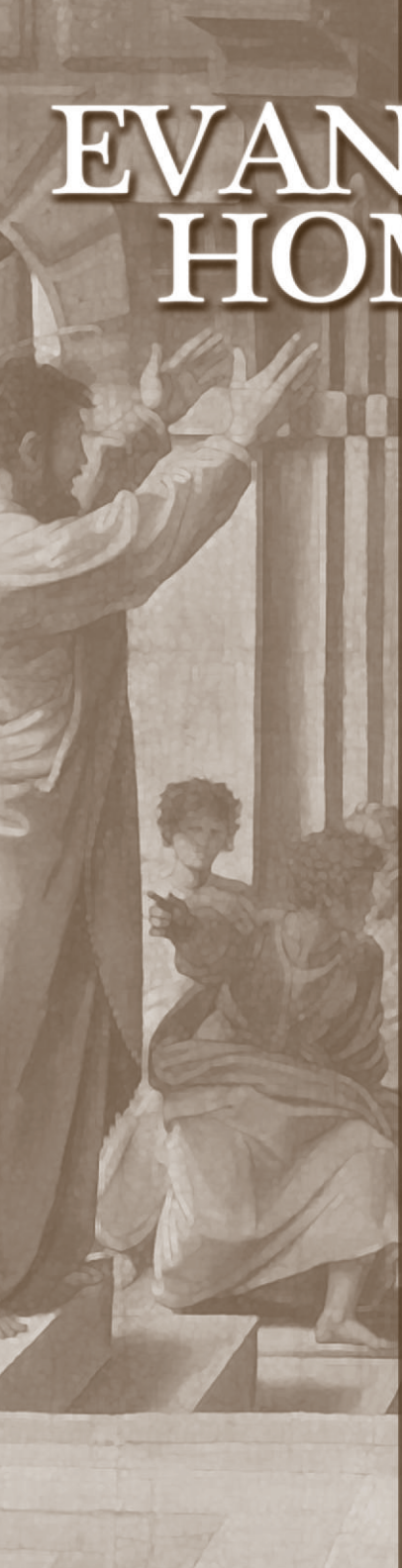

THE JOURNAL OF THE

EVANGELICAL HOMILETICS SOCIETY

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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 TODAY

SCOTT M. GIBSON
General Editor

Homileticians have made helpful advances in analyzing culture and racial issues and finding ways to address such concerns in approaches to preaching—of course, we are only beginning this venture and have more work to do. The Evangelical Homiletics Society has study groups focused on these very issues. So, it was not surprising that the October 2020 Annual Scholars gathering took as its theme, "Preaching in an Age of Idols"—with contemporary culture as a demonstrative theme.

In this issue of the *Journal*, Darrell Bock, the plenary presenter of the 2020 conference, provides an insightful overview of a biblical approach to cultural engagement. His article, "Intelligent Cultural Engagement and the Bible: A Second Effective Way to Teach Scripture," is a framework for such engagement.

Next, Chris Rappazini's Presidential Address is featured with a call for all preachers to be both evangelical and evangelistic—to the current culture and to the next generation. Rappazini served as president of the society for the 2019-2020 year.

The Keith Willhite Award, named after society co-founder, Dr. Keith Willhite (1958-2003), is given to the author of the paper that is recognized as having the most impact among papers presented at the conference. The 2020 recipient is Paul A. Hoffman. Hoffman's paper is titled, "Preaching that Heals Our Divides: A Model for Addressing Ethnocentrism and Reconciliation from the Pulpit." With insight, Hoffman provides a helpful model for preachers to consider as they engage the culture with the gospel keeping in view the impact of prejudice and the call for reconciliation.

The fourth article shifts to a focus on the theology of preaching. Nathan Wright explores the nature of speech—in preaching—and the theological role of the preacher, as a viceregent of God. His insights will stimulate readers' thinking about the place of the preacher and the role of his or her speech in preaching.

Douglas Sean O'Donnell provides in the following article an engaging exploration of the book of Ecclesiastes. O'Donnell offers readers suggestions for preaching this different and sometimes considered difficult book. Preachers will glean much from taking into consideration the various aspects of this article.

In the sixth article Abraham Kuruvilla provides an extended review of *The Lost World of the Torah* by John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton. Kuruvilla's assessment of this volume is full-bodied and rich. He writes, "Scripture is not *to* us—it is not "obeyable"; but it is *for* us—it is "applicable," that we may create microcosms of divine rule amongst us, that will one day become the macrocosm of the Kingdom of God and of his Christ." Readers will gain much from Kuruvilla's appraisal of this volume in view of preaching.

The recipient of the Haddon W. Robinson Biblical Preaching Award for 2020, Jonathan S. Nason, presents his sermon titled, "A Christian's Posture in a Pandemic" and brings to a close the articles in this edition of the journal.

Of course, an edition of the *Journal* would not be complete without the Book Review section edited by Gregory Hollifield. Newly released books from various publishers that touch on the field of preaching comprise the book review segment. Readers will appreciate the careful reading of each book and the assessment provided by the reviewer. The books in the review section help professors, librarians and preachers in the building of a strong homiletics library.

We are immersed in our culture and are called to preach to it thoughtfully and skillfully. The Evangelical Homiletics Society is committed to move professors and preachers forward in the task of reaching today's culture for Christ, which may mean confronting the idols of the age.

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INTELLIGENT CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT AND THE BIBLE: A SECOND EFFECTIVE WAY TO TEACH SCRIPTURE[1]

DARRELL L. BOCK
Dallas Theological Seminary
Dallas, TX

In thinking about cultural engagement, church leaders also need to consider how we handle and present the teaching of Scripture in the public space. The Bible is central to the church and her message, pointing to how God worked through Jesus Christ and developing the story of God's program as well as the gospel. It reveals the relevance of theology to life. It shows the presence of God.

Yet there is a problem. As important as the Bible is to the church, for many on the outside, it is irrelevant; they see it as an old, out-of-date book. This is part of the reality of the spiritual battle that the church faces. It's also the result of having lost the Judeo-Christian net around much of Western culture. Worse than that, because people have been exposed to Christianity in the West, the gospel message is not a "new" thing as it is in several other parts of the world.

There is history attached to the church's reputation—some of it not so great. In my church history classes, as we've discussed the church in America, the Northeast region of the country has been referred to as the "burned over" district, meaning that many of its inhabitants were exposed to the church as it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and walked away. So how does one handle Scripture in an environment where people think they know what it says, and yet they don't know. What they've heard about the Bible is either mistaken, or they only know the bad and ugly of the church's involvement and not the good?

This is all the more a challenge as we seek to teach others to how to read the Bible and how to share the gospel with their unbelieving neighbors. This is not a Nike world where you "just do it." Teaching the Bible to leaders and to people was already difficult enough. Now it has become even more difficult, partly because of the brave new world we have entered into in the past several decades with the technological revolution and partly because of the globalization that is taking place in the midst of it all. So how should we think about the Bible and use it in this more challenging context? This chapter runs a little deeper than our previous chapters because the problem needs to be thoroughly appreciated in order for the solution to be effectively applied.

The Boomer generation has witnessed a significant cultural shift that has produced an even more desperate need for theological *and* life relevance in a world that "is not my father's Oldsmobile" (since Oldsmobiles aren't manufactured anymore!). When the world changes so much, we need to wrestle with what that change means for those of us whose job it is to communicate or share the message of an unchanging Word in a changing world.

Context does matter in determining what needs to be addressed in order to build a bridge for the message to have a chance of being heard.

Realities in Our Changing World

So how did we get here? *Secularization*. The increasing secularization of our world will not let us get away with what we've been doing. As we discussed early in this book, our world is both larger and smaller at the same time. However, another factor is that most of our culture, including many people in the church, have compartmentalized their lives into the secular and the sacred. Secularization in its rawest form has no room for the sacred at all. But there is an even subtler form of it that is very widespread: the belief that the sacred space ought to be a private space. It should not wander into public or into the public's

consideration. Keeping God in a box is the result, if He is not excluded from consideration all together.

Thinking about and responding to this environment is not easy, for there is a sense in which the world, though filled with God's presence, is a less sacred space than the church. Ephesians 2:1–3 speaks of the prince of the power of the air at work in the world. Scripture presents the church as a real, corporate, sacred space—a temple—that is also scattered into the world through its people. Those people in turn invite others into this special, set-apart space where God is especially present and indwells people.

It is no accident that the church is called the body of Christ. We are not speaking of buildings and walls but about his people. This is why the invitation in the gospel is so significant in intelligent cultural engagement. People *are* being invited into a different kind of space than the one they are used to functioning in.

What also makes this confusing is that our own conception of kingdom growth has been flawed. We speak of "growing the kingdom" and of "penetrating the world," even of "conquering it" in some forms of teaching. Those images could not be more misleading about what we are called to as a church. Our calling is to invite people into sacred space—a space that operates in and penetrates the world but that does not "take it over."

The world and its pushback will be with us until Christ returns. Our call is to be a presence in the world's midst that offers an alternative way to live. This call invites people not only to take a look but to experience the distinctiveness. This means that how the church conducts itself as the church and its consistency in shining forth this new way of life represents its most important tasks in engagement. Of paramount importance is how the church lives and functions as a community—how it serves in the world to show this loving way of life with its distinct values.

Thinking about that is challenging enough. But here is yet another layer to consider. The concept is *glocalization*, the interconnectedness of the local and global. This reality is now a

part of our world in intensified ways. As we've already noted, distance is not what it once was. Technology and our means of communication have changed even from when I went to seminary. Being overseas and listening to sports from another region of the world is no longer a function of Armed Forces Radio. I can watch nearly any major event in full, crisp color from anywhere if I'm willing to pay for it. Our culture's shift in access to information is the biggest since the time of the printing press. More than that, people are moving around in unprecedented numbers, creating pressures that we hear in all the debates about immigration in many countries.

Something should not be missed, however, in all the emotion this change stirs up: virtually nothing can prevent the penetration of the array of voices and options in our world. There is no going back to how things used to be. Living in the bubble of a monoculture isolated from the rest of society is not possible. What we're faced with is how to make choices, intelligent ones, in the midst of such change and options. It involves equipping people for the cards life is dealing us. We can try to run and hide, but then engagement becomes impossible. We are called to go into the world, not to run from it; to be in the world, not of it.

Glocalization and the Loss of a Common Local Culture

North America is changing. With glocalization, the world— the globe—has come to us. We not only see the world and its globalization, we experience it with neighbors who are different from our parents' neighbors.

My neighbors and what they believe are not what they used to be. My kids went to a high school at the turn of the millennium where far more languages were spoken than the three or four that were present in my high school. The number of worldviews they encountered from their "neighbors" was far more than what I was exposed to. This is one reason that Millennials, Gen Xers, and Gen Zers respond so differently to issues and people than Boomers do. Simply citing biblical

warrant for things is no longer good enough in such a mixed cultural context.

Yes, the Bible is true, but if people do not recognize that truth, then our claim to have life (supported by the simple citing of a text) falls on deaf ears. The elixir of Scripture doesn't "take" as it once did when the audience knew and appreciated the Bible to some degree. We used to be able to say, "It's true because it's in the Bible," and be heard. And we still should do this now and again, because what Scripture offers is true. But we also need to say it another way with the same goal in mind. We now have to say, "It's in the Bible because it is true. God put it there because he was pointing to how life should be lived."

We must realize as well that we make this claim in a world where the idea of universal truth itself is debated, if not denied altogether. That makes all of this even more of a challenge. No wonder the Spirit has to be at work to get beyond the fog of secularization and glocalization!

These cultural dynamics raise some fundamental questions regarding application. How do we best prepare for this challenging new world? How do we read and apply the Bible? An essential part of the short answer is that there's a real premium on authenticity, integrity, and how the church demonstrates what it values.

The First Way of Reading Scripture: From Bible to Life

The way many pastors and lay church leaders are taught to read the Bible has much to do with the way we approach biblical interpretation in our seminaries. Seminaries are rooted in a university model, born in old Europe with a Judeo-Christian backdrop and then impacted by the Enlightenment. In these institutions where many of our pas- tors learn to preach and teach the Bible to God's people, the primary focus is on knowledge, often abstracted, with a con- centration on disputes about the text and its meaning. Such an approach also often zeroes in on the individual, not corporate concerns or society at large.

I have given my life to wrestling with textual meaning, interpretive options, and theological disputes, but this immersion has mostly been focused on "in-house" disputes, potentially leaving us unprepared for the larger world in which we live. In noting this, I am not saying that what we've done is wrong. It's truly necessary for the well-being of the church. I am asking instead whether our approach has been incomplete and even, at points, too insular.

This first way of reading Scripture, then, is what I call *reading from Bible to life*. It is focused on determining the meaning of passages in relation to their context within specific books. Key questions are what the words would have meant to the original audience and how the passage and the broader biblical book fits within the biblical canon as a whole. Application in this approach is driven by this primary task of determining the meaning of particular texts.

The danger in this, the danger I'm warning against, is that the Bible-to-life approach often fails to meet people where they are and fails to consider the questions they're asking or the tensions they're living with. Our teaching and sharing with this approach tells people what to believe before stopping to listen to what they're experiencing and why, or what they may already believe. If we're not careful, even when we share the Bible with good intentions, we'll miss the opportunity to show them how the Bible speaks powerfully to the questions they're asking. Thus we have to be careful to balance our biblical teaching, giving time to where most of life is lived.

What should we focus on as we teach, preach, and reflect the Bible's contents to a needy world? Scripture drives us to honor God by being deeply concerned about character, community, and mission to that needy world. We are called to serve the city, to work to see that it experiences peace and prosperity (Jer 29:7). We turn to God so that we are also better equipped to turn toward others. This assumes that corporate realities are a big deal: both what we believe and how we believe matters. They belong together. Truth *and* tone matter, sometimes

quite equally. One without the other is like trying to fly with one wing. It will not work.

Applying Scripture in a way that engages with relevance for life requires wisdom in contextual engagement. It is dependent on the Spirit. He is the One who guides our way through a fallen world and its inherent tensions. That world will remain fallen until Christ returns; in the meantime, we are to call people to a different way of life rather than passively awaiting the Lord's return.

One way we can invite people into sacred space is to show that we care about them. Our love and concern is our calling card. We are called to preview, as a healthy, functioning community, what is to come. When our culture was substantially Judeo-Christian, the model of appealing simply to Scripture worked most of the time. Now there's a need to reflect and "incarnate" Scripture to a world that otherwise is unfamiliar with God's Word.

How can we do that if most of the spheres of life are excluded from that conversation? If we never let the sacred be seen, how can we invite someone into that space? Words alone are not enough. A loving church makes God's truth known by making it relationally visible.

Competing Worldviews in Open Access

Our traditional way of handling Scripture struggles to connect with unbelievers more than it once did. Globalization, greater cultural diversity, and the loss of a common cultural background have gotten in the way. We act as if we can go from Scripture to life with no static in between. However, there are multiple worldviews in play that challenge our presentation of Scripture. Some worldviews claim there is no God. Others claim there is no truth. Others argue that the truth is only what you determine it to be. Life offers a panorama of choices, and for most people, their life has become more isolated from spiritual values.

The challenge for pastors and all of us who want to utilize the Bible as we engage is that the vast array of common life

situations has expanded: there are more broken families, views on sex and sexuality have changed, violence and terror- ism and greed are on the rise, just to mention a few. No wonder we feel overwhelmed by the task of reading and sharing the Bible today. No wonder so many people are searching to find their location in life. There is a great deal of static in our world when it comes to hearing God's message.

The Challenges of Corporate Concerns: To Expand What We Address and the Core Tensions We Face

The world is at our door. It can overwhelm us or we can engage it intelligently. It is a world that is crowded, complicated, contentious, and captive.

The unchurched need to be affirmed for aspirations that reflect biblical values (however weakly). They also need to be respectfully confronted in the public space, where life is pursued in destructive ways. Ultimately, though, they need to be invited into sacred space, where we believe the solution is actually found.

As we already noted, challenge and invitation exist side by side as the church engages in mission. This combination of challenge *and* invitation is perhaps the core tension the church faces today as she preaches to a fallen world that Jesus desires to reconcile. If believers are going to get help with their lives and help others, then the relevance of theology must be addressed from the pulpit and in Bible studies. It cannot be abstract theology alone. It has to address not only our Sunday-morning lives as we gather as the church, but guide us in how to function in the larger world from Monday through Saturday. This is where God has us most of the time.

These settings and realities really do matter, because where mission withers, there is a lack of reflection about how to live where God has us most of the time. Thus we need to expand our reading and sharing of Scripture to explicitly include these settings and time frames. We need to move our interpreting and sharing into such spaces. This is especially the case for leaders in

the church. Most of their training does not take them outside the issues of private spirituality, of serving in the church, of how we live at home, and issues tied to evangelism.

This menu is a capitulation to secularism, for look at how many places in life are excluded by these emphases: our work, our affiliations, our view of public issues, even how we engage those areas (tone). Consider those spheres of life where our engagement is underdeveloped: where we work *and how and why*; issues in the public sphere where much of corporate life takes place.

This public space is where human values are inevitably displayed relationally and where a visible contrast is possible with how the world tends to function. We have to think *more corporately* about how secular and sacred institutions function in the world, and even how differing cultures interact (yes, those niggly, actually not so little, corporate dimensions). Where we have tended to park our focus leaves big gaps in people's lives. One result is that the secular/sacred divide is unconsciously affirmed, undercutting a robust discipleship. Another consequence is that the Bible and faith seem irrelevant to vast areas of people's lives. How do we invite people to walk moment by moment with God through much of the week, if much of the week's activity is left out of our sermons and our Bible studies? When we treat Scripture this way, the secular gains the majority of people's time and space. No wonder the relevance of theology is often questioned and culture wields a large influence.

Where Do We Go from Here?

So, the questions are: how do I move beyond myself *in* the church, and how is the church to function *in* the world *for* the world? Christians, seminaries, and churches need to see this as their mission: to train leaders and guide people into a biblically rooted Christian life in all its spaces. This involves looking at ourselves both as individuals and as part of the various sacred and distinct public communities in which we live. We have to cope with a world that is pluralistic and glocal. We need to walk

into and address public spaces with the right content and tone. We must consider how to understand Scripture, especially in daily choices, morally *and* relation- ally, conceptually *and* theologically. This has to include asking questions about those settings and times of day where most of life's choices are made.

Old Models Will Not Do the Whole Job Required

The models we have used in the past to achieve our mission ignore one crucial, game-changing fact. For example, the Kuyperian model, to which I am attracted and which was inspired by the life and theology of Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920), did apply the Bible to all spheres of life in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the point of impacting how some governments functioned. The Puritans who preceded Kuyper also had the advantage of a mostly Judeo-Christian backdrop. That back- drop is significantly diminished and often challenged today. It was like a societal safety net. The one game-changing fact is that this net is now mostly gone and cannot be assumed. Judeo-Christian values must be contended for and explained.

Our time is not like earlier periods, when Christian presuppositions, though declining in the culture, were still present, even if stripped of their theological elements. Today, Christian assumptions have given way to a myriad of options, some of them not coherent at all and not trying to be. In these cases, most people have followed their cultural commitment to religious freedom so zealously that we as a people have little to nothing in common. As we noted earlier, our technology and global-supply chains are also making it much harder to achieve cultural coherence even if we wanted it.

Though our day and age does bear some resemblance to the early church period, the differences between our time and theirs are monumental. We need to appreciate how unprecedented our situation is. So, what does our response need to be?

A New Kind of Building

We have lost the foundations and cultural unity that used to be in play. Think of the difference between building on dry ground, on solid earth, versus building a structure that has to sit in the sea, like an oil rig. One has to hunt for the sea bed and construct rigging to get it to stand. There is more depth required to get there.

The study of Scripture and how we train people to apply theology to life needs to be calibrated similarly. The leaders we are training and the people we are preaching to come with less biblical background and a larger playing field than in the past. This is even more true of the people the church is called to serve. So, this is a desperate need. How should we deal with it? By balancing a pair of enormous tensions.

Two challenges demand our attention, especially in thinking about the corporate concerns we often bypass. One is the tension in mission between challenge and invitation (2 Cor 5:17–21). The second is wrestling with the tension between the public space of culture and the sacred space of the kingdom.

Our invitation is tied to the deep-seated belief that the most important solution to life's problems is a personal relationship with God through Christ. This means acting with an awareness that real change cannot take place without internal, heart change. The combination of these tensions embedded in our approach to engagement requires us to do some fresh thinking about presenting the Bible, both its teaching and application.

A Second Way of Reading Scripture: From Life to the Bible

We need to switch-hit when it comes to how we read and teach Scripture. What I mean is, we have to be able to interpret the Bible in two directions while seeking and establishing the truth it offers. We need to go from the Scripture to life, as we often do, but we also need to work from the tensions and settings of life to

mine the gold that is the inspired text. This is the second way: *from life to the Bible*.

In suggesting this second way of reading and handling Scripture, I am proposing that this way may have more potential today in our changed world than the traditional, Bible-to-life approach.

Today, some Christians still read from the Bible to life, but the reality is that most people read their Bibles in the reverse direction. They start with their lives, searching for answers to the dilemmas they're in, and then refer to the Bible. They are seeking specific help for the tensions they experience. They're sorting through their choices and seeking answers about what they should do.

For most believers, there *are* tensions that drive them back to the Bible. They are reading for wisdom and help. Reading from life to the Bible means understanding these tensions theologically and what drives them. It resembles the way case law works for a lawyer or clinical studies work for a psychiatrist. You start with a scenario and then break it down in terms of the law or the psyche.

To do this with Scripture in order to engage intelligently requires not just knowledge but relational ability. It involves not only individual piety but the ability to see things corporately, in the church and the world. It requires patience, sensitivity, and a comfort level with seeing the tensions that are there. It requires slow thinking and careful reflection. It means seeing the difference between public space shared with all, and sacred space that people choose to enter or are drawn by God to occupy.

Sacred space involves a distinctive space within the world of public space that God invites us to enter through faith in Christ. There, God equips us with his Spirit to participate in his work, giving us discernment, wisdom and other capabilities we formerly lacked. The sacred space exists in the midst of the larger public space and always faces the pressure public space puts on it. Distinguishing the two spaces and what is realistically possible in each is an important part of this discussion.

Beyond this public/sacred space strain, yet another tension faces us. It is tied to our mission and message. As believers, we have to cope with how the fallen world challenges and sometimes even shapes our view and experience of life.

The world often requires us to engage in ways that already challenge what we hold dear, even as we invite people into the distinctive experience the gospel brings.

Are you picking up a theme about the ongoing tensions of life that careful Bible reading must address? Awareness of life in tension is a core part of the interpretive approach for reading from life back to the Bible. *We have to identify those tensions, theologically assess them in their various dimensions, and balance them, not cherry-pick between them.* That is not always clear or easy. But it's important to have a theology that integrates divine values in life's array of settings; in the face of real, often uncompromising, tensions. This does not mean that we take someone's life or experience as authoritative for determining the meaning of Scripture, but it does mean recognizing that life is messy.

With humility we should consider whether we are limiting how widely Scripture can speak to life. We may need to recognize the depth of tension and the messiness of life and reassess those things biblically so that a better or clearer path can be found by sorting out all the elements at work. This will often involve challenging the beliefs and values of our culture, but it also may require some empathy to touch the person in their need. We need to recall that they are held in the grip of something they may not entirely sense or some- thing that is overwhelming to them.

To be able to handle life and the Bible in a mostly secular context, and to show others how to bring the Bible into their work and their communities is cultural intelligence at work. We live in a real we are still called to personal and collective faithfulness while living in a world which may well choose life paths and beliefs that are different than or even opposite of our own.

We also need to recognize the tensions of the spiritual war we are in, where the real enemy operates (Eph 6:12). Our call is to be an ambassador in that contentious world, engaged in a kind of rescue mission in a war where people are not the enemy but

the goal (2 Cor 5:17–21). We have to learn to read, and help other believers read, the text and our lives in a way that does not cherry-pick from Scripture. We cannot allow the Bible to cancel itself out, leading to imbalance.

All of this involves a way of reading Scripture that puts it in direct and purposeful conversation with where we are. It is a *canonical* and *contextualized* reading. The space where God has me (and us) is a core part of that context.

It is *canonical* in the sense that Scripture possesses a theological unity across the entire canon, and we should always consider the part in light of the whole. Thus, we don't interpret particular passages as saying things that we don't see the entire Bible saying across its narrative. Our interpretation is built on expository, exegetical, and systematic approaches but ultimately relates to the whole of Scripture on a topic.

Our reading is also *contextual* in the sense that we're asking how Scripture speaks to a specific setting, paying attention to how our context may also have affected how we read Scripture, but letting Scripture have the final say. This way of reading is neither easy nor simple. It does not come fast, but it also reflects a mature handling of the full text and rein- forces why knowing Scripture as a whole is a lifelong and important constant in the believer's life.

The Proposal

For years I have been sensing this partial disconnect between what the church is doing with Scripture and what is needed. Now you might be thinking, *Oh no, a proposal to change everything we do! That's nothing short of a nightmare. It will* never *work!*

I agree, that is a nightmare. It's also not what I'm arguing for in this proposal, so let me calm your nerves.

I'm not talking about completely changing how we handle Scripture. I'm speaking of the application we draw from Scripture and the ways we consider how Scripture speaks to our context. I'm talking about how we counsel our friends and neighbors, what goes into our teaching on discipleship and

mission, the way we communicate Scripture from the pulpit or in Sunday school classes, and how we teach our children to study the Bible. What do we ask, how do we teach, and what questions do we pursue in the text?

How do we handle Scripture, and what do we concentrate on as students interacting with the text?

I'm not proposing that we stop doing what we've been doing. I'm suggesting that there is another route we some- times need to take that will equip us to better engage a changed context. On this other path, we are still delivering Scripture, and its teaching is still deep.

What I'm contending for is another lens or hermeneutical overlay through which we present the biblical material and connect with people and their lives. It's a proposal for showing how theological thinking and discipleship teaching are relevant. When the Bible is shown to be relevant, then respect for it is enhanced. When we show how theology matters, we also show to a secular world that God matters. And showing involves more than telling. It has to be displayed in our actions and tone. We have to live out what we teach. We have to show, not just know.

This is a great challenge because we often struggle as we move from the Bible to life, not to mention the reverse direction, from life to the Bible! If we allow this two-way lens to shape what we do from the start and see this end game of relevance as a crucial and necessary part of our goal, then through this dual approach to Scripture we can engage with life more deeply. We can prod people in the church to think in these terms and tones from the start. Maybe a new set of glasses with a fresh set of lenses will help us all see better, teach better, and connect more fully to life, giving us the recalibration we need.

Good News: Why Seminaries Are Necessary

Let me make one final point. I believe that seminaries are crucial to all of this. Some people think seminaries are not as relevant as they once were and not as connected to real life as they ought to be. But seminaries offer something that church-trained

leadership cannot offer as easily or comprehensively. Residential theological education and good online structures give people access to a group of theologians with a broad level of expertise. Most churches cannot provide that in one place. That coherent, unified "groupthink" is still one of the most effective selling points for seminaries. Yet with- out relevance, people will be slow to appreciate the value of this benefit.

Groupthink that is siloed, or kept in isolation from the larger world (as is often the case with seminaries), will not get this done. The combination of silos and abstract, detached instruction plays into the hands of those who say we do not need seminaries. But genuine groupthink might be exactly what the church needs. An interdisciplinary environment, invigorated by this shared expertise and properly implemented, is necessary for the church to generate and sustain the kind of approach to Scripture that I'm proposing. It is an anti-silo approach, very integrative and synthetic—some of the most challenging work we can do. It needs a team of mutually engaged people with an array of expertise who respect each other. The possibility of online education, now made more accessible, also allows for this kind of training without requiring a person to fully uproot their life or leave their everyday ministry. Face-to-face teaching is best, but our online capabilities now offer potential for seminary instruction, which allows a better connection to a company of necessary disciplines. Such teaching can lead us into more effective ministry and church service.

The Approach

What exactly am I suggesting? Our common way of reading and interpreting the Bible is what I call *the Bible to life*. The ways of reading with this emphasis include working through a book; a topical study, a segment at a time; biographical work; and systematic theological reflection, with the Bible driving our theological application of Scripture. Such an approach is relatively neat and clean. The core theological ideas are in view;

the ideal, or else the good or bad example, is set forth; and we look for principles along the way.

But what we need more of is a reversed reading, *life to the Bible*. This involves taking a specific, real-life situation or set of scenarios and biblically and theologically analyzing and formulating a biblical response.

Case studies dominate this approach, which is often more of an art than a science. *Life to the Bible* requires wisdom and discretion due to the varying tensions within the cases. Tensions are the natural result of life in a fallen world, and we must wrestle with how to balance those tensions in order to reach a biblically sound conclusion. Sometimes the choice is to determine the best among less-than-ideal options.

Two core elements are involved in working from life back to the Bible.

First, it may require a reorientation in how we present the Bible because we're seeking to shift to where others are in the larger culture. Do we teach something is true because it is in the Bible? Or is it in the Bible because it is true? The latter encourages probing and does not appeal to the Bible as the imprimatur of an idea. Although we as Christians esteem the Bible as God's Word, the people we address in the culture may not. We also may need to explain the relational rationale for what we believe. We are still explaining what the Bible is teaching but we are also suggesting why the Bible's teaching makes for a better way to live. In doing this, we are not neglecting the Bible, or its authority, or even its way of seeing things. We are simply noting that God tells us to conduct ourselves a certain way because it reflects a good way to live, the way things function best in the world he has created.

Even though it starts with a life situation, this is not theology "from below"—reading our experience and thoughts back up into what God has said—for we are still using the Bible as our authoritative lens for assessing the situation. We are simply working harder to understand the questions people are already asking and how they see the world as our basis for a better, more thorough assessment.

This all sounds pretty theoretical right now. The final sections of this chapter will give examples that flesh out what I mean.

Second, working from life to the Bible requires this understanding: arguing for something as true because it is in the Bible is not the same as recognizing that God has placed his teachings there because they are true.

Both points are valuable for us in application. Both approaches are rooted in what Scripture teaches, but the issue of sequence is reversed to help an unbelieving person (and perhaps ourselves as well) see that the authority of the Bible is tied not merely to its actual words but also more broadly to what it says about how God has designed life.

"Life to the Bible" requires more of the latter approach. It causes us to dig in and analyze why God takes us this direction through a particular text or situation. To get there, we often have to look at the whole of the Bible's teaching on a topic and not just a specific text.

In sum, "life to the Bible" means noting tensions and facing up to those tensions. It means taking life and its choices through the "fallen world" lens, working back toward how to be biblically righteous in the midst of such tensions. In particular, it requires balancing a constant issue regarding mission in the fallen world: How do I *challenge* my culture while at the same time *inviting* my culture into sacred space? How do I give pause to someone's thinking and suggest there is another way, a biblical way, to see life? How does that work concerning the topic I am studying? When do I confront? When do I invite? How and when do I mix them? And how do I respond when the options I face are not particularly clean?

For example, LGBTQQIA scenarios are loaded with such tensions. How do we define truth and pursue morality while showing compassion to those who are working toward godliness or who need to get there? Sometimes we must wrestle with how to balance truth and compassion, maintaining a hand stretched out in invitation.

How do we achieve that balance without abandoning truth? This balance is necessary because mission is an ultimate goal in engagement; because to embrace the gospel with its enabling power is the ultimate answer to all human need. Our solutions have to acknowledge and address the limits of what a person *can* do without the Spirit of God. This is where our politics, nationalism, racial identity, or ideology might get in the way of being missional. All these human answers have limits. If we're unaware of these tensions, we could mistakenly claim that more is possible in these spheres of public engagement than is realistic. To expect significant life or societal change apart from what the gospel supplies is asking too much of our efforts in these spheres, however well intended.

Life to the Bible reading involves more interpretive skills than *Bible to life* reading. This is not just about exegeting texts. Life to the Bible reading also involves synthesis— considering the scope of a text in light of other texts on that theme—and so it is more challenging. It works against cherry-picking among the tensions that are present within a topic. It asks how a passage fits in a wider way, given what the whole of Scripture teaches.

Such a wider reading recognizes that an isolated reading of a passage may distort or cancel out what other passages say about a topic. Failing to synthesize across the canon may tempt us to "force" the Bible to say things it doesn't actually say. Preempting the full process may prevent us from even seeing the problem. However, when done faithfully, fully engaging the canon, this kind of reading can be a powerful tool to see the array of angles by which Scripture addresses a topic.

We also have to be careful about drawing analogies from Scripture because the result may be to nullify the connecting text or a related, relevant text on the topic. It also means relating to people (not just ideas) and their background (often their culture and subculture) with an awareness of the social-cultural context(s) in which they function. This is not because those factors nullify truth, but because they may impact how people see their situation. That (mis)perception may need addressing when speaking to them about life.

There are numerous other elements that feed into how "life to the Bible" is done. For example:

1. *It requires reading our culture through scriptural eyes, looking both for positive longings and negative faults.* We tend to concentrate on negative traits, but there may be something to noting positive longings—the things people are hoping for that reveal the questions they're asking and their desires. These can build bridges to the gospel and how it fulfills human needs and longings.

I find myself looking for glimpses of core life questions in songs and movies. When a prominent songwriter asks, "What's it all about, Alfie?" and turns to love as the answer, I want to say "Yes!" and then fill in the gap with more content—discussing what that kind of love looks like, and to whom and how it is to be directed. In Acts 17, Paul recognized a misguided spiritual pursuit, represented by the idol to the unknown God, then sought to redirect it. He was building bridges, starting conversations where the people had left off.

2. *It requires listening*. I call this getting a spiritual GPS reading. It means letting the person tell their spiritual- quest story or explain why they believe what they do. It can also mean initially surfacing past someone's issues, bad experiences, or false perspectives—the things that may color what we hear. Our tendency can be to correct people before we get the whole picture. As a result, we perhaps miss some factors to be aware of as we respond. We speak too soon versus being slow to speak. I tell people, "Put your theological tilt meter on mute at first, to hear just where the person is coming from and why. It may give you insight into how to engage down the road when the meter is turned back on."

3. *It can require theological translation.* Theological translation involves putting terms that we understand (but that someone else may not) into more mutually transparent language. As we engage, we have to avoid in-house, "foreign" language. This

involves thinking of synonyms or word pictures that explain what we mean. We use alternative terms initially until the concept is grasped. Translation work may also involve defining common terms in order to be sure my conversational partner and I are understanding each other. Sometimes our culture uses terms differently than the church does. Misunderstanding can be clarified in such cases. This is yet another reason to listen carefully first.

4. *It certainly requires a good biblical theology, drawing carefully on what the whole of Scripture teaches.* Theologically, life to the Bible involves a holistic approach that allows texts to speak from their unique angles and be placed together side by side to make up the whole. In other words, we consider how an array of texts on a given topic relate to each other, being careful not to let one set of texts annul or neutralize another set of texts that may reflect a distinct but significant topical angle.

This last point means we must be wary of generalizing application and moving too quickly into a broad, comprehensive conclusion. The issue may not be what is the constant or universalizing principle of any text (as we often teach students), but what in this specific circumstance triggers this response and why Scripture calls for something different in a similar scenario elsewhere. I think of the example from 1 Corinthians 8–10, where principles are given but the application shifts a few times as additional factors, such as location and context, change in the space of just a few verses (for example: meat in the marketplace, yes; in the pagan temple, no; at a meal, it depends).

Such a holistic reading across a topic requires nuancing in how we apply Scripture. We let the Bible's own seeming tensions and various topical angles speak individually and collectively. That means paying careful attention to all of these angles that Scripture gives, not removing some of them. We need to be slow and careful in our efforts to harmonize so that our result does not negate the depth and nuancing of the texts being considered, which may possess tensions that a quick harmonization may obscure or obliterate. Exposition alone can fail us here in our

preaching. Interpreting specific texts or books alone will not achieve our objective. Unless one takes a full, careful look at a specific topic, exposition of a text may leave us nearsighted in our view of the topic as a whole. A solid contextual look at *each* passage will also protect us from the danger of prooftexting from one passage alone. (Prooftexting is the practice of using a single verse or passage, often out of context and based on personal bias, to support one's own argument on an issue.)

The Challenge

The challenge and call to action mean the church has to move beyond the university model of knowledge—the mere pursuit of facts—and learn a biblical integration of knowledge, relationship, and application that engages questions more directly. Such a shift has the potential to serve the church and society better than a strict, ideas-centered model. Moving beyond ideas alone to their connection to "life as we find it" includes challenge for change as well as the offer of hope for a better way. It steps into the array of life spaces that exist. To do this, we will need to give more attention to the methods and approach I am describing. It requires directly addressing more of life as it is being lived.

The hope is that structured teaching in this two-way approach will utilize both tracks and will better equip churchgoers and ministers for their task. This will pave the way for more effective leadership and teaching in the church as well. Our challenge as a believing community is to show how we can do a better job of applying theology to real life. To get there, we have to go from the Bible to life but also work back from all of life to the Bible. That expanded capability is another crucial part of having cultural intelligence.

Some Specific Examples of "Life to the Bible"

Let's take a look at some specific examples to clarify what I am and am not saying.

The kind of approach I'm speaking of is canonical and contextual. We're taught often to pay attention to the specific context of a passage. However, where a text fits in light of the teaching of the entire biblical canon is important to consider as well.

The canonical requirement is necessary because of how the Bible works, as well as the kinds of issues life throws at us. Many texts in Scripture operate in a specific context. Likewise, the answer to the ethical questions life raises may be impacted by the kind of context I'm addressing.

Another factor or layer at the canonical level is that as you bring many different passages to bear on a topic or theme, those collective passages may bring tensions that reveal important qualifications to be made regarding ethical principles on that topic. At the least, this has to be considered when asking how all of Scripture works together. For example, we are generally told to obey religious or governing authority, yet there are some texts that show disobedience to such authority—such as how Daniel handled certain situations or how Peter refused when the religious leaders told him to stop preaching about Jesus. These instances point to a limit on such a general principle.

A careful canonical study will examine what kinds of contexts are present when the exception applies. Only after we have considered such texts are we ready to speak to cur- rent life settings and examine whether or not they apply.

The three types of public-square issues I noted earlier are also a factor here. Allow me to review them to show how they fit into this biblical reflection conversation.

In writing *How Would Jesus Vote?* it became clear to me that most public-square issues divide into three categories. Category 1 involves real worldview conflict, where there is strict disagreement with little to no middle ground. Debates on same-sex marriage or abortion fit here. The ethical ground with which each side of this debate approaches the question is so distinct that discussion is particularly difficult.

Category 2 is where there is agreement on what needs to be done, but no one is quite sure how to get there. This is usually

triggered by a different kind of experience in the background that raises distinct sets of concerns and sensitivities. The pursuit of racial reconciliation falls here.

Category 3 involves biblical points in tension. We live in a fallen world, and life is messy. What's in view here is where biblical values come into tension with each other and need to be balanced. They need to be related to each other— studiously connected, not merely chosen between—as we seek to address an issue with balance. Most corporate issues we face fall into this category.

The danger is that we focus on one biblical value and risk negating the other. We cherry-pick and end up with a potential imbalance in the process. To recognize this tendency means there's a lot of room for discussion on these topics. Looking for and identifying the tensions precisely is key to this kind of a reading. To miss or pretend one tension does not exist will skew the assessment.

A common problem in our public discourse is that we treat category 3 discussions as if they were category 1. This can blind us to seeing if there is some kind of common ground possible. When one biblical value negates a legitimate concern, a full biblical perspective is muted and the solution is not what it could be.

Why do most of our societal conversations belong in the third category? A part of the answer is a fallen world, which means tensions inevitably exist and have to be negotiated. The whole of the Bible reflects that reality as it engages with life. The challenge is that specific passages often give us one glimpse of a topic, but that is not enough. These kinds of usually large themes require canonical balance. The solution is to recognize the tension(s) and go to work. Let me run through some examples.

Examples

In this final section we consider examples from all the categories but will concentrate on category 3 because category 3 issues are often placed into category 1, elevating their importance. This

move obscures the clarity with which these issues could be handled. When category 3 issues are dropped into category 1, they are usually oversimplified, and a discussion worth having might be missed as a result. I save category 1 topics for last.

Racial Reconciliation. Here is a category 2 topic. We know that Scripture urges us to be reconciled, both to God and to each other. The problems in this area have to do with appreciating the experience of majority-minority relation- ships and what those dynamics produce. I've done many interviews on this topic on my podcast for Dallas Seminary, called *The Table*. We discuss issues of God and culture there, including this one.

For this subject I've included believers of various ethnicities, and we have heard about their experience in American culture. Those discussions have revealed how the experiences of some groups are so different from my own. Things they regularly deal with are things I have not experienced or, if I did, I was in a context (another country, for example) where I did not share the majority culture and the language. My foreign-travel experience has helped me understand some of what these fellow believers often face, although I can never completely understand what it's like to be a minority dealing with constant stereotypes.

Here the church's responsibility is to help people apply texts on love, justice, and caring for those on the fringe whose voices should be heard. Developing sensitivity to these dynamics is a call of many texts (Isa 29:17–20; Mic 6:8; Jas 1:26–27; 2:1–13). The question is not where the text seeks to take us, on which we agree, but how practically to get there. In this category, a key commitment is to listen and sort through the options. This is usually not as difficult as a discussion in the other categories because the desired result is held in common. All agree on the shared goal. The discussion becomes difficult when we cease to be good listeners and fail to appreciate the distinct experiences that some have had.

Wealth and Money. Here is a category 3 issue. The accumulation of resources and wealth is something that is of value. It is tied to wisdom themes in Proverbs (10:15; 15:6; 28:8). Resources and wealth are part of the way we steward the creation and care for our families. Yet there is a danger lurking within this topic. Numerous texts, especially from Jesus in the Gospel of Luke, point to how the love of money can be a danger and distraction for people, affecting how they treat others (Luke 6:24–26; 12:15–20; 16:13). The prophets also spent much time challenging those who used their wealth in destructive ways (Jer 17:11; Ezek 7:11).

Here is a classic example of tension: something with good potential can be turned into something bad. In biblical terms, wealth is something to be handled as a matter of stewardship. Our concern for others is a way to balance this tension. But someone might miss this tension if he or she reads texts in Proverbs alone. We also will miss the other part of the equation if we only deal with certain texts from Jesus or Paul. We can fall into a kind of trap about class rather than use and responsibility. We might miss the instruction to encourage generosity and compassion on the one hand for those who have, and being responsible with resources on the other hand for those who lack. How do we bring balance to these life tensions in our observations and teaching about wealth, resources, and poverty? Along with personal responsibility, do we wrestle with structural questions since we are speaking of politics and cultural realities? Do we recognize how these considerations can impact the way we as a society approach the questions? Do we also keep our eyes on the concerns of responsibility as we engage? What does the balance between these legitimate concerns look like? Biblical values are not to be pitted against each other but related to each other so both elements are honored. This is why cherry-picking between themes cannot be a biblical response.

I hope you are beginning to see how balancing extant tensions can work, as well as why these are topics that need the entire canon.

Faith and Work. This area is not so much about resolving a tension as seeing faith and work as important to pursue (though the tensions do surely surface once we walk into the often very secular workplace). Most church messages I hear largely bypass the 9 to 5, Monday through Friday part of the week. I hear a great deal on how to live at home, how to serve the church, how to share Jesus, how to manage the family, and how to think about the world. It's ironic that the workplace is so neglected, since it is often the place where we spend the bulk of our time. When the workplace is addressed, it may be only to ask how can we evangelize there and be a good witness.

Less talked about is how we should view work or how Scripture may help us with the challenges one faces there. Being a steward of the creation means understanding where work fits in. God has given us vocation in this life. How do we wrestle with the core tension between the sacred space we are a part of as members of God's people and the public space where we often spend most of our time serving? How do we face the ethical challenges in a pluralistic work space?

These last two questions do move us into tensions that Scripture addresses, but we only see them if we consider how Scripture handles such contexts. It is here that specific case studies covering a variety of challenging situations may help. Life-to-the-Bible application requires pastors and teachers who know the dilemmas people face from 9 to 5—a world many pastors or seminary faculty members have not been in. A commitment to speak on this topic requires getting to know your people and their activities in order to gain aware- ness about the questions involved.

World Religions. Here there are two sets of issues. The first is simply knowing what's out there. Most of us do not know enough about other religions to engage those who pursue them. This is where glocalization impacts us. It used to be that, to engage a neighbor, we only needed to understand another denomination or the difference between a Catholic or Protestant. In addition, there might have been an encounter with a Jewish

person now and again. Now, though, between the way the world is linked technologically, how business is done globally, and the diversity of most contexts, that paradigm has changed. When it comes to world religions, most Christians think that all we need to know is how Christ is the answer and how our faith is the way. Those truths are essential and important, but is that all that is advised? No. We need to know more about the content of other faiths in order to engage them. Such understanding can open up additional ways of approaching someone with a different religious conviction.

Yet there is more. In this conversation, it's also valuable to try to understand what drives another faith and makes it attractive to people. What aspirations does it speak to and raise? How might the gospel step into that space? Here I have in mind trying to ask someone of a different faith what he or she senses it gives them and what causes a person to adhere to it. Is it the result of upbringing? Has it simply become a routine? Or is there something substantive that drives adherence that the gospel also treats, perhaps even more comprehensively? Knowing this might open up doors for us to address it.

Paul's speech in Acts 17 at Mars' Hill makes its challenge by acknowledging the draw of Greco-Roman spirituality, but then goes about addressing how the gospel fills that space— and does so even better. Books like Daniel help us see how a believer negotiates that other spiritual world (mainly by being who God calls us to be). Here the quality of our life is the draw versus trying to force a not-yet-appreciated lifestyle on others. Joseph shows the same approach to engagement in the book of Genesis, by focusing on his own integrity and his walk with the God of his people, rather than on dismantling the Egyptian system of deities. Books like Ezra demonstrate efforts to enforce moral standards, but interestingly, their focus is on how this is done "in house," among those who are connected to God. Do these distinct contexts have something to teach us as we seek to bring together all of what Scripture says about engagement in places where our neighbors do not share our faith? Does this distinction help us with governments that are not monoreligious?

Gun Control. This is a classic example of a category 3 issue. The tensions that come with this issue should give us pause about how to discuss it biblically. After all, guns did not exist when Scripture was written. We get to this topic in part by examining how Scripture handles violence. On the one hand, there are texts that allow me the right of self-defense (Exod 22:2; Num 35:5–13; Josh 20:4–6; Ps 72:12–14). Nations are allowed to bear the power of the sword (Rom 13:4). There are even OT laws that distinguish what happens if I kill someone who invades my tent at night versus my culpability if it happens during the day. In one instance there is no fine; in the other there may be (Exod 22:1–4). Distinctions like this begin to introduce our tension, which is the right to defend but with an awareness of how much violence to apply. Add to this the texts that plead for or describe non-violent responses, Jesus's general tenor toward dealing with violence, and the church's model of almost never fighting back with violence in the face of persecution—and we are suddenly in that space between tension and balance.

With this topic, cultural context also matters. In the UK, gun control is a different discussion than in the US because of cultural realities and different national laws about gun possession. In America, the right to own a gun is a constitutional "given." So the questions we discuss involve applying those rights in a way that is best for society at large. This is actually a complex question, especially in light of the biblical tensions just noted.

Part of my point in walking through these examples is to show how much room exists for discussion in category 2 and 3 topics. Usually in our ideological debates, the tension is bypassed for a choice. This actually robs us of discussions that the tensions suggest we need to have. We don't tend to ask how to balance the tensions or what their relationship might be as we seek to cope with it all. Yet the nature of the topic almost demands discussion. When the tensions are bypassed or go unrecognized altogether, we aren't aiding society's need to consider the real options that might exist.

Refugees and Immigration. Here is another category 3 topic that often is treated as a category 1. Its tensions are multiple. On the one side of the ledger is the right of a nation to establish its laws, expect them to be followed, and determine the kind of society it wishes to be. On the other side is the biblical call in many texts to have compassion for the alien and love one's neighbor.

Now, some try to adjudicate this by restricting who qualifies as the alien in Scripture, making it equivalent to a legal immigrant. I am not sure this works, given what Jesus taught. As we've seen, he dealt with the question of "Who is my neighbor?" and the call to be a neighbor in the par- able of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:28–38). According to Jesus, my call to love extends to anyone, even enemies (Luke 6:29–37). The tension remains.

This debate also often overlooks a little-appreciated aspect of our current situation: the moral responsibility we have applied to our laws. Our actions got us into this position to begin with: America invited people from other countries to work here initially, and we did not enforce immigration laws because we wanted the cheaper labor. This lasted for a few decades and produced a situation where those immigrants bore children with citizenship status and have never known another home besides America. How does our nation's moral responsibility for that relational and social reality impact our discussions in some of these cases?

Finally, as a democracy we have the option to look at how our laws are constructed with the opportunity to improve them. Such adjustments allow us to deal with the realities that our own actions have contributed to the problem. Add to this the layer of safety concerns tied to threats of terrorism, and the immigration question becomes far more complex, with multidimensional tensions.

Again, the approach of *life to the Bible* asks us to con- sider how to balance these factors by understanding what the realities are at various levels. Oversimplifying this discussion does no one any favors. No wonder this topic is so heavily discussed and hard

to fully grasp. It requires slow, reflective thinking on all the biblical and social angles. The way in, I think, is not to deal with one of these dimensions only. That does not resolve all the tensions. Rather, we should face up to them all and enter into a deeper level of reflection.

Sexuality. My final example involves a category 1 issue. Some people might challenge the idea that same-sex issues are built on a core worldview difference, contending that Scripture at least holds open the possibility of monogamous same-sex relationships. Pursuing this argument within a biblical model, they claim that Scripture's condemnation of same-sex relationships is focused on specifically abusive relationships, such as a master and his unwilling slave. They also appeal to a "canceled" set of Old Testament precepts.

The biblical case for same-sex, monogamous relationships is not so strong. In Scripture there isn't a single mention of same-sex activity where it is expressed positively or even neutrally. It is always condemned or challenged. By the way, this recognition makes this discussion different than debates on slavery or the activity of women. In those two discussions, a canonical look at texts shows pro and con elements that need to be balanced. The biblical evidence also means the slavery/women/same-sex analogy does not work. In fact, some who favor same-sex relationships simply concede that to advocate for monogamous same-sex marriage means one has to argue that the Bible is wrong in prohibiting it. That recognition says a lot about the topic and what the Bible does teach. It also shows the honesty of some who contend for this alternative lifestyle that some do actually recognize what they are contending for is not what the Bible teaches versus others who claim it does permit such cases.

This topic is a straightforward, category 1, worldview clash. To get there, a person has to cancel out or challenge the reality that every time this topic comes up biblically, it is in a context where the behavior is rebuked.

In the area of sexuality, the tensions are not so much biblical as practical, pastoral, and applicational. We have national laws that allow for a lifestyle that is not biblically sanctioned, and even laws at levels that prohibit discrimination. Here the tension is between the world and the biblical ethic. This is but one space where the world and Scripture run into each other. Beyond this obvious practical tension, there is still more. Despite the seeming biblical clarity, there are tensions at a pastoral level as well. Pastoral tensions arise anytime the commitment to minister to people and help them grow spiritually and morally intersects with someone's immoral behavior. Debate exists as to whether homosexual sin, because it is against the nature of things, is more severe in its impact than other sins or is just a particularly vivid example in Romans 1. Tensions here become obvious when sins that are rooted in heterosexual misbehavior are handled by the church one way, while same-sex sins are treated another way. Should this be? To chastise one category of sin while being more "sympathetic" to another category may be evidence of how cherry-picking can happen. It also undercuts the impact and the morality of the church on issues at a pastoral and relational level.

On the other hand, how does a pastor maintain the corporate concerns and testimony of the church while seeking to minister to anyone caught in moral failure? How does a shepherd attempt to lead individuals into growth?

Biblical texts point to both nurture and discipline as means for the church to use. The tensions are resolving how, how much, and when. These texts talk about the contextual sphere of the church. What does one argue for in a public space where both moral (i.e., spiritual) enablement and a moral restriction may be lacking? Understandable concerns for the well-being of society drive our efforts to engage the full public context and challenge such a lifestyle, but theological and relational understanding may make one aware of the challenges that come with it. Here expectations may need calibrating alongside a reminder of where real solutions lie. Those limited expectations need to include a recognition that a person's ultimate accountability is to God,

regard- less of our national laws. Each person becomes accountable before God for their choices, no matter what the laws of the land may be.

My point in raising this example is to show how tensions may help us with a discussion. How we balance these tensions still needs to be sorted out, and the specific context may matter significantly in such a discussion. Responsibility in the church should work differently and demand more than expectations in the world at large. The character and purity of church values are in view here, along with the need to show moral life in the church. Its values are not like the values of the world.

There also is the pastoral concern of wrestling with how to work compassionately with those caught in sin. Scripture suggests that the community of faith only leave them on their own when they show no desire to consider living differently (Matt 18:15–18). No wonder the church has been challenged with how to approach this area of sexual sin while maintaining its moral commitments.

Conclusion on Examples

What I have attempted to do with these examples is to open a dialogue on how life-to-the-Bible discussions might work, especially with regard to the kinds of questions they ask about text and setting. Obviously, what the Bible says is key, even in working backwards from life to the Bible. The point is that bringing the Bible to that discussion has to be canonical and contextual, not merely exegetical or expositional.

An introductory overview to the examples and challenges we face does not answer all the questions a person might have. Instead, it raises questions for reflection. My goal has been to suggest what these discussions look like at the start. Only a full treatment of each theme according to such an approach would move a person closer to specific kinds of answers. That is not just another book, but another set of books beyond our scope. But I do hope to have shown where to start. I also hope to have laid

some biblical rationale for why, in many cases, we must go into these spaces to show cultural intelligence.

May this be the beginning of a long-needed, important discussion about how we apply Scripture and live the life God calls for from all of us.

Summarizing Cultural Intelligence

Cultural intelligence requires us to understand our assignment. People are not the enemy. They are the goal. As we engage, it's important to appreciate that our battle is spiritual and people are caught in the grasp of forces they often do not even recognize. We need to understand that real change is not a matter of law or politics but of spiritual transformation that only the hope of the gospel can give. That realization might help the church to emphasize what can bring real change and lessen the emotion that often comes in our political debates. The culture war's elevation of politics to a more central role has not served the church well. It has distracted us from our core mission as a church, obscuring what we should care about the most: the message of how the gospel is the best way to meet human need.

Tone also matters in cultural engagement. Paul shows us that whatever we may think about culture, engaging requires working to build bridges. The texts on dealing with people outside the church call us to be gentle, gracious, and humble as we challenge. The effort to engage requires balancing challenge and invitation. We are never to lose sight of the fact that hope is our core emphasis. In the debates that are often a part of engagement, we don't desire to leave biblical conviction behind or fail to express it, but how we do this needs recalibration in many settings, as does what we prioritize. The opportunity to learn by listening well may also be a healthy by-product of seeking to listen more carefully as we engage.

Intelligent engagement will lead us into many challenging and difficult discussions. We need to patiently and diligently listen—and listen well—for those bridges to hope.

We need to appreciate the complexity of life in a fallen world. Recognizing real biblical tensions of fallen-world life may help us have discussions that move beyond labels to substance.

The most important way to open doors to hope may be showing the authenticity the Bible contains about life. We can do this by what we say, and especially by how we say and live it. Cultural intelligence reflects a commitment to love others well, including those outside the church. We seek by the power of the Spirit to draw outsiders toward an invitation to faith. It requires an ability to switch-hit: going from the Bible to life or working from life to draw people back to the Bible.

Cultural intelligence also involves an appreciation of the richness of Scripture, discernment, and dependence on the leading of God. It means grasping the core elements of our call. They involve a spiritual battle and the capability of the gospel to enhance life and allow it to flourish for those who believe. Christians are ambassadors for Christ in the world. Our citizenship is a heavenly one that transcends our national commitments. We are commissioned to represent God individually and together as the church. We should do so with applied intelligence in the spaces and places God has us. We do so through an invitation into hope and into a new and different kind of life—an entry into sacred space in the midst of life in the public space. That life is lived out because of grace, forgiveness, reconnection to God, and enablement from God's Spirit, which is given to those who turn to him in faith.

A spiritual challenge requires spiritual resources and a way of engagement unlike that of the world (Eph 6:10–18). I close with the reminder of 2 Tim 2:24–26, for in it is a glimpse of how to engage with cultural intelligence. This text summarizes hope and a spiritual prayer of practical guidance for the way forward:

The Lord's servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

NOTES

1. The following is Chapter 5 of the author's book, *Cultural Intelligence* (Nashville: Broadman Academic, 2020). It is used with permission.

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PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS: BE EVANGELICAL AND EVANGELISTIC

CHRIS RAPPAZINI
Moody Bible Institute
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INTRODUCTION

Evangelical Homiletics Society, serving as your President during the 2019-2020 year was an honor. I know it is custom for the President to give a sermon at the annual conference, but since things are already a bit different this year, I thought I would give more of an address than a sermon. In fact, I cannot think of anything more intimidating than preaching a sermon before a group of preaching professors and scholars. So instead, I want to share with you what has pressed on my heart and mind over the past several years. It deals with the gospel and the next generation. Now let me say, I am by no means an expert on this subject matter. This is not everything there is to know about the gospel and the next generation, but this is just about everything I know about the gospel and the next generation.

Growing up, many of my friends attended youth group and church, but when they went to college, their commitment to the local church, and more importantly, their commitment to God vanished. Now, this surfaces many questions. How strong was their commitment in the first place? Do youth ministries actually work? However, anecdotally I noticed, and maybe you have too, what a number of studies from both secular and faith-based organizations over the past several years have reported: Millennials and the Gen Z generation are leaving the church.[1]

Now, some could say that this is nothing abnormal, or at least not in evangelical churches. For generations, young adults have left the church, but when they get married or have kids,

they come back. In fact, that could be part of your story or the story of many people in your church. But what the most recent research shows, what I can personally attest to as I keep up with my family and friends, and with churches having to pivot because of Covid-19, is that the next generations are leaving church, or changing lanes, and there is no sign of them coming back. The sad truth is, the prodigal sons and daughters are gone, and unlike the account in Luke 15, they do not appear to be coming back. While the prodigal son in Luke 15 returned to his father because "he came to his senses," our modern-day prodigals today feel that coming to their senses, is not returning to their heavenly Father, but rather it means leaving the church, and sadly abandoning God altogether.

Now, I may be completely wrong, in this thinking, I mean I am young after all. Honestly, I hope I am wrong. But I do not want to be naively singing the words of King George in the American musical Hamilton, "You'll be back," when in reality, the next generations would rather fight us than join us. So, my message to you, Evangelical Homiletics Society, is keep being evangelical and now more than ever, *Be Evangelical and Evangelistic.* For the next few moments, I want to share with you a challenge I see us having with the next generations, some reasons why the next generations struggle with God and the church, and then a few suggestions on what I think we can do.

A MAJOR CHALLENGE WE FACE

One of the biggest challenges I see, from where I sit today, is the next generations have more obstacles in their way of returning to God or listening to us, than ever before. I think we would all mostly agree that Millennials, like myself, and Gen Z-ers—those who were born in the early 2000s—have had it pretty easy. Even though we complain a lot about how difficult "adulting" is and how stressed we can be, we did not have to go through the Great Depression, World Wars, or Cold Wars. Of course, there have been struggles, but one could easily argue we have experienced the easiest of times in the history of humanity. Thanks to

technology and the internet, there have been more opportunities, more options, and more information widely available at our fingertips than ever before. And that is the problem. Because of an extreme advancement in technology, there is so much MORE than ever before.

Now, do not get me wrong, I am not anti-technology. I mean without technology and the internet, this message and our 2020 meeting would not be possible. But if we do not pause and try to understand what the next generations grew up with, in particular, the influence of technology and the internet on their lives, then the war for their souls is already lost.

Edward Tufte, professor emeritus of computer science, political science, and statistics at Yale University, states, "There are only two industries that call their customers 'users': illegal drugs and software."[2] There is a good amount of truth to this statement. For instance, ask any young person, "Do you remember a day when you did not pick up your phone or go on the internet?" I imagine it would be difficult for them to recall such a date. This is because their phone is not just an extension of their life, as Marshal McLuhan[3] would claim, but it is their life.

The problem posed is all of the monumental moments, events, and experiences taking place in the world and in their lives exist within the framework of controlled and calculated algorithms. Their reality and truth are shaped and delivered every day through the use of artificial intelligence. We often think that AI is like the Arnold Schwarzenegger in the Terminator, yet AI persisted for decades and is persuading the next generation every moment of every day. So what does this all mean? The next generations are left trying to navigate through culture-shaping events and personal experiences, circulated and edited in 1-to-1 and 1-to-many platforms dominated by people who do not follow Jesus and are enemies to the gospel. This is the uphill challenge we face. Therefore, it is no wonder that the next generations struggle with God and the church. Here are some of their main struggles.

THE NEXT GENERATIONS' STRUGGLE WITH GOD

For starters, the next generations have been given inadequate answers to the problem of pain and injustices in the world. Tragedies and injustices existed in every generation, but with the increase of technology and social media, these events can be viewed over and over again, causing significant implications. One of the implications is the question, "Where was God?" and, "How could He allow this to happen?" To be honest, I do not think our current answers are sufficient enough. So when the next generations look to the internet for answers, there is an apparent silence from God in the midst of a culture and media that repeatedly reject Him. This is just one of the many reasons younger generations struggle with God but the reality is that they struggle more with the church than they do with God.

THE NEXT GENERATIONS' STRUGGLES WITH THE CHURCH

First, some churches try too hard to conform to the world. The leaders allow their church to feel more like *a business* than *the body*. While Millennials and Gen Z-ers may not be able to tell the difference between was it true and false online, they are excellent at sniffing out people who are inauthentic and fake. So, when a church tries to mask itself in worldly ideas and gimmicks, it simply comes across as counterfeit.

Second, the next generations struggle with the church because of the perception, and perhaps reality, that the church is more concerned more with *politics* than *people*. Do not get me wrong, I think we should be involved in politics, but we often think that politics is the solution. While politics play a crucial role in any society, many in the next generation see the church as one-sided. They feel that the church simply uses Jesus and the Bible to justify their actions and their political party's platform.

Finally, many in the next generations struggle with church because they feel no one is listening to them or cares what they think, and even if the church is attempting to listen, the next

generations feel like not much is expected from them anyway. Instead, as David John Seel, Jr. says in his book, *The New Copernicans*, the church needs to do less looking at Millennials as causes of culture but rather carriers of culture. Furthermore, they have a vital role to play in shaping the church and Christianity in the years to come.[4] Even though many in the next generation would rather be *known* for making a difference than *actually* making a difference, there are some who genuinely care about the future of the church and Christianity. Often times, the next great ideas come from the next generation.

OKAY, NOW WHAT?

Now for the remainder of our time together, I want to give you just a few ways I think we can move forward and help the boomerang of Millennials and Gen Z-ers to start curving back towards God and His church. Many of you already know this and are already doing these things. I applaud you and hope to learn from you on how I can do it better. So thank you! But if you are not making an effort to reach the next generation, I ask you to start considering doing so. Here are just a few of my thoughts on how we can be both Evangelical and Evangelistic.

For starters, we need to make our messages and our lives more evangelistic. I think we need to stop trying to get the next generations to come to church, and instead, more directly, start getting them to come to Jesus. Our messages and actions have to be more evangelistic. I am not saying every sermon needs to be entirely evangelistic, but I am convinced that both believers and non-believers need to be presented with the gospel clearly, concisely, and regularly. As I teach preaching, I am going to implore my students to give a concise gospel presentation and make their sermons more evangelistic, with a clear invitation to come to Christ. I am not simply talking about pointing to Christ or the gospel in every sermon, I am talking about teaching them how to give a clear call to Christ in every sermon or every worship service.

In addition to making our messages more evangelistic, we need to start making our lives more evangelistic. What I mean is we need to visit Millennials and Gen Z-ers at their work, instead of waiting for them to visit us at our work. Jesus convinced Peter, Andrew, James, and John to become fishers of men after a miraculous catch on the Sea of Galilee (Mt. 4:18-22; Mk. 1:16-20; Lk 5:1-11). He knew where the fish, and the fishermen, were that morning and He went to them. We need to start visiting young people, both our students and non-students, at their work and stop waiting for them to visit us at our work. We are the missionaries after all.

Instead of going after Millennials and Gen Z-ers, we need to learn how to walk alongside them. It is interesting, Millennials will listen to you, but first, they want you to listen to them. I know, it sounds backward, but the next generations want to know that someone cares about them. Growing up in two houses because of their parents' divorce, going to multiple schools, and having thousands of surface-level "friends" on social media has made them crave attention more than ever before. All they want is for someone to care about them. These are the generations with the highest ever percentage of fatherless homes after all! We have to stop wanting to *impress* them but instead make an *impression* on them, by walking alongside them and caring for them. Listening to them and then sharing our life stories with them. It is very rare that you find a Millennial or Gen Z student, neighbor, or friend, who will turn you down if you offer to buy them lunch or coffee or have a standing meeting with them. After all, they love their overpriced beverages from Starbucks.

The next generations have grown up with a difficult time trusting people and committing to things. For many, their family dynamics influenced them deeply and their friendship pools changed frequently. As I mentioned before, they have been given more options than any other generation. More choices to buy clothes, where one goes to school, what shows to watch and when to watch them. Committing to someone, like God, or something, like His church, is a huge challenge. However,

because of the lack of long-lasting friendships and stability, Millennials and Gen Z-ers crave community.

When they say community, what they are really meaning is they want strong, trusting relationships. We can show them that *community* takes *commitment*. We can show them how to be adults, who are committed to our family and genuinely committed to God and His church. We can show them that commitment takes sacrifice. It takes sacrificing one's desires so someone else can feel loved. We need to do better at walking alongside the next generation by inviting them over to our homes and inviting them into our lives. Maybe it means giving them a seat at your table to eat or even a space in your home to live. It might be inviting them on a vacation with you and your family. We have to find ways to show them that community takes commitment.

Finally, challenge them with reading the Scriptures or devotional apps, listening to podcasts, or watching sermons. God's Word is powerful! It is sharper than a double-edged sword (Heb. 4:12). After you have built a strong relationship with them, recommend a place for them to be exposed to God's Word. Be patient and be praying. Have an active, fervent prayer team. In fact, this is where we need to start. We need to start by praying for the next generations. We need to pray as Elijah prayed on top of Mt. Carmel, that in the midst of false idols, they will know him and that He will turn their hearts back again (1 Kings 18:37).

CONCLUSION

Here is why this is so important, because too much is at stake if we don't. Too much hangs in the balance. The next generation is not the problem of Christianity and church, the next generation is the solution. If there was one group of people who knew this the best, it was the early church. They knew that the message of Jesus and His resurrection rested on their shoulders. That is why they prayed in Acts 4 for boldness. So they could tell the next generations about everything they had witnessed. As a result of

their boldness, they changed their communities, their cities, and eventually the entire Roman Empire.

Today, we have that responsibility. We have the honor and privilege of taking that same message of Christ and His resurrection to the next generations. So Evangelical Homiletics Society, be Evangelical and Evangelistic!

NOTES

1. See Daniel Cox and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux, "Millennials Are Leaving Religion And Not Coming Back," *FiveThirtyEight*, December 12, 2019, https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/millennials-are-leaving-religion-and-not-coming-back/; Christine Emba, "Opinion: Why Millennials are Skipping Church and Not Going Back," *The Washington Post*, October 27, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/why-millennials-are-skipping-church-and-not-going-back/2019/10/27/0d35b972-f777-11e9-8cf0-4cc99f74d127_story.html; David Masci, "Q&A: Why Millennials are less religious than older Americans," *Pew Research Center*, January 8, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/01/08/qa-why-millennials-are-less-religious-than-older-americans/; Ryan Burge, "Guest Column: Young People Will Come Back to Church, Right?" *Barna Group Organization*, October 21, 2019, https://www.barna.com/young-people/

2. Preston Vanderslice, "Review: Netflix's 'The Social Dilemma'" *Daily* Sundial, October 14, 2020, https://sundial.csun.edu/161195/arts-entertainment/review-netflixs-the-social-dilemma-is-a-great-conversation-starter-but-not-enough-to-create-change/

3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media* (Pennsylvania: McGraw Hill Education, 1964).

4. David John Seel Jr., *The New Copernicans: Millennials and the Survival of the Church* (Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 2018).

PREACHING THAT HEALS OUR DIVIDES: A MODEL FOR ADDRESSING ETHNOCENTRISM AND RECONCILIATION FROM THE PULPIT

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ABSTRACT

Tragically, ethnocentrism appears to be rising in the United States. Three examples illustrate this disturbing trend: recently, the Federal Bureau of Investigation issued a warning about a possible surge in hate crimes against Asian-Americans, the Anti-Defamation League sounded the alarm regarding an increase in anti-Semitic incidents, and black people such as Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd were shockingly murdered.

Given this challenge, how can the faithful homiletician wisely address the idol of ethnocentrism from the pulpit?

This paper endeavors to answer that question and make a unique contribution to the field of homiletics by offering a six-step paradigm. First, the homiletician examines ethnocentrism theologically by exploring the ways the Holy Scriptures depict sin fueling alienation and division. Second, the preacher attends to ethnocentrism contextually: in her milieu—both historically and the present reality. Third, the communicator engages ethnocentrism personally: facing his sin and admitting his prejudices. Fourth, the homiletician admits her limitations: she is a herald and not a heart-changer. Fifth, the preacher employs the "Big Idea" philosophy in studying and proclaiming the text. Lastly, the communicator will hone in on specific themes and particular passages that will most incisively expose ethnocentrism and promote reconciliation and unity among the body of Christ.

The model proposed in this paper may provide homileticians with a robust and practical way to confront this social scourge with the hope of the gospel.

INTRODUCTION

In a land brimming with idols, it appears 2020 is the year many white Americans are being awakened to the ugly reality that our country remains beset by the blight of ethnocentrism. For instance, in April 2020, Christopher Wray, the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation issued a warning regarding "a potential … spike in hate crimes" against Asian-Americans due to the coronavirus pandemic.[1] A short while later, the Anti-Defamation League announced "Antisemitic Incidents Hit All-Time High in 2019."[2] Then, on May 25, came the horrific video depicting the murder of George Floyd while in police custody, which catalyzed protests and demonstrations in cities across the globe.

Our present reality raises a crucial question: how can the faithful homiletician wisely address the idol of ethnocentrism? In other words, how can she preach the Holy Scriptures with clarity, conviction, and sensitivity in confronting this scourge while also promoting justice, healing, and reconciliation?

This paper endeavors to answer that question and make a unique contribution to the field of homiletics by offering a model that engages ethnocentrism theologically, contextually, personally, positionally, methodologically, and categorically. If the communicator will traverse through these six dimensions, they will guide him toward a robust analysis of the problem and a constructive, gospel-centered solution.

DEFINING ETHNOCENTRISM

This paper joins other scholars in distinguishing "race" from "ethnicity."[3] Consequently, the focus here is on the idol of

ethnocentrism rather than racism, although Jemar Tisby's definition of racism as "*prejudice plus power*"[4] is a good one that can also apply to ethnocentrism, particularly when an ethnic group holds a dominant or majoritarian position in a culture. With that in mind, an ethnic group is one that is "set apart from others because of their national origin or distinctive cultural patterns."[5] I concur with Matthew Kim's definition of ethnocentrism as

> the belief that one's ethnicity is the center of the universe, the most important, and thus ethnocentrists believe that all other ethnic groups are inferior to their own ethnic group. When we are ethnocentric, we look down on others and expect them to become just like us (i.e., forced assimilation).[6]

Ethnocentrism then, is animated by pride and alienation, which directs our attention to the theological dimension.

THE THEOLOGICAL DIMENSION

To address ethnocentrism properly, the homiletician—as a theologian—will examine this idol through a theological lens. In particular, the Bible can be interpreted through a metanarrative composed of "five movements: Creator, first creation, alienation, reconciliation, and final creation."[7] The eternal, triune God is fundamentally relational: one being with three persons living in perfect harmony. God crafts the first creation out of the overflow of His love and it is pristine—in fact, "very good" (Gen 1:31). God's relationship with the created order is marked by joyful mutuality and flourishing. God made humans in His image for the purpose of communion: "for personal and interdependent community with God and his people."[8]

However, Adam and Eve succumbed to pride, rebelled against God, and brought alienation into the world (Gen 3). The aftermath is catastrophic: "a passage from communion to a rupture"[9] and "the tragic fracturing of a relationship."[10]

Alienation brings comprehensive division and disintegration: "man was separated from God, separated from himself (psychological problems), separated from his neighbor (social problems) and separated from nature (ecological problems)."[11] Ethnocentrism is a fruit of alienation that has its roots in the Fall.

In response, God sent His son, Jesus Christ, "to reconcile to himself all things … by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross" (Col 1:20). Indeed, Jesus tore down "the dividing wall of hostility" between Jews and Gentiles to form "one new humanity" who is restored to a right relationship with God and one another (Eph 2:14-16). This new community is to proclaim and embody "the ministry and message of reconciliation" serving as "Christ's ambassadors" (2 Cor 5:16-21). God's story culminates in the final creation: at the consummation of all things we discover "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1-5). Communion is restored between God, His people, and creation.

Faithful preachers must help their listeners grasp this narrative arc. History does not conclude with ethnocentrism, hatred, violence, and division. Rather, God's final plan and ultimate reality is of "a great multitude … from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9). Our glorious destiny shapes our preaching in the here and now.

THE CONTEXTUAL DIMENSION

John Stott famously conceived of preaching as building a bridge "between the biblical world and the modern world."[12] More pointedly, the communicator declares the Holy Scriptures to a specific group of people in a particular place with distinct characteristics, including a unique history that shapes current reality.[13] Historical events are like a rock that strikes the surface of a calm pond: they cause undulating ripples moving outward (i.e., the present consequences caused by the precipitating event). Indeed, action (past) and reaction (present) are dynamically interlinked. A good homiletician then, understands that an effective sermon brings God's ancient (and inspired) truths into

dialogue with the socio-cultural and concrete lived reality of his listeners. This means the preacher will cultivate a strong historical intelligence—both nationally and locally—so when she enters the pulpit, she will be prepared to address the context and social location of her listeners.

For instance, when I preach on a topic relating to ethnocentrism, repentance, and reconciliation, I must comprehend the complex background of my milieu. Because I love my city of Newport, Rhode Island, and because I desire to be a faithful preacher, I have become aware of the chasm between its reputation and reality. Newport is known for its Gilded Age mansions, gorgeous beaches, award-winning cuisine, expensive yachts, music festivals, and acclaimed Naval War College, to name a few characteristics. As a result, Newport has developed a reputation as a playground for the rich and famous: billionaire businessman Larry Ellison and comedian Jay Leno both own mansions in Newport and Oscar-winning actress Jennifer Lawrence got married at Belcourt Mansion in October 2019.[14] However, the city "also endures high levels of poverty, unemployment, and drug and alcohol addiction, as well as a housing shortage for the impoverished and homeless."[15] Furthermore, Newport is finally starting to come to terms with the fact it played a significant role in the notorious triangle trade. Indeed, some are beginning to acknowledge that "Newport ships carried 106,000 enslaved Africans across the Atlantic."[16] It appears the city's wealth and fame are the fruit of acute injustice. Armed with this information, I am able to connect present to past and help my hearers gain a broader perspective of their home, and their role in forming it.

The skilled preacher then, does the hard work of exegeting *both* the text and the context—the history and current story. This process enables her to explain *why* ethnocentrism is so intractable *here* and *now* and why justice and reconciliation are so hard—but necessary—to achieve. In sum, the *kerux* agrees with Bishop Desmond Tutu that history and memory are indispensable to healing and forgiveness.[17]

THE PERSONAL DIMENSION

A mature preacher cultivates an attitude of self-reflexivity, brutal honesty, repentance, and accountability. She acknowledges she is not hermetically sealed from her setting, but rather is embedded within it.

This dimension engages both *personal* and *communal* responsibility and repentance. The personal aspect involves admitting, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jer 17:9). It means examining one's heart and asking questions like "Do I harbor any ethnocentric attitudes? Did I laugh at that racist meme? Did I fail to rebuke a friend when he or she mocked another person? Am I doing *everything* I can to develop multi-ethnic relationships and promote a diversity of leaders in my church/organization? If not, why not?" When the Holy Spirit reveals any prejudice, he unconditionally repents—à la King David in Psalm 51—no excuses, justifications, or rationalizations. She also invites safe friends or accountability partners to check with her regularly and ask hard questions.

Furthermore, the vigorous homiletician moves beyond the personal to embrace corporate responsibility and penitence. Humans are interdependent creatures. That is, "[O]ne's identity—even one's very being—cannot be understood apart from others. Personhood is, in part, a socially constructed reality."[18] To demean another person due to his ethnicity is to attack his personhood and the identity of the family, tribe or people group to which he belongs. Most tragically, to do so shows contempt for their Creator, who crafted them as His image-bearers.

In addition, corporate responsibility grasps the systemic nature of sin. Every person is corrupted by sin in some way, shape or form. For example, when evaluating the Truth and Reconciliation Commission following Apartheid in South Africa, Professors Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith assert that

> the truth commission constructed "victim" and "perpetrator" as "binary identities" and failed to account for the position of the "beneficiary" – "those who benefited from the everyday policies and practices of the apartheid regime." Beneficiaries were "neither identified [by the TRC] as complicit in perpetuating systemic violence nor called to account."[19]

Complicity is a crucial concept. Leaders and communicators must acknowledge that regarding social sins, everyone is contaminated, even by the smallest trace. Every person has contributed and/or benefited, directly or indirectly.[20] It appears James gestures at this when he states, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them" (Jas 4:17). On the other hand, the mature preacher—as a theologian—grasps that our interconnectedness "also works to our benefit. In fact the gospel is predicated upon the interrelated notions of identification, vicarious substitution, and federal headship."[21] Jesus enters our complicity, takes it upon Himself, and pays the price for it on Calvary.

Consequently, the homiletician will regularly practice communal repentance as a public event (activity) and a posture of ongoing identification and humility.[22] This includes the four-step process of "Telling the Story, Naming the Hurt, Granting Forgiveness, and Renewing or Releasing the Relationship."[23] For biblical examples, see Daniel 9:1–19, Ezra 9:1–37, and Nehemiah 1:1–7.[24] By taking these necessary steps, the communicator seeks to perpetually grow in holiness by unmasking ethnocentric blinders, which if left untreated, will diminish the preaching moment by making it hypocritical. Indeed, a self-reflexive and repentant attitude fosters authenticity and unction in one's proclamations.

THE POSITIONAL DIMENSION

The effective preacher understands and embraces the limitations surrounding her role: she is a herald and not a heart-changer.

Nevertheless, preaching is a means of persuading an audience or congregation to change thought patterns and habits or to take a certain action. As such, the homiletician recognizes the power of words: "[T]he identities of both rhetor and audience are fashioned in and through the language we use. The language we use not only *references* but also *shapes* reality … all language functions constitutively."[25] Resultantly, the preacher acknowledges her responsibility to carefully steward her words.

However, the preacher cannot, in his own human volition and agency, transform a human heart. This power belongs to God, and in particular, to the Holy Spirit (cf. Titus 3:3–7). Thus, the herald accepts his role as a vessel or conduit that conveys God's truth and so prioritizes the preparation of his heart through prayer, personal devotional, exegetical, and contextual study of the text, proper application, and sermon delivery. In short, the preacher cares more about obtaining unction than obsessing over the audience's immediate, quantifiable response. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones defines *unction* as

> the Holy Spirit falling upon the preacher in a special manner … It is God giving power, and enabling, through the Spirit, to the preacher in order that he may do this work in a manner that lifts it up beyond the efforts and endeavors of man to a position in which the preacher is being used by the Spirit and becomes the channel through whom the Spirit works. This is seen very plainly and clearly in the Scriptures.[26]

Only the Holy Spirit can bring deep conviction of the sin of ethnocentrism and supernatural repentance.

We find two instructive examples in the life of Peter. Peter displays unction in Acts 2:37, when the hearers of his sermon on Pentecost "were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'" Yet afterward, Peter resists accepting the Gentiles' inclusion into the Kingdom of God, until the Holy Spirit brings him into relationship with Cornelius (Acts 10—11). The Spirit catalyzes a seminal shift, one that Lesslie

Newbigin asserts "is the story not only of the conversion of Cornelius but also of the conversion of Peter and of the church."[27]

At this point it must be noted that many Christian traditions and denominations believe one cannot easily or readily divorce the preaching moment from a communal and embodied response, including forms of social justice and political action. Cases include the black church, some voices within Reformed theology, and Catholic Social Doctrine.[28] Along with listening to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the speaker must be sensitive to the diversity of perspectives within the people of God.

THE METHODOLOGICAL DIMENSION

The fifth piece of the scheme offered here is the methodological, containing two thrusts. The first is the theoretical: this paper affirms Haddon Robinson's "Big Idea" approach[29] along with "The Homiletical Template" of HABIT, BRIDGE, and DIALECT posed by Matthew Kim.[30] The model presented in this paper seeks to build on these reputable works by stressing the cruciality of choosing reconciliation vice discrimination during the exhortatory event. It is at this juncture that homiletics and a theology of reconciliation converge.[31] To wit, preaching on reconciliation is the invitational challenge given to the congregation to eschew ethnocentrism and incarnate and reflect the radical nature of the new creation in the *here* and *now*. The koine Greek verb for "reconcile" (*katallasso*), used in 2 Corinthians 5, means "to effect a thorough change" and was used in the ancient world to describe "the process of money-changing where one set of coins was exchanged for an equivalent set."[32] In this scenario, the audience trades their clouded vision for God's clear vision, their pride and prejudice for humility and peacemaking, degradation and separation for edification and koinonia.

However, the preacher must repeatedly remind her listeners that reconciliation is hard because it's unique, countercultural, even other-worldly. In commenting on the

concepts of the "ministry" and "message of reconciliation" laid out in 2 Corinthians 5, N.T. Wright asserts,

> Something new *has* happened; something new *must now* happen. The world has never before seen a ministry of reconciliation; it has never before heard a message of reconciliation. No wonder the Corinthians found Paul's work hard to fathom. It didn't fit any preconceived ideas they may have had. He was behaving like someone … who lived in a whole new world.[33]

To this day, God's reconciling work—in and through his people—remains a paradox: both grueling and glorious, liminal and lofty. Overcoming ethnocentrism is more open-ended journey than conclusive achievement.

That leads to the second methodological thrust: the applicational side of reconciliation. The astute preacher presses for a change in attitudes and behavior: that is, she seeks "to provide a balance of *being* versus *doing* applications."[34] Effective gospel proclamation directs the hearer's affections—both individually and collectively—toward Jesus Christ, the great Reconciler, who "destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" between Jew and Gentile "through the cross" (Eph 2:14–16). When the congregation's desires are fixed upon the reconciling work of Jesus, it inspires imitation leading to purification, which animates Christ-like character formation.

With that in mind, reconciling must be applied or enacted. It is a mode of being *and* a concrete practice or habit. Along this vein, the homiletician will demonstrate caution in order to avoid giving applications that are disjunctive from the authorial intent of the text.[35] This raises a question: how can the communicator help the listeners incorporate reconciling into their lived experience? Again, this takes unction, wisdom and skill on the part of the speaker. However, as it relates to preaching reconciliation, Jemar Tisby proposes the following mnemonic: "The ARC (Awareness, Relationships, Commitment) of racial justice helps distinguish different types of antiracist actions. They

are not formulaic; they can happen nonsequentially and simultaneously."[36] This paper contends that when a homiletician deftly combines a text calling for reconciliation (see examples in the Categorical Dimension below), an accounting of Robinson's necessary, probable, and possible implications, and the ARC mnemonic, there is the potential for faithful and fruitful application. That is, after a preacher expounds a passage, she may urge the listener to repent and be conformed to the image of Christ by pursuing more education, interethnic friendships, or dedicated action.[37]

THE CATEGORICAL DIMENSION

The sixth aspect of the model pertains to preaching themes and texts. Given our current climate, marked by ethnocentric tension, the pastor may choose to preach a sermon series defining and denouncing ethnocentrism and promoting the gospel of reconciliation. If so, although it could be argued every text in Scripture points to God's redemptive, restorative, and reconciling work in Christ, there are certain topics and passages that might prove more salient than others. By way of illustration, some appropriate themes are these: the nature of the Trinity (the Godhead exemplifies unity and diversity), the first creation (God establishes and values diversity), the Fall (brings sin and alienation), the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, and the new creation (the Revelation 7:9 vision). Regarding texts, while the interpreter is careful to avoid eisegesis, the following is a sample list of recommendations: Matthew 5:9 ("Blessed are the peacemakers"), Romans 5:6–11 ("We were reconciled to him [God] through the death of his Son"), Ephesians 2:11–18 ("His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity"), Colossians 1:15–23 (God's plan is "through him [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things"), and 2 Corinthians 5:16–21 ("All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation"). When preached correctly—and with unction and vigor—these topics and passages will cultivate

an atmosphere of conviction, repentance, interdependence, sacrificial love, and unity within the body of Christ.

CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to (a) equip the homiletician to identify and condemn the persistent and pernicious idol of ethnocentrism and (b) promote effective and faithful communication of the gospel of reconciliation. Consequently, I have presented a thick framework composed of six dimensions: the theological, contextual, personal, positional, methodological, and categorical. The point is to engage the preaching event in a fully orbed way: objectively (externally) through the story of the triune God and human history, subjectively (internally, the *kerux*'s soul) through reflexivity, repentance, and humility, theoretically by exploring divine and human agency and the nature of communication, and practically through concrete actions and habits. Put differently: without engaging the theological dimension, the preacher may produce heretical and shallow sermons. Without the contextual dimension, truth is divorced from the listener's rooted reality, making it irrelevant and thus raising the likelihood it may fall on deaf ears. Without the personal dimension, preaching is tainted and tends to become hypocritical. Without the positional dimension, the speaker is tempted to over-rely on her human efforts, leading to anemic preaching that lacks the Spirit's unction. Without the methodological dimension, the homiletician may indulge in eisegesis or give esoteric sermons. And finally, without the categorical dimension, preaching lacks the precision required to catalyze change in the congregation.

Nonetheless, the urgency of our age challenges preachers to commit to rising to a higher level of homiletical efficaciousness. As we highlight reconciliation, restoration, and unity in the gospel, it is our conviction God will honor these efforts for His kingdom glory.

NOTES

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2. "Antisemitic Incidents Hit All-Time High in 2019," *Anti-Defamation League*, May 12, 2020, https://www.adl.org/news/press-releases/antisemitic-incidents-hit-all-time-high-in-2019.
3. See Matthew D. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence: Understanding the People Who Hear Our Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 95–97; Gary L. McIntosh and Alan McMahan, *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012), 23–27.
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6. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 97.
7. Paul Hoffman, *Reconciling Places: How to Bridge the Chasms in Our Communities* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2020), 51.
8. Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 42.
9. Donald G. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, vol. 1, *God, Authority, and Salvation* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978), 108.
10. Timothy C. Tennent, *Invitation to World Missions: A Trinitarian Missiology for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2010), 24.
11. Antoine Rutayisire, "Our Gospel of Reconciliation," in *Christ Our Reconciler: Gospel/Church/World*, ed. J.E.M. Cameron (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 67.

12. John R.W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 137–138.
13. For more information on the concept of "place," see Hoffman, "Your Place," chap. 1 in *Reconciling Places*.
14. Stacey Leasca, "Jennifer Lawrence Threw a Rager of a Wedding at This Historical Rhode Island Mansion – See Inside (Video)," *Travel and* Leisure, October 21, 2019, https://www.travelandleisure.com/travel-tips/celebrity-travel/jennifer-lawrence-wedding-newport-rhode-island-mansion
15. Hoffman, *Reconciling Places*, 12.
16. Newport Middle Passage Project, http://newportmiddlepassage.org.
17. Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Random House, 1999).
18. James Beitler, citing the thought of Desmond Tutu, in James E. Beitler III, *Seasoned Speech: Rhetoric in the Life of the Church* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2019), 139.
19. Cited in Beitler, *Seasoned Speech,* 146–147.
20. Speaking to a predominantly black audience, Dr. King averred "we must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to cooperate with that system, and thereby to become a participant in its evil." Martin Luther King, Jr, *Strength to Love* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 7.
21. Hoffman, *Reconciling Places*, 121.
22. For more information on this, see Beitler, *Seasoned Speech,* chap. 4, and the excellent book by Jennifer McBride, *The Church for the World: A Theology of Public Witness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
23. Desmond M. Tutu and Mpho A. Tutu, *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World* (New York: HarperCollins, 2014), 49.
24. For contemporary examples, see Hoffman, *Reconciling Places*, 122–123.
25. Beitler is drawing from the thought of philosopher Kenneth Burke; Beitler, *Seasoned Speech,* 136–137.

26. D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers*, 40th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 322.
27. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: An Introduction to the Theology of Mission*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 59. Furthermore, Christopher Wright states, "The mere fact that Luke devotes two chapters to tell the story and then repeat it indicates how pivotal it was in his narrative." Christopher Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006), 515.
28. See Amy E. Black, ed., *Five Views on the Church and Politics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015).
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31. For more on a theology of reconciliation, see Hoffman, *Reconciling Places*.
32. Leon Morris, *The Apostolic Preaching of the Cross. Third Edition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 215.
33. N.T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 2 Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 65. Emphasis original.
34. Kim, *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*, 27.
35. This brings to mind Haddon Robinson's assertion that "Implications may be necessary, probable, possible, improbable, or impossible." Haddon W. Robinson, "The Heresy of Application: It's When We're Applying Scripture That Error Most Likely Creeps In," in *The Art and Craft of Biblical Preaching*, ed. Haddon Robinson and Craig Brian Larson (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 309.
36. Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 262.
37. In addition to Tisby's mnemonic, I recommend the "Reconciliation Roadmap" in Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2015).

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THE ESCHATOLOGICAL REDEMPTION OF HUMAN SPEECH: TOWARDS A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF CHRISTIAN PREACHING

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INTRODUCTION

This essay introduces the idea that human speech, and therefore Christian preaching, exists and functions in relation to humankind's viceregal identity. Scripture describes a human stewardship, or viceregency, over creation as God's original design which is now being restored in Jesus Christ. Relatedly, Scripture implies that human speech plays a key role in God's design for humans to rule creation. Within Christ's redemption of humanity, we find a corresponding redemption of human speech.

This essay offers a fresh proposal for understanding the nature of Christian preaching within this schema: preaching is a viceregal act which manifests Christ's restored Adamic authority in the creation. Further, faithful Christian preaching is human speech that is being redeemed.

Initial Clarifications

I write here as a Christian who preaches and who teaches others to preach, and the following survey grows from my re-reading of Scripture in order better to understand those tasks.[1] My intent is to foster, in accord with the founding statements of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, biblical-theological descriptions of preaching to complement and clarify the many homiletical methods held and discussed among members of that society. In

addition, I am interested in providing a general response to some of my more progressive homiletical colleagues, many of whom are members of the Academy of Homiletics, regarding the idea of "preaching as theology."[2]

With these wider interlocutions in mind, this article turns again to Scripture to ask what the canonical metanarrative implies about Christian preaching as a whole. Towards this end, this article begins by assuming the historic Christian faith's understanding of Scripture's grand story, of that story's coherence, and of how Christians fit into it.[3] More particularly, this article assumes the validity of prior work by scholars who have described the biblical story using biblical theology in the tradition of Geerhardus Vos,[4] George Ladd,[5] and Brevard Childs.[6] Specifically, this article builds on the prior work of Dan G. McCartney[7] and Gregory K. Beale[8] regarding Christian viceregency, and from all these predecessors, general and specific, seeks to animate a generative discussion of what Christian preaching is as a whole.[9]

HUMAN SPEECH WITHIN THE SCRIPTURAL METANARRATIVE

We move now to the general question of this article: how is human speech portrayed in each era of the Scriptural metanarrative? The following survey here will trace out that metanarrative in four acts: 1) creation, 2) fall, 3) redemption, and 4) consummation. After examining all four acts of the metanarrative, I will harmonize these collected insights into a biblical-theological sketch of Christian preaching.

We turn now to the first question: how does the Scriptural narrative describe the creation of human speech?

The Creation of Human Speech

God is the first to speak in Scripture. Divine speech is the conspicuous organ of God's creation and rule in the beginning. "And God said" (1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29). These acts of

creation were punctuated by God naming, or calling. "God called the light 'day' and the darkness He called 'night'" (1:5)... "God called the expanse 'sky.'" (1:8)… "God called the dry ground, 'land,' and the gathered waters He called 'seas.'" (1:10). In these verses which begin the Bible's story, the creation's existence is a result of God's power to create *ex nihilo*. The narrative presents this power as intertwined with God's naming of that which is created. This is particularly significant in light of the ancient near eastern literary traditions from which Genesis springs, which understood naming as assigning functions and ordaining destinies,[10] in addition to confirming the namer's lordship over the named.[11]

In Genesis 1:1-2:3, God's speech exhibits a pattern: each utterance of divine speech develops and particularizes what has gone before. God sets the sun to govern the day (1:16-18) after He has created light (1:3). He calls forth creatures on earth (1:24) after the dry land has been created (1:9-10). He crowns humans as his viceregents (1:26-30) after the creation over which they would rule had come into being (1:3-25). While one might say that this is nothing more than narrative sequencing, it surfaces an important characteristic of the divine speech recounted in Genesis 1. Divine speech exhibits an inherent internal structure which develops through time with subsequent utterances, but never comes into conflict with itself as it develops. God remembers, we might say, what He has already said and done, and His subsequent words and actions align with, develop, and particularize what has preceded them.[12]

By the end of Genesis 1 the perceptive reader has learned several things; key among them is that God exerts his power through speech. Further, the divine speech, which here coexists with and directs divine power, is speech that names and orders, and speech which develops and particularizes what has gone before it.

Into this conceptual fabric Genesis weaves humanity. Genesis 1:26-28 forms the biblical foundation for what a human is in this and subsequent passages in the Scriptural metanarrative. Unlike any other creature, humanity is created

"in the image of God" and is intended "to rule over and subdue" the creation. The apparent divine purpose is for humans to be viceregents of the creation: stewards responsible for ruling the earth under God.[13]

Due to the relatively few verses in Scripture that describe human activity before the Fall, it seems at first difficult to comprehend precisely what this human viceregency would have entailed. We are not, however, entirely without clues. Because Genesis 1 presents God's own rule of creation as manifesting through his own speech, we might expect for part of humanity's viceregal rule of creation to involve human speech. This is indeed what we find: "So the man gave names…" (Genesis 2:20), the Hebrew here placing Adam's "calling" (2:20) parallel with God's "calling" names in Genesis 1. In light of this it seems right to understand Adam's naming of the animals as part of Adam ruling in God's image.[14] The simple structure of the narrative within Genesis 1-2 at the very least implies this. Just as rule-by-speech is key to God's divine administration of creation, rule-by-speech is key to Adam's viceregal administration of that same creation.

Yet the brief narrative also implies that Adam's naming was not exempt from God's scrutiny. The Lord brought the creatures *to the man to see what he would name them* (2:19). Here the Hebrew verb "to see" recalls God's observation of his own creating and naming of creation in Genesis 1. *And God saw that it was good* (1:10). This sight denotes judicial review. As Adam names animals in 2:19, God as judge follows after humankind's naming speech to "see" if it was good; that is, to see if the viceregal speech of Adam was proceeding in congruence with the divine speech and reign. Adamic naming, like Adam's rule, is presented as being under the authority of God himself; it is entirely a subsidiary project.[15]

Yet simultaneously Adam's naming is a project with its own integrity. "*Whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name*." (2:19) This means, first, that Adam himself "called" the animals' names himself. There is no indication in the narrative that God verbally dictated names to Adam; Adam's naming of

the animals was inherently a human activity that enlisted Adam's wisdom and knowledge of the creation.[16] Secondly, it means that Adam's specific names are honored and accepted by God, so that later in Scripture when God speaks the names of animals (e.g. Exodus 20:17 "ox"), He refers to them by the names which humanity has given and recognizes. Adam's names took. If we recall God's words ("and let them rule") in 1:26-28 wherein He vested humanity with viceregal authority, it seems that God would be going back on His own word if He ignored Adam's names, which were the verbal enactors of Adam's rule and therefore, also, of God's rule. The biblical narrative here ascribes to human speech a particular integrity and permanence, such that it plays a role in the administration of creation.

The idea that begins to emerge here, pertinent to our survey regarding human speech and Christian preaching, is that human speech, from its first appearance in the canonical story, appears as a thing subsidiary to, yet parallel with, divine speech. It is a tool of humanity's viceregal administration, apparently fitted to play a central role in the administration of God's kingdom reign within creation.

This alone has significance for understanding what human speech is in the canonical metanarrative, yet one more insight from Genesis 1-2 further clarifies how Scripture presents the nature of human speech at creation. If we recall the pattern within the sequence of divine utterances in Genesis 1, divine speech there exhibited an internal structure which developed through subsequent statements, such that later utterances developed and particularized what had preceded them. We have now seen also that Adam's rule as viceregent of creation was to reflect God's divine rule, and that Adam's speech was part of him reflecting the divine rule. Here human language uttered by a human tongue was received by God and became part of the administration of God's reign in creation. Human speech, in this analysis, functions in creation as a kind of image of divine speech: naming and ordering creation according to God's prior speech in order to develop and particularize what God has already said.

This then seems to be the first state and function of human speech in the biblical story. We turn now to the second question: how does the Scriptural narrative describe the fall of human speech?

The Fall of Human Speech

With the viceregal commission (1:26-28) and Adam's naming of the animals (2:19-20) in view, the narrative of Genesis 3 describes the spoliation of humanity's dominion over the creation. This fall occurs at the point of humanity's rejection of God's speech and concomitant acceptance of the serpent and his speech. Rather than following God's already-spoken words, humanity follows the words of the serpent, misjudges the fruit to be *good for food,* and disobeys God.

Both Adam and Woman had warrant to exert their viceregal authority to condemn the snake, yet did not at the critical moment. Adam, who "was with" Woman as she spoke with the serpent, is speechless throughout the conversation. This speechlessness stands in stark contrast to his viceregal naming of eight verses prior, which paradigmatically exerted God's kingdom rule over all the animals.

Humanity's sin was a specific breach of God's prohibition regarding the tree in the center of the garden (2:17), and yet was also a violation of the wise ordering of creation brought by all of God's prior speech, which had enrealmed the creation and enthroned humanity over it. Adam and Woman were to rule over and command the serpent, not vice versa. In submitting to a beast's words, humanity rejects all of God's prior speech and work, upending the creational order and dethroning themselves.

Genesis 3:14-19 describes drastic ruptures in humanity's relationship with the creation; these ruptures correspond with human speech, and the intellectual and judicial processes which inform it, tearing free from the divine speech and wisdom. The speech Adam utters after eating the fruit illustrate the rupture: his words are deceitful (3:10), and call into question the goodness of God's prior actions and words (3:12).[17]

The tower of Babel narrative (Genesis 11:1-9) seems to describe the maturation of sin's effects on human speech. In Genesis 11, rather than forwarding the God-glorifying project of naming creation according to God's prior speech, human speech comes fully to manifest sinful human pride. "Let us build...so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (11:4). These words directly contradict God's commands for humans to exist and act "in the image of God," to make a name for the Creator and to "rule over [and] fill the earth" (1:26-28). Thus, human speech as a whole falls under divine judgment, and is rent into a splintering power which separates human beings. Human speech's inherent capacity to bring humans together is now cursed; thereafter it will animate tribalism and cultural animosity. Thus, humans fall, and their speech with them.

We turn now to the third question: how does the Scriptural narrative describe the redemption of human speech?

The Redemption of Human Speech

We now examine Scripture's portrayal of God's redemption of humanity, remaining mindful of humanity's viceregal role in creation, and how human speech seems particularly to manifest that viceregency.[18]

According to Genesis 3:15, from Woman would come a descendent who would crush the head of the serpent. Read according to the viceregal grammar of Genesis 1-3, this statement anticipates a reassertion of human viceregal rule over the beasts, and particularly the defeat of the rebellious serpent. God does not abandon His design for creation to be ruled by viceregal human beings. Inasmuch as viceregal naming is an inherent part of human viceregency, Genesis 3:15 implies a redemption of viceregal human speech as well.

The next occurrence of human speech in the narrative of Genesis 3 affirms this hope. Adam named his wife "Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living" (3:20). This naming demonstrates a realignment of Adam's words with the

prior words of God. God had commanded humanity to "be fruitful and multiply" (1:28), and God's disciplining words to Woman (3:16) affirmed that childbearing would still be part of creation. Adam's new name for Woman reflects this, and also affirms that God's promise in 3:15 of victory over the serpent would come through Eve's descendants. Woman would theretofore be called "Eve, the mother of the living."

Clearly, however, most of the humans mentioned in Genesis 3-11 have little interest in naming creation or acting in light of God's prior speech; they choose instead to exert oppressive dominion through deceit (4:8-9), threats (4:23-24), and construction projects for the sake of their own names (4:17; 10:10; 11:4). Thus Genesis 3:20 contrasts with the majority of human speech recorded in Genesis 4-11; Adam renaming Woman is human speech exhibiting its redemptive mode, calling to mind not only God's prior words of creation, but also of judgment and promise of future redemption. Redeemed viceregal speech here emerges as human speech naming creation, acknowledging its former goodness and present sin, in light of God's promise.

Generally speaking then, the human speech recorded in these chapters of Genesis differentiates sharply the speech of sinful humanity from the speech of God's people. The wicked speak differently than the righteous (Luke 6:45). This pattern continues throughout the canon of Scripture.[19]

The Old Testament illustrates this differentiation as it recounts the shape and progress of God's redemption of Israel, a redemption which, with the viceregal grammar of Genesis 1-3 in mind, has the effect of reinvesting God's people with authority over creation akin to Adam's original Edenic role.

For example, God's restoration of viceregal rule is evident in the covenants with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The suzerain-vassal form of these covenants implies that God intends the patriarchs to act as vassal kings, and the promise of land implies that the patriarchs would rule over the earth "under God as overlord."[20] The later Davidic theocracy represents a fulfillment of these promises, and is a "typological and imperfect" example of restored human viceregency.[21]

Many of the passages which describe David and the Davidic monarchy do so in terms of the king's re-investiture with viceregal authority over the earth. In Psalm 2, the king anointed by God sits enthroned against the warring pagan rulers, is named God's "Son," and will possess the ends of the earth (2:8-9). In Psalm 8, humanity is crowned over the works of God's hands in a clear reassertion of Genesis 1:26-28's creational structure (8:6-8). In Psalm 45, the anointed king receives dominion over all the nations (45:17). Further, the throne of David is synonymized with the throne of the Lord (1 Chron 28:5; 29:23; 2 Chron 9:8. Cf. Jer. 8:19), and the human upon David's throne sits at the right hand of God (Ps 80:17). The human sitting on God's earthly throne represents the divine rule and glory on earth, akin to Adam's original viceregency in Eden.[22]

In these passages, "God is not himself the anointed king; he is the one who anoints."[23] Here we see that the concept of an "anointed one" fits clearly within the idea that God rules and orders creation through a human who images him in and to the creation. The anointed one is God's viceregent.

If these passages do portray humanity regaining its viceregal position, we might expect also to observe a reanimation of some kind of viceregal naming. The righteous prophets, priests, and kings, "anointed ones" of the Old Testament, exhibit such a reanimation. All these leaders exert their leadership by naming contemporary contexts and events according to prior divine speech. Prophets condemn (1 Kings 17:1, cf. Deut 28:20-24) and approve (2 Kings 19:20-34), priests pray and bless (Lev 9:23, cf. Num 6:22-26); kings rule and sentence (Deut 17:18-19, 2 Kings 22:13), all according to God's prior words of creation, judgment and promise. Israel's righteous leaders regularly exhibit human speech that ascribes to God glory and praise (Exodus 15:1-21; Judges 5:1-31; 1 Samuel 2:1-10; 2 Samuel 22; Isaiah 25).

These anointed ones' speech orders and rules God's people by naming the creation according to prior divine speech, thereby imaging God on earth and guiding others also to do so. Advents of this kind of redeemed human speech provide

glimpses into God putting the world aright, realigning creation with its original viceregal structure.

And yet, the Old Testament as a whole witnesses to Israel's failure, and longs for the arrival of one greater than David. In Isaiah, the Lord's return to Israel is expressed as Israel regaining her anointed king in the line of David (Isa. 9:6-7). The operation of the Holy Spirit upon this expected king results in his right judgment and a reharmonization of the created order such that the infant will play by the hole of the cobra (Isa. 11:6-9). The Messiah's return will reinstate the proper order of humankind ruling over the beasts.

Other prophets forward these same themes (Micah 4:7, 5:1-5. Jer. 23:5-6), and the book of Daniel describes particularly God's re-investiture of humans with authority over the earth.[24] In chapter 7, dominion over all nations is given by the Ancient of Days to "one like a son of man" (7:13-14).[25] The appearance of God's exalted viceregent breaks the dominions of the oppressive, beastly empires (7:1-12), and revisits the idea that humanity will again express God's holy rule over the beasts of the earth.

The New Testament draws from these Old Testament schemas as it describes the exaltation of Jesus Christ, and through him the exaltation believers, over all creation (Heb 2:6-9, Rev 2:26-27).[26] Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament's expectation that the anointed Davidic king would again rule Israel and subdue the nations of the world, saving and exalting God's holy people. This second Adam would restore human viceregency and inaugurate a new creation evocative of Eden.[27]

Hebrews 2:6-9 interprets Psalm 8's fulfillment in Christ, and in that fulfillment anticipates the subjection of all creation to redeemed humanity—*In putting everything under him* [humanity], *God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we see Jesus…* The end-of-time restoration of human rule has begun with the enthronement of Jesus at the Father's right hand. Concomitant with His sacrificial death on the cross for the sins of the world, Jesus pioneers and represents redeemed humanity re-attaining viceregal dominion over the creation.

If Jesus is this Adamic king who restores the divine creational order, His speech marks the reinvestment of human speech with its divinely-intended viceregal function; it is the verbal correlate and key indicator of Christ's perfect imaging of God on earth. Jesus's teaching judges creation rightly, manifesting the renewed human ability to name creation according to the prior speech of God, and therefore ordering and filling the creation with God's glory. The fullness of what the people of God in prior generations had experienced episodically through the words of the just patriarchs, prophets, priests, and kings of Israel now manifests fully in and through Christ's incarnate ministry. Jesus speaks with authority uncommon (Mt 7:29; 9:5-8; Mk 1:22, 27; Lk 4:32), his words command effectively the wind and waves (Mt 8:26; Mk 4:39; Lk 8:25), trees (Mt 21:19; Mk 11:14), demons (Mt 17:18; Mk 5:8; Lk 4:36; 9:42), sickness (Mt 15:28; Lk 7:7; 13:12), physical deformity (Mk 2:11; 3:5; Lk 6:10), and even the dead (Mk 5:41; Lk 7:14; John 11:43). Peter would later reflect that "he committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." (1 Peter 2:22, quoting Isa 53:9).

Beginning during His earthly ministry and continuing after His death and resurrection, Jesus shares with His followers His viceregal exaltation and the redemption of speech which that exaltation entails (Matthew 10:1; Mark 3:13-19; Luke 9:1; 10:1-20; Jn 20:21-23). Christian speech, renewed by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, is redeemed from the Babel curse. The Church uniquely exhibits speech's inherent, now renewed, ability to communalize persons under God, particularly overcoming the national and ethnic barriers that were so enhanced by sin (Acts 2:7-11). The Church, unified in one accord and voice, images God in creation by naming creation according to prior divine speech. Exorcism (Acts 16:18), healing (Acts 3:6; 14:10), and raising the dead (Acts 20:10) all occur at the command of the followers of Jesus (Acts 4:10). Preaching (Acts 2:14-39) and conciliar decisions (Acts 15:12-29) clarify God's call of repentance by interpreting God's prior words and their import for the present moment.

The Holy Spirit specifically equips believers to speak the verbal confession, "Jesus is Lord," in faith and truth (Rom 10:9; 1

Cor 12:3). It seems that this verbal confession of Christ's Lordship is the microcosm and forerunner of all redeemed speech in the believer; it is a foundational observation about the structure of creation which is logically prior to all redeemed viceregal naming of creation. Here is the summative statement of personal assent to all God has done, the verbal indicator that one's life is coming into alignment with all prior divine speech.

In addition to this general redemption of human speech in all believers, in the Holy Spirit's distribution of gifts, particularly among leaders in the Church, we see a particular emphasis on speech. Discussions of the Spirit's speech gifts comprise most of Paul's discussion regarding the spiritual gifts (1 Cor 14). Further, church leaders exhibit exemplary speech (2 Cor. 2:17; 6:7; 1 Tim 4:12; 2 Tim 2:24-25; Titus 2:8; 1 Peter 4:11). This indicates at the very least that human speech functions very importantly within the Church.

Our account here suggests that this emphasis on speech is because of the importance of human speech in expressing the reign of God in creation. As believers participate in Christ's redemption of human viceregal stewardship over creation, believers' speech participates in Christ's redemption of human speech. The Church begins wisely and effectively to name creation for the manifestation of God's glory and reign. The redemption of viceregency refits the speech of all Christians, and manifests particularly in leaders.

And yet, Christian speech is far from perfect. Just as Christ is now enthroned but awaits the submission of all things under him (Heb 2), the Church tastes her exaltation with Christ but has not received the fullness of redeemed viceregal authority. "The kingdom of God has begun to exercise its influence within human history, although its full realization and fulfillment lie in the future."[28]

Likewise, the redemption of human speech looks forward to a future fulfillment. We turn now to the fourth and final question of this section: how does the Scriptural narrative describe the consummation of human speech?

The Consummation of Human Speech

If God's redemption in Christ renews creation into its pre-fall structure, human speech will regain fully its Adamic viceregal naming function at the return of Christ.

The return of Christ in great glory to judge the living and the dead will mark the full restoration of a human to the viceregal throne of God on earth. Christ, a human, judges the earth in God's name (Rev 20:11-15; 22:12), and is joined in that function by God's redeemed people (Mt 19:28; Luke 22:30; 1 Cor 6:3; Rev 20:4). This represents Jesus Christ's coming fully into the lordship of creation, and the concomitant full revivification of the people of God's viceregal position and speech which names the creation according to God's prior speech.

At the consummation, all Christians will join Christ fully in the "revelatory position that had been carried out by prophets, priests, and kings in the Old Testament."[29] The speech of believers will reflect the glory of God such that they will image God as the incarnate Christ does.

The book of Revelation describes a great beast who, mirroring the divine naming project of Christ (Rev 2:17), requires all inhabitants of the earth to receive his mark, which is his name (13:16-18). This act of a beast naming humans represents a maturing of the creational disorder wrought by the first sin. The subsequent condemnation and downfall of the beast by Jesus and His followers (19:11-21) means that the naming project of the new Adam, Jesus Christ, triumphs over the naming project of the beast. Genesis 3:15 is fulfilled; redeemed humanity is silent no more in the presence of the rebelling beast, and condemns it according to God's prior word. Thus, "[t]hey overcame him by the blood of the lamb and the word of their testimony" (Rev 12:11), and in so doing, manifest anew God's intended order for the creation. It is perhaps unsurprising that Scripture portrays redeemed human speech, at the consummation of all things, employed almost exclusively to recount God's mighty salvation in Christ, and to ascribe Him praise (Rev 5:12; 7:10; 11:15; 15:3-4; 19:1-3, 6-8).

This concludes our biblical-theological survey of the creation, fall, redemption, and consummation of human speech.

CHRISTIAN PREACHING: A BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL SKETCH

Our survey of the Scriptural metanarrative has yielded several key ideas regarding the role of human speech in each era of redemptive history.

At creation we found human speech portrayed as a subsidiary project of divine speech. God's speech coexists with and directs divine power; it names and orders creation, and develops and particularizes divine speech that has gone before it. Following after God's speech, human speech, from its first appearance in the canonical story, appears as a thing subsidiary to, yet operating in conjunction with, the speech of God. It is a tool of humanity's viceregal administration, apparently fitted to play a central role in the administration of God's kingdom reign within creation. It seems that human speech functioned as a kind of image of divine speech: naming and ordering creation according to God's prior speech in order to develop and particularize what God has already said.

Though sin damaged speech's ability to function rightly within creation, God's redemption refits human speech. Redeemed viceregal speech emerges after the Fall as human speech naming creation, acknowledging its former goodness and present sin, in light of God's promise. We see the fullness of righteous human speech in Jesus Christ, who provides for the redemption of human speech in his followers.

In light of these ideas, we can reflect generally on what Christian preaching today is. Like Adam naming the animals, the preacher judges creation within his or her contemporary context according to God's prior speech, developing and particularizing the prior words God.

Preaching shares in God's viceregal reinvestiture of humans as the preacher works willingly and humbly under the constraint of God's prior speech to fill the entire earth with divine

wisdom and glory. Preaching is a redeemed human wisely naming creation, and thereby regaining and reasserting true and healed humanity in Christ. More than a trained exegete explaining the contemporary import of an ancient text, more than a chosen and empowered herald announcing a particular message, the preacher, redeemed in Jesus Christ, foreshadows humanity's viceregal representation of God himself. Preaching in this era, then, can be said to be a manifestation of the rule and speech of the already enthroned Jesus Christ as He rules in anticipation of His second advent.

Specifically, the preacher names creation according to the prior speech of God. Using patterns of perception, thought, and speech derived from Scripture, preaching aims to enrealm all aspects of contemporary reality under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In a sermon, then, the preacher strives to place his or her human perception and speech entirely under the holy constraint of Scripture, and exhibits them publicly as realigned to God's kingdom in Jesus Christ. The preacher publicly and willingly participates in the Holy Spirit's redemption of human speech.
A Christian sermon thus manifests the truth that redemption has occurred and is occurring. It proclaims, by its mere existence, "Jesus is Lord," and "repent, for the kingdom of God is at hand." A sermon is a microcosmic re-enactment of Christ's triumph over Satan; like Christ in the desert, it judges the proposals of Satan and the sinful world in light of God's prior speech and rejects them. In Christian preaching, humanity – both preacher and congregation- regains dominion over the serpent; and tastes the beginning of the eschatological beast's demise at Jesus Christ's appearing, and of the ennobling exaltation of redeemed humanity which that appearing will bring.

If this account as a whole is generally accurate, a human speaking for God today, naming creation entirely in congruence with prior divine speech, would constitute an eschatological foretaste of the consummation of human speech.[30] In other words, such human speech would be functioning as God intended human speech to function. This means, inasmuch as Christian preaching today seeks to be faithful to Scripture,

Christian preachers anticipate and partially participate in the full redemption of human speech which will come at the renewal of all things.

CONCLUSION

Christian preaching exists and functions in relation to humankind's viceregal identity. Scripture describes a human stewardship, or viceregency, over creation as God's original design which is now being restored in Jesus Christ. Relatedly, Scripture implies that human speech plays a key role in God's design for humans to rule creation. Within Christ's redemption of humanity, we find a corresponding redemption of human speech.

This essay has offered a fresh proposal for understanding the nature of Christian preaching within this schema: faithful Christian preaching can be said to be redeemed human speech, for preaching is a viceregal act which exerts Christ's restored Adamic authority over the creation.

This paper has proposed that Jesus Christ's enthronement at the right hand of the Father reinvests redeemed humanity with the Adamic viceregal office, and that a key part of this reinvestiture restores viceregal speech to those in Christ. Redeemed viceregal speech is experienced today by the Church in an inaugurated-eschatological manner; faithful preaching is an example of redeemed viceregal speech, and gives foretastes of the future consummation when all human speech will cohere with the truth of God's words and exert God's power.

Faithful preaching, then, is inaugurated eschatological human speech; speech which is publicly and willingly spoken under the constraint of prior divine speech in Scripture, and therefore rooted in Christ's prior death and resurrection and future full enthronement in the new creation. Redeemed viceregal speech is the speech of the image of God, enthroned under God and over creation, fulfilling God's word, "and let them rule" (Genesis 1:26), and expanding God's reign, through speech, toward the end that the earth may be filled with the

knowledge of the glory of the Lord. The consummation will perfectly complete this redemptive process, enthroning Christians with Christ over creation (Rev. 3:21), and thereby investing their speech with a full and regular viceregal authority.[31]

NOTES

1. Thanks are owed to Fr. Adam Gosnell, Aaron Gies, and others whose comments helped shape the current form of this essay.
2. I have written elsewhere regarding the implications of understanding preaching as an act which generates new insights about God in "'Preaching as Theology': A historical sketch of the New Homiletic's native theological habitat." Paper presented at the Evangelical Homiletics Society annual conference, Louisville, Kentucky. October 2015.
3. Especially as summarized in the Nicene Creed.
4. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948). See also *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: the Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos*, ed. Richard B. Gaffin (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1980).
5. George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).
6. Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress, 1993). Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology in Crisis* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 1970).
7. Dan G. McCartney, "Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency," *Westminster Theological Journal* 56:1 (Spring 1994): 1-21.
8. Gregory K. Beale, A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old in the New (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

9. This article is an exercise in what might be termed holistic biblical theology for homiletics. It is thus not an attempt primarily to exegete the plain meaning of the canon, nor to locate particular words from Scripture that may give insight into what preaching is. Thankfully, such studies exist in abundance, and I begin this article aware and receptive of the discrete insights into preaching that those projects have offered to us. If, however, the Scriptures exhibit an inherent unity of structure and message, contemporary homiletics has a further opportunity to describe preaching as an organic, ideological whole in a way that mirrors more of the unity of Scripture itself. Thus, to a reader expecting historical-critical exegesis of Scripture, my work here might easily, and even rightly, be seen to suffer lapses. Nevertheless, this particular project does not seek to bypass critical engagement with Scripture, nor ever to eclipse its plain meaning. Rather, by building on what has come before, this article seeks to bring broader, more synthetic, and more comprehensive patterns of Scriptural thought to bear fruitfully upon our discussions of homiletics today.

10. Meredith G. Kline, Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2006) 75.

11. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*. trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, rev. ed., 1976) 51.

12. Stated differently: God's former naming shapes the course of His future naming, such that his future actions and speech serve to unfold what has gone before. He is faithful to His word.

13. A *viceregent* is one who rules in the name of a sovereign, particularly when the sovereign is not immediately present. The English term *viceregency* denotes the office and/or reign of a viceregent. Theologians have used the term to describe Adam's office under God, yet some also use the term *vicegerency*, which exchanges the "g" with the "r." Due to different transliterations and patterns of use, vicegerency and viceregency are not only spelled nearly the same way but mean nearly exactly the same thing. This seems to have led some scholars to use the two terms interchangeably, and to mistake others' use of one or the other of

the terms. (*Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "viceregency" and "vicegerency").

14. Intertestamental Jewish traditions maintained that Adam naming the animals was connected to his identity as made in the image of God. The naming was part of "maintaining the sacred order of the Edenic sanctuary." John Walton, *Genesis*, 174. Beale also cites Gorman and Hornung in *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 84fn11. Cf. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 83fn7, citing Midrash Genesis 17:4 and Cohen, *Be Fertile and Increase*, 99.

15. "Man's interpretive-naming was no more an autonomous activity than his kingship was an autonomous activity. Though his naming was God-like, it still was something imitative and secondary. Man's role as wise man was rather one of discovering and explicating, of receptively reconstructing the meaning of the things already imparted to them by the Creator." Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 76.

16. It seems best to assume that God's naming of the kingdoms of animals had created a structure of perception from which Adam would particularize names for each individual animal. We here borrow the concept of "structure" from Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ* (Colorado Springs: Helmers & Howard, 1992) 17. "God's revelation of himself…has provided mankind with permanent structures of thought and speech about him."

17. See also Cain's words in Genesis 4:8-9.

18. As Scripture presents God's redemption of humans as an episodic and gradual process, we might expect to find evidence within Scripture's description of that redemption some episodic, gradual occurrences of redeemed viceregal speech. This kind of speech would be human speech reoriented to prior divine speech, human speech which names creation by developing and particularizing what God has previously stated.

19. E.g. "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. The poison of vipers is on their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." (Rom 3:12f); "The words of the reckless pierce like swords, but the tongue of the wise brings

healing." (Prov. 12:18); "The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just" (Psalm 37:30). "And no lie was found in their mouth; they are blameless" (Rev 14:5).

20. Dan G. McCartney, "Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency." *Westminster Theological Journal*, 56:1 (Spring, 1994), [1-21], 3.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid. "When the son of David rules on Zion, the reign of God is properly upon the earth."

23. "The empowerment by the Spirit is why God's vicegerent is 'the anointed one,' the Christ." Dan G. McCartney, "Ecce Homo: The Coming of the Kingdom as the Restoration of Human Vicegerency." *Westminster Theological Journal*, 56:1 (Spring, 1994), [1-21], 4.

24. McCartney, 6.

25. McCartney, 6-7, notes that the Daniel 7 son of man's identity is both particular and communal based on the vision's interpretation in Daniel 7:26-27. In other words, the vision not only concerns Jesus Christ receiving viceregal authority and glory, but all of God's people being restored, in Christ, to the Adamic viceregal position.

26. McCartney, 4.

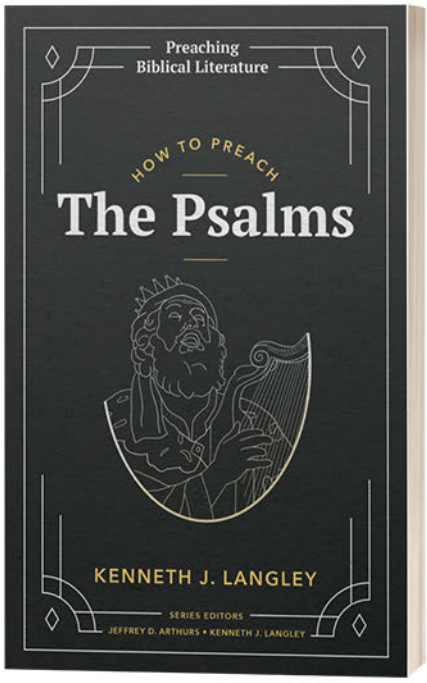
27. McCartney, 8.

28. Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology*: *An Introduction* 3rd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) 563.

29. Gregory K. Beale, A New Testament Biblical Theology, 909.

30. See esp. Gregory K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology*, 88-92; George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993) 596-597.

31. Gregory K. Beale, New Testament Biblical Theology, 909.



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14 PROVEN STRATEGIES FOR PREACHING THE PSALMS

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THE *END* OF ECCLESIASTES: AN INTRODUCTION TO AN ENIGMATIC BOOK

DOUGLAS SEAN O'DONNELL
Elgin, IL

INTRODUCTION

The Westminster Confession of Faith 1.8 states that "all things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all." The book of Ecclesiastes certainly falls under these assertions. Put simply, it is a tough read. You know Ecclesiastes is a tough read when commentaries—books designed to help clarify the complexities—contain sentences such as: "This book is one of the more difficult books in all of Scripture, one which no one has ever completely mastered,"[1] and "Two thousand years of interpretation . . . have utterly failed to solve the enigma,"[2] and "Ecclesiastes is a lot like an octopus: just when you think you have all the tentacles under control—that is, you have understood the book—there is one waving about in the air!"[3] Without overlooking the complexities, in this article I will argue for a simple reading strategy, namely, that Ecclesiastes is best understood as (1) wisdom literature (2) with a unified message (3) that makes better sense in light of the crucified, risen, and returning Christ.[4] By setting this unmasterable masterpiece within its literary and canonical context, I hope to provide the diligent and discerning reader a hermeneutical path to follow, or at least three safe steps to avoid getting pushed off course by some unruly octopus's tentacle.

WISDOM LITERATURE

We begin with genre. Ecclesiastes should be read as wisdom literature. It is not an epistle (like Galatians), a lawbook (like

Leviticus), or an apocalyptic revelation (like Revelation). And as a book of wisdom, it shares characteristics found in Proverbs, Job, and the Song of Songs. There is a plethora of poetry. There are piles of parallelisms (synonymous, antithetic, synthetic, and inverted), as well as many metaphors, similes, hyperboles, alliterations, assonances, and other wonderful wordplays. There is even onomatopoeia! There are proverbs. There are short narratives with pointed, parable-like endings. There are practical admonitions. There are rhythmic-quality refrains. There are rhetorical questions. There are shared key terms, such as "wisdom," "folly," and "my son." There are shared concepts, such as "the fear of God." And as is true of much other biblical wisdom literature, it was written by or about or by *and* about Solomon, the Old Testament's ultimate wisdom sage (1 Kings 4:29–34).[5]

In the Christian canon, the order of the wisdom books is Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. Proverbs begins: "The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel" (Prov. 1:1). Ecclesiastes is introduced with: "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccles. 1:1) = Solomon? The Song starts out: "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's" (Song 1:1). Regarding Ecclesiastes, because Solomon wrote wisdom literature and was literally a "son of David" as well as a "king in Jerusalem" (Eccles. 1:1; see also 1:12), commentators before the nineteenth century thought Solomon was the author. Yet for legitimate reasons,[6] most scholars today shy away from Solomonic authorship.[7] They claim that Ecclesiastes might have been written about Solomon (a fictional autobiography)[8] or in the tradition of Solomon, but probably not by Solomon.

Whatever the truth, for this introductory essay I will call "the Preacher" (as the ESV translates קהלת) "Solomon," as I am not completely convinced by the consensus of modern scholarship.[9] Moreover, I will add the title "Pastor" because of the book's pastoral tone, motive, and message and also because the word קהלת is the Qal feminine singular participle of the verb קהל, which means "to assemble." This verb was used of Solomon when he assembled God's people together for the temple

consecration ceremony in 1 Kings 8:1 (cf. 2 Chron. 5:2). The implied setting for Pastor Solomon's speech—the body of the book of Ecclesiastes itself—is that of an assembly or a 'church' (ἐκκλησίᾳ).[10] This is why Philip Ryken writes that קהלת or the Assembler is 'not so much a teacher in a classroom but more like a pastor in a church. He is preaching wisdom to a gathering of the people of God'.[11] Whoever the original author was (Pastor Solomon, King Qoheleth, Simon the Sage, Ephraim the Editor, or whatever we want to call him)—and whenever he wrote it (tenth century or third century B.C.)—his timeless message is what matters most. We turn to that message next.

A UNIFIED MESSAGE

The book of Ecclesiastes can be, and too often has been, read as a noninspired, postexilic Hebrew wisdom book that is as unorthodox as it is disjointed. I hold that Ecclesiastes should not be read that way. I find it unlikely, as some estimate, that an editor got hold of the raw material of what we now call Ecclesiastes and tried to clean up the contradictions and clear up the confusions by adding a corrective verse here and there as well as tacking on an appropriate theological addendum at the end, and still in the end botched the whole project (i.e., that the canonical book remains slightly unorthodox and disjointed). Rather, the best way to read Ecclesiastes is as God's wisdom literature *with a unified message*.[12] For as we will see there is persistent literary intention and a consistent theological argument to the book.

With that claim and clarification made, it is nevertheless true that if you look at all the separate parts of Ecclesiastes, the book is an enigma. What is meant by saying "the race is not to the swift" (Eccles. 9:11) or by the image "the grinders cease because they are few" (12:3)? Ecclesiastes is also filled with seeming contradictions. How does the maxim "For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow?" (6:12) fit with the refrain-like call to eat, drink, and find satisfaction in our work? And how

does the observation "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money" (5:10) blend with the claim that "money answers everything" (10:19)? Ecclesiastes is like a thousand-piece puzzle taken from the box, thrown on the floor, and kicked around by the kids. But if you discipline the children, quiet the house and your heart, start to lift the scattered pieces from the ground, lay them on a clean table, and slowly, humbly, and prayerfully piece the pieces together, a clear picture emerges.

The obvious edge pieces are all filled with the unmistakable and undesirable word "vanity." In Hebrew it is the word הבל, which is the same Hebrew spelling as the name of the first man to die, Abel (Gen. 4:8), and it is an example of an onomatopoeic word! As Daniel Fredericks notes: "One must aspirate twice with the initial he-sound, then again with the soft bet, pronounced as '-vel'. So the speaker illustrates what the nature of a breath is simply by saying the word."[13] This word is found thirty-eight times throughout the book, most prominently at the bookends—"Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity" (Eccles. 1:2; cf. 12:8). This word is translated in various ways, including temporary, transitory, meaningless, senseless, futile, ephemeral, contingent, incomprehensible, incongruous, absurd, empty, and more visually as a striving after wind, a bubble, smoke that curls up into the air,[14] mist, or breath/mere breath.[15]

> Man is like a breath [הבל];
> his days are like a passing shadow. (Ps. 144:4)
>
> Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,
> and my lifetime is as nothing before you.
> Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath [הבל]! (Ps. 39:5)

However, we are to translate הבל (in most contexts 'breath' is best), look below at the short list of Solomon's long list of mist.[16] What is like hot breath on a cold day disappearing into the air?

Every effort	1:14; 2:11, 17, 19
Any fruit of our labors	2:15, 21, 26
Pleasure	2:1
Life	3:19; 6:4, 12; 7:15; 9:9
Youth	11:10
Success	4:4
Wealth	4:7–8; 5:10; 6:2
Desire	6:9
Frivolity	7:6
Popularity	4:16; 8:10
Injustice	8:14
All future events	11:8
Everything!	1:2; 12:8

Ecclesiastes 1:2 begins the curse-filled concept: "Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity." In Hebrew, as in English, there is a nice wordplay on this superlative genitive: הבל הבלים. As "the Song of Songs" is the best of all songs, "the God of gods" is the greatest or the only God, and 'the heaven of heavens' is the highest heaven, so Solomon sounds this sad and sober message of "vanity of vanities"—everything is utterly futile. Put differently, because of God's curse on creation (the consequences of the fall recorded in Genesis 3:14–19 are assumed throughout),[17] in all human endeavors we cannot find much meaning or sustainable joy in this world or present age.

The thirty-eightfold repetition of הבל are the dark pieces to the puzzle. They constitute the black border that connects to the dark gray pieces of death, injustice, and other bleak realities. Yet like a Rembrandt, in which darkness and light play off each other and blend together in seemingly inexplicable ways, those gray pieces of Ecclesiastes do eventually connect with אלהים, who is at the center of the picture and is bright in all his incompressible glory and wisdom.

This God of glory and wisdom is touched, if you will stay with the puzzle analogy, only through the *fear of God*, which is highlighted five times in Ecclesiastes (Eccles. 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12–

13; 12:13). This is the central concept of biblical wisdom literature, and, as it relates to Ecclesiastes, we can summarize the idea as *trembling trust*. Those who, in the midst of all the hard truths and awful troubles of this fallen world, come before the Lord with trembling trust are given by him the gift of grateful obedience, steady contentment, and surprising joy.[18] The puzzle of Ecclesiastes includes the black border, the seemingly random gray pieces, the white, bright center, and the multicolored blessings given to those who have given themselves to God. "The fear of God . . . is not only the beginning of wisdom; it is also the beginning of . . . purposeful life."[19]

In order to arrive at the picture above, I have taken key words—such as vanity (thirty-eight times), wise/wisdom (fifty-three times), God (forty times), toil (thirty-three times), give/gives/given (sixteen times), death (mentioned or alluded to twenty-one times), sun, as in "under the sun" (thirty-three times), and joy and derivatives such as rejoice, enjoy, enjoys, enjoyed, and enjoyment (seventeen times)—as well as key themes such as God and humanity, futility and fleetingness, time and chance, gain and portion, work and toil, wealth and poverty, power and domination, wisdom and folly, justice and judgment, eating, drinking, and pleasure[20]—and attempted to show what Ecclesiastes looks like. It might be better, however, to simply state what the unified message is.

Three authors on Ecclesiastes have summarized the book as follows. (These are the three best I have found.) Michael Eaton claims that Ecclesiastes "defends the life of faith in a generous God by pointing to the grimness of the alternative."[21] Jeffrey Meyers says that "true wisdom" that Ecclesiastes offers us "is to fear God and keep his commandments, to receive and use the gifts of God with joy and gratitude."[22] And Sidney Greidanus writes this excellent summary admonition: "Fear God in order to turn a vain, empty life into a meaningful life which will enjoy God's gifts."[23]

Another way to get at the unified message is to answer the key questions raised by Pastor Solomon. The first key question is the one raised in Ecclesiastes 1:3, "What does man gain by all the

toil at which he toils under the sun?" The implied answer is "nothing." Death makes all human work and wisdom and wealth and pleasure הבל. From a mere observation of this world and its workings, human work, wisdom, wealth, and pleasure appear to be of no eternal value or significance.

The second key question follows that blunt and realistic reality: "In light of such vanity—the fact that our work and knowledge and pleasures and possessions are ultimately made futile by death—how, then, should we live this temporary life under the sun?" The answer to that riddle is simple. We are to live our earthly lives by abandoning human "illusions of self-importance" and "all pretense of pride" and by embracing divine wisdom.[24] This is done, according to Ecclesiastes, by trusting the Lord and doing what he says: "[This is] the end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments, for that is the whole duty of everyone" (Eccles. 12:13, NRSV). Obedient trust is the *end* (or goal) of Ecclesiastes.

IN LIGHT OF THE CRUCIFIED, RISEN, AND RETURNING CHRIST

That might be the end of Ecclesiastes (its goal and its conclusion), but it is not the end (the conclusion) of God's story of salvation. When the last chapter of Ecclesiastes was completed, hundreds of chapters in God's inspired book were yet to be written. Soon Ezra and Jeremiah, as well as Peter and Paul and all the others, would pick up their pens and add their voices to the divine drama ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.

While Ecclesiastes contains no obvious messianic prophecy or promise, and while the New Testament rarely quotes from or alludes to the book, the ultimate concern of the Christian preacher should be to preach the words of "the Preacher" in light of the words and works of the Word incarnate. This is not a concern or commission laid upon pastors by their local churches or the denomination in which they are ordained, but by Jesus himself. The Lord taught his followers to read the Old Testament with him in mind—"everything written about *me*

in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms" (Luke 24:44). Even "the Psalms" (or "the Writings"), which includes Ecclesiastes, bear witness to him (John 5:39) and can "make [us] *wise* for salvation" (2 Tim. 3:15). So woe is we if Christian preachers preach through Ecclesiastes as though Jesus had never touched his feet on this vain earth!

Derek Kidner writes that one way to read Ecclesiastes is to see "the shafts of light" (i.e., the call-to-joy refrain) and "the author's own position and conclusions" to get to the purpose of the book.[25] To that helpful reading strategy, we may add that if we read the book through the lens of Jesus Christ—the true embodiment of wisdom who has crushed the curse of death on the cross, brought hope through his resurrection, and will bring justice at his return—we actually understand the book better. Put simply, the best way to read Ecclesiastes, as noted in the introduction, is as (1) God's wisdom literature (2) with a unified message (3) that makes better sense in light of the crucified, risen, and returning Christ.

Earlier, I painted the picture of Ecclesiastes—with its black border, shades of gray, and white, bright center. There is another image of Ecclesiastes that I have found tremendously helpful in reading the whole book. It is the banner that Marge Gieser created for the original book jacket for Ryken's commentary on Ecclesiastes, which is aptly titled *Why Everything Matters*. The banner has three colors—black, gold, and red. In the black section, which takes up the bottom third of the banner, are words such as meaningless, wearisome, twisted, toil, nothing, grievous, madness, and folly. Those words are in gold. Above the black section is a red section, also with words, such as pleasure, contentment, abundance, and joy. Those are also written in gold. The black and red sections are divided by a slanted, slightly off-center gold cross that is faintly lifted above the rest of the fabric. About the design the artist wrote:

> Words such as meaningless, wearisome, . . . folly, etc., cover the background of the banner, describing life as it really is. Life without God is futile. But for the believer,

> redeemed by the blood of Christ, life takes on meaning, and there is hope for all of life's tough questions.
>
> The colors included in the banner all have a meaning. Black symbolizes life lived in struggle and confusion with no hope; the gold of the cross that cuts through the entire design symbolizes the redeeming work of Christ, who intercedes for us at the right hand of the Father in Heaven; the red background at the top of the design stands for Christ's blood shed for us, offering us a hopeful and eternal worldview.[26]

Jesus Christ redeemed humanity from the vanity that Pastor Solomon so wrestled with and suffered under by subjecting himself to our temporary, meaningless, futile, incomprehensible, incongruous, absurd, smoke-curling-up-into-the-air, mere-breath, vain life. He was born under the sun. He toiled under the sun. He suffered under the sun. He died under the sun. But in his subjection to the curse of death by his own death on the cross, this Son of God "redeemed us from the curse" (Gal. 3:13). By his resurrection, he restored meaning to our toil. And by his return, he will exact every injustice and elucidate every absurdity as he ushers those who fear the Lord into the glorious presence of our all-wise, never-completely-comprehensible God.

LOVE AND DEATH…AND GOD!

In Woody Allen's comedy *Love and Death*, Allen's character, Boris, and Diane Keaton's character, Sonia, have the following exchange:

> *Boris*: Sonia, what if there is no God?
> *Sonia*: Boris Demitrovich, are you joking?
> *Boris:* What if we're just a bunch of absurd people who are running around with no rhyme or reason.
> *Sonia:* But if there is no God, then life has no meaning. Why go on living? Why not just commit suicide?

> *Boris:* Well, let's not get hysterical; I could be wrong. I'd hate to blow my brains out and then read in the papers they'd found something.[27]

In the small book of Ecclesiastes we discover a great God who brings rock-solid meaning to everything under the sun by means of his Son. We discover that he brings meaning to human work, learning, possessions, and pleasures. We discover that he will bring meaning even to the world's accidents, injustices, oppressions, absurdities, and evils. Ecclesiastes is a tough read, but a good one. It is worth studying, understanding, and teaching this enigmatic book's authentic truths. Take and read. Take and teach.

Take and Teach!

This essay has focused on hermeneutics. We might say, in the context of the usual articles in this journal, that its value is that it reinforces the idea that foundational to biblical preaching is spending the time eyeing the inspired Word until what is obscure is obvious, or at least plain enough to preach it to our parishioners. Let me conclude, however, with some practical advice on homiletics, particularly related to helping pastors and Bible teachers take on the thrilling task of teaching this tricky text.

I will briefly state *why* God's workmen and workwomen should take and teach this text, and then cover *how* the sacred task can be done. The *why*, now more than ever, is evident. As I pen this paper, the COVID-19 pandemic is frontpage daily news around the world. Tens of thousands have died, and most people, for perhaps the first time in their lives, have the dominant themes of Ecclesiastes pinned to their consciences. What is the value of our lives and labors? How do we respond to the power and fear of death? Can joy be found at the end of this terrible tether? What does the God of the Bible have to say about such practical and pressing matters? Where can wisdom be found? In light of what this book teaches about God and our work, possessions, pleasures, mortality, and the coming judgment, how then shall we live? At the end of 2020, the book of Ecclesiastes

provides God's perfect vision for the coming year and months ahead.

By answering the question *why* preachers and teachers should take and teach Ecclesiastes, hopefully I have provided enough motivation to add Ecclesiastes as a small group Bible study and/or a sermon series. I will conclude by showing you *how* to develop a teaching series and gather the needed resources.

First, get your head around the hermeneutics. How does one read Ecclesiastes? Obviously, the body of this article attempts to help. Other resources include my book *The Beginning and End of Wisdom* (Crossway, 2011), David Gibson's *Living Life Backwards* (Crossway, 2017), Sidney Greidanus's *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes* (Eerdmans, 2010), and Barry Webb's *Five Festal Garments* (InterVarsity, 2000). Also check out the introductions to scholarly commentaries, such as Daniel Fredericks (Apollos, 2010) and Craig Bartholomew (Baker, 2009).

Second, divide the text of Ecclesiastes into preaching pericopes. If you desire to do a short series on Ecclesiastes, I suggest six sermons/lessons on these texts: 1:1–11; 2:1–11; 3:1–15; 5:1–7; 11:1–12:8; 12:13–14. If you want to tackle the whole text, feel free to follow the outline I used when I preached Ecclesiastes.[28]

1:1–2	The *End* of Ecclesiastes: An Introduction
1:3–11	Why I Wake Early
1:12–18	A Crack in the Window of Wisdom
2:1–11	The Hollow House of Hedonism
2:12–26	Enjoyment East of Eden
3:1–15	The Terrific Truth about Time
3:16–22	Sights Under the Sun
4:1–16	It Is not Good for the Children of Man to Be Alone
5:1–7	Sandals Off, Mouth Shut
5:8–6:9	Grievous Evils, Great Joys
6:10–7:14	Instructions from the Grave
7:15–29	Finding the Fear of God in a Crooked World
8:1–15	Living within the Limits to the Limit

8:16–9:12	What to Know about Knowing Nothing
9:13–10:20	Dead Flies, a Serpent's Bite, and Twitter
11:1–12:8	Before the Evil Days Come
12:9–14	Repining Restlessness

Third, to aid your exegesis further, and provide helpful illustrations and applications, use concise commentaries and homiletical commentaries on Ecclesiastes. Besides my commentary (P&R, 2017), I recommend Heim (IVP Academic, 2019), Shaw (Banner of Truth, 2019), Akin (Holman, 2016), Meyers (Athanasius Press, 2013), Ryken (Crossway, 2010), Limburg (Eerdmans, 2006), Wilson (Canon Press, 1999), and Kidner (InterVarsity, 1976).[29] Moreover, when I prepared to preach Ecclesiastes, I found Greek myths, church history, Christian hymns, popular songs, classic odes, modern poetry, plays, novels, television sitcoms, films, and comics rife with relevant lines, stories, and ideas.[30] From Huxley's *Brave New World* to Anne Bradstreet's "The Four Ages of Man," and from John Calvin to *Calvin and Hobbes*, gather the necessary illustrations to bring God's living Word to life in the imaginations of God's people.

Ecclesiastes is indeed a tough read! But, Lord willing, the tools and resources provided above will inspire you to take on the challenge of understanding and applying this often enigmatic but always relevant book for the good of Christ's church and the glory of his name.

NOTES

1. Martin Luther, "Notes on Ecclesiastes," in *Luther's Works*, trans. and ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, 56 vols. (St. Louis: Concordia, 1972), 15:7.
2. R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, Old Testament Guides (Sheffield, UK: JSOT Press, 1989), 12.
3. Craig G. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms (Grand Rapids: Baker

Academic, 2009), 13, summarized in Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 188. Gregory of Nyssa's analogy of "wrestling in the gymnasium" is good, too! *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed. S. G. Hall (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 33.

4. Portions of this article were taken with permission from Ecclesiastes; a Reformed Expository Commentary by Douglas O'Donnell ISBN 978-1-59638-398-2 by P&R Publishing Co. P O Box 817, Phillipsburg N. J. 08865 www.prpbooks.com.

5. Cf. 1 Kings 3:12; 5:12; 1 Chron. 29:25; 2 Chron. 1:12.

6. For a helpful, short summary of the grounds for non-Solomonic authorship, see Michael V. Fox, *Ecclesiastes*, JPS Bible Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2004), x.

7. What Brevard Childs wrote over three decades ago still well summarizes the situation today: "There is an almost universal consensus, shared by extremely conservative scholars, that Solomon was not the author." *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 582. But a growing number of conservative scholars now think Solomonic authorship probable (e.g., Walter Kaiser, Duane Garrett, Daniel Fredericks, James Bollhagen, and possibly Richard Schultz).

8. It might be that Ecclesiastes is a "royal autobiography," that is, that "the person who calls himself Qoheleth pretends to be Solomon in order to argue that if Solomon cannot find satisfaction and meaning in life in these areas, no one can." Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 7.

9. For a critique of the consensus, see Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, New American Commentary 14 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 254–67; and Daniel C. Fredericks, 'Ecclesiastes', in Daniel C. Fredericks and Daniel J. Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 31–36.

10. The Septuagint's rendering of קהלת is Ἐκκλησιαστοῦ from which we get, via the Vulgate (*Liber Ecclesiastes*), the English word for church (*ekklesia*). As Jerome notes, "Now the name 'Ecclesiastes' in the Greek language means 'one who assembles the gathering' (that is, the church)." *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, trans. Richard J. Goodrich and David J. D. Miller, *Ancient Christian Writers* 66 (New York: Newman, 2012), 33–34.
11. Philip Graham Ryken, *Ecclesiastes: Why Everything Matters*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 16.
12. Since we do not know the prehistory of the book, Michael V. Fox's proposal that we read Ecclesiastes as a literary whole makes good sense. "Frame-Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qohelet," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 48 (1977): 83–106. Moreover, I agree with Garrett that the book is "seamlessly joined" because of "literary technique," not later redactions. *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 263.
13. Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," 68.
14. See William Ernest Henley, "Of the Nothingness of Things," in *Poems* (London: David Nutt, 1919), 94–97. Jerome suggested "smoky vapor." *Commentary on Ecclesiastes*, 36.
15. For example, Fredericks's translation is "'Breath of breaths," said Qoheleth, 'Breath of breaths. Everything is temporary!'" "Ecclesiastes," 65. Robert Alter's is "Merest breath . . . . All is mere breath." Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2010), 346.
16. From Fredericks, "Ecclesiastes," 30–31.
17. As Barry G. Webb summarizes: הבל "is not simply a brute fact, something which happens to be there without cause or explanation. It is a judgment, a condition, imposed on the world, and on human beings in particular, by God. It is a manifestation of the fall and, positively, of God's rule as creator and judge." *Five Festal Garments: Christian Reflections on the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 10 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 104.
18. Eccles. 2:24; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7–9; 11:9–12:7.

19. Michael A. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 16 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 48.
20. See Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. O. C. Dean Jr., Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004), 1–5. I added "justice and judgment."
21. Eaton, *Ecclesiastes*, 44.
22. Jeffrey Meyers, *A Table in the Mist: Meditations on Ecclesiastes*, Through New Eyes Bible Commentary (Monroe, LA: Athanasius Press, 2006), 17.
23. Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Ecclesiastes: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 22.
24. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 278.
25. Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes: An Introduction to Wisdom Literature* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 93.
26. See "About the Book Jacket," in Ryken, *Ecclesiastes*, 319.
27. Woody Allen, quoted in Thomas V. Morris, *Making Sense of It All: Pascal and the Meaning of Life* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 51.
28. See Douglas Sean O'Donnell, *Ecclesiastes: Enjoyment East of Eden*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2017).
29. If you can find it, see Leupold (Baker, 1952).
30. For a list of illustrations, see O'Donnell, *Ecclesiastes*, 241–48.

"APPLICABLE" BUT NOT "OBEYABLE"! REVIEW ESSAY: *THE LOST WORLD OF THE TORAH*

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The Lost World of the Torah is part of InterVarsity's *Lost World* series and the second tome co-authored by the Waltons, a father and son duo.[1] The senior member is professor of Old Testament at Wheaton College and Graduate School (and author of several monographs in the same series); the junior Walton is a graduate student at St. Andrews. The book has five parts: methodology, function of Ancient Near East (ANE) legal collections, ritual and Torah, context of Torah, and the ongoing significance of Torah. Each part is composed of a number of "propositions," one to a chapter (the consistent style of the *Lost World* series), for a total of twenty-three such assertions. While I esteem all the Waltons' productions, I have not been much of a fan of this proposition-oriented structure. Far too many propositions are interconnected, necessitating as many, or more, "hyperlinking" notations that distract. I would much rather have seen each of these tomes organized more broadly.[2] Nonetheless, this work, like their others, is very readable, stimulating, and, needless to say, provocative.

I appreciate the authors' respect for the field of pragmatics, particularly related to genre, their deference to original settings of inscriptions, and their concern for the proper use of the Torah: "We must … seek understanding of how genre works, what the paragraphs of legal sayings meant in their context, and what the significance (if any) they should have for people today" (3).

TORAH: NOT A LEGAL CODE

As do all of the *Lost World* undertakings, this one also emphasizes that "[the] Bible is written for us but it is not written to us (not in our language or in the context of our culture)" (13–14). How exactly this is the case for the *Torah* and what the ramifications are for the modern reader is the burden of this volume.

The Waltons assert that documents relating to law in the ANE were not "codified legislation"—"they were not *prescriptive* documents establishing law. Instead they *described* rulings (whether through actual verdicts or hypothetical examples)—reporting decisions" (19–20; emphases original). So, according to the authors, when discussing the Torah we should abandon "words like code, legislation, prescription, coercion, obedience, and obligation" and instead adopt "words like wisdom, illustration, circumscription, description, instruction, comprehension, and assimilation of ideas" (36; emphases removed). Now it is certainly true that most of the laws of the ANE were casuistic (the "if …, then …" model of case law, as opposed to the apodictic style, giving definitive injunctions/prohibitions) and therefore rightly "descriptive." However, that does not change the fact those were, indeed, laws. As Westbrook noted, "The casuistic form … was itself a process of editing, creating *a uniform body of rules* indifferent to their origins."[3] The nature of the documents does not negate their being rules of some sort, promulgated by an appropriate authority that expected adherence to them by addressees.

The Waltons give three reasons for not viewing the Torah as a legal code: it is non-comprehensive; it is non-prescriptive; and it is non-reusable.[4]

Non-comprehensive

Firstly, they argue that the Torah cannot be legislation because it is not comprehensive enough. Most ANE legal collections, including Israel's Torah, say the authors, "do not even try to be comprehensive; many important aspects of life and society are

left unaddressed. … These documents could not possibly serve as codified legislation to regulate every aspect of society" (29–30). And again, "trying to construct a moral system from the teachings of the Torah (or even from the New Testament, which is not comprehensive either) is like trying to build a skyscraper out of seven two-by-fours and a pot of glue. It simply cannot be done" (214): the Torah "does not provide a full moral system" (206). But does lack of comprehensiveness mean absence of imperatival force? What if God chose to regulate some matters and not others, leaving the latter to be subsumed by broader, non-specific directives, even those generic ones enjoining love for God and neighbor? I would argue that whatever guidance God provides for the faith and praxis of his people is *moral*, and whatever he reveals *is* full enough for his purposes and sufficient to accomplish his goals for mankind. Indeed, adequacy is the key to any body of law, not comprehensiveness. New laws are constantly being added to the fifty-four Titles of the United States Code (as of this writing); legislative activity continues. Despite this non-comprehensive and seemingly inexhaustible nature of the US Code, it is a system of legislation that may not be disregarded by citizens and entities of this nation.

Non-Prescriptive

Secondly, the Waltons declare that "the intention of the Torah is to produce knowledge, not obedience; it was not given because Yahweh wanted Israel specifically to do anything. What it offers is not an imperative but a choice" (162). But is not a call to make the right choice a call to obedience—choosing to do what God would have his people do? And if there are consequences for the choice one may make, there clearly is an imperatival force operating in the divine offer of alternatives. Choice does not diminish obedience in the least: Adam and Eve chose to disobey.[5] Noting that the Hebrew verbs "to obey" (שָׁמַע, *shama'*) and "to keep" (שָׁמַר, *shamar*) are linked to the voice of God, the Waltons observe that "obeying the voice of the Lord is always a good idea, but it should not be equated to obeying laws" (42). But divine

voice and divine law are often considered equivalent; even the giving of the law was by the "great voice" of Yahweh (Deut 5:22). And אִמְרָה, *'imrah,* "utterance/word," occurs nineteen times in Psalm 119, as one of the many synonyms for תּוֹרָה (*torah,* "law"). Besides, Isa 5:24 parallels "the תּוֹרָה of Yahweh Sabaoth" with "the utterance [אִמְרָה] of the Holy One of Israel"; likewise, Deut 33:9 parallels "covenant" with "utterance." In fact, Lev 26:14 equates "obey [שָׁמַע] Me" and "carry out all these commandments" (see Deut 4:1; 5:1; 28:1; etc.). Likewise, for שָׁמַר; several texts make it clear that the "keeping" is of divine commandments (see Deut 4:2, 40; 5:10, 29; 6:2, 17).[6]

The Waltons' declaration that "legislation carries a sense of 'you ought'; instruction carries a sense of 'you will know'" (45) is not sustainable. In the canon of Scripture, even narrative implicitly carries a "you ought." In fact, this is true for any communication intended for application. When a wife tells her husband, "The trash is full," though an indicative verb is employed, who could deny that the utterance functions as an imperative?[7] The Waltons, denying such authorial *doings,* assert that the verbal form of Lev 19:2 ("you *will* be holy") is "indicative, not imperative" (54–55). According to them, this verse is asserting a fixed fact that the Israelites *will* become holy by divine fiat: "It is a status that he [God] gives and it cannot be gained or lost by the Israelites' own efforts or failures" (55). While this may be true of positional holiness, the imperfect verb form תִּהְיוּ, *tihyu,* has imperatival force and impacts practical holiness as, for example, in 2 Chr 30:7 and Zech 1:4: "You *will not be* [וְאַל־תִּהְיוּ, *w'al-tihyu*] like your fathers." That is not a prediction of the future, but a prescription for behavior. As with the English future tense, when such an imperfect verb form is used by a superior who has the power of imposition, it can carry the force of a decree (also in Ps 32:9).[8]

Non-reusable

Thirdly, the Waltons claim that "the legal sayings are presented in the context of a covenant between Yahweh and Israel, in which case they serve as stipulations to that covenant agreement" (39). The covenantal context has changed, and therefore, apparently, those stipulations are non-reusable in a changed setting. It is, no doubt, true that the circumstances of the ancient provenance of OT documents and those of modern readership of Scripture are drastically different. But the OT period itself was not monolithic and uniform; contexts changed quite dramatically even within that era, from the immediate post-exodus age, to the amphictyony, and then to the monarchy, exile, and even to multiple post-exilic returns, followed by Roman rule over Palestine. In every such shift one would have to reinterpret the OT for one's own time and space.[9] In fact, that transaction of reinterpretation also needs to be performed on the NT by modern readers, since the socio-cultural-anthropological milieu of this archaic corpus is also vastly different from that of today. So an absolute stance such as the Waltons take forces us to abandon not only the Torah, but all sixty-six books of Scripture, at least for the purposes of application.

In the Torah, law is embedded in narrative and so we have "stories … poking out through the repeated patterns and linguistic formulas …, despite the parsimonious language, the minimalist descriptions, and the paucity of detail."[10] Thus the role of the original free-standing document (whatever it was) has undergone alteration; in its fresh setting in the canon of Scripture it functions as the author/redactor of the final form intended it to. Therefore, what must be respected and privileged in any era and hemisphere is the thrust/force/import of these final canonical forms that are now part of Scripture, not the function of putative progenitor documents and their creators' intentions. If one follows this trajectory, then the fundamental issue is not whether the Torah, in its freestanding status, was legislation or not. Rather, it is: What is the function of this *final form* of the Torah in the canon of Scripture, construed and read as such by

the people of God? While the Waltons agree that "none of these [legal collections in the Torah] are in a literary context of legislation; they have been adopted for secondary (or even tertiary) use" (39), their argument throughout *The Lost World of the Torah* is that the role of these lists as free-standing ephemera was not to legislate or guide morality, but to serve as illustrations and examples of "order" and "wisdom." And they work with the assumption that this character of the prototypical texts is carried over with those documents into their new residence in the canon (94). But the fact is that canonicity changes the role of its constituent books, both in the OT and the NT. All such texts, whatever their functions may have been in their independent existences without the canon, now take on a unique role within the canon as inspired and authoritative guides for the faith and praxis of God's people—what I call an emergent property of canonicity.

So, on the one hand we have the fairly common understanding of the Torah that the Waltons rightly deplore: "Modern Bible readers are inclined to regard the Torah as universal because they have assumed that it is God's law, that it is to be equated with a moral system, that it reflects God's (unchanging) ideal, and that it is in the Bible—God's revelation to all his people" (101). This extreme takes the law as something that needs to be obeyed as such, everywhere and in every age, though its advocates arbitrarily pick the laws they deem worthy of adherence. This polemical intention of *The Lost World of the Torah* I do appreciate; it is a much-needed corrective. But on the other hand, we have the Waltons asserting that the Torah has nothing to do with either legislation of life or morality of behavior. According to them, like other legal documents of the ANE, the Torah is simply a collection of model verdicts, legal declarations that, in a very general sense, guide "wisdom." But the repetitive textual stress in this corpus on keeping and obeying divine commandments is not commensurate with such a hands-off approach to life and behavior as the Waltons attribute to the Torah. Is there an option that avoids these two extremes?

A FRESH LOOK AT INTERPRETATION FOR APPLICATION

Over the last decade, I have argued for an approach to textual interpretation from the vantage point and interests of a preacher expounding pericopes of Scripture for application to real life. The *media res* that I propose, primarily a preaching hermeneutic, provides a fresh option for interpreting for application not only the Torah, but all other texts of Scripture, both in the OT and the NT.

I suggest that a distinction—admittedly artificial but practically useful—be made between "obeyability" and "applicability" of texts. Every pericope of Scripture that carries a divine demand is "obeyable" if that demand can be put into practice straightaway, without any particular thought or concern for its relevance to the one "obeying" it.[11] Levirate marriage? Well, I need to marry my sister-in-law if my brother dies. Cultivate particular plants in particular seasons? Yes, get the fertilizer ready. Do things with ephods, altars, and Urim and Thummim? Sure, let's engage in some fortune-telling. Stone that rebellious child? Right, hand out the rocks. And so on. On the other hand, "application" calls for more work, particularly in answering the question: How is the ancient text relevant to the modern "applier"?

The ancient laws of the Torah, as well as the rest of biblical literature, are, as the Waltons agree, uniquely and exquisitely contextual, documents addressed to particular peoples, billeted in a particular geographical location, sojourning in a particular era, maintaining a particular cultic organization, constrained by a particular culture, and supporting a particular political configuration. None of those laws or divine demands are, on the surface, relevant to a Christian living in Dallas, TX, in 2020. What can one do to overcome this "distanciation"?[12] The interpreter should first discern what the author is *doing* with what he is saying—the thrust of the text, or as I call it the theology of the pericope—and then "apply" that thrust to contemporary life. In other words, "obeyability" (direct and straightforward) is to be

distinguished from "applicability" (indirect, via discernment of pericopal theology). Allow me to explain.

Theological Hermeneutics

I have argued elsewhere that every pericope of Scripture depicts a facet of an ideal world that God would have (its thrust/force/import: pericopal theology), the authorial *doing* in that pericope—the pragmatics of the text, as opposed to the authorial saying—the semantics of the text.[13] So, each pericope is God's gracious invitation to mankind to live in his ideal world by abiding by the theology of that pericope—i.e., the requirement of God's ideal world (the *world in front of the text*) as called for in that pericope. And as mankind accepts that divine invitation and applies the theology of the pericope, pericope by pericope God's people are progressively and increasingly inhabiting this ideal world, adopting its values, and abiding by its requirements. Thus, interpretation for application has two moves: discerning theology and deriving application.

Since the only one to comprehensively and perfectly fulfill the requirement of every pericope in Scripture is Jesus Christ, the perfect Man, every pericope is, in essence, portraying what it means to be more like Christ, i.e., a facet of Christlikeness, a pixel of the *Christicon*. The whole canon thus projects the plenary image of Christ. Thus, pericope by pericope, through application, God's people become increasingly more Christlike, as they align themselves to the image of Christ displayed in each pericope. After all, God's ultimate goal is to conform his children into the "image" (εἰκών, *eikōn*) of his Son, Christ (Rom 8:29). And so we have a *christiconic* hermeneutic.[14] In other words, pericopal theology tells us *what* Christ looks like, and application directs us

to *how* we can look more like him, in our own particular circumstances. Such applications of pericopal theology, being specific to the situation and circumstances of the particular audience, is the responsibility of leaders of congregations to derive and suggest to their flock, with pastoral love, wisdom, and authority: this is spiritual formation and discipleship from Scripture.[15]

Legal Hermeneutics

Such a theological hermeneutic has its analogy in legal hermeneutics of the modern day.[16] Valid application must be made of the text of canonical law in situations and circumstances distant from, and unforeseen at, the event of its original inscription. For instance, the U.S. Constitution empowers Congress "to raise and support armies," "to provide and maintain a navy," and "to make rules for the government and regulation of the land and naval forces" (Article I, ¶8, clauses 12 and 13). As written, this edict is silent about any support for an air force. However, despite the absence of any explicit reference in the Constitution to this branch of the armed forces, the U.S. government continues to raise and support, provide and maintain, govern and regulate an air force. Presumably, the terms *army* and *navy* in the aforementioned late eighteenth-century document projected a broader category—*all military undertakings*. The pragmatic thrust of the declaration[17] was to designate any conceivable military force as worthy of establishment and maintenance by Congress; such an intention would necessarily include an *air force* and, potentially, a *space force*, or even a *robot force*, as future applications.

FACETS OF MEANING		
Text	**Pragmatics**	**Application**
army, navy	*all military undertakings*	air/space/ robot force …

Of course, no canonical corpus can be expected to bear the burden of explicitly expressing all possible applications for all possible people in all possible future times. As U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice Marshall observed:

> A constitution, to contain an accurate detail of all the subdivisions of which its great powers will admit, and of all the means by which they may be carried into execution, would partake of the prolixity of a legal code, and could scarcely be embraced by the human mind. It would probably never be understood by the public. Its nature, therefore, requires, that only its great outlines should be marked, its important objects designated, and the minor ingredients which compose those objects be deduced from the nature of the objects themselves.[18]

Likewise, for the Bible to direct every possible twist and turn in the life of every individual Christian and of every community of God in every millennium in every land would be impossible. Instead a canonical *world in front of the text* is projected, with each pericope of the text portraying a slice of this plenary world, each with its own pericopal theology, i.e., God's intentions for how his ideal world should function (or, with regard to the *Christicon*, how each child of God may be conformed to the image of the Son of God). Such textual intentions are therefore necessarily generic, capable of being applied to a variety of situations/individuals in a variety of ways.[19] With regard to the Bible, this specification of application is the task of the preacher; with regard to the U.S. Constitution, it is the task of the judge. Both preacher and judge bring the pericopal theologies/transhistorical intentions of their respective texts to bear upon the particulars of the people they are responsible for, lives in the pews and lives before the bar.

Consider the example of Eph 5:18—"Be not drunk with wine." While this textual fragment is not a pericope or even a full sentence in the Greek, focusing on the word "wine" in this verse will be profitable for the purpose of illustration.[20] The imperative in this verse demands that one not be drunk with *wine*. The

transhistorical intention of the text—for biblical texts, this is pericopal theology—is clearly concerned with *all alcoholic drinks*, thus prohibiting drunkenness with *vodka*, *beer*, *Scotch*, or one's libation *du jour* (even future alcoholic concoctions that are yet to be conceived, compounded, and consumed). What the author of Ephesians in this verse is *doing* is projecting a segment of God's ideal *world in front of the text* in which the people of God refrain from intoxication with alcoholic beverages of any kind.

FACETS OF MEANING		
Text	**Pragmatics**	**Application**
wine	*all alcoholic drinks*	vodka, beer, Scotch …

This is the difference between "obeyability" (not getting drunk on *wine*) and "applicability" (not getting drunk on *any alcoholic beverage*). Such confusion of "obeyability" with "applicability"—the way I am defining those terms—is widely prevalent in circles of biblical interpretation and pulpits of biblical preaching. So while the Waltons declare that "[God's revelation] is written for us, but not to us" (103), I would nuance this further: Scripture is not *to* us—it is not "obeyable"; but it is *for* us—it is "applicable."

RAMIFICATIONS OF THE WALTONS' THESIS

The argument made by *The Lost World of the Torah* has significant ramifications for the Christian and the church: for atoning sin, for life transformation, for valuing the OT and the NT, and for application by Gentiles.

For Atoning Sin

Of sin and guilt offerings involving blood rituals, the Waltons assert that these "rituals were not designed to take away the sin of the person. They were designed to restore equilibrium to the place of God's presence" (76). What is this "disequilibrium" if it isn't sin? The authors continue: "The 'clearing' antiseptic role of

the blood accomplishes *kipper*. *Kipper* rarely has a person or sin as its object. The verb's direct object is typically the part of the sanctuary … being expunged from desecration" (76). But we have Lev 4:35 that explicitly states that "the priest shall make atonement [כִּפֶּר, *kipper*] for him *for his sin which he has sinned*, and it shall be forgiven him" (also see 4:26, 31; 5:6, 10, 13, 16, 18, 26; etc.). Besides, it is not at all inconceivable that any sin is ultimately against God *and* his holy place. So while I appreciate the Waltons hedging by saying that *kipper* "rarely" has a meaning relating to personal sin, it is certainly far more frequent than the authors are willing to grant.

In any case, they note that "the translation 'atonement' is quite unfortunate and misleading if we associate it with what Christ accomplished on the cross regarding our sin" (76). Well, of course: The Israelites in OT days would have had no knowledge of Christ, and the atoning work of the Savior is certainly not what is described in Leviticus. However, as one reads the Bible canonically, it is hard to deny that the sacrifices at the very least are an adumbration of Christ's ultimate sacrifice. But the Waltons disagree: the sacrifices "are not simply an anticipation of what Christ would do—they do not do anything like what Christ would do" (77). I would argue that they are, and that they do.[21] Otherwise, one would have to admit that the NT doctrine of sin and atonement, and therefore forgiveness and salvation, is entirely based on an erroneous reading of the intent of the Torah (more on this below).

For Life Transformation

With regard to 1 Pet 1:15, that calls upon God's people to "be like the Holy One who called you," the Waltons write: "Peter is invoking a contemporary (first century) understanding of what holiness means (*hagios* [ἅγιος] means 'dedicated to God') and what Torah is for (divine legislation) to exhort the audience of his epistle to a particular kind of behavior" (205).[22] In other words, Peter was wrong about "what holiness means" and "what Torah is for," at least on the OT's own terms. But it is not only Peter

who seems to have made this unforced error: Jesus said "You are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48); and John talks about the Christian "purifying [ἁγνίζω, *hagnizō*] himself, just as He is pure [ἁγνός, *hagnos*]" (1 John 3:3). In fact, I would argue that the entirety of the NT assumes that God's people will live lives of holiness, in which case, by the Waltons' thesis, the bulk of the NT is wrong about "what holiness means" and "what Torah is for."[23]

But all that is inconsequential for, according to the Waltons, "Yahweh is establishing a reputation for himself through his interaction with Israel. He does not tell them that they ought to reflect him in a certain way; his reputation will be established one way or another, regardless of what Israel does" (162). If God does not care what his people do, why does he go to the trouble of giving them any divine demand, whether in the Torah or in the rest of Scripture? According to the Waltons, "Yahweh wants them to be faithful vassals, and they need to do so if they expect to enjoy the blessings of the covenant relationship" (163). Of course, submission and obedience is what is required to remain in the flow of blessings, and that's what "faithful vassals" are to be about.

God's demands (in the pericopes of every book of Scripture) are for those in relationship with him. That is to say, relationship with God precedes responsibility to God; and relationship to him mandates responsibility on part of those who are in that relationship. Even the Ten Commandments (responsibility) was prefaced by an announcement of relationship: "I am Yahweh your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exod 20:2). A loving relationship with God (relationship comes first) should result in the keeping of his commandments (responsibility follows), as the NT points out often, particularly in Johannine literature: John 14:15, 21; 15:10, 12; 1 John 2:3–5; 3:22–24; 4:21; 5:2–3; and 2 John 6. And it is the role of each pericope of Scripture to portray what the will of God is (the theology of the pericope, what happens in God's ideal *world in front of the text*, in his kingdom), so that we, God's children, might be aligned to it in

the power of the Spirit to become holy, as God, our Father, is holy.[24] Their obedience would then be the discharging of their responsibility to reflect their relationship with God. And through this obedience, God is glorified as his people express his holiness to the world—the manifestation of the *imago Dei*, specifically of the *Christicon*.

For Valuing the OT and the NT

Anticipating their critics, the Waltons observe: "Some will respond that by contending that the Torah is not establishing morality or legislation for us today, we are diminishing the Old Testament and negating its relevance. Nothing can be further from the truth. Trying to identify the precise function of the Torah makes it more significant to us, not less important and relevant" (208). But as to how the Torah becomes significant, important, and relevant the Waltons fail to explain adequately. According to them, the role of the Torah is to help us "make sense of the New Testament" (216) and to comprehend "the way God has worked in the past to unfold his plans and purposes for the world" (221). If the value of the OT is only as a historical appendage and prelude to the NT, then it does not appear to have any direct transformative value for the Christian. So much so, according to the authors, "it is possible to have moral knowledge, even moral knowledge that has its source in God, without needing to get it from the Torah, or even from special revelation of any kind, including the New Testament" (213).

The Waltons also extend their speculations into the NT. According to them, Paul, like Peter, was mistaken about the Torah: "He is not interacting with Torah as it was understood and used in the Old Testament" (213). Indeed, all the NT authors are culpable: "The New Testament understands the Torah differently from the way the Old Testament does" (198). If the Waltons are right, then Christians are left with the unavoidable situation of the two Testaments essentially going in different directions. The Torah, as proposed by the Waltons, simply gives "illustrations" for the maintenance of "order." The NT reading of

the Torah, as traditionally understood, sees it as divine demand, the breakage of which is sin (1 John 3:4). I suggest that the only way to reconcile this seeming disparity is by acknowledging the "applicability" (but not "obeyability") of all biblical texts to all people in all times, an emergent property of the incorporation of time-bound texts into the timeless canon, rendering every part of it always "applicable" for the development of Christlikeness.[25] It is impossible to get away from the fact that the diktats of the OT were considered by Jesus as worthy of being applied (see Mark 10:18–19; 12:28–33; etc.). If Jesus affirmed it, it must be true.

Acknowledging the value of the Torah, Paul affirms that "the law is good" (1 Tim 1:8). And elsewhere in Romans, he asserts that "the Law is holy and the commandment is holy and righteous and good" (7:12), and "spiritual" (7:14). In fact, Paul "establishes" the law (3:31), and he "delights" in it (7:22; also see 7:16). And it is through obedience powered by the Holy Spirit that the "righteous requirement of the law is fulfilled" (8:4).[26] The apostle refers to the Mosaic Law often in his writings (e.g., Eph 6:2–3) and even cites it approvingly, drawing application from that older text (1 Cor 9:9; 1 Tim 5:17). Indeed, "*all* Scripture is inspired and profitable …" (2 Tim 3:16).[27] So the OT (and, indeed, all of Scripture), pericope by pericope, directs the chosen people of God on how they are to live, now that they are in relationship to God: relationship mandates responsibility (not by "obeyability," but by "applicability" of divine demand). And how they are to undertake that responsibility is explicated pericope by pericope, via pericopal theology, the thrust of the text. It is the role of the preacher to discern this thrust from the text and facilitate listeners catching it, and then to derive specific application for that specific audience living in that specific age.

On the other hand, the Waltons' take manifests a rather anemic use of both OT and NT. They assert, "it is what Christ has done that brings order to the world, not what Christians do (or fail to do). Human efforts do not bring order to the human world" (228). In that case, why do we need the Torah as "illustrations" of order, or even the NT, and why do we need to know what Christ has done? If there is no moral law that calls for

the people of God to live responsibly in relationship to him, then there can be no sin. If there is no sin, there can be no punishment. Would we then need a Savior?

For Application by Gentiles

The Waltons belabor their assertion of the uniqueness of the Torah: "Only the Israelites were in a covenant relationship with Yahweh" (100).[28] And so, "non-Jews can neither accept nor reject the Torah because it was never offered to them" (155). But the audience of the Torah (the free-standing corpus)—Israelites—is very different from the audience of the canon of Scripture (of which the Torah is part)—all the people of God of all times and all places. Indeed, Leviticus 18 puts the Waltons' thesis in doubt. At first, uncleanness appears to have been a possibility only for Israelites and sojourners (Lev 18:6–23). But then in 18:24–25 we are told that the nations had *already* become unclean because of "all these things." So you have the "abominable" activities of Israel (Lev 18:22, 26, 29) and their "defiling" of themselves and the land (18:20, 23, 28, 30); *as well as* the "abominable" activities of the nations (Lev 18:27, 30) and their "defiling" of themselves and the land (18:24, 25, 27). The warning is clear: if Israel did what the nations had done earlier, they, too, would suffer the same fate as the latter—"spewed out" of the defiled land (18:28, of the Israelites; and 18:25, 28, of the nations). This suggests that God judges Israelites and Gentiles with a single standard (Lev 20:23; and as the NT oft affirms), making the Waltons' argument that the canonical Torah is restricted to Israel and its covenant untenable.

In like fashion, the Prophets and the Writings assert Israel's covenantal status and responsibilities (1 Kgs 8:9, 21, 57–58) as a light to the nations (1 Kgs 4:34; 10:1–13). Failure to be who God wanted them to be and do what God wanted them to do would bring about punishment (2 Kgs 17:7–22, focusing on Leviticus 18 and 20). Unfortunately, that is exactly what happened: Israel was expelled from the land (2 Kgs 17:23). Subsequently, Gentiles were resettled in Samaria (17:24), with

not much better results. They, too, were judged and removed (17:25–26). Again, one sees a pattern: the judgment of the Israelites for breaking God's divine demand in the Torah is repeated upon Gentiles. The fact that even non-Israelites were held responsible for disobedience to divine law, even when they were not governed by any Israelite covenant or treaty, falsifies the Waltons' claim and establishes that the NT writers were right in maintaining that the standards of the divine Lawgiver were applicable to all, and have been broken by all, and that "all have sinned" (Rom 3:23).

The Waltons fail to see the synergism that is an emergent property of the biblical canon: the integral whole is greater than the sum of its free-standing parts. And therefore, every pericope of Scripture is "profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16)—for all of God's people, of all time, and in all places. While direct "obeyability" is impossible both for Israelites in a different space and time, as well as for all Gentiles living anywhere in any time, the "applicability" of Scripture (all parts of it) is universal and omnitemporal. The thrust of each pericope of Scripture, bearing a divine demand, has potent theological value (as pericopal theology), for it portrays God's ideal *world in front of the text* is and how it should be instantiated and actualized in life. Such a hermeneutic has immense value in cohering both the OT and the NT understanding of law into a consistent singularity.

CONCLUSION

In sum, I appreciate the Waltons' firm reaction to the view of the Torah, held in some quarters of Christendom, as a tract of universally "obeyable" laws from which items are idiosyncratically culled for "obedience." Such a facile reading of the Torah, indeed of all of Scripture, is to be deprecated. However, the remedy for this malady is not to see the Torah as containing merely examples or illustrations of wisdom or order that say nothing about morality, do nothing for holiness, and are unintended for transformative purposes. There is, I have argued,

"a still more excellent way." Yes, the Torah (and all of Scripture) *is* universal, but not in the sense of being universally "obeyable." Rather, it is universally "applicable"—and for this, one must discern the thrusts of the text, pericope by pericope (pericopal theology), and align oneself to their particular demands, in order to be Christlike. Scripture is not *to* us—it is not "obeyable"; but it is *for* us—it is "applicable," that we may create microcosms of divine rule amongst us, that will one day become the macrocosm of the Kingdom of God and of his Christ.

NOTES

1. John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton, *The Lost World of the Torah: Law as Covenant and Wisdom in Ancient Context* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2019).
2. Following my own recommendation, I shall structure this review essay topically, integrating ideas rather than tackling the work proposition by proposition or even part by part. References to *The Lost World of the Torah* will be indicated in the main text by page number(s) in parentheses.
3. Raymond Westbrook, "What is the Covenant Code?" in *Theory and Method in Biblical and Cuneiform Law: Revision, Interpolation and Development* (ed. Bernard M. Levinson; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 30 (emphasis added).
4. This is my organization of their arguments.
5. Choice is explicit in Gen 6:2, that has the first instance of בָּחַר, *bakhar*, "choose," in the OT, describing the action of the sinful "sons of God." And there is Deut 30:19: "And choose life, in order that you may live—you and your descendants"—undoubtedly a command to be obeyed (by choice). (All translations of Scripture are my own.)
6. After equating the Torah with depictions of wisdom, the Waltons beg the question by arguing that שָׁמַר in wisdom literature is "clearly not a matter of obedience," but "a response to the Wisdom instruction being given" (43); hence the verb in the Torah does not indicate obedience. They cite Prov 2:20 and

4:21 but fail to note that 4:4 explicitly asks readers to "keep [שָׁמַר] My commandments and live" (also see Prov 6:23–24; 7:1, 2; 19:16; all reflect injunctions in the Torah, such as Lev 18:4, 5; Deut 4:40; 30:16). And Prov 28:4 and 29:18 explicitly refer to "keeping [שָׁמַר]" the תּוֹרָה. But with regard to these two verses, the Waltons resort to special pleading: תּוֹרָה here, according to them, is simply indicating "order"—"a wise person perceives what brings order, pursues that sort of life, and puts it into practice" (43). All this starts to look suspiciously circular.

7. Which also means that grammar is not the final arbiter of meaning!

8. Throughout the work, the Waltons make insufficient distinction between conferred positional holiness and acquired practical holiness, even denying the latter: "Holiness is a status that is conferred; it cannot be earned, acquired, or lost by behavior" (57). But there is Num 15:40 that exhorts the Israelites to "do all My commandments and be holy to your God."

9. See the references in Ezra 9–10 to the stipulations of Exodus 34 and Deuteronomy 7 regarding the taking of foreign wives.

10. Assnat Bartor, *Reading Law as Narrative: A Study in the Casuistic Laws of the Pentateuch* (Ancient Israel and Its Literature 5; Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 1.

11. The issue of a text's authority over the Christian, I shall take for granted; it, too, is an emergent property of the canon that the church considers normative for God's people. I am also arguing that every pericope of Scripture, by virtue of incorporation into the canon, bears a divine demand and carries an inherent imperative, regardless of genre.

12. Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," 131–44 in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation,* by Paul Ricoeur (ed. and trans. John B. Thompson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

13. See a series of my articles: "Pericopal Theology," *Bibliotheca sacra* 173 (2016): 3–17; "Christiconic Interpretation," *Bibliotheca sacra* 173 (2016): 131–46; "Theological Exegesis," *Bibliotheca sacra*

173 (2016): 259–72; and "Applicational Preaching," *Bibliotheca sacra* 173 (2016): 387–400. As well, see *A Vision for Preaching: Understanding the Heart of Pastoral Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 71–148; and *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019), 27–86. For worked out examples discerning pericopal theology, pericope by pericope through a particular biblical book, see my commentaries on Genesis, Judges, Mark, Ephesians, and 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus.

14. See Abraham Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text! A Theological Hermeneutic for Preaching* (Chicago: Moody, 2013), 211–69.

15. See my *A Vision for Preaching*, 31–50. I agree with the Waltons that "the biblical text never points to a method of interpretation and then instructs us to go and do likewise" (132). But neither can we discern grammar and syntax from the Bible—it is silent about those elements of language. And yet we do employ grammatical and syntactical rubrics to interpret biblical writings. I would argue that pragmatics, discerning authorial *doings*, is as fundamental to language as is grammar and syntax. Therefore employing those norms to Scripture is entirely warranted, and indeed mandated, so that we can make sense of this inspired work that is intended to be applied far from its originary circumstances.

16. See my *Privilege the Text!* 143–45, from which much of the following discussion is adapted.

17. Or its "transhistorical intention." See the series of articles by E. D. Hirsch: "Past Intentions and Present Meanings," *Essays in Criticism* 33 (1983): 79–98; "Meaning and Significance Reinterpreted," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (1984): 202–25; and "Transhistorical Intentions and the Persistence of Allegory," *New Literary History* 25 (1994): 549–67.

18. *McCulloch* v. *Maryland*, U.S. 17 (4 Wheaton) (1819): 407.

19. This also counters the Waltons' predication that the Torah (and the rest of Scripture) is non-comprehensive in its depiction of morality.

20. Neither does the pericope that this five-word slice is extracted from deal primarily with drunkenness.

21. Even if one were to concede that the OT sacrifices referred exclusively to the cleansing of the sanctuary, Heb 9:23 hints at that very event being accomplished once and for all by Christ. The Waltons make a common mistake in assuming that if an interpretation does not encompass what could have been intended by the author, then that interpretation is invalid. Referring back to the earlier example, if one were to ask the apostle: "Hey, Paul, did you mean Scotch when you wrote 'wine' in Eph 5:18?" I have no doubt he would reply—after being enlightened on what that modern potent fluid is—with an emphatic "Yes!" Because what he was *doing* with what he was saying in Eph 5:18 was implicitly creating the category, "all alcoholic drinks." Into this slot, Scotch would fit, as would any other alcoholic libation, and they would all be verboten means of getting besotted—that would be sin. This sort of interpretive broadening to encompass even elements not explicitly intended by the original author is valid and necessary for the transhistorical interpretation of any canonical text intended for application, whether theological or legal.

22. The Waltons admit that "in the LXX *hagios* translates *qdš* [קדשׁ], but that decision represents an interpretive choice of translators. … *Qdš* means 'divine'; a closer semantic equivalent would be *theios* ([θεῖος] Acts 17:29; 2 Pet 1:3–4)" (205n11). One then would have to wonder why the translators of the Septuagint failed to use θεῖος for קדשׁ, since they were undoubtedly familiar with the former term (see LXX Exod 31:3; 35:31; Prov 2:17; Job 27:3; 33:4; etc.).

23. But the Waltons assert: "In the ANE, people did not aspire to imitate the gods, and the gods did not expect their worshipers to imitate them. … Israel would have conceived of Yahweh in the same way" (58). *Pace* Waltons, John Barton declares: "This might thus be one of the implications or meanings of being made 'in the image of God': that God and humankind share a common ethical perception, so that God is not only the commander but also the paradigm of all moral conduct" ("Imitation of God in the Old Testament," in *The God of Israel* [ed. R. P. Gordon; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007], 38). Indeed, exhortations to

imitate God/Christ are numerous in the NT (Matt 5:44–48; Luke 6:36; John 17:11, 21; Eph 5:1; Phil 2:4–11; Col 3:13; Rom 15:1–3, 5; 1 Cor 10:32–11:1; 1 Thess 1:6; 1 Pet 1:15; 1 John 2:6; 3:16; etc.), and all were likely rooted in the OT notion of "following Yahweh" (Num 14:24; 32:11–12; Deut 1:36; Josh 14:8–9, 14; 1 Sam 12:14; 1 Kgs 11:6; 14:8; 2 Kgs 23:3; also see Sir 46:10) and "walking in his ways" (Deut 8:6; 10:12; 11:22; 19:9; 26:17; 28:9; 30:16; etc.). Perhaps reflecting this OT emphasis, in the Gospels, rather than calling for an imitation of Jesus, the command, quite frequently, is to *follow* him (as in Matt 8:22; 9:9; 10:38; 19:21; etc.). Mark develops the notion of following Jesus "on the way" (8:3, 27; 9:33, 34; 10:32, 52); Jesus calls himself the "way" (John 14:6); Christians are said to be those of "The Way" (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22); and "walking" (περιπατέω, *peripateō*) in the NT is a synonym for godly life (Rom 6:4; 13:13; 14:15; Gal 5:16; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 2:12; etc.). So much so, imitating/following /walking with Jesus becomes a biblical idiom for discipleship. For an example, see the unique cameo in Mark 14:51–52 that exemplifies the notion of discipleship as "following" (Abraham Kuruvilla, "The Naked Runaway and the Enrobed Reporter of Mark 14 and 16: What is the Author *Doing* with What He Is Saying? *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 54 [2011]: 527–45).

24. This will of God expressed in each pericope is a gracious invitation extended by God to his children, offering them the possibility of living in his way in his ideal world. Yet it should not be forgotten that although it is an invitation that can be refused, repudiation of that gracious call comes with grave consequences. Hence, the gracious invitation is also a divine demand—not peremptory, not capricious, not tyrannical, but loving, tender, merciful.

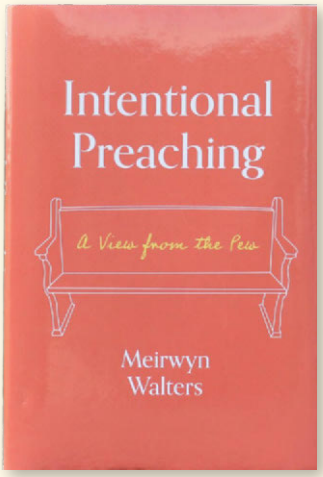
25. This is a synchronic view of Scripture for application purposes: all of Scripture is equally valid for all people for all time (2 Tim 3:16–17). That is not to deny a diachronic reading of Scripture to descry timelines of history and describe theological truths about God and his creation—the operations traditionally linked to biblical and systematic theology. They have value, no doubt, but the primary function of Scripture is the

transformation of the lives of the people of God to the image of the Son of God for the glory of God, via pericopal theology.

26. This is the "obedience of faith," a God-glorifying, Spirit-driven, merit-rejecting, grace-accepting, faith-exercising endeavor (see Kuruvilla, *Privilege the Text!* 195–210).

27. One might point to Eph 2:14–18 where Paul is seemingly derogating the law. I submit that in texts such as this, he is actually talking about the *condemnation* of the law—the sentence pronounced in/by divine law upon sin and sinners. The limited jurisdiction of the law, restricted to the ones upon which it passes condemnation, is what is described in Rom 7:1–4; release from the law (i.e., from its condemnation) is found in 7:6 (also see Gal 2:19). It is the condemnation of sin by God's law anywhere in Scripture (divine demand) that has been removed by Christ's atoning work (Rom 8:1), not that God's law/demand has been removed *en masse*: they are still "applicable," though not "obeyable." Paul's declaration of believers as no longer under the condemnation of the law (Rom 6:14)—the law having come to bring about wrath, increase transgression, and arouse sinful passions (4:15; 5:20; 7:5)—is consistent with this view. Divine demand/law, in its theological sense, is always valid for "application" (but not "obedience") by all humanity—it directs the behavior of those who (already) are the people of God. See my *Ephesians: A Theological Commentary for Preachers* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2015), 66–83.

28. And again: "Those who are not participants are not under obligation" (104).



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HENDRICKSON PUBLISHERS

A CHRISTIAN'S POSTURE IN A PANDEMIC

JONATHAN S. NASON
New Hope Church
Queens, NY

We do not need a lot of explanation to see that we're living in unprecedented times, not only in this world, but here in Queens, New York. We're living in a pandemic, and here in Queens we are living in the epicenter of the global outbreak (April 2020).

So, today I want us to look at what is the faithful posture a Christians should take within a pandemic. There's a lot of conversations about practical ways to respond, and rightfully so, but I want to get past the practicals and more to the heart of what our posture should be.

I want to preface my answer to the question, "What should a Christian's posture be during a pandemic," with two things. First, the answer I'm going to give is not the only answer to this question, but it is the textual answer that we're going to talk about.

Second, this answer does not apply only within a pandemic. I think we can learn from this truth no matter the situation, but this answer is especially important right now.

Now turning to the text, let's read Proverbs 3:27-28, "Do not withhold good from those whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it. Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it'—when you have it with you."

What should the posture of a Christian be amidst a pandemic? Two answers arise from this text.

OUR POSTURE SHOULD BE ONE OF GENEROISTY, NOT ACCUMULATION (Verse 27)

On the surface, we may think the proverb is saying, "Hey, if you are an employer, or if someone's done a service for you and they've earned the payment, then pay them." But I really believe the emphasis of the text is not as much on giving somebody something they have earned, but on recognizing that you have been given something as a blessing to give to someone else. It's about being generous with what has been given to you.

Psalm 67:1-2 comes to mind, "May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his facet to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations." This passage is prayer asking for God's blessing so that, in return, they can be a blessing to others.

Last year I was in San Francisco visiting some churches. One of the unique things I saw, which I thought was really cool, was at the end of their worship gathering their leaders came and gave a hundred-dollar bill to every member of the congregation. They said, "Your responsibility this week is to go and give this $100 away to be a blessing to someone else." The congregants understood that the money had been entrusted to them to give it away in an act of generosity.

The language, "of whom it is due," in verse 27 is implying that what has been entrusted to you is not yours, but it is theirs. It has been given to you for the sake of giving to them. Just like with the church in San Francisco, might we see from this text a healthy posture of generosity, especially now in a pandemic.

When you go to the stores, and when you look around, you see people saying, "I need, need, need." So, what they do is accumulate for themselves. They accumulate all of the soap, all the food, all the hand sanitizer, and, apparently, all the toilet paper. They accumulate all these things. However, I think this text challenges us to recognize God has entrusted us with resources to be generous to others by giving away.

So, "What should a Christian's response be within a pandemic?" First, it should be one of generosity, not

accumulation. Might we respond differently than the world around us? Instead of hoarding for ourselves, might we recognize that everything has been entrusted to us. It is not ours. It is due to someone whom we can give it to. The text teaches us that we are to have a posture of generosity that gives away.

OUR POSTURE SHOULD BE ONE OF EXPEDIENCY, NOT DELAY (Verse 28)

28 says, "Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come again, tomorrow I will give it'— when you have it with you."

I grew up with a truck. One of the effects of growing up with a truck is people would call asking me to help them move. They would say, "Hey, I'm moving on Saturday. Can you help me?" They know I have a truck. They don't have a truck. So, they are asking for my help. I'll be honest. I did not want to spend most of my Saturdays helping people move. So, I learned to say, "I'll have to check. I call you back later and let you know." I knew I was available, but by delaying, I could often find an excuse not to help them move.

I give that illustration because, I think, at the heart of this verse we see selfishness. Why do we delay being generous to someone? Sometimes it may be an inconvenience. Moving on Saturdays was an inconvenience, so I delayed in giving them a response and I delayed in helping. Someone may be asking you for something, but in that moment, the timing is bad.

Another reason why we may delay in being generous, especially now in the middle of a pandemic, is we are afraid. We are afraid of giving them something today that we may need tomorrow. If I give you this hand sanitizer today, I may need it tomorrow. If I give you my extra mask today, I may not have one for tomorrow. Therefore, we delay being generous and don't give them something they need, even if we have extras.

I'm not saying we shouldn't be wise, but I want to challenge that heart of fear. I want to challenge us to be a church that leans towards expediency in our generosity, not delay. Let us not delay our generosity out of fear. Let us trust the Lord to

provide for us tomorrow. Let us give generously to others today. Today is the day to help.

CONCLUSION

Due to the pandemic, we can immediately think of ways to apply this truth to physical needs, but I want us to see that this truth applies to spiritual needs as well. In John 4, Jesus has a conversation with his disciples. Prior to the conversation with his disciples, Jesus has the encounter with the woman at the well. The woman runs back into town and the disciples return to Jesus. The disciples just returned from buying food. They were on a mission to meet a physical need. They offered the food to Jesus, but Jesus said he had food they did not know about. They were confused wondering where his food came from.

While that conversation was going, a crowd was coming to see Jesus. As they were coming towards him, Jesus said to his disciples, "Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest" (John 4:35). Jesus was kindly rebuking his disciples for ignoring the spiritual needs of people in the town they were just amongst while buying food. They were so focused on the physical needs that they missed the spiritual needs. The messiah was right outside of town, but they told no one about him. They just bought their food and then left town. The women, on the other hand, ignored her physical need of water to tell everyone about the messiah outside of town.

In John 4, Jesus was trying to realign the disciples' posture to pay attention to the spiritual needs, as well as the physical needs. They weren't wrong for going into to town to buy food. That wasn't the problem. The problem was they missed the spiritual needs of the town.

Our world needs a physical saving, absolutely. We clearly get that due to the pandemic. But let's not miss the great spiritual need around us during this difficult season.

Christian, what is your posture during this pandemic? It is to live generously, today, to meet physical and spiritual needs. Today, live generously!

Prayer: Lord, we are grateful you have caused us to serve you today. Lord willing, if you give us tomorrow, we will faithfully serve you tomorrow. Amen.

BOOK REVIEWS

An Essential Guide to Public Speaking: Serving Your Audience with Faith, Skill, and Virtue. By Quentin J. Schultze. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020. 978-1-5409-6188-4, 229 pp., $26.99.

Reviewer: *Jared E. Alcántara, Baylor's Truett Theological Seminary, Waco, TX.*

In *An Essential Guide to Public Speaking*, Quentin J. Schultze offers readers an accessible handbook on speech communication drawn from his 40-plus-year career as a scholar, teacher, and practitioner. Although he is now professor of communication emeritus from Calvin University in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Schultze still maintains an active ministry of writing, consulting, mentoring, and public speaking in the areas of speech communication, media ecology, and leadership. In 2006, he published the first edition of this popular textbook as an instruction manual for public speaking written from a Christian perspective for communication classrooms at Christian colleges and universities. In the second edition, published in 2020, Schultze has rewritten, updated, and expanded his work to reach a new generation. He features guest authors in at least five chapters; provides discussion questions at the end of each chapter; and directs readers to his personal website, YouTube channel, and the online materials provided by his publisher.

In Chapter 1, Schultze lays out his thesis that faithful Christian public speaking should be understood as "servant speaking," which he defines as "using God's gift of speech publicly to love our neighbors as ourselves" (3). A servant speaker moves beyond acquiring skills to practicing virtues, beyond public speaking as self-promotion to public speaking as love and service to our neighbors, including those who do not have the power to "speak up for themselves" (6). Then, in the

remaining chapters (Chapters 2-21), Schultze shows readers how to plan speeches using a 7-step process, how to overcome speaker-specific obstacles (e.g., anxiety and fear) or listener-specific obstacles (e.g., distractions and hostility), how to become a virtuous communicator, how to tell stories well, how to use media, how to overcome problems in delivery (e.g., voice and nonverbals), and how to think biblically and theologically about speech communication. Those who read *An Essential Guide to Public Speaking* will notice the extensive overlap between the subjects covered in its pages and the work of Christian preaching such as the importance of having a main idea, a purpose for speaking, a clear flow and structure, knowing one's audience, the *ethos* of the speaker, and speech as a spiritual act of worship.

Preachers will likely appreciate the sections of this book that offer wisdom on speaking without notes, telling better stories, and using multimedia (e.g., recording videos), subjects that often do not make it into standard preaching textbooks. Those preachers who wrestle with fear and anxiety will likely be inspired by the author's willingness to talk openly and vulnerably about having to overcome his deep phobia of public speaking and frequent panic attacks stemming from his difficult childhood. Some readers may struggle to follow the flow, structure, and progression of the book on account of its complicated layout and tendency toward information overload: twenty-one chapters without clear sections, frequent spotlight sections in each chapter that may or may not be by a guest writer, several guest-written chapters with a foreword and an afterword; it comes across at times as a collection of essays.

In the hands of a preaching pastor, this book will offer helpful knowledge on preaching as speech communication, provide fresh ideas for writing and delivering sermons, and close a few gaps in one's training. In the hands of a preaching professor, it will serve as a good resource for teaching students how to speak extemporaneously, engage their audiences, and overcome their fears. Although this book could serve as an informative required textbook for a preaching elective on sermon delivery, the most appropriate and best landing spot for it

continues to be an undergraduate public speaking course at a Christian college or university.

The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation, 2nd ed. By Jim Herrington, Trisha Taylor, and R. Robert Creech. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020. 978-1-5409-052-8, 234 pp., $25.00.

Reviewer: *Gary L. Shultz Jr., First Baptist Church, Tallahassee, FL.*

Preachers are leaders. To stand in front of a congregation and open the word of God, calling on people to believe, repent, and conform their lives to God's vision instead of their own, is to lead. Pastors are called to lead in a number of different ways, but nowhere is their leadership more evident, and more impactful, than in the pulpit. Therefore, any book that equips pastors to be better leaders will impact their preaching, even if leading through preaching is not the primary focus of the book.

The Leader's Journey is not a book on preaching, but if its instruction on pastoral leadership is put into practice, it will benefit the pastor's preaching as well. The purpose of *The Leader's Journey* is to offer a practical pathway for becoming a better congregational leader by helping leaders understand themselves, the groups they lead, and the discipleship processes that actually lead to personal and congregational change. The authors define effective leaders as those who have "the capacity to know and do the right things" (1). Their conviction, based on their shared experiences in different contexts of helping equip pastors to lead (seminary professor, pastoral counselor, and leader of a leadership-training organization), is that while knowing the right thing to do is common, actually knowing how to do the right thing when faced with the typical challenges and stresses of pastoral ministry is much less common. They aim not to offer another book of leadership techniques and strategies but an

understanding of human relationships and how best to engage in those relationships for effective leadership.

The authors' understanding of leadership is rooted in Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory, which the authors explain and apply from a Christian perspective. Bowen understood human behavior in light of "living systems" and believed changing behavior required an understanding of those systems. Building on his work, the authors organize *The Leader's Journey* into four sections. The first is "The Call to Transformation," which includes chapters on the problems pastors regularly face, the call to personal transformation, and the elements of experiencing this transformation. To illustrate the path the authors are calling pastors to follow, this section includes an examination of the life of Jesus from a systems perspective and how he always knew and knew how to do the right thing despite the pressures he faced. The second section focuses on leading living systems, introducing the basic concepts of systems thinking and how to put those principles into practice within a congregation. The third section helps leaders understand their family backgrounds and the impact their families have on how they lead. The last section of the book then focuses on the role of discipleship in transformation and leadership, with chapters on spiritual disciplines, the Spirit's transforming processes, and how to approach family systems theory from an explicitly biblical perspective. Helpful questions for self-assessment are found at the end of each chapter, and the book ends with three appendices designed to help the reader put the principles they have just read into practice.

Just as essential as a preacher's content is a preacher's character and relationship with their congregation, and it is in these areas where *The Leader's Journey* will be most helpful to the preacher. The authors offer a solid psychological basis for personal transformation as well as clear biblical instruction that enables personal transformation. Written at an introductory level and drawing on authors as varied as Edwin Friedman and Dallas Willard, the book explains and applies a number of concepts such as systems thinking, emotional triangles, and chronic anxiety,

which are all pertinent both to the pastor's personal life and to life within a congregation. Potential sermon applications for helping congregations resolve conflict and work through times of crisis from the conflict can also be found throughout the book. While not a book one would look to for homiletical instruction, it is certainly a book that would benefit any preacher's ministry.

Diary of a Pastor's Soul: The Holy Moments in a Life of Ministry. By M. Craig Barnes. Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2020. 978-1-5874-3444-0, 240 pp., $18.25.

Reviewer: *Larry Torres, Edinburgh Theological Seminary, Edinburgh, UK.*

In *Diary of a Pastor's Soul*, M. Craig Barnes gives unique insight into his years of experience as a pastor. The book is written in the form of journal entries of a pastor who has decided to retire a year after the first entry. Barnes does not write this book as an exact account of what happened during his time as a pastor but as a fictious account based on his experience. Throughout the book, the protagonist reflects on his years of ministry while dealing with the issues facing his congregation and congregants as they come. The events in the book have their ups, downs, and everything in-between, reflecting how life and pastoral ministry can be.

It is important to note that Barnes is part of the PC-USA denomination, so this book is written from the perspective of a PC-USA pastor in what appears to be a predominantly Caucasian-American suburban church. So those who decide to read this book who come from different denominational or ethnic backgrounds may not be able to relate to everything the protagonist deals with in his church. There is nothing wrong with this because Barnes is simply writing from his own experience in the pastorate, but the book is still valuable for those who serve or seek to serve churches in different contexts. The

universal aspect Barnes touches on, which is dealing with people, is what ministry is all about. The different congregants the protagonist minsters to and describes are types of people many pastors will encounter in their ministries.

This book gives readers a picture into what pastoral ministry is like without romanticizing or sugarcoating the complexities of it. Barnes keeps each chapter or diary entry short, only a few pages, and this makes the book easy to read and follow and leaves the reader wanting more and wanting to continue reading. This book would do well as assigned reading for a pastoral ministry course in seminaries. It is filled with wisdom and it is presented creatively. One major insight that Barnes offers to his readers is that the pastorate is not glamorous or a place to desire big dreams of glory and recognition for oneself; it is a place that is ordinary and requires faithfulness and constant reliance on God's grace. Many pastors are unknown outside of their churches and small communities. Those who are called to the ministry must be ready to accept this reality, and at the same time be ready to love the people of their church with their messy and broken lives because this is where pastors encounter the Holy as Barnes puts it. *Diary of a Pastor's Soul* is a good balance to the technical and theological works that are read in pastoral ministry classes (which are important), and it offers something different and interesting that is relatable and filled with practical wisdom for pastors in training.

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to the Sexual Revolution. By Carl R. Trueman. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 978-1-4335-5633-3, 425 pp., $34.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Gregory K. Hollifield, Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies at Union University, Memphis, TN.*

"The origins of this book lie in my curiosity about how and why a particular statement has come to be regarded as coherent and meaningful: 'I am a woman trapped in a man's body'" (19). With that, Carl Trueman is off and running in his timely and insightful work on *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self*.

Trueman is professor of biblical and religious studies at Grove City College. An esteemed church historian, he previously served as the William E. Simon Fellow in Religion and Public Life at Princeton University and has authored or edited more than a dozen books.

Drawing from the ideas of Philip Rieff, Charles Taylor, and Alasdair MacIntyre, part one of Trueman's book analyzes the development of America's sexual revolution as a symptom rather than the cause for much of Western culture's upheaval that we are currently witnessing, particularly in the realms of sexual ethics and gender identity. In part two he traces the foundations of the revolution starting with the thought of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, continuing with the influence of key figures associated with Romanticism, and ending with a discussion of ideas from Frederich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, and Charles Darwin. Part three turns to a consideration of Sigmund Freud's sexualizing of psychology and the New Left's politicizing of sex, followed by specific examples in part four of how different areas of contemporary society have been transformed by the conceptual developments analyzed in preceding chapters. A helpful "unscientific prologue" concludes the volume, including an all too brief consideration of how the church should respond to the ongoing revolution in its surrounding culture.

The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self is the kind of book that will put more than a pebble or two in the preacher's shoe. It provides readers with a clear, albeit thick, set of lenses through which to see and a new set of terms to name the challenges faced by today's church in the Western world, starting in the sexual realm and stretching from there. The biggest challenge is the central role that "expressive individualism" (46) takes in what Taylor calls our "social imaginary" (36-39). In today's "third-world culture" (74-78) where "plastic" (50) people no longer

imagine life to be controlled by fate or faith but by feelings, in this "liquid" (43) world of "psychological man" (45-50), it is the inner self as the individual perceives it that is the true self. The pursuit of happiness through sexual fulfillment is life's chief end, producing not a culture but an "anti-culture" (89) of "deathworks" (96-99). Societal expectations, particularly those identified with Christian sexual codes and the normative status of lifelong, monogamous, heterosexual marriage, are considered oppressive and harmful. History's victims of the enforcement of those codes are her true heroes. Any idea that nature has intrinsic meaning, that human beings are especially significant, or that any authority should be allowed to suppress one's true self are to be quashed. Aesthetics/feelings trump logic, and it is therapy, not salvation, that people most need in this strange new world.

Trueman's concluding thoughts on "three things that should mark the church" as she moves forward in the wake of society's current revolution are particularly noteworthy. First, she should consider carefully "the connection between aesthetics and her core beliefs and practices" (402), emphasizing the latter over the former. For preachers this means consistently reminding hearers of the Bible's authority, their church's doctrines, and the reasons for her practices, while exercising pastoral compassion within the bounds of "deeper, transcendent commitments" (403). Second, the church must be a true community. Selves are formed, known, and affirmed in communion with others. People long for the type of stable community that a world of egocentric individualists cannot provide. Preaching helps to create and maintain a church's community by touting those beliefs and practices that unify it and exposing the same that undermine it. Third, the church needs "to recover both natural law and a high view of the physical body" (405). Regarding the latter, Trueman warns, "Protestantism, with its emphasis on the preached word grasped by faith, is perhaps peculiarly vulnerable to downplaying the importance of the physical. But to tear identity away from physical embodiment and to root it entirely in the psychological would be to operate along the same trajectory as transgenderism" (405-6). Naturally, a renewed emphasis on the

physical body should lend itself to discussion of biblical sexual morality.

That same expressive individualism that fuels transgenderism and current initiatives to separate gender identity from sex can be found today in common catchphrases ("You do you!), popular cinema (as when Thor says in *Avengers: Endgame*, "It's time for me to be who I am instead of who I'm supposed to be."), and local church (as when a preacher or Sunday school teacher says, "I just *feel* that this is what God is saying to us today."). God has given us a "more sure word" than that! It's *that* word which we must preach. Trueman's work will undoubtedly help us Western preachers to expound God's sure word more effectively by its thoughtful exegesis of the world in which we and our hearers now live.

ESV Literary Study Bible. By Leland Ryken and Philip Graham Ryken, eds. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 978-1-43356-871-8, 2032 pp., $39.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Alex Kato, Trinity Baptist Church, Renton, WA.*

The *ESV Literary Study Bible* is the second edition of a 2007 book by Ryken, Wheaton Professor of English Emeritus, and son Ryken, current Wheaton president. Crossway advertises the new edition as "all the same content," "refreshed with an all-new typesetting," but this new edition also incorporates the 2016 version of the ESV text and a tasteful clothbound cover. The study supplements include 12 pages of introduction on literary study of the Bible; short introductions to each book discussing genre, structure, and themes; and roughly 1200 introductions to literary units (most of which follow chapter divisions). One of the volume's strengths is this use of unit introductions, allowing the reader to read the preparatory notes and then the whole of the biblical passage rather than interrupting reading to consult footnotes.

Ryken and Ryken's decision to compile an entire study Bible centered on literary interpretation should academically interest many EHS members. They try to show their readers how "the content of any piece of writing is communicated *through form*" (ix), a claim EHS members recognize and discuss to an uncommon degree. In the context of our ongoing hermeneutical debates, the fact of the project boldly asserts the priority of the text itself over the world of the author and the world of the reader. Of particular note to EHS members, this leads the editors in most unit introductions to focus on the details of the pericope rather than the canonical or Christological implications, though each book introduction does end by locating the book "in the Master Story of the Bible." Due to their focus on the text itself, the editors also try to maintain neutrality on contemporary theological controversies, though they generally follow the ecumenically evangelical approach for which their institution is known.

Curiously, the *Literary Study Bible's* weakness is its form. After using it in both personal devotions and sermon preparation, I find the ideal reader remains unclear. Most laypeople would be confused by the hermeneutical polemic and would benefit from notes that included but did not limit themselves to literary analysis. Most preachers and homileticians would find the study portions sound but unsurprising. The book introductions and unit notes are not robust enough to replace commentaries in sermon preparation (and most high-quality commentaries would include similar literary analysis). The introduction is too short to be an academic case for literary interpretation (Ryken's 1987 *Words of Delight* better serves this purpose). That said, even an advanced reader could find the study notes alongside a stylized and less well-known passage (such as Job or Ecclesiastes) to be a helpful quick-start guide. A yearly Bible reader might benefit from a year with this volume to see the text with fresh eyes.

A study Bible is a major investment, if not of money, of devotional or study time. While this volume does promote a skill most EHS members would like to promote among their

congregants and students—apprehending what biblical texts are communicating in their forms—the form of this book limits its audience, in turn limiting its potential to equip the saints with this ability.

The Whole Counsel of God: Why and How to Preach the Entire Bible. By Tim Patrick and Andrew Reid. Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 978-1-43356-007-1, 256 pp., $22.99.

Reviewer: *Kevin Koslowsky, Faith Presbyterian Church, Wilmington, DE*.

In their book *The Whole Counsel of God*, Tim Patrick and Andrew Reid urge "preachers to make it their goal to preach the *entire* Bible" which, they clarify, is more than "preaching *from across* the Bible" (22). Their central thesis: "All vocational preachers should set themselves the goal of preaching through the entire Bible over a thirty-five-year period…every chapter of every book, and every verse of every chapter—the whole lot!" (81). Their book develops this thesis across three main sections. Chapters 1-3 cover the importance of preaching the whole Bible. Chapters 4-8 explain how to meet this goal by providing theological strategies and practical planning suggestions. Finally, chapters 9-12 offer further practical and pastoral suggestions.

The authors' high view of Scripture and optimistic tone will encourage readers in their ministry of the word. Their pastoral sensitivities and insights generated by decades of experience in the church and academy edify the reader over and over.

Commendably, Patrick and Reid warn against the dangers of a patchwork approach to choosing texts or preaching only the highlights of the Bible, like an abridged children's Bible. Topical series, they suggest, should be reserved for retreats or other venues beyond Sunday morning. Their summaries of biblical theology, systematic theology, and gospel theology—the gospel

of Jesus is "the single biggest topic in the Bible" (99)—are certainly noteworthy.

Unfortunately, the book fails to make its case for preaching every verse of Scripture during a preacher's lifetime. Its argument rests, primarily, on Paul's claim in Acts 20:27 to have preached the whole counsel of God to the Ephesians. But, as Patrick and Reid admit, Paul ministered in Ephesus for only two or three years and could not have possibly preached every verse of the Old Testament in that length of time. Therefore, the Acts passage should be understood to mean something else. Observing that the Bible's message centers on "the person and work of Jesus" (41), they conclude that preaching the whole counsel of God cannot require preaching every verse, but instead means that every verse preached is related to the whole and centered on the gospel.

Despite their failure to make their case for preaching every verse, Patrick and Reid's work is not totally devoid of value. Their theological emphasis and practical ideas will serve to broaden the reader's efforts to preach more fully across the Bible's many books and genres. Readers will also benefit from the authors' admonition to plan their preaching. Patrick and Reid offer a sample framework for how to do this built around a six-fold division of the Bible: Torah, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, Writings, Gospels, Other New Testament Books (130). They discourage preaching straight through from Genesis to Revelation because "the huge time frame we are considering would mean that the benefit of it would probably be lost" (123). Ironically, this admission of the massive timeline, along with their understanding that many people will cycle through a congregation in only a few years, further undermines the authors' initial suggested goal of preaching every verse.

Those who choose to follow the model suggested by Patrick and Reid should beware that a biblical passage can only be preached once during a minister's lifetime. They explain, "once we have preached a passage, we should not expect to preach it again" (135). While they offer flexibility in choosing texts for each sermon which may cover only one verse or could

cover an entire section of Scripture, like "the temple vision of Ezekiel 40-48" (162), they instruct the reader to never go back to preach those chapters in greater detail since "whatever we plan to preach now we will not plan to preach again" (140).

The Whole Counsel of God offers a strong argument for a broader diet of preaching from across the Bible. The authors rightly assert, "Our goal in preaching is to serve, not to impress" (235). But perhaps their arbitrary goal of preaching every verse once in a lifetime introduces the subtle temptation to impress others with a massive lifetime accomplishment. Patrick and Reid foster a meaningful conversation and encourage each believer to submit to the whole counsel of God in their devotional reading (209). They conclude that preachers should "feed our congregations with as much of the word of God as we are able, even if it does not end up that we preach every single chapter and verse ourselves" (240). This final bit of practical wisdom and various insights offered along the way commend their book to preaching pastors and students as good food for thought.

Preaching Romans: Four Perspectives. By Scot McKnight and Joseph B. Modica, eds. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019. 978-0-8028-7545-7, 191 pp., $20.00.

Reviewer: *Matthew Morvay, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY*.

Scot McKnight, the Julius R. Mantey Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary (Lisle, Illinois) and Joseph B. Modica, university chaplain and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Eastern University (St. David's, Pennsylvania) have edited a fantastic resource for preachers and lay people alike, *Preaching Romans: Four Perspectives*. Pauline scholarship can be a hot bed of various schools of thought, and this work aims to present an accessible sketch of the four major interpretive schools of thought on Paul today: the Reformational (old) perspective, the new

perspective, the apocalyptic Paul, and the participationist perspective (xi).

The book is organized into two major sections: (1) interpretive perspectives on the apostle Paul and (2) preaching Romans: sermons. The first section seeks to present the four major perspectives by leading proponents of each, explaining how that perspective influences the preaching of the letter. The first perspective, the *Reformational perspective*, offers as its central emphasis the sacrificial death of Jesus for all people, who are under God's judgment, and are counted righteous through faith in Christ (4). The *new perspective*, being influenced by E. P. Sanders, has its focus on the new way of understanding Judaism (25). The *apocalyptic perspective*, rooted in the work of J. Louis Martyn, focuses on the epistemology of Paul's revelation (43). Finally, the *participationist perspective* stresses the transformative participation of the believer in the life of the Father, Son, and Spirit (79).

The second section provides three sermons from well-known preachers that illustrate how a particular approach to interpreting Romans might show up in preaching Paul. The Reformational perspective sermons are drawn from Michael F. Bird, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Carl R. Trueman; the new perspective sermons are by James D. G. Dunn, Tara Beth Leach, and Scot McKnight; the apocalyptic perspective exemplifies sermons from Jason Micheli, Fleming Rutledge, and William H. Willimon; finally, the participationist perspective provides sermons by Timothy G. Gombis, Richard B. Hays, and Suzanne Watts Henderson (85-168).

In the final chapter, Modica provides four observations in light of the various perspectives: "(1) each perspective is an earnest attempt to interpret the Letter to the Romans, (2) each perspective offers a way of understanding what the perspective thinks is the main thread in the apostle Paul's theology, (3) the perspectives on the apostle Paul are actually perspectives on first-century Judaism, and (4) each perspective needs the others to exist" (170-174).

Preaching Romans is a great one-stop resource for laypeople and preachers alike who are interested in navigating through some of the complexities of academic debates in Pauline scholarship, particularly in the book of Romans. The unique contribution of this work comes through the four perspectives that are clearly presented and the demonstration of how these views show up in sermons. The deep dive into Pauline scholarship as applied to the interpretation and preaching of Romans makes this book worth a read!

Sunday's Sermon for Monday's World: Preaching to Shape Daring Witness. By Sally A. Brown. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. 978-0-8028-7112-1, 216 pp., $19.99.

Reviewer: *Eric Price, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School.*

In a society divided along so many lines, there perennially exists "the temptation to retreat into homogenous social enclaves" (xvii). Yet for Christians, social retreat from the world – and from those who are different than us – would be an abdication of our responsibility for public witness. In *Sunday's Sermon for Monday's World*, Sally Brown, professor of preaching and worship at Princeton Theological Seminary, explores how preachers can equip listeners for public witness in their day-to-day lives and social contexts.

To address this topic, Brown integrates theology of mission with homiletical theory. The first section of the book – "Rethinking the Shape of Christian Witness in Everyday Life" – consists of two chapters. Chapter 1 surveys and critiques contemporary missional theology. "The emphasis in missional theology falls on the congregation as the basic unit of public Christian witness" (5). While appreciating the corporate aspect of missional theology, Brown suggests it has "not enough focus on individual believers acting in public space" (32). In practice, missional theology overlooks the fact that most public witness

takes place in spaces that are not explicitly Christian. Individual believers must learn to navigate pluralistic settings well in order to witness effectively.

In chapter 2, Brown offers a theology of mission that better accounts for "the witness of ordinary, individual Christian lives carried out in...everyday places" (42). Drawing from missional theologians Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, Brown emphasizes that individuals are called to participate in the ways "God is already redemptively at work in the world" (44). This requires imagination because our "participation cannot be read out of a rule book" (44). Due to life's complexity, sermons cannot offer exact steps for faithful witness in every given situation. Rather, "the aim of the sermon...is to imaginatively rehearse courses of action that might realistically play out in the everyday settings of the world our listeners will face on Monday and beyond" (135).

The second part of the book – "Preaching to Shape the Everyday Witness of Ordinary Lives" – provides homiletical strategies for this theology of mission. Chapter 3 proposes that "a hermeneutical lens of hope...is appropriate for interpreting *both* Scripture *and* the realities of everyday life" (72, italics original). Because of the redemptive hope of new creation, preachers should help listeners "see any situation...as it will be...when, in the power of the Spirit, the dynamics of inclusive divine love, restorative justice, and healing mercy have fully claimed that situation" (72). Readers may note that Brown's underlying theology of religions is at times ambiguous – for example, when she says that "those of other faiths also know the God who makes and keeps promises" (74). Consequently, it is unclear to what extent the gospel message offers hope that is distinct from other religions. Further clarity on this matter would strengthen the case for distinctively Christian preaching.

Chapter 4 suggests that pastors preach on subjects pertaining to the church's communal practices, including the sacraments and corporate fellowship. Such preaching empowers everyday witness by demonstrating how the relational dynamics we ought to model toward one another within the church should

also characterize our interactions with others in society. Chapter 5 discusses the homiletical use of stories to form listeners' imaginations. Through story, preachers imagine possible correspondences between the biblical text and contemporary context. "Ideally, the aim of story-driven preaching is to transfer the work of imagination from the preacher to the listener" (136).

Finally, chapter 6 explores the value of structuring individual sermons around a dominant metaphor. Brown says that metaphors can become lenses to help listeners re-frame daily situations as possible sites of gospel opportunity. "A well-crafted metaphor functions as a key to unlock imagination, aligning biblical witness and contemporary context." (167).

As I read Brown's homiletical suggestions, I wondered what strategies of congregational ethnography she might suggest to preachers for learning about parishioners' Monday-Saturday lives. If peoples' daily lives remain an abstraction to the preacher, then he/she will have difficulty concretely guiding people to imagine ways of acting redemptively in daily life.

Though *Sunday's Sermon for Monday's World* does not directly answer the question of ethnographic practices, the fact that it raises the question is a testament to the book's value. Brown's homiletical proposal sensitizes preachers to the disconnect that can occur in listeners' minds when preaching appears indifferent to lived realities. Sermons which oversimplify the complexities of life by offering pat answers may lose credibility with listeners. Because many situations in life elude easy answers, preachers should help people develop the wisdom, tact, and discernment to navigate these complex realities with creative gospel faithfulness. Brown's call for preachers to engage listeners' imaginations with redemptive possibilities is a promising way to honor the complexity of life while maintaining the authoritative nature of preaching.

A Lay Preacher's Guide: How to Craft a Faithful Sermon. By Karoline M. Lewis. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020. 978-15064-6273-8, 136 pp., $18.99.

Reviewer: *Keith Essex, The Master's Seminary, Sun Valley, CA.*

A Lay Preacher's Guide is the fourth of five volumes in the "Working Preacher Books" series currently in print. These books are designed to provide assistance to the bi-vocational preacher who has little or no formal training in preaching. Lewis writes, "There is no one way to teach preaching, but I hope this book will provide you with enough central homiletical capacities to feel more confident in what faithful preaching sounds like and feels like" (viii). She articulates her one goal in this volume for the homiletical novice is "to give you the tools you need to be the preacher God has called you to be" (xi). To that end, the book gives a succinct but precise guide from the author's perspective on how the preacher can craft a faithful sermon, a sermon in which provides the listener an encounter with God.

There are seven components listed in the book that characterize a faithful sermon. These characteristics for which the preacher should strive are described in the first seven chapters. Faithful preaching is viewed as a step-by-step process incorporating these features, but not necessarily in a linear progression. A faithful sermon is biblical, autobiographical, contextual, theological, intellectual, emotional, and inspirational. Because faithful preaching is not just something preachers do, but is to be a way of life, the eighth and final chapter presents "A Faithful Preaching Life."

The book is primarily a guide to Lewis's understanding of a faithful sermon. A sermon is a proclamation of the preacher's testimony of an encounter with God (autobiographical), thus the text of Scripture is not an object to be studied, but a narrative of people's experiences with God to which the preacher gives witness (biblical). A sermon brings the touch and presence of

God into every aspect of the human condition (contextual). As the preacher leads the sermon hearers to constantly engage with our ever-changing God, the perceptions of and beliefs about God progress (theological). A sermon is organized around a main point with subpoints or, better, a number of moves that engage the mind (intellectual), tap into powerful and intense feelings (emotional), and inspire the listeners to embody the gospel in their lives (inspirational).

Although not the specific purpose of the book, *A Lay Preacher's Guide* is a clear and concise presentation of the contemporary liberal, mainstream Protestant approach to preaching that can serve as an excellent introduction of that viewpoint for the evangelical expositor. With the growing number of bi-vocational preachers without formal homiletical training throughout the world, a similar volume from the evangelical perspective is a definite need.

A Little Book for New Preachers: Why and How to Study Homiletics. By Matthew D. Kim. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. 978-0-83085-347-2, 128 pp., $12.00.

Reviewer: *Rob O'Lynn, Kentucky Christian University, Grayson, KY.*

In this excellent "little book," Matthew Kim, an Associate Professor of Preaching and Ministry and Director of the Haddon W. Robinson Center at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, introduces what preaching is from a theological and professional perspective. Part of the new "Little Books" series from IVP Academic, this volume focuses "on the characteristics of what makes for effective sermons and faithful preachers" (14). In writing this "little book" on preaching, Kim hopes to alleviate concerns one might have about the task of preaching and ignite a deep passion for communicating God's word.

The book breaks down into three units that focus on why one should study preaching, the characteristics of faithful

preaching, and the characteristics of faithful preachers. Each unit is comprised of three chapters, and each chapter is titled in such a way as to demonstrate connection between the contents of each section. For example, in the unit on faithful preachers, each chapter begins with "Being," indicating that the personal and spiritual qualities of the person in the pulpit rather than demonstrated rhetorical skill is of more importance to defining faithful preaching.

In terms of strengths, Kim avoids the traditional discussion about sermon models and delivery mechanics. Instead, he focuses on more central issues such as "Faithful Exegesis" and "Being a Person of Character and Integrity," two often overlooked topics in most preaching introductions. Additionally, Kim includes a chapter titled "Faithful Cultural Exegesis," which builds off his larger (and also excellent) volume *Preaching with Cultural Intelligence*. Plus, in his footnotes, he provides the building blocks of an incredible pastoral library for the new (and even seasoned) preacher.

My only criticisms are that I wish he had given at least some illustrations that would have matched his second and third units, "Characteristics of Faithful Preaching" and "Characteristics of Faithful Preachers" respectively. I think a single sermon illustrating the concepts of that unit would have added an extra dimension to this already excellent volume. Also, his chapter on "Faithful Application" is somewhat lacking. In abstract terms, it is fairly solid. Yet, until we in the homiletic community take educational theory seriously and begin connecting a pedagogical moment to our sermons (such as we see in the works of Paul Scott Wilson, Rick Blackwood, Richard Voelz, and Scott Gibson), we will continue to be just one abstract step away from the moralistic preaching that Kim (and many others, including myself) are rightfully concerned about.

That being said, I plan to use this book in my introductory preaching class the next time it comes around. And because Kim is quickly becoming a leading author and scholar in the preaching community, I look forward to continuing to glean from his writing for years to come.

The Learning Cycle: Insights for Faithful Teaching from Neuroscience and the Social Sciences. By Muriel I. Elmer and Duane H. Elmer. Downer's Grove: Intervarsity Academic, 2020. 978-0-8308-5383-0, 240 pp., $22.00.

Reviewer: *Nathan Wright, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, Charlotte, NC.*

How shall we, as Christian teachers and pastors, teach so that our hearers gain not only knowledge of truth but also the character, integrity, and wisdom to live out the truth? In their insightful and engaging book, Drs. Muriel and Duane Elmer trace out an answer that synthesizes scriptural teaching with the most recent insights from neuroscience and the social sciences. Their answer probes what it looks like for a human to learn and to change, and the book thus takes form as a taxonomy of human change in service of the teachers of God's truth. The progression of the chapters illustrates five levels in what the Elmers call "The Learning Cycle." These levels are as follows: 1) Recall - I remember the information. 2) Recall with Appreciation - I value the information. 3) Recall with Speculation - I ponder how to use the information. 4) Recall with Practice - I begin changing my behavior. 5) Recall with Habit - I do consistently. Between levels 3 and 4, the Elmers' discussion probes barriers that hinder learners from changing and how such barriers can be overcome. The book is written for teachers and pastors, and its discussion regularly engages issues relevant for those groups.

In the authors' own words, "[i]n its most succinct form, this book is about teaching for orthodoxy (correct knowing or believing), orthopathos (appropriate emotions or feelings stemming from correct knowing and believing), and disciplined orthopraxis (living truthfully)" (197). This book is clearly about how to form doers of the word and not just hearers of the word. At several key points Dallas Willard's influence appears, including Willard's quote: "...we must never forget that Jesus

points beyond action to the source of action in character. This is a general principle that governs all he says" (189). This idea—that teaching Scripture and the Christian faith should actually result in Christians changing their choices and behavior—is foundational for this book, though it remains unfortunately prophetic in today's world.

This reviewer welcomes particularly several pieces of the work. The generally holistic view of the human person fits well with not only Scripture, but with longstanding catechetical traditions of the Church, and even reinvigorates classical views of the human. This is a welcomed development. Our hearers are not just absorbers of information but are made in God's image, with bodies, emotions, intellects—we are living humans. Education in the kingdom of God, then, aims to enlist and ennoble the entirety of the human person. The result of real catechesis is not mere confession of Christ or of a creed but a life lived in integrity, wisdom, and character. The Elmers understanding of this infuses this book and lends a coherence to an inevitably broad discussion of Scripture, neuroscience, and social sciences. The book's synthesis of recent scientific insight is helpful and easily understood. I found myself regularly revisiting my own methods of teaching homiletics, but also reviewing my own sermons, as I followed the book's lines of helpful reasoning. The chapters on barriers to change were particularly insightful—worth the price of the book itself.

In all, a welcome and helpful book not only for preachers, but for teachers of preaching.

A Commentary on James. By Aída Besançon Spencer. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020. 978-0-82544-461-6, 320 pp., $26.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Cisco Cotto, Village Bible Church, Sugar Grove, IL.*

Aída Besançon Spencer, a Ph.D. graduate of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is Senior Professor of New Testament at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Her current work is a volume in the Kregel Exegetical Library series of commentaries. The book's cover states that it "sheds exegetical and theological light on the book of James for contemporary preachers and students of Scripture."

One of the challenges in using this commentary series is the significant differences in how each volume is formatted. Unlike other commentary series that feature uniform structure despite different authors, this series appears to allow each author to structure the commentary in a way that feels appropriate for them. That means some volumes (e.g., Allen Ross on Psalms, Robert Chisholm on Judges and Ruth, and John Harvey on Romans) read as though they were specifically written to help with the homiletical task. Others, such as Duane Garrett on Exodus and Michael Shepherd on the Minor Prophets, offer only fleeting help with application and the unique theological themes contained in each pericope. Spencer's volume falls into the latter group. The preacher will benefit from this commentary because of its exegetical heft, not its attempt at application or other sermon suggestions.

The reader benefits greatly from Spencer's many years of studying the book of James. She digs deeply into the text. The reader has access to 40-50 pages of detailed exposition for each chapter of James. The author offers word-by-word and phrase-by-phrase commentary. The bulk of the volume features this detailed analysis. There are portions of the book that reflect both her mastery of the Greek and her ability to present material clearly that she has developed over many years as a teacher, such as when she discusses the promise of healing in 5:16. She shows simply and convincingly that the Greek construction precludes the idea of immediate physical healing. The reader may wish she had offered this same exegetical clarity in areas such as James' seeming assertion that a person is justified by works in 2:24.

Spencer arranges the book into just five large passages according to the chapters of James. Someone preaching through

the book would likely break it up into 10-14 preaching units. It would be more helpful to the preacher if the commentary was organized according to individual pericopes. This would help the preacher more easily access the theological points of the shorter passages.

Spencer engages with the latest scholarship but also shows the maturity of thought that comes from working with and reflecting on the text for many years. The reader will benefit from the fruit of her labor and would be wise to consult this commentary often when preaching through James.

Finding Our Voice: A Vision for Asian North American Preaching. By Matthew D. Kim and Daniel L. Wong. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 978-1-68359-378-2. 187 pp., $17.99.

Reviewer: *Gregory K. Hollifield, Memphis College of Urban and Theological Studies at Union University, Memphis, TN.*

As a white professor who teaches homiletics primarily to black student-preachers, I appreciate books that address preaching related matters from cultural minority viewpoints within a North American context, especially when written by authors who hold a high view of Scripture's inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility. Matthew Kim and Daniel Wong are to be commended for writing just such a book. Their work, *Finding Our Voice*, is unique in its attempt to distinguish Asian North American (hereafter, ANA) preaching from preaching that is either entirely Asian or European American.

Rejecting Russell Yee's assertion that there are "no particular Asian American…styles of preaching," Wong asserts "there are enough particularities of ANA preaching, preachers, and listeners that make it a vital area of study" (104). What, specifically, are the particularities of ANA preaching? Where are they found? According to the authors, ANA preaching, "like preaching in traditions associated with other minority groups,

should be distinct in the areas of hermeneutics, illustrations, applications, delivery, and in the choice of topics to address" (141). How exactly is ANA preaching distinct in these areas? To answer that question requires an understanding of ANAs themselves, their hermeneutics, and their theological influences.

Before turning their attention to the aforementioned topics, Kim and Wong provide an illuminating Preface to their book. Through it, they help the reader to begin to understand what it is like to be considered both a member of the "model minority" and a "perpetual foreigner" (42-43) at the same time. Here they also helpfully clarify why they prefer the term Asian North American to the older category of Asian American.

Wong develops the topic of ANA identity in chapter one. Most insightful, and somewhat painful to read, are his descriptions of the expectations that first generation Asian immigrants often place on their American-born children relative to language acquisition, education, career choice, marriage, and children. The resulting shame for children who fail to meet those expectations can be profound and lifelong.

As for ANA hermeneutics, Kim contends that "ANA preachers require a bicultural or 'hybrid' hermeneutic that takes into consideration both Western and Eastern cultures and philosophies" (50-51). The two prevalent Western hermeneutical perspectives to be accounted for in Kim's view are the redemptive-historic and law/gospel. The hermeneutics that he identifies as "Eastern" are Confucian (emphasizing a harmonious existence through a system of hierarchy and ethical living), pilgrimage/marginalization/liberation (resulting from the ANA's outsider status), postcolonial (requiring the reinterpretation of biblical texts previously abused by a group's oppressors), and blessing (seeking from God a spiritual version of the secular American Dream). Against this backdrop, Kim calls for a form of ANA contextualization that respects the "vowels of hermeneutics" (64)—observation (What in this text will grab my ANA hearers' attention?), experience (How do my ANA hearers' experiences confirm or conflict with the situations in this text?), understanding (Which of my ANA hearers' preconceived

notions or understandings does this text call into question or reject?), interpretation (What assumptions, conflicts, and questions will my ANA hearers have as they wrestle with this text?), and application (What will obedience to this text look like for an ANA hearer?).

Turning to theology, Kim maintains "there is no pure, culture-free theology" (76). After listing some of the various theologies that ANAs have adopted and adapted across the years then speaking to the dangers of pluralism and syncretism, Kim, a theological exclusivist, calls for an integrated theology that accentuates both the Asian and North American elements of a person. Such a theology celebrates the image of God in every person, recognizes the ANA's liminal location on this continent as being reflective of the Christian's situation in this world as both on pilgrimage and at home in Christ, and finds in the Christological statement of Chalcedon a helpful way of understanding the concept of "duality" in a single person. Biblical examples of people possessing and struggling with the demands of dual identity cited by Kim include Moses (a Hebrew reared as Pharaoh's son) and Esther (a Jew seated as Persia's queen).

Finding Our Voice is not the final word on ANA preaching. It is rather, as the book's subtitle indicates, a "vision"—showing how the authors view ANA preaching today and their hopes for where it's headed. If the two sample sermons by Kim and Wong that round out the volume are indicative of ANA preaching, that future appears bright. Their work demonstrates that preaching can, and must be, both biblically sound and culturally relevant.

Say It!: Celebrating Expository Preaching in the African American Tradition. By Eric C. Redmond. Chicago: Moody, 2020. 978-08024-1920-0, 238 pp., $15.00.

Reviewer: *Cameron R. Thomas, Samford University, Birmingham, AL.*

Eric Redmond, associate professor of Bible at Moody Bible Institute, has compiled an insightful volume to clarify the rich tradition of African-American preaching relative to sound exposition. Redmond and nine pastors from the African-American expository preaching tradition display the diversity, distinctives, and dynamic elements found in the African-American pulpit.

To begin, Redmond and his fellow contributors set out to dispel any notion that the African-American preaching tradition competes with the expository preaching tradition (31).
Redmond defines expository preaching as an "invitation for the preacher to explain the central idea of the text to an audience with a means that would be understood by the audience, while prompting the audience to obey God's Word within that audience's contemporary social and ecclesial contexts." He goes on to clarify, "Expository preaching and African-American stylistics are all-star dance partners, not battlefield enemies" (27). According to Redmond, the African-American preaching tradition emphasizes justice and hope because of the lived experiences of African-Americans in these United States, and that along with emphases, African-Americans have long practiced faithful biblical exposition.

Part one of the book discusses the foundation and background of expository preaching and discusses the African-American tradition relative to this form of preaching. In part two, contributors consider what's required to preach Old Testament texts, highlighting the importance of both biblical and cultural exegesis. Part three addresses sermon development from the varying genres in the New Testament, with the common thread being a desire to communicate the hope of Christ in every sermon.

This book's major strength lay in its presentation of select African-American preachers' contributions in the fields of biblical exegesis and exposition. Along the way, Redmond and his contributors analyze sermons, raise questions for further

consideration, and expose readers to the distinctives of the liturgical calendar as it's used in the African-American church.

Say It! informs readers about the extent to which expository preaching has been practiced throughout the history of the African-American church. The book insists that the African-American preaching tradition has much to contribute to expository preaching, without "requiring a particular verbal delivery" (26).

The study of African-American preaching is gaining ground among evangelicals. *Say It!* invites readers to explore the theological undergirding of African-American expository preaching and serves as a launching pad for further investigation into the subject.

Life-Situation Preaching for African-Americans. By Willie J. Newton Jr. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2019. 978-1-5326-5497-8, 135 pp., $21.00 (paperback) / $40.15 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Larrin Robertson, Christian Theological Seminary, Indianapolis, IN.*

Prompted by a quest to identify the "life-giving, life-sustaining spiritual and intellectual substance of the word of God" (xii) for persons who listen to sermons, with *Life-Situation Preaching for African-Americans*, Willie J. Newton Jr. demonstrates the potential of life-situation preaching. By grounding life-situation preaching within the tradition of African-American preaching, Newton also aims to enhance the relevance and reach of life-situation preaching within the tradition of African-American preaching. Readers of this volume will be satisfied that Newton has accomplished both goals.

With *Life-Situation Preaching*, Newton is simultaneously concerned about young African-American preachers and "the preacher of any ethnicity who is accountable to African-American listeners" (xvii). For the benefit of African-American

preachers and their listeners, Newton calls for contemporary experiences of African-American life-situations as a starting point for their preaching. Despite obvious contextual and cultural distinctions, for non-African-American preachers, Newton believes life-situation preaching has value for all conscientious preachers. Within this call, Newton is aware that African-American listeners of preaching listen to preachers who are not African-American. Thus, while the title suggests a narrow audience, the content can be useful on a broader scale.

Given the title and aim of this work, Newton concedes that his focus on the life-situation preaching of Harry Emerson Fosdick, a white preacher whose primary audience was not African-American, is rather surprising. Newton manages Fosdick's distance from the experiences of African-American life-situations by connecting Fosdick's personal and ministerial contexts (i.e., white and quite distant from the pastoral ministry of most African-American preachers) to the book's intended audience. Anticipating that such a distance raises questions of appropriateness, Newton highlights Fosdick's homiletical influence on iconic African-American preaching personalities, including Benjamin E. Mays, Samuel DeWitt Proctor, and Martin Luther King Jr. Moreover, Newton locates life-situation as a viable homiletical theory already present within African-American preaching. The notable distinction, however, is that "the point of departure for African-American preaching" differs from Fosdick's homiletic, which "represents the white homiletic tradition" (97).

Readers interested in a helpful critique of life-situation preaching will benefit from Newton's analysis of the method's weaknesses. Newton offers compelling discussions regarding Fosdick's appeal to life-situations as the starting point for preaching, the seeming lack of appreciation for the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching, and the place of the church and doctrine in preaching. To these discussions, Newton engages the work of William Willimon, Marvin McMickle, James Forbes, and Richard Lischer to good effect. The attention paid to weaknesses of Fosdick's life-situation preaching notwithstanding, Newton does

not offer similar support for the strengths of life-situation preaching. The reader is left to surmise that Fosdick and Newton, by extension, are on solid footing. That said, a case is made separately for the method's theoretical potential within the tradition of African-American preaching.

Newton's composite sketches of the theories advanced by leading African-American scholar-practitioners strengthen his call for life-situation preaching. They are also helpful primers for persons unaware of the depth of similar calls from within the tradition of African-American preaching. Newton is right: African-American preaching may be difficult to define, but characteristic of the practice is the concern for relevance achieved through the address of African-American experiences. Including these voices can encourage succeeding generations of African-American preaching scholars and practitioners to hold close the homiletic imperative to address the vast life-situations that are unique to African-American persons and communities.

Also noteworthy is Newton's approach to preaching in response to difficult, contemporary sociological realities. As a point of reference for life-situation preaching, unfortunate and ill-framed conversations of so-called Black-on-Black crime must not escape the mind or practice of preachers who "are accountable to African-American listeners." Newton handles this subject matter well with a direct address, while carefully dismantling dangerous pathologies that influence uninformed preachers and their preaching. This conversation stands to add discernment and depth to preaching that does not presently hold this type of sociological tension in view.

Where some readers will find wanting the focus on the homiletic method of a non-African-American preacher, Newton remains objective enough to rightly locate Fosdick as a product of his time who was on the right side of the question of race. Still, for those hesitant to accept Fosdick, Newton offers his own set of five traits of a life-situation sermon that can help to bridge the gap between Fosdick's world and that of Newton's young African-American preacher and the listener with whom the preacher must identify. With *Life-Situation Preaching for African*

Americans, Newton adds a helpful volume worthy of consideration for preaching practitioners.

Waging War in an Age of Doubt. By Robert David Smart. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2020. 978-1-60178-762-0, 155 pp., $16.00.

Reviewer: *Joshua Peeler, Mount Olive Baptist Church, Pittsboro, NC.*

In *Waging War in an Age of Doubt*, Robert Smart examines spiritual warfare in light of twenty-first century skepticism. Part handbook, part historical and theological treatise, this work explores topics surrounding spiritual warfare. His approach combines several disciplines: "…this 'military textbook' combines knowledge of the Bible, historical theology, contemporary culture, apologetics, practical theology, and biblical counseling" (17). Smart believes that the better versed a Christian is in spiritual warfare, the more prepared that person is when faced with an encounter. Throughout this work, Smart provides detailed stories that reflect real world application of spiritual warfare. These stories serve as a complement to his theological, apologetic, and historical analysis. Drawing from a variety of sources, these stories of demonic encounters by missionaries, preachers, and evangelists underscore the value of his systematic biblical approach. After all, Christians must be prepared to engage the powers, principalities, and rulers of this present age.

Drawing from over thirty years of pastoral experience, Smart's writing addresses a variety of subjects. Although his dissertation and formal education focused on Jonathan Edwards, his later works examined spiritual formation. *Waging War in an Age of Doubt* provides theological insight and practical application for spiritual formation in power encounters with the demonic.

Smart organizes this book around a series of related themes, such as biblical foundations for spiritual warfare, Satan's strategies when Christians are vulnerable, and waging war in God's strength. (7-8) Each chapter includes a brief examination of relevant biblical passages that addresses the overall theme of the chapter. Smart's discussion of historical theology, for example, contains the reflections of several theologians' perspectives on key warfare passages. (34-70). Discussion questions are placed at the end of each chapter. These questions re-emphasize the main concepts from each chapter and encourage personalized application of the content. In "Waging War in God's Strength, Armor, and Weapons," Smart asks whether a personal application of this chapter is "reasonable, measurable and attainable" (124). Overall, Smart's discussion questions are relevant, applicable, and well written.

Throughout this work, Smart makes effective use of personal testimony. In chapter six for instance, he discusses the lies he believed about himself and his lack of significance. He argues that it was not enough to simply identify the truth about his own significance, but that he had to repent, identify, and renounce it (127). Smart also describes his early interest in spiritual warfare during his period as an evangelist. During the early part of his ministry, Smart found himself faced with powerful spiritual forces and strange encounters. Relating one story, he remembered a young man "shaking and bent over in an unusual way" (3). After praying over him, the student eventually repented, was saved, and was very fruitful that week. Each of Smart's testimonies adds a level of authenticity and practicality to this work. His sophisticated arguments of biblical, apologetic, and historical theology are dramatically strengthened by including his own personal testimonies of "power encounters" (3).

Although the content, activity, and action of spiritual warfare can at times be overwhelming, Smart concludes this work reminding Christians that they must hold fast, resisting the devil and his schemes, for they are more than conquerors (155). Smart's ambitious work is excellent, examining topics related to

spiritual warfare in deep, engaging, and practical ways. It is truly both a guidebook for spiritual encounters and a theological treatise on the subject. At a time of doubt and skepticism about the place of power encounters in ministry, many pastors would do well to pick up this work.

Pulpit Apologist: The Vital Link Between Preaching and Apologetics. By Thomas J. Gentry II. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2020. 978-1-5326-9504-9, 104 pp., $16.00.

Reviewer: *Michael Hogeland, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA*.

The work of the apologist is necessary for defending the faith, but what role should apologetics play in preaching? Thomas Gentry's *Pulpit Apologist* seeks to demonstrate apologetics' essential link to preaching, especially for sake of evangelism and discipleship (x).

Gentry provides readers with two particularly helpful ideas for integrating apologetics into their sermons. First, he recommends the use of moral apologetics. He defines moral apologetics as "either positively or negatively making an apologetic argument for the existence of God derived from the existence of objective moral facts and their implications for the existence of a moral being whose character and commands provide the basis for those facts" (24). According to Gentry, the use of moral apologetics in a sermon will strengthen its appeals to reason and emotion when dealing with "sin, righteousness, and redemption" (30), which is vital for preachers in a post-modern world as they attempt to engage their hearers with a text's practical implications and guide them toward a biblical worldview.

Second, Gentry recommends the use of abductive argumentation. Instead of using a deductive or inductive structure when preaching apologetic themes, Gentry proposes

that preachers use abductive arguments to promote humility and to avoid oversimplifying the truth (42). He explains abduction with expertise and clarity, including a biblical example in the form of Joshua's second farewell sermon (37-42). According to the author, there are two ways that preachers can argue abductively. He explains both using STEPS as his acronym. In the first, he outlines how a negative apologetic sermon defends the faith with a Specific challenge, Tells the challenger's argument, Exposes the challenger's weakness, Presents the biblical answer, and Summarizes (45-52). In the second, he outlines how a positive apologetic sermon presents faith's rationality with a Specific topic, Tells the subject's importance, Explains the biblical reasoning, Practically applies the topic, and Summarizes (52-59).

While deductive and inductive arguments are beneficial in preaching, Gentry shows that abductive arguments can be equally so (35). Abduction is routinely used by doctors, mechanics, and technicians when diagnosing a problem. Preachers who take the time to learn how to use abductive argumentation will undoubtedly discover it to be a valuable tool to add to their preaching toolkit.

Though Gentry provides helpful links between the works of apologetics and homiletics, two of his ideas are less helpful. The first is his identification of apologetic preaching as a particular sermon genre. I would agree that sermons often require an apologetic appeal, but I am unconvinced that the entire sermon must be shaped as an apology in order to persuade an audience toward a biblical worldview.

Second, Gentry suggests that preachers begin with a topic when preparing their apologetic sermons. I find this to be a potentially problematic approach because it seeks to present and defend a text's theological truth less than it attempts to address a specific challenge to the Christian faith. The four sample sermons provided by Gentry address the problem of evil, the reliability of Scripture (twice), and the resurrection of Christ. While preachers undoubtedly need to discuss these topics, how are they to address them apologetically in the course of an expository

sermon? Does apologetics in preaching yield topical sermons only, or can apologetics serve the expository sermon as well?

Pulpit Apologist is a valuable introductory book on the subject. Any pastor or homiletician interested in this topic will benefit from the author's knowledge and experience.

Taken Up and Preached: A Collection of Biblical Sermons. By Blayne A. Banting. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019. 978-1-53269-035-8, 203 pp., $25.00.

Reviewer: *Derek Kitterlin, Leavell College, New Orleans, LA.*

Banting begins his book by noting the pedagogical conundrum that accompanies homiletical instruction. One can formulate a homiletical method but demonstrating how to implement that method requires written examples to examine. Still, an examination must take place to determine if the homiletician practices what he preaches or, better yet, if what he is teaching correlates with his preaching. Banting, therefore, offers *Taken Up and Preached* as a supplement to his previous work *Take Up and Preach: A Primer for Interpreting Texts*. The sermons offered in *Taken Up and Preached* illustrate the homiletical bridge methodology developed in his previous book.

The sermons presented in this second volume are sermons that Banting delivered to his own congregation. They are real world samples from one who is both a professor and preacher. These sermons are shared as manuscripts rather than transcripts, being what he intended to say rather than what he actually said.

As part of this work's introduction, Banting includes an overview of his homiletical bridge method. I have not read his earlier work in which he details his method, but I found that to be unnecessary—at least for sake of this review—thanks to the overview presented here. In his homiletic method, Banting uses a double-pylon cable suspension bridge as an analogy. The cables that hold the bridge tell the story of redemption in Scripture. The

two pylons that support the bridge are God and human needs. The God pylon is the Divine Vision Disclosed (DVD) within a pericope and the human pylon represents the Deep Needs Addressed (DNA). The bridge deck contains five lanes, with the deck being the redeemed community, that is, the listening church. The five lanes account for a pericope's (and sermon's) form, flow, focus, function, and feel. The form lane identifies the sub-genre of the text itself. The flow lane examines the macro and micro sense of the text. The macro is the literary sense of the text in the larger context, and the micro sense is the specific internal flow of the text that is being preached. The focus lane studies what the text is saying and doing. The function lane examines what the text intends to do to the reader, while the feel lane is the emotive quality of the text (and sermon).

Banting groups his sample sermons into three types: discursive, poetic, and narrative. Each section contains ten sermons related to the type. His sermons are humorous, relevant, and witty—with regular uses of antanaclasis and paronomasia. Banting uses various schemes and tropes—rhetorical devices—for added seasoning. He unites the truth of each text with the context of his congregation. His sermons touch the head, move the heart, and urge the hands to action. His Canadian humor is unique and funny. (I wondered to myself how a town came to be named "Moose Jaw.")

One particular concern came to mind when reading this collection of sermons. All the reader is able to see is the finished product, the supposed result of Banting using his homiletical bridge to develop each sermon. Is the reader to heuristically integrate the bridge method/model onto or into the finished sermon and find the implementation of the five lanes, our location on the bridge deck, and the other traits of the method/model? The book would have risen above other sermon books if the author had noted how the components of his method directly impacted the development and delivery of each sermon. As a collection of sermons built on a particular homiletical method, I was looking for how Banting's method shaped his preaching. I read this specific collection of sermons looking for

more than sermon content. Banting noted in the introduction how the questions that his students have asked him regarding his method led to the production of this book. I would like to have seen a little more detail, more background work related to his use of the bridge. Regardless, this is a collection of sermons well worth reading.

Preaching to Head and Heart. By Thomas R. Swears. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019. 978-1-5326-9010-5, 157 pp., $19.00.

Reviewer: *Dongjin Park, McMaster Divinity College, Hamilton, ON.*

Thomas R. Swears' book, *Preaching to Head and Heart*, leads preachers to reflect on the longest journey—from the head to the heart—in their preaching ministries. Some preachers tend to focus on delivering theological information to the congregation, disregarding preaching's emotional aspect. In contrast, other preachers make an effort to evoke emotions in the listeners' hearts at the expense of theological understanding. In this book, Swears suggests that the combination of head and heart in preaching can bring about "the most compelling, evoking responses" (18) in preaching events.

In his consideration of what's involved in the journey from head to heart, first, the author defines preaching as a craft rather than a science (information) or an art (emotion) because it involves "the deep bonding of heart, mind, memory, volition, and visceral response to the word" (34). Then, Swears guides his readers on this journey step by step, driving them to consider preacher, listener, sermon, and preaching event. As for preacher (Chapter 2: "The Person in the Pulpit"), the author emphasizes the preacher's integrity (harmony between word and deed), authenticity (the presence of Christ in the preacher's life), and authority (encountering the presence of God in the preacher's words).

Regarding the listener (Chapter 3: "Valuing the Listener"), Swears emphasizes the preacher's valuing his/her listeners as active partners, not just passive recipients of information. Swears points out that the relationship of "openness and trust" (71) between preacher and listener is required for effective communication. He also argues that preachers should preserve "an internal honesty about the ambiguities of daily life" (75), not attempting to speak with dishonest confidence about something unsure.

Concerning the preparation of a sermon (Chapter 4: "How to Develop the Head and Heart Connection"), the author first suggests practical methods for obtaining a message from the chosen biblical text. Then, he describes how to form a sermon to deliver the message, emphasizing the significance of "movement" in the sermon: "from a felt discrepancy toward a resolution" (98). Lastly, Swears suggests "metaphor" as the most appropriate language for effective preaching. For preachers, for instance, when introducing the person of Christ, it is better to describe "the Bright Morning Star" than "the incarnation reality constituent of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity" (111).

As for the act of preaching (Chapter 5: "Communicating to the Head and Heart Connection Effectively"), the author presents such principles of effective communication as partnering, preaching as an art of action, freeing the text, and scripting. In the last chapter (Chapter 6: "Making the Connection"), Swears includes two of his own sermons as examples that connect head and heart successfully.

Swears' goal in this brief volume is to help preachers who are supposed to deliver sermons weekly to the same congregation over an extended period. As such, this work is a helpful and detailed resource that will guide preachers in an examination of their current preaching ministry in terms of the "journey from head to heart" according to the four aforementioned categories (preacher, listener, sermon, and preaching event). Unfortunately, the author does not deal much with the Holy Spirit's role in preaching events. It is the Spirit that ultimately not only combines intellect and emotion in the

preacher as well as in the listener but also makes preaching effective. Moreover, the author's understanding of preaching, focusing only on the conversational (horizontal) aspect, seems to disregard the proclamatory (vertical) part. Nonetheless, *Preaching to Head and Heart* is a valuable work for reminding preachers that the ultimate goal of preaching is to transform the hearer's whole being (mind, heart, and will). For this reason, the journey from head to heart is crucial in every preaching event.

Revelation (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament). By Buist M. Fanning. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020. 978-0-310-24417-2, 623 pp., $54.99.

Reviewer: *Andrew Thompson, Union City Church, Brunswick, GA.*

Zondervan has recently released the Revelation volume of its *Exegetical Commentary* series, a volume authored by Buist M. Fanning. The structure of the book is standard. Beginning with a substantial (49-page) introduction and bibliography, the bulk of the work is commentary, followed by a brief essay on the theology of Revelation and various indices. Within the body, the commentary on each passage follows the ZECNT format: literary context, main idea of the passage, translation and graphical layout (a simplified semantic structural analysis of each passage in English), comments on structure, exegetical outline of the passage, explanation of the text, and theology and application. Fanning also includes "in depth" discussion boxes on special topics like Armageddon and the Millennium.

The book's strengths are manifold. Readers who use it to study and preach will immediately appreciate Fanning's clear style and his strong grasp of the linguistic, exegetical, and theological tar pits that can suck unwary preachers into eschatological despair.

The commentary's format offers another boon: the editorial team designed it with serious students and preachers in

mind. The main ideas for each passage and the exegetical outline orient readers to the text at hand within the flow of the book. The graphical layout tool is priceless. It diagrams each sentence in terms of its clauses and their functions, giving an instant and intuitive grasp of the flow of John's thought. The Greek text is displayed with no transliteration, and Fanning comments often on the grammar of the passage, which will be helpful to those who study in the original language. Most of the technical grammatical and textual material is in the footnotes, so the main body can be followed by those whose Greek textbooks are in a cardboard box in the attic.

Fanning's introduction is also, in my judgment, the right length and depth for preachers. He states his own interpretive approach clearly then quickly covers the basics of author, setting, and genre. His discussion on text critical issues and the grammar and style of Revelation are brief but excellent.

All of these strengths make the book worth buying and using as a study companion when preaching from Revelation and for classroom use in seminaries. Nonetheless, readers should bear in mind the following.

First, the introduction promises more than the body delivers. Fanning's comments on the text of Revelation and on hermeneutics for interpreting Old Testament and extrabiblical allusions are engaging, and one hopes to see those stances unfold in the body of the commentary. They rarely do. Where they appear, discussion is relegated to text-critical footnotes and parenthetical citations of the Old Testament texts.

Second, Fanning's theological approach to Revelation could render much of his work irrelevant to readers who have different perspectives. This is true of any book but particularly one that addresses so many controversial topics. Fanning, an evangelical with a hearty respect for the Scriptures as the word of God, bills himself as a preterist-idealist-futurist, but the accent falls heavily on the latter. The commentary interprets much of John's work as referring to future periods immediately before the return of Christ (though not without 1st-century and 21st-century preludes). As a progressive dispensationalist, he finds

clear divisions between Israel and the church in God's future plan and looks for the premillennial return of Christ. If preachers view these topics (or the rapture, the great tribulation, Armageddon, or 666) from within other frameworks, they may not find Fanning as helpful as they had hoped.

Finally, the commentary lacks a clear statement of the macro-theme of the book as a whole and clear argumentation for its macro-structure (which contributes to that macro-theme more directly for Revelation than most other books of the Bible). Neither the introduction nor the theological conclusion answers the questions, "What is John talking about, and what is he saying about what he is talking about?" Such an orientation would have helped readers entering into the jungle of a strange and challenging New Testament book.

This is a commentary for preachers and professors who are not primarily New Testament scholars but who want to get serious about Revelation and preach expository sermons based on John's Apocalypse. The format and the level of detail are right for that purpose. Additionally, preachers will derive helpful indicators for application from the commentary, which gives responsible direction for that application without spelling everything out. As helpful as Fanning's work is, it should not be the only commentary one uses. I do not believe a single all-sufficient commentary on Revelation has yet been written, nor do I see it coming soon.

The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society

History:

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

Specifically, the EHS was formed to advance the cause of Biblical Preaching through:

> promotion of a biblical-theological approach to preaching increased competence for teachers of preaching integration of the fields of communication, biblical studies, and theology scholarly contributions to the field of homiletics

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

Purpose:

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

Vision:

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

General Editor:

The General Editor has oversight of the journal. The General Editor selects suitable articles for publication and may solicit article suggestions from the Editorial Board for consideration for publication. The General Editor works cooperatively with the Book Review Editor and the Managing Editor to ensure the timely publication of the journal.

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The Book Review Editor is responsible for the Book Review section of the journal. The Book Review Editor contacts publishers for books to review and receives the books from publishers. The Book Review Editor sends books to members of the Society who serve as book reviewers. The reviewers then forward their written reviews to the Book Review Editor in a timely manner. The Book Review Editor works in coordination with the General Editor for the prompt publication of the journal.

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The Managing Editor has oversight of the business matters of the journal. The Managing Editor solicits advertising, coordinates the subscription list and mailing of the journal, and works with the General Editor and Book Review Editor to ensure a timely publication of the journal.

Editorial Board:

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

Frequency of Publication:

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

Jury Policy:

Articles submitted to the Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society are blind juried by members of the Editorial Board. In addition, the General Editor may ask a scholar who is a specialist to jury particular articles.

The General Editor may seek articles for publication from qualified scholars. The General Editor makes the final publication decisions. It is always the General Editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

Submission Guidelines

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

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

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

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

   a. From a book:

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

   b. From a periodical:

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

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

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

Abbreviations

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

Captalization

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

Direct Quotes

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

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Headings

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Notes

All notes should be endnotes, the same size as the main text with a hard return between each one.

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Manuscripts should be sent to the attention of the General Editor. Send an email with attached Word document to: scott_gibson@baylor.edu

Address correspondence to Scott M. Gibson, General Editor, Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society, Baylor University's Truett Seminary, One Bear Place #97126, Waco, TX 76798-7126

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