the exultation of His own Son.

So to communicate the second shepherd I imitate the first shepherd. Maybe that *is* the best compliment for the preacher: "Boy, you sure were stricken. Man you sure were dominated by that text. You sure were ruled by the Spirit."

Maybe this is why Paul, when pressed to defend his ministry in 2 Corinthians 4:12, described his ministry this way "This ministry works death in me but life in you." I wish that was a preaching passage specifically, but it's not. It's about ministry in general, but insomuch as preaching is a ministry, I think this is a perfect description of the preaching act.

Preaching is not coming to life in the pulpit. Preaching is crawling up into the pulpit and dying so that other people might live. And I believe that there is, if you will, a dynamic tension here; there is a cruciform continuum. Insomuch as I enter the pulpit and I live to my right to be liked, I live to my right to be loved, I live to my right to be thought of as funny or intellectual or engaging or bright or trendy or whatever, insomuch as I live to that, the people die. And insomuch as I die to those rights, the word of God lives within them. In this way, really, the Gospel is the best metaphor for its own proclamation. I am preaching a message of death to life, and they're watching that message come from a preacher who is willing to die so that they may live.

Richard Lischer observed, "Those who preach out of need-love… turn the pulpit into therapy—not for the people, but for the preacher."[5] I wish I could say this wasn't true about me, but how many times have I used the pulpit to manage my own reputation as a preacher? But I can't communicate the second shepherd unless I'm willing to imitate the first shepherd. There can be no cross from

the pulpit unless there is first a cross in the pulpit.

S.M. Lockridge, one of the most respected African American preachers of a generation ago, was a profound wordsmith. He was famous for a sermon simply entitled, "The Lordship of Jesus Christ". He began his sermon with a great opening line; I'll make his opening thought my last.

Without announcing a text, Lockridge began his sermon with these words. "The hinges of history turn on those who have linked their lives to the Lordship of Jesus Christ." The hinges of history turn on those who have linked their lives on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It is so poetic it almost belies how difficult it is to do, isn't it?
This is the pedagogy of homiletics. It's calling a generation to die so that other people might live.

Notes

1. This sermon was originally preached at the 2009 annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. November 15, 2009, Fort Worth TX.
2. All Scripture quotations are from the New American Standard translation.
3. See 4:1; 11;19; and 15:5.
4. See Rev. 9 and 13 respectively.
5. Richard Lischer, *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 1992), 68, 69.

~•~•~•~Book Reviews~•~•~•~

Can Words Express Our Wonder: Preaching in the Church Today. By Rosalind Brown. Norwich, U.K.: Canterbury, 2009, 978-1-85311-969-9, 190 pp., £12.99.

This is a grammar of homiletics written to train ministers who serve primarily in England, but the term "grammar" does not imply that it is shallow or even rudimentary. Giving readers a bird's eye view of the landscape of homiletics, Brown demonstrates broad vision. She has read widely in the field, although apparently not extensively in evangelical theory and methodology. As a grammar, three unusual features are worth noting. The first is Brown's emphasis on the formation of the preacher, a welcome emphasis since, as we all know, preaching is truth through personality. The second is her appreciation for literary arts. Brown is a poet as well as a preacher, and she clearly loves language. Her exercises on the use of imagination and concrete language are excellent. Another welcome feature is the depiction of preaching within the life of parish ministry. Too many of our works in homiletics examine the sermon as a stand-alone event. Illustrating her work with numerous passages from her own sermons, most preached at Durham Cathedral, Brown fleshes out abstract principles.

This book does not approach exegesis as "scientifically" as many readers of this *Journal* might advocate, but when supplemented with rigorous grammatical-historical interpretation, *Can Words Express Our Wonder* will aid imagination. The book's strength is not the systematizing of homiletics, but rather the energizing of heart and imagination.

Jeffrey Arthurs Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, MA

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Novel Preaching: Tips from Writers on Crafting Creative Sermons. By Alyce M. McKenzie. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010, 978-0-664-23322-8, 179 pp., $16.95.

Alyce McKenzie's purpose for this book shines forth clearly from the opening pages. She desires to implant within the hearts of preachers a passion for using imagination while preparing and presenting sermons. She wisely lays a foundation for her encouragement by citing Augustine's assertion that, in addition to teaching and persuading, sermons should "delight" the listeners (1).

McKenzie clearly declares her belief that sermons not only need to teach, but also satisfy the yearning of contemporary people for knowledge about Scripture and

their faith. Just as clearly, she admits that contemporary people are easily bored and that sermons need to include stories and images that capture their attention and help them engage truth. That being emphasized, she promises that the book will teach readers, aided by the advice of creative writers and creative teachers of preaching, how to cultivate imagination to observe the inner life, the life of the congregation, and the life of the biblical text.

Part One focuses on "Cultivating the Imagination." The author believes that preachers have much to learn about communication from the principles of fiction writing. Indeed, she claims that both sermons and novels are invitations to enter into stories: "now more than ever, people need to be drawn into a coherent story that is bigger than the disjointed episodes of our distracted lives" (13).

True to her thesis, McKenzie presents her insights on cultivating imagination by inviting readers to attend a writers' conference with her. At this conference, creative writers hold court briefly, providing mini-lectures and sound advice. Thus, the author uses story to convey insights and encouragements on how to use careful attentiveness, along with imagination, in order to move toward an effective shaping of the sermon.

Part Two—"The Shaping of the Sermon"—introduces writing strategies for sermons. McKenzie introduces four types of sermon struggles, and then provides advice from fiction writers for how to deal with each of them. She continues her shaping strategies focusing on: making an entrance, staying on track, and knowing when to leave. Though briefly visited, this material is both succinct and helpful when pondered carefully and developed thoughtfully.

Returning to a narrative style of presentation, the author then offers "recipes" from contemporary preachers. She surfaces names that are familiar to most homileticians, and adds additional "chefs" who whet readers' appetites for the thoughts of those preachers who are less familiar. This extended section is a rich find for those who wish to branch out from sermon forms that are routine.

The book closes with eight sermons that McKenzie has prepared ("without benefit of the specific insights of this book"), then preached. She challenges readers to consider the sermons critically, to note places where the proposals found in this book show up, and places where they do not.

Following the sermon sampler, McKenzie provides a helpful appendix of suggested reading. This excellent bibliography groups works by helpful categories; it is not so exhaustive as to be impractical.

In this reviewer's opinion, this book would be most helpful for: (1) those who

already have a measure of experience—I suspect it would less helpful for those who are in the early stages of a preaching career; (2) those whose audiences would appreciate an indirect style of teaching, a style akin to the Jesus' parabolic method; (3) those who are grounded well in the scriptural text and, thus, can present ideas clearly even when those are wrapped in story or portrayed as major images; and (4) those who are ready to venture out of comfortable boundaries and willing to experiment with alternative genres of oral communication—genres that might well engage listeners more holistically.

Kenneth E. Bickel
Grace Theological Seminary
Winona Lake, Indiana

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The Write Stuff. By Sondra B. Willobee. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009, 0-664-23281-7, 123 pp., $16.95.

The premise of this book is that preachers can connect better with their audiences by learning the techniques capable authors use to capture their readers. "Good writers know how to grab and hold attention. They can show us how to create compelling openings ('hook'), how to generate suspense through structure ('book'), and how to arouse interest with vivid language"(2). Willobee organizes the book around these three elements of creative writing in order to—as she states—condense the "material on the creative-writing shelf for busy pastors" (3).

Good writers know that if they want to be read they must capture the audience's attention. The same truth holds for preachers, who can no longer assume that they will automatically have an audience's attention; this is why Willobee dedicates the first section to the methods authors/preachers can use to "hook" their audience. She summarizes several of the most effective strategies preachers can employ to create conflict or tension within the audience, and then moves onto to a helpful discussion of how preachers can cultivate the imagination.

The second section of the book deals with sermon development or "book." Good writers understand the power of story and learn how to shape their narratives to keep the readers' attention and move the story forward. Willobee provides a succinct but insightful summary of the various proposals from writers and homileticians for crafting the plotline of a sermon or story. However, she does not fall into the trap of suggesting that all sermons be forced into a set pattern. She suggests that preachers use a variety of sermonic forms, including mimicking the shape of the biblical text in the sermon. An entire chapter is devoted to how one might find good stories to be used in sermons.

In the final section of the book she examines what she calls the "language of incarnation." Her thesis is that sermons require a different kind of language. In our day-to-day to experience we use "steno-language." She defines this as the language of "logic and definition, the language of business letters, scholarly articles, and management journals" (89). While this kind of language is important and useful, Willobee asserts that "[a] different kind of language is needed to communicate religious experience" (90). She then explores how this kind of "incarnation language" is used in the Scripture and how preachers can develop the skills to apply this species of language.

While there is not much that is new in this book, pastors and teachers of homiletics, alike, will find it helpful and informative. I appreciated the simple summaries provided by the author and her straightforward approach. As a teacher of preaching, I found the book to be an insightful introduction to the craft of shaping a sermon for maximum impact. The fact that Willobee does not advocate a single homiletic approach makes this book even more useful in the classroom. I would envision this book being used for introductory preaching classes as a helpful companion to other textbooks, such as Wayne McDill's *Twelve Essential Skills of Great Preaching,* or Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching*.

I fear that this book may not receive enough attention because some may too quickly pigeonhole this book with the narrative schemes of Eugene Lowry or Fred Craddock. While Willobee draws deeply from the insights of these and others, she is not beholden to any one approach and is far more balanced than she may first appear. I would encourage pastors who want to improve their skills, and teachers who want to help their students grasp the skills of effective communication, to read and use this book.

Joseph Buchanan

First Baptist Church
Metropolis, IL

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Reclaiming the Imagination: The Exodus as Paradigmatic Narrative for Preaching. Edited by David Fleer and Dave Bland. St. Louis: Chalice, 2009, 978-0-8272-3259-4, 202 pp., $25.99.

Fleer and Bland have made another solid contribution to the field of homiletics. To their collection of works on preaching *John*, *Mark*, the *Sermon on the Mount*, and *Psalms*, they now add another thought provoking and fruitful tome. This book is not a "how to" preach from Exodus; rather it is a "how should/could" the exodus influence preaching and congregations today. They propose that God's work in the exodus "is the archetype for how God acts throughout history and how God works today." In light of that premise, "What claims on our lives does

the exodus narrative imagine?" (2). Herein lies the heart of this work.

Many of the contributors to this work utilize a hermeneutical lens different from the grammatical-historical lens with which readers of this *Journal* are most familiar. In general, the insights gained are worthy of exposure. For example, with an eye towards justice, Lucy Hogan's sermon highlights Micah's use of the exodus and observes that Miriam is "an equal in the triumphant triumvirate that led Israel out of slavery" (81). Though it is right there in the text, many miss such an obvious opportunity to esteem the role of women in God's mission simply because they do not read the text looking for such insights. Likewise, Cleophus LaRue's essay is an informative survey of how the exodus has been used in the African American community—a perspective with which all should become familiar (119–128). Brian McLaren's comparative look at the ecological impact of empires is thought provoking, too (160–163).

In addition to the variegated hermeneutics that is employed, the format of the book lends itself to fruitful contemplation. Each of the five chapters begins with an essay, and is followed by three sermons. The sermons flesh out the theology and themes highlighted in the essays. These sermons are both a strength and weakness of the book. Most of the sermon manuscripts are rhetorical delights, characterized by thoughtful turns of phrase, creative word pictures, insights into humanity, and clarity. Anyone who enjoys reading sermons will find the book worthwhile simply for their creativity. However, the sermons also highlight a weakness. Several flow more from the preceding essay than from the text of Scripture. Instead of mining the text to see what God would have a preacher proclaim from a particular text, many of the sermons seem to be proclamations of preconceived agendas. Others do arise from the biblical text, and their authors walk the reader through their preparation process; this is both useful and encouraging.

Ultimately this book is a conversation between theology, hermeneutics, and homiletics. Such conversations are vital for the church. While one may not agree with all of the conclusions in this book, it is a worthwhile conversation partner.

Brandon Cash
Oceanside Christian Fellowship
El Segundo, CA

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We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken: a Grammar of The Preaching Life. By Michael Pasquarello III. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009, 978-0-8028-2917-7,158 pp., $18.00.

We Speak Because We Have First Been Spoken is a passionate plea for the life of the

preacher to be fused to the work of the preacher. Pasquarello quotes John Wesley ("I do indeed live by preaching") in the preface and then explains that "because it was not possible for Wesley to conceive of the calling to preach apart from the person who preaches, or to think of preaching 'scriptural holiness' without faith energized by love suffusing the preacher's whole manner of living and speaking, I want to suggest that it might be equally fitting to say, 'I do indeed preach by living'" (vii).

Thus, "I do indeed live by preaching" can, and should, be rephrased as "I do indeed preach by living." He uses the metaphor of "grammar" to emphasize how preachers communicate or preach with their lives, just as they preach with their words. The preacher's silent speech is critical for Pasquarello because "we cannot reason our way to God." Given the diminished role that the author appears to give to reason in the preaching event, Pasquarello's assertion is not surprising, that "the most important element of sermon preparation is the theological, spiritual and moral formation of the preacher through the Spirit's empowerments of faith, hope and love, which are completed by the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, godliness, and fear of the Lord" (3, 4).

I resonated with Pasquarello's emphasis on the person of the preacher and the community within which preaching takes place. We all know of times when inconsistent actions by preachers and congregations have cancelled out the most eloquent of sermons. The reminder for us to nourish our lives on theology so that the grammar of our lives speaks to those we preach to is an important one for us to hear. May we heed the author's passionate call to examine what our lives are saying when we stand to preach.

While I found Pasquarello's emphasis on "being the gospel" refreshing, I confess I also found it frustrating. Who but Christ has lived a truly exemplary life? Moses never did get control over his temper, but still had a significant ministry. Paul called himself the chief of sinners, and yet accomplished much through the proclaimed Word. The gospels portray the disciples as significantly less than a perfect and, at the same time, highlight the impact of their preaching. Moreover, how many New Testament churches fully exemplified the gospel they professed? Imperfect preachers, part of imperfect communities, are all we have available to preach today (or any day).

The author's many exemplary references to Thomas Aquinas and the Dominican movement were unconvincing. The most unsatisfying part of this book, however, flowed from Pasquarello's repeated criticism of the pragmatic, technique-oriented homiletics so prevalent in evangelicalism today. While I largely agree with this critique, the author did not offer concrete suggestions for what the local church pastor could do on a weekly basis. Instead, Pasquarello issued a passionate

call: what we need is not new and more relevant method, technique, or way of preaching; rather, we need intellectual and moral habits that enable us to discern how to love wisely and speak well according to God's providential wisdom, which finds its center in the Word by which the world is re-made, the "economy for the fullness of times, to recapitulate all things in Christ, things in heaven and things on earth" (Eph.1:10) (3).

What does that look like for the pastor of a local church? While I agree with the author's call for preaching that goes beyond formulaic technique, this book would have been stronger if it contained some more concrete language and specific recommendations regarding a better way to put sermons together. While most of us would agree with the author's sentiments, not many would know what to do differently week in order to accomplish the book's homiletical objectives.

J. Kent Edwards Talbot School of Theology / BIOLA University
LaMirada, CA

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Preaching in an Age of Globalization. By Eunjoo Mary Kim. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010, 978-0-664-23369-3, 168 pp., $24.95.

Preachers encounter daily the challenges wrought by globalization in the world. The struggle is that we often do not know how to respond to these universal concerns. *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* is the first major step forward in synthesizing the often disparate topics of "gender, age, disability, ethnicity, culture, religion, and class" (vii), among other themes, as they relate to the task of preaching in a diversifying terrain. The primary contribution of Eunjoo Mary Kim (no relation to the reviewer) to the field of homiletics in this volume is her concept of "transcontextual preaching."

Interacting with the formative works of Leonora Tubbs Tisdale (*Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*) and James Nieman and Thomas Rogers (*Preaching to Every Pew*), Kim describes her transcontextual homiletic as preaching that "protects preaching from becoming exclusively locked into its own local context" and "moves beyond particularity to reach interdependent relationships between one's own and the contexts of others" (16–17). Put simply, Kim seeks to promote an interconnected worldview in the church rather than permitting Christians to persist living in a self-absorbed bubble.

Kim develops her homiletic by asking preachers to study not just the local context of one's congregation, but to strive toward careful exegesis of global issues in light of one's church locale. Her sermonic method is expansive, looking beyond the immediate to the global in symbiotic fashion. In the four major chapters of

the book, she submits this new paradigm of transcontextual preaching through four key strands: context, theology, hermeneutics, and preaching style. The work concludes with several sermons written by Kim attempting to embody the theme of preaching and globalization.

I commend the book for several different reasons. First, Kim speaks prophetically to the changing world in which we live. She describes poignantly the struggles of global climate concerns, cultural diversity, and information technology, among other topics, and the impact these problems have for preachers and their preaching. Second, Kim understands the complexity of our world and her transcontextual preaching approach keenly addresses the unifying factors that bridge all of humanity. She helps the reader to see how we, as humans, share commonalities that are not conspicuous at first glance. Third, Kim clearly advocates preaching as a shared experience, not something pastors do in a remote church office without any semblance of human interface. She leads preachers to think about how their sermons traverse the local to the global and back.

At the same time, however, I found some elements in the book quite troubling. For instance, due to the nature of exploring globalization and humanization, it is fitting that Kim's perspective on preaching bends heavily toward a human-centered theology. The book is grounded in cultural, sociological, and rhetorical theories for communication rather than allowing the biblical text to speak unequivocally to various issues regarding globalization.

Another disturbing feature in her transcontextual approach, particularly for evangelicals, concerns what she calls "the Other." For Kim, the Bible is useful chiefly as a dialogue partner enabling the preacher to speak on behalf of "the Other" and their concerns. She writes: "The otherness of the Bible leads us to understand that its status as the canon does not have to with absolutizing the literal corpus of Scripture and its traditions. It is neither 'an authoritative depository of revealed truth' nor a timeless, absolute norm for human life. The Bible as the canon of the community of faith is authoritative in the sense that it is to be used as the point of departure for reflection in the faith and life of the contemporary Christian church without ignoring its otherness" (67). While she is sensitive not to step on the toes of whom she would consider "strangers" or "others" in the world, following her method sacrifices the authority of Scripture which evangelical Christians hold in highest regard.

Overall, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* is a landmark study that will help preachers accrue knowledge about the impact of globalization on the church. The book is written with craft and grace while drawing from a plethora of current events and influential authors. However, the reader will quickly notice Kim's bias toward "experience" and the theories of Continental philosophers, which is

typical of sponsors of the New Homiletic.

Matthew D. Kim
Logos Central Chapel
Denver, Colorado

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Preaching the Incarnation. By Peter K. Stevenson and Stephen I. Wright. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010, 978-0-664-23280-1, 229 pp., $19.95.

Preaching the Incarnation is the sequel to *Preaching the Atonement* published by Westminster John Knox in 2009. Co-authored again by Peter Stevenson and Stephen Wright, noted British homileticians, this volume contributes to existing scholarship regarding the doctrine of the incarnation of Christ. The authors explore the implications of Jesus Christ becoming flesh through twelve Scripture passages from both Testaments. Each chapter comes to a conclusion with a full sermon manuscript and a commentary on that sermon by its author. Included are sermons by six experts on preaching: Thomas Long, William Willimon, Rowan Williams, Anna Carter Florence, Calvin T. Samuel, and Michael Quicke.

Throughout the work, the authors seek to answer two foundational questions concerning the nature of the incarnation of Christ: "What kind of God" and "So what?" Their aim is to help both preachers and listeners "live, love, work and serve in the light of this declaration" (xiii) that Jesus took on human flesh.

There are some highlights to the book worth mentioning. First, I greatly appreciated the writers' ability to think "outside the box," primarily in the first two chapters as they spawn the connection between the incarnation of Christ and Old Testament passages (i.e., Exod 3:1–15 and Prov 8). These texts are not traditionally associated with the incarnation of Christ. Another positive element to the book is the sermons written by gifted communicators and homileticians. They spark the imagination with masterful illustrations and proffer colorful word pictures in the mind of the reader. Third, each chapter draws out rich theological nuances from the text regarding the incarnation that we would not typically find in purely homiletical texts.

However, like its counterpart, *Preaching the Atonement*, some caveats are in order. Preachers and professors of homiletics will gain little homiletical instruction from reading this work. This text often reads like a theological exposition or a biblical commentary rather than a concrete resource on preaching. Discouragingly, I am noticing increasing numbers of publishers offering manuscripts that bequeath the illusion that their books address the subject matter of preaching, when in reality, they fall short in delivering on this promise. Tagging on sermons at the end of each chapter regarding the incarnation with a brief commentary afterwards

does not adequately satisfy the homiletical itch that preachers and teachers of preaching want to have scratched.
Overall, I recommend the book for its depth of insight regarding the important theme of the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ. Yet, if you are looking for a book to help you prepare a sermon on the incarnation, you may need to look elsewhere.

Matthew D. Kim
Logos Central Chapel
Denver, Colorado

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The Preaching of Jesus: Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now. By William Brosend. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010, 978-0-664-223215-3, 180 pp., $19.95.

We are not the first to preach. It is only reasonable that we should take our cues from those who have preceded us. Yet it only takes a cursory reading of the gospels to sense that the preaching we engage in week by week sounds very different from the preaching we find in those biblical books. How do we explain this? This question is the focus of *The Preaching of Jesus: Gospel Proclamation, Then and Now*. According to William Brosend, "this study is not as interested in what Jesus said as it is interested in how Jesus is depicted in the Gospels as having said it" (2).
The rhetoric of Jesus is marked by four characteristics. The first mark Brosend observes is that it is *conversational*. This is not a feature of its volume or pitch but its responsive nature. According to Brosend: "almost everything Jesus says comes either in response to and/or in conversation with someone else" (21). Jesus' conversation is not only with inquirers and disciples, "it is also explicitly with the tradition, and implicitly with the culture" (21). The contemporary preacher can follow Jesus' example by engaging in dialogical preaching. Brosend believes this is consistent with "the first hallmark of good preaching," which is "authentic responsiveness to the needs and the interests of the audience" or the sermon's sense of "pathos" (36). To accomplish this preachers need to slow down and determine the questions their listeners will have when they hear the words of the text and identify what they really need to know about it. At the same time, Jesus' preaching is *proclamatory*. The intent is declarative and the tone is authoritative. Brosend explains, "Jesus is not asking, even in the middle of dialogue; Jesus makes claims, theological and soteriological" (22). In view of this, one wonders how Brosend can separate Jesus' rhetorical technique from the content of his message. In this case, the content of the message shapes the delivery.

It is the third mark which most clearly differentiates Jesus' preaching and our own. This is Jesus' apparent reticence to speak about himself. As Brosend puts it, the preaching of Jesus was *occasionally self-referential:* "The frequent use of self-

reference in the Fourth Gospel is one of the main differences between the rhetoric of Jesus in John and in the Synoptic Gospels. But regardless of that comparison, it is striking how infrequently Jesus is depicted as speaking about himself directly in Matthew, Mark and Luke" (25). This leads Brosend to characterize Jesus as "a Galilean Jew who proclaimed a kingdom and resisted a crown." According to Brosend, "Jesus is consistently and persistently depicted as focusing the attention on God and God's kingdom, not on himself" (13). Brosend offers several helpful suggestions about things to avoid when it comes to self-reference and self-disclosure in the sermon. But they are not really based on Jesus' practice. Jesus' reticence in this area was missional rather than practical.

The fourth mark of Jesus' preaching is its figurative nature. "Jesus never misses an opportunity to elaborate, illustrate, or sharpen his message through metaphor (Matt 15:24–26), hyperbole (Mark 9:42–50), allegory (Luke 20:9–19), and other rhetorical figures." Jesus' preaching is *persistently figurative* (26–27). This is where our preaching is most like our Lord's. "One of the simplest ways to add interest to our sermons is to pay more attention to how we describe things" Brosend advises. "Sharp, vivid, active words and phrasing beat tortured, adjective-laden, convoluted ones every time" (135).

I would have liked to have seen Brosend treat the content of Jesus' preaching more seriously. Focusing on the "how" of Jesus' preaching rather than the "what" enables him to avoid dealing with the question of historical accuracy. But his observation about Jesus' reluctance to speak directly about himself does beg an obvious question. Is Jesus a realistic model in terms of content as well as rhetorical technique? Does the unique nature of Christ's mission mean that we would do better to emulate the apostles' preaching after Pentecost instead? Or are we, as William Willimon asserts in *The Intrusive Word*, so anxious to be heard, that we fail to "respect the gospel enough to allow people not to understand it?" Brosend's scholarly and well written book is well worth attention.

John Koessler
Moody Bible Institute
Chicago, IL

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Jonathan Edwards and the Ministry of the Word: A Model of Faith and Thought. By Douglas A. Sweeney. Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2009, 978-0830838516, 208 pp., $20.00.

Sweeney is professor of church history and the history of Christian thought and director of the Carl F. H. Henry Center for Theological Understanding at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. His goal in this book is to use Edwards "as a model of Christian faith, thought and ministry" (17). Weaving together the story of

Edwards's life with the insights of centuries of scholarship, Sweeney tells the fascinating story of the eighteenth century pastor and draws numerous parallels to pastoral ministry in the twenty-first century.

The church and the world in which Edwards ministered are like ours in many ways, but also markedly different. According to Sweeney, "The task that faces those who would look to Edwards for help today is not to search for a time machine that we can use to live in his world, but to live in our own world thoughtfully, appreciatively and lovingly, and to ask ourselves how we can apply his insights in our time. What can we do *in our own world* to draw attention to the Word, enhance the ministries of the church and deepen faith in the things of God? What can be done to encourage Christians to pay attention to the divine, thinking biblically, theologically, about their daily lives?" (31).

Of particular importance to Sweeney is Edwards's life of the mind, principally his interest in the Scripture and theology. Preaching several times a week, each sermon up to two hours in length, required a great deal of time in the biblical text. Sweeney explains, "To support this kind of preaching, Edwards devoted most of his waking life to meditating on Scripture, delving deeply into its contents, reading biblical commentaries, praying fervently for the Spirit's help interpreting and applying the Bible faithfully to life. Notwithstanding his reputation as a literary artist, natural scientist, philosopher and psychologists of religion, he was chiefly a biblical thinker, a minister of the Word" (83).

Sweeney cautions his readers not to try to duplicate Edwards's ministerial practice. Few congregations today have the biblical and theological foundation that Edwards's audience did, nor will many sit through two-hour sermons. Yet, he insists, "We can learn about the challenges of Christian faith, life and even ministry from him. To be sure, he preached in a wig. He got himself fired by the people whom he led for most of his ministry. He seems old-fashioned today. Yet his love for God and his Word has never gone without a witness. He continues to inspire and instruct" (196–197).

Sweeney closes the book with seven theses for discussion, seven principles of application. The purpose is to help to frame a conversation which asks "how to live in our own, twenty-first century world, loving the people whom *we* serve, but using insights and examples gleaned from Edwards' life and ministry to enhance our Christian faith and fortify our gospel witness" (197). The pastor or ministry leader who devotes significant time to mediating on these theses, or, even better, engages in conversation with other ministers about them, will reap a good return on the investment.

This book is highly recommended for pastors, preachers, and other Christian

leaders. Even scholars of Edwards will gain new insights from Sweeney's skillful telling of the familiar story of this pastor. Preachers of the Word of God will find in Edwards a kindred spirit and will learn from him how to communicate more effectively the truth of Scripture. One can hardly engage the work of this great mind and come away unchanged, not simply because of his theological and biblical acumen, but because of the power of the Spirit of God who speaks through him.

Glenn R. Kreider — Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX

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R. Albert Mohler Jr., *He is Not Silent: Preaching in a Postmodern World.* Chicago: Moody, 2008, 978-0802454898, 174 pp., $22.99, hardback.

Mohler, president of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a strong voice for reformed theology, is always passionate and never one to hold back his punches.

He bemoans the state of preaching today, characterized by preachers' "embarrassment before the biblical text" and their choosing to focus on texts that are "more comfortable, palatable, and nonconfrontational to the modern mind." This he labels as "pastoral neglect and malpractice" (18). Strong words. I would agree with the basic premise, but not because pastors are negligent or because they are embarrassed, but simply because they find those less obscure texts easier to understand and apply. It is a problem of inadequate hermeneutics, not necessarily theological treason, as Mohler alleges.

I appreciated Mohler's criticism of preachers emptying sermons of biblical content: "Every text does have a point, of course, and the preacher's main concern should be to communicate that central truth. In fact, he should design the sermon to serve that overarching purpose. Furthermore, the content of the passage is to be applied to life—but application must be determined by exposition, not vice versa" (19). Amen!

Mohler's tendencies are apparent: "All Christian preaching is unabashedly christological. … That message of divine salvation, the unmerited act of God in Christ, is the criterion by which all preaching is to be judged" (43). And more in the same vein: "Every single text of Scripture points to Christ. He is the Lord of all, and therefore He is the Lord of the Scriptures too. From Moses to the prophets, He is the focus of every single word of the Bible. Every verse of Scripture finds its fulfillment in Him, and every story in the Bible ends with Him" (96). I hope that those parts about "every single word" and "every verse" and

"every story" are hyperbole, for I am at a loss to understand how Christ can be in every word, verse, and story, without some ambitious hermeneutical acrobatics being performed by the interpreter upon the text.

Nonetheless, I find some balance in Mohler's assertion that "[o]ne of our aims in preaching, for example is evangelism. … Another motive for our preaching is the edification of our people and their encouragement in the faith" (67). But all too often, the school of thought to which Mohler subscribes implies that only the former—gospel-related, cross-demonstrating, evangelistic preaching—is valid preaching, the making of "a bee-line to the cross" no matter what the text exposited might be (Spurgeon's dictum is approvingly cited by Mohler [21]).

On expository preaching, Mohler is adamant: "*I believe that the only form of authentic Christian preaching is expository preaching*" (49; emphasis original), and such a sermon is "one that takes its message and its structure from the biblical text" (50), for "the text of Scripture has the right to establish both the substance and the structure of the sermon" (65). Why the stress that sermon *structure* be derived from the biblical text? The latter is a written document addressed to one particular group of people in one particular way; a sermon is a spoken word addressed to another particular group of people in another particular way. Should the *structure* of both text and sermon be identical? I think not. *Meaning* (the thrust of the text and that of the sermon, what Mohler calls "substance") should. Thus preachers need only attend to the *structure* insofar as it contributes to meaning; subsequently, that elicited *meaning* may be exposited in a variety of sermonic structures. Of course the structure of the text is inspired, but so is the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek in the Bible, as well as all its genres. Surely one would not be preaching in the arcane versions of those languages, or in poetry, narrative, proverb, letter, or song, merely to reproduce the Bible's inspired language and forms—or even structure?

Overall, an interesting read. Nothing particularly new here for preachers to glean and, despite the subtitle, nothing particularly new regarding preaching in a postmodern culture either. However, it brings to the fore the sore need in homiletic theory and practice for a sound hermeneutic on preaching Christ.

Abraham Kuruvilla
Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX

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The Word in Small Boats. By Oliver O'Donovan. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010, 0802864538, 172 pp., $18.00.

"The Word in small boats" pictures, for Oliver O'Donovan, what happens in

preaching. God requisitions his spokesmen to carry his Word abroad, even as Peter's humble boat once bore the Word incarnate and served as floating pulpit. O'Donovan's pulpit for a quarter century was Christ Church, Oxford, where he labored as Canon of the Cathedral and university professor.
These thirty-two sermons come from that chapter of the author's ministry.

Knowing that the author preached these messages at a university church helps explain why they are unusually erudite: O'Donovan uses big words; he quotes Latin and German; he references ecclesiastical history, ancient doctrinal debates, and obscure figures without explanation. Musical references are uniformly high brow: there's a lot about Bach, especially, but no rock, pop, or CCM in these sermons. Illustrations are few and far between, and come from the world of the scholar and scientist. In one short sermon ("How to be a Human Being"), he quotes Cleanthes, Bishop Butler, Heidegger, and Sarastro. No quotes from Winnie the Pooh or sports heroes in these pages. Jacket blurbs mention the author's "penetrating analysis," and "intellect"; the sermons are "delicately crafted and nuanced"; and some readers have found the author "a little daunting." O'Donovan does expect a lot of his listeners.

The editor of this collection reminds us that sermons are located "in the here and now" of their listeners. O'Donovan's listeners were "a preponderantly older body of worshippers," happy "with the finer points of intellectual striving" (viii). Ministers who preach to more typical congregations will probably not be tempted to plagiarize O'Donovan!

They may, however, wish to emulate some of his more transferable strengths. He excels at clear, tightly-worded explanations of textual background—a potentially boring part of all sermons; he handles these expeditiously. He knows church history and wants his flock to know it. He knows how to turn a phrase (for instance: on Calvary, "the cunning of mercy was at work").

He crafts fresh, apt word pictures and milks them for all they are worth. In the eponymous first sermon, "The Word Traveling in Small Boats," preachers commit to a "perpetual and incessant voyage" of discovery; our message does not travel along one or two "grand cruise lines," but in many "vessels less capacious." To the end of the sermon, this metaphor is sustained, without overdoing it or twisting the message to make it fit. Preachers who love words will be challenged to make better use of imagery and metaphor in their own preaching.

Others interested in political theology (O'Donovan's area of expertise), will find in these sermons examples of how such thinking can be addressed with educated laymen. Not that the sermons are all about politics or ethics. But O'Donovan champions the mission of God in the world and understands that mission more

broadly than many of us. He notices the interconnectedness of community and ecology and economy and ecclesiology and mines some relatively odd texts to enrich our understanding of all these spheres. Reading these sermons is intellectually and spiritually stretching.

These sermons are not what many readers of this *Journal* would call expository. The "texts" are typically short sentences ("Cain built a city," for instance) or, in one case, a line from the *Te Deum;* and O'Donovan does not structure these sermons (which, we are told by the editor, were preached as written) by the shape and grammar of his passage. He also adopts an occasional critical stance some evangelicals will be uncomfortable with: "the *myth* of Cain," "John *corrects* Ezekiel" (emphases added). But he knows we have an authoritative word to proclaim¾a reasonable word and a word of judgment that describes our world, commands, reconciles, and saves (171). He challenges us on the final page of the book: "Have we really come to grips with the fact that the incarnate God came among us as a preacher" and "devoted his life to the spreading of a word …?"

Ken Langley
Christ Community Church
Zion, Illinois

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Christ-Centered Worship: Letting the Gospel Shape Our Practice. By Bryan Chapell. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009, 978-0-8010-3640-8, 320 pp., $24.99.

Among the multitude of recent evangelical works on worship, few offer a better treatment of the role and practice of Christian worship than Bryan Chapell's recent work that argues that "the structure of a worship service is the story of Christ's ministry" (123), with the implication that "Worship is about renewing relationship with the risen Christ. As we represent his redemptive ministry through the liturgy, God's people experience the grace of the gospel and grow in their relationship with him" (124).

Chapell divides his treatment into two major parts. "Gospel Worship" (chapters 1–12) offers clear definitions and describes an *ordo* (order of liturgy) that expresses the truths of the faith and which is by definition "Christ-centered." Chapell affirms that worship communicates theologically and allows the worshipper to embrace it experientially, a helpful restatement of the ancient *lex orandi, lex credendi* principle. Then he surveys and compares the liturgical structure of late Medieval Roman rite, Lutheran, Genevan (Calvin), Westminster, and modern (Rayburn) *ordo*. He concludes that Christian worship that embodies the gospel should include the following key elements: Adoration, Confession, Assurance, Thanksgiving, Petition and Intercession, Instruction, Communion/Fellowship, Charge and Blessing. Then in the next section entitled "Gospel Worship

Resources" (chapters 13–24), Chapell offers practical suggestions for designing and implementing the elements of worship that affirms the gospel in a Christian *ordo*.

Having established worship's theological role, Chapell's historical analysis of the roots and structure of Reformed worship provides excellent background for the student of worship. His theological and psychological analyses of the *ordo* blaze a helpful path for those who would better understand the placement of elements in the rite. The work makes a strong case for an approach to congregational worship that is designed to lead a congregation through a clear understanding of orthodox Christian theology and a genuine personal experience of its implications.

The work is flawed, however, by two weaknesses that represent the author's self-confessed knowledge gaps (and naïve assumptions) concerning liturgical history. First, Chapell begins his study with the medieval Roman Catholic *ordo*, and follows its adaptations by the two primary Continental Reformers (Luther and Calvin), the English Calvinists (Westminster) and a 20th century American spokesperson (Rayburn), as if all the elements of this tradition stream represent (or exhaust) the universal, primitive praxis. Such an approach ignores the slow formulation, the addition and accretion of liturgical elements over the centuries leading to the medieval rite preceding the Protestant Reformation. It ignores the liturgical developments and innovations of other Protestant Reformers as well as the corpus of rites followed by the Eastern Churches. Such omissions limit the value of the work for research outside the worship tradition of the Reformed Church.

Secondly, Chapell's liturgical analysis focuses almost exclusively on the Liturgy of the Word, the first half of the liturgy also known in the East as the Liturgy of the Catechumens. To these rites all are invited, whether pagan or baptized, for in them the gospel and its implications are preached. Unfortunately he offers no similar treatment of the Liturgy of the Table, the second half of the liturgy also known in the East as the Liturgy of the Faithful. This part of the corporate sharing of bread and wine was always understood to be the unique property of believers who, in fidelity to their baptismal vows, share in the act of covenant renewal. Chapell's emphasis on the Liturgy of the Word (with the general omission of the Liturgy of the Table) reflects the Reformed practice of emphasis on the proclamation of the Word and an infrequent celebration of the Table—the consequence of the Genevan civil government's triumph over Calvin's ecclesiology—and ignores Calvin's own emphasis on the Eucharist as the seal of the community's liturgical offering. This limits the ability of the work to speak outside of its own tradition.

Chapell's restatement of these ancient themes represents a valuable orientation to worship within the Reformed liturgical tradition and offers helpful counsel to its discussions over form. All those interested in a helpful discussion of the role of

liturgy in theological expression and experience will find his contribution helpful.

Timothy J. Ralston
Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX

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Old Testament Narrative. By Jerome T. Walsh. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, (2009), 978-0-664-23464-5, xiii + 266 pp., $29.95.

Jerome T. Walsh draws on his decades of experience as a professor and biblical scholar to produce this accessible introduction to narrative criticism of Old Testament narrative texts for English Bible readers. His goal is to help readers become transformed by greater self-insight through thoughtful interaction with these texts.

The book contains eleven chapters and three appendices. In chapter one, Walsh establishes his theoretical foundations. First, he accepts the final form of biblical books and assumes their unity. Second, meaning is polyvalent, residing in the author, text, and readers. His focus is on the last two, but draws little distinction between the first two. Third, distinctions must be made between real and implied authors and readers.

Chapters two through ten teach a set of literary-critical skills. Each chapter contains three sets of practice exercises from the narrative cycles of Jeroboam, Elijah, and Ahab in 1 Kings. Walsh encourages his readers to work through the book's exercises one narrative cycle at a time. The book's pedagogical genius is found in the appendices wherein one can find his responses. In this way, readers can receive feedback from a seasoned scholar immediately after completing the exercises. Working through the Jeroboam cycle, I found it quite helpful to review his responses.

In chapter two, Walsh addresses the dynamics of plot. He does a masterful job of explaining how to recognize the many mini arcs of tension which impel the major arcs of tension (i.e., story units) forward. In chapters three and four, he highlights the varying complexity of characters and the techniques narrators use to develop them.

In chapter five, Walsh likens point of view in Old Testament narratives to the camera in cinema. Like cinematic directors, narrators shift their literary camera's angle (e.g., up, down, left, right) to shoot close-ups or wide shots in an effort to persuade readers by affecting their emotions. In chapters six and seven, he surveys the ways narrators arrange their material. Of particular importance are changing tempo, the order of events, gaps, and ambiguities.

In chapter eight, Walsh discusses repetition and variation, especially within literary units. This chapter alone, like chapter two, is worth the price of the book. He underscores the importance of recognizing subtle differences when characters repeat what the narrator or another character says.

In chapter nine, Walsh includes introductory discussions on two advanced subjects: narrator identification and structural analysis. These chapters, along with much of chapter one, is, however, too advanced for beginners to use. In the final chapter, he touches on the text's contemporary significance. For him, the text finds significance when readers allow the text to affect them in some way.

Walsh is a clear and engaging writer. Readers will appreciate his consistent use of examples to illustrate abstract ideas. Given the overall length of the book, it may be wise to let students know it is essentially 130 pages with the rest being appendices, notes, recommended reading, and indices. It will fit well English Bible and homiletics courses on Old Testament narrative texts.

Ben Walton
(D.Min. Candidate)
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, MA

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Proverbs: Concordia Commentary: A Theological Exposition of Sacred Scripture. By Andrew E. Steinmann. Saint Louis: Concordia, 2009, 978-0-7586-0320-3, 719 pp., $42.99.

Students, biblical scholars, and pastors will benefit from Steinmann's meticulous, yet efficient, attention to the Hebrew text, his intentional theological contexting (from a conservative Lutheran perspective), and his practical applications for the contemporary church. The wisdom and practicality of Proverbs become accessible as the author presents first, a translation of each verse; second, textual notes that discuss Hebrew terms, grammar, and syntax; and finally a commentary in which theological connections are probed and potential relevance is developed.

Steinmann, professor of theology and Hebrew at Concordia University Chicago, having published over fifty articles, essays, and reviews, and having authored nine books, approaches Proverbs with the following presuppositions: 1) "the content of the scriptural testimony is Jesus Christ," 2) "Law and Gospel are the overarching doctrines of the Bible" and "to understand them in their proper distinction and relationship to one another is a key for understanding," 3) "the Scriptures are God's vehicle for communicating the Gospel" and are inspired, infallible, inerrant, possessing an inner unity, 4) "the scriptural Gospel has been given to and through the people of God, for the benefit of all humanity," and 5) the Word of God "creates a unity among all those in whom it works the obedience

of faith and who confess the truth of God revealed in it" (xiii–xiv).

A brief and insightful introduction acquaints the reader with the authorship and date of Proverbs (Solomon wrote 1:1–22:16, compiled 22:17–24:34, and is credited with chapters 25–29 as compiled by Hezekiah's men), key themes ("Wisdom" and "Fools"), matters of form (e.g., parallelism, brevity), strategies for understanding and applying Proverbs from a Law and Gospel viewpoint (the three uses of the Law [39–42] is a crucial discussion), and the text of Proverbs. The thematic discussions in the introduction, along with the many cross references embedded in the commentary, the twelve excursuses scattered throughout the text, the several figures that summarize key concepts, and the exhaustive subject index offer the preacher a lifetime of significant topical-theological sermon material.

The introduction deliberates over the proper use of the Proverbs, concluding that "the primary intended audience …[was] God's people, those who are forgiven and justified, who have a living relationship with him through faith in his Gospel promise" (40).

The commentary divides into nine major sections, determined by the author/compiler and/or the subject matter, with over sixty sub-sections, determined primarily by subject matter. Each section includes translation, textual notes, and commentary. Although much of Proverbs can be taken as stand-alone wisdom, most of the proverbs are in a context of related themes, catchwords, or similar sounding words. "Knowing the reason why two proverbs are next to one another can be a great aid in interpreting them" (38).

While some may regard the Lutheran imprint as a weakness, this reviewer found it broadening when compared alongside other commentaries. Each reader will want to evaluate the work's predetermined theological understandings/applications before embracing them. For example, moving from a "victory" in military battle (Prov 21:31) to "the victory in our crucified and risen Lord Jesus Christ," seems to force a Christological interpretation on a text that did not intend to proclaim Christ as Victor. When we are told that "the theme that unites the book is Christ as God's Wisdom, and no passages can be properly interpreted if one's understanding of any part of Proverbs is not informed by this aspect of the Gospel" (44–45), we must beware any tendency to read Christ back into the text where he was not intended.

The placement of icons to highlight theological themes (e.g. incarnation, baptism, justification) throughout the commentary—and also found in its companions in this series—seems affected, inconsistently applied, and often misdirecting. For example, one struggles to find a legitimate connection to Christian baptism from

the terms "deep waters" and "fountain of wisdom" in 18:4.

The strengths of this text include the author's scholarly, yet practical, exposition of the Hebrew text, the conservative theological approach, and the understanding that the Proverbs are not formulaic, but relational: "If the first part [Prov 3:1–12] is read by itself, the reader might conclude that obtaining blessings from God is simply a matter of following instruction. However, the second part [Prov 3:13–20] reminds the reader that Wisdom comes before obedience to the commands" (114). An extensive bibliography and exhaustive subject and passage indexes make this text valuable for research and useful for sermon preparation.

To sum up: this one, along with a couple of other commentaries on Proverbs, will provide the preacher with a deep and broad understanding of the meanings embedded in this wisdom literature. I am pleased to add it to my principal works on Proverbs.

Timothy S. Warren Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX

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Kindling Desire for God: Preaching as Spiritual Direction. By Kay L. Northcutt. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009, 978-0-8006-6263-9,160 pp., $16.00.

What better way to evaluate a book seeking to integrate preaching and spiritual direction than to use the classic spiritual formation categories of consolation and desolation, attachment and detachment upheld in the work itself?

Kay L. Northcutt brings excellent credentials to this task as Fred B. Craddock Associate Professor of Preaching and Worship at Phillips Theological Seminary, an ordained minister in the Christian Church, and a "certified spiritual director." Her aim is clear and persuasive: "This book proposes that preachers become as spiritual directors to their congregations, that preaching itself be a formational, sacramental act of spiritual direction, and that sermons *do* for congregations what spiritual direction does for individuals" (2). She goes on to unpack this process in highlighting three of its primary goals: "Preaching as spiritual direction orients congregations toward increasing their attentiveness to God, their compassion for one another, and their vocational clarity, particularly in regard to the congregation's work toward God's *shalom*" (13-14).

Evangelical homileticians will find three main areas for consolation and attachment in Northcutt's work. Ironically, she can sound downright Piperesque in not only the title of the book, but in recurring statements such as "the *aim* of preaching [is] the process of forming congregations toward the love and desire

of God" (17). The image on the book's cover riffs on Calvin's famous symbol of cupped hands lifting up a burning heart to God, albeit with a more nebulous aura of light substituted for the heart. Even though Northcutt is teaching in a more liberal context, her concern that God seems to show up fairly rarely in her students' sermons, and then more as referent than as subject, is shared by many evangelical preaching professors whose students may mention God more frequently, but primarily in terms of the "long ago and far away."

A second area of consolation and attachment echoes the Robinsonian emphasis in his Doctor of Ministry track title that preaching is about more than the sermon, but must include "The Preacher and the Message." Northcutt's section on the importance of self-knowledge and the resources found in classic spiritual formation writings such as *The Interior Castle* by Teresa of Avila (which could be considered as *My Heart Christ's Home* on steroids) are extremely helpful and illuminating. "Self-knowledge resides as the very heartbeat of preaching as spiritual direction. And quite unexpectedly, the pastor's complete confidence in God's unconditional love is the beginning of self-knowledge" (69). Such confidence helps preachers face their false self and avoid the distortions that come from preaching for affirmation or confrontation arising from unexamined needs to be liked or appear "prophetic." Following Gregory the Great's model of pastoral authority that enjoins the virtues of "indifference and detachment" as a way to "seek not to please men" guards pastors from viewing themselves "as politicians holding congregational factions together by virtue of their own skillful negotiations, manipulations, or 'conflict resolution'" (73).

A great cloud of witnesses will arise from the ranks of evangelical homileticians to cry "Amen" to Northcutt's excellent critique of the overemphasis of "preaching as pastoral counseling" (44ff) and the resulting triumph of the therapeutic and individualistic in pulpit and pew. This approach falls short because it treats individual Christians like "clients" instead of as a community, reduces God to the ultimate "fixer," and transforms churches into "can-do solution-oriented chambers of commerce" (48). As a result suffering is avoided, "understanding" is mistaken for healing, and "pain relief" for spiritual growth and engagement. The preacher's identity becomes more "expert therapist" focusing on the self, instead of pastor tending to the soul, drawing upon the latest psychological fads instead of classic Christian wisdom.

For all the consolation and attachment that *Kindling Desire for God* provides, there are unfortunately three major areas of desolation and detachment. The primary one relates to Northcutt's explicit theological assumptions which draw from the "postliberal and revisionist schools of thought," as well as the "liberal theologies of my divinity school studies at the University of Chicago," building upon theologians such as David Tracy, Gordon Kauffman, and Joseph Sittler (5).

As a result, God is viewed "as a symbol of orientation;" "God as alternative reality is what I understand myself to be praying into being when I pray" (6). Christ is understood as "less a specific content of doctrine or belief, than a flexible, living activity among us, breaking open whatever limits or constricts us from opening to God" (7).

Not only are these abstract and impersonal conceptions of God suspect in and of themselves, but they undermine the case Northcutt seeks to make in the remainder of the book. How can one grow in attentiveness to noticing "God's presence and activity in one's life and the world" in spiritual direction (3) or learn with Teresa of Avila to "take God as friend" or "how to love and be loved by God" (13) if God is a "symbol of orientation" or "alternative reality?" Why privilege Christ and the Scriptures –particularly through the practice of *lectio divinia*—in this process as Northcutt seems to want to do alongside Teresa, Gregory the Great, and the Desert Fathers and Mothers, when her own theological assumptions diverge so far from theirs and do not seem to allow for this kind of authority?

Northcutt seems happily inconsistent and—ironically—detached from fully working out the implications of her explicit theology in her approach to preaching as spiritual direction, allowing the more orthodox and Biblically grounded spiritual formation tradition to shape her actual practice. As a director of a Doctor of Ministry program, I am willing to ascribe the disconnect at least partially to the insistence of her D.Min. mentor to add some more contemporary sources to her theology chapter since this book is based upon her doctoral thesis. (For a more evangelical approach to integrating classic spiritual practices such as *lectio divina* into preaching, see David A. Currie and Susan P. Currie, "Preaching As Lectio Divina: An Evangelical and Expository Approach," *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*, Volume 4, Number 1 (2004): 10-24.)

Perhaps as a result of the somewhat schizophrenic theological underpinnings of *Kindling Desire for God*, the three model formational sermons in the concluding chapter are also a source of desolation and detachment, with the first and third lacking much significant textual engagement. In the first case, this tendency may have been beneficial since the text was the deutero-canonical Wisdom of Solomon, though the Big Idea "Go Find Your Greatness" was drawn more from the "Wisdom of My Mother." This sermon also suffers from lacking any mention of Jesus.

The middle sermon is a much better example of a basically sound "Sermon Preparation" methodology laid out in Appendix 1. Of particular interest to those following Haddon Robinson's process of asking the developmental question, "What difference does it make?" is Northcutt's step of asking "Are any of the themes of spiritual direction evident in the text?", with sub-questions such as "A

call to listen 'with the ear of the heart?' A call to 'Behold! God!'?... A call to focus on seeing 'as God sees'?" (143).

A final source of desolation and detachment is the designation of Northcutt as a "certified spiritual director" on the back cover of *Kindling Desire for God*, which I attribute to a clueless publisher's publicist rather than to the author. While there are a number of programs that provide people with a certificate of having completed training as spiritual directors, there is no national organization that certifies directors to give them a status such as certified public accountants. Indeed, spiritual directors generally have resisted such efforts at professionalization of their ancient discipline for some of the same reasons Northcutt uses to critique preaching as pastoral counseling.

This book, like life itself, contains consolations and desolations, elements for attachment and detachment. Discerning preachers will benefit from learning from both the positive and the negative, resulting in the realization of the title, *Kindling Desire for God*, in the lives of both pastors and congregants.

David A. Currie
Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
South Hamilton, MA

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.

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