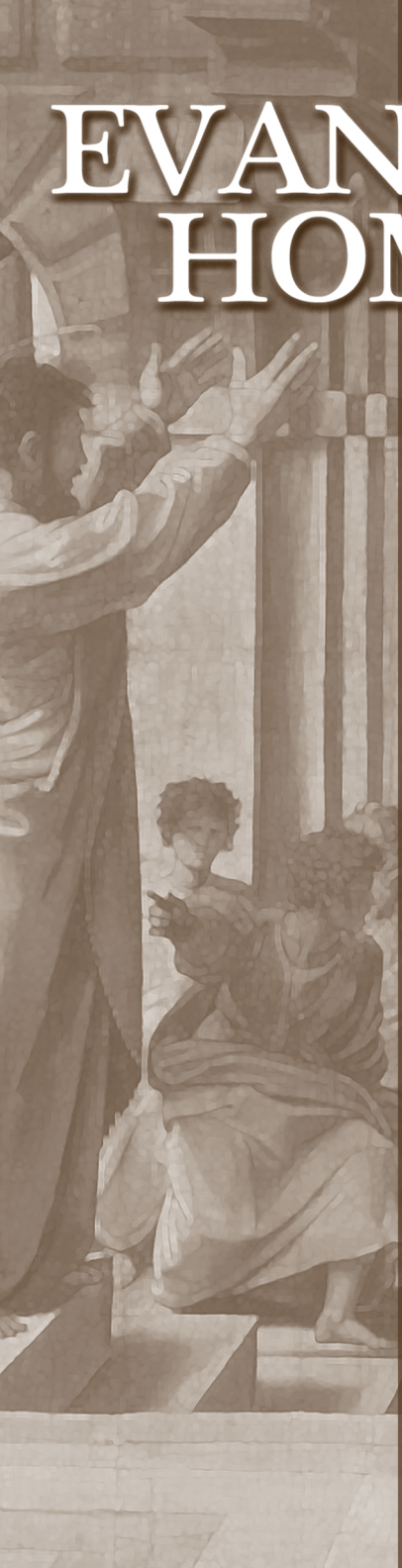

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The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society is the publication of the Evangelical Homiletics Society. Organized in 1997, the Evangelical Homiletics Society is an academic society established for the exchange of ideas related to the instruction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

FRUITFUL THINKING ABOUT PREACHING

SCOTT M. GIBSON
General Editor

This edition of *The Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* provides readers with fruitful thinking about the field of preaching. The first article by David Lyle Jeffrey, Resident Distinguished Professor of Literature and the Humanities at Baylor University, examines the language of scripture and the language of preaching. In view of the cultural shifts in language and meaning, Jeffrey explores the importance of holding to the biblical sense than the cultural interpretation. He calls all preachers to wrestle with being faithful in a world antagonistic to the gospel.

The second article by Jeremy M. Kimble of Cedarville University in many ways builds upon Jeffrey's premise. He argues for book-level meaning, suggesting that authorial intent is to be acknowledged in the smaller passage as well as the book or even the larger writing of the author as a whole. Kimble advocates that book-level meaning is a useful hermeneutical tool for preaching.

The third article is written by a team of writers: Karen Mason, Esther Kim, and Blake Martin, of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. This piece is a demonstration of yet another fruitful exploration in the field of homiletics. The authors raise the question whether or not listeners hear preachers when they preach on topics like suicide or suicide prevention. And, in what ways listeners from different traditions hear such preaching. Their research provides much for preachers to consider at they preach and teach on suicide as well as preach at funerals and memorial services.

The final article in this edition of the journal is by Mike Chandler of St. Cloud, Florida, who explores the historical development of communication theory as this theory intersects with homiletics. Chandler reveals that much has not changed in the last few decades with regard to an evangelical engagement with communication theory. His article challenges the present generation in exploring communication theory and its current and ongoing impact on the field of homiletics.

The sermon included in this edition is by Chase Campbell of Atlanta, GA, titled, "Jesus is Coming—So What?" Chase Campbell is 2021 recipient of the Haddon W. Robinson Preaching Award, being part of a now a six-year tradition. This past year, the genre for sermons submitted for the award was apocalyptic literature. Campbell's sermon is based on Micah 4. The society is pleased to encourage preaching among associate members who are pursuing an undergraduate or master degree.

The Book Review section edited by Gregory Hollifield, yet again underscores the fruitful thinking that is taking place in the field of preaching. The various books are reviewed by our members and the books reflect thinking on homiletics from a wide-range of authors and points of view. Make sure you garner the fruit from this resourceful section of the journal.

The field of preaching is ripe with fruit. The various angles and avenues by which one can harvest knowledge with regard to preaching abounds. Homileticians have the advantage of exploring the field of preaching through any number of lenses, including biblical, historical, theological, sociological, psychological, philosophical, rhetorical, congregational—and many more. This multi-dimensional aspect homiletics is what makes this field of study rich and stimulating. Fellow homileticians, continue to till the soil so that the Word might be proclaimed, the church strengthened, and the Lord honored.

BIBLICAL LANGUAGE AND THE LANGUAGE OF PREACHING*

DAVID LYLE JEFFREY
Waco, TX

Faeder ure, thu the eart in heofunum,
Si thin nama gehalgod; to-becume thin rice
(1000 AD)
Our fadir that art in heuenes,
halwid be thi name; thi raume or kingdom come to the
(Wycliffite, ca. 1390)

O oure father which arte in heven,
Hallowed be thy name. Let thy kingdome come.
(Tyndale, 1534)[1]

INTRODUCTION

Language changes—not just the English language, but every language. Some languages change more rapidly than others. In general, the more contact with other languages, the more rapid the change; in our time, the more language is mediated by advertising agencies and the entertainment industry, the more vapid the change. In a decadent culture, media-conditioned to the lowest standard of verbal intelligence, a degeneration of meaning and diminishment of comprehension corresponds to our evident loss of cultural memory. In a Christian sub-culture such as ours, this puts the very foundations of our faith in peril, for if the Scriptures are not received with understanding a vacuum is created and that vacuum tends to get filled with rubbish.

I take this to be a crucial problem for most North American Christian churches in our time. It is all too easy to laugh over the grade three vocabulary and incoherent morality of some politicians, but harder to acknowledge that in the entertainment industry—and frankly, a lot of preaching falls into this category—that sort of bombast, full of sound and fury and signifying next to nothing, is becoming merely part of the white noise people tune in or out at a whim. Babble of his sort is not normative language change, for in any healthy social context the purpose of language is still to convey meaning. Babble, or psychobabble, is a willfully induced distortion of meaning, usually for some ulterior purpose. There are many manifestations of this in decadent cultures—but let me give two concrete examples that directly impinge on Christian ministry.

BABBLE

First, there is the ubiquitous dumbed-down language of advertising, social media and the public square. Prophetic voices have long before now asked the question, "Who does this infantile order of language most serve?" Two generations ago George Orwell warned that political chaos is connected with the decay of language. In his novel *1984* the political masters of the totalitarian state know that by reducing the vocabulary of their citizens and debasing their language they cramp their ability to think.[2] In our time, as columnist David Brooks has noted, public language has also become demoralized. Brooks points to the way virtue words have decreased dramatically, while terms of abuse such as "loser," "disgusting," "weak," and "idiot" have taken their place. Brooks' concern is simply that *thought* has suffered as a consequence.[3] As one of his reviewers sums up his point, "you cannot contemplate what you cannot articulate."[4]

How do we as Christian teachers begin to cope with the "inability to contemplate what you cannot articulate"? Not, I think, by substituting general feel-good therapies for thoughtful teaching of the Word of God itself. In far too many cases the default response to perceived inability in our congregations to

think their way through a Psalm or a hymn by Charles Wesley or Isaac Watts is to provide them with vacuous and repetitive "praise songs" made palatable by schmaltzy musical accompaniment.

Another path of compromise is paraphrase and 'modernization' of the language of Scripture itself. Rather than fighting the diminishment of language in our culture, some pastors prefer user-friendly paraphrases to the Bible itself, just because they use fewer difficult or unfamiliar words. These pastors see themselves as needing to target the comfort zone of the culture more than to be scrupulous about conveying as clearly as possible what Scripture says in the original Hebrew and Greek. Unfortunately, many a phrase in such loose versions of the Bible is neither a translation, properly speaking, nor even an adequate approximation of what the text says. For example, to render Hebrews 11:1 ("Faith is the substance of things hoped for," as the KJV responsibly has it) as "Now faith is being sure we will get what we hope for" (New Life Version) or "faith is the firm foundation under everything that makes life worth living" (Message) may be well-intended, but these are at best impoverished deflections of the original meaning. They carry a materialist overture and an emphasis on present experience, rather than, as in the original Greek, an understanding that faith is ordered to *eternal* beatitude, precisely the point of the whole chapter. When a reader—or preacher—takes such language to be what "the Bible says," wittingly or not, these impoverished versions actually undermine the original text.

This challenge is not new. In his fourth-century treatise *On the Holy Spirit* St. Basil the Great stresses that Christian "instruction begins with the proper use of speech," and asks: "What theological term is so insignificant that it will not greatly upset the balance of the scales unless it is used correctly?"[5] My point today is similar. In our time, as in his, the task of would-be-faithful Christian preachers is *not* to resign ourselves to the therapeutic moral deism of weak facsimiles for Scripture, but to choose a reliable translation and teach from it, difficult words or not, by explaining the meaning of doctrinally important terms as

we go along. That we do so with all diligence is imperative, for very often what is at stake is not merely reliable representation of God's Word, but, as Basil noted, the consequent understanding of his *Person*.

Undeniably, the God of the Bible is difficult: holy, as we are not, demanding that we become holy, even as He is holy. We are to become more in His image, not He in ours: "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9V).

Likewise, though the language of Jesus is vernacular, it is far from easy. Jesus not only reiterates the law of God, he intensifies it. He is poetic, teaching in parable and enigma that often leave his disciples as well as his enemies baffled. What he does *not* do is give them a pablum of clichés and nostrums. He adds *nous,* mind, to the Great Commandment. Humble fishermen and arrogant religious folk alike have to *stretch* to understand. They have to put their minds to it. You who preach are called to no easy task, for as the Apostle Paul says, we are to "follow God's example, therefore, as dearly beloved children" (Ephesians. 5:1).

In a responsible home, children learn to deepen their capacity for meaning by imitating the language of their parents and teachers, not the other way round. The language which they learn ought *not* to be merely of the world, light-weight, sexually impure, and therapeutically vacuous in ways that will anesthetize their minds. The language which our flocks and our children need to learn and keep learning is the pure and undefiled, God-breathed words of Holy Scripture, rich in transcendence and a far higher view of the meaning of persons accordingly, that they "may be complete, equipped for every good work." In our time they will need this learning to escape the great deceit, and for eternity they will depend on it for the salvation of their souls.

DECONSTRUCTION

What I have just now been describing is a first order language problem in our culture, universal in its power to corrupt. I want to suggest that it may, however, be dealt with successfully by a rigorous exposition of Scripture in a context which takes Scripture to be true Revelation, or, as T.S. Eliot said, "a reliable report of the Word of God."[6] Most of us are aware that we have also a second order language problem, a kind of disease of language to which academics, including seminarians, are especially prone, and which, if they succumb to it, paralyzes their will as surely as it beclouds their intellect. I refer to those fashionable views we associate with the literary and linguistic school of "deconstruction" and its many progressive academic allies. Though not unrelated to the first, this order of language abuse involves the dialectical redefinition of key words in our received theological vocabulary. This second degree abuse depends on a much greater command of the lexicon, a choice for cleverness over clarity, and works best if its victims think they know more than in fact they do. More subtle, more academically serpentine, and thoroughly gnostic, this type of language abuse is ultimately more dangerous to the pastor or teacher than the person in the pew, but it can appeal to the sophomore in any of us, especially if we have made something of an idol out of cleverness.

Deconstruction, a type of subversive redefinition of words so as to make them seem unstable, even to turn them inside out, is a strategy well known to all in this audience. Such a tactic for achieving redefinition is not nearly so new as it seems. As a tactical maneuver it has a long history, as old as the serpent in Eden. In theological contexts, re-definers have always capitalized upon sloppy thinking and loose understanding of terms to turn biblical meaning and principles inside out, all the while claiming to uphold them, and in so doing they have in many times and places been able "to deceive the very elect" (Matthew 24:24 KJV). The gullibility of Eve is an archetype.

Some of you may remember that the fourth book of St. Augustine's *Confessions* is devoted to an acknowledgement of his willful self-deception and deception of others. For Augustine, words had been toys, instruments for entertainment, for strategy in debate, for obtaining advantage and wielding power. He admits:

> I was led astray myself and led others astray in turn. We were alike deceivers and deceived in all our different aims and ambitions, both publically when we expounded our so-called liberal ideas, and in private through our service to what we called religion. In public we were cocksure, in private superstitious, and everywhere void and empty (*Confessions* 4.1).[7]

A millennium and a half later, Soren Kierkegaard found that such infections of language had turned European Christendom into a fraud. Speaking of the preaching in his day, he deplored what he described as a collective "feat of dialectics [which] leaves everything standing, but empties it of significance."[8] People still employ words such as "God" and "holy," he notes, but in such a fashion as to make it clear that God is nothing more than a weak projection of one's best self, and "holy" is a certain order of piety that will suffice for social respectability. The words remain, but not their meaning. With this we too are familiar.

If rhetoric is essentially the art of persuasion, dialectic is typically an art of *dissuasion*. As it operates in our own time, dialectic works not so much by persuading openly as by subverting presuppositions and traditional understandings, in this way eroding meaning at its base. Such deconstruction, by whatever name it goes, has *always* been preparatory to replacing one authority with another. The great Russian novelist Alexandr Solzhenitsyn, who was not untutored in dialectical redefinition, said that he cherished each word in his language and studied them in his dictionary "as if they were precious stones, each so precious that [he] would not exchange one for another."[9] After

his conversion in a Siberian prison, he spent his entire life trying to write truth, and he knew that to do that he needed to recover the true meaning of ordinary words. By comparison, too many of our contemporaries can seem glib, sloppy in their use of the most precious words of all. Might this be a danger in our pulpits? If so, faithfulness to Holy Scripture will require of us a more rigorous use of biblical language, and careful definition of key terms in our teaching and preaching. My old friend, the late J.I. Packer, in his *Eighteen Words: The Most Important Words you will Ever Know*, offers an excellent guide for pastors and teachers; I am glad to recommend it.[10]

RECOVERING TRUTHFUL LANGUAGE THROUGH LITERATE BIBLICAL PREACHING

During my student days at Princeton the philosopher Walter Kaufman reflected on the trends and fashions in modern Christian thought and pronounced our own time an "age of Judas" (Introduction to Kierkegaard, *The Present Age*, 12). What he was saying was that the criticisms of nominal Christianity articulated by Kierkegaard more than a century earlier applied very much to America in the 1960s, and he was clearly implicating modern theologians in particular. He prefaced his critique with some rhetorical questions:

> Who would stand up against Christ and be counted his opponent? Who openly rejects the claims of the New Testament? [Imagine: at Princeton in my lifetime one could still say that and not seem ludicrous.] Who lets his "yea be yea, Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil?" Certainly not the apologists who simply ignore what gives offense or, when this is not feasible, offer "interpretations" instead of saying Nay. To be sure, it is not literally with a kiss that Christ is betrayed in the present age: today one betrays with an interpretation.[11]

Many a subversive interpretation begins with a surreptitious redefinition of a biblical term.

Orthodox Christians, including Baptists, have in the past comforted themselves with assurances that none of their number would betray in this way. Baptist interpretation has tended to remain reliable, we feel, because we have always held up the Word of God on its own terms. Yet even as we have presumed the trustworthiness of our text in the pew translation, we may have missed the fact that the attack against a high view of Scripture has metastasized. Antagonists for three generations, many from within the seminaries, have been insisting that the issue is not in any case historical truth, which they declare to be beyond recovery, but rather an appreciation of relative cultural perspective, of the sociology of knowledge which requires a "new" dialectical development of meaning "in *contemporary* terms." This can appear as a call for cultural translation, a demand that the energies of biblical scholarship be turned toward *adapting* the text to contemporary conditions they think irreconcilable with the biblical view of persons and conditions. This is indeed to betray with a kiss, turning our Lord over to the dictates of our social and political shibboleths. Not merely mistranslation, then, but actual re-writing of the Bible is now being called for in some quarters. Such re-writing requires even more explicit perfidy than betrayal by interpretation, and would-be faithful pastors will need to develop deliberate teaching strategies in the face of it.

PASTORAL STRATEGIES

In such a spiritual war, the Church needs more rigorous preaching, not less—a preaching that is scrupulous in its use of biblical language and openly corrective of the abuse of it in our culture. As our secular contemporaries become less and less literate, we must teach our congregations to become more and more literate.

One difference between a genuinely literate person and an ordinary victim of cheating words is that a literate person

understands the historically determined character of the language he or she speaks. Nowhere is the advantage of such knowledge more essential than when a great text is considered, be it the works of Shakespeare, the dialogues of Plato, or the Bible. In all such cases, as George Steiner puts it, we discover that

> … every language act has a temporal determinant. No semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history. A text is embedded in specific historical time; it has what linguists call a diachronic structure. *To read fully* is to restore all that one can of the immediacies of value and intent in which speech actually occurs.[12]

To be interested in language as a medium for the discovery of truth is thus to approach each text, each occasion of listening or reading, in humility. Someone else is talking. Humility in this case involves trying to understand the other person before asserting our own ideas, however clever. In the case of the words of Scripture, the divine authors' intent is usually not all that difficult to discern in context, even where it may well, as our earliest expositors saw, have several registers of application. To get at any of these, however, we must ask about more than what a given word in a text we are expounding means to our contemporaries, for their usage may well be a debasement of the original word.

Let me give you a couple of simple examples. In an age such as ours, in which many people take the highest human good to be sexual freedom, "freedom," a rather important biblical word as it happens, may have acquired a meaning so corruptive of its biblical sense as to be positively dangerous if not re-rooted in its historical and biblical context. If I ask my undergraduates what freedom means to them, they invariably answer in terms of "choice," "autonomy," even "liberty to define myself in terms I choose." When I ask them if they think that semantic range would do justice to the intention of Thomas Jefferson, some pause, especially if they have studied the Declaration of

Independence or his Letters. I then ask them what they think freedom meant to Chaucer or Wyclif, and they all go blank. "What about the Knight in the *Canterbury Tales* who "loved trouthe, honour, freedom, and curtesye"?[13] I have to tell them that in the fourteenth century "freedom" was glossed in bilingual dictionaries as "largesse," generosity to others. This meaning, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* will confirm, is in our time preserved only in the phrase, "a free spirit," that sort of bon vivant who may spontaneously offer to buy everyone lunch. But any such generosity—other-directed largesse or charity—is polar opposite to my students' reflex definition, in which the meaning of freedom is entirely self-directed. "So then," I say, do you think that when Jesus said, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32), he meant that the truth would make you autonomous, a law unto yourself?" We typically then have a discussion in which they discover that they really haven't understood Jesus at all, for the phrase is only part of a sentence in Greek which begins in the previous verse: "If you abide in my word, then shall you be truly my disciples, and then you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8: 31-32, NKJV). Freedom depends, in the usage of the Lord, on a sequence of "if-then" conditionals; one must abide (μεινητε) in his word, live there. This is in fact the *sine qua non* condition of being a true rather than a false disciple, and only that kind of obedience and self-effacement makes it possible to have the foggiest idea of what Jesus means by freedom.

Truth is another word needing clarification. In no small part this is because the prevalent theory of truth in our time does not require correspondence between word and deed or claim and fact, something which characterizes the correspondence theory of truth, historically fundamental to science and medicine, and certainly normative both epistemologically and morally in the Bible. For those of you who remember Aristotle, whose law of non-contradiction says that something cannot be itself and a contrary at the same time, you will see that this correspondence view of truth has been common to the logic of more than biblical tradition. Those who have read the general prologue to *The*

Canterbury Tales will remember that truth is also one of the things Chaucer's knight loved. But in Chaucer's era, "truth" carried an additional meaning which owed specifically to Scripture, namely the virtue of fidelity or trustworthiness. That sense is still visible in the *Book of Common Prayer* liturgy for marriage, in which the bride and groom conclude their vows to each other: "and thereto I pledge to thee my troth," which is to say more than "I am speaking these promises to you truthfully," but "I am pledging myself to be faithful to you forever."[14]

In our time another theory of truth has come to be prevalent. In the pragmatic theory of truth, truth is whatever you and perhaps some of your peers choose it to be; in the words of a prominent literary theorist (Jonathan Culler), "our truth is what gets us what we want."[15] Needless perhaps to say it, but this theory has also been around a long time. When Pilate scoffed at Jesus, saying "What is truth?" he knew very well that "truth" in his world was anything that Caesar wanted it to be. For Jesus, by contrast, truth was a matter of fact, not opinion, and when he said of himself, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (John 14:6), he clearly meant to be understood as saying that he was the embodiment of truth, the embodiment of faithfulness, and that he was trustworthy as no one in the world before him had ever been. In a self-referential world such as ours, the meaning of the *word* "truth" may be unstable in the minds of many, but the quality of truth as it is represented in the Word of God and the person of Jesus is not a matter of subjective opinion, like "my truth" or "our preferred narrative." The truth in God remains solid like a rock, yesterday, today, the same forever. To teach that effectively now, we need to re-root the word itself historically and in Scripture especially, with precision and clarity.

As Christians, we have a crucial task before us, not just as a necessity for self-preservation but as a moral obligation to others. We must endeavor to restore to the language of fellow-believers the richness and depth of its historical and biblical meaning. We must show them the power of language to distinguish, to contrast, not just compare, to detail the nature of

created reality in Scripture and in the moral life of faithful believers.

This can be done in a few sentences in almost any sermon. For those of you whose charge is a Church of the Blessed Power-Point Projector, it is certainly possible to do it simply by putting a few words, definitions, and examples on a slide. Try *that* instead of a video clip from a TV show or movie, and measure the results after a year or so. We should be more resistant to what Richard Lischer calls "the Gospel of Technology."[16] Actually teaching people to think, to use the language of Scripture intelligently, will not only enable them to grasp more fully the truth and recognize distortion, it will give them more self-respect, more confidence in that faith which they profess.

Let us face the obvious. You do not get faith in language much beyond the point where you have lost the language of faith. By allowing words whose primary meaning is anchored in Scripture to be de-natured by worldly abuse, we have gotten into a swamp from which there can be no exit without first retracing our steps. We live in a world of babble, what Richard Rorty once called "incommensurable discourse,"[17] a linguistic anarchy which has proven, however, insufficiently therapeutic to ward off social calamity. To restore sanity we will need to recognize, as Emmanuel Levinas puts it, that in the end there can be no intelligibility without transcendence. A corollary of this axiom is that there can be no sustained morality without ontology, just as there can be no Christian understanding without a diligent and faithful preaching of the Word of God, straight up, no fizz and no ice.

You are all intelligent men and women. You can all afford a good historical dictionary. What you cannot afford is to let ideological redefinition by antagonists to the Word of the Lord set the default understanding of those for whom you have spiritual responsibility. You are all familiar with the closing words of the Revelation to John. This is not an unprecedented warning in Holy Scripture. Here is another:

> Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not to his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar. (Prov. 30:5-6; KJV)

And subtract not either. For the love of Christ and his Kingdom, please be at pains to define carefully, and patiently explain, every word of God to your people—in its original biblical register.

> *Our Father, may your name be kept as holy by us, and may your kingdom come and flourish in us. Please give us this day bread not only for our bodies, but the bread of life which is your Word and yourself. Forgive us, please, our sins—which are many, sins of omission as well as commission—even as we make a sincere effort to forgive everyone who has sinned against us. And deliver us from the evil of presuming to think we have a better idea than that which you have given to us in your Word and in Christ Jesus. Protect us from such evil when it is imposed upon us by others. For the Kingdom is yours, not ours, and the power and the glory of it are yours alone, now and forever. Amen.*

NOTES

*I first essayed some of the ideas expressed here in talks given to a conference of Anglicans in Canada in 2016. Two of these talks were subsequently published in a magazine of the Episcopal Diocese of Fort Worth.

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BOOK-LEVEL MEANING: A NEGLECTED BUT ESSENTIAL TOOL FOR PREACHING

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of homiletics, much attention is given to the understanding of the particular details of a passage, as well as how that passage speaks Christologically, within its canonical context. While these are needful elements of the hermeneutical and homiletical enterprise, one must also understand a passage within the context of the book it is contained in. Book-level meaning allows authorial intent to be guarded at the macro-level, considering not merely a passage or chapter, but how such a unit of thought fits within the entirety of the author's distinctive approach and argumentation. This article will contend that book-level meaning serves as a key hermeneutical tool that should be used in preaching in ways that are exegetically faithful and witness to Messiah and our calling to follow him in accordance with the author's intent.

INTRODUCTION

"And that's what the book of _____ is all about." So ends many of the frequently watched videos put out by the Bible Project.[1] While there are a number of videos on biblical themes and the various genre contained within Scripture, the most useful videos, in my estimation, are those that summarize an entire book of the Bible visually within a 7-8 minute span. Many of the students I teach are aware of these videos, which are even

embedded in an app (Read Scripture) that guides you in reading through the Bible in a year, and have been helped in understanding the main message of larger, more neglected books like Isaiah, Jeremiah, or Numbers. These resources have reminded us that book-level meaning really matters.

Hermeneutics and homiletics textbooks focus much of their energy on understanding the details of a particular passage with tools, such as word studies, sentence diagramming, block diagramming, syntactical analysis, and the like. Over the last several decades in particular, attention has also been given to understanding passages Christocentrically, and/or within its canonical context.[2] And these matters are essential to the interpretive enterprise, as well as for responsible preaching. However, what does not always garner as much attention is the need to understand a passage within the context of the book it is contained in.[3]

Book-level meaning allows authorial intent to be guarded at the macro-level, considering not merely a passage or chapter, but how such a unit of thought fits within the entirety of the author's distinctive approach and argumentation. This can also be useful when thinking through how a given Old Testament (OT) passage points forward to Christ, or how we venture from Christ's work to the application of a text to our own lives. Wanting to do justice to texts like Luke 24 and John 5 where Jesus speaks of the Law, Prophets, and Writings witnessing to him, while at the same time seeking to do so in a textually responsible manner, passages can be brought back to book-level meanings to see how the author is pointing readers to Messiah.

This paper will contend that book-level meaning serves as a key hermeneutical tool that should be used in preaching in ways that are exegetically faithful and witness to Messiah and our calling to follow him in accordance with the author's intent. As such, this paper will speak briefly to the need to address the passage-level, book-level, Testament-level, and canon-level meaning of a text, focus in on how one understands the book-level meaning, give practical counsel on how to keep the book-level context in mind when preaching passages, as well as how

to preach a sermon on a whole book, and, finally, offer two specific examples of what this would actually look like in practice.

VARIOUS LEVELS OF CONTEXT

Passage-Level

When someone speaks of passage-level context, they are typically referring to a paragraph, argument, story, coherent set of images, or a song seen in Scripture with a clear and logical beginning and end. Essentially, a passage will consist of a chain of clauses that should be read together to get the full intent and meaning of that section.[4] Typically, this will also comprise the unit that one will preach to a congregation.[5]

Understanding passage-level context will involve determining the specific genre, translating the passage from its original language, and engaging in detailed discourse analysis and exegetical outlining. These steps are key to see the fine details of the content one is dealing with. This is often a massive focus for the preacher, and rightfully so, but study does not end here.

Book-Level

The focus of this paper will concern book-level context. In fact, Osborne recommends we start at this level to really understand the meaning of a smaller passage: "first, we chart the whole of a book to analyze its flow of thought in preliminary fashion; next, we study each part intensively in order to detect the detailed argumentation; finally, we rework the thought development of the whole in relation to the parts. We move from the whole book to its major sections and then to its paragraphs and finally to its individual sentences."[6] If we hope to get a clear view of a passage we must understand the book as a whole and refer people to that level of meaning often.

More will be said regarding this level of context later in the paper.[7]

Testament-Level

The passage one is preaching will be contained within a book, and that book will be contained within a Testament. The Bible is a two-Testament book, signifying those books that are anticipating Messiah and those that speak of his arrival, his person, work, and the call of the gospel to all nations. One could, in other words, summarize the OT as a series of promises made and the New Testament (NT) demonstrating how those promises are kept, all in the context of Jesus Christ.[8] Which Testament a passage is found in will shape and determine how one preaches that text, considering various details as well as the passage's location in redemptive history. Thus, Testament-level context quickly takes us to one other realm of context, namely, canonical.

Canon-Level

The canonical level of context means that as we think about a particular passage we will preach, we consider it in light of the book it is found in, the Testament it is contained in, and then how it fits in the midst of the whole Bible. The Bible, while filled with many books, contains one unified story (Rom. 1:1-6), many authors, but one overarching author (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:20-21). Thus, preaching demands that we think in terms of biblical theology.

Biblical theology is the study of the whole Bible on its own terms[9] to the end that we understand and embrace the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.[10] Biblical theology makes textual and salvation-historical connections by means of noting continuity and discontinuity between the Testaments, promise and fulfillment, typology, and the NT use of the OT (as well as the OT use of the OT). As a discipline it analyzes and synthesizes the whole canon on its own terms, showing how the Testaments integrate, and the covenants

(Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, New) and promises of God climax in Christ (2 Cor. 1:20).[11]

UNDERSTANDING THE BOOK-LEVEL MEANING

All of these aspects of context are crucial when studying Scripture and laboring to preach a passage to a particular group of people. However, as has been stated earlier, it does seem at times that book-level context in hermeneutics and for homiletics can be a neglected area. Thus, it is to this level of context that we turn our attention for the remainder of the paper.

Again, if we hope to get a clear view of a passage we must understand the book as a whole and refer people to that level of meaning often. The first key step in understanding book-level meaning is to read the entire book in one sitting. This may sound easy for books like Jude or Philippians, but it is certainly more of a challenge for Luke or Isaiah! This is essential to understanding the overall flow and message of the book, and is just our normal way of reading. For example, we do not read emails one paragraph at a time only over several days, breaking them down for analysis. Instead we read the whole thing. While certainly daunting when thinking of reading Psalms in one sitting, most books can be read in one sitting in two hours or less (we watch movies and shows for at least that length of time).[12] Reading the book through in one sitting multiple times (at least 3-4 in preparation) to understand the overall flow and argumentation is essential for properly interpreting a passage in light of its overall book-level context.

This reading of the book, when approached intentionally, gives interpreters a much better comprehension of the structure of the book and, thereby, a fuller overall picture when approaching a specific passage. Carson rightly maintains, "It is essential to develop literary sensitivity—or to put it another way, to become a good reader. . . . Above all, good reading goes with the flow. Although it is always worth meditating on individual words and phrases (especially in discourse), even so the meaning of those words is shaped by their context. Good readers will

diligently strive to make sense of the flow of the argument."[13] As one understands the flow of the argument of the book it is valuable at this point to write out a one-sentence summary of the entire book. This is good to capture the essence of the message of the entirety of that particular book, and will likely get minor adjustments through further study.

After reading through the book in one sitting several times and writing out the book's theme in a sentence the preacher is then better equipped to go through book at a slower pace since the overall context is now in his mind. At this point it is best to break the book down into its natural seams (chapter and verse breaks may or may not help you here). This would mean seeing the larger sections of the book (e.g., Gen. 1-11; 12-50), as well as the discrete passages that stand on their own in terms of their contribution to the book overall (e.g., breaking down Genesis into smaller, more manageable sections). Depending on the genre, this could mean breaking the book down into distinct narratives, sections of an argument, or a particular chapter.[14] We should read these distinct sections, again multiple times, and then write a brief summary for each section.[15]

At this point in the study of the book you would have before you a one-sentence summary of the entire book and summary sentences of each section within that book. This is needful for the exegetical rigors to come, as well as thinking through the book's place within the entire canon. As an interpreter, one cannot manage to understand distinct details of a paragraph until they know the overall flow of the book and where and how that paragraph fits in. This is essential for our hermeneutics, and it should also shape our homiletics.

KEEPING THE BOOK-LEVEL MEANING IN MIND FOR PREACHING

Preaching is the task of stewarding and heralding God's Word such that the people of God encounter God by means of His Word.[16] While philosophies of preaching differ, this paper is assuming that many preachers will be preaching in an expository

fashion, likely through whole books of the Bible, as a significant portion of their preaching calendar throughout the year. If that is the case, all that has spoken of thus far does not apply merely to the hermeneutical side of things, but also to homiletics. Book-level meaning is significant for preachers.

This is true for at least three reasons. First, we need to train who listen to our sermons to be good readers of whole books. This will allow listeners to consider that level of context as a guide for their understanding of smaller passages within the book. If we can do this effectively, we will help our people become more faithful as students of the Word in their own personal study. Second, the focus on book-level meaning could help listeners make textual connections they have yet to make. For example, church members likely think of 1, 2 Samuel as separate books that tell a continuing story, but are not aware of literary links that bind the whole narrative together. This can be seen in the connection of Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and David's song (2 Sam. 22:1-51), which tell of a main theme in the book, namely, God puts down those who are prideful and lifts up the oppressed and humble.

Finally, book-level meaning is significant for preachers because it is a way to bring your hearers back to the main theme of the book and, by virtue of that, show them the theocentric/Christological significance of the book as a whole. This is not the only way to think of Christ in all of Scripture, but it is a strategic, and textually faithful (and sometimes neglected) way to bring church members to a place where they can responsibly see God's work in Christ throughout all of Scripture, as well as textually fitting application for today.

With these points in mind consideration will now be given to the preaching of a particular passage with book-level meaning in mind, as well as how a preacher could go about responsibly preaching an entire book in one sermon.

In Preaching a Particular Passage

Let's suppose a preacher is in the midst of a series working through a book of the Bible. At this point the preacher will have read the whole book numerous times, summarized the book in one sentence, summarized the various sections in a sentence each, and will have already preached several messages in the series. The temptation will be to focus on the task at hand (the passage to preach) and potentially forget about the overarching message of the book as a whole. A preacher can also say the idea of the book each week, but do so redundantly in a way that eventually falls on deaf ears.

Strategically, therefore, a preacher needs to keep in mind several matters when preaching a text and wanting to keep book-level context in the minds of their hearers. First, throughout the preaching series continue to read the whole book in one sitting (perhaps once a week). This will keep the big idea of the book fresh in your mind. Second, consider memorizing large sections of the book, or even the entire book itself. Again, this will keep you invested in the breadth of the book as much of your time will now be focused on depth. Third, on some occasions, remind your congregation of the main idea of the whole book as part of your introduction. Doing this at strategic moments allows one to remind the audience, but not do so to the point of boredom. Help them connect the passage to the larger argument of the book as a whole.

Fourth, connect the context of your passage in varying ways to the big idea of the book. This could be a connection to a particular explanation or application. Finally, as you speak of how the book points to Christ, or from his work toward application, use the main idea of the book as a means of taking your hearers to that point. This will bring them through passage, book, Testament, and canonical-level contexts, which is excellent for their reading of the Bible as a whole. None of these approaches should be used every time in preaching, but it is good to tether the passage you are preaching to the overarching theme

as the book-level context is the main context one must consider for understanding.

In Preaching a Whole Book

Another approach to keeping the book-level context in mind while preaching is to preach a message that encapsulates an entire book of the Bible. Mark Dever differentiates such sermons from those that are more typical in evangelical churches. "Some people preach *topical* sermons, which focus on a particular topic such as money, parenting, or repentance. . . . Other people preach *expositional* sermons. An expositional sermon takes a portion of Scripture, explains it, and then applies it to the life of the congregation."[17] Each of these types of sermons have their place, though, if we are going to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), exposition should be the norm for proclaiming the Word to our congregation. Dever classifies sermons that preach through an entire book in one message as expositional in nature, but "rather than looking at particular Scripture through a microscope, we are looking down from an airplane."[18]

Dever terms these types of messages as overview sermons (i.e., sermons that make book-level meaning their main emphasis): "An overview sermon attempts to give the burden of one particular book in a single message. If a typical expositional sermon makes the point of the biblical text the point of the sermon, an overview sermon simply makes the point of the whole book the point of the sermon. . . . aspects of God and his plan can be seen most clearly not only when studying the microscopic structure of one phrase in one verse but when examining a book as a whole."[19] While preaching in this way can be complex on a number of levels, this is an effective approach to allow church members to think about the overall context of a book. This kind of sermon could begin or end a series, but seems most logical to use at the front end.

When preaching an entire book in one sermon, several matters need to be kept in mind. First, one simply cannot speak to every detail contained within the book. This may seem

obvious, but the temptation in study will tend toward including important details from various passages within the book. However, with sermons like of this kind, one must differentiate between what is important and what is essential, focusing on the latter for preaching to our congregation. Second, while a great deal of time and focus could be spent on background information (author, recipient, cultural and historical details, etc.), it is vital that the majority of this kind of sermon focus on the actual text of the book. This demonstrates that our hearers are able to do study and see the kinds of things we will point out as faithful Bible readers. It is Scripture that transforms (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Third, it will be helpful to your congregation to have both a one-sentence big idea for the book, as well as a breakdown of the key sections of the book. This is true because one will be easy to recall and refer to again and again, but the breakdown of sections will give our people a better idea of how to locate specific passages in the overall book. Both items are useful. Fourth, place the book in its larger canonical context. In other words, use these kinds of sermons to help your people understand the overarching storyline of Scripture. And finally, when preaching through a whole book in one sermon, keep your audience in mind. This is an opportunity to show them that books written millennia ago were written for future readers as well. Hosea may have spoken to Israel in a particular time period, but it is still calling us away from spiritual adultery to worship of the true God. Sermons on whole books have great value for teaching your people about book-level meaning.

TEST CASES

Having considered some key principles of book-level meaning and the impact it can have on our approach to preaching, we will now consider two test cases for how this would look in a typical ministry context. The first book will be 1 Timothy, a book that I preached through recently at my local church as part of a preaching team. I will then also look at Judges as a test case for how this could be done.

1 Timothy

1 Timothy is a book of manageable size, consisting of only six chapters. As a preaching team we committed to reading the book through multiple times, especially doing so in one sitting. This allowed us to discern repeated themes, key imperatives, and other textual clues as to the main thrust of Paul's message in this letter. We noted the book had much to say about false teachers. We then looked at the broader context of 1 Timothy as contained in the Pastoral Epistles and recognized that while the letters to Timothy and Titus differ in context, they all have instructions that relate to dealing with false teachers. This also grants a focus on Christ, as any false teaching spoken of belittles gospel truth. Based on the purpose stated in 1:3-4 (avoid false teaching, be a good steward of God) and the key call to know "how one ought to behave in the household of God," we titled the series "Family Life in God's House." Our oft-repeated one-sentence summary of the book (not brief, but said numerous times) was as follows: The local church is to learn how to live well as God's family by rejecting false teaching, embracing godly leadership, and living as good stewards of God's truth.

Once we had the overarching summary of the book, we sought to break the book down into manageable units, for preaching and for listening comprehension.

Greeting, Charge to Timothy, Challenge to False Teachers	1:1-20
Instructions for Family Life in the Church	2:1-3:13
Challenge to False Teaching, Charge to Timothy	3:14-4:16
Instructions for Family Life in the Church	5:1-6:2
Challenge to False Teaching, Charge to Timothy, Salutation	6:3-21

We broke down the sections to preach in slightly smaller units, but this was the overall flow of the book we came back to

again and again. In this way we reminded members of the overall main idea and where we were in the context of the book so we could always tether fine details to the overarching structure. The sermon series began with an overview sermon of the entire book, highlighting many of these points along with key themes and questions that would need to be answered as went through the letter.

In speaking to our congregation, people appreciated the consistency and book-level context reminders throughout the sermon series. This allowed us as preachers to continue to have our thoughts held at a holistic level (especially as it relates to false teaching and the proper stewardship of God's Word), and also allowed our people to engage varying dynamics of the text in small groups, keeping the entirety of the book in mind with intentional questions. Thus, book-level context, when connected to a church-wide reading plan, intentional small group questions, and a united team-preaching approach, has garnered good results of recall and specificity of application as we continue to assess.

Judges

The book of Judges is a book we are looking at as a preaching team, possibly in late 2021. The book is much longer than 1 Timothy and is found in an OT context under a different covenant than our own, and thus poses some different challenges. However, the tools for book-level context remain the same and can provide the same kind of clarity as we study distinct passages.

First, we should read the twenty-one chapters of Judges numerous times before preaching, and as many times as we can doing so in one sitting. We need the overarching context of the book itself, and this is the best way to get it. Doing so will lead one to offer a one-sentence summary of the book, such as "God's people, who have no king to lead them, exhibit an ongoing cycle of covenant unfaithfulness." This highlights the cycle one observes within the book, as well as the continual refrain toward

the end, which states, "There was no king in Israel, everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

One would also need to consider where the book of Judges is placed in the OT. Judges comes on the heels of all that occurred in the Pentateuch and the book of Joshua. The people are now occupying the land, but there are still residents that are harassing Israel and even leading them into idolatrous practices. They are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the midst of foreign nations (Exod. 19:5-6), but we continually observe their failure in upholding this calling. We have judges, but we are awaiting the days of a king. This context matters as one seeks to locate themselves in the particular moment of redemptive history.

With the overarching summary of the book in mind one would then break the text down into preachable units.

Failure to take the land	1:1-2:5
The cycle of disobedience	2:6-3:6
God's deliverance seen in judges	3:7-31
Unlikely means of deliverance with Deborah, Barak, and Jael	4:1-5:31
God delivers Israel through an unlikely leader, Gideon	6:1-7:25
Victory, idolatry, and chaos	8:1-35
The rise and downfall of the wicked ruler, Abimelech	9:1-57
Further examples of sin, deliverance, and disobedience	10:1-12:15
The birth of Samson	13:1-25
God's providence seen in an imperfect life	14:1-15:20
Samson and Delilah	16:1-31
No king in Israel leads to idolatry and unrest; we need a king	17:1-18:31
No king in Israel leads to depravity and atrocities; we need a king	19:1-30
No king in Israel leads to war and unrest; we need a king	20:1-21:25

This kind of broad breakdown of the book will serve as a rubric for preaching content, and must always be tied back to the book-level context, the overarching story of Judges as a whole. One can see as they read through the book and work through these sermons that the judges (as well as the people) go through a continually downward spiral, with the judges beginning as fairly good, to by the end there are completely immoral judges or in fact no judges at all. Everyone is just doing what is right in their own eyes.

A series on the book of Judges would certainly be helped by an overview sermon to get things started, as this would help people orient themselves to a large book and give them something to hold onto as they traverse the terrain of the various narratives. After that initial sermon, focus would go to the sections to preach for each week, working through the book in a systematic manner. Preachers and congregants alike may be wondering how one can point to Christ and the gospel on a weekly basis, as well as how the truths of an OT book apply to them today. However, if we keep the main idea of the book (God's people, who have no king to lead them, exhibit an ongoing cycle of covenant unfaithfulness), and continue to point our people back to this overarching idea, it can be understood how one would point forward to Christ and the gospel. First, while we may view some humans as hero-deliverers in Judges, ultimately, we see that God is the ultimate hero-deliverer who sends Christ to save his people. Second, sin is real and has real consequences. We need to be saved from our sin. The darkness of Judges highlights the light of redemption.

Third, we need a king. Judges points this out through repetition at the end of the book, and we see the king come in Samuel. Saul fails abysmally, and David is a very good king, in fact the prototype of kings to come. But even he fails, pointing the reader beyond David to a coming king. This is a final way to think of Christ and the gospel when preaching through Judges, namely, the covenants. Israel is breaking the Mosaic covenant frequently, but in the broader context we see the Davidic covenant rendered in 2 Samuel 7, telling of a king to come who

would reign forever in righteousness. The covenants point to Christ. Certainly, there are other ways one could point forward to Christ and make specific applications to people today when preaching Judges, but one can observe that book-level context is a helpful tool for this purpose.

CONCLUSION

Book-level context can be neglected at times, but is a helpful tool for preaching. Dever rightly reminds us,

> I want the members of my church to become so familiar with the books of the Bible that they know how to turn there as easily as they turn to popular Christian books. So when members of the church struggle with conflict, I will encourage them to read the book on conflict resolution by Ken Sande, but I also want them to have been trained by an overview sermon to immediately ask themselves, 'I wonder what James says about this situation?' When members want to learn about the Christian life, let them read C. S. Lewis and J. I. Packer; but let them also think to read 1 Peter and 1 John! When people struggle with discouragement, by all means read Ed Welch on depression; but also read Revelation! When people worry they are slipping into legalism, I hope they know to reach for Martin Luther or C. J. Mahaney on the cross-centered life; but I also hope they know to reach for Galatians.[20]

We are called to preach the whole counsel of God,[21] and a key tool in doing that work will be to do our work of interpretation and preaching thinking about the passage, the Testament, and the canon, as well as considering the context of an entire book. This level of context will be essential when consider authorial intent, and as such it provides needful work for the preacher of God's Word.

NOTES

1. See https://bibleproject.com/.
2. "Christ in All of Scripture" was the theme of the 2019 Evangelical Theological Society meeting. Myriad books get into this topic, including works by Ed Clowney, Graeme Goldsworthy, Dennis Johnson.
3. Hermeneutics texts do at times address this matter, though not always referring to this level of context as "book-level." For example, John H. Sailhamer, *Old Testament Theology: A Canonical Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 209-12, refers to this level of context as "inner-textuality." Other texts deal with this level of context when considering the different genres contained in Scripture. See for example Andreas J. Köstenberger and Richard D. Patterson, *Invitation to Biblical Interpretation: Exploring the Hermeneutical Triad of History, Literature, and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 237-563.
4. For more on this point see Jason S. DeRouchie, *How to Understand and Apply the Old Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017), 98-127.
5. This is especially true when preaching in expositional fashion through a book of the Bible. For more thoughts on how one breaks a book into discrete units for preaching see Abraham Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching: The Journey from Text to Sermon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019), 4-6.
6. Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral: A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 40.
7. One may also want to consider whether a book they are preaching is a part of a collection to incorporate "collection-level" context. For example, considering Exodus as an entire book, but also within the collection of the Pentateuch. Or consider Hosea as a book, but also as a part of the collection of the Twelve, or the Minor Prophets.
8. For an expansion of thought on these themes as shown through a series of sermons on each book of the Bible see Mark Dever, *The*

Message of the Old Testament: Promises Made (Wheaton: Crossway, 2006); Mark Dever, *The Message of the New Testament: Promises Kept* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2005).
9. Jeremy M. Kimble and Ched Spellman, *Invitation to Biblical Theology: Exploring the Shape, Storyline, and Themes of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2020), 16.
10. James M. Hamilton Jr., *What is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2014), 15-16.
11. Parts of this summary comes from Andrew Davis Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament: Twelve Steps from Exegesis to Theology* (Phillipsburg: P&R, 2017), 231-38. See also Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 303-10.
12. See Naselli, *How to Understand and Apply the New Testament*, 196 for a chart that depicts the amount of time it generally takes to read each book of the Bible out loud. You may also want to listen to the book on audio as a means of doing this.
13. D. A. Carson, "Approaching the Bible," in *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, ed. D. A. Carson, et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 13-14.
14. For good examples of breaking down the book of Ephesians and Genesis 25:19-36:43 see Kuruvilla, *A Manual for Preaching*, 20-25.
15. Osborne notes that this should be done with a pen in hand, taking down notes about the various sections as you read through the book. Also, this is a time to look at repeated patterns and natural breaks in the narrative or argument that you are studying. See Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral*, 41-45.
16. See Jason C. Meyer, *Preaching: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2013), 21.
17. Dever, *The Message of the New Testament*, 15-16.
18. Ibid., 16.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid., 17.
21. For a helpful resource on how one could strategically work to preach through the whole Bible in their ministry, noting the

major divisions of Scripture (Pentateuch, Former Prophets, Latter Prophets, Writings, Gospels, remainder of the NT) and giving equal attention to each area, see Tim Patrick and Andrew Reid, *The Whole Counsel of God: Why and How to Preach the Entire Bible* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2020).

WHEN CLERGY PREACH AND TEACH ON SUICIDE PREVENTION: DO LISTENERS HEAR?

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ABSTRACT

Clergy have a key role in suicide prevention by ministering to people struggling with suicidal thoughts and behaviors and performing suicide funerals and memorial services. However, it is not clear if clergy preach or teach on suicide-related topics and if congregants hear them preach on these topics. It is also unclear if clergy and congregants in three religious traditions differ. Convenience samples of U.S. Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant participants (471 clergy and 703 congregants) completed online surveys on 15 preaching and teaching topics. Five topics were clearly suicide-related (moral objections to suicide, asking about suicidal thinking directly, how to care for loved ones after a suicide death, why people of faith have mental illness, and how they heal) and the rest were topics that covered protective factors for suicide but were less clearly related to suicide (why people suffer, how to manage suffering, why/how life can have meaning, reasons for living life, how to build a life worth living, why/how religious people have hope, the importance of belonging, how to manage conflict, self-esteem and self-care). Clergy reported preaching and teaching and congregants reported hearing significantly more topics that are perceived as unrelated to suicide as compared to suicide-related topics. Clergy reported preaching and teaching on all topics (both suicide-related and those perceived as non-suicide-related) significantly more than congregants reported hearing the same list of topics. Catholic and Protestant clergy and congregants

reported that their clergy preached and taught more on all topics compared to Jewish clergy who may preach more on striving to live a moral and ethical life. While Protestant clergy reported they preach and teach on all topics, their congregants do not report hearing the suicide-related topics.

BACKGROUND

Gibson and Mason recently published *Preaching Hope in Darkness: Help for Pastors in Addressing Suicide from the Pulpit*.[1] It is important that clergy preach and teach about suicide, as attendance at religious services is associated with fewer suicide deaths.[2] The performance of religious services by clergy plays a key role in suicide prevention, but clergy do more than simply preach and teach. They also perform special services such as suicide funerals and memorial services.[3] People struggling with thoughts of suicide are also likely to seek help from clergy.[4] Clergy have been called "first-line helpers" for most mental health problems including the risk of self-harm.[5] However, clergy are often reluctant to take on the role of a first-line helper.[6] They may prefer the roles of preacher and/or teacher, as they have often not been trained to respond to mental health crises. Catholic and Protestant clergy spend approximately one-fourth (22%; median: 10 hours/week) of their work week preaching (including preparation) and 13% of their work week (median: 4 hours/week) teaching.[7] Preaching is particularly important because, in preaching, clergy form the attitudes of their listeners.[8] Kruger cautions preachers to preach The Word, not their own words, but he also asserts that "Preachers have the privilege of wrestling with theological and existential issues raised by the congregation's experience in society"[9] in order "to equip hearers to be salt and light in the midst of the reality in society."[10] Studies have explored the effect of preacher's sermons on congregant attitudes toward cancer education[11] and HIV AIDS.[12] Less is known about sermons and suicide prevention. Furthermore, while we know that religiosity helps protect against suicide, it is

not clear what about religiosity is helpful in preventing suicide[22]. As a result, this study examines preaching about suicide and its role in suicide prevention.

This study investigated clergy's frequency of preaching or teaching about topics related to suicide prevention, such as moral objections to suicide and how Christians understand mental illness, given the association between suicide and mental illness.[13] We examined this by asking clergy to complete a Clergy measure (see Appendix A). Because clergy report their training "did not prepare them adequately" to engage suicide in their faith communities,[14] we expected that clergy would report preaching and teaching less on five topics that are clearly related to suicide or mental health (moral objections to suicide, asking about suicidal thinking directly, how to care for loved ones after a suicide death, why people of faith have mental illness, and how they heal) and would report preaching and teaching more on topics that are not perceived as suicide-related.

A related and understudied question is, do listeners hear what preachers are preaching? The belief that people remember only 20% of what they hear has been debunked as urban myth[15] but Hermans and Mooij[16] found that listeners have a poor memory for the content of sermons. Listeners who remembered sermon content were more frequent church attendees and those who held more orthodox beliefs. We expected that frequently-attending congregants would differ from congregants who attend their place of worship less frequently. We examined this by asking congregants to report on their attendance and to complete a Congregant measure (see Appendix B).

Congregants have been found to differ in their personalities and these differences affect how they listen to sermons.[17] Congregants also differ in their attitudes toward suicide[18] as do clergy.[19] However, it is not known if differences among clergy or congregants affect preaching/teaching or listening. Because this research question is exploratory, we expected that some differences among three religious traditions (Catholicism, Judaism, and Protestantism) in preaching and listening would be found.

METHOD

Participants

We asked U.S. Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant clergy and congregants to complete separate online surveys hosted by SurveyMonkey.[20] Over seven months beginning January 2017, we invited clergy who were working part time or full time in the role of clergy or any 18-year-old or older congregant who was currently attending a faith community, at least 2-3 services per month, to participate.

The demographics of this convenience sample of 471 clergy and 703 congregants (see Table 1) generally compared favorably to the *Pulpit & Pew* demographics of a 2001 nationally-representative sample of 883 Catholic and Protestant senior or solo clergy.[21] It also generally aligned with the 2001 U.S. Congregational Life Survey (USCLS), as reanalyzed by Stroope and Baker,[22] with the Faith Communities Today (FACT) 2010 National Survey of Congregations completed by congregants and clergy from a random national sample of 11,077 congregations,[23] and with another convenience sample of 801 clergy.[24] However, the clergy sample over-represented female, White, and educated clergy from the northeastern U.S.[25] Furthermore, the congregant sample over-represented White, married and Protestant congregants.[26]

Table 1
Demographics of Clergy and Congregants

Demographic characteristics	Clergy	Congregants
Full time (FT) or part time (PT)	FT: 75% (*n* = 375) PT: 25% (*n* = 123)	
Average hours worked per week (hrs/wk)	*M* = 34 hrs/wk (*SD*: 11.92) *Mdn*: 40+ hrs/wk *Mod*: 40+ hrs/wk 64% (*n* = 319) work more than 40 hrs/wk	
Age	*M* = 51.87 (*SD* = 13.03) *Mdn* = 54 (*range*: 23-88)	*M* = 52.88 (*SD* = 16.02) *Range*: 21-91 years old
Gender	Female: 21.84% (*n* = 102) Male: 77.94% (*n* = 364)	Female: 64% (*n* = 449) Male: 35.86% (*n* = 251)
Race	American Indian: 1.12% (*n* = 5) Asian: 4.47% (*n* = 20) African American or Black: 3.13% (*n* = 14) White: 91.72% (n = 410) Mixed race: 0.22% (*n* = 1)	American Indian: 1.58% (*n* = 11) Asian: 4.4 % (*n* = 31) African American or Black: 4.6% (*n* = 32) Pacific Islander: 0.6% (*n* = 4) Mixed race: 0.4% (*n* = 3) White: 89.11% (*n* = 622)
Ethnicity	Hispanic: 3.06% (*n* = 14)	Hispanic: 3.6% (*n* = 25)
Religion	Catholic: 12.21% (*n* = 57) Jewish: 13.06% (*n* = 61) Protestant: 69.38% (*n* = 324) Other (included 6 Mormons and other Protestants): 5.35% (*n* = 25)	Catholic: 8.47% (*n* = 53) Jewish: 5.91% (*n* = 37) Protestant: 85.62% (*n* = 536) Other (included 19 Mormons, 1 Buddhist, 1 Taoist, and 51 other Protestants): 10.32% (*n* = 72)
Number of attendees on an average worship day	*Mdn*: 151-200 *Mod*: 1-50	Mdn: 201-250 Mod: 251-500

Measure

To develop the clergy and congregation measures, preaching and teaching topics were generated that met two criteria: 1) the topic was found in the literature as a factor that protects against suicide, and 2) the topic was found in Judeo-Christian scripture so that clergy could preach or teach an expository message on the topic. Table 2 summarizes the literature and scripture for 15 preaching and teaching topics: 1) having moral objections to suicide, 2) asking directly about suicidal thinking, 3) assisting family and friends following a suicide, 4) having a theodicy, 5) having strategies for how to suffer, 6) having purpose and meaning in life, 7) having reasons for living, 8) having a life worth living, 9) having hope, 10) having social support and a sense of belonging, 11) having strategies for resolving interpersonal conflict, 12) being mentally healthy, 13) getting treatment for mental illness, 14) having self-esteem, and 15) engaging in self-care. Higher scores on the measure reflect a greater number of times a respondent preached/taught or heard a message on the topic.

Table 2
Fifteen Preaching and Teaching Topics Supported in the Literature and Judeo-Christian Scripture

Literature basis	Judeo-Christian Scriptural basis
1. I have preached or taught my congregation about whether suicide is a sin or not.	
Moral objections to suicide have been found to be related to less suicidal thinking[27] and fewer suicide attempts.[28]	God commands people "do not murder" (Ex 20:13; Dt 5:17), because life is a gift from God and the natural course of life should be preserved (Dt 32:39; Job 1:21; 1 Cor 6:19-20; Eph 5:29; Phil 1:20-26).
2. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to ask about suicidal thinking directly.	
Asking about suicidal thinking is viewed as essential to managing suicidal risk.[29] Contrary to common assumptions, asking directly does not cause harm.[30]	While scripture acknowledges the reality of the suicides of Abimelech (Judges 9:52-54), Samson (Judges 16:30), Saul (1 Samuel 31:4), Ahithophel (2 Samuel 17:23), Zimri (1 Kings 16:18), and Judas (Matthew 27:5; Acts 1:18), suicide prevention occurs when God prevents Jonah from killing himself (Jonah

1:17), addresses his suicidal thinking (Jonah 4) and when Paul calls out to the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-40) "Do not harm yourself!"

3. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to help loved ones following a suicide.

Assisting family and friends following a suicide is important because the risk of suicide increases following exposure to suicide.[31]

People of faith mourn with those who mourn (Num 20:29, Dt 34:8, Rom 12:15), avoid the platitudes of Job's "friends" (Job 42:7), carry each other's burdens (Num 11:16, 15, Dt 1:12-13, Gal 6:2) and provide practical helps (Ruth 1:16-17, Mt 25:31-46).

4. I have preached or taught my congregation about why religious people suffer.

Clergy report that one of the questions that suicidal people of faith ask is why they are suffering.[32]

While suffering is not good in itself, people of faith suffer (Job). God is present in their suffering (Ps 56:8, Ps 107). People of Christian faith groan as they wait eagerly for the redemption of their bodies (Rom 8:23). Suffering won't exist in God's new heaven and new earth (Rev 21:4).

5. I have preached or taught my congregation about how religious people can manage suffering.

How people of faith manage suffering is important because people who report greater spiritual struggle report more depression[33] and are at greater suicide risk.[34]

People of faith practice God's presence (Ps 23:4), remain open to joy (Hab 3:17-18), lament and ask for justice (Psalms of lament, Lk 18:1-8), wait for God (Ps 33:20, Lam 3:22-26), change what they can (Neh 1:4-11, Mk 7:24-30) and avoid taking revenge (Gen 50:15-21, Mt 5:44).

6. I have preached or taught my congregation about why/how life can have meaning.

People endorsing a greater sense of purpose in life live longer than their peers[35] and meaning of life is associated with less emotional distress and suicide risk.[36]

All people have the God-given purpose of taking care of creation (Gen 1:28). In addition, people of faith are gifted by God (Ex 36:1-2, 1 Cor 12, Rom 12:3-10, Eph 4:7-13, 1 Pet 4:8-11) to fulfill their God-given purpose.

7. I have preached or taught my congregation about reasons for living life.

Having reasons for living differentiates between suicidal and non-suicidal people[37] as well as religious and non-religious people.[38]

God gave Moses (Num 11:15-16) and Elijah (1 Kings 19:4-6) reasons to live. Paul gave the Philippian jailer a reason to live: "We are all here!" (Acts 16:28).

8. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to build a life worth living.

Building a life worth living, referring to positive functioning across social, occupational and housing domains[39] as well as having meaning, purpose, optimism, and hope, is related to suicidal thinking.[40]

William James (1890) said that religion made life worth living in the face of contemplated suicide because of the belief that we are needed to redeem "something really wild in the Universe."[41]

9. I have preached or taught my congregation about why/how religious people have hope.

Hopelessness is a risk factor for suicide.[42]

Hope is based in the faithful certainty of God who is present (Ps 34:18), loving (Ex 34:6-7, 1 Jn 4:8), sovereign (Ps 31:15), and almighty (Job 42:2; Mt 19:26; 1 Cor 6:14), who brings people back to the promised land (Jer 29:11), who redeems their suffering (Gen 50:20; Joel 2:25-32; Rom 5:3-5; Rev 17:17) and who ultimately will create a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:4). God repeatedly intervenes mightily to redeem evil into something good (Pv 16:4). Narratives of hope include Joseph (Gen 50:20, Hagar (Gen 16:6-16; Gen 21:8-20), Hannah (1 Sam 1), Tamar, Rahab and Ruth (Mt 1:1-17). From a Christian perspective, hope is one of the Christian virtues (1 Cor 13:13). It is trusting that Jesus holds the world together (Col 1:17; Heb 1:3), that the Holy Spirit is with people of faith forever (Jn 14:16) to teach them (Jn 14:26), to convict them of sin (Jn 16:8), and to guide them (Jn 16:13), that both Jesus and the Spirit intercede for them before God (Rom 8:26-27, 34).

10. I have preached or taught my congregation about the importance of belonging.

An absence of social support is associated with suicidal behavior including suicidal ideation,[43] suicide attempts,[44] suicide death.[45] Thwarted belongingness is associated with suicide.[46]

People of faith support one another, loving their neighbor as themselves (Lev 19:9-18, 1 Thess 3:12). From a Christian perspective, people of faith are members of God's family, members one of another (Rom 12:5; Eph 4:25), encouraging one another (1 Thess 5:11).

11. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to manage conflict with others.

People who have a high number of unresolved relational conflict report higher levels of suicidal thinking, hopelessness and depression.[47]

People of faith avoid hatred (Pv 10:12), hot temper (Pv 15:18) and anger (Pv 29L2). People of faith work out problem areas truthfully and lovingly (Ex 18:13-23, Eph 4:15) through confession (Lev 5:5) and restitution (Num 5:5-7). They forgive others (Mt 6:15) because God avenges (Dt 32:35) and forgives sin (Is 1:18, Dan 9:9, Mic 7:18-19). People of faith reconcile with those who repent (Gen 32-33) and set boundaries with people who don't (Pv 24:21, Mt 18:15-18).

12. I have preached or taught my congregation about why religious people have mental health problems.

Depression is among the top risk factors for suicidal thinking.[48]

All people including people of faith are affected by the brokenness of the world (Dt 28:28, 1 Sam 18:10, Dan 4:31-36, Rom 8:22-23). They are sinned against (e.g., abuse) and they sin (e.g., substance abuse).

13. I have preached or taught my congregation about how religious people heal from mental health problems.

Beliefs about how people of faith heal from mental health problems will affect the kind of treatment they seek.[49]

God put in place regulations for people to actively follow to protect their health (e.g., Lev 13-14). In the Christian tradition, Jesus healed the sick as a sign of the Kingdom of God (Lk 10:9). People of faith have cared for the sick, those in prisons, in insane asylums, and in medical missions. Blind Bartimaeus (Mk 10:46-52) and the friends of the paralytic (Mk 2:1-12) reached out for healing.

14. I have preached or taught my congregation about self-esteem.

Self-hate has been found to be related to suicidal thinking.[50]

All people are created by God (Ps 8, Ps 139:14), in the image of God (Gen 1:28-29), are loved by God (Zeph 3:17; Jn 3:16), and are to be treated with dignity (Dt 15:11). Poor people gleaned (Dt 24:19-21) and the Year of Jubilee allowed reversion of wealth (Leviticus 25). In the Christian tradition, Jesus treated all people with respect and care: women and girls (Lk 8:40-54), children (Mt 19:14), the sick (Jn 5:1-9), Samaritans (Jn 4:4-42), and tax collectors (Lk 19:1-10).

15. I have preached or taught my congregation about self-care.

Self-care is used to cope with suicidal thinking.[51]

God commands people of faith to observe a weekly Sabbath (Ex 20:8-11) and to care for themselves (Ex 33:14, Ecc 9:7-8, Is 58:11, Mk 6:31, Lk 5:16, Eph 5:29-30).

The institution's review board approved the study. Participants were given all relevant information before beginning a survey.

RESULTS

Statistical analyses[52] included psychometric tests of the measure which revealed excellent reliability[53] and four theoretically consistent principal components for the clergy measure (Appendix C).[54] The average number of times clergy reported preaching/teaching about sermon topics and the average number of times congregants reported hearing these topics are listed in Appendix D. Clergy reported preaching/teaching most about why/how religious people have hope, why/how life can have meaning, the importance of belonging, how to build a life worth living, and reasons for living life. Clergy reported preaching/teaching least about how to ask about suicidal thinking directly, how to help loved ones following a suicide, whether suicide is a sin or not, why religious people have mental health problems, and how religious people heal from mental health problems.

Congregants reported hearing clergy preach/teach most about why/how religious people have hope, why/how life can have meaning, the importance of belonging, how to build a life worth living, and reasons for living life. Congregants reported hearing clergy preach/teach least about how to ask about suicidal thinking directly, how to help loved ones following a suicide, whether suicide is a sin or not, why religious people have mental health problems, and how religious people heal from mental health problems. Congregants and clergy agreed on the same most and least preached/taught topics.

First expectation. Clergy will report preaching/teaching less on topics that are clearly related to suicide (e.g., moral objections to suicide) and will report preaching/teaching more frequently on topics that are not perceived as suicide topics (e.g., hope, theodicy).

Clergy respondents reported preaching/teaching significantly more on topics perceived as unrelated to suicide ($M = 3.33$, $SD = 0.71$) compared to suicide-related topics ($M = 1.36$, 0.94; $t(470) = -$

47.77, $p < 0.0000$**). Congregants reported that they have heard clergy preach/teach significantly more on topics perceived as unrelated to suicide (M =3.06, SD = 0.82) compared to suicide-related topics (M = 0.93, SD = 0.81; $t(702)$= -70.71, $p < 0.0000$**). Clergy consistently reported preaching/teaching significantly more than congregants reported hearing all topics except why/how life can have meaning and why/how religious people have hope. On these two topics, clergy and congregants did not significantly differ.

Second Expectation. Congregants will report hearing clergy preach/teach on all topics less than clergy report preaching/teaching on them.

Clergy reported preaching/teaching on all topics (M = 37.64, SD = 13.63) significantly more than congregants reported hearing them preach/teach on the same list of topics (M = 33.24, SD = 13.31: $F(1, 1244) = 32.21$, $p <$ 0.0000*). This is the case for topics perceived as both non-suicide-related and suicide-related. Clergy reported preaching/teaching on non-suicide topics (M = 3.33, SD = 0.71) significantly more than congregants reported hearing them (M = 3.06, SD = 0.82; $F(1, 1172) = 34.69$, $p < 0.0000$**). Clergy also reported preaching/teaching on suicide-related topics (M = 1.36, SD = 0.94) significantly more than congregants reported hearing them (M = 0.93, SD = 0.81; $F(1, 1172) = 66.54$, $p < 0.0000$**).

Third expectation. Congregants who attend a faith community more often will differ from congregants who attend less.

Congregants were divided into four groups, those who attended two services per month (n = 27), three services per month (n = 103), one service per week (n = 441), and more than one service per week (n = 158). No differences were found between groups in the frequency they reported hearing clergy preach/teach on all topics or on topics perceived as unrelated to suicide. While congregants who attended two services per month reported hearing the least number of suicide-related messages (M = 0.65, SD = 0.48) and congregants who attended more than one service per week the most (M = 1.1, SD = 1.03), the difference only approached significance, $p = 0.058$.

Fourth expectation. Clergy and congregants in three religious traditions (Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant) will differ in their preaching/teaching and hearing.

Protestant ($M = 41.23$, $SD = 9.19$) and Catholic ($M = 39.09$, $SD = 10.38$) clergy reported preaching/teaching on all topics significantly more than Jewish clergy ($M = 32.53$, $SD = 11.38$; $F(2, 442) = 20.97$, $p < 0.0000$**). In line with this finding, Protestant ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 0.62$) and Catholic ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 0.75$) clergy reported preaching/teaching on non-suicide-related topics significantly more than Jewish clergy ($M = 2.81$, $SD = 0.92$; $F(2, 442) = 20.31$, $p < 0.0000$**). For suicide-related topics, Protestant clergy ($M = 1.42$, $SD = 0.93$) reported preaching/teaching on suicide-related topics significantly more than Jewish clergy ($M = 0.9$, $SD = 0.82$; $F(2, 442)=8.54$, $p = 0.0002$**). The difference between Catholic clergy ($M = 1.25$, $SD = 0.96$) and Jewish clergy was not significant.

Protestant ($M = 35.58$, $SD = 10.22$) and Catholic ($M = 33.25$, $SD = 12.96$) congregants reported hearing clergy preach/teach on all topics significantly more than Jewish congregants ($M = 27.54$, $SD = 11.88$; $F(2, 623)=10.72$, $p < 0.0000$**). Protestant congregants ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 0.76$) reported hearing clergy preach/teach on non-suicide-related topics significantly more than Catholic ($M = 2.8$, $SD = 0.98$) and Jewish congregants ($M = 2.44$, $SD = 1.02$; $F(2, 623) = 14.47$, $p < 0.0000$**). Catholic congregants ($M = 1.04$, $SD = 0.95$) reported hearing clergy preach/teach on suicide-related topics more than Jewish ($M = 0.63$, $SD = 0.62$; $F(2, 623)=3.16$, $p = 0.04$*).[55]

DISCUSSION

Clergy were more likely to preach/teach and congregants were more likely to hear topics that were not perceived as suicide-related topics (why/how life has meaning, reasons for living life, how to build a life worth living, why/how to have hope, and the importance of belonging). The finding that these items were grouped as the first component of the measure explaining the most variance suggests that the broad topic of "the meaning of

life" is one that both clergy and congregants agree is part of the preaching/teaching domain. Given that these types of messages may help to prevent suicide, it is a positive finding that clergy were preaching/teaching and congregants were hearing messages that may protect against suicide. This finding also suggests that the belief that life has meaning, is worth living, that there is hope, and that belonging is important may contribute to what protects against suicide in religion. These themes fit with previous research which found that some of the themes that clergy use to reflect on end-of-life decisions include sanctity of life, preservation of the natural course of life, support of the faith community, decision-making in community, and hope.[56]

Clergy and congregants agreed on the suicide-related topics that they found to be least fitting for preaching/teaching (asking about suicidal thinking directly, helping loved ones following a suicide, suicide as a sin, religious people and mental health problems, and how religious people heal from mental health problems). It may be that, until tragedy strikes, clergy avoid preaching/teaching on a stigmatized topic like suicide or mental health. Clergy and congregants may be unaware that suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S.[57] and that depression is the leading cause of disability worldwide.[58] It may also be that clergy and congregants view suicide as a mental health issue, not a religious one, or may conflate struggles with depression and suicide with spiritual weakness.[59] Given the dearth of biblical texts which deal specifically with suicide, clergy may find few opportunities to preach/teach on suicide. In addition, it may be that clergy who preach/teach based on a lectionary are constrained in identifying these opportunities. Additionally, clergy may be unsure about how to preach/teach on a biblical text and apply it to current events or issues of relevance to the daily lives of congregants, especially a taboo event or an issue like suicide. While Gibson and Mason's book on *Preaching Hope in Darkness* provides clergy with guidance on how to address suicide from the pulpit,[60] more research is needed to understand what obstacles to preaching/teaching exist.

It is surprising that clergy reported preaching/teaching about topics consistently more than congregants reported hearing about the topics, both suicide-related and non-suicide related topics. Memory is likely implicated in this discrepancy. Clergy members may be more likely to remember preaching/teaching on topics because of the time and effort they invest in developing sermons and teaching material and therefore remember it through elaborative rehearsal.[61] Confirmation bias, a congregant listening for arguments that support what they already believes, may also be implicated, although this relationship may be complex.[62] It may also be that congregants need more explicit statements of connection to the application of preventing suicide. For example, a clergy member may preach/teach on Genesis one on the sanctity of life but congregants may remember a good story about Adam and Eve. Or, again, it may be that if clergy preach/teach based on a lectionary and a congregant always travels at a certain time through the lectionary cycle, the congregant will report that clergy do not preach/teach on a topic due to being out of town when that topic is addressed. However, congregant attendance was not related to congregants hearing clergy preach/teach on any topics. More frequent attendance was found to be related to hearing more suicide-related topics though this finding only approached significance. This result may have been related to our respondents being invited to participate only if they attended at least two services per month, which restricted our range.

Differences in religious traditions were found. Catholic and Protestant clergy and congregants agreed that their clergy preached/taught more on all topics compared to Jewish clergy. It seems that Jewish clergy may approach preaching and teaching differently. This finding fits with one rabbi participant who emailed the authors to clarify that Jewish people don't have hope, they "do hope." Rabbi Daniel Roberts[63] pointed out that Jewish rabbis do not preach about belief as much as they preach about living life ethically and morally in the midst of current issues. Because faith itself differs in three religious traditions, it

follows that preaching/teaching among these three traditions would also differ.

Congregants and clergy disagreed, however, in the preaching of non-suicide-related and suicide-related topics. While both Catholic and Protestant clergy reported preaching/teaching more on non-suicide-related topics, only Protestant congregants reported hearing clergy preach/teach more on non-suicide-related topics. For Catholic respondents, this discrepancy fits with the finding that clergy report preaching/teaching more than congregants report hearing. A greater discrepancy, however, is that Protestant clergy reported preaching/teaching on suicide-related topics more than Jewish clergy, yet it is Catholic congregants who report hearing clergy preach/teach more on suicide-related topics. This result may relate to the finding that Catholic clergy have been found to experience significantly more suicide deaths and conduct significantly more suicide funerals.[64] Catholic clergy may not view their suicide funeral homily as preaching/teaching on suicide, but Catholic congregants may hear the homily as a sermon on suicide.

Since suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the U.S., it is vital for clergy to recognize the role of their preaching/teaching in suicide prevention. Further, it is important for clergy to preach/teach on suicide-related topics found in Judeo-Christian scripture because scripture provides a trustworthy basis for belief in the sanctity of life, the preservation of the natural course of life, the meaning of life, reasons for living, how to build a life worth living, hope, belonging, theodicy, how to manage conflict, self-esteem and self-care. However, there seem to be obstacles that make it difficult for clergy to preach and teach explicitly on suicide prevention.

While this study had some limitations,[65] it found that clergy and congregants agreed on the suicide-related topics most frequently preached/taught: why/how life has meaning, reasons for living life, how to build a life worth living, why/how to have hope, and the importance of belonging. They agreed that topics least frequently taught included: asking about suicidal

thinking directly, helping loved ones following a suicide, suicide as a sin, religious people and mental health problems, and how religious people heal from mental health problems. Clergy reported preaching/teaching more than congregants reported hearing the same topics. Clergy and congregants differed most with the frequency of the preaching / teaching of suicide-related topics. Jewish clergy seemed to approach preaching/teaching differently from Catholic and Protestant clergy. While Protestant clergy reported they preach/teach on all topics, non-suicide-related and suicide-related, their congregants do not seem to be hearing the suicide-related topics. The measure of preaching/teaching topics was found to be reliable though the factor structure differed in the clergy and congregant samples. While more research is needed,[66] *Preaching Hope in Darkness* by Gibson and Mason may be a crucial first step in helping clergy address suicide from the pulpit.

Appendix A. *Clergy measure*

About how many times in your career do you remember talking to (preaching or teaching) your congregation about the following?

Response Scale: Never, Once or twice in my career, Every one to two years, Once a year, More than once a year

1. I have preached or taught my congregation about whether suicide is a sin or not.
2. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to ask about suicidal thinking directly.
3. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to help loved ones following a suicide.
4. I have preached or taught my congregation about why religious people suffer.
5. I have preached or taught my congregation about how religious people can manage suffering.
6. I have preached or taught my congregation about why/how life can have meaning.
7. I have preached or taught my congregation about reasons for living life.
8. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to build a life worth living.
9. I have preached or taught my congregation about why/how religious people have hope.
10. I have preached or taught my congregation about the importance of belonging.
11. I have preached or taught my congregation about how to manage conflict with others.
12. I have preached or taught my congregation about why religious people have mental health problems.
13. I have preached or taught my congregation about how religious people heal from mental health problems.
14. I have preached or taught my congregation about self-esteem.
15. I have preached or taught my congregation about self-care.

Appendix B. *Congregant Measure*

About how many times in your life do you remember hearing a faith leader preach or teach on the following?

Response Scale: Never/once or twice in my lifetime, Every one to two years, Once a year, More than once a year

1. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about whether suicide is a sin or not.
2. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about how to ask about suicidal thinking directly.
3. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about how to help loved ones following a suicide.
4. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about why religious people suffer.
5. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about how religious people can manage suffering.
6. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about why/how life can have meaning.
7. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about reasons for living life.
8. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about how to build a life worth living.
9. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about why/how religious people have hope.
10. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about the importance of belonging.
11. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about how to manage conflict with others.
12. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about why religious people have mental health problems.
13. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about how religious people heal from mental health problems.
14. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about self-esteem.
15. I have heard a faith leader preach or teach about self-care.

Appendix C. *Four Principal Orthogonal Components of the Clergy Measure*

Item I have preached/ taught my congregation about… I have heard a faith leader preach/teach about…	Comp 1	Comp 2	Comp 3	Comp 4
whether suicide is a sin or not			0.56	
how to ask about suicidal thinking directly			0.59	
how to help loved ones following a suicide			0.57	
why religious people suffer				0.64
how religious people can manage suffering				0.51
why/how life can have meaning	0.44			
reasons for living life	0.42			
how to build a life worth living	0.44			
why/how religious people have hope	0.38			
the importance of belonging	0.35			
how to manage conflict with others		0.3		
why religious people have mental health problems		0.39		0.36
how religious people heal from mental health problems		0.42		0.31
self-esteem		0.5		
self-care		0.51		

Appendix D. *Average number of times clergy have preached/taught and congregants have heard sermon topics*

Topic	Clergy Mean (Standard Deviation)	Congregants Mean (Standard Deviation)
Why/how religious people have hope	3.69 (0.76)	3.69 (0.78)
Why/how life can have meaning	3.67 (0.74)	3.6 (0.85)
The importance of belonging	3.64 (0.74)	3.3 (1.06)
how to build a life worth living	3.59 (0.83)	3.44 (1.02)
Reasons for living life	3.58 (0.89)	3.36 (1.09)
How religious people heal from mental health problems	1.93 (1.4)	1.28 (1.27)
Why religious people have mental health problems	1.89 (1.41)	1.19 (1.25)
Whether suicide is a sin or not	1.05 (1.04)	0.82 (0.87)
How to help loved ones following a suicide	0.99 (1.11)	0.78 (0.99)
How to ask about suicidal thinking directly	0.91 (1.12)	0.6 (0.88)

Never = 0, Once or twice in my lifetime = 1, Every one to two years = 2, Once a year = 3, More than once a year = 4

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53. Examined on all clergy and all congregants aggregated, the measure had good reliability ($\alpha = .9$ for aggregated samples, $\alpha = .88$ for clergy, $\alpha = .9$ for congregants).

54. An exploratory principal components analysis (PCA) of the measure for the aggregated samples, followed by varimax orthogonal rotations, with eigenvalues greater than 1, yielded four factors (see Appendix C). Component 1 ($\alpha = .89$), explaining 43% of the variance, appeared to measure meaning in life. Component 2 ($\alpha = .85$), explaining 16% of the variance, appeared to measure psychological aspects of life. Component 3 ($\alpha = .83$), explaining 8% of the variance, appeared to measure approaches to suicide. Component 4 ($\alpha = .81$), explaining 7% of the variance, appeared to measure theodicy. A PCA for the congregant sample yielded the same four components. A PCA for the clergy sample yielded a similar grouping of items for component one. Component two grouped the same items as component four above. Component three was identical in both congregant and clergy samples. Two items positively loaded on component four: self-esteem and self-care, and one item negatively loaded: how religious people can manage suffering.

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65. Study conclusions are limited by the congregants not being matched to clergy. While the authors originally asked clergy to recruit their congregants, some clergy were unresponsive or unwilling due to other obligations or they expressed a commitment to protect their congregants' privacy. Some were also reluctant to send out a link to a suicide survey to their congregation, presumably due to the nature of the topic of suicide. Engaging congregants from all three faith traditions was difficult, with Jewish congregants being particularly challenging to recruit. Another limitation is that the measure was developed by Protestants and, as noted above, hope and other suicide-related theological concepts may be conceptualized differently by the Jewish faith tradition. In addition, results are based on the self-report of two convenience samples which are cross-sectional, and therefore no conclusions about causation can be made.
66. Experimental approaches may help to clarify the role of memory or confirmation bias in the difference between clergy and congregant reports. To understand differences between

religious traditions, it would be helpful to examine actual sermons, especially from Jewish clergy. Also, it is not known if preaching/teaching on suicide-related topics would help congregants become more effective in addressing suicide in their faith community and whether suicides would be prevented. Future samples might include less frequent attendees in order to be able to compare frequent and infrequent attendees.

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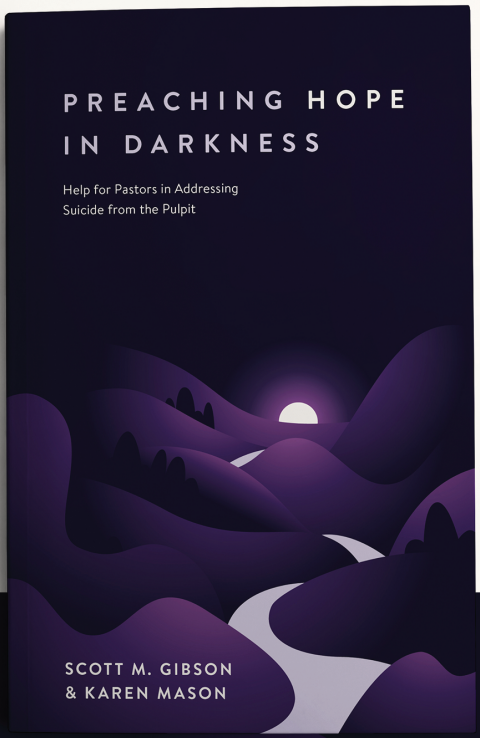

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THE ADOPTION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY MODELS IN HOMILETICS

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ABSTRACT

Communication theory grew out of the mathematical theories of Claude Elwood Shannon and Warren Weaver. In the two decades that followed, their theories were carried forward by the likes of Fearing Franklin, Milton Dickens, Wilbur Schramm, and others. Since then, numerous homileticians have taken notice of communication theory and adopted theorized models for speech-communication and mass-communication into their own homiletics writings. Examination of relevant works in homiletics reveals the communication models adopted in the last fifty-five years have remained mostly unchanged in that time. The present article reveals the extent and the static state of the adoption of communication theory in homiletics.

INTRODUCTION

Modern communication theory permeated at least a portion of the field of homiletics, as reflected in its presence in the works of homiletics authors of the last fifty-five years.[1] Beginning in 1948, Claude Elwood Shannon, Warren Weaver, Fearing Franklin, Milton Dickens, Wilbur Schramm, Donald F. Roberts, Bruce Westley, Malcolm MacLean, David K. Berlo and others theorized on the characteristics and function of communication. Their theories can be traced into the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries in the homiletics writings of: Clyde H. Reid, J. Daniel

Baumann, Merrill Abbey, Chester A. Pennington, George E. Sweazey, J. Randall Nichols, Myron Raymond Chartier, John Stott, Bryan Chapell, J. Randall Nichols, Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, Wayne McDill, Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, and Stephen Rummage. Even the later authors neglected to consider developments in communication theory beyond the mid-twentieth century. The field of communication theory itself offered them few favors, itself falling into a malaise of possibly-outdated models requiring further evolution based on more-modern trends. Robert T. Craig described the malaise:

> The "field" of communication theory came to resemble in some ways a pest-control device called the Roach Motel that used to be advertised on TV: Theories check in, but they never check out. Communication scholars seized upon every idea about communication, whatever its provenance, but accomplished little with most of them-entombed them, you might say, after removing them from the disciplinary environments in which they had thrived and were capable of propagating. Communication scholars contributed few original ideas of their own.[2]

Craig's indictment suggests theories in the field are readily welcomed and piecemealed with previous ideas, to be accepted permanently and without question. His indictment may be unfair since the field is less than a century old. However, his words serve as a warning against complacency in the field itself and certainly a cautionary word against other fields that adopt communication theories without considering the need for updated models. If homiletics authors continue referencing theories now more than sixty years old, perhaps they risk complacency as well.

The purpose of the present work is to assess the level to which mid-twentieth century communication theory has been adopted in homiletics works of the last fifty-five years (the period of time since David K. Berlo's *The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*).

Communication Theory Models

Littejohn and Foss outlined the history of communication theory models in their *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory*. They wrote, "Early communication theory took the form of models," which C. David Mortenson suggested must be viewed "as a systematic representation of an object or event in idealized and abstract form."[3] No communication theory model can account for every human circumstance. Each model may only attempt to capture the thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions of the time in which it was created (and homiletics authors of this century continue referencing models of the 1960s!). The field of study is fluid and therefore the development and adoption of its models are likewise.

ADOPTION OF COMMUNICATION THEORY IN HOMILETICS

In the last fifty years, some authors on preaching have adopted many of the conceptualized models of communication theory developed in the mid-twentieth century. The adoption is peppered in homiletics writings since the 1960s. In 1976, Chester Pennington also suggested the adoption was societally phenomenological. He wrote:

> In bewildering profusion, mass media have multiplied during the past quarter century. Radio, magazines, newspapers, and TV have assaulted our senses with amazing power and variety. Some of the best talents of our time, funded with apparently limitless financial resources, are dedicated to the not always noble arts of manipulation and persuasion. Small wonder that serious students of communication theory speak of an information explosion, or communication explosion, and of total immersion in a welter of input overload.[4]

According to Pennington, patterns of consumption conditioned people for specific patterns of thought and therefore patterns of communication as well. Such conditioning was naturally reflected in homiletics literature as much as it appeared in other fields of study. The adoption of communication theory was phenomenological—invading and occupying the thought and speech patterns of preachers and congregations everywhere.

Pennington marked the phenomenon by its devaluation of words.[5] However, it is more accurately defined by the loss of trust in the words associated with its era. Pennington wrote, "Many of the cleverest efforts at communication are commercially motivated. Their persuasive earnestness is an act design to sell us something. Words are used in order to manipulate us—and we know it. As a consequence, the integrity of language is destroyed."[6] David Martin Lloyd-Jones described a similar sentiment in conveying the ideas of Stanley Baldwin: "… if a man is a great speaker he is a man whom you cannot trust, and is not quite honest."[7] As Rosenstock-Huessy put it, "Words are trifles, to most men. They have heard them too often. It is all fake, advertising, propaganda, lying. Indeed it is."[8] Pennington added, "Words do not necessarily mean what they say. The real peril may be that we have learned to live with dishonesty and to accept it as an everyday fact."[9] As much as man had lost confidence in words, Pennington asserted he has lost confidence in the relevance of discourse, speaking specifically of preaching:

> During the past decade or so it has been asserted that communication theory demonstrates preaching to be an outmoded means of communication which should be replaced by something more appropriate to our electronic age. So it has gone for thirty years, and all these emphases still continue side by side, in fact, all mixed up with one another. You can imagine the cumulative unsettling effects of all the turmoil.[10]

By the 1970s, Pennington sensed popular communication theory threatening the relevance of homiletics. He asserted many of his

time had begun to see preaching as outdated and therefore ineffective in modern communication.[11] He wrote, "Every year the schools of theology graduate a new generation of ministers. In each generation, there is a significant number of persons who have been persuaded that preaching is not an important aspect of the ministry."[12] Pennington desired to turn the tide, asserting:

> Preaching is a communicative event. That is, a sermon is an occasion when people come together in the context of corporate worship to engage in the communication and celebration of the gospel. What happens depends on how the sermon is preached and how it is heard. Communication is likely to be most effective when we, congregation as well as preacher, understand how communication between persons actually takes place.[13]

Pennington might have hailed preaching's early adoptions of communication theory in the 1960s and 1970s as "just in time."

Communication Theory in Modern Homiletics Literature

In the past five or six decades, vernacular and concepts common in communication theory have become evident among some homileticians and their written works. Below is an examination of the communication theory content evident in a selection of fifteen homiletics books from the last fifty-five years.

Clyde H. Reid: The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication (1967)

Reid's contribution to homiletics provides evidence of one of the early-most adoptions of communication theory in homiletics. Reid was in favor of a "two-way flow of information" between the church and its leaders and the fields of "communication theory and research."[14] He believed communication theory as well as media theory (including Marshall McLuhan's theory that "the medium is the message") all held important wisdom for

gospel preachers who should be "deeply interested in understanding the nature of communication."[15] Reid explored the historical developments of communication theory from World War II through to his present day, including theories in mass communication and Schramm's idea's on feedback as a common characteristic of "communication as dialogue."[16] Reid built a framework for understanding the process of communication, building on the work of Melvin L. DeFleur and Otto N. Larsen, who themselves synthesized a set of theories derived in-part from Shannon and Weaver as well as Schramm. His communication process included: transmission, contact, feedback, comprehension, acceptance, internalization, and action.[17] His process was mostly linear on paper, but he believed the element of feedback was continually molding the transmitted message.

J. Daniel Baumann: An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching (1972)

Baumann adopted communication theory as the basis for his proposed preaching methodology. He cited Shannon and Weaver, Schramm, Westley and MacLean, and Berlo by name. He adopted Berlo's SMCR model, adding that sender, message, channel, and receiver are "overlapping dimensions in a dynamic process."[18] He implicitly included the concept noise, exploring various types of contemporary noise (for example neglect of contemporary application, "communication overkill," breakdown of integrity, and more).[19] Perhaps most telling is that Baumann's exploration of the applications of communication theory constitute the first chapter of his text! The subject matter is not hidden away in a latter chapter as food for thought, but poured as a foundation for the entire book.

Merrill Abbey: Communication in Pulpit and Parish (1973)

Abbey's entire text is an application of communication theory to homiletics. He explored communication theory models in-depth,

citing Shannon and Weaver specifically as well as Berlo. He developed his own model for pastoral preaching, counseling, and teaching, which was based on a combination of Shannon and Weaver, Schramm, and Berlo. His model assumed a possible proliferation of continually-functioning channels, each carrying a type of message (verbal or nonverbal) to a type of receiver. The receiver was assumed capable of both verbal and nonverbal feedback, which had an impact not only the pastor/teacher/preacher, but the context of communication (or "current situation" in which communication occurs).[20]

As with Reid, Abbey believed communication theory held important wisdom for the field of homiletics. Likewise, he paid particular attention to the concept of feedback in the "field of communication." Abbey called feedback the "vital link" between preacher and congregation.[21] According to Abbey, feedback is what enables adaptation on the fly. He wrote, "This role of feedback in guiding both sender and receiver makes it far more than a device by which the sender finds the sensitive points to which to direct his appeals."[22] Rather,

> For the communicator who enters the interdependent relation of true communication and is fully sensitive to those with whom he is dealing, this aspect of feedback makes it a channel for the reconciliation of differences. Through it a sense of community can develop. By its aid the parties to the communication can mature together.[23]

His ideas required congruence with Fearing's belief that communication cannot be decoupled from ethics, since such reconciliation requires mutual trust. Abbey's reflections were optimistic for the preaching moment. He saw communication theory models as a framework for understanding how to harness the power of the field of communication for mutual understanding of a biblical text between preacher and listener.

Chester A. Pennington, God Has a Communication Problem (1976)

Pennington adopted a communication model that included concepts from Shannon and Weaver, Dickens, Schramm and Roberts, and Berlo. His mode was also two-way. He wrote,

> It is frequently observed that communication is a two-way process. This is true in church too. Some critics of preaching portray it as a one-way attempt at communication, in which the members of a congregation are passive receivers. This is not really true; at least, if preacher and congregation know what preaching is all about, it need not be true.[24]

Pennington pointed out, "In any thoughtful design of a sermon, the congregation has already had significant input. Their needs, their joys, their crises have helped shape the sermon."[25] Greg Heisler pointed out the same concept in examining the effects of indeterminacy on a sermon.[26] In defending the argument that a "sermon is not a sermon until it is preached," Heisler wrote, "in a real sense the preacher who is open to the Spirit's leading and sensitive to the dynamic of indeterminacy must learn to work with what the audience or the context gives him."[27] Pennington added,

> But it is also true that a congregation can be active throughout the entire experience of worship. The people communicate with the preacher as they participate in the liturgy and receive the sermon. Indeed they communicate with each other. In a congregation, communication is not only two-way; it proceeds in many directions at the same time.[28]

Though Pennington's model does not seem explicitly two-way, his writing suggests a preacher receives a constant stream of feedback in the preaching event to help him overcome barriers, shape his speech, and account for their needs. Pennington also

included the concepts of "barriers" and "ambivalence" to describe the obstacles between sender and receiver—a likely reference to Shannon and Weaver's concept of "noise source." Pennington's model was more thorough than most modern models found in preaching manuals.

George E. Sweazey: Preaching the Good News (1976)

Sweazey widely adopted communication theory, suggesting "every sermon is a multimedia communication" in which "the preacher is by sound and sight transmitting over multiple channels."[29] He adopted a simple model, crediting Shannon and Weaver by name. He also referenced Berlo (and cited him in his bibliography), for instance, highlighting the role of the receivers senses in decoding the transmitted signal so it can "penetrate his consciousness and be taken up by his apperceptive faculties."[30] He asserted, "any contact between two people … is manipulative"—a possible callback to Berlo's assertion that all thought requires the "manipulation of symbols."[31] Though the imagery he provided aligned closely with Shannon and Weaver, his writing included reference to more-circular ideas of communication, including interaction through informative and reinforcement feedback. Sweazey's text provides further evidence of early adoption of communication theory in homiletics.

J. Randall Nichols: Building the Word (1980)

Nichols' work was pregnant with communication theory concepts. He adopted the concept of metacommunication into preaching, referring to it as common and helpful. He wrote, "we automatically [metacommunicate] all the time when we include in our messages certain instructions, sometimes overt and sometimes implicit, for how we want the receiver of those messages to respond."[32] He asserted nonverbal communication is equally responsible for metacommunication, though it usually happens within a complex combination of all the characteristics

of communication available to us.[33] However, a preacher with effective metacommunication preaches sermon that are easier to listen to and understand than most.[34] He applied the concept to the entire worship service as well, proposing that in the congregational setting everything before and after the sermon can easily metacommunicate something about the sermon content as much as the preacher himself.[35]

Myron Raymond Chartier: Preaching as Communication (1981)

Myron Raymond Chartier wrote extensively on the application of communication theory to the field of homiletics. Among his contributions to the application of communication theory in preaching is his exploration of both verbal and non-verbal communication through the communication channel. He differentiated between the words "used as symbols to represent objects, events, and ideas" and "all other form of message behavior: (1) sign language, (2) action language, (3) object language, (4) space, and (5) time."[36] He also introduced exploration of intended versus unintended communication through the both verbal and nonverbal communication.[37] He wrote, "Much communication research has focused on intentional communication. … Activity or inactivity, words or silence—all have message value: They influence others, and those others, in turn, cannot not respond to those communications, and one thus finds oneself communicating."[38] Chartier also differentiated between intrapersonal and interpersonal communication. Intrapersonal communication "occurs within … individuals and involves the processing of internal and external messages."[39] However, interpersonal communication "refers to interaction between persons."[40] Chartier seemed to draw these concepts from Berlo's fifth chapter of *The Process of Communication*.

Chartier also identified small-group communication ("face-to-face interaction of a group of people"), organizational communication (in "highly structured settings"), mass communication ("transmission of a message to masses of

people"), and intercultural communication ("between private individuals, groups, or government officials of more than one nation").[41] The latter concepts were not explicitly named by Berlo, however, Berlo examined similar concepts in his sixth chapter of *The Process of Communication*.

John Stott: Between Two Worlds (1982)

Stott examined the "rich and diverse process" of learning in which "we are assimilating knowledge and experience all the time, directly and indirectly, consciously and unconsciously, by words and images, by listening and looking, by discussing and discovering, by passive absorption and by participating in the action ourselves."[42] He cited Berlo directly, adopting ideas regarding an encoding-source, a message, a channel, and a decoding-receiver.[43] He suggested preaching is unique, as there is "no other form of communication which resembles it," since there is no other form of communication for which the source is divinely appointed for a specific receiver.[44] He asserted the message must be "God's own Word" for communication to count as preaching. [45] In the preaching moment, the "divine terms" applied to the SMCR model must be understood as "God speaking through his minister to his people."[46] Stott purported no matter the development of technology or media, preaching will always remain a purely unique type of communication (nothing else is "God's people assembled in God's presence to hear God's Word from God's minister"). [47]

Bryan Chapell: Using Illustrations to Preach with Power (1992)

Chapell included theories on communication in his text devoted to illustrations. He asserted modern communication theory not only legitimized, but necessitated the inclusion of illustrations in sermons. He wrote, "the conclusions of … communication theorists do much to indicate why illustrations are so important."[48] He continued, "Beyond their much-cited ability to garner attention, provide nonredundant repetition, and

substation sermon interest, illustrations create experiential dynamics that actually further understanding."[49] For instance, illustrations make message transmission clearer by encoding meaning in terms easier for a receiver to decode.[50] Additionally, explaining concepts using illustrations that incorporate "lived-body experience" are able to connect to "those matters deepest in the human heart."[51] In such cases, one message in the form of a narrative analogy continues communicating on behalf of another message passing through the channel, but now with greater clarity.

Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix: Power in the Pulpit (1999)

Vines and Shaddix adopted Berlo's SMCR model (source, message, channel, receiver), though they may have been referencing Dickens' earlier model which included source, channel, and receiver, as they cited Dickens without citing Berlo. They discussed communication theory briefly, only devoting one page to the topic. Describing the preaching moment as an application of SMCR, they wrote,

> The preacher is the source. He stands before a congregation, called of God to preach and gifted and empower to do so. He takes the message from the Bible, places it in his words, and conveys it to the waiting congregation via the medium of the spoken word. The person in the congregation receive the words delivered by the preacher and then decode them in categories that are understandable to them.[52]

Additionally, Vines and Shaddix referenced Dickens' ideas regarding communicative attitude, writing, "The preacher will be helped if he takes the attitude that he and the listeners are participating in the preaching situation as a group. His attitude cannot be 'they, the audience, and I, the speaker'"—the latter a direct quote from Dickens.[53] Rather, a preacher's attitude must be "you and I."[54] They continue,

> A minister must help his hearer sense that they are as much as part of the communicative process as is he. The idea is to create the feeling that "we are all thinking this through together." The more the preacher makes his listeners aware of their participation in what he is saying, the better he will communicate.[55]

Their concepts are similar to Merrill Abbey's regarding the field of communication as a place for common agreement around biblical truth (since by the elements of communication "parties … can mature together"[56]). Vine and Shaddix suggest communication theory to be a valuable tool for helping preachers avoid drabness and disconnection between "pulpit and pew."[57]

Wayne McDill: The Moment of Truth (1999)

McDill proposed even the "most basic" model of communication should include those elements theorized by Shannon and Warren Weaver (the only theorists he named explicitly).[58] He also referenced communication elements present in the models of Dickens, Schramm and Roberts, Westley and MacLean, and David K. Berlo. McDill also suggested his readers see the encyclopediac volumes of Ronald B. Adler and George Rodman (*Understanding Human Communication*) as well as Gail E. Myers and Michele Tolela Myers (*The Dynamics of Human Communication*) for an overview of the history of communication models.

McDill included a communication model essentially congruent with Pennington. He provided a number of applications worth noting. First, he suggested preachers utilize more channels for communication than they aware of during the sermon, including "words, gestures, facial expressions, bodily movement, and other factors about the speaker."[59] Whereas some may limit the concept of a channel, he implied a theoretically unidentifiable number of active channels during preaching.

Second, McDill adopted the ideas regarding noise identified originally by Shannon and Weaver and further developed by Berlo. He wrote,

> Noise, in communication theory, is any distraction that interferes with the communication process. Noise can be sounds, sights, or unusual behavior, anything that hinders the reception of the message. Noise can be external to the hearer, in the circumstances of the speaker's manner. It can also be internal, in the hearer's own attitudes and thoughts.[60]

McDill noted preachers are responsible for removing the noise they can identify in their own manner, language, gestures, preaching style, vocal tone, accent, physical movement, clothing choices and more.[61]

Third, McDill adopted the "field of experience" concept popularized by Schramm. He wrote, "Every aspect of our communication is affected by our past experiences, our feelings, our attitudes, our knowledge, etc."—our field of experience.[62] Likewise, a preacher must consider the field of experience of his audience, which will unavoidably shape the way his hearings decode the message or even produce its own noise impacting the communication process.[63]

Gregory Edward Reynolds: The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures (2001)

Reynolds explored the intersection of media theory and homiletics, giving communication theory consideration in the fifth chapter of *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures*. Citing Marshall McLuhan's assertion that the "medium is the message," Reynolds purported that the message and the channel must be understood in harmony in a modern context.[64] The outlook is progressive relative to classic theories that separated the two, and therefore, could have easily seen noise as imposing on the message or the channel separately. Modern theories saw noise

impacting the communication process holistically. In other words, Reynolds asserted that in the age of electronic media if noise impacts the channel, it impacts the message. If noise has an impact on the receiver, it has an impact on the message. In the hyper-connected communication processes, everything touches everything else and noise is all the more powerful.

Hershael W. York and Bert Decker: Preaching with Bold Assurance (2003)

Hershael Y. York and Bert Decker asserted the importance of communication theory as a framework for understanding how preachers can "convey the message that God gave in his Word" for "hearers to receive and comprehend."[65] They produced their own model, which included elements from Schramm and Roberts, but replaced communication theory terminology with homiletics terminology.[66] For instance, the source possesses its own reality (or "field of experience" according to Schramm and Roberts) and the two occupy a share space in some way (Schramm and Roberts' fields of experience converged with each other, whereas York and Decker's realities converged with a shared space).

York and Decker purported for communication to occur sender and receiver must mutually understand the signals being transmitted.[67] They added that in preaching the phenomenon must occur successfully from God to biblical author (which the doctrine of inerrancy purports), from biblical author to preacher (the interpretive burden of the preacher), and from preacher to listener (the homiletic burden of the preacher).[68] York and Decker's treatment was concise, but highlighted the importance of a clear signal.

Daniel Akin, David Allen, Ned Matthews, et. al.: Text-Driven Preaching (2010)

Seven years after his joint-work with Bert Decker, Hershael W. York contributed a chapter in *Text-Driven Preaching* focusing

solely on communication. He built his ideas on the same model contributed in *Preaching with Bold Assurance* and the chapter contained similar content as well. He explored the doctrine of inerrancy and its implications on encoding and decoding between God, author, reader/preacher, and congregation.[69] Inerrancy suggests the meaning is purposefully and carefully encoded and therefore, meant to be decoded rightly and understood properly. He purported meaning is "readily clear" in the vast majority of biblical texts and that the perspicuity of Scripture suggested although "we may not be able to understand everything in Scripture because of our own limitations, distance from vocabulary or context of the text, or even our sinfulness unwillingness to believe it … we can certainly apprehend the main things in nearly every text."[70] In other words, Scripture communicates well and human limitations are what make it difficult to decode.

Daniel Akin, William Curtis, and Stephen Rummage: Engaging Exposition (2011)

Stephen Rummage devoted four pages in *Engaging Exposition* to communication theory. He purported, "The goal of preaching is to communicate a message from God's Word, in cooperation with the Holy Spirit's desire to change the hearts and lives of listeners."[71] He cited Paul's writing and the command to "preach the Word" (2 Tim. 4:2 ESV), including convincing, rebuking, exhorting, and teaching—congruent with a charge for speech communication. Rummage suggested that since "when we deliver His message, we are engaged in public communication … preachers will profit from a working knowledge of how communication operates, just as they benefit from understanding principles of hermeneutics and sermon construction."[72] For such "knowledge of how communication operates," Rummage turned heavily to Berlo.

For context, Rummage provided a model he named "The Communication Process," and which he referenced as the "Berlo mode of communication."[73] Summating the model, Rummage

wrote, "In communication, a speaker sends a message through a channel to a listener, who in turn provides feedback to the speaker. Both the speaker and the listener communicate based on their unique fields of experience."[74] Rummage's modeled expression of Berlo's theories cannot be found explicitly in Berlo's works, however it does provide a simplified expression of his writing.

Rummage's model was relatively unique among homiletics texts in the way it expressed noise. Rummage wrote, "Noise can interfere with the process of communication."[75] His depiction of noise was congruent with Berlo's assertion that fidelity is impacted by noise's interaction with other elements. The message is impact by noise's impact on the speaker as much as the listener. In Figure 2.9, the message converges with noise at the "listener" element, the "speaker" element, and both feedback elements.

SUMMARY

Communication theory had and continues to have a notable, demonstrable impact on homiletics. Many homiletics manuals of the last fifty-five years contain overt references to communication theorists and their theories. However, scholarly lacunae exist between ethnically-influenced homiletic traditions and the connection they may (or may not) have to the communication theories of Shannon, Weaver, Schramm, Berlo, and others. The gap could be remedied by scholarly assessment of the influence of communication theory on African, Hispanic, and Asian-American homiletics.

The homiletics authors referenced in this paper defend the field of communication theory as worthy of application in the domain of homiletics. Many depend on mid-twentieth century communication theory as the basis for their understanding of human verbal and nonverbal interaction. Their adopted (or adapted) communication models were derived from the vocabulary and structures of Shannon and Weaver, Franklin, Dickens, Schramm and Roberts, Westley and MacLean, and

Berlo. Therefore, one may rightfully say communication theory has been widely adopted in the field of homiletics.

NOTES

1. See Clyde H. Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967); J. Daniel Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972); Merrill R. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973); Chester A. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976); George E. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976); J. Randall Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980); Myron Raymond Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1981); John R. W. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982); J Randall Nichols, *The Restoring Word: Preaching as Pastoral Communication* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987); Bryan Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Jerry Vines and Jim Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999); Wayne McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999); Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003); Daniel L. Akin, David Lewis Allen, and Ned Lee Mathews, eds., *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon.* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010); Daniel L. Akin, William J. Curtis, and Stephen Nelson Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011).
2. Craig, "Communication Theory as a Field," 122.

3. Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen A. Foss, *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2009), 175.
4. Chester A. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1976), 40.
5. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 40.
6. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*.
7. David Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Preaching and Preachers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), 11.
8. Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy, *Speech and Reality* (Norwich, Vt: Argo Books, 1970), 46.
9. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 40.
10. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 27.
11. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 28.
12. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 29.
13. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*.
14. Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication*, 81.
15. Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication*, 63, 81.
16. Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication*, 64–68.
17. Reid, *The Empty Pulpit: A Study in Preaching as Communication*, 68–71.
18. J. Daniel Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1972), 22.
19. Baumann, *An Introduction to Contemporary Preaching*. 27–28.
20. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*, 47–49.
21. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*, 47–48.
22. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*, 49.
23. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*.
24. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 55.
25. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*, 55.
26. Greg Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2007), 106–108.

27. Heisler, *Spirit-Led Preaching: The Holy Spirit's Role in Sermon Preparation and Delivery*, 108.
28. Pennington, *God Has a Communication Problem*.
29. George E. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976), 52.
30. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News*, 53.
31. Sweazey, *Preaching the Good News*, 54; Berlo, *The Process of Communication: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*, 44.
32. Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching*, 99–100.
33. Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching*, 100.
34. Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching*.
35. Nichols, *Building the Word: The Dynamics of Communication and Preaching*, 104.
36. Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective*, 17. Chartier defined these terms: "Sign language is operating when a gesture—for instance, a V made with two fingers—is use to convey and idea, such as 'peace.' Action language is the language of the body—gesture, posture, or facial expression—which communicates unintended messages. Object language is the display of a tangible item, such as a clerical code, communicating role and status. The use of time, particularly tardiness or punctuality, communicates; the use of space—a pulpit located on the same level as the congregation, or fifteen feed above them—carrier its own message" (p. 17).
37. Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective*, 18–20.
38. Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective*, 19.
39. Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective*, 22.
40. Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective*.
41. Chartier, *Preaching As Communication: An Interpersonal Perspective*, 22–24.

42. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 76–83.
43. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 80.
44. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 81.
45. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 82.
46. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 82.
47. Stott, *Between Two Worlds: The Art of Preaching in the Twentieth Century*, 82.
48. Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 57.
49. Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*.
50. Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 59.
51. Chapell, *Using Illustrations to Preach with Power*, 59.
52. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, 305.
53. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*; Dickens, *Speech: Dynamic Communication*, 17.
54. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*.
55. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*; Dickens, *Speech: Dynamic Communication*, 17.
56. Abbey, *Communication in Pulpit and Parish*.
57. Vines and Shaddix, *Power in the Pulpit: How to Prepare and Deliver Expository Sermons*, 304.
58. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, 61. Shannon worked with Weaver to develop the theories commonly connect with Shannon.
59. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, 62.
60. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, 64.

61. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*.
62. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*, 65.
63. McDill, *The Moment of Truth: A Guide to Effective Sermon Delivery*.
64. Gregory Reynolds, *The Word Is Worth a Thousand Pictures: Preaching in the Electronic Age* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2001), 184.
65. Hershael W. York and Bert Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2003), 136.
66. York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*, 136–9. The authors do not explicitly cite any communication theorists, nor to they provide a bibliography of sources consulted from which they developed their theories.
67. York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*, 137.
68. York and Decker, *Preaching with Bold Assurance: A Solid and Enduring Approach to Engaging Exposition*, 138.
69. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 229.
70. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 229–30.
71. Daniel L. Akin, William J. Curtis, and Stephen Nelson Rummage, *Engaging Exposition* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 2011), 252.
72. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 252-53.
73. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*, 254.
74. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*.
75. Akin, Curtis, and Rummage, *Engaging Exposition*.

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JESUS IS COMING—SO WHAT?

CHASE CAMPBELL
Christ Church of Atlanta
Atlanta, GA

Micah 4

INTRODUCTION

When I worked in Downtown Pittsburgh, or as we called it, "Dahntahn," I saw a lot of interesting characters. I'm talking there was a guy who always wore a bright-colored, three-piece, longtail velvet suitwith a top hat. Once a year, we had the furry convention where people showed up in animal costumes and literally acted like whatever furball they dressed up as. And you thought Portland was weird.

The most interesting characters, however, were the soapbox preachers. They seemed more like protestors than preachers. I haven't seen a lot of them in Atlanta. Do you know what I'm talking about? These are some of the more zealous angry Christians who hang around a corner. Often, they carried signs with them. Signs that would say, "Jesus will return soon!" "The End is Near!" As a Christian, I didn't have a problem with the message. What I didn't care for was their delivery. There was always an ominous tone attached to it. It was as if Jesus' return seemed like a bad thing, or we should be scared when He does. I always thought His return was supposed to be a good thing.

And every time I saw those men and women on the corner, I always wondered, "So what?" Yeah, Jesus is coming back someday, but so what? They never said why that's important or what we should do about it. So, for that reason, I think most people simply ignored the soapbox preachers. Sure, it didn't help that they were a bit over the top, but they never

preached the "so what?" Jesus is coming back someday. So what? What are we to do about it?

To be fair, it's easy for me to get on their case, but if we're honest with ourselves, are we, and when I say "we" I mean those of us who profess Jesus as our Lord and Savior, all that much better? Think about it, every week, we confess in the creed we believe Jesus will come again someday but do we really know why that's important? Do we know why we feel the need to remind ourselves every week?

It's not just the creed. Throughout the year, we also read prophetic and apocalyptic passages in the Bible, like that from Micah 4, which tells us that there will be an end of time as we know it; a latter day. Other places call it the Day of the Lord. A day when Jesus will return and turn this world on its head. But do *we* know why that's important?

It kind of reminds me of when I was in seminary. We were studying this topic. In academics, it's called the "Parousia," which is a $5 word that simply means "arrival" or "Jesus' second coming." We were going over the various views: Amillennialism, Pre-millennialism, Post-millennialism. A heated debate grew in a class. Well, one boneheaded student (and I know he was boneheaded because it was me), out of frustration, just yelled out amid the debating, "What does it matter? If we believe in Jesus and we believe He's going to return, shouldn't we be pan-millennialist and trust that it will all pan out in the end?" To which the fiercely divided suddenly unified in unequivocal "No!" That was the only thing they agreed on that day.

You see, I couldn't answer the "So what?" question. I believed Jesus was coming back, but I couldn't tell you why that was important in my present life or what I was supposed to do with that information. My solution was to ignore it, but that wasn't the right answer.

So can *we* answer the "So what?" Do we know what we're supposed to do with these apocalyptic texts? And, as a quick aside, apocalyptic simply means revealing. They're passages which reveal something about God and His future. So why do we have them? And what are we to do with them?

Let's start with what we're not supposed to do with them.

WHAT WE'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO DO

In general, I find that when it comes to these apocalyptic passages, people in the Church fall into one of two groups. The first group merely looks at these texts and doesn't know what to do with them. So, they put them on the back burner. It's like they're the B side of the Bible (Yes, I'm old enough to know what a B side is). It's not that they don't believe them. It's just that they have been waiting a long time for them to come to fruition, so they don't seem all that relevant to our present lives. They can't answer the "So what?" question, so they ignore them. That's what I was doing in seminary.

But did you know that nearly 25% of the Bible is made up of apocalyptic or prophetic texts? It seems to me that if God intended for us to put these writings on the back burner, He wouldn't have made them such a large portion of His Bible. So, we can't ignore them or see them as irrelevant. In fact, 2 Peter 3 warns us not to become complacent or indifferent to the coming of the Lord. It's important that we seek out the relevance of these passages to our lives and faith. That's group one; they ignore these texts.

Then there's group two. This group is on the other end of the spectrum. They think there are hidden messages within these passages; little Easter eggs that can only be discovered through secret codes and formulas. In general, they look for details on the exact times and ways these things will occur. Lots of people have claimed to have cracked the Bible code. For almost 2000 years, Bible students and scholars have attempted to crack some secret Bible code, But, for 2000 years, every person has been wrong.

Unfortunately, for these individuals, in all their study of the scripture, none of them took Jesus' words in Matthew 24 very seriously, "But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." You see, Jesus made it clear, these texts do not serve as some crystal ball. So, therefore, I would say the purpose of these apocalyptic texts

is not to get us to dig out some deep hidden message with a secret date. But then, that still leaves us with our question: what's their purpose? What's the answer to our "So what?"

THE ANSWER TO "SO WHAT?"

What do we do with a text like Micah 4 that we just read? A text that describes a future day when God will establish His house and His city. A house and city that will be the most important place in all the world. A day in which people from every nation will walk away from their false gods and turn to the true Lord. A day when there is no longer any need for armies or weapons because God will have established His perfect peace and His justice. A day when you won't have to worry about hearing boring sermons or bad jokes from the pulpit anymore because the Lord Himself will be the one who will teach us. It sounds lovely, right? But what are we to do with it in the here and now?

Well, I think vs. 5 gives us one of the best answers, "[Therefore,] though the nations around us [presently] follow their idols, we will follow the Lord our God forever and ever." In other words, one of the main reasons, not the only reason, but a big reason why God gives us texts like Micah 4 and other apocalyptic passages is that they're meant to encourage us to live out our present lives in anticipation of our future hope. They remind us that the way things are now in the present is not how they will always be. And, so our hope is not to be found in anything this world has to offer us. It's not in getting our candidate elected to office, nor is it in finding a cure or vaccine to whatever plagues us. It's not in how much we have in our retirement and savings accounts, nor is it in our country's military strength. It's not in our ability to remain a leading nation. It's not in our success nor the success of our children. Our hope, our only hope, rests in knowing that the same Lord who rose from the dead, thereby conquering sin and death, will return someday to put all of creation back into order. That's our hope, and we're to live our lives anticipating that great hope.

I know it seems like we've been waiting for that day forever, and at times it feels like it may never come, but, again, Peter reminds us, "Don't be fooled by the Lord's "slowness." Slowness is relative. With the Lord, a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance."

And so, while we wait, Micah 4 reminds us of this hope and reminds us that we are called to live out that future hope in the present. This means we're called to be a foretaste of that future kingdom. As citizens of this future kingdom we are to stand out as a beacon of what's to come.

It makes me think of one of my favorite restaurants, a place called "The Pearl." It's in Rosemary Beach Florida. It's a swanky little place off 30-A. One of my favorite things about this place is that before you order your cocktail or an appetizer, they bring you a spoon hors d'oeuvre. The chef packs an entire little microcosm meal onto a little spoon. And they are always delicious, and they always leave you wanting more. But that's the point. They're not meant to be filling. They're meant to give you a little foretaste of the grandness that is to come. They are meant to whet your appetite and get you excited for the even greater things ahead.

Like The Pearl, these texts call us to be God's hors d'oeuvre. We're to be a foretaste of what's to come when Jesus returns: to offer people a glimpse of the great hope to come. So, while the rest of the world might follow false gods and idols, "we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever" as a testimony of the hope we have in Christ's return.

So, what does it practically look like for us to live out God's future in our present? Let's look at Micah for some examples.

EXAMPLES OF GOD'S FUTURE IN OUR PRESENT

In the first verse it says, "the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall

be lifted up above the hills; and peoples shall flow to it" God's house will be lifted up on the highest hill. Now we can't build God's house on the hill, but Jesus tells in Matthew 5 we can be the light of the world, like a city on a hill." We can point people who do not know Jesus to true faith in Him. We can live out our faith in the Gospel boldly for others to see. I think now more than ever people need to see authentic Christian faith boldly lived out as light in the darkness.

Verse 2 goes on, "and many nations shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." So, this tells us, not only are we to study God's word, but we are to take the word out into the world. We're to stand firm in the word. We're to share the word. As St. Paul puts it, we're to "Stand firm in the faith; Be on guard; be courageous; be strong." Stand firm in the word.

Verse 3 continues, "He shall judge between many peoples, and shall decide disputes for strong nations far away; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore;" It's an image of justice and peace. If you want to get into an argument in the Church right now, just bring up the question of how we are to be a people of God's peace and justice right now. It's literally tearing apart the evangelical Church. This topic could be a sermon in and of itself. So, here's the thumbnail version. Psalm 34 tells us if we want peace, we have to pursue it; be intentional. Proverbs 13 shows us the enemy of peace is pride. To be a person of God's peace means to be a humble person. And, finally, Jesus explains to us in John 14, being a people of God's peace is only possible when our relationship with Jesus is square. Share peace.

Last verse. Verse 4 says "but they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree, and no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken." We see here God extending his charity and love. How do we do that in the present? I like how C.S. Lewis put it, "Charity means love in

the Christian sense. But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, we must learn to have towards other people." To be a people who live out God's future in the present means to be a people who share God's love and charity in the here and now.

CONCLUSION

Jesus is coming back. So what? Here's what: be bold, stand firm, share peace, and extend love. Live with anticipation of what's to come. Live as a foretaste of the greatness Jesus will bring.

It's not an exhaustive list, but it's a good start. It's a good start for us as we live out God's future hope in our present time. That's a good start in our effort to point the people in the right direction who do not have the hope we have. It's a good start for giving people a foretaste of what's to come when Jesus returns.

As we celebrate in this Easter season the hope we were given in the past, let the words of Micah, and others like it, remind us of the hope we have in the future. Let them encourage us to live out our present lives fully confident in the future hope that we have in Christ. And let them give us the confidence to boldly say, "Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ is coming again." Amen

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BOOK REVIEWS

Words That Heal: Preaching Hope to Wounded Souls. By Joni S. Sancken. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 978-1-50184-968-8, 128 pp., $18.99.

Reviewer: *H. Jared Bumpers, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City, MO.*

Joni Sancken, associate professor of homiletics at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio, wrote *Words That Heal* in the aftermath of an unexpected loss. She explains, "On July 4, 2016, my sister-in-law died from a brain aneurysm.... After this heartbreaking experience, I became more attuned to the wounds that other families and individuals carry and how these wounds can affect relationships with God and the church. Those who write about healing from trauma often have a personal catalyst. Our family's journey through trauma toward healing is traced in these pages" (xiii).

Given this background, Sancken's book is unavoidably personal. At the same time, it's broadly applicable. Even if there are only a few people in a congregation who have experienced a major traumatic event, she observes, "lower levels of pain and bitterness are widely present in our congregations" (11). Unfortunately, preachers often lack the knowledge or tools to address trauma from the pulpit. Sancken set out to fix this problem by writing a book that "equips preachers to help individuals and congregations heal from traumatic experiences and develop resilience" (xiii).

One of the primary keys to equip preachers to aid others who have experienced trauma is to raise their awareness about trauma and how it affects those in the pew. To raise awareness, Sancken defines trauma, lists its common causes, describes its various effects, and provides a theological framework for addressing trauma. She does not provide this information to turn

the pulpit into "a trauma center" but to inform preaching practices and enable preachers to deliver trauma-informed sermons (17). Armed with the knowledge of trauma and its effects, she believes, preachers can deliver sermons that are sensitive to those who have experienced major traumatic events, as well as those who have experienced lesser levels of pain and bitterness.

Another key to equipping preachers to address trauma from the pulpit, according to Sancken, is to read the Bible "through the lenses of trauma and resilience" (26). She offers the following five interpretive tools to guide the process: (1) Scripture as a source of the language of faith, (2) assigning the blame, (3) focusing on the power of God, (4) typology, and (5) cross and resurrection. At times, these tools are explained and powerfully applied. For example, Sancken quotes Lamentations and Psalm 137, then encourages preachers to "use biblical language to externalize the pain of wounding experiences today" (27). By identifying texts that contain language expressing devastating experiences and the resulting pain, preachers can provide a vocabulary for trauma survivors to verbalize their internal suffering and anguish. At other times, however, the tools are unhelpful and distract from the point of the text. For example, Sancken applies the tool of "assigning blame" to the narrative of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22 and concludes, "As a fallible human, Abraham may have mischaracterized God's call" (42). Nothing in the text or the remainder of Scripture indicates Abraham "mischaracterized God's call." In this case, Sancken's interpretive tool led her astray. This does not render her interpretive tools useless, but preachers should use them judiciously.

While *Words that Heal* is designed to help preachers address trauma from the pulpit in a healthy way, Sancken acknowledges the trauma caused by the church throughout history. She writes, "Racism, sexism, colonialism, participation in cultural genocide, anti-Semitism, and complicity in the face of clergy sexual abuse are examples of traumatic wounds caused in part by or deepened by the church" (49). Instead of acting as

agents of healing, pastors and church leaders have been guilty of inflicting pain on the vulnerable. Sancken encourages Christian leaders to listen to survivors, confess and apologize for abuse, and preach about justice. Ignoring the reality of trauma caused by the church is simply not an option. Yet preachers are not constrained to lamenting previous abuses in the church. They can build resilience in their people by preaching the hope of the gospel. As Sancken observes, "The good news of the resurrection never gets old or tiresome, and listeners struggling with wounds of all kinds need to hear it" (77). This is the heart of her argument. In the face of trauma, preachers can address the pain and suffering of survivors with the hope of the gospel and build resilience in their listeners.

This volume makes a unique contribution to the field of preaching. While conservative evangelical preachers will undoubtedly disagree with certain theological convictions and statements contained in the book (for example, God is described as one who takes risks and a reference is made to the feminine Spirit of God), the book will stimulate their thinking about trauma and how it impacts the task of preaching. At the very least, readers will come to possess an increased understanding of trauma and its effects and will be encouraged to preach the gospel in order to develop resilience in their listeners.

Practicing the Preaching Life. By David B. Ward. Nashville: Abingdon, 2019. 978-1-5018-5494-1, 178 pp., $29.99.

Reviewer: *Glenn Watson, Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary, Cochrane, AB.*

Who among us has not heard (or preached!) sermons that were exegetically accurate, homiletically correct, thoughtfully applied, and adequately delivered, yet which still seemed to fall flat? All the essential pieces are in place, yet there is a sense that some intangible quality (authenticity? credibility? wisdom?) is

missing. David Ward, Professor of Homiletics and Practical Theology at Indiana Wesleyan University, addresses this problem with the principled assertion that "preaching is more about life than it is about skills" (ii).

In *Practicing the Preaching Life,* Ward offers a philosophy and practice founded on the assumption that preaching's proper aim is not merely a good sermon but "living well as a worshipping community for the sake of the world" (2). His philosophy consists essentially of four preaching functions (healing, teaching, saving, freeing) that shape a preacher's doing, and four "contextual virtues" (centered humility, compassionate empathy, participatory wisdom, courageous justice) that shape a preacher's being. He urges preachers to pursue the "good life" above the "good sermon" (79) through Christian practices of devotion (spiritual disciplines) and practices of compassion (serving the needs of others). These practices he calls "means of grace," helping the preacher to "practice the presence of God" and to enter a cycle of Christian formation: "The preaching life is embedded within a Christian life, a Christian life funds a rich preaching life, and a rich preaching life points the church to a comprehensively Christian life" (93).

In the final chapters, Ward gives practical tips for integrating these functions, virtues, and practices into a sermon development process. He offers the practices of devotion and compassion as the context in which a "hermeneutic of tradition" and a "hermeneutic of suspicion" work together to lead to fresh insight. He proposes a "delay" between insight and sermon through a four-week preparation process to allow the time for the contextual virtues to shape the preacher's perspective. He suggests a process of oral preparation that locates the sermon by "sounding it out," affirming that "for most preachers, the sooner orality is injected into the preaching process, the better" (124). He discusses three preaching voices (herald, witness, testimony) and develops each insightfully, including pitfalls to avoid. Finally, a chapter on sermon form explores a variety of possibilities ranging from inductive to deductive, with an emphasis on a sermon logic that undergirds each.

Though Ward clearly writes from the perspective of his Wesleyan tradition, expressed through the New Homiletic, he makes efforts to converse meaningfully with a broader readership. He also exhibits a keen conviction that issues of racial and social justice should occupy a prominent place in today's Christian pulpit. He emphasizes this theme by devoting an entire chapter to the virtue of "courageous justice," covering the other three virtues in a single chapter. Readers who oppose the use of Critical Race Theory will likely find fault with some of his comments regarding the need to address systems of injustice, but his perspective is compelling and worth considering.

The book includes a "For Reflection" section at the end of each chapter with a series of exercises and questions to help process the chapter's content, either with a class or as an individual. Five appendices also provide helpful handles for the reader through exercises, assessments, summaries, and diagrams. Though the insights of the book are of value for preachers of all levels, the fact that it does not address basic homiletical skills might preclude it from being the primary textbook for a beginning preaching course. It might serve best as a supplementary or secondary text, or perhaps as a primary text for a more advanced course. Preachers who have been at the task for a while will also find here an important perspective for deepening their preaching life and practice.

In this work, David Ward has taken an aspect of preaching that is universally recognized as crucial but which is often neglected in books on preaching, and he has put it at center stage. He reminds us that preaching is not merely a skill to be mastered but a life to be lived, that sermons flow best from a life lived faithfully before God and among his people.

Father Taylor: Boston's Sailor Preacher. By William H. Armstrong. Amazon Self-Publishing, 2020. 979-8060-3960-067, 496 pp., $19.95.

Reviewer: *Martin L. Knox, Lakeshore Baptist Church, Hudson Oaks, TX.*

In his tribute to Boston preacher Edward Thompson Taylor, William Armstrong opens with a nineteen-page overview of his subject's life. Here he details what little is known about Taylor's early history, including the fact that he spent eleven years at sea working on ships after beginning at the age of seven. When he finally returned home, Taylor was unable to find anyone he formerly knew nor the graves of his own parents.

Late in 1811, he entered the Broomfield Lane Methodist Church to listen to a young preacher. Thomas Tucker, who would also become a preacher, noticed the emotion aroused in Taylor by the message and helped him to the altar and his conversion. Tucker later wrote of Taylor that he was "one of the roughest and most unpromising specimens of a sailor that he had ever seen, and gave but faint promise of a brilliant career (2)."

Taylor's journey into the pastorate and preaching was challenging. He was uneducated and lacked experience. He struggled to obtain his license and to keep it.

In 1828, the Methodists formed a Port Society in Boston due to their concern for sailors. Father Taylor, as he came to be known, was invited to preach to a group of those men. Immediately upon hearing Taylor's sermon, all knew they had the right man to lead this new ministry. For the next forty years, he served in this position while the ministry and his congregation grew significantly. Sadly, his last few years were plagued with declining mental and physical health. An assistant pastor was called to work with him until his death.

The greater part of Armstrong's book, pages 39-405, are historical accounts by various people familiar with Taylor. Each contributor is named and a brief description of her/his connection to Taylor is given when possible. These accounts range from local people of no apparent significance to luminaries like Ralph Waldo Emerson who enjoyed listening to Taylor preach.

Father Taylor provides a brief history of but one local pastor in Boston in the 1800s. He was regarded as a fine orator by the sailors to whom he ministered. His popularity and service to the larger community earned him influence across his city. Armstrong's record of this preacher provides another entry into the history of homiletics, which often overlooks men of Taylor's stature. Readers will find Father Taylor's story to be of interest but will likely find the testimonials from those who knew him to grow increasingly tiresome with each passing page.

Communicating with Grace and Virtue. By Quentin J. Schultze. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2020. 978-1-540-96127-3, 160 pp., $18.99.

Reviewer: *Randall A. Boltinghouse, Windsor Road Christian Church, Champaign, IL.*

In *Communicating with Grace and Virtue*, Quentin J. Schultze offers a readable, values-based text for students of communication. Schultze (Ph.D., University of Illinois) taught for forty years in higher education (most recently at Calvin College) and now mentors, speaks, and writes in his field. From his Judeo-Christian worldview, Schultze sees "servant communication" as a God-endowed stewardship to benefit others (16).

In chapter one, Schultze invites the reader to view communication as a calling, essential to every area of life. He lists twenty-two vocations involving communication, as well as everyday interactions ranging from "mealtime" to "worship communication" (27). In chapter two, Schultze contends that "our best communication flows from grateful hearts" (38). He is thankful that humans cannot only communicate but talk about how to improve communication with the help of the Holy Spirit. In effective "servant communication," the speaker understands the importance of symbols, their shared understanding, and the wisdom of an "active listening heart" that picks up cues beyond the spoken words (49).

In chapter three, Schultze discusses the ethics of communication, a chapter which this reviewer found difficult to track. For instance, the discussion begins with communicating ethically but shifts abruptly to listening effectively. After six pages, the chapter unexpectedly returns to ethics. The chapter's main ethical dilemma left this reviewer confused as to what boundaries demarcate responsible communication. Is Schultze really recommending that we intentionally do sloppy work (i.e., deliberately write "unintelligible" ad scripts for "massage parlors") as a way of appeasing our consciences before an undesireable client? A separate chapter on listening as a pathway to better communication would strengthen this book.

In chapters four and five, Schultze soars as he urges transparency and vulnerability in the context of community. Servant communicators are broken vessels who strive to be self-aware of their blind spots and imperfections. Their presentations avoid "always," "never," and "you." They speak and write, building relational bridges instead of inciting chaos. In chapter six, Schultze effectively explicates Aristotelian *ethos*, urging the servant communicator to be the same person always: "Integrity is all about integrating our words with our hearts" (105). In chapters seven and eight, he discusses the importance of story-telling as a medium of communication, then offers guidelines for utilizing technology. "Fittingness" is his key word, whether choosing to use PowerPoint in a sermon (maybe) or texting an employment termination notice (definitely not!) (138).

Best used as an undergraduate text for speech communications or pre-homiletics, discussion questions after each chapter provide for robust teacher-student interaction. Also, the various window-in-text discussions further explore each chapter's theme. Topics include (1) careers in communication, (2) non-verbal communication by one's attire, (3) effective story-telling, (4) "listening beyond our tribe," (5) communicating in first person plural, and (6) why Christians should enter the gaming industry. Throughout his book, Schultze rightly stresses the character of the communicator over performance mechanics. "Whom did I serve?" takes priority over

"How well did I speak?" Additionally, Schultze's instructive video lessons, articles, and blog posts can be found at Quentinschultze.com, where the reviewer found his lesson "How to eliminate Ums, Likes, and Ahs" very useful.

Schultze's text reminds this reviewer of C. S. Lewis's "need-love" versus "gift-love." Is the speaker communicating out of some need to extract *love from* or offer *love to* the listener? Schultze conveys the latter with a pastor's touch. In doing so, he equips future public speakers and preachers with their most important tools, neither podiums nor PowerPoints, but towels and basins.

The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching. Edited by Matthew D. Kim and Scott M. Gibson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2021. 978-1-5409-6179-2, 625 pp., $39.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Michael Duduit, Clamp Divinity School of Anderson University, Anderson, SC.*

Haddon Robinson's 1980 book *Biblical Preaching: The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages* became a foundational book for the teaching of homiletics in evangelical colleges and seminaries. In that book Robinson introduced his term the "big idea" to refer to the central idea of a biblical text, shaped for effective preaching. The concept was not new–John A. Broadus emphasized the same idea in different words a century before–but since then, "big idea preaching" has become a popular methodology in many evangelical pulpits.

Several books have been produced in recent years building on Robinson's methodology, and the latest volume is *The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching*. The book is edited by two preaching professors with ties to Gordon-Conwell Seminary, where Robinson concluded his teaching career–Matt Kim is currently on the preaching faculty there, while Scott M. Gibson taught there many years as a colleague of Robinson's

until recently joining the faculty of Baylor's Truett Theological Seminary.

The *Big Idea Companion* is a tool designed to guide preachers and teachers in understanding the key concepts of biblical texts and to help them narrow down to a preachable big idea. As Kim explains, the hefty volume is designed to give readers "an insider's view of the process of determining the main idea of a passage in its context (i.e., subject, complement, exegetical idea, and homiletical idea). In addition, for each book of the Bible you will have access to several features: (1) a brief introduction to the big idea of the entire book, (2) tips on how to divide the book into teaching and preaching pericopes, (3) guidance on difficult passages and verses, (4) cultural perspectives to facilitate faithful application, and (5) recommended resources for interpreting, preaching, and teaching each book" (1-2).

The book moves from Genesis to Revelation, covering selected chapters and texts. Each book is written by one of a large team of contributors (several have written on more than one biblical book). For example, the book of 1 Corinthians is analyzed by Joel Gregory. Here is his text for 1 Corinthians 16:

SUBJECT: What does Paul tell the Corinthians is God's will for stewardship of life and time?
COMPLEMENT: God intends people who believe in the resurrection to give in a timely and proportionate way.
EXEGETICAL IDEA: Paul tells the Corinthians God's will for stewardship of life and time is that God intends people who believe in the resurrection to give in a timely and proportionate way.
HOMILETICAL IDEA: Manage your money and minutes well.

Readers of Robinson's *Biblical Preaching* will recognize here elements of his suggested process for developing an expository sermon. The homiletical idea is, of course, the "big idea" of the sermon that forms the foundation of the expository sermon.

This volume promises to be a useful resource for preachers and teachers as they approach biblical texts. The material provided here is not a replacement for one's own exegetical study but does provide a spark for deeper study and understanding. Given that the best big ideas are short and memorable, many of the ones offered here tend to be a bit on the long side, so preachers will want to use these as a starting point, then develop their own big ideas that are more tightly crafted.

As with any book involving multiple contributors, quality will vary from book to book, though readers will find value in each section. Contributors include preaching professors, pastors, and a graduate student in preaching. They reflect different denominations, ethnicities, and locations, but all are "committed to the authority of God's Word and trust its effectual work in the lives of those to whom we teach and preach" (604).

As Scott M. Gibson points out in the book's conclusion, this volume is meant to be a "guide in helping you teach and preach God's Word. It does not replace good, hard work as one studies in preparation for teaching and preaching" (603). Nevertheless, the *Big Idea Companion* will find a welcome spot on the desk of expository preachers as they study God's Word.

Predicadores: Hispanic Preaching and Immigrant Identity. By Tito Madrazo. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2021. 978-1-481-31390-2, 199 pp., $39.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Kerwin Rodriguez, Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, Waco, TX.*

Tito Madrazo's *Predicadores* explores Hispanic Protestant preaching through the lives and practices of immigrant preachers living in North Carolina. Through collaborative ethnography, Madrazo provides an understanding of Hispanic preaching that is both personal and insightful. The study reveals that Hispanic immigrant pastors are shaped "by [their] migration stories and

bicultural realities" (15). For most of the pastors, their migration journeys produced various traumas, for which they found healing through personal relationship with God, and their callings.

The preaching Madrazo observed during his study was a complex blend of traditional and liberative preaching. Most of the sermons were based on traditional interpretations of Scripture, "yet they also affirmed the worth of their hearers, incorporated themes of solidarity among immigrant communities, and even called for social change" (75). Their sermons exhibited a "strong focus on personal salvation along with a highly contextualized understanding that salvation extend[ed] into all areas of life" (80). Madrazo noticed that the preachers related certain truths about God to their context of migration and feelings of marginalization. He identified five recurring themes in their preaching which addressed their own context and that of their hearers: Christ as savior and friend; God as miracle worker on behalf of the marginalized; God as gatherer of his people; God as lawgiver and provider of structure in the midst of chaos; and God as healer of the family.

Predicadores provides a fresh exploration of Latino/a preaching practices. Its use of collaborative ethnography is honoring to the ministers involved in the project and the communities they represent. As a way of honoring his collaborators, Madrazo includes responses and sermon excerpts in Spanish with an accompanying English translation. The bilingual excerpts invite readers to hear directly from the participants who might otherwise remain invisible.

Hispanic population in the United States has experienced significant growth in recent years. From 2000 to 2015, the Hispanic population grew from just over thirty-five million to over fifty-six million people. In North Carolina, where Madrazo conducted his study, the population of Hispanics in 1990 was just under seventy-seven thousand. In 2015, it grew to over nine-hundred thousand people (4). Hispanic religious identification as Protestants has also increased. Despite these increases, few studies have been done on Hispanic Protestant preaching. The

most popular work by Justo González and Pablo Jiménez was published in 2005.

Predicadores is a welcome addition on the subject to the field of homiletics. Despite its title, the book's usefulness should not be limited to Hispanic readers. Anyone who ministers in a community with a growing Latino/a population would find the book insightful. Additionally, teachers of preaching should read the book as an example of contextual preaching. The book does leave a few unresolved questions that need exploration. Almost all of the pastors who participated in the study are first generation Hispanic immigrants. Throughout the book Madrazo hints at the generational fragmentation the Hispanic immigrant church faces. The study does not address how these churches might address these challenges, but the book raises the need for more study on the subject of Hispanic Protestant preaching and ministry.

To Aliens and Exiles: Preaching the New Testament as Minority-Group Rhetoric in a Post-Christendom World. By Tim MacBride. Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020. 978-1-5326-9683-1, 237 pp., $31.00.

Reviewer: *Casey Barton, North Park Theological Seminary, Chicago, IL.*

In *To Aliens and Exiles*, Tim MacBride makes the case that the New Testament speaks to the church and its people as those who represent a *minority people* in their culture; believers in this moment find ourselves as this same minority people in relation to our cultures; and the *minority rhetoric* utilized by Scripture's authors is an important biblical and rhetorical lens for preaching to God's people today. MacBride's observations are both poignant and pragmatic for the Western church in general, and for the white evangelical church in particular.

MacBride presents the community of the church as "aliens and exiles," relying on Peter's designation in his first epistle. In a

post-Christian world, "we can no longer preach with the assumption that we are part of the dominant culture. Increasingly, we preach conscious that we belong to a minority...one that is being pushed unevenly yet undeniably from its former central place in society toward the margins" (ix). From here, MacBride's take on post-Christendom preaching is altogether valuable because of the lens of *minority rhetoric* he gives preachers.

When MacBride uses the term *minority*, he is not primarily speaking in terms of ethnic minorities as our dominant usage of the term may indicate. He is speaking of the church and of Christians as those who stand in a minority position to the thoughts, practices, and values of the world. Even while on one level we may think of ourselves as a "Christian country," there is a reality in which our culture would dictate to us the terms of this faith. In this sense, the church is now, and always has been, a minority people.

Within this ecosystem, MacBride identifies the dynamic of minority rhetoric in the New Testament, exploring this rhetorically, sociologically, and theologically. Once a group recognizes its minority status there are generally three trajectories it can take: the group will seek to minimize differences with the dominant culture, often resulting in capitulation; the group will embrace inherent differences with the larger society, often distancing itself beyond accessibility; or, the group will seek to become *attractively different*, the most difficult yet also most biblical strategy (xiii).

The first two chapters establish how the minority rhetoric of the New Testament has as its aim this goal of creating a community that is attractively different to the dominant culture, maintaining unique beliefs while evangelizing the world beyond its walls. The group must answer questions of approval, disapproval, identity, practice, worldview, and salience (14). Attentiveness here helps preachers craft and preach sermons with the goal of forming the church's identity as attractively different. The value of these first chapters is amplified by

MacBride's practical exploration of minority rhetoric throughout the New Testament, which occupies the balance of the book.

I strongly recommend this book to preachers and teachers of preaching. One of the weaknesses of the contemporary pulpit (or church generally) shaped by modernity is that there is a tendency to believe that we are very different from our brothers and sisters who preceded us. Yet, in more ways we are similar than different. MacBride's study helps to cut some of the distance that we (artificially) insert between the first communities and today. He brings us back to some New Testament roots of how the church is created to be a different structure and system–body, bride, family, aliens, strangers–than the structures and systems that the world has built and into which it would force the church to assimilate.

The work is helpful as well to those of us preachers who increasingly feel like a minority within our own tribe, as branches of Christian faith have sought to eliminate distance between the church and segments of political belief. When the church fights the reality of post-Christendom, it can seek to hold on to a perceived power and privilege that may be viewed as a civic right. Pastors preaching in opposition to the church's politicization, syncretism, or nationalism will benefit greatly from MacBride's exploration of and exhortation to minority rhetoric for the church today. One of the most important chapters in this regard is the last one which seeks to give a perspective of the African-American church for the (especially white evangelical) church struggling with its majority heritage. MacBride's lens of minority rhetoric has the potential to give preachers tools to help the church re-locate from a perceived majority position to its minority roots and to preach in such a way that would help form that community as attractively different in the world today.

The Overshadowed Preacher: Mary, the Spirit, and the Labor of Proclamation. By Jerusha Matsen Neal. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. 978-0-8028-7653-9, 249 pp., $25.17 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Dwayne Milioni, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Wake Forest, NC.*

A new book exploring a new biblical metaphor for preaching by Jerusha Matsen Neal, assistant professor of homiletics at Duke Divinity School, encourages the preacher to seek the presence of the living Christ in proclamation. The unused metaphor connects the story of Mary's conceiving, bearing, and naming Jesus in Luke's gospel account to the preaching event. This book is a rendition of Neal's dissertation. It is well-researched and includes helpful footnotes.

Neal encourages the preacher to identify fully with their humanness and claim the promise that God's Spirit will "overshadow" their preaching. In a manner similar to Barth, the preacher who embodies the Spirit-filled life through acts of hospitality, dependence, and discernment will also embody Christ in the proclamation of the gospel.

Eight chapters align the preacher to Mary's experience in becoming Christ's mother by the Spirit's promise and power. This metaphor is challenging for a male preacher and, to Neal's purpose, an encouragement and empowerment for the female preacher who can more easily identify with the concept of labor when considering sermon preparation and delivery. Neal tells her own story of the burden of bearing and conceiving her sermons like she did her children throughout the book.

A preacher's physical body matters to Neal, and she desires more female bodies to be ordained and take on the responsibility of preaching with the full blessing of the church. The ecclesial oppression of women and minorities past and present has hindered the progression of women in pulpit ministry. Neal does not want to make an exegetical or theological

justification for ordained women preachers, she assumes the importance of this and wants Mary's story of vulnerability to empowerment to become the story of any woman desiring a public preaching ministry.

Neal believes there has been an unfortunate partition between rhetoric and the living word in Protestant preaching. A thread from John Calvin to John Broadus to Peter Adam (even David Buttrick) reveals the influence of rhetoric in preaching apart from divine revelation. The author says, "When rhetoric's primary function becomes the exertion of power, performances that appease and entertain become a preacher's bread and butter. But the result can also be performances that manipulate and divide" (40).

The relationship between the Spirit of God, the resurrected Christ, and humble "handmaids" who preach are explored in this work. Mary's pregnancy is used to show how the three work together in the preaching event. Neal rejects the Roman Catholic ideal of Mary so she can represent the common person. Mary receives Christ's bodily presence by the Spirit's aid, which should encourage any woman who may feel intimidated to preach. Preaching becomes a mystical union of Christ and the preacher, a type of Protestant sacrament to the church.

It is helpful to hear Neal speak of preaching as proclaiming life and to deal honestly with its messiness and costs. Also helpful are statements like, "Sermons do not live on the page. They live in time. They are material, embodied events that unfold, moment by moment" (165). Even the metaphor of preaching as giving birth connects with anyone who regularly experiences the regular burden of bringing the living Christ to a congregation.

In the end, the task of the preacher is to bear the resurrected Christ to the world: the particular, permeable, and provisional Christ. Preaching is not about performing, manipulating, or domineering over vulnerable people, but experiencing the shadow of God's Spirit to preach a message of relationship rather than deliver a performance. Though several of Neal's assumptions ought to be critically challenged, if one is

looking for fresh insight on the labor of proclamation, this book will be useful.

The Beauty of Preaching: God's Glory in Christian Proclamation. By Michael Pasquarello III.
Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2020. 978-0-802-82474-5, 288 pp., $26.99.

Reviewer: *Charlie Ray, III, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA.*

In *The Beauty of Preaching*, Michael Pasquarello III attempts to show "that responding to the beauty of God's glory is the heart of preaching as human speech" (xxii). "This book invites preachers to behold the beauty of Christ, which is inherent to the gospel we proclaim. It does this by offering a 'homiletical aesthetic' that returns preaching to the joy of knowing and making known God's glory to the world" (xv). Pasquarello is reacting against much modern preaching, which he considers to be "devoted to topics, ideas, principles, positions, and programs in the name of being relevant" (6). Instead, he seeks to call preachers to a form of preaching that upholds the beauty of Christ, leads to doxology, and ends in a church that lives out the beauty of the message. "The *Beauty of Preaching* is an invitation to 'see' afresh the heart of the church's vocation of preaching: to know, love, and enjoy God in all we think, say, do, desire, and suffer" (24).

Much of Pasquarello's work is essentially character studies: of the widow and the widow's mite, the woman who anointed Jesus with oil, Augustine, Welsey and the Wesleyan tradition, and Martin Luther. He examines each of these characters to demonstrate either how their actions displayed the beauty of the gospel or how their preaching was doxological in nature. Each of these characters helps build toward a "homiletical aesthetic" that is not just about the acquisition of

more knowledge but is about beholding the glory of Christ and being transformed into his image.

The Beauty of Preaching would best serve the experienced preacher who does not need another book on homiletical method but who needs to be reinvigorated by the proper aim and end of preaching. This book is not a how-to on preaching, but it is a reminder that the goal of preaching is the glory of God in Christ, and the end of preaching should be a church transformed to live for the glory of God in a broken and sinful world.

Yet, one of the tensions every preacher must face is how to preach a beautiful message of a glorious Savior that the world often perceives as a scandal or an offense. Pasquerello has reminded preachers of the beautiful message of a glorious Savior, but I would have liked to see him wrestle more with how to balance the glory of the message with the offense of the gospel. In his endorsement of the book, Jason Byassee asked, "Imagine if we asked the average passerby what they thought of Christianity, and they responded, 'I don't know if what they are saying is true, but wow, is it ever beautiful'?" (back cover). While this idea is certainly appealing, we recognize that the gospel is a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles (1 Cor. 1:23). It is only the wisdom of God to those who are called (1:24).

Pasqurello says of 2 Corinthians 2:15-16, the "proclamation of the 'fragrance' of the knowledge of Christ is a sweet 'aroma' that overcomes the foul odor of death." Yet the whole point of that passage is that unbelievers hear the gospel and smell the stench of death. Paul asks "who is sufficient for these things" (2 Cor. 2:16) because of the great paradox of proclaiming a beautiful message to a world that tends to hate that message. I was encouraged by Pasquarello's emphasis on proclaiming the beauty of Christ, but I think we also need to be reminded that the world will not always see this beauty but, in fact, will often see ugliness in its place.

This leads to my second criticism of the book. I consider pastoral preaching to be primarily geared towards the believer. While this preaching should be sensitive to unbelievers in the midst of the assembly of the church, this pastoral preaching is

primarily directed toward the people of God. Many of Pasquarello's biblical examples focus on evangelistic peaching and not pastoral preaching. These two forms of preaching are obviously related, but they are not identical. I think highlighting this distinction would have helped with my first criticism. Since pastoral preaching is primarily geared toward the church, the preacher should be concerned that the church beholds the glory of Christ, but the preacher cannot become enslaved to the reactions of unbelievers. Pasquarello does well to remind us of the beauty of preaching which should lead to a beautiful church, but we must also be reminded that the world will often see ugliness where God's people find beauty.

How to Preach the Psalms. By Kenneth J. Langley. Dallas: Fontes Press, 2021. 978-1-948048-53-8, 185 pp., $18.95.

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

Readers will find in Kenneth J. Langley's first volume of the ongoing *Preaching Biblical Literature* series, edited by himself and Jeffrey D. Arthurs, a treasure trove of insights, examples, suggested resources for further study, possible student assignments, sample sermons, and two helpful indices. The author is senior pastor at Christ Community Church in Zion, Illinois; an adjunct professor of homiletics at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; past president of the Evangelical Homiletics Society; and, as is evident from his writing, a long-time and serious student of the Psalter.

Concerned that preachers tend to ignore the "poemness" of the psalms and treat all genres of Scripture the same in their preparation of sermons, Langley sets to his work by first pointing out the distinctive features of poetic literature—to wit, affect, imagination, and aesthetics. According to the author, the psalms speak to the heart by captivating the imagination with their

beauty and eloquence. Sermons that are true to the genre will do the same.

Having made the foregoing argument, Langley presents fourteen strategies to help the reader craft genre-sensitive sermons that pay attention to each psalm's imagery, moves, poetic devices, word usage, orality, emotion, and context. His strategies offer a blend of advice on what to look for when exegeting a psalm and techniques to consider for reflecting a psalm's rhetorical affect. For example, in his chapter on the "poetics" of psalms, Langley identifies those devices, like refrain and chiasm, that survive translation and others that don't carry over into English. Afterwards, he recommends that sermons use those devices that do translate and, for those that don't carry over, to employ similar English poetic devices, explicate the untranslatable, or make judicious use of English poetry to recapture the poetic tone and theme of the psalm under consideration.

Langley's writing style is direct, engaging, and clear. His book is laid out well. The table of contents is exhaustive, making it easy to track his development of thought; footnotes cite a variety of sources and offer additional information at a glance; each chapter ends with suggestions for further reading, a question for group discussion or personal reflection, and an assignment for applying the chapter's contents. In his book's first appendix, Langley weighs the questions of whether one should preach all of the Psalter and whether to preach whole psalms. In his second, he offers three sermon manuscripts—one on Psalm 131 by Thomas H. Troeger and two of his own from Psalms 84 and 130. Out of the concluding materials, researchers will most appreciate the seventy-eight titles found in the select bibliography, while preachers will gravitate towards the index of psalms discussed throughout the book.

How to Preach the Psalms will serve well both homiletics professors, especially those in doctoral programs, and practicing preachers. The book is ready made for inclusion in a seminar on genre-sensitive preaching. (One hopes that the other volumes in this series, growing out of an Evangelical Homiletics Society

discussion group, will prove to be just as handy. If they are, what a seminar they will create!) Practicing preachers will want to revisit what Langley says about any given psalm as they begin preparing a sermon thereon. Taking what he offers in this little gem and adding it to his chapter on the Psalms as found in Matthew Kim and Scott Gibson's *The Big Idea Companion for Preaching and Teaching* (Baker, 2021), the reader will be well on his or her way to composing a sermon that sings!

Using Our Outside Voice: Public Biblical Interpretation. By Greg Carey. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020. 978-1-451-49633-8, 192 pp., $28.60.

Reviewer: *Gary T. Alley, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, LA.*

In *Using Our Outside Voice*, Greg Carey, professor of New Testament at Lancaster Theological Seminary (Pennsylvania), shines a light on an important topic for our times. Pointing out how so many contemporary cultural issues are impacting our relationships, influencing our nation's legislation, and threatening the sustainability of our society itself, Carey maintains that biblical texts have much to contribute to the conversations regarding these issues. His book challenges Christians to learn how to interpret Scripture for the public square.

A twenty-five year veteran of the classroom, Carey broadly describes the framework of his academic mission as being public biblical interpretation. He is the author or co-editor of nine books and serves on the editorial boards of *Biblical Interpretation*, *Horizons in Biblical Theology*, and *Review of Biblical Literature*. Much of Carey's work demonstrates a keen interest in the interface of contemporary Christianity and politics.

In chapter one of *Using Our Outside Voice*, Carey builds his argument for the concept, definition, and application of public

biblical interpretation. He bases his argument on his observations of cultural dynamics and his personal experiences as an educator. Carey makes the case that developing the capacity to engage theological materials in everyday life is a prerequisite for effective public biblical interpretation and should not be the exclusive domain of professionals. In chapters two and three, he discusses the roles that higher criticism and literary genres play in biblical interpretation. Chapter four highlights broad personal characteristics that may predispose readers to be more or less effective in their public biblical interpretation, while the following chapter digs deeper in its consideration of how a person's social class, ethnicity, or family background may influence their ability to interpret a text accurately and apply it contextually. Chapter six concludes the book by challenging readers to do the work necessary for effective public biblical interpretation and to embrace the need to bring biblical interpretation into public conversations.

The premise of this book is its strength. Public biblical interpretation will bring a much-needed voice to dialogues involving contemporary issues. As suggested by the author, interpreting biblical truth in the public square is not just for professionals. This book challenges the non-professional to become involved in this interpretive exercise and shows a path towards that end.

Although the concept of public biblical interpretation is needed, conservative evangelicals will likely find Carey's critical approaches to that interpretation to be a weakness. This is most noticeable in chapter two where he promotes interpretive methods typically advocated by more liberal theologians and scholars, such as the documentary theory related to the Pentateuch (68).

Those interested in the intersection of a biblical worldview and secular culture will appreciate this book. Its overall premise warrants attention in seminary classrooms. While appropriate for doctoral and master's level courses, professors will need to consider carefully how to handle the book's overall hermeneutical approach to Scripture.

The Gospel People Don't Want to Hear: Preaching Challenging Messages. By Lisa Cressman. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2020. 978-1-5064-5639-3, 143 pp., $18.99.

Reviewer: *Michael H. Mills, Greensport Baptist Church, Ashville, AL.*

Lisa Cressman in *The Gospel People Don't Want to Hear* provides a succinct look into the difficulties preachers face when approaching topics that their congregations might find sensitive. She explains why listeners sometimes react strongly to their preachers' sermons and suggests several tools and strategies that she believes preachers can use when addressing difficult topics.

Her work contains much that successfully addresses the problem of preaching on subjects that audiences want to avoid. She pictures her audience as living in a world where their sky is falling, much like in the fictional character Chicken Little. Change can make people feel as if their world is falling apart. This metaphor shows why some topics are sensitive to audiences. Consequently, preachers should be empathetic when they notice members struggling to accept the truth. Cressman argues that a preacher's ethos in particular influences the likelihood that such messages will be accepted. In fact, her emphasis on the preacher's ethos is a strength of her work. She rightly states, "If listeners are going to place their trust in us to go places they don't want to go, we need to make a concerted effort to build that trust. It's too critical to leave it to happenstance" (29). She insightfully argues that audiences will have more trust if preachers prove themselves to be faithful and dependable, show a hopeful spirit in the future, and genuinely love and care for others. While Cressman's later chapters can be useful, her metaphor of the "falling sky" and her emphasis on ethos especially should be considered when approaching a sensitive issue.

Despite these positive elements, evangelical preachers may be disappointed by the overall thrust of her work. The book's title makes it appear that the author will address how to

preach challenging Bible passages or how to apply the gospel to sins which are uncomfortable to address. This, however, is not what Cressman has in mind.

First, she is mostly concerned with sermons that speak to social issues (50). Moreover, Cressman wants pastors to take a progressive stance on these issues. For example, on human sexuality, she challenges pastors to ask individuals which pronoun they prefer be used when addressing them. She posits that the pastor should then use that same pronoun when speaking about God so that those hearers will "recognize themselves (their sexual orientation) as an expression of that aspect of God's image" (131). If a preacher wants to learn about how to address the difficult orthodox doctrines of Scripture, much of what Cressman says offers little help.

The second reason the work can fall flat for an evangelical audience involves what Cressman means by the "gospel." In her title, she claims to be sharing how to preach the gospel people don't want to hear. This sounds noble until she gives her definition of the gospel. She says, "What do you believe is the gospel? …I believe the good news is God's love, mercy, justice, and compassion are applied equally to every human being, and that through Jesus Christ nothing, not even death, can separate us from God" (57). Since she believes that Christ's atonement already is applied to all humans equally, this affects what she sees is the purpose of preaching: "Preaching is the art of communicating the Spirit's desires to persuade listeners that they are loved and forgiven more than they realize. It is the art of persuading listeners to believe something they didn't before; and then they are converted." In other words, since all people are already saved, then preaching is persuading people to believe that they are already saved. Thus, the theology which drives Cressman's work runs counter to the doctrine that the atonement is applied only to those who are in Christ by grace through faith.

Cressman's work certainly contains much that can help preachers understand how their ethos makes a difference when preaching on difficult topics. Her theology, however, will make her book off-putting to many evangelicals.

Intentional Preaching: A View from the Pew. By Meirwyn Walters. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2020. 978-1-68307-268-3, 184 pp., $24.95 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Christopher Priestaf, Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, Waco, TX.*

It has been said that you never really know a person until you have walked a mile in their shoes. In *Intentional Preaching: A View from the Pew*, Meirwyn Walters invites preachers back into the shoes–or seats–of their listeners, providing a perspective that is easy for the pulpiteer to forget, particularly over time.

Walters is not a preacher, at least by trade; he is a trial attorney and law professor at a Christian liberal arts college. He is active in his local church and often called to consult within other churches. But his upbringing as the son of famed Welsh preacher and teacher Gwyn Walters has developed in him a passion for "preachers, preaching, and everything that comes with it" (8). That passion is tangibly clothed in love throughout the book's pages. The preacher-reader will learn, laugh, and perhaps occasionally disagree with Walters' assertions, but he will never feel condemned or judged. This is a book meant to encourage, refortify, and increase the preacher's effectiveness in the pulpit to the benefit of everyone involved.

Walters' premise for writing the book is straightforward: "Everything you do with respect to your preaching should be the product of an *intentional* choice" (4). The preacher desiring to communicate with the greatest effectiveness should make every decision "deliberately, consciously, intentionally" (4). Walters unearths literally dozens of areas of focus, from facial hair to funerals, from elephants in the room to airplanes overhead, from detailed descriptions to distracting dress, all while seeking to examine those areas which most significantly affect those in the pews. In all, the book oscillates between the simple and the profound, oftentimes combining the two extremes into one.

The format of the book makes it easy to pick up and set down, as none of the considerations are overly lengthy. Such a construction is intentional on the part of Walters, who wants the preacher to be able to read the book "on the fly," reading a section or two in the morning, and chewing on it during the day (11). The sheer quantity of topics makes such an approach appropriate, preventing the suggestions from becoming too overwhelming or too easily overlooked. As Walters helpfully acknowledges at the book's end, "there is no way you can do everything in this book." Yet, as he continues, "you *are* doing everything in this book in some fashion or another" (184).

Such a poignant concluding statement is worth consideration. Are preachers like us already doing, either intentionally or unintentionally, either successfully or unsuccessfully, much of what Walters writes? As I read through the book, I could not help but examine my own preaching ministry. I found myself needing to wrestle through my convictions relating to preaching's purpose (12–14), asking how much attention I give to helping the listener visualize that which I am describing (149–150), and perhaps most importantly, recognizing the enormity and solemnity of the task of handling God's holy word (68–72). I was also glad I did not struggle with the far less noble issues like blowing my nose (29) and having a wasp fly up my trousers (93), but I know some people have.

While opinions will certainly vary on Walter's suggested number of points in a message, or getting to Christ every time, or the use of visual aids–either material or technological–each of the areas is worthy of consideration. Regardless of where one lands on the numerous and respective issues, at least they are being considered *intentionally*, which is the whole of Walters' purpose in writing the book.

For the preacher prone to forget or unconsciously ignore the perspective of those we most want to affect, namely those sitting in the pews before us, this book is well worth the read—for your sake and theirs.

Misreading Scripture with Individualist Eyes: Patronage, Honor, and Shame in the Biblical World. By E. Randolph Richards and Richard James. Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2020. 978-0-830-85275-8, 304 pp., $28.00.

Reviewer: *Timothy Ward, Oak Hill College, London, UK*.

Richards and James intend to demonstrate to Bible readers from individualist societies that they are prone to misread certain things in Scripture because biblical texts carry the stamp of having being written in collectivist societies. Cultural features of texts are often missed, they argue, because they lie unarticulated, below the surface. They define an individualist society as one in which community is "the sum of the individuals" and a collectivist as one in which "the individual is the sum of the community" (22). This book is an expansion of sections of a previous work, *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*, which Richards co-authored with another.

The authors identify the following features as distinctive in collectivist societies: kinship, patronage, brokerage (or mediation), honor, shame, and boundaries. Each section is nicely structured. Anecdotal examples are given from the authors' own long experience in collectivist societies. These are all well-chosen, and I found them hugely helpful in grasping in practical terms what was being described. I was regularly shown that aspects of life and biblical interpretation which I easily assume are just "normal" are anything but. Then from Scripture come examples of that collectivist feature evident in a text, with suggestions of what readers from individualistic societies might miss or distort.

I found a number of the biblical examples persuasive and insightful. Highlights were the reading of the book of Ruth as reworking kinship ties (60-63) and the explanation of Paul's different attitudes to receiving gifts in light of ancient patronage practices (95-97). With other examples I was less persuaded that knowledge of the text's cultural background is as crucial as was

claimed in preventing misreading. The authors appeal to the use in ancient patronage practices of the Greek word *pistis* (usually translated "faith" in the NT) to argue that it means not bare assent but something closer to loyalty (109). Many Bible readers from individualist cultures have grasped this point from Scripture's own use of the word. Similarly, I struggled to see just what misreadings of the Last Supper I am prone to if I'm not aware or persuaded that Jesus is presented analogously to an ancient patron (73). On other occasions, some ancient cultural background was brought forward to justify an unusual reading of a text, such as Nicodemus' motives in John 3 (167-9). Perhaps I'm too locked into my culture to be able to see these as legitimate readings, but the authors lacked space here to make these persuasive.

In summary, I think that this book sometimes overreaches itself with implausible or at least unpersuasive examples. The title itself exaggerates a bit. The best biblical examples given are ones not so much ones of *mis*reading, that is, distorting the point of a biblical text, but of *under*-reading, that is, grasping the central point but missing further color and angles through lack of cultural awareness. The basic message of the book though–that people from individualist cultures will often miss things in Scripture, and may sometimes distort it, if they lack awareness of their cultural distance from the world in which it is written–is a vital one, and the book serves well to press it home. Homiletically, trainee preachers who enjoy the book may need help in discerning wisely how much cultural background to explain in preaching, lest the helpful insights they offer lead to sermons that suggest that the Bible is safely handled only by experts in culture and history.

Spiritual Practices of Jesus: Learning Simplicity, Humility, and Prayer with Luke's Earliest Readers. By Catherine J. Wright. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Academic, 2020. 978-0-8308-5226-0, 210 pp., $25.00.

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

Have Christians historically understood the Gospel of Luke to commend to us the spiritual practices of simplicity, humility, and prayer? In her insightful book, Catherine Wright draws Luke's gospel into dialogue with Greek and Jewish literature, in addition to early church fathers, in an effort to argue that the ancient Church did exactly this. Her discussion aims to suggest what it looks like for contemporary Christians to see in Luke's Jesus a "model of the ideal king." The book takes form around three practices which Wright finds central to that model: simplicity, humility, and prayer; and the three sections of the book correspond with these three practices. The first chapters of each section (chapters 1, 4, 7) consist of commentary-like explication of Lukan texts pertinent to each practice. Chapters 2, 5, and 8 introduce a wealth of insights from ancient Greek philosophy and intertestamental Jewish writing, comparing and contrasting the messages of Jesus with those insights from the same time period. The final chapters of each section (3, 6, 9) outline how each of the three practices were discussed by Church fathers of the first five centuries of the Church.

In the author's own words, "[t]his book invites readers to explore the spiritual disciplines of simplicity, humility, and prayer with Luke's earliest readers… The book is written with the hopes that the practice of reading with Luke's earliest interpreters will expand the horizons of our understanding, enabling us to embrace the power of Jesus' example" (xxx).

This reviewer welcomes particularly several aspects of the work. First, the book is interested in how Scripture—especially Luke's gospel—was understood by its earliest readers. Further, the work traces out how Luke's gospel was interpreted by the earliest writers of the Church. If responsible conservative exegesis involves engagement with the scriptural texts while attending to how the Church has engaged with the same texts

during its two thousand-year history, this book is thoroughly conservative.

The work is also, however, unique in its frame and scope. To put it simply, this reviewer is unaware of any similar studies, particularly those wherein quotes from such a wide variety of writers—both biblical and extra-biblical—are brought to bear on the scriptural text on nearly every page. Cyril of Alexandria, Philo, Epictetus, Thomas Merton, Plutarch, Chrysostom, and John Cassian are just a few of these, and the depth of discussion reflects the breadth of great minds which Wright has brought to the table. The results of her work surprised this reviewer at several points, including, for example, the congruence between many of Christ's teachings with other writers of that time period.

In all, a welcome and helpful book.

Hebrews: A Commentary for Biblical Preaching and Teaching. By Herbert W. Bateman and Steven W. Smith. Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2021. 978-0-825-45839-2, 389 pp., $36.99 (hardback).

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

Each volume of the Kerux Commentary series features one author who focuses on exegesis and another who focuses on homiletics. The book's back cover states: "Each volume is divided into distinct preaching segments, in which the authors guide the reader through a well-tested sequence: exegetical analysis, theological focus, and teaching strategy." The entire series is squarely focused on providing help to the preacher. The structure of each commentary is uniform, so the reader knows what to expect in each new addition.

In the present volume, Herbert W. Bateman is the exegetical author, and Steven W. Smith is the homiletician. Bateman, a Ph.D. graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, is president of the Cyber-Center for Biblical Studies. Smith, a Ph.D.

graduate of Regent University, is senior pastor at Immanuel Baptist Church in Little Rock, AR.

Any commentary on Hebrews must address the issues of authorship, literary genre, and interpretation of the five warning passages. Bateman and Smith do this thoroughly.

In their introduction, the authors provide historical and exegetical support for their conclusion that Hebrews was written by Barnabas. Though they acknowledge there is no concrete evidence for this position, Bateman and Smith structure the commentary in order to reinforce their view. Nearly every paragraph contains Barnabas's name. Sentences which include the phrases "Barnabas contrasts," "Barnabas explained," and "Barnabas continued" are found on almost every page. This may feel awkward to the reader who is not as certain of Barnabas's authorship.

Bateman and Smith include a balanced treatment of the many arguments for the genre of Hebrews being either midrash, epistle, or sermon. The authors conclude that all three are found in Hebrews, thus maintaining it should be viewed as "a sermonic-letter with midrashic-*like* methods of interpretations." The authors acknowledge the description is cumbersome, but they feel as though it best explains the diverse literary structure of the book.

The use of multiple genres and ample inclusion of OT quotes in Hebrews lead Bateman and Smith to follow a threefold hermeneutical reading strategy in interpreting the book. This strategy begins with the Hebrew Bible, then moves to the LXX and noncanonical Jewish literature, followed by NT observations and theological development. The authors employ this method throughout the commentary in order to discern the reasons for the biblical author's inclusion of each OT quote.

Rather than include a section with an overview of their methodology for interpreting the five warning passages, Bateman and Smith handle each passage in its context. They take each warning passage through the same "hermeneutical reading strategy" and allow their exegesis of the individual passage to determine its theological meaning and homiletical application.

This leaves open the question of whether the warnings are issued to believers who can apostatize, non-believers who are in the gathered assembly for worship and may walk away from Christ, or whether the warnings are simply issued to believers who are secure in the faith but need to be spurred toward perseverance. Those issues were already well handled in *Four Views on the Warning Passages of Hebrews*, edited by Bateman and also published by Kregel.

This latest volume in the commentary series is to be commended for its dedication to helping preachers prepare exegetically faithful and homiletically creative sermons. It is challenging to find weaknesses in it. Personally, this writer and other preachers at Village Bible Church consulted the volume during a recent preaching series through Hebrews and found it helpful throughout. Readers will benefit from Bateman's many years in the text of Hebrews and Smith's many years of preaching and teaching preachers at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Echoes: The Lord's Prayer in the Preacher's Life. By Geoff New. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Langham Preaching Resources, 2020. 978-1-78368-812-8, 168 pp., $15.99.

Reviewer: *Rock LaGioia, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, IN*.

This book is not about the craft of preaching but the character of the preacher. Geoff New, minister in the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa, New Zealand, focuses on the preacher's spiritual formation and foundation. To stimulate formation (2 Tim. 1:6) and establish foundation (2 Tim. 1:9) in the life of the preacher, New has written twenty-four devotional meditations on the Lord's Prayer, or the Disciples' Prayer as some refer to it. Pastor New expresses his intent saying, "...this book is written in the

prayerful hope that it will help you deepen and widen your character and call as a preacher" (xvii).

The Introduction offers a helpful explanation of the nature of the Lord's Prayer and the significance of its strategic placement in the center of the Sermon on the Mount. The text's main body is arranged in three sections: Chapters 1-8: The Lord's Prayer as Seen in Jesus' Life (Luke 18:1-19:10); Chapters 9-16: The Lord's Prayer as Seen in Jesus' Death (the Seven Cries from the Cross); and Chapters 17-24: The Lord's Prayer as Seen in Jesus' Resurrection (John 20-21). All eight petitions of the Lord's Prayer are examined from three distinct angles in the three sections respectively.

New points out that the Sermon on the Mount is "bookended" by references to the future Messianic Kingdom (Matt. 5:3, 5; 7:21-22). Yet, when commenting on the petition "Your kingdom come," his emphasis decidedly favors the "already" over the "not yet." In fact, New describes the petition with an exclusive focus on the future Messianic Kingdom as "a prayer of faith for a later time but not for this time" (82). Perhaps a more balanced approach would have been to acknowledge that when believers concern themselves with the future Messianic Kingdom, it should impact their present walk with the Lord (Isa. 2:1-5).

The strengths of this book are many. For example, New skillfully asks perceptive questions which probe the preacher's soul. "If the only teaching someone were to have access to about our Father in heaven were to be based on your prayer life as a preacher; what would they learn?" (19). Reflecting upon diagnostic questions such as the following can be spiritually salutary. "A question to test ourselves is 'How much money would it take for me to stop preaching?' ...I wonder what you expect from God as a result of the sacrifices you have made as a preacher" (40-41).

The reader will also be delighted to discover a wealth of practical wisdom: "There is only room for one Messiah in the pulpit" (24). "All forgiveness is at someone's expense ...Asking for forgiveness is costly ...Granting forgiveness is costly" (45-46).

"As a preacher, you are limited in who you can confide in, and your current despair is hardly material for a sermon illustration. To speak of it publicly while in the midst of it could cause harm for others. Perhaps you can refer to it at a later time when you preach. But you need to be on the other side of despair. You have a pastoral responsibility to be wise in what you say and when you say it" (78).

One of the greatest strengths of these rich devotional studies is the illustrative material. In fact, the book's opening illustration about a pilot's early life experiences which prepared him for an in-flight emergency forms an inclusio with the book's closing illustration about his co-pilot who helped save the lives of the passengers and crew. This illustrative inclusio powerfully reinforces the book's overarching theme of how formation and foundation prepare the preacher for the present. New offers many helpful illustrations from his personal life which illumine the biblical text and inspire the reader.

Most diligent preachers give their lives over to sharpening their preaching skills. Their calling, gifting, and passion for preaching compel them to do so. Sadly, however, many preachers do not invest as much time and energy in stimulating their own spiritual formation. The craft of preaching gets attention far more often than the character of the preacher. Thoroughly digesting the contents of *Echoes: The Lord's Prayer in the Preacher's Life* can help to correct this imbalance.

Nehemiah: A Pastoral and Exegetical Commentary. By T. J. Betts. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 978-1-68359-393-5, 235 pp., $28.99.

Reviewer: *Si Cochran, Cornerstone Baptist Church, Orange City, IA.*

For readers seeking to exposit the book of Nehemiah in a *lectio continua* series, T. J. Betts provides a multifaceted commentary thoughtfully designed to aid the preacher. The multifaceted

approach of Betts's commentary is evidenced by his focus upon "the literary, canonical, historical, [and] theological contexts," along with "exegetical and expositional concerns" (1). Betts's analysis of Nehemiah is not presented as the reworking of a sermon manuscript, which is then edited into an expositional commentary. Rather, Betts seeks to assess each literary thought unit within Nehemiah through the method of "careful exegesis and exposition" (1). This methodology is intended to occupy a "middle" ground between a "devotional" and "technical" commentary (1-2).

With Betts's goals in mind, he succeeds in addressing the relevant exegetical details of each literary unit of thought, while avoiding unnecessary discussions on matters unlikely to be addressed in an expository sermon. His analysis does not negate the value of consulting a technical commentary during the exegetical phase of sermon preparation, but it does help to center the preacher upon the relevant data that needs to be communicated from the pulpit. Betts also succeeds in presenting the exegetical data in a manner that is structured to prepare the preacher for exposition. To accomplish this, each literary thought unit includes the following sections: an introduction, structure, summary of the passage, outline of the passage, development of the exposition, and conclusion. While the reader may quibble with some of the interpretive moves presented in each section, Betts helpfully navigates the reader through the biblical text and its contexts via these sections. However, Betts also includes an additional section entitled "final thoughts" which seems out-of-place. This section does not actually provide "final thoughts" by Betts on the respective literary thought unit but is rather a series of questions more akin to discussion questions placed at the end of chapters in a classroom textbook. Because the inclusion of this section distracts from the commentary's overall format, it can be ignored without compromising the helpfulness of the remaining work.

As a whole, Betts's commentary on Nehemiah is a valuable addition to the pastor's library. This is especially true for those preaching an expository series through Nehemiah.

Betts's commentary is particularly helpful in the task of delimiting the biblical text via literary thought units. Here, he does not atomize the text to mute the literary features within each respective thought unit but faithfully delimits the text to preserve the divine and human author's intended theological thrust uncovered in the literary thought unit. If the preacher is to exposit the biblical text faithfully in a *lectio continua* series, he must simultaneously delimit the text with utmost literary care. Here, Betts provides an invaluable contribution for the preacher as he interpretively discerns the literary boundaries of the text. To say nothing of the many other valuable contributions in this commentary, his navigation of the text delimitation of Nehemiah is alone worth the book's price.

Pages from a Preacher's Notebook: Wisdom and Prayers from the Pen of John Stott. Edited by Mark Meynell. Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020. 978-1-683593-898, 297 pp., $24.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Akintayo Emmanuel, Columbia International University, Columbia, SC.*

Pages from a Preacher's Notebook is a compendium of nuggets of wisdom drawn from John Stott's archives. Photographs of his actual notes are interspersed throughout the book, enhancing its authenticity. Stott's insights are presented here in short paragraphs, making them simple and quick to read, and his prayers concluding the volume are both thoughtful and reverent.

Stott's notes are meticulously and topically arranged by the editor, Mark Meynell. Following his introduction, Meynell organizes the notes into four main sections: "God and the Gospel," "Church and Christian," "World and Worldviews," and "Prayers."

The book includes seventy-eight entries on various topics including courting, dating, romantic relationships, and marriage among others, and thirty-five prayers. According to Meynell,

anyone who reads the book will come to appreciate Stott's early-formed, disciplined, and rigorous habit of writing illustrations and talk outlines on notecards. About Stott's notes Meynell writes, "Those who knew John Stott well would hardly expect to find trivia, let alone shopping lists. Furthermore, instead of using notebooks, he jotted down a whole range of thoughts on 4x6-inch index cards, which he arranged under various topical headings or biblical references. He also used these cards for his notes when preaching" (xiv).

Although Meynell arranges Stott's notes according to their topics and themes, he doesn't indicate the dates of their composition. Readers are left to wonder how often Stott wrote and the circumstances under which he wrote. Nevertheless, what they will discover here is evidence of Stott's teachable spirit, flexibility, and hunger for learning. His sources included those with whom he would otherwise disagree on the controversial issues of his time as well as individuals with diverse cultural backgrounds and experiences from North and South America, Africa, Asia, and Europe.

While the book covers several important topics, today's hearers might not readily appreciate the significance of Stott's thoughts or his sources. Preachers will have to work to show their relevance if they wish to incorporate them into their sermons. Apart from that, *Pages* serves as a model to preachers for developing the discipline of carefully recording their own ideas, observations, and discoveries, while simultaneously providing a glimpse into the mind and heart of Stott himself.

Small Preaching: 25 Little Things You Can Do Now to Become a Better Preacher. By Jonathan T. Pennington. Bellingham: Lexham, 2021. 978-1683594710, 119 pp., $18.99.

Reviewer: *Scott M. Gibson, Baylor University's George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Waco, TX.*

This compact book is published by Lexham Press, a publishing house that is increasingly building its catalog with helpful resources in the field of homiletics. This short hardback is packed with insights on what preachers can do to develop into better preachers. The author, Jonathan T. Pennington, associate professor of New Testament interpretation and director of research doctoral programs at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, is also a preaching pastor at Sojourn East Church in Louisville, Kentucky. Pennington states, "My goal in this book is to help you make some small ball/small teaching steps toward intentionally better preaching." He continues, "This is not a book about a whole philosophy and practice of preaching…Instead, this is a book of small ideas that you can try today" (3).

Pennington's field of specialty is New Testament studies, not homiletics, but he offers insights from the depth of his own preaching experience that may be of help to preachers who struggle in the areas he addresses. Pennington's title and the concept of his book is based on the work of James M. Lang in *Small Teaching: Everyday Lessons from the Science of Learning* (Jossey-Bass 2016). Lang, director of the Center for Teaching Excellence at Assumption College, Worcester, MA, was inspired by the 2014 success of the Kansas City Royals as they made their way to the World Series using the concept of small-ball, which is "the simple, incremental strategies that enable baseball teams to move runners from one base to the next and keep the other team from scoring: bunting, stealing bases, hitting sacrifice fly balls, and playing solid defense" (Lang 1). Reflecting on the lessons he learned from observing small-ball, Lang recognized the opportunity of changing one's course or teaching strategy. He notes, "My reflections on this dilemma led me to consider whether I should incorporate into my workshops [on teaching] more activities that instructors could turn around and use in their classrooms the next morning or the next week without an extensive overhaul of their teaching—the pedagogical equivalents, in other words, of small ball" (Lang 4). Pennington aims in his book to do the same with preaching.

There are three sections that comprise the volume: The Person of the Preacher, the Preparation for Preaching, and the Practice of Preaching. The chapters vary in their emphases, topic, and content. The author provides insights and advice for the young and more mature preacher. If indeed the author's perspective is true—which I think it is—every preacher can benefit from making small-ball changes in his or her preaching. I know I can! For one, Pennington encourages readers to, "[l]earn to ask thoughtful questions that invite your hearers to ponder and anticipate what you're discussing" (87). His angle on plagiarism is helpful in light of preachers studying with each other: "Each sermon was the work of each preacher—don't plagiarize, please!—but each sermon benefitted from the group's collective wisdom, integrative wrestling, and homiletical moves" (19). See also chapter 25, "Stealing as Sub-Cheating" (107-110).

A small critique may be that sometimes the author writes with an imperative yellow-highlighter tone employing "should" and "need to" in some of his advice, which may come across as an admonition or a necessity. This is a small stylistic aspect that certainly does not take away from the thrust and positive impact of the book.

This practical volume can, as Pennington writes, "[Provide] Small adjustments…where we must focus our energy" (112). For, as he concludes, "today is the moment to be intentional about the task of preaching" (113). *Small Preaching* can provide big changes for preachers—and seminary students—as they take small-ball steps to preach the word faithfully and skillfully.

Creative Bible Teaching. By Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt. Chicago: Moody, 2020. 978-0-80241-959-0, 378 pp., $32.99 (hardback).

Reviewer: *Mark Drinnenberg, Living Word Fellowship (formerly), Volo, IL.*

This book is a revised and updated version of a work originally written by Lawrence Richards and published in 1970. A second edition was released in 1998 with Gary Bredfeldt doing the updated writing and being listed (with Richards' blessing) as the co-author. The edition under review here is a further update by Bredfeldt and was published in 2020, four years after Lawrence Richards' passing. Over the years, *Creative Bible Teaching* has been widely used in Christian Education classrooms.

The book is not aimed at homileticians. The philosophy of teaching it puts forth places great value on the kind of interactive learning that can take place in a classroom or a home study but not in a pulpit. A pastor or teacher of homiletics may find some value in the book's treatment of subjects such as how people best learn or how to bridge the gap between the biblical world and the present-day audience, but plenty of other books exist that address such issues as they relate specifically to preaching.

For pastors who might want to direct their Christian Education leaders to *Creative Bible Teaching*, they will find a well-written, easy-to-read book that uses many true-to-life stories about Bible teaching to illustrate the points that are made. The book is laid out as "a five-step process by which the Christian teacher can construct a bridge across time, language, geography, and culture" (14).

Step One is "Studying the Bible." It stresses that the teacher must seek "to identify what the author" of the biblical text being studied "actually said to the original recipients of the text" (68). The idea is that "those who teach the Bible well do so with authority," and that authority comes from teaching "only and always what the Word of God intends to teach" (20). There is an explanation of how to do inductive Bible study, along with a sample study of Hebrews 10:19-25. This could provide helpful training for the Bible study aspect of pastoral ministry, but, here again, plenty of books about preaching do the same thing.

Step Two is "Focusing the Message." It urges that the Bible be taught not just as factual information but as useful information that addresses the needs of the students. The authors

state, "The ultimate objective in teaching the Bible is not Bible knowledge, though that is very important; it is *applied* Bible knowledge in the student's everyday life" (104). Much is made in this section on the importance of the teacher knowing students' needs on a level that may be possible in a small group situation but would not seem feasible for many pastors with their congregations. The section stresses the value of doing needs-assessments and provides charts and tools for help with that.

Step Three is "Structuring the Lesson." It presents a plan for grabbing the students' attention, teaching what the text says, figuring out implications of the text for the students' lives, and encouraging the students to take what they have learned and apply it in their daily lives. Those principles certainly apply to preaching as well, but the means and methods of teaching described here are presented with direct student involvement in mind (e.g., group discussion). One chapter deals with how to evaluate and choose curricula. While the authors state this book "is written for both the layperson's use and professional training" (12), their 37-question "Curriculum Evaluation Guide" (228-229) seems best suited for the latter. It certainly does not apply to the task of homiletics.

Step Four is "Teaching the Class." It looks at "common practices of truly great teachers" (235) and then discusses how to motivate students to learn. The principles covered could be helpful to anyone who teaches, pastors included. For instance, "An effective approach to teaching is to start with what a student knows and move to what he does not know. That is true not only in Bible study, but in all kinds of learning situations" (264). Then follow four chapters that each deal with teaching the Bible to a particular audience: adults, youth, children, and preschoolers.

Step Five is "Evaluating the Results." It includes a tool for teacher evaluation and concludes with some guidelines for improving as a teacher.

All in all, *Creative Bible Teaching* is a good book for what it seeks to do. It does not present itself as a book on preaching. The church ministry it addresses is that which goes on in the Christian Education department. As such, the book is highly

respected and has been widely used. For homiletics, though, one ought to look elsewhere.

The Heart is the Target: Preaching Practical Application from Every Text. By Murray Capill. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2014. 978-1-59638-841-3, 258 pp., $16.99.

Reviewer: *Quentin Self, Shiloh Terrace Baptist Church, Dallas, TX.*

Murray Capill contributes an immensely helpful book on the theory and practice of sermon application. He addresses the problem of expository preaching that neglects application and ends up as "little more than an information dump" (14). The renewed interest in expository preaching in recent decades is fueled by the reality that God's word is powerful and, "when it is proclaimed clearly and its message is applied pertinently to those who listen, it has massive, Spirit-laden potential to change lives" (13). The desire for biblical faithfulness, however, can inadvertently cause preachers to overlook the essential task of application. According to Capill, neither biblical faithfulness nor relevant application can be neglected. Rather, "Effective expository preaching takes place when biblical faithfulness and insightful application are inextricably bound together" (14). In *The Heart is the Target*, he presents the "Living Application Preaching Process" (53), which he describes as a "model of expository sermon application" (257).

Chapter 1 lays a foundation for this model by providing readers a thorough yet concise theology of application. Part 1 then describes the Living Application process according to its three components—the living word, the life of the preacher, and the lives of our hearers. The preaching process begins in the word, passes through the preacher, and then lands in the lives of those who hear.

Chapter 2 describes "The Living Word" according to the fundamental conviction that "[the living word] has work to do"

(57). Based primarily on 2 Timothy 3:16, Capill identifies four primary purposes God intends to accomplish through the Bible. These include: 1) teaching the truth and rebuking false doctrine, 2) training believers in godly living and correcting wrong patterns of behavior, 3) testing the state of people's hearts and bringing conviction of sin, and 4) encouraging and exhorting people according to their particular needs (62). The Living Application Preaching Process begins by identifying which of these purposes God intends to accomplish through a given text and how God intends to accomplish this purpose (or purposes) through that particular text.

Chapter 3 moves on to the second component of the preaching process—the life of the preacher. Capill argues that effective, living application occurs when a preacher works "from a full reservoir" (81). By "reservoir" Capill means "all that lives within a preacher" (81). A preacher fills the reservoir through "our own walk with God," "experiencing life richly," "learning to be close observers of life," and "our knowledge of theology, church, and culture" (84–92).

Chapter 4 addresses the lives of our hearers by considering the biblical description of the heart and what this means for preaching. A biblical vision of the human heart consists of four quadrants: 1) mind, 2) conscience, 3) will, and 4) passions (103). Preachers should consider how the Holy Spirit intends the text to impact each of these four faculties of the heart by "asking the right questions"—that is, questions regarding each quadrant (114–115). The heart is the proper target for preaching because it is only by moving the heart that people are actually moved to action.

Chapter 5 continues to discuss the lives of our hearers with the recognition that "one size doesn't fit all" (129). Like other homileticians who have resounded the importance of being specific with application, Capill acknowledges, "Living application must speak to the real-life issues of our hearers. But their lives differ" (129). The lives of our hearers consist of two parts: "the faculties of the heart and the spiritual conditions of our people" (130). He recognizes several homileticians

throughout Christian history who have provided categories for types of hearers, and then offers his own. All hearers fit within four categories: 1) those who are going well and know it, 2) those who are going well and don't know it, 3) those who are not going well and know it, and 4) those who are not going well and don't know it (137). When coupled with the faculties of the heart, preachers are giving a detailed and thorough grid by which to analyze the varied conditions of their hearers.

Part 1 then concludes with Chapter 6, which offers a list of nine "arrows" that describe living application (152). Throughout Part 1, Capill progressively builds a visual diagram of the living application process, which he provides in full on page 170 (a strength of the book is its consistent use of helpful diagrams). Part 2 includes four more chapters that further explain how to put the living application process into practice.

In conclusion, this book is well-researched and spiritually rich. It balances well the philosophical and practical aspects of sermon application and provides a treasure of wisdom for the novice preacher and experienced homiletician alike. Readers are sure to benefit from Capill's invitation to think deeply on the subject of sermon application.

So Everyone Can Hear. By Mark Crosby. London: SPCK, 2019. 978-0-281-08214-8, 245 pp., $10.82.

Reviewer: *Jonathan Holder, Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, Waco, TX.*

One would assume that a book titled *So Everyone Can Hear* would deal directly with the subject of preaching. Surprisingly, this book does not, but its subject is something that is just as important for churches. The author, Mark Crosby, addresses how churches communicate the message of who they are and what they stand for "so everyone can hear." His concern is how

churches plan, strategize, and make use of resources at their disposal to reach diverse groups of people with the love of God.

Crosby works for Vineyard Churches UK & Ireland as the Director of Communications and serves on the staff at Vineyard Church Cardiff. He studied marketing and public relations, writing his thesis on "How Churches Should Be Communicating in the 21st Century." His expertise is evident in a clearly written book that balances text and pictures. In a work on clear communication, there is no doubt as to what is being communicated here!

So Everyone Can Hear is split into 14 chapters, moving from Chapter 1 – What's the Point? to Chapter 14 – Outwardly Focused, Inwardly Strong. It covers digital communication comprehensively but also deals more widely with other forms of church communication such as posters, bulletins, announcements, etc. The book is essentially a step-by-step primer on church communication, asking readers to consider their vision and values, the kind of stories they're telling, how they engage with visitors, and how they present themselves on social media. It is a book that really engages churches in thinking about ways they present the gospel and the steps they need to go through to present it more clearly

So Everyone Can Hear communicates simply and intelligibly, clearly and colorfully. As for weaknesses, if the reader is expecting a book heavy on endnotes or footnotes, this is not it. It is not, in that sense, a scholarly work. Whether that's an advantage or disadvantage depends on one's viewpoint.

Crosby has produced a reference work for how churches communicate that can be returned to time and again. It isn't a book one reads then forgets but a helpful step-by-step resource to help churches communicate more effectively in a digital culture. Crosby's insights will challenge church leaders to examine how they are communicating and why they are communicating in that way. He is to be commended for tackling a subject that can seem so complicated and making it accessible through his clear writing style. Highly recommended!

Christ-Oriented Expository Preaching: Preaching the New Testament Use of the Old Testament. By Kyoohan Lee. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020. 978-1-7252-7767-0, 186 pp., $25.00.

Reviewer: *Todd H. Hilkemann, Truett Theological Seminary at Baylor University, Waco, TX.*

In this wide-ranging adaptation of his dissertation research, Kyoohan Lee adds his voice to the growing literature on both the redemptive-historical homiletic and the hermeneutics of the New Testament [NT] use of the Old Testament [OT]. His book "aims at showing homileticians and preachers how to bridge the gap between biblical interpretation and proclamation when preaching the NT use of the OT" (5). Lee contends that contemporary interpreters ought to follow the interpretative methods of the NT authors who "interpreted the OT in line with the original intention of the OT authors" (5). Lee's proposition "that unfolding the self-attesting Christ of Scripture is the most appropriate biblical approach to contemporary hermeneutics and homiletics" (9) is nothing new. What is new is his application of that premise to the NT use of the OT. Lee maintains, "Preaching the NT use of the OT becomes accurate in exposition, effective in faith response, and practical in pulpit ministry, as long as preachers faithfully unfold the self-attesting Christ of Scripture" (10). In other words, accurate expository preaching of the NT use of the OT is Christ-oriented.

Lee organizes his book in three parts. He begins the first part (chapter 2) by reasserting the well-trod redemptive-historical hermeneutic from Luke 24:27, 44. He extends that hermeneutic to intertextuality and argues that "Jesus Christ…becomes the unbreakable continuity between *what a text meant* and *what a text means*" (32). He concludes the first part (chapter 3) by addressing challenges to his proposed hermeneutic including issues of *sensus plenior*, typology, redemptive history, and biblical continuity.

In the second part, he applies his hermeneutic to homiletics. The high point of the book is chapter 4 where he examines the intertextuality in Peter's Pentecost sermon (Acts 2:1-36). Lee proposes a "sevenfold expository model" (82) that "enables contemporary preachers to accomplish accurate exposition of the NT use of the OT" (87). Lee argues that his model allows preachers to "effectively present the meaning and significance" (141) of the text. He concludes the second section (chapter 5) by discussing homiletical implications including sermonic purpose, illustration, and application.

In the final part, Lee moves from theory to praxis. In chapter 6 he takes his readers through his sevenfold expository model in his treatment of Mark 14:22-25; in chapter 7 he evaluates three sermons by John MacArthur from the book of Revelation; and in chapter 8 he summarizes his findings, suggests some benefits for the church, and offers suggestions for further research. The book contains two appendices: a discourse on Christian epistemology and a sermon from Lee's exposition of Mark 14:25.

Christ-Oriented Expository Preaching has several strengths. It is a thoroughly-documented and thoughtful addition to homiletics. Lee summarizes the important issues for christocentric preaching and intertextuality. He also synthesizes the two fields in an important dialogue. Lee acknowledges many of the challenges of christocentric hermeneutics but refutes them with thoughtful Christian charity. Furthermore, he moves beyond academic theory by engaging with pastoral concerns. He consistently demonstrates passion for preaching that connects with the hearers and helpfully proposes a nuanced view of the telos of preaching, "which is none other than the authorial intention of the whole Bible, Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, who encourages the audience to pursue Christ-likeness in genuine transformation" (117). Although Lee is unlikely to persuade skeptics to embrace his "Christ-oriented" homiletic, those who already embrace a christocentric approach will find his methodology of the preaching of the NT use of the OT a

helpful development. Lee addresses two important fields with thoughtful engagement.

Unfortunately, the book has a number of weaknesses. In his desire to address these two significant fields, Lee's arguments are complex, wide ranging, and quick moving. At times his synthesis lacks clarity and becomes cumbersome as he tries to account for a multiplicity of issues. The results are dizzying. His multi-step practical suggestions are sometimes more cumbersome than workable for the busy preacher. Lee's weakest chapter is the hagiographic analysis of John MacArthur's sermons. His "critical evaluation" (146) here lacked criticism and left this reviewer wondering how sermons preached in 1992 and 1999 perfectly matched Lee's model which he developed ca. 2020. Finally, Lee's writing contained a small handful of repeated stylistic inconsistencies which this reviewer found distracting.

Preachers who are curious about Christ-centered preaching will find Lee's work a helpful scholarly overview of many of the major hermeneutical and homiletical issues involved. Those who are already committed to this approach to preaching will appreciate his expansion of the field into intertextuality and voice a hearty "amen" to the glories of preaching the self-attesting Christ of Scripture.

Biblical Storytelling Design: Understanding Why Oral Stories Work. By Jim Roché. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020. 978-1-7252-5811-2, 138 pp., $21.00.

Reviewer: *Philip Long, Infinity Church, Fountain Inn, SC.*

Jim Roché's *Biblical Storytelling Design* is written to address an urgent need. He quotes Charles Madinger saying, "At least 80% of the world cannot or will not hear and understand our message when we communicate in literate ways and means. These people function as oral-preference learners" (32). Roché continues by describing these oral learners as "those who are illiterate and

cannot read or write, and those whose learning preference is oral though they can read or write" (32). For this reason, finding non-literate ways to communicate the gospel and the broader biblical message is critical to missions to the majority of the world today!

Roché's aim is to offer "ways to craft biblical stories that engage the listeners' minds and begin new generations of disciples who can continue to retell the stories and lessons and thereby bring change to their own lives and, eventually, their communities" (xv). He later restates and shortens his purpose saying, "The objective of this book is to encourage spiritual generations to multiply by enabling each generation to teach others also" (69). Roché builds this model off of the four generations of gospel multiplication found in 2 Timothy 2:2—Paul to Timothy to "faithful men who will be able to teach others also" (xvi).

The book's first chapter may prove helpful to the widest audience. With missionaries and mission sending organizations in mind, Roché outlines "The Process of Creating Story Lessons" that can empower anyone to craft and communicate biblical stories for oral learners. Given that even in highly literate societies many people are oral preference learners, there is much wisdom here not just for the missionary but for every preacher and teacher. Roché's seven step process is: 1. Misconceptions, 2. Main Points, 3. Biblical Passage, 4. Story, 5. Questions, 6. Scripture Memory, and 7. Hook Questions. This thorough process pushes past telling biblical stories "too casually" with "discussions unplanned and pointless that result in limited influence" (xvii). That's especially critical for highly literate people who may be new to oral cultures.

Chapter two introduces a helpful framework for "creating story lesson sets." This chapter is filled with examples of mission work that benefited from the missionary having a group of stories related to the listeners' situation—such as sharing a set of stories about strong women in the Bible with a group of oppressed Muslim women. Roché also points out a number of helpful organizations and resources in this chapter that use

storytelling in missions, such as Cru's StoryRunners, st4t.org, and noplaceleft.net.

Part 2 (chapters three-nine) is the bulk of the book where Roché names seven potential negative influences on storytelling, and Part 3 (chapters ten-eleven) shows how his model for curriculum design can overcome these negative influences. Given Roché's goal of storyteller multiplication, these sections may be overly technical and academic for the average reader. However, a missions organization crafting a curriculum for missionaries who are coming from a literate preference culture and entering an oral preference culture would highly benefit from the in-depth nature of these chapters. It is obvious that Roché is drawing here from his extensive experience both in the academy and in cross-cultural missions. His wisdom is most evident in his warnings about mismatched teaching and learning practices (chapter three) and worldviews (chapter four).

Chapter six raises the important point that in missions and all other forms of ministry we should be aiming for multiplication, not addition. "Multiplication is not telling people what you know, but enabling other people to do what you did" (80). That heart for multiplication is clear throughout the book, and it's one of the primary motivations for a storytelling strategy: "Our primary strategy is to encourage and enable new converts to introduce Jesus quickly to their own relational networks using stories about God (particularly the gospel). Therefore, it is more effective and achievable to have people learn, retell, and discuss stories that to learn theological propositions that become subject to challenge, debate, and potential defeat for the new believer" (43).

As stated above, the highly detailed nature of the later chapters may be best aimed at a mission sending organization. Still, there is pastoral guidance for all here when Roché reminds readers "the power of telling biblical stories does not rest upon the greatness of the storyteller but on the greatness of the stories!" (43)

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.

Book Review Editor:

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.

Managing Editor:

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.

5. Those who have material of whatever kind accepted for publication must recognize it is always the editor's prerogative to edit and shorten said material, if necessary.

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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Notes

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

Submission and Correspondence

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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