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Perspective Criticism and Preaching: Merging Character and Congregation

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Abstract: *This article suggests one possible way that perspective criticism, an emerging methodology within biblical studies, can inform homiletics. Perspective criticism provides the homiletician with an understanding of why it is that listeners might either condone or condemn a character in the sermon. This being the case, the preacher can use the planes to either have the congregation merge with a particular character or be distanced from a particular character.*

Undoubtedly, one's faith tradition shapes how one reads Scripture. When it comes to the reading of biblical narratives, one's faith tradition can influence the character in the story with which one most readily identifies. For example, if Luke 15:11-32 is the text for the sermon, some denominations have been conditioned to identify with the older brother while others will tend to identify with the younger brother.¹ Yet there may be times in the life of the church that a congregation needs to identify with a new character in the story. How can the sermon function to help the congregation move toward seeing itself as a different character in the narrative? This study seeks to show how perspective criticism, an emerging methodology in biblical studies, can inform the sermon in such situations.²

Wayne Booth's evaluation of the novel *Emma* resulted in literary critics examining how it is that authors are able to get readers to make favorable judgments about a character when, by typical standards, the readers should condemn the character's actions.³ Following Booth, the work of Boris Uspensky has arguably been the most influential.⁴ Uspensky proposed that point of view can be understood as functioning on five planes: ideological, phraseological, spatial, temporal, and psychological.

The ideological plane addresses whose point of view the author assumes when the author evaluates the world being described. The phraseological plane explains how a particular phrasing may represent a shift in point of view. This plane explores the speech patterns of characters and how a given character might tend to address another character in the story world.

The spatial plane and temporal plane are combined into one chapter.⁵ The spatial plane examines the spatial location of the narrator within the story. The narrator may be very close to the story, narrating intricate details, or the narrator may be far away from that which is being narrated. The temporal plane concerns where the narrator is in relation to time. In many stories, the narration is given in past tense. Finally, the psychological plane provides insight into the character's inner world, such as what the character felt or saw.

¹ David Fleer, "Preaching as Conformity to Scripture's Language: The Case of the Elder Brother and the Party," *Restoration Quarterly* 43 (2001): 253-266.

² The term perspective criticism derives from Gary Yamasaki's recent work. Gary Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism: Point of View and Evaluative Guidance in Biblical Narrative* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012).

³ Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁴ Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973). Several other studies have been important to the development of point of view analysis within literary criticism. Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978); Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980); Paul Simpson, *Language, Ideology, and Point of View* (London: Routledge, 1993); Roger Fowler, *Linguistic Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁵ Uspensky, *Poetics*, 57-76. Because these two planes are combined into one chapter, it is not uncommon for scholars to refer to Uspensky's work as consisting of four planes.

In addition to these five planes, the informational plane developed by Steinberg has been used by biblical scholars.⁶ Yamasaki has explored the implications of the informational plane to biblical exegesis.⁷ The informational plane examines the amount of information available to a character within the story versus the amount of information available to the reader.

Perspective criticism suggests that the narrator's use of the aforementioned planes influences the reader's judgment of a character. A character's function as either a protagonist or antagonist is directly tied to the point of view supplied by the narrator to the reader. Certain techniques can be used by narrators to either merge the reader with a character, thus resulting in the reader making a positive judgment about a character, or distance the reader from a character, resulting in the reader making a negative judgment about a character.

As early as the 1970s, biblical scholars began realizing that the planes could aid in the interpretation of biblical narratives.⁸ Biblical scholars are just beginning to realize the potential implications that perspective criticism holds for the interpretation of biblical narratives.⁹ The field of homiletics, however, has not yet fully explored how perspective criticism can inform the sermon.

Point of View and Preaching

Most discussions of point of view and preaching can trace their lineage back to David Buttrick's *Homiletic: Moves and Structures*.¹⁰ Noting that point of view shapes "congregational consciousness,"¹¹ Buttrick discusses five categories of which the preacher should be aware. First, Buttrick identifies stance. This is defined as the location from which one speaks. Buttrick considers one's location in space as well as one's location in time. Second, orientation is explained as the aim of one's consciousness. Essentially, for Buttrick, this appears to be the location of the congregation's focus in the sermon, whether it be Jerusalem, one's self, or others. Third, Buttrick discusses distance. Distance can be created spatially, temporally, or emotionally. Fourth, there is focal field. Using the illustration of a camera, focal field is explained as how near or far an image is located. Fifth, Buttrick names lens depth. This is defined as the degree of the self which is involved in the telling. "See the children" is a very different statement from "O God, we feel utterly helpless."¹² Finally, Buttrick speaks of focal depth. This is "how far we may be seeing into things and people."¹³

Buttrick also observes that perspective is more than angles. Perspective is also attitudinal. This may manifest itself in the social attitudes of the preacher and congregation. Buttrick's most influential assertion was that the same point of view should be held within a move.¹⁴ Various points of view should not be expressed within one move, but rather a move in the sermon should be expressive of a single point of view.

⁶ Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003), 129–152.

⁷ Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism*, 54–68.

⁸ For a historical overview of point of view analysis within biblical scholarship see Gary Yamasaki, *Watching a Biblical Narrative: Point of View in Biblical Exegesis* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2007), 68–110.

⁹ The website <http://perspectivecriticism.com/> is devoted to advancing perspective criticism.

¹⁰ David Buttrick, *Homiletic: Moves and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 57–65.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹² *Ibid.*, 60.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

Buttrick's understanding of point of view can be found in more recent homiletical works.¹⁵ While his understanding of the attitudinal element and the need for a single move to contain a single point of view are helpful, his six categories seem to overlap. For example, stance is described as being spatial and temporal, yet "Distance is a peculiar category that is spatial, temporal, and perhaps even emotional."¹⁶

Much has been written on "point of view" and preaching.¹⁷ However, these homiletical discussions rarely address point of view in the same vein as Booth, Uspensky, and Yamasaki. Usually, these discussions focus on the located nature of the preacher and congregation. Will the preacher tell the story from a first-person point of view or a third-person point of view? Is the point of view of female listeners different from male listeners? Will Caucasian members come to the sermon with a different point of view than African-American members? While these issues have been helpful in homiletical discussions, they should not be confused with the issues with which perspective criticism is concerned.

Perspective criticism provides the reader with a means by which to make judgments about a character. Even if a narrator does not make explicit statements evaluating a character's actions, the readers "may be receiving guidance in a less obvious fashion through the way in which *point of view* is being used in the passage."¹⁸ It is my contention that even if a preacher does not make explicit statements about the actions of a character in a biblical narrative, perspective criticism is a methodology which provides the preacher with an understanding of how to give implicit clues which will inform the judgments that a congregation makes about a given biblical character.

This being the case, perspective criticism provides a way of understanding how the sermon can function to either merge the congregation with a character or distance the congregation from a character.¹⁹ Thus, it is possible to use point of view crafting to have the congregation merge with a character, and then, use a different point of view strategy to have the congregation become distanced from the character. It might be helpful for the preacher to first identify the point of view character in the text, and then identify the character with whom the congregation needs to identify.

¹⁵ Mary Alice Mulligan, "Teaching Disciples to Preach in the Service of Word and Table," in *Preaching at the Double Feast: Homiletics for Eucharistic Worship* (ed. Michael Monshau: Collegeview, MN: Liturgical Press, 2006), 81–85; Kenton C. Anderson, *Choosing to Preach: A Comprehensive Introduction to Sermon Options and Structures* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 81; Michael Brothers, *Distance in Preaching: Room to Speak, Space to Listen* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 143–144.

¹⁶ Buttrick, *Homiletic*, 59.

¹⁷ For a study that is representative of how the term "point of view" is usually used in homiletics, see Robert R. Howard, "Gender and Point of View in the Imagery of Preaching," *Homiletic* 24 (1999): 1–12. Howard shows awareness of point of view discussions within literary criticism. He does reference the work of Booth and Uspensky in literary theory. However, Howard's aim is not so much an examination of how these theories can influence homiletics, but rather how an understanding of point of view can reveal that "whole areas of theological knowledge exist which may be seen only from a distinctively women's point of view. If this is true, images from that point of view may reveal them to the church's previously unseeing eyes" (8).

¹⁸ Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism*, 1.

¹⁹ For a survey of how the term "distance" has been understood within homiletics see Brother's recent work *Distance in Preaching*. I am using the term to explain a congregation's tendency to either condemn or condone a character. If the congregation is established as being near to a character, they will be more likely to identify with the character's actions. The opposite is true if the congregation is distanced from a character.

From Text to Sermon

The text used to provide an example will be Luke 10:25-37. Within this parable, a clear point of view character does not emerge. Rather, the crafting of this story leads the reader to view these events from the point of view of an objective bystander. This bystander witnesses a man being stripped and beaten by robbers. The bystander then observes a priest and Levite who successively pass by on the other side of the road before the man is aided by a Samaritan.

For the purposes of this article, I am primarily concerned with a congregation that has historically identified itself as the Good Samaritan yet needs to become aware that perhaps they have become more like the priest or Levite, simply leaving the marginalized on the side of the road. Therefore, the sermon will function to align the audience with the priest, yet eventually condemn his actions. One possible way that this can be achieved is by creating what Uspensky calls “nonconcurrence” between the planes.²⁰ It is possible that some of the planes can be used to merge the audience with a character, while others can be used to distance the audience from a character.

In the sermon below, the principles of perspective criticism will be applied in such a way that the priest is established as the point of view character. Having merged the congregation with the priest, the congregation will then be distanced from the priest. The sermon will contain extensive footnotes, explaining how perspective criticism is informing the sermon.

The Sermon

A priest²¹ walks²² on the road. The smell of sacrificial animals still lingers on his hands.²³ As he walks along, he gets a waft of another familiar scent. It’s something he’s quite acquainted with: blood. As the priest finds the trail of the red substance and follows it with his eyes, it doesn’t lead back to an animal on an altar but rather to a man in a ditch.²⁴ The priest looks up and sees the one from whom the blood is flowing.²⁵ As the priest walks nearer to the man he can hear a faint whimper, loud enough to be indicative of pain yet not quite loud enough to clearly decipher. He feels that he should stop and do something, but he reasons that it’s not really his responsibility.²⁶ Whatever his reasoning may be, he walks by on the other side of the road.²⁷

²⁰ Uspensky, *Poetics*, 101.

²¹ The ordering of the entrance of characters can shape how a character is perceived. Since my aim is to establish the priest as the point of view character, I have introduced the priest prior to introducing the man who fell into the hands of robbers.

²² The present tense has greater power to merge the reader/listener with a character. The past tense can have the inadvertent effect of creating an initial distance between a character and reader. Although perhaps not as important as the other planes, the temporal plane can be used to establish the point of view character. See Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism*, 69–90.

²³ The spatial plane is here being used. I have drawn the reader/listener close enough to the priest to be able to smell what the priest can smell.

²⁴ If extensive characterization is given of the man, it could function to pull the reader/listener away from the priest. Therefore, I have not provided detailed description of the man.

²⁵ By noting that the priest has seen the man, I have used the psychological plane to establish an inside view. To say that the priest “looks” at the man does not necessarily function to merge the reader/listener with the priest. In order to fully merge with the character, the audience needs to know what is seen. Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism*, 42–48. See also J. P. Fokkeman, *Reading Biblical Narrative: An Introductory Guide* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 140–143; Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 62–63.

²⁶ The priest has further been established as the point of view character by noting what he hears, feels, and reasons. As Yamasaki suggests, “a cluster of well-paced inside views can make a strong contribution toward the establishing

The priest walked²⁸ on the road. And he kept walking. As he turned away from the man,²⁹ sounds of the man's pain filled the awkward silence created by neglect.³⁰ The man had a story to tell. It was a story about the twists and turns of life that sometimes result in being on the side of the road.³¹ But the priest didn't give him the opportunity. Rather than listen to this story, the priest continued to walk along the twists and turns of the path in front of him.³²

How often do we turn away? Perhaps we can think of times that we have "turned down" someone, but to turn down entails involvement. That is, you've heard the story but decided to not enter the story. Perhaps we are not as guilty of turning down as we are of simply turning away. We turn away and continue to walk along the path that we prefer—a path of solitude rather than solidarity, a path of self-reliance rather than self-emptying, and a path of selfishness rather than selflessness. It's a choice between egotism and altruism. Which will we choose?

As the priest rounded the corner,³³ red mud gave way to black dirt.³⁴ No longer having to avoid the man's inconvenient stream of red, the path became predictable. As the priest continued walking away, the path became safe for him once again. His gait became normal. There was no need to step around puddles of blood. There was no need for him to walk cautiously, avoiding potential defilement.

Too often, those on the side of the road become nothing more than a sight in the rearview mirror. Yet we continue to speed away because "objects in mirror are closer than they appear." We long for a path more familiar—one that is replete with privileged, pretty people. On the familiar path, we don't have to worry about bloodstains on our shoes or the defilement of our holy garments.

The priest became a small sight in the distance as he hiked over the hill.³⁵ Surely, he must have had places to go, things to do, and people to see. The man on the side of road did not fit into this prefigured plan.

of a given character as a point-of-view character—perhaps just as strong as any dynamics on the spatial plane." Yamasaki, *Perspective Criticism*, 53.

²⁷ Having used the planes to establish the priest as the point of view character, the planes will now be used to distance the congregation from the priest. For the purpose of simplicity, I have chosen only to introduce the priest in this present work. The planes could also be used to speak of the Levite and the Samaritan.

²⁸ I have now placed the word in the past tense to begin to distance the congregation from the priest.

²⁹ This strategy is the result of private correspondence with Gary Yamasaki. The spatial plane is being used to begin to distance the congregation from the priest. Throughout the rest of the sermon, the priest will continue to spatially move away from the congregation, creating a distance on the spatial plane. Yamasaki initiated the idea which gave rise to the following phrases in the sermon: "As the priest rounded the corner" ... "the priest became a small sight in the distance" ... "the priest vanished."

³⁰ If, at this point in the sermon, I were to say that "the priest *heard* sounds of the man's pain" the congregation would continue to merge with the priest. Yamasaki can also be credited with this insight which was gained from private correspondence. The goal is to begin to distance the congregation from the priest, so I have not included any views into the inner workings of the priest.

³¹ This is a move on the informational plane. The congregation is being supplied with more information than the priest.

³² This is a move on the ideological plane for a congregation which would prefer to continue walking along their own path rather than join the path of others. This sentence is used as a transition into the next paragraph. The ideological plane will be used in this manner throughout the remainder of the sermon.

³³ See footnote 30.

³⁴ This is intended to represent that which a bystander can see rather than that which the priest himself can necessarily see.

³⁵ See footnote 30.

Perhaps this is our great problem. Those who are successful in the eyes of the world are often busy people. Their calendars are booked-up for weeks, if not months, in advance. Who has time for the one on the side of the road—especially the one who doesn't look like we do or think like we do or believe like we do? Such a person just doesn't quite fit into our world, much less our calendar.

So, the priest vanished.³⁶ In the text for this morning, he vanishes. Now, in our telling of the story, he vanishes. And, may I add, in our memories he vanishes. This parable is never referred to as the Parable of the Bad Priest. He is rarely remembered. Perhaps this is because God does not remember those who profess holiness externally and yet are unwilling to step into the story of another.

The one who is remembered is the Good Samaritan. Repeatedly, our Scriptures remind us that God remembers the one on the side of the road. The Good Samaritan is a God-like character in the story. Seeing that this is the case, the Good Samaritan is acting like Jesus. Luke frequently recounts the occasions when Jesus spent time with those whom society had left in the ditch. Whether it be tightfisted tax-collectors, promiscuous prostitutes, or unregenerate Gentiles, Jesus stopped. He stopped to listen, he stopped to help, and he stopped to heal. Jesus was simply doing what the God of the Israelites would have done, for the prophets frequently proclaim that God is a God of the fatherless and the widow. Today, let us proclaim that our God is the God of “a certain man” on the side of the road, regardless of how he got there.³⁷

Conclusion

Perspective criticism holds great potential for the analysis of biblical narratives. This being the case, homiletics should consider how this methodology can inform the sermon. In this article, I have proposed one such possibility. Perspective criticism allows a means whereby the preacher can begin to understand the process by which listeners make judgments about characters. Characterization can occur in a sermon in such a way that the listener is either merged with or distanced from a character. During different seasons of its life, the church may need to identify with different characters in a biblical narrative. In such seasons, perspective criticism could prove to be a helpful tool.

³⁶ See footnote 30.

³⁷ One of the potential insights that homiletics can gain from perspective criticism pertains to how a narrator can create a situation that is such that an audience can make judgments about a character without the narrator explicitly stating what sort of judgments the audience should make. I have not said, “We need to realize that we have been more like the priest than the Good Samaritan.” Rather, my strategy was to use point of view crafting in order to merge the congregation with the priest, and then distance the congregation from the priest.

Aristotle's *Poetics*: Comparative Offerings to Homiletical Theory and Practice

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Abstract: *Aristotle's mimetic understanding of plot as representational of reality invites preachers to examine how a sermon might also mediate the story of God with the everyday lives of congregants. Mimetic approaches to art emerging from antiquity provide critical insights for analyzing the poet's work, but also constructive guidance for training, crafting, and producing new pieces.¹ Subsequently, I have assigned *Poetics* the past three years asking students to reflect on the implications Aristotle's work has for preaching. A fresh reading of *Poetics* enables students to discover narrative patterns that enhance their plotting of sermons. The essay looks at *Poetics* through the lens of homiletics asking, "What is its relevance to teaching the craft of preaching in contemporary times?"²*

Poetics. Much can be learned from a title. The word ποιητικός means "things that are created, crafted, or made." The poetic arts are not copies but are creative acts of translating realities into other mediums. When using words as the medium, by an act of the imagination, the maker of the art is rendering realities (or as defined below as "action") into language.

Aristotle's *Poetics* primarily talks about how the Greek tragedy represents the dramatic field at its height.³ He believed analysis of an art in its "purest" form would lead to a better understanding of the larger field.⁴ While Aristotle talks about other dramatic works like comedies and epics, his work is fragmentary and only supplements what he says about tragedy.⁵

¹ *Mimetic* approaches are not the only options available. Literary criticism also offers rhetorical approaches that emphasize the intent of the art in relationship with the effect art has on the audience (delight, teach, persuade), expressive approaches that focus on the relationship of the artist's sensibilities and the art, and formal approaches that key on the internal aesthetics of the art. The art of writing sermons flourishes when preachers draw from the diversity of this rich tradition.

² The essay does not explicate the translation, exegetical, or even historical context of Aristotle's fragmentary and incomplete description of the emerging field of the Greek tragedy. While there is a long and complex discussion of *Poetics* in the dramatic fields, the following essay is not intended to comment on that discussion.

³ *Poetics* was written in a specific cultural and historical context. While maybe the first, it is not the last word on drama or completely transferable to other contexts. If that is true of drama and the modern screenplay, how much more so are the limitations of applying it to homiletics? The rationale for applying *Poetics* to homiletics is given below. And my purposes are only suggestive as a pedagogical beginning point for the field.

⁴ According to Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, objects are analyzed according to four causes: (1) shape or formal cause, (2) composition or material cause, (3) manner of construction or efficient cause, and (4) purpose or final cause. *Poetics* analyzes the Greek tragedy through this four-cause method. In the above paper, I only identify the final cause.

⁵ While Aristotle indicates he plans to say more about other fields, he does not. When Aristotle talks about epic, he explicitly says it will follow many of the same rules as for a tragedy (the difference about multiple actions will be discussed below). *As to that poetic imitation which is narrative in form and employs a single meter, the plot manifestly ought, as in a tragedy, to be constructed on dramatic principles. It should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end. It will thus resemble a living organism in all its unity, and produce the pleasure proper to it. It will differ in structure from historical compositions, which of necessity present, not a single action, but a single period, and all that happened within that period to one person or to many, little connected together as the events may be (Poetics XXIII.1).* By extrapolation, I then also include sermons. There are obvious differences, but it is the similarities of poetic imitation in narrative form that invites my speculation.

Additionally, he explicitly connects what he says about tragedy to include other artist like painters, musicians, sculptors, and dancers. In this essay I include preachers (*Poetics* I.4–5, II.3).⁶

Aristotle focuses primarily on the work of the playwright,⁷ which he calls the poet or the “maker” of art (*Poetics* I.6–7). As a poet, the sermon script and its performance on Sunday represents the preacher’s art. Aristotle emphasizes the making of the play, the creative labor of plot making, more than the play itself. More than half of *Poetics* is devoted to plot. Therefore, as a suggestive homiletic, my analysis is delimited to a discussion of plot and sermon writing.

The arts are distinguished in three ways (*Poetics* I.3): according to the action (*πράξις*) or life of the object imitated (plot, character, and thought); according to the medium employed (diction and song; the poet’s words, the sculptor’s stone, the preacher’s words); and according to the manner or convention the art is displayed (spectacle, stage production, what actors say or do on a stage). Let’s examine the first of these more closely.

The arts these poets make, by definition, represent an object by imitating the life and action of an object.⁸ The arts are representations of the countless forms the world and human life may take. Aristotle defines representation of an object with the word “imitation” or “μίμησις” (*Poetics* I.1). Aristotle emphasizes that the objects of imitation are people in action and portray them as “better than in real life, or as worse, or as they are” (*Poetics* II.1; XXV.1). “Action” is an essential term for understanding *μίμησις*. As Paul Ludwig notes,

When he refers to tragedy as an imitation of men in action, the reference is not primarily to an external or physical process. There are three actual objects of imitation: *ἡθῆ*, which like the Latin “mores” constitute the temper, the moral character, the native disposition; *πάθη*, which are the transient emotions, the passive conditions of the affections; and finally *πράξεις*, or actions in their real inward sense as functions of the will. Thus “action” includes everything that expresses the mental life or reveals a rational personality.⁹

In *Poetics* VI, Aristotle details what he means by action. Actions (as represented in both divine and human life) arise out of both character and thought. Character represents the customary behavior or habits of a person and is seen in the choices they make (the protagonist).

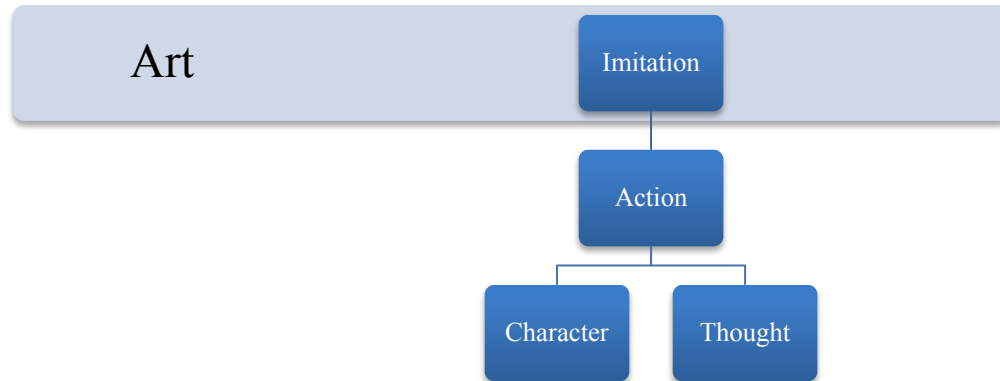
⁶ The potential intersection of drama and religion is probable. Aristotle in *Politics*, VIII notes that the tragic play is analogous to religious rituals in their symbolic enactments, initiation processes, and socialization functions. See Francis Fergusson’s discussion of the origins of tragedy in the introductory essay, *Aristotle’s Poetics* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 37–39. Ferguson notes that “Jane Ellen Harrison’s *Themis, A Study of the Social Origins of Greek Religion*, ... contains a note by Gilbert Murray, ‘The Ritual Forms Preserved in Greek Tragedy,’ (page 341)” that one of the options that emerged from religious rituals was “A Messenger. For this Pathos seems seldom or never to be actually performed under the eye of the audience. ... It is announced by a messenger.” Likewise, Gerald F. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics: The Argument* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 4 includes “religious service” as a beginning point.

⁷ Various synonyms include dramatist, screenwriter, writer, or scriptwriter.

⁸ Aristotle differs from Plato’s more idealist approach who saw art as a mere copy of reality or a copy of the appearance of things. Plato did not value art as a worthwhile activity and emphasized the work of artisans who made useful objects. Aristotle is also unlike philosophers who primarily focus on the representation of an idea. Aristotle was not an idealist but a materialist who saw everything in process and subject to change. Aristotle saw an object’s form and function as essential to its being. Else, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, 28, 320, emphasizes the representation of the “universal” aspect of the object and how the universal comes to expression through human action. Plot is the heart and soul of such universal representation of the human condition.

⁹ Paul Ludwig, “The Poet and the Preacher,” *Theology Today* 2 (Oct 1945): 360.

And the sum total of all character choices is the essential raw material for a plot. A person's "character disposes him [her] to act in certain ways, but he *actually* acts only in response to the changing circumstances of his life, and it is his thought (or perception) that shows him what to seek and what to avoid in each situation. Thought and character together *make* his actions."¹⁰ "Action (*πράξις*) does not mean deeds, events, or physical activity: it means, rather, the motivation from which deeds spring. ... [T]he whole working out of a motive."¹¹ Complete action therefore refers to rational purpose and intentional behavior emerging from who one is. For the purposes of preaching and given the definition of action that I pursue below, a sermon will re-present the intersection between the actions between the two characters, the divine and the human.¹²



While in *Poetics* the representation of an object is more broadly defined, I believe the above definitions allow for the following teleological delimitation. While *Poetics* describes the work of plays, it is in his *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* that he describes the good life worth pursuing (e.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1). Aristotle addressed the question how one should live, maintaining that a conversation between virtue (*arête*) and *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονία; human flourishing; fully flourishing human being) lead to the telos of a good life that is doing well and living well especially as he understands the word "contemplation." *Eudaimonia* implies a telos of a positive and divine state of being that humanity is able to strive toward and possibly reach.

Analogically, Judeo-Christian teleological approaches to the goal or purpose of life revolve around various concepts including:

1. *Tikkun olam* (humanity's shared responsibility to heal, repair, and): תיקון עולם or תקון עולם .transform the world
2. *Shalom* (.seeking peace and welfare): שלום
3. *Theosis/deification*: becoming like God or attaining union with God. Closely related to the doctrine of godliness is the call to Christians to be conformed to the image of Christ (2 Cor 3:17-18; 2 Pet 1:4). And other theological concepts including *glorification*, *sanctification*, *holiness*, etc.
4. *New creation* or restoration of the world aligned with God's desired future for humanity. New creation theology begins with God's intended telos of the first creation. In

¹⁰ Ferguson, 8.

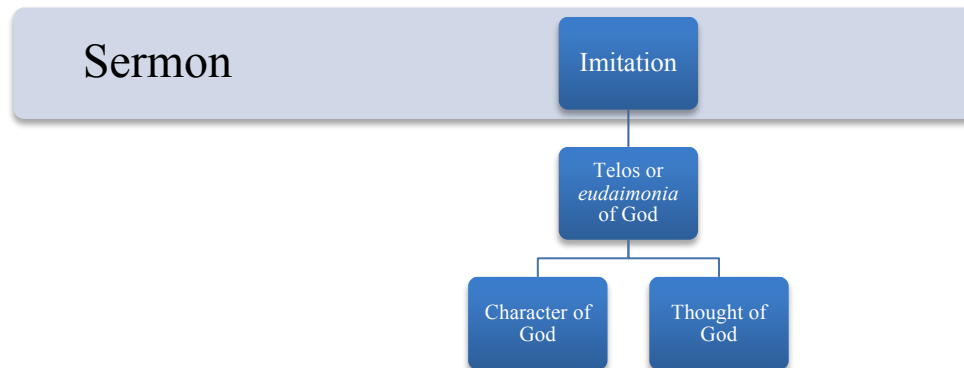
¹¹ Ibid., 8–9. Ferguson goes on to describe a richer definition of action that includes three modes: doing, making, and contemplation. Or three forms of *ἐνέργεια*: *πράξις*, *ποίησις*, and *θεορία*. While *Poetics* primarily deals with *ποίησις* (making), Aristotle's other writings are inclusive of all three modes of action. Similarly, in *Nicomachean Ethics* I.7, an object's *ἔργον* (work) is constituent to an objects form, function, and *τέλος*.

¹² Access to the divine life comes by way of experience, the incarnation, and revelation.

relationship with the human, being created in God's image (Gen 1:26-27; 5:1-2; 9:6) connects with being transformed into the image of Christ who is the image of God (Col 1:28-29; 2:9-10).

5. Furthermore, Christians understand the nature of virtue (a word Paul only uses once) differently than the Greeks. For Christians, the cardinal virtues of faith, hope, and love take center stage. Humility is no longer a vice but a window into understanding a kenotic God and a cruciformed life. And the *ecclesia* is a different way to understand the *polis* of God.

While preaching may agree with Aristotle and portray the realities of life as they are (*hamartia*) and the heartaches of life when people live lives that are "worse," a primary purpose in preaching is to call people to the life of God's intended future, Aristotle's "better than they are" and his "possible," "universal," and "credible" action. In other words, a sermon is a plotted action of the human imitation of the realities of God's life that God calls persons to share. The preacher is a maker of these plots that imitate the human telos of the action of God.¹³



So, how does Aristotle say art (or preaching) can imitate this flourishing life? In a word, plot. A play has six parts: plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and song (*Poetics* VI.7).¹⁴

¹³ Ludwig, 353, suggests the same correlation for preaching when he says, "It is an expression of the 'universal'; that is, the universal element in human life. ... What else is the task of the preacher than to offer to a world of 'men who are doing and suffering' the story of a God who is likewise 'doing and suffering' on our behalf? If the denominator of our job can be reduced at all, it is simply that we address ourselves to underlying universal factors in human life." Ludwig, 356, goes on to say, "The real point is that the poet describes what may happen, the historian only what has happened. Poetry is of a much higher order than history. If we were using a term more compatible to religion, we would speak of the prophetic quality of poetry, expressing itself in universals rather than particulars; presenting the permanent, catholic possibilities of human nature, rather than the story of the individual life; transforming facts into truth."

¹⁴ Since this essay is emphasizing plot, little will be said about the other five categories. Ethos or character is the second most important part of a play in view of the action of life that is represented. Character depends on the action that is portrayed in the plot. Character is the means by which we ascribe certain qualities to agents. Thought refers to the faculty of saying what is possible and pertinent in a given circumstance. Character and Thought help preachers speak the language of life. Character and Thought reveal moral purpose, showing what kinds of things a person should choose or avoid. Thought is third in importance and relates to the language of what is being said and best discern through Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (*Poetics* XIX.1). Thought includes every element to be produced by the speech (proof and refutation, excitation of the feelings, the suggestion of its importance or its opposite) (*Poetics* XIX.2). Diction, the expression of the meaning in words, is fourth. "One branch of the inquiry treats of the Modes of Utterance. But this province of knowledge belongs to the art of Delivery and to the masters of that science" (*Poetics* XIX). Diction comprises eight elements: Phoneme, Syllable, Conjunction, Connective, Noun, Verb, Inflection, and Utterance (*Poetics* XX). Metaphor, analogy, and newly formed words are powerful tools to support plot. Metaphor has an eye for resemblances (*Poetics* XXI.4-9; XXII.9). The language should include the following parts in general:

From the poet's perspective, the structure of the plot plays the pivotal role in the function of a play (*Poetics* VI.14b). Aristotle talks about how plot expresses what may happen, the possible (according to the law of probability or necessity as applied to the incidents),¹⁵ the universal (not the particulars of history), and the credible (*Poetics* IX.1–6). In the narrative description of the life of God intersecting human life, plot is the imitation of the actions that unfold in terms of the possible, the universal, and the credible.

By plot, Aristotle assumes by definition the arrangement of the incidents or the episodes that occur in the unfolding narrative action (*Poetics* VI.6, 9). Every step in a good plot is connected by “but,” “therefore,” or other significant transition words or phrases. Plot creates a clean and logical line of action that is “whole,” “complete,” and of adequate “magnitude” (*Poetics* VII.2). By “whole,” Aristotle means the play has a beginning, middle, and end. The beginning leads to something but does not follow something else. The middle follows something as some other thing follows it. The end naturally follows some other thing but has nothing following it (*Poetics* VII.2–3). In other words, there is a connected flow and logic between the episodes. The connecting transitions between the episodes carry the weight of movement from one scene to the next. Movement often follows the flow of cause and effect. By “complete,” the movement also must flow towards a significant dénouement.¹⁶

Aristotle's “magnitude” refers to the size of the play. It is not too small or too big for the memory to take in. The imagination of the audience cannot be left empty or overloaded with details and facts. A well-written plot will be narrow and unified in its focus by revolving around a single action. The plot, therefore, will imitate one action that is organically connected (*Poetics* VIII.4, XXIII.1).

letter, syllable, connecting words, nouns, verbs, and sentence or phrase. In *Poetics* XXII, Aristotle says, “The clearest style is that which uses only current or proper words.” *Poetics* XXI: The kinds of words we use matter, but occasionally we are allowed to reimagine the words or create them altogether. Common words are necessary, but metaphors and new words stir the imagination. Using common language in engaging ways is more compelling than using complex words in a plain way. Preachers are wordsmiths, and word choice, turn of phrase, and performance turns the mundane into the beautiful.

“Of the remaining elements Song holds the chief place among the embellishments” (*Poetics* VI.14). The chorus (or for my purposes, the larger liturgy) should be regarded as one of the actors and integral to the whole play. For drama the chorus is closer to the narrative voice. The chorus shares in the action and is not simply an interlude between episodes (*Poetics* XVIII.7; see also *Poetics* XII).

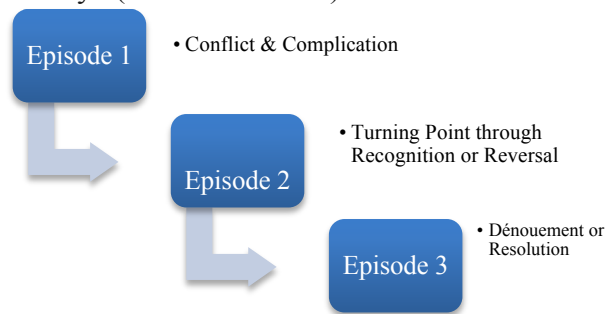
“The Spectacle has an emotional attraction of its own, but, of all the parts, it is the least artistic, and connected least with the art of poetry.” Spectacular, the presentation or performance on stage is last in giving meaning and depends more on the directors, actors, and staggers more than the poet. The “power” of the script is “felt” even apart from the performance (*Poetics* VI.14–19). He notes that spectacular works but is best done with plot so that even if the story is told without the aid of the eye, the one who hears it is moved (*Poetics* XIV.1–2). In other words, performance without plot, character, and thought is meaningless. Yes, some people love it for it “tickles their fancy” and it “scratches their itching ears” but when it stands alone, it has no lasting moral value (think *Transformer* movies; all dazzling pyrotechnics with little story). Unlike Aristotle's poet, preachers need to consider seriously diction and spectacle. However, I agree with him that they still play a lesser role in successful preaching.

¹⁵ Aristotle talks about “probability and necessity” (cause and effect) about eleven times indicating the importance of logical flow, but maybe he is also describing what he often saw missing in the plays of his day.

¹⁶ “Everything in a plot strains forward anticipating the end, working toward its consummation. Sermons are not propelled by powerful beginnings; they are evoked by significant endings. ... Sermons are not characterized by the unfolding of that which is already apparent, but by the anticipation of that which will be.” Thomas G. Long, “Shaping Sermons by Plotting the Text's Claim Upon Us,” in *Preaching Biblically: Creating Sermons in the Shape of Scripture* (ed. Don M. Wardlaw; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1983), 88. Or, that which is tied (complication) must be untied (dénouement).

- Implications for teaching preaching.
 - A topical sermon works when it focuses on a single action. For example, a sermon on fruits that talks about the fruits of the Spirit in Gal 5, the fruits of good works in Col 1, and the fruits of evangelism from John 4 contains multiple actions and violates the notion of a single plot.
 - Similarly, an expository sermon from a single pericope also may have multiple actions (and support multiple sermons).
 - The sermon (whether topical or exegetical) should only preach one sermon with a single point of entry and a single point of view on any given Sunday.

Plot is best understood as beginning with complication and moving to a turning point in the story. Often a look at life and society all around us shows the antithesis of a flourishing life. The conflict of how life is and how life ought to be churns the emotions in our hearts. Only when we recognize an alternative can there be resolution (see catharsis below). From the turning point in the narrative, the plot moves to an unraveling of the plot (dénouement) (*Poetics* XVIII.1).¹⁷ From complication to dénouement, the plot still represents only one single action. The unraveling of the story and complication of the story should carry the same weight within the plot so that you create “identity” (*Poetics* XVIII.3).



When writing a plot, first see the scene as a whole (from a distance). Knowing the whole of the plot will enable you to overcome inconsistencies and incoherencies. Therefore, sketch out the whole plot, then fill in the parts and amplify the details (*Poetics* XVII.1–5). Ludwig quotes none other than Edgar Allan Poe on this subject, saying,

[I]n his *Philosophy of Composition* wrote: “Nothing is more clear than that every plot, worth the name, must be elaborated to its dénouement before anything be attempted with the pen. It is only with the dénouement constantly in view that we can give a plot its indispensable air of consequence, or causation.”

In other words, it is in the sketch work that the details gain significance and purpose. When discussing the plotting of a drama, Aristotle demonstrates that giving short descriptions of each episode can quickly summarize the *Odyssey*. These descriptions, when read together, provide a succinct outline of the epic. This can be a useful method for story-boarding a plot. If each move can be summarized in one short statement, and if when reading those statements together the

¹⁷ I must confess that Paul Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*, (vol 1) trans. by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984) use of three mimetic activities (prefiguration, configuration, and refiguration) neatly fits into a three episode sermon where each episode represents the “action” and/or narrative of human life, God’s life, and a proleptic life. See also Tom Long, *Preaching from Memory to Hope* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 46–50; and Lance Pape, *The Scandal of Having Something to Say* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013).

sermon says what the preacher intends to say and functions the way a preacher intends the sermon to function, then the storyboard is likely decently constructed.

Aristotle contrasts the single plots of tragic plays with epic plays. Epic stories look at duration of time by telling all the possible plots within its purview. The problem is that these epic plots portray different actions. The only time you can use multiple plots in the same play is when they represent the same action forming a convergence or synergy that maintains the unity of the piece for the audience (*Poetics* XVIII.4; XXIII.1–2). Aristotle does not directly talk about the “present, past, or future” tense. When Aristotle talks about a single action in a particular time, I would add, “told in the present tense.” Narratives have a backstory that reflects the specific experiences or contexts that have a direct bearing on what transpires in the present and plays out in the future. It is often the nature of the backstory that has an implied destination in the future, or the idea of “narrative imperative.” Practically speaking this means when we preach in the Present tense, it’s more than just capturing the vibrancy and immediacy of the moment, it’s also about Present-Past and Present-Future: That is each move feels the push of the past and the pull of the future.

- Implications for teaching preaching. Avoid multiple plots or as Ludwig says, “a sermon within a sermon.”¹⁸ There is no such thing [or should not be] a static moment in a sermon. Even explanation or argumentation should function to propel thought to an intended dénouement. While tragic plays, and by analogy sermons, speak often of past tense actions, their function is to speak to the assembled audience in the present tense in order to affect the future. In other words, the present tense of a sermon, while emerging from the past, calls the audience into a proleptic future. So, the sermon should have a single plot representing a single action in the present tense.

Aristotle drives home his commitment to single plots with a stern judgment. “Of all plots and actions the episodic are the worst. I call a plot ‘episodic’ in which the episodes or acts succeed one another without probable or necessary sequence” (*Poetics* IX.10). For Aristotle, “unity of action” is not just about a story being about one thing, it must also have a *flow* from scene to scene, event to event, that is as well both probable and necessary. “Episodes are not forbidden; the correct procedure includes their use, but they are to be kept relevant ... and brief. ... The episodic plot, then, is one in which the episodes are irrelevant or inorganic ... and outgrow their proper size: they are too numerous or too long in proportion to the rest of the play. In short, we can define an episodic play as one in which the episodes overshadow the plot.”¹⁹

- Implications for teaching preaching. In the 21st century world of hypertext and multi-linear lives, an episodic life is becoming more prevalent.²⁰ Episodics resemble the private iTunes playlist as compared to a designed album by the artist. Often, only the creator of the playlist can make the connection from one song to the next. But a well-scripted album often follows narrational rules. On the one hand, I grant the possibility of needing sermons

¹⁸ Ludwig, 363.

¹⁹ Else, *Aristotle's Poetics*, 325.

²⁰ See the discussion of episodic culture in Long's *Preaching from Memory to Hope*, 12, 14. For a discussion of hyperlink scripts or multi-linear storytelling (think the movie *Crash* or *Memento*) see <http://gointothestory.blcklst.com/2012/11/reader-question-how-to-approach-writing-a-story-with-multiple-main-characters.html>. See also Linda Aronson, “Parallel Narration,” in *The 21st Century Screenplay: A Comprehensive Guide to Writing Tomorrow's Films* (Australia: Silman-James, 2011), 165ff.

that speak the language of a new generation.²¹ But on the other hand I contend, to break rules of plot and to avoid the label of “worst” Aristotle is so quickly to judge, a preacher should be well versed in the rules that are being intentionally broken. The sermonic plot should, like good drama, flow naturally from one move to the next, so that all the pieces work together to function in the way the preacher intends for the sermon to function. An episodic sermon would be one in which the sequence isn’t necessary, where one idea moves to the other without obvious connection and in such a way that it doesn’t add to the cumulative effect of the sermon. To overcome the pitfalls of an episodic plot while still connecting to new forms of how knowledge is processed and discerned, much could be learned from Hollywood where plot is sometimes successfully circumvented (sometimes not). Even then, the action the sermon intends to imitate should be intricately tied to the intent and affect of the sermon.

A key to understanding tragedy involves seeing how Aristotle talks about *hamartia* and its relationship to *pathos*. The character in plot will be displayed as a representation of human action (especially as it is being contrasted and in conflict with divine action). The character flaw the protagonist brings to the story is the point of contact that arouses the audience’s emotion. The “final cause” or purpose of tragedy is to use the audience’s connection (identification) to provide a way forward through emotions to enhance a flourishing life. Identification happens when the audience connects with the “familiar” concrete situations of life and persons more than some anonymous or distant event or person (*Poetics* XIV.4). And in those particulars, we will glimpse something common to us all (the universals).

Plots work best when they contain “reversal” of a situation or “recognition” of a situation that affects the emotion of the audience profoundly (*Poetics* XI.1–4).²² And through the recognition of that which is represented, humans by nature learn, infer, and delight. Through recognition, humans not only feel but also embrace growth and change (*Poetics* IV.1–5). Change in the protagonist is closely related to change in the audience. *And to define the matter roughly, we may say that the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad* (*Poetics* II.1). Change, either positive or negative, must occur.²³

Additionally he states,

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is a serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in a language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative, through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions (*Poetics* VI.2).

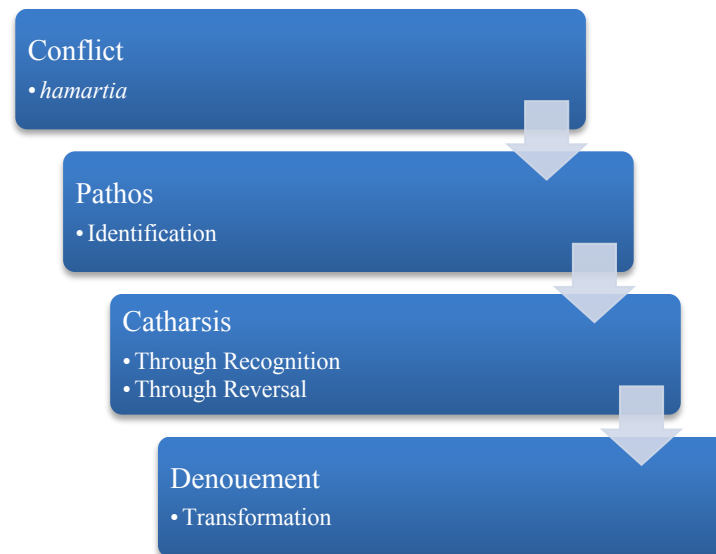
Emotion (often reduced to “pity” or “terror” in *Poetics* [or at least to that range of emotions]) is the feelings that arrest the mind in the presence of whatsoever is constant in the human experience and unites us with the human experience. Sometimes as we encounter art we even feel these emotions physically (our stomach churns, our heart races, our face flushes). The

²¹ By looking at poetry as a fixed and objective form, Aristotle fails to note the ways in which art often progresses precisely by overturning the assumed laws of a previous generation.

²² For example, in *The Sixth Sense*, the audience identifies with the protagonist’s fear and confusion. When the recognition occurs, it is both surprising and cathartic producing a change in the protagonist and the audience.

²³ Recognition can be achieved by using “signs,” “a turn of an incident,” “invented at will,” “depends on the memory” by awakening a feeling, “a process of reasoning,” and from “the incidents themselves” or natural means (*Poetics* XVI.2–8).

“purgation” or “catharsis” or even the satisfaction of our emotions (resolution, wonder, and peace) happens when we identify with the action imitated on stage or in the script.



Aristotle says the best plots happen when the affect produced comes by the combination of the inevitable (cause and effect) and the unexpected (surprise) (*Poetics* IX.11).

- Implications for teaching preaching. As sermons re-present action, identification is also achieved when there is some distance that creates a safe spot for congregants to experience vicariously what is re-presented (overhearing the Gospel). Through identification the sermon can achieve its intended function leading to catharsis and transformation for the listener. Now the audience is ready for resolution and a proleptic dénouement imaginatively gives them a new way of being in the world.

Conclusion

The above exploration of Aristotle’s *Poetics* proposes that the preacher plot sermons that represent (μίμησις) the human and divine life (both object and action) so that the performance of the text fosters transformation. The sermon is a plot of the representation of the divine life designed to create human identification in order to realize transformation.

While novel to the pedagogy of preaching, nothing in the above essay proposes new homiletical theory or practice. Often, many homiletical works have eclectically borrowed from Aristotle. In relationship to *Poetics*, most previous works refract Aristotle through Ricoeur or other secondary sources. However, asking students to read *Poetics* unfiltered and consider its implications for homiletics can create distance from the sermon writing task and result in the articulation of “universals” that are also “possible” and “credible.” With an image driven Hollywood generation, using *Poetics* as an entry point with first time preaching students also opens conversations with current narrational homiletical musings. Students not only make connections with their own experiences, the narrational logic of Aristotle enables them to see preaching in a new way.

Political Theology through a History of Preaching: A Study in the Authority of Celebrity

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Abstract: *This article shows some of the ways that historical studies of preaching can open into normative reflections on political life. A focus on embodied practices reveals the ways those practices circulate between religious, political, and other spheres of society. This transmigration of practice means that reform in one sphere leads to changes in others. Practical theology becomes public theology. And the ritual and rhetorical forms of preaching can have at least as much political significance as any overtly political content of sermons. The argument proceeds through an extended case study of the ways that Charles G. Finney's techniques for preaching helped create a distinctive authority of celebrity that has grown in significance for late modern mass democracies.*

These days, critical reflections on politics are not usually done through histories, let alone through histories of preaching. It is more common to proceed in the manner of John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, which presents itself as abstract discourse about universal norms in the timeless present of analytic philosophy. But I want to argue that a history of preaching offers distinct resources for critical and theological reflection on the present political moment. I think this is true in a broad way, but I will make a preliminary case through one particular example: a history of the revival preaching of Charles Finney that opens up fresh lines of critique of the growing power of celebrity to authorize political leaders in late modern mass democracies. A close study of Finney's preaching both reveals deep fissures in the authority of celebrity and begins to suggest what it would mean to hope for the redemption of this mode of politics.¹

A Turn to History

In the last forty years scholars in religious ethics have come to remember (again) that all knowledge has a social location. It has become a truism that there is no view from nowhere—and that the somewhere from which all views look is shaped by things like gender, class, race, ethnicity, and religion—a group of categories that are often gathered together under the sign of “culture.”² And so, as I have argued elsewhere, a surprising variety of scholars in religious ethics have shared in what might be called a turn to culture. Communitarians like Stanley Hauerwas have insisted that ethics must begin from a turn to some distinctive culture of the church. Womanists like Joan M. Martin have turned to African American women's culture as found in literature and in practices of survival and resistance. And a pragmatist like Jeffrey Stout swerves

¹ This essay originated as a lecture at Vanderbilt Divinity School. Parts of the essay are adapted from Ted A. Smith, *The New Measures: A Theological History of Democratic Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), Chapter 5. Used with permission.

² The phrase a “view from nowhere”—and an elegant argument for the place of such a view—appeared in Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). I borrow language of a “cultural turn” and analysis of a swollen cultural sphere from Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), ix-xxii. Kathryn Tanner neatly parsed and problematized what I am calling the cultural turn in theology in her *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997). Another good discussion of the cultural turn appears in Sheila Greve Davaney, “Theology and the Turn to Cultural Analysis,” in *Converging on Culture: Theologians in Dialogue with Cultural Analysis and Criticism*, ed. Delwin Brown, Sheila Greve Davaney, and Kathryn Tanner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3–16. Like Davaney, I am trying to point to “common themes with broad credence,” not some “spurious consensus.”

away from states of nature and original positions and turns instead to democratic cultures of the United States. The list could extend across multiple movements and schools of thought throughout the major guilds in the study of religion and theology. The best accounts of culture do not take it as an accomplished, almost ontological thing. They rather remember cultures as complex human creations made in time and over time through contentious and power-laden practices. Thus the best turns to culture will include turns to history.

Ethicists have been much more interested in calling for people to turn to culture than in doing it themselves. Hauerwas has appealed to a “church” that is notoriously abstract. Just where is this community of character? And while Stout has written that “the ethical inheritance of American democracy consists, first of all, in a way of thinking and talking about ethical topics that is implicit in the behavior of ordinary people” his definitive book on the topic gave a short history of the ideas of extraordinary people like Ralph Waldo Emerson and James Baldwin—and said very little about the lived stuff of everyday democracy. A later book began to make good on the promise of a turn to what Stout calls “grassroots democracy.”³ Years earlier, womanist and Black liberationist scholars had made this turn to historical, sociological and anthropological work. Books like Joan Martin’s *More Than Chains and Toil*, for example, take seriously the task of history for the sake of ethics. In doing so they call the discipline back to the genre of some of its formative texts: books like Ernst Troeltsch’s *The Social Teachings of the Christian Churches* and H. Richard Niebuhr’s *The Kingdom of God in America*. I am trying to join Martin, Troeltsch, and Niebuhr in this much-demanded but rarely-performed genre of history told for the sake of ethics.

If it makes sense to turn to history (along with ethnography, anthropology, sociology, and other studies of culture) for the sake of political theory, how does it make sense to turn to a history of *preaching*? Shouldn’t we turn instead to histories of things like political parties, or the Constitution, or religious movements for political reform? One could turn to any of those topics, and with good results. But I want to argue that one can also turn to practices that are not native to the political sphere. Practices might start in the religious sphere—in preaching, say—and then migrate to other spheres. Seeing this *transmigration* of practices depends on a theory of practice that stresses body and performance rather than intention—that is, a theory of practice like that of Pierre Bourdieu rather than that of Alasdair MacIntyre. Bourdieu’s theory depends not on the intended *telos* of the practitioner, as MacIntyre’s does, but on the *habitus* of the action, the embodied template for improvisation, the “structured structure predisposed to function as a structuring structure.”⁴ A *habitus* can carry a whole world with it as it migrates between social spheres. Preachers and politicians might share a *habitus* even as they have dramatically different intentions, and make very different arguments. Because of the transmigration of practices, reflection on a practice of preaching can open into reflection on cultural, political, economic and other spheres.⁵

In this essay I focus on that *habitus* of preaching rather than the content of sermons. I focus on the deep pattern of action, and the politics implicit within it, rather than on the politics explicitly stated in the text of the sermons. I don’t mean to draw a sharp line between form and content. But I do mean to stress a pattern that was repeated in all kinds of performances in

³ See Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004), 7; and Jeffrey Stout, *Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁴ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72.

⁵ For more on the transmigration of practices, see Smith, *The New Measures*, 28-30.

preaching, politics, and entertainment. Because it is so often repeated, often unconsciously, a *habitus* can become a little ritual that creates ways of seeing, relating to other people, and making sense. A *habitus* can form political imagination, and it can be very difficult to name and resist. And so I investigate practices of preaching with an eye to the rituals and habits of modern, mass democracy.

More particularly, I want to consider the bundle of practices that make up what I call the authority of celebrity. I try to show how these practices developed in the “new measures” revivals of the 1820s, 30s, and 40s—revivals associated especially with Charles Finney. I try to show the deep fit between these practices and an emerging mass democracy. And I try to follow these practices into some of the deepest fissures within our social and political order.

A Country in Masquerade

In the decades immediately after the Revolution, people in the United States felt rising anxiety about what they understood as public representations of private realities. These anxieties crossed social spheres. In the economic sphere, new forms of exchange depended on abstract representations of goods, money, agreements, and persons. In the domestic sphere, new patterns of intimate relationships stressed the importance of a person’s true feelings even as an emerging White middle class marked its respectability by its ability to mask and repress those feelings. In everyday social interaction, international immigration and internal migration meant that people who had grown up in small towns where they knew everyone increasingly had the experience of meeting people whom they did not know. New social mobility—unleashed in part by democratic revolution and an expanding economy—only intensified the sense that you didn’t know the “real” person. (She may dress like European royalty, and he may present himself as a free man, but who are they *really*?) In nearly every social sphere, new practices of representation emerged – and produced anxiety. In 1808, eight years after leaving the Presidency, John Adams expressed the concern many felt: “Our country is in masquerade! No party, no man, dares to avow his real sentiments. All is disguise, visard, cloak.”⁶

Questions of faithful representation arose with special intensity for persons seeking to participate in emerging public spheres. In the eighteenth century *the* distinguishing mark of fully public speech became the ability to address an abstract, generalized audience. Like Jean-Jacques

⁶ John Adams to Benjamin Rush, 20 June 1808, in John A. Schutz and Douglas Adair, eds., *The Spur of Fame: Dialogues of John Adams and Benjamin Rush, 1805-1813* (San Marino, Calif.: The Huntington Library, 1966), 110. Charles Brockden Brown, *Three Gothic Novels: Wieland or, the Transformation; Arthur Mervyn or, Memoirs of the Year 1793; Edgar Huntly or, Memoirs of a Sleep-Walker* (New York: Library of America: Distributed in the U.S. by Penguin Putnam, 1998), John Witherspoon, *Serious Inquiry into the Nature and Effects of the Stage: And a Letter Respecting Play Actors . . . Also a Sermon on the Burning of the Theatre at Richmond; by Samuel Miller . . . Together with an Introductory Address, by Several Ministers in New York, Etc.* (New York: Whiting & Watson, 1812). Witherspoon’s inquiry was first published in Glasgow in 1757. Alexis de Tocqueville registered the effects of novelty and mobility on democratic language. Because old conventions of meaning did not bind word usage in the United States, Tocqueville wrote, its citizens had the freedom to make and assign new meanings. As a result people often encountered one another’s words, as one another’s persons, as opaque and difficult to decipher. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Harvey Claflin Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), II.1.xvi, p. 455. For more on social mobility in antebellum America, see chapter two of this book. For an account of self-presentation in the time of Finney’s adulthood, see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982). The present chapter has been greatly influenced by Jean-Christophe Agnew’s superb analysis of anxieties of representation in early modern England. See Jean-Christophe Agnew, *Worlds Apart: The Market and the Theater in Anglo-American Thought, 1550-1750* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Rousseau pleading his case before all of heaven and earth at the end of his *Confessions*, the public person spoke or wrote to a universal body. The “greatness of democratic oratory,” Alexis de Tocqueville observed, was just this drive to speak of “general verities,” and to speak of them to all humankind.⁷ Such speech required the development of a “prosthetic person,” a public voice distinct from any private qualities and authoritative precisely because of its ability to transcend particulars of history, heritage, or biology. Authoritative public personae, by definition, stood alienated from the private lives of the people who created them.

Anxiety arose because people like Adams created and encountered these public personae—even as they believed that the *real* identity of a person was the self of private spaces and relationships. If a minister preached the gospel in public and sipped whiskey at home, they had no doubt that these identities were mutually exclusive and that one of them was real and the other artificial. The man was what he was in private. He was a drunk. This basic assumption structured and encoded with moral and epistemological value a whole world of oppositions: public selves were representations, but private selves were real; public selves were self-conscious fabrications, but private selves were natural; the public speech of oratory was suspect, because it was planned, but the private speech of conversation was trustworthy, because it came spontaneously, “from the heart”; and printed matter (the definitive public form) could deceive, but the spoken word could be trusted. Qualities associated with the private sphere—natural, conversational, spontaneous, expressive, and spoken—glowed with the aura of reality and reliability. But exactly those qualities had to be suppressed in order to form a fully public persona. And so questions of sincerity, the harmony of public and private selves, came hard-wired in to the bourgeois public sphere. And sincerity became the cardinal virtue for public figures.⁸

Questions of sincerity followed every public figure, but they hounded ministers with special intensity. Traditional systems of legitimation for clergy eroded steadily through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in the colonies and then the United States. Democratic sentiment, progressive disestablishment of churches, the rise of itinerant exhorters, and the proliferation of religions and denominations meant that pastors no longer had authority simply because of their office. Preachers who wanted to compete in the new economy of attention needed to form public personae. But the rising importance of sentiment in religion also made a minister’s private, emotional life increasingly important, even more important than that of other public figures. Preachers faced a sharper form of the dilemma faced by every public figure: on the one hand, the loss of traditional legitimation forced them to project public selves; on the other hand, the very act of projection called their sincerity into question. Preachers had to choose between publicity and sincerity, between getting heard and being trusted.⁹

⁷ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.1.xvi, pp. 475–76. The poverty of democratic oratory, Tocqueville noted in parallel, was that each person seemed to feel not only able but also obligated to speak, whether or not they had ability or even anything to say. “The inhabitants of the United States,” he wrote, “bear witness to their long practice of parliamentary life not in abstaining from bad speeches, but in courageously submitting to hearing them. They resign themselves as to an evil that experience has made them recognize as inevitable.”

⁸ Michael Warner, “The Mass Public and the Mass Subject,” in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1992), 379–82. Warner borrowed the apt phrase “prosthetic person” from Lauren Berlant. For more on the importance of a mass, abstracted public for new measures sermons, see chapter four.

⁹ Harry S. Stout rightly connected the rising importance of sentiment in religion to the differentiation of social spheres and the rise of a mass public: “As the public sphere grew more impersonal and abstract, the private self gained proportionate importance as the repository of spiritual experience.” Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), xvii.

Measures of Sincerity

The genius of the “new measures” for preaching was to turn this dilemma into a complex set of resources. New measures preachers found, made, and handed on practices for the public presentation of private lives. They fused the veracity of private selves with the omnipresence of abstracted public selves. And no one joined public and private more famously than Charles Grandison Finney (1792–1875). Finney was a star.

Finney projected a sincere public persona by adapting habits of body and voice associated with private spaces and relationships. He carried private—and so reliable—ways of speaking and moving into public media like the pulpit and the press. A quick sketch of these habits would highlight the natural, conversational, expressive, and extemporaneous qualities of Finney’s sermons.

Finney rejected the studied, neo-classical rhetoric of Noah Webster and Joseph Dana. Webster taught particular tones and devices for particular purposes; Dana suggested different standardized gestures for every part of a speech. Finney swept all that aside. If a preacher just felt as he should, Finney promised, “He will naturally do the very thing that elocution laboriously teaches... Let him speak as he feels, and act as he feels, and he will be eloquent.” Finney’s public display of natural tones and gestures gave his preaching the trustworthiness of the speech of a natural, true self.¹⁰

Webster and Dana called for a high rhetorical style deliberately distant from everyday speech. But Finney spoke personally to a mass.¹¹ “The gospel will never produce any great effects,” Finney told his listeners in New York in 1835, “until ministers *talk* to their hearers, in the pulpit, as they talk in *private conversation*.” Finney used the truthfulness associated with private speech to secure the trustworthiness of his public preaching.¹²

Finney found ways to express emotions usually limited to private life in respectable public forms. He denounced both the effusiveness of the one he denounced as an “ignorant ranter” and the restraint of the one he called a “mannered fop.” He found ways to rant with reason and to engage in respectable theological disputation with tears rolling down his cheeks. Again, he fused public and private ways of being – like a star.

Being sincere meant being spontaneous, speaking from the heart. And so Finney preached from outlines, not manuscripts. And he took great pains to tell people that all of his “written” works—even his *Systematic Theology*!—were nothing more than transcriptions of extemporaneous speech. He went into print not as a scheming, careful, tricky writer, but as a natural, sincere, spontaneous speaker.

¹⁰ Ibid., 214, 18. Finney made fun of the gestures of the Rev. Peter Starr, a Congregationalist minister in Warren, Connecticut whom he heard while working on his uncle’s farm (c. 1812-1814). Charles G. Finney, *The Memoirs of Charles G. Finney: The Complete and Restored Text*, ed. Garth M. Rosell and Richard A. G. Dupuis (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 8-9. Henrietta Matson, *Recollections of Rev. Charles G. Finney* (Nashville, TN: Pentecostal Mission, n.d.), 11. For the contrast with Webster and Dana, see Joseph Dana, *A New American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking ...* (Boston: Samuel Hall., 1792), Noah Webster, *An American Selection of Lessons in Reading and Speaking ...* (Philadelphia: Young and M’Culloch, 1787).

¹¹ For more on personal mass address, see chapter four.

¹² Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 208. Finney’s declaration that the preacher should speak “like a lawyer” depended on a very contentious and particular view of the ways in which a lawyer should speak. Justice Joseph Story put forth a very different picture of the barrister’s form in his 1827 Phi Beta Kappa address. Story defended an elegant, neoclassical style in opposition to a rising Romantic style that appealed to “the sublime” and individual “genius.” See Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965), 144ff.

Presenting private personae in public required not only new ways of modulating tone, face, and body, but also new spaces for the display of those modulations. New measures preachers replaced high, boxed pulpits with open lecterns set on raised platforms. The crowd had to be able to see the preacher's body. Finney's Broadway Temple was perfectly adapted to this need – and a real break from traditional spaces for preaching. It moved the preacher towards the center of the room, closer to more people. This move, coupled with a simple, open pulpit, made the preacher's body visible to all those gathered. It facilitated the preaching of a star.

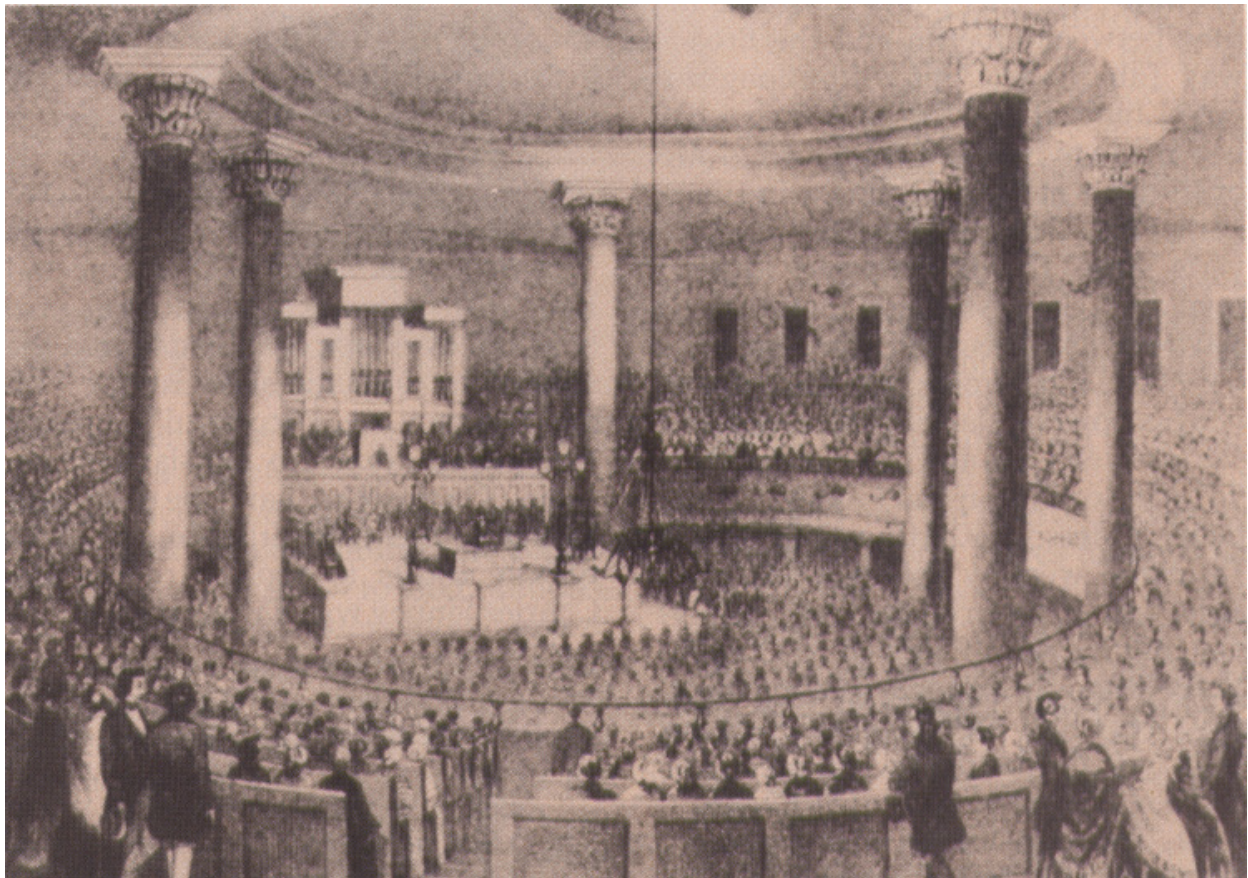
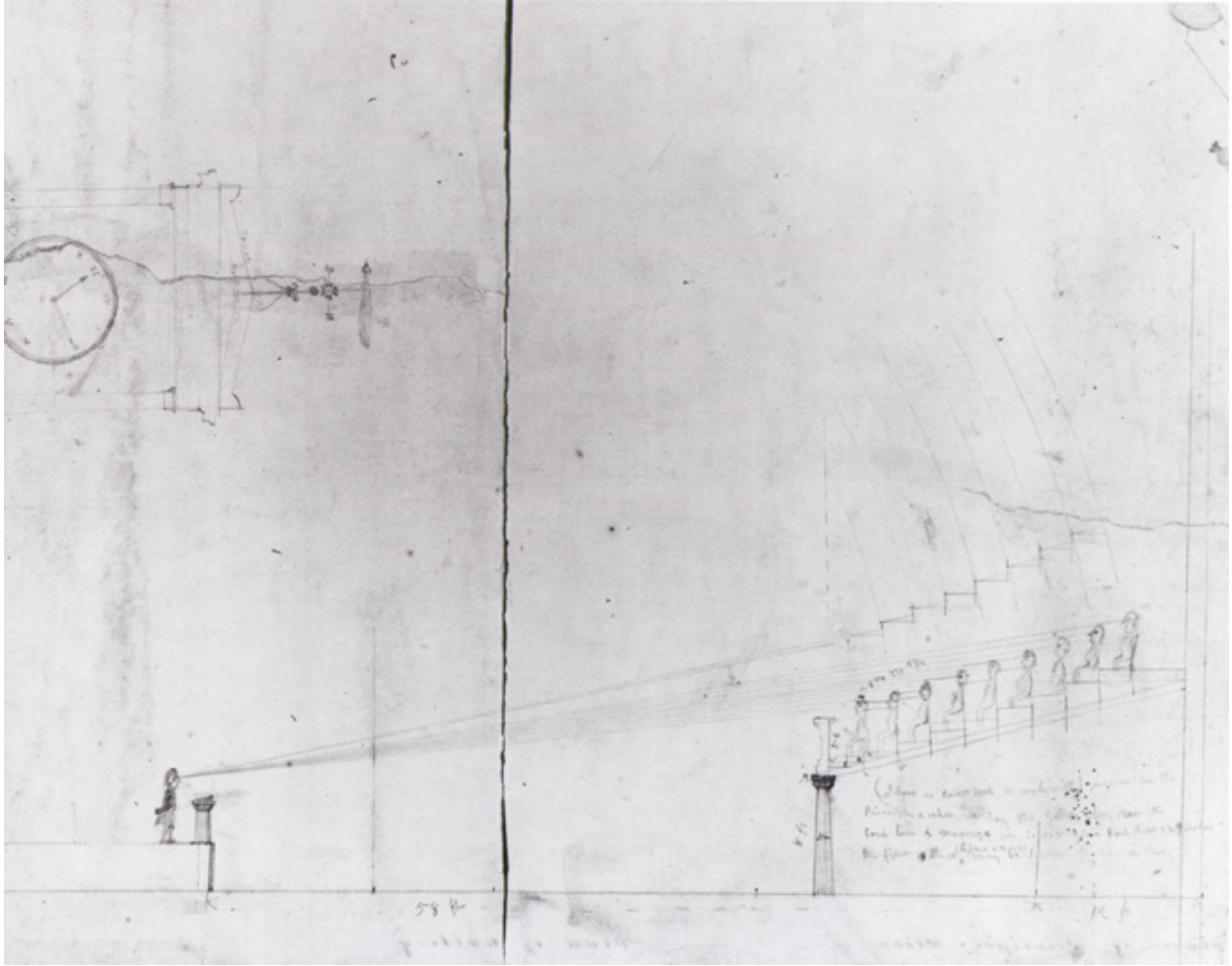


Fig. 1: F. Palmer & Co. lithograph of the interior of the Broadway Tabernacle, New York, New York (c. 1845). Courtesy of the Eno Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints, and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

Above all, the crowd had to be able to see the most private part of the speaker—the eyes. Finney used his eyes to great effect, and nearly every account of his preaching mentions his “searching” or “blazing” blue eyes. The planners of the Oberlin meeting house valued eye-contact so much that someone, perhaps Finney himself, sketched tiny lines on the architectural drawing to make sure that an unobstructed line of sight existed between each person in the building and the preacher in the pulpit. Oberlin’s founders had to cut some other corners to save money on the building, but they spent the extra money necessary to install raked pews in the gallery (where the students sat) in order to guarantee these lines of exchange.



Anticipated sight lines drawn on the reverse side of Richard Bond's architectural plan for Oberlin College Chapel, 1841. Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives, Oberlin, Ohio.

Finney's amalgamation of public and private forms of discourse let him fit the prevailing definition of sincerity, and his perceived sincerity proved to be one of the most winsome aspects of his style. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, writing 70 years after she gave her life to Christ at a Finney revival—she later took it back—had little use for Finney's theology. His "preaching worked incalculable harm to the very souls he sought to save." He cast people into despair. He filled them with fear, reasoning with them in a way that robbed them of reason. But, she concluded, "He was sincere, so peace to his ashes!"¹³

¹³ George Washington Gale, *Autobiography of George Washington Gale (1789–1861), Founder of Galesburg, Illinois and Knox College* (New York: n. p., 1964), 183. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More (1815–1897 Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton)* (New York: European Publishing Company, 1898), 43. On doubts about Finney's sincerity, see Robert Samuel Fletcher, *A History of Oberlin College: From Its Foundation through the Civil War*, 2 vols. (Oberlin, OH: Oberlin College, 1943), I.16.

The Authority of a Star¹⁴

To display a private persona in public, a preacher had to set aside the trappings of traditional authority. New measures preachers gave up high pulpits, distinctive dress, powdered wigs, and the mannered rhetoric of Webster and Dana. Those older practices showed the connections of a preacher to an institutional church whose legitimacy could be taken for granted. Authority radiated from the institution to its agent. But that traditional authority was crumbling, and new measures preachers knew they had to give it up. Finney did not say, as some of his allies did, that every preacher relying on traditional authority was insincere. He said you could not tell if someone was sincere or not, and that was the problem. He wrote with pity about one traditional minister in particular. The man's ministry was failing miserably by Finney's standards. But, Finney said, the man was in fact a sincere believer. What he did not understand was that it was not enough to *be* sincere. He needed to *show people* that he was sincere. And the poor man's attachment to traditional sources of authority kept him from doing that. The practices of traditional authority required submerging any private and particular aspects of one's self behind the emblems of the institutionalized role. They completely occluded the private self – and so prevented hearers from comparing public and private selves. A public display of sincerity required stepping out from behind the insignia of office and making visible a distinct, private self.

New measures preachers did just this kind of thing. They gave up the authority of office and tradition for a new kind of authority better suited to a mass democratic age—what I call the authority of celebrity.

Historians have more often named the authority of new measures preachers as “charismatic.” Relying on Max Weber's famous typology of authority as “charismatic,” “traditional,” or “legal,” some historians have argued that the new measures replaced a traditional mode of authority with a charismatic one. For if Finney did not have traditional authority—and for the most part he did not¹⁵—what other kind of authority could he have?

Finney's power did not rely on the legitimation of tradition, but neither did it rely in a pure form on what Weber identified as charisma. Rather Finney should be understood within the context of the emerging “star system” that appeared most clearly on the stage but also arose in religious and political spheres. Performers like Edmund Keane, Clara Fischer, and P.T. Barnum swapped practices back and forth with politicians like Senator Davy Crockett and President Andrew Jackson ... *and* with preachers like Charles Finney. They were all looking for ways to represent private sentiments to mass publics. As I have argued above, they managed to combine the intensity, passion, veracity and heightened reality of a private self with the prestige, reason, power and widespread presence of an alienated public representation. That amalgamation gave

¹⁴ Londoners began to use “star” to refer to famous actors by the 1770s. The term clearly migrated to the United States well before Finney's notoriety. “Star” was, I will show below, the preferred term of theatre manager William B. Wood. English speakers also used “celebrity” as early as 1600 to mean “the condition of being much extolled or talked about,” “famousness” or “notoriety.” But the *Oxford English Dictionary* did not record the word's applying to a person (rather than a condition) until 1849. Both words were in circulation during Finney's lifetime, though “star” probably had greater currency in the early years of his fame. Those years serve as the focal point of this dissertation, and so I use “star” rather than “celebrity.” The relatively late emergence of both of these terms adds thin support to this section's argument that “the star” was a relatively new category in the eighteenth century and represented an alternative to both traditional and charismatic forms of authority.

¹⁵ Finney's break with traditional forms of authority should not be overstated. He took pains to be ordained and then to make sure he located himself within denominations that would not withdraw that credential. More subtly, part of Finney's appeal depended on his status as a white male and on the traditions that attached special legitimation to his race and gender.

stars a distinct kind of authority, one that could neither be reduced to nor conflated with what Weber called charismatic authority.

Four quick points of contrast help to distinguish the authority of celebrity from charismatic authority. They also bring the workings of the authority of celebrity into sharper relief.

First, Weber defined charismatic authority as depending on the “extraordinary” quality of a person. Unlike a classic charismatic, though, Charles Finney took great pains to show his followers that he was just like them. He invited students to address him as “Brother,” even when he was the President of Oberlin. He spoke—quite self-consciously—in common language, and dressed in common ways. He insisted that his success as a revivalist depended on no special gifts, but rather on a method that anyone could use. His followers saw him as one just like them ... only more so. He was an icon of their aspirations. Not the extraordinariness, but the *interchangeability* of the star’s persona with that of audience members helped ground the authority of a star.¹⁶

A second, closely related contrast comes from the “proof” cited in support of Finney’s power. Weber’s charismatic leader proved her power “through miracles” that showed *divine* favor, wonders like healings and victories against overwhelming odds.¹⁷ But Finney proved himself through miracles of popularity, signs and wonders that showed *public* favor. Handbills promoted Finney as the man who had converted thousands in Rochester, just as other handbills promoted Keane as the actor who had played to throngs in London, and just as today a sign might promote a restaurant according to the number of billions served or a president might obsess over the number of people at his inauguration. The star embodied the new kind of authority that Tocqueville saw emerging in democratic nations. “As citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant of each to believe blindly a certain man or class diminishes. The disposition to believe the mass is augmented, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world.” The authority of stars arose out of their ability to relate to a mass of people large enough to symbolize the public to itself. Stars worked *social* miracles.¹⁸

Finney further shows the difference between a celebrity and a classic charismatic leader in his appeal to existing canons of reason. Weber defined the charismatic as “irrational” in the sense of leaving behind traditional norms of reason in order to appeal to “concrete revelations and inspirations.” The charismatic preacher did not reason within existing structures, but rather said, “It is written—but I say unto you...!” The ecstatic exhorters at Cane Ridge and other revivals had this kind of charismatic authority, but it cost them: to signify the divine origins of

¹⁶ On the uniqueness of Weber’s charismatic, see Max Weber, “The Social Psychology of the World Religions,” in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H. H. Geertz and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 294-301, esp. 295. On Finney’s public suppression of stories of powerful personal prayer, see Finney, *Memoirs*, 39. On interchangeability of star and fan, see McConachie, “American Theatre in Context, from the Beginnings to 1870,” 148.

¹⁷ Weber, “Social Psychology,” 296.

¹⁸ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, II.i.2, 409. About one hundred years after Tocqueville, another European with aristocratic sympathies came to the United States (though, it must always be remembered, as a refugee and not a tourist) and framed similar conclusions in updated language. The astrology column, Adorno wrote, reflects “changes in the pattern of authoritarianism which no longer invests real father figures with authority but replaces them with collectivities. The image of the friend [Brother Finney] invokes a collective authority consisting of all those who are like himself, but who know better since they are not beset by the same worries.” The stars function as a “messenger of society,” a symbol of the whole social process. Theodor W. Adorno, “The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column,” in *Adorno: The Stars Down to Earth and Other Essays on the Irrational in Culture*, ed. Stephen Crook (London: Routledge, 1994), 105.

their message, they had to act in ways that transgressed emerging notions of white merchant and professional class respectability. Finney developed a style that stayed firmly within the bounds of respectability. He claimed no new revelation. He simply charged what sounded like common sense with an extra aura of emotional power. This amalgamation of passion and reason, public and private, gave Finney the authority of a star.¹⁹

Finally, Finney showed a star's dependence on routinized mass images and measures. Weber explicitly contrasted the initial burst of charismatic authority with its subsequent routinization.²⁰ With routinization charisma became regular and regulated, institutionalized and reliably reproduced. But Finney's style did not oppose routinization and charisma to one another. Instead, he joined them together. The new measures were, in a sense, reliable techniques for the reproduction of charisma. To the extent that Finney followed the measures, his charisma already depended on routinization. A Weberian charismatic might in fact follow a set routine, but Finney followed a routine with a high degree of self-consciousness *and* promised followers that the routine—and not the charismatic leader—had all the power. In stressing the power of the measures themselves, Finney managed not only to routinize charismatic expression, but also to make routinization itself gleam with a charismatic aura.

Finney's authority depended on his ability to project his private self in public, but he did not embody Weber's charismatic type. Finney might best be understood as one who found a way to be authoritative just as modernity was beginning to make classic charismatic authority problematic in new ways. As a rising egalitarian ethos made qualitative distinctions between persons more difficult to sustain, Finney's presentation of himself as a realization of the potential in every individual fit the times. As miracles involving the natural world became less believable to many U.S. citizens, Finney's miracles of the social world became even more authoritative. As charismatic and ecstatic speech took on the stigma of bodies out of control, Finney's charged common sense offered an exciting but respectable alternative. And as mass production seemed to make more and more things repeatable, Finney made repeatability itself something powerful, meaningful, and immensely attractive. The public-private authority of this star arose from the ruins not only of tradition, but also of charisma.

The authority of celebrity cannot be reduced to one of Weber's types. I am not saying that it is completely new with Finney and other new measures preachers. But if they did not invent it, they did much to perfect it and to package it for mass distribution. Neither charismatic

¹⁹ Weber, "Social Psychology," 296. Historian Perry Miller cut Finney to fit a basically charismatic model, stressing Finney's "demonic" power. But Miller, ever attentive to details, noted this exception: "What is fascinating about [Finney] is that he was not a bully, but an advocate at the bar." Miller, *Life of the Mind*, 23. Theodor W. Adorno noted this curious fusion of reason and quasi-magical authority in the astrology column of the *Los Angeles Times*, and took it as a distillation of the deepest trends of modern life: "Everything sounds respectable, sedate and sensible and astrology as such is treated as something established and socially recognized, an uncontroversial element of our culture, as though it were somewhat bashful of its own shadiness. Hardly ever does the practical advice tendered to the reader transgress the limits of what one finds in any column dealing with human relations and popular psychology. The only difference is that the writer leans on his distinctively magical and irrational authority which seems to be strangely out of proportion with the common-sense content of what he has to offer. This discrepancy cannot be regarded as accidental. The common-sense advice contains, as will be shown later, many spurious 'pseudo-rational' elements, calling for some authoritarian backing to be effective." Adorno was arguing that "common sense" did not keep its promises of effectiveness in late capitalism. (Working hard and saving money did not necessarily secure a retirement, for instance.) Because people knew, on some level, the bad faith of common sense promises, common sense required the backing of some magical or irrational authority – like the stars. See Adorno, "The Stars Down to Earth: The *Los Angeles Times* Astrology Column." (English original.)

²⁰ Weber, "Social Psychology," 297–301.

nor traditional, it is the form of authority that fits most closely with the ethos and structures of a modern, mass democracy in which people relate to representations of public figures and long to know the “real” selves behind them.²¹

The Price of Fame

Charles Finney seemed to thrive as a star. He did not mind to project his voice into text, his sentiment into argument, or his private self into public discourse. He had nothing to fear, for his public and private personae were practically identical. He was who he seemed to be, and seemed to be who he was. The star system cost Finney just that distinction between public seeming and private being.

Finney valued the consonance of public and private selves so highly because he believed the success of revivals depended on it. Finney warned his listeners that people could detect insincerity, and it would put them off. And even if a preacher could fool all of the people all of the time, a preacher could not fool the most discerning fan of all. God would withdraw God’s presence from insincere preachers, and the revival would fail. One way or another, effectiveness in revivals depended on public displays of sincerity. Sincerity became extremely important—but always in an instrumental sense. It became important as a *measure*.²²

Effective revival preaching demanded more than sincerity from preachers, Finney thought. Sincerely expressing doubt, lust, or melancholy would save few souls. A preacher needed to express sincerely *the right set* of sentiments. If a leader felt the right feelings, and transmitted those feelings clearly and powerfully, people would flock to the revival. Not just sincerity, then, but also feeling “as one ought” became a measure for revival. The emotions of the preacher—the quintessence of the private self—became a means to public ends.²³

Finney explained the importance of right feeling through a dynamic theory of sympathy. He described an “economy of grace” driven by sympathetic transactions of feeling. The Spirit of God inspired the feelings of a minister and worked through them to ignite right feelings in the hearers. Finney saw the exchange of feelings operating in two directions. The wise preacher did not simply pour out the same set of feelings, in the same order, at the same tempo, every time he preached. The soul-winning preacher had, Finney said, a “single eye” for the reactions of the congregation, and adjusted his feelings to give people the particular emotions they needed. Finney kept his eyes on a congregation constantly. He watched his congregation in order to adapt his public speech to their needs. Because sincerity required that public speech be identical to private sentiment, adapting public speech involved adaptations that went deep into the self that

²¹ The last example in this string suggests an illuminating comparison. Finney took the conditions that produced the “loss of aura” that worried Walter Benjamin (and filled him with a sense of possibility) and made them auratic. Compare “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” in Benjamin, *G.S.*, I.471–508. Translated as “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Mechanical Reproducibility” in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, trans. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael William Jennings, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), III.101–33.

²² Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 134–35. Finney may have overstated the public’s demand for sincerity. Phineas T. Barnum packed people in to see wonders even after he himself had revealed his previous “wonders” as frauds. And historian R. Laurence Moore recounted the case of temperance lecturer John Bartholomew Gough, who drew big crowds on the lyceum circuit in the 1840s in part because people wanted to see if he would be drunk or sober when he spoke. At least some people in the United States in the 1830s and 40s enjoyed watching the play of seeming and being so much that it trumped any desire for sincerity. On Gough, see R. Laurence Moore, *Selling God: American Religion in the Marketplace Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57.

²³ Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 137.

Finney and his listeners considered most authentic. Finney made eye contact not just to express himself, but also to transform himself.²⁴

Understanding these self-transformations by the speaker clarifies the nature of celebrity and the dynamics of power in the spaces in which it was enacted. Historian Jeanne Halgren Kilde understood eye contact in the Oberlin meeting as a way for preacher-professors to control the room. The gaze from the pulpit monitored and molded students, as in Michel Foucault's analysis of Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon. But new measures preachers used the space differently than did Bentham's observers. The Oberlin meetinghouse did allow a preacher to make eye contact with an entire congregation, and it did facilitate attempts to discipline the feelings of students and other congregants. But a preacher in this new democracy disciplined others by reading their faces and then disciplining himself to feel the feelings he wanted them to feel. Disciplinary power therefore flowed along lines of sight in two directions. Eye contact made a preacher like Finney both observer and oblation, supervisor and sacrifice.²⁵

There are at least two ironies at work in the complex dynamics of this practice. First, because the authority of celebrity transforms and then displays the private self for the sake of public projects, it gradually erodes the very private self it celebrates. Stars of many kinds and many magnitudes—from preachers to politicians to actors to workers in service and culture industries—find the public projects of their work claiming every aspect of their lives. It is not just a matter of work taking more time. It is rather that the authority of celebrity requires the display of whatever counts as private, and so as real. This leads to the instrumental, public use of all kinds of interests, feelings, activities, and relationships. Children get pressed into service as props that display wholesomeness. Pets become emblems of character: Consider Tinkerbell, the Chihuahua Paris Hilton carried as something like an insignia for her brand; or Socks, the cat Bill Clinton once featured on his official Christmas card; or the corgis whose public display has done so much to humanize Queen Elizabeth in the years after Diana's death.²⁶ Like children, pets get used to reveal the "real" self. Within this logic, religious practices become some of the most powerful accessories of all—not only for preachers, but also for stars in every field. The authority of celebrity can display and make use of every aspect of life. And so the price of public sincerity runs through institutions, and bodies politic, and deep into the lives of stars.

I believe this drive to mobilize so much of private life for the sake of the authority of celebrity is a primary reason for the burnout and hollowness that can set in for so many people who rely on this kind of authority, including politicians, musicians, actors, and preachers. When all of life becomes at least potentially a resource for one's authority, and so for one's work—even if that work is for the best of causes—then no part of life is safe to exist as a good in itself. Relationships are under constant pressure. Leisure activities lose the quality of free play. And, as

²⁴ Finney, *Memoirs*, 88. Gale, *Autobiography*, 258. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, 211.

²⁵ Kilde, *When Church Became Theatre: The Transformation of Evangelical Architecture and Worship in Nineteenth-Century America*, 51-52. Adorno named an interaction like this in his description of what musical performance became in the era of the virtuoso – a close analogue to the star preacher. The virtuoso, like a priest, "slaughtered" the piece for the delight of the audience. "Of course, as in our dreams, the ritual characters in the concert can become conflated [sich verwirrt]. Oftentimes we no longer know who it is that is sacrificed: the work, the virtuoso, or in the end ourselves." Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften*, 20 vols. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1977), 16.310. In English: "The Natural History of the Theatre," in Theodor W. Adorno, *Quasi Una Fantasia: Essays on Modern Music*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1992), 66.

²⁶ For one of the most insightful studies of the role of pets in the projection of a star's persona, see Michael Joseph Gross, "Queen Elizabeth and Her Corgis: A Love Story," *Vanity Fair*, August 2015, <http://www.vanityfair.com/style/2015/07/queen-elizabeth-corgis-a-history>.

Jesus knew, prayer is transformed when it is performed to be seen, or to be described in a later sermon. All those things that keep human life human are threatened by the drive to turn them into resources for the authority of celebrity.

A second irony is costly in other ways. As the authority of celebrity erodes the self it frames as private, this mode of authority undermines the conditions of its own legitimacy. When the private self is deployed for public purposes, it ceases to appear as all those things that made it authoritative. It no longer seems given, spontaneous, natural, pre-social, and prior to every project. It no longer seems like the “really real.” For instance, when George W. Bush told the nation a story about something his spouse Laura said to him while they were reading in bed, just before turning out the light, discerning observers knew that the story has been scrutinized and judged fit for public presentation, perhaps in Bush’s own mind and perhaps in more formal conversations with spin doctors. Even if the conversation really happened—especially if it really happened—we know, on some level, that this story does not give us a direct look at some private, natural, pre-political George Bush. In the same way, the running story about Barack Obama’s struggle to quit smoking—and Michelle Obama’s role in urging him to quit—was not a simple glimpse inside the workings of a marriage. The public came to understand this, and the story lost its allure over time. Consistent public displays of private selves eventually wear away the aura of the self we take as private—and so the authority of celebrity, in the long run, undermines the basis of its own legitimacy.

This loss of legitimacy has not prevented the growth of the authority of celebrity. The election of Donald Trump shows that it may be more important than ever before. Trump appealed to people because he projected an air of authenticity. Supporters cited his willingness to speak his mind without counting the political cost. He seemed “real” because he said things in public that his white base usually kept behind closed doors. His manner seemed unpolished, unstudied, natural. This celebrity style of presenting a private self in public was central to Trump’s appeal. If the election of Trump shows the power of the authority of celebrity, it also shows the ironies of this mode of authority. When even marriage seems designed for display, it is hard to know what is left of any pre-political life or self. As the vacuum at the center of the star’s private life becomes more apparent, the public display of that private life loses its aura.²⁷

Even in decay, the authority of celebrity continues to circulate through multiple spheres of society. Practices of purposeful public sincerity have long migrated between politics, entertainment, and religion. But one of the features of the contemporary economy is that more and more people engage in practices for public sincerity in their work. Practices of public sincerity assume greater importance whether one stresses the expansion of the service sector, the significance of working with symbols, or the rapid growth of the so-called “gig” economy. Sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild has dubbed this management of self for public consumption as “emotional labor.” She studied the training of flight attendants for airlines with reputations for outstanding service. The attendants were trained not just to perform their duties competently, and not just to perform their duties in a warm and friendly manner, but to perform their duties in a conspicuously sincere manner. They were trained for service with a smile—a smile that they *really* meant, and, even more, a smile that the customer *knew* they really meant. This kind of service requires just the kind of slipping between public and private roles that Finney mastered. And it is exactly the kind of skill prized across multiple sectors of the economy today.

²⁷ See also Ted A. Smith, “Discerning Authorities,” in *Questions Preachers Ask* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016), 55–72.

Stars come in many magnitudes, and they rise in many spheres. The authority of celebrity has expanded, even as it has worn away the distinctions between public and private on which its legitimacy depends. The new measure rolls on, if in a cynical and empty form.

Four Openings to Political Theory and Some Gratuitous Theology

Social critics on all sides of recent debates about “democracy” and “modernity” have tended to resort to idealist caricature. More careful empirical work in sociology, history, anthropology, and cultural studies can break up stereotypes and deepen debate. This little sliver of history could generate a long, long list of interventions in political ethics. The glory of the world is just this bottomlessness. But I want to focus on four places where this story of the authority of celebrity opens on to debates in religious ethics and political theory.

First, it interrupts one of the standard narratives of decline told especially by “new traditionalists” like Stanley Hauerwas and Alasdair MacIntyre. They have argued that modernity brings the dissolution of authority and the rise of a new, toxic individualism. It is true that what Weber called traditional forms of authority eroded significantly with the onset of “modernity” and “democracy.” But traditional forms of authority did not give way simply to free-floating individualism without *any* kind of authority. Hauerwas and MacIntyre see only the decline of traditional authority, and so miss the new kinds of authority and community at work, for better and for worse.

The new traditionalists also miss the threat this new order poses to an individualism that can sustain what we think of as autonomy. The practices of public sincerity associated with the authority of celebrity do not represent the triumph of individual autonomy. If anything, they undermine the kind of character that can sustain autonomy. The autonomy MacIntyre and Hauerwas worry so much about depends on a self that has and knows its own projects, purposes and desires prior to social interaction. But the authority of celebrity demands that we modify our own deepest hopes and desires for the sake of public consumption. As more and more of us engage in those practices in more and more spheres of life, the result is a political order of people who are very good at modifying and displaying what we “really” feel for the sake of public projects—and who have a very hard time saying what we really care about apart from those projects. Such selves do not use means to their own ends, but become means to other ends. Thus I would argue that the story is not one of the collapse of authority and the rise of individualism, but rather of the shift from one kind of authority to another, and with that shift a threat to the kind of character that can sustain the individualism necessary for meaningful autonomy.

Second, it is important to note that the authority of celebrity grew out of and made use of anxieties created by the emergence of modern public spheres. Jürgen Habermas has sometimes written as if the culture industry—and the authority of celebrity which is at its center—attacks the public sphere like an alien invader. But if the authority of celebrity is an enemy of proper public discourse (and is it really? but that’s a topic for another paper) it is an enemy from within, an organ turned against the body as a whole. The authority of celebrity arose precisely because of anxieties created by the differentiation of a public sphere from a private sphere that was taken as somehow more authentic. (Habermas’s notions of “system” and “lifeworld” replicate just this pairing.) That differentiation created anxieties about sincerity, and the authority of celebrity gained power and legitimacy because of its ability to soothe those anxieties. I don’t mean to say that the authority of celebrity is a logically necessary outcome of the emergence of the public sphere. History is always contingent. But I do mean to say that celebrity is the mode of authority that has in fact risen to dominance with the emergence of a public sphere. It makes use of the

stuff and structures of the public sphere. But because the authority of celebrity breaks down distinctions between public and private, it also *undermines* the public sphere. This is not a small point, for it means that the public sphere, as Habermas conceives it, has unleashed dynamics that wear away the conditions necessary for its own existence. Protecting the public sphere, then, cannot simply involve policing its borders to keep celebrity out. The stuff of the authority of celebrity is always already inside a liberal democratic order.

Third, understanding the dynamics of celebrity exposes the particular ways that race, ethnicity and gender are coded into the deep structures of authority in a modern, mass democracy like the United States. The authority of celebrity depends on a certain *frisson* that arises from acting in private ways in public. Dominant understandings of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality make those performances perilous for minoritized people. The role of public person is still deeply coded as straight, white, and male. People who present themselves in ways that match that template—people like me—can slip out of a public persona and into modes associated with the private sphere without fear of losing their status as public persons. This kind of slipping between public and private is exactly what the authority of celebrity requires. Thus—especially in political, economic, and ecclesial spheres—it is easier for those already advantaged by political structures to exercise the authority of celebrity.

Women seeking to exercise the authority of celebrity, for instance, face burdens that men do not. Consider the challenges Hillary Rodham Clinton had in replicating Bill Clinton's uncanny connections with a mass public. This was not just a matter of individual temperament. When a woman shows a private self in public she often faces charges of weakness, shrillness, or even lewdness. This is true for preachers as well as politicians, for the obstacles migrate between spheres with the practices. Billy Sunday inherited and adapted Finney's practices of public sincerity. When he made eye contact with two thousand people, they found it riveting. When Aimee Semple McPherson did the same thing, people charged her with public indecency.

Just so, the enduring power of racism in America makes it difficult for African American, Latino/a, Asian American, and Native American leaders to exercise the authority of celebrity. Analogous obstacles show up across different social spheres. When Finney spoke with tears rolling down his face, it showed that he had heart. If his contemporary Henry Highland Garnett, a powerful African American Presbyterian preacher, had done this, it would have been read as a sign that he was irrational and out of control. Just so, Barack Obama could not express outrage with the freedom that George W. Bush and other recent presidents had been able to. Comedian Keegan-Michael Key's character of Luther—the “anger translator” for Obama—played with these restraints in revelatory ways. Restraints like these not only limit what public figures identified with minoritized groups can say and do. They also make it more difficult for these leaders to access the authority of celebrity that has come to be so important in late modern mass democracy.

Seeing the ways that the authority of celebrity replicates structures of privilege already in place makes clear that deepening democracy and dismantling unjust structures of authority will require a radical rethinking of the roles, rules, practices, norms, manner, and mores of democratic life. It will not be enough to expand the number of people eligible for particular offices—ecclesial, political, or otherwise—for authority is not rooted only in office. Likewise, it will not be enough to expand the number of people who can acquire education that makes them experts in this or that field, for authority is not rooted only in technical proficiency. Deepening democracy will require opening up the ways in which all people can make use of the authority of celebrity. And that will require fundamental shifts in our shared social imaginaries.

Fourth, seeing the role of practices of preaching in creating the authority of celebrity begins to suggest a way around the paradox of public theology. Those who argue for that paradox state it like this: if a religious group speaks in language peculiar to its own tradition, it will not get much of a public hearing; but if a religious group speaks in language it shares with other groups, then it does not make a distinctive contribution. Either way, the argument for paradox goes, religious groups contribute nothing *as religious groups* to public deliberation. But if practices migrate across social spheres—as practices of the authority of celebrity have circulated between religious, cultural, political and other spheres—then religious groups might contribute to public discourse by reforming a practice as it arises in their own spaces. In its own space a group could speak in its own particular language. It could reform a practice for reasons related to commitments it would not need to justify in public discourse. A Christian cultural critic might therefore treat the migration of practices between churches and other social spheres not as a rash of impurities that must be washed or wished away, but as a series of opportunities for critical, public engagement that do not require a church to abandon its first, explicitly theological language. Through the transmigration of practices, critical, theological reflection on church practices becomes critical, theological—and potentially transformative—reflection on crucial elements of social spheres such as law, politics, economics, family life, and entertainment. Practical theology becomes public theology.

In highlighting the wider potential for reflection on religious practices, I do not mean to devalue the importance of working for changes in public policy. I do mean to recognize the difficulty of making such changes without giving up distinctly religious language. I also mean to assert—with so-called “cultural Marxists” such as Antonio Gramsci and Raymond Williams—that cultural power plays an enormous role in sustaining injustice and so that changes in the practices of religious groups could have important consequences in the political sphere. To speak more specifically, and more contentiously, about my home tradition: Mainline U.S. Protestants are far more likely to change the larger society by changing their practices of preaching than by issuing another round of denominational position papers.

The migration of practices enables a religious cultural critic to reflect in distinctly religious language on a practice as it passes through religious institutions. Reform of worship can make an intervention in a social imaginary—and not only within the religious body, for the practices being reformed will almost always be circulating between multiple social spheres.

What, then, might a Christian theologian interested in political theory say about the authority of celebrity? It can be tempting to tell the story of the rise of the authority of celebrity as a narrative of decline. This would fit with a larger story about the erosion of boundaries between public and private spheres and the steady dissolution of the modern self. But crossing the bourgeois boundary between public and private has been important in struggles against child abuse, domestic violence, clergy sexual abuse, and other evils once sheltered in the name of protecting a private sphere. The women’s movement has worked hard to make the personal political, and temporal justice has flourished because of it. This story cannot be told *only* as a narrative of decline.

The facts resist a simple, total narrative of decline. And I want to argue that a Christian theology of history also resists stories of total and complete decline. We might talk about things getting better and worse, but this is something very different from the almost ontological stories of decline told by people like MacIntyre, Hauerwas, and (too often) Adorno. If one is committed to the very basic idea that God yearns for the redemption of all creation, then no point in time—

not even late modernity—could be regarded as Godforsaken. It would always make sense to ask what it would mean to hope for a redemption of the present moment.

But what would it mean to hope for redemption at the end of a story about the dissolution of the modern self? I think that raises a contextual question of theological anthropology. Who are the people at the end of this story? What is the ground of their true identity? Who is the subject of redemption? Or, more concretely: if Charles Finney's life and person were formed through his practice of the authority of celebrity, what would it be like to hope for his resurrection? If the deepest truth about Finney was that he was the self he was in the private sphere, then his redemption, the fulfillment of the promise made in his creation, would be to make the life he lived in the private sphere perfect and total, all in all. His redemption would not involve work, citizenship, preaching or other public activities, but only the consumer pleasures and affective delights of a perfect life at home. Above all, it would involve eternal reunion with family. Finney's younger contemporary Elizabeth Stuart Phelps expressed such hope in *The Gates Ajar* (1868).²⁸ This view still dominates many sentimental understandings of redemption.

There is another possibility. If the deepest truth about Finney was that he was a self behind or apart from the role he played in every sphere, then his redemption would not even involve the perfection of these domestic pleasures. It would instead be the deliverance from body, relationship, and history of every kind, into a life unsullied by particular content. Finney's contemporary Ralph Waldo Emerson expressed such hope in "The Over-Soul" (1841)²⁹—and this view still dominates many "new thought" and liberal Protestant visions of hope.

But there is still another possibility. If the deepest truth about Finney was that he was a star—bound to a public, implicated in social orders, never quite identical to himself—then Finney's redemption would require a resurrection of *that* broken, social body. The raising of a body bound by relationships could not help but pull up other people, both intimates and crowds, with the strings attached. The restoration of a body shot through by the eyes of others would involve the cleansing of those eyes. The redemption of a body made through social orders and practices would have to raise those orders and practices with it. The healing of a body wounded by history would involve and accomplish the healing of that history. It is almost too much to hope for. But this is the kind of hope—personal, political, and more—that a history of preaching can make possible.

²⁸ Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, *The Gates Ajar* (Boston: Fields Osgood, 1868).

²⁹ Emerson published "The Over-Soul" as part of *Essays: First Series*. It was reprinted in Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Essays and Lectures* (New York: Library of America, 1983), 383–400.

Charles A. Bobertz. *The Gospel of Mark: A Liturgical Reading*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2016. 258 pages. \$27.99.

The Gospel of Mark: A Liturgical Reading interprets the whole of Mark's Gospel in light of two central rituals of the church, baptism and Eucharist. As Professor of Theology at St. John's University (MN) and a Roman Catholic deacon, Bobertz's interest in liturgical theology animates the whole of his project, providing a liturgical touchstone for readers who seek to understand how the early church's understanding of baptism and Eucharist may inform our interpretation of the oldest canonical Gospel.

Amid the apocalyptic context of the early church, Bobertz contends that of foremost concern to Mark was the controversy over whether baptized Gentiles, both male and female, would have a place at the Lord's Supper with Jews. According to Bobertz, the Gospel's symbolic narrative attests that through baptism both Jews and Gentiles ritually enter into the death of Jesus Christ and both are given a place at the table of the risen Lord. He argues that the earliest of the canonical Gospels "was created to convey a particular understanding of these two rituals to the community" (xvii) and that "it is not possible to understand what Mark is attempting to convey without realizing that the story itself emerges from Mark's experience of the cultic reality of his own church" (7) – a reality that includes being crucified in baptism and joining the risen Christ in the Eucharist as Christians whose identities are bound to him in martyrdom.

Addressed to the "liturgical reader" who encounters the Gospel "from the present formative experience and reality of Christian liturgy, especially baptism and Eucharist" (10), Bobertz offers a sacramental reading of the text and a liturgical reconstruction of the Markan community's ecclesial concern over who is included in these ritual practices. He argues that through Mark's deeply symbolic narrative Jesus begins his struggle against death and chaos in his baptism and that these are overcome through his crucifixion and resurrection on behalf of all people. In ritual meals, Jesus further invites his followers "to enact in ritual the final gathering of a unified humanity, Jews and Gentiles, men and women" (6f). Each of the book's ten chapters explores narrative blocks of the Gospel and argues for their having been created to provide a theological rationale for baptism and Eucharist as the bases of Christian identity, theology, and practice. Of particular note are the chapters addressing Jesus' own baptism in Mark 1 and his feeding of the crowds in the first and second "ritual meals" described in Mark 6:30-44 and 8:1-9. Chapter 7 also provides an intriguing examination of Jesus' apocalyptic discourse as Bobertz proposes that Mark 13 was not created as an historical account of Roman destruction (as most modern interpreters have insisted) but was created as Gentile men and women gathered with Jewish men and women in house churches, to communicate deeply "the proper identity of the ritual body in the face of the daunting circumstances of active persecution." (147)

However commendable the author's interest in portraying the early church's inclusive practice of Eucharist may be, his liturgical interests sometimes override ethical and theological concerns named in the Markan narrative itself. For example, by arguing that Mark was "first and foremost a story about Jesus created to convince the original readers and hearers of the story that there was a correct way to understand and practice these rituals in the context of violent persecution and an expectation of the imminent return of Jesus as Lord and judge of history" (xvi), Bobertz sets these liturgical concerns above the text's own claim that there are other reasons for Jesus having fed the thousands who came to him: namely, he had "compassion for the crowd, because they have been with me now for three days and have nothing to eat." (Mark 8:2) More than asserting correct liturgical theology and practice, Mark portrays Jesus as

embodying divine compassion and care for those who are hungry and hurting. Whatever speculations may be made about the early church's interest in establishing correct ritual practices, Mark's narrative leaves no doubt as to what governs Jesus' presence and ministry, both sacramental and practical: it is the divine imperative to provide food for the hungry, care for the hurting, and other ministries that embody God's just and loving intentions for all creation. The liturgical reader whom Bobertz addresses may well reach within this book to find support for the church's liturgical practices but must also reach beyond it to Mark's Gospel itself to learn more about the church's call to compassionate ministry for neighbors near and far.

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Sidney Greidanus. *Preaching Christ from Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 595 pages. \$40.

Sidney Greidanus, Professor Emeritus of Preaching at Calvin Theological Seminary, offers a study on Christian preaching from the Psalms in this volume. He follows the methodology he used in his work *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament* (1999). It also echoes ideas from his *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text* (1988). He has also written on the theme of Preaching Christ in three other volumes on Genesis, Ecclesiastes and Daniel.

He bases his study on 22 psalms from the Psalm reading from *The Revised Common Lectionary* Year A. However, preaching from the Psalms does not need to be limited to this and he offers a variety of helpful suggestions in an appendix, “Series of Sermons on the Psalms.”

Chapter one discusses issues found in preaching Christ from the Psalms. He addresses such objections as the Psalms were meant to be prayed or sung in the church. He emphasizes that preaching Christ from the Psalms should not be a forced ideology. His approach to preaching Christ from the Psalms is to “preaching sermons which authentically integrate the message of the text with the climax of God’s revelation in the person, work, and/or teaching of Jesus Christ as revealed in the New Testament” (5). Greidanus views a predictive nature of many of the Psalms in which Jesus fulfilled the hope that went unfulfilled during the earthly Israelite reigns. He also notes the extensive use of the Psalms in the New Testament, by both Jesus and the writers, to emphasize the importance of the Psalms for the Church today.

One of the strengths of the book is its emphasis of understanding the literary structure of the Psalms in the preparation and preaching from the Psalms. Poetic devices can often be lost in translation. Parallelism is common in Hebrew poetry and provides an insight to the flow of a given Psalm as well as other rhetorical structures such as repetition, inclusio, and chiasmic patterns. It is also important to understand the literary structure of the Psalms including its division into five books and the use of different types of psalms throughout the book. Knowing these types and their functions aids in the interpretation of the Psalms.

Each of the 22 Psalms is dealt with in separate chapters that follow a shared outline. The text and the context are dealt with first followed by a discussion of the literary and rhetorical qualities of the text. Greidanus then deals with the theocentric aspect of the text. After addressing the theme and goals of the text, he offers various ways in which Christ can be addressed through the text. Finally, the author offers an expository sermon based on the text.

Helpful appendices at the end include additional sermons and meditation. It has as already noted, “Series of Sermons on the Psalms,” which offers alternatives to *The Revised Common Lectionary* for preaching from the Psalms. Two appendices, “Ten Steps from Text to Sermon” and “An Expository Sermon Model,” offer primers for sermon preparation.

Sidney Greidanus’ *Preaching Christ from the Psalms: Foundations for Expository Sermons in the Christian Year* provides a rationale for preaching from the Psalms in the church today. As an Old Testament professor, I do question the need to always to preach Christ from the Psalms. The Psalms can be a personal and rich resource for the reader to voice his or her own self to God. Nevertheless, Greidanus provides an introduction to understanding the literary and rhetorical nature of the poetic literature of the Psalms. Each chapter offers a good example of the depth of research and thought that should be included in the sermon preparation process. This is

accentuated by his inclusion of developing the sermon and the expository sermon and also additional suggestions for developing Psalms sermon series in the appendices.

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Aaron E. Lavender. *Enduring Truth: Restoring Sound Theology and Relevance to African-American Preaching*. Nashville: B & H Academic, 2016. 128 pages. \$24.99.

Aaron E. Lavender is the vice president, professor of pastoral ministries, and director of seminary studies at Carver Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary in Kansas City, Missouri. Lavender is also the pastor of Grace Baptist Church in Kansas City, Missouri, and serves as Vice President of Church Development for the Fundamental Baptist Fellowship Association.

In the Introduction of his book, *Enduring Truth*, Lavender immediately states his purpose for writing this book. He argues that on any given Sunday, there are preachers in pulpits across the nation opening their bibles and mouths, muting God's words and inserting their own. These preachers, notes Lavender, have been fooled into believing that what they preached is God's Word when in reality they are the preacher's personal thoughts and opinions. He further argues that the need to restore textual accuracy and relevance to biblical preaching is urgent, particularly in African American pulpits (2).

Enduring Truth consists of four practical chapters revealing the author's conservative view of Scripture, belief in complementarianism, and appreciation for expository preaching. Each chapter concludes with at least six discussion questions to help readers think through what the author has written. Throughout chapter one, "The Crisis: Erosion of Biblical Preaching in African American Pulpits," Lavender contends that segregation, black liberation theology and prosperity theology are the three factors that precipitated the decline of biblical preaching in black churches. The first factor segregation, made alleviating racism, sexism, and poverty the main focus. This, however, was at the expense of traditional Christian teaching about repentance and faith in Christ (11).

The second factor, black liberation theology, has at least three problems, according to Lavender; it is a threat to biblical Christianity, it deemphasizes the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ, and it contributes to the segregation of Christian churches alienating black Christians from their white brothers and sisters.

The final factor Lavender believes precipitated the decline of biblical preaching in black churches is what he calls the heretical teaching known as "prosperity theology." This teaching states God rewards faithfulness with good health and material wealth (22). The three factors Lavender refers to are viewed as satanic plans to water down God's truth. He refers to black preachers who preach the social gospel, black liberation theology, and the prosperity gospel as false preachers.

In Chapter Two, "The Importance of Biblical Exegesis," Lavender warns preachers against reading their personal biases and presuppositions into a text. He argues that the text should speak for itself, and then offers a definition of exegesis as expressed by white conservatives, noting how many black theologians read their own biases into a text, which affects their understanding of the text's meaning. Next he provides three reasons why biblical exegesis is important; the divine origin of the Bible necessitate it, God commands it, and because of the rejection of truth. Lavender uses his complementarian view to validate his case by arguing that reading personal opinions into a biblical text has led to an influx of women being ordained into pastoral ministries in urban churches, which is not biblical (50).

In Chapter Three, "A Theology of Preaching," Lavender offers a definition of biblical preaching. Though the book is specifically about African American preaching he references Euro-American publishers as he works towards this definition. He then discusses the ethos of

preaching in the African American context and claims expository preaching as the best preaching method. Lavender uses two conservative expository preachers to define, illustrate, and explain why this method is so effective.

The last chapter, "Relevance in Biblical Preaching," analyzes postmodernism and its effect on biblical preaching. It further discusses what it means to preach contextually and then five seasoned pastors are asked to and answer six questions pertaining to the relevance and practice of preaching. The book concludes with Lavender stating that African American pulpits are in desperate need of a spiritual makeover and that it is incumbent upon black preachers to preach God's Word because most problems faced by the black community relate to its deficiencies in understanding the Bible (96).

Lavender seeks to recover what he defines as biblical preaching, biblical accuracy and relevance to preaching. This book is challenging to those steeped in the African American preaching tradition. In many ways it rejects a long-tenured, venerable preaching tradition in basing the future credibility of the tradition on a conservative perspective established and verified by Euro-American males. Those who know and cherish the distinct history and practice of African American preaching will certainly question Lavender's homiletical critique.

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Joyce Ann Mercer and Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, eds. *Conundrums in Practical Theology*. Boston: Brill, 2016. 320 pages. \$76.

A conundrum is a puzzle or riddle without an apparent solution, an enigma that baffles, frustrates, and evades resolution. *Conundrums in Practical Theology* examines the confusing and difficult problems and questions currently catching at the “raw spots” within practical theology. From the tensions around race and bodies; to questions about whether studies of practice count as respectable scholarship; to the complexity that local, contextualized knowledge brings to the task of academic study, this book offers eleven chapters that raise awareness about important issues often ignored or avoided within the academy and religious communities.

Paging through the table of contents of this fine volume of essays, the homiletician will notice that there are no chapters about preaching. While this is a disappointing oversight and/or omission, the essays in this book do have important insights for teachers of preaching and worship. For example, Kathryn Turpin’s essay on “The Complexity of Local Knowledge” includes a case study about teaching students the importance of liturgical language and its ramifications surrounding the congregational practice of communion. She first shares the speech she uses in class to illustrate the formative power of liturgical language. But for the reader she reveals several layers of unredacted detail about how things like race and country of origin, gender and sexual orientation, ecclesiology and hospitality, hierarchy, and good old church politics complexify the story. Later in the chapter she homes in on the very real but often ignored dimensions of smells, sounds, and interpersonal interactions that happen during the preaching of a sermon, details which are rarely discussed when we teach seminary students. This chapter offers many excellent questions and issues which are especially applicable to field education supervisors guiding students in their congregations. Turpin’s essay also references Dale Andrews, whose book, *Practical Theology for Black Churches*, buttresses her section on “situated knowledge.”

Part of the authors’ aim for this book is to help “seminary faculties at large think afresh about how curriculum evolves, how colleagues relate, how courses are structured, how problems in ministry and faith are addressed, and so forth” (5). Thus, I would recommend this book as ideal fodder for faculty discussions. Take, for instance, Faustino M. Cruz’s chapter, “The Tension between Scholarship and Service.” He highlights the double bind set up within the academy of requiring countless hours for professional activities and institutional service, while simultaneously penalizing a lack of published scholarship. Especially for women and scholars of color, this situation is a Catch-22. When scholars of color are invited to leadership or administrative positions (often with the unspoken expectation that they will “represent” their historically marginalized group), Cruz notes that saying “no” is not an option, because of the need to represent the minority and have a voice at the table. The unfortunate result is that “women and faculty of color contribute a disproportionate level of service to the academy,” but then struggle with earning promotion because of not having an “acceptable” publishing record (73-75). Thus, he calls for faculty perception of service to shift toward “scholarship of service” in order to create new ways of evaluating scholarship. This may, in turn, help rectify deep institutional bias favoring research and publishing over service.

Cruz’s colleagues in this volume all demonstrate a similar fearlessness in shining a light on injustices and deep-seated patterns of power and privilege within the academy. The chapters on racism, for instance, are a must-read because they lay bare the conundrums of race and racialization in a fine-grained, yet systematic way. Courtney T. Goto analyzes her experience of

“Writing in Compliance with the Racialized ‘Zoo’ of Practical Theology,” and the metaphor is a powerful indictment of the way in which the “white gaze” both represents and activates power over minoritized scholars. In tandem with Goto’s essay, Phillis Isabella Sheppard’s chapter, “Raced Bodies: Portraying Bodies, Reifying Racism,” uncovers the irony that even committing to “a robust analysis of raced bodies” can unintentionally serve to reinforce and reproduce widespread stereotypes. Her hope is that “we will bear witness to the lived experiences of dismissed raced bodies and the discipline’s history of complicity,” with the goal of transforming “the scholarship, membership, and practices of the discipline” (247).

While this is not a book for undergraduate study, it is essential reading for practical theology graduate students and their advisors. There are chapters on the devaluation of using single case studies in one’s research; the tension between knowledge, subjectivity, colonialism and reflexivity; normativity within empirical practical theological research; interdisciplinarity; and the politics of the theory-practice binary. Each essay raises imperative questions that defy easy answers, and yet demands a reckoning if we are to engage in research, teaching, and leadership with authenticity and accountability.

Conundrums in Practical Theology is intentionally destabilizing, as it should be. The honesty with which these writers enter the unsolvable riddles is refreshing and permission-giving, and may lead to still more questions from scholars freed to delve into taboo topics. What holds the project together is the obvious collegiality and solidarity among the writers as they shared their questions and chapters with each other throughout the writing process for this book.

With Mike Grave’s edited volume *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today* (Westminster John Knox, 2004) over a decade old, now might be the ideal time to revisit the conundrums facing our own guild. Perhaps it is time for the rising generation of preaching scholars to identify our own particular conundrums to puzzle over and explore together. As *Conundrums in Practical Theology* demonstrates, the results may yield discernments that have important ramifications for homiletics and the art of preaching for this present time.

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Claire E. Wolfteich, ed. *Invitation to Practical Theology: Catholic Voices and Visions*. New York: Paulist Press, 2014. 386 pages. \$30.

While homiletics has long been a sub-discipline of practical theology in many theological institutions in the United States, the question of what practical theology is has not always been clear to many homileticians and pastors. Claire E. Wolfteich, a leading Catholic scholar in the field of practical theology, invites us to reflect on what we have been doing in a larger point of view: practice. In other words, though this book does not mention specifically about preaching, it provides its readers with a fruitful opportunity to ruminate on preaching as one of the Christian practices, allowing them to navigate many possible future trajectories of homiletics.

What, then, is practical theology? Wolfteich does not provide a clear definition because there are many different understandings of practical theology among practical theologians. Instead, she names three core components of practical theology from the Catholic perspective as follows: 1) A critical thinking about practice, i.e., what we do and how we live out our faith, 2) particularities of local contexts, cultures and communities (practice as *locus theologicus*), and 3) three dialogical stages of engaging and interpreting contemporary practice, deeply remembering and critically analyzing the tradition, and envisioning the future practice with theological imagination (2-7).

Based on these three components of practical theology, Wolfteich indicates that this book aims to advance a conversation between practical theology and Catholic theology, by focusing on practical theological resources of Catholic communities, traditions, and practices. It also seeks to contribute to interdisciplinary, ecumenical and interfaith reflection on religious practices, in terms of approaches, methods, and orientations in practical theology. Moreover, it intends to cultivate “practical theological agency within cultures and faith communities” (5). In this way, this book makes it clear that Catholic practical theology deals with the everyday life and practice of believers in order to shape lay *and* ordained leaders for the church (6).

The book is structured in three parts, including chapters all written by nineteen Catholic scholars. Part One contains three chapters which provide the historical contexts of Catholic practical theology and the initial understanding of key terms and issues. The nine chapters in Part Two explore a variety of concrete faith practices which are commonly understood as “theory-laden” and opening “epistemological horizons” (14). Areas included in the chapters are ecclesiology, practices of dialogue, family ethics, Latino/a popular religion, missiology, and spiritual direction. Part Three includes three chapters which deal with practical theological teaching and research. While it is quite profitable to read from the beginning to the end of the book, it is also beneficial to read selectively some of the chapters and later pick up the rest. For example, as Wolfteich suggested, the sequential reading of the chapters written by Kathleen A. Cahalan and Bryan Froehle (Chapter 2), Colleen M. Griffith (Chapter 3), David Tracy (Chapter 4), Thomas Groome (Chapter 14), Annemie Dillen and Robert Mager (Chapter 15), and Wolfteich (introduction and conclusion), is helpful to gain a clear understanding of practical theology (20).

Among these chapters, it is notable that Griffith’s essay, “Practice as Embodied Knowing,” focuses on practice as a source of theological and epistemological knowing and stresses the significance of balancing Aristotle’s three forms of knowledge—theoretical knowledge (*episteme*), practical wisdom (*phronesis*) and the know-how (*techné*). This chapter invites readers to rethink preaching as one of the most important Christian practices. Groome’s essay, “Practice of Teaching,” proposes shared praxis as a teaching method and insists that the

learning outcome of practical theology should be the students' knowledge and competency by informing and forming them in the habitus of doing theology, by taking account of their contexts seriously. This chapter is worthwhile for those who are specifically interested in hermeneutics and homiletical pedagogy. In addition, Wolfteich's essay, "Catholic Voices and Visions in Practical Theology," and Steven Bevans' essay, "Missiology as Practical Theology," are helpful resources for those who want to further develop their own spiritual, contextual, and missional homiletic and prophetic preaching. Both chapters clearly show the possibility of expanding the scope of preaching to the larger practical theological framework beyond the wall of the church.

While this volume opens a new vista for homiletical discourse, it has a couple of hurdles that are difficult to overcome, especially for the readers who do not have the previous knowledge about practical theology. The first hurdle is that, even though a variety of definitions of practical theology are offered sufficiently throughout the volume, they are scattered all around the book. The second hurdle of the book is that some essays focus too much on thick descriptions of certain practices, rather than developing theories from them. Nonetheless, I would recommend this book to homileticians, preachers, students, and lay leaders, because of its clear focus on everyday practice and its broad implications for our religious lives.

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Ellen F. Davis with Austin McIver Dennis. *Preaching the Luminous Word: Biblical Sermons and Homiletical Essays*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. 356 pages. \$33.

This volume contains fifty sermons collected by Austin Dennis and preached by Ellen Davis from 1985 to 2015. The book also contains five essays by Davis: 1) Witnessing to God in the Midst of Life: Old Testament Preaching, 2) Holy Preaching: Ethical Interpretation and the Practical Imagination, 3) Surprised by Wisdom: Preaching Proverbs, 4) “Here I Am”: Preaching Isaiah as a Book of Vocation, 5) Preaching in Witness to the Triune God. Four of these five essays were previously published in other journals or books. The fifth essay introduces the last thirteen sermons that are from New Testament texts and describes how preaching from the Old Testament and the New Testament are not “distinct activities” for Davis (245). She reads texts in their larger canonical context as they deal with the biblical story of “creation and new creation; suffering and death, redemption and resurrection; . . .” (246).

Most of the fifty sermons come from Old Testament texts. Thirteen of the fifty come from New Testament texts. Dennis selected the sermons out of a collection of several hundred and writes a brief introduction to each one. Twenty of the sermons were preached in a church context, seventeen in various seminary chapels, and six at different convocation, commencement, and bachelorette occasions. Three wedding sermons and one funeral sermon are included. One sermon was preached to a church in Sudan. Three sermons were delivered at different conferences. The sermons represent a variety of preaching contexts which adds to the strength of this collection.

Davis identifies her sermon style as “biblical preaching” which means that her preaching “takes its primary impetus from scriptural texts” (xxii). Her philosophy and theology of preaching causes her to “make light use of sermon illustrations” (xxii). She was influenced by the preaching of John Donne and the theological imagination that informed his sermons. When she uses illustrations, they are brief. Davis believes the greatest challenge facing preachers today is the “shallow readings of Scripture” (xii and xvi).

In the foreword, Stanley Hauerwas maintains that Davis does not need homiletical theory. Her sermons are not theory driven because her sermons are more art form than skills based. Her sermons are primarily informed by “the text and her exegetically informed imagination” (xvi). Hauerwas affirms Davis’ belief that illustrations contribute to sentimental and superficial sermons (xvii). She is committed to “exegetical sermons” (xvii). Influenced at Yale by Hans Frei and George Lindbeck, her preaching is characterized by a strong post-liberal theology. She wants to bring listeners into the world of Scripture. She uses the biblical text to “‘absorb’ the world rather than the world the text” (xix).

An ecological theme runs through many of Davis’ sermons. She addressed this topic in more detail in her 2009 work, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (Cambridge UP). In the current volume, the reader gets a glimpse into how she incorporates ecological concerns in her sermons. In one of her sermons, Davis speaks of a “deep ecology” which is a phrase she uses to affirm that the ecological crisis is not primarily related to technology but to sin that isolates humans from the rest of creation. It is the sin that privileges humans over the rest of creation (301). In the afterword, Dennis observes this thread weaving through her sermons and refers to it as an “ecological homiletic” (317, 324). It is a double-pronged homiletic that expresses Scripture’s concern for creation and for the recreation of God’s world.

Davis honors Scripture not dismissing too quickly those passages that rub us the wrong way because of our cultural values. For example, against the preference of many preachers and theologians, she does not excise the story of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. Rather she preaches it as a story for people who already believe and who face a most difficult experience (6–7). It is a story more about trust than obedience.

Davis says she does not allow theory to drive her sermons but instead theology is the lead dance partner. This is made clear when she says she always preaches texts in their larger canonical context of both Old and New Testament (245–249). This is an important model for preachers to follow today.

Hauerwas, however, takes it a step further and concludes that Davis' "sermonic practice is blessedly free of theory" (xv). It is one thing to say that theory does not drive the sermon; it is another thing to say that the sermon is "blessedly free of theory." Homiletic theory is not without value. Theory plays an important role, if only in a supportive way, in enabling preachers to understand what homileticians identify as effective means of communicating Scripture. Theory opens up options and allows preachers to broaden their perspective. As an aid, however, it disappears into the background of the process. A well thought-out post-liberal theory does lie in the background of Davis' sermons whether or not it is stated.

One more observation in this regard: Davis' emphasis on the use of imagination in preaching is reminiscent of Gadamer's concept of "play" as the preacher encounters the text. Play involves a dialectical movement between preacher, imagination, and text. In this process, a good preacher will be quite aware of theory but will not impose it on the text or the sermon; it remains subservient. This book is an excellent collection of sermons and essays that I highly recommend and plan to use as a textbook.

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Elizabeth Goodman. *Breaking and Entering: Unexpected Sermons for an Unfinished World*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016. 201 pages. \$26.

As I read Rev. Elizabeth Goodman's *Breaking and Entering: Unexpected Sermons for an Unfinished World*, I sheepishly realized that I expect complex, engaging preaching to be largely the realm of grand pulpits in tall-steeple churches. Goodman's congregation perhaps suspected that she bore the same assumptions; upon her arrival at her tiny Massachusetts parish in 2001, one of the seven members told her that despite the congregation's size her preaching need not be small. Goodman took that advice to heart.

Breaking and Entering is a collection of twenty-five of Goodman's sermons preached in her United Church of Christ congregation in Monterey, Massachusetts. The sermons are interspersed by a few "Asides"—shorter reflections that were perhaps anecdotes excerpted from longer sermons or ideas that never made the cut. Her sermons are intricate, thoughtful, wide-ranging and, yes, unexpected. For Goodman, the truth of the gospel is itself often unanticipated. In an echo of the inductive whispers and wagers of Fred Craddock and Lucy Rose, Goodman values the power of "suggestion." She writes, "The truth is, [the rhetorical device of "suggestion"] is one of my favorites. As a way to insight, a way to surprise, a way to sudden laughter, a means for art, suggestion is a powerful mode...Most crucially of all, though, is that I most often encounter God's living truth when I find it suggested to me in the many layers of Scripture, tradition, translation and experience" (14).

Goodman seems to thrive on learning and preaching in unexpected directions. Her exegesis is thorough and rigorous, often leading to semi-unorthodox conclusions. In "Obey" (25–30), she proposes that Abraham's obedience to God is not found in bringing Isaac to be sacrificed, but in Abraham's bucking of social conventions (i.e., child sacrifice, which she suggests was probably standard practice) by heeding the call to stay the execution. In "An Easy One" (135–142), Goodman interprets Jesus' command in Luke 10:37 to "Go and do likewise" as a call to emulate not the Samaritan, but the vulnerable, powerless man beset by robbers who receives mercy. Her extended illustrations lean towards the intellectual and philosophical, from the definition of religion itself (20), to a sociological understanding of awe and aweism (37–40), to the difference between the metanoia of being seen and the paranoia of being watched (48–49), to Darwin and game theory (95–102). Many of these reflections begin with, "I've been reading..." Would that all preachers read as widely as Goodman.

Though Goodman provides occasional information for the reader via footnotes—for example, that a sermon focused on race and white privilege was preached just after the jury verdicts were returned exonerating the killers of Michael Brown and Eric Garner—I frequently wished for more context to guide me. Goodman includes Scriptural texts and refers to the lectionary in her sermons, but the volume is not organized according to the liturgical calendar, and the sermons are mostly undated. Many begin with (or are interrupted by) lengthy stories or descriptions that then make a quick turn into scripture or theology, sometimes with little but an intuitive leap to tie the pieces together. Punctuation and other markings indicate some of these shifts; others read as abrupt and almost disruptive breaks in flow. Much meaning seems to be embedded in Goodman's oral delivery: turns of phrase that I had to guess were slightly sarcastic, offered with wry wit, or tainted with melancholy. I suspect that in person Goodman makes strong use of pauses and silence when she changes mood and tenor, but these are harder to gauge in words on the page. The complexity and depth of Goodman's sermons, coupled with the lack of oral and visual cues, made some of the sermons difficult to follow. In the end, both for clarity

and for richer engagement, I found I wanted to hear the sermons embodied in Goodman and her worshiping community rather than extracted and abstracted in a book.

Still, what is clear from Goodman's preaching is that she has no qualms about bringing big ideas to her small congregation (which now numbers thirty). And this may be the most important implication of her preaching: that despite our preoccupations with size, the kingdom of God can and does break and enter into even the smallness of our lives, always larger and more transformational than we expect.

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David Schnasa Jacobsen, ed. *Homiletical Theology in Action: The Unfinished Theological Task of Preaching*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 202 pages. \$25.

In this collection of essays from the second consultation for the *Homiletical Theology Project*, editor David Schnasa Jacobsen and six contributing authors demonstrate “how various dimensions of homiletical theology, whether made explicit or operating more implicitly, shape the work that preachers do” (1). If the task of the first volume from the *Homiletical Theology Project* was to define what homiletical theology is, this volume explores what homiletical theology may look like in practice.

An introductory article by Jacobsen groups the essays into methodological categories—descriptive, confessional, and analytical—that speak to their primary emphases, aims, and working assumptions. The first set of essays engages in the task of homiletical theology from a “descriptive” mode that engages “in the most self-conscious methodological and inductive way” (3). In chapter one, Sally A. Brown demonstrates homiletical theology is something the preacher does on a weekly basis by navigating various “theological horizons” on her way from text to sermon. In doing so, Brown makes a case for homiletical theology’s paying close attention to the “concreteness, diversity, and complexity of religious practices” prior to any theorizing (39). In chapter two Adam Hearlson uses the story of the Canaanite woman’s encounter with Jesus in Matthew 15 to develop the metaphor of homiletical theology as “street art”—theology that is “public, permanent, and provisional” (47). Through this metaphor Hearlson describes homiletical theology as never complete, but waiting on the next “artist” to paint the world with the Gospel. Understanding homiletical theology as “the theological discernments that take place during the preparation of any given sermon” (62), in chapter three Teresa Lockhart (Stricklen) Eisenlohr draws on the theological method of Edward Farley to describe the sermon process as a series of movements—portraiture, ecclesial universals, judgment, and rhetorical shaping—that requires the preacher’s discernment.

The second part of the book consists of essays from those authors operating from a “confessional mode” in which “a more strongly held sense of ‘gospel’ becomes itself the starting point of homiletical-theological reflection” (4). In chapter four, Luke Powery emphasizes the role of the Spirit and human bodies to question the assumption of Scripture as the starting point for theological method. In doing so, Powery makes a powerful argument for the priority of the Spirit that results in his giving the Holy Spirit a primary and central role in homiletical theology. In chapter five Jacobsen considers the problem that eschatology, as traditionally conceived, poses for the white mainline pulpit. Jacobsen reframes questions of eschatology in light of theologies of promise that enable a reformulated eschatology to face context and conversation with other traditions.

The final set of essays operates within an “analytical mode” that “point to a larger theological task of providing a kind of theological prolegomena for homiletical theology, that is, analytically exploring its premises or the validity of its first theological judgments in the hope of refining and clarifying its process of reflection” (5). Given the assumed “unfinished” and “provisional” quality of homiletical theology, in chapter six O. Wesley Allen inquires as to the limits of the field as it relates to scriptural authority. Allen encourages those who do homiletical theology to be clearer on how they relate to the sources and norms of Christian theological reflection. In the final chapter, Rein Bos uses the doctrine of divine judgment to challenge forms of homiletical theology that minimize the authority of Scripture and Tradition. Bos’ essay reveals

the need for theological judgment in how we relate the various contexts and theological loci in our homiletical projects.

It is impossible in this brief review to fairly or adequately evaluate each contribution. Yet one of the real strengths of this book is what it does collectively. By exploring homiletical theology in a descriptive, confessional, and analytical mode the authors bring needed conceptual clarity and examples to a developing field. While these modes certainly overlap in practice, each essay speaks to what homiletical theology looks like when operating from different locations. There is no single way to do homiletical theology. But different approaches begin with distinct aims, assumptions, and goals, and the degree to which we can be clear about this facilitates the conversations that will give the field a future, rather than merely engaging in parallel play. These essays are an excellent example of homiletical theology in their own right, but they will also help those in the field who work from different theological locations and assumptions better understand one another.

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O. Wesley Allen Jr. *Preaching and the Human Condition: Loving God, Self, and Others*. Nashville: Abingdon, 2016. 118 pages. \$25.

O. Wesley Allen Jr., one of the leading conversational homileticians in North America, presents this book as a sequel to his previous volume, *The Homiletic of All Believers: A Conversational Approach*. In this book, he specifically focuses on the human condition, lamenting what we preachers often lack in our critical, existential encounter with and analysis of that condition and thus fail to bring about the transformation of the lives of congregants (2). So, what is the human condition? Allen uses this term to depict “the underlying, structural, existential problems inherent in being and living as human being,” that is, the various threats and damage done to/by individuals and communities, which is theologically understood as having two sides of *sin* and *suffering* (6).

What is unique in his suggestion is that he applies his notion of a *cumulative* approach of his conversational homiletic to the human condition, hoping that it will enable preachers to gradually address it with true depth. In other words, he desires to shape “the congregation’s process of making meaning of and responding to sin and suffering *over time*” (9). Moreover, Allen, using the greatest commandment as a heuristic lens, suggests his three-dimensional model as a theoretical framework for his cumulative approach to the human condition: loving God, loving self, and loving others. By pairing sin and suffering with three—vertical, horizontal, and inner—dimensions, he makes proposals for a cumulative homiletic appropriate across the theological spectrum.

Then, how can his approach to the human condition attain its applicability beyond the uniqueness of each theological position? Allen argues that in reality, the three dimensions in any theological camp co-exist with a varying degree of emphasis on one particular dimension as the theological starting point for sin and suffering (14). However, since these three dimensions of vertical, horizontal, and inner, are inseparable and mutually interpenetrate one another, preachers should engage with the three dimensions together in order to bring greater depth concerning the human condition, the whole of the problem(s) facing the whole of humanity (17).

Allen presents three overarching suggestions for a cumulative approach to the human condition as follows (18–26): First, preachers should establish *analogies* between the text and our context by focusing on the similarity between the deep structures of the human condition in the situation in or behind the text and the same structures in different contemporary situations. Second, *language and imagery* should be tailored to invite hearers reflect on their lives and world. Third, revising Wilson’s trouble/grace model and expanding Lowry’s narrative movement from an itch to a scratch, he suggests creating *the accumulation of sermon ic itches* “to set up a word of depth concerning God’s grace and calling on our lives and the world” (25).

For the next three chapters, Allen deals with the three dimensions respectively. He begins with the theological and biblical descriptions of sin and suffering in each dimension, followed by many useful homiletical prescriptions in terms of how to deal strategically with biblical passages, analogies, language and imagery and sermon structures. In addition to this, Allen provides a sample sermon for each sub-section, which is greatly helpful for readers wondering how to weave all these elements into a single sermon.

Among many, I would like to name three unique contributions of this book: First, the author expands conversational homiletics by re-focusing on his own cumulative approach to a specific issue of the human condition. Allen rightly asserts that while the human condition is commonly shared across the theological spectrum, preachers should approach it from the

vertical, horizontal, or inner dimension that is the most appropriate for their own contexts, in order to address its depth more fully. Second, the author's cumulative approach not only illuminates the depth of the human condition but also acknowledges preachers' humble task of conversationally and cumulatively providing a provisional and theological understanding of it. Last but not least, Allen's detailed suggestions for each dimension of sin and suffering are markedly beneficial for many preachers who find themselves at any point on the theological spectrum. Personally, I find Allen's careful dealing with the issue of theodicy in the vertical dimension and his sound advice on the issue of ethics toward others in the horizontal dimension most worthwhile.

However, there are also a couple of critical questions to be raised. First, as Allen indicates, his three-dimensional model may be too artificial for many congregations, especially those in urban areas which tend more or less to struggle with denominational change and a diverse makeup of congregants from (theologically or existentially) different backgrounds. I wish he could have been more explicit about how to address cumulatively the human condition for a more complex congregation, even while attending to the two other dimensions. In relation to the first point, some contextual homileticsians may resist Allen's vision of a cumulative effect of preaching because it sounds too optimistic to hope that preachers are able to fit together neatly the three dimensions of the human condition. Still, there are some contexts where these dimensions cannot be easily reconciled but rather conflict with one another, especially in congregations comprised of different races, genders, cultures, and languages.

Despite these questions, I highly recommend this book to any homileticsians, preachers, and students who are interested in practices of preaching in light of its specific focus on the human condition and its broad applicability to any congregation. This book is deeply theological and practical and deals profoundly with the existential issue of sin and suffering in our broken world.

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Michael Eric Dyson. *Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America*. New York: St. Martins Press, 2017. 240 pages. \$15.

Michael Eric Dyson is University Professor of Sociology at Georgetown University, author of more than a dozen books about race in the United States, one of the most visible black public intellectuals of the twenty-first century, and an ordained Baptist minister.

The book is organized like a worship service, with chapters titled “Call to Worship,” “Hymns of Praise,” “Invocation,” “Scripture Reading,” and so on through the ninth chapter “Closing Prayer.”

In “Call to Worship,” Dyson lays out the purpose for his lament, which is to call white America to “return to the moral and spiritual foundations of our country and grapple with the consequences of our original sin” (3). Admitting that the academic form left him frustrated, he opts for the language of a Baptist preacher and the form of a worship service. “I simply want to bear witness to the truth I see and the reality I know. And without white America wrestling with these truths and confronting these realities, we may not survive” (7).

Chapter 2 (Hymns of Praise) is introduced by a W.E.B. DuBois quote about the sorrow songs and speeds through a play-list of contemporary music featuring artists like N.W.A., KRS-One, The Fugees, Tupac Shakur, Jay Z, *Beyoncé*, and Kendrick Lamar. “These are our griots. These are their songs. These and a thousand others are the hymns that answer the reign of terror that consumes our days” (17). The book is dedicated to Beyoncé, Knowles Carter, Solange Knowles, and Tina Knowles-Lawson. This chapter sets the form for the following chapters, which will be a homiletic combination of short examples, analogies, personal stories, history lessons, theological exhortation, and cultural references.

Chapter 4 (Scripture Reading) comes from the Book of Martin Luther King, Jr., 1968:3-8. In this brief chapter Dyson asserts that most white Americans have not really understood the full canon of King. “Beloved, you say you love King, or at least to admire him, but you really don’t know him, not the King who was too black and too radical for most America” (37).

Chapter 5, “Sermon” is the centerpiece of the book, comprising about 150 pages of the volume. It’s hard not to think of the divisions as occurring in two acts, with three scenes in each act. Act One, “Repenting of Whiteness,” includes “Inventing Whiteness,” “The Five Stages of White Grief,” and the “Plague of White Innocence.” These three sections will probably be the most demanding for white preachers, since they unmask the sins of unrepentant white privilege in all its manifestations. “I must say to you, my friends, that teaching in your schools has shown me that being white means never having to say you’re white. Whiteness long ago, at least in America, shed its ethnic skin and struck a universal pose” (65).

He makes the same claims we have seen in Ta-Nehisi Coates’ *Between the World and Me*, and Debby Irving’s *Waking Up White*, that even though race is a social construct, it’s one that wields the power of life and death. Narratives matter, Dyson preaches, whether it’s the invisible narrative of manifest destiny or the American mythology of exceptionalism. White supremacy and the construction of whiteness must be demythologized. Race, as a fabricated idea, can be dismantled, but not until we learn to see it. The section on “The Five Stages of White Grief” is almost worth the price of the book. Dyson names the powers and principalities in this section: ignorance, denial, appropriation, revisionism, and trivialization.

The second section or second act of the Sermon Chapter, “Being Black in America,” includes shorter divisions titled “Nigger,” “Our Own Worst Enemy,” and “Coptopia.” The themes are respectively about social erasure, internalized violence, and state-sponsored violence.

This part of the unmasking reveals what's at stake for black people when white people engage in various forms of denial and complicity.

Dyson's book is a gift to white preachers and white churches that should be on the front lines of the march for racial justice. When I first began reading it, I thought it should be adapted as a performance, something like *The Vagina Monologues*. It would also be a handy guide to organize a sermon series, preaching workshops, or adult church school classes. "Oh Lord, give us the courage to tell the truth to white folks who need it more than air itself" (33).

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Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse. *The Altars Where We Worship: The Religious Significance of Popular Culture*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2016. 230 pages. \$21.25.

Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse in *The Altars Where We Worship: The Religious Significance of Popular Culture* attempt to describe religion as it exists within popular culture. In such culture traditional religion as a central institution appears to have fallen victim to the effects of post-modernity. Even as the authors describe a culture where they believe “religion is in crisis” (x), they also clearly state personal faith within the same culture has persevered. Of course, a void now exists. To fill the void the authors assert that people of faith, already thoroughly immersed and invested in popular culture, seek fulfillment in familiar places within culture. There they find sustenance and meaning (13). The Floyd-Thomases and Toulouse name these places “alternative altars” (ix).

Alternative altars are cultural places of worship, located beyond the boundaries of the traditional religion, where worshippers are formed, sustained, and find meaning (13). In this text, the authors analyze the following alternative altars: “body and sex, entertainment, sports, politics, big business, and science and technology” (4). These six areas of popular culture, which are also the chapters in the book, are by no means an exhaustive list. Instead, they provide a narrow opening through which we enter for deeper reflection on popular culture, religion, and how we worship.

To frame their analysis, the authors adapted Ninian Smart’s sevenfold typology to analyze and understand how the alternative altars function within popular culture. The elements of Smart’s typology are:

1) a *mythic narrative* which aids in addressing matters of sacred meaning and holy significance; 2) a system of *doctrines* that outline appropriate relationships and offer guidance concerning how followers should orient themselves within the world; 3) a set of *ethical codes* that define key values, principles or precepts, and rules or laws; 4) an *organization or institution* that aids in perpetuating religious ideals and imbedding them in the fabric of society; 5) a *ritualistic dimension* within which the faithful engage in acts that define meaning for life and merge belief with exercises of experience and practice; 6) an *experiential dimension* that enables followers to express their feelings and experience meaning; and 7) a *material dimension* with concrete and tangible expressions of the sacred that enliven the five senses of touch, smell, sight, hearing, and taste (7).

As an interpretative guide Smart’s typology provides a framework for understanding the culture (altar) and “the fabric of religion operating in it” (13).

Juan M. Floyd-Thomas, Stacey M. Floyd-Thomas, and Mark G. Toulouse in this intelligent and provocative text, challenge our notion of altars. Not limited to distinctly ecclesial spaces, the authors open our eyes, using the lens of worship, to reveal the alternative altars built in plain sight. Like traditional religion, these new altars are formative, provide a sense of community, identity, and meaning. Unfortunately, the “altari-zation” (188) of some aspects of American culture can be viewed as an indictment against organized religion. While culture shifted due to the impact and demands of post-modernity, it appears as though religion, in many ways, stood still by extolling the virtues of its traditions. In doing so, worshippers were left with

unmet needs and desires and a religion out of step with culture. This is precisely where popular culture stepped in.

Although not a preaching text, this book provides valuable information for homiletical reflection. In a culture where religion is now described as being in crisis, this text helps the preacher understand the needs of the worshipper at a fundamental level. It calls the preacher to introspection, not only about preaching, but also about engagement with and understandings of the larger culture. It questions the preacher about ways in which their worship and theology of worship have kept pace with changes in culture. More importantly, it informs the preacher of the ways in which culture is responding to the needs of worshipper and the ways in which religion has failed to do so. While this is a fairly easy read, the level of reflection beckons the reader to wade in deep water. This is a timely and necessary text if we dare to respond to the question: What then of traditional religion?

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Michael P. Knowles. *Of Seeds and the People of God: Preaching as Parable, Crucifixion, and Testimony*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2015. 263 pages. \$28.20.

Michael Knowles has written a remarkable book. He combines in his writing and research a deep interest in a critical interpretation of the scriptures, a lover's quarrel with homiletic theory and method, and strong desire to see the scriptures fund the theological work of both. For all of this breadth in what he wishes to accomplish in his three-part book, in which preaching is understood as parable, crucifixion, and testimony, his singular vision of preaching points to grace—both for hearers and preachers who too easily succumb to the fiction that success is up to them.

The first part of the book begins by trying to retrieve the deep connection between the language of seeds in the parables as part of the wider scriptural tradition and the mysterious promise of God. Knowles' close reading of the language of seed yields more than just grist for the mill of revisiting the parables for preaching. Instead, Knowles argues that the language points to a pervasive sense of God's providential grace. We cannot read parables, or think about preaching for that matter, apart from the parabolic disclosure of seeds as mysterious manifestations of the working of God's grace whether we sow or not, whether we sleep or wake. In doing so, Knowles reminds readers that the parables cannot be read as free-floating, a-contextual stories, but as sprouting from a Jewish world shaped by scripture where seed and promise are part of God's surprising work of fecund, providential grace.

The second part then turns to crucifixion as a key way for understanding preaching. Again, Knowles' knowledge of Biblical texts shines through. This theme is a familiar one, especially for those conversant with Knowles' other work. Preaching is "shaped by the cross." Preachers attuned to matters of rhetoric and success may wish to check these at the door of proclamation. Preaching is cruciform.

The third part then makes a signal contribution to considering preaching as testimony. Knowles is careful to acknowledge how this language of testimony has functioned in contemporary homiletic theory, connecting it in particular to the work of Tom Long on witness and Anna Carter Florence on testimony. What is most rewarding, however, is to read the testimonial literature again through Augustine, Barth, Brueggemann and Ricoeur. It is, to my mind, Knowles' re-reading of Ricoeur's understanding of testimony that represents his most important contribution to homiletic theory in these pages. A revisiting of Ricoeur's work on testimony may help testimonial homiletics move even deeper. Along the way, Knowles' also continues his careful turn toward a critical reading of scripture, now connecting the dots between the three parts of the book: seed language meets crucifixion meets testimony in the parabolic "U" of theological experience: descent, death, and resurrection in the biography of the preacher as failure, not successful manager and mediator of the sacred. This third part is supplemented nicely with searching questions for the reader and homiletic examples of the preacher himself. I appreciate Knowles because he seeks to do his work as what I would call a homiletical theologian. Knowles' work, for me, is amazing to the degree he integrates theology, scripture, and (to a degree) homiletic theory in his seedy, cruciform, parabolic vision of preaching and the preacher.

There are things I disagree with, too. I would contest at least part of Knowles' reading of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*. Augustine does not mind "plundering the Egyptians" when it comes to using rhetoric, whereas Knowles occasionally gives the impression that any such move is tantamount to managing God or God's Word. At times Knowles freely acknowledges

the ambiguity of our work as preachers, but sometimes his desire to contrast the human and divine aspects of preaching leads him to an overly binaried way of thinking. It is important to remember that in the Reformation there were at least two ways of appreciating the relationship of the *capax*: with Calvin the finite was *incapable* of bearing the infinite; but with Luther and his more sacramental interests, the finite *was* capable (*finitum capax infiniti*), at least in connection to the promise as grounding the means of grace in Word and Sacrament.

That said, these are mere quibbles. Michael Knowles has made an important theological contribution to our work as preachers and theologians of preaching. He, of course, would fail to take credit for that. In the end, he would just point to grace.

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Frank A. Thomas. *Introduction to the Practice of African American Preaching*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016. 190 pages. \$23.

Writing with a deep passion and commitment to the particular practice of African American Preaching, Thomas has provided a work that perhaps may better be described as an introduction both to the practice and study of African American preaching. While making a case for the inherent rhetorical and theological nature of African American preaching, Thomas also offers a rationale for African American preaching to have its own place within the theological academy. As the director of the Academy of Celebration and Preaching at Christian Theological seminary, the first academy dedicated solely to the practice of African American preaching, Thomas is committed both to preserving the rich African American preaching tradition and working toward its continued development. This work demonstrates this mission as it offers strong reflection on the history of African American preaching as well as offering potential roadmaps for the future of African American preaching. Ever the teacher, Thomas leaves peppered throughout this work what might be called “research breadcrumbs” as indicators to future students of places within the field of African American preaching where there could be future research.

Chapter one begins with a “bus tour” of the study of African American preaching, demonstrating how this practice transitioned from a primarily oral practice to and oral/written tradition. Here Thomas addresses the relationship between folk preaching and educated preaching as well as the changes in the study of African American Preaching before and after Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Chapter two makes the most explicit case for African American preaching as an inherently theological and rhetorical practice. After a brief history on the connections between the study of homiletics and rhetoric, Thomas argues that “rhetorical processes are fundamental to African American preaching, and not something that one adds on after the preacher has figured out the rational content of what to say” (69). Thomas invokes both Zora Neale Hurston’s work on African American preaching and Gates’ seminal work *Signifying Monkey* to help demonstrate the marriage between the rhetorical and theological in African American Preaching. Chapter three offers Gardener C. Taylor’s “In His Own Clothes” as a paradigmatic sermon within the African American tradition. The rhetorical analysis of this sermon also allows Thomas to offer his thoughts on what makes African American preaching distinctive from other preaching forms. In Chapter four Thomas brings in rapper Jay-Z as a conversation partner, not only to discuss his work on existentially authentic performance (keeping it real) but also because Thomas believes that the blurring of the lines between the sacred and the secular in African American culture calls for studying “whenever and wherever powerful oral communicative expression is uttered” (9). Chapter five talks about the issues of race and economics within African American preaching, paying special attention to challenge of preaching to Black millennials who desire social justice action from the church. The final chapter written by Rev. Dr. Jeremiah Wright serves as afterword for the text and is a reflection on his seven decades of experiencing African American preaching.

This work lays a strong foundation for thinking of and studying African American preaching as its own distinct practice. Thomas’ depth of experience as pastor, scholar, and lover of African American preaching comes through these pages, providing a survey of different ways that African American preaching can be studied and demonstrating the depth of this practice. Its import stretches beyond information on African American preaching, as all students and teachers of preaching would find this work useful. While clearly written in conversation with scholars and

practitioners of Black preaching, Thomas' work offers a new and substantive entry into the African American preaching library while also providing an exciting preview of the work that will come from students at the Academy of Preaching and Celebration.

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Sunggu Yang. *Evangelical Pilgrims from the East: Faith Fundamentals of Korean American Protestant Diasporas*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2016. 163 pages. \$68.77.

In this book, Sunggu Yang, Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow in Preaching and Worship at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, explores the unique cultural faith formation of Korean American Protestant diasporas in the United States through three key analytical lenses: the bicultural theological lens, the interreligious historical lens, and the ecclesial liturgical lens. Through a thoroughgoing analysis, the author uncovers the five socio-ecclesial codes of Korean American faith constructs and investigates how these faith fundamentals have been actualized in ecclesial practices with style variations, particularly in preaching (xvii). The author organizes each chapter of the book in accordance with two key concepts, namely, code and style. He defines code as “a specific configuration of the Korean American cultural-religious hermeneutical foundation” (xxviii) and style as “a very unique adoption and adaptation of the code depending on various situations” (xxix). The author identifies the five codes and two or three styles in each code. The five socio-ecclesial codes are “the Wilderness Pilgrimage code, the Diasporic Mission code, the Confucian Egalitarian code, the Buddhist Shamanistic code, and the Pentecostal Liberation code” (xv).

Chapter 1 examines the socio-ecclesial situation of the Asian/Korean American community and delineates key themes arising from the unique experience of Asians/Korean Americans. Living in a liminal and marginal space in two different cultures is not only a locus of struggle for survival and identity, but also a creative space for new possibilities of life and transformation. From this liminal but creative standpoint, Korean American evangelical protestants formulated the five socio-ecclesial codes in response to the socio-ecclesial issues and challenges (12). The five socio-ecclesial codes function as distinctive Korean American hermeneutics.

Chapter 2 and 3 explore the first two foundational codes with their style variations through the bicultural theological lens. The Wilderness Pilgrimage code provides a particular theological interpretive perspective through which persons in the Korean American diaspora interpret their life journey in the foreign land as pilgrims. By creatively adopting the pilgrim idea in the Biblical and Christian tradition for their own context, Korean American Christians have constructed their own pilgrimage narrative upon which a new socio-ecclesial identity of Korean American diaspora has built. While the Wilderness Pilgrimage code provides a deep ground for socio-contextual identity, the Diasporic Mission code gives rise to the fundamental sense of calling or vocation (49). The influence of premillennial evangelical western missionaries and biblical fundamentalism shaped Korean Christians to adopt the Great Commission as the central task of all Christians. Relating to the pilgrimage code, the Korean American church tends to understand itself as an evangelical mission community or missional outpost in the United States. (40) Thus, this diasporic mission code shapes the *telos* of Korean American Christians as “missionary pilgrims” (49).

Through the interreligious perspective, Chapter 4 and 5 examine historical Korean religions and how these traditional religions have contributed to the formation of Korean American Christian spirituality and relating codes. Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism are three religions that shape the fundamental ethos of Korean spirituality and influence on the Korean American church. While the author’s cultural analysis of the Confucian Egalitarian code and the Buddhist Shamanistic code relies on earlier studies on the same topic by theologians and homileticians, the author’s genuine and insightful work identifies recent style variations in these

codes for the practice of preaching. The basic religious ethos and codes shaped by traditional religions continue to influence Korean American Christian spirituality, but the Korean American church creatively adopts and adapts these codes in relation to new socio-ecclesial contexts. As a result of contextual style variations in codes, new visions of codes—i.e., a more egalitarian vision of the Confucian code—are articulated by revising oppressive aspects and values in traditional religions.

Chapter 6 scrutinizes the Pentecostal Liberation code with three style variations—the pure spirituality style, the prosperity living style, and the liberative style—through the ecclesial liturgical perspective. Unlike many other Korean and Korean American theologians who generally consider Korean Pentecostalism in relation to Shamanism, the author treats the Pentecostal Liberation code as distinct from the Buddhist Shamanistic code. By attending to unique Pentecostal characteristics of Korean American worship and its liberational aspects, the author contends that Spirit-led worship “as an outlet for spiritual and social liberation” (89) contributes to the formation of liberational ethos in the Korean American church. The Pentecostal Liberation code attends to the direct, transformative, and liberative presence of God in the world. For Korean American Christians, this historical involvement of the Spirit God in human reality is the ultimate ground for both healing inner brokenness and liberation from external oppressive reality (121).

Notwithstanding its century-long presence in the United States and contributions to North American homiletics, the voice of the Asian/Korean American church and its practice of preaching still remains at the marginal place in the field of homiletics due to limitations of cross-cultural investigation on complex bicultural and liminal experiences of Asians/Koreans. This innovative in-depth study on faith fundamentals of the Korean American evangelical church provides a clear and accessible pathway to the multidimensional aspects of Korean American faith constructs. The contribution of this volume to the field of homiletics is twofold: content and method. The author’s comprehensive description of multifaceted Korean American faith constructs, namely, the five socio-ecclesial codes, and a critical analysis of the prescriptive use of the codes in the practice of preaching with style variations, provides rich theological, historical, and cultural resources to those who wish to engage with the study of Korean American Christianity and Asian/Korean American preaching. Further, the author’s use of symbolic anthropology as a foundational research method for this project introduces new methodological options for a cross-cultural approach to homiletical traditions other than one’s own. This book is, foremost, a thoughtful guide for Korean American preachers, but the wisdom of this book can still be a valuable resource for those who preach the gospel at multi-cultural congregations.

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David T. Bradley, Erica E. Ryherd, and Lauren M. Ronsse, eds. *Worship Space Acoustics: 3 Decades of Design*. New York: ASA Press, 2016. 346 pages, \$44.95.

Worship Space Acoustics: 3 Decades of Design belongs on a coffee table, with its generous shape (9 x 11.5 inches), its myriad drawings, and its elegant multi-colored plates. The coffee table would not be in a private home, however, but in cathedrals, auditoriums, chapels, houses of worship, meditation halls, meeting houses, mosques and synagogues, wherever a community of faith is searching for a way to create holy human space. Its editors, David T. Bradley, Erica E. Ryherd, and Lauren M. Ronsse have provided a series of architectural acoustic treatises that document worship spaces developed in the last 30 years as part of the work of the Acoustical Society of America. The ASA's mission is "to increase and diffuse the knowledge of acoustics and promote its practical application." This book fulfills its mission by offering six succinct essays ranging from the history of ecclesiastical design to the holiness of acoustics. Its core of images and data plots document what happens when knowledge of acoustics is put into practice for sacred space.

Homiletics isn't included in the list of the fields that have a vested interest in this book: engineering, physics, signal processing, architecture, bioacoustics, noise control, sound and vibration, oceanography, aeroacoustics, and macrosonics. Music and speech, however, are the primary forms of communication that the book's spaces and sciences serve. Paul's question ". . . and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Romans 10:14, KJV) has been replaced by "Why can't we hear our preacher?"

It's complicated. *Worship Space Acoustics* examines 67 worship spaces from 12 major religions located in 5 countries. Each worship space comes with full-page floor plans, architectural drawings, acoustical data plots, photographs, and computer-generated rendering. The diversity extends to size as well. If a worshiping community seats 100, there are examples; if the gathering holds 5,000, there are examples. Each case study documents the community's strengths and struggles with sound and space, making the narratives accessible to a wide range of readers.

Designed as a primary resource and reference, with appendices that include a glossary of key terms, and a design overview with a summary of the design process for each of the worship spaces, the book is written by professionals intimately linked to the spaces investigated: an audio systems designer, music director, acoustical consultant, architect, and a builder/owner. Consider two essays that have been selected below to showcase the conversation.

Gary Siebein, a professor of architecture, opens his essay, "The Soundscape of Worship" with a biblical passage, 1 Kings 19:9, 11-13. He uses the text to pose a primary question to any community seeking to reform their worship space: "What is one listening to and for when they attempt to communicate with their god in worship spaces?" (4) He extends the acoustical implications of this question by pointing to the obvious: who is doing the listening makes a difference in what is heard. The soundscape of worship is inhabited by the worship leader, the congregation, the music leader, the choir, and the technical staff. They have different locations in the soundscape, different acoustical values, and even distinct acoustical identities. Those competing differences require skilled acoustical and architectural negotiations so that this holy human communication can take place. Siebein uses Martin Buber's understanding of "I-Thou" as the way this dialogical relationship is "formed though tangible and intangible communication through a variety of media (12).

Dan Clayton outlines the complications of these differences in his “Audio for Worship Spaces” essay. “Traditional worship music, plus congregational singing and responses, may be well supported by the warm and responsive natural acoustics of a reverberant building. Sermons, prayers and scripture readings, however, are best served by a space with little reverberance which favors clarity of the spoken word” (28). Clayton underscores how values such as reverberance, responsiveness, spaciousness, intimacy, and clarity require a balance of natural room acoustics and sound systems, enhanced by architectural design.

All the essays recognize the threat that noise pollution creates when a community is seeking a sense of what Mark K. Williams calls “The Holiness of Acoustics.” What contaminates a space and what makes a place holy? How do we recognize where we are? His closing summary bears repeating “...when we walk into it our conversation is hushed, and we know in our core that we have entered into a holy place set apart for coming before our Creator God... who is not us” (36).

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Mark J. Cartledge and A. J. Swoboda, eds. *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship, and Liturgy*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. 252 pages. \$150.

This collected volume is the first of its kind, combining historical, theological, and ethnographic analysis in a wide-ranging set of studies that advances our understanding of global Pentecostalism. What these essays say about preaching, ritual practices, and theologies of worship holds particular interest to scholars in homiletics and liturgical studies, and also to practitioners in churches. (It's worth noting that one of the volume's contributors and editors, A. J. Swoboda, is the pastor of an innovative Pentecostal congregation in Portland, Oregon.)

The volume includes thirteen chapters divided into two sections, many of them drawing on the efforts of Daniel Albrecht, Walter Hollenweger, and other pioneer interpreters of Pentecostal ritual. Part 1 is historical and theological, with three essays tracing developments in classical Pentecostalism, a chapter on the emergence of the charismatic movement in the U.K., U.S., and Australian axis, and three essays that deploy theological lenses to interpret Pentecostal worship. The historical material offers little that is unknown, but it's helpful to read Pentecostal and charismatic history through a tighter lens of ritual and worship. It's necessary background for what comes next, the theological material and the six global case studies that form Part 2.

The best of the essays take up the standard practices of Pentecostal ritual and worship—spirited preaching, glossolalia, singing, dancing in the Spirit, healing, and other charismatic expressions—and explore them in new contexts or through new theoretical lenses. Hybridity is a recurring theme. The historical chapters trace the multiple roots of Pentecostal ritual in Wesleyan and Holiness movements, Welsh revivalism, American camp meeting culture, and African-American “folk spirituality” (60), a term in the Friesen essay that remains frustratingly undefined. From the case studies, we see both tradition and ritual innovation at work in Pentecostalism's global flows. In Denise Ross' work among the Chin people in Myanmar, she finds indigenous musical forms as well as worship songs imported and translated from the Australian-born Hillsong churches. And in Swoboda's church in Portland, there is a weekly Eucharist set within a more typical Pentecostal context.

With such a wide geographical and temporal scope, readers have to search with difficulty for connective threads. What characterizes Pentecostal worship, in all of its varied expressions? Perhaps no other common theme is as prominent as the altar as a space and place for Pentecostal ritualizing. Many of these essays recognize “the altar” in many contexts. Aaron Freisen writes about the altar, altar calls, and altar workers in classical Pentecostalism in the U.S. (62). Among Myanmar's Chin people, Ross also notes the centrality of altar calls, citing Albrecht's *Rites in the Spirit* (1999) in identifying the altar call as the “climax” of Pentecostal ritualizing (175).

There are other, scattered references to the Pentecostal altar, but it is Wolfgang Vondey who weaves together a theology of Pentecostal sacramentality, and he does so in conversation with modern Catholic thinking on liturgy, ecclesiology, and eschatology. Vondey's move is stunning in itself, given the historical enmity and contemporary competition between Pentecostals and the Catholic Church. While admitting that the Eucharist is not the heart of Pentecostal liturgy and that Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* has few references to the Holy Spirit, Vondey nevertheless constructs a theology of Pentecostal sacramentality in conversation with this document.

The altar calls of Pentecostal preachers, the anointing and healings that take place in this space, the embodied expressions of Spirit-filled worshippers who run, dance, weep, or sing in the Spirit, even the celebrations of the Lord's Supper, are in Vondey's construction, held together

“by the notion of a manifest divine-human encounter central to the Pentecostal liturgy and symbolized by the altar” (102), a space where the church meets the Holy Spirit “in eschatological orientation toward the heavenly altar” (104). Other scholars will argue with Vondey’s method and conclusions, but still, these are audacious and convincing theological claims.

Of course no book, not even a collection of essays as excellent as this one, can provide everything we need. There is little about life-cycle rituals: We don’t learn anything about how Pentecostals dedicate their babies, baptize their new believers, or bury their dead. There is some attention to how Pentecostal ritual leadership is gendered, but we need more. Some Pentecostal churches have provided an arena for women’s participation in worship, as pastors and preachers, while others shut the doors to formal leadership. Still, in every case, women have been significant shapers and interpreters of ritual life, as Judith Casselberry has argued in her recent ethnography, *The Labor of Faith: Gender and Power in Black Apostolic Pentecostalism* (Duke University Press, 2017).

Another underdeveloped theme in these essays is the political and economic entanglements of Pentecostal ritual. Samuel Muindi’s essay in this volume is one exception. Muindi notes the lack of attention to socio-economic and political matters in the preaching he hears among Kenyan Pentecostals. Yet we know from the work of Amos Yong and Samuel Cruz, among others, that Pentecostal worship and preaching often engage local and global political and economic realities, sometimes accommodating hegemonic power, and in other instances challenge the status quo.

Still, the essays in *Scripting Pentecost* will remain indispensable guides for surveying, theorizing, and theologizing global Pentecostal worship and liturgy, in all its shape-shifting dynamism.

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Emmanuel Falque. *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist*. Trans. George Hughes. New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016. 336 pages. \$36.

The Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Eros, the Body, and the Eucharist, translated by George Hughes and written by French Catholic phenomenologist and theologian Emmanuel Falque, completes a triptych of works framed by the Easter Triduum (the Passion, Resurrection, and the Eucharist) in which Falque endeavors to show how Christian claims inform everyday culture and life. Dean of the Catholic Institute in Paris, Falque has a growing readership in the United States following the reception of other French phenomenological and theological figures such as Jean-Louis Chrétien, Michel Henry, and Jean-Luc Marion. *Le Passeur de Gethsémane* [*The Guide to Gethsemane*, untranslated at the time of this review] is the first of the triad and expounds upon the narrative of the Passion to explore “anguish” and “death.” *The Metamorphosis of Finitude* is the second in the series, and investigates the resurrection to uncover “what is existential about birth” and the “resurrected flesh.” *The Wedding Feast of the Lamb* concentrates on the body itself, as received in the host of the Eucharist and as experienced within the “chaos” and “animality” of the human interior, to assert that the human body is a site where God comes to us and a corporal and spiritual gift that knits us to one other and Christ in faith and fidelity.

Falque’s style is intricate and European. Basic familiarity with phenomenology will assist his readers. Yet he also brings a layman’s attention guided by classical pastoral concerns that most researchers of Christian proclamation and worship will find accessible, with or without exposure to Falque’s earlier works, the modern interplay between French Catholicism and phenomenology, or Falque’s position within it. Allow me to quote him at length as an example:

If “we are nourished by the Body and Blood” of Christ, according to the Eucharistic Prayer, it is not simply because a banquet or a meal has brought us together (a symbolic perspective that can be justified that seems a bit threadbare today). The bread is consecrated bread, his body branched into ours so that we “become one body”; the wine is consecrated, his blood flowing in our veins. To be nourished with his body can and should be understood as a kind of organic transplant—a sharing of powers (the body) by which I live through his true corporal power, in the way of a community of life, even a transfusion of blood: ‘It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20), 109.

Above, Falque takes on the question, what is “the body” that we eat at the Lord’s Supper? In subsequent chapters, Falque examines that body and its inherent animality or creatureliness with phenomenological concepts like *Jeimeinigkeit* or “mineness” to describe how the “my body” and “my blood” language articulates a bodily sacrifice and redemption where God becomes animal, as the Lamb, to rescue all of human animality from bestiality (fleshly life consumed by sin) in order to bring humanity with its fundamental creaturely difference into “carnal fidelity” with Christ (36, 43-5. 59). At the wedding feast of the Lamb, animality joins divinity in eternal love. Falque also explores flesh in terms of sexual difference and its witness to human and divine love communicated and shared at the communion table. He writes, “[i]t is not human love (eros) that serves as a model of divine love (agape), but rather divine love (agape) that, in espousing human love (eros), succeeds in integrating and transforming it at the heart of the eucharistic act” (134). In other words, divine love incorporates human love at the Lord’s Supper and transforms it to satisfy the desires of God.

Though he distinguishes sexual difference from genital difference, Falque's discussion of sexuality might reveal a heteronormative bias linked to his Catholic identity. For Falque, sexual difference between male and female is originary and comes from God (140). He mines Genesis to support a "man-woman dialectic" that intimates embodied redemption in God. Yet following his schema to its eschatological end might necessitate radicalizing the dialectic he proposes, especially if all who are thirsty are unified in a conjugal bond with Christ at the wedding feast of all time (Rev. 21). In any case, embodiedness, animality, and love constitute the three primary characteristics of the wedding feast as Falque understands it. The book's focus upon communion makes it a generative text for advanced study of worship and a deeper engagement of phenomenological approaches to sacramental theology. Its philosophical line of argumentation may also give it crossover appeal.

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Nicholas Taylor. *Paul on Baptism: Theology, Mission and Ministry in Context*. London: SCM Press, 2016. 180 pages. \$32.

Every minister is familiar with the disjunction between the slow-moving and reflective quality of their life in seminary and the fast-paced nature of their ministry “in the trenches.” Pastors face a never-ending stream of practical pastoral issues that raise questions concerning the community’s practices and inherited traditions and must respond to them while living out their sense of vocation in ways that are theologically responsible. Yet while in seminary these ministers had access to libraries and other resources for doing this reflection well, when they are “in the field” these tools are not always readily available. Whether because academic books are increasingly inaccessible to non-specialists or because the aims of those books make them remote from any specific pastoral situation, the result is the same: pastors often lack resources that integrate recent scholarship and contemporary pastoral issues for the purpose of enhancing the theological practice of ministry.

Nicholas Taylor, a Research Fellow in Theology and Religion and honorary Professor at the University of Zululand, addresses this lacuna in *Paul on Baptism* by bringing the newest scholarship on the apostle Paul’s understanding of baptism to bear on the contemporary practices of the minister. To this end, Taylor seeks to provide a resource to “others in pastoral ministry who seek to be true to Christian doctrine and the discipline of their particular denomination regarding baptism, and at the same time to administer the sacrament in a manner that is pastorally responsible, so it can be an effective vehicle of God’s love and saving power in a broken world” (xiv).

The book possesses a fairly straightforward outline. Following an introduction, chapter one provides a historical reconstruction of the world in which Paul wrote. In particular, Taylor emphasizes three aspects of the ancient world vital for our understanding of baptism in that context: communal identity, the significance attached to rites and ceremonies, and the activity of spiritual forces. These three aspects of the ancient world come together in the rite of baptism to mark it as one’s entrance into the Christian community and the harnessing of the supernatural being to whom the community offered its prayer and worship. Chapter two turns to the Pauline letters and offers a systematic account of every pericope in which Paul (or those writing in Paul’s name) refers to the Christian rite of baptism. As a substitute for Paul’s physical presence in the community, his letters draw upon that community’s experience and understanding of baptism to speak to other issues and allows us, according to Taylor, to derive some understanding of Paul’s teaching on baptism. Chapter three examines the practice of baptism as depicted in the “Pauline tradition.” Specifically, Taylor explores the baptism accounts in the book of Acts to understand how those to whom Paul preached came to be converted and baptized. Chapter four draws together the insights of the previous three and ventures several suggestions for how what has been said about baptism can be made relevant to contemporary pastoral situations.

Reading through this book, I found myself wishing Taylor had devoted more pages to the final chapter that reflects on the contemporary implications for Paul’s understanding of baptism. For example, if baptism is an identity marker that initiates one into a particular community and forms one into a way of life, how might contemporary congregations manage this claim in the face of globalization trends that require people be more mobile than ever before? How should we understand the “communal” aspect of baptism when people do not stay with a single congregation (or faith tradition) for their entire life? Furthermore, given the role of baptism as the initiation into a new community, would not this new rite call into question the idolizing of the

traditional family? Taylor largely ignores these kinds of questions in favor of discussing the “traditional” debates over baptism. Yet, Taylor’s aim in writing was to provide a resource for the pastor in the trenches that makes accessible the fruits of scholarship. In that sense, this book is certainly a success as it provides a thorough evaluation of those passages of the Pauline corpus that make reference to baptism. Taylor explores the larger context of each book, making this a valuable reference for understanding both the rite of baptism as depicted in Paul’s letters and the larger theological themes of the letters themselves. What results is a valuable book on the Pauline literature that any preacher will welcome.

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