Articles

Reviews

Exploring the Use of Narratology for Narrative Preaching

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Abstract: *Although narrative preaching as a movement may have gone out of fashion in North American homiletics more than two decades ago, there has since been a resurgence of interest in the rhetorical function of biblical narratives along with the continuing exploration of more democratic, dialogical and open-ended homiletical forms. This study, therefore, suggests that the discipline of narratology can potentially combine these two elements by replicating the dynamics of biblical narratives in a variety of narrative sermon formats. By providing an examination of the elements of narratology, this approach seeks to reunite the often-separated elements of textual and homiletical form and function. The use of these narratological exegetical tools can then allow biblical narratives to assert a greater influence upon the form of the sermon itself, create an experience of the text for the listeners, and enable them to enter into the "world of words" of biblical narratives.*

Introduction

How is it that narratives actually "work"? In other words, how do authors create experiences and convey meaning to their readers simply through the telling of a story? Since a large portion of the Bible is made up of narrative[1] it is incumbent upon careful readers and preachers to understand just how it is that narratives function rhetorically. Preachers seeking to convey some sense of comprehensible meaning from biblical narratives to their audiences may struggle to do justice to the original literary form of the text. Representing perspectives strongly grounded in the world of modernity, traditional preaching forms often sought to "mine the text" in order to extract and proclaim propositional truth statements regardless of original literary form. This approach set up the text as a problem to be solved and resulted in a homiletical method whereby "the content of texts could be separated from the form and made the subject of some other form of communication."[2]

The approach explored here seeks to reunite the often-separated elements of form and content in both the exegesis and proclamation sides of preaching.[3] Such an approach can not only aid preachers in more effectively assessing how biblical narratives function rhetorically, but also can serve to replicate aspects of those functions in the sermon event. Such preaching seeks to create an experience of the text for hearers rather than utilizing a traditional homiletical approach seeking to interrogate and then explain the Bible propositionally using traditional preaching modes of third-person referential language.[4]

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[1] According to Lubeck, the Bible is comprised of 44% narrative, 33% poetry and 23% discourse. See Ray Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change* (Waynesboro: Authentic Media, 2005), 14. Eslinger believes that it is more like 70% narrative; see Lyle Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations in the Bible." In *Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text*. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier, eds. Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990), 87. Here "Discourse" refers to a literary type such as the books of Romans, Ephesians, etc. and is not to be confused with the use of the word "discourse" as used later within this paper.

[2] Charles H. Cosgrove and Dow Edgerton, *In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 24.

[3] Fred B. Craddock, *Overhearing the Gospel* (Calver: Cliff College Publishing, 1995), 72, 65. He points out that rather than seeking to define "biblical preaching" as merely presenting content *from* the Bible in substantive ways, preachers ought to explore the notion of "how does the Bible itself preach?"

[4] The creation of an experience in the sermon event is one of the central concepts of the New Homiletic. Craddock comments that "it is the method that effects the experience. The method is the message. So it is with all preaching;

In order to determine both the nature and rhetorical function of narrative texts, this study will provide an overview of the following narratological elements: narrativization and narrative levels; narrative order, duration and frequency; types of biblical narrators; point of view, characterization, plot and setting. It will also analyse relevant examples from biblical narratives in order to illustrate these various narratological aspects. The paper will conclude by suggesting briefly a few values of narratology for homiletics, suggesting three implications for narrative preaching that make use of the approach advocated within this essay.

The operative value driving this study forward is the notion that the forms of preaching should be as varied as the forms of literature located in the Bible.[5] In this connection Long points out that preachers tend to fall into the habit of creating sermon forms based upon their own preferred listening and learning styles and thereby gravitate toward a narrow range of sermon patterns. The attempt to integrate biblical narratives and homiletics can ideally help avoid such habits by creating sermon forms that do not divorce the content of the sermon from the original rhetorical form in which it is found.[6]

It has long been observed that human experience itself is inherently narrative in form.[7] In his now-classic article exploring this idea Crites maintained that "stories give qualitative substance to the form of experience because human experience is itself an incipient story."[8] Interaction with biblical narratives, therefore, can help readers discover a newfound sense of self-identity. This takes place when readers of narrative texts—and hearers of narrative sermons—step into the world of biblical narratives and choose to identify with or against certain characters. Readers can therefore enter in "not merely as observers but as active participants and actors within this great drama."[9]

Similarly narrative sermons that take their cues from the form of biblical narratives "both enable and demand a high level of involvement on the part of those who hear them. Stories 'create a world' and invite the listeners to enter that world and participate in it."[10] Gilmore comments that "the task of the preacher, like the playwright, is not so much to *invite* response as to *achieve* response."[11] Narrative preaching that is faithful to the rhetorical dynamics of the biblical narrative itself is one potentially effective way in which to invite just such a response.[12] Furthermore, in addition to creating the potential for an experience of the text, sermons that model the oftentimes open-ended nature of biblical narratives can not only encourage further exploration and dialogue but also provide necessary space for listeners to make their own discoveries. Craddock maintains that while preachers can only break and offer the bread of life to their audiences, ultimately "the hearers must be allowed to chew for themselves."[13] Embracing more dialogical and democratic homiletical forms offers the

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how one preaches is to a large extent *what* one preaches." Fred B. Craddock, *As One Without Authority: Revised and With New Sermons* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001), 44, italics his.

[5] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 45.

[6] Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching Second Edition* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 42, 169.

[7] Terrence W. Tilley, *Story Theology* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1985): 23.

[8] Stephen Crites, "The Narrative Quality of Experience." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* Vol. 39 No. 3 (1971): 297.

[9] Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, 96.

[10] Long, *The Witness of Preaching Second Edition*, 42.

[11] Alec Gilmore, *Preaching As Theatre* (London: SCM Press, 1996), 3, italics his.

[12] Craddock points out: "If the speech-forms of the Bible were adopted, sermons would be strengthened by the fact that the text would not be forced to fit a new frame. In other words, narrative texts would be shared in narrative sermons, parables in parabolic form, biography in biographical sermons, and similarly in other speech models" (*As One Without Authority*, 141).

[13] Fred B. Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 64.

possibility of creating a listener-culture in which increased participation and ownership of application can occur. Using narrative elements carefully to manage a multiple point-of-view narrative sermon, for example, can create a potentially "heuristic form that allows the worshipers to overhear multivalent proposals, interpretations, or wagers and, by the aid of the Spirit, decide their own conclusions."[14]

Narratology and Narrativization

As a theory for evaluating narrative texts, the discipline of narratology enables readers to understand, analyse and evaluate narrative texts[15] along with their various rhetorical functions and dynamics. Narrative analysis involves studying both the "what" and the "how" of the ways in which a narrative is presented by the author (and the narrator of the story) to the reader. In its simplest definition a narrative is a story that is told *by* somebody *to* somebody else: a narrator to a hearer. A good narrator can create an experience in the hearer simply by relating the story while withholding the "moral of the story." With his often-confusing parables, Jesus was the master of such open-ended narrative preaching and the rhetorical strategies of his parables concealed as much as they revealed.[16] In order to "get the point" of the story, the hearers wrestle with the various aspects by which the narrator presented the narrative – they become participants in creating the "meaning" of the story. Without knowing it, they are caught up in a powerful set of rhetorical dynamics within narratives involving a variety of factors: the type of narrator, characterization, plot, setting, dialogue, etc.

Several narratological terms can help us to understand how narratives function. The first term is "narrativization." Narrativization is a process that occurs whenever a storyteller (or an author) creates a narrative text with the specific aim of relating that story to others. The tendency toward narrativization is common the world over: every human culture displays the tendency to communicate to others occurrences of real events using a narrative format. Narrativization allows human experiences to be understood, shared and identified with by others by fashioning them into a comprehensible narrative structure.

Throughout the course of history, people have been able to transmit understandable messages of events and experiences to one another through the use of this shared narrative reality.[17] Lubeck points out that "stories do not merely tell us about life; stories are the essential means for us to experience life."[18] As Barthes notes there is a difference between our *experiences* of the world on the one hand, and our efforts to *describe* that experience in language.[19] Whenever a person relates in a narrative fashion any past experience to another person, she is engaging in the process of narrativization.

The very process of re-telling these events to another person thus imposes a particular *form* and *arrangement* upon them (a beginning, middle and an end) that is normally associated with a narrative format. This then becomes a narration of one's accounts of the reality that she perceived or thought she perceived.[20] Because of this, narrativization is ultimately defined as "imposing the form of a narrative upon real events or experiences for the purposes of relating

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[14] Lucy Atkinson Rose, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1997), 7.

[15] Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 3.

[16] See Matthew 13:13-14.

[17] Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality." In *On Narrative*, Mitchell, W.J.T., ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), 3.

[18] Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, 96.

[19] White, "The Value of Narrativity," 2.

[20] Ibid., 2.

those events or experiences to others." Narrativization creates a comprehensible "narrative world" accessible to listeners and allows them to identify with, and potentially share, the experiences being described by the narrator.

Narrative Levels: Story and Discourse

When an author utilizes the process of narrativization in order to produce a narrative, this immediately creates two "narrative levels." The first level is referred to as the *story*. The second level is referred to as the *discourse*.[21] The qualitative differences between narrative levels are what Genette refers to as "diegetic levels."[22] The first level, "story," refers to the actual chronological events that occurred in real space-time. The second level, "discourse," relates to the way in which selected elements from the story are presented to the reader by the author and narrator within the narrative account itself. This is how "what actually happened" in space-time is presented to the reader in the discourse by the use of a narrative format.
It is crucial to note the distinction between the chronological sequence of events (story) and the way in which those events are presented to the reader (discourse).[23] In other words the story refers to the narrative *content*, while the discourse refers to the narrative *presentation*—the story as it is told in a discourse.[24] On the diegetic level of the discourse, in order to accomplish a purpose, the author has the freedom to manipulate the narrative content—the actual sequence of events—into a different chronology, ordering and narrative pace than what took place in linear, chronological real-time.

To illustrate the distinction between story and discourse an analogy can be drawn from the world of movie-making. On various filming locations the filmmakers shoot hundreds or even thousands of hours of footage in real-time. This corresponds to the story level. Following the filming of this raw footage, at some later date editors selectively edit it to produce the final movie—approximately 90 minutes long. This corresponds to the discourse level. In this editing process the editors have selected only what they deem to be the best or most relevant scenes from the raw chronological footage (story level) that will make up what they consider to be the best movie (discourse level). The remaining footage ends up discarded on the cutting-room floor since it is deemed irrelevant to the final product.

This illustration clarifies not only the process of narrativization but also the distinction between the two diegetic levels. Using the principle of selectivity, the author selects key elements from the story level and narrativizes only those elements deemed important to convey meaning. The author has the freedom to rearrange those selected elements into some type of discernible narrative format. Thus in the process of narrativization itself one can begin to see the two operative narrative levels of story and the discourse. Story-time is measured linearly: in seconds, minutes, hours, months, and years, while discourse-time is measured "on paper": words, sentences, paragraphs, and pages. Figure 1 illustrates the differences in these diegetic levels.

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[21] For the sake of clarity this paper will consistently use the terms "story" and "discourse" respectively. Bal, for example, utilizes the term "fabula" rather than discourse (Bal, *Narratology*, 6), and Fokkelmann uses "story" when referring to the narrative discourse. See J.P. Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative: A Practical Guide*, Ineke Smith, trans. (Leiden: Deo Publishing, 1999): 65.

[22] Genette explains that "*any event a narrative recounts is at a diegetic level immediately higher than the level at which the narrating act of producing this narrative is placed.*" See Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980): 228, italics his.

[23] Bal, *Narratology*, 6.

[24] Patrick O'Neill, *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 3.

Figure 1.

Story-Time and Discourse-Time

Once key elements from the story have been selected and narrativized into a narrative discourse, the author now has the freedom to rearrange them in whatever order desired. These events are then narrated to the reader through the creation of a narrator, discussed in more detail below. Distinctions in the way that elements are arranged become more obvious when comparing the differences between story and discourse levels. This comparison is crucial because the way in which an author arranges and presents the materials to the reader begins to reveal his or her purposes in writing. In this connection Bal observes that order within the discourse is significant:

> Playing with sequential ordering is not just a literary convention; it is also a means of drawing attention to certain things, to emphasize, to bring about aesthetic or psychological effects, to show various interpretations of an event, to indicate the subtle difference between expectation and realization, and much else besides.[25]

Three manipulations of discourse-time become important to observe: *order*, *duration* and *frequency*,[26] and the comparison that inevitably arises when comparing the events of the story to the written text of the narrative discourse.

1. *Order*
This first manipulation of the events on the story level relates to the temporal succession of events as they occurred chronologically on the story level, and then the order in which they are arranged by the author on the discourse level as displayed in
Figure 2.
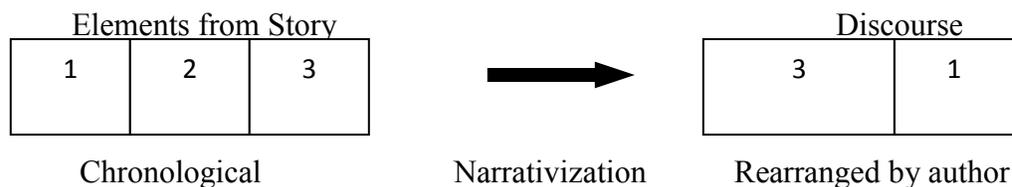
Figure 2.

As noted in the analogy earlier, in filmmaking movie editors rearrange the raw film footage into a completely different order than it occurred when it was filmed. These *differences in order* arising chronologically between the story and the discourse levels are termed *anachronies*.[27] Anachronies refer to instances where an event is narrated out of chronological

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[25] Bal, *Narratology*, 82.
[26] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 35.
[27] Ibid., 40.

order in a comparison between the discourse-time and the story-time. They are thus discordances between the temporal orderings of narrative discourse and the chronological and linear events of the story level. Here the author can make use of flashback (referring back to an event occurring in the past), or flash-forward (moving ahead to refer to an event that has not yet happened at this point in the discourse).[28]

The book of Jonah provides a good example of the use of anachrony within biblical narrative. The book unfolds chronologically as the events narrated appear to unfold in real-time. From the opening sequence, however, the reader encounters a major interpretive problem: identifying Jonah's motivation for his lack of obedience. Why did he not go immediately to Nineveh? The differences in chronological order between the story and discourse levels are not easily discernible. In 1:10b, however, the narrator inserts a brief comment that gives the reader a brief insight: Jonah had earlier admitted to the sailors that he was fleeing from Yahweh. Still, no indication of motive is given. Later, however, Jonah provides his own "flashback" statement (4:2) regarding his motives prior to his abortive flight to Tarshish. Again, after his encounter with the fish, he provides some additional justification for his behaviours that provides the reader more insight as to his motives. At the beginning of the book, however, and throughout much of its narrative chronology, readers are left in the dark. Why did Jonah flee from his mission? Jonah's extreme rage over the subsequent repentance of the Ninevites, his arguments with Yahweh and his eagerness for death send the reader seeking for bits and pieces of the scarce information concerning his motives provided within the discourse. These bits and pieces, however, are provided to the reader somewhat "out of order."

Flashbacks and flash-forwards can project either a short distance or quite far into either the past or future. An example of a flash-forward into the distant future can be found in Jesus' ministry as narrated in John 2:19-20. In conflict with the Jews, Jesus makes a cryptic statement about destroying the temple and raising it up in three days. The narrator intrudes and points out that Jesus' audience misunderstood a reference to the destruction and razing of the physical Temple in Jerusalem. The narrator comments in 2:21-22 that Jesus' disciples later remembered what he had said—after his resurrection!

2. *Duration*

Duration consists of the speed at which events in the discourse are narrated to the reader. In the manipulation of elements selected from the story level the narrator can choose to compress discourse-time, slow it down or speed it up by inserting large gaps into the narrative discourse. This creates the effect of jumping ahead in time. The insertion of a gap into the discourse-time is referred to as an *ellipsis*.[29] There are two types of ellipses: *explicit* and *implicit*. Explicit ellipses occur when the narrator explicitly mentions the passage of time in the discourse. Looking again at Jonah, the narrator mentions the three days Jonah spent in the belly of the fish (2:17), and notes Jonah's single day's journey into Nineveh (3:4). While such insertions in the text explicitly indicate the passage of time they can be either definite or indefinite. For example, the narrator does not indicate how long it took for the plant to grow over Jonah's head as he sat outside Nineveh (4:6): an indefinite period of time. But in 4:7 there is a definite mention of time passage ("the next day" the worm ate Jonah's shade-providing plant).

Implicit ellipses, on the other hand, are gaps in discourse-time *not* specifically mentioned by the narrator. They must be inferred by the reader. For instance, how long did it take Jonah to

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[28] The more precise narratological terms for these are *analepsis* (flashbacks, something narrated from the past) and *prolepsis* (flashforwards, something narrated from the future). See Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 40.

[29] Genette, *Narrative Discourse*, 106.

travel from his home to the port of Joppah? How long was he on the ship prior to the arrival of the storm? How long did the storm last? How long did it take him to travel to Nineveh after being vomited up by the whale? How many days/weeks/months did he sit sulking outside Nineveh? The text does not explicitly contain this information, but obviously certain lengths of time passed. What is important to note is that the author/editor deemed these details unimportant for achieving the rhetorical strategies of the discourse.

In addition to using ellipses authors can also choose to speed up discourse-time or slow it down. In the first chapter of Jonah, time proceeds at what appears to be a relatively "normal" narrative pace. Although one can detect certain implicit ellipses as noted earlier, its chronological forward-movement appears to correspond with the linear movement of story-time. In the second chapter, however, where the reader encounters the prayer of Jonah from the belly of the fish, the pace changes. Several things occur. First there is a change in literary form from narrative to poetry. Second, the speed of narration is slowed down in what is referred to as a "descriptive pause."[30] This change of both form and pace encourages the reader to focus on the content and motives of Jonah's prayer. Is Jonah's apparently sincere prayer of repentance legitimate, signalling a true change of heart and mind? Or is he merely paying lip service to get out of trouble? These questions must be evaluated against the events, actions and dialogue between Jonah and Yahweh later in the discourse. From the third chapter onwards, although there again are implicit ellipses, the literary form changes back to narrative and the discourse-time resumes its more or less normal chronological forward movement.

Finally, it bears brief mention that another way of compressing large amounts of chronological time into a single mention is accomplished by summarizing. The author can summarize in a few sentences or paragraphs large passages of time and omit all details of dialogue and actions, such as the narrator's brief summary that encompasses a forty-year span of peacetime in Judges 5.31. Another example of summary is located in Ezekiel 11:25, which involves the merest summarizing mention that Ezekiel re-told to the elders in Babylon the events he experienced in his vision of Jerusalem within chapters 8-11:24.

3. *Frequency*

Frequency relates to the number of times an event taken from the story is narrated in the discourse. Usually this takes place on a 1=1 correspondence level: what happened once in the story is related once in the discourse. But sometimes an event is narrated more than once—and there may be significant differences between the two accounts. Note for example 1 Sam. 31:1-6: according to the narrator's account Saul fell on his own sword and died. But in 2 Sam. 1:1-16, a young Amalekite re-tells the same account to David and takes personal credit for Saul's death.

The Narrator

Every narrative discourse involves two factors: one is a narrative that is told, and the second involves a teller who relates that narrative.[31] The narrator is the teller of the narrative, the voice that the reader "hears" when reading a narrative discourse. Because all biblical narratives are mediated to the reader by a narrator, the reader is thus dependent upon the narrator as an interpretative guide. On this point Eslinger observes: "As readers, all that we can know about the fictional story world is already filtered and interpreted for us by our ears, eyes, and nose—the

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[30] Ibid., 93–94; Genette notes that this is a case "where some section of narrative discourse corresponds to a nonexistent diegetic duration."
[31] Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations," 74.

biblical narrator."[32] The type of narrator chosen to present the narrative discourse to the reader is the one that best serves the author's purposes. By creating a narrative discourse and presenting it to the reader using the vehicle of a narrator, authors are essentially constructing a "world of words."[33] These are narrated "worlds" into which we as readers are invited, such as for example Tolkien's Middle Earth or C.S. Lewis's Narnia.

In the process of analysing narratives, readers need to keep an open mind and continually ask questions of the text to understand how it operates on its own terms as a "world of words." In relating this world of words to readers there are two types of narrators authors typically utilize as rhetorical devices when creating a narrative discourse: external third-person or internal first-person narrators.

1. *External Third-Person Narrators*

External narrators occupy a higher diegetic level than characters on the discourse level. They inhabit a position effectively "above the discourse looking down" and are omniscient, omnipresent and privy to information no human could possibly know. Fokkelmann clarifies this separation of levels between that of the characters and the narrator by stating that

> …there is an essential, even radical difference between narrator and character. This is a hierarchical difference, as the two parties move on totally different levels. In terms of communication, the narrator is above the narrative material and outside the story [discourse], as the transmitter of a message of which we are the recipients. The characters only live inside the story; they are part of that world that by virtue of a string of language signs is said to have existed then and there.[34]

External biblical narrators are separated from the discourse on a higher diegetic level because they possess key information about the thoughts, motives and actions of the characters within the narrative. Importantly, they also have access to the very mind, thoughts, actions and motives of Yahweh. For example the external narrator of the book of Job provides the reader with critical information regarding the nature of the "cosmic bet" between Yahweh and Satan. However, Job and the other characters within the discourse, who operate on a lower diegetic level, are never privy to this information. Thus the reader "watches from above" as each character explores the reasons behind Job's suffering. That the reader is privy to this information that the characters do not know provides a fascinating interpretative insight relating to the rhetorical purposes of the book itself.

Because they possess so much information, external narrators appear to the reader to be entirely reliable, objective and trustworthy. Most biblical narratives are narrated in this fashion. (cf. Genesis and the four Gospels). The fact that the narrator of Genesis, for example, possesses specific information about the creation event in the first two chapters becomes significant in terms of the narrator's "insider knowledge" and therefore apparent reliability.

External narrators can be more or less involved in the presentation of the discourse, choosing either to stay "out of the picture" or intruding with narratorial comments to the reader. For example, the narrator of John constantly intrudes into the narrative discourse (2.22-25; 4.2, 54; 5.3b-4; etc.). This type of narrator is existentially "close" to the reader by constantly "whispering in the reader's ear" comments to guide interpretation. The third-person narrator of

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[32] Ibid., 78.

[33] Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 207.

[34] Ibid., 65.

Genesis, on the other hand, intrudes much less frequently (cf. Gen. 1:24). There is a much wider existential gap between this type of narrator and the reader. Distant narrators leave more interpretative room for the reader, whereas intrusive narrators consistently guide the reader along by providing explanatory comments.

2. *Internal Character-Narrators*

The second type of narrator is an internal first-person character-narrator who operates on the same diegetic level as the characters in the narrative discourse. Such narrators are those who in one way or another participate in the action that the narration describes.[35] David Balfour in *Treasure Island* or David Copperfield are good examples of this sort of narrator. The narrator identifies him/herself as one of the characters and claims to recount true facts about him or herself.[36] A character-narrator of this sort shares or has shared either space or time with his fellow characters, and is conditioned by the same environmental constraints and existential limitations as the other characters.[37]

Very few biblical narratives are narrated from a first-person perspective. Ezekiel is the only book narrated consistently throughout from this point of view. This is unique since the entire discourse is presented in a first-person narrative frame that puts forth the self-presentation of the prophet.[38] Much of Nehemiah is narrated in the first-person, while sections within Acts seem to indicate that Luke is the narrator. Existentially limited and conditioned like real humans, first-person narrators do not know what is happening in other places, are unaware of the motives of other characters, and do not know what others are thinking or doing when they are not present. Character-narrators simply do not have access such information.

First-person character-narrators such as Ezekiel reveal that they are inevitably tied to the discourse level by mentioning specific dates, times and locations, as well as by demonstrating their clear involvement in the events on the story level. For example, at the beginning of his narrated account Ezekiel physically places himself in Babylon by the Chebar River along with his fellow-exiles in the thirtieth year on the fifth day of the fourth month (Ez. 1:1-3). The discourse begins at this point and advances forward basically chronologically, although at times there are large ellipses. Within the discourse most of Ezekiel's oracles are specifically dated, but between the oracles he received there are often large chronological gaps where the text gives no indication as to what has happened in the interim.[39]

Significantly, although the character-narrator Ezekiel is limited by all normal human limitations, he nonetheless possesses one critical advantage: due to his unique relationship with Yahweh he is privy to information that other characters cannot possibly know. Because the omniscient character Yahweh reveals it directly to him, Ezekiel knows for example what the future will hold regarding the fate of Jerusalem prior to its destruction (Ez: 15.8), what other characters are saying about him behind his back (Ez. 33:30-32) and what the future holds in store for the nation of Israel years into the future (Ez. 37: 40-48). This added advantage lends

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[35] Bertil Romberg, *Studies in the Narrative Technique of the First-Person Novel* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1977), 4.

[36] Bal, *Narratology*, 22.

[37] Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations," 79.

[38] Ellen G. Davis, "Swallowing the Scroll: Textuality and the Dynamics of Discourse in Ezekiel's Prophecy." PhD Dissertation (Yale University, 1987), 120. Davis also argues that another unique element of the first-person frame is the evaluative structure Ezekiel establishes for his readers.

[39] For example, the oracle of Ezek. 20 is dated precisely at the seventh year, in the fifth month on the tenth day. He then receives three oracles that are undated but are placed in Chapters 21-22-23. The next dated oracle is in Chapter 24 at the ninth year, in the tenth month on the tenth day. What happened during the intervening years?

credibility to his words since much of the discourse involves Ezekiel mediating the oracles of Yahweh directly to his exilic audience.

First-person narration carries with it both negative and positive aspects. Negatively, because they are limited and conditioned, character-narrators are open to the charge of unreliability since they only know what other characters tell them or what they discover in the process of events. They may have their own agendas and may not be reporting elements of the story to the reader in a trustworthy manner. For example, the unreliable narrator of the movie *Fight Club* is revealed (at the end of the narrative) to be suffering from schizophrenia. This revelation throws into question everything viewers may have believed about his earlier self-portrayal and point of view regarding his experiences and personality.

Positively, because first-person narrators narrate the discourse *after* the events have taken place, this gives them the advantage of retrospection. Eslinger points out that the internal narrator "can only give the reader a common, limited view of the interaction. His narratorial point of view is superior to that of the other characters' only by advantage of hindsight."[40] Importantly this aspect helps to establish the narrator's credibility since the character-narrator already knows how the story ended before beginning to relate it to the reader.

The character-narrator's *epic situation*—the actual point in time that the narrator is narrating the story to the reader—becomes a key to understanding first-person narratives.[41] Looking again at Ezekiel, although his specific epic situation is never revealed to the reader, one can reasonably infer that he must be narrating the discourse from a point *after* these events occurred and is looking back upon them. In other words when he begins to narrate to the reader at the beginning of the discourse, Ezekiel the character-narrator already knows how the story ended. Although internal narrators are on the same level as the other characters, having the advantage of hindsight not only separates them from the other characters in the discourse but also adds to their credibility. This leads to what Romberg refers to as "natural dualism" on the part of the narrator who both narrates and experiences, who is simultaneously both old and young; it is a case of identical persons, and yet not the same person. Although Ezekiel is the same person *biologically* at the beginning and the end of the discourse, he is not the same person *ideologically* due to the changes he has undergone precisely because of his experiences.[42]

Point of View

The discussion of differing narrators leads directly into a discussion of *point of view*. When reading a narrative discourse we the readers are exposed to one or more points of view. Also termed *focalization*, point of view involves the particular perspective or angle of vision from which the narrative is being told to the reader. Identifying the various points of view in a narrative becomes especially relevant for narrative sermons because it is important for preachers to distinguish between the various "voices" encountered within the biblical narrative. As discussed later, the particular point or points of view the preacher chooses to represent in the narrative sermon is of critical importance.

In order to determine point of view the reader can ask the following questions of the discourse: who is speaking at any given time, and to whom? Is the narrator's voice being heard—in which case the addressee is the reader—or is a particular character's voice being heard?

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[40] Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations," 78.

[41] Romberg, *Studies in the Narrative Technique,* 33. Understanding the epic situation of the narrator is important because one can track the various changes the narrator undergoes during the time span of the discourse (36).

[42] Ibid., 36. Although one today may take issue with levels of scientific precision regarding biological makeup, the point nonetheless stands in terms of the physicality of the character-narrator versus ideological changes due to experiences, etc.

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In that case, perhaps the addressee(s) are other characters within the narrative. In the field of narratology this is referred to as establishing the "voice hierarchy." The reader must discriminate what is termed "definiteness of the address"— in other words, somebody is speaking *to* somebody else within the discourse.[43] It is crucial that readers establish exactly whose voice is speaking at any one time as this determines point of view.

Typically within narratives the point of view (or "voice") heard telling the narrative to the reader belongs to that of the narrator. Whether internal or external, the narrator serves as the reader's guide to interpreting the events being related within the narrative itself. But it is equally important to realize that *whenever one or more of the characters within the discourse speaks, the readers are being exposed to another point of view different than that of the narrator.* Fokkelmann warns readers on this point: "Our knowledge of a narrated situation expands if we keep asking ourselves whose perspective we are actually being given."[44]

The point of view of the narrator and that of various characters within the discourse may not necessarily be the same, or be in agreement. This is important to bear in mind. Moreover, the reader must be careful to weigh a particular speaker's actions against his/her words, and observe what types of narrative comments the narrator may make *about* a particular character. As an example the narrator of Jonah makes a comment about his fleeing from Yahweh in 1:10b, but this statement must be compared to Jonah's own point of view as he describes it throughout the rest of the discourse.

Narrators have two options when narrating the speech of a character: *direct* ("He said to her"), or *indirect* (reporting what a character said without directly stating it: "He told her what happened."). The reader must always keep the following point in mind, as Bar-Efrat points out in this extended quotation:

> Whenever the characters use direct speech in the narrative their point of view is, naturally, reflected. In these instances the narrator's existence is least apparent, being pushed aside and becoming practically imperceptible. When the characters' voices are heard the narrators' voice is silent; and then to all intents and purposes the narrator is absent. In actual fact, however, the narrator is never absent from the narrative, for when the characters speak in their own voices, their speech does not have the same independence as that of characters in a play, because in narrative literature…the narrator prefaces the characters' speech with a phrase, such as: 'And he asked,' 'And she replied,' 'And X said to Y' etc., making it clear that we hear the characters' conversations only by virtue of the narrator's assistance. The protagonists' speech is always imbedded in that of the narrator, who gives them the floor. The narrator not only informs us who is speaking and to whom, but also sometimes defines the nature of the speech.[45]

As readers we can be aware that biblical narratives are not static texts but dynamic texts that seek to influence the reader in a wide variety of ways. Among other influences, texts may be encouraging readers to adopt particular values or ideologies, change behavior, or establish new frames of reference. Within a narrative, the narrator generally strives to accomplish this rhetorical function. Eslinger observes in this connection: "All biblical narrative is mediated by a narrator. The narrator is the reader's guide, a medium for the duration of the story."[46] He further

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[43] James Craig La Driere, "Voice and Address," In *Dictionary of World Literature: Criticism-Forms-Technique (New Revised Edition).* Joseph T. Shipley, ed. (New Jersey: Littlefield, Adams & Co. 1960): 443.
[44] Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 139.
[45] Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 41–42.
[46] Eslinger, "Narratorial Situations," 78.

states that the reason so much of the Bible is narrative is because it "is the genius of biblical authors to have developed a narrative vehicle — the external, unconditioned narrator — to explore what would otherwise be a no-man's-land of misconception and ignorance."[47]

Biblical narrators play a critical interpretative role by helping the reader to negotiate the wide existential gap between humanity and God. External and omniscient narrators, by far the preferred narrative vehicle in the Bible, have apparently unlimited access to all sorts of information, including the thoughts, motives, words, and actions of Yahweh and of characters alike. The narrator then relates these elements to the reader within the narrative discourse and the task of the reader becomes to interpret what all of it means. However, despite this guidance Fokkelmann notes that most good narrators are

> …rarely willing to disclose the "moral of the tale" at the end of his story. Good narrators are usually frugal with this; something should be left to guesswork. In fact, this process of weighing and guessing might be the very job the writer wants us to do. This draws us more actively into the story, so that we participate in the never-ending debate between various interpretations. In this way, we educate ourselves further, while the story, through the moral, legal and religious challenges arising from its unique events, confronts us with the question of what we are prepared to accept, and what not. So, the world of the text and that of the real reader touch, and regularly even collide for the benefit of our progressive awareness.[48]

Characterization: Actors and Characters

It is important to distinguish between *actors* and *characters* when exploring the issue of characterization within narrative texts. Actors are agents (human or otherwise; it could be a dog or a machine) who perform certain actions on the diegetic *story* level in real space-time, whereas characters are located on the diegetic level of the *discourse*. In the process of narrativization, the effect of a character is created when transitioning from story to discourse level. For example, in the television show *Friends* the real-life actor David Schwimmer (corresponding to the *story* level) became the character Ross Geller (corresponding to the *discourse* level). Actors become characters when the narrator provides them with certain distinctive characteristics. Narrative character is essentially an image of an actor that the author wants the reader to reconstruct. *Characterization* therefore refers to the way in which authors creatively shape the way readers perceive each character in the narrative discourse.[49] Bal explains how characterization functions in narratives:

> When a character appears for the first time, we do not yet know very much about it. The qualities that are implied in the first presentation are not all "grasped" by the reader. In the course of the narrative the relevant characteristics are repeated so often—in a different form, however—that they emerge more and more clearly.[50]

There are basically two ways in which the narrator constructs a character for the reader: *directly* and *indirectly* (see Figure 3). Direct characterization occurs when the narrator straightforwardly informs the reader with a direct statement about certain traits of a character in

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[47] Ibid., 87.
[48] Fokkelmann, *Reading Biblical Narrative*, 148–9.
[49] Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, 101.
[50] Bal, *Narratology*, 125.

the discourse. As an example, the narrator of John makes a direct statement concerning Judas being a thief in Jn. 12:4-6. This aspect of character definition lends itself to interpretative closure and definitiveness and moreover puts the reader in a more passive role because the narrator provides the information in a straightforward fashion.

When characterization is indirect, the narrator may portray a character indirectly in terms of actions or dialogue without any direct commentary. Rimmon-Kenan notes that "a presentation is indirect when rather than mentioning a trait, it displays and exemplifies it in certain ways."[51] In the Book of Ezekiel, for example, this is mostly what the reader finds of the character-narrator: his characterization is revealed indirectly by his actions. Mostly he obeys Yahweh, but at times Ezekiel disputes with him (as in Ezek. 4:14-15). Other aspects of his characterization are revealed indirectly by suggestions embedded within his scarce dialogue with Yahweh or other characters, his fellow-exiles.

Biblical narratives typically involve characterization utilizing the following five possibilities: 1) the actions of characters, 2) their speech, 3) their external appearance, 4) their physical environment and 5) analogously by comparing characters with other characters.[52] For example, the way in which the narrator characterizes Jonah utilizes many of these attributes. Readers note his actions (evading his responsibilities by fleeing to Tarshish, 1:1); his angry disputation with Yahweh over the fate of the vine and the city (4); his physical environment east of Nineveh (4:5-6); and finally, by analogy the other characters in the discourse appear far more willing to repent than does Jonah (the sailors, 1:16; Ninevites, 3:6-9).

Narrator
(Direct/Indirect)

Story → Discourse

Narrativization
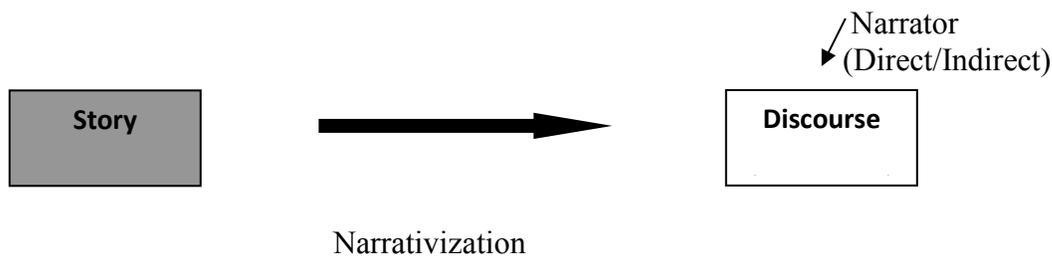
Figure 3.

Plot and Setting

Two final elements of narrative remain: *plot* and *setting*. Plot is a rhetorical device that helps to move the discourse-line along and is usually centred upon a conflict of some sort. There are many different types of potential conflicts: humans vs. humans; a person vs. God; a person vs. nature; a person vs. an animal; and a person vs. him/herself. Typically the plot conflict progresses along six stages. First, the narrative opens, typically with a description of the setting and the introduction of one or more characters are introduced. Second, there is the introduction of some sort of conflict whereby the protagonist begins to encounter a problem or undergoes a task. Third, the plot intensifies as more complications arise, thus making the task or conflict more difficult. Fourth, a climax occurs, the "turning point," or crux of the story. Fifth, there is a resolution of the conflict or *denouement*. At this stage the conflict is either successfully completed or perhaps ends in abject failure. The sixth and final stage is the ending, which may include comments by the narrator evaluating what just happened, or an evaluation of what the

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[51] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics* (Oxford: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 61.
[52] Ibid., 70. She notes that "When two characters are presented in similar circumstances, the similarity or contrast between their behaviour emphasizes the characteristics of both" (70).

protagonist may or may not have learned from the experience with the conflict. Perhaps others have benefited from the conflict or its resolution.[53]

R. Alan Culpepper points out that within narrative discourse, plot functions "to establish internal coherence and convey the significance of the story… [therefore, the author] selected, shaped, and arranged materials so that its sequence established a certain progression and causality."[54] The narrator has narrativized the raw materials from the story level by selectively arranging the elements drawn from the story level into the narrative discourse. This serves rhetorically to give the reader precisely the right amount of information in the right order and at the right time.[55] Readers are drawn into the story by identifying with characters as they experience conflicts: readers may root for, sympathize with or boo a particular character. All these responses are accomplished through use of a careful narrative strategy that guides the telling of the narrative.[56]

When considering the way conflict functions within plot, the book of Jonah demonstrates a multiplicity of narrative conflicts. The character Jonah has conflicts with nature (the storm, the fish, the sun, the worm and hot wind); conflicts with Yahweh (fleeing in 1:1; arguing with Yahweh in 4); and finally possibly internal conflicts within himself that reveal his motives (his apparently "sincere" prayer within the fish, chapter 2; and his motives for fleeing to Tarshish are finally revealed in 4:1-3).

Setting is the second element of plot and involves a physical place or space, in effect the "stage" on which the various elements of the narrative discourse take place. Setting involves two elements: *place* and *time*. The reader should also be aware that while in biblical narratives this involves not only actual physical places (Egypt, Jerusalem or Babylon) often these can also convey theological meaning. Places like Jerusalem, Zion, the temple, Babylon, the East, and "the land" all seem to represent elements of theological significance. Time, on the other hand, involves both the time the particular narrative took place (cf. at night, John 3:2; or a season such as Passover in the Passion narratives), as well as the movement of time within the discourse itself (days, weeks, months, years).

Again, Jonah provides excellent examples of these elements of setting. At the beginning of the discourse, Jonah was at home in the Promised Land (theologically a good place) and was told to go to Nineveh (a theologically and physically bad place inhabited by cruel pagans). The Jews were not a seafaring race, and moreover, within biblical literature the sea is typically characterized as a threatening, unpredictable and dangerous place (Ps. 107:2-32). Being east of Nineveh is associated with those in the biblical narrative fleeing east who typically end up outside the land and away from the presence of God.[57] The reader also encounters internal time movement (three days in the fish; one day of a three day journey into Nineveh).

Implications for Homiletics

This introduction to the discipline of narratology has identified and explored certain basic elements of how narratives function. By learning to study narrative texts while looking for these elements, one can begin to understand how meaning is produced through the means of a narrative discourse. Through the process of narrativization, in the movement from story to discourse and the creation of characters from actors, an author constructs a "narrative world of

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[53] Adapted from Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change*, 106–107.

[54] R. Alan Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel: A Study in Literary Design* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 85.

[55] Lubeck, *Read the Bible for a Change,* 106.

[56] Ibid., 107.

[57] This pattern is established in Genesis: Cain murders Abel and goes east (4:16); Lot went east and got into trouble (13:11); Ishmael's descendants go east and live in hostility (25:17–19).

words." The author then invites the reader to inhabit this world; but in order to understand its meaning this world must be encountered on its own terms.[58] As Culpepper points out:

> Meaning is produced in the experience of reading the text as a whole and making the mental moves the text calls for its reader to make…As one reads [a narrative], the voice of the narrator introduces the narrative world of the text, its characters, values, norms, conflicts, and the events which constitute the plot of the story.[59]

The authors of biblical narratives effectively make the claim that the narrative world they have fashioned is, or at least reflects, something that is more 'real' than the world the reader has encountered previously. The text is therefore a mirror in which readers can 'see' the world in which they live."[60] Creating an experience for the listeners from a narrative text invites them to participate in that world of words. Such a homiletic potentially elevates the role of the audience to that of active participants in the making of meaning. In this connection Long believes "that the best stories, the ones most faithful to real experience, have enough ambiguity built into them to force the hearer to make a decision about the story's meaning and application. The idea is that a story listener cannot be passive but must participate with the narrator in creating the world of the story."[61]

Homileticians have long observed that much of contemporary preaching involves third-person observational language: the preacher speaks about God objectively or explains (ostensibly objectively) what they believe the Scriptures mean. Preachers have tended to explain narrative texts by reducing them to objective propositions or abstract principles that are then illustrated and applied to the hearers' lives. Such practice not only potentially does violence to the text by changing its rhetorical form from one type to another, but also can objectify biblical narratives and turn Christianity into a formulaic faith. Worse still, as David Buttrick notes: "The grave difficulty with a third-person observational language in preaching is that it usurps God's position and, in so doing, turns God into an 'object,' and God's Word into a rational truth."[62] Because the form of the sermon shapes the faith of the listeners[63] it is important for preachers to explore the purposes of preaching itself.

Suggestions for Narrative Preaching Models

There are at least three implications of this outline of narratology as it relates to narrative preaching. First, understanding and employing these concepts explored within this study can aid in the tasks of biblical exegesis. Understanding and analyzing the "world of words" of biblical narrative texts on their own terms can give preachers greater facility to re-create that world and then invite listening audiences into it.

Second, the tools of narratology can suggest ways in which the form, rhetorical dynamics, and rhetorical function of the biblical narrative can exercise a greater influence upon the ultimate form of the sermon. In this way, form and function are united both in the exegesis and proclamation phase of sermon preparation and delivery. This brings the added value of sermons

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[58] Fokkelmann notes that readers are invited into this "narrated world" of narrative texts. Through the process of reading, this world "and that of the real reader touch, and regularly even collide for the benefit of our progressive awareness" (*Reading Biblical Narrative*, 148–149).

[59] Culpepper, *Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel*, 4.

[60] Ibid., 4–5.

[61] Long, *The Witness of Preaching Second Edition*, 40–41.

[62] David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 56.

[63] Craddock, *Preaching*, 174.

that replicate the open-ended nature of many biblical narratives. As Long points out open-ended narrative sermons require listeners to "have to roll up their sleeves and get involved in the project of making meaning in the sermon."[64]

A third and final suggestion focuses in on one such narratological element: point of view. When preparing a sermon from a narrative biblical text, preachers typically have the tendency to identify with certain characters or points of view in the text and against others. On this tendency Craddock observes that "usually in the course of intense engagement with a text the interpreter, quite unconsciously, identifies with or is against particular persons or actions in the text."[65] Craddock cautions that preachers should make a conscious effort to turn away from the tendency to identify with what he terms are the "best seats in the text."[66] Preachers might instead make the effort to discover and articulate alternative points of view from the text. For example, should not the listeners be exposed to the points of view of the priest and the Levite who (with apparently clean consciences) passed by the beaten man who was left for dead in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10. 25-37)? How difficult would it be for the preacher to give Judas a voice in the sermon to explain his point of view? Would it be possible to construct a sympathetic reading of Potiphar's wife in Gen 39, who is so often negatively characterized as a seductive and scheming *femme fatale*? Narrative analysis invites preachers to identify to some extent with the actions and motives of these and other characters.

Pushing still further, Buttrick argues that "our pulpit language must relate to a new twentieth-century consciousness that is simultaneous, perspectival, and complex."[67] Homileticians have noted that biblical texts are often interpreted and preached from a white, Western, male and Protestant point of view. However, in the current Western tradition preachers are proclaiming biblical messages to increasingly postmodern audiences who quickly tire of the same interpretative or theological angle of vision presented week after week. These audiences are capable of holding in tension multiple points of view on reality.

One possible way forward, therefore, involves multiple point-of-view narrative sermons. Such sermons are difficult to manage and often discouraged for splitting rhetorical and cognitive focus. But if the preacher understands how to use narrative elements to *glue these perspectives together narratively*, that is, in service to narrative meaning or function, it is possible that more of the postmodern complexity around us can be welcomed into our sermon preparation and delivery without sacrificing clarity or homiletical focus. Such sermons would invite the audience to experience—and to wrestle with—previously-unheard points of view. Such preaching would become more open-ended trusting the audience with the freedom to exercise their own narratology – placing multiple points of view into conversation and finishing the sermon with the aid of the Spirit. Creating this type of homiletical culture may be difficult to establish in practice but it brings the distinct possibility of increased dialogue, participation and much higher ownership over potential applications. Such sermons can enable the listener to form a sense of identity by means of identification with, and theological exploration of, the points of view represented by many characters within the biblical narratives. This outcome becomes a distinct possibility when listeners grapple with potentially new understandings from what may be familiar biblical narratives.

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[64] Long, *The Witness of Preaching Second Edition*, 41.
[65] Craddock, *As One Without Authority*, 119–120.
[66] Ibid., 120.
[67] Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 56.

Are Congregations Texts?

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Abstract: *It is a common sentiment among homileticians that preaching requires exegeting both the scriptural text and the congregational context. The relevancy of the preaching message, it is argued, depends in part upon a deep knowledge of the congregational culture. The preacher is therefore encouraged to "read" the culture of the congregation and discern how the symbols, practices, and actions of the congregation are used to make meaning so that the preacher might construct a fitting sermon. In this way, the congregation is likened to a text that awaits a reading by a literate observer. In this paper, I examine the limitations of such an analogy arguing that while a semiotic approach to congregations has merit it is often blind to the ways in which power and production influence the creation and reproduction of the congregational culture. Finally, the paper concludes with descriptions from recent homiletical works that offer productive alternatives to the semiotic approach to congregational study.*

In his famous poem, "Correspondences," Charles Baudelaire writes,

Nature is a temple, where the living Columns
sometimes breathe confusing speech;
Man walks within these groves of symbols,
Each of which regards him as a kindred thing.[1]

For Baudelaire, the world is a text, an obscure and abstruse text to be sure, but a text nonetheless. The tangled symbols of everyday life are awaiting an interpreter, one who can intimately gaze back at nature and make sense of the confused words. Baudelaire asserts that the universe is shot through with semantics and symbols. Specifically, words, the primary symbols of our world, are the very fabric of existence. The world is linguistic to its very core and if we are to ever gain understanding we must read the text that is our world. For Baudelaire and many others, the appropriate analogy for our relationship to reality is that of a reader and a text. Specifically, those sciences that concern themselves with the interpretation of practices, actions, and cultures have latched onto the assumption that the universe is essentially semantic. The metaphysical conviction that the world is primarily verbiage funds strategies of interpretation that approach culture, actions and rituals as if they are texts waiting to be read. In this paper, I want to examine the methodological consequences of such a view for the field of homiletics.

Within the field of homiletics, the important question—who are my hearers?—is linked to an important methodological question—by what means do I understand my hearers? Within the last thirty years, a common answer to the former ontological question has been that the hearers are in some part both a product and producer of the culture in which they reside. Thus, to understand their hearers, preachers ought to study the culture that is constituting and being constituted by the congregation. But what exactly is culture? Clifford Geertz, one of the United States' most influential anthropologists, asserts that culture has always been a text waiting to be read by the literate observer. He writes, "The concept of culture, I espouse…is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of

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[1] Charles Baudelaire, "Correspondences," *Le Fleur de Mal*. Trans. James McGowan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 19.

significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. It is the explication I am after, construing social expressions that are on their surface enigmatical."[2]

For Geertz, all actions, rituals, and practices, all objects, artifacts, and relics, whether linguistic or not, are part of the web of significance that constitutes reality. An interpreter can gain access to this reality by observing and "reading" the publicly available signs and symbols that represent local human experience. For Geertz, understanding culture is always an act of interpretation. The culture is a text, so to speak, where symbols are available to be "read." Yet, like a book, the symbols are not the end. The story that is made up of symbols that are contained within the book is the end. No one regards *Anna Karenina* to be a wonderful compilation of words, rather it is a transcendent piece of literature precisely because the words provide an avenue toward some greater story. Or as Northrop Frye puts it,[3] "You wouldn't go to Macbeth to learn about the history of Scotland— you go to it to learn what a man feels like after he's gained a kingdom and lost his soul."[4] This difference is crucial. Symbols are not the sole focus of study; instead they are assessed for both the way they make meaning and the type of meaning they make. Symbols are vehicles for meaning and story, they are not the end in and of themselves.[5] Geertz's symbolic anthropology is primarily concerned with how symbols shape the worldview, values and ethos of the social actors.[6]

According to a semiotic approach to culture the Eucharist feast is as much a text as one of Baudelaire's poems. Reading these texts requires organizing and making meaning from the network of significance made up of signs, symbols and actions. If you want to understand a culture, whether it is the foreign practice of Balinese cockfighting, or the idiosyncratic behavior of your local church, you must learn to read the signs that constitute the text of culture. Specifically, Geertz argues that the reader needs to map the structures of signification and render the enigmatic accessible by relating the text of the outside world to the world of her own experience.

Geertz's most devoted and able acolyte in the field of homiletics has been Lenora Tubbs Tisdale. In her book, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art*, Tisdale argues that preachers are called to preach both faithful *and* fitting sermons. Preaching is a practice that helps construct local theologies that are relevant for the unique context of the congregation. Preaching as local theology therefore must take serious account of the context of the congregation. As Tisdale puts it, "In preaching as local theology, exegesis of the congregation and its subcultures is not

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[2] Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretations of Culture* (New York: Basic Book, 1973), 3.

[3] A particularly important influence on Geertz.

[4] Northrop Frye, *The Educated Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1964), 64. As quoted by Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," *The Interpretation of Culture,* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 450.

[5] Some semioticians come dangerously close to focusing solely on the symbols and thereby ignoring the meaning that may lie behind the words. Geertz does not seem interested in cataloguing or providing a taxonomy of symbols, like Milton Singer, "Signs of Self: An Exploration of Semiotic Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 82, no. 3 (Sept. 1980): 485–507.

[6] Sherry Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology since the Sixties" *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26, no. 1 (Jan., 1984): 129. Ortner goes on to explain that Geertz's work has always leaned more toward describing the ethos of a culture rather than the worldview of the culture. Geertz seems more concerned with the distinctive flavor of the culture than the cognitive systems that the culture uses. Geertz has chosen the most elusive form of culture to study: ethos. Ortner surmises that this may provide a reason for his popularity: Geertz is one of the few thinkers who have built a method for observing and discussing otherness.

peripheral to proclamation, but central to its concerns."[7] For Tisdale, the preacher must become a part-time ethnographer (a "participant/observer" in her words) who studies the congregation in order to produce and preach a faithful and fitting word. As the part–time ethnographer, the preacher gathers and meaningfully arranges the local cultural detritus into a coherent corpus that accurately portrays the congregational ethos and worldview. This meaningful arrangement of the complex codes, symbols and actions is what Geertz calls "thick description." The point of this description, for Geertz and Tisdale, is not purely academic, rather symbolic analysis of culture is designed to gain access to the conceptual world of the subjects so that "we can, in some extended sense of the term, converse with them."[8]

Within the field of homiletics, the semiotic assumptions of Tisdale and Geertz are widespread.[9] Preachers are exhorted to "exegete" the scriptural texts *and* the congregational culture. Preachers are advised to study their culture by reading the practices and symbols that constitute congregational worldviews and ethoi. And yet, I am unconvinced that this approach to congregations is as helpful as the field has assumed. This paper is designed to slow the spreading assumption that understanding our congregations requires "reading" the "text" of local congregational culture. This paper is a reminder that metaphors need an internal antagonism and that an examination of how congregations are unlike texts can be as important as papers about the many ways in which the congregation are like texts.

Let me be clear, the depiction of congregations as texts is not a fundamentally flawed comparison. The description of congregations as texts can be quite useful in trying to discern the regular patterns of a large group of people. The synchronic assessment of a group of people as a whole has methodological merit. Thick description at its heart is an attempt to grasp the dynamics of culture as a whole all at once. In this way, thick description is akin to a map. It shows a territory all at once. The map brackets time and history out of the picture so that we can see everything all at once. The problem arises when we assume that a map of reality is a total depiction of the landscape. The map is not a replacement for reality. To be fair, I don't think that Geertz or Tisdale intend thick description to replace reality. Yet, their ideas in the hands of less professional observers their ideas have begun to lose their sophistication and complexity. The metaphor of the congregation as text is in danger of losing its internal antagonism, where the ways that congregations are unlike texts escape critical examination. The goal here is to remind us of the problems that come with assuming that congregations are texts and discuss some recent alternatives that might amend the semiotic approach to congregational study. To this end, I will first discuss three problems that come with the semiotic approach to interpreting culture and then conclude with a discussion of some recent alternative options to a semiotic approach to congregations within the field of homiletics.

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[7] Lenora Tubbs Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 48.

[8] Geertz, "Thick Description," 24; also quoted by Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art,* 59.

[9] Interestingly, the work of Clifford Geertz entered the field of homiletics through a back door opened by James Hopewell and his book, *Congregations: Stories and Structures*. While some homileticians, like James Nieman, Lenora Tubbs Tisdale, Charles Campbell, and John McClure, examine the Geertzian semiotics in their work, others are quite content to use Hopewell's appropriation of Geertz's semiotic ideas. See: James F. Hopewell, *Congregations: Stories and Structures* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1987); Tisdale, *Preaching as Local Theology and Folk Art* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997); John S. McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991); James R. Nieman, *Knowing the Context: Frames, Tools, and Signs for Preaching* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2008); Charles Campbell, *Preaching Jesus: New Directions for Homiletics in Hans Frei's Postliberal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

Problem #1: How Whole?

The first problem with the textual conception of congregational cultures is that it assumes that congregations are monolithic wholes. According to Geertz and Tisdale, the minister reads the congregation by examining the parts in order to make sense of the whole. The observer attends to the microscopic public texts and fashions these small signs into a coherent narrative. The ontological assumption at the center of this method is that cultures function uniformly and monolithically. Unique idiosyncratic texts of a small sample of people are assumed constitutive of the congregation as a whole. In this way, semiotic ethnography is synechdotal, the symbols stand in for the whole world. But congregations are not single coherent texts. In reality, they are full of contradiction and competing discourses. Signs, symbols and actions can as easily be the locus of distinction and struggle that divide congregations, as they can be touchstones around which congregational identity is formed.

In his famous essay, "Deep Play: Notes on a Balinese Cockfight," Geertz remarks in a footnote that there is little gender differentiation between men and women in Bali, yet the cockfight is one of the few places where women are excluded.[10] Given the total absence of women in the world of the cockfight some caution would be expected when drawing conclusions about the Balinese "culture." Geertz claims to read the texts that are present in the culture but consistently assumes that these texts are the product of the whole of the culture. The truth of the matter is that Geertz's conclusions about the cockfight as a "status blood bath"[11] might be an appropriate description of those who engage in the cockfight, but what about the other half of the Balinese population? Are they equally obsessed with their status?

Geertz and Tisdale would be the first to admit that cultures are not homogenous. And yet, the approach to congregations as text tacitly advocates rearranging multivalent and conflicted cultures into coherent and ordered pictures. The methodological assumption is that a congregation (or if we use anthropological language the "native") presents itself without distortion.

But congregations are very distorted and conflicted places. In his article, "Putting Hierarchy in its Place," Arjun Appadurai argues that ethnography over the past half century has subscribed to the idea that "natives" are simple, ahistorical, and unsullied people far from the metropolitan western world. Appadurai explains that ethnographers exempt themselves from seeing themselves as "natives" of their own place because they are "too enamored of the complexities of our history, the diversities of our societies, and the ambiguities of our collective conscience. When we find authenticity close to home we are more likely to label it *folk* than native…"[12] Whether we regard foreign cultures as "native" or "folk," the consequence is the same—incarceration. "Natives" do not *belong* to a particular place; rather they are *confined* to a particular place. Appadurai writes, "They [the "natives"] are confined by what they know, feel, and believe. They are prisoners of their 'mode of thought.' This is, of course an old and deep theme in the history of anthropological thought…"[13]

Appadurai goes on to conclude that the idea that "natives" are confined by their spatial and intellectual limitations is based upon the idea that cultures are "wholes."[14] Ethnographers are always prone to falling into the trap of believing that they are observing a pristine and untouched "culture" when in fact they are viewing a culture recently affected by a whole host of outside

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[10] Geertz, "Deep Play," *Interpretations of Culture,* 417–418.
[11] Ibid, 436.
[12] Arjun Appadurai, "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (February 1, 1988): 37.
[13] Ibid., 38
[14] Ibid.

interactions. Anthropologists naively assume that cultures are fundamentally incarcerated and therefore unaffected by surrounding cultures. Appadurai thus concludes that the idea of a "native" or "folk" culture, as understood by anthropology, is a figment of an anthropological imagination.[15] Anthropology has operated under the assumption that certain images and ideas are quintessential to the creation and preservation of a culture. Over time these ideas and images become "metonymic prisons" for particular cultures. Whole worlds are closed off from the influence of diffusionism, globalization, and historical transcultural interactions.[16]

When attempting to read a congregation or exegete a community the observer is always in danger of devising new "metonymic prisons" for the congregational culture. Preachers are tempted to assume that the congregation has only a single common narrative or has only one common folk dance. Yet, in reality, there are many dances and narratives that are operative in the congregation. In truth, congregations are full of many competing and diverse texts, because a congregation consists of many congregations. Congregations are as fractured as they are cohesive, they are as diverse as they are whole.

The totalizing tendency of semiotic approaches to culture stems in part from a method that reads the microscopic and public texts of culture as though they are indicative of the whole of culture. This is central to both Geertz and Tisdale's method. Ethnography is synechdotal: the symbols stand in for the whole world.[17] Cultural critic James Clifford argues that this ethnographic methodology privileges the position of the ethnographer as one who makes sense of the wild and varied discursive acts that take place in a culture on any given day. The ethnographer takes the texts and makes them "the corpus." This "corpus" is a fictive creation of the ethnographer designed to make sense of the competing and complex system of symbols and actors who employ those symbols.

In his provocative essay, "On Ethnographic Authority," Clifford argues that the ethnographer is not simply interpreting the discourse of actors in a culture; in actuality, the ethnographer is making sense of her own field notes, her own memories *and* the discourse of the actors.[18] Thus, the research experience is turned into its own textual corpus at a location far away from the initial discursive occasion of production. For Clifford this has important consequences, he writes, "The data thus reformulated need no longer be understood as the communication of specific persons….A textualized ritual or event is no longer closely linked to the production of that event by the specific actors. Instead these texts become evidences of an englobing context, a 'cultural' reality."[19] As actors in the text are removed from their initial productive actions, a fictive, more generalized (and more absolute) author of the production is substituted.

In the case of Geertz's account of the cockfight, the various actors with whom Geertz interacted, are lumped into one group, "The Balinese." Clifford writes, "By representing…the Balinese as whole subjects, sources of meaningful intention, the ethnographer transforms the

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[15] Ibid., 39.

[16] Homiletician Eunjoo Mary Kim makes a similar argument in her book, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization.* See: Eunjoo Mary Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 6–10.

[17] In this regard, Geertz departs from his philosophical muse, Paul Ricouer. Ricouer does not posit a strict relationship between the part and whole when talking about the relationships of text and world. He only argues that there is a necessary relationship between these two parts. Geertz on the other hand seems to argue that by gathering the texts of a culture we can create a corpus that allows the ethnographer to create a thick description of the culture.

[18] Put another way, Geertz reads rules into the society where really there are only the regularities of the observer's experience.

[19] James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art* (Harvard University Press, 1988), 39.

research situation's ambiguities and diversities of meaning into an integrated portrait."[20] What has dropped out of sight in Geertz's depiction of "the Balinese" is the actuality of competing symbols, actors, and cultures. In an attempt to find a common text, distinction is too often ignored and cultures are represented as cohesive wholes.

Problem #2: Product or Production?

The second critique of a semiotic approach to congregations is related to the first. The textual approach to congregations treats congregations as a product of its actors without ever discussing the role of the congregations in production. Put another way, congregations are not written by the actors, they are always in the process of being written.

In his essay, "The Seduction of Anthropology," William Roseberry puts it this way, "Here we confront the major inadequacy of the text as a metaphor for culture. A text is written; it is not writing. To see cultures as an ensemble of texts or an art form is to remove the culture from the process of its creation."[21] By conceptualizing culture as a text, Tisdale and Geertz have removed the cultural products from their historical production; a production that is consistently underwritten by asymmetrical power relations and histories of domination and subjugation.

Dwight Conquergood, ethnographer and professor of performance theory, suggests that the totalizing tendencies of the textual approach to culture stem from an ethnocentric ethnographic method that cannot account for the presence of difference. Conquergood puts it this way, "Instead of listening, absorbing, and standing in solidarity with the protest performances of the people… the ethnographer, in Geertz's scene, stands above and behind the people and, uninvited, peers over their shoulders to read their texts, like an overseer or a spy."[22] Geertz's method contains an intrinsic imbalance of power that privileges the vantage of the ethnographer's intrusive gaze. This intrusive gaze requires silent acquiescence by the observed and the ignored.[23] Geertz never problematizes the ethnographer's access to (or choice of) the text that she observes; rather Geertz assumes that the products or "texts" of culture are on public display for anyone who would take the time to see them. But in actuality, what is on display in public is the message of the dominant power structure. The observer is never fully privy to the "subjugated knowledge" of those at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Conquergood argues that a methodology that uses a text-based metaphor will necessarily ignore those texts that come from non-dominant regions of the culture because, "they are illegible; they exist, by and large, as active bodies of meaning, outside of books, eluding the forces of inscription that would make them legible, and thereby legitimate."[24] Put simply, it is hard to account for distinction when the presence of distinction is often invisible.

At its heart, the semiotic approach to culture is primarily a synchronic approach to culture in that it brackets out the role of time and production from it method. Such synchronic commitments often prevent the observer from engaging in the equally important diachronic assessment of the histories that produced the culture. A synchronic approach to culture abolishes time from the analysis of the congregation, seeing the vast historically conditioned culture as a single continuous landscape. A diachronic approach to culture assumes that things are not always

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[20] Ibid, 40.

[21] Ibid, 24

[22] Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research," *The Drama Review* 46 (2002): 150.

[23] Conquergood tips his own methodological hand when he writes, "The strain and tension of this scene are not mediated by talk or interaction; both the researcher and the researched face the page as silent readers instead of turning to face one another and, perhaps, open a conversation." Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 146.

as they have been and that a historical account of the culture is as important for understanding the culture as the current web of symbols within the culture.

Semiotic exegesis approaches the congregation as if it is suspended in time but rarely leads to discussions about the ways in which past disjunctions and competing narratives disrupted production within the culture and thus altered the web of symbols. Disjunction and the failed reproduction of the system lead to change, and change cannot be measured without time—without some sense of history or continuity. The lack of a diachronic component in congregational study prevents the observer from accounting for those instances of difference and disjunction that have shaped (and are shaping) the congregation. With a method that oscillates between the synchronic snapshot and diachronic landscape the ethnographer would be better equipped to assess the wider cultural context but also recognize the new instances of production that are initiating change into the culture.

Problem #3: Who's Watching Who?

The final critique of a textual conception of congregations is less about what the approach proposes and more about what it fails to propose, namely, a methodological check on the authority of the observer. When approaching the congregation the observer is cast as the interpreter of the "foreign" and "opaque" practices of the society, thereby assuming an authority as the hermeneut for an audience. The practices of a people are filtered through the experience of the observer who then organizes an account of the culture *as it i*s. The unwritten behaviors, beliefs, actions and rituals are gathered and organized into an accessible and coherent description of the congregation. Vincent Crapanzo likens the ethnographer to Hermes, the messenger, who

> given methodologies for uncovering the masked, the latent, the unconscious, may even obtain his message through stealth. He presents languages, cultures, and societies in all their opacity, their foreignness, their meaninglessness; then like the magician, the hermeneut, Hermes himself clarifies the opaque, renders the foreign familiar, and gives meaning to the meaningless. He decodes the message. He interprets.[25]

Like Hermes, the ethnographer roams invisibly. It is impossible to fix the observer's vantage point. And this invisible vantage hides possible objections to the ethnography. The ethnographer creates a self-portrait as disinterested and objective, promising like Hermes, not to lie, but never attempting to tell the whole truth either. The ethnographer reserves the right to leave out information deemed not immediately pertinent, or reserves the right to translate the actions and realities of other people into the language of a chosen audience. For Crapanzo, the powerful conclusions of ethnographers are made possible only by hiding the invisible and contradictory truths through exclusion and rhetoric. Ethnographic accounts of cultures are always partial, provisional, and incomplete because all knowledge is partial, provisional and incomplete.

Congregational observation carries with it the temptation to separate out the observer's own subjectivity and allow others to believe that their world is being interpreted by a non-existent and silent observer. The textual approach to congregational study rarely admits that the observer assumes a unique place of authority when describing the congregation. I am not saying that the observers have no authority or that they ought to divest themselves of their own authority.

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[25] Vincent Crapanzano, "Hermes Dilemma: The Masking of Subversion in Ethnographic Description," eds. James Clifford & George E. Marcus, *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography: A School of American Research Advanced Seminar* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 51.

Further, I am not suggesting that gaining authority is inherently a problem; rather, I am advocating for a method of ethnography that pays as much attention to the watcher as the watched. I am advocating for displaying epistemic humility alongside conclusions built upon thorough research and hard won insight. As it is, the methods of Tisdale and Geertz assume an authority but neither provides a rationale as to why the observer should warrant such authority or what the limits of such authority ought to be. Missing from these analytical methods is a backward critique of the observer's own subjective ideas of normativity, which may hinder the reading of the culture.

New Directions in Homiletics

While the influence of semiotics is still widespread, its prominence is in jeopardy as homileticians have begun to rethink the value of the semiotic approach to culture and provide alternative interpretive paradigms. New conceptions of congregations have, in turn, dictated new methods of congregational study. Curiously, those who were among the first to be intrigued by a Geertzian ethnographic method are among the most astute proponents of alternative visions of the congregation.

For instance, John McClure, who leaned on Geertz in his early work *The Four Codes of Preaching*,[26] recognizes that while the semiotic approach to culture is helpful in understanding the *represented* theology and culture within congregations, it does not help us understand the micro changes that are always and at once altering the shape of the congregation.[27] McClure writes, "Ultimately, semiotic approaches do not take preaching and embed it within the living dialogical process in which theological meaning is being created and shaped by the ongoing conversations and verbal interactions that make up church (and cultural) life."[28] As an alternative to the semiotic method of congregational study, McClure turns to post-semiotic philosophies of communication that argue that utterances, not signs, are the fundamental unit of communication. The utterance is alive and moving, it is an address that has an address. It is has an aim, a direction and recognizes the presence of the other. The utterance is not static, but exists in the uncontrolled territory between speaking subjects. The methodological demands of the congregational observer thus shift from trying to observe and arrange the visible public signs of the culture, to observing the event of theological communication in the moments when it is birthed by two (or more) subjects in dialogue. Moreover, the shift from a semiotic framework to a post-semiotic framework is accompanied by a shift of the role of the preacher from ethnographer or participant/observer to what McClure calls a "mashup theologian." Like a DJ whose own "voice" is made up of the samples, beats and hooks of other musicians and whose art relies not in the creation of a brand new tune, but the production of the right tune for the right time, the preacher uses the utterances (that which is "in the crate," so to speak) of the congregation, to produce new theological meaning. McClure writes, "Mashup theologians, therefore, will be pragmatic to a fault… they embrace the logic of textuality and file-sharing, arguing that all words, traditions, and styles of speech are borrowed, plagiarized, and exchanged in an attempt to communicate—that is, to discover and share a religious worldview."[29] McClure,

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[26] It should be noted that McClure's semiotic vision for preaching was influenced primarily by the French linguist Roland Barthes. McClure makes use of Geertz in this early work but is less devoted to the whole of the Geertzian paradigm than some other homileticians. See: John McClure, *The Four Codes of Preaching: Rhetorical Strategies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991).

[27] John McClure, "Preaching and Theology," *Quarterly Review* 24, No. 3 (Fall, 2004): 257.

[28] Ibid.

[29] John McClure, *Mashup Religion: Pop Music and Theological Invention* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 102.

alters the dominate metaphor of semiotics by arguing that congregations are not products, not "texts," but producers. Life is a studio and humans are always producing new hooks, beats, and tunes, and it is the job of the preacher to retrieve these creative utterances and fashion new theological meaning in spite of how seemingly incommensurate these utterances might sound.[30]

Like McClure, Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen has also recognized the benefits of post-semiotic communication theory. Lorensen uses the work of Russian communication theorist Mikhail Bahktin to argue that preaching is always "co-authored" by the speaker and the listener.[31] The world of the congregation necessarily intrudes upon the carefully crafted words of the preacher. The congregation is not a passive receptacle for preaching ideas but is always in dialogue with the preacher. This reality is supported by empirical research conducted by Lorensen's co-researcher, Marianne Gaarden. Gaarden conducted qualitative interviews with 29 churchgoers and five ministers from five congregations about the experience of listening to a sermon. Gaarden found that congregants weren't passive listeners but were active in "creating their own meaning in a dialogic interaction with the sermonic discourse…."[32] Given this reality, Gaarden and Lorensen are less concerned with investigating how to invite churchgoers into the preacher's mind and more interested in researching "how and to what extent churchgoers allow preachers, among others, to have dialogical input on their inner reflections, or implicit sermonic discourses during the polyphonic event of preaching."[33] Moreover, given the reality that churchgoers are the primary authors of the sermon and therefore controlling the terms of the sermon, the function of the preacher changes from simply a dialogue partner to an "'agent of interruption,' who enters into and disturbs the inner dialogue of the preacher."[34] In Gaarden and Lorensen's schema, there is no static congregation that can serve as text to be read, not even the sermon is a text, it is an utterance and therefore prone to change in the process of its reception. Moreover, the congregation is atomized as each individual engages in his/her own dialogue with the preacher, and while these dialogues might sound similar they cannot be assumed to be the same. To the extent that these dialogues are similar it is because utterances have emerged in a common situated context. What exactly constitutes the context is outside the scope of Lorensen and Gaarden's work. The value of Lorensen and Garden's research is the way in which it complicates the task of the preacher who looks to observe the congregation. Lorensen and Gaarden provide a vision of the congregation that resists the prying eyes of the ethnographer with a field notebook. After all, it is difficult (maybe impossible?) to observe the inner dialogue of a person in a specific moment.[35]

Charles Campbell is another homiletician whose work was once friendly with a Geertzian semiotic vision, but who is now exploring alternatives to the vision of a congregation as a text. In the book, *Preaching Fools*, Campbell, with his colleague Johan Cilliers, describes the preacher as a fool who stand between cultures looking for the unexpected and foolish ways in which God's new creation is entering the old age. The preacher is called to discern "the ironic,

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[30] Ibid, 103.

[31] Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, "Carnivalized Preaching- in Dialogue with Bakhtin and Other-wise Homiletics," *Homiletic* 36, no. 1 (2011): 26–44.

[32] Marianne Gaarden & Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, "Listeners as Authors in Preaching – Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives," *Homiletic* 38, no. 1 (2013): 29.

[33] Ibid. 33.

[34] Ibid. 45.

[35] Even if a person were to reflect upon their dialogue after the fact, the reflection would be a second order memory of an internal dialogue and important communicative data would be lost. Similar to the ethnographer who writes thick description from her field notes, so too would the inner dialogue be removed from its original situation and therefore be tamed of its own hurly burly character.

cruciform fragments of God's new creation within the shattered fragments of the old age…"[36] Additionally, the preacher participates in the in-breaking of the kingdom by assuming the posture of a fool who chooses to occupy the liminal spaces of the world in order to break down the reified boundaries of oppressive power structures. Campbell and Cilliers recognize that structures of power seem to be built of iron, and yet, the fool is capable of melting these iron structures by instigating liminality, altering perspectives, and calling for discernment.[37] The very presence of the fool character in so many cultures, betrays the Geertzian assumption that a common set of symbols could be gathered to discuss a single text. The fool exists in between the competing worldviews of a single culture. The fool is not beholden to any one culture but lives intertextually. Moreover, the power of the fool resides in the ability to be versed in both the symbols of the powerful and the weak. The fool, in a liminal position, recognizes that a culture is full of competing worldviews that are not immediately compatible. The fool is the one who points out the antagonistic symbols within culture in order to subvert the powerful who assume a single semiotic landscape and empower the weak whose own signs and practices are ignored by the powerful.

Finally, EunJoo Mary Kim has provided a strong critique of the semiotic method as anachronistic to a new globalized world. Kim critiques the homiletical appropriation of semiotics for ignoring the radical difference that permeates our cultures. Difference, Kim adds, that is more conspicuous in our increasingly globalized and urbanized world. The semiotic approach to congregations might have made sense in a more parochial world but it is harder to support when "the majority of Christian churches today have become urbanized and globalized; their members lives as social beings in a multiracial and multicultural society on a global scale; and their churches coexist with different ethnic, denominational, and religious communities in close proximity."[38] Kim makes clear that while local practice still remains, no congregation has remained untouched by the global forces of economics, cultural diversity, information sharing, and climate change. Thus, the context for most congregations is an idiosyncratic amalgamation of local tradition, practice, and language and global sociopolitical, ecological and cultural forces. Kim calls this web of local and global forces, "glocalization," and argues that preaching must become "transcontextual" if it is to speak into this new glocalized world.[39] For Kim, a transcontextual paradigm for preaching needs to stereoscopically attend to both the local context and global forces simultaneously. Like the other post-semiotic proposals above, the specter of "otherness" looms. Kim recognizes that the presence of otherness demands careful hermeneutical strategies and ought to give the preacher pause as she attempts to understand her congregation. Similar to Campbell, Kim encourages the preacher to seek a liminal space of interpretation. Kim writes, "In the liminal space, dynamic interaction happens among the world of the text, the world of the context and the world of the preacher's own toward a new reality."[40] It is in the in-between spaces of culture that the vision of otherness becomes so apparent and the metaphor of the congregation as "text" seems most inadequate. A flat synchronic map of the world is not very useful when caught between the shifting landscapes of a glocalized world.

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[36] Charles L. Campbell & Johan H. Cilliers, *Preaching Fools: The Gospel as Rhetoric of Folly,* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), 172.
[37] Ibid. 70.
[38] Kim, *Preaching in an Age of Globalization*, 9.
[39] Ibid, 41.
[40] Ibid, 69.

As noted above, I have no intention of sabotaging the textual approach to congregations. Rather, my purpose is to provide a helpful description of the ways in which a textual approach to congregations can lead to obfuscation rather than greater clarity. A textual approach to the study of congregations can be very helpful in understanding some of the pre-established harmonies of the congregational culture. But not everything is pre-established harmony; cultures are formed as much by distinction and struggle as they are by harmony and unity. The synchronic observation without a corresponding diachronic move will lead to objectivist fictions. The unchecked authority of the observer can sponsor as much dissonance as harmony. My hope is that by bringing to light these critiques of a text based approach to congregations we might begin to produce paradigms of congregational interpretation like the ones above that have respect for the ways in which congregations are both whole and fractured, both product and producer, and both subject and object.

Congregations are both like a text and unlike a text. Congregations are like a book, but unlike any book in the library. Congregations are like a book of questions and provisional answers, a book of conversation and dialogue. This book is not simply full of words, but it has pictures as well, some of the pages in this book are illegible, some pages are written in code that is impenetrable to certain readers. This book has some pages torn out and some pages glued back in. Some of these pages sing—simple melodies just lift off the page. Some of the pages are written in an angry scrawl and some pages in a floral script. The book has many authors and it is always in the process of being changed, altered, and rewritten. The point of the observer is not to redact, compile, and harmonize, the point of the observer is to point out that this book exists and that people in the congregation can keep adding to it because, in the end, the book is never finished, and, thanks be to God, the book has room for everyone to add something.

Joseph Blenkinsopp. *David Remembered: Kingship and National Identity in Ancient Israel*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013. 219 pages. $26.

Conveniently, Joseph Blenkinsopp clearly states his intended aim for *David Remembered* in the very first line of his book: to trace one strand in the social and political life of the people of Israel from the sixth century B.C.E. to the early second century of the common era (1). That "one strand" is the legacy of David and the Davidic dynasty. Blenkinsopp uses biblical texts, early Jewish texts, and extra-biblical A.N.E. sources to reconstruct the various ways that David's legacy was remembered centuries after the Davidic line was extinct, what attempts were made to restore the Davidic monarchy, how various prophets viewed new leaders in light of David's legacy, and how that memory shaped a people's response to foreign rule (i.e. Assyria, Babylon, Rome, Persia, etc.).

Blenkinsopp begins his historical survey by retelling and recasting the narrative of Israel and Judah's dissolution, arguing that the biblical texts present Josiah as the last of the Davidic line. He then moves on to the various ways that the Hebrew people attempted to restore the native monarchy or to interpret their political situation theologically when such attempts failed (chapters 2–6). Factions who advocated for the restoration of a Benjamin-Saul monarchy, the Shaphan family's attempts to restore the Davidic monarchy during Jeremiah's prophetic career, Deutero-Isaiah's theological support for Cyrus as the new anointed ruler, and Haggai and Zechariah's approval of Zerubbabel are all carefully examined. After looking at Davidic themes in later prophecy (chapters 7–8), including apocalyptic prophecy, Blenkinsopp turns to David's legacy in the spiritual and physical resistance to Rome (chapter 9). In this final chapter, Blenkinsopp provides a brief treatment of the Davidic legacy in Jesus' ministry arguing that, "the gospel record about Jesus is the only explicit attestation of royal, Davidic messianism through the entire period of Roman rule" (176). Although the gospels do present Jesus' ministry in connection with the Davidic monarchy, Blenkinsopp presents a chastened argument for how significant this association was for the gospel writers.

David Remembered is a compelling read that illuminates how David's legacy is remembered and utilized in the centuries after his death; further, it corrects common assumptions that attitudes surrounding his kingship and its future restoration were monolithic and mainstream. Blenkinsopp is remarkably thorough and also quite careful with his assertions. Whenever he goes beyond the bounds of what can be explicitly gleaned from his sources, he is quick to remind the reader that his assertion is simply that. Still, he rarely goes beyond logical and responsible claims.

In my opinion, there are two places where *David Remembered* falls short despite its overwhelming positive merits. First, the introduction sets up an intriguing implication for the historical survey found within the book—Blenkinsopp claims that if we understand how one monarchy was remembered and reappropriated, then we may better understand "the world that we live in, how we arrived at where we are, and what our future prospects may be" (3). He even parallels David's remembrance in Israel to King Arthur's remembrance in Great Britain, highlighting how the legacies of both legendary kings have survived to present day and continue to affect a nation's identity. This line of argument is rich and fascinating, yet Blenkinsopp does not return to it or provide anything beyond this introductory query. The second disappointment is that Blenkinsopp rarely mentions Psalms and he never gives them any sort of systematic treatment. The psalms attributed to David or the psalms that invoke David's character provide remembrances of the king long after his death. One would expect for their theology to either be examined or for their exclusion to be addressed.

David Remembered is remarkably readable and lucid despite its hefty task. It does not require an understanding of the Hebrew language, but it does assume more than a basic familiarity with the history of Israel. This book is best suited for students in Hebrew Bible and/ or History, who have moved beyond their introductory education in their fields, through advanced scholars. For the homilitician, this book does deepen one's knowledge of the Hebrew Bible. Obtaining any greater depth of knowledge in the Hebrew Bible certainly results in more responsible and nuanced preaching. The final chapter would probably hold the most interest for the Christian homilitician; however, one might be disappointed to find that typological and figural readings of the David/Jesus connection are not more prominent in ancient literature.

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Richard Horsley and Tom Thatcher. *John, Jesus, and the Renewal of Israel.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. 201 pages. $15.48.

As the title indicates, this book analyzes the Gospel of John as a source for the historical Jesus. The authors argue that the fourth Gospel portrays Jesus' mission as a movement to mobilize the people of Israel against the rulers of Israel, who had political and economical hegemony around the temple in Jerusalem under the rule of the Roman Empire in the first century.

Having designated John as "a spiritual Gospel," historical Jesus studies have been mainly focused on the Synoptics. However, by using both of literary criticism and historical analysis of socio-political conflicts in Roman Palestine, the authors demonstrate that the Gospel "tells a historical story." Horsley and Thatcher contend that Jesus' activities are inseparable from the political movement that tried to bring a renewal to people's political-religious lives by bringing together Israel's entire heritage: the Galileans, the Judeans, and the Samaritans.

Rather than studying the historical Jesus by focusing on sayings, episodes, and theological statements of the past, this project approaches John's Gospel as one whole, orally performed story of antiquity. A series of episodes are viewed as fundamental components that create the overarching story. For example, turning water into wine and healing a royal official's son are signs of people trusting in Jesus in Galilee. The act of cleansing the temple depicts Jesus' attack on the exploitation of the people for the benefit of the ruling elite in Jerusalem. Jesus' meeting with the woman at Jacob's well in Sychar is a "pointed inclusion of the Samaritan version of popular Israelite tradition in Jesus' renewal of all Israel." The temple, claimed by the Judean rulers as the only legitimate place of worship, is said by Jesus to be just "a temporary, historical institution." To worship "in spirit and truth," without any centralized institution, is the ultimate way to tear down the walls between Judeans and Samaritans and bring all of Jacob's children together. The authors of this book remind readers that Passover, which had originally been a celebration of exodus from Egyptian rule once was concentrated in households, but became centralized in Jerusalem, which resulted in exploitation. Jesus' action of feeding the multitude in the wilderness at Passover not only served to reject temple politics, but also to substitute the Passover festival for a popular alternative celebration in the countryside. Healings on Sabbath in pools of purification, one at Bethestha (5:1-9) and another at Siloam (9:1-7), were also Jesus' acts of repudiation of Judean law and its enforcers. John's Jesus claims that his life-giving work supersedes Judean law and his authority is given by his Father (5:22; 9:39).

Other Gospels describe Jesus' activities of healings and exorcisms primarily in Galilee and nearby areas and present his confrontation with the high priest and scribes in Jerusalem at the end. However, John's Gospel not only presents Jesus confronting the temple and its rulers in Jerusalem from the outset, but it also depicts him as a spokesperson, in all aspects of everyday life, for "a popular movement of renewal in opposition to the rulers of Judea and their Roman overlords." That supposed opposition was also the reason for Jesus' crucifixion by the Romans, which the writers argue is clearly described in John's Gospel but remains somewhat unclear in other Gospels.

Scholars, students, and preachers will appreciate this interdisciplinary work not just because of the new findings in Johannine research, but also because of the rich historical non-biblical resources that this book brings into the discussion. Even though the authors cautiously mention this work of searching for the historical Jesus in the fourth Gospel as a "new" and "provisional exploration" recognizing the value of many other approaches, this book gives readers like me more than enough reason to recommend it to my colleagues and students. I hope I can see more similar work in the future.

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Lucy Bregman. *The Ecology of Spirituality: Meanings, Virtues, and Practices in a Post-Religious Age*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014. 190 pages. $29.95.

The word *spirituality* yields an overwhelming number of definitions. Each of these definitions ramifies according to a desire for wholeness—a yearning for meaning and purpose capable of unifying a holistic vision of life. In her book *The Ecology of Spirituality: Meanings, Virtues, and Practices in a Post-Religious Age,* Lucy Bregman wades into this murky semantic swamp the in the service of grounding the word in terms of professions and practices. It is well worth the read.

Bregman opens by tracing the genealogy of spirituality. She argues that "even if spirituality is a new category needing new definitions, it is also itself a legacy of other areas and activities and theories about human nature. Those who offer seemingly fresh and original definitions of spirituality do not appear to have pondered the strengths and weaknesses of this ancestry" (28). In particular, Bregman sketches the movement from what she labels a "two-poled definition" of spirituality—one that accounts for both the inward, subjective dimension of individuals and the outward, objective focus upon an object of apprehension and aspiration. She argues that rather than getting lost in the divisive rhetoric between secular versus religious understandings of spirituality, analyses that attend to the occlusion of one pole over another will yield more fruitful understandings of the core differences between definitions of spirituality.

Accordingly, Bregman moves toward articulating the *practice* of spirituality. This chapter will offer much in terms of dialogue with contemporary homiletics, suffused as it is by the drive toward understanding preaching as a practice of the church *à la* Bourdieu and MacIntyre. Bregman is right to note that the turn to spirituality in contemporary culture is simultaneously a turn from merely *believing* in something to actually *doing* something. This seemingly straightforward assessment is vexing, however, when one considers the one-dimensionality of much contemporary spirituality. Said differently, when spirituality is understood as innate, universal and inescapable—when one *has* spirituality, when one *is* spiritual—it makes little sense to think of spirituality in terms of practice; when one already *is* one has no need to *become*.

Bregman takes St. Theresa of Avila's spiritual practices as a privileged example of the *practice* of spirituality, as movement or progress toward that which transcends the inner self: God. Drawing from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre as a complement to her argument, she shows that every practice implies a lack, a void of knowledge. Bregman's assessment is worth citing in full:

> All the practical pieces on "enhancing our spirituality" promoted today tout techniques that derive from and depend upon ancient disciplines such as yoga, meditation, contemplative prayer practices, and so on. . . . But they do not, repeat, do not grow directly from the definitions of spirituality as "the search for meaning" or "sense of connection." . . . There is no conceptual continuity between the contemporary definitions of spirituality (one-poled, dependent on the inner self) and the practices that now fascinate many of spirituality's advocates, along with many of the more traditionally religious (41).

Chapters four through six articulate what Bregman calls "the intellectual ecology of spirituality." Helpfully, she makes her case from three discrete fields of knowledge: psychology, religious studies, and sociology of religion. In chapters seven through nine, Bregman presents what she labels "niches for spirituality." These are locales wherein spirituality has found a home: health care, the workplace, and recreation. Bregman provides us with a well-written and cogent account

of contemporary spirituality. By tracing both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions of the term, she presents a balanced account of the term and its usage between the spiritualism-as-narcissism camp and the spiritualism-as-eschatological/utopian deliverer.

My only critique is that I found the book short by two chapters. I would have appreciated a chapter on the intellectual ecology of spirituality vis-à-vis *theological studies*. Perhaps her fondness for a Tillichian paradigm of understanding the religious dimensions of spirituality is to blame for this oversight, but ignoring the field of theological studies is glaring in a treatment on spirituality. A second chapter that would have helped me would examine the church (or at least houses of worship in general) as another "niche" for spirituality. Churches are places in which practice and belief are united—more or less holistically—and where the religious and the spiritual are blurred. In a book aiming to clear up "the confusions, conflations, and murkiness of these issues" (166), I can think of no domain where the conversation gets more muddled than in ecclesial discourse.

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Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson. *Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible*. New York, NY: Morehouse, 2012. 192 pages. $14.66.

As digital media becomes a more entrenched part of everyday life, it is also making a significant impact on the work of the church. Some fear this as an encroachment of the secular world on the sacred spaces of the church. Others see this as a new method of spreading the gospel and making ministry more relevant in the 21st century.

Elizabeth Drescher and Keith Anderson have written *Click 2 Save: The Digital Ministry Bible* as a practical guide for all of those in ministry who want to engage the possibilities offered by digital and social media. This book is a helpful guide for incorporating digital media into the life of the church in a number of areas. The first thing necessary is a definition of digital media, which they provide.

Digital media is the set of practices that extend spiritual care, formation, prayer, evangelism, and other manifestations of grace into online spaces life Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, where more and more people gather to nurture, explore, and share their faith today (1). Their definition also includes how both online and offline digital media can enhance ministry for the church.

The next area of insight they offer is a chapter on how social media is transforming the landscape of our culture in order for them to lay the groundwork for how digital media can impact ministry. Laying out the "Typical US Social Networking Participant" in an accessible graphic, with additional graphics for the typical Facebook and Twitter participants, allows congregations to better understand how they might understand the range of digital media users likely in our contexts (23-25). Chapter one ends with a social media ministry survey that would be helpful for pastors, preachers, and churches alike (29-31). One of the most helpful elements of this book is the addition of definitions and sidebars that offer supportive information to the reader. While a few times, I wanted more time spent on these comments and facts, they added greatly to the effectiveness of the book.

Chapter two looks at the issue of real presence on social media platforms and developing an authentic voice on those media sites. One of the ideas discussed repeatedly in the 21st century is authenticity. This chapter helps those involved in digital media to determine how best to articulate their faith and ministry in a consistent and authentic manner. An excellent additional piece in this chapter is the wisdom from several digital media users about how they utilize media and how they found their own voice.

Chapter three is a primer on the different social media platforms available today. The variety of platforms and the ways those platforms can be incorporated into one's ministry is an important discussion to have. The authors provide guidance on this point that is both helpful and informative. Included in this discussion are the benefits and limitations of several platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Blogs, YouTube, and Foursquare (60, 75, 86, 93, 104, 115). While there are additional platforms that are being used by ministry teams—Pinterest, to search for creative images and ideas, and Instagram, for posting photos of worship or group settings, to name just two—the list and information the authors provide is exhaustive enough for most communities of faith.

Chapter four provides a glimpse into how digital sources and helpful guides for providing hospitality and welcome can enhance ministry and create digital sacred space. Leading users of digital media to create "liminal space" through their interactions online is an important part of this book (138). Providing opportunities for pastoral care, holding persons in prayer, creating moments to affirm the ordinary, and guiding persons into disciplined living are helpful options provided by the authors (139-143). As a preaching professor, I appreciated the short section on

making proclamation participatory through the use of digital ministry (147-151). As I read this section I wanted even more, but it is a great preliminary analysis of how preaching can be impacted by social media interactions. Expanding the community in conversation about preaching and proclamation is a 21st century reality that the authors and others believe cannot be ignored. Throughout this chapter, Drescher and Anderson provide examples of preachers, advocates, and pastors who utilize digital media in profound ways to augment their ministry. In the concluding chapter, the reader is provided a synopsis of how digital media provides an additional opportunity for incarnational ministry along a number of planes of existence—in person, online, and others. They also provide some necessary cautions.

This book is an excellent resource for engaging in digital ministry; however there are some weaknesses in the book. One is that its usefulness is limited to those for whom digital ministry is a newer process. Writing for all levels of digital experience would be problematic; therefore these authors chose to provide a resource that would be most beneficial for people needing an entry point into digital media. That makes sense in so many ways, but it also means that for those with more digital expertise there are portions of the book that are less useful. Overall, this is an intriguing book with insights and insider information about platforms and ideas essential for persons wishing to engage digital ministry in the 21st century.

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Meredith Gould. *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2013. 133 pages. $13.18.

Since the late 1990s, times have already been transformed with the invention of social networking services (SNS) in the context of globalization. In general, those who were merely passive receivers of the mass media played a significant role in one-way communication in the past, are transfigured as dynamic senders, who create unique media content by one's own and keep watch over the mass media by actively using social media platforms. That is, the hierarchical one-way communication structure between one sender and multiple receivers is no longer working in current society. It also challenges that the one-way communication-centered churches are no longer quietly relevant for a ubiquitous social media world. Without doubt, the secular and sacred lives of individuals are living in, with, and through social media platforms.

In this sense, Meredith Gould's book written in 2013, *The Social Media Gospel: Sharing the Good News in New Ways*, is a valuable basic resource for those who want either fully or partially to be in charge of digital ministry or for users who are quietly interested in this inevitable social media-entered ministry. In this book, as the digital strategist and communications consultant, Gould's understanding of the positive relationship between digital ministry and social networking services (SNS) or social media platforms (SMP), such as Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube, Blog and so on, has fully engaged her sustained intellectual, spiritual, professional exploration, as well as her abundant experiences, based on her personal social media platforms. Therefore, one can easily recognize the author's ultimate intention to present the readers with practical and action-oriented guidelines of these extraordinarily powerful communication tools (58-82). These instruments are not toys or simply interesting things for just making fun, but are tools inclusively to fulfill digital ministry, within mature communities of faith, while enhancing interactive relationships with those who do not and those who cannot attend the church on a regular basis (52-54, 105).

This book is especially distinctive for users in digital ministry, who want sociologically to comprehend participants' characteristics on social media platforms. As a sociologist, her analysis on participants' gender, race, ethnicity, age (13-17), learning styles/preferences (18-21), personal types (22-26), social behaviors/attitudes, and the Social Technographics Ladder developed by Forrester analysts, Charlene Li and Josh Bernoff (39-41), such as Inactives, Spectators, Joiners, Collectors, Critics, and Creators, enable users to comprehensively understand their own particular digital ministry context and participants' general tendencies. As Gould introduces her book on YouTube (*http://youtu.be/iXxzunf-Sfk)*, this book demonstrates well that the author's passion is transparent in that she is eager to introduce social media platforms as valuable communication infra structures while, at the same time, critically articulating their pros and cons (108), based on the usage of social media platforms.

From my observation, Meredith Gould's book arouses a two-fold curiosity because her guideline about "the symptom of social media burnout" is intensively introduced, though not in depth (108). First, in her book, Gould recommends that church leaders' effective time management for digital ministry is required in order to avoid burnout (106-109). However, as Gould comments, if a virtual community is a real community in real life (27-31), it is not as easy to maintain it through one's sheer determination as she suggests. One may spend one's time as a time-killer by being fully immersed in social media platforms. In terms of time management, if one cannot timely control the usage of social media platforms, there exists the danger of it becoming addictive, much like internet-game addiction. From the perspective of the scope of pastoral care, these are unchartered waters. In addition, one needs to be seriously concerned with the potentially dangerous psychological impact from it and its aftereffects. We encounter various

responses based on one's personal opinion regarding social media platforms (102-105). It has been reported that numerous participants have suffered from severe depression and even have committed suicide due to cruel and unlimited negative social commentary toward individuals. This tragic phenomenon has been really happening in countries throughout the world among all age groups. Serious social issues have occurred as a result of this lack of civility. Therefore, it demands that the time-management issue for digital ministry and the reality of negative psychological impacts, caused by the improper use of social media platforms, need to be continuously monitored with appropriate guidelines established as discussed by Gould.

Second, nowadays, participants inside and/or outside the church are so worried about their private information being hacked within social media platforms that they are reluctant to use them and it limits their access to the public conversation. Recently, Apple, Twitter, and Facebook have been hacked by hackers. The companies frankly reported this serious hacking issue to their registered customers. This phenomenon has caused a kind of social media phobia in relation to the issues of confidentiality and security that Gould briefly mentions in her book (117). Therefore, in terms of security issues, they need to be reviewed in every way to determine whether social media platforms are truly safe zones for an effective digital ministry and communication system.

Gould's text paradoxically indicates that digital ministry is still in its infancy, even though the social media stream has already been swept into Christian life over the last decade. Yet, how it will best be utilized, is our new challenge. The potential for immediacy in response allows the Church to become a living body of Christian doers. In addition, as a new form of Christian discipleship, the Church can serve as the creator of new civil discourse, which is our ongoing prophetic responsibility.

Leonard Sweet posted his fresh insight into social media on his Twitter account (#lensweet) on May 6th, 2014: "Social media should never become a substitute for living, or an escape from living, but a resource for living." In this respect, this book, dealing with social media revolution, is well worth reading and a significant resource for the living digital ministry.

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Jennifer R. Ayres. *Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology.* Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013. 248 pages. $25.34.

Good Food: Grounded Practical Theology by Jennifer R. Ayres introduces a grounded practical theology of food in two parts. Part one is contextual and sacramental. Ayres examines selected economic, agricultural, environmental, medical, political, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of global food system practices to compel her readers to act for social changes in food production, distribution, and scarcity in the world and especially the United States. Expounding upon a lament from Wendell Berry that humanity has failed to notice and protect the intrinsic relationship between human and economic health and the health of the land, Ayres writes, "Humans belong to not only social communities, but also the land, in its deepest, most interdependent sense. And yet, even those human beings who most long for a felt sense of relationship to the land find themselves alienated from it" (27).

Why should people of faith, and specifically the readership targeted by Ayres—Christians—care about worldwide issues of food security? Because needing and sharing food knits all of us to one another and to the life-sustaining earth given by God. And, to quote directly from Ayres again, "If God is being revealed in the food system as it is, people of faith might justifiably question whether this god is worthy of worship" (54). Of course for Ayres global food processes do not reveal God. Rather God becomes embodied in sacraments such as the Eucharist. Table fellowship and feasting invites the gathered to imagine and enact alternative futures for human flourishing over and against the intractable problems of the global food system. Just as Christians become members of the body of Christ at the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper and its elements of ordinary food also remind the faithful that their lives belong to the earth and share connection with the hunger and thirst of God's people everywhere. So, when Christians arise from communion, they must go out into the world and attend to feeding the people of God justly.

Part two of *Good Food* is ethnographic and practical. It presents actual communities of faith dedicated to transformative measures of food justice and illustrates how to practice the sacramental purpose that Ayres recommends. Ayres begins with congregational life attuned to food justice. She describes Faith in Place, an interfaith environmental organization with focus upon sustainable food. It sponsors a winter farmers market hosted by Faith Lutheran Church in Brookfield, Illinois, Sola Gratia, and a community-sustainable agriculture (CSA) farm worked and located at St. Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church of Urbana, IL. Next she highlights urban farming projects such as Woodstreet Farms in Chicago's Englewood neighborhood and the *Atlanta Community Food Bank Community Gardens* to portray how the most blighted metropolitan areas can be renewed by savvy initiatives for food sovereignty. Her Chicago connections lead her to Cuentepec, Mexico where the Chicago Religious Leadership Network for Latin America (CRLN) provides a firsthand look at farmers, laborers, and impoverished families crippled by multinational food enterprise. Food practices in the United States destabilize the lives of people beyond its borders. Ayres returns stateside in her narrative with a visit to Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina. Originally a set of Mission Schools founded by the Presbyterian Board of Home Missions to provide quality education to Appalachian students, and marked by a triad commitment to work, academics, and service, Warren Wilson College continues its three-part educational legacy by fusing it with liberal arts education. Ayres writes about how Farm Crew students reimagine the dignity of agricultural life and resist and respond in their own way to the alienation and exploitation of global food systems.

Preachers and homileticians will find *Good Food* to be informative, persuasive, and pragmatic for crafting theological responses in classrooms, pulpits, and the public sphere to food insecurity at multiple registers. But some conclusions may overreach, for instance—"And when

young adults on a rural college farm work together to tend to a sick sow, whom they know by name, they resourcefully practice an improvisational kind of agricultural creativity. They also honor life in all its complexity . . . [i]n these seemingly small things, they are visionaries" (161). Expanded discussion of how the array of "local global" food practices from less visible visionaries like mono-cultural and multi-cultural immigrant and enclave communities inflect the complexity of sociality, food, land, justice, and theology is also missing. Still, *Good Food* arrives as a timely Christian analysis and charge to remedy a social threat affecting the entirety of creation.

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Paul S. Chung. *Church and Ethical Responsibility in the Midst of World Economy: Greed, Dominion, and Justice.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013. 320 pages. $35.

For too long the Western church has heard complaints about global capitalism as a swat-able nuisance, annoying but entirely natural to the order of things. Paul Chung calls for a paradigm shift. By recounting key moments in the history of capitalism with perspectives from developing nations, he helps the church face its complicity, complacency and power to change. His study is a rigorous one that demands fairly technical economics language at times and includes detailed discussions of John Locke, Thomas Hobbes, and other architects of the current order.

With haunting clarity, Chung points to the ways capitalism wears the guise of Christianity. His insistence on this dynamic should stir the interests of those who study mission and evangelism as well as theological ethics. Capitalism emerges from the book as a religion and chief among its virtues is personal accumulation.

The book reads like a history of the church's relationship with capitalism beginning with the colonization of La Hispaniola. By reaching back to this moment, Chung makes it clear that the church has a long history of treating people as commodities and resisting correction. In this case it is Bartolomé Las Casas who urges the church to maintain allegiance to the "God of the victim" (26), but revenue proves to be more compelling than human life or Christian mission. Martin Luther and John Calvin are equally concerned about the church's attitude and Chung outlines their worries in Chapter Two. He starts with appreciative nods to both reformers for taking a stand against injustice. Luther's sermons on "Sir Greed" and usury (42) provide a model for critiquing corrupt economic practices. Calvin is cheered for coupling his preaching with action in the public square. But Chung is quick to note that these legacies of resistance are subsequently distorted; Mammon trumps the word of the reformers.

So along with the examples of figures like Luther and Calvin, Chung thinks the church needs a robust understanding of economics. He devotes large portions of his next seven chapters to economic theory, beginning with an examination of the relationship between economics and civil society. This discussion features Locke, Hobbes, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Some important contradictions in Locke's thought emerge, like his tendency to link poverty with moral failure, his participation in the slave trade, and his "glorification of property rights" (60). Troubling aspects of Hobbes' thought are also given close attention, like his conception of human labor as a commodity in *Leviathan* and his lack of concern about the impact of colonialism on the colonized.

While attending to Chung's thorough discussion of the "Fathers" of Western economics, I was struck by the scarcity of women's perspectives. I was eager to read a discussion of sexism as one of the sad legacies of early capitalism—one that capitalism shares with the church. Yet it is clear that Chung has an inclusive vision of human flourishing and disgust for the church's insensitivity. He demonstrates this insight in his chapter on industrialization and self-regulation where he chronicles the prison-like conditions mill workers faced as well as the church's pattern of using missions as a façade for economic domination. The corruption of Christian mission is especially disturbing and drives part of his argument about the religious nature of capitalism—an argument that takes off in Chapter Six when he presents accumulation as a form of asceticism.

Chung challenges neoliberal approaches to global economy and laments the ways investors abuse foreign markets and pummel resources. His critique of global empire is formidable. Yet, one can come away from it without a sense of the continuous struggle against capitalist brutality. I was eager to read about the communities of resistance that manage to clog the capitalist machine because they might also inspire faithful Christian practices.

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Chung concludes that economic justice is not just an ethical issue but a confessional issue, and Chapter Ten is his effort to help the church revise its theology. The strength here is not just in his masterful theological argument but in his awareness of the church's penchant for ignoring hard messages. Some helpful nudges follow in the Excursus and Epilogue where he essentially compares the "capitalist faith" to Buddhist, Taoist, and authentic Christian alternatives. Perhaps the supreme achievement of the book is its vision of the church's agency in the face of overwhelming crisis.

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J. Dwayne Howell, ed. *Preaching and the Personal*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2013. 158 pages. $20.00.

In this volume editor Dwayne Howell assembles a series of papers delivered at the Society of Biblical Literature and hosted by the Homiletics and Biblical Studies group. Howell writes an introductory chapter as well as an epilogue. The papers explore how the quality of the personal comes through in the biblical text, the preacher, and the congregation. Scripture itself contains a strong personal dimension. Biblical authors brought their personal experiences to bear on Scripture. When preachers interpret the text they too bring their own experiences to bear on what they prepare and preach. Finally as the congregation comes to Scripture, each individual hears the preacher through his or her personal experiences and prejudices.

In chapter two Anna Carter Florence describes how preachers constantly battle the temptation to move from speaking about God to speaking about self. Preachers can navigate the tension between these two poles through the tradition and practice of testimony. She says, "The preacher tells what she has seen and heard *in the biblical text and in life*, and then confesses what she believes about it" (13).

In chapter three Ruthanna B. Hooke takes issue with Barth's view of a preacher as "a hollow tube through which the Word comes" (32). She believes that "the personal element of preaching, the preacher herself, is a necessary aspect of the preaching event and should not be minimized" (20). The most personal element of worship, she observes, is the sermon and suggests that performance theory provides important insight for properly engaging the personal (24). In performance theory performance is always done _for_ someone. The task of the preacher is to restore the work of the text that represents God.

Walter Brueggemann in chapter four develops the metaphor of testimony as an image of preaching using Deutero-Isaiah as a dramatic example of testimony. Testimony brings to light the falsehood of the practice of hegemony. Deutero-Isaiah erupts out of the silence of Babylonian captivity, calls into question that way of life, and announces an alternative future calling for others to join in the testimony. Brueggemann maintains that the task of the preacher is analogous. The preacher identifies the dominant narrative that rules our lives as Americans promising safety and happiness and testifies to an alternative narrative that sets us free from the dominion of the empire's world view.

John McClure enters the conversation by addressing the personal dimension through the experiences of ordinary people interpreting Scripture (chapter five). After critiquing different models of preaching that respond to postmodern decentering of listener identity, McClure proposes that collaborative preaching is the most effective way of engaging in listener memory by putting the preacher in the thick of the action, listening to diverse listeners as memory is performed on the reading of different texts. The preacher is not a prophet, herald, witness or storyteller. Rather the preacher serves as conversation host about biblical texts (64).

Valerie Bridgeman wrestles with the personal in the context of how Womanist Theory interprets Scripture. In her chapter she grapples with identifying "texts that continue to support and promote oppression of any peoples" (74). She writes, "It is just as important to know the destructive tendencies of the text as it is to know the salvific ones" (74).

David Cortes-Fuentes approaches the personal in still another cultural context in chapter seven. Cortes-Fuentes describes how hermeneutics and homiletics is personalized in the Hispanic and Latino cultures. He surfaces general themes and characteristics that identify the way this culture engages in the practice of interpreting and preaching Scripture.

In the remaining chapters Karoline Lewis, Charles Aaron, and Dwayne Howell all illustrate the personal investment of the preacher in interpreting particular texts. In the Gospel of

John scholars often see a Jesus who is distant. In chapter eight, Lewis identifies the prologue of John as a lens through which to see a more personal Jesus (95). She invites interpreters to engage the practice of "rereading" (95-98), a reader response type of method. In rereading the Gospel of John the reader comes to a more intimate relationship with the Christ of the Fourth Gospel.

In chapter nine Charles Aaron probes into how pastors and scholars "approach biblical texts in different ways" (104). He investigates how the scholar's "objective" and the pastor's "subjective" approaches can work together to assist preachers in the task of preaching. He explores these two approaches by examining a text in John 12:1-11 using two subjective-type methods (from Florence's methods described in *Preaching as Testimony*) and two objective-types (redaction and narrative analysis). In combining these methods he discovers new insights from the text in John 12.

As a white Anglo-Saxon middle class Protestant, Dwayne Howell needed help in understanding the text in Leviticus 19:33-34 and what it meant to be an immigrant in Israel. Howell organized several small groups from a rural church, a multi-racial urban church, a group of international college students, and personal conversations with missionaries (128). These groups provided him with insight he otherwise would not have had.

One distracting element in the volume is that a small section from page 74 is repeated verbatim on page 76, making the reading confusing. In addition, even though the thread running through all of these chapters addresses the theme of the personal, that thread is not always evident. Readers must regularly remind themselves of how a particular chapter carries forth the book's motif. This collection contains provocative discussions from capable scholars and practitioners. It provides a significant contribution to the field of homiletics and contains heuristic seed for future studies.

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Debra J. Mumford. *Exploring Prosperity Preaching: Biblical Health, Wealth, and Wisdom*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 2012. 160 pages. $15.99.

In this work, Debra J. Mumford engages with the prosperity gospel in the United States that allures many Christians into believing that "God wants believers to be rich and enjoy good physical health" (1). It promises material wealth and physical health for people who believe and obey the word of God. Mumford is concerned that advocates of such theology usually interpret the Bible out of context and often dismiss social justice as unimportant. While recognizing several strengths that prosperity preaching may contribute to Christianity, Mumford critically reflects on its distorted message by comparing it with black prophetic preaching. Through her work, Mumford intends to provide the audience of prosperity preaching with "a critical analysis of the theology and alternative ways of understanding God in relation to financial prosperity, physical health, and Christian social responsibility" (3).

In her first chapter, Mumford attempts to trace the origin of prosperity preaching in the United States. While recognizing that the prosperity gospel in the United States is deeply rooted in the "American dream," she describes how New Thought and the Word of Faith Movements have shaped prosperity preaching in the United States. She argues that they have originated with Phineas, Parkhurst, Quimby, and Essek W. Kenyon, respectively, who emphasized self-reliance and individualism. Although prosperity preaching in the United States originated from Euro-Americans, Mumford argues that it quickly crept into many black churches, coming into conflict with the black prophetic tradition that proclaimed the need for solidarity and the power of unity in the face of injustice (17).

From chapter two through chapter eleven, Mumford begins each chapter with her description of the prosperity theology and ends with a critical reflection that she calls "Sifting the Wheat from the Chaff." In chapter twelve she offers her view on the positive aspects of the prosperity gospel, her critical stance on the prosperity gospel as "unbiblical," and reconstructive ways for the audience of the prosperity gospel to guide their faith.

Instead of simply condemning the prosperity gospel as unchristian, Mumford carefully approaches it as a Christian practice in which many Christians in the United States have already engaged. For example, she believes that many Christians today need to learn the "unwavering faith in God" from the prosperity gospel. However, she boldly names it as "unbiblical" since she believes that the prosperity gospel is based on Christianized humanism that focuses on individualistic positive thinking (131–132). It uses biblical texts to support its messages but often lacks contextual interpretation of the scripture. It seems that one of the strengths in her work is to invite ordinary Christians, not necessarily theological scholars, to reflect on their belief and practice critically and reorient them toward a more biblical, contextual, and communal understanding of Christian life.

In recognizing the gap between the prosperity gospel in black churches and the black prophetic tradition, Mumford tries to bring both parties together, offering several points they can learn from each other. However, many audiences may want to know more about the black prophetic tradition in terms of its definition, history, and challenges for today. While Mumford works mostly with the prosperity gospel, her discussion of the black prophetic tradition seems to be too little or only in comparison with prosperity preaching. Some readers might find it difficult to reconcile them. In addition, her view on the black prophetic tradition seems too simplistic and needs further discussion when she argues that it often lacks "personal accountability" in favor of "blaming the 'Man' and the systemic structures" (127).

Still, this work of Mumford should be appreciated because she picks up an important topic in Christianity that has often been dismissed as unchristian or disregarded as nonacademic.

It is still a critical Christian practice to which many cling in search for temporary release from their stressful situations. Many preachers will also have to approach their listeners wherever they are, invite them to analyze and reflect critically, and offer a constructive way in which they may redirect the ways of their Christian life.

Song Bok (Bob) Jon, Ph.D. candidate, Boston University, Boston, MA

Daniel Overdorf. *One Year to Better Preaching: 52 Exercises to Hone Your Skills*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013. 319 pages. $17.99.

Daniel Overdorf teaches preaching at Johnson University in Knoxville, Tennessee. Overdorf writes the book for experienced preachers who have found their preaching slipping into a rut. He offers preachers a series of fifty-two exercises to practice on a weekly basis that will help sharpen their homiletic tools, enable them to gain new energy, and bring freshness to the task of preaching. Each exercise, he claims, should take about an hour or two of time during the course of any given week.

Each exercise chapter is brief, between four and six pages in length. Each consists of an introduction that lays out a concise description of the specific skill. This is followed by an exercise to strengthen this particular skill. An "I Tried It" section follows where usually two or three preachers briefly testify to how they completed the exercise and to what degree it was effective for them. Each exercise ends with a "Resources for Further Study" section. The exercises Overdorf focuses on include some of the following: Show Don't Tell, Read the Text Well, Listen to a Storyteller, People Watch, Analyze a Movie, Pray for Your Listeners, Talk to an Artist, Preach in Dialogue, Pray Through Your Sermon, Explore the Original Context, Go to Work with a Church Member, Utilize the Five Senses, etc.

Overdorf makes several suggestions for how to use the book. One is simply to go through the exercises week by week in the sequence laid out in the book. The sequence of the exercises, however, seems quite random, skipping around from one skill to another with no apparent rhyme or reason. He argues, however, that this is a kind of cross-training process that balances the exercises. If this weekly routine is too difficult, then he suggests focusing on one or two exercises a month. A second suggestion for using the book is to put the exercises into broader categories. He does this for the reader in a nice eight-column chart. The categories include the following: Prayer and Preaching (three exercises), Bible Interpretation (five exercises), Understanding Listeners (nine exercises), Sermon Construction (eleven), Illustration and Application (fifteen, which is the largest category), Word Crafting (four), The Preaching Event (eight), and Sermon Evaluation (three). Still yet another suggestion is to collaborate with others and commit to working through the exercises with them.

The book serves as a great tool for experienced preachers who want to hone their preaching skills. Most of the exercise chapters begin with interesting analogies that identify the important role the exercise plays in the task of preaching. For example, in the exercise on Effective Delivery, Overdorf begins by relating the experience of watching a TV show on cake decorating and seeing the amazing cakes they make. The show, however, never describes how decorators deliver the cakes to their destination. Do they make it in one piece? This provides a segue into the importance of sermon delivery.

I take issue with a few of Overdorf's perspectives. In the exercise entitled "Make a Bee-Line to the Cross," he argues that, "Every passage of Scripture either (1) prepares humankind for Christ, (2) proclaims Christ, or (3) equips humankind to live in response to Christ" (270). Clearly his theology is christocentric when Scripture from beginning to end is theocentric. Preaching, however, must honor the theocentric perspective of Scripture.

In another chapter on "Minimize Notes" he concludes that "the further we move toward no notes, the more we connect with our listeners" (149). Plainly he encourages note-free preaching. The chart he includes moves from full manuscript as the least effective communication to no notes as the most effective communication (149). I have witnessed, however, some preachers using notes and delivering sermons from manuscripts connecting quite effectively with listeners.

I might take issue with a few other matters along the way as well. He advises against overusing personal material and then specifies the advice by saying, "One or two personal stories per sermon is [sic] plenty" (41). That seems like a lot of personal references. He recommends making notations in the sermon outline regarding voice inflection and physical movement (115-116). That comes across as too mechanical, especially for more experienced preachers. He offers good suggestions for how to responsibly encourage texting during worship as a means of crowd sourcing and engaging the audience. No suggestion, however, is given as to what to do with those who do not text.

Overall I give a strong recommendation to this book for its ability to deal in concrete ways and offer practical exercises to experienced preachers in order to help breathe new life into the task of preaching. This book is a good resource for professors of homiletics to consider using in conducting workshops for local preachers. In my context in Memphis, I am part of a group that reads and discusses one of the eight categories each month. It has worked well.

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Timothy H. Sherwood. *The Rhetorical Leadership of Fulton J. Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale, and Billy Graham in the Age of Extremes*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013. 170 pages. $80.00.

Timothy H. Sherwood's *The Rhetorical Leadership of Fulton J. Sheen, Norman Vincent Peale and Billy Graham in the Age of Extremes* sees mid-twentieth century American history through the lens of three preaching witnesses, while grasping the wide range of religious and cultural ideologies of these personalities. The book appears to be an outgrowth of Sherwood's earlier study, *The Preaching of Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen: The Gospel Meets the Cold War* (2010), which investigated the ways in which the pioneer Catholic radio and television personality helped to define post-World War II American (anti-Communist) identity through a masterful rhetorical media strategy. The subject has broadened considerably in Sherwood's current work, drawing from what *Life Magazine* called its most influential preachers of 1953, including Sheen, Peale, and Graham. Taken together, the three celebrated preachers crystalize around a particular *Zeitgeist*: to Sheen belongs the Age of Ideology, to Peale the Age of Anxiety, and to Graham the Age of Heroes.

What becomes quite lucid throughout Sherwood's investigation of America at mid-century is the vital role of rhetoric in shaping middle class sensibility. In this regard, we find Sheen as uniquely suited to bridge religion and patriotism during the Cold War. It was Sheen, after all, who artfully navigated a fear-struck nation in the depths of the Great Depression by famously popularizing a kind of common sense religion with the advent of the "Catholic Hour" in 1930. By the time of the Cold War, Sheen's credibility was so high that he drew multiple denominations in the millions; his audience was ripe for the defining distinctions of American freedom and democracy over and against Soviet "chicanery," "enslavement," and (best of all) "the kiss of Judas."

No less important was Norman Vincent Peale in softening the Age of Anxiety for a troubled American society. Sherwood does an admirable job in summarizing an enormous amount of material concerning the rise of American anxiousness from about 1940 to 1970, including the rise of psychiatry, paranoia over the Bomb and the Red Scare, and the rise of self-help books; but I missed Peale's obvious antecedent in the pulpit: Harry Emerson Fosdick. One wonders if Peale's triumph of the (evangelical) therapeutic would have been as effective without the legacy of Fosdick, whose rejection of a stern Calvinism and fundamentalism seem to carry the "Power of Positive Thinking" even before Peale made those words a household phrase. Also, not unlike Fosdick, Peale was often criticized for psychologizing the Gospel, even as *Guideposts* magazine empathically drew a readership of the "psychologically homeless" into its pages. Indeed, Peale seems to have understood quite well that the rhetoric of religion finds a natural companion with the "Problem Solver." The Gospel is a handbook for the "Tough Minded Optimist." Christ and his teaching become instrumental in integration and wholeness, salient advice for a society riddled with guilt and fear, haunted by the specter of psychologically wounded veterans, and raising children within the looming shadow of an atomic apocalypse. Peale's "therapeutic" Gospel helped countless people to unlock another kind of American Dream, one not based on material wealth (although Peale was also accused of preaching a "Prosperity Gospel"), but based on peace of mind.

Billy Graham also makes his way into Sherwood's study, but for slightly different reasons than Sheen and Peale. While Sheen and Peale's rhetoric negotiated the cultural contours present in ideology and hyper-anxiety in America during the Cold War, Graham transformed himself into an American religious icon in the Age of Heroes. It might have been more useful for Sherwood to have called this particular time in America the "Age of Celebrities," since it would

seem that Graham's rhetorical style effectively gathered into his "Crusade" those who were searching for a person with an aura which only the rhetoric of the camera can bestow. Along with his convincing, impassioned voice, it was the visual impact of Graham's rhetoric that further persuaded tens of thousands at rallies and on television of the preacher's power, credibility, and, most of all, as Sherwood points out, "authority."

Sherwood's book goes a long way in demonstrating the powerful rhetoric of three outstanding lives. They illustrate just how words may make us.

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Karyn L. Wiseman. *I Refuse to Preach a Boring Sermon! Engaging the 21st Century Listener*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2013. 128 pages. $17.

In this volume Karyn Wiseman explores different ways preachers can enable their preaching to connect with the congregation. She identifies several resources one can develop including the integration of storytelling, the development of creativity, the use of images, and employing the constructive use of social media and technology.

In chapter one Wiseman reminds preachers once again of the power of storytelling. Storytelling enables sermons to connect emotionally with listeners. She offers several suggestions for enhancing the telling of stories. One is to work at telling stories in a non-linear manner. For example, tell the story from forward to backward or use flashbacks ". . . allowing our listeners glimpses of where our stories are going and then leading them back to the beginning . . ." (26). Other suggestions include contemporizing biblical stories and creating participatory stories that encourage listeners to fill in the details.

Chapter two investigates ways of enhancing the preacher's creative abilities. Creativity often lies dormant within the preacher. Wiseman gives several suggestions for activating those creative juices such as avoiding perfectionism, taking risks, finding a sacred space in which to work (a walk in the woods, listening to music, etc.), giving oneself permission to fail, and giving oneself permission to feel frustrated. She also offers creative suggestions for rewriting a text or a biblical narrative.

Chapter three explores the value of images. Images, she maintains, must be concrete. In addition, preachers must use images appropriately. Don't develop a "kitchen sink" sermon where the sermon is cluttered with images (71). To make sure preachers appropriately use images, Wiseman calls on them to ask important questions like does it make sense with the text you are using? Does it make sense to listeners? Is it legal to use it? Could it be offensive to anyone? One key is to identify concrete images within a text and then ask: Which ones would work in your context? With which one would your congregation most easily identify?

Chapter four looks at the roles social media plays in enhancing the preaching and worship event. Wiseman refers to Leonard Sweet's acronym, EPIC (Experience, Participation, Images, and Connection, 83). These are four ways of engaging the congregation. Social media can assist in activating these four avenues. Wiseman, however, also acknowledges that social media can leave out some members. Looking for ways to include these members is important.

Chapter five addresses the use of visual technology. She traces how her congregation managed the pros and cons of using a screen in worship and negotiated the resistance they faced through the process. She concludes the chapter by sharing websites where one can go to find helpful video clips (108). Each chapter, except for chapter five, ends with a section she calls "Things to Try on Your Own."

In this book, Wiseman taps into her experiences as a preacher, pastor, teacher of preaching, and family member to provide practical advice and wonderful examples of the principles she sets forth. She invites us into her family experiences to demonstrate how she created imaginary stories about Fred the Duck for her nieces. She discloses many exercises she conducted in classes with her students. And she reveals the conflicts she experienced in the local parish to enable her sermons to connect with the congregation.

I would choose a different title for the book. Initially it caused me to approach it with reservation. Refusing to preach boring sermons left the impression that the preacher's primary job is to entertain. Even though I may do all I can to refuse to preach a boring sermon, I have little control over listeners' responses. They are the ones, not I, who decide whether or not the

sermon is boring. Wiseman acknowledges that boredom is often in the eye of the beholder and the ear of the listener (13). So is the ultimate goal of preaching to avoid boring the audience? Actually Wiseman expresses it best when she speaks of the need for preaching to "connect" with the audience (14). At the end of the book she also emphasizes this perspective when she exhorts preachers to, "Help your listeners hear your sermons better by engaging them concretely . . ." (115). Wiseman writes in a way that engages the reader, offers creative insights, and provides concrete exercises and examples of the ideas she shares. Wiseman does what she wants preachers to do, and that is to connect with their listeners. This book connects with both preachers and teachers of preaching.

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Brian Bantum. *Redeeming Mulatto: A Theology of Race and Christian Hybridity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2010. 193 pages. $34.62.

      In the title of this work, *Redeeming Mulatto*, Bantum offers a double entendre that speaks to his overarching aims in this work. On the one hand, he attempts to redeem the idea of mulatto and describes how the very presence of mulatto people disrupts the binaries of race that lead to oppression in our country. On the other hand, Bantum describes Jesus as a redeeming mulatto, one whose very nature is a mixture of the divine and the human and one who calls the church into a kind of mulatto discipleship.

      This work is an extensive and nuanced combination of theological, sociological, and historical analysis. Part one describes the ways in which Bantum believes that understandings of race have developed in America and the ways that people have become indoctrinated in these beliefs. Calling it a "racial discipleship," he suggests that racial distinctions in America were the result of a system designed to control people and keep things "pure." This binary understanding of race is prevalent in all facets of our society including the church. By tracing the historical presence of mulatto people, Bantum describes how their very existence proves false the "tragic illusion" of America's conception of race.

      In part two, Bantum constructs a Mulatto Christology that situates Jesus as a hybrid of humanity and divinity. For Bantum, recent theological developments have limited Jesus by attempting to make him "like us." While clearly sympathetic to those contextualized theologies that reimagine Jesus in solidarity with members of a particular ethnic or socioeconomic group, Bantum believes that a better way to understand Christ is through his mulatto body. Jesus' mulatto body is the actual source of salvation and solidarity. Jesus cannot be restricted by socially constructed racial categories and it is this very refusal to be defined, the paradoxical "neither/nor" space that Christ inhabits, that Bantum believes humanity is called to enter. Bantum suggests that "our imitation of Christ is located not to our likeness in essence, but our entrance into this neither/nor (107)." This mulatto distinction does not simply mean a mixture of different entities, but also a denial of binary identification.

      Part three of this work invites the church into a new kind of hybridized discipleship. Genuine Christian discipleship in this theological construction calls the Church to join with Christ in a hybridity of Spirit and Flesh. Believers who are bound together through baptism become mulatto together. Bantum puts it this way, "imbuing all human personhood with the Spirit, the incarnation, bound to baptism renders all who confess mulatto" (109). Baptism brings believers into communion with God is such a way that they are transformed into something new. This new identity is the result of a union with God so strong that the believer cannot be known apart from or separated from God. Baptized believers take on a new hybridized identity akin to the hybridized identity of Jesus. In the concluding chapter Bantum writes that prayer is what guides the new hybrid believer through this world and into deeper connection with God.

      While there is no mention of preaching in the text, Bantum's theological propositions do offer fruitful ground for reflecting on the preaching task. I believe that one of the most important moves that Bantum makes in this book is his insistence on (re)connecting the body to ideas. He argues for an embodied theology and a particularly embodied Jesus. It is Jesus' very body, the beautiful mulatto mix that is human and God in Jesus that is the solution and source of salvation. What might it mean to more fully embody the Spirit and in preaching? What might it mean for preacher to view the sermonic moment as a beautiful mulatto moment of hybridity between the Spirit and preacher? Bantum's vision of the hybridized believer might prove an interesting model for the preacher. Many homileticians attempt to provide a pneumatology in their homiletical theological propositions. Bantum's work may offer new language for thinking about the

preaching task as a joint venture between flesh and the Spirit. This text also offers a way of thinking race that may be appropriate for the preacher in the postmodern landscape. This idea of Christian hybridity could be quite helpful in congregations that are or are becoming multiethnic, or in communities that have already begun to resist the ideas of racial binaries. Any preacher that is interested in reflecting on the racial construction of theology in her or his preaching would benefit from this intelligent work.

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James Henry Harris. *No Longer Bound: A Theology of Reading and Preaching*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. 244 pages. $22.50.

     No Longer Bound is a homiletic mix-tape of recognizable theological and philosophical greats sampled to make the argument that "there is a positive correlation between Black sermonic discourse as communication, personal narratives as texts, and a Black practical theology of freedom as the necessary hermeneutic for interpreting the cultural, economic, social, and political lives of Black people" (7). James Henry Harris eschews systematic theology in favor of a practical theology in order to retrieve the experiences and theologies of those traditionally left out of academic theologizing, but whose "feet are firmly placed on the ground" making sense of the worlds they inhabit. Harris goal is "to shape sermonic discourse afresh such that it becomes an act of love as well as a sign and symbol of love in service to the people and the Word of God" (8). Harris understands preaching as an act of freedom and an act of love. His personal narrative, critique of literature and film, use of philosophical hermeneutics, semiotics, critical theory and black theology each contribute to his goal of reshaping black sermonic discourse.

     Harris makes clear that preaching requires extra-biblical reading in the service of one determinant alone and that is an acknowledgment and eradication of racism. While each chapter ends with a sermon, his book is not an exploration in homiletic methodology. This book is not text on how to preach but rather how to prepare for the preaching moment. *No Longer Bound* is partly memoir, theory of reading for preaching, foray into hermeneutics and phenomenology for preaching, and sampling of the kind of preaching that brings each of these pieces together. *No Longer Bound* also begins to critique the literary and cultural function of the symbol of race in literature from the United States as it reimagines the preacher as an accessible and significant public intellectual.

     Harris begins by identifying that "Homiletics and hermeneutics are first and foremost about reading and understanding as a prelude to preaching" (28). The strength of his book lies in the myriad examples from some of the aforementioned sources, but the very strength of the book belies its only fault: the weakness of the occasional unsustained argument. For example, he argues from Charles Taylor's *The Ethics of Authenticity* "modern understanding of identity and recognition is highly correlated with the ideal of authenticity" (111). His point then is underscored by a reference to Taylor's "citizen-dignity" and a reference to the quest of black dignity in the United States. He asserts recognition is as important as compensation. This chapter section makes the final point that preaching is in the service of recognizing folks rendered invisible. While human understanding and recognition are important aspects of a theology of reading and preaching especially for a people whose painful history is more reflective of the absence of recognition, Harris does not provide the reader propositions that expound the categories of his theology of reading and preaching. Instead he ends with a sermon. He does warn the reader in the introduction that "Each chapter concludes with a sermon that allows the reader to use her imagination to make connections between the theological discourse and the sermonic discourse" (9). The disclaimer is likely the pedagogic intent of a seasoned professor, but yet the open-endedness of the arguments might provide less of a theology of reading and preaching, and more a do-it yourself kit for assembling one's one own theology of reading and preaching from the samples given.

     The book would benefit from one adjustment: a concise statement on his theology of reading and preaching supported by subsequent moves he made quite well. Notwithstanding, the success of *No Longer Bound* is two-fold. Harris' personal accounts of his childhood, seminary, and pastoral experiences are a gift, especially to the student of preaching. Harris is a gifted writer

and reads his life against a black American experience, an American literary past that has struggled with its legacy of racism and bigotry, and white Christian tradition coming to terms with its colonialism and oppressive past, and black church culture, which is both good and evil, blessing and curse. He also weaves Bonhoeffer and Tillich, Ricoeur and Gadamer, Charles Taylor and Charles Long, Mark Twain and James Baldwin, and others to demonstrate how to read for preaching. For Harris literature, poetry, music, philosophy, linguistics, theology, critical theory, and Bible can each contribute to the goal of freedom, which for him is the "unbinding power of the imagination" (6). He demonstrates in his sermonizing how to include outside reading in preaching, he gives a clear narrative on how his own preaching has benefitted from this reading.

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David Lose. *Preaching at the Crossroads: How the World—and Our Preaching—Is Changing*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2013. 112 pages. $15.91.

      David Lose has written a marvelous book of contextual-theological import for preaching. Simultaneously drawing on yet actually refocusing his analysis of the postmodern context from *Confessing Jesus Christ,* Lose succeeds in *Preaching at the Crossroads* in helping preachers to see the ongoing homiletical-theological impact of postmodernity, secularism, and pluralism. Yet the impact of the book goes beyond the refining of preacherly practice; it also engages the laity to take up the theological task of identity construction as well. In this sense, the book portends a conversational vision for doing theology in preaching.

      The book is made up of six chapters divided into three parts corresponding to the topics indicated above. The introduction sets the scene: preaching is at a crossroads that requires a careful rethinking of our task theologically and practically. Chapters 1 and 2 are devoted to postmodernism. Here readers conversant with Lose's earlier work will find familiar treatments and themes: we preach where a hegemonic modern world crumbles and a new perspectival, metanarrative-free postmodern world emerges. The response to postmodernism in chapter 2 includes the possibility for reinstituting a kind of operative theological center for the practice of preaching as a humble, yet bold confession—a rehabilitation of an older exegetical notion of *Sachkritik* understood as content—or theological criticism, here at the service of a perspectival, postmodern hermeneutic. Chapters 3 and 4 are devoted to secularism. Here, Lose's analysis breaks new ground in that he moves past the impasse of the old secularization thesis. Secularization is specifically a problem for the loss of transcendence, not the sacred in general as attested by our vibrant religious pluralism. Chapter 4 therefore posits a view of preaching that understands itself not offering objective truth but hopeful transcendence *in the midst of ordinary life*—a homiletical vision that includes a renewed sense of vocation and seeing God in the everyday. And yet some of the most original contributions in this work come in final two chapters devoted to pluralism, which Lose sees in largely digital terms. The problem of pluralism is not so much new, but has a new force in the age of the internet. In a time when pluralistic religious options are available in the media as never before, the discretion of the user rather than the duty of the church member becomes key. Preaching must meet such digital pluralism where it is: with a Biblical story, yes, but one offered in a digital-interactive, perhaps even homiletically conversational way.

      Lose's work is to be applauded. He has started with his already insightful readings of the postmodern situation and built upon them here in new ways. In the process, his added focus on secularism and pluralism allows him to engage important literature that touches on the rapidly changing Euro-American religious landscape and a new digitally charged pluralism. It means, for the field of homiletics, that culture and media criticism should not merely inform homiletic theory as they often have over the last fifty years, but homiletical theology itself. More importantly, Lose revisits the conversationalist and collaborationist models of homiletics (McClure and Rose in particular) and teases out a vision of postmodern preaching that engages congregations as engaging in a *theological* identity construction and not solely hermeneutical participants.

      Of course, there are still important questions to ask of Lose. Sometimes it seems like the radical nature of chapter 2's postmodern Bible is skirted rather than confronted. *Sachkritik,* ironically, might end up occluding the otherness of the *text* in the name of claiming a unified center (think of the term's Bultmannian source!). Such an approach at the level of Biblical interpretation runs the risk of actually thwarting postmodernism in the name of confessionalism, in the sense that every center runs the risk of merely reinscribing a new margin. An even deeper

question would be this: the postmodern move naturally extends to the scriptures themselves, not solely at the level of a plurality of interpretations, but to a more radical *questioning* of a given text's authority. Here, a "center" could be used to avoid wrestling with the very authority issues that have proven so problematic for postmodern critiques of language and power. *Sachkritik* certainly should not simply be a stance by which we shield the Bible itself from criticism and thus import premodern commitments under a postmodern guise.

Even with the above critiques, I strongly recommend the book for preachers and homileticians alike. In fact, I intend to adopt it as a text to help frame my introductory course. Preachers will benefit from Lose's careful integration of context and homiletical theology—especially those who are called to preach along the modern/postmodern boundary that Lose describes with deep pastoral discernment in the final chapter. Teachers of preaching will find a knowledgeable and reliable guide to negotiate the new crossroads that Lose has so carefully sketched: a theological vision of preaching at the intersection of the postmodern age's strangely welcoming secularism and digital pluralism.

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Gregory Walter. *Being Promised: Theology, Gift, and Practice.* Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013. 110 pages. $18.75.

Theologian Gregory Walter aims to answer the question: "What is this promise that is the gospel of Jesus?" In doing so, he also seeks to frame the question in a decidedly non-foundationalist way. Yet he does not pursue it in purely confessional terms, but brings the theological language of promise into public conversations as well. For this reason, he traverses theology, cultural anthropology, and speech-act theory, too. The result is a fascinating attempt to envision a theology of promise in post-metaphysical terms, namely as gift practice.

Walter does this work through five chapters. The first places his contribution at this point of intersection between promise, speech acts, and theories and practices of gifts. The deep connection between promise and gift is explicated in chapter 2 (this is where Abraham, Sarah and the three visitors make a cameo). Chapter 3 is devoted to the weak power that promise represents. Here Walter connects such weak power to the work of the Spirit at Pentecost: a present gift *and* future promise that opens possibility. In chapter 4 Walter deals with the impure gift. The language of gift and conditionality opens up a Derridean problem of the gift's purity—a relationship that Walter wishes to transform. In a fifth and final chapter, Walter turns to the Eucharist as the "place" of promise. Here he draws on the narrative of the Last Supper to help promise take place at the close.

In one sense, the audience for this work is probably not the Academy of Homiletics. Those accompanying Walter through his five-chapter work are chiefly contemporary theologians like Moltmann, Jenson, Pannenberg, and Bayer. Because Walter is so doggedly public in orientation, he wishes to press beyond the link between promise and speech-act theory, an analytical-philosophical move, to consider gift *practices* and cultural-anthropological theories of gift giving. This takes him into the company of theoreticians like Mauss, Malinowski, and Derrida—all of whom have deepened conversation around gift as practice. His thesis is that promise participates in and yet interrupts the conditionality and obligation of gift exchanges, not by obliterating them (e.g., Derrida's unconditional, pure gift), but *transforming* them. Promise, in other words, pries open the practice of gift exchange and offers a new space for living toward a future in freedom. He demonstrates this beautifully in his close reading of the three strange visitors to Abraham and Sarah in Genesis 18. Sarah's laughter is occasioned by the incommensurability of the visitors' feeble promise in response to Abraham's lavish hospitality *and* the possible impossibility of a son that the disproportionate promise offers. The normal round of threat-reducing gift exchange in desert hospitality has been broken open toward an incredulous rejection *and* making transformation possible in the promise.

And yet in another sense, the audience of this work *is* the Academy of Homiletics. The importance of promise in contemporary homiletical-theological reflection cannot be gainsaid. Homileticians like Eunjoo Mary Kim, Dale Andrews, Dawn Ottoni Wilhelm, Christine Smith, and Kenyatta Gilbert allude to promise as a way of speaking of its eschatological, prophetic power in situations of suffering. Homileticians like James Kay, David Lose, Paul Wilson, Richard Lischer, and Allan Rudy-Froese want to link promise deeply to the scriptures, its narrative, and/or to the gospel itself. Here Walter pushes the homiletical conversation into greater depth by placing promise at the fruitful intersection of theology, culture, and practice. The results of this study hold together elements of promise that homileticians sometimes hold apart: promise as an intra-ecclesial confessional matter and promise as an eschatological reality that both includes and transforms cultures, and perhaps even publics.

As a devotee of promise in my own work as a homiletical theologian, I recommend the book highly. Homileticians will find Walter's work useful to press our work more deeply

especially since it calls forth a more sturdy and tensive contextualization of promise. My only real criticism of the book would be the connection between chapters 1–4 and 5. The final chapter seems almost an afterthought. As promise shapes both theologies of Word and Sacrament, it need not be quite so difficult to negotiate this move.

My hope is that Walter's promising work will engender a transformative conversation in our field as well. By refusing to leave promise in a kind of Barthian tangential relationship to world and culture, Walter invites us to pursue our work as homiletical theologians in ways both more rigorous and more gifted than before.

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Ruth C. Duck. *Worship for the Whole People of God: Vital Worship for the 21st Century*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2013. 358 pages. $24.02.

"After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from *every nation*, from *all tribes* and *peoples* and *languages*, standing before the throne and before the Lamb . . . ."[1] By the optimal use of this inclusive text in the Introduction, Ruth C. Duck demonstrates the primary focus and purpose for her worship textbook (also its title): *worship for the whole people of God*. Duck acknowledges four liturgical principles growing out of the *Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture*[2] as the key foundation for her inclusive liturgical propaganda: transcultural, contextual (both nature and culture), counter-cultural, and cross-cultural. Thus, Duck aims to provide a liturgy textbook that can eventually facilitate each liturgical assembly's active participation in worship in its own contextualized cultural situation, yet remain widely open to diverse other-cultural expressions of the same transcultural God. She is keenly aware that today's multi-cultural and inter-denominational worship classroom, not to mention the ecclesial context, demands critical resources.

In order to ease and satisfy that urgent liturgical demand in and out of the classroom, Duck includes fourteen chapters in three interrelated compartmental groups. Chapters 1–3 serve as the foundations of the book, discussing the issues of 1) worship as active participation of the whole people of God and 2) worship in diverse Christian liturgical traditions, including, but not exclusively, African American, Korean/Korean American, Hispanic American, and Euro-American. In this section, we especially see how solid and determined Duck is in her theological understanding of worship *by*, *with*, and *for the whole people of God*, regardless of different cultural or liturgical traditions. The second section, chapters 4–9, brings up practical liturgical concerns appearing as general matters in most worshipping communities, such as the worship order, the arts in worship, various forms of prayers, and Scripture readings in relation to the church year. Once again, we read Duck's passionate dedication to making possible the full participation of the whole worshipping community in all liturgical moments, from initial preparation of worship, through the greeting, up to the benediction, and beyond (living out our worship moments in every reality!). In the third section, chapters 10–13, Duck articulates via her main "whole-people-philosophy" the sacraments and various rites of the church, including marriage, funeral, and the rites of healing and reconciliation, the last being oft-neglected areas in the liturgical study, as she acknowledges. Duck ends the book with chapter 14 for a brief discussion on contemporary worship as an ever-growing new trend in worship today.

Among many, a notable strength of the book is Duck's compassionate attention to oft-ignored diversity issues of sexual orientation (LGBT), gender equality (esp. the ordination of women), age difference (concerns on children), and mental and physical ability, not to mention the multi-cultural situation of the church today. Duck is so confident that worship for the whole people of God should consciously embrace all these diversity issues as fundamentals in and for worship. In particular, she encourages, not forces, the reader to ponder deeply LGBT issues as perhaps the most critical in today's liturgical context, even adding an appendix on that matter.

When we read through groups two and three (chapters 4–9 and 10–13), we find that the multi-cultural dimension and emphasis in worship suddenly weakens. Unlike group one (chapters 1–3) where the propagating voice for openness to and inclusion of multi-cultural worship theology and elements is strong, in later chapters Duck finds her primary liturgical resources for worship

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[1] Emphasis added, Rev. 7:9 NRSV.
[2] This *Statement* is the product of an international study group of the Lutheran World Federation at their meeting in Nairobi, Kenya in 1996.

planning mostly in European or Euro-American traditions, probably because of the research time and travel limitations (the current volume is already a massive research work!). In even doing so, however, her writing still remains strongly multi- or inter- denominational, introducing a variety of liturgical practices and elements appearing in many western Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. Hence, a reference list for multi-cultural resources and sources in the back will greatly help as a further research and practical guide for the reader.

Overall, the book is just what Kimberly Long in her blurb calls "the most comprehensive introduction to worship for our [multi-cultural and inter-denominational] time." Especially, Duck's focused pastoral eyes on the actual liturgical practices of the church throughout the book reward the volume itself as an excellent introductory worship textbook for local seminaries today. In the worship class, it will be very wise to use this book in developing a 14- to 16-week-long curriculum utilizing all fourteen chapters. Specifically, when the worship class is diverse culturally, denominationally, and in gender/sexual orientation, which is a rapidly growing trend in most U.S. seminaries now, the book is a first-rate choice as a main textbook.

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Paul E. Hoffman. *Faith Shaping Ministry*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. 114 pages. $15.30

Readers of this text, *Faith Shaping Ministry*, by Paul E. Hoffman, might appreciate the story of a seminarian who was studying Tillich, but felt as though he was in over his head. He asked his professor for help in discerning and describing the theological essence of Tillich's theology. The answer was, "Water. All in the water. It's a water theology."

That summary would also serve to initiate the reader into the biblical teachings and the practical mysteries of Hoffman's theological response to the modern dilemma of the church. Romans 6 is the source of this inviting yet deepening water of this pastoral theology and offers a preacher the opportunity to dive into the text without fear of the shallows in this monograph.

The rock of modernity demands that we break church theology and practice into finer and finer bits of life-style chaplaincy that appeals to the fragmented identities that present themselves in church to be served. The hard place of post-Christendom can also posit a too firm foundation of traditionally structured Christianity with no compromises or adjustments permitted. Hoffman's pastoral-lay theology avoids the trappings between the weakly relative and the hardened absolute by affirming all the ways that a fully biblical and baptismal theology offers living water from the rock and in the hard places.

His chapters are shaped by stories about the promises made and kept in baptism. This work is, in some ways, a collection of sermon cores that can be used to cut through to the discipleship that can die to the modern world and live in, but not of, the world in the Word of God, Jesus Christ. *Faith Sharing Ministry* takes baptism as the solid foundation and the liquid metaphor of the Christian life as a rock that flows. Hoffman uses prose, poetry, analysis and story to explicate a solid foundation within the flow of spirit-filled possibilities for preaching, confirmation, pre-martial counseling, hospitality, parish meetings, biblical interpretation, worship planning, stewardship, and prayers. This water theology is in service to a faith-forming and faith-shaping ministry. With its foci in baptism and baptismal renewal, this short volume is a small pastoral systematics that clears old clogged springs and breaks new channels for the ways an ordinary thing, water, can be put to sacred use.

It is clearly written so it promises a new vision for ministry. It is also deeply thought, so it encourages a deep and prayerful appropriation of its church-formed and new church-forming theology. In the final analysis, it promises to build the bridges that will cross the troubled waters of modernity, and to use a phrase from the country church, which Tillich would certainly endorse, the baptismal emphasis of this essay will bring us home in new ways, through deep waters, to Jesus.

The chapter on Formational Preaching is located in the last third of the book, not as a final thought, but as clearly positioned in relationship to the ministry of the baptized. When a new model for Sunday School precedes a commentary on preaching, there is a theology of water at work. Hoffman examines six characteristics of what he calls formational preaching to a catechetical community over time. For him, formational preaching does not offer a listener something to do; it offers a believer someone else to be (68). For Hoffman, formation preaching is: intimately connected to the text or texts for the day; embraces ambiguity and mystery; is challenging both to preach and hear; is highly narrative; honestly evaluates the human condition of sin and suffering; and points to Christ on the cross as our only hope, targeted more to the community than to the individual. Those who know Luther well will recognize these descriptions as part of their mother tongue, but the author's message is offered with the hospitality of an open font or the way water is stored in the desert.

Those who have traveled through the American Southwest know that water collects in tanks, natural bowls worn in the rocks over thousands of years. Without these tanks, life in the

desert is impossible. This is the depth of this meditation on Romans 6. It makes us thirsty for the water that gives us life. The newness and creative spirit of this essay is grounded by the ancient practice of blessing, putting ordinary things to sacred use. Water, considered a natural holy symbol in every human culture, becomes a source of Christian renewal, for even a short essay can cut deep channels for the waters of life.

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Leonard Sweet. *Giving Blood: A Fresh Paradigm for Preaching.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013. 368 pages. $22.99.

  Calling for a "vital fire" that is "mingled with blood," Leonard Sweet builds on this metaphor from John Wesley for his treatise on preaching (13). Part history, part polemic, and part instruction, *Giving Blood* offers a myriad of quotes, ideas, methods, and musings about the homiletical endeavor.

  In this book, Sweet demonstrates a strong penchant for blood. He mentions vampires, Socialist hymns, and the Mithras cult, among other topics, as a means of connecting preaching through blood to our basic humanity. Reminding us that the "centerpiece of Christianity is a divine-human exchange" (279), he grounds his work in the Christian life and Scriptures. "Whatever you do, always end by lifting up Christ," he writes (264).

  At the same time, Sweet calls for experiences that "move from knowing God with our left brain to knowing God with our whole brain" (131). To accomplish this, he recommends the liberal use of metaphor, riddles, irony, paradox, puns, storytelling, and other techniques. "'Points' no longer make points," he says, and so preachers need to make the familiar strange, cultivate imagery, and otherwise engage in what he calls "narraphor"—an amalgam of narrative and metaphor.

  The book's twenty-nine chapters—some as short as three pages, some thirty or more— almost all have titles that begin with the word "blood," a contrivance that feels more forced than narraphoric to this reviewer. Nevertheless, they are packed full of helpful advice, persuasive rhetoric, and interesting anecdotes. Sweet defends his blood fixation thus: "to be squeamish about blood is to develop an aversion to our own life source" (24).

  His method includes a number of acronyms. His call for more semiotic preaching, for instance, he refers to as EPIC style—"an experimental medium (E) that allows for participatory engagement (P) with biblical images and stories (I) that connect the congregation with what Christ is already doing in their midst (C)" (23). How helpful or easy-to-remember these are can be debated, although referring to preaching and the church as missional, relational, and incarnational fits very nicely into the medically derived acronym MRI.

  Sweet's basic tenet is that traditional methods of preaching no longer work. In this age of social media connectiveness, concepts like topical, textual, or expository preaching no longer appeal to many Christians, he holds. His book gives some explanation of these methods, plus a delineation of what was once considered good style for a rhetorical sermon. Instead of these tired methods, he promotes the idea of semiotic preaching, which "reads the signs of what God is up to in the world, connects those signs in people's lives with the Jesus story, and then communicates the gospel by connecting people in relationship to Jesus through stories, images, and gestures" (22).

  Asserting the "chaos and paradox are the defining features of life in the twenty-first century" (248), Sweet challenges his readers—presumably seminarians—to let passion rule, push limits, take risks, expect to fail, and "never turn your back on the ocean" (250-253). He decries preachers who are "skulls," and therefore cease being learners instead of continually becoming more learned; in turn, he challenges us to become "lobsters," shedding the shell that may keep you safe but will not let you grow (254).

  Sweet concludes many of the chapters with "Interactives" or a "Lab Practicum," some of which are as long as fifteen pages. He also devotes a chapter to "Blood Poisoning," in which he describes and gives advice about how to deal with heresies, which he describes as "viral." These include Christianity without a Messiah; Christianity as solely an individual experience;

worshipping idols such as money, buildings, and bibles; and finger-pointing, as well as a few traditional heresies (Gnosticism, Baalism, and Pharisaism).

Sweet even offers some advice for the question, "What do you do with bad sermons?" When a sermon drizzles and fizzles instead of "streaming a spray of grace with fire in the blood" (297), he recommends three correctives: 1. Don't multiply when you should subtract; 2. Get creative; and 3. Let Jesus do the talking. To this last admonition, let the people say, "Amen."

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