



**"WHO IS JESUS TO YOU?"  
CHRISTOLOGICAL PREACHING IN TWO BAPTIST  
CONGREGATIONS**

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"Christology proper is the interpretation of Jesus and the significance and meaning of Jesus for the faith and life of the believer."<sup>1</sup>

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**ABSTRACT:** Jesus Christ is central to Christianity, a fact reflected in Christian worship and proclamation. He informs the Christian believer's experience and understanding of God. About which Jesus are we talking? Multiple Varieties exist in the contemporary church. What factors contribute to the formation of these Christologies? Haddon Robinson argues that four worlds or contexts influence a preacher and the message he proclaims: the ancient world of the Bible, the modern world, the world of the preacher's listeners, and the preacher's personal world. This paper examines the Christologies communicated in the preaching at two Baptist congregations in Boston, Massachusetts, each with a different theological orientation, through the interpretative lenses of Robinson's four worlds of the preacher. Reflecting upon the Christologies of others can help us to identify and evaluate our own Christologies in the light of the New Testament.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Over a period of fourteen years as an evangelist, youth worker, and pastor in London, England,<sup>2</sup> my experience precipitated increasing curiosity in the theological convictions<sup>3</sup> I encountered in individuals and congregations. I made three observations. First, a range of different theologies<sup>4</sup> is commonly present within a single denomination.<sup>5</sup> Second, the theologies that 'people in the pews' articulate are frequently at variance with the theology the pulpit proclaims.<sup>6</sup> Third, academic theology is often not adept at preparing ministerial students for the theology located in the everyday worlds of evangelistic witness, youth work, and pastoral ministry.<sup>7</sup> I was especially intrigued, in view of the central importance of Jesus Christ to Christian worship and mission, by the spectrum of convictions about the person and work of Jesus Christ evident in individual Christian lives and congregational practices. The opportunity to pursue doctoral studies in practical theology

and systematic theology at Boston University School of Theology enabled me to investigate individual and corporate theologies within local congregations.

My doctoral research centred on an ethnographic<sup>8</sup> study of personal and corporate convictions about Jesus Christ in two Christian faith communities.<sup>9</sup> I selected two congregations affiliated to American Baptist Churches (USA)<sup>10</sup> in Boston, Massachusetts: First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain (FBCJP), South West Boston, and Ruggles Baptist Church (RBC), on the edge of Central Boston.<sup>11</sup>

The sermons preached in 2006 at FBCJP and RBC, when I attended public worship, form the basis of this paper.<sup>12</sup> Two Christological questions interrogate the sermons preached. How were Jesus and his significance for listeners presented to each congregation? What factors informed the understandings of the person and work of Jesus Christ communicated in sermons to each congregation?<sup>13</sup>

This paper utilises a set of hermeneutic perspectives developed by Haddon Robinson to analyse sermons in the two congregations.<sup>14</sup> In his influential lecture, "The Four Worlds of the Preacher"<sup>15</sup> Robinson resonates with the metaphor, advanced by John Stott in *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today*,<sup>16</sup> of preaching as bridge building between the past world of the Bible and the present world of the listeners.<sup>17</sup> Robinson agrees with Stott that preaching is about connecting the Bible to listeners.<sup>18</sup> However, he goes beyond Stott and suggests four worlds or contexts impinge upon the preparation and delivery of a sermon: the ancient world of the Bible, the modern world, the world of the preacher's listeners, and the personal world of the preacher.<sup>19</sup> These worlds serve as interpretative lenses through which to view the Christological preaching directed to each of the congregations profiled. The findings can also help us reflect upon our own preaching of Jesus Christ.

## THE ANCIENT WORLD OF THE BIBLE

The Bible formed the basis of preaching at both FBCJP and RBC.<sup>20</sup> The accounts of the person and work of Jesus preached to each congregation took Scripture as the starting point.<sup>21</sup> They exhibited similarities but also striking differences. The Jesus proclaimed at FBCJP by the Pastor, Ashlee Wiest-Laird, signifies a Prophetic Christology.<sup>22</sup> Jesus is a prophet in the sense he speaks truth to power. He announces the in breaking of the Kingdom of God, which transforms individual lives and challenges oppressive religious and political structures. The Jesus proclaimed at RBC by the pastor, Larry Showalter, indicates an Evangelical Christology. Jesus is a saviour for the person that puts his or her faith in him. Jesus alone restores relations between God and individual human beings through the forgiveness of sins. He enables his followers to trust and obey God. These two types of Christology are analysed in relation to five categories: Jesus' message, the cross, the resurrection, Jesus' identity, and Jesus' relation to the church today.

*Prophetic Christology*

Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God, which is God's presence and activity to disturb the status quo in the world and usher in a new order of justice, peaceful relations, and an inclusive community. The sermon preached on Palm Sunday from Mark 11:1-10 depicted the entrance of Jesus into Jerusalem as a dramatized parable to proclaim the Kingdom of God in contrast to the Roman Empire with its violence and oppression. The title of this sermon "Location, Location, Location" hints at the choice a follower of Jesus must make. Where are they going to stand? Whom do they identify with? The Kingdom of God or Imperial Rome?<sup>23</sup>

The death of Jesus on the cross is the consequence of his commitment to the Kingdom of God. The betrayal, trial, and execution of Jesus illustrate what happens when a human life is completely faithful and obedient to God.<sup>24</sup> The sermon "A Grain of Wheat" based on a saying of Jesus recorded in John 12:24 interpreted Jesus' death as an example to inspire others to work for the poor and so adopt a similar pattern of life.<sup>25</sup>

The resurrection of Jesus is God's act to vindicate Jesus, the basis for Christian hope, and a source of inspiration for Christians to work for a better world. It signifies that God's purposes for the world will ultimately prevail. The sermon "Christ is Risen!" preached on Easter Day affirmed the risen presence of Jesus who changes lives and empowers his followers to seek the kingdom of God. Wiest-Laird declared, "Sisters and brothers, on this Easter morning let me tell you that no matter the state we're in, our lives can be transformed. The living God longs for us to be liberated from fear, loneliness, and pain ... Surely, Christ is rising up in the First Baptist Church of Jamaica Plain and all things are possible!"<sup>26</sup>

The sermons preached at FBCJP presume Jesus stands in a unique relation to God. God's presence in and with Jesus is acknowledged. Jesus shows us the love of God more clearly than any other human being does. No sermon explicitly identified Jesus as God incarnate. A certain ambiguity is present. It is possible to infer that Jesus is truly God and truly human or, perhaps, simply a human life uniquely inspired by God.<sup>27</sup> However, the preaching makes a consistent claim that it is possible to experience God in and through Jesus here and now to transform individual lives, relationships, communities, and social structures.

Preaching at FBCJP insists that people can encounter Jesus in worship, mission and everyday life. It does not explore the nature of the resurrection, but routinely confesses that Jesus is a living presence accompanying the believer on the journey of faith.<sup>28</sup> A disciple is required to discern the spirit of Jesus in signs of the Kingdom breaking in around him or her and work for justice and peace.

*Evangelical Christology*

A series entitled "Pursuit of Spiritual Authenticity" claimed that God repeatedly sought after the rebellious people of Israel in the Old Testament. "Elijah: Holding Steady in a Roller Coaster World"<sup>29</sup> explored the story of the prophet Elijah (1 Kings 15:25-19:18) to show God does not abandon the people of Israel despite their persistent rebellion. God's determination to bring Israel, indeed all the peoples of the world, into fellowship comes to fruition in the life, ministry, message, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus announced that God seeks intimate relationship with individual human beings and taught his followers to love God and love neighbor. The ministry of Jesus stands in continuity with God's purpose and action in the Old Testament.

"Hosea: A living Illustration of God's Love" (29 October) and "Isaiah the Prophet: A Child Who is God, Born to Die" (3 December), "Immanuel: A Name for Fearful Times" (10 December), and "Unpredictable" (17 December) stressed the importance of the death of Jesus for the forgiveness of sins. God is a God of love and *justice*. Hence, God cannot ignore the fact of human sin. Human sins accrue a "debt" that incurs a "penalty" which must be paid. Satisfying the price of sin is beyond the ability of human beings. God chose to pay the price of sin in Jesus Christ. The death of Jesus is decisive in effecting reconciliation between God and human beings thus creating a new relationship.

The resurrection is bodily and verifies that Jesus is divine. The preaching presupposed the resurrection, although it rarely mentioned it explicitly. Sermons at RBC explained the cross more than the resurrection during the period of observation.

Jesus is the pre-existent Son of God incarnate.<sup>30</sup> He is truly human and truly divine. His identity and what he has done to effect atonement, mean he is of universal significance. Jesus is truth in an absolute sense and the only way to God. Religious pluralism is potentially misleading. The follower of Jesus is to be wary of idols or false substitutes for God.

Jesus is someone that his followers relate to through the Holy Spirit. Listeners were encouraged to put their trust in Jesus. Spiritual wellbeing is dependent upon the individual responding with a "Yes" to Jesus, accepting Jesus' call to discipleship and confessing him as Savior and Lord. "Jesus is our ultimate example" based on Hebrews 12:1-3, preached by a visiting speaker, reiterated a common theme in Showalter's sermons. Namely, Jesus is the supreme example of how to live before God.

## THE MODERN WORLD

The preaching at FBCJP and RBC occurred in the shadow of 9/11 (2001) and subsequent military action in Afghanistan and Iraq. Violence and conflict loomed large on the national scene and the landscape of international af-

fairs. The New Atheism constituted an intellectual movement that gained increasing public attention in the media<sup>31</sup> and elicited a response from Christian thinkers.<sup>32</sup> Two developments in Massachusetts dominated the public context in which FBCJP and RBC worshipped and witnessed. The Boston Globe's Spotlight investigation into priest abuse of children in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston broke in January 2002 and exposed a culture of secrecy and cover-up in the Church's hierarchy that permitted abuse to continue and perpetuated the suffering of victims.<sup>33</sup> In 2003, the State of Massachusetts legalized same-sex marriage, a decision that divided Christians across the United States.<sup>34</sup> For some, the legal judgement in Massachusetts corrected a self-evident injustice. To others, the decision illustrated how far the nation had slipped from Judaeo-Christian values. Hurricane Katrina battered the Gulf Coast in August 2005. The belated response of the Federal Government to a disaster that devastated African-American communities precipitated a national outcry.<sup>35</sup> Sport provided a feel-good factor. The Boston Red Sox won the World Series in 2004 and the New England Patriots won the Super Bowl in 2001, 2003, and 2004.

#### THE WORLD OF THE PREACHER'S LISTENERS

First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain and Ruggles Baptist Church belong to the same denomination, American Baptist Churches (USA), and, in their origins, share a common evangelical theology and ethos.<sup>36</sup> However, each pursued a different path in the last quarter of the twentieth century. FBCJP identified theologically as liberal and progressive, RBC as conservative and evangelical. FBCJP practised a traditional Protestant mainline pattern of worship led by organ and choir. A music group led public worship at RBC. Public worship consisted mostly of contemporary songs associated with charismatic renewal. FBCJP met on a site it had occupied almost from its inception. RBC is geographically distant from the location where it was founded in the nineteenth century. FBCJP explicitly owned a Baptist identity.<sup>37</sup> RBC identified primarily as an evangelical congregation. FBCJP perceived the social, economic, and political systems in the United States to be historically and intrinsically flawed and unjust. RBC viewed the social, economic, and political landscape of America at the beginning of the twenty-first century differently; it was the product of departing from Judaeo-Christian principles.

#### *First Baptist Church Jamaica Plain*

Three factors in the congregational life of FBCJP were particularly significant in relation to the preaching. First, the church was in the process of recovering from an extended period of numerical decline. When FBCJP called its new pastor, Ashlee Wiest-Laird (AWL), in September 2003, the congregation consisted of 15-20 people. This small (mainly white) membership had

decided to invest a significant portion of the church's resources in appointing AWL with a brief to spend fifty per cent of her time focused on inward looking responsibilities (e.g., leading worship, preaching, and pastoral care) and fifty per cent of her time on outward looking and missional activity in the local community.<sup>38</sup> The congregation began to grow over the next twelve months. The congregation had increased to 60-70 people by the end of 2004. It also started to become more ethnically diverse. Second, a fire devastated the FBCJP building on the evening of 18 January 2005. The shell of the FBCJP building remained standing, but the fire destroyed the roof and interior. A doublewide trailer served as a temporary meeting place. The trailer stood on the church lawn adjacent to the sidewalk. The fire posed a new challenge to a congregation in the early stages of recovery from decline and inertia. Should it persevere in seeking a new lease of life in the face of such a devastating blow? What did following Jesus mean in these new circumstances? Third, AWL endeavored to persuade the church to become a 'Welcoming and Affirming'<sup>39</sup> congregation through the preaching at FBCJP. AWL proclaimed a message of comprehensive inclusivity in relation to age, class, race, gender, and sexual orientation predicated on the message and lived example of Jesus Christ. FBCJP offered a refuge or safe space for "Christians [and others] that feel theologically and spiritually displaced."<sup>40</sup> In the context of Jamaica Plain, a Boston neighborhood with an established Gay and Lesbian community,<sup>41</sup> AWL began to challenge FBCJP in 2004 to determine if it would welcome gay and lesbian residents from the local Jamaica Plain community.<sup>42</sup> AWL initiated a study and discussion process within the congregation through 2005.<sup>43</sup> Three sermons considered the radical inclusivity of Jesus's ministry in the run-up to the church's annual meeting in June 2006.<sup>44</sup> The preaching contended Jesus kept company with people rejected by the mainstream of society and living on its margins. These outsiders became his friends. He sowed the seeds of a new kind of inclusive society. The church's annual meeting considered a formal motion to become a "Welcoming and Affirming" congregation on 18 June 2006. It assented and joined the Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists.<sup>45</sup>

### *Ruggles Baptist Church*

Ruggles Baptist Church is close to the Charles River Campus of Boston University, Fenway Park, home to the Boston Red Sox, and the affluent residential neighbourhood of the Back Bay. RBC spent much of the two decades from 1980 – 2000<sup>46</sup> negotiating its public culture of worship (e.g., adopting a new contemporary style of worship, organising prayer concerts, and interacting with the Toronto Blessing<sup>47</sup> and mobilising members to engage in evangelistic witness (e.g., planting a new congregation, participating in the March for Jesus, and using the Alpha Course).<sup>48</sup> Two themes appear repeatedly in all this activity: a quest for authentic spirituality or encounter with God and a desire to witness to Jesus Christ to people who

are not Christians. Twenty years of experimentation stretched the resources of the church to the limit. Conflict over the direction of the church resulted in a parting of ways for some. RBC embarked upon a process of discernment (1999 – 2002) to plot a pathway forwards into the future. It identified four priorities: Worship, the Ministry of the Holy Spirit, Evangelism/Discipleship, and Unity for the Church.<sup>49</sup> In 2006, on my arrival as a researcher at RBC, I sensed a congregation, emerging from a difficult season in its history, starting to look to the future with some, albeit fragile, confidence and hope. However, a lack of energy was also evident. People resources were unstable and limited. The congregation attracted students at Boston University resident on its doorstep,<sup>50</sup> but this population was transient and constantly changing. Most long-term members did not live in the immediate neighborhood where the congregation gathered. They commuted from across Metropolitan Boston. The time availability of these groups for church activities was limited. RBC's building, a former Unitarian place of worship, commands the neighborhood's skyline with its towering spire. This impressive edifice needed attention to maintain it in good order and make it fit for worship and mission in the twenty-first century. A dearth of financial resources made such a prospect challenging.

## THE PERSONAL WORLD OF THE PREACHER

### *Ashlee Wiest-Laird*

Ashlee Wiest-Laird's Christology reflects continuity and discontinuity with her earliest perception of Jesus Christ. She grew up in a Southern Baptist environment that declared the love of Jesus for all people. Indeed, Jesus for AWL demonstrates and points to the love of God for all people everywhere. The appropriate response to the love of Jesus, expressed in his death upon the cross for the forgiveness of sins, in her youth, took the form of accepting him as Lord and Savior in one's heart. Discipleship entailed participating in a local church, going on mission trips, and maintaining a life of personal devotions through daily prayer and Bible study. Wiest-Laird's studies at Wake Forest University introduced her to historical, contextual, and literary readings of the Bible. Jesus became a person located in a specific time and place. She also discovered alternative traditions of Christian spirituality.<sup>51</sup> Her understanding of God's love expanded to incorporate a commitment to social justice. She came to see the Kingdom of God as a divine reality that transforms human relations. Wiest-Laird did not dispense with the category of personal sin, but fitted it into a broader picture of systemic injustice.<sup>52</sup> Encounters with Christians and people from different faiths alerted Wiest-Laird to injustices in church and society.<sup>53</sup> Her observation of conflict between what have been called the Fundamentalists and Moderates in the Southern Baptist Convention, personal experience of the misuse of authority and power in a local congregation, and the struggle to be recognised and valued

as a female pastor in the Southern Baptist Convention, also contributed to a keen sense of the reality of injustice. For Wiest-Laird, Jesus challenges both individual and congregation to choose between the Kingdom of God and those realities opposed to God manifested in individual lives and systems of society. Jesus' announcement of the in breaking of the Kingdom of God requires individual Christians and congregations to seek justice, work for peace, and remake society's structures where they oppress and ruin human lives.

It is apparent that in Wiest-Laird's preaching the story of Jesus takes precedence over doctrinal preciseness and formulations. What really counts is the difference Jesus makes to how a person or community lives. However, such a perspective does not mean doctrine is irrelevant. The preaching depicted the cross principally as the outcome of the life Jesus lived in obedience to God as the agent of the Kingdom of God. It is a salutary reminder that obedience to God is risky. Following Jesus Christ can cost everything. The cross also inspires a similar self-giving attitude in disciples. She is concerned that "transactional" theories of atonement, which conceive the cross as an occasion where God objectively changes relations between God and human beings, are frequently adhered to cognitively with no amendment of attitude or lived practice. The resurrection and the living presence of the risen Jesus are critical to Wiest-Laird's personal faith and the message she proclaims in her preaching. These convictions arise from her personal experience and reading of the Bible. She is adamant the resurrection occurred and the risen Jesus is a living presence to encounter here and now. Nevertheless, Wiest-Laird is content to admit an element of mystery. She does not feel obliged to define precisely the nature of the resurrection event or Jesus' risen presence. It is sufficient to recognise Jesus is alive. The resurrection is God's vindication of Jesus and means God's purposes will ultimately prevail.

### *Larry Showalter*

Larry Showalter grew up on a dairy farm in rural Pennsylvania. His family attended a Church of the Brethren congregation. Although curious about God and Christianity, he did not find satisfactory answers in his hometown church. He eventually made an intentional decision to become a Christian in response to the witness of a Youth for Christ worker in the break between his sophomore and junior years at college. Returning to college, he came across Campus Crusade for Christ. This evangelistic organisation helped Showalter make sense of his conversion experience; it supplied an interpretative framework that defined his understanding of the Gospel and, hence, the content of the message to preach.

Bill Bright, who established Campus Crusade for Christ, formulated Four Spiritual Laws as a summary of the Gospel to assist with communicating it in a clear and coherent manner to students on college campuses:<sup>54</sup>

1. God loves you and offers a wonderful plan for your life.

2. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore, he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.
3. Jesus Christ is God's only provision for man's sin. Through Him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.
4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.<sup>55</sup>

On completing his college programme in Dairy Science Showalter joined the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ at the University of Massachusetts (where he met his wife). Sensing a call to pastoral ministry Showalter earned a Master of Divinity degree at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. He accepted a call to the pastorate at Ruggles Baptist Church in 1981. Showalter's search for God/conversion experience and Campus Crusade for Christ's framework for understanding the Gospel constitute the critical formative influences on his Christology. Showalter's sermons consistently promote the vital importance for the individual of encountering God in Jesus Christ and subsequently witnessing to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. A member at Ruggles Baptist Church observed in an interview:

Well, I don't know if you've noticed recently ... all he's preaching about is your relationship with God. Which I think is, basically, what he's preached about for the last twenty years in some shape or other.

Sermons at RBC constantly assumed that the human heart longs for a sense of meaning and security made possible only through an experience of God's love and forgiveness.<sup>56</sup> The preaching reflected a profound personal impulse on Showalter's part that God unconditionally loved and accepted him. He is classically Baptist and Evangelical in his orientation to conversion.<sup>57</sup> Baptist theology and piety, historically, stress the fundamental importance of conversion to Jesus Christ.<sup>58</sup> Although acknowledging the reality of hell, Showalter prefers to accent the love and determination of God through history, most clearly in Jesus Christ, to enter in to an intimate relationship with every human being.

## CONCLUSION

My purpose in presenting these findings through the lenses of Robinson's "The Four Worlds of the Preacher" is to stimulate all who preach the Good News to use the concrete examples from FBCJP and RBC as sounding boards to help identify, analyse and evaluate our personal Christological convictions, the factors that influence them, and our preaching of Jesus Christ. Such a

comparative approach can enable us to see our personal convictions more clearly, recognise the elements that shape them, and modify personal convictions, where appropriate, in the light of Scripture. What shapes your Christology? Who is Jesus to you?

## NOTES

1. Tyrone L. Inbody, *The Many Faces of Christology* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 41.
2. Voluntary Evangelist: 1987-1988 (London City Mission, West Croydon); Assistant to the Minister and Youth Worker: 1988-1991 (Brixton Baptist Church, South London); Minister: 1991-2001 (Battersea Chapel, South London).
3. "Convictions are ... heartfelt beliefs about the way the world is, about the significance of Jesus Christ, about the reality of God." Nigel G. Wright, *Vital Truth: The Convictions of the Christian Community* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015), 3. The study that emerged out of my interest in peoples' beliefs about Jesus Christ ultimately adopted James McClendon's formal definition of a conviction. "A conviction is a persistent belief such that if X (a person or a community) has a conviction, it will not be easily abandoned, and it cannot be abandoned without making X a significantly different person or community than before." James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Ethics: Systematic Theology Vol. 1* Second Edition (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 22-23.
4. The term 'theology' is derived from two Greek words *theos* (God) and *logos* (word). It literally means "talk about God," In this paper, 'theology' is deployed in the sense defined by James McClendon. See above: note 3.
5. I am thinking here of my encounters with Anglican, Baptist, Methodist, and United Reformed Church denominations in the United Kingdom. Diverse theological perspectives also existed in the London City Mission, an interdenominational urban mission agency.
6. Jeff Astley coined a term for such theology. "Ordinary theology is ... the theological beliefs and processes of believing that find expression in the God-talk of those believers who have received no scholarly theological education." Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 1.
7. I read theology as a non-ministerial student at Regent's Park College, a Baptist seminary and Permanent Private Hall within the University of Oxford, England (1984-1987). Subsequently, I returned as a ministerial student and prepared for ordained ministry on the church-based Regent's In-Pastorate Programme, which coincided with my role as Youth Worker and Assistant to the Minister at Brixton Baptist Church (1988-1991). Revd Bruce Keeble and Revd Malcolm Goodspeed, my tutors in Pastoral theology and Mission at Regent's Park College, created

a programme at the forefront of contextual formation for ministry in the United Kingdom. They challenged students to step back and think about the factors that shaped identities, images of God, and theological understandings in ourselves and others as individuals but, also, in the corporate lives of faith communities. They alerted students to the importance of understanding social identities and social contexts. We were constantly encouraged to think carefully about our images of God. What do these indicate about us? They insisted that we scrutinise our images in the light of Scripture and Christian doctrine.

8. "Ethnography is a form of social research used by sociologists, anthropologists, historians, and other scholars to study living human beings in their social and cultural contexts. Participant observation is the hallmark of this kind of social research. Ethnographers go to the places where people live, work, or pray in order to take in firsthand the experience of group life and social interactions." Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 25.
9. Julian R. Gotobed, "Living with Jesus: Practical Christologies in Two Boston American Baptist Churches" (PhD diss., Boston University, 2010).
10. ABC (USA) is probably the closest approximation in an American context to my native denomination, The Baptist Union of Great Britain. See: <http://www.abc-usa.org>.  
My family and I belonged to Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, also affiliated to ABC (USA), from 2001 to 2007. See: <http://www.lpb-church.org>.
11. Ruggles Baptist Church is close to Kenmore Square, a major transport hub serving the Boston University Charles River Campus on Commonwealth Avenue, and Fenway Park, home to the Boston Red Sox baseball franchise.
12. The project gathered data from three main sources: church documents, one-to-one semi-structured interviews with members, and participant observation of congregational activities. In 2006, I spent four months at FBCJP in the late Spring and early Summer (April – July) and four months at RBC in the Fall and Winter (September – December) attending church activities, including public worship on Sunday mornings, as a participant observer.
13. I am grateful for the welcome, hospitality, and assistance extended to me by the pastors of FBCJP and RBC, Ashlee Wiest-Laird and Larry Showalter, and the members of both congregations.
14. Baylor University's list of the Twelve Most Effective Preachers in the English Language twice recognised Haddon Robinson in 1996 and 2018. See: <https://www.baylor.edu/mediacommunications/news.php?action=story&story=198528> [accessed 10 July 2018]. Robinson served as the Harold John Ockenga Distinguished Professor of Preaching at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, MA (1991 – 2012).

15. Haddon W. Robinson, "The Worlds of the Preacher" in Scott M. Gibson (ed.) *The Worlds of the Preacher: Navigating Biblical, Cultural, and Personal Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 1-14. I heard Haddon Robinson present a version of this lecture as a part of the introductory module "Preaching: Principles and Practice" in the autumn semester at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, 1998.
16. John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Challenge of Preaching Today* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).
17. Stott, *Between Two Worlds*, 135-179.
18. Robinson, *The Four Worlds*, 1-2.
19. Robinson, *The Four Worlds*, 1-14.
20. Preaching based on the Bible is normative in Christianity. Peter K. Stevenson, *Preaching: SMC Studyguide* (London: SCM, 2017), 25-28. Text selection at FBCJP was determined by following the Revised Common Lectionary. At RBC, the pastor selected the Biblical texts to fit a series and its themes.
21. Both congregations, the pastors, and guest preachers presupposed that the Bible is the normative basis for Christian preaching.
22. The Pastor at FBCJP, Ashlee Wiest-Laird, preached most of the sermons in the four months of my participant observation. Other preachers included students on placement from Andover-Newton Theological School (ANTS), a church member studying for a Master of Divinity part-time at ANTS, and an officer of the Massachusetts Bible Society. The Pastor at RBC, Larry Showalter, preached most of the sermons in the four months of my participant observation. Visiting preachers included a former assistant pastor at RBC.
23. Easter Day, 2006. Other sermons also invited listeners to choose Jesus' pattern of life. "For the love of God" based on John 7:53-8:11 reiterated the notion that to encounter Jesus is to be compelled to evaluate the basis of one's life. What is the wellspring of our faith? Is it hate, shame, and guilt or love, grace, and forgiveness? Jesus makes clear that God is essentially about love.
24. AWL liked to refer to the kingdom of God as the "kin-dom" of God.
25. "A Grain of Wheat" (John 12:20-33), 2 April 2006.
26. "Christ is Risen!" (Mark 16:1-8), 16 April 2006.
27. Public worship at FBCJP included traditional hymns that articulate an orthodox Christology. The liturgical context thus might dispose worshippers to assume an unambiguously orthodox Christology in the preaching even though sermons did not necessarily affirm it explicitly and unambiguously.
28. AWL "Complete Joy" (1 John 1:1-2:2) reminded the congregation that although the first disciples witnessed the death of Jesus on the cross they encountered him alive again after the resurrection, 23 April 2006. BG "Movement from fear to faith" (Mark 4:35-41) based on the story of Jesus stilling the storm encouraged the congregation to acknowledge their

- fears but to embrace Jesus in faith as the one to call upon to still the storms faced in life today, 25 June 2006.
29. 17 and 24 September 2006.
  30. The sermons at RBC reflected the congregation's acknowledgement of Advent and Christmas. The liturgical year influenced the selection of texts and doctrinal themes or convictions preached at this point in the calendar year.
  31. <http://www.pbs.org/now/science/dawkins.html> [Accessed 17 September 2018]. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Bantam, 2006).
  32. Keith Ward, *Why There Almost Certainly is a God: Doubting Dawkins* (Oxford: Lion, 2008).
  33. <http://archive.boston.com/globe/spotlight/abuse/betrayal/foreword.htm> [Accessed 17 September 2018].
  34. Massachusetts case legalizing marriage. <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/massachusetts-law-about-same-sex-marriage> [Accessed 15 September 2018].
  35. <http://www.disastersrus.org/katrina/> [Accessed 17 September 2018].
  36. The prominent nineteenth century Evangelical A. J. Gordon pastored FBCJP. Scott M. Gibson, *A. J. Gordon: American Premillennialist* (Lanham: University of America, 2001).
  37. Strong congruity existed between the views expressed in the preaching from the pulpit and the views expressed from people in the pews at RBC. The preaching at FBCJP conveyed a Prophetic Christology. However, three varieties of Christology existed in the membership: Prophetic, Evangelical, and Exemplarist (i.e., Jesus was primarily an example to follow).
  38. The demographic profile of Jamaica Plain was becoming increasingly diverse.
  39. The phrase 'Welcoming and Affirming' signals that an ABC (USA) congregation is hospitable and affirming towards people that identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, or Transgender (LGBT). All people are welcome and included whatever their gender identity or sexual orientation.
  40. Wesley J. Wildman and Stephen Chapin Garner, *Lost in the Middle? Claiming an Inclusive Faith for Christians Who Are Both Liberal and Evangelical* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2009), xi.
  41. Massachusetts LGBT Aging Commission, "Special Legislative Commission on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Aging: Report to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts" (December 2015), 37. <https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/MA-LGBT-Aging-Commission-Report-2015-FINAL-1.pdf> [Accessed 13 September 2018].
  42. Ashlee Wiest-Laird, "Reflections from Pastor Ashlee..." *The First Baptist Church in Jamaica Plain* 2:10 (October 2004): 2.
  43. Lance Laird, AWL's spouse, led a four-week Bible Study on the topic.
  44. "That Steady Beat" (Matthew 9:9-13) 7 May 2006; "Friends of Jesus"

- (John 15:12-17) 21 May 2006; "Faith and Pride" (Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30) 11 June 2006.
45. See: <http://www.awab.org/member-congregations.html>.
  46. Larry Showalter served as pastor in this period.
  47. The "Toronto Blessing" refers to an alleged manifestation of charismatic renewal associated with the Toronto Airport Vineyard Church in the 1990s. The phenomenon generated excitement and scepticism. See: Stanley E. Porter and Philip J. Richter (eds.) *The Toronto Blessing – Or Is It?* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1995).
  48. RBC mirrors wider trends across evangelicalism in North America and the United Kingdom in the same period.
  49. Larry Showalter, "Ruggles: The Local Positioning of the Church (Get out your GPS)" *The Beacon Light* (January 2007): 5-6.
  50. A banner adorned the building exterior with a public invitation: "Students and Internationals Welcome!"
  51. For example, a chaplain at Wake Forest introduced AWL to the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.
  52. Wiest-Laird's political reading of Jesus and his ministry is reflected in a study guide to the Gospel according to Mark used in the Adult Sunday School. Ched Myers, Marie Dennis, Joseph Nangle, OFM, Cynthia Moe-Lobeda, and Stuart Taylor, *"Say to this Mountain": Mark's Story of Discipleship* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1996).
  53. Wiest-Laird and her husband Lance lived in Israel for twelve months. AWL worked with the Sabeel Liberation Theology Centre and Middle East Council of Churches in Jerusalem. See: <https://sabeel.org> and <https://mecc.org>.
  54. For an official account of the early history of Campus Crusade for Christ, see: <https://www.cru.org/us/en/about.html> [Accessed 13 September 2018].
  55. Campus Crusade for Christ International now operates under the name 'Cru' in the United States. See: <https://www.cru.org/us/en/about.html> [Accessed 13 September 2018]. For a copy of the original form of the Four Spiritual Laws see: <https://crustore.org/downloads/4laws.pdf> [Accessed 13 September 2018]. The current version and an explanation of the Four Spiritual Laws is posted on the Campus Crusade for Christ website. See: <https://www.cru.org/us/en/how-to-know-god/would-you-like-to-know-god-personally.html> [Accessed 13 September 2018].
  56. The notion of restlessness within human experience that seeks God appears in the Early Church. Augustine famously observed, "Our hearts find no peace until they rest in you." Augustine, *Confessions 1:1* trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 21.
  57. B. J. Leonard, "Getting Saved in America: Conversion Event in a Plural-

- ist Culture" *Review and Expositor* 82:1 (1985): 111-127.
58. Mark S. Medley, "A Good Work Spoiled? Revisiting Baptist Soteriology," in *Recycling the Past or Researching History? Studies in Baptist Historiography and Myths*, ed. Philip E. Thomson and Anthony R. Cross (Bletchley, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2005), 84-105.

*The Scott M. Gibson*  
**Emerging Scholars Grant**

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- This scholarship is open to all Associate Members of the Evangelical Homiletics Society enrolled at the PhD level of graduate study
- The submission must focus on research regarding a relevant issue in homiletics
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- The target readers are evangelical professors of homiletics
- The student must submit the research to ResearchScholarship@ehomiletics.com by the stated deadline of APRIL 30, 2019
- A jury of EHS members will evaluate the essay “blindly” based on relevance to the teaching of biblical preaching and the EHS confessional statement, and determine a recipient
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- The awardee is expected to attend the EHS annual conference
- Recipient will be recognized at the annual Evangelical Homiletics Society conference, may be given an option of presenting the research during the Evangelical Homiletics Society annual conference and possibly published in a future issue of the *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society*

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