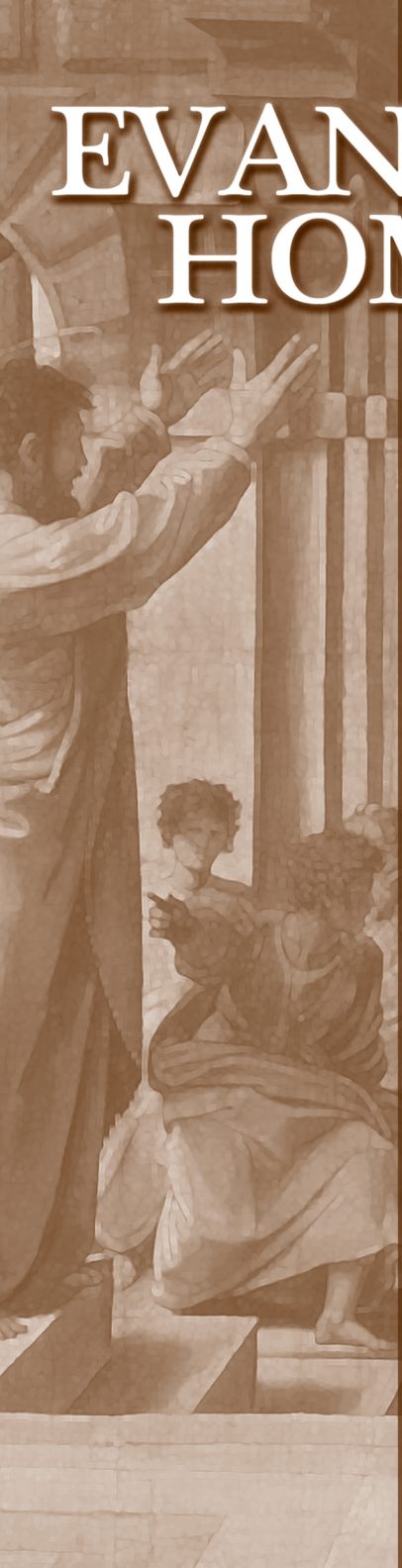

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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is the publication of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Organized in 1997, the Evangelical Homiletics Society is an academic society established for the exchange of ideas related to the instruction 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.

PREACHING TO THE GENERATIONS

SCOTT M. GIBSON
General Editor

The psalmist writes, "One generation commends your works to another; they tell of your mighty acts." That is what preachers have done throughout the ages: they have told their own generation about the God who is faithful, true, glorious, gracious—and so much more!

In this edition of the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society we explore various aspects of preaching to this and future generations—and preparing preachers toward that end.

The first article by Gregory K. Hollifield addresses the preacher and the presuppositions that may be influencing the interpretation and preaching of a given text. Hollifield carefully navigates the challenge of the plain meaning of the text and the responsibility the preacher has to preach it.

The second article by Benjamin D. Espinoza explores the concept of "child-conscious" preaching. In preaching to children, Espinoza provides compelling considerations for preachers in perception, preparation and preaching.

Next, Troy Borst examines the preaching textbooks that have been used in seminaries and Bible Colleges. He studies what the textbooks reveal when it comes to the training of preachers across various Christian traditions and generations of teachers of preaching and preachers. His findings are worth consideration.

The final article is a reprise of Kent Edwards' fine piece published a few years ago. His focus is on the power of story for adults and how preachers can leverage narrative in their preaching.

The sermon is by Haddon Robinson. Robinson preached a series of sermons in 1 Corinthians 12 while he served as president of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary from 2007-2008. "Two Traits of Agape Love" is one of the sermons from this series. Readers will benefit from how Robinson deals with the text—particularly since the sermon was preached to students preparing for ministry.

The Book Review section contains yet another collection of books with helpful and insightful reviews from members of the society.

Mary sang the praises of the Lord when she proclaimed, "His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation." As preachers, our task is to proclaim to this generation and to the generations that come after us that the Lord has mercy, and that mercy is found in the gospel. This is the message we are to tell to this generation and the next!

DANGER AHEAD: PREACHING THE WARNING PASSAGES OF HEBREWS

OR

WHEN YOUR TEXT'S PLAIN MEANING CALLS YOUR PERSONAL THEOLOGY INTO QUESTION

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INTRODUCTION

I was stunned when my wife told me what she had heard moments earlier on our local Christian radio station. A nationally renowned evangelical pastor was expounding one of the warning passages from Hebrews, suggesting his text be taken as a serious caution to believers against the real possibility of irremediable apostasy in the form of losing one's salvation and all its benefits. Then he said it. "I know that's what it sounds like this text is saying *(pause for effect)*, but we all know that can't be what it means." Well...

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

Mystery enshrouds much of Hebrews as scholars continue to debate the book's authorship, intended audience, date of composition, and the correct meaning of many of its passages. Among the most fiercely contested[1] are the book's five passages of warning: 2:1-4; 3:7 - 4:13; 5:11 - 6:12; 10:19-39; and 12:14-29.[2]

Interpreters question: Who were these "Hebrews?" To what temptation(s) were they in danger of succumbing? Did they together face one great temptation, against which the author warned using various descriptors? Or, were there two or more temptations faced by disparate groups comprising his audience?

Commentator Stanley Outlaw has helpfully cataloged seven positions taken by his peers regarding the identity of Hebrews' original intended audience and the nature of the temptation they faced.[3] Outlaw surveyed these positions as they relate directly to the clearest, sternest, and most controversial of the warning passages, Hebrews 6:4-6. Commentators assert:

1) The warnings were addressed to "professors of salvation, but not

actual
possessors of salvation."[4] These individuals, who constituted at least one group in a spiritually-mixed congregation, felt tempted to turn back from the light of revelation and nascent conviction they had already experienced. 2) The warnings' recipients were "regenerate" but not "elect," tempted to turn back on the One who gave them new life. So, while Henry Alford maintained that "the simple plain sense" of the text indicates the readers were regenerate, he posited they were obviously not elect "or they could not fall away, by the very force of the term."[5]

3) The intended audience consisted of genuinely saved people who received the warnings as a preventive measure, but the whole thing was either a) hypothetical since other New Testament passages teach that a Christian is eternally secure,[6] or b) the warnings themselves were an efficacious means by which Christians are kept from apostasy.[7]

4) The warnings were addressed to saved people, but the writer was speaking about loss of rewards, not loss of salvation.[8]

5) The warnings applied to a situation which could not be repeated today. So, Kenneth Wuest claimed, the only sin spoken of in Hebrews was that of a first century Jew who had left Judaism and identified himself with the visible Christian church, and who, having made a profession of Christ, was in danger under stress of persecution of renouncing that faith and going back to the rituals of the Levitical system.[9]

6) The intended audience consisted of saved people who were on the verge of apostasy. But even if they proceeded into apostasy, they could have come back to God because of the power of His Spirit.[10]

7) They were saved people who were seriously backslidden in their spiritual lives. If they continued to the point of apostasy, they would be eternally lost, having sinned against the Holy Ghost. Outlaw, favoring this position, believed this sin "can be committed by both unsaved people, who constantly and willfully reject the obvious truth of the Gospel (Mt. 12:31-32; Mk. 3:28-29), and by saved people who also constantly and willfully turn their back on Christ to the point of final apostasy (Lk. 12:10)." [12]

Apart from those surveyed by Outlaw, some commentators attempt to avoid the more controversial aspects of the warnings altogether.[13] N. T. Wright, for example, maintains it wasn't the author's intention to pursue the question of whether a genuine Christian could lose everything included in salvation. And that while the author expresses confidence his readers will not fall into the condition described in 6:7-8, Wright claims, "he doesn't unpack the wider theological question." [14]

In addition to these, other interpretations might be offered. But the question would likely remain as divisive, and its answer as elusive, as ever. To wit, what do these warnings really mean? Most folks agree that on their surface they seem to be saying it's possible for Christians to lose their salvation. This appears to be their plain meaning. But, so many protest, this isn't their intended meaning. Therefore, the question becomes:

WHEN IS IT RIGHT TO LOOK FOR MEANING BEYOND A TEXT'S PLAIN MEANING?

Plain meaning, as used here, refers to the "natural, clearest, most evident meaning of a text."[15] David Cooper, founder of the Biblical Research Society, identified plain meaning as the "golden rule of interpretation." The rule is, "When the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense; therefore, take every word at its primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning...."[16]

Cooper's rule goes on to list only three factors to be considered when determining whether an alternate, or more nuanced, meaning of a text should be sought. These mitigating factors include immediate context, related passages, and axiomatic and fundamental truths. "When...such evidence is lacking, one must positively accept the literal meaning of the text."[17]

In his fuller presentation of "Some Basic Rules of Interpretation," Cooper proceeded to discuss a few special addendums to his Golden Rule, that is, other factors to be considered when interpreting a passage. Among these he included the law of double reference in prophecy, parallelism in Hebrew poetry, symbolic language (specifically, the Old Testament's use of types and shadows), and figurative language (particularly, metaphors).

Not included by Cooper, other factors recognized by modern scholarship as potentially justifying the pursuit of meaning apart from a text's plain meaning include textual variants in the biblical manuscripts (e.g., the ending of Mark), occasions when the disputed text is the only one addressing its subject matter (e.g., 1 Cor. 15:29, baptizing for the dead), the presence of culturally-specific elements that may affect contemporary application (e.g., texts addressing the slave-master relationship), and the influence of a text's literary genre[18] upon its correct interpretation and application.[19]

One of the first possibilities today's preacher must consider when a text's plain meaning calls his or her personal theology into question is whether there is something exceptional about it that might signal an alternative meaning should be sought. Plain meaning should rule otherwise. So, returning to the pericopes under present consideration, the question must be asked:

WHY ISN'T THE PLAIN MEANING OF HEBREWS' WARNINGS ENOUGH?

The diversity of interpretations cataloged by Outlaw (above) indicates that many commentators believe it appropriate to set aside the warnings' apparent meaning for another. But does the evidence justify these interpreters' actions?

A quick check of the textual apparatus in the UBS *Greek New Testament* (4th ed.) reveals no significant variants in the ancient manuscripts as far as the warning passages are concerned. Indeed, no variants whatsoever are indicated for 2:1-4 and 10:26-31. Minor variants are indicated here and there

in the rest, but none are significant enough to justify the setting aside of any warning's plain meaning due to uncertainty over its original wording.[20]

The book's literary genre is epistolary, meaning its warnings are presented in the type of biblical literature that is interpreted most literally. Key to interpreting epistolary literature are its grammatical, historical, and cultural contexts.

Nothing in the grammar of the five warnings suggests they should be understood in any way other than their "primary, ordinary, usual, literal meaning." Figurative speech, where it appears, seems easy enough to comprehend generally in its immediate context.[21]

The historical context of the warnings, like much of Hebrews, is highly disputed. The most that can be safely said is a situation of genuine peril had developed, placing the original audience at a decisive crossroads. The way the author sounds his warnings indicates his concern to be real, the consequences of his audience's decision to be serious, and his attempt to persuade them to continued faith and obedience to be sincere. To assert, as did Wuest, this historical context was so particular as to limit application of the warnings to the people who lived then resembles the more modern claim that cultural context is such a limiting factor that a text's plain meaning must be ignored or contradicted in favor of some deeper meaning. As Robertson McQuilkin cautions: "Cultural understanding may illuminate the text, but it must not be allowed to set aside or contradict the plain statement of Scripture. Otherwise our authority is no longer the Bible but our current understanding of ancient culture."[22] So it is with historical context. To set aside a text as historically isolated can prove to be a usurping of its scriptural authority unless there is sufficient cause for doing so.[23]

Hebrews is unquestionably unique in the Bible's epistolary literature in that it originated as a sermon—either one the author had preached earlier or was only now composing for his audience.[24] The author of Hebrews calls his work "my word of exhortation" (13:22), the same phrase appearing in Acts 13:15 to refer to a sermon. The sermonic nature of the epistle is unmistakable in its use of diatribe (3:16-18), rhythm (1:1-4), constant alternating between exposition and exhortation, and especially in its five passages of warning. Its tone is generally "more like a kick in the pants than a gentle arm around the shoulder."[25]

Should the epistle's obviously persuasive intent affect how it's interpreted? Andrew Trotter thinks so. Understanding Hebrews to be a sermonic epistle designed to persuade should make us "reticent," declared Trotter, "to build whole theologies on highly rhetorical and emotive passages like Heb. 6:4-6, since the wording of these passages is often dictated by literary rather than strictly theological concerns."[26]

Trotter's intimation that a text's persuasive and emotive elements are somehow misleading is troubling on a couple levels. Generally, it suggests that highly poetic and rhetorically-stylized passages are inferior to the more prosaic when it comes to teaching theology. More specifically,

regarding the warnings, Trotter's remark suggests that no other passages in the epistle itself—to say nothing of the larger New Testament—present a doctrine of apostasy which the warnings don't echo or develop. On the contrary, each warning is directly related to the richly theological context of the section where it appears and arguably coincides with a soteriology taught in other New Testament texts.[27] Though the warnings may have been intended to exhort more than instruct, they remain theologically informed passages intended to impact the beliefs, no less than the behaviors, of their hearers.

If discrepancies in the manuscripts, complications created by literary genre, grammatical issues, and historical context are non-factors because they either don't exist or are unknown, it appears the real reason interpreters often choose to set aside the warnings' plain meaning is due to their preexisting commitment to a theological system of thought. Passages that on their surface seem to contradict their system must be reinterpreted to fit it. Roger Nicole made the point as baldly as anyone. After considering a couple commentators' attempts to explain why a phrase in 6:4-6 shouldn't be taken to refer to a Christian, Nicole admitted, "Neither of these explanations appears entirely free of difficulty, *although one may prefer to have recourse to them than to be forced to the conclusion that regenerate individuals may be lost*" [emphasis added].[28] Rather than give up his theological position, Nicole found it more palatable to accept a "difficult" interpretation! When it comes to the warnings of Hebrews, the determining *hermeneutical* factor for men like Nicole is often *systematically theological*.[29]

"The Arminian," on the other hand, claimed Reformed Arminian Robert Picirilli, "is quick to urge that the issue whether a saved person may be lost should be settled not on systematic but on biblical grounds. That is (as all would agree) the question: Does the Bible teach the possibility of apostasy?"[30] It isn't that Arminians are opposed to comparing Scripture with Scripture or dismiss the importance of a well-reasoned doctrine of soteriology, he maintained, they simply "have not traditionally been as strong for systematic theology" as others.[31] To put it more sharply, Arminians, in Picirilli's studied opinion, maintain that privilege ought to be assigned to the text rather than the interpreter's preexisting theology. When it isn't, when any philosophy, theological system, or political agenda is allowed to set aside the plain teaching of Scripture, that source has become the authority displacing the authority of the Bible itself.[32]

Certainly, all would agree, any pericope whose perceived meaning appears to violate the boundaries established by systematic, biblical, and canonical theologies calls for extreme scrutiny. But when all other factors indicate a text's plain meaning is its intended meaning, that meaning shouldn't be lightly or categorically cast aside out of deference to one's theological system. Too often commentators, many of whom are preachers, when addressing the warnings create the impression that their theological system is more important than the plain meaning of the pericope under

consideration. This serves to weaken hearers' confidence in their ability to interpret the Word for themselves and may cause them to doubt whether the particular passage in question is even necessary. Acknowledging and confronting one's own theological bias are essential steps for a preacher to take before he or she can proclaim the warnings with either exegetical integrity or pastoral sensitivity. It is to this final and most practical matter that we now turn.

HOW SHOULD WE PREACH THESE WARNINGS?

As when handling any pericope, guidance for preaching the warnings should be sought first in paying close attention to Hebrews' literary genre then the logical development of the book's contents. (See, outline in endnotes.) Throughout his sermon the Preacher[33] argues from the lesser to the greater. His chief argument being that if those who rebelled against God under the terms of a lesser covenant were severely punished for their actions, those living under a superior covenant sealed with the blood of Christ will suffer an even worse fate if they choose to rebel. Regardless of the reader's position on the Arminian-Calvinist soteriological spectrum, the following guidelines are offered for careful consideration.

Preach the warnings collectively

Assuming Hebrews originated as a single sermon, it seems logical to think all its warnings might be preached in a single sermon today. Scot McKnight has conclusively demonstrated all five warning passages share a common form that speak of the same sin, contain the same warning, and address the same audience.[34] Thus, it should be possible to preach them all in a solitary sermon of two points ("warnings" and "consequences") or five (expounding briefly the warning and consequence in each successive pericope).

Preach the warnings individually

Because the lesser-to-greater method of instruction's degree of success depends upon an audience's prior knowledge of the lesser to establish the significance of the greater, today's preacher must consider carefully his congregation's overall biblical literacy. Each warning of Hebrews lays at the heart of one of its five main sections,[35] and each section develops one or more Old Testament themes (including, but not limited to: God's means of revelation, contrasting those revelations that came through angels with those that came through Christ; Israel's unbelief in the wilderness, climaxing at Kadesh-Barnea; Christ's priesthood, being after the order of Melchizedek rather than Levi; Israel's sacrificial system, as inferior to the finished work of Christ; and the believer's relationship to Mt. Zion, as contrasted with the Jews' experiences at Mt. Sinai). Hearers unfamiliar with these themes require sermons that will first explain their ancient contexts before heralding

the warnings derived from them. Thus, a series of sermons on the warnings appears the wisest course in today's biblically illiterate world—ideally, a six-message series beginning with an introductory sermon over-viewing the entire book, followed by separate messages on each warning in its immediate context.

Preach the warnings honestly

When sound exegesis of any passage leaves today's preacher with a message calling into question his personal or her denomination's preferred theology, that preacher has three choices. He can refuse to deal with the incongruity and set aside his troubling pericope for another (which is more difficult when preaching consecutively through an extended text); she can deny her exegetical conclusions (and conscience) by preaching only what her theology dictates; or, better, he can preach his exegetical conclusions, acknowledge the incongruity, and challenge hearers to think through the issues involved.[36]

The preacher might also take it as an occasion to reexamine his theology—not for sake of reconstructing it necessarily but with a view towards sharpening it. "In this matter," Donald Hagner helpfully reminds, "systems of theology, whether Calvinist or Arminian, need to exercise restraint. We do well to limit ourselves to the full scope of the specific statements of Scripture, the raw data of biblical theology, and to preserve the tensions we encounter therein."[37]

Preach the warnings boldly

The faithful expositor will not only treat interpretive problems honestly, he or she will expound the controverted pericope directly enough so that its force isn't lost. Handled poorly, the warnings can feel less like a kick in the seat of one's pants than one of those ridiculous disclaimers at the end of a television commercial.[39] The author of Hebrews issued his warnings directly, with unflinching boldness, and without apology. Why should today's preacher do any less?

The need for this type of preaching is obvious. Soul-drift (2:1), hard-heartedness (3:7-12), spiritual immaturity (5:12 - 6:3), deliberate sin (10:26-27), a refusal to heed God's Word (12:25), and, not least of all, church absenteeism (10:25) remain significant problems in today's church. Dustin Willis and Aaron Coe report in *Life on Mission* that "America's evangelical population loses 2.6 million people per decade;" in thirty years "if trends continue, the number of U.S. evangelicals will have dropped to about 16 million, while the population will have jumped to more than 400 million;" "about 4,000 evangelical churches [in America] close their doors every year," and of those that "remain open, about 80 percent identify themselves as plateaued."[40] The Barna Group claims, "Six in ten people will leave the church at some point

during their twenties."[41] All the research in this area confirms what many of us regrettably know firsthand. People are walking out the back door of our churches every Sunday never to return, and many whose bodies remain anchored in their pews are souls slowly drifting away from their Lord. Love demands they be boldly confronted with the seriousness of their actions.

Preach the warnings cautiously

Whenever addressing sin's relation to apostasy (3:7-19; 10:26-31), today's preacher must proceed cautiously, emphasizing that faith in Christ is the only grounds for salvation. Hearers must be reminded, lest they fall prey to a works-based righteousness, that they weren't saved because they quit sinning and don't stay saved by avoiding sin. Security is not imperiled by sin itself but, as Hebrews indicates, by sin's hardening affect that results in an unbelieving heart.

At the same time, the importance of works mustn't be ignored. Good works are the by-product of a genuine and on-going faith, especially during times of trial. "[A]ny assurance without the presence of fruit in one's life is a false one," contends Thomas.[42] Good works should therefore be promoted and celebrated in the sermon as an assurance of salvation but never proffered as salvation's basis.

Additionally, today's preacher must proceed cautiously lest hearers be misled into reducing faith to the status of work. It must be made clear that no soul's security depends upon how deeply or sincerely one believes but upon the finished work of Christ. New life is found in Him—faith's object—never in the act of faith itself.

Preach the warnings pastorally

Whatever one concludes about the spiritual state of the warnings' original intended audience, today's preacher should warn *all* hearers that *any* retreat from Christ and faith bodes ill both for the individual and his community. To retreat is to move in the wrong direction—from light to darkness, from life towards death. This is true whether the individual is saved or lost.[43] No soul in retreat should be given a false sense of security but be warned about the dire consequences of his present state and potential consequences if she persists therein.

The communal consequences of apostasy mustn't be overlooked either. Many are "defiled" by unbelief's ugly roots when they spring up in a congregation (12:15). Like a tree growing too close to a house, they can break up a solid foundation and destabilize what's built atop. Young and mature believers alike are shaken whenever a brother or sister in Christ abandons their ranks. The person's immediate family is affected. And the more well known the deserter's earlier Christian testimony, the worse the scandal in the larger unchurched community. Preachers must remind hearers that though

their spiritual welfare is a personal matter, it is by no means private.

This same community of faith that is hurt by defections from its ranks is simultaneously one of God's gracious means for discouraging defection in the first place. The Preacher reminded his readers of the importance of fellowship among believers (10:25),[44] exhorted them to encourage one another—seeing to it that no one fell into unbelief (3:12-13), and celebrated the heavenly nature of Christian fellowship (12:22-24).[45] Contemporary sermons on apostasy that are faithful to the Preacher's lead will emphasize the necessity of private and congregational fellowship, an often underemphasized topic in our ruggedly individualistic society.

When the warnings are preached so that apostasy is depicted as a real possibility for believers, today's preacher will be wise to offer two reassurances for sake of sensitive hearers especially. First, the preacher should be clear that apostasy is more than what might be called "ordinary sin." It is a particular sin—a willful, deliberate rejection of Christ, the One to Whom the Spirit bears witness. This is not to say that ordinary sin should be dismissed as insignificant. All sin is deadly (Jam. 1:15). But this particular sin is especially devastating, as realized when one understands that its severity can only be "measured," in the words of Luke Timothy Johnson, "by the greatness of the experience of God it abandons."[46] Put differently, apostasy is Trinitarian in scope. It involves forsaking the living God (3:12), crucifying the Son of God afresh and exposing Him to public contempt (6:6; 10:29a), and despising the Spirit of grace (10:29c). The perpetrator of this sin has deliberately refused the voice of God speaking through His Son (1:1-4; 12:25).[47] So while all sin is serious, this one is in a category of its own.

Second, today's preacher should emphasize for sake of sensitive hearers that apostasy is characterized by a hard heart. Those who worry they may have committed this sin show by their concern that they most likely have not. "Apostasy in Hebrews does not lead to a concern over one's status before God but to pride in sinful defiance of God's will."[48] Anyone who feels compelled to repent of sin should be encouraged to do so. The real apostate rarely, if ever, feels any such compulsion (6:6).[49] At the same time, preachers might consider challenging hearers who are doubtful of their right standing before God to examine themselves as to whether they've ever truly come to faith. The warnings of Hebrews attest to the urgency of monitoring closely one's spiritual condition and taking nothing for granted.

How one perceives the tenor of the warnings will go a long way in influencing how he or she proclaims them. Rather than use the warnings to frighten hearers, today's pastor-preacher should sound them so as to encourage spiritual development. The warnings are helpful for defining and emphasizing what discipleship, often wrongly separated from salvation, demands.[50] For the Preacher, suffering lay at the heart of discipleship. Per Johnson, suffering "is an inevitable concomitant of opening oneself to the presence and the power of God. It is the essential means by which humans become transformed into God's true and beloved children."[51] To grow

in God's family, one must suffer; and for suffering to realize its divinely intended purpose, one must persevere. To turn back is to lose out.

In this light, it is seen that the Bible issues its warnings because God desires His children to enjoy fully all the benefits salvation affords. He warns out of loving concern, lest spiritual growth be stunted, healthy communion stopped, and other blessings missed. This is especially clear in the larger context of 6:4-6 where the Preacher exhorts his audience to mature in the faith (5:11 - 6:3), speaks hopefully of their future perseverance in light of their past acts of charity (6:9-12), and recalls God's faithfulness in fulfilling His covenant promises (6:13-20).[52] Sermons on the warnings today should follow this example, highlighting the joys set before those who press onward (12:2).

Should today's preacher conclude that a Christian can in fact choose to believe no longer, he is saying that salvation doesn't diminish the believer's will. Real choices remain ours, just as much as they did before we were saved. Those who accept this view of free will should depict the ability to choose as yet another of God's blessings. He Who refused to compel Adam's obedience in Eden chooses not to compel ours today. He treats us as adults, with respect for the decisions we make. Every day brings potential blessings dressed as opportunities—in the title words of one hymn, opportunities to "trust and obey" and "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 3:18) or opportunities to harden our hearts (3:8, 15) and suffer the consequences.[53]

Preach the warnings Christocentrically

The warnings in Hebrews' sermon are issued in an obviously Christocentric context. The text of this sermon is the story of Jesus, and most of this story's components appear in 1:1-4, including: His existence before creation and subsequent role therein; His incarnation—reflecting God's glory and bearing the exact imprint of God's being in human flesh; His death-bought purification from sins; His enthronement at the Father's right-hand (presuming His resurrection and ascension); and His ongoing preservation of all things and eventual inheritance thereof. This story, supplemented by the promise of His second coming in 9:28 is, says Charles Campbell, "the starting point and the recurring 'theme' for the sermon."[54]

Following its "text" / prologue in 1:1-4, Hebrews' sermon unfolds by developing the theme of who the Son through whom God has spoken is and how He is "better than" certain persons and practices under the old covenants. The Christology that emerges in this sermon is, to quote Johnson, "astonishingly complex"—first, propounding the reality of both Jesus' humanity and deity; then, suggesting that "the human Jesus progressively grew into his stature of divine Son."[55] That is, Jesus learned obedience through what He suffered, being made perfect in the process (5:8-9); and as His sustained obedience resulted in Him becoming more fully what He already was—God's Son, so today's Christian is transformed as s/he obediently

perseveres in Christ's footsteps.[56] It is for this reason that throughout his sermon, and straightforwardly so in the end (12:1-3; 13:13), the Preacher invites his audience to look to Jesus. Offered in this context, the purpose of the warnings isn't to make hearers obsessively self-conscious and doubtful of their salvation but Christ-focused, appreciative of the deliverance He secured, and committed to following His example.

Like the Preacher, today's expositor of the warnings must strive constantly to train hearers' attention upon Jesus (12:1-3). He is the supreme example of endurance in the face of suffering, and He in all His glory is the sole source of the believer's security (6:19-20). Because of Who Jesus is and the effectiveness of what He has done, the Father is satisfied. Believers are "accepted in the Beloved" (Eph. 1:6 [KJV]), never on the basis of their own merits. Faith is the door through which one walks into life as found only in Christ. A Christ-less faith, or faith with Christ only on the periphery, is no faith at all—no matter its by-products or persistence.

All preachers, and especially those who believe apostasy poses a real threat to genuine Christians, must guard against preaching the warnings so as to imply the believer's security is somehow tenuous. Hebrews emphatically argues the opposite. Christ's work on the believer's behalf is superior to anything found under the old covenants.[57] His sacrifice, priesthood, Word, and indwelling Spirit are ours. No third party, no outside force, can separate us from Him (Rom. 8:31-29). As long as one abides in Him—God's Son who faithfully endured, finished His redemptive work, and is seated at the Father's right-hand (1:3), one is unassailably secure.

CONCLUSION

I once taught a couple of seminary courses on preaching at my alma mater. One of my students, Dan, espoused a fully Reformed theology. Over time, he came to learn what I believe about the real possibility of apostasy and its consequences for a genuine believer. He didn't agree with me, of course, and sometimes even teased me about it, but he was always respectful. I liked Dan. But, as so often happens, we lost touch after the class ended.

One night years later, Dan reached out to me through Facebook. He wanted to talk. He told of how he went into full-time evangelism after graduation and enjoyed a moderate level of success. But, in his own words, he felt something was missing. Many of the services in which he participated seemed cold to him. He found his audiences to be apathetic, satisfied in their salvation, seeing no need to seek after God.

Dan asked the Lord to show him what was wrong. Almost immediately the preaching invitations stopped. He took this as a sign, began praying fervently, and studying the Scriptures intently. After awhile, the warnings in Hebrews and other verses that on their surface seem to teach the possibility of apostasy started making sense to him in a way he previously denied. He called to let me know he had changed his theology.

During our hour-long conversation Dan remarked, "Without the fear of apostasy, people really have no reason to lead holy lives or to grow spiritually." While I believe that's an overstatement—that the love of Christ should be enough to constrain us—I had to admit he was on to something. A well-reasoned and sensitively proclaimed doctrine of apostasy based on the warnings of Hebrews isn't a cure-all, but it just might prove to be much needed medicine for the spiritual lethargy that has infected many in today's church and post-Christian world.

NOTES

1. Due to defections and subsequent applications for re-admittance in the pre- Constantinian church during seasons of intense persecution and questions over what to do with believers who committed post-baptismal sins, debates over how to interpret and apply the warnings in Hebrews were as practical in the pre-Reformation era as they are sometimes volatile today. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary*, in *The New Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 163, singles out Tertullian and the third-century Novatians as early church advocates of a stringent application of these warnings in the cases of those who lapsed, with Hermas, Cyprian, and Ambrose of Milan holding more moderate views. Following the Reformation, debates over the warnings came to focus more narrowly on the eternal security and assurance of believers. Regardless, the concern for all interpreters of the warnings historically has been "basically the same," claims C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience with Reference to the Warning Passages in the Book of Hebrews* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 68. That question being, "do these passages threaten the eternal safety of believers?"
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are to the book of Hebrews.
3. W. Stanley Outlaw, *The Book of Hebrews*, in *The Randall House Bible Commentary*, gen. ed. Robert E. Picirilli (Nashville: Randall House, 2005), 118- 25. As the doctrine of apostasy is a distinguishing tenet of the National Association of Free Will Baptists, in which Outlaw and the present writer are ordained ministers, and as *The Randall House Commentary* represents that denomination's majority opinion on such matters, this lesser known commentary was intentionally selected for surveying some of the most well known interpretations of the warnings.
4. Ibid., 118. Commentators holding some form of this view include: John F. MacArthur, *Hebrews* (Moody); *Matthew Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Revell); Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Baker); Gleason Archer, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Baker); F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans); Leon Morris, *Hebrews* (Zondervan); Arthur W. Pink, *An Exposition of Hebrews* (Baker); A. C. Gaebelein, *Philippians to Hebrews* (Our Hope); John Gill, *Romans to Revelation* (rep. Baker); John Calvin, *Commentary on Hebrews* (rep. Baker);

John Owen, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (rep. Baker); H. A. Ironside, *Hebrews* (Loizeaux); Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All: An Exposition of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Revell); John A. Bengel, *Romans to Revelation* (Kregel); George H. Guthrie, *Hebrews* (Zondervan); William Lane, *Hebrews: A Call to Commitment* (Hendrickson); Paul Ellingworth, *The Epistle to the Hebrews: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Eerdmans); Buist Fanning, "A Classical Reformed View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* (Kregel); Ray Stedman, *Hebrews* (IVP); C. Adrian Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience...*(Peter Lang); Andrew H. Trotter, Jr., *Interpreting the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Baker).

5. Henry Alford, "Prolegomena & Hebrews," Vol. 4, in *Alford's Greek Testament* (Guardian Press, 1857), 113, quoted by Outlaw, 120. See also, Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, David Brown, *Matthew to Revelation* (rep. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 543.
6. Thomas Hewitt, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1960), 108. Other commentators holding this position include: Albert Barnes, *Hebrews* (Baker); W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Hebrews: A Devotional Commentary* (Eerdmans); John Peter Lange, *Thessalonians--Hebrews* (rep. Zondervan); Charles R. Erdman, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Westminster); Clarence S. Roddy, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Baker); Theodore H. Robinson, The Epistle to the Hebrews (Harper); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Confident* (Victor); Homer A. Kent, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Baker).
7. Thomas Schreiner, "Calvinism and the Warning Passages: A Brief Reply to Scot McKnight," *Credo Magazine*, www.credomag.com, retrieved on March 12, 2014.
8. Randolph Yeager, *Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James 1:1 - 3:18* (New Orleans: Pelican, 1985), 202, quoted by Outlaw, 123. See also, James T. Draper, *Hebrews: The Life that Pleases God* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, n.d.), 153; Walter A. Henrichsen, *After the Sacrifice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 79. Randall Gleason, "The Old Testament Background of the Warning in Hebrews 6:4-8," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155 (January - March 1998): 91, argued the apostate's potential loss to be one of "blessings *and ultimately the loss of physical life*" [emphasis added].
9. Kenneth Wuest, *Golden Nuggets from the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1945), 20-21. Randall Gleason, "A Moderate Reformed View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews* agrees in part with Wuest but maintains the warnings were intended for genuine Jewish believers and the danger they faced wasn't final apostasy but a "serious act of unfaithfulness" (354) to result in physical, not eternal, punishment.
10. Commentators holding this position include: D. D. Whedon, *Titus-Revelation* (Hunt & Eaton); Charles W. Carter, *Hebrews to Revelation* (Eerdmans); B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans); Harless and Hofmann according to Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (rep. Klock & Klock); Ben Witherington, *Letters and Homilies for Jewish Christians* (IVP).

11. That gradual backsliding can lead to final apostasy isn't a distinctively Christian, much less Arminian, theological viewpoint. Haim Hillel Ben-Sasson, "Apostasy," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd. ed., 2007, observed: "[A]postasy [from Judaism] was not always motivated by debased considerations, the historical situation, or meditations of this nature. The autobiography of an apostate of the first half of the 12th century (Hermanus Quondan Judaeus) demonstrates the effects of gradual absorption of Christian ideas and acclimatization to the Christian mode of life through everyday contacts and conversations."
12. Outlaw, 125. Though sometimes claimed as an advocate of position 3 (above), B. F. Westcott, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, believed "apostasy is a *real* possibility," according to Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will* (Nashville: Randall House, 2002), 227. Other authors holding position 7 include: Gottlieb Lunemann, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Epistle to the Hebrews* (T. & T. Clark); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Epistle of James* (Augsburg); Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (rep. Klock & Klock); James Moffatt, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (ICC, T. & T. Clark); W. F. Moulton, *Ephesians to Revelation* (Zondervan); Marcus Dods, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans); Johannes Schneider, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Eerdmans); H. Orton Wiley, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Beacon Hill); Robert E. Picirilli, *Grace, Faith, Free Will* (Randall House); Stephen M. Ashby, "A Reformed Arminian View," in *Four Views on Eternal Security*, gen. ed. Matthew Pinson (Eerdmans); Milton Crowson, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Randall House); Grant Osborne, "A Classical Arminian View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*. For the sake of full disclosure, this position is the one favored by the present article's author.
13. Commentators refusing to weigh-in on the larger soteriological implications of the warnings as traditionally presented, seeking a middle ground, or maintaining the warnings can be interpreted properly only in a particular historical light include: Craig Koester, *Hebrews* (Doubleday); James Thompson, *Hebrews* (Baker); David DeSilva, *Perseverance in Gratitude* (Eerdmans).
14. Tom Wright, *Hebrews for Everyone* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 59. Wright proceeded to explain that the "normal" way of resolving the apparent contradiction between 6:4-6 and Paul's "emphatic 'no'" to the question of whether a Christian can lose all is to suggest the original audience was made up of church members who never made the gospel "their own, deep down inside" (60). So, despite his initial attempt to render the question moot, Wright finally fits under the first position cataloged by Outlaw.
15. J. Robertson McQuilkin, "Limits of Cultural Interpretation," in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (June 1980), 114.
16. David L. Cooper, *The World's Greatest Library: Graphically Illustrated* (Los Angeles: Biblical Research Society, 1970), 11.

17. Ibid., "Some Rules of Interpretation," *The World's Greatest Library*, from www.biblicalresearch.info, retrieved March 5, 2014.
18. Although Cooper addressed how parallelism in Hebrew poetry and double-reference in prophecy may affect interpretation, he didn't delve into the larger discussion of how genre affects meaning—a discussion that began later in the history of hermeneutics.
19. Traditionally, interpretation and application have been held as two distinct functions with each contributing to a text's overall meaning. Interpretation yielding the original meaning, i.e., what it meant; and application, the text's contemporary meaning, i.e., what it demands. Ideally, application should follow interpretation, but increasingly we find the two functions being conflated (McQuilkin, 114).
20. Trotter, 97-110, analyzed all the textual variants rated A or B in USB(4). He concluded the variants in 4:2, 5:12, and 6:2 have only "some theological/exegetical significance," with those in 6:3 and 12:12 having "little." None, according to Trotter, hold "great significance."
21. Admittedly, the metaphor of "rest" in Hebrews 3 - 4 is somewhat complex, as explained by Judith Hoch Wray, *Rest as a Theological Metaphor in the Epistle to the Hebrews and the Gospel of Truth* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998).
22. McQuilkin, 115.
23. Historical and cultural contexts, previously researched to establish a text's original meaning, are now often (ab)used in the *application* process to distort or dismiss what the Bible plainly says about homosexuality, women in senior pastoral roles, and other subjects where the biblical position disagrees with contemporary tastes. Wuest was guilty of a type of special pleading when he argued for consigning Hebrews' warnings to the first century based primarily on his (theologically influenced?) reconstruction of their historical context. If his rationale is accepted, the plain meaning and common sense application of any passage might be set aside because of what the expositor chooses to (dis)believe about it historical and cultural contexts. This would call into question Paul's clear assertion that all Scripture (without reference to contextual reconstructions) is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness (2 Tim. 3:16).
24. Leon Morris, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Volume 12*, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 3.
25. Trotter, 69.
26. Ibid., 80. George Guthrie, in *Four Views of the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 436, cautions against using hortatory passages as a foundation for building a theology then using that theology to interpret the presuppositions behind the hortatory passages.
27. The two primary New Testament passages teaching the possibility of apostasy are the book of Hebrews and 2 Peter 2:18-22. As for other related passages, the present writer concurs with Picrilli, 199: "I do not tend to look for intimations of the possibility of apostasy everywhere in the New Testament, but instead to build the case on the passages that treat the

matter directly. Following that, I am prepared for other intimations of the possibility when they arise." Among these Picirilli lists: 1 Tim. 1:18-20; 2 Tim. 2:16-18; Col. 1:21-23; 1 Pet. 1:5; Gal. 5:1-4; 1 Thess. 3:5; Philip. 2:16; Gal. 4:9-11; 1 Cor. 10:1-14.

28. Roger R. Nicole, "Some Comments on Hebrews 6:4-6 and the Doctrine of the Perseverance of God with the Saints," in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 361, quoted by McKnight, 52 [emphasis added].
29. Systematically theological, as opposed to pericopely theological. See, Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2013), 110-8, 136-7. Joseph Fantin, in his review of Bateman's *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, from www.dts.edu, retrieved November 13, 2014, noted this tendency to rely on systematic theology among the book's Reformed writers: "Interestingly the methods of the Arminian and Reformed positions differed. The Arminian contributors focused primarily on the warning passages themselves, whereas the Reformed authors often took a more synthetic or thematic approach to the passages."
30. Picirilli, 199.
31. Ibid., 202. Picrilli's claim here is borne out in Witherington's caution: "Theological systems, while not bad in themselves, can often lead to very strained interpretations of biblical texts, especially when the system is the primary intellectual grid through which the text is being read" (215).
32. McQuilkin, 114.
33. With Thomas Long, as cited by Richard Eslinger, "Spirituality and Preaching: Metaphors of the Journey," in *Preaching Hebrews*, eds. David Fleer and David Bland (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 2003), 46, this article will designate the author of Hebrews' sermon as "the Preacher."
34. Scot McKnight, "The Warning Passages of Hebrews: A Formal Analysis and Theological Conclusions" (*Trinity Journal* 1992), 25, summarizes, "In each warning passage we find: (1) the *subjects* or *audience* who are either committing or in danger of committing, (2) the *sin* that leads to (3) the *exhortation* which, if not followed, leads to (4) the *consequences* of that sin." Likewise, comparing Hebrews 6:4-6 and 10:26-39, Outlaw, 252, sees enough structural similarities to indicate that at least these two warnings deal with the same subject. "In each passage there is: (1) a definition of apostasy from the standpoint of that passage; (2) a clear declaration of the result of apostasy; (3) an illustration to clarify the point; and (4) encouragement to avoid following the road that leads to apostasy." Therefore, writes McKnight, 28, "when we need to know the meaning of an individual expression in any of the warning passages and are unsure as to the precise nuance intended by our author, it is both compulsory and eminently helpful to comb through the evidence about the same component [i.e., audience, sin, exhortation, consequences] in the other warning passages to help resolve our initial difficulties. A synthesis of each component, then, is

the best procedure for determining meaning for each passage."

35. Picirilli, 214-5.
36. McKnight, 52, "What I am saying is two-fold: (1) our theology ought to be challenged and reformulated as a result of our exegesis and in light of those exegetical conclusions; and (2) we need to admit when our theological constructions are at odds with a text's apparent reading and so construct our synthesis in a way that incorporates exegetical conclusions that may be more plausible."
37. Donald A. Hagner, *Encountering the Book of Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 91.
38. R. Larry Overstreet, "Hermeneutical Problem? Homiletical Opportunity," paper presented at the 2014 annual meeting of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Chicago, IL.
39. DeSilva, 244, "We should not make Hebrews 6:4-8 to have less force than it did for its first hearers, and many discussions of the passage written from the perspective of a conviction of 'eternal security' seek to do exactly that."
40. As quoted by Mark Coppenger, "Evangelism in a Post-Christian World: Ten Lessons I Think I've Learned," paper presented at the 2014 Theological Symposium of Welch College, Nashville, TN.
41. Barna Group, "Learn How To Engage Millennials," solicitation for enrollment in Barna Labs, November 11, 2014.
42. Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 286.
43. Similarly, Gareth Cockerill, "A Wesleyan Arminian View," in *Four Views on the Warning Passages in Hebrews*, 292, suggests the warnings do not mean people should be viewed as "in" or "out" of God's kingdom but as moving toward or away from Him.
44. Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 287, connects the habit of abandoning the assembly (10:25) to the deliberate sin for which no sacrifice remains (10:26), concludes that "church participation" for the author of Hebrews "reveals one's standing in salvation," and suggests "withdrawal from the assembly would indicate a lack of saving faith."
45. Cockerill, 291-2.
46. Johnson, 163.
47. Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 179.
48. McKnight., 42-43.
49. Whether the "impossibility" of being renewed again to repentance is psychological or theological is debated. Trotter, 218, following the lead of Ellingworth, takes the neuter gender of the adjective to be decisive. "It indicates that his readers cannot be renewed again to repentance objectively, not that they themselves are incapable of repentance... [Ellingworth] suggests that according to Heb. 10:26-29 even God is rendered powerless in this situation, because in Christ he has offered the perfect sin offering and it has been rejected. Therefore there remains no sacrifice for sins. This is surely correct."
50. Thomas, *A Case for Mixed-Audience*, 288-9.

51. Luke Timothy Johnson, "Hebrews' Challenge to Christians: Christology and Discipleship," in *Preaching Hebrews*, 28.
52. Rubel Shelly and John York in their dialogical sermon "We Are at Risk!" in P*reaching Hebrews*, 128-39, do a fine job of handling the surrounding context of 6:4-6 so as to offer encouragement and exhortation. Interestingly, although they touch on the security issue raised in 6:4-6, they don't expound this part of the pericope (5:11 - 6:20).
53. Many of the guidelines in this section were originally inspired by Picirilli's, 204-8, seven cautions for developing a doctrine of apostasy.
54. Charles Campbell, "From Narrative Text to Discursive Sermon: The Challenge of Hebrews," in *Preaching Hebrews*, 30-31.
55. Johnson, "Hebrews' Challenge to Christians," 14, 21.
56. Ibid., 20, 25.
57. Cockerill, 291, "[S]ince the severity of the warnings rests on the greatness of the salvation Christ has brought, these warnings remind us of its full adequacy."

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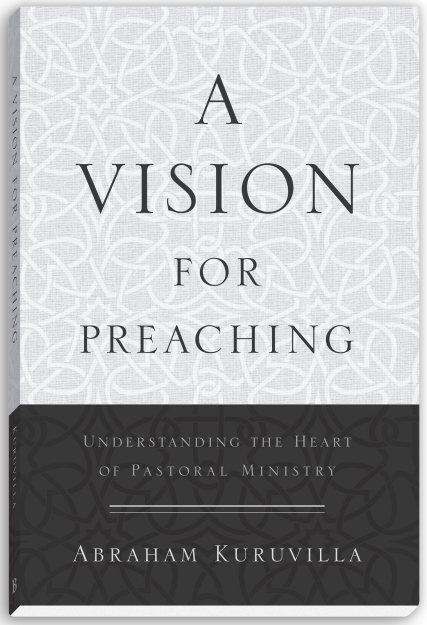

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"LET THEM COME, FORBID THEM NOT": EXPLORING CHILD-CONSCIOUS PREACHING

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ABSTRACT: Every Sunday across the world, many pastors preach to an audience that includes children. This article develops the notion of "child-conscious preaching," which seeks to take the unique developmental and spiritual needs of children into account when crafting a sermon. The article first explores the child-consciousness of the Bible, demonstrating that children play a vital role in God's redemptive plan and deserve nurture and nourishment in the Christian community. The article will then explore the various characteristics of child-conscious preaching, and provide a critically reflective approach to child-conscious preaching that enables preachers to ensure that their sermon will be child-friendly and child-nurturing.

INTRODUCTION

On many Sunday mornings, pastors across the world will preach to an audience that includes children. In my own church, children up until fifth grade join us for worship and communion, and depart to Sunday school once the preacher (usually myself) steps into the pulpit. Children 6th grade and up stay for the entire service. I have had the privilege of attending services that allow even the youngest children to listen to the sermon, and have attended churches that restrict their Sunday services to those over a certain age. However, the trend appears to be, at least in evangelical churches, that propagating an intergenerational church culture is highly desirable in a society segregated by age.[1]

While pastors often tailor their sermons to be culturally relevant, comprehensible to all people, and engaging, the question of constructing a preaching style that is conscious of children in the congregation has not been seriously dealt with. What is the reason for this homiletical lacuna? I contend three things. First, some churches do not allow children to partake of Sunday morning worship services, pushing the need for child-conscious sermons to the periphery of the preaching pastor's foci and responsibilities. Second, and along the same lines, it is an issue of ministry compartmentalization. Pastors who craft their sermons to be intellectually and spiritually engaging tend to have adults in mind. The question of nurturing children's faith on Sunday mornings is often relegated to Sunday school teachers and children's

ministry volunteers, leaving the sermon to be geared specifically toward adults. Thus the task of nurturing children's faith is taken off the plate of the teaching pastor, who now does not need to worry about preaching to children. Third, it could be an issue of difficulty. How can a pastor, who already has limited time every week to craft the sermon they actually want to preach, be expected to construct a sermon that is appropriate for everyone, ages 5–100 years? The task demands a certain level of understanding the needs of children, and for pastors whose ministry focuses mostly on the needs of adults, their exposure to children and their spiritual needs is limited. Thus, child-conscious sermons are hardly considered due to a lack of need, the proliferation of ministry compartmentalization, and a lack of understanding children's faith development.

In light of the dearth of literature on preaching with children in mind, I propose that pastors who regularly find children in their midst should seek to craft child-conscious sermons. When I speak of "child-conscious" sermons, I mean a particular homiletical approach that understands and embraces the high status of children in the Bible--their role as divine blessings and exemplars of humble faith--and accounts for their unique spiritual and developmental needs in the process of sermon-crafting. Child-conscious preaching differs from "child-centered" preaching, which focuses on preaching to children instead of preaching *with children in mind*. One accounts for an intergenerational audience, the other, a single age group.

In order to craft an approach to preaching that accounts for the children in our midst, I will first look to the witness of Scripture, as a cursory survey of both testaments demonstrates that children have always had a particular role to play in God's redemptive narrative, and merit closer attention than we care to give in our churches at times. Next, the article will propose several characteristics of child-conscious preaching that engages the robust and growing literature base on children's spirituality. To conclude, the article will articulate a series of questions that preachers should ask themselves as they prepare sermons for an audience that includes children. It is the hope that this paper will ignite a conversation regarding the pastor's role in nurturing the faith of children apart from hiring professional staff to accomplish the task, and challenge pastors and preachers to grow more aware of the role children play in the grand plan of God.

THE CHILD-CONSCIOUSNESS OF THE BIBLE

There is a robust and growing literature base related to locating childhood in biblical and theological perspective. Until recently, this literature base did not consist of much in the way of sustained theological reflection, and instead focused on "the responsibility of parents to educate their children, or for children to obey their parents."[2] However, closer readings of Scripture and great theologians throughout history have yielded significant fruit with regard to understanding children in theological perspective. This

is especially evident in Marcia Bunge's edited volume, *The Child in Christian Thought* (2001), which surveys the child theology of figures such as Augustine, John Chrysostom, John Calvin, Martin Luther, and Karl Barth.[3] It must be noted that while these figures were not especially known for their theological musings on childhood, they nonetheless expressed numerous ideas regarding the theology of childhood, the role of children in the Kingdom of God and in society, and thoughts on nurturing children in the faith. While exploring the breadth of ecumenical Christian thought on childhood is outside the scope of this article, this section will look to the testimony of the Bible with regards to children, which demonstrates that children play a bigger role in the Story of God than many of us may have originally thought.

1. *The Child-Consciousness of the Old Testament*

From the outset, the Bible considers children as gifts from above to communities and families. Adam and Eve are given the mandate to procreate in Genesis 1:28, indicating that physically bearing children was a blessing and served as a part of God's overall redemptive program. In discussing the mandate to procreate found in Genesis 1:28, May et al. write that "The author of Genesis saw the God-given privilege of procreation as a blessing. From the beginning of the biblical record, then, children are considered a blessing."[4] In Genesis 3:5, we read of the reunion of Jacob and Esau where Esau inquires of Jacob whom he has with him, to which Jacob responds "The children whom God has graciously given your servant." It is also interesting to note that God instructed Noah to take his sons with him when boarding the ark, when God could have easily told Noah to leave his sons to suffer the fate of the rest of the world. Joseph introduces his sons Manasseh and Ephraim to Jacob as those "whom God has given me" (Gen. 48:9). The Psalms also have much to contribute to the understanding that children are indeed a blessing from God (113:9; 127:3-5; 128:1-4).

Children also play a central role in the Abrahamic covenant. In Genesis 12:1-3, God calls Abraham to join Him in covenant; Abraham's role is to believe that God will keep His promises, and practice firm obedience to God's commands. Abraham's son Isaac plays a crucial role in the execution of that covenant, as he was born to a 90-year old mother and 100-year old father (Gen. 17:17). Abraham endures hardship throughout his time on earth, growing impatient with God's redemptive pace and the continual trying of his faith. However,

> God's ultimate blessing for Abraham is that through his children all the nations of the world will be blessed. He and his children have the great privilege of being partners with God in blessing the world. Through them, the Messiah will come, bringing salvation to all."[5]

Thus, children continue to be a central theme from the earliest

chapters of the Bible onward.

While children are indeed a blessing and play a key role in redemptive history, the Old Testament indicates that children are still in need of educational and formational experiences that immerse them in the life of faith and facilitate spiritual growth. We read in Deuteronomy 6 of the responsibility for parents to obey the Mosaic Law so that their children and their grandchildren onward would know the story of Israel's redemption from the bondage of Egyptian slavery. Parents are given the responsibility to "diligently teach" their children the statutes and discuss them on a daily basis. May et. al write:

> Reciting the commandments and talking about them with the children is to take place at home, when the family travels, at bedtime, and the first thing in the morning...it should flow freely, spontaneously, at any time and in any place. In this way God becomes an integral part of the family's life."[6]

In addition, symbols are used to instruct children in the life of faith (6:8-9), and regular storytelling of the Hebrews' redemptive history is necessary in order to ensure the transmission of faith onto the next generation (6:10-12). Children's faith formation then becomes even more crucial as we see the negative fruit of the Hebrews' lack of attention to diligently teaching and discussing God's salvation both physically and spiritually, as the Israelites were continually led astray by the idols of other nations.

2. *The Child-Consciousness of the New Testament*

The status of children in the Bible intensifies with the birth of Jesus. It is significant to note that God the Father chose to send Jesus not as a fully-formed adult human but as a baby, to experience to the helplessness of childhood and the awkwardness of physical growth. The incarnation of the Messiah as a child speaks volumes to the emphasis that God places on childhood nurture throughout the Bible. Though we know very little of Christ's formative years, we do know that he engaged religious leaders at the age of 12, and regularly pointed to children as exemplars of faith who could express heartfelt praise to God. While the theme of Jesus and children could be considered its own sub-discipline, I will briefly analyze children the Lukan account in order to demonstrate Jesus' own thinking on childhood.

Joel Green contends that "To readers of the Gospels, Jesus' engagement with children is well-known...but nowhere in the New Testament are children more at center stage than in Luke's Gospel."[7] Green notes that in the ancient Mediterranean world, children occupied the bottom rung of society's social hierarchy; children were valuable so far as they were *useful* to their parents'

business and work.[8] It is against this backdrop of diminished social status and utilitarian anthropology that Luke's Gospel sharply contrasts with the dominant culture. Christ, answering the query of his disciples regarding their status in the Kingdom of God, responds, "Whoever welcomes this little child in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. For it is the one who is least among you all who is the greatest." (9:46-48, NIV). Christ subverts the social order by locating children as the exemplars of faithfulness which the disciples should readily serve and imitate. As Green notes, this line of thought meshes harmoniously with the episode of the woman barging into Simon the Pharisee's home and washing Jesus' feet; the disciples were to imitate the example of the sinful woman, not the Pharisee.[9] "Put sharply, whereas children might be called upon to perform acts of hospitality, so now Jesus' followers are called upon to do so."[10]

In Luke 18:16-17, in response to the refusal of the disciples to allow parents to present their children to Jesus for blessings, Jesus responds, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it." Green observes that this interaction is located between the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (18:9-14), and Jesus' encounter with the rich young ruler (18:18-23). These episodes demonstrate the transformational component of Jesus' ministry; as Jesus himself contends that "For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted" (18:14).[11] Thus children in Jesus' ministry serve as an exemplar of faithfulness, and the treatment of children on behalf of Jesus' disciples tells of their own relationship with Jesus. "Jesus had informed his disciples that they embody the gospel when they extend hospitality to little children. To welcome children is to welcome Jesus, and in turn, God."[12] Green goes on to state just how pertinent children are to the theology and function of the Kingdom of God:

> Clearly, for Luke, children, these little ones, exemplify those who are aligned with God's royal rule; we see them in the politics of God's Kingdom. Here we have on display the dispositions of those whose lives are at significant remove from the corridors of conventional power and prestige...When Jesus wants to speak of God's royal rule, in Luke's gospel, he points to the poor, including newborn babies. Their place in the world serves to fill out a definition of the life-world revealed in Jesus' coming.[13]

Further, Green (2014) notes:

> According to this way of putting the world together, God's kingdom deconstructs those worldly systems, conventions, and practices

> that lead to the devaluation of these little ones like these newborn babies. And according to this way of putting the world together, the disciples' behavior is self-incriminating. Just as they have censured parents bringing their infants to Jesus, so their behavior is now censured by God's own valuation system, in which the lowest are held in the highest regard.[14]

Thus, in God's economy, children are regarded as having intrinsic dignity. As humans created in the image of the Triune God, children deserve attention, nurture, and respect. As a side note, Jesus' culturally subversive paradigm of children as exemplars critiques modern -day practices of relegating children to the halls of Sunday school while the "mature believers" enjoy sermons with the rest of the Christian community.[15]

CHARACTERISTICS OF CHILD-CONSCIOUS PREACHING

The Bible verifies that children are worthy of our attention and care in the Christian community. They are our co-pilgrims in the journey toward Christlikeness and as such require our diligent spiritual nurture and nourishment. A child's nourishment and formation in the life of faith requires that all aspects of church ministry seek to engage their hearts, minds, and imaginations. Typically, in evangelicalism, this has come in the form of Sunday school lessons, vacation Bible schools, programs such as AWANA that seek to educate children in biblical knowledge, and catechetical approaches (in high churches). While these efforts certainly have their respective strengths and weaknesses, it figures that pastors who preach to an intergenerational audience should not let the opportunity to preach a sermon that reaches into the hearts and minds of children be a wasted opportunity. At its core, child-conscious preaching uses child-friendly language, stimulates the spiritual imaginations of children, uses narrative as a means of communicating deep theological truths to children, and recognizes and celebrates the place and contribution of children to the Christian community.[15]

1. *Child-conscious preaching uses comprehendible language suitable for all ages.*

This first point may seem a bit obvious, but it is worth repeating, especially in the context of preaching with children in mind. While there are numerous definitions for "preaching," at its core, preaching entails proclaiming the truth of God in a clear manner, understandable by all. The tendency to use high, abstract language removed from the parlance of everyday life is pervasive among people who have studied the original language of the Bible and rigorous theological works. However, in order to preach a message that reaches all ears and hearts, it is imperative that preachers use words that everyone can understand and embrace.

Child-conscious preaching naturally demands that the language

used in sermons take into account the developmental needs of children. While children are imaginative and quite creative, they still generally describe and understand things in concrete terms. They do not possess the rational or cognitive capabilities of adults. They are continually hearing new words they do not understand, and thus being stretched in a positive way. However, when preaching sermons, it is imperative that preachers take into account that children have a limited understanding of high abstract concepts, and as such need explanation in order for them to grapple with the truths contained in the sermon.[16]

2. *Child-conscious preaching makes room for the imagination, seeking to stimulate the natural, organic spirituality of children.*

Children possess an inherent orientation toward the spiritual. While studying the spiritual lives of young children, psychiatrist turned children's spirituality expert Robert Coles found that as children begin to understand the world around them and its complexities, they naturally turn to the religious to construct meaning and make sense of their world. Coles thus understood children to be "spiritual pilgrims." He writes, "Children try to understand not only what is happening to them, but why; and in doing that, they call upon the religious life they have experienced, the spiritual values they have received, as well as other sources of explanation."[17] Thus as children navigate the complexities of their young lives, their inclination is toward interpreting their experiences through the lens of the spiritual.

Csinos and Beckwith contend that since children possess a natural inclination toward the spiritual, the church should open its ears to the spiritual insights of children. They write, "one could argue that children should be some of the church's main theologians-in-residence, since their understandings of their God experiences are less likely to be fettered and boxed in by the adult conceptions that we teach them as they grow up."[18] Csinos and Beckwith contend further, "If we're all pilgrims on a spiritual journey, then we need to remember this when we get into conversations with children."[19] While the proposal that children should engage in theological discourse in ecclesial communities is no doubt controversial among evangelicals, the thought still stands that children do have spiritual imaginations that need to be cultivated, and a Sunday morning sermon is one of the best places to accomplish this task.

Noted children's spirituality expert Catherine Stonehouse explores the religious lives of children in great detail:

> To say that children are spiritual beings does not assume that they are ready for spiritual disciplines or that they can be expected to consider what pleases God in all their interactions. Often children experience God in fleeting moments of awareness and may not be

> fully conscious of the encounter. Such glimpses of God, however, are real, and the joy, peace, and insight of those glimpses within the child someday may come into the full bloom of conscious love for God.[20]

While children do not possess the capacity to think rationally about the finer points of Christian doctrine and biblical texts, they nonetheless possess an imagination and sense of wonder that surpasses that of adults. In order to preach in a way that engages this deep sense of spiritual imagination in children, pastors need to be aware of the power of wonder and inspiration can have in the homiletical task. Sofia Cavaletti, another noted children's spirituality expert, writes that "Wonder...attracts us with irresistible force toward the object of our astonishment," and leads us to become a people "immersed in the contemplation of something that exceeds us."[21]

Child-conscious preaching stimulates the spiritually imaginative lives of children through explorations of the wonder, awe, and majesty of a living God who has reached down to the earth and touched our lives. While it could easily be said that imagination is a needed component in effective preaching for everyone, it especially rings true for children. The teaching pastor has the incredible opportunity of cultivating spiritual awareness and imagination through preaching, which in turn, inspires children to contemplate deeply the things of God. Karen-Marie Yust explores this possibility by noting that our own cultivation of spiritual awareness "means that we are better prepared to supply some of the religious information that our children need for their own development of a spiritually reflective life."[22] The more a pastor can look to a biblical text, contemplate its spiritual richness, and impart holy imagination, the more children will be comfortable and encouraged to explore the things of God through Bible reading, hearing stories, and conversations with God through prayer.

3. *Child-conscious preaching uses narrative as a means of communicating deep truths to the minds of children.*

> I have written elsewhere:
>
> Stories awaken our deepest emotions, transform the ways we understand essential truths of the faith, and lead us to take redemptive action in this broken world. Story has the power to give us strength, peace, and comfort, even when devastating events occur and when evil is ever-present in this world.[23]

While story has the potential to provide powerful formational experiences for those of all ages, children are especially captivated by story. Newton muses that "As a good storyteller shares an adventure, listeners of all ages picture themselves in the characters rehearsing emotions, thoughts,

and dreams. Stories are intensely interactive. They spawn activity within the hearts of all ages."[24] As mentioned previously, the depth of children's' imaginations provide a sensitive orientation toward story that impact them on a heart-deep level.

There is a reason that children are educated in the many classic stories of Scripture. Children who grow up in the faith can easily recite the finer points of the stories of Noah, Joseph, Moses, David and Goliath, and Christ. Stories captivate their imaginations, help them interpret their own faith experiences and understand the grand Story of salvation found in Christ, and provide principles that shape and form their spiritual imaginations. May et al. mention ironically that "the stories of the prodigal son and the good Samaritan tell us who God is and what God expects of us more compellingly than a hundred sermons," and that we should follow Christ's example of fusing stories into our teaching.[25] This exhortation certainly applies to the task of preaching, as practically speaking, stories ensure that a congregation will be more likely to stay awake for a compelling story than to hear the nuances of the Greek New Testament!

While the Bible is inexhaustibly filled with several powerful and compelling stories that certainly can form and transform the spiritual lives of children, Richard Jensen proposes that there are several sources for stories. Other than the Bible, Jensen proposes autobiography as a source for stories. However, Jensen cautions against using *autobiography* in excess: "There can be too much of self in our preaching. The listeners wonder when they come to church what aspect of our life we will talk about this Sunday...The stories we tell cannot continually revolve around our self and our own private world." The purpose of autobiography, Jensen writes, should bring glory to God, and not to ourselves. "We tell the story of our own struggles in order to throw favorable light on God's gracious love."[27] A third source for stories are *stories of people and communities of faith*. He ponders, "We want to know how God has worked in other human lives in times of illness, stress, an uncertain future, grief, and so forth...We are comforted by the stories of individuals in whose lives God's presence has been revealed."[28] A fourth source for stories is from the world of the arts. "Cultural works of art give shape to the questions of life. . .If we use these works of art in our preaching in order to define the human dilemma we can almost be guaranteed that the picture we paint will be a picture that is relevant to our congregation."[29] A final source for stories is creative fiction. This refers to the stories that we write ourselves as an aid in the homiletical task. Of this, Jensen provides the caveat that "Our stories are always subservient to God's story. Our goal is not to dazzle with storytelling ability but to simply tell a story in service to a text of scripture."[30] Jensen's sources of stories provide the preacher with ample room to explore what stories work for a particular congregation and its children.

Child-conscious preaching articulates the grand Story of God's redemption through Christ and stories of humanity in a way that engages the story-driven minds and hearts of children. "The stories children love

shape what they believe," as May et al. contend.[31] Bringing the dimension of narrative (biblical, personal, or cultural) serves as an effective means of including children in the sermon and engaging their attention. These stories have the potential to shape their faith experiences for a lifetime and help them picture themselves as actors in the grand Story of God over the course of their lives.

4. *Child-conscious preaching recognizes and celebrates the place of children in Christian community.*

As mentioned previously, the children of Israel had an important role to play in their community. In the New Testament, children are pictured as being exemplars of faith, worthy of simultaneous (and almost paradoxical) emulation and nourishment. As human beings created in the image of God, children need Christian community. Marva Dawn, in her classic work Is *It A Lost Cause?* writes:

> It is crucial that our children experience a community that wrestles together to comprehend texts, that acknowledges the incomprehensible ones, that obeys those that make clear God's heart, that treasures all the narratives...as part of God's Revelation to form his people, that is eager to keep on learning.[32]

Strong Christian community that loves one another, serves one another, shares with one another, challenges one another, and learns from one another provides the perfect context for children to develop in their dependence on God in the life of faith. May et al. contend that Christian community does not only provide children with rich formational experiences, but provides adults with the opportunity to be blessed by the presence of children.[33] In this sense, May et al. offer five gifts that Christian community offers children, as well as what children offer Christian community.

The first gift the Christian community offers children is *true belonging*. Against the grain of many approaches to children's ministry, May et al. write The church will be a positive influence in the development of its children to the degree that they are seen *as part of* the church, not just attached to it through programs, no matter how well conceived or entertaining these programs are."[34] Children seek to belong to something greater than themselves. The Christian community offers children a sense of belonging to a greater body composed of people from a variety of different backgrounds--a testimony to the power of God to redeem and restore. As Dawn writes, the gospel calls us to "welcome everyone as God has welcomed us, breaking down barriers to discover the unity of God's diversity, the revealing of God's grace that comes from people not like ourselves."[35] Child-conscious preaching seeks to welcome children to experience true belonging in the congregation by engaging and encouraging them in their development of

Christ-centered lives. In addition to touching on issues that adults commonly struggle with, child-conscious preaching addresses the issues that children regularly deal with in an effort to ensure that they "truly belong" in the Christian community, such as identity, discipline, and peer relationships.

The second gift the Christian community offers children is *meaningful participation*. In many evangelical churches, the aim or goal of children's ministry is to provide a learning experience for children. However, May et al. contend that "Along with adults, children grow spiritually through expressing their faith and love for God in service, when as members of the church--not just *future* members--they do the work of the people of God."[36] Child-conscious preaching enables children to participate in and hear the proclamation of the gospel through preaching. While other components of a Sunday morning worship service may be more conducive toward participation, the hearing of the sermon allows for children to embrace the language of Christianity and engage the ideas therein.

The third gift the Christian community offers children is *formation through experience and education*. Many times, pastors and ministry leaders fall trap to the misconception that prior to experiencing God, children must first understand God. However, May et al. write, "children learn first and most profoundly through experience… They sense God's presence, even if they cannot name it."[37] The power of the proclaimed word is beyond the definition of finite humanity, as God supernaturally blesses the proclaimed word and uses it to transform minds and hearts. As pastors and preachers, we must never make the mistake of intentionally preaching sermons that will be incomprehensible to the children in our midst. Children are in a stage of life where their brains are like "sponges" soaking up everything to which they are exposed, including language and experience. As mentioned previously, imagination plays a significant role in children's faith formation, and child-conscious preaching seek to use imagination in order to educate children about God, His Word, and the church.

A fourth gift of Christian community is that children offer is simply *presence*. "Not only do children need the community of faith, the community needs children," writes May et al.[38] "We see faith in fresh ways when we invite children to process their experiences with us, and we experience grace as God ministers to us through them."[39] There is a reason why Jesus pointed to children as the exemplars of faith for adults. They are humble, imaginative, creative, simple, and dependent, and have much to teach us about how to live in Christ and in community. Child-conscious preaching celebrates the vital place that children have in the Christian community, and the ways in which children can teach us about the Christian life.

A fifth gift of Christian community is the ability of children and adults sharing together to experience the *mystery of formation in the community*. "How does God meet children in the faith community?...God meets children in the same way God meets adults--through the mystery of the Holy Spirit's work, through relationships among the people of God, through the

revelation of God's will and purpose in Christ and the Scriptures."[40] In the task of preaching, the shepherd presides over a community that is continually being shaped and molded more and more into the image of Christ through preaching. Child-conscious preaching seeks to allow the mystery of how God interacts with humanity to encompass the task of preaching, seeking to allow the Holy Spirit to move in and through the preaching process in order to change lives.

Recognizing and celebrating the place of children in Christian community is a primary goal of child-conscious preaching. This is done through continual affirmation of children and the potential they have to share Christ with their friends and family, and witness to the Kingdom of God through their actions. In addition, child-conscious preaching celebrates the role that children play in the church, empowering them to join in on the mission of the local church.

PRACTICING CHILD-CONSCIOUS PREACHING: THE "L.I.N.C." MODEL

While child-conscious preaching may sound like another addition to the always-growing field of sermon types, I do not propose that child-conscious preaching as simply another type preachers should add to their homiletical arsenal. Child-conscious preaching is more of a *lens* than a *type*. It is different than expository, narrative, and topical preaching in that it does not provide a structural homiletic paradigm or method, but posits an *awareness* of the spiritual needs of children. It is a critical lens that brings shapes to a sermon, helping the preacher better connect with an intergenerational audience which includes children.

Practically speaking, how does one go about practicing child-conscious preaching?

For simplicity and clarity, I propose the helpful acronym "L.I.N.C.," which stands for *Language, Imagination, Narrative, and Community*. This acronym can be a useful tool in the sermon-crafting process that enables preachers to ensure that their sermons are child-conscious, incorporating the proper and necessary elements to effectively minister to children. Listed beneath each word are a series of questions which will help preacher self-reflect on the child-consciousness of their sermon. While many preachers possess the tendency to craft the kind of sermon they themselves want to hear, the task of preaching requires that the preacher does not simply preach the sermon he would like to hear, but the sermon the congregation needs to hear. LINC provides this needed lens that will guide a preacher toward crafting an effective sermon that speaks into the hearts and minds of children.

Child-Conscious Preaching through LINC: Language, Imagination, Narrative, Community

1. *Language*: Am I using language that is appropriate for all ages?

Goal: To ensure that the language you use is suitable for all ages. Children as well as adults should understand you, and you should not have to use complex language.

• What words am I using that would require someone to pull out their thesaurus app on their smartphone?
• Will children need to ask their parents what these words mean?
• Can I use simpler words in this sermon?
• Can I use fewer words to get my point across to people?
• Am I explaining big, complex theological concepts adequately?
• Is the Bible version I am using comprehendible to everyone in the congregation?

2. *Imagination*: Does my sermon have enough imagination?

Goal: To ensure that the message you preach creatively conveys a biblical text or concept in a manner that spurs adults and children alike to wonder and marvel at biblical truths and the character of God.

• Am I using creative imagery to illustrate my main points?
• Am I conveying the majesty and wonder of who God is to my congregation?
• When speaking of biblical characters or theologians, do I give emotional or physical details about their lives (ex. Esau was a body-builder, covered in red hair, and quick to anger; Martin Luther speculates about how Paul was probably a short and ugly man, etc.)
• Do I bring the text "to life"?
• Am I seeking to connect with multisensory imaginations of children?
• Do I inspire wonder in my preaching?
• Does the text I am preaching use imaginative imagery, and if so, how can I best convey this effectively while preaching?
• Would a creative video clip help illustrate my thought in clear, vivid detail?

3. *Narrative*: Am I using the power of story to form children's spirituality lives in my preaching?

Goal: To capture the minds of both adults and children by proclaiming the grand Story of God in Christ, as well as the stories of people in a manner that serves the greater Story of God.

• How aware am I of the stories swirling around in our culture?
• Do I know what television shows, movies, and music people in my congregation, particularly children, are partaking of?
• Do the stories I use in my sermon connect with the experiences of children?
• Does the text I am preaching tell a specific story? How does it fit into the grand story of God?
• Is there another story from the Bible, cultural, or personal life I can use that connects with this story?

4. *Community*: Does my sermon celebrate and recognize the place of children in the Christian community?

Goal: To promote an ecclesial culture that welcomes both adults and children, and recognizes that there is a place for everyone in this community.

• Am I empowering children to become vital members of the faith community?
• Do I encourage everyone to participate in community activities?
• When I speak to children directly during my sermon, am I patronizing?
• During sermon preparation, do I contemplate how this will impact all people in my faith community?
• Will children leave this service empowered or discouraged from Christian community?

CONCLUSION

The question of how to best nurture the faith of children will continually be asked among scholars and practitioners alike. There will always be professional children's ministers whose job it is to nurture children in the faith and nourish them with care. However, the task of nurturing children should not be left up to a distinct few alone. As pastors and preachers, our job is to preach child-conscious sermons when children are in our midst. By using language understandable by all, engaging children's' imaginations, proclaiming truth through narration, and celebrating children's' place in Christian community, pastors can develop a preaching style that speaks to both adults and children, challenging them to grow into the image of Christ. When Jesus himself says, "let them come, forbid them not," we ought to listen.

NOTES

1. See Holly Allen and Christine Lawton Ross' *Intergenerational Christian Formation: Bringing the Whole Church Together in Ministry, Community, and Worship* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012) for information regarding intergenerational church communities. Allen and Ross provide one of the most comprehensive and clear articulations on why churches should embrace an intergenerational approach to ministry. They outline psychology, biblical, and theological reasons for an intergenerational church culture, and highlight several core practices that churches can adapt.
2. Todd-David Whitemore and Tobias Wainright, "Children: An underdeveloped Theme in Catholic Teaching," in *The Challenge of Global Stewardship*, ed. Maura Ryan and Todd David Whitmore (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997): 10.
3. See Marcia Bunge's *The Child in Christian Thought* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001) and *The Child in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008) for a broad overview of biblical and theological explorations of childhood.
4. Scottie May, Beth Posterski, Catherine Stonehouse, and Linda Cannell, *Children Matter: Celebrating Their Place in the Church, Family, and Community* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005): 27.
5. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 30.
6. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 33.
7. Joel B. Green, "Hospitality for Kids: A Lukan Perspective on Children and God's Agenda," in *Exploring and Engaging Spirituality for Today's Children: A Holistic Approach*, ed. La Verne Tolbert (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014): 25.
8. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 33.
9. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 34.
10. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 34.
11. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 35.
12. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 35.
13. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 36.
14. Green, "Hospitality for Kids," 36.
15. When I presented this paper at EHS 2014 at Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, an objection was raised that the characteristics of child-conscious preaching I propose are not unique to children, but are applicable to all people. I answer this critique by noting that while the characteristics I outline are indeed applicable to all people, children are especially sensitive to the issues I raise. Hence, that is why I propose a model for child-conscious preaching toward the end of this paper as a self-reflective approach that allows preachers to "catch" their homiletical shortcomings and/or adapt the content of their sermon to the needs of children.
16. For a more Christian perspective on human development, consult James Estep and Jonathan Kim, *Christian Formation: Integrating Theology and Human Development* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2010). For a foundational

understanding of child development, consult Jean Piaget's *The psychology of the child* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), *The child and reality: Problem of genetic psychology* (A. Rosin, Trans.) (New York: Grossman, 1972), and *The moral judgment of the child*. (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1997).

17. Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1990): 10. For a modern treatment of Coles' work, see Rebecca Jones, "Exploring the Narratives of Robert Coles and Seeking Meaningful Communication with Children About Faith" in *Exploring and Engaging Spirituality for Today's Children: A Holistic Approach*, ed. La Verne Tolbert (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014): 14-24.
18. David Csinos and Ivy Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013): 71. While Csinos and Beckwith approach children's spirituality from a non-evangelical perspective, their conclusions regarding the value of children in Christian community are a worthwhile engagement for evangelicals.
19. Csinos and Beckwith, *Children's Ministry in the Way of Jesus*, 74.
20. Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998): 182.
21. Sofia Cavaletti, *The Religious Potential of the Child: Experiencing Scripture and Liturgy with Young Children*. 2nd English ed. (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1992) :138-139.
22. Karen-Marie Yust. *Real Kids, Real Faith: Practices for Nurturing Children's Spiritual Lives* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004): 136.
23. Benjamin D. Espinoza. "The Christian Story and Our Stories: Narrative Pedagogy in Congregational Life," *Christian Education Journal* 3(10), no. 2, (Fall 2013): 433.
24. Gary Newton, *Heart-Deep Teaching: Engaging Students for Transformed Lives* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012): 124.
25. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 180.
26. Richard Jensen, *Thinking in Story: Preaching in a Post-Literate Age* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing, 1995): 98.
27. Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 99.
28. Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 101.
29. Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 103.
30. Jensen, *Thinking in Story*, 105.
31. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 178.
32. Marva Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause? Having the Heart of God for the Church's Children* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997): 53.
33. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 139.
34. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 140.
35. Dawn, *Is It a Lost Cause?*, 56.
36. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 141.
37. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 141.
38. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 143.
39. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 143.
40. May et. al, *Children Matter*, 144.

HOMILETICAL TEXTBOOK STUDY: WHAT ARE SEMINARIES ACROSS TRADITIONS USING TO TEACH THE NEXT GENERATION OF PREACHERS?

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ABSTRACT: Christendom is fractured among historical traditions (Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) and further divided among Protestant denominations. Preaching is a common practice among all Christian traditions and denominations. What are the major homiletical textbooks in use in seminaries across Christian traditions and denominations in the United States? What are the top textbooks for the homiletical student?

CHOOSING SEMINARIES AND RELIGIOUS DEPARTMENTS

Nine traditions/denominations were chosen at random due to the private and often random reporting nature of Christian religious bodies in the United States and consistent with other religious studies[1]. The sampling for this study crosses Protestant denominations, but also crosses more long-established barriers between Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant traditions. The Christian traditions and denominations selected were: the Roman Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, the Anglican/Episcopal Church, the Lutheran Church (MO and WI synods only), the Presbyterian Church (PCUSA), the United Methodist Church, the Southern Baptist Convention, the Church of the Nazarene, and the Restoration Movement Churches.

In order to ascertain the major textbooks used by the various denominations, informal conversations and surveys were taken of clergy from the various denominational traditions. This informal information gathering included phone calls, emails, text messages, and face-to-face conversations with all types of clergy. From the responses, a listing of seminaries was developed.

From the Roman Catholic Church tradition, the Pontifical North American College in Rome, Italy, Mundelein Seminary in Chicago, St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore, and. St John's University in New York were selected. All of these seminaries were contacted, but only information from St. Mary Seminary in Baltimore was entered into the study.

From the Orthodox Church tradition, Hellenic College Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts, Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in Yonkers, New York, and St. Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Seminary in South Canaan, Pennsylvania were selected and all three were entered into the study.

From the Anglican / Episcopal Church, General Theological Seminary in New York, Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, Virginia, and Berkeley Divinity School at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut were chosen. All of these seminaries were contacted, but only General Theological Seminary and Virginia Theological Seminary were entered into the study.

The Lutheran Church is a Christian tradition with a large denomination and two smaller denominations in the United States. The two smaller denominations were selected (Missouri Synod and Wisconsin Synod) to balance the size of the denominations selected in the overall study. Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana (Missouri Synod) and Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary in Mequon, Wisconsin (Wisconsin Synod) were both contacted and both were entered into the study.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States is similar to the Lutheran tradition in that there are several splinter groups within the tradition. The Presbyterian Church (PCUSA) was selected from among Presbyterian flavored denominations in the United States. From an informal survey of PCUSA active clergy, Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California, Princeton Theological Seminary in Princeton, New Jersey, and Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia were all contacted and were all entered into the study.

The United Methodist Church (UMC) is a large denomination in the United States and through informal surveys with UMC ministers and self-reporting from the United Methodist Church General Board of Higher Education and Ministry website, Duke Divinity School in Durham, North Carolina, Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia, and Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. were selected. Duke Divinity School and Wesley Theological Seminary were entered into the study.

The Southern Baptist Convention has regional seminaries to serve the southern-based denomination. Southwestern Baptist Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest, North Carolina, and Southern Baptist Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky were contacted and all three were entered into the study.

The Church of the Nazarene protestant evangelical denomination has several seminaries and educational institutions to choose from. Trevecca Nazarene University in Nashville, Tennessee, Nazarene Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri, and Olivet Nazarene University in Bourbonnais, Illinois were contacted and all three were entered into the study.

The Restoration Movement (RM) is a brotherhood of churches with three main branches which includes the Disciples of Christ, Churches of Christ Non-Instrumental, and the Independent Churches of Christ. All branches of

the Restoration Movement were included in the study and Lincoln Christian University in Lincoln, Illinois, David Lipscomb University in Nashville, Tennessee, and Phillips Theological Seminary in Tulsa, Oklahoma were contacted and all three were entered into the study.

Noting that clergy are not always educated in seminaries dedicated to one Christian denomination, other seminaries which bridge denominational divides were also contacted and added to the study. Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, Dallas Theological Seminary in Dallas, Texas, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia were all added to the study.

The thirty-two seminaries and higher educational institutions selected comprise a random sample across three major Christian traditions and span at minimum twelve different American Christian denominations. Of the thirty-two selected, twenty-seven responded and were included in the study. The data from each of the seminaries listed comes from one or more of four sources.

First, phone interviews (PI) were conducted in which faculty were asked about the homiletical textbook selections used at their institution. This source was the least used in collecting the data with 6.25% (2/32) responding in this way.

Second, an email response (ER) form or general email response was used to compile a list of homiletical textbooks used by the faculty. This source was the most convenient for the faculty in offering data with 31.25% (11/32) responding in this way.

Third, many seminaries keep their booklists and other required textbook information online (BO) or on an online bookstore or in online student catalogues which students or researchers can access which accounts for 40% of the responses (12/32).

Fourth, some seminaries chose to send syllabi (S) which contained the needed textbook information. Three seminaries sent syllabi which accounts for 9.3% of the responses. Those that did not respond or information could not be obtained are noted with an appropriate non-applicable designation (N/A) which was 15.6% of those requested or only 5/32.

These twenty-seven seminaries and higher education institutions comprise the base for inquiry about homiletical textbooks used. The numbers of texts used among seminaries varies greatly. In surveying all twenty-seven seminaries, at minimum, ninety-six separate texts are used to educate students in the area of homiletics.

SELECTING MAJOR TEXTBOOKS IN HOMILETICS

Ninety-six textbooks is quite a corpus of knowledge and unmanageable for a study. In developing the homiletics textbook list, texts had to meet three criteria for inclusion in the list to answer the research

question.

First, books had to have been used in more than two seminaries or religious departments at universities. For example, eight different seminaries use Thomas G. Long's *The Witness of Preaching* making it the most used homiletical textbook in the twenty-seven seminaries and religious programs surveyed. For example, Bryan Chapell's *Christ-Centered Preaching* was used in seven different seminaries and religious programs. Many of the ninety-six textbooks were only used in one seminary and did not meet this qualification.

Second, books had to be used across denominational lines. For example, Fred Craddock's works were not only used in multiple seminaries, but also were used by Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, and Interdenominational schools. Another popular work in this regard is Barbara Brown Taylor's *The Preaching Life* which is used in the Church of the Nazarene, the Restoration Movement, Roman Catholic, and United Methodist Church.

Third, for those books only used in one denomination, the frequency of use of the textbook must be high within that denomination. In the Orthodox Church, all the seminaries used works by John Behr and Sebastian Dabovich in their homiletics classes no matter the seminary.

THREE TYPES OF HOMILETICAL TEXTBOOKS DISCOVERED

Based on the survey for this study, seminaries and religious departments in the United States use three basic types of textbooks when teaching students about homiletics.

First, textbooks which are practical in nature are used. These texts offer step-by-step methods for creating and delivering sermons or have a significant amount of the work dedicated to the practical subject of sermon preparation. A student of homiletics could take such textbooks and learn "how" to present weekly messages. 45% (9 of 20) works in this study are designated as practical in nature.

Second, textbooks which are theoretical in nature are assigned. These works often present communication theory, theology, philosophy, human biology, and Biblical emphasis as basis for understanding the art of preaching. A student of homiletics could take such textbooks and learn the "why" of preaching. 35% (7 of 20) works in this study are designated as theory in nature.

Third, anthologies and collections of sermons are used to present examples of good preaching and sermon formation technique. A student of homiletics could take such textbooks and learn how others have preached in the past and the present to learn how they could preach in the future. 20% (4 of 20) works in this study are designated as anthologies.

TOP 20 HOMILETICAL TEXTBOOKS

The top ten (20) homiletical books according to this study include (in alphabetical order by author):

Arthurs, Jeffrey D. *Preaching with Variety*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007. Jeffrey Arthurs is Associate Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Arthurs states, "I believe that a sermon's content should explain and apply the Word of God as it is found in a biblical text, and a sermon's form should unleash the impact of that text."[2] This work is interestingly used by four different educational institutions in four different denominations: Southwestern Baptist Seminary (SBC), Lincoln Christian Seminary (RM), Nazarene Theological Seminary, and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Baptist/Interdenominational). Arthurs' book is practical in nature.

Behr, John. *On the Apostolic Preaching*. Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997. John Behr is Assistant Professor of Patristics at St Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. Behr's work is one which is used exclusively by the Orthodox churches in the United States. His book is a translation of the "demonstration of the apostolic preaching" from the ancient Armenian version.[3] It is a handbook and a guide to scriptural reality. The book is a translation of the earliest summary of Christian teaching, presented in a non-polemical or apologetic manner from St Irenaus. Behr's book is an anthology.

Buechner, Frederick. *Telling the Truth: the Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*. San Francisco CA: Harper & Row, 1977. This work is among oldest of the works in the top twenty. In fact, only three books in the entire list of ninety-six homiletical works were dated older. Three schools reported its use: David Lipscomb University (RM), Virginia Theological Seminary (Episcopal), and Fuller Theological Seminary (Presbyterian /Interdenominational). Buechner's work is a theory work.

Chapell, Bryan. *Christ-Centered Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1994. Bryan Chapell, minister and former Chancellor and Professor of Preaching at Covenant Theological Seminary in St Louis, is the author of the book that arrives at number two amongst the twenty because of it's frequency of seven schools and its distribution across denominational lines. This work is highly favored by the behemoth that is the Southern Baptist Convention, but also by the small Lutheran Church- Wisconsin Synod. The interdenominational schools also favored this particular homiletical work with 60% (3/5) of the interdenominational schools reporting its use. Chapell's book is practical in nature.

Craddock, Fred B. *As One Without Authority*. 3d ed. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1979. This work by Fred B. Craddock is a theory work. This work

was selected by three schools: Concordia Theological Seminary (Lutheran-Missouri Synod), Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Lutheran- Wisconsin Synod), and Columbia Theological Seminary (Presbyterian). Craddock sought to enrich the lives of those who preach with a solid understanding of why they preach. He states, "The Word of God comes in ordinary vernacular; hence, the priest is responsible for choosing his words and preparing carefully his sermon. This view of preaching is incarnational: as the Word came in the flesh, so the word comes in the form of human speech."[4]

Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1985. This theory work (although there are practical aspects to it) was selected by three schools. Along with Barbara Brown Taylor's *The Preaching Life*, this is the only other homiletical work selected by the Roman Catholic tradition. Thus, St. Mary's Seminary (RC), Princeton Theological Seminary (Presbyterian/ Interdenominational), and Duke Divinity School (United Methodist/ Interdenominational) were the three schools selecting this phenomenal work on homiletics.

Dabovich, Sebastian. *Preaching in the Orthodox Church: Lectures and Sermons by a Priest of the Holy Orthodox Church*. Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2008. Dabovich writes:

> In this book, I offer the English-speaking public in general, and to the American in particular, a historic, theological, and moral review of the Orthodox Eastern apostolic Church, commonly called the Greek Russian church, in the form of lectures and sermons, thus enabling them to see the actual practice and teaching of the Church which is making herself at home in the West, notwithstanding her birth in the East, and which knows no other head but Jesus Christ.[5]

Dabovich's anthology work is used exclusively by the Orthodox Church in America.

Florence, Anna Carter. *Preaching as Testimony*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007. Florence's work is a theory work is not the only book listed among the top twenty authored by a woman, but is the only work that is decidedly from a feminist point of view. Carter notes:

> Preaching in the testimony tradition provides us with a historical, biblical, theological, and homiletical memory of women's preaching: in short a woman's preaching tradition. This tradition is part of a long history of preaching by a marginalized Christians that calls us to rethink our assumptions about what is to preach and what it takes to become a preacher. For postmodern Christians, preaching in the testimony tradition is a vibrant and powerful way to proclaim the

liberating Word of God into a new context.[6]

Greidanus, Sidney. *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988. Sidney Greidanus, Professor of Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, presents a practical work on homiletics which emphasizes "in general, the purpose of sermons is to build up the congregation, to encourage and console, to equip its members for service, to teach, reprove, correct, and train in righteousness."[7]

Long, Thomas G. *The Witness of Preaching*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989. This book, practical in nature, was slated at number one amongst the surveyed textbooks due to meeting the above characteristics in all three categories. This 1989 work is most used among the most diverse audience among all of the works submitted for the study (8 schools total). Thomas Long's (Professor of Preaching and Worship) work is heavily favored by the Presbyterians, but also the Restoration Movement, the Church of the Nazarene, the Episcopal Church, the United Methodist Church, Interdenominational schools, and even the Orthodox Church in America. It is this last group which sets this work apart from all others. No other homiletical work surveyed crossed as many denominational and Christian tradition boundaries.

Long, Thomas G. *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*. Philadelphia PA: Fortress Press, 1989. This work, two of three for Thomas Long in the top twenty, is a theory book which focuses on preaching from different genres of the Bible: "This book is about Biblical preaching, and is based upon the relatively simple idea that the literary form and dynamics of a biblical texts can and should be important factors in the preacher's navigation of the distance between text and sermon."[8]

Long, Thomas G. and Cornelius Plantinga. *A Chorus of Witnesses: Model Sermons for Today's Preacher*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994. Thomas Long and Cornelius Plantinga (Professor of Systematic Theology) produced this anthology work which states its purpose on back cover and echoes the purpose for other anthology works given to homiletics students: "Students of preaching benefit greatly from studying remarkable sermons by such gifted preachers as Frederick Buechner, the Buttricks, and Barbara Brown Taylor. To make model sermons more accessible, Thomas G. Long and Cornelius Plantinga Jr. have compiled this anthology of mostly contemporary sermons that display excellence in form, aim, style, and content."[9]

Lowry, Eugene L. *The Homiletical Plot*. Rev. ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001. This book was ranked number three because of its frequency in six schools including: Concordia Theological Seminary (Lutheran- Missouri Synod), Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (Lutheran-

Wisconsin Synod), Asbury Theological Seminary (United Methodist Church / Interdenominational), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (Baptist / Interdenominational), Dallas Theological Seminary (Interdenominational), and Columbia Theological Seminary (Presbyterian).

Piper, John. *The Supremacy of God in Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1990. Piper's book neither relays step-by-step instructions on how to build a sermon nor is an anthology of sermons. This book is theoretical in nature with the theory grounded in the historical American preacher Jonathan Edwards. "So I am persuaded that the vision of a great God is the linchpin in the life of the church, both in pastoral care and missionary outreach. Our people need to hear God-entranced preaching. They need someone, at least once a week, to lift up his voice and magnify the supremacy of God."[10]

Robinson, Haddon W. *Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1980. This book is favored by two interdenominational schools and a Southern Baptist seminary: Liberty University (Interdenominational), Dallas Theological Seminary (Interdenominational), and Southwestern Baptist Seminary (SBC). This book is practical in nature.

Robinson, Haddon W. and Craig Brian Larson. *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005. This work is difficult to categorize (practical, theory, or anthology) because of the sheer volume of the work (732 pages with 109 contributors). This book is an anthology of theory about all aspects of homiletics. This work covers topics such as African-American preaching, Asian-American preaching, biographical preaching, expository preaching, first-person narratives, Hispanic American preaching, storytelling, topical preaching, and two dozen other topics.

Stott, John R. W. *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982. This work was favored by Southeastern Baptist Seminary (SBC), Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBC), and Lincoln Christian University (RM). This work from 1982, one of the older books on the list, is a combination of both theory and practice, but in the end is practical in nature because of the step-by-step nature included in the work. Stott explains:

> If anything is distinctive about Between Two Worlds, I think it is that I have tried to bring together several complementary aspects of the topic, which have often been kept apart. Thus, in the opening historical survey I hope readers will feel, as I do, that there is a certain 'glory' in the preaching ministry, which prepares us to face with integrity in the second chapter the problems which said it today. Although in chapters 5 and 6 I seek to give practical advice both on study and on sermon preparation, I say little about such

matters as delivery, elocution and gesture.[11]

Taylor, Barbara Brown. *The Preaching Life*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1993. This selection is fourth in ranking amongst the twenty textbooks because of its frequency of five schools and also has the distinction of being one of only two homiletical works to break into the Roman Catholic tradition. Most of the resources used by the Roman Catholic Church were unique to their tradition and were published by Roman Catholic publishers; either Paulist Press in Mahwah, New Jersey or Liturgical Press in Collegeville, Minnesota. This work stood out not only among the Roman Catholic tradition, but also the Restoration Movement, the United Methodist Church, and heavily by the Church of the Nazarene (2 schools reporting its use). This work is theory in nature.

Vines, Jerry, and Jim Shaddix. *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons.* Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1999. This work is completely practical in nature and takes the reader step-by-step through a process in developing a sermon. Vines (Christian Minister) and Shaddix (Professor of Homiletics) state, "This particular book seeks to capitalize on the twofold dimension of practical experience and classroom training and is then written from the perspective of pastor who actually is involved in the week to week discipline of sermon preparation."[12]

Wilson, Paul Scott. *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching*. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1999. This practical work by a Professor of Homiletics states unapologetically, "I love the preaching of the church when it is good, and I love trying to make it better."[13] This work presents a unique manner to craft a sermon using a "four page" metaphor drawn from the film industry.

CONCLUSION

These twenty books comprise the corpus of the major homiletical textbooks used across all three Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) and across Protestant denominations. Three conclusions can be drawn from this study.

First, seminaries across all traditions use three types of homiletical textbooks to train the next generation of preachers. All three (practical, theory, and anthology) are used across traditions which indicates a normative way of teaching the craft of homiletics. In order to produce a well-rounded educated preacher, use all three in homiletics education.

Second, in order to study the "best practices" for sermon preparation and delivery, these twenty textbooks would be the logical sources to use as they are the educational textbooks being used in seminaries today. In order to be well-educated in the area of homiletics, use these twenty textbooks.

Third, the art and craft of preaching is a practice in Christendom which can be a point of unity amongst clergy. Specific points of theology or liturgy may divide Christians, but the practice of preaching is a point of unity among those who are learning to administrate His Church.

FUTURE RESEARCH

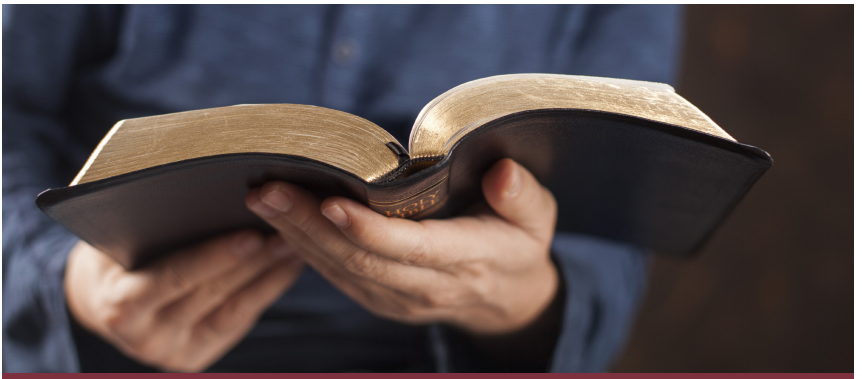
I am currently using this research to study the sermon preparation practices of clergy across three Christian traditions (Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant) and across Protestant denominations. I have used the information in these textbooks in order to create an eight step all-inclusive process for sermon preparation which has led to groundbreaking research questions in the area of sermon preparation. I am comparing these eight steps from the textbooks with actual pulpit practice of preachers in local churches.

NOTES

1. Gerdien D. Bertram-Troost, et al. "Religious Identity Development of Adolescents in Christian Secondary Schools: Effects of School and Religious Backgrounds of Adolescents and Their Parents," *Religious Education* 102.2 (2007): 132-150. Kevin L. Ladd, Daniel N. McIntosh, and Bernard Spilka, "Children's God Concepts: Influences of Denomination, Age, and Gender," *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 8.1 (2009): 49-56. "Religious Bodies—Selected Data." *Statistical Abstract of the United States: 2011*. (Washington DC: U.S. Census Bureau), 2011.
2. Jeffrey D. Arthurs, *Preaching with Variety* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007), 13.
3. John Behr, *On the Apostolic Preaching* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1997), back cover.
4. Fred B. Craddock. *As One Without Authority* 3d ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1979), 39.
5. Sebastian Dabovich, *Preaching in the Orthodox Church: Lectures and Sermons by a Priest of the Holy Orthodox Church* (Rollinsford, NH: Orthodox Research Institute, 2008), iii.
6. Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), xxvi.
7. Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (Grand Rapids, MI:Eerdmans, 1988), 128.
8. Thomas G. Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1989), 11.
9. Thomas G. Long and Cornelius Plantinga, *A Chorus of Witnesses: Model Sermons for Today's Preacher* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994), back cover.
10. John Piper, *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker

Book House, 1990), 11.

11. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1982), 9.
12. Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago IL: Moody Press, 1999), 12.
13. Paul Scott Wilson, *The Four Pages of the Sermon: A Guide to Biblical Preaching* (Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 9.



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STORIES ARE FOR ADULTS: EQUIPPING PREACHERS TO COMMUNICATE BIBLICAL NARRATIVES TO ADULT AUDIENCES

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ABSTRACT: The use of narrative passages of scripture need not be limited to "Bible stories for children." This paper will argue that the unique learning characteristics of adult learners contained in D.A. Kolb's "experiential learning cycle," make biblical narratives especially valuable for preaching to adult audiences. This paper also suggests that students trained to employ this writers "story shaping" homiletical methodology, will be equipped to effectively proclaim the stories of scripture to adults.

INTRODUCTION

Every parent and grandparent understands the universal attraction that stories have for children. Every day and all across the globe youngsters ask the adults in their lives: "will you read me a story?" Early childhood educators have long recognized that a child's predilection for narrative can be harnessed as a learning tool. Wise parents—and Sunday school teachers—have used stories to teach children. Christian education in the evangelical church has long—and wisely—capitalized upon Children's innate love for stories to instruct them about the person and work of God. We teach children bible stories because they love stories. But children are not the only ones interested in stories.

Stories burst generational boundaries. All age groups enjoy a good story. The healthy sales of airport novels, movie tickets, DVD rentals, and cable TV packages testify to the intergenerational appeal of narrative. Every marketer in America knows that adults enjoy stories. But what many do not realize is that stories have the potential to be far more than just brain candy for adults. Stories can also be used as effective educational vehicle.

STORIES AND MATURE LEARNERS

There is a growing recognition today of the instructional value of stories for mature learners. The once undervalued story is being increasingly

viewed as an effective educational tool. The growing respect for teaching adults through story can be seen in at least two areas: the business world and the counseling office.

The business community is using stories to teach business principles. Spencer Johnson, M.D. has written ten international bestselling books including three #1 bestsellers. No business book has been better received, however, than his parabolic book, "Who Moved my Cheese." This simple story sold over 10 million copies in the first two years of its release. Amazon.com declared that *Who Moved my Cheese* was its #1 all–time bestselling book. The influence of Johnson's narrative based approach to business leadership is not limited to North America. The New York Times Book Review reported in a 2005 article that *Who Moved My Cheese?* is China's all time bestselling translated work with official sales of over two million copies to date. In Japan, *Who Moved My Cheese?* sold over 4,500,000 copies to become the #1 bestselling book in Japan's history by a non-Japanese author.[1] All around the world, the adult business community has resonated with the simple story of Johnson's book.

The counseling community also recognizes the educational value of stories. Books such as *Narrative Means to Therapeutic Ends,*[2] *Story Re-Visions: Narrative Therapy in a Postmodern World*[3] *and Narrative Therapy: The Social Construction of Preferred Realities*[4] all encourage therapists to help their clients view their lives as stories. This narrative approach assists hurting people to view their lives as a grand story and, in the process, understand how their life story was shaped in the past and how they can be re-shaped in the future. Christian counselor John Trent encourages a similar process in his book *LifeMapping*.[5] These authors and therapists believe that stories are an appropriate and beneficial vehicles for adults to gain an increased understanding of their lives and environments. Adults are being taught how to live healthy lives through the use of stories. Adults learn from stories. To understand why stories are such an effective teaching tool for adults, it is necessary to understand how adults learn.

Of all the adult learning theorists in print today, perhaps none is as highly regarded as Malcolm S. Knowles. Knowles groundbreaking book *The Adult Learner*[6] pointed out that "traditionally, we have known more about how animals learn than about how children learn; and we know much more about how children learn than about how adults learn."[7] Knowles set out to correct this problem by distinguishing between "pedagogy" the art and science of how children learn and "andragogy" the art and science of helping adults learn. This educator considered it a mistake for an instructor to treat adult learners as large children. Knowles spent his professional life arguing that teachers should recognize adults as unique learners and alter the learning experience accordingly. In what way are adult learners unique? Knowles principles for adult learning could be summarized as follows:

1. A need for relevance. Adults need to know why they need to learn something. An understanding of the practical application of what is being learned is essential.
2. A readiness to learn. Adults come ready to take what they learn and immediately apply it to life.
3. A need for engagement. Adults want to be self-directed learners who are active participants in their learning experiences. Adults are not willing to passively memorize and regurgitate content that some "expert" says that they should know.
4. An appreciation of prior life experience. Adult learners want their life experiences be recognized and resourced for learning.
5. Internally motivated. Adults value education because of how it will positively impact their quality of life. External motivators become less important.

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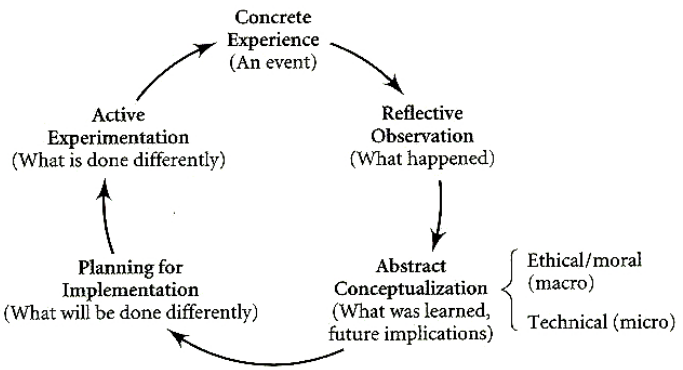


Kolb's model for adult education is an appropriate andrological response to the characteristics of adult learners outlined by Knowles. In the above model, the teacher begins with a concrete event in the life of the student. For the adult learner, this approach immediately establishes relevance and creates a situation in which the student is motivated to learn the material. In addition, this problem centered starting point affirms the adult learners past experiences and explains why it is in the learner's best interest to fully engage in the learning process. This "case-study" approach to education is a highly effective adult education model that is currently being utilized by some of the most respected adult-oriented educational institutions today.

One of the highest profile academic institutions to utilize Kolb's

andrological teaching methodology is the Harvard Business School. According to their web site:
About 80 percent of the classes in the MBA program are taught via the case method,
a practical approach to learning where students work under the guidance of a faculty
member to address real business problems in all their innate complexity and ambiguity.[10]

Case study education typically begins with a story. The instructor uses narrative to describe an actual or true to life situation and encourages the students to identify the relevant issues and suggest a resolution to be applied to the problem. Narrative is a powerful educational tool for the adult learner. This is especially true when the narrative used by the instructor is drawn directly out of or is obviously related to the experience of the student. By examining the narrative of a concrete "slice of life," the student can follow Kolb's cycle and engage in reflective observation, identify what concepts were learned through the event, plan what to do differently as a result of the lessons learned, and then implement those lessons.

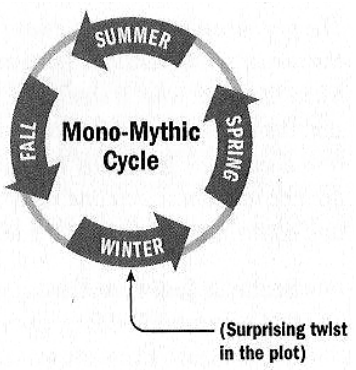
PREACHING TO ADULTS

Those of us who preach to adults can learn a great deal from adult educational theorists. When we preach we want those listening to us to learn and apply God's word to their lives. In order to accomplish this objective with adults, we would be wise to include narrative sermons from the narrative portions of Scripture in our preaching repertoire. The stories of scripture have the potential to be relevant, enjoyable and educationally significant for the adult listener. How can we preachers ensure that the narrative sermons we preach reach their potential? How can we release the full benefit of the Bible's narrative literature for our adult listeners?

While there are a number of effective, genre sensitive homiletical forms available to the contemporary preacher, I have found that many narrative homiletical forms have a limited usefulness. You can, for example, only preach so many first-person sermons in a year. I have found, however, that a homiletical form I have called "Life Shaping"[11] to be a highly effective "meat and potatoes" homiletical approach for the preaching of biblical narratives. "Life Shaping" sermons can be used on a regular basis and retain their ability to educate adults while maintaining a high level of interest. As you will see, this homiletical approach applies Knowles andrological observations in a Kolb-compatible format.

The first step in preaching a "Story Shaping" sermon is to interpret a biblical narrative from a literary perspective. Preachers who do not understand the literary dynamics of how the biblical writer fashioned his biblical story, will not understand the theological point the original author

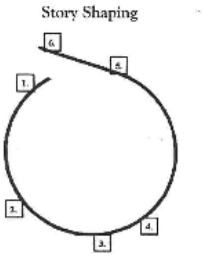
was making in the story, or how to harness the literary power of the original story in their sermons. While scores of books have been written on the literary dynamics of biblical narrative, perhaps the most important factor is the shape of the story. As I have argued elsewhere, the mono-mythic cycle is a helpful tool that preachers can use to determine a story's shape.[12]



Since conflict is inherently interesting, stories start with an inciting event. Something goes wrong with the summertime perfection we would all prefer. Stories spend most of their time exploring the increasing complications that occur as negative events unfold. As far as the protagonist is concerned, life is getting colder and colder–worse and worse. While a few biblical stories end in winter (these are called tragedies) most don't. The vast majority of biblical narratives enjoy a sudden reversal—a surprising twist in the plot that starts to return life back to the bliss of summer. Stories do not have points. They make a single point. This point is revealed in the surprising twist—the moment of "aha" when the solution to the problem is revealed.

The point of a biblical story is always a theological point. We learn something about God and how to live in response to him when we understand a biblical story. The narrative literature of the bible is concretized theology. The stories of Scripture examine abstract theological truths through the lens of real life situations. Properly understood, biblical narratives discuss theology in an adult learner oriented "case study" approach.

"Story Shaping" sermons are an attempt to harness the natural advantages of narrative literature for the benefit of the adult listener. As the diagram below indicates, this sermon form shamelessly piggybacks upon the structure of the biblical narrative while intentionally intertwining the lives of the listeners with the problem faced by the biblical protagonist. If this is done successfully, the problem of the biblical protagonist becomes the problem of the contemporary listener. As a result, the listener looks with interest at the critical choice made by the biblical protagonist makes to resolve their ancient problem – and decides whether to follow the protagonists' example in their own contemporary situation.



"Story Shaping" is a homiletical attempt to reshape the story of our listener's lives with the lives of the biblical narratives. Here is how it works.

1. Personal identification with biblical character.

Your sermon begins in the "summer" of the narrative. Your goal in this portion of your sermon is to help your audience identify with the biblical character. Build bridges between the biblical character and your audience. You want your audience to discover the ways in which their lives are linked to the lives of the biblical character. It may be helpful to ask yourself:

- Who is this person?
- Where do they live?
- What is their background, education level, profession and social standing?
- In what ways are they like my audience?

2. Cultivate the awareness that characters in stories (biblical and contemporary) can and must make choices.

As you relate the "fall" difficulties being faced by the biblical character, show the parallel pressures in the life of your congregation. Biblical characters were real people. You want your congregation to "feel" the same tension and pressure that the biblical hero felt leading up to her/his decision. Harness this pressure to help your audience to recognize that we cannot avoid making choices. The following questions will help clarify your thoughts.

- Is the biblical character a victim or a victimizer? Of whom / what?
- Does the character display a sense of powerlessness?
- Have you (or someone you know) ever felt the same way?

Take time to go through the biblical story scene by scene outlining the parallels between protagonists story and the life story of the listeners. As you do, be sure to preserve the inherent tension of the story. If there is no tension / conflict in your sermon there will be no interest. If there is no

interest there will be no life change.

3. Help your congregation to understand what the biblical character decided and why they made these choices.

At this point, you are in the "winter" of the biblical story. Things have become unbearable and the character has chosen to act. You are at the bottom of the mono-mythic circle, the climax of the emotion. Here you are looking for the biblical character's psychological motivation. What would have made this decision difficult?

- When did the character finally choose to act?
- Why not earlier or later?
- What decision did they make?
- Why did they finally choose to act?
- What factors motivated them to act the way that they did? (e.g. social, physical, spiritual, etc.)

4. Emotional identification with the consequences that biblical character faced as a result of their choices.

At phase #4, the diagram above curves upward. It assumes that you are preaching a biblical story that has a happy ending. These "comedic" stories are best used to show audiences how godly decisions result in restored lives.

But while many biblical stories end as positively as Daniel's, this is not a universally true. Characters such as Samson, Saul, and Absalom did not make God-honoring decisions. The lesson of their lives is negative. We are not to imitate their decisions.

Regardless of whether the biblical narrative you are preaching ends up or down, however, help your congregation slip into the sandals of the biblical character that just made the decision. God-honoring decisions have a real and often immediate impact upon the life story of the decision maker. Allow your congregation to see this.

- What happened to the character when the choice was made?
- What happened to those around the character? (friends, family, members of the community)
- If the character could have gone back in time and re-written their life story, do you think that they would have make a different decision?
- Have you ever faced / made a similar decision to the biblical character? Did you face similar consequences? Why?
- Would the consequences experienced by the biblical character likely follow a similar decision today? Why?

5. Decide whether to emulate (parrot) or avoid the choices and consequences endured by the biblical characters.

Let your congregation have a good look at the benefits of the God-honoring choices. Allow them to gaze on the ripple effect that those decisions had on their family, friends and community and then bring them to the point of decision. Exhort your congregation to learn from the mistakes and successes of the heroes of Scripture.

- What is holding you back from making a God-honoring decision today?
- What are the pressures you face to imitate / reject the decision of the biblical character?
- How will your life be changed by your choice? What will happen to your story?
- How would the stories of others (e.g. your family, friends, church community) respond to and be affected by your decision to imitate the biblical character?

6. Alter behavior in accordance with the decision.

As a caring pastor, you know many of the issues with which the people in your congregation are struggling. Give them specific examples of what the application of this passage might look like in their lives. Concretely outline how their actions might he different as a result of their choice. Challenge them to implement the lessons from this text into their lives immediately and to tell someone about their decision to do so.[13]

The "Story Shaping" sermon form does not make six different points. It proceeds through six stages to make sure that the listeners understand the single theological point of the narrative passage, and how that point influences the life story of the listener. As you make your way through the sermon you will weave in and out of the ancient and modern worlds—explaining the text so that your listeners appreciate the depth of the problem the biblical protagonist faced, and explaining how your listeners will face very similar tensions in their lives. You want to do your best to stitch these worlds together into a seamless and unified sermon.

ADVANTAGES OF STORY SHAPING SERMONS

"Story Shaping" sermons have many advantages for the adult listeners. First, because they are stories, adults enjoy listening to them. We pay good money to listen to a good story! Second, because they are delivered in the 3rd person, and the vast majority of biblical narratives are written

in the 3rd person, they are inherently more compatible with the narratives of Scripture. Thirdly, because they are delivered in the 3rd person, they are considered more appropriate in a greater number of venues than less traditional sermon forms. Even the most traditional settings I have preached in have enjoyed "Story Shaping" sermons. Fourthly, "Story Shaping" sermons address Malcolm Knowles characteristics of the adult learner.

1. A need for relevance. As the listeners identify with the issue of the biblical protagonist, the understanding of the practical relevance of the message is obvious and compelling.
2. A readiness to learn. Since the relevance of the sermon is clear, adults are eager to learn.
3. A need for engagement. As adults re-live the experience of the protagonist and wrestle with the decision to make, their desire to be self-directed learners is satisfied. Adults are not being asked to passively memorize and regurgitate content that some "expert" says that they should know. They are figuring out how to make their way through life.
4. An appreciation of prior life experience. In order to apply envelop the adult learner in "Story Shaping" sermon, preachers are forced to recognize and resource the life experiences of their audience.
5. Internally motivated. Adults value education because of how it will positively impact their quality of life. With this homiletic form, the listener is forced to examine how the lives of the biblical protagonist were benefited or harmed by his/her choices. The link between application of theological truth and quality of life is obvious.

A fifth advantage that "Story Shaping" sermons have for the adult listener is their correspondence to David A. Kolb's Experiential Learning Model. If Kolb is correct that experience is the best source for adult learning, then "Story Shaping" sermons are an ideal way to help adults learn the truths of Scripture. As Kolb's model suggests, this sermon begins with a "Concrete Experience," a historical event found in Scripture that is then related to similar concrete experiences in the lives of the adult listeners. As the preacher and listeners examine the biblical account scene by scene, they are engaging in what Kolb referred to as "Reflective Observation." The question being asked here is "what happened?" When the "Story Shaping" preacher identifies the theological truth contained in the surprising twist in the plot (the moment of "aha") Kolb's "Abstract Conceptualization" has occurred. The preacher and listener identify together what was learned and begin to think about the future applications of this theological principle. When the preacher moves towards challenging the listener to decide whether they will emulate or eschew the principle revealed in the actions of the protagonist they are moving into Kolb's "Planning for Implementation," what will be

done differently stage of learning. While the final stage of the learning cycle, "Active Experimentation" or what is actually done differently can usually only be achieved outside of the sermon setting, the "Story Shaping" sermon has made a significant contribution to the transformation of the lives of the adult listeners.

CONCLUSION

"Story Shaping" sermons are theological case studies. These messages present real-life situations very similar to our own presented by the preacher for adult learners to analyze and learn from. They harness one of the best adult educational models available today.

Children may like stories, but the stories of Scripture need not and should not be limited to the very young. Stories are a valuable tool for the instruction and spiritual transformation of adult learners. In the opinion of this writer, the "Story Shaping" homiletical form is an interesting and educationally effective way to communicate the narrative portions of Scripture. This homiletical form has the potential to be a highly effective tool for the proclamation of the biblical narratives. Teaching "Story Shaping" in our classes could benefit our students and the churches they serve.

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TWO TRAITS OF AGAPE LOVE

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1 Corinthians 13:1-3

INTRODUCTION

In 1929, Cole Porter wrote a hit song for one of his musicals in which he asks, "What is this thing called love? Ask the Lord in heaven above, what is this thing called love?" The song had feet. For the next fifty years or so, singers in nightclubs—Nat King Cole and others—sang that song. I think the reason it lasted so long was that it was asking a question that any thoughtful person in our culture would ask. Really—what is this thing called love?

In our culture love stands for everything from Hollywood to heaven: Love in the raw, rated X; "I just love strawberries, but they give me a rash;" "I love New York, but I wouldn't want to live there;" "Oh come on, baby, if you love me you'll go to bed with me;" "My Jesus, I love thee, I know thou art mine." In cultures like ours, "What is this thing called love?" is a good question.

If you read the New Testament with any degree of care, you find that again and again we are called to be people of love. In fact, Jesus said that the badge of our discipleship is whether we love one another. Paul told the Roman church that we must not owe a thing except the debt of love. He told the Galatians that the fruit of the Spirit, the evidence of Gods working in your life, is first of all love. Then, in 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, Paul says that whatever gifts you have, you exercise them. But if you do so without love, those gifts accomplish nothing. They make you nothing. No matter how impressive your sacrifices are of money or self, if they are done without love, you gain nothing at the judgment seat of Christ. So again, the question is an important one: What is this thing called love?

PHILEO AND EROS LOVE

I think the people in the first century may have been as confused about love as we are. The Greeks had a large number of words for love. The most common word was the word *phileo*. This word described the garden-variety love--the love you have for friends, for people in your family, for your country. You see this word tied to other Greek words, like *delphus* (where we

get "Philadelphia," the "city of brotherly love") or *anthropas* (where we get "philanthropy," the love for human beings).

There was another word for love that was very common in the ancient world—*eros.* When translated into English, it almost always speaks of sexual passion, erotic love. However, it was used in a much wider sense by the Greeks. It basically spoke to the kind of love that is won from us in a moving moment. It's the feeling you have when you stand at the Niagara Falls, and you see millions of gallons of water pouring down and feel the spray of the water on your face. It's what you feel if you're a Red Sox fan, and in the bottom of the ninth, on the last out, the Sox are behind by three runs with the bases loaded, and Big Papi [David Ortiz, Red Sox designated hitter] hits a homerun into the right field stands. You leap into the air. What a rush! It's the feelings that you have when you listen to Beethoven's Fifth, and it almost moves you to tears. Eros.

Our society puts a great deal of emphasis on this kind of love--just like the Greeks—but the word is never used in the New Testament. This is probably because of its association with pagan worship. The Greeks also used the word *eros* to describe the kind of response someone had when they worshiped the pagan gods. It was a moment of ecstasy that the priests tried to produce.

AGAPE LOVE

When you come to 1 Corinthians 13, and you ask, "What is this thing called love?" Paul—along with other writers in Scripture—uses the word agape. What is strange about this word is that it's seldom used outside the Bible. Classical scholars say it is only used four times outside the sacred writings of the Scriptures, and each time it's a rather anemic word that is translated "good will." Yet biblical writers take agape and baptize it into the Christian faith. It is the major word that is used to describe God's love for us, our love for him, and our love for each other.

What characterizes this kind of love is that it's not primarily a love of the emotions. Agape love is a mindset, an orientation of the will. Agape love determines that it will seek the highest good for other people. This is why Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, can say, "Love your enemies" or "Pray for those who persecute you" or "Do good to those who despitefully use you." Immanuel Kant read those words of Jesus and dismissed them, saying it's impossible—that you can't just command love. He was right. If you're talking about a "feeling" kind of love, you can't start that up like you would a fire, or stop it like blowing out a match. But agape love isn't primarily about feelings. It is a mindset. Even if I'm dealing with an enemy, I can determine that I will do no harm to that person—that I will not respond to cursing with cursing, to bitterness with bitterness. Agape love seeks the highest good of other people.

As long as we hold agape love at this level of understanding—an

abstract, theological, ethical level that speaks of seeking the highest good of other people—everybody passes. Everyone is as loving as the next guy and perhaps a little bit more. But in verses 4-7 in our text, Paul defines this love beyond a dictionary definition. He shows us what love is by showing us what love does. He defines love by describing "loving." Sometimes you need that. If you had no idea what music was, and I said to you, "Music is the science of the art of tones," you would still wonder what it is. It would be better to have you listen to an Irish tenor singing Danny Boy. If I said that diamonds are native carbon in isometric crystal, that would get a passing grade on a geology exam. But if you've never seen a diamond, that definition won't do you a bit of good. Just one diamond flashing offers a better definition! In order to help us understand love, Paul defines it by describing it. He shows us what agape love is by showing how agape love acts.

If you look at the list in 1 Corinthians 13, you discover it has fifteen phrases. The first two serve as an umbrella for everything that follows. The love of which Paul writes is patient and kind. Then Paul lists eight negative things that love doesn't do. If you do any of these things, you are not loving. Love does not envy. It does not boast. It is not proud. It is not rude. It is not self-seeking. It is not easily angered. It keeps no record of wrongs. It does not delight in evil. Then Paul turns the corner and gives us five positives. The love of which he speaks "rejoices with the truth, always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

AGAPE LOVE IS PATIENT

Look at the first two traits of agape love. First of all, "love is patient." If you were writing this list, would you start with patience? Most of us are impatient with patience! But this kind of patient love is possible because it comes from God. It's God's love in us.

As we know, God is patient with us so he can lead us to repentance. Imagine confessing your sins, and God says, "Wait, wait, wait. Which sins do you have in mind?" When you begin to spell them out, God says, "Wait, wait, wait. You were here three days ago confessing that. In fact, you were here three times last week. Look: I'm going to take my lead from California law—three strikes and you're out!" But God doesn't do that. He does not deal with us according to our sins or reward us according to our iniquities. He's patient with us. He works with us. Because that's the nature of the God who gives us agape love. God does for us what we do for others.

You can also be patient if you take seriously the Christian doctrine about men and women—that is, that we are depraved. We're all sinners. We all mess up. In fact, when we think we've got sin licked, it comes back again. We struggle with it, and other people struggle with it. So, we need to be patient with folks. We are patient with folks because the work God does in them doesn't happen overnight. That's why it's perfectly appropriate, when you get around exasperating people, to say, "God, I need your patience!"

AGAPE LOVE IS KIND

The love of which Paul speaks is not only patient with people, but kind. Patience and kindness go together like a couple in a good marriage. Patience can be passive. I can be patient with injustice if it's not happening to me or because I'm too weak to respond. But to be patient with somebody and then to respond by being kind to them? That's a triumph of love! And people need that. All of us are on an uphill climb, carrying heavy burdens. All of us need kindness.

I've seen kindness happen on this campus. I remember waking up one morning, and all the cars on campus were snowed in. I didn't have a shovel, and I didn't know how I was going to get out. Before I left the apartment, I noticed that the wife of one of our Korean students was out there with a shovel, digging out the cars. Soon two or three of the men came out to help her. What a lovely kindness.

I saw kindness when I was at a Promise Keepers rally in Washington. A million men had gathered to sing praises to God. But what struck me was that when these men arrived at the rally, there were a number of women's groups protesting outside. They were upset about these "male chauvinists" getting together. They yelled and held signs. As the day went on, it got hot and humid. I watched as several different times I saw men get up, go to their cooler, pull out a frosty, cool bottle of water, and take it over to the protesting women. I saw a guy go to one woman carrying a big poster. He actually took her poster and held it up while she had a drink. That's the love of Christ! Forget all the singing! That was beautiful!

The next day there was an article in the Washington paper—a sidebar that explained what happened when the park department came on Monday morning to clean up after the rally. We all know the mess one man makes. How about a million of them? But when workers arrived, the place was completely clean. They had bagged all their garbage. One of the men from the park department said, "I'm impressed. They didn't just walk away from their dirt." That's kindness. I think that was the love of God's Spirit working through those men.

I've seen kindness when folks on this campus have taken some time to help new students get settled into their apartments—when others have taken international students down to the bank or the local store, helping them through the intricacies of this culture we've got. What a lovely thing!

CONCLUSION

I know you might be sitting there, thinking, You're right, Robinson. They ought to be patient with me. They should be kind to me. We appreciate it when agape love is shown to us. But God's Spirit is working in us so that we can show this love to others. The Christian life often boils down to just that: being patient and kind with people—even impossible people. What a different campus we could be if we would do just that.

BOOK REVIEWS

Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric: The Promise of Rhetorical Criticism for Expository Preaching. By Tim MacBride. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014. 978-1-6256-4995-9. 265 pp., $31.00.

Reviewer: *Jeffrey Arthurs, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, South Hamilton, MA*

This well-researched volume is Tim MacBride's dissertation turned into a book. It proceeds with tight, methodical argumentation and is rich in primary sources from classical rhetoric as well as secondary sources from modern rhetorical and biblical scholarship. Throughout the book, MacBride maintains his focus on expository preaching—saying what the author said and doing what the author did. His conviction that expository preaching is founded on the discovery and proclamation of authorial intention is congenial to evangelicals, and he contends that the handbooks of Greek and Roman rhetoric provide insight for that task. One of the unique contributions MacBride's volume makes is demonstrating how the identification of an epistle's rhetorical genre (deliberative, forensic, or epideictic) helps the preacher reproduce the author's intention (48-95). He also devotes chapters to rhetorical arrangement, and the three modes of proof—ethos, pathos, and logos.

Although the title claims to cover the New Testament, this book actually covers only the seven undisputed letters of Paul. This is probably because the constraints of a dissertation demand a tightly focused subject. The limited coverage may also occur because classical rhetoric dealt with oratory, similar to the genre of epistle, and the methods and presuppositions of the discipline are less conducive to application to genres of gospel and apocalypse. The author also notes that we know of no handbooks of rhetoric from the Ancient Near East; the kind of analysis he performs on Paul's epistles is therefore not possible on the Old Testament. Instead, he would allow for the use of a synchronic method of rhetorical analysis (242).

But for the interpretation of Paul's epistles, MacBride recommends that preachers not use a synchronic method, or use it only with caution. He repeatedly asserts that classical rhetoric, not modern rhetoric, aids the preacher committed to authorial intention. At times he nods in the direction of a "moderate form of modern rhetorical criticism" (39) but by and large "rejects the 'new' rhetorical approaches as being useful for expository preaching, [because] they [do] not provide us with an objective means of recovering the original intent or function of the text" (236). By "moderate forms" he has in mind hybrid rhetorical methodologies that keep an eye

on authorial intention and historical context, and by "new approaches" he has in mind reader-oriented perspectives that examine the social dynamics and power relationships between ancient texts and modern readers (37). I am largely in agreement with MacBride, but in a spirit of collegial debate I would like to nudge him a step closer to a positive assessment of "hybrid" methodologies. He has already opened the door for this with the entire Old Testament. I contend that many modern theories of rhetoric aid the search for authorial intention (discerning what an author said and did): theories such as Campbell's "vivacity," Perelman's "presence," Toulmin's "argumentative layout," Burke's "identification," Black's "second persona," Austin and Searle's "speech act," Booth's "rhetoric of irony," and Campbell's "genre criticism." In the words of Kenneth Burke, critics should use "all that is there to use." Not that we should drag out every possible method and fad of rhetorical methodology, but rather that we should use methods that illumine what is actually in the text. If the text prompted the ancient readers to identify with the author, a methodology that illumines identification is helpful. The ancient rhetoricians would be of limited help in that endeavor. If the author suppressed warrants in his argument, Aristotle/Bitzer's theory of the enthymeme *and* Toulmin's theory of everyday argumentation illumines what "is there." If the text is a generic hybrid such as the book of James with its blend of epistle, synagogue homily, and wisdom literature, then we need a theory of generic hybrids even if such a theory is not discussed in the classical handbooks. On some matters of authorial intention, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian are of little help although it could be argued correctly that the seeds of all of the theories others can be helpful as well.

McBride feels that synchronic methods of rhetorical criticism are justified when interpreting the Old Testament, and he apparently feels the same using Quintilian throughout his book. That is, Quintilian's *Institutes* were published around the year 95, so it is impossible that the Apostle Paul would have written his epistles under the direct influence of the Roman rhetorician. MacBride may counter this by saying that the *Institutes* articulate the rhetorical spirit of the age and that Paul wrote under the influence of a proto-Quintilian. Perhaps. My point is that MacBride himself uses a mild form of synchronic criticism. He uses theory written *after* Paul to exegete Paul's intention.

The argument I am making about "new" rhetoric could also be made about new homiletical theories that help preachers recreate the rhetorical dynamics of the text; theories such as Chapell's "fallen condition focus" (FCF) and Robinson's "developmental questions." If Paul intended to correct an issue of fallenness, then a modern theory such as Chapell's FCF helps the

proclaimer reproduce the authorial intention. Ancient rhetoric says nothing about the FCF, yet it "is there" in the epistles of Paul. This argument could even be extended to grammar: although Paul (presumably) knew nothing about the method of analysis called "sentence diagramming," diagramming helps reveal what "is there."

All the same, I value *Preaching the New Testament as Rhetoric* and largely agree with MacBride's argument. The book breaks new ground and helps preachers say what the text says and do what the text does.

The Christ-Centered Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Classic Sermons for the Church Today. By Elizabeth Catherwood and Christopher Catherwood, eds. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014. 978-1-4335-4102-5. 277 pp., $ 17.99, paperback.

Reviewer: *Daniel D. Green, Moody Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL*

A medical doctor by training, Martyn Lloyd-Jones was one of the most renowned preachers of the mid-twentieth century. He ministered in English parishes, the last being London's Westminster Chapel where he served for thirty years. This work is a compilation of seventeen sermons that the editors believe represent some of his best exposition in the Reformed tradition.

The messages are exemplary in their timelessness, theological depth, psychological insight, and practical approach. They demonstrate extraordinary comprehension of the world in which Lloyd-Jones lived. To use the metaphor of Duvall and Hays, he masterfully merged their town (the text) with our town (the context). He demonstrated keen awareness of human nature, and was quite clear and specific in applying his texts. The sermons are edifying. Reading them builds up and encourages the reader. They ask for obedience without heaping up guilt or condemnation.

The sermons are not expositional works that plumb deeply a paragraph of the Bible, but are textual, and topical. They usually start with a basic treatment of a verse of Scripture that isolates a theological principle which is traced here and there through the Bible. For instance in "The Final Answer to All Our Questions," he starts with a good contextual explanation of Romans 8:28 that considers the challenges facing the saints in said congregation. From there he follows a theological principle through Hebrews 11 and 12, 13:6; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Ephesians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 2:9, and Philippians 1:29, before returning to his original verse and back again to Hosea 5:15, Psalm 119:71, and 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. Readers who are accustomed to Big Idea messages, from a single passage, may experience some frustration with his approach.

One potential use of these messages is for devotional life. Each can be comfortably read in one or two sittings. The reader is quickly shown the personal relevance of the theme for himself. The insights remain fresh.

Preachers can learn to emulate the balanced attention given the original and contemporary contexts.

There are a number of questions to be raised about this work, starting with its title. Is preaching really supposed to be Christ-centered, or is it theocentric as Steve Mathewson and Ken Langley have argued? There are also the assertions of the editors (Lloyd-Jones's daughter and grandson) who say that one purpose of the book is to "prove the point that if you preach in an expository way you always speak to your congregation, and if you are biblical you are always relevant …" (8). Preachers and homileticians know that this is often simply not the case. The editors are also likely hyperbolic in their claim that "no one could have been more enthusiastic about church history than the Doctor …" (8). In addition, they do a good bit of cheerleading for Reformed theology, the promotion of which, they say, is another purpose of publishing the sermons. The volume may have been better served with a brief, and less preachy, introduction that let the sermons speak for themselves.

Of course, these concerns do nothing to diminish the distinguished work of Lloyd-Jones himself. The volume is clearly beneficial for those who would be better preachers and better Christians.

Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness. By Richard B. Hays. Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014. 978-1-4813-0232-6. 177 pp., $34.95.

Reviewer: *Randal Emery Pelton, Calvary Bible Church, Mount Joy, PA, and Lancaster Bible College, Lancaster, PA*

If you anticipate preaching from the Old Testament and/or helping others preach from the *Old* Testament, you will enjoy Hays's book. An odd way to begin a review on a book devoted to analysis of the four Gospels? Not really. Hays focuses on how the Gospel writers "reread Israel's Scripture, as well as the ways in which Israel's Scripture prefigures and illuminates the central character in the Gospel stories" (x). Hays's paragraph about Psalm 69 was worth the cost of the book (86). Most anyone preaching sermons on the Gospels and helping others preach the Gospels will also enjoy and benefit from this book.

The preface contains helpful information about sources. Hays lists eleven authors who have influenced his thinking and provides brief description of their contributions.

Along with an interesting look at how Martin Luther read Luke's birth narrative, chapter one defines figural interpretation and its importance. "Figural reading need not presume that the OT authors—or the characters they narrate—were conscious of predicting or anticipating Christ. … the discernment of a figural correspondence is necessarily retrospective rather

than prospective" (2). And as far as importance? In an age when authors are arguing that a loving Jesus trumps a wrathful God (I'm thinking of Jersak's *A More Christlike God*), Hays writes, "The OT focuses our understanding of Jesus' role as an eschatological prophet of God's judgment. The sweet, infinitely inclusive Jesus, meek and mild, so beloved by modern Protestantism, is a Jesus cut loose from his OT roots" (12). Finally, anyone interested in exploring Jesus' Emmaus road lecture will appreciate Hays' analysis: "the puzzled Emmaus disciples have all the facts but lack the pattern that makes them meaningful. In other words, what is lacking is a figural interpretation of the Old Testament's psalms and stories" (14).

Chapters 2–5 provide detailed examples of how each Gospel writer employed figural interpretation to present their view of our Lord Jesus Christ. Hays's insights will add theological depth to your sermons as the portrait of Jesus gains resolution with each visit to the OT. He argues that "if the scriptural intertexts of Mark [and the other three Gospel writers] are ignored, a diminished Christology inevitably follows" (28).

The final chapter unpacks some challenges presented by this Gospel-shaped hermeneutic, such as coming to grips with the multivocality of the four Gospels. Hays cautions, "Discerning hearers do not want to eliminate the dissonances" (95). Hays also presents the strengths and weaknesses of each of the four Gospel writers' method. Finally, he states ten ways the four Evangelists teach us to read Scripture.

For homileticians interested in hermeneutics, Hays addition to the field of intertextual interpretation will be welcomed. The more comfortable readers are with figural interpretation, the more gain they'll receive. Preachers of the New Testament and those who teach others how to preach the New Testament will benefit immediately from this book. Preachers of the Old Testament and those who teach others to preach the Old Testament will have to continue digging. Hays provides the shovel and starts the hole going. I was ready to roll up my sleeves and dig more.

As far as weaknesses go, I found myself wanting Hays to provide more rationale for reading like the Evangelists. I wished Hays had followed up his angle about christological interpretation being "nothing other than the climactic fruition of that one God's self-revelation" (109). I also wished Hays had spent some time showing how figural interpretation didn't tamper with textual meaning. One weakness of having New Testament scholars write on this subject is that they rarely get around to showing how this impacts Old Testament interpretation and application.

Some readers will struggle with Hays's insistence that we should read the Old Testament the way the Gospel writers did. "I want to suggest that we will learn to read Scripture rightly only if our minds and imaginations are opened by seeing the scriptural text … through the Evangelists' eyes" (4). Even more strongly: "To read Scripture well, we must bid farewell to plodding literalism and rationalism in order to embrace a *complex poetic sensibility*" (105).

I'll close the way Hays does because he speaks to what those in the Evangelical Homiletics Society tend to do: "So, let the intertextual conversation continue. By seeing Israel's Scripture through the eyes of the Gospel writers, may we be encouraged to read backwards—and empowered to carry forward the story of Jesus with new freedom and faithfulness" (109).

Augustine's Theology of Preaching. By Peter T. Sanlon. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2014. 978-1-4514-8278-2. xxxii + 211 pp., $24.00.

Reviewer: Greg R. Scharf, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL

Peter Sanlon is vicar of St. Mark's Church, Royal Tunbridge Wells, U.K., and distance education tutor in systematic theology at St. John's College, Nottingham. The acknowledgements imply that this is Sanlon's 2012 Cambridge University dissertation, *Interiority, Temporality and Scripture in Augustine's Preaching*. Sanlon hopes to "provide a meaningful hermeneutic of Augustine's preaching . . . to interpret his [sermons]" (xvii). The volume consists of eight chapters, a bibliography and a subject index.

In the Preface, Sanlon argues that Augustine studies are impoverished by the fact that the 590 unedited *Sermones ad populum* are largely neglected in serious treatments of Augustine. He includes these, and *De doctrina christiana*, among his primary sources. He also introduces but does not elaborate on "interiority" and "temporality," the two hermeneutical keys that dominate this volume and whose relationship in Augustine's preaching is Sanlon's "major goal" to explore (82). The Introduction lists five ways Augustine's example can potentially help contemporary preachers: the role of secular insights in communication, the role of doctrine, freedom and order, the relationship to pastoral ministry and the training of preachers. Chapter One, "The Historical Context of Augustine's Preaching," enables the reader to picture Augustine preaching in his normal setting in North Africa, seated in the midst of standing listeners, speaking as much or as little as needed so that they might understand the transformative Scriptural content he was conveying to them. Chapter Two probes the influences of pagan philosophers and orators on Augustine's homiletic and notes how Scripture authorizes both Augustine's temporal approach to preaching and his "focus on interiority" (45). In Chapter Three, "Training Preachers: *De doctrina christiana*," aware that Augustine began to write this as a young man but did not finish it until late in his ministry, Sanlon shows how Augustine puts understanding Scripture at the heart of his preaching—key to how he departs from his training as a pagan orator. In Chapter Four, having alluded multiple times to the twin hermeneutical keys of interiority and temporality, Sanlon, affirming that he came to these inductively, now compares his interpretation with three modern interpreters to defend it (71). He charts some of the contours of

Augustine's thought as it relates to interiority under the headings of self-reflection, the inner teacher, the heart, and hierarchy, only defining interiority for the first time on page 81: "In short, interiority may for the purposes of our book be defined as the inner realm of desirous longing, evaluation and prayer." Temporality gets a similar treatment also culminating in a definition, "the successive flow and teleological development of God's plan for creation from beginning to consummation" (86). After dealing with Augustine's use of Scripture and interacting with Coleen Hoffman Gowans, Paul Ricoeur, and Charles Taylor, Sanlon concludes, "Our claim is that Augustine preached with a particular regard to interiority and temporality because he wished to use Scripture to change listeners" (98). Chapters Five, Six and Seven "explore inductively themes which were of particular importance in Augustine's preaching … [to] deepen the conclusions drawn in our book, and provide the reader with something of the experience of reading through Augustine's sermons."

The value of this book is that it lets Augustine's actual sermons speak into the discussion of his thinking and preaching. The fact that Sanlon deals with such a substantial corpus in Latin and interacts with both those who influenced Augustine and so many who have studied him—note the twenty-nine pages of bibliography—renders his conclusions virtually unassailable by a non-specialist such as myself. For this reason alone, Sanlon's volume is a valuable complement to the readily available histories of preaching. The first and second chapters helpfully contextualize Augustine's preaching in ways that help the contemporary preacher or homiletician understand some elements that may seem strange to us. The third chapter on De doctrina christiana also has relevance for us though, in my judgment, this chapter, like the remainder of the book is marred by the frequent references to temporality and interiority, many of which occur before the terms are defined at all, much less argued for on the basis of specific statements from the primary documents. Sanlon hopes his definition of interiority is "broad enough to include the various ways in which Augustine approaches it, but specific enough that it encompasses the distinctively Augustinian flavor of his methodology in general and his preaching in particular." In my judgment, both his hermeneutical keys—temporality as well as interiority—employ labels that are far too broad. All preaching—not just Augustine's—deals with the interior life as it impacts behavior and community; all preaching has a temporal component because we live in time and all of us see these elements in Scripture and therefore they appear in our preaching. These words—or the concepts behind them—may indeed be the keys that unlock Augustine, but I hoped for arguments that would make the case for this instead of merely restating that Sanlon kept seeing them in Augustine's sermons. Unfortunately, the Introduction's promise of five ways Augustine's preaching could potentially "resource" contemporary preachers was largely unrealized, or perhaps buried within the text. I—and I suspect others—would welcome a far more radically-edited version that succinctly states the

ways Augustine's sermons teach us in each of those important domains and gives examples from his sermons themselves.

Invitation To The Life of Jacob: Winning Through Losing. Biblical Preaching for the Contemporary Church. By Donald R. Sunukjian. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. 978-1-941337-10-3. 168 pp., $14.99.

Reviewer: *Sawyer Nyquist, Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX*

Don Sunukjian, Professor of Christian Ministry and Leadership at Talbot School of Theology, has taught and practiced preaching for over forty years. *Invitation To The Life of Jacob: Winning Through Losing* is part of a larger series that "offer[s] models of the principles presented" in Sunukjian's earlier *Invitation to Biblical Preaching* (Kregel, 2007). This volume is a collection of sermons delivered to actual congregations that have received minor edits for publication.

Sunukjian has an established reputation for creatively and clearly communicating God's word through preaching. With a Ph.D. in Communications (UCLA), the publication of these sermons puts his rhetorical qualities on display for all to engage with and respond to. In the preface the author provides four criteria for compelling sermons; true to the author thought, clear in presentation, interesting to listen to, and connected to life (xi). Sunukjian aims at all of these categories as he walks readers through the life of Jacob (Genesis 25–33).

This volume offers a coherent whole that standard collections of sermons lack. The author's as a storyteller is highlighted as he moves throughout each passage tracing Jacob's highs and lows. A reader will assimilate this volume with a linear understanding of Jacob's life and the larger narrative arc of the text, as Sunukjian sees it. The rhetorical skills of this experienced preacher are evident as the author paints word pictures and turns clever phrases that keep readers on their toes. The sermons read smoothly and are brief enough to permit accessibility at all levels.

While there is room for commending Sunukjian's accomplishments as a preacher and author, this book falls short of compelling, exemplary preaching.

The content of these sermons is best characterized as biblical theology in both his exposition and application. After deriving the general topic of the passage, Sunukjian proceeds to preach that topic, backing it up with numerous other passages. The later part of the sermon normally includes an exposition of an entirely different passage (usually from the New Testament). For example, Chapter 5 (Genesis 26:34–35; 27:46–28:9) begins briefly with the

Jacob narrative where Sunukjian establishes the topic as marriage, and then diverts into several other passages of Scripture that discuss marriage. In the end he spends only one and a half of his total of nine pages for that sermon talking about Jacob. This chapter was not an invitation to Jacob but a topical sermon on a theology of marriage. Several of this book's chapters take a similar form.

Each chapter/sermon concludes with a brief and vague application. The audience leaves the sermon with a general impression about the text, but they receive no compelling actionable application for their life. While providing specific applications for a particular audience would be difficult, it would have been helpful to see how these texts could have been applied to a real congregation. Rather abstract, the applications revolve around loving God, trusting God, obeying God. Once again these applications are derived from a canonical view of the topic rather than emphasizing the message of the specific text he is preaching. Is there something about trusting God that I can learn specifically and uniquely from this passage?

As a storyteller, Sunukjian has a tendency look behind the text at the event being portrayed in an effort to recreate what happens (See Chapter 6, a modern reenactment of the selling of the birthright). Speculations about what actually happened and drawing applications out of those assumptions weaken the authoritative appeal of God's word for the Church. This yields a sermon and application that is based on the historical and not on the biblical account. The preacher's job is to compel the audience to life change through the text, not through a historical reconstruction and retelling of the story.

In short, this book's attempts to provide examples of exegesis or application for the people of God fail to be compelling or helpful. Nonetheless, *Invitation to Jacob* may be useful for exploring the use of different outlines and for reviewing examples of preaching those texts. The rhetorical skill, creative structures to the text, along with illuminating dialogues and illustrations can make this work a helpful aid for pastors in sermons preparation.

Invitation to Philippians: Building a Great Church Through Humility. Biblical Preaching for the Contemporary Church. By Donald R. Sunukjian. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. 978-0-9891671-4-7. 113 pp., $14.99.

Reviewer: *Craig Schill, Lake Cities Community Church, Rowlett, TX, and Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas, TX*

The sermons found in this book are of the highest caliber. As a master-teacher, Don Sunukjian models effective rhetorical and interpretive skills on every page. Each sermon contains gems waiting to be discovered by the observant reader. His sermons demonstrate clarity, employ a variety of inductive and deductive techniques, are built on clear homiletical propositions and use an effective variety of illustrations.

Sunukjian's clarity is the product of careful communication. Often he will state a point, reveal his point from the text, and then restate the same point (4–5, 29, 44–45, 93–94). This deductive approach increases clarity, however, if used too much can cause the text to appear as an illustration to the preacher's proposition. Clarity is also found in the repetition of key words such as "confidence" in his sermon on Philippians 1:1–8 (repeated more than 25 times) and the word "know" in his sermon on Philippians 3:10–11 (repeated more than *45 times*). With such repetition, the listener can hardly miss the main point!

While much of the exposition is deductive, most of the messages are inductively structured, building toward a clear homiletical proposition. Brick by brick the house is built until at the end the listener can stand back and enjoy the final result.

Some of Sunukjian's homiletical propositions are: "Share that confidence that God is doing a good work in us" (10), "Conduct yourself in a manner worthy of the gospel" (48), "All I really need to know I'll learn by suffering" (83), and "Give generously because you want to share in what God is doing" (113). While these propositions are clear, the application is not always given in detail. For example, what does it look like to give generously and thus share in God's work? How can I come to know Christ through suffering? In a local church setting, a pastor will want to add more detail for his or her particular setting and congregation.

This reviewer was especially interested in the author's use of different kinds of illustrations. Often Sunukjian lays out for the listener a grouping of three or four illustrations in one breath (8, 13–14, 20–21, 32–33, 88, 98–99, etc.). Each additional situation draws in a greater percentage of the audience to see their "need" for the message. At times, these stories are shared at the start of the message and finished later (18–19, 28, 104–105). Such an approach creates interest and demonstrates relevance. In addition, Sunjkjian presents a balance of illustrations. He splits his time between personal stories (11, 38, 54, 90) and "pop-culture-type" illustrations (3, 20, 84). When he speaks about himself, he presents himself as a learner and uses self-deprecating humor (55, 65, 90).

At times, however, it felt that not all of Paul's purposes in each text were adequately addressed. For example, in the author's sermon on Philippians 2:12–18 nearly half of the sermon is taken up by an opening hypothetical illustration, and little time is left to exposit the text of this key passage. Other sermons also appear to be relatively short for the amount of text selected.

The most significant concern to this reviewer was a lack of guidance provided to help the reader know how to use this collection of sermons. Stated in the "Series Preface" the reader is informed that the sermons are "models of the principles" found in Sunukjian's textbook on preaching (xi). But how does one extract those principles and apply them to their own work? And what about the reader who is unfamiliar with the companion

textbook? In a world where preachers struggle to find their own voice, and where temptations toward plagiarism are real, additional help here would be most welcomed.

In conclusion and perhaps most importantly, Sunukjian's pastoral care for his flock was visible. An effective sermon is not a clinical exercise but a key part of worship in which God's people are conformed to the image of Christ. As stated in the introduction to the series, "These messages were originally preached before a congregation of God's people. I've tried my best to retain their oral flavor" (xi). The intimacy between pastor and congregation will set this series apart from other sermon-to-book projects.

Invitation to James: Persevering Through Trials to Win the Crown. Biblical Preaching for the Contemporary Church. By Donald R. Sunukjian. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. 978-1-941337-04-2. 123 pp., $14.99.

Reviewer: *Russell St. John, Twin Oaks Presbyterian Church, St. Louis, MO*

The Book of James is notoriously difficult to preach. While James provides a wealth of hortatory material and a strong ethic for Christian living in a hostile world, scholars have long struggled to discern a hermeneutical key that might bind together his seemingly disparate instructions, thereby identifying a previously unseen unity underlying his epistle. In *Invitation to James* Sunukjian offers just such a hermeneutical key.

Invitation is comprised of a brief introduction, followed by fourteen sermons, which cover the entirety of the epistle, and which interpret James' various exhortations in the light of Sunukjian's proposed hermeneutical key. After briefly describing the dispersion of Jewish-Christians from Jerusalem after the stoning of Stephen, Sunukjian identifies the hermeneutical key that will guide his interpretations of James. Viewing James's references to perseverance through trials in 1:2–4 and in 5:11 as an inclusio, Sunukjian interprets all the material within this inclusio in reference to the theme of perseverance in trials. Noting that this proposed hermeneutical key "will drastically change some of our previous interpretations" (2), Sunukjian summarizes, saying, "James's purpose is to tell his friends and us how to act, both as individuals and as a church, when we find ourselves in stressful and difficult situations" (3).

The greatest strength of *Invitation to James* is the way in which Sunukjian sticks to this hermeneutical key throughout. And the greatest weakness of *Invitation to James* is the way in which Sunukjian sticks to this hermeneutical key throughout. If the reader agrees with Sunukjian's hermeneutical key—that every passage is written in reference to perseverance through trials—then he will find *Invitation to James* refreshing, insightful, and filled with wonderful counsel for how to preach a difficult

book. However, for the reader not convinced that Sunukjian has identified the right hermeneutical key, *Invitation to James* offers interpretations which "drastically change our previous interpretations."

Consider Sunukjian's exposition of James 2:14–17. James is discussing faith and works, but according to Sunukjian, "The faith [James] has in mind is not faith in Jesus Christ as Savior. It's faith that God is working good in you through your trials" (51). Thus, "You know that your faith in God's goodness is alive … if it is accompanied by concrete deeds of obedience" (55). Rather than seeing this passage as a discussion of the relationship between saving faith and good works, Sunukjian sees it as exhorting believers to maintain faith in the goodness of God through the trials that the Christian community is enduring, and to prove their faith in God's goodness through a life of good works. Given his hermeneutical key, this makes sense, and handily resolves the apparent conflict between Paul and James on the place of good works over against faith in salvation. If Sunukjian's hermeneutical key is wrong, however, then he is promoting faith in an attribute of God—his goodness—rather than faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and is encouraging the reader to seek assurance in his own good works rather than in the mercy of God in Christ.

This interpretive pattern repeats in James 3:1. Given his hermeneutical key, Sunukjian interprets James' warning against presuming to be a teacher in a novel way. "James's words have nothing to do with teaching Scripture or biblical doctrine. Instead, his warning is against presuming to teach others how they should act so that they don't add to the stresses and hardships that the rest of us are facing" (60). In other words, James is not talking about teaching in the church; he is rebuking Christians who try to tell other believers how to reform their behavior when that behavior brings unwanted attention—in the form of persecution—upon our faith community. If Sunukjian's hermeneutical key is correct, this makes sense. If, however, his hermeneutical key is not correct, this interpretation is untenable or even misleading.

Sunukjian is a wonderful storyteller; his illustrations sparkle with detail and point. His ability to state theological truths in plain language is enviable, and he moves from the theoretical to the concrete and back again with ease. If, however, the hermeneutical key he has identified is not correct, then all of these great homiletical gifts are being marshaled to divide the word of truth incorrectly.

I applaud Don Sunukjian for his boldness and creativity, but caution the prospective reader to consider carefully the hermeneutical assumption on which *Invitation to James* stands or falls.

Preaching By Ear: Speaking God's Truth from the Inside Out. By Dave McClellan, with Karen McClellan. Wooster, OH: Weaver, 2014. 978-1-9413-3702-8. 171

pp., $15.99.

Reviewer: *Gary L. Shultz Jr., First Baptist Church, Fulton, MO*

Unfortunately it is all too easy as preachers to preach messages that are solid and biblical, even helpful, but aren't personal. We can fall into a routine of mining the biblical text, writing our outline or manuscript, and delivering our message without ever being changed by God's truth ourselves. This remove from Scripture doesn't only hurt us, it hurts the congregations we preach to every week. McClellan aims to rescue us from that reality, to re-invigorate our preaching by urging us to preach from the heart, from the inside out. He uses the controlling metaphor of playing music by ear as opposed to playing by musical score. His goal isn't necessarily to get us to stop using notes when we preach, but to help us purposely preach from "personally held, deep convictions in a way that enables our words to unfold in the moment by considering the actual people present to us" (5). Drawing upon ancient rhetoricians such as Aristotle, Quintilian, and Augustine, as well as more modern scholars like Walter Ong, McClellan explains that we learn to do this by focusing first on who we are as preachers rather than onour preaching, and then practicing an oral rather than a literary model of preaching.

McClellan's overriding concern is for our preaching to be authentic and personal, for God's word to take root in the preacher first, so that our preaching is no longer based on theory, but practice. He believes that since the invention of the printing press, our focus in preaching has been on preparing an outline or a manuscript instead of preparing ourselves to preach. Premodern preachers, orally driven instead of literary, viewed the sermon as something inside the preacher, as a spoken event rather than a thing written down on paper. A literary focus would be appropriate if we read or distributed copies of our sermons every Sunday, but because we deliver sermons orally, we should prepare them orally. This means preparing ourselves as preachers first, focusing on becoming the people God wants us to be before we ever preach the sermons he wants us to preach. It then means studying and practicing the text we are going to preach until we know it and can present it from the inside out. We should prepare, we should use the text devotionally and in a discipling context throughout the week, we should rehearse, and then we should go into our pulpits to deliver our sermons extemporaneously, by ear, instead of by note. McClellan makes the case that this oral model of preaching is more faithful to the Scriptural model, better for the congregation, and better for us as preachers.

After reading the first chapter of this book I found myself intrigued, but doubtful. I manuscript my sermons, and while I deliver them extemporaneously, much of my effort and preparation throughout the week goes into writing my manuscript so I know what I am going to say on Sunday mornings. The more I read, however, the more convinced I became

that McClellan is onto something fundamental in how we should approach preaching. We should work hard at internalizing the biblical text, not just exegeting it, before we preach it. We should commit ourselves to authenticity and vulnerability before our churches, if it costs us some polish in our delivery. Sermons are first and foremost oral events that only happen in real time, and should be explicitly for our congregations; this truth should drive our preparation and delivery. McClellan spends a chapter describing his weekly routine of sermon preparation, and I have already started to incorporate some of his practices and suggestions into my weekly routine. His work is scholarly, but he also takes care to ground his assertions in Scripture and in years of practice and pastoral experience. I recommend it especially for experienced preachers looking for something fresh in their approach, as well as professors who are looking for a textbook that emphasizes oral, personal nature of preaching.

Reading the Parables. By Richard Lischer. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2014. 978-0-664-23165-1. 194 pp., $35.00.

Reviewer: *Donald Sunukjian, Talbot School of Theology, Biola University, La Mirada, CA*

Richard Lischer is Professor of Preaching at Duke Divinity School, where for the past twenty years he has taught an elective course on preaching and the parables. His book is not a systematic exposition of the parables, but rather an attempt to "read the parables" from different angles—i.e., how the different Gospel writers shaped common parables; how modern, secular parabolic writings utilize selected details of the parables; how the parables can be read through the lens of contemporary social, political, or economic conditions; and how Christian interpreters through the ages have approached the parables.

Along the way the way the author is both appreciative and critical of all these different ways of reading the parables. His conclusions for each section are something along the lines of, "You can get some benefit from looking at the parable from this angle, but you will probably not get the author's intended point or meaning of the parable." All of which leads the reader and expositor to ask, "Is there enough value in doing this to justify my purchasing and reading the book?" My answer is that the expositor would probably find greater value in consulting top-notch exegetical treatments of the parables as they occur in the Gospel records.

The author's willingness to depart from the intended point or meaning of a parable surfaces early in the first chapter: "The elasticity of the parable is such that it can be preached from different perspectives and to different ends on successive Sundays" (3); "That we can no longer ask the

original performer about his intention in telling the story means that the text now has the capacity to address new audiences and unforeseen situations . . . as well as the possibility of new contexts of meaning" (8). Yet, the author also acknowledges that Jesus told the parables as "stories of intent" to convict his generation and move them to a radically new way of life (38). And in a later chapter he talks about a parable's "singularity of meaning", and how it "can be boiled down to one essential meaning" (58).

Though Lischer identifies himself with "gospel-centered, progressive evangelicals" (106), his seemingly low view of inspiration and inerrancy, however, repeatedly emerges. In comparing how parables show up in different Gospels, he makes such statements as: "When we recognize that Luke has appended three separate explanations to the parable of the Dishonest Steward, we can assume that the evangelist did not create the story but received it, and that he was as puzzled by it as we are"; "the evangelist's 'reading' of one of the little stories appears to be at odds with Jesus' telling of it" (71); and Luke's "framing of the parables occasionally betrays his own misunderstanding of the material he has received" (94). In any case, Lischer declares that "it is always good homiletical advice to 'preach Luke's or Matthew's or Mark's narrative' and to avoid the mistake of harmonization" (111).

Using the parable of the Good Samaritan, Lischer shows how it has been variously interpreted through the centuries. Approaching the parable allegorically, Augustine at times made Jesus the victim who takes our wounds as his own, and at other times he made Jesus the Samaritan who dresses and heals our wounds. Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth-century mystic, saw Jesus as the victim in his identification with Adam's fallen human race, and God in the role of the Samaritan. Luther, following Augustine, saw Jesus as the Samaritan who delivers us. Calvin understood the parable to teach that we are all neighbors of each other, with a responsibility to assist one another. Martin Luther King frequently referenced the parable's racial overtones, connecting the victim with the black experience or with some contemporary issue (e.g., the plight of sanitation workers), and interpreting the story as guidance for the nation's and the Christian's moral life with its teaching on compassion, courage, and sacrifice.

In conclusion, Lischer seems to want it both ways. Asking whether it is possible to choose a right interpretative lens from those mentioned in the book, he replies: "It is not, because the question itself freezes the living history of interpretation and makes of it a tray of options from which the reader may select one (and only one) position. … Nor is it adequate to claim that 'all of the above' options are right, for such a judgment overlooks linguistic patterns and contextual clues to meaning that are present in the narrative itself and make themselves available to all." For the biblical expositor, these "linguistic patterns and contextual clues to meaning" are really what matter. But the focus of this volume is not in that direction (164).

Masters of Preaching: More Poignant and Powerful Homilists in Church History, Volume Two. By Ray E. Atwood. Lanham, MD: Hamilton, 2014. 978-0-7618-6207-9. 468 pp., $82.67.

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

Ray E. Atwood serves as a Roman Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Dubuque, Iowa. This volume is the second of two with the same title. The book may be of value to those who have not read Hughes Oliphant Old's seven-volume series *The Reading and Preaching of the Scriptures in the Worship of the Christian Church or O. C. Edwards's A History of Preaching*. Of the thirty-some preachers that Atwood highlights, only five are not mentioned by Old or Edwards. These include the Dominican and de facto Archbishop of Lyons, William Perault (1190–1271), Pope John Paul I, Pope Benedict XVI, and two little known priests from Iowa, friends of the author. Atwood's major contribution will be to the Catholic community, which suffers from a "paucity of good Catholic preaching textbooks" and "few comprehensive histories of Catholic preaching" (ix–x).

Readers will note the clear Roman Catholic stance from which this text is written. This will likely not be off-putting, but rather will provide insight into a Catholic approach to preaching. The author's stance is gracious and not harsh. An extensive appendix of over one hundred fifty pages contains a liturgy for the various seasons/feasts of the Catholic calendar, with biblical readings and patristic quotes, as well as a "Mass Readings Index."

The book is structured clearly. After a thirty-seven page chapter on "The Principles and Mechanics of Effective Preaching," the balance of the book covers preaching and preachers representing the following periods: Old Testament, New Testament, Post-Apostolic Church, Patristic Age, Middle Ages, Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods, and Modern and Contemporary Era. These chapters are introduced with historical, political, religious, theological, and homiletical overviews. Next, individual preachers are highlighted. Readers are provided biographical material, descriptions of the preachers' preaching and/or writings on preaching, examples of their preaching (some very brief), and a summary of their contributions to preaching.

Apart from the New and Old Testament preachers and a few representatives of the early church, all the preachers are European. There are no representatives from Africa, Asia, South American, or North America (excepting the two Iowans). Another weakness is the author's extremely broad definition of preaching. "A sermon is a formal address or discourse presented by an educated member of the clergy who addresses a congregation

on a scriptural, spiritual, doctrinal, or moral topic" (5). At best, most of the sermons are not expositional, but rather spiritual, doctrinal, or moral. The readers of this Journal will likely find them lacking biblical substance. So while this text may prove useful in the Catholic community, most Protestant preachers and researchers will find more insight from Old and Edwards.

Persuasive Preaching: A Biblical and Practical Guide to the Effective Use of Persuasion. By Larry Overstreet. Wooster, OH: Weaver Book Company, 2014. 978-1-941337-00-4. 312pp., $24.99.

Reviewer: *Nick Gatzke, Old North Church, Canfield, OH*

A recent but quiet debate in the Evangelical community regarding the nature of preaching sets the backdrop for *Persuasive Preaching* by Larry Overstreet. In one camp, many evangelicals desire to hold high the work of the Holy Spirit and the sovereignty of God in his mysterious working that surrounds the delivery of the sermon. In the other camp, those who focus on the strategies of oral communication and rhetoricians place significant focus on sermon form, structure, and the methods employed in an attempt to *persuade* the listener toward the speaker's point of view. In this volume, Overstreet stands in between them and gives a compelling argument that these two priorities are not mutually exclusive.

The thrust of this work is that preachers are called to persuade their congregations and function in concert with the Holy Spirit "to alter or strengthen their attitudes and beliefs toward God, His Word and other individuals, resulting in their lives being transformed into the image of Christ" (14). Overstreet makes no apology for the fact that Christian preachers are called to persuade. He can do so because he clearly defines what persuasion is, sets boundaries to indicate what healthy and unhealthy persuasion consists of, and points to a uniquely Christian motive in the act of persuasion.

In the middle section of the book the author shows how persuasion is used in the Bible by presenting a theology of preaching in the writings of Paul and giving an impressive lexical compilation of the Greek words pertaining to persuasion. Despite the fact that this detailed work can feel laborious, it represents a key component of the author's argument and is worth the time to consider carefully. When one engages with the significant amount of biblical data it becomes increasingly convincing that persuasion was indeed an important part of the New Testament example.

To add practical instruction to the book, Overstreet gives four helpful examples of how to structure persuasive sermons. He identifies appropriate scenarios for each sermon structure and uses contrast to display how each form accomplishes its persuasive purpose. This section helps put some meat

on the bones of the theoretical framework, but it leaves the reader desiring more practical examples and wondering if these forms alone can make up a persuasive ministry. Overstreet does not imply that the four forms are all encompassing; however, more practical examples would have been helpful.

This work has two significant strengths. First, the biblical and lexical data that it provides gives a convincing argument for the fundamental place of persuasion in preaching. Overstreet sees the *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* of traditional rhetoric in the Pauline corpus and exposes it for the reader to engage with. Second, unlike many preaching books, this book attempts to provide appropriate balance of the complete and utter dependence on the Spirit's role in preaching with the rhetorical goals and responsibility of the preacher. Sections on "Identifying Persuasion," "Persuasion vs. Manipulation," and "The Holy Spirit in Preaching" all seek to recognize this tension and conceptualize an approach that clearly highlights both realities. A section on *the mystery* of preaching would have provided further help in accomplishing this goal of the book, but this work does not lack in a theological balance and many evangelicals will appreciate this.

Persuasive Preaching is a helpful and needed addition to the field of homiletics and is a welcome addition to the library of those who have moved past their initial exploration in the field and desire a more nuanced treatment of this important area. I highly recommend it.

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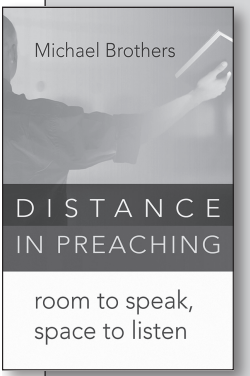

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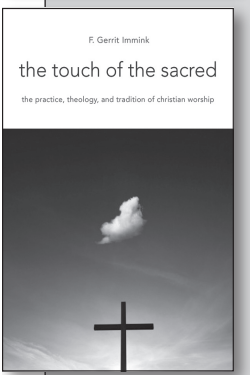

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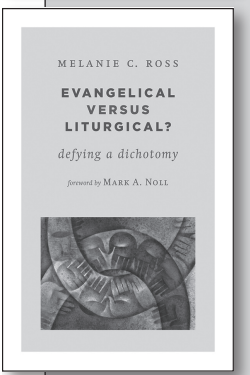

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