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

Publishers should send catalogs and review copies of their books to Abraham Kuruvilla, Dallas Theological Seminary, 3909 Swiss Avenue, Dallas, TX 75204.

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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.



HOMILETICS AND HERMENEUTICS

SCOTT M. GIBSON

General Editor

Homiletics and hermeneutics are not disconnected entities. They are integrally linked. As preachers we cannot separate our preaching from our hermeneutical presuppositions. The landscape of preaching and approaches to it is contoured by interpretation.

The theme for the 2014 Annual Meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society was “Hermeneutics for Homiletics,” an examination of theological presuppositions to preaching. The plenary speaker was our own Dr. Abraham Kuruvilla, professor of pastoral ministries at Dallas Theological Seminary. Kuruvilla explored the implications of his hermeneutics with the concept of, “Pericopal Theology.”

This issue of the journal begins with the two plenary addresses provided by Abraham Kuruvilla. The first, “Re-Visioning Preaching: Issues; and the second, “Re-Visioning Preaching: Implications.” Both addresses helped to generate discussion on the matter of hermeneutics and homiletics. A panel discussion with responses to Kuruvilla’s presentations from Bryan Chapell, Laurie Norris, and Steven Tu deepened the dialog as well as the various papers that addressed the topic of hermeneutics—including conversations over the dinner table and in the hallways. Members of the Society can access the papers presented on the Society’s website.

The following article is by Timothy S. Warren who helpfully explores the pathway of development that Kuruvilla has taken to “Pericopal Theology.” Warren is one of two recipients of the Willhite Award. Chosen by the members of those in attendance at the conference, the annual prize is given to the author—in this case two papers—of the outstanding paper presented at the conference. The award is in memory of co-founder and past-president, Keith Willhite.

The next article and other recipient of the 2014 Willhite Award is Greg R. Scharf, professor of pastoral theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, IL. Scharf’s paper, “The Pulpit Rebuke: What is it? When is it Appropriate? What makes it Effective?” examines the nature of what it means to challenge one’s listeners, its suitability and whether or not it has the kind of impact intended. His study is insightful.

The sermon featured in this edition is by past-president Ken Langley, senior pastor of Christ Community Church, Zion, IL, and adjunct professor of homiletics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. This sermon was preached at the conclusion of the annual meeting where the out-going president traditionally preaches to those in attendance. In this sermon, which

Langley preached at the 2014 gathering at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, IL, he engaged the text from Nehemiah 3:1-12, calling listeners to appreciate the scribal preaching found in this incredible passage.

Finally, the Book Review section continues to provide stimulating reviews mostly from members of the society. Readers will engage with the ideas found in the books reviewed. Most of the books are recently published homiletics books from a wide range of publishers. The book review editor, Abraham Kuruvilla continues—with his reviewers—to provide an excellent array of reviews of notable books in the field of homiletics.

The articles in this edition and the book reviews demonstrate the textured hermeneutical approaches evidenced in the field of homiletics. Our desire as a society is to continue to explore the relationship between hermeneutics and homiletics so as to understand the various expressions within the field for the furtherance of scholarship, for the assistance of the church, and for the glory of God.



RE-VISIONING PREACHING: ISSUES¹

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INTRODUCTION

The other day, in a church I visited, I found a copy of a popular daily devotional that can be often seen in the foyer of many churches. Skimming through its pages in an idle moment, I spotted this devotional on Acts 28. Paul is shipwrecked in Malta. And he joins everyone else in helping out, and picks up sticks for a fire. So, the devotional recommended, we too should be willing to do menial jobs in churches. Always be willing to do even the lowliest job. Of course the writer of the devotional conveniently forgot about the viper that came out of the cord and bit the hapless apostle.

I, being the clever guy that I am, could use that part of Acts 28 to recommend exactly the opposite: *Never* do menial tasks, because—who knows?—a poisonous snake may sink its fangs into you. And, needless to say, there are lots of these deadly species with two legs in churches. So, *never ever* engage in lowly jobs, for fear of venomous beasts lurking in the shadows. How do we go about this task of finding valid application for an ancient text? Through the two millennia of the church age, this has been the gaping hole in every theory of preaching. A robust hermeneutic for making this move from text to audience has been lacking. In the history of the church it has remained somewhat of a black box. David Buttrick once said:

[M]any books have been written on “biblical preaching”; specifically on how preachers can move step by step from the Bible passage to a sermon. But in all such books there seems to be a gap. There’s something left out in between. The crucial moment between exegesis and homiletical vision is not described. The shift between the study of a text and the conception of a sermon—perhaps it occurs in a flash of imagination—is never discussed. So alert readers are left with the odd impression that we move from the Bible to a contemporary sermon by some inexplicable magic!²

SECOND SAMUEL 11-12³

I struggled with this black box in my seminary days and, thereafter, in my preaching ministries. It was with a scrutiny of 2 Samuel 11–12 that I first caught a glimmer of light.

The Send Motif

A striking feature of the opening episode of the narrative (11:1–5) is the recurrence of the verb *שָׁלַח* (“to send”). Altogether in 2 Samuel 10–12, this term appears twenty-three times. In the larger unit of 2 Samuel 9–20, it is utilized forty-four times; only thirteen instances occur in the rest of 2 Samuel. For the most part, it is the king who does all the sending here: he *sends* to inquire about Bathsheba, he *sends* for Bathsheba, he *sends* for Uriah, he *sends* Uriah back to the battlefield bearing his own death warrant, and so on (11:1, 3, 4, 6 [×3], 12, 14, 27). This repeated element, “send,” then, is a motif indicating regal power and imperial authority, as David, supreme in his kingdom, sends people hither and thither; they all jump to do his bidding. This “sending” emphasizes David’s selfish transactions with Uriah (and with Bathsheba who belonged to Uriah), callously undertaken, and with an utter disregard for consequences, even if it meant denigrating God’s name in the process (12:9–14). It was clearly not what God expected from his chosen; he does not condone such odious behavior—the shameless flaunting of power and the total contempt for the victims of abuse. Here was a potentate abusing his power in the service of his immoral desires; indeed, this was power that was not inherently his, but that had been granted him in the first place. Yahweh, exercising his sovereignty, had chosen David from being a nobody, to replace a predecessor who had himself been warped by his own fantasies of omnipotence. David, exercising *his* “sovereignty,” had chosen to have his own way, not God’s.

The Ophthalmic Malady

In light of the overarching theology of 1–2 Samuel, one would have expected this evil perpetrated by David to incur the wrath of Yahweh. However, quite strikingly, the narrative of 2 Samuel 11 fails to make any mention of Yahweh, until one gets to 2 Sam 11:27. There, the main character in the *dramatis personæ*, Yahweh, finally makes his appearance.

Wanton sexual morals, rooted in base self-indulgence, had culminated in a tyrannical unconcern for the wounded “third-party.” Uriah was heartlessly slaughtered, the zenith of an unbroken sequence of escalating malignity. Indeed, this last act succeeded in getting not just one man killed, but many, some of them the nation’s best warriors (“valiant men,” 11:16). David’s reaction was a cavalier comment to his commander, Joab, through a messenger: “Don’t let this thing be evil *in your eyes*” (בְּעֵינֶיךָ, 11:25). But immediately afterwards, divine disapprobation is registered in no uncertain terms (in fact, it employs the same metaphor of sight): “But the thing that David had done was evil *in the eyes of Yahweh*” (בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה, 11:27b).⁴ There appears to have been an ophthalmic incompatibility between David and Yahweh: king and God were not seeing eye to eye. What David saw as not

evil was expressly seen and condemned as evil by Yahweh, and the conflict between David and God becomes most intense at this juncture: Who gets to decide what is evil and what is good—David or Yahweh?

Perhaps David imagined that God was nowhere present; in that case, he was only deluding himself—God is one character that cannot be written out of the narrative script. Not only was Yahweh implicitly present as David went about his nefarious activities, but Yahweh had also seen (11:27)! There is no deed so shrouded in darkness that it will be invisible to an all-seeing, omnipresent God. As if to rectify any misconception about the presence of deity on stage, from this point onwards, Yahweh, “absent” in the previous scenes, becomes almost tangible: the Tetragrammaton occurs thirteen times in 2 Samuel 12, in the section that details the judgment, sentence, and punishment of the king (another example of the author’s literary *doings*). God had seen, and now would take action to bring justice and closure to this sinister episode; punishment was now inevitable. The verse that points to God’s seeing, 11:27, turns out to be the focal point of the chiasmic structure of 2 Samuel 10–12, emphasizing the crux of the narrative—what God considered “evil in his eyes.”

10:1–19	A	War—partial victory over the Ammonites
11:1–5	B	Sin; Bathsheba conceives
11:6–13	C	Concealment of David’s sin
11:14–	D	Murder of the innocent Uriah
11:27b	E	Evil in the eyes of Yahweh
12:1–6	D’	Murder of the lamb
12:7–15a	C’	Exposure of David’s sin
12:15b–	B’	Death; Bathsheba conceives
12:26–31	A’	War—complete victory over the Ammonites

Interestingly, an addendum in 1 Kgs 15:5 points out again this malady with David’s eyesight, as it asserts that David did what was right *בְּעֵינָיו* all the days of his life, “except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.” Rather than recognize evil for what it was in the eyes of God, David, here, had despised God’s word and denigrated God’s name (2 Sam 12:9, 14).

The Punishment Merited

That the climax of the narrative has been reached in 2 Sam 11:27b (the crux of the chiasm, E; see above) is also indicated in the very next verse as the prophet Nathan is commissioned to play the prosecuting attorney. For a change, Yahweh is the one now doing the sending (שִׁלַּח, 12:1—“Then Yahweh *sent* Nathan ...”). The tables had been turned! Resolution was forthcoming. And the punishment would fit the crime: Yahweh would take David’s wives (לָקַח, 12:11)—a grim reminder to David of how he had taken Bathsheba (לָקַח, 11:4; 12:9, 10), just as the rich man had taken the poor man’s ewe lamb in Nathan’s parable (לָקַח, 12:4). This taking by Yahweh would be “in his [David’s] sight,” and his wives would be lain with “in the sight”

of the sun (12:11; see 16:22 for Absalom's fulfillment of this curse, upon the same roof whence David had commenced his contemptible conspiracy). The scorning of Yahweh and his word (12:9, 10) was heinous indeed, and that not by a private individual but by Yahweh's anointed himself, the king of God's chosen people (Israel/Judah is mentioned five times in 12:7–15). The fact that these nefarious affairs had given occasion for the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme him (12:14) would also not be forgotten. Indeed, the fourfold punishment (12:6), when exacted, would take the life of four of David's children: Bathsheba's newborn, Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah. Only faithfulness to God yields blessing; unfaithfulness will yield its just deserts.

What happened here in this exegetical exercise from 2 Samuel 11–12? From the text, itself, from a close reading of the text, we got a sense of what it is all about: God alone gets to decide what is "evil" and what is "good"; and unfaithfulness to God, in the disrespect of his word and his name, and in the uncontrolled, wanton indulgence of one's passions, only produces discipline (loss of blessing). Is this possible—can the text itself give us its thrust? Over the years, wherever I looked in Scripture, I started seeing evidence of this everywhere. So the first two articles in this series will essentially be a report of what I've found and continued to work on for the last decade.⁵

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS:

AUTHORS DO THINGS WITH WHAT THEY SAY

Take this piece of Jewish folklore, in the form of a letter⁶:

Dear Riwke,

Be good enough to send me your slippers. Of course, I mean "my slippers" and not "your slippers." But, if you read "my slippers," you will think I mean your slippers. Whereas, if I write: "send me your slippers," you will read *your* slippers and will understand that I want *my* slippers. So: send me your slippers.

Whose slippers are being asked for here? The distance in time and space between the writer and future reader, Riwke, necessitates the enterprise of interpretation: What is this communication all about? What is the author referring to, where and when, why and wherefore? In other words, if she is to respond to the writer with valid application, Riwke is going to have to figure out the *thrust* of the letter, what the author was trying to do, i.e., whose slippers were being referred to in that letter.



The same issues surface in the interpretation of Scripture: the human author is unavailable and readers are far away from the origins of the text. Yet, the unique discourse that the Bible is, it mandates its own application in times and spaces distant from the circumstances of its writing.⁷ So if Scripture is to be employed in new locales of reading, the *thrust* of the text—what it is all about—must be recovered and communicated. This is the primary role

of the preacher, the intermediary between God's word and God's people: to understand the thrust of the text, and to convey that thrust to listeners.

Communication of any kind—sacred or secular, spoken or scripted—is now increasingly being recognized as a communicator *doing* something with what is communicated. Authors, including those of Scripture, *do* things with their words: a specific thrust is being conveyed.

Take the case of the narrative in 1 Samuel 15. With the following words, the prophet Samuel passes on God's message to king Saul that he should annihilate the Amalekites: שָׁמַע לְקוֹל דְּבַר יְהוָה - Listen to the *voice* [or *sound*] of the word of Yahweh" (15:1).⁸ Saul, however, does not obey: rather than eliminate all the animals and humans, he saves the good ones of the former and the chief of the latter. Soon after, Samuel confronts Saul. The king declares he has done everything that God told him to do. Whereupon Samuel goes: "What then is this *voice* of the sheep in my ears, and the *voice* of oxen which I hear?" (15:14).⁹ Did you catch the thrust of the text? The author is *doing* something here, telling readers: *The child of God listens to the voice of God, not the voice of worldly seductions.*¹⁰ So rather than parse and slice and dice and atomize the text to extract propositions, and then preach a theological sermon on genocide, or a historical discourse on the egregious sins of the Amalekites, or some such, the preaching thrust of the text is clearly the issue of listening/obedience to God: שָׁמַע can be translated "listen" or "obey" (15:1, 4, 14, 19, 20, 22, 24). That is what the author is *doing* with what he is saying here. Such thrusts must be the interpretive goal that a preacher seeks from any text, and such thrusts must be the communicational goal a preacher accomplishes in any sermon.

One sees this even in folk tales. Take the old one by Aesop about the dog that found a bone. On its way home with its booty, the canine happened to cross a bridge over a stream, and as it looked into the water it spotted "another" dog with a bone. Well, greed took over, the real animal barked at the virtual one, and thereby lost the bone it had. While the story deals with dogs, bones, bridges, streams, and reflections, the thrust of the story is about being content (and the loss one incurs otherwise). This is what the text is all about, its thrust; this is what Aesop was *doing* with what he was saying; and this is what he would want readers to catch and respond to: *One practices the prudence of contentment rather than lusting for the ephemeral.* Indeed, only after grasping this thrust of the text can one ever move to valid application consonant with the author's purpose. So we have this scheme of interpretation:

Text  Thrust  Application

This notion of authors' *doing* things with what they say falls into the field of language philosophy called pragmatics.

Pragmatics

Pragmatics, studying communication as an event, deals with what authors/speakers do with what they write/say. In an event of communication, what is being conveyed by authors is the pragmatics of the utterance—the *thrust* of what they wrote, i.e., what they were *doing* with what they were saying. To catch what communicators are doing takes more than just a dissection of the linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical aspects of an utterance—the operations of *semantics*. Semantics, though a necessary facet of interpretation, does not by itself yield the thrust of the text, its *pragmatics*. In other words, it is not enough to comprehend what authors are saying (the semantics of the utterance); one must also arrive at what authors are *doing* with what they are saying (the pragmatics of the utterance)—the text's thrust. In the fable by Aesop, the semantics deals with the description of the specific events—the dog-and-bone theater; the pragmatics or the thrust of the text, on the other hand, is an endorsement of contentment—that was the thrust of the story. It is obvious that without catching the pragmatics of the text, valid application is impossible.

For interpretation for preaching, too, the thrust of a text of Scripture—what the author is *doing* with what he is saying (pragmatics)—must be discerned. Only then can God's people discover valid application. In that earlier illustration using 1 Sam 15, unless one catches what the author was *doing* with those wordplays on “voice,” one will not be able to respond appropriately to the demand of that text. *Trust God's fairness without doubting!* (from God's severe treatment of the Amalekites) or *Watch out for sin's serious consequences!* (from the fate of those wicked people) is not what that text is recommending. Rather, it is something like: *Listen to God's voice, not the voice of anyone else or anything else!* (from the textual clues dealing with “voice”). Authors *do* things with what they say, and therefore preachers are obliged to discern what was being *done* with what was being said in the text, and then to communicate that thrust to their audiences. This, according to Buttrick, is “critical” for preaching, and “may well mark the beginning of homiletical obedience.”¹¹ Only by catching the author's *doing* in and with a text of Scripture can God's people discover valid application.

THE WORLD IN FRONT OF THE TEXT

One might interpret the Bible in many ways depending on one's purpose for that interpretation. But when we interpret the text *for preaching*, we must focus upon what the author is *doing* what he is saying in that particular text (i.e., the thrust of the text, its pragmatics) in order to elicit valid application for readers. Let me move this notion another step forwards.

A text is not an end in itself, but is the means to an end, a literary instrument of the author's action of projecting a transcending vision, what Paul Ricoeur called the *world in front of the text*.¹² Here is an example: earlier, I

utilized the story of the dog and the bone. The folk tale is projecting (or if you wish, “painting”) an ideal world for readers, a world in which inhabitants practice contentment: that’s what Aesop wanted us to catch. Or in that 1 Samuel 15 narrative discussed earlier, the biblical author is projecting an ideal world in which inhabitants listen to/obey the voice of God, disregarding the seductions of all other voices. In essence, these worlds are the thrusts of those texts, and this is what their authors are *doing* with what they are saying; indeed, this is what those writers would want their readers to respond to. And, in both cases, with uninspired Aesop and with inspired 1 Samuel 15, readers are being invited to dwell in such ideal worlds, abiding by the values of those worlds. Here’s Aesop: “Come, live in this ideal world by practicing contentment”; and here’s the author of 1 Samuel: “Come, abide in this ideal world by obeying only God’s voice.” Thus, in texts, a view of life is portrayed, projecting for the reader a world beyond the confines of the text. A *world in front of the text* is portrayed, an invitation to that world is extended, and lives are changed as listeners respond by inhabiting the world and living by its values.¹³

All literary texts function in this manner to project worlds in front of themselves; thus, texts serve as instruments or agents of that world-projecting action and, in this way, such texts have bearing upon the future. That is to say, a text’s projected world enables subsequent application. Because Scripture is intended for future application by God’s people, its interpretation cannot cease with the elucidation of its linguistic, grammatical, and syntactical elements (semantics), but must proceed further to discern the *world in front of the text*—the thrust of the text, what the author is *doing* (pragmatics). So this projected world forms the intermediary between text and application, and enables one to respond validly to the text. And when the text is rightly applied, its readers are, in effect, inhabiting the world it projects.¹⁴

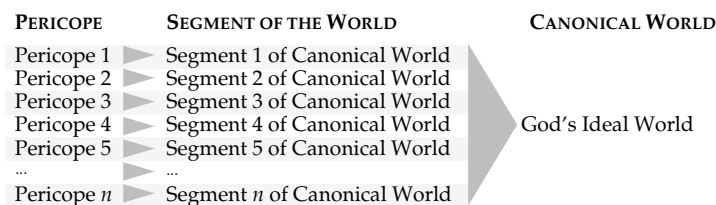


Indeed, *all* communication functions this way. For instance, if A tells B, “Hey, you are standing on my foot!” the semantic meaning (what the author is saying) asserts the spatial location of B upon the lower limb of A, while the pragmatic meaning (what the author is doing with what he is saying) attempts to get B to relocate from that traumatic situation upon A’s anatomy. In fact, what A was *doing* with what A said was projecting a *world in front of the text*, an ideal world in which no one is ever stationed upon A’s lower extremities to produce distress. A’s desire was for B to inhabit such an ideal “nobody-ever-standing-on-A’s-foot-to-cause-A-pain” kind of world. That inhabitation could be accomplished only by conforming to the demand of that world—removing the burden off A’s foot, thus alleviating the latter’s

agony, for in that projected world nobody ever stands on A's foot to cause A pain.

Unfortunately, that is not how biblical texts are looked at in the "old" homiletic style. For instance, if that statement by A to B ("Hey, you are standing on my foot!") were an inspired utterance in Scripture, a preacher in the traditional camp expositing that "text" on Sunday morning would conceivably expatiate on the derivation of the word "foot" from the Old English *for* from the Latin *pes* from the Greek *pos*. The preacher might discourse upon the foot's kinesiology (twenty-six bones, thirty-three joints, over a hundred muscles, tendons, and ligaments), its hematology (blood vessels), and its neurology (nerve supply). This preacher would, no doubt, wax eloquent about the pathology of that extremity (the various abnormalities: club foot, flat foot, athlete's foot, skew foot, rheumatoid foot, ...); and so on, focusing on all the "-ologies," but completely missing the thrust of the utterance and its intended valid application: "*Get your foot off mine!*" In other words, unless one catches what A is doing with what he is saying (its pragmatics and thrust, i.e., the world in front of the text), valid application in response to A's utterance is impossible. Without a comprehension of the pragmatics, without grasping the *world in front of the text* (an ideal world in which no one stands on A's foot to cause A pain), all this regurgitation of kinesiology, hematology, neurology, Christology, ecclesiology, or one's favorite "-ology" *du jour*, can never bring one to valid application.

So also for the biblical text. The biblical canon as a whole projects a *world in front of the text*—God's ideal world, individual segments of which are portrayed by individual pericopes.¹⁵ Taken together, the integrated composite of all such segments make up the canonical projection of God's ideal *world in front of the text*—the plenary canonical world.



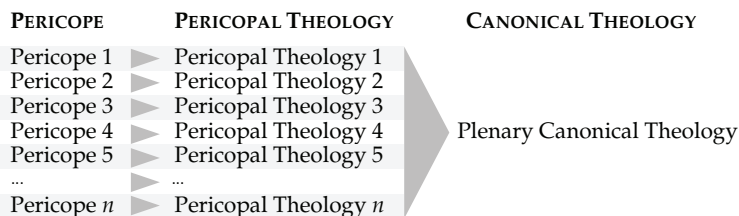
Thus each sermon on a particular pericope is God's gracious invitation to mankind to live in his ideal world by abiding by the thrust of that pericope—i.e., the requirements of God's ideal world as called for in that pericope's world-segment. And as mankind accepts that divine invitation, week by week and pericope by pericope God's people are progressively and increasingly inhabiting this ideal world and adopting its values. One pericope at a time, the various aspects of Christian life, individual and corporate, are gradually being brought into alignment with the will of God for the glory of

God—God’s world is becoming reality. This is the goal of preaching.

THEOLOGY OF THE PERICOPE

Because this world speaks of God and how he relates to his creation, the values of this projected world may rightly be called “theology”—“that skein of thought and language in which Christians understand themselves, the Bible, God, and their everyday world.”¹⁶ Speaking as it does of God and his relationship with his creation, and bearing as it does direction for life-change, this projected world is the concern and focus of theology as a discipline.

Thus, the segment of this ideal world that each pericope projects is the theology of that pericope. To live by the theology of the pericope is to accept God’s gracious invitation to inhabit his ideal world; by so doing, his people align themselves to the values of that ideal world—i.e., to the will of God.



In sum, each sermon must point out the theology of the pericope under consideration, elucidating what that specific text affirms about God and his relationship with mankind—the values of the *world in front of the text*. This “theological interpretation” is exegesis done with theological lenses: the preacher essentially discerns and describes those elements of the text that serve as clues to the theology of the pericope (the repetitions of “voice” in 1 Samuel 15, for example), synthesizing these clues to arrive at the theological thrust of the pericope. And what the pericope so affirms in its theology forms the basis of the subsequent move to derive application. Biblical interpretation for application that does not elucidate this crucial intermediary, pericopal theology, is *de facto* incomplete, for without discerning this entity, valid application can never be arrived at.

So, sermon by sermon, and pericope by pericope, more and more facets of life are aligned to divine will. God’s call to be aligned with his will is a gracious invitation to his people to inhabit his ideal world, and to enjoy its fullness of blessing, in the presence of God. It is a divine offer that should capture our imaginations and set afire our affections for God’s ideal world, for “our action emerges from how we *imagine* the world.”¹⁷ This vision of the good life captivates us not with propositions and points but with “a picture

of what it looks like for us to flourish and live well” in every facet of our existence—a vision cast by the preacher from the word of God in the form of pericopal theology.¹⁸ This is the vision of a *world in front of the text*, God’s ideal world, painted by Scripture, and portrayed in preaching—a glimpse of the divine kingdom. And as this world is gradually unveiled by faithful preaching, and as the community of God inhabits this ideal world pericope by pericope in faithful application,

[t]he goods and aspects of human flourishing painted by these alluring pictures of the good life begin to seep into the fiber of our ... being (i.e., our hearts) and thus govern and shape our decisions, actions, and habits. ... Attracted by it and moved toward it, we begin to live into this vision of the good life and start to look like citizens who inhabit the world that we picture as the good life. We become little microcosms of that envisioned world as we try to embody it in the here and now.¹⁹

It is the biblical canon, preached pericope by pericope, that portrays what this divine world and kingdom looks like, how it functions, and how the community is to inhabit it. Thus, sermon by sermon, the theological panorama of God’s ideal world is unveiled. This is the world God would have; and that is the kind of people God would have us be.

THEOLOGICAL EXEGESIS

What is necessary for preachers, then, is to grasp the thrust of the text, what the author is *doing* with what he is saying, to comprehend the projected world, the theology of the pericope. I propose, therefore, a *theological* exegesis that privileges the text, looking for clues to its theology—not a random excavation through the text, but a directed exploration that searches specifically for those gold nuggets of pericopal theology. Within every text, there are literary and stylistic traces of authors’ agendas, evidence pointing the authors’ *doings*, signs that lead to the discovery of pericopal theology. But only a privileging of the text by theological exegesis will yield that precious ore.

In sum, it is the *text* that must be privileged, for it alone is inspired. Events *behind* the text (the bleating and lowing in 1 Samuel 15) are not inspired and therefore not expressly “profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16–17). All this to say, for the goal of life transformation—and I am speaking exclusively from a homiletician’s point of view, i.e., for the purposes of preaching—it is not the events that must be attended to, but the Holy Spirit’s *accounts* of those events: the *text* must be privileged. Or to put it differently, the text is not a *plain glass* window that the reader looks *through* (to discern some event[s] behind it—traditional exegesis). Rather, the narrative is a *stained glass* window that the

reader looks *at* (to discern the world in front of it—theological exegesis).²⁰ The glass, the stains, the lead, the copper, and everything else that goes into the production of the stained glass are meticulously planned for the appropriate effect, to tell a particular story. So too with narratives, textual or otherwise. The preacher must, therefore, pay close attention to the text, not just to what is being said, but also how it is being said and why, in order that the agenda of the author may be discerned—i.e., the theology of the pericope.²¹ For each pericope, its particular world-segment is what the author wants us to catch; this is what he would want us to respond to—this is the theology of the pericope, i.e., how things should be in God’s ideal world.

This theological exegesis is exegesis done in order to arrive at the theology of the pericope, for only from this intermediary may valid application be discerned. Buttrick was right: “The odd idea that preachers can move from text to sermon without recourse to theology by some exegetical magic or a leap of homiletic imagination is obvious nonsense.” He calls for “theologic” to grasp the thrust of the text.²² Let me repeat: Biblical interpretation for application that does not elucidate this crucial intermediary, pericopal theology, is *de facto* incomplete, for without discerning this entity, valid application can never be arrived at.

So here is my definition of pericopal theology: *pericopal theology is the theology specific to a particular pericope—representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God in his relationship to his people—which functions as the crucial intermediary in the move from text to application.* Living by the theology of the pericope, God’s people are accepting his gracious invitation to inhabit his ideal world; and by so doing, his people align themselves to the will of God. So here’s the scheme of preaching I espouse:



PERICOPAL THEOLOGY DISTINGUISHED

So how does pericopal theology differ from systematic and biblical theology (at least as they are commonly defined)? Systematic theology draws conclusions deductively from one text and integrates those with deductions from other texts, slotting them all into a variety of theological categories. D. A. Carson defines systematic theology as “the branch of theology that seeks to elaborate the whole and the parts of Scripture, demonstrating their ... connections.”²³ By virtue of this connecting and correlating activity, systematic theology operates at a level that is more general than does pericopal theology. The latter, on the other hand, is more inductively derived, and is constrained by the particulars of a single pericope. It deals with matters pertaining to God and his relationship to his creation, as proposed in *that* pericope; so it is

an expression of the divine demand in *that* text, that the people of God must abide by, if they are to inhabit God's ideal world.

The operation of biblical theology also tends to be more general than that of pericopal theology, for it develops broad biblical themes across the canon, with a strong emphasis on timelines. According to Sidney Greidanus, "biblical theology ... helps us trace longitudinal themes from the Old Testament to the New."²⁴ Invariably, then, the preacher employing biblical theology as the basis for sermons will find that several pericopes, especially adjoining ones, deal with the same general themes of biblical theology, potentially resulting in the same sermon, week after week. Seeing a text in the wider historical context of the canon, for which biblical theology is certainly helpful, is not the same as seeing how a particular pericope makes a specific demand of its reader as it projects a segment of the ideal world of God. "[B]iblical theology involves the quest for the big picture, or the overview, of biblical revelation."²⁵ But big canonical pictures tend to miss the small pericopal miniatures. And it is these miniatures (i.e., the theology of the individual pericopes) that are essential for the week-by-week life-changing transactions of preaching.

For instance Mark 8 has the healing of a blind man. If we preach this text as demonstrating Jesus' power over the retina, optic nerve, and occipital cortex, what will we do in Mark 10, when Jesus heals another blind man? Or with the two feedings of thousands in Mark 6 and Mark 8? Mark is actually doing two different things with each of the blind healings, and with each of the crowd feedings.²⁶

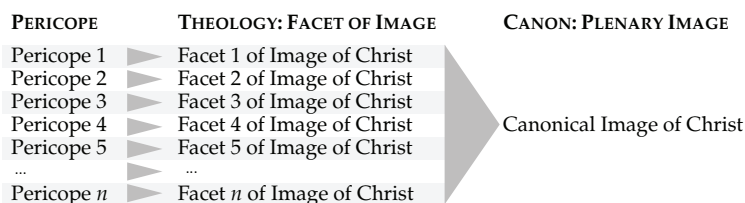
So, on the one hand, with systematic or biblical theology as the basis of individual sermons, distinctions between the theological thrusts of successive pericopes are harder to maintain. Operating, as these species of theology do, at a level of generality somewhat removed from the specificity of the text and the intricacy of its details, sermons on contiguous pericopes will often have similar goals and applications. On the other hand, given the degree of specificity prescribed by pericopal theology, the sequential preaching of pericopes would not be impeded by this handicap. The particular theological thrust of each pericope would be heard clearly, without the weekly tedium caused by the repetition of the broad themes of biblical and systematic theology.

Pericopal theology, thus, helps bring that specific portion of the biblical text to bear upon the situation of the hearers, thereby aligning congregation to canon, God's people to God's word. Pericope by pericope, the community of God is thus increasingly oriented to the will of God as it progressively inhabits the projected canonical world.

CHRISTICONIC INTERPRETATION

The goal of preaching is to align God's people with God's requirements in Scripture—pericopal theology—week by week, sermon by

sermon. Preaching is God's gracious invitation to his people to live with him in his ideal world, abiding by its values. Since only one Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly met all of God's demands, being without sin (2 Cor 5:21; Heb 4:15; 7:26), one can say that this Person, and this Person alone, has perfectly inhabited the *world in front of the text*, living by all of its requirements: Jesus Christ alone has comprehensively abided by the theology of every pericope of Scripture. In other words, each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a characteristic of Christ, showing us what it means to perfectly fulfill, as he did, the particular call of that pericope. The Bible as a whole, the collection of all its pericopes, then, portrays what a perfect human looks like, exemplified by Jesus Christ, God incarnate, the perfect Man. By him alone is God's world perfectly inhabited and God's requirements perfectly met. So if the world-segment of a pericope is displaying a facet of Christ's image, then the composite *world in front of the text* (i.e., the integration of all the world-segments projected by individual pericopes—the integration of the theologies of all the pericopes of Scripture) is the complete, plenary image of Christ. Thus, the written word of God depicts the incarnate Word of God.



Thus, sermon by sermon, the children of God become progressively more Christlike as they align themselves to the image of Christ displayed pericope by pericope. Preaching, therefore, facilitates the conformation of the children of God into the image of the Son of God. After all, God's ultimate goal for his children is that they look like his Son, Jesus Christ, in his humanity—"conformed to the image [εἰκόν] of his Son" (Rom 8:29; also 2 Cor 3:18; Eph 3:19; 4:13–16; Col 1:28; etc.). So I have labeled this model of interpretation for preaching *christiconic*. I submit that Scripture is geared primarily for this glorious purpose of God, to restore the *imago Dei* in mankind, by offering a theological description of Christlikeness, pericope by pericope, to which God's people are to be aligned. In this sense, the focal point of the entire canon of Scripture and all of its pericopes is the Lord Jesus Christ, the perfect Man and the paramount *imago Dei* himself (Col 1:15; 2 Cor 4:4; Heb 1:3). And "it is the destination of all the children of God 'to be conformed to him'" (Calvin, *Institutes* 3.8.1).

This is why 2 Tim 3:16–17 declares that "*all* Scripture is profitable" to render every person mature, i.e., Christlike—to "the measure of the stature of

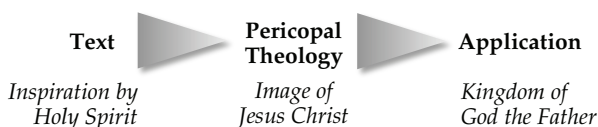
the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). And thereby, believers gradually become "partakers of the divine nature" (2 Pet 1:4), a privilege to be consummated on the day of glory. But even in this life, pericope by pericope, God's people are gradually being conformed to the image of Christ. This is the purpose of preaching: "We proclaim Him, instructing every person and teaching every person with all wisdom, that we may present every person mature in Christ" (Col 1:28).

I liken preaching, then, to hypothetical multiple, weekly visits to a doctor. Say you are visiting me, a dermatologist, this week. I might tell you how to take care of your dry skin. Next week, if you return, I might advise you on how to take precautions in the sun. The week after that, you might be given recommendations regarding your moles. After that, I'd offer tips on how to care for your hair. Then, your nails. Et cetera. (Skin, hair, and nails, by the way, make up the realm of dermatology.) As you follow my recommendations, your dermatological status is being improved week by week, and you are well on your way to developing perfect skin—cutaneous impeccability! After several weeks of this, you might decide to visit your cardiologist. The first week she might tell you all about controlling your blood pressure. The week after that, how to maintain an exercise regimen. Then, how to control your cholesterol with diet and a prescribed statin. And so on, week by week, till you attain to a perfect cardiovascular state. You might then move on to an endocrinologist, and after a few weeks of that, a gastroenterologist, nephrologist In short, slowly and steadily, you are being perfected in health.

So also for preaching. Week by week, sermon by sermon, as God's people align themselves to the divine requirements in the pericopes preached, to the values of their world-segments (i.e., pericopal theology), they are being molded, slowly and steadily, into the image of Christ, the only one who fully abided by the theology of all pericopes, and who perfectly inhabited the *world in front of the text*.²⁷ It is through the entire corpus of Scripture that we learn what it means to be Christlike. This is the primary function of Scripture and, therefore, the primary purpose of preaching!

PREACHING IS TRINITARIAN

Christiconic preaching also is Trinitarian in concept and function. Looking that the three entities that constitute the preaching schema—text, pericopal theology, and application—each one is related to a person of the Trinity, making the whole endeavor Trinitarian. The text inspired by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21) depicts Jesus Christ, the Son, to whose image mankind is to conform (Rom 8:29). In so being conformed, the will of God the Father is done and, in a sense, his kingdom is coming to pass (Matt 6:10).²⁸



Preaching is for the transformation of lives, that the people of God maybe conformed to the image of Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, through the instrumentality of Scripture, by the agency of the preacher. Week by week, sermon by sermon, pericope by pericope, habits are changed, dispositions are created, character is built, and the image of Christ is formed, until humans become fully and completely what humanity was meant by God to be.

In the second article in this series, we will look at the implications for the ministry of preaching that this hermeneutic has.

NOTES

1. This and the following article in this series are re-workings of the plenary addresses delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, held at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Ill., on 9–11 October 2014. Portions of these lectures were also duplicated in the W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Tex., on 3–6 February 2015. Of necessity, an oral lecture entails some borrowing of material already published by the lecturer. I have pointed readers in the appropriate direction, towards my publications both past and future, as called for.
2. David G. Buttrick, *A Captive Voice: The Liberation of Preaching* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1994), 89.
3. For more details see Abraham Kuruvilla, “Pericopal Theology: An Intermediary between Text and Application,” *TrinJ* 31NS (2010): 265–83.
4. This parallel in the Hebrew is, unfortunately, often lost in translation. See below for example of another unfortunate English translation from the Hebrew.
5. For further details, see Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013).
6. From Marina Yaguello, *Language through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 8.
7. See Deut 4:10; 6:6–7, 20–25; 29:14–15; Matt 28:19–20; Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:6, 11; 2 Tim 3:16–17; etc.
8. Surprisingly, such a literal translation of the Hebrew is found only in the KJV and its heirs. The seeming redundancy of “voice” is swept under the rug in the major English translations that essentially have: “Listen to the word of Yahweh.”
9. Again, unfortunately, most English translations render “voice” in each case here as “bleating” and “lowing,” respectively, and thus, combined with the omission of “voice” in translations of 15:1, the thrust of the text is almost

- completely negated! These translational missteps are a clear indication that Bible translators and scholars don't think in terms of what biblical authors are doing with what they are saying.
10. Also see 1 Sam 15:19, 20, 22, 24, for other significant voices in the story—thankfully, these are translated accurately in English.
 11. David G. Buttrick, *“Interpretation and Preaching,”* *Int* 35 (1981): 58.
 12. *“Naming God,”* USQR 34 (1979): 217. Also see Abraham Kuruvilla, *Text to Praxis: Hermeneutics and Homiletics in Dialogue* (LNTS 393; London: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 19–35.
 13. Needless to say, the fables of Aesop have nowhere near the Authority or the transformational power of Spirit-inspired Scripture.
 14. For all practical purposes, these elements—labeled world in front of the text, the thrust of the text, and the pragmatics of the text (i.e., what its author is doing)—may be considered equivalent. Later, I will call this entity the “theology” of the pericope.
 15. Though “pericope” has the technical sense of a demarcated portion of the Gospels, I use the word in these essays simply to designate a preaching text, irrespective of genre or length.
 16. Paul L. Holmer, *The Grammar of Faith* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 9.
 17. James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works* (Cultural Liturgies 2; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 31–32.
 18. Idem, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Cultural Liturgies 1; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 53.
 19. *Ibid.*, 54.
 20. The stained glass metaphor is borrowed from Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 196.
 21. For sure, there is a place in the church for the chronological organization and harmonization of events behind the text. However, the focus for preaching, I claim, ought to be not on events behind the text, but on the inspired text, and its projected world in front of itself—pericopal theology. It is this interpretive product that leads one to valid application and life change for the glory of God.
 22. Buttrick, *“Interpretation and Preaching,”* 57.
 23. “Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: The Possibility of Systematic Theology,” in *Hermeneutics, Authority and Canon* (eds. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 69–70.
 24. *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament: A Contemporary Hermeneutical Method* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 267.
 25. Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture: The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 22.
 26. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2012), 129–41, 155–68, 226–37.

27. As with the clinic visits that assume sound medical advice from the doctor and diligent compliance from the patient, the success of preaching assumes faithful work on the part of the preacher and conscientious application on the part of the listener.
28. Of course, the arrival of this kingdom in all its fullness and glory will have to await the Second Advent.



RE-VISIONING PREACHING: IMPLICATIONS¹

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INTRODUCTION

In the first article in this series, I discussed the importance of a vision for preaching, focusing on hermeneutics for homiletics.² Authors *do* things with what they say, and so the thrust of the text, its pragmatics—what I called “pericopal theology”—must be discerned. Only then can we move to valid application. The biblical canon as a whole projects a canonical *world in front of the text*—God’s ideal world—individual segments of which are portrayed by individual pericopes. Thus each sermon on a particular pericope is God’s gracious invitation to mankind to live with him, abiding by the values of God’s ideal world as called for in that pericope’s world-segment. Or to put it another way, as mankind accepts that divine invitation in each pericope, week by week and sermon by sermon God’s people are applying pericopal theology. One pericope at a time, the various aspects of Christian life, are gradually being brought into alignment with the will of God for the glory of God—God’s ideal world is becoming reality. This is the goal of preaching.

Since only one Man, the Lord Jesus Christ, perfectly met all of God’s demands, being without sin, one can say that this Person, and this Person alone, has fully met every theological thrust of every pericope. He alone has comprehensively abided by the theology of every pericope, and perfectly inhabited the *world in front of the text*. In other words, each pericope, portraying a world-segment, is actually depicting a facet of the image of Christ, showing us what it means to perfectly fulfill, as he did, the particular requirement in that pericope. So Scripture portrays Christ’s image. And on our part, living by the theology of each pericope, sermon by sermon we become progressively more Christlike, as we align ourselves to the image of Christ. Preaching, thus, facilitates the conformation of the children of God into the image of the Son of God. Indeed, God’s ultimate goal for his children is that they look like his Son, Jesus Christ, in his humanity—“conformed to the image [εἰκόν] of His Son” (Rom 8:29). Thereby we have a *christiconic* hermeneutic.

VISION FOR PREACHING³

All of this has significant implications for a Vision for Preaching. Here is the vision, in one sentence:

VISION for PREACHING	
Biblical preaching, by a leader of the church, in a gathering of Christians for worship, is the communication of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture discerned by theological exegesis, and of its application to that specific body of believers, that they may be conformed to the image of Christ, for the glory of God —all in the power of the Holy Spirit.	<i>Preaching is Biblical</i> <i>Preaching is Pastoral</i> <i>Preaching is Ecclesial</i> <i>Preaching is</i> <i>Communicational</i> <i>Preaching is Theological</i> <i>Preaching is Applicational</i> <i>Preaching is Conformational</i> <i>Preaching is Doxological</i> <i>Preaching is Spiritual</i>

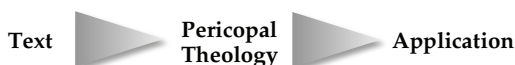
I have deliberately refrained from calling this recital a “definition,” preferring to label it a “vision.” A definition is far too categorical for what I am attempting in this work. Rather, I seek to articulate this vision as a target towards which all of us preachers—novices and experts and everyone in between—can work towards.⁴ In other words, this vision is not the prescription of a precise destination with GPS coordinates that tells you that you’re either there or you aren’t. Rather it is more of a road to travel, a direction to take, a momentum to develop. The vision is thus an ideal that preachers (and churches) can aim for.

That preaching is *conformational* (i.e., to conform Christians into the image of Christ) was covered in the first article of the series. This second (and final) article will focus upon preaching as *communicational*, *theological*, *biblical*, and *applicational*.⁵

PREACHING IS COMMUNICATIONAL

“Biblical preaching ... is the *communication* of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture”⁶

Communication of any kind—sacred or secular, spoken or scripted—is now increasingly being recognized as a communicator *doing* something with what is communicated. Only after grasping this thrust of the text—what the author is *doing*—can one ever move to valid application. This thrust I labeled the theology of the pericope. So here’s our scheme:



The theological thrust of the text (then) has to be transposed to the audience (now). With the hermeneutic that I propose, I see this as the primary task of the preacher: the communication of the theological thrust of the text. Without listeners catching the theology of the text, there can never be valid application.

For starters, then, we must reconceive the role of preachers. I propose

the analogy of a curator or docent guiding visitors in an art museum through a series of paintings. Each text is a picture, the preacher is the curator, and the sermon is a curating of the text-picture and its theology for the congregants, gallery visitors. A sermon is thus more a demonstration of the theological thrust of the text, than an argument validating a proposition. A creative exegesis of the text is undertaken in the pulpit with a view to portraying for listeners what the author is *doing*, and thereby the sermon unveils the author's agenda (pericopal theology), with the preacher as a curator of the text.

Or, as Long describes, the preacher is a "witness" of the text, to the text. The witness-preacher is "one who sees and experiences and tells the truth about what has been seen and experienced."⁷ The verb "to witness" has the dual sense that corresponds to this twofold responsibility of the preacher. Firstly, "to witness" means to see/experience—to take something in. Secondly, "to witness" also means to speak about what one has seen/experienced—to give something out. The preacher is thus a personal witness *of* the text and its *doings*, and then a public witness *to* the text and its *doings*. "The move from text to sermon is a move from beholding to attesting, from seeing to saying, from listening to telling, from perceiving to testifying, from *being* a witness to *bearing* witness."⁸ And, in so witnessing, the theology of the text will have been apprehended, first by the preacher, then by those to whom the sermon is preached. Preaching is communicational.

PREACHING IS THEOLOGICAL

"Biblical preaching ... is the communication of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture, *discerned by theological exegesis*"

A few months ago, on an evening of torrential rain, I was turning into the alley behind my townhome, ready to pull into the garage. That's when I saw a utility truck parked right in front of my garage door. I stopped. I flashed my headlamps. I honked. I waved. I pointed. All to no effect. In the downpour, the driver couldn't make anything of my frantic gesticulations. And as for the flashing and honking, he must have figured: "There's enough room in this alley for another car to drive by. Why should I move? This guy can squeeze by."

I was stuck. I didn't have an umbrella. And I didn't want to get soaked to the skin by going out and approaching the truck. That's when I had a brainwave. I punched that button under my rear-view mirror that remotely operates the garage door. Garage door opens. Truck driver nods. Utility vehicle reverses. And yours truly drives in, all safe and dry.

Now if I were to ask: "What did I do?" you might answer in a number of ways. You might say that the motor cortex of my brain initiated a signal that went down the spinal cord to the anterior horn cells at levels C4-C8 and T1, and thence to the muscles of my shoulder, arm, and hand that,

in response to those signals, contracted. Or you might say that I opened my garage door. Then again, you might say that I successfully communicated to the truck driver my intent—that I wanted to get into the garage in front of which he was parked, and that he should move.

What did I do? From the point of view of the “listener,” the one applying my communication—i.e., the driver—surely it was the last of those three options. My signal bore an implicit requirement of the truck-driver: “Move!” The truck driver caught the thrust (“theology”) of my action, and responded appropriately by backing away. That was the valid application I, the communicator, was trying to provoke.

The same distinctions operate in the analysis of biblical texts. One might interpret the Bible in many ways, that is to say, for a variety of purposes (to construct a systematic theology, or a biblical theology, or to delineate the historical events behind the text, etc.). But when we interpret the text for *preaching*, we must focus upon what the author is *doing* what he is saying in that specific text (its theology), in order to elicit a particular response from readers. Without catching this important intermediary, pericopal theology, valid application is impossible. So what is crucial for us preachers is first to grasp the theology of the text, what the author is *doing* with what he is saying. Within each text, there are literary and stylistic traces of authors’ agendas, evidence pointing the authors’ *doings*, signs that lead to the discovery of pericopal theology. Such clues can be discerned only by a careful reading of the text and discovered at the level of exegesis—*theological* exegesis. Preaching is *theological*.

Traditional Homiletics

But this is not the way traditional homiletics (or biblical scholarship) has operated. Long expressed the angst of the preacher incisively:

[C]onscientious biblical preachers have long shared the little secret that the classical text-to-sermon exegetical methods produce far more chaff than wheat. If one has the time and patience to stay at the chores of exegesis, theoretically one can find out a great deal of background information about virtually every passage in the Bible, much of it unfortunately quite remote from any conceivable use in a sermon. The preacher’s desk can quickly be covered with Ugaritic parallels and details about syncretistic religion in the Phrygian region of Asia Minor. It is hard to find fault here; every scrap of data is potentially valuable, and it is impossible to know in advance which piece of information is to be prized. So, we brace ourselves for the next round of exegesis by saying that it is necessary to pan a lot of earth to find a little gold, and that is true, of course. However, preachers have the nagging suspicion that there is a good deal of wasted energy in the traditional model of exegesis or, worse,

that the real business of exegesis is excavation and earth-moving and that any homiletical gold stumbled over along the way is largely coincidental.⁹

This I call the hermeneutic of excavation—the exegetical turning over of tons of earth, debris, rock, boulder, and gravel: a style of interpretation that yields an overload of biblical and Bible-related information, most of it unfortunately not of any particular use for one seeking to preach a relevant message from a specific text. And then all of this excavated material dug up from the text is reduced to points and propositions and principles, which are then preached. No wonder Fred Craddock wryly observed: “[T]he minister boils off all the water and then preaches the stain in the bottom of the cup.”¹⁰ Indeed, the approach of traditional homiletics with its points and propositions may even imply that once one has gotten the distillate of the text—i.e., the coffee-stain, the reduction of the text into propositions and principles, one can abandon the text itself. In fact, there’s even a recent Study Bible that seems to imply exactly that. Its publisher claims that their product “complements” the English text of the Bible “by elaborating on 1,500 principles in Scripture that are as relevant today as when the sixty-six books of the Bible were written. Distilling these truths into principles, ... helps the reader more easily remember and effectively apply the Bible’s wisdom to everyday life.”¹¹ Boiling off the water and preaching the stain!

Here’s an example: “A Principle to Live By: #32 (from Genesis 22).” According to the author, “We should not be surprised when God allows unique tests to come into our lives to enable us to become more mature in our Christian experience.”¹² Did we really need Genesis 22 to tell me that? James 1 in the NT would have been quite sufficient. This kind of propositionalization and principization is not only faulty, but potentially dangerous. Let’s see for ourselves what the author of Genesis 22 was *doing* with what he was saying.

GENESIS 22 AND THE AUTHOR’S DOINGS¹³

The narrative of Genesis 22 begins with Abraham being asked to “go forth”[הֵלֵךְ-לְךָ], a rather unusual Hebrew phrase, that occurs only twice in Genesis—both times uttered by God, both times addressed to Abraham, and both stressing a journey, an altar, and promised blessings.. The last time Abraham had heard this phrase, “Go forth,” was in Gen 12:1.¹⁴ At that time, God had commanded him:

Go forth from your country → your people → your father’s house.

Here, the second command to “go forth” is similar—it, too, has three parts:

Go forth and take your son → your only son → the one you love.

In Genesis 12, Abraham had been asked to sacrifice his country, his clan, his family—his past. Now in Genesis 22, he is asked to sacrifice his son—his future. A burnt offering. Trial by fire—God’s fire! “How important am I to you? Sacrifice your son, your only son, the one you love.” While we know this was only a test, Abraham is completely in the dark: “Why are you doing this to me, O God?” And we, readers, can’t but echo that thought: Was it really necessary? And why this test now?

The narrative of Genesis 22 begins with a time-stamp: “Now it came about *after these things*, that God tested Abraham” (Gen 22:1). What exactly were “these things”? A review of the life story of Abraham till this point is helpful for arriving at what the narrator was *doing* with what he was saying.

Yes, Abraham showed faith in stepping out as commanded in Genesis 12, but one notices that he took Lot his nephew, even though the divine word called for a separation from relatives and father’s house. Was Abraham thinking of Lot as the likely heir, seeing that he himself was already 75 years old, and his wife 65 (12:4)? That certainly was not an attitude of faith in God’s promise. Later, perhaps still holding on to the hope that his nephew Lot would be the chosen heir, Abraham gives him the choicest portion of the land; Lot goes east and Abraham west (13:10–11). God appears to Abraham soon thereafter, renewing the promise to his descendants (13:16), as if to assert that he, Abraham, had been mistaken in his reckoning of Lot as his heir. The patriarch *was* wrong, for the descendants of Lot would become enemies of the descendants of Abraham (19:38).

Soon after he left his father’s household and homeland, as Abraham stepped into the Negev, his caravan was hit by a famine (12:9–10). He promptly decamps to Egypt “to sojourn there,” despite the fact that Yahweh had just appeared to him and promised, “To your descendants I will give this land,” upon which Abraham had immediately built an altar (12:7). Surely he could have trusted God to keep his promise without fleeing? Of course, one knows what happened in that land of refuge—Abraham was willing to pass off his wife, Sarah, as his sister, lest he get killed by Pharaoh for that “very beautiful” woman (12:12–14). Would not God keep his promise about the seed? Why then did he have to worry about his own life, and even put his wife’s wellbeing in jeopardy?

In Genesis 15, Yahweh’s promise to Abraham was renewed (15:1). But Abraham was still childless, and so the heir, he figured, had to be Eliezer, his steward (15:2–3). God immediately negated that suggestion: Abraham’s heir would be “one who shall come forth from your own body” (15:4), a promise set forth in covenant form (15:5–21).

Yet Sarah continued to remain barren (16:1). Abraham then resorted to a compromise: perhaps the chosen heir, “from your own body,” was to come through the maternal agency of a concubine (16:2). Acting on this misconception, Abraham fathered Ishmael through Hagar, the Egyptian. God reappeared to Abraham in Gen 17 and once again spelled out his promise to the patriarch. The divine word was crystal clear: *Sarah* would be the mother

of the heir (this was iterated thrice here: 17:16, 19, 21), not the maid, Hagar. And just as in the case of Lot, Ishmael's descendants (25:12–18) would turn out to be enemies of the descendants of Abraham. Again, faithlessness characterized Abraham's response to God.

Then, to make matters worse, in Genesis 20, Abraham palmed his wife off as his sister ... again! This time to Abimelech (20:2), but for the same reason that he had conducted his subterfuge in Genesis 12—out of fear for his own life (20:11), and this despite the extended account of Yahweh's appearance and re-promise to Abraham and his wife that an heir would be born to them (Genesis 19). As in Genesis 12, God had to intervene to set things straight (20:6–7).

Thus, all along, Abraham is seen rather clumsily stumbling along in his faith. All of his attempts to help God out with the production of a heir had come to naught. None of his schemes had worked; in fact, they had only created more trouble for himself and, in the future, for his descendants. Genesis 12–20, then, is not the account of a pristine faith on part of the patriarch.

And then, in the very next chapter, Genesis 22, Abraham is tested. It was almost as if this test was a necessary one. Had Abraham learnt his lessons? Would he come around to realizing, finally, that God was faithful? Would he now acknowledge that even against all odds and despite all unfavorable circumstances God's promises.

Abraham's Fear of God

Notice, towards the end of the story, the key phrase in the acclamation of the angel of Yahweh in Gen 22:12: "Now I know that you fear God." Abraham's fear of God had, through this test, been proven. This "fearing of God" is a critical element in the account. The last time fear of God was mentioned in the Abrahamic saga was in 20:11 (in fact these are the first two occurrences of "fear of God" in Bible: יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים in 20:11; and יִרְאָה אֱלֹהִים in 22:12). In the first instance, when Abimelech confronted Abraham with his wife/sister deception, Abraham's excuse was: "Surely there is no fear [תַּחֲרִין] of God in this place; and they will kill me because of my wife" (20:11). Hearing the patriarch's excuse, "No fear of God in this place," the reader immediately catches the irony. Abimelech was terror-stricken at the possibility of having run up against God; the text explicitly tells us so: "And the men were greatly frightened [הָאֲנָשִׁים ... הָיְרָאוּ]" (20:8). On the other hand, it was *Abraham* who did not fear God enough to trust him to take care of him when God had promised him descendants. Surely his life would not be in danger before he produced progeny.

But here, in Genesis 22, Abraham appeared to have learned his lesson in trusting God as indicated in his response to Isaac: "Yahweh will provide" (22:8). From the way the story is discoursed, it seems clear that Genesis 21, with the birth of Isaac and Yahweh's triple assertion of his faithfulness (21:1–

2), had something to do with that change of heart. Apparently, after many blunders and fumbles, Abraham had finally come around to trusting God when Isaac was born: God *had* kept his word! So in Genesis 22, the divine declaration “Now I know that you fear God” (22:12), confirmed the fact that Abraham now feared God, trusting him enough to obey him without question. Surely a God who could give him an heir from a dead womb could bring back that one from a charred altar. Thus the *Aqedah* defines the meaning of “fear of God”: faithful obedience that holds back *nothing* from God.

Abraham’s Love for Isaac

The extent of Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice “everything” and the depth of his wholehearted obedience is indicated in Genesis 22 by the emphasis on the father-son relationship: “father” and/or “son” is mentioned fifteen times in Gen 22:1–20 (in 22:2 [$\times 2$], 3, 6, 7 [$\times 3$], 8, 9, 10, 12 [$\times 2$], 13, 16 [$\times 2$]). In the only conversation recorded in the Bible between Abraham and Isaac, the latter’s words begin with “my father” and the former’s words end with “my son” (22:7–8)—this is also Abraham’s last word before he prepares to slay Isaac (בְּנִי, “my son”). The narrator is explicitly creating an emotional tension in the story: a father is called to slay the son he loves.

It is therefore highly significant that the first time the word “love” (אהב) occurs in the Bible is in this account, in 22:2. With the entry of this new word into Scripture came an implicit question: Was Abraham’s love for Isaac so strong that his allegiance to God had diminished? It appears then, that this love of Abraham for Isaac was a crucial element in the test; it was this love that was being tested. Would Abraham be loyal to God, or would love for the human overpower trust in the divine?

Without even perusing the details of Abraham’s test, one can find the answer to that question of Abraham’s loyalties when one compares the unique descriptors of Isaac. There are three heavenly announcements to Abraham (22:1–2, 11–12, 14–16) with three corresponding descriptors of the (proposed/putative) sacrifice, Isaac. These three descriptors contain three of the ten instances of בֶּן (“son”) in the account; but these three alone are inflected with the second person singular possessive pronoun (בְּנִי, “your son”). However, there is a significant alteration, before and after the test, in how God and the angel of Yahweh describe Isaac.

Pre-test:

22:2 “your son, your only son, the one you love”

Post-test:

22:12 “your son, your only son”

22:16 “your son, your only son”

The trifold description of Isaac in Gen 22:2 was to emphasize that this son, this particular one, was the one Abraham *loved*, with a love that potentially stood in the way of his allegiance to, and faith in, God. The subsequent, post-test deletion of the phrase, “the one you love,” was clear indication that Abraham had passed the examination. The three-part description of Isaac *before* the test (“son/only son/one you love”) becomes, *after* the test, two-part (“son/only son”). The *Aqedah* was, in reality, a demonstration of love for God over and against anything that advanced a rival claim to that love.¹⁵

Isaac's Disappearance

One element of the account that has perplexed interpreters throughout the ages is the apparent disappearance of Isaac from the Abraham stories after the mention of “son” in Gen 22:16. Abraham, we are told, returned from his test, *apparently* without Isaac: “So Abraham returned to his young men, and they arose and went together to Beersheba; and Abraham lived at Beersheba” (22:19). After the test, it was as if Isaac had altogether vanished; the narrator apparently took an eraser and wiped out any mention of Isaac after the “sacrifice. Indeed, father and son are never shown speaking to each other again after this narrative; Isaac does not even show up in the account of Sarah’s death and burial (Genesis 23). The only mentioned “contact” between father and son after the stunning episode of the *Aqedah* is at Abraham’s funeral (25:9).

When one remembers that the test was actually an examination of Abraham’s loyalties—to God or to son, “the one you love”—one understands what it was the author was doing in Gen 22:19 with Isaac’s “disappearance”: he was describing, in yet another way, Abraham’s success in this critical test. A line had been drawn, the relationship between father and son had been clarified, the tension between fear of God and love of son had been resolved. This test had revealed that Abraham loved God more than anyone else. *For Abraham so loved God that he gave his only begotten son* And to bring that home to readers, father and son are separated for the rest of their days—*literarily* separated, that is, for the purpose of accomplishing the narrator’s theological agenda.¹⁶

“What, then, does Abraham teach us? To put it briefly, he teaches us not to prefer the gifts of God to God. ... Therefore, put not even a real gift of God before the Giver of that gift” (Augustine, *Serm.* 2). God’s people everywhere are to exercise the kind of faith in God that Abraham had, the kind of love for God that Abraham demonstrated, the kind of fear of God that Abraham exhibited: nothing comes between God and the believer. *Nothing!* This is the lesson the preacher must proclaim; this is what the reader must do. But this is a far cry from “A Principle to Live By: #32 (from Genesis 22): We should not be surprised when God allows unique tests to come into our lives to enable us to become more mature in our Christian experience.”

Thus a text may not only tell the reader about the world *behind* the text—what actually happened: the story of a man, his son, a ram, the angel of Yahweh, and God (Genesis 22). A text also projects another ideal world *in front of* the itself that bids the reader inhabit it, a world characterized by certain values: the theology of the pericope, what the author is *doing* with what he is saying. This is what we must preach. No more boiling down the text and preaching the stain. Instead, we are to be curating or witnessing the word of God to the people of God, so that their lives may be changed for the glory of God.

PREACHING IS BIBLICAL

“Biblical preaching”

The community of God’s people holds that this divine discourse that comprises the Christian canon is to be preached as normative for the faith and practice of the church. If preaching is to be biblical, respecting 2 Tim 3:16–17 that declares all Scripture to be profitable for rendering every person mature, i.e., Christlike, then *every* portion of Scripture must be preached from. How can one begin to achieve this?

While most of the evidence about the liturgical practices of the synagogue comes from the second century CE onwards, it is clear that quite early on, the pattern of communal utilization of Scripture in measured doses came to be directed by Jewish lectionaries that prescribed what passages of the Bible were to be read and preached on a given day. Appropriately divided sections of the text (pericopes) were read in continuous fashion (*lectio continua*, “reading continuously”) from week to week, each subsequent reading taking up from where the previous one had left off. This was the oldest approach to the exposition of Scripture, and it was the standard practice on non-festival Sabbaths in Jewish synagogues. In all likelihood, this protocol of continuous reading was bequeathed to the church; and this sequential assimilation of Scripture, *lectio continua*, appears to have been the norm for most of early church history.

By the time of the fifth century, however, the proliferation of feasts and special days in the church calendar and the allotment of specific biblical texts for each of those days rendered readings almost entirely *lectio selecta* (“reading selectively”): the textual assignments for these occasions were based upon the significance of the particular saint or that special day being celebrated. Such selections of the biblical text were rarely contiguous and thus *lectio continua* fell into disuse. Soon, the complexity of the festal calendar required that texts allocated for particular occasions be listed formally, and so Christian lectionaries configured for this purpose came into existence. Unlike for most of church history, the Middle Ages therefore suffered a dearth of *lectio continua* sermons. It was not until the Reformers that this practice returned to popularity in churches. Luther advised: “[O]ne of the books

should be selected and one or two chapters, or half a chapter, be read, until the book is finished. After that another book should be selected, and so on, until the entire Bible has been read through."¹⁷ So also Calvin (*Commentary on Acts* 20:26):

What order must pastors then keep in teaching? First, let them not esteem at their pleasure what is profitable to be uttered and what to be omitted; but let them leave that to God alone to be ordered at his pleasure. ... [M]ortal man shall not be so bold as to mangle the Scripture and to pull it in pieces, that he may diminish this or that at his pleasure, that he may obscure something and suppress many things.

A couple of crucial assumptions operate in the practice of *lectio continua*. Firstly, *all* portions of the abiding, weighty, and binding text of Scripture are valuable and worthy of being preached. The tendency to pick and choose texts based on preacher's fancy, significance of event, or ease of exposition, is to be strongly resisted. Secondly, individual pericopes are properly interpreted only in the context of the rest of the book, and it is the protocol of continuous reading and preaching that clarifies this relationship of part to the whole. Preaching by *lectio continua* affirms the pericope's indissoluble unity with its textual neighborhood. Thus the integrity of a whole book may not be disrupted by preaching non-contiguous pericopes.

What, then, is the role of topical preaching that necessarily deals with diverse texts of Scripture in a single sermon? There is undoubtedly a place in the life of the church for *ad hoc* sermons, i.e., those that are topical in nature, to meet the needs of particular situations and circumstances, be they national in scope (to address wars, terrorism, special days), or local (to address celebrations, bereavements, weddings), or theological (to address doctrinal weaknesses, spiritual issues, festivals on the church calendar), etc. Such sermons may be biblical in the sense that their ideas are drawn from the Bible. However, I submit that to be biblical, not only do ideas have to be from Scripture, but also the sequential development of its ideas—i.e., the trajectory of a particular book incrementally developed pericope by pericope—has to be respected. Only by *lectio continua* can one catch the theology of a text, the agenda of the author, in its fullest sense. Jesus' healings of the blind men in Mark 8 and 10 are often preached in isolated fashion as proving Jesus' divinity and omnipotence (a systematic theology topical sermon that expounds Jesus' control over the optic apparatus, and exhorts listeners to trust in the Great Physician). But Mark's thrust with each of these texts is different and may be caught only as one moves through the book, pericope by pericope.¹⁸ Thus, while not discounting the value of the occasional topical sermon, I would strongly recommend that the regular diet of the congregation be sequential sermons through books of the Bible—*lectio continua*. One scholar with a particular aversion to topical messages advised his students "to preach a

topical sermon only once every five years—and then immediately to repent and ask God’s forgiveness!”¹⁹ I have to confess there is some merit to this recommendation.

In short, to preach pericopes sequentially through books, *lectio continua*, is a significant part of what it means to preach biblically. Preaching is *biblical*!

PREACHING IS PASTORAL

“Biblical preaching by a leader of a church”

The last few iterations of the iPhone have TouchID, Apple’s fingerprint scanning security system. Gone are the days of passwords to unlock your phones. Now all you need to do is put one of your fingers on the sensor and—*voilà!*—your device is instantly accessible. Only the one whose fingerprints were recorded during set up can use the device. In other words, there is a rightful person authorized to operate that iPhone. No one else can. And no one else should.

I claim that preaching, too, has similar constraints. Not all can preach. Not all should preach. Biblically and historically, preaching has always been pastoral, i.e., an ideal vision of preaching has the shepherd of the flock, the pastor, engaging in the formal and corporate ministry of the word.²⁰ In other words, there is an authorized person for this important task. Not everyone can be preaching. Not everyone should.

In Neh 7:73b–8:18, when the Israelites returning from exile in the fifth century BCE assemble for the reading and exposition of the divine law, it is the leaders of the assembly that are at the forefront of this endeavor. Thirteen named leaders of the community stand by Ezra the protagonist, on his right and his left, as Ezra does his thing. These leaders are the prime activators of the reading of God’s word for God’s people. Subsequently, another group of thirteen named leaders (Levites) explains this reading to the people (Neh 8:4, 7–8). And, thus, the Bible is preached.

This pastoral nature of preaching was documented very early in church history, too. Justin Martyr in the third century recorded a typical worship service, with the leader taking the responsibility for preaching: “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the *leader*²¹ verbally instructs and exhorts the imitation of these good things” (1 *Apol.* 67).

Why is it the pastoral leader’s task to preach? It devolves upon the one who is tasked with shepherding the congregation to preach, because the regular exposition of Scripture is part of the task of shepherding: preaching is essential for spiritual formation. There cannot be a severance between preaching and pastoring, between the exposition of God’s word and the

shepherding of God's people. The two form an inseparable and integral unity, and so it is a leader of the church who must preach. Preaching is, in its essence, spiritual formation from the pulpit—truly a pastoral ministry. So it is pastoral leaders who have immersed themselves in the word of God and the things of God who must convey to the children of God, with discernment and sensitivity, what a particular text means for their lives, and how they might align themselves to the will of God, the theology of that text.

Moreover, it is obvious that not anyone and everyone can be a preacher, for the gifts of the Spirit are not universally distributed in monotonous uniformity, "but to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor 12:7). "Not all are apostles, are they? Not all are prophets, are they? Not all are teachers, are they?" etc. (12:27–30). No, not everyone is identically gifted, and therefore "not all" engage in these activities; so also for preaching (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11; 1 Pet 4:10–11).²² As Luther wryly put it: If everyone wanted to preach, who would want to listen? If they preached at the same time, it would become like a racket made by frogs: "Croak, croak, croak!" Instead, it should happen in this way: the congregation should set in place someone who is competent for it to preach²³

I have used "leader" in my vision of preaching quite deliberately: "Biblical preaching, by a *leader* of the church"—whether pastor or teaching elder in the context of the whole church, or one bearing another title in another context. Irrespective of label, the one who preaches must be one who also shepherds the flock (or a part thereof), and is pastorally involved with the lives of people on a consistent basis.

All that to say, there is a place for ordination to the task of preaching, particularly for those engaging in that ministry in a more public venue. Ordination refers to two dimensions in the service of every member of the church, a public dimension and a more private one. It is the public nature of the preaching ministry that calls for this restriction of ordination. Many may have the gift, the talent, and the capacity to preach, but not all are legitimized to exercise that gift on behalf of the larger body, though they may, of course, do so at other, less public venues. The appointment of a pastor-preacher is a sacred trust, and the responsibility of preaching, one of immense gravity for the preacher: "O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus ... preach the word" (1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 4:1–2). Preaching is *pastoral*!

PREACHING IS APPLICATIONAL

"Biblical preaching ... is the communication of the thrust of a pericope of Scripture ... *and of its application to that specific body of believers*"

Preaching is applicational, that is to say, life change has to be called for, in specific fashion, as the pericope preached demands. Preaching that

solicits listeners' alignment to the divine requirement in each pericope is not justification-oriented; i.e., such obedience does not accumulate merit towards salvation. Rather it is sanctification-oriented, intended for those *already* in relationship to God. For, in Scripture, relationship to God is always followed by responsibility. That is to say, when men and women come into relationship with God, God always stipulates how they should live—in accordance with the values of his ideal world, his kingdom. Indeed, such a theme resonates even through the Pentateuch. God elected a people; *then* he required of them obedience to divine demand. Notable is the fact that the Ten Commandments (responsibility) were prefaced by an announcement of relationship: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). Relationship always precedes responsibility. Yahweh had separated his people to himself as his possession; *therefore*, they were to be as holy as he was. "'So you are to be holy to Me, because I, Yahweh, am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine'" (Lev 20:26).

Obedience, or even a willingness to obey God, was never a criterion for establishing a relationship between deity and his people. The initiation of the divine-human relationship was entirely a unilateral divine act of love and grace, apprehended from the human side by faith alone. Thus, God's plan, all along, has been to direct the behavior of those who were already his children.²⁵ Relationship always precedes the responsibility of the people of God to meet divine demand and to be holy as God was. "First God redeems Israel from Egypt, *and then* he gives the law, so obedience to the law is a response to God's grace, not an attempt to gain righteousness by works."²⁶ Therefore, a loving relationship with God should result in the responsibility of keeping his commandments, as the NT is not hesitant to point out in John 14:21; 1 John 2:3–5; 3:21–24; 5:3. And it is the role of each pericope of Scripture to spell out what those commandments of God are, so that the children of God might keep them and be holy as God, their Father, is holy.

Needless to say, it is also God who empowers his people to obey him. The Holy Spirit now indwells them, enabling them to overcome the flesh and meet God's "righteous requirement." Indeed, this was the purpose of God's redemptive intervention—"so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit" (Rom 8:4). The power of God through the Spirit is at work in the believer, enabling obedience and a life that pleases God (Eph 2:10; 3:16; Phil 4:13; Col 1:9–11). It is God's Spirit that enables believers to obey him, a fact that even the OT affirmed: "I will put My Spirit within you, and I will cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep and obey My ordinances" (Ezek 36:27). And Jesus himself pronounced on the importance of obedience: the experience of divine blessing (here, God's love) is contingent upon such a walk with God. "If you keep My commandments, you will remain in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and remain in His love" (John 15:10).²⁷ All this to say, there is great value in application for the

believer, not to mention that such obedience is God-glorifying. “Now may the God of peace ... equip you with every good thing to do His will, doing in us what is pleasing before Him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen!” (Heb 13:20–21).

May God help us, through his Spirit—not just to preach—but also to live lives pleasing to him and that are worthy of the name of his Son, to whom be glory forever. Amen!

NOTES

1. This and the following article in this series are re-workings of the plenary addresses delivered at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, held at Moody Bible Institute, Chicago, Ill., on 9–11 October 2014. Portions of these lectures were also duplicated in the W. H. Griffith Thomas Lectures at Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, Tex., on 3–6 February 2015. Of necessity, an oral lecture entails some borrowing of material already published by the lecturer. I have pointed readers in the appropriate direction, towards my publications both past and future, as called for.
2. See Abraham Kuruvilla, the previous article in this edition, “*Re-Visioning Preaching: Issues.*”
3. For more details, see idem, *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015).
4. For the same reason, I have purposely retained the vagueness of some terms in the preaching vision: “gathering” (how many make a “gathering” and how often should they gather?), “worship” (what constitutes “worship?”), “leader” (what office of the church does a “leader” occupy?), etc.
5. Time and space also keep me from expanding upon preaching being pastoral, ecclesial, doxological, and spiritual.
6. Again, by “pericope,” I only intend a small, preachable portion of Scripture. To a great extent, what is preachable will depend upon the preacher. Too narrow a slice will result in texts with theological thrusts not very different from each other week by week; too large a section will result in specific theological thrusts of individual texts being overlooked.
7. Thomas G. Long, “The Distance We Have Traveled: Changing Trends in Preaching,” in *A Reader on Preaching: Making Connections*, eds., David Day, Jeff Astley, and Leslie J. Francis (Alderdsot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2005), 16.
8. Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 100.
9. Thomas G. Long, “*The Use of Scripture in Contemporary Preaching*,” *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 343–44.
10. Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1985), 123. As will be seen below, the typical “old” homiletic preacher is a “distiller.” Unlike the “alchemist” (see Introduction for these labels), this one affirms that preaching ought to be biblical.
11. See “*Life Essentials Study Bible*,” <http://www.bhphublishinggroup.com/books/products.asp?p=9781586400453> (accessed February 1, 2015).

12. Gene A. Getz, ed., *Life Essentials Study Bible: Biblical Principles to Live By* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), 32.
13. For further details, see Abraham Kuruvilla, "The Aqedah: What is the Author Doing with What He is Saying?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 55 (2012): 489–508.
14. "Abraham" is, of course, "Abram" in Gen 12, but for ease of expression his final name (and that of his wife, "Sarah," not "Sarai") will be used throughout, despite the anachronism.
15. The equation of "fear of God" and "love for God" is not illegitimate: Deut 6:2, 13 command fear, while the Shema calls for love (6:5); and see Deut 10:12 and 13:3–4—each has both elements; also see Deut 10:20 with 11:1; as well as Pss 31:19, 23; and 145:19–20. There is considerable overlap between the two concepts of fear and love, as is evident in the Aqedah itself.
16. As to whether they were actually separated, that is an issue behind the text that need not concern the interpreter.
17. Martin Luther, "Concerning the Order of Public Worship (1523)," in *Liturgy and Hymns*, Vol. 53 of Luther's Works trans. Paul Zeller Strodach; rev. Ulrich S. Leupold (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1965), 12.
18. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Mark: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, Oreg.: Cascade, 2012), 155–68, and 226–37.
19. Walter C. Kaiser, *Toward an Exegetical Theology: Biblical Exegesis for Preaching and Teaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 19.
20. Now, by "pastoral" I don't necessarily mean a particular office. All I'm emphasizing is the importance of integrating preaching with the pastoral function of shepherding, in whatever context—whole church, or Bible study group, or youth group,
21. Or "presider," the one presiding over the gathering. The verb is also found 1 Thess 5:12, to refer to pastoral/teaching authority: "those who are over you/presiding/leading."
22. And, for that matter, not everyone who works in a hospital is a nurse; neither is everyone who plays on the football field a linebacker.
23. Martin Luther, "Sermon for the First Sunday After Easter, John 20:21–29," in *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John Chapters 17–20*, Vol. 69 of Luther's Works ed. Christopher Boyd Brown; trans. Kenneth E. F. Howes (St. Louis, Miss.: Concordia, 2009), 330–31.
24. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2012), 151–209, for further discussion of this issue.
25. But with time, what God had intended as guidelines for sanctification was misconstrued as means of justification: a self-glorifying, flesh-driven, merit-attempting, grace-rejecting, faith-negating obedience to law (divine values)—the legalism Paul so often excoriated.
26. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Paul Apostle of God's Glory in Christ: A Pauline Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2001), 117–18.

27. Also see 1 John 2:5; 4:12. And there are the benefits of eternal rewards, too, of course.



EXPLORING PRECURSORS TO AND BENEFITS OF ABE KURUVILLA'S "PERICOPAL THEOLOGY"

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ABSTRACT: Abraham Kuruvilla defines pericopal theology as, "The theology specific to a particular pericope, representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God and his relationship to his people, and which, bearing a transhistorical intention, functions as the crucial intermediary in the homiletical move from text to praxis that respects both the authority of the text and the circumstances of the hearer."¹ This paper attempts to explore the role of interdisciplinary theories in developing homiletical theory by reviewing my own implementation of communication theory into the homiletical process, by identifying some who have contributed to our understanding of the role of theology in that process, and finally, by examining how Kuruvilla's pericopal theology incorporates linguistic theory into the homiletic process in what I consider a step in the right direction.

INTRODUCTION

For at least a century fundamentalist and evangelical preachers have, in general, undervalued the distinctive theological message embedded in their discrete and particular preaching unit, preferring instead to concentrate either on the text's faithful recounting of the historical events behind the text that grounded their faith,² or on systematic doctrines detected in the text and verified by proof-texting.³ The move from ancient text to contemporary congregation has been more a matter of apologetics—"trust the Christ who's life you find accurately recounted in the Bible," or of systemization, "See how the doctrine of Jesus' deity is proven by the miracle of the loaves," than of true exposition. The major missing link in the preparation and delivery of the sermon has been the theological message the biblical author's text proffered in order to impel his readers toward conformity to Christ. Teaching and defending the historicity of the events of the Bible or proof-texting the fundamental doctrines of Christianity—admittedly in response to the liberal influences of the early twentieth century—often outweighed the exposition of the biblical worldview that the preaching unit projected. Defending truth too often overshadowed forming the believer into the image of Christ.

One of the responsibilities of any scholarly academy is to advance theories that explain its field of interest. While homileticians should pass along existing models and methods of preaching, more is required. We must always pursue better means of analyzing, critiquing, and developing our field of study. We must clarify and justify how both hermeneutics and homiletics contributes to more faithful and relevant exposition of the Scriptures. We undertake this task not simply for the joy of inquiry, or in order to retain some professional standing, but for the benefit of the Body of Christ. Our goal is not to guarantee the perfect sermon, but to improve the integrity and efficacy of the sermons that weekly issue from our pulpits.

It was with the goal of practical, responsible scholarship in mind that Paul Scott Wilson challenged his fellow members of the Academy of Homiletics:

Homiletics is not as pastoral or academic a discipline as it needs to be. By pastoral I mean – among other things – practical. Homileticians at times are too interested in devising new paradigms and not interested enough in how effective or helpful they are, or how faithful they are to the call to preach the gospel of Christ. . . Homileticians try to import categories to homiletics without doing careful spadework to determine how those categories might translate into sermons.⁴

Wilson's critique of not being practical enough was directed primarily at the Academy, and rightly so, for the more liberal Academy has produced the vast majority of homiletic theory over the last half century, though much of it has lacked practical application in growing a mature church. Wilson's critique of not being academic enough needs to be taken to heart by the Evangelical Homiletics Society, for while conservatives have written preaching texts, few have proposed or developed scholarly models of preaching that have advanced our homiletic theory. Theories of preaching, through a kind of reverse engineering, describe what happens when preachers expound the Scriptures faithfully and beneficially, so that they may then prescribe processes and practices that help future preachers accomplish that goal. We must borrow, adapt, and reshape metaphors, paradigms, and models from other fields of study and discern whether they apply to our own theories as we seek to represent and explain how a sermon does what it does. Some theories seek to map the entire process while others seek to address a smaller portion of the process. Both are helpful.

Homileticians have seemed slow to develop a substantive theory in one area in particular: the unique theological contribution of the individual preaching unit. A more fully developed theoretical model of the expository preaching process that explicitly incorporates the theological message of the preaching text is essential. If that task does not fall upon members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, upon whom will it fall?

One who has advanced our understanding of that essential element of the preaching process is Abraham Kuruvilla in his *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching*. Kuruvilla argues that what the biblical authors are doing, “is projecting a *world in front of the text*” bearing a “transhistorical intention,” that transcends the specific circumstances of the author and the writing; i.e., “the text is given a future orientation, enabling valid application by readers at locations and times far removed from those of the event of inscription.”⁵ This projected world with future intention is the crucial intermediary between ancient text and contemporary listener, that is, the theology of a pericope, the weekly preaching unit within the context of the church. Adapting insights from language philosophers, Kuruvilla reiterates the legitimacy and the necessity of a theological link between the biblical text and the sermon’s listeners. The notion that theology is the substance of the bridge between the text and the audience has been proposed, as will be explored later in this paper. It is the nature of this *pericopal theology*, as differentiated from biblical, canonical, and systematic theology that is original with Kuruvilla and amplifies our homiletical theory. To illustrate the practicality of his theory Kuruvilla keys in on the Old Testament Law, which still must be applied via theology to the contemporary Christian and what he terms a “christiconic interpretation that sees each pericope of Scripture portraying a facet of the canonical image of Christ”.⁶

While Kuruvilla has surfaced many ideas that invite further deliberation and discussion, this essay will focus on his conception of pericopal theology. This new category of theological classification seems to be the major concern of his text. Though it is only a single element of a complex expository process, his notion of pericopal theology promises to deepen and clarify our understanding of that crucial element. *Privilege the Text!* advances our homiletical theory incrementally though significantly. Kuruvilla’s concept is evolutionary rather than revolutionary in that it stands on the shoulders, as does all theory, of work that has preceded it. My goal in the following portion of this piece is to demonstrate, if only selectively, some of the antecedent expressions of the theological bridge as it relates to our current preaching theory. In so doing I hope to exemplify how homiletical theory develops and challenges our Society to do more of the same. I begin with my own search for the link between the text and the sermon.

DEVELOPING A MODEL

I entered Dallas Theological Seminary with no model of the preaching process. I had no method with which to approach the task. Haddon Robinson was chair of the Practical Theology Department and was in the process of developing his approach to exposition as published, three years after I had graduated, in *Biblical Preaching*. My first two preaching courses were taught, by Robinson’s design, in tandem with New Testament, epistolary, exegetical

courses with the result that the exegetical to homiletical (E-H) progression became my model of exposition. This model was confirmed by *Biblical Preaching* in which the, "Stages in the Development of Expository Messages," proceeded from, "4. Analyzing the Exegetical Idea," to "5. Formulating the Homiletical Idea."⁷ It should be noted that in his discussion of the analysis of the exegetical idea Robinson invested several pages⁸ to suggest ways of discovering "the text's theological intention," though the reader was never informed as to the species of theology (Biblical? Canonical? Systematic?) he should be looking for. Unfortunately that theological concept was missing from his E-H model.

I was perfectly content with the E-H model, however, because it was readily applicable to any New Testament church and because Robinson's process was far better than historical models that moved rather arbitrarily through verse-by-verse explanation with (perhaps?) an "application" or two tagged on at the end of the message. I figured I could preach for years out of the Epistles using the E-H model, and I did for a couple of years to a congregation that seemed content with such exposition.

Then I decided to take a crack at narrative. I soon realized that the E-H model was not sufficient. I stumbled my way through a lot of, "Jesus is the Messiah and worthy of our trust and obedience," alongside a good dose of imitation exhortation resembling, "Jesus resisted Satan's temptation by knowing and quoting Scripture and so can you." My congregation had never heard narratives preached any other way, so they were pleased. But I had a growing and very troubling sense that something was missing. For one thing, I knew that unpacking the meaning of a narrative was a lot more difficult than unpacking a didactic paragraph from an epistle written to New Testament believers. For another, I sensed that the real message of Matthew was somewhere between the lines of historical biography and systematic apology.

Two major developments encouraged my quest for a more comprehensive preaching model. The first was John R. W. Stott's *Between Two Worlds*. The second was that my doctoral studies at Ohio State were exposing me to communication theory.

In 1982 Stott articulated the problem of the gap between the world of the ancient text and the world of the immediate audience, and then proposed a model that linked the two.

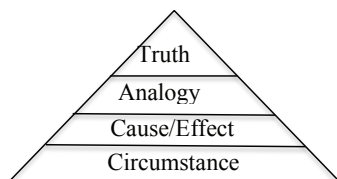
It is because preaching is not exposition only but communication, not just the exegesis of a text but the conveying of a God-given message to living people who need to hear it, that I am going to develop a . . . metaphor to illustrate the essential nature of preaching . . . that of bridge-building.⁹

We should be praying that God will raise up a new generation of Christian communicators who are determined to bridge the chasm;

. . . who refuse to sacrifice truth to relevance or relevance to truth; but who resolve instead in equal measure to be faithful to Scripture and pertinent to today.¹⁰

Stott's gap and bridge-building metaphor made sense. Still, Stott fell short in describing how this linking of the two worlds was to be accomplished. Was the preacher, by means of the sermon, the bridge spanning the two worlds? Doubtless the preacher stood between the two, but did he alone possess sufficient authority to bring them together? Though the question of what from the text was carried over the gap with authority to the contemporary listener remained, the concept of something authoritative bridging the gap made sense and provided the framework of a new model, one that went beyond E-H.

The works of Richard M. Weaver and Ernest Bormann, communication theorists, also began to stimulate my theory-building imagination. Weaver proposed a "Hierarchy of Realities," that would allow a speaker to determine the weight of authority and obligation his arguments might carry. Weaver identified the highest level of the hierarchy as "ideal truth."¹¹ Collaborative insight came from the work of Karl Wallace who implied the same when he wrote, "A good reason is a statement offered in support of an *ought* proposition . . . or of a value-judgment."¹² I agreed that a sermon should consist of value-laden language that makes a moral demand upon those who hear it. Weaver identified weaker arguments, lesser manifestations of reality, in descending order as analogy, cause-effect, and circumstance.

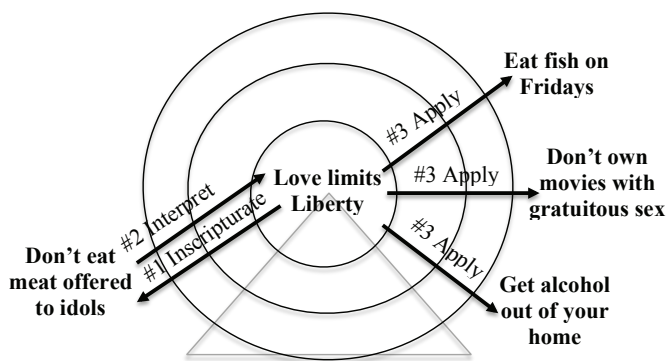


Finding insight in *Language is Sermonic*, I looked for more of Weaver's writings on the same subject and discovered his 1948 volume *Ideas Have Consequences*. In it, Weaver used "Center" to refer to the highest level of argument and "Periphery" to refer to circumstance. Weaver lamented that culture was becoming fragmented because of its obsession with the peripheral, with facts and science, and not ultimate realities. Yet, "The return which the idealists propose is not a voyage backward through time but a return to center, which must be conceived metaphysically or theologically."¹⁴

It occurred to me that what Weaver referred to as truth or center was a higher level theological generalization that served as the source of the biblical author's specific message as delivered to a particular group of people in a given context. Shortly after adapting Weaver's concepts into the

beginnings of a homiletical model, it occurred to me that his truth/center concept was similar to Ernest Bormann's "Rhetorical Vision," and that both were, in their essence, the substance of the bridge that spanned the gap between the biblical text and the contemporary listener. When Bormann wrote of a rhetorical vision catching up the listener, transporting him, "to a world which seems somehow even more real than the everyday world,"¹⁵ he was associating rhetorical vision with Weaver's center/truth, that ideal, transcendent world into which the listener would enter and participate in order to realize the vision in the here and now.

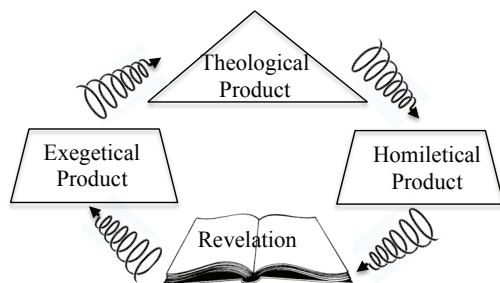
For example, Paul drew from an ideal truth ("Love limits liberty") applying it with specificity to the context in Corinth ("Don't eat meat offered to idols if it stumbles a weaker brother into sinning against his conscience.") His Inscripturation of 1 Corinthians 8-10 (see below #1) rested on the ideal truth/theological proposition that, "Love for a brother in Christ limits one's expression of Christian liberty." The preacher seeks an Interpretation (#2) of that theological truth. Then, and only then can the preacher consider how that theological truth Applies (#3) in a contemporary preaching context. The application(s) may be multiple depending on the most pressing concern related to the congregation, but consistent with the core theological principle. While I may be free to eat beef on Fridays, own a movie with a sex scene in it, and keep alcohol in my home, I will not do so at the risk of causing my Catholic brother to eat against his conscience or my teen-aged son to lust or my daughter to abuse alcohol.



Communication theory was providing me with concepts in support of a homiletical theory. I began to realize how these concepts might be adapted to a map of the expository process. It was as these concepts began to play out into a preaching model in my mind that I revisited one of my seminary textbooks, Robert A. Traina's *Methodical Bible Study: A New Approach to Hermeneutics*. Traina concluded that contemporary applications of the Bible must rest on "the universal elements of a passage . . . the universal truths . . . the timeless principles," not the "peripheral," but what

was “central and essential in nature.”¹⁶ It seemed that Traina had read *Ideas Have Consequences*. His hermeneutical concept of “Principle”¹⁷ fit well with Weaver’s, Wallace’s, and Bormann’s theories. I was certain the concept of “timeless principles,” by whatever designation, was the authoritative bridge between text and listener, but I was not certain how to detect them in any given text.

These ideas were still taking shape when I returned to my alma mater to teach homiletics in 1984. While the model the Pastoral Ministries Department was offering students still followed the E-H method, a new paradigm had taken shape in my mind. I would apply the concepts of the rhetorical and hermeneutical theorists to a homiletical model. I first presented the idea of a four-step “expositional process” to my fellow faculty members during the 1984-1985 school year. I suggested that we include a specific step between the exegetical and homiletical. Later in an article entitled, “A Paradigm for Preaching,” I proposed the following model.¹⁸

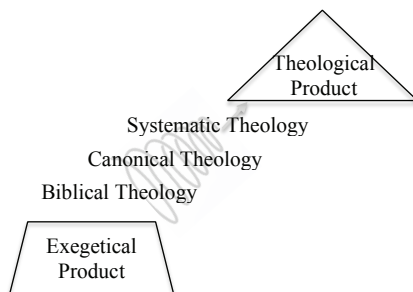


The new paradigm (model, map) of the expositional process sought to include the theological process and product as intentional elements. The exegetical, theological, and homiletical idea statements would be distinguished. The exegetical process would result in an exegetical product, the outline and proposition, and would be stated in terms of the original author and readers. The theological process would lead to a theological outline and proposition that would be stated in terms of a universal principle with the “ideal” reader/hearer in mind. This theological statement would not be, “a reading into the text of theological doctrines and theories, but a reading from the text of the fullness of meaning required by God’s complete revelation.”¹⁹ The homiletical process would lead to the sermon itself as delivered to specific listeners. A post-sermonic, revelational process would involve both the preacher and the listeners in thinking, feeling, and/or acting more in line with God’s revealed will, having heard the Word expounded.

The place where I sensed the most uncertainty with my model was in identifying the nature of the theological product and determining how to discover it. I suggested that the preacher/ theologian would first focus on

"biblical theology," by which I meant the theological worldview and message of the biblical author. Then, as a final theological consideration, the preacher / theologian would pass the proposed theological proposition through the grid of his systematic theology to insure that what he was proposing was within the scope of orthodoxy. As a result, my final theological product often tended to be quite abstract and overly general as in, "God loves sinners." After all, I had heard my homiletics professor suggest that there were only a few general principles in all of Scripture. They were just restated in different ways in different texts. Kuruvilla sees the same suggestion in Carson who, "reduces preaching to painting these big pictures every week – the same twenty-odd [biblical-theological] vistas."²⁰

In a later development of the theological process I suggested a three-stage process including biblical, canonical, and systematic considerations.²¹ Doing biblical theology constitutes the first move of the theological process.



Biblical theology seeks, by multiple readings through the text, to identify and interpret the author's world view by noting the author's use of God, Creation, God in relation to Creation, and Creation as it relates to other aspects of Creation along with any theological terms, allusions, motifs, themes expressed in a unit of meaning as they relate to the other units of a text (paragraph, section, book and/or author) within their own historical/authorial context.²²

Canonical theology seeks to discover the interconnections between previous manifestations of biblical theology and their counterparts as developed through the progress of revelation. It examines theological terms, allusions, motifs, themes and emerging patterns in terms of the entire and completed canon.

I saw a final move in the theological process testing and qualifying the theological message in a specific text against a system of theology as expressed in doctrines or dogma.

The preacher would undertake the three-stage theological process not so that all the passages on a particular theological theme might be included comprehensively in the sermon, but so that the various theological approaches might help the preacher conceptualize, shape, and express a

text's theological proposition. The goal was not to take the listeners through the theological process, but to discover and test the truth statement, the timeless, transcultural theological proposition, before preaching it with its particular implications and applications in a specific time and place.

My primary goal in offering this clarification of the theological process was to encourage preachers to come to a legitimate theological ground from where they could move to a relevant sermon. I hoped that my students would not seek to find their authority simply in the events recorded in the text, but in the theological principle expressed in the text.

I wanted to express the theological message of the text in a statement that was universal, yet not so abstract as to become disconnected from the passage that expressed them. Thus the too abstract, "Faith forgives," could better be stated, "Faith in God's sovereign position and power evokes forgiveness" (Gen. 50:15-21). The more specific statement incorporates the object and the content of Joseph's faith; concepts Moses would not want the reader to overlook.

When the theological proposition becomes too abstract two results follow: there is much repetition of the same concepts and the specific theological message of each preaching unit is lost. My colleagues, Tim Ralston, Ramesh Richard, and later Abe Kuruvilla, criticized my model because it so easily climaxed in theological abstractions that were too distant from the text. I was allowing abstract, systematic theology to dominate my theological proposition and disconnecting from the distinctive message of my preaching text.

As I continued to reflect on the role of theology in bridging the gap between the ancient text and the contemporary audience I found others who were writing along the same lines. In this next section I overview some of the works that most influenced my thinking. Although I found all of these discussions helpful, I noted the lack of theoretical grounding in most.

CONFIRMING THE CONCEPT

Over the next several years I discovered many authors who also identified a theological intermediary between the text and the sermon. Several of these are mentioned in the "Reference List" below. I refer here to a few who had particular influence on my thinking and, I believe, contributed significantly to the scholarly advance of the hermeneutical-homiletical process.

Walter Kaiser was explicit about the necessity of following the text to its theological claim. "Even in the text's historical particularity, it also carried in its very bosom an enduring plan of the everlasting God," so that, "If this informing theology was what made the text timeless and full of abiding values for the people in that day . . . then could not this same diachronic accumulation of theology provide the same heart of the message for all people in all times?"²³

I had noted the same sentiment in Allen Ross, who began with the presupposition that biblical narratives, “are highly developed and complex narratives that form theological treatises.”²⁴ He warned that, “The substance of the exposition must be clearly derived from the text so that the central idea unfolds in the analysis of the passage and so that all the parts of the passage may be interpreted to show their contribution to the theological idea.”²⁵ “Once the expositor demonstrates that the message is from the text, then the exposition [theology] will carry the authority it must have to be effective.”²⁶

Bryan Chapell stated that, “Each preachable unit of the Bible disclosures a Fallen Condition Focus, *The mutual human condition that contemporary believers share with those to or for whom the text was written that requires the grace of the passage.*”²⁷ For our every fallen condition instance there is a corresponding solution that is a “divine solution.”²⁸

I have concluded that Chapell’s “theme,” or better, “universal truth”²⁹ statement—which is different from both the FCF and the DS statements, though both are theological concepts—serves as the theological bridge between text and congregation. Note that he describes the sermon proposition as, “*The wedding of a universal truth based on the text [the theological proposition based on the one’s exegetical conclusions] with an application [homiletical proposition] based on the universal truth,*” and that, “A universal truth is the biblical principle derived from the sermon’s dominant text.”³⁰

Haddon Robinson continued to wrestle with how the gap between text and sermon is managed. His solution was to move from the particulars of the text to some level of generalization before journeying over to specific application for the contemporary listener. “I picture a ‘ladder of abstraction’ that comes up from the biblical world and crosses over and down to the modern setting.”³¹ Indeed, Robinson suggests that the preacher may, “Climb the ladder of abstraction a couple of levels until you reach the principle.”³² A definition of “principle” would be helpful at this point, but the closest we get to it is, “Sometimes, as I work with a text, I have to climb the abstraction ladder until I reach the text’s intent.”³³ Robinson implied that the text’s intent is something to be discovered by “abstracting up to God” or up to “the depravity factor”³⁴ in order to get to “a universal experience.”³⁵

It seems to me that Robinson intuitively understands that the journey up the abstraction ladder is somehow theological. Yet, he has not fully expressed the significance of the role theology plays in the expository process. His E-H model may imply a theological move in the form of a journey up and down the ladder of abstraction, but he has not identified it as an explicitly theological move. Additionally, Robinson’s generalizations do not necessarily reach the level of Weaver’s truth or center concepts. Rather, he seems to be seeking a practical means of moving to relevance while remaining within the realm of general orthodoxy. His thinking is helpful, but does not delve deeply into the kind of theology that aids the preaching in making that move.

Donald Sunukjian's *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* offers a Passage-Truth-Sermon movement.³⁶ Unfortunately Sunukjian's strategy for moving from the "passage" statements and outline to the "truth" statements and outline errs toward the minimalist. That transitional move consists of two adaptations: "Turn the historical statements into timeless, universal ones,"³⁷ by which he means abstracting from the specifics of the text to generalizations, and, "Put the outline concepts in the author's original thought order."³⁸ Doubtless these two changes are necessary, but the theological move is actually more complex and demanding.

FRESH DIRECTION

In a telling insight Paul Scott Wilson noted, "It may be significant that after a long hiatus, exegesis once again is a subject in textbooks in homiletics," then observed, "For some reason this is not the case in key homiletics books that are firmly in the evangelical camp." Evangelical homileticians have added little to the development of the preacher's hermeneutical understanding and skill. For the most part we have been content to repackage what has been said before rather than engage in advancing new theory.

That is why a contribution like Kuruvilla's *Privilege the Text!* is such a welcome addition to our homiletics libraries. He has grounded his development of "pericopal theology" in the academic arena of language theory. Such grounding helps to legitimize our homiletical theory and provides deeper, clarifying insights into what faithful preaching is and does. The rest of this piece will highlight several significant and theoretically grounded contributions of *Privilege the Text!*

WHAT TEXTS DO

Kuruvilla's goal is to allow the biblical text to do what it was intended to do. The Scriptures not only say, they do. In its portrayal of an ideal spiritual reality, the Bible invites, even compels, its readers to enter into and participate in that ideal realm, as in Bormann's rhetorical vision. "The text is not an end in itself, but the means thereto, an instrument of the author's action of employing language to project a transcending vision – what Ricoeur called the *world in front of the text*."⁴⁰

Drawing primarily on the writings of Paul Ricoeur and E. D. Hirsch, Kuruvilla first addresses:

. . . a crucial facet of *general* hermeneutics that renders a text capable of exerting its influence into the future. The pragmatic operation of language – what authors *do* with what they *say* – is particularly important for this capacity of texts to impact future readers. What authors are doing is projecting a *world in front of the*

text bearing an intention that is transhistorical, transcending the specific circumstances of the author and the writing; i.e., the text is given a future orientation, enabling valid application by readers at locations and times far removed from those of the event of inscription.⁴¹

The Bible is a “fixed” (permanent) speech act. In the writing of their texts the biblical authors were not only saying things (speech), they were also doing things (acts) that demanded a response from their readers. In its written form the Scripture continues both to say and to do. Kuruvilla draws from the insights of pragmatics and speech act theory – the study of how oral and written communication performs (saying, doing, affecting) – to demonstrate that although the Scripture has been “frozen” (preserved) and has become “emancipated” (distanced) from its authors, it still has the effect of compelling a response.

A simple example reveals the legitimacy of this conception of how language works. When my wife says, “The trash is full,” she is both saying something and doing something. She is stating a fact about the level of trash in the can, but she is also instructing me to take the trash out to the dumpster. Similarly, when the Bible says that God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, including mankind in His image, it is compelling its readers to inhabit, in Ricoeur’s conception, an ideal *world in front of the text* in which God rules over His creation and where everything proceeds as God desires, and to align themselves with that world’s priorities, precepts, and practices.⁴² “The text becomes an advocate for that world, recommending adoption by the reader.”⁴³

Because of the nature of this *world in front of the text* – its projection of an ideal reality – it communicates (says *and* does), “something universally relevant across the passage of time,”⁴⁴ so that, following Hirsch, “it is by a text’s projection of a world that bears a *transhistorical intention* that it achieves this futurity.”⁴⁵ Until the preacher grasps the pragmatic (doing) in addition to the semantic (saying) aspect of the text, he has no authoritative basis for moving to application. It is the future directed transhistorical intention expressed in the world in front of the text that carries authority for application. “As far as interpretation for preaching is concerned, the ‘point’ or thrust of a text is what the author was *doing* with what he was *saying* (the pragmatics of the utterance, or as we have seen the *world in front of the text* [WiFoT]). In response, the people of God derive valid application from grasping that author’s *doing*.”⁴⁶ Based on these concepts drawn from Hirsch’s theory, Kuruvilla proposes the following model.

Facets of Meaning			
Original Text Sense	Trans-Historical Intention: Author's Doing (WiFoT)	Exemplification (Valid Application)	Signification (Not Valid, but Appropriate Application)
"No drunkenness with wine"	"No drunkenness with alcohol"	"No drunkenness with vodka"	"Cancel subscription to <i>Wine Spectator</i> "
		Facets of Application	

When Kuruvilla speaks of a text's meaning he includes 1) the text's original sense or the semantic (saying) meaning, as well as 2) the world in front of the text (Ricoeur) or the transhistorical intention (Hirsch) or the pragmatic (doing) meaning, and, in addition, 3) the exemplification or valid application. Exemplification is considered part of the text's meaning because classics allow for a plurality of potential exemplifications, that is, valid applications that recontextualize the futuristic intentions residing in the world in front of the text. It is the "pragmatic 'surplus' of meaning that generates potential application"⁴⁷ out of the "richness of the ideal meaning."⁴⁸ Because the text is doing as well as saying, it demands a response. A plurality of exemplifications inherently reside within the text's doing. Valid applications carry authority because they are part of the text's meaning.

When Kuruvilla speaks of the application of a text he includes, following Hirsch, 1) exemplification (valid application) and 2) significance (not valid, but "appropriate" application). The world in front of the text, the transhistorical intention, carries forward into the future the challenge to respond to its portrayal of the ideal (theological) world. "The discernment of this projected world is therefore an essential task of the interpreter, for from this intermediary alone many valid applications may be derived."⁴⁹ Exemplifications are considered valid applications because, "they fall within the boundaries of the text's transhistorical intention,"⁵⁰ that "unchanging conceptual component of the text that creates a virtually infinite potential of exemplifications that may be realized in a myriad of future reading contexts."⁵¹ Significances, on the other hand, do not pass the test of validity because they, "are not part of textual meaning,"⁵² though they may be "appropriate" since they advocate "means of accomplishing the exemplification."⁵³ Exemplifications reside within the meaning of the text, while significances lie outside of meaning, but are nonetheless useful for preachers who, "suggest significances for application that move one toward accomplishment of the exemplification demanded by the text."⁵⁴

While texts on hermeneutics and homiletics have alluded to "what texts do," the concept generally lacks a scholarly defense. Kevin Vanhoozer

and Thomas Long provide a couple of happy exceptions. Vanhoozer, for example, has instructed, "Theological interpreters should ask not 'What actually happened?' but rather 'What is the author saying/doing with these words?'" because, "The theological interpreter describes what God, the divine author is doing in and through the works of the human authors."⁵⁵

Thomas Long's *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* also wades into how biblical texts work, immersing the reader in language theory. He asks, "Precisely what relationship does literary form have to what is typically called 'meaning' in biblical texts? When and how, in the process... should the literary dynamics of a text be taken into account? What is the connection between [such a process] and the more traditional approaches to biblical exegesis?" and then proposes, "To answer these questions, we must first examine the basic role form plays in human communication."⁵⁶ The real issue is, "How may the sermon, in a new setting, say and do what the text says and does in its setting?"⁵⁷ Both Vanhoozer and Long have engaged the theological and language theory literature, brining their insights into our understanding of the expositional process.

While some homileticians have made passing reference to what texts do (Adams, Craddock, Greidanus), they have not validated how it is that text's do. Kuruvilla, in contrast, has given a substantive theoretical basis for our seeking a text's theological message, a message that obligates the reader/hearer to respond to what the text is doing.

This theory of how language works, how it both says and does, demonstrates that the Bible carries in its very nature as a classic—with a theological component—the imperative of application. It projects an ideal world and compels the reader/listener to live/act in that world. It is in the preacher's appeal to this theological, ideal world projected in the text that he finds the authority for his sermon application(s).

PERICOPAL THEOLOGY

Kuruvilla has wrestled with what to call this theology which bridges between text and sermon. Systematic, biblical, and canonical theologies develop theological concepts that reach beyond the parameters of a single preaching text and often supersede the text's meaning. For lack of a better term Kuruvilla has chosen "pericopal" to categorize the nature of the theology that captures a particular text's world in front of the text or transhistorical intention:

Pericopal theology by definition is the theology specific to a particular pericope, representing a segment of the plenary world in front of the canonical text that portrays God and his relationship to his people, and which, bearing a transhistorical intention, functions as the crucial intermediary in the homiletical move from text to praxis that respects both the authority of the text and the

circumstances of the hearer.⁵⁸

Whether consisting of a paragraph from an epistle or an entire psalm or a single proverb or a distinct narrative, Kuruvilla classifies all coherent units of thought that comprise a preaching text as pericopes. His focus is on that portion of text that the preacher expounds upon during the gathering of a group of believers for worship and edification. He presumes that each preaching text, if it is wisely chosen, contains a theological message that contributes to the more comprehensive canonical theology projected in the entirety of the Bible. It is through the preaching of these texts that portray the fullness of the Bible's theological worldview that God's people are challenged to commit themselves anew to at least a portion of that plenary world in front of the text. "Thus, sermon by sermon, pericope by pericope, the various aspects of Christian life, individual and corporate, are effectively brought into alignment with the will of God."⁵⁹

Because each pericope seeks to project a unique segment of the plenary world in front of the text, that segment must be privileged.⁶⁰ Every biblical writer had a theological agenda. The theological message of each writer was distinct and each, pericope by pericope, contributed in its own way to a fully developed canonical world. For example, Mark and Peter viewed the cross as an act of submissive obedience to the call to discipleship, while John and Paul emphasized its atoning merit. While a comprehensive understanding of the cross requires a system of theology that incorporates all biblical perspectives, the preaching of a pericope demands that we privilege the theological message of that text, not transposing or transporting, for example, John's theology back onto Mark's.

Kuruvilla's challenge to "*Privilege the Text!*"—to honor the theologically unique message of every pericope—helps the preacher identify the level of theological generalization he must choose in order to cross over to contemporary application legitimately. Although biblical, canonical, and systematic theology should be considered in the process of interpreting a pericope, none of these kinds of theological statements are adequate to faithfully represent the theological message of a distinct pericope. Biblical, canonical, and systematic theology can help refine the specific theological contribution of a pericope and help keep one's conclusions within the boundaries of orthodoxy, but they cannot serve as the bridge between the text and the sermon. Only the theology unique to that pericope can serve that role. The theological idea/proposition/focus statement must represent that portion of the world in front of the text that any given text is addressing.

It is by means of this pericopal theology expressed in the privileged preaching text that the preacher bridges between text and sermon. "In biblical interpretation, it is the pericopal theology (transhistorical intention) that in its generalization encompasses every conceivable option of exemplification . . . and governs what may be considered valid and what may not, what is faithful to the original and what is not."⁶¹ It is Kuruvilla's notion of pericopal

theology that defines the nature of and limits the applicability of the bridging theology. This theology is discovered only through a theological exegesis that employs a close reading of the text to discover the textual clues that point to the theology of the pericope. Kuruvilla's example from 2 Samuel 11 and 12 attends closely to David's sending, lying, seeing, and punishment to glean the pericope's theological focus.⁶²

THE CHRISTICONIC GOAL

Once Kuruvilla established his theory of pericopal theology, grounding it in the world in front of the text with its transhistorical intention, he was able to address the question, "Where is Christ in this text?" in a new and more helpful way. It is through a proper understanding of what the text is doing that the interpreter/preacher can preach Christ without mutating every text into an evangelistic message.

The question is legitimate because of Luke's account in chapter 24, verses 27 and 44: "Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] interpreted to them the things written about himself in all the scriptures," and, "Then he said to them, 'These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms must be fulfilled'." Evangelical scholars do not debate whether Jesus was portrayed and prophesied as Christ in the Old Testament or even in all the major divisions of the Old Testament. The controversy is over whether every book, chapter, paragraph, or verse makes reference to Christ.

In answering that question some have tried to find Christ in every preaching unit. In fact, for some, if Christ is not in a particular portion, it is not worth preaching. For them, every Christian sermon will have Christ in it. This method is the christocentric approach. For example, Graeme Goldsworthy states, "I know it will not always be a simple matter to show how every text in the Bible speaks of the Christ, but that does not alter the fact that he says its does."⁶³ He then answers his own question, "Is it possible to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?"⁶⁴ with, "Why would you even want to try to preach a Christian sermon without mentioning Jesus?" This leads others to conclude that, "The Bible mandates preaching Christ in every sermon from every text."⁶⁵

Kuruvilla takes a different view of how the Bible presents Christ, concluding that, "The plenary text of Scripture projects an image (εἰκόν) of Christ, with each pericope portraying a facet of this image: what it means to be Christlike."⁶⁶ This contrasts with the christocentric approach that seeks some connection to the life of Christ (his birth, death, resurrection, etc.) in every sermon. Kuruvilla rejects the necessity asking the question, "How does this passage proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ?" He names Greidanus, Poythress, Clowney, Carson, Goldsworthy, and Mohler as modern proponents of, "Such biblical-theological transactions," in which,

“the specifics of the pericope being preached—the miniatures [of pericopal theology] —tend to get swallowed up in the capacious canvas of RH interpretation.”⁶⁷ Not every passage in the law, the prophets, and the psalms points to the redemptive-historical work of God in the person of Christ. But, Kuruvilla claims, all preaching texts do portray an attribute of the image of Christ.

“One may say that each pericope of the Bible is actually portraying a facet of Christlikeness, a segment of the image of Christ: what it means to fulfill the particular divine demand in that pericope after the manner of Christ. . . . and the Bible as a whole, the plenary collection of all its pericopes, canonically portrays the perfect humanity exemplified by Jesus Christ, God incarnate. So much so, the *world in front of the text* may even be considered to be an “image” (εἰκών, *eikōn*) of Christ.”⁶⁸ Kuruvilla’s proposal allows any text to stand on its own without forcing upon it some reference to Christ. His theory asserts that what the biblical authors are doing in each and every pericope is projecting some aspect of Christlikeness and inviting their readers/hearers to embrace that aspect of his image into their character.

A FINAL CHALLENGE

Kuruvilla’s contributions have been a long time coming and have come on the shoulders of others. That, of course, is what good scholarship does. It builds off what is known to describe and prescribe what has not yet been articulated. As members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society we can restate and even repackage what has been said before in many ways. I fear that is what most homiletics texts do. There is some benefit in that because every generation needs to hear the basic principles of expository preaching. Yet, we miss an opportunity if we do not also look more broadly and dig more deeply into the theory that grounds our field of study. Kuruvilla’s texts are dense, technical, scholarly, and sometimes difficult. They employ the language of the academy. Yet we need to become capable of engaging this level of theory making to avoid becoming anti-intellectual, to grant credibility to our theory, to better comprehend the concepts of homiletics, and to translate theory into practice. This kind of work is significant and necessary. We are busy, but also distracted, unfocused, and perhaps lazy. It takes energy to engage and dialogue. It takes courage to set our precious new theories before a critical academy. It takes discipline to read and research in other fields of study to seek insights into what we are about. But we must. Kuruvilla’s work should challenge every member of the Society to engage that practical and academic undertaking.

We must also engage our brothers and sisters who labor in the biblical and theological disciplines. We can remind them that the goal of their endeavors is not realized in the knowledge that is passed along in the classroom or through the bookstore. The goal of their endeavors is realized when the pastor speaks the words of God to the community of believers

gathered for renewal and conformation. We must convince our colleagues that their studies, too, must be practical and pastoral as well as soundly academic. We must keep climbing on each other's shoulders in order to prepare the preachers of today and tomorrow to invite God's people to Christlike maturity.

NOTES

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 27. Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Preaching: Redeeming the Expository Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994,) 4. See also, 2nd edition, 14, 304, 309 and Bryan Chapell, *Christ-Centered Sermons: Models of Redemptive Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), xvii.
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 30. *Ibid.*
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 33. *Ibid.*
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 36. Donald Sunukjian, *Invitation to Biblical Preaching: Proclaiming Truth with Clarity and Relevance* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2007), 27-28.
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THE PULPIT REBUKE: WHAT IS IT? WHEN IS IT APPROPRIATE? WHAT MAKES IT EFFECTIVE?

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ABSTRACT: The injunction, “preach the word” in 2 Tim. 4:2 urges the preacher to reprove and rebuke as well as exhort. Despite this clear directive, pulpit rebukes are rare. This essay notes the words in the semantic domain “rebuke” and then surveys biblical rebukes to clarify who is authorized to rebuke, and under what circumstances. Next, by observing how rebukes function in the New Testament, this paper affirms some criteria for pulpit rebukes and concludes with practical guidelines for administering them.

INTRODUCTION

The Apostle Paul solemnly directed Timothy:

I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim. 4:1-4).

He told Titus to “rebuke [the lying, evil, lazy, gluttonous Cretans] sharply, that they may be sound in the faith” (1:13). More generally, he said, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (2:15). This mandate is not restricted to apostolic delegates Timothy or Titus. Titus is to appoint elders for whom the capacity to rebuke is at the core of their qualifications: “He [i.e., each elder in every town] must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:9).

Rebuking, evidently, is integral to preaching the word both publicly and privately. Despite that, the rebuke is seldom listed in the subject index

of homiletics texts. Tim Chester and Marcus Honeysett, citing Titus 2:15, use the word “challenge” as a synonym for rebuke. “Ensure your preaching includes both comfort and challenge.”¹ Dever and Gilbert offer wise counsel on how to rebuke under the heading, “Giving Godly Criticism.”² These are exceptions that prove the rule. The rebuke’s comparative rarity as a subject matches its paucity as a practice. Preachers that I hear seldom if ever rebuke their listeners. They may steer clear of rebukes out of the fear of scolding the congregation, or even appearing to do so. As Alec Motyer says, “Between ourselves, I have heard some preachers who, to tell you the truth, I would as soon go twelve rounds with Muhammad Ali as be battered around the ears again by them. Our calling is not to bruise but to heal the Lord’s people!”³ Those who practice consecutive exposition of Scripture may get stuck in the original setting and not be adept at contextualizing its claims from the first hearers to contemporary ones. Another plausible reason preachers neglect the rebuke is that in large congregations, multi-site churches, or venues where sermons are broadcast or posted to the web, the preacher may not know the congregation well enough to rebuke them or reckon that the listeners do not know him (or her) well enough to *receive* the rebuke. Moreover, rebukes may have been supplanted by generalized cultural critiques of the kind so masterfully offered by Billy Graham whose influence as a model is incalculable. Whatever the root of this sin of omission, preachers who seldom faithfully apply an apt rebuke need to explore ways to realign their practice with the apostolic mandates. A valid starting point in that reformation is a working definition of the rebuke, one that helps us survey the biblical data. From there, we may usefully note biblical examples of rebukes. Finally, we will let this clarified definition of the rebuke and our review of Scripture suggest some biblically defensible criteria for the pulpit rebuke and move us to a renewed commitment to practice it in ways that are both appropriate and effective.

WHAT IS A REBUKE?

Not surprisingly, more than one New Testament word underlies the English word “rebuke.” Louw and Nida include six words in their semantic domain “rebuke”: ἐλέγχω [1. bring to light, expose, set forth, 2. convict, convince, point out 3. reprove, correct; discipline, punish] νοουθετέω, [admonish, warn, instruct], ἐπιτιμάω [rebuke, censure, warn], ἐπιπλήσσω [strike at, reprove, rebuke], ἐμβριμάομαι [scold, censure, warn sternly], and ὀνειδίζω [to reproach, revile, heap insults upon, or to reproach justifiably].⁴ Forms of two of these words, ἐλέγχω and ἐπιτιμάω, occur in 2 Tim 4:2 cited above, the former appearing also in 2 Tim 3:16 where it describes one of four ways Scripture is profitable in equipping the person of God for every good work. Büschel says of ἐλέγχω, “with accusative of person it means ‘to show people their sins and summon them to repentance,’ either privately (Matt 18:15) or congregationally (1 Tim 5:20)...”⁵ What distinguishes the words in

this semantic domain is that they address existing sins, not merely potential ones. This is a good working definition of the preached rebuke precisely because it is linked to preaching both contextually and linguistically. What the apostle affirms to be the nature and purpose of Scripture—it reproves or rebukes and corrects—should inform how biblical preachers expound it—to “reprove, rebuke and exhort” in the words of 2 Tim. 4:2. Stated this way, most evangelical preachers would acknowledge both the necessity and appropriateness of the pulpit rebuke. Listeners need rebukes because sin is deceitful, the devil is a liar, and left to themselves people tend to suppress the truth in unrighteousness. As we will see, not all rebukes should be administered from the pulpit, but some should be for reasons which will become clearer when we survey the Old and New Testament phenomena that the text describes with the word “rebuke.” That survey will enable us to develop a more complete definition and point to best practices by drawing attention to who does the rebuking and who deserves to receive it.

A PRELIMINARY SURVEY OF BIBLICAL REBUKES

In this section, all the verses where the word “rebuke” occurs in the ESV are quoted in full so that Scripture can speak for itself and readers can experience the impact of these utterances without having to look up the passages cited. Initial underlined side headings capture the conclusions drawn from the texts cited while words in italics describe how individual verses lead to those conclusions.

The LORD God himself rebukes

The LORD rebukes Satan. In a vision, Zechariah sees Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, “and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. And the LORD said to Satan, ‘The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?’” (Zechariah 3:1-2). “But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, was disputing about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a blasphemous judgment, but said, ‘The LORD rebuke you’” (Jude 1:9).

The LORD is said to rebuke nature, a figure of speech that conveys his authority over all creation. “Then the channels of the sea were seen; the foundations of the world were laid bare, at the rebuke of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils” (2 Samuel 22:16). “The pillars of heaven tremble and are astounded at his rebuke” (Job 26:11). “Then the channels of the sea were seen, and the foundations of the world were laid bare at your rebuke, O LORD, at the blast of the breath of your nostrils” (Psalm 18:15). “He set the earth on its foundations, so that it should never be moved. You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At your rebuke they fled; at the sound of your thunder they took

to flight" (Psalm 104:5-7). "He rebukes the sea and makes it dry; he dries up all the rivers; Bashan and Carmel wither; the bloom of Lebanon withers" (Nahum 1:4).

Sometimes these rebukes are integral to God saving his people. "He rebuked the Red Sea, and it became dry, and he led them through the deep as through a desert" (Psalm 106:9). God wants his people to know that he can save. "Why, when I came, was there no man; why, when I called, was there no one to answer? Is my hand shortened, that it cannot redeem? Or have I no power to deliver? Behold, by my rebuke I dry up the sea, I make the rivers a desert; their fish stink for lack of water and die of thirst" (Isaiah 50:2). *Sometimes God's rebukes of nature are pure mercy toward his covenant people.* "I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts" (Malachi 3:11).

God rebukes the nations. Speaking to God, the psalmist writes, "You have rebuked the nations; you have made the wicked perish; you have blotted out their name forever and ever" (Psalm 9:5). Sometimes the nations are personified as beasts. "Rebuke the beasts that dwell among the reeds, the herd of bulls with the calves of the peoples. Trample underfoot those who lust after tribute; scatter the peoples who delight in war" (Psalm 68:30). God is not intimidated by them. "The nations roar like the roaring of many waters, but he will rebuke them, and they will flee far away, chased like chaff on the mountains before the wind and whirling dust before the storm" (Isaiah 17:13).

Even when rebuking the nations, God's purposes are redemptive. "He who disciplines the nations, does he not rebuke? He who teaches man knowledge—the Lord knows the thoughts of man, that they are but a breath" (Psalm 94:10). Even his wrath is educational. "Thus says the LORD God: 'Because the Philistines acted revengefully and took vengeance with malice of soul to destroy in never-ending enmity, therefore thus says the LORD God, Behold, I will stretch out my hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the rest of the seacoast. I will execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I lay my vengeance upon them'" (Ezekiel 25:15-17). He often rebukes the nations for the sake of his people. "When they were few in number, of little account, and sojourners in it, wandering from nation to nation from one kingdom to another people, he allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account, saying 'Touch not my anointed ones, do my prophets no harm!'" (Psalm 105:14) Sometimes it works the other way around: he rebukes his people as a way of making them an object lesson for the nations. "You shall be a reproach and a taunt, a warning and a horror, to the nations all around you, when I execute judgments on you in anger and fury, and with furious rebukes—I am the LORD; I have spoken" (Ezekiel 5:15).

He also rebukes his own wayward covenant people. "Not for your

sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me" . . . "These things you have done, and I have been silent; you thought that I was one like yourself. But now I rebuke you and lay the charge before you" (Psalm 50:8, 21). These rebukes too are redemptive. Consider Isaiah 51:20-22. "Your sons have fainted; they lie at the head of every street like an antelope in a net; they are full of the wrath of the LORD, the rebuke of your God. Therefore hear this, you who are afflicted, who are drunk, but not with wine: Thus says your Lord, the LORD your God who pleads the cause of his people: 'Behold, I have taken from your hand the cup of staggering; the bowl of my wrath you shall drink no more; and I will put it into the hand of your tormenters, who have said to you, "Bow down, that we may pass over"; and you have made your back like the ground and like the street for them to pass over.'" "This is like the days of Noah to me: as I swore that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth, so I have sworn that I will not be angry with you, and will not rebuke you" (Isaiah 54:9).

God rebukes in words, and in actions. God is understood to be the source of rebukes mentioned passively or not directly attributed to another cause. "Thus says Hezekiah, This day is a day of distress, of rebuke, and of disgrace; children have come to the point of birth, and there is no strength to bring them forth. It may be that the LORD your God heard all the words of the Rabshakeh whom his master the king of Assyria has sent to mock the living God, and will rebuke the words that the LORD our God has heard; therefore lift up your prayer for the remnant that is left" (2 Kings 19:3-4. Cf., Is. 37:3-4). "If the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had not been on my side, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God saw my affliction and the labor of my hands and rebuked you last night" (Genesis 31:42). "David went out to meet [the men of Benjamin and Judah] and said to them, "If you have come to me in friendship to help me, my heart will be joined to you; but if to betray me to my adversaries, although there is no wrong in my hands, then may the God of our fathers see and rebuke you" (1 Chronicles 12:17). [The LORD our God] "allowed no one to oppress them; he rebuked kings on their account" (1 Chronicles 16:21).

Job counted on the LORD's rebuke. "He will surely rebuke you if in secret you show partiality" (Job 13:10). To be sure, not all difficulties are validly assigned to God. Elihu connects pain and God's rebuke in a way the book of Job ultimately does not affirm. "Man is also rebuked with pain on his bed and with continual strife in his bones" (Job 33:19). Asaph only belatedly realized that his assessment of his inner turmoil was faulty when he said, "For all the day long I have been stricken and rebuked every morning" (Psalm 73:14). Those who grasp that the LORD is rebuking them often plead with him to stay his hand. "O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath" (Psalm 6:1). "O LORD, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath!" (Psalm 38:1). There, by poetic parallelism, we learn that rebuke and discipline are closely related; God's strokes are for our good. We see the same idea in Psalm 39. "When you discipline a man

with rebukes for sin, you consume like a moth what is dear to him; surely all mankind is a mere breath!" (Psalm 39:11)

God rebukes individuals for their sins including tampering with, mishandling, or disregarding his word. "Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him. Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar" (Proverbs 30:5-6). To the priests who were charged with speaking for him but failed to do so he said, "Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it" (Malachi 2:3). "You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments" (Psalm 119:21). He could use unconventional means when necessary. "[B]ut [Balaam] was rebuked for his own transgression; a speechless donkey spoke with human voice and restrained the prophet's madness" (2 Peter 2:16).

Ultimately, God's rebukes redound to his glory. "Glorious are you, more majestic than the mountains of prey. The stouthearted were stripped of their spoil; they sank into sleep; all the men of war were unable to use their hands. At your rebuke, O God of Jacob, both rider and horse lay stunned" (Psalm 76:6). The same idea is conveyed by Psalm 80:16 when read in its wider context. "They have burned it with fire; they have cut it down; may they perish at the rebuke of your face!" Notice also Isaiah 66:15-16 that speaks of the final judgment which is as broad as God's authority. "For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to render his anger in fury, and his rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by his sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many."

The Lord Jesus rebukes nature, demons, and people

Like his Father, *Jesus sometimes rebukes nature.* "And he said to [his disciples], 'Why are you afraid, O you of little faith?' Then he rose and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm" (Matthew 8:26). See parallels in Mark 4:39 and Luke 8:24. "And they went and woke him, saying, 'Master, Master, we are perishing!'" And he awoke and rebuked the wind and the raging waves, and they ceased, and there was a calm." Luke 4:39 adds another example. "And he stood over her and rebuked the fever, and it left her, and immediately she rose and began to serve them."

Jesus rebuked demons, sometimes even forbidding them to speak the truth about his identity. "And Jesus rebuked the demon, and it came out of him, and the boy was healed instantly" (Matthew 17:18). "But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'" (Mark 1:25). "And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again'" (Mark 9:25). "And demons also came out of many, crying, 'You are the Son of God!'" But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ" (Luke 4:41). See

also Luke 9:42: "While he was coming, the demon threw him to the ground and convulsed him. But Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the boy, and gave him back to his father."

Jesus rebuked James and John for wanting to call down fire on a Samaritan village whose residents did not receive him because his face was set toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:55). On the other hand, he declined to rebuke his disciples for praising him as the coming King who comes in the name of the Lord. "And some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, rebuke your disciples.' He answered, 'I tell you, if these were silent, the very stones would cry out'" (Luke 19:39-40).

People rebuke each other, sometimes appropriately, sometimes not; sometimes privately, sometimes publicly.

Jacob rebuked Joseph as recorded in Genesis 37:10. "But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, 'What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?'" Boaz instructed his laborers not to rebuke Ruth for gleaning extra sheaves. "And also pull out some from the bundles for her and leave it for her to glean, and do not rebuke her" (Ruth 2:16).

God rewards those who issue a deserved rebuke. Proverbs 24:25 says, ". . . but those who rebuke the wicked will have delight, and a good blessing will come upon them."

A withheld rebuke reveals a false prophet's inconsistency. "Now why have you not rebuked Jeremiah of Anathoth who is prophesying to you?" (Jeremiah 29:27)

Matthew 16:22 records how when Jesus announced that he would be rejected and killed, amazingly, Peter rebuked the Lord Jesus. "And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, 'Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you.'" Jesus then rebuked Peter and clarified why he was in the wrong. "But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me, Satan! For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man'" (Mark 8:33).

On another occasion Jesus' disciples had to be corrected for a misplaced rebuke when children were brought to him. "Then children were brought to him that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, 'Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of God'" (Matthew 19:13). See also Luke 18:15.

Two blind men who cried out to Jesus for help were rebuked by a crowd. "The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, 'Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!'" Jesus heard their cry and healed them (Matthew 20:31). Mark 10:48 and Luke 18:39 are parallels.

Jesus actually commands his disciples to rebuke one another in Luke

17:3. "Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him,"

One dying thief rebuked another: "But the other rebuked him, saying, 'Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?'" (Luke 23:40). When instructing Timothy how to handle the specific case of older men where a rebuke may seem to be called for, he says, "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father" (1 Timothy 5:1). With regard to elders, he writes, "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (1 Timothy 5:20).

2 Timothy 4:2, as we have already seen, provides the impetus for this essay. There Paul clearly links preaching and rebuking. "Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching."

As we have seen, Titus 1:9 includes the rebuke as an essential practice of elders who must be qualified to do it, and places sound instruction alongside it. "He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it."

Paul instructs Titus with regard to reportedly evil, lying, lazy, gluttonous Cretans, "This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith (Titus 1:13).

Titus 2:15 also links rebuking to authoritative preaching. "Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you."

Human willingness to speak rebukes and receive them varies. It is the essence of wisdom to receive valid rebukes.

Psalms 38:13-14 adds an interesting twist. "But I am like a deaf man; I do not hear, like a mute man who does not open his mouth. I have become like a man who does not hear, and in whose mouth are no rebukes." God's rebuke fell heavily on the psalmist and reduced him to silence, to the muteness of the deaf. The rebukes in the last line of this couplet may convey the idea of rejoinders, self-vindicating responses to the human enemies who take advantage of David's vulnerability, smarting as he is under God's rebuke. David's turn to God as his only refuge from God's rebuke is a way of breaking his silence and is an instructive example for God's people.

The wise receive rebukes from the upright and see their life-giving intent. "Let a righteous man strike me—it is a kindness; let him rebuke me—it is oil for my head; let my head not refuse it" (Psalm 141:5a). The proverbs and Ecclesiastes set forth contrasts related to rebukes. Together they offer wisdom concerning giving and receiving rebukes. "A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke" (Proverbs 13:1). "A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than a hundred blows into a fool" (Proverbs 17:10). "Better is open rebuke than hidden love"

(Proverbs 27:5). “Whoever rebukes a man will afterward find more favor than he who flatters with his tongue” (Proverbs 28:23). “It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools” (Ecclesiastes 7:5).

SUMMARY OF THE DATA SO FAR

A few warranted conclusions emerge from this preliminary survey of the lexical data. God is free to rebuke anything or anyone in his creation. He does so for the glory of his name and the good of his people and no one can find fault with his words or works of rebuke. His rebukes of sins of commission are also, implicitly, rebukes of the sin of unbelief, a sin of omission. Jesus, God’s unique Son, shares these prerogatives. The rest of us, God’s other, imperfect, image-bearers including those called to speak on God’s behalf as preachers, must sometimes rebuke fellow humans even publicly when to do so reflects God’s love, mind, and will and guards or affirms his truth, holiness, and glory. Not all human-to-human rebukes are justified, and some that are deserved are ill timed or are delivered imperfectly.

AFFIRMATIONS CONCERNING REBUKES ROOTED IN A CLOSER LOOK AT THE PRACTICE IN SCRIPTURE

Clearly, there are rebukes in Scripture that are not labeled as such, so our survey of the data must now extend to include some of those. The natural question that we now pursue is how we who speak for God in the congregation can rebuke others in ways that are not only obedient to our calling as preachers, but also justified, appropriate, and fruitful. To answer that question, we offer the following assertions with scriptural examples to support them. In what follows, I assume that the examples provided by the Lord Jesus and apostles, unless their respective roles plainly state or imply otherwise, are included in the canon at least in part because they are exemplary. I also assume that dictates given by the biblical writers to Timothy, Titus, and others are directly applicable to us. When referring to examples from the epistles, I agree with James W. Thompson who, following Ricoeur, argues that Paul’s epistles may validly be treated as “a legitimate model for our own preaching.” Even though we do not replicate the precise cultural forms the ministry of the word took in the first century, what is true of biblically recorded rebukes—both public and private—needs to inform our contemporary practice.

Rebukes are to be an expression of love.

This truism is grounded in the very nature of God. “My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves him whom he loves as a father the son in whom he delights” (Prov.

3:11). Ephesians 5:1-21 reaffirms this by both precept and example. Beginning with the exhortation to “be imitators of God,” Paul exhorts his listeners to walk in love, following Christ’s example. He then spells out several ethical accompaniments of love and their opposites. These ungodly traits and practices he says are to be *exposed*. “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (5:11). Exposing sin is the work of the rebuke. Paul goes on to practice what he preaches, calling attention to the debauchery of drunkenness and enjoining its alternative, being filled with the Holy Spirit (5:15-21). He explains in 2 Cor. 2:4 that the painful letter he had to write earlier was written “out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.” Nor did he want his letters to frighten his listeners (2 Cor. 10:9).

Rebukes, broadly speaking, address two kinds of waywardness: faulty beliefs and unacceptable behavior.

There are multiple strategies for rooting them out, as we will see, but there is value at the outset in noting that zeal of God’s glory and love for his people move apostolic and pastoral leaders to address both maladies because they are often intertwined. For instance, in 1 Tim. 6:2c-5 Paul instructs Timothy:

Teach and urge these things. If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

Paul instructs Timothy to address heresy and patently unbiblical behavior, because both are contrary to the truth as it is in Jesus and therefore are harmful not merely to the individuals who believe the false doctrine or live in ways they could not have learned from Christ (Eph. 4:17-20), but also, when allowed to continue, they injure the church, the Body of Christ. When such rebukes are administered publicly, they function not merely to turn some from these sins, but also to help others to avoid them in the first place.

Rebukes are not the only kind of corrective speech in the Bible.

This is where the range of words used and variety of biblical examples help us nuance our preliminary observations. For instance, Paul says, “I *appeal* to you brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that

all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you" 1 Cor. 1:10. The sin of divisiveness is met with an appeal for agreement. He confessedly prefers the appeal to the command in his efforts to reconcile Onesimus and Philemon (Philemon 1:8-10). Even in his shame-based culture, Paul could write "I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to *admonish* you as my beloved children" (1 Cor. 4:14; cf. Acts 20:31). To be sure, he was not unwilling to evoke shame when necessary (1 Cor. 6:5; 15:34). He could also *urge* listeners (1 Cor. 4:16; 16:15; Eph. 4:1; 1 Thess. 4:11), *reason* with them (1 Cor. 10:14-15), *plead* with them, *offer himself as a counter example* of their unacceptable behavior (1 Cor. 10:31-33), *ask searching questions* (1 Cor. 6:5-7; Gal. 3:1-6; 5:7), *express astonishment* (1 Cor. 6:8; Gal. 1:6), *exhort* (1 Cor. 6:18), *charge* (1 Cor. 7:10), *remind* (1 Cor. 15:1). These last two practices are explicitly transferable. He urges Timothy to remind and charge those in his care at Ephesus (2 Tim. 2:14). He could *cajole*, saying, "I speak as to children" (2 Cor. 6:13). He could *entreat* by the meekness and gentleness of Christ (2 Cor. 10:1; Gal. 4:12). He could *play the fool* to make others look foolish (2 Cor. 11-12). He expresses fatherly concern that he might have to mourn over unrepentant sin (2 Cor. 12:21), and threatens disciplinary action (13:2), and makes his spiritual children's behavior a matter of prayer (13:7-9). Indeed reporting the content of his prayers at some length was an effective way of communicating the beliefs and behavior he sought to foster (Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-13). He could *warn* his spiritual children of possible dangers (Phil. 3:2; Col. 2:8, 16, 18-19; 1 Thess. 4:6-8; 2 Thess. 2:3) and made it his stated objective to do so in the context of proclamation (Col. 1:28). Paul does not hesitate to *threaten* (Gal. 5:1) or even *anathematize* (1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8-9) when the grievance threatens the essence of the gospel. He expected the Lord to repay the great harm done him by Alexander the coppersmith who opposed the gospel, and whom he apparently deemed beyond reclamation by a rebuke (2 Tim. 4:14). He even used the visual aid of shaking out his garments as he said to those who opposed and reviled him, "Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent" (Acts 18:6). Characteristically, Paul explains things thoroughly, placing a solid gospel foundation under godly living, and points toward righteous alternatives to the ideas or behaviors he considers to be out of step with the Spirit. *Ephesians* models this strategy well. Often, his words *affirm* his listeners' obedience as a starting point for further obedience (1 Thess. 4:1-2, 10; 2 Thess. 5:11). In his incomplete testimony before the Jerusalem mob as recorded in Acts 21:37—22:21 Paul could even describe himself before his conversion as "being zealous for God as all of you are this day" (22:3). Paul skillfully lets Scripture itself indirectly rebuke his listeners by quoting Is. 6:9-10 in Acts 28:26-27. He affirms that in Isaiah's words the Holy Spirit is speaking directly to his listeners' fathers whose unwillingness to hear God's word freed Paul to turn to the Gentiles. In effect, Paul is inviting his listeners to consider whether these words also describe them. So, Paul clearly had a range of tools in his toolbox to move beloved friends toward right doctrine and godly living. He used the ones best tailored to the needs

of those addressed. He not only used the tools but urged others to use them thoughtfully too. "And we urge you brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all" (1 Thess. 5:14).

Rebukes in the New Testament reflect this bias toward gracious speech, but sometimes a sharp rebuke is the most gracious approach. For instance, in the context of correcting faulty ideas about the resurrection, the Apostle Paul does not hesitate to utter as stinging rebuke: "Wake up from your drunken stupor, as is right, and do not go on sinning. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame" (1 Cor. 15:34). As always, the apostle is alert to the corrosive impact of sin not merely on the stupefied sinner but also upon others who may be watching. Inflicting emotional pain on the one rebuked is justified when it produces the godly grief that leads to repentance (2 Cor. 7:8-13).

James skillfully develops his exhortation to "show no partiality" by means of a hypothetical situation where two worshippers, very differently clothed, are also treated differently. The rhetorical questions that follow the scenario are increasingly direct and address listeners to effect repentance (James 2:1-7). This comparatively soft touch appears elsewhere in his letter. For instance, James 3:10 says "From the same mouth comes blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so." Once again, rhetorical questions follow to drive home the point. The rebuke of worldliness in James 4:1-10 contains the same elements but is significantly more forceful, calling his listeners "You adulteress people!" The diatribe against the rich in James 5:1-6 employs vivid images to dramatize the seriousness of the offense and the wholeheartedness of the repentance it calls for.

Perhaps the most fruitful rebukes in the New Testament come from the mouth of Peter. Twice in the Pentecost sermon Peter unambiguously lays blame for Jesus' crucifixion squarely at the feet of his listeners, even though in one of the two instances he says they did it "through the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23, 36). His hearers were cut to the heart and asked what they could do. Peter invited them to repent and be baptized and three thousand did so. Peter's words in Acts 3:13-15, 19 similarly blame those present for killing the Author of life and offer them the forgiveness that comes with repentance. Those who repented on that occasion brought the total to some five thousand men (Acts 4:4). When on trial for the healing recorded in Acts 3, Peter levels the same charges of rejecting and crucifying Jesus (Acts 4:10-11). The same pattern reappears in Acts 5:30-31. (Stephen, who begins his recitation of Israel's history in a conciliatory way, addressing his listeners as "brothers and fathers," ends much as Peter did, holding his hearers accountable for betraying and murdering Jesus [Acts 7:52]. Like Peter he feels free to do so because underlying their actions was a clear rejection of God's mediated word [7:53]). When Ananias and Sapphira conspired to lie to the Holy Spirit, Peter levels his charge at Ananias in the form of questions, followed by a clear rebuke, "You have not lied to man but to God" (Acts 5:3-4). Sapphira had a similar opportunity to repent and failed the test as

spectacularly as did her husband.

Later in the New Testament, when Peter urges wives to submit to their husbands and husbands to live with their wives according to knowledge (1 Peter 3:1-7), it is not clear whether he is supplying positive teaching on marital interactions because he imagines that marriages in Asia Minor fell radically short of the Christian ideal, or if he had received a report that this was a known problem in the churches that needed to be addressed. The same could be said of his exhortation to elders and others in chapter 5. So when we come to his second letter—which I take to be Petrine also—the rebuke of false teachers that occupies the whole of chapter two shows us how Peter feels when he is certain that false teachers will appear (2:2) even if they have not done so yet. His language is vivid and forceful employing multiple biblical examples and allusions, and rich word pictures. He describes false teachers as bold, willful, irrational animals, ignorant blasphemers who revel in their deceptions, insatiable for sin, lovers of gain from wrongdoing, waterless springs, slaves of corruptions, culpably worse off than before conversion, dogs returning to their own vomit, and sows wallowing in the mire. Clearly the dangers to the church that Peter excoriates are both ethical and doctrinal and the two are inseparable as are sins of commission and omission. Those he rebukes profess faith but do not demonstrate its fruit. In my judgment, this counts as a pulpit rebuke, public as it is. Like other public rebukes, it has value for those who are not—or are not yet—guilty as charged. They see the seriousness of sin and ideally are moved to avoid it at all costs. Jude alerts his readers to these dangers with similarly rich language. His letter ends with a redemptive entreaty: “And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh” (Jude 1:22-23).

The Apostle John also takes the pre-emptive approach: “My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin” (1 John 2:1). He writes to those who know the truth (2:20-21), “about those who are trying to deceive you” (2:26). 3 John 1:9-10 rebukes Diotrephes for his self-advancing stance, for speaking against John, for his unwillingness to acknowledge apostolic authority, and his unwarranted acceptance of the heterodox as opposed to true brothers. The latter he expels from the church for their practice of hospitality. Not only does John detail Diotrephes’s shortcomings in this letter, he promises to do so *in person* if and when he has the opportunity. Once again, we see the focused rebuke as providing a wider benefit to the church.

The letters to the churches recorded in Rev. 2-3, coming as they do from the risen and ascended Lord Jesus, provide exemplary rebukes. Jesus declares his motivation: “Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent” (Rev. 3:19). The letters usually begin with some expressed or tacit acknowledgement of the circumstances of the church being addressed. This may be followed by a word of encouragement for faithfulness manifested. In the case of Sardis and Laodicea, Christ professes to know their

works which, in the case of Sardis, do not match the church's reputation, and, in the case of Laodicea, are lukewarm. In the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira, a phrase like "but I have this against you" is followed by a warning of judgment for that sin, and a call to repentance together with a promise to those who persevere and obey. Significantly, in three churches—Pergamum, Thyatira and Sardis—Jesus distinguishes between the faithful and unfaithful who will hear this letter. He goes out of his way not to rebuke the innocent with the guilty, saying "I do not lay on you any other burden" (Rev. 2:24).

Some rebukes should be administered privately; others publicly

According to Matthew 18:15-20, a sinned-against individual should privately bring his or her grievance to the attention of the alleged offender. If the person so accused does not listen to the complaint, one or two others should be enlisted to determine the facts of the matter. Only then, if necessary, does the case go before the church. The text leaves unstated when the alleged sinner is actually rebuked, but the implication seems to be that the whole undertaking is aimed at repentance and restoration. When the apostle Paul entreats members of the Philippian church, Euodia and Syntyche, to agree in the Lord (Phil. 4:2), and enlists his true yokefellow to help them obey the injunction, his implied rebuke of their *disagreement* could scarcely have been more public. Elders, having met the qualification of being above reproach (Titus 1:6, 7), are to be honored if they rule well, and those elders who labor in the word and teaching are to be accorded double honor. That honor is presumably public. Correspondingly, accusations against them must be substantiated by additional witnesses. Those who are judged to be guilty of sin and persist in it are to be rebuked very publicly so that "the rest may have fear" (1 Tim. 5:17-22). The function of the rebuke thus includes deterrence as well as correction. These rebukes do not seem to be part of the regular ministry of the word, despite the fact that they occur when the whole congregation is present. Although the text is silent concerning precisely how and when these rebukes should be administered, it seems likely that this disciplinary function is separate from the ministry of the word.

The letter to the Galatians is an example of a very public rebuke of an entire congregation who are "so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel" (1:6). Paul not only rebukes and seeks to correct the whole church, he reports that he rebuked Peter "to his face" (2:11). He did this "before them all" (2:14). His rebukes are forceful and make the most of rhetorical questions. "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?" (2:14) "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (3:1) See also questions in 1:10, 2:17, 3:2-6, 3:19, 21, 4:15, 16, 21, 30, 5:7, 11 that expose the folly of this opponents' position or advance the logic of Paul's. [This technique reflects the Lord Jesus' use of convicting questions that simultaneously teach

the truth (Matt.15:2; 26:40)]. Paul reasons with the Galatians as a father might with a wayward child, and like such a father is aware that in the medium of writing his tone may sound too harsh. "I wish I could be present with you now and change my tone, for I am perplexed about you" (Gal. 4:20).

Rebukes are not aimed at the world, the culture, or the church in general, but are directed toward those present who are or might be guilty of sin that can be repented of or doctrinal deviations that can be renounced.

To be sure, John the Baptist could level corporate rebukes, calling his unbelieving contemporaries a brood of vipers (Matt. 3:7). He also courageously and repeatedly rebuked the powerful Herod (Matt. 14:14). Both of these recipients, it should be noted, were spoken to as part of the Jewish household of faith. Paul is realistically alert to toxic doctrinal and behavioral environments within and around the church (2 Tim. 3:1-9, 13). Yet, in that case, instead of rebuking the perpetrators, he counsels the godly to avoid them. In a statement apparently intended to clarify who he was rebuking, Paul writes, "For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you" (1 Cor. 5:12-13). Elsewhere, he clearly expresses his antipathy to enemies of the gospel in 1 Thess. 2:14-16, but in Philippians 1:15, he is less agitated when the gospel itself is not compromised but only others' motives for preaching the truth are questionable. He tells Titus that certain doctrinal deceivers should be silenced (Titus 1:10-11). His prescribed antidote in Crete is the sharp rebuke to be administered by Titus (Titus 1:13). In these and many other cases, the New Testament writers warn the faithful but do not directly rebuke the wayward. Perhaps, this is the apostolic application of Proverbs 9:8-9: "Do not reprove a scoffer or he will hate you; reprove a wise man and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning." Hebrews 5:11-14 is a good example of a general rebuke, applicable to all the hearers of this letter. Here the author says of them that they had become dull of hearing. By this time they should have become teachers but instead need remedial instruction. This was the case despite his listeners' commendable track record of serving the saints (6:10). There are apparently some occasions where a generalized assessment is warranted and for which the way of repentance can be spelled out. That fact leads to our next assertion.

Rebukes, when necessary, are more likely to be received when expressed in the context of a preacher's positive aspirations for listeners that reflect God's ambitions for them.

Paul's stated aim in sending Timothy to Thessalonica was "to establish and exhort you in your faith" (1 Thess. 3:2). Paul himself longed to come in person to "supply what is lacking in your faith" (1 Thess. 3:10). Paul told the church in Ephesus through Timothy that he wanted them to know

how to behave in the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). He even described his aim in visiting the Corinthians again as affording “a second experience of grace” (2 Cor. 1:15). It is clear that his exasperation with the Galatians notwithstanding, Paul wanted them to experience the freedom that was theirs in Christ and to be able to manifest the fruit of the Spirit against which there is no law.

Rebukes spoken by church leaders carry more weight than those of others and are intended to do so.

Paul exhorted Titus, “Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you” (Titus 2:15; cf. 1 Tim. 4:11). This fact underscores the importance of neither claiming authority for pulpit rebukes that are not warranted by Scripture, nor being reticent to rebuke sin and heresy where they clearly exist.

INTENTIONAL PULPIT REBUKES: FOLLOW THE EXAMPLES OF BIBLICAL WRITERS

How, then should we improve the ways we administer justified pulpit rebukes? Given all these biblical injunctions and examples, it should not surprise us that pulpit rebukes are one of the ways we serve the word by letting it do the transforming work God designed it to do. These New Testament practices and directives provide the starting place for practical guidelines. The Westminster divines advised:

In dehortation, reprehension, and publick admonition (which require special wisdom), let him [that is, the preacher], as there shall be cause, not only discover the nature and greatness of the sin, with the misery attending it, but also show the danger his hearers are in to be overtaken and surprised by it, together with the remedies and best way to avoid it.

Take seriously the biblical injunction to rebuke false teaching and ungodly behavior. What the apostles did and instructed others to do should neither be neglected nor disregarded by contemporary preachers. If our preaching is to effect transformation, rebukes are not optional extras but integral to serving the word and serving our listeners. For good to overcome evil in the lives of our hearers they must be recognize what is evil and turn from it. We who preach should examine our own preaching to assess whether we neglect clear rebukes in the text and seek discernment concerning the root of this deficit.

Rebuke privately first whenever you can; rebuke publicly only—and always—when you must. In some cases, the pulpit rebuke is the last resort. If you have reason to suspect unrepentant sin, go to the individual privately to

discover the unshakable facts of the case and implore the sinner to repent. If that fails, take it to the church. In other cases, where the sin is more widespread and less well recognized, address it from the pulpit in the confidence that the Holy Spirit can shine a light into the hearts of your hearers and dispel the darkness there. Sinners can repent and the tempted will be warned. Micah's searing rebuke of both rulers and prophets recorded in Micah 3:1-12 is worth careful meditation for it exemplifies the courage, vividness, specificity and logic of the pulpit rebuke. Especially searching for those called to speak for God is the warning that those who persist in the besetting sins listed can expect no further word from God.

Rebuke publicly whatever genuinely threatens the purity of the gospel. This will not only affirm the seriousness of guarding the gospel but will also warn the congregation of doctrinal dangers and denounce those who hold and teach errant doctrines. The frequency and fervor of doctrinal correction in the New Testament should light a fire under us who preach, kindling our zeal to guard the gospel. Conferring with godly, praying elders before you issue a pulpit rebuke can help you avoid merely riding theological hobbyhorses or taking up popular culture war causes.

When possible, affirm good behavior before you rebuke sin (1 Cor. 11:2, 17; 1 Thess. 4). This is not merely psychologically wise; it affirms that God is at work in those to whom you must now offer correction. This fosters faith, from which all gospel obedience flows (Rom. 1:5, 16:26).

Use the full range of rhetorical devices Scripture employs when it records public rebukes. For instance, Paul could create a hypothetical opponent and then sternly call that person a fool (1 Cor. 15:35-36). For some preachers seemingly everything in Scripture can be turned into a rebuke or a command. Instead, our preaching should reflect what the expounded pericope is doing and so reflect the balance of Scripture. Spell out the consequences of sustained disobedience or false teaching and the benefits or repentance (e.g. 1 Cor. 11:27-32). Scripture itself supplies ways to move people toward Christlikeness. Paint a clear picture of the two paths and where each leads (Psalm 1; Deuteronomy 27-28).

Tailor your corrective speech to the circumstances of your listeners. "Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:1). This directive, initially written to Timothy, a comparatively young man, should encourage younger preachers who feel they have no business rebuking their elders. It would be more accurate to say that none of us—whatever our age—have any business being haughty or self-righteous when we rebuke anyone and special care must be taken when we feel compelled to point out the sins or errors of our elders. The very fact that Paul includes instructions concerning how to rebuke older people implies that Timothy was to do so. It seems that the sort of rebuke envisioned here is individual and private. Timothy may not yet have had a fellow elder to accompany him; hopefully we do.

Model grace, wisdom, and love when you rebuke. Accusation is the devil's work; rebuking is what we do lovingly to turn people from their sins. Anger at sin is not the same thing as being indignant when someone else's sin puts them on a collision course with your own desires (Matt. 20:24). Distinguish carefully between what annoys you and what God himself finds offensive; bearing with the former and rebuking the latter. Preachers are sometimes tempted to abuse their status and its privileges to promote their own agendas and give vent to their personal and professional frustrations. Pre-test pulpit rebukes with your spouse, a trusted friend or wise elders. Invite the Lord to wash you with his word and examine your own heart. Put yourself in the shoes of both guilty and not-guilty listeners to feel how they might receive such a rebuke. Let the tone and wording of your rebuke reflect the text you are preaching. If we inappropriately soften a rebuke by a thousand qualifications, when the text itself is forthright, we do our listeners no service. If we harshly scold them when our text entreats them gently, we fail to reflect our heavenly Father's tender mercies.

When you rebuke others, watch yourself. Administer rebukes with a spirit of gentleness and caution, lest you be tempted either to fall into the same snare or to feel superior to the one ensnared, or even to make yourself look better by comparison (Gal. 6:1). Imitate Christ in simultaneously being above reproach and bearing the reproach of others. David bore the reproach that sinners directed toward the Lord (Ps. 69:9). Paul attributes to Christ this posture of not pleasing oneself (Rom. 15:3) and exhorts believers to take up the same attitude (Rom. 15:1). A good reputation with outsiders is to be the elder's protection against disgrace and the devil's trap (1 Tim 3:7). The only reproach or disgrace we should experience is the reproach we experience for identification with Christ (Heb. 10:33; 11:26; 13:13).

Rely on God himself to work the sanctifying changes needed (2 Thess. 1:11-12; 3:16; 1 Thess. 3:11-12; 5: 23-24; Matt. 11:25-27). Your skill as a preacher in crafting and delivering a pulpit rebuke will never carry the day, but God has committed himself to go to work in believers when we speak his word on his behalf to them (1 Thess. 2:13).

CONCLUSION

Biblical preachers speak for God and are called therefore to do so in ways that reflect his speech. That speech includes lovingly and therefore firmly rebuking those who sin or stray. The transforming work of God's word, by his Spirit through preachers, will be less transformative than God intends when those who speak for God neglect to rebuke their listeners for their good. How preachers do this effectively need not be a mystery since we have multiple examples to follow, beginning with God himself. Those who learn from these rebukes in Scripture and prayerfully restore this practice to its proper place will move toward greater faithfulness as preachers and do more good to their listeners and churches.

POSSIBLE FUTURE RESEARCH

An empirical study of representative sermons coded by NVivo or some other means could track pulpit rebukes historically and culturally to discern to what extent they are missing or muted and explore possible reasons why this is the case.

NOTES

1. Tim Chester and Marcus Honeysett, *Gospel-Centered Preaching: Becoming the Preacher God wants you to be* (Epsom, Surrey: Good Book Company, 2014), 106.
2. Mark Dever and Greg Gilbert, *Preach: Theology Meets Practice* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 133-135.
3. Alec Motyer, *Preaching? Simple Teaching on Simply Preaching* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2013), 96.
4. Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida eds. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament based on Semantic Domains*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1988, 1989), 436-437; definitions from BDAG via BibleWorks).
5. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged in one volume by Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 222. emphasis added.
6. See also Luke 4:35, 41.
7. See also Mark 8:32.
8. James Thompson, *Preaching Like Paul: Homiletical Wisdom for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 16.
9. This is not unlike Stephen's speech in Acts 7 that began with affirming language before becoming more confrontational.
10. Dever and Gilbert, 51.



ON BEING LIKE EZRA WHEN I GROW UP

KEN LANGLEY

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Nehemiah 3:1-12

INTRODUCTION

If you ask me, our faculty colleagues who teach church leadership have had Nehemiah to themselves long enough. For years, they've mined this book for principles of administration: managing people, deploying people, overcoming obstacles to the work. They've put out books like *Hand Me Another Brick*, *The Nehemiah Factor*, *Living like a Missional Leader*, a number of others, including one for women in leadership, *Becoming Mrs. Nehemiah*.

But you'll search CBD in vain for anything on Nehemiah homiletics. Too bad. This book, or at least chapter 8, is a gold mine for homileticians (at least if you're willing to practice the hermeneutics that yield all those management principles).

Verse 3 gives us warrant for long sermons. Ezra spoke from daybreak to noon, and that was just the Scripture reading. Even the Mark Dever doesn't preach that long.

In verse 2 we find support for children's church, dismissing the youngsters to Fellowship Hall before the sermon. Ezra's congregation was made up of men and women and "all who were able to understand," presumably second grade and older. The little ones were led off site to color pictures of Moses and have a muffin.

Verse 4 is a proof text for the use of a pulpit. In the original (King James) it says Ezra went to a pulpit. He didn't roam around like a talk show host or pace back and forth like a tiger in the zoo. He went to a pulpit. Never mind that a pulpit, properly speaking, is not the podium but the platform on which it stands: if you find a translation that says what you want to say, don't let facts get in the way!

You can use verse 8 in your next faculty turf war, and make a case for including oral interpretation in the seminary curriculum. It says that Ezra read the book *clearly*. But be prepared for the possibility that your Old Testament colleagues will counter with the NASB, which says Ezra

“translated.” It’s possible that on this occasion Ezra read from the Hebrew scroll but spoke Aramaic, a kind of proto-targum. But with any luck, the Biblical scholars won’t think of this and you’ll gain an hour in the curriculum for pastoral theology.

Somewhat less facetiously, we find in this text a case for a team approach to pulpit ministry. Ezra’s not the only preacher. Nehemiah, a layman, preaches. And all these Levites with unfortunate names. We don’t know exactly what this shared teaching ministry looked like. I like to think of adult classes and small groups discussing the previous Sunday’s sermon and digging deeper into the text for the coming Lord’s Day.

I told you Nehemiah 8 is a gold mine for homiletics.

Nehemiah 8 is a gold mine for homiletics. I’d like to mine it with you for a few minutes, this account, as our plenary speaker calls it, of “the prototypical transaction of covenant renewal.”

There’s a nugget in verse one:

THE DESIRE OF GOD’S PEOPLE IS TO HEAR THE WORD OF THE LORD

All the people assembled and told Ezra to bring out the Book. They had rebuilt the walls; now they had a nation to rebuild, and the foundation for that worthy work must be the word of the Lord. Ezra does not have to cajole them, shame them, or bribe them to come to church. He doesn’t go down the water slide in his priestly robes to draw a crowd. The desire of God’s people is to hear word of the Lord.

As it was centuries later when “they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching.” As it was centuries earlier when the people said to Moses, “You listen to God and tell us what he says.” Now Ezra, sometimes seen as a second law-giver, a postexilic Moses, is asked to bring a Word from God.

In any generation, the normal desire of God’s people is to hear the Word of the Lord. When no such appetite exists, we should ask what’s wrong? Are preachers unskilled, clumsy, boring, superficial? Are we offering, instead of the meat or the Word, thin gruel? Are God’s people stuffing themselves all week with spiritual junk food, so they can’t enjoy the Lord’s Day feast?

The *norm* is hunger for God’s Word. Here they listen attentively (v.3). They add their “Amen” (v.6). They bow, they worship, they weep. Why do they weep? Because they have heard the covenantal obligations of the Torah and realize how far short they and their fathers have fallen.

The preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God. The vocal apparatus may be Ezra’s but the words are God’s. The desire of God’s people is to hear the Word of God.

Here’s another nugget:

THE TASK OF GOD’S MINISTERS IS TO EXPOSIT THE WORD OF THE LORD

You and I do what Ezra and his team did: They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. Edmund Clowney said this episode is paradigmatic for the preaching ministry. Elizabeth Achtemeier, Walter Brueggemann, and Abe Kuruvilla have all said the same. This was the model for synagogue preaching and early Christian preaching.

You and I are not prophets who hear a new word of revelation direct from heaven. We're not apostles, commissioned by the resurrected Christ to speak with prophetic authority. We're scribes. We have nothing to say except what the Book says.

I've wanted to serve the Lord vocationally since I was a little kid. I didn't know that meant I would become a hermeneut. I wanted to serve the Lord like Billy Graham or David Livingstone. But as a youngster, I never once said, "Gee, I want to be like Ezra when I grow up!"

But that's what I am, that's what you are—an interpreter.

We get up on a platform (vs. 4) not because we're superior to the laity but so we may be seen and heard. We open the Book, like Ezra in verse 5, even if we have our text memorized or it's on the big screen or printed in the bulletin.

Last semester a preaching student read the text and preached from his tablet. He didn't do it very well, scrolling too far or not far enough, getting lost in the process. In our class debrief, we were gentle with him for losing his place, something that can happen to any of us. But two students said they think it's important to use a Bible—a codex—when preaching. There's symbolic value to a physical book. I was glad *they* said it. If I say it I can be dismissed as a paper-dependent, leather-cover-loving old fogey. But these students saw what I see, the iconic value of the Book.

You're free to disagree because the Book itself doesn't dictate how the Word is to be delivered (in Nehemiah 8 the technology was almost certainly a scroll). Just so preacher and people know this, this Book, is our authority.

Like Ezra in verse 6, we worship in our preaching. By the way, I hope we can get rid of this unbiblical idea: "We've worshipped, now let's hear a sermon." Like Ezra we read it clearly, we explain it, we discern the theology of the pericope, leading to what Nehemiah does in verses 9 and 10, faithful, valid application.

Which leads to another nugget. The desire of God's people is to hear the Word of the Lord, the task of God's ministers is to exposit the Word of the Lord. And . . .

THE FRUIT OF THIS MINISTRY IS THAT GOD'S PEOPLE AND GOD'S MINISTERS SERVE WITH THE JOY OF THE LORD

Verse 9: all the people had been weeping—understandably. They

had violated the covenant and had paid the price. But Nehemiah sees, with pastoral sensitivity, how that day's preaching portion can be applied either inappropriately or appropriately. Verse 10: Do not grieve, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.

There's a place for godly sorrow, but it's not a place God intends us to stay for long. As Spurgeon said, "Sorrow for sin is the porch of the House Beautiful, where all the guests are filled with 'the joy of the Lord.'"

Nehemiah know it's time to move on—literally time to move on: it's the Feast of Tabernacle, the week we put up tents in the back yard, build a fire, roast marshmallows and sing kum-ba-ya. A time for rejoicing.

But there's an even more fundamental reason for Nehemiah's application. Even if it wasn't Feast of Tabernacles, even after the Feast has come and gone, the joy of the Lord is your strength. Nehemiah knows that joy energizes. Sorrow does not. When you're sad – maybe the sadness is understandable—you don't want to jump out of bed, take on the world, rebuild a nation, advance the kingdom—you just want to curl up in a fetal position and stay under the covers. But joy gives you a reason to get up in the morning. Joy energizes us for service.

Wilberforce persevered for decades of misunderstanding, violent opposition and bad health because, in part, of boundless, contagious joy. His biographers say he was incapable of staying low more than a few days. George Mueller, who carried congregants and orphans on his shoulders, said, "My first duty every morning is to get my soul happy in the Lord. Until then, I'm no good to anybody."

I think Nehemiah would agree. Derek Kidner writes, "Three times in this short paragraph we're told that holiness and gloom go ill together."

The joy of the Lord is our strength for service. The joy of the Lord is also our strength for battling temptation. Maybe you've heard the differing strategies of two Greek heroes for resisting temptation.

Ulysses had been warned against the sirens and their enchanting songs. (The sirens were ravenous monsters who disguised themselves as beautiful women who sang irresistibly, luring sailors towards the rocks, where they would founder and be devoured. Ulysses was determined not to lead his men to death, but he wanted to experience the famed sirens' song. So he had his sailors tie him to the mast, with ropes to his hands and feet. He then made his sailors fill their ears with beeswax so that they could not hear the sirens' song. The ship passed by the islands where the sirens were and Ulysses was enthralled by the song. He tried to break the ropes that held him to the mast and shouted to his sailors to free him but they could not hear him. The ship passed by without incident and Ulysses did not perish.

Jason, too, had to lead his men past the sirens' island. And Jason, too, had been warned about the sirens' song. But Jason had on board the Argo Orpheus, the greatest musician of his time. When the ship passed the island Orpheus brought out his lyre and began to play and sing, music more beautiful than that of the sirens by far. Jason's ship passed by the sirens'

island because the sirens didn't stand a chance.

We want God's people to understand his Word and obey it. If it takes ropes and wax – rules, safeguards, internet filters, accountability partners—well, OK; that's better than destruction. But wouldn't we rather let them hear a sweeter song? Wouldn't we have them be enchanted by the beauty of holiness? Energized by the joy of serving the Lord. We don't just want people to live the Christian life—we want them to enjoy living the Christian life.

The desire of God's people is want to hear the Word of the Lord. The task of God's ministers is to exposit the Word of the Lord. And the fruit of this ministry is God's people and God's ministers serve with the joy of the Lord.

That's too long for a homiletical idea, so let me sum up: The exposition of God's Word helps God's people serve him with joy. Again, the exposition of God's Word helps God's people serve him with joy.

That, I think, is what this prototypical account of scribal preaching teaches us. That, Abe Kuruvilla says in *Privilege the Text*, is the claim of Nehemiah 8: the exposition of God's Word (reading, explaining, applying) helps God's people (week after week, pericope after pericope) serve God with joy.

You know, I think I do want to be like Ezra when I grow up.



BOOK REVIEWS

Expositional Preaching: How We Speak God's Word Today. By David Helm. Wheaton: Crossway, 2014. 978-1-4335-4313-5, 125 pp., \$14.99.

Reviewer: Gregory K. Hollifield, Memphis, TN

This short easy-to-read book in the *9Marks: Building Healthy Churches* series delves into the first of nine healthy church traits identified by Mark Dever, Senior Pastor of Capitol Hill Baptist Church (Washington, D.C.) and President of 9Marks Ministry. David Helm, the book's author, serves as lead pastor at Holy Trinity Church in Chicago and chair of the Charles Simeon Trust, which promotes practical instruction in preaching.

Nowhere does *Expositional Preaching* claim to have been written in homage to the preaching ministry and methods of Charles Simeon. Nevertheless, it offers more than a mere tip-of-the-hat to that renowned nineteenth century preacher's ideas. Aligning himself with Simeon's conviction "never to speak more or less than I believe to be the mind of the Spirit in the passage I am expounding," Helm defines expositional preaching as "empowered preaching that rightfully submits the shape and emphasis of the sermon to the shape and emphasis of a biblical text" (13). His book details the process for constructing such sermons under three headings: Exegesis, Theological Reflection, and Today. Helm's purpose in writing is two-fold: to introduce expositional preaching to the beginner, and to offer a useful grid for self-evaluation to the more seasoned preacher and teacher of preaching.

The first of the book's four chapters deals with the problem of contextualization run amok—what Helm terms a "blind adherence problem." It is here that the reader, especially the novice preacher, will find himself under the glare of the book's most uncomfortable light as it exposes three common mistakes preachers make in their quest to be relevant. Rather than let the passage take the lead, preachers too often wrest away control in the sermon by sharing instead what impressions the passage made upon them following an initial reading, how it supports their own preconceived ideas, or what the Spirit said to them during the week while meditating upon the passage.

Sermons submitted to the authority of a biblical text do not begin with a blind adherence to contextualization, says Helm in chapter two, but with careful historical and literary exegesis. Deliberate reading strategies that give attention to a book's beginning and end, stated purpose(s), repeated terms and themes, and literary genre will bring to light a text's line of thought, structure, and emphasis. While other books explain the exegetical process in greater detail, Helm's summary is nonetheless instructive.

With exegesis finished, the preacher is ready to engage in theological reflection. At this point, in chapter three, the author makes his case for Christ-centered/gospel-centered preaching. To his credit he acknowledges the potential danger at this juncture of dehistoricizing the passage while attempting to relate it to the gospel—what Helm terms “blind adherence to Christ-centered preaching” (66). To counter this danger he insists upon the importance of prayer, followed by the development of a comprehensive biblical theology complemented by a sound systematic theology. Then, safe gospel connections can be made as the preacher considers how a select passage makes or fulfills a gospel-related prophecy, where it fits in the Bible’s historical trajectory of the development of its subject, what themes it contains that are related to the gospel, or how it offers an analogy to some aspect of the gospel. Following theological reflection, the preacher is ready to consider the contemporary audience, a proper arrangement of the sermon’s materials, and appropriate applications. As Helm deals with these topics in chapter four, he repeats again the importance of letting the text take the lead, meaning that the sermon’s shape mirrors that of the text and the sermon’s application(s) aligns with the text’s primary application. Despite what he said earlier about the importance of accounting for a passage’s literary genre in the exegetical process, this final section of the book made me question to what extent a text’s genre might influence the overall feel and impact of one of Helm’s sermons. Would his hearer perceive any great difference between a sermon based upon a parable versus one drawn from an epistle? Apart from this quibble, I find much in *Expositional Preaching* to commend it as a sound introductory summary and guide.



Teach the Text Commentary Series: 1 Corinthians. By Preben Vang. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014. 978-0-8010-9234-3, 258 pp., \$29.99.

Reviewer: Gregory K. Hollifield, Memphis, TN

If any set of commentaries written by a cadre of scholars has ever been designed specifically to serve the needs and interests of preachers devoted to a particular homiletician’s method, this would appear to be that series. Published by Baker, who over thirty years ago brought us Haddon Robinson’s *Biblical Preaching* (now available in its 3rd edition), the *Teach the Text Commentary Series* aims to provide in its compactly composed volumes what preachers need to identify, understand, teach, and illustrate Robinson’s “Big Idea” of the biblical text.

Each volume in the series seeks to divide its chosen book(s) of Scripture into units “that are faithful to the biblical authors’ ideas and of an appropriate length for teaching and preaching” (ix). These units are discussed successively over no more than six pages each. Textual discussions are purposely limited

and the technicality of many modern commentaries set aside to provide the reader a ready reference tool for exposition. Thus, the entire series attempts to steer a steady course between the rocky cliffs of technical works marked by hermeneutical sophistication that often include extraneous (i.e., unpreachable) details, and the depthless shallows of the more devotional commentaries. It thus aims to follow a similar path as the one taken previously by the generally successful *NIV Application Commentary* series (Zondervan).

Compared to the New International Greek Testament Commentary (NIGTC) on 1 Corinthians that weighs in at over 1,400 pages and the same volume in *Black's New Testament Commentary* which is a thousand pages lighter, Preben Vang's contribution here comes in at a smidge over 250 pages. It's a light work but no lightweight when it comes to handling Paul's first Corinthian epistle.

In his brief introduction Vang points to the new wealth of Corinth's residents and their unwritten rules of patronage as key to understanding many of the church's problems there. As a college student back in the 80s, I was taught the source of those problems was an over-realized eschatology combined with a suspect pneumatology. Vang's contention that it was something else made me curious as to whether he'd develop his thesis later in his commentary (which, indeed, he did), and to what extent it might influence his handling of the epistle (which it did, throughout).

Although he often leaves the impression that much more could have been said about any given word, phrase, or verse, Vang still manages to provide enough information in his "understanding the text" sections (and informative endnotes) for the reader to get a handle on what the biblical text was saying and where scholars might disagree. His "illustrating the text" sections are also to be commended.

Big Idea preachers will certainly appreciate Vang's attempts to divide the biblical text into smaller sections that he considers to be of appropriate length for preaching, but they may disagree with where he places his breaks and how these affect his shaping of the text's Big Ideas. And while they will certainly find his insights in the "teaching the text" sections to be thoroughly biblical as well as practical, they may just as likely judge them to be disconnected from one other. Vang doesn't suggest how his disparate thoughts here might be mustered and organized into a single message. Thus, while the commentary does more than a respectable job of identifying many of the text's Big Ideas, it's not quite as helpful as it could have been for crafting cohesive Big Idea sermons.



Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages. 3rd ed. By Haddon W. Robinson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014. 978-0-8010-4912-5, xi + 244 pp., \$21.99.

Models for Biblical Preaching: Expository Sermons from the Old Testament. Edited

by Haddon W. Robinson and Patricia Batten. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014. 978-0-8010-4937-8, viii + 189 pp., \$19.99.

Reviewer: Ben Walton, Arizona Christian University, Phoenix, AZ

The virtually unchanged third edition of Haddon Robinson's modern homiletical classic, *Biblical Preaching*, remains a must-read for serious students of preaching. It begins with a preface that contains a high-level overview of the events and figures in Robinson's distinguished career. The body of the book is organized in ten chapters. The first makes a case for expository preaching and the second introduces the reader to Robinson's key concept, the "Big Idea." Chapters three through eight develop a ten-step expository preaching model. The process includes text selection, exegetical study, discernment of exegetical and homiletical ideas, use of three developmental questions (i.e., explain, prove, apply), and development of the sermon's purpose, outline, introduction, and conclusion. Chapters nine and ten address issues of intentionality in word choice and delivery. The book concludes with an epilogue, a sample sermon with an evaluation, and a new set of student exercises and answers created by Robert Permenter.

The readers of this *Journal* need no account of the merits of this text. Its strengths—and popularity—are the result of its simplicity and clear presentation of ideas. Those who require the text in their courses will be delighted to know that it contains improved student exercises, formatting, and index.

Reading through the text again, two issues struck me. First, Robinson believes that the main points of a sermon are the preacher's exclusive property. The preacher is aware of what they are, but not the listener: "While you see your outline lying before you on the page, remember that your congregation does not hear an outline" (94). Further, a comparison of Robinson's sample sermon outline with its sermon manuscript confirms this (180–82; 173–78).

Second, Robinson's brief discussion of the significance of genre for the creation of exegetical ideas remains undeveloped (41–43). The discussion is necessary, because elsewhere Robinson equates a text's theology with a well-written summary of its words (i.e., exegetical idea) regardless of genre—an untenable position. It is crucial, then, that he raises "a series of different questions" that allow for deviations to this approach (42). The problem is that he provides no examples, and readers are likely to gloss over it and miss its significance.

Models for Biblical Preaching is a companion volume that contains eleven sermons from the Old Testament that show how some of Robinson's former Denver Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary students put his homiletic philosophy into practice in their contexts. At least seven of the eleven have taught preaching, and two are women. After each sermon is a half-page commentary and an interview, usually four to eight pages in length. The sermons are of good quality. Sid Buzzell's is the most notable. It is

accurate, thoroughly relevant, clear, and inspiring.

The sermons showcase two perennial weak spots in preaching: clarity and application. With regard to clarity, there is no mention in any sermon introduction of the question the sermon answers (inductive) or the idea it proclaims (deductive). For nearly all sermons, the result is that listeners do not know what the sermon is about until the big idea is stated toward the end of the sermon, and when it is stated listeners may not recognize it, even if stated multiple times, because they have not been prepared. Further, without a clear, listener-centered approach to demonstrating how the homiletical idea is taught in the text, listeners are left to take the preacher's word for it—as they do with non-expository messages. In terms of application, only the leanest of exhortation is present, and sometimes the asking of a question is confused with application (103). Listeners need more than vague encouragements; they need concrete exemplification, scenarios that show what it might look like to put the message of the text into practice. Without clarity and concrete application, listeners are short-changed, and less dynamic expositors are left without the tools they need to showcase the value of their preaching to congregations.



Blessed and Beautiful: Multiethnic Churches and the Preaching that Sustains Them. By Lisa Washington Lamb. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade, 2014. 978-1-62032-812-5, 222 pp., \$24.00, paperback.

Reviewer: *Matthew D. Kim, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA*

As North American congregations become increasingly diverse with respect to race and ethnicity, pastors and preachers find themselves in a precarious situation. The overarching issue is how one should preach in a multiethnic church context with maximum effectiveness taking into consideration the various cultures represented. *Blessed and Beautiful* seeks to offer some direction in helping us make sense of the complexity in multiethnic churches and the ministry of preaching.

This is the fourth book in the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching Series for the Cascade imprint of Wipf & Stock. The author is an ordained pastor in the Presbyterian Church (USA) denomination, and has been an instructor of homiletics at Fuller Theological Seminary. Her experience also includes campus ministry with InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. One of the central foci in Lamb's book is "whether ethnicity is something the church should reinforce, challenge, or obscure (28)." Recognizing the wide range of views on ethnic diversity in churches, Lamb articulates "theological resources for those churches that have discerned that they are called to pursue greater diversity and to embrace the arduous ministry of racial reconciliation (31)."

Lamb is purposeful and clear in the trajectory of her book. In chapter

1, Lamb provides a helpful taxonomy of how race, ethnicity, and culture have been viewed historically, anthropologically, sociologically, and theologically. Arguing primarily from the doctrine and example of the Trinity, Lamb develops a theological position for the importance of churches to pursue multiethnic congregations in chapter 2 in spite of the numerous challenges diversity engenders. The third chapter, "Models of Preaching Text and Experience," describes and examines the strengths and weaknesses of The New Homiletic and postliberal approaches to preaching which interpret Scripture placing heavy emphasis on lived experience. Lamb asserts that "[e]thnically diverse churches require preaching that furthers a strong sense of social cohesion and commitment, and preaching that names a broad range of experiences, both in lamentation and celebration (85)." As such, Lamb promotes the work of Charles Campbell in his "strong vision for preaching that furthers the unity of churches, forming the people of God into covenanted communities (85)." In the remaining four chapters, Lamb presents a vision for multiethnic preaching that incorporates what she calls a "shared and redeemed memory (87)." Since ethnic groups share memories and past histories which are positive and/or painful, the author envisions multiethnic preaching ministries that cultivate a collective memory which leads to healing, forgiveness, reconciliation and unity.

Blessed and Beautiful makes a contribution to the field of homiletics in thinking philosophically about cross-cultural preaching. Lamb adeptly weaves insights from biblical studies, history, cultural studies, theology, hermeneutics, and homiletics to present a much-needed framework for what multiethnic preaching could look like in the twenty-first century. Memory is a powerful lens to comprehend and interpret the multifaceted nuances of preaching to diverse cultural contexts. As an evangelical, my main concern with the book is that it heavily appropriates the hermeneutical and homiletical philosophies of new homileticians and their "turn toward the listener" with little or no consideration of authorial intention. Another limitation in the book is that its death of concrete homiletical strategies for preaching to a wide variety of racial and ethnic listeners. That is, beyond memory, what other methods and approaches could be employed to communicate effectively across racial, ethnic, and cultural divides?

Overall, the book is written clearly, with a definite bent toward an academic and mainline engagement with multiethnic preaching.



Ordinary Preacher, Extraordinary Gospel: A Daily Guide for Wise, Empowered Preachers. By Chris Neufeld-Erdman. Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2014, 978-1-62564-218-9, 182 pp., \$21.00, paperback.

Reviewer: Matthew D. Kim, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA

Ordinary Preacher, Extraordinary Gospel is the third book in the Lloyd John Ogilvie Institute of Preaching Series with Cascade Books. The author serves as senior pastor of University Presbyterian Church and has taught spirituality and homiletics classes at Fresno Pacific University. Readers of this Journal may recognize an earlier version of this book published by Brazos entitled *Countdown to Sunday: A Daily Guide for Those Who Dare to Preach*. *Ordinary Preacher, Extraordinary Gospel* is a new and improved edition of that work.

The book serves as a memoir and pastoral reflections on preaching from a seasoned preacher with over two decades of pulpit experience. Neufeld-Erdman reveals the inner struggles of many preachers who commonly internalize insecurities about homiletical ability or the lack thereof: "Those of us who preach know how tempted we are to be someone else, wear masks, and live inside our own skin in ways that are not altogether authentic (5)." In the first five chapters, the author lays the bedrock for the rest of the book, demonstrating our need as preachers to view ourselves with a sober mind and a posture of humility rather than seeking to be known for our preaching aptitude. He writes: "The drive to be perfect is gone. In its place is the pleasure of simply being human (16)."

In the rest of the book, Neufeld-Erdman unpacks his subtitle "A Daily Guide for Wise, Empowered Preachers" where he discloses his daily method of how he puts a sermon together. He explains, in clusters of brief chapters (titled Monday through Sunday), what he accomplishes each day of the week in preparation for Sunday's message, and his observations on this process. In each chapter cluster or day, he also offers a short lectionary reading, prayer, and a cultural assessment, all of which enlighten his approach to the various tasks of preaching and sermon preparation.

The book is a valuable reminder of the weighty assignment that preachers have been given by God in preaching the gospel. Yet the author playfully reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously. With wisdom, humor, candor, and grace, Neufeld-Erdman speaks winsomely into the complexities of preaching, specifically, and pastoral ministry, in general.

I conclude with a couple of cavils regarding the book. One initial quibble is that Neufeld-Erdman advocates a lax stance regarding study, exegesis, and the original languages. For instance, he confesses that he has developed a "preaching on the run" philosophy where preachers simply grasp whatever study they can get done in the midst of the busyness of pastoral life. While it is a truism that the pastorate is taxing and that this "catch-as-catch can" attitude is rife among preachers today, I was hoping that the author would have encouraged us to reclaim the necessity of rigorous and faithful exegetical and hermeneutical engagement. Second, though Neufeld-Erdman underscores throughout his sentiments of being an "ordinary preacher," the book lacks a clear, robust depiction of this "extraordinary gospel" that we have been given and are called to herald to the world.



Praying Curses: The Therapeutic and Preaching Value of the Imprecatory Psalms. By Daniel Michael Nehrbass. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2013. 978-1620327494, 214 pp., \$22.50.

Reviewer: *Abraham Kuruvilla, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX*

This has been a topic that has been on the back burner of my mind for a long time. What do we do with the imprecatory psalms? How may those be preached? How would one apply them?

Nehrbass, in what appears to be a reworked PhD dissertation from Fuller, does us all a service by tackling this issue head on. I should note that this is far from being a dry, pedantic, academic recitation of facts; on the contrary, Nehrbass has made this work very readable. Kudos to him! However, vestiges of a dissertation are still visible: at least a full third of the book could have been removed without significant loss. And a more stringent editing would have helped, too, and would have precluded the embarrassing typo on the cover of the book (“Theraputic”).

Nehrbass begins with a history of interpretation of the imprecatory psalms: spiritualizing or allegorizing the text; assuming them to be merely historical (whether inspired or otherwise) and not for current praxis; seeing them as cathartic and/or poetic, thus not modeling behavior for today; accounting them as prophetic (and or messianic) and what would inevitably happen to the enemy; recognizing their inadequacy in light of progressive revelation; rendering imprecations as quotations of the adversary, and not of the psalmist himself; and even considering them as magical spells! None of these explanations is found satisfactory, though the “dependence theory”—i.e., that the utterances in those psalms were really acts of dependence upon God, who was being asked to take (vengeful) action—appears to be the most acceptable of the list. After all, the psalmist was not taking matters into his own hands, but leaving it all to God. But even this interpretive tack is not fully explanatory: Did David cease his warring operations after these imprecations? How serious is dependence if that is the only option for the one praying? (13–52). At any rate, the discussion is thorough.

Yet one is left with the question: What is a Christian to do with all of these vicious prayers? If one is a victim of such severe deprecation as is depicted in those psalms, can one pray these prayers?

Comparing the imprecatory psalms with the Sermon on the Mount, Nehrbass draws out a useful distinction of purpose between the former and the latter (and other genres of Scripture): while Jesus’ sermon instructs his people on how to live, the psalmist is instructing the people of God *how to pray*. This is helpful, though it does leave the question open: Is it appropriate for us, in this dispensation, to pray as the psalmist did, imprecations and all?

The author recognizes that the imprecatory psalms are consistent

with covenant promises (God promising to curse his enemies), with prophecy, with the warnings of Scripture, with the New Testament (Jesus, too, uttered an imprecation or two against the Pharisees, a couple of cities, and even a fig tree), and even with a doctrine of a holy God who takes sin extremely seriously. Another important notion that Nehrbass brings to the fore is the idea that “it is vital to keep in mind that the words ‘I’ and ‘we’ speak for the community of Israel,” and that the psalms were part of the community’s worship. Thus the imprecations were not necessarily intended to be seen as an individual’s frustrated response to evil, but rather as the cry of an oppressed nation. And humans, of course, can be instruments in the hands of God to punish evildoers. Nehrbass’ final section of the book intends to give some practical guidelines for employing the imprecatory psalms: “concern yourself with God’s reputation” (righteous anger is appropriate); “let God take care of your problem” (transfer the responsibility of vengeance to God); “make your complaint clear” (as opposed to a generic prayer for world peace); “pray for the plans of the wicked to be foiled”; “take responsibility for your part” (from the psalmist’s frequent admission of his own guilt) (148–73). These are helpful.

In all, though precise answers are not provided for the major issues of the use of imprecatory psalms in the modern day, these guidelines do help further the discussion. To that end, the book is successful. Worth reading, especially if you intend to tackle the Psalms in a forthcoming sermon series.



Paul’s Pisidian Antioch Speech (Acts 13). By John Eifion Morgan-Wynne. Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick, 2014. 978-1625640505, 260 pp., \$30.00.

Reviewer: S. Jonathan Murphy, *Sacra Script Ministries, Dallas, TX*

John Eifion Morgan-Wynn is commended for providing a thorough and valuable study of the Pisidian Antioch speech in Acts 13. The book is clear and insightful, which is a testimony to the skill of the author given the technical depths it submerges to. The work unfolds as seven chapters.

In the first chapter, the author surveys recent scholarship on the kerygmatic speeches in Acts focusing attention on the Pisidian Antioch speech. Morgan-Wynn looks mainly at relevant English works without ignoring key studies in German and French. His review is systematic and summarizes the thrust of relevant literature on his topic, albeit from a specific angle—Luke’s sources. His critique does draw out the salient issues within each work. However, the chapter is of limited value to a preacher. It is a literary survey establishing a spectrum on *who-said-what* concerning Luke’s sources for these speeches.

The second chapter places the Pisidian Antioch speech within the context of the story of Acts. To accomplish this, Morgan-Wynn retells selective parts of the story of Acts. This is a clear, accurate, and readable version of those

events as they relate to the relevant speech. But the author suggests it is a narrative-critical level of examination (45 footnote 28) and as such is sensitive to the “the way in which Luke tells the story” (34, 43). If so, this reviewer expects the use of more genre-sensitive analytical criteria in the examination of an alleged narrative-critical reading. There is no obvious analysis of plot structure and development, literary-rhetorical devices used to lead a reader, key characters and characterization, the value of settings, or of the overall ideological point of view advanced by the narrator. Morgan-Wynn does accomplish his goal of presenting the unity of the speech within Luke-Acts giving preachers confidence in the place of the speech in the story. But a purer narrative-critical reading would make his point better *literarily* and provide a homilist with priceless gems for engaging his audience in the story.

The third chapter presents a survey and short analysis of how numerous scholars structure the speech under study. Once again, Morgan-Wynn presents a *who-said-what* spectrum arguing on the basis of form and content for a tripartite division. His position is valid and well defended. However, he is too quick to dismiss strong, contemporary influences of Greco-Roman rhetoric on a first-century CE discourse, only to then propose that it is epideictic rhetoric—a Greco-Roman classification itself (64, 66). Taking the structure to a proposed homiletical outline would have benefited preachers of this text.

The fourth and fifth chapters contain the most significant contributions of Morgan-Wynn to the study of the Pisidian Antioch speech. The first of these examines the speech in detail. The author presents a careful, comprehensive, and interesting analysis. However, he does not offer up any new vistas. He is too focused on answering a question of limited value to a homilist, namely, *to what extent is this speech a construct of Luke's?* The fifth chapter crystallizes the numerous details of his analysis to present the theological emphases of the speech and their continuity with Luke's message throughout Luke-Acts. This is a helpful read for preachers as it provides relevant theological reflection that translates readily into a sermon.

The final two chapters are brief and miles apart in usefulness. Chapter six deals with whether the speech throws any light on Luke's recipient congregation(s) (206). It is a very short chapter (the equivalent of two pages) and would not be missed if removed as it does not add to the book's pursuit. Its inclusion is somewhat perplexing, for the author assumes Luke's initial audience is a congregation (or several) without really dealing with the named recipient Theophilus (Luke 1:3; Acts 1:1). The final chapter, on the other hand, is beneficial. Here, Morgan-Wynn summarizes the point of each chapter, inclusive of his conclusions, yet now devoid of many useful but weighty details.

Overall, this book is a positive contribution to the field of biblical studies providing a one-stop place for all *content* related issues of the Pisidian Antioch speech. Morgan-Wynn sheds all sorts of lights on every nook and cranny! However, the work is of limited value to would-be preachers. A

critical commentary or biblical-theological study on Luke-Acts would suffice. Morgan-Wynn does not advance homiletical scholarship generally or pulpit preaching particularly (ix). It is simply difficult to envision how major portions of this book would translate into Sunday morning sermons. The work explores scholarship on the content of a sermon within its literary environment rather than advance the *how-to* of preaching a sermon. In short, this work is at home among New Testament scholarship rather than in the hands of homilists.



Text Message: The Centrality of Scripture in Preaching. Edited by Ian Stackhouse and Oliver D. Crisp, Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014. 978-1-61097-673-2, xxvi + 238 pp., \$35.00.

Reviewer: D. Bruce Seymour, Talbot School of Theology, La Mirada, CA

This book is a collection of essays on various aspects of preaching. At first it did not look promising. In the introduction, one of the editors, Ian Stackhouse, writes, “this book is about taking the text seriously . . . what each contributor is seeking to convey is the importance of the biblical text for the task of preaching” (xxiv). Since readers of this *Journal* members are probably already committed to that idea, I was not sure this book would be helpful. I was wrong.

In the forward, Thomas Long, Bandy Professor of Preaching at Candler School of Theology, wrote: “This remarkable collection of essays on preaching by an international group of scholars and pastors shares more than a common subject matter. Running like a river through these chapters is the vision of preaching as a faithful *craft*; that is, as a skilled and complex practice possessing standards of excellence, embedded in a rich tradition, and performed out of deep theological conviction” (ix). Long continues, “In a self-absorbed, self-referential culture, it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the idea of preaching as a disciplined craft that can be studied, learned, practiced, and, to some extent at least, mastered” (ix). He concludes, “The church has, through fire and trial, learned slowly over the centuries many lessons of the Spirit about how to preach faithfully, how human words can be obediently shaped as vessels of proclamation. Preaching is not a science, but it is surrounded by a deep vein of accumulate wisdom, which constitutes a homiletical tradition that can be passed on and learned” (x).

This book makes a helpful contribution to the craft of preaching biblical sermons. Like any collection, some chapters are more helpful than others, but all are worthy. What follows is a list of the chapters and a personal comment or two about the contribution that chapter makes to the craft of preaching.

“Hebrews as a Model for Expository Pastoral Preaching,” by Philip Greenslade. Greenslade observes that Hebrews is a sermon and that we should

hear the text as a living example of early Christian preaching.

"Christ the Sermon: The Importance of Text in Bonhoeffer's Lectures on Preaching," by Ian Stackhouse. Bonhoeffer's Lectures on Preaching are not familiar to most of us, so Stackhouse helps us become acquainted with what Bonhoeffer said and shows how the lectures continue to speak to our modern situations.

"Prophetic Preaching from Old Testament Narrative Texts," by Stephen Mathewson. He presents an approach to preaching prophetic texts and applies it to an extended exposition of the Jephthah narrative.

"Preaching The Darkest Psalm," by David M. Howard. Howard reviews how to preach lament psalms and provides an example of a sermon on Psalm 88.

"Gender Sensitive Preaching: Reading as a Woman," by Emma Ineson. She argues that there is a difference between men and women, and that difference affects how they approach the text. Most of this chapter is descriptive and I was not convinced.

"Jonathan Edwards on Preaching," by Oliver D. Crisp. Crisp describes Edwards' approach to the text. What I found most interesting was Crisp's candor in pointing out the moral cost of Edward's work. In a telling footnote Crisp writes, "Hopkins tells us that Edwards worked up to thirteen hours a day in his study. But this single-minded pursuit of ideas was made possible by a household managed by his wife, the redoubtable Sarah Pierrpont Edwards; a large family; and slave labor. His otherworldliness had an important moral cost that should not be lost on contemporary admirers of his work ethic and output" (88 footnote 6).

"The Bible for the Masses: The Popular Preaching of C. H. Spurgeon," by Peter Morden. He acknowledges that Spurgeon was influenced by the Victorian culture that surrounded him, but retained a resolute commitment to preaching the text. Morden mentions that Spurgeon's essential theological framework was Calvinistic but quotes a prayer Spurgeon is reported to have prayed, "Lord, hasten to bring in all Thine elect—and then elect some more" (107).

"Homiletics, and Biblical Fidelity: An Ecclesial Approach to Orthodox Preaching," by Andrew Walker. This was a fascinating chapter. Walker describes the key components of Orthodox preaching, with a special emphasis on the enduring contributions made by John Chrysostom.

"Living with the Text," by Ian Stackhouse. Stackhouse describes the rhythm of his week, living with the text through preparation, delivery, and aftermath.

"Defamiliarization: Purging our Preaching of Platitudes," by Karen Case-Green. Case-Green makes a compelling plea for preachers to take a fresh look at the text. She writes, "The artistic medium of any preacher is words, and a good preacher will take familiar, ancient words and make them new" (149). She presents good advice on how to do that.

"Preaching without Notes," by Robert May. He argues that preaching

without notes helps a preacher to be more flexible in responding to the Spirit and more engaged with the audience. He presents practical advice on how to actually undertake this.

“Genre Sensitive Preaching,” by David Ridder. He emphasizes the familiar truth that the genre of the text is the single most important factor in the shape of the sermon (181).

“From Text to Message: The Text Living in the Preacher,” by John Woods. Woods explores “the journey a text must take through the preacher to the message” (197).

“Every Sermon Fights a Battle,” by David Hansen. This is a fine sermon, but ironically it is not a biblical sermon. There was no central text and no exposition. It struck me as an odd way to close a book on biblical preaching. I found this book to be the unusual combination of inspirational and practical. It reminded me of lessons that I have learned, and rekindled my passion for preaching. I agree with Long, “The authors of this book are persuaded that God’s grace is made perfect in our weakness, and they are, therefore, emboldened to take up ever anew the task of proclamation” (xi).



Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching. By Leonard Sweet. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014. 978-0310515456, 68 pp., \$22.99.

Reviewer: Abraham Kuruvilla, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX

Sweet is the E. Stanley Jones Professor of Evangelism at Drew Theological School, and author of a number of trail-blazing works on ecclesiology. This is his most comprehensive take on preaching.

When Sweet declared, “[t]raditional textual exegesis is based on mining the ore of words to excavate the gems of ‘biblical principles,’ a biblical panning for nuggets of wisdom in one massive stream of words” (23), I gave it a hearty “Amen!” Sweet is a good diagnostician of the homiletical ills of the present day: Modern homileticians “can be found approaching the text in an attack mode: ‘unlock’ the passage; barrage the Bible with a variety of hermeneutical and exegetical strategies. We analyze texts, dissect passages, take apart words, construe points, principle-ize concepts. ... [And we] randomly shoot our points at unsuspecting parishioners, hoping for some bull’s-eye hits. The problem is, for all our attempted impact, the next day most parishioners couldn’t repeat any one of those sermons, or the points and/or principles, for the life of them” (105). Nice! But the prescription Sweet offers for these sermonic afflictions are far from therapeutic.

He doubts if words are the best conveyors of the divine; instead, he is for “experiences, intuitions, emotions, images, and stories,” because they are “more reliable and memorable” (23). So “we need to train ourselves and others not to exegete more words but to exegete images” (28), for “the power

of the Word isn't in the words—it's in the images, the stories, the music of the text" (53). Jesus' parables are, for Sweet, a case in point. "Jesus ... was best known as a master of metaphor, a legendary storyteller, and a powerful healer who communicated in signs, images, and gestures" (28). This is a specious argument. Did Jesus *never* use other means of public address? Do we have *all* the sermons and teachings of Jesus? At any event, Sweet recommends that preachers, therefore, create their own images, employing "a multitude of sensory experiences," including music, video, drama, drawings, liturgical dance, placards, poetry, posters, puppets, quizzes, Twitter feed, etc. (214, 222).

When I came to Chapter 4, "Blood Stream: Scriptures," I was hopeful: finally a focus on the inspired text. But here's how Sweet approaches the Book of Jonah, in his "right-brain reading," "the revelational encounter or transductive reading" (125). "When Jonah flees to Tarshish, we can feel his frustration and anger, his desire to be a 'free agent,' and his fear of his neediness. Like Jonah, we want a God who meets all our needs, who takes away our neediness, especially our need for God" (126). From Jonah's experience on the boat, "we find that God is showing us that we cannot save ourselves. The tempest on the sea may well reflect Jonah's (and our own) anger, the struggle and panic that he takes out on everyone around him." (127). And more in that vein. None of the intricacies of the text was discerned and explicated for what the author of Jonah was doing with what he was saying. For instance, the commission of Jonah ("arise," "go," and "cry," in 1:2 and 3:2) is distorted in the prophet's execution of that commission: he only "arises," and "goes" (3:3), as he delivers a five-word (in Hebrew) oracle that, quite unusually for such declamations, has no reason given, no repentance recommended, no hope offered, and no remnant promised. In fact, God's subsequent grace is labeled by the prophet as "evil, great evil" (4:1). These—and other—signs of the inherent power of the text are overlooked in Sweet's "transductive reading," which is essentially a gaze through the text, at something behind it, followed by a psychological analysis of every character, all in the service of a rush to relevance. Sweet rather arbitrarily calls his reading "the Holy Spirit reading," which, if neglected, "is to bypass life" (129)!

On Mark 6:14–29 (the murder of John the Baptist by Herod), Sweet advises us to look for: "images of Word or words (telling, listened, swore, oaths) and body (danced, head)"; "metaphors of righteous and holy (... covenant, promise, Word, kingdom, lawful, Jewish, God) as opposed to secular kingdom and law metaphors"; "bodily metaphors (head, dance, body, beheaded)" (216). In short, Sweet does everything but undertake a patient privileging of the text, with attention to context (the sandwich of Jesus sending disciples, 6:7–13, 30–31). The text, it seems, is mere putty—you can mold it any way you want. Scattered throughout the book one spots Sweet's tendency to link preachers with musicians: the Mozart of homiletics—Charles Haddon Spurgeon (64); the Thelonious Monk of homiletics—Eugene Lowry (69–70); George Gershwin—Clovis Chappell (194), apparently forgetting that he had already labeled Bryan Chappell as Gershwin (139); the Louis Armstrong

of homileticians—Henry Mitchell (192); Miles Davis—Louie Giglio (213); Palestrina—John Piper (228); and so on. I suggest that Sweet himself is the John Cage of homileticians, one who was well known for his composition, “4’33”” (“Four minutes, thirty-three seconds”), a three-movement piece that has only silence for its entire duration!

Nice cover. Catchy title. Well-known author. But the book, I do not recommend, because Sweet’s idea of preaching is, well, anemic!



The Kind of Preaching God Blesses. By Steven J. Lawson. Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 978-0-7369-5355-9, 128pp., \$9.99.

Reviewer: Ken Langley, Christ Community Church, Zion, IL

This little book is an expanded version of a message preached at various pastors’ conferences, an exposition of 1 Corinthians 2:1-9 that retains the sermonic feel of the original oral address. Steven Lawson pleads for contemporary pulpit ministry modelled on Paul’s “definitive passage on biblical preaching.”

Lawson laments the superficiality and market-driven character of much contemporary preaching (*most* contemporary preaching, if repeated statements to this effect are to be taken literally). He chides preachers for pragmatism, passionless delivery, pride, and prayerlessness. He urges pastors to depend not on human wisdom or eloquence but on the power of the Holy Spirit; to care nothing for the world’s approval, but only the “well done” of the Master who commissions his heralds. The kind of preaching God blesses is not the kind the Corinthians liked, which is all-too-popular in our own time as well, but preaching that knows nothing but Christ crucified.

There is much here that every evangelical preacher should be able to affirm. Not all, however, will agree with Lawson that unless preaching is rooted in Calvinist soteriology “sermons inevitably drift into shallow waters” (95), or that this claim is taught in 1 Corinthians 2.

Nor will all agree that Lawson has drawn accurate inferences from his text at two other points. Lawson absolutizes Paul’s anti-rhetoric stance as prescriptive for all preaching, rather than recognizing the situational nature of the Corinthian correspondence. To a congregation of sermon-tasters enamored with fashionable modes of rhetorical flourish, Paul understandably defended his own less glitzy approach, one dependent on the givenness of the message and the power of the Spirit working through a weak instrument. What he writes in 1 Corinthians 2 continues a pride-crucifying project begun in chapter 1 and sustained throughout the epistle as Paul rebukes this proud congregation for one problem after another. It’s questionable, though, whether Paul eschewed any and all rhetoric in any and all situations—indeed, it would have been ironic if he did so: Paul is rhetorically effective. And so is Lawson! His own tract for the times displays knowledge of his audience, wit, emotional

appeal, cadence, alliteration, refrain—in short, effective oral strategies without which it would fall flat and remain unpublished. Those who decry rhetoric employ rhetoric!

It is also doubtful that Paul meant to make “Christ crucified” the sum and substance of all Christian proclamation as does Lawson, with his insistence that every sermon be centered not only on the incarnate second person of the Trinity but on Calvary. It’s understandable that Paul would say to a proud congregation, “Don’t forget that the gospel is all about voluntary self-humiliation, telling as it does of a crucified Savior.” But in other contexts—virtually all the sermons in Acts, for example—the resurrection and ascension are stressed at least as much as the cross. Neither gets much attention in Lawson’s apologetic for cross-centered preaching. Romans expounds “the gospel of God” (Rom. 1:1; 15:16), setting the Jesus story in the ongoing story of God’s dealings with Israel; this greatest of NT letters is, arguably, God-centered, not Christ-centered, and certainly not, more narrowly, cross-centered.

The kind of preaching God blesses is certainly Paul’s burden in 1 Corinthians 2. Steven Lawson gets it *partly* right.



Preaching in Hitler’s Shadow: Sermons of Resistance in the Third Reich. Edited by Dean G. Stroud. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2013. 978-0-8028-6902, 203 pp., \$20.00.

Reviewer: Timothy S. Warren, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX

Dean Stroud studied theology at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary and pastored Presbyterian churches before earning a graduate degree in German at the University of Iowa and teaching modern languages at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse. When he commenced reading twentieth-century German theology, he discovered the historical context in which the luminaries of his seminary studies—Barth, Bonhoeffer, and Bultmann—had ministered. For the first time, Stroud realized that their works were not written in a bright and sterile environment, but in the dark and ominous shadow of the Nazi regime. He came to view the “German Church Struggle” as a tragic, but not unique reality. Years before he had wondered how his southern congregation would receive his own sermons whenever he preached on civil rights issues.

So, how do theologians, especially theologian-pastors, speak truth to “the powers” that infect a people with their evil, even pagan values. How do they speak encouragement and faithfulness to the confessing believer? In order to answer these questions, Stroud read and translated the sermons delivered by courageous German preachers who spoke against National Socialism. Although there were many pro-Nazi preachers in the 1930s and 40s, Stroud focused his work on a few dauntless preachers who challenged the status quo.

The book has two parts. The first overviews the historical and political context of preaching in Hitler's Germany and the second includes the sermons of ten resisting preachers and one Confessing Synod "example" sermon, all translated by Stroud.

As Hitler spun out his own version of the gospel for the German Volk, a gospel in which he replaced Christ, and the Third Reich replaced the Kingdom of God, the message was clear: Germanic blood and not the blood of a Jew was salvific (11). He turned the biblical message upside down. "Nazi murder of Jews, the weak, and the mentally ill certainly illustrate its total incompatibility with Christianity" (19). While many pastors embraced the grotesque joining of Nazi values with Christian language, others resisted and formed the Confessing Church. "The difference between the two sides was great. For Christians with Nazi sympathies, the church was primarily German and nationalistic, while for others Christ was the Alpha and Omega of Christianity. The New Testament and not history, race, or nationality defined the believing community" (30). There were at least two reasons why pastors would not speak out against Hitler's doctrine. First, neither Catholic nor Protestant leaders viewed themselves as political. Traditionally, the church refrained from involvement in matters of state governance. Second, to speak out against the Nazi propaganda was to invite arrest, imprisonment, and even death. The Nazis implemented their creed with brutal force. Yet, some had the moral courage to preach "the authority of Jesus Christ; the sovereignty of God; both the Old and New Testaments as Holy Scripture; the purity of the church; the certainty of God's judgment on Germany for immorality and for the failure to love the neighbor, especially the Jewish brother and sister; the relevance of the gospel after the European Enlightenment and in spite of Nazi pseudoscience and paganism; and the gospel's insistence that Christians must risk even their lives for the truth of Christianity" (48). In forty-five pages Stroud portrays the threatening world into which a faithful band of Christian brothers resisted the monstrous Reich and defended the faith in their generation.

The sermons that comprise the second part of the book should not be considered expository. Although all begin with a text, the text serves primarily as a springboard from which to address a topic, or better, an immediate crisis that is then developed from the preacher's biblical-theological (Christian) perspective. Bonhoeffer's sermon on Gideon, delivered February 26, 1933, just after Hitler was appointed chancellor, urged true Christians to hold to their faith in the God of the Bible, in spite of overwhelming political and military odds, because only by faith in God would they see truth triumph over evil. Barth's sermon about Jesus as a Jew, delivered at the end of Hitler's first year as chancellor, reminded the church that "anyone who believes in Christ, who was himself a Jew, and died for Gentiles and Jews, *simply cannot* be involved in the contempt for Jews and ill-treatment of them which is now the order of the day" (64). Bultmann's sermon on the Parable of the Great Banquet, delivered as Germany invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, counseled the congregation at the university of Marburg to be faithful to God and his calling

even in the midst of a world shaken by evil. Every sermon in this anthology demonstrates an awareness of the immediate and the relevant. Every sermon inspires courage in the face of peril and fidelity to the Christ of Christianity.

Stroud's brief biographical and historical introduction to each sermon sets the tone and theme for what follows. The sermons speak to all times and places, for they address how Christians should live whenever they are confronted by worldly powers that dismiss the God of the Bible and replace biblical values with evil.

Though not a text on how to preach expositionally, this book demonstrates how some preached boldly and in defense of historic Christianity. Simply hearing the pastoral concern of some of the twentieth century's most noted theologians makes this volume worth reading.



The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

History:

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

Specifically, the EHS was formed to advance the cause of Biblical Preaching through:
promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching
increased competence for teachers of preaching
integration of the fields of communication, biblical studies, and
theology
scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics

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

Purpose:

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

Vision:

The vision of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is to provide academics and practitioners with a journal that informs and equips readers to become competent teachers of preaching and excellent preachers.

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

b. From a periodical:

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

c. Avoid the use of op. cit.
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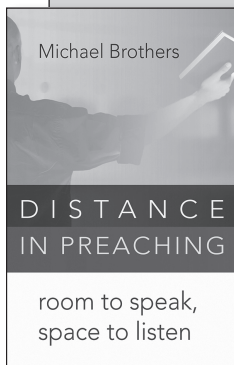
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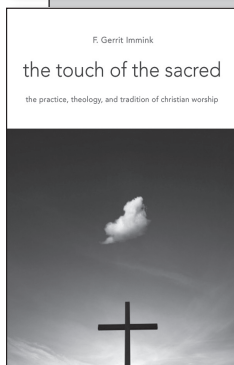
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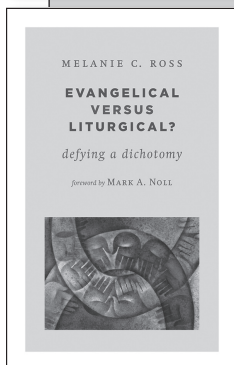
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