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**DYING AND BEHOLD WE LIVE**

**by**

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**THESIS**

**Submitted to the Faculty of Waterloo Lutheran Seminary**  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Law and gospel are significant themes in not only the New Testament but also in the writings of foundational Christian theologians. In terms of preaching, Paul Scott Wilson is the first homiletician to develop a theological concern with law and gospel in a manner which can be considered an explicit and fully developed law/gospel homiletic. However, it is the concern of this paper to embrace Gerhard O. Forde's theology for preaching, in particular his understanding of the gospel as a liberating offence, while utilizing the advantages of Paul Scott Wilson's methodology for law/gospel preaching in general.

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper begins with a brief overview of the treatment of law and gospel in the letter of Paul to the Romans and in the writings of Saint Augustine, Saint Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, and John Calvin. Following this overview Paul Scott Wilson's *Imagination of the Heart* and *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, will be examined for the benefits he provides in terms of not only a theology for preaching but more importantly as the first homiletician to develop a complete methodology for preaching law and gospel.<sup>1</sup> The theology for preaching of Gerhard O. Forde in particular his commitment to understanding justification in terms of death and life will then be juxtaposed with Wilson's preoccupation with the gospel as primarily a source of comfort. It is the thesis of this paper that to understand the gospel in a manner which takes God's sovereignty seriously transforms the gospel from a simple source of comfort into a "liberating offence" which begs that preaching acknowledge not only the comfort of the gospel but also its "strange work." Finally a number of suggestions will be made to assist in preaching God's grace mindful of his sovereignty.

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<sup>1</sup> Law and gospel have been treated by various homileticians previously to Paul Scott Wilson. For a complete history of law/gospel preaching consult Paul Scott Wilson, *Preaching and Homiletical Theory* (St. Louis Missouri: Chalice Press, 2004).

## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND

#### *Law/Gospel in Paul's Letter to the Romans and Foundational Christian Thinkers*

We begin our overview of the biblical basis of the law/gospel distinction with the letter of Saint Paul to the Romans; “‘For no human being will be justified in his sight’ by deeds prescribed by the law, for through the law comes the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20).<sup>2</sup> Biblically speaking, the law then serves a purpose, but the purpose is not that of procuring salvation for us. Instead, the law, according to Saint Paul, performs the function of exposing the limits of human effort as a means of securing salvation. Is there anyone that escapes this condemnation? Paul’s answer, “‘For there is no distinction, since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:22b-23).<sup>3</sup>

The radical nature of what Paul is teaching is exposed most acutely when he raises the possible objection, “‘What then are we to say? Should we sin in order that grace may abound?’” (Romans 6:1). By raising this objection, and this objection only, Paul in fact is reinforcing, although in an implicit manner, the extent to which he understands salvation as a matter of faith alone. The question that then follows, almost necessarily from this conviction, “‘If salvation is by faith then does sin really matter?’” Paul does not then retract what he has been teaching, or even attempt then to, at this point in his letter,

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<sup>2</sup>All biblical quotations are from, *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> There has been much debate among contemporary scholars concerning traditional interpretations of the writings of the Apostle Paul. Stephen Westerholm, *Perspectives Old and New on Paul: The “Lutheran” Paul and His Critics* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004) is an invaluable resource in becoming familiar with the current debate. Westerholm’s work is epic in its overview including not only the perspectives of foundational Christian theologians but also an extensive overview of contemporary scholarship. Particular attention should be paid to Krister Stendahl, E.P. Sanders, Terence Donaldson, and James D.G. Dunn.



defend his theology. Instead Paul simply writes, “By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?” (Romans 6:2).

How then are we saved? Again, from Paul’s letter to the Romans, we “are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith...it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:24-26).

Although the law/gospel distinction is usually identified with Martin Luther, it is important to highlight that these categories were not new to Luther. In fact, Luther in his, *Concerning the Letter and the Spirit*” reflects his indebtedness to Augustinian categories: “Thus we want to finish this [discussion] now with St. Augustine’s fine comment regarding Psalm 17, in which he defines nicely and briefly what the letter is. He says, ‘The letter is nothing but LAW WITHOUT GRACE.’ We, on the other hand, may say that the Spirit is nothing but GRACE WITHOUT LAW” [emphasis author’s].<sup>4</sup>

Likewise, Saint Thomas Aquinas, although his theological summary is more indebted to Aristotelian categories, still gives an extensive treatment of the distinction between law and gospel. Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologica*, begins his discussion of the essence of law by stating, “It belongs to law to command and to forbid.”<sup>5</sup> Aquinas then expands the conversation to include a discussion of natural law. Relying on Romans 1:20, which reads, “Ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press 1989), 89.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, 1a IIaeQQ. 90-1.

has made,” Aquinas then writes, “the light of natural reason, whereby we discern what is good and what is evil, which is the function of the natural law, is nothing else than an imprint on us of the Divine light.”<sup>6</sup> However, even though there is natural law, and human law, which he admits, “cannot have that inerrancy that belongs to the demonstrated conclusions of sciences,”<sup>7</sup> there is still the need for divine law. “In order, therefore, that man may know without any doubt what he ought to do and what he ought to avoid, it was necessary for man to be directed in his proper acts by a law given by God, for it is certain that such a law cannot err.”<sup>8</sup>

However, in terms of the distinction between how the law motivates and the gospel compels or inspires us to good works, “...it belongs to the law to induce men to observe its commandments. This the Old Law did by fear of punishment: but the New Law, by love, which is poured into our hearts by the grace of Christ, bestowed in the New Law, but foreshadowed in the Old. Hence Augustine says that there is little difference (playing on the Latin words *timor* and *amor*) between Law and the Gospel-fear and love [brackets mine].”<sup>9</sup>

What is also interesting to note is that Aquinas seems to support what is sometimes referred to as the third use of the law. To the question, “Does the law make humans good?”, Aquinas writes, “And since law is given for the purpose of directing human acts; as far as human acts conduce to virtue, so far does law make men good.

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1a IIaeQQ. 91-2.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 1a IIaeQQ. 91-3.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1a IIaeQQ. 91-5.

Wherefore the Philosopher says in the second book of the *Politics* that *lawgivers make men good by habituating them to good works*” [italics author’s].<sup>10</sup>

In his *Smalcald Articles*, Martin Luther writes concerning both the law and grace. In terms of the law, “Here we maintain that the law was given by God first of all to restrain sins by threats and fear of punishment and by the promise and offer of grace and favor. But this purpose failed because of the wickedness which sin worked in man.”<sup>11</sup> Luther goes on to specify, “the chief function or power of the law is to make original sin manifest and show man to what utter depths his nature has fallen and how corrupt it has become.”<sup>12</sup>

On the subject of the gospel, in the same articles, Luther is equally clear and also offers a broad understanding of the gospel, distinguished by its scope. Luther writes,

We shall now return to the Gospel, which offers counsel and help against sin in more than one way, for God is surpassingly rich in his grace: First, through the spoken word, by which the forgiveness of sin (the peculiar function of the Gospel) is preached to the whole world; second, through Baptism; third, through the holy Sacraments of the Altar; fourth, through the power of keys; and finally, through the mutual conversation and consolation of brethren. Matthew 18:20, “Where two or three are gathered,” etc.<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, Martin Luther’s treatment of law and grace in his *Answer to the Hyperchristian, Hyperspiritual, and Hyperlearned Book by Goat Emser in Leipzig*, specifically his chapter entitled, “Concerning the Letter and the Spirit,” is of some benefit to our discussion here. Luther writes, “From this it is now clear that the words of the apostle, ‘The letter kills, but the Spirit gives life,’ could be said in other words: ‘The law

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<sup>10</sup> Aquinas, *Summa.*, 1a IIaeQQ. 92-1.

<sup>11</sup> Timothy F. Lull (ed.), *Martin Luther’s*, 517.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

kills, but the grace of God gives life.’ As well, ‘Grace grants help and does everything that the law demands and yet is unable to do by itself.’”<sup>14</sup>

Finally, to be clear as to Luther’s understanding of the benefit of the law, “But as the law discloses, things are quite different with man; he is evil, unjust, sinful, carnal, and out of harmony with the law in every measure.”<sup>15</sup> Grace, on the other hand, “makes him good, godly, holy, spiritual, brings all things into accord with the law, and leads him to God’s grace.”<sup>16</sup>

Finally, to complete our brief theological overview of the basis for the law/gospel preoccupation in current homiletics, we now consider the theology of John Calvin. Calvin, in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in a manner that hardly needs commenting, explicitly refers to the three uses of the law.

That the whole matter may be made clearer, let us take a succinct view of the office and use of the Moral Law. Now, this office and use seems to me to consist of three parts. First, by exhibiting the righteousness of God—in other words, the righteousness which alone is acceptable to God,—it admonishes every one of his own unrighteousness, certiorates, convicts, and finally condemns him. This is necessary, in order that man, who is blind and intoxicated with self-love, may be brought at once to know and to confess his weakness and impurity.<sup>17</sup>

The second office of the Law is, by means of its fearful denunciations and the consequent dread of punishment, to curb those who unless forced, have no regard for rectitude and justice. Such persons are curbed, not because their mind is inwardly moved and affected, but because, as if a bridle were laid upon them, they refrain their hands from external acts, and internally check the depravity which would otherwise petulantly bust forth.<sup>18</sup>

The third use of the Law (being also the principal use, and more closely connected with its proper end) has respect to believers in whose heart the Spirit of God already flourishes and reigns. For although the Law is written and engraven on their

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>17</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2.7.6.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 2.7.10.

hearts by the finger of God, that is, although they are so influenced and actuated by the Spirit, that they desire to obey God, there are two ways in which they still profit in the Law. For it is the best instrument for enabling them daily to learn with greater truth and certainty what that will of the Lord is which they aspire to follow, and to confirm them in this knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

It is this third use of the law, which Calvin describes as its “principal use and more closely connected with its proper end” that essentially divides Protestantism into two distinct camps. Although Saint Paul, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, and Calvin agree that grace, even the very capacity to choose God’s grace is a free gift from him, the issue that is implicitly raised is the question of what the Christian vocation then consists of. Do we grow in righteousness in the sense that we are formed by God day by day, in large part by his teaching and law, or are we instead called to grow in faith, evermore becoming aware of his mercy and responding in a spirit of thankfulness. Of course, the next question being, is it proper to make such a distinction? Is it really “all or nothing” as Gerhard O. Forde insists, to the extent that he goes so far as to define sanctification as “the art of getting used to justification.”<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 2.7.12.

<sup>20</sup> Donald L. Alexander (ed.), *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1988), 13.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PAUL SCOTT WILSON AND LAW/GOSPEL SERMON CONTENT AND FORM

#### *Law/Gospel in Wilson's Imagination of the Heart*

The significance of Paul Scott Wilson for our discussion here is that he develops the significance of law and gospel not only in terms of sermon content but also in terms of sermon form to an extent previously unexplored in the field of homiletics.

Wilson's first book to be considered here is, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching*. Wilson's self professed concern in *Imagination* is to assist preachers in crafting sermons that help keep "faith alive and vital," "foster hope," help keep the preacher's heart "open to [their] people," and foster greater love within the congregation.<sup>21</sup> Not surprisingly, given the title of his book, the key to developing faith, vitality, hope, and love in a given congregation is,

love illuminated by the Scriptures. It takes our experience of the world and shows us new possibilities. It opens mystery to us. It gives us the ability both to see this world as it is, with Christ in the midst of our brokenness, and to imagine a world different from our own, a world already transfigured by Christ's love, already penetrated by the new order. Imagination of the heart is always motivated by concerns of the heart, by God's love for the world, and by our desire to respond to that love.<sup>22</sup>

In essence, Wilson's concern is to "Juxtapose two identities in order to create a spark that will be rooted in scripture."<sup>23</sup> Each chapter of *Imagination* is then divided into "imagination poles" consisting of "The Biblical Text and our Situation," "Law and Gospel/Judgement and Grace," "Story and Doctrine," "Pastor and Prophet." For our

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Scott Wilson, *Imagination of the Heart: New Understandings in Preaching* (Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 1988), 15.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Wilson, *Imagination*, 47.

purposes here, and to help identify just exactly what law/gospel preaching is in contemporary homiletics, we will examine more closely Wilson's section entitled, "Law and Gospel/Judgement and Grace."

It is important to keep in mind as we proceed that at least in terms of preaching, "Until now the terms law and gospel or judgement and grace have been explored and argued, but never fully combined with a homiletical approach."<sup>24</sup> We are indeed in new territory. What Wilson is encouraging is in fact significant in the sense that what has been affirmed theologically by Wilson is also explored methodologically. Wilson even goes so far as to emphasize our responsibility, perhaps even our moral obligation, to utilize an effective methodology for law/gospel preaching. Wilson writes, "Homiletical structure is not something that just happens over which we have neither control nor responsibility. If structures are not present to bear law or gospel, judgement or grace, then we are accountable."<sup>25</sup>

Helpful for us here, Wilson conveniently offers brief definitions of both law and gospel. In terms of the law, "at its simplest level, law, although a gift, places the burden on us, requiring us to do something."<sup>26</sup> Gospel, on the other hand, "at its simplest level places the burden on God, and God has already accepted that burden in Jesus Christ."<sup>27</sup> In short, law consists of imperative, whereas gospel consists of promise.

However, it is also important to highlight that within this preoccupation with law and gospel, Wilson as throughout maintains an overall commitment essential to his

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 92-93.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 96

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 107.

homiletic, which is concerned ultimately to bring healing and wholeness to the world by the preaching of Good News.

One way for most preachers to become more effective is to lean more into the future, to claim Christ's future promise as it meets us in the present. This is the hope that pacifies the lion and encourages the lamb; that consoles the unconsolable; that comforts the uncomfortable; that reconciles the irreconcilable; that binds the exile in a foreign land to the sweet abundance of homecoming; that finds wholeness through brokenness; that offers forgiveness where there are debts; that proclaims life where there is death; and that makes inseparable the cry of dereliction on the cross from the hushed joyous resurrection utterance of Mary's "Rabboni!" Over and over again we have seen God's Word overturning the way of the world in our lives, yet too often in our preaching we stand upright, failing to lean into the future to claim the grace that is already ours.<sup>28</sup>

To be clear, Wilson does acknowledge that law and gospel are inextricably intertwined and within the law is something of the movement toward grace.<sup>29</sup> However, there is still the clear distinction between law and gospel in that law makes demands upon us, which without God's grace we are unable to fulfil, whereas it is the gospel that completes this "overturning of the way of the world in our lives." It is the gospel that brings restoration by enabling the congregation to imagine a world "already transfigured by Christ's love."

It was my intention to treat some of the ideas of Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr. separately in this paper but considering the indebtedness of Wilson's homiletic to the ideas found in Stuempfle's *Preaching Law and Gospel* it seems appropriate to include comments on his work here. The important additional distinction to make here as explored by Stuempfle is the difference between the law as "hammer of judgement" and as "mirror of existence." In terms of law as judgement, Stuempfle, admitting that this understanding of the law dominated not only Luther's theology but Medieval theology in

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 95.



general,<sup>30</sup> highlights that in terms of law as judgement, “The Law is a ‘large and powerful hammer’ with which God smashes our pretensions and brings us to our knees. In this way, we are finally driven to recognize the desperateness of our condition and to cry out for help.”<sup>31</sup> Further, two characteristics of the law as judgement are that “First, the Law falls upon us vertically, intersecting our lives as a demand and/or threat from God himself.. [and secondly, that] the target of this hammer of judgement is the conscience.”<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, law as mirror of existence, drawing heavily on the theology of Paul Tillich, concerns itself with such terms as “*alienation, meaninglessness, brokenness, finitude, anxiety, and despair.*”<sup>33</sup> Further, “Such an analysis represents a shift from the Reformation tradition with respect to the Law and its use in preaching.. [Firstly,] Judgement is not so much an attack from above as a threat from within the actualities of our life.. [and secondly,] the target of the Law is not so much the conscience as, more broadly, our consciousness of the true situation in which we stand.”<sup>34</sup>

Important for our discussion here is that Wilson, although not exclusively, tends to favour a preaching of the law which is more in keeping with understanding the law as mirror of existence: “This kind of law that mirrors existence may be our normal, but not exclusive, goal in providing a structure that enables law, simply because in today’s world

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<sup>30</sup> Herman G. Stuempfle, Jr., *Preaching Law and Gospel* (Ramsey, New Jersey: Sigler Press, 1990), 21.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

the other law, law as hammer of judgement, is frequently regarded with suspicion, even by many faithful Christians... If we want to reach people with the gospel, we must understand them.”<sup>35</sup> Clearly, inherent to Stuempfle, and by extension Wilson’s homiletic, is that one of preaching’s main concerns is to provide relief from the destructive powers inherent in our human, anxiety filled, alienated situation.

Wilson, however, is not only concerned with the substance of law and gospel but also the necessity of being intentional concerning the methodology employed for law/gospel preaching in general. Wilson begins by offering the following practical broad strokes framework for preaching law and gospel: “A fifty-fifty balance between law and gospel (which in practical reality may vary from week to week between sixty-forty or forty-sixty) may seem radical, given what we have been used to, but it is a worthy ideal.”<sup>36</sup> More specifically,

There is a natural movement in the Christian faith from law *to* gospel, from judgement *to* grace, from Exodus *to* Promised Land, and from Good Friday *to* Easter. The movement is not reversed, nor is it back and forth, the *to* and *fro* wearing each other out like two parts of an old hinge. Rather, it is a progression that marks God’s continuing restorative promise to the world. The same natural flow might be our normal goal in structuring preaching. First comes the law, then comes the gospel. We want each to be heard in strength, each to be heard as dominant, not each drowned out by the other, or one heard at the expense of the other.<sup>37</sup>

Wilson does offer as well, a helpful diagram to exemplify law/gospel preaching. Law/gospel preaching as envisioned by Wilson is a circle, the first half of which is characterized by preaching of the law followed by a deliberate reversal, what he calls the “law-gospel spark,” the point at which we have “reached the depth of our awareness of

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 108-109.

our sin.”<sup>38</sup> And perhaps of even greater significance, “When we move into the gospel section, we structure the reversal as an overturning of the world, a reversal of our expectations, and an action of God’s inbreaking realm. To set up this movement it is necessary to identify the central idea of the sermon or homily.”<sup>39</sup> This central idea is essential for obvious reasons in keeping a sermon focused and intelligible for the congregation.

### ***Law/Gospel in Wilson’s The Four Pages of the Sermon***

Next we consider Wilson’s *The Four Pages of the Sermon*, in which Wilson presents his fully developed methodology for preaching law and gospel. Wilson offers this helpful summary early on, “Page One I devote to trouble and conflict in the Bible—in other words, as preachers, we consider the Bible in its own time. On Page Two we look at similar sin or human brokenness in our time. Page Three returns to the Bible, this time to identify what God is doing in or behind the biblical text as it opens the story of good news. And on Page Four we point to God graciously at work in our world, particularly in relationship to those situations named on Page Two.”<sup>40</sup>

It is not essential at this point for us to discuss, in detail, many aspects of the homiletic of Wilson. For our purposes here it is relevant to simply focus on Wilson’s suggestions for speaking of sin and grace, regardless of on which page these comments should occur. It is appropriate for us to view Wilson’s sermon methodology as divided

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 123.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 16.

into two overall halves. The first half of the sermon addresses the problem of sin the second half discloses grace. In speaking of sin, Wilson writes, “In any biblical passage, something is wrong in human affairs because then, as now, sin is present.”<sup>41</sup> However, instead of just mentioning sin in passing, as is often the case, Wilson suggests that the preacher develop the evidence of sin as found in the biblical text. Using the example of Luke’s parable of the good Samaritan, Wilson highlights the extensive trouble that is found in the text. Trouble is not just an aspect or part of what is happening throughout the parable, but like the parable of the prodigal son, there are many evidences and instances of sin that the congregation would benefit from reflecting upon for a significant period of time. In other words, we need to take our time with coming to terms with the evidences of sin. If sin is the problem, we would benefit from contemplating the problem in depth and detail, before moving on to speak of grace.

When speaking of trouble in the world, page two of the sermon continues the themes developed in page one by interpreting similar trouble in the world today. Again, because there is trouble in the world, it is less advantageous to skim over the problems in a manner that makes too little of them. Wilson does caution preachers to avoid sermons that “beat up” on the congregation. Instead he offers a three-part understanding of trouble in order to encourage a more comprehensive understanding of sin.

The first kind of trouble, for Wilson, is that of transcendent trouble: “the mood is imperative; the sin tends to be personal or individual sin before God; a sentence of judgement is passed from on high; the recipient experiences guilt (or anger); repentance and forgiveness are the only way out; responsibility and change rests mainly on the

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 74.

individual; the only recourse is to turn to God for grace and mercy.”<sup>42</sup> The second, namely, immanent trouble, becomes evident “when we examine the world horizontally for evidence of the fall and when we reflect in our words the brokenness of the world and the suffering of the innocent.”<sup>43</sup> And thirdly, we have what Wilson calls, human trouble, which is “concerned only with human responsibility to act.”<sup>44</sup>

Again, although the content of what Wilson is encouraging is not new, it is the degree to which his form explicitly encourages or insists that the problem of sin be exposed in detail, and inwardly digested by the congregation, that distinguishes Wilson. Wilson is intent at least to begin his sermons by exposing the members of the congregation and the powers of this world for the inherent sinfulness that exists within them.

The second half of the sermon for Wilson then concerns itself with the workings of God’s grace. On “Page Three” Wilson is concerned to show the activity of God as found in the biblical text. This third section is characterized by the imperative to proclaim the good news of God in Christ Jesus.

On this page we proclaim God’s amazing nature and saving acts without further putting the burden of action on the congregation. We proclaim God’s faithful and redeeming love without hesitation, reserve, or condition. This is not a way of removing the listener’s duty to act, of ignoring God’s demands, or of erasing the trouble that has been established biblically and theologically on Pages One and Two. Rather, it is a way of putting our trouble in perspective before the cross of Christ who has taken our place, entered suffering, and gone to death for us, and thereby accomplished something so decisive that all life is changed by it. The possibility of trouble having the determining word over us humans is ended. Our old way of being, with its freedoms that led to death, is replaced by the death of One who gives us our freedom for life.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 110-111.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 112.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 157.

Combined with Wilson's imperative to proclaim the gospel without condition is his commitment to "showing" grace, in the same manner as found in *Imagination*, rather than simply speaking of grace in general terms. Although Wilson does offer a number of suggestions in this regard, by no means does he present a conclusive examination of exactly how this is to be done. Instead Wilson makes a number of suggestions: "Make a movie; be visual," "Use imagination to ask questions of the text," "We compose Page Three best when we first have the text vividly pictured in our own minds and then share a few essential details with the congregation."<sup>46</sup>

"Page Four" completes the sermon by "filming" God's action in the world. Although Wilson recognizes that claims about God's activity are difficult to make, and that new or inexperienced preachers may "occasionally associate God with something relatively trivial or trite, such as the smile from the grocer to the stranger,"<sup>47</sup> in order to express something of God's activity in the world the challenge must be met.

In this task of displaying God's activity in the world, Wilson offers "Two Key Doctrines in Discerning God." The first is that to understand or appreciate the words and ministry of Jesus Christ we understand something about the inbreaking of the kingdom of God into this world.<sup>48</sup> To speak of healing, deliverance, justice, and mercy is to notice and proclaim what God has done and is doing in the hearts and lives of human beings. Secondly, Wilson suggests that we use the doctrine of the Trinity to help us discern God's activity in the world. For Wilson, to reflect the Trinity in human terms is to first

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 201.

understand the Trinity in terms of God as “lover, beloved, and their mutual love (i.e. the Person of the Holy Spirit). This analogy implies [quoting theologian Daniel L. Migliore] ‘a social ethics grounded in Trinitarian theology.’”<sup>49</sup>

Clearly then, as an overall framework for preaching, pages three and four of the sermon are, for Wilson, intended as explicit and reassuring expressions of the goodness and favour of God as found in both the bible as well as today, in light of the display of sin expressed and/or mirrored in the first half of the sermon.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE GOSPEL AS “OFFENCE”

But what if the gospel itself is a kind of offence? What if the gospel proclaimed is a challenge or even a kind of death? Further, not death in the sense of something to be passed through to resurrection life as quickly as possible, but rather a permanent bind which is not to be resolved in this life. The real question then becomes whether or not it is possible to preach something of this bind and still preach good news?

There is ample evidence of the gospel as offence throughout the bible and Christian theology. To begin, from the letter to the Ephesians, “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). We are indeed saved by faith, but to go a step further, even the very capacity to receive the faith by which we are saved is a gift from God. The writer of John’s gospel reinforces this necessity of God’s favour in being moved to receive grace: “No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day” (John 2:44). Aquinas, for example, in keeping with both the letter to the Ephesians and John’s gospel writes, “But if man could prepare himself, he would not need to be drawn by another. Hence man cannot prepare himself without the help of grace.”<sup>50</sup> In short, the Christian makes no contribution to grace or even the receiving of grace. As a result, there is *no room* for boasting.

Admittedly, we are treading dangerously close to a doctrine of predestination and perhaps this is the point: “And those whom he predestined he also called; and those

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<sup>50</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, 1a IIaeQQ. 109-6.



whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified” (Romans 8:30). Again, utilizing Aquinas, “It is fitting that God should predestine men. For all things are subjected to His providence.”<sup>51</sup>

The doctrine of predestination, humanly speaking, is offensive. It is a doctrine that every Christian wrestles with. What then of free will? What then of theodicy? What then of the condemned? However, to quote Gerhard Forde, “Anyone who takes God seriously at all has to reckon with some sort of predestination. It simply goes with the business of being precisely *God*.”<sup>52</sup>

What then of the condemned? What are we forced to posit? If we follow Aquinas and the direction of his thinking, “Thus, as predestination is a part of providence, in regard to those ordained to eternal salvation, so reprobation is part of providence in regard to those who turn aside from that end.”<sup>53</sup> In keeping with the offence of predestination, Aquinas, almost in passing, offers an understanding of Romans 8:28 which actually robs it of the typical meaning derived from the verse, as a means of receiving comfort: “This mercy, however, is not vouchsafed to all those who are blinded, but only to the predestined, to whom *all things work together unto good*” [italics not mine].<sup>54</sup> Have we made too much of a single passage? To be clear, Aquinas later writes, “All things happen equally to the good and the wicked, as regards the substance of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>52</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Fortress Press, 1982), 67.

<sup>53</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, 1a QQ. 23-4.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 1a IIaeQQ. 79-4.

temporal good or evil; but not as regards the end, since the good and not the wicked are led to beatitude by them.”<sup>55</sup>

What of the question of free will? The dilemma in part arises from, on the one hand, the necessity of asserting the omnipotence and goodness of God, but yet on the other hand, the necessity of attributing the problem of sin to someone or something specifically. The answer, of course, is to locate the problem of sin within those that commit the actual sins. The result is that God is glorified without qualification, and humanity is condemned without qualification. Indeed the dilemma we are now confronted with is no better articulated and “resolved” than by Augustine in his *The City of God*, where in discussing the will and necessity, he finally writes, “Therefore we are by no means compelled, either, retaining the prescience of God, to take away the freedom of the will, or, retaining the freedom of the will, to deny that He is prescient of future things, which is impious. But we embrace both. We faithfully and sincerely confess both. *The former, that we may believe well; the latter, that we may live well* [italics mine].”<sup>56</sup>

The concern here, for the moment, is not to try to resolve the dilemma, but rather to again recognize at least in theological terms, something of the inherent dilemma and offence of the gospel, when understood in relation to the omnipotence of God, and to, in time, come to some appreciation of the implications of this dilemma or offence for those that preach this gospel. If even the purpose of prayer is “not that we may change the

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 1a IIaeQQ. 114-10.

<sup>56</sup> Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, 5.10.1.

Divine disposition, but that we may impetrate that which God has disposed to be fulfilled by our prayers,”<sup>57</sup> what might the implications be for preaching?

### ***The Theology for Preaching and the Sermons of Gerhard O. Forde***

Fortunately we have something of an ally in the theology and homiletic of Gerhard O. Forde. To be fair, Forde is generally appreciated for his theological contribution, especially within Lutheran circles, and he was for many years professor of Systematic Theology at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota. However, the significance of Forde’s theological venture, as well as his contribution to the field of homiletics, is not to be underestimated. Although to a great extent (and we will attempt to address this shortcoming) Forde’s homiletic is admittedly underdeveloped and his actual preaching suffers as a result, for our purposes here we are simply concerned with coming to some appreciation of the manner in which Forde retains the difficulty of the gospel and his suggestions for preaching as a result.

The first work of Gerhard Forde to be discussed is *Justification by Faith-A Matter of Death and Life*, published in 1982. The expressed thesis and purpose of *Justification by Faith*, “is that the doctrine can be both radicalized and found more satisfying and universal in structure if it is complemented by the biblical and Reformation understanding of death and life. To be justified *is* a matter of death and life. The purpose of this book is to explore what that might mean for the thinking and preaching of the church.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Aquinas, *Summa*, IIa IIQQ. 83-2.

<sup>58</sup> Gerhard O. Forde, *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), vii-viii.

In this short yet powerful work, Forde attempts to reinvest the doctrine of justification by faith with a substance that does not revert to yet another form of legalistic Christianity, while at the same time deliberately avoiding superficiality or what he simply calls “foolishness.” Admittedly, there is a strong existentialist tone to what is presented. To speak of death and life necessitates a felt reality intrinsic to the dogmatic or theological claims argued. Forde’s genius is that he manages to maintain his theological integrity, as well as his relevance to the actual situation or predicament in which the believer/unbeliever finds themselves day-to-day, without proposing conditions or religious requirements which would once again foster despair; despair which so easily is the direct result of not having met whatever new conditions have been prescribed.

Halfway through Forde’s book, a kind of summary is given which alludes to each of the important elements treated throughout his work:

Nothing shows more clearly the desperate need for the move to the idea of death and new life. If one is going to be at all serious about justification *sola fide*, about the *simul iustus et peccator*; if, whenever threatened, one is going to move even farther “to the right” and speak of absolutely forensic justification (and that move *is* essentially the right one) so that one comes up hard against the limit, against the fact that nothing is required because all is an unconditional gift, then the only way forward is to see that all that spells precisely death to the old, the end of the law and its hegemony, the end of the Old Adam and Eve and their desperate attempts to stay alive and find new possibility in the law. The way forward is not to hedge on the nothing, or qualify forensic justification with a little warmed-over mysticism, or withhold the *sola* lest the “simple” get the wrong idea, or “add” sanctification to keep people moral and domesticate the law. The only way forward is precisely *through* the nothing, through the death to new life. If there is a progress in the Christian life, it must be seen precisely as a progress driven by the justifying word which brings death and new life, a progress in dying to the old and being raised to the new. It is a situation where dying, we live.<sup>59</sup>

Essential to this quotation is that it easily interrelates to, invests in, and clarifies various difficult passages in the bible; passages which haunt the preacher and question the immediacy of the gospel as simple good news. For example, “For those who want to

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<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 49.

save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it” (Luke 9:24), “Fool! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies” (1 Corinthians 15:36), and “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

The answer to the question regarding just exactly what the nature of this difficulty is that characterizes the Christian life is precisely in the demand made upon us as believers in being captivated and indeed possessed by the absolute nature of God. It seems that there is no more demanding, and transformative command than to “Let God be God.” It is an imperative due to its incomprehensibility, humanly speaking, and offence (summarized and invested by the Cross), which is the end of the present world order and preoccupation with self. It is a spiritual death; a death which frees us to lay aside self-mastery in favour of discipleship. Freedom is the result, in large part, due to the laying aside of the impossible task of realizing and maintaining existence apart from God, especially in those ways unnoticed or unacknowledged. To instead trust God, who is and remains God regardless, and who is already conducting the elements according to his will, is to then shift from the futile to a life lived in faith. What makes the doctrine of justification by faith difficult to absorb is that it denies a theoretical freedom in favour of a theological freedom; to give my will and my life over to God is the end of attempting to gain what cannot be gained, in order to gain and live in what has already been given.

Furthermore, and perhaps most startling, in case the objection might be raised that Forde is really not offering anything unique or new, is that justification by faith is the end of the idea of progress. To offer another lengthy but significant quote:

The “progress” of the Christian therefore, is the progress of one who has constantly to get used to the fact that we are justified totally by faith, constantly has somehow to “recover,” so to speak, from that death blow to pride and presumption—or better, is

constantly being raised from the tomb of all pious ambition to something quite new. The believer has to be renewed daily in that. The Old Being is to be daily drowned in repentance and raised in faith. The progress of the Christian life is not our movement toward the goal; it is the movement of the goal upon us. The righteousness granted unconditionally is eschatological in character; it is the totality of the "Kingdom of God" moving in upon us. The sin to be attacked and abolished is not merely immorality and godlessness, but also pious presumption, the refusal to believe in God or his creation, always taking flight toward some spiritual dreamland. Sanctification cannot, therefore, mean that the ideas of moral progress blasted by the divine imputation of righteousness are now subtly smuggled back in under the table. The sin to be removed *is* precisely such understanding of progress. The justification is not a mere beginning point which can somehow be allowed to recede into the background while the supposed "real" business of sanctification takes front and center. The unconditional justification is the perpetual fountain, the constant source of whatever "righteousness" we may acquire. "Complete" satisfaction is not the goal but the source of all good works. The imputed, unconditional righteousness is not a temporary loan, or a legal fiction, but a power, indeed, "the power of God unto salvation." It attacks sin as a total state and will not relent until it has reduced all sin to nothing. It always attacks as a *whole* as the unconditional word consigning the old to death and calling forth the new. When the confessions use statements like "Faith will bear fruit!" or "Faith is bound to bear fruit," that is what stands behind the statement.<sup>60</sup>

Furthermore, without a recognition of the spiritual death that takes place once the omnipotence of God arrests and disarms the believer, the doctrine of justification by faith tends to lack any experiential element; it remains a part of the world of theology but not of daily life. On the other hand, those who claim freedom in Christ without cost seem to suffer from what Forde elsewhere calls premature "resurrection enthusiasm."<sup>61</sup> In fact, justification by faith "is the end of all idealism, the death of heaven-stormers."<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the doctrine of justification by faith is and remains an offence.

Forde is clear not to make the doctrine of justification by faith more effective by making it "expensive," by imposing conditions, but instead to insist that justification is free and unconditional. However, the effect of the grace of God upon the lives of those who are apprehended by its unconditionality, and here is the difficulty, is that it is the end

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>61</sup>Gerhard Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1990), 82.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 83.

of the various preoccupations to gain God's favour or even control one's own destiny. Justification by faith is the end of, for example, the preoccupation with being sorry enough, practicality, pride, pious ambition, pious presumption, flight to a spiritual dreamland, religiosity as a profession, the pursuit of both virtues and vices, hypocrisy, despair, and personal holiness.

In terms of the question of good works, "Faith simply does good works naturally and spontaneously. It is not naive to insist on that—*if* one has any inkling at all of what the explosion of justification is!.... Faith doesn't *ask* about good works, but does them without all the theological fuss and bother. Good works are works done in faith, the faith which has simply gotten over looking at itself and its 'progress' and begun to look at the neighbor."<sup>63</sup>

It should be of no surprise that a book entitled *Justification by Faith* has relatively little to say about the issue of sanctification. It is not as if the issue of sanctification does not merit consideration for Forde, but rather that the issue of importance is the sovereignty of God and the freedom that ensues from appropriation of that sovereignty. It is in this sense that the doctrine of justification by faith is a "liberating offence." What Forde writes regarding the topic of sanctification does (gladly for this Anglican) coincide with the Articles of Religion, especially article XII on good works. Article XII reads, "Albeit that Good Works, which are the fruits of Faith, and follow after Justification, cannot put away our sins, and endure the severity of God's Judgement; yet are they pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ, and do spring out necessarily of a true and lively Faith; insomuch that by them a lively Faith may be as evidently know as a tree

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<sup>63</sup>Forde, *Justification*, 55.

discerned by the fruit.”<sup>64</sup> The key word in article XII is “necessarily.” It is almost as if good works are accidental and not to be paid too close attention to unless they become the center of attention and a source of pride or distraction rather than drawing our attention to the justifying work of Christ.

As a side note, although the Articles intentionally place justification at the center of salvation, it seems that Forde might contest one aspect of Article XI, which concerns itself specifically with the doctrine of justification by faith. Article XI reads, “We are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ by Faith, and not for our own works or deservings: Wherefore, that we are justified by Faith only is a most wholesome Doctrine, and very full of comfort...”<sup>65</sup> It is these last few words quoted from Article XI that Forde would assuredly object to. For Forde, the doctrine of justification by faith is not really a “comfort,” but as he stated in his introduction (and quoted earlier), satisfying only if the doctrine is “radicalized” by “biblical and Reformation understandings of death and life.”

Published two years later (1984), Forde’s contribution to the second volume of *Christian Dogmatics*, which concerns itself specifically with the doctrines of justification and sanctification, is of some use in our discussion here. Not surprisingly, considering the proximity of the two publications we find many of the same conclusions being made regarding the essence of justification by faith. The introductory “summary” of the 11<sup>th</sup> Locus reflects all of the same themes and ideas treated in *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*:

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<sup>64</sup>Thomas Cranmer, *The Book of Common Prayer* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1959), 703.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 702-703.



The death of the old and the resurrection of the new, by the word of justification in proclamation and sacrament, are the basis of the Christian life. Justification by faith in the divine word cannot readily be synthesized with thinking in terms of law, process, and progress, but must be seen as an eschatological event, as new life from death, in which the depth of human sin is unmasked at the same time as righteousness is granted. Law is ended as “the way,” driven out of the conscience by Christ, and given its proper function in exposing sin, unbelief, and mistrust. To foster the Christian life, the proclamation of the church must do this, not just describe it.<sup>66</sup>

There is actually very little in terms of new material offered by Forde in the opening chapters of his treatment of justification in *Christian Dogmatics*. Again Forde gives an overview of justification, paying particular attention to the doctrine of justification by faith as “solely God’s doing,”<sup>67</sup> which results in the end of all attempts to achieve salvation through the law. Justification by faith is again the end of the preoccupation with “change, progress, process.”<sup>68</sup> As well, justification by faith is the beginning of the recognition that “our virtues are not better than our vices. The difference is only a matter of taste. Some like vice and some like virtue; both do what *they* like.”<sup>69</sup> What is essential, as with the theme explored in *Justification by Faith: A Matter of Death and Life*, is that justification by faith is an end to the old and the start of the new; it is death and life. “The divine judgement flowing from the death and resurrection of Jesus, the word of forgiveness and justification pronounced for his sake, *is* the doing of death and resurrection to us. The faith created by that word *is* the death and resurrection” [italics not mine].<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (ed.), *Christian Dogmatics: Volume 2* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 399.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 401.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 400.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 409.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 410.

When Forde begins a more concentrated examination of the distinction between law, gospel, and conscience it is interesting to note that he almost exclusively limits his discussion to the theological use of the law. Although he acknowledges the political use and attributes the third use to Melancthon and the later reformers, it is not surprisingly, the theological use that Forde concerns himself with.

In terms of the conscience, it is important to note that Forde deliberately distances himself from a purely psychological interpretation of the law/gospel paradigm. In fact, “Conscience does not reflect order and constancy. It is insatiable, fickle, and arbitrary. It does not represent God’s presence within us, it represents his absence, that we are left to ourselves.”<sup>71</sup>

However, despite all that has been stated so far, the content of the doctrine of sanctification is still largely undeveloped in the writings examined up until this point. We turn then to the second chapter of *Christian Dogmatics* entitled “Justification and Sanctification” to address this shortcoming.

Firstly then, Forde acknowledges that a judicial understanding of justification by faith, “although orthodoxy’s finest achievement,”<sup>72</sup> leads to anxiety concerning the role or importance of sanctification in terms of salvation and the Christian life. The doctrine of justification by faith alone, at times, forces a complete distinction between justification and sanctification leading to either a leaving of things as they already are or a fleeing from justification to subjectivism in order to have some measure of effect. Because the former option is obviously incredible, what has happened more often than not is a

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 417.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 427.

moving from the objective doctrine of justification to what can be considered a subjective doctrine of sanctification. However the problem is, “The separation of justification from sanctification in this manner thus leads only in one direction: The process of sanctification becomes the primary reality; justification fades into the background as something everyone presupposes or takes for granted, but which possesses no real dynamic.”<sup>73</sup>

What is missing, according to Forde, is to view justification as an eschatological event leading to the death of the pursuit of salvation in legalistic terms and instead to salvation by grace through faith. What is essential once again, and Forde goes to great lengths to establish this, is that there be no room for any sense of progress when it comes to either justification or sanctification. “Justification by faith means the death of the old and the resurrection of the new. Sanctification is what results when that is done to us.”<sup>74</sup> Justification is complete and absolute in the moment that faith is received from Christ. Justification by faith is a taking from Christ and a remaining in Christ, who continually by his spirit renews the font from which good works proceed. If there is anything comparable to progress, “if it is a movement at all, [it] is a movement from nothing to all, from that which one has and is in oneself to that which one has and is in Christ. Such a movement can never be completed this side of the grave.”<sup>75</sup>

Justification can, and indeed must, be considered eschatological in that justification both enjoys what has been accomplished in Christ and anticipates its

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 429.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 430.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 431.

completion at the end of this age. “The ‘progress’ is the coming of the kingdom of God among us.”<sup>76</sup> To be justified by faith means that we leave behind every attempt to find salvation in the law and in being freed from the burden of the law; good works spring forth from the freedom that justification creates. It is essential then not to view justification and sanctification as separate doctrines but rather as one doctrine unified in hope, which rests in the saving act of Christ, complete, new, and life giving, in each and every moment of every day.

It must be admitted that it can be said of Forde that he in essence lacks any practical doctrine of sanctification; there is no system. It is almost as if Forde, regardless of the issue at hand, intentionally and insistentlly, moves from that topic (whatever it may be) to justification in order to provide for its content and power. Even in his contribution to *Christian Spirituality: Five Views of Sanctification*, Forde not surprisingly writes, (as quoted earlier), “Sanctification is thus simply *the art of getting used to justification*” [italics author’s].<sup>77</sup> In short, sanctification happens but it is justification that is, and remains, our treasure.

We now turn our attention to the issue of preaching. In light of all that Forde has suggested, what is the preacher to do? What is it that the preacher is bound, as a proponent of the gospel, to say? The final chapter of *Justification by Faith—A Matter of Death and Life* and his book entitled *Theology is for Proclamation*, provide a clear answer to these questions.

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 435.

<sup>77</sup>Alexander (ed.), *Christian Spirituality*, 13.

Instead of wrestling with questions of relevance or of being contemporary, Forde's concern is that the preacher instead simply proclaims anew the gospel. The message is that you (present tense 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and plural) are justified in Christ by grace through faith and not of works lest anyone should boast, declared in both word and sacrament. The preacher as a vehicle for the grace of God is bound to do no more than proclaim what has already been proclaimed and achieved in Christ. The mystery may be that God uses sinful creatures to proclaim his absolute love toward humanity but nevertheless the message remains the same, "You are loved by God!" If there is such talk of relevance "we might have recourse to the two other ways in which the relevance of it all might come home to us. The first of these ways we might call the attempt to establish the need for justification *sola fide* as unconditional, promise, death and life; and the second more of an attempt to drive to proclaim justification in such a way that the proclamation itself does the deed."<sup>78</sup> In other words, to expose the futility of the law and the necessity of justification by faith alone and then to let the proclamation itself do the work. Preaching then is always in the present tense, it is always from God to humans (through humans), and it is always an offence to the "world order" both corporately and individually expressed. Not to say that the Word is always received, that can never and will never be the case, but rather that the preacher simply fulfils their God-given commission to proclaim what has been accomplished and given in Christ, to the end that some may come to the saving knowledge of God.

The church is therefore an absolutely unique body in the world. It is the place where the absolutely strange and unheard-of kind of speaking-gospel speaking-takes place. Thus the church is where the gospel is preached and the sacraments administered according to that gospel. This is its primary business and this is what it must see to. To those whose

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<sup>78</sup>Forde, *Justification*, 85.

perception of the gospel is jaded or dimmed this will not seem like much. But it is really all there is to do. For those who are always impetuously anxious to be about the business of helping the world it must be said that this is also the primary way in which the church can help the world. The world needs above all to know that in the gospel of the crucified and risen Lord it too comes up against its limit, end, and goal. Only where and when the gospel is heard will people be set free to turn back to the world and genuinely care for it. As the “outpost” of the new age, the kingdom of God, the church must proclaim this gospel so that all, including the world, may be saved.<sup>79</sup>

### ***Law/Gospel as Offence in Forde’s Sermons***

In order to come to a better appreciation of Forde’s theology and homiletic in practice, and this expression of the gospel as “liberating offence” in action, we will briefly examine three of Forde’s sermons as found in *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, Atonement, and Ecumenism* published in 2004. We do have some sense of Forde’s theology, but what about his preaching? Again, we will be focusing on the use and treatment of the doctrines of justification and sanctification and the place of proclamation in each of these sermons, with some comment on the effectiveness of each of the sermons in general.

The first sermon, entitled “God’s Rights,” is based on Matthew 20:15 which reads, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what is my own.” The theme of the sermon is the sovereignty of God. Although Forde does not use the term justification specifically, the theme of justification by faith is implicit throughout the sermon. The sermon begins by speaking of the rights of various minority groups and the human rights movement in general. Forde is careful not to show allegiance to one group over another, they are all equally represented, and our general preoccupation with human rights as a culture is brought to the forefront. Forde then turns things on their head, which is

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<sup>79</sup>Forde, *Proclamation*, 190.

actually not surprising in light of one of the few practical suggestions he makes in *Theology is For Proclamation*: “In moving from text to sermon, one would do well to look first for the offence, the killing letter of the text, the hard saying, the uncompromising word, and start with that rather than with some cute story.”<sup>80</sup> The offence presented, as far as this sermon is concerned, is the question of God’s rights. It is likely that few in our congregations have ever really thought about God’s rights. Does God have rights? “Hath not the potter power over the clay?” (Romans 9:21). What Forde is refreshingly contrasting the question of God’s rights with is what he views has become an incessant preoccupation with God as simple love. “We tell ourselves that God is, in general, love, and as such can be safely filed away in the back of the drawer.”<sup>81</sup>

Forde’s genius, however, is not that he then separates the privileged from the persecuted minority, insisting that the gap be bridged, but instead that he throws all, regardless of their social standing, upon the mercy and generosity of God. “For if we are honest, what chance do we have, other than the generosity of God? What chance do we have if all the laborers do not get the same? Where would we be if we got what we deserved?”<sup>82</sup> Spiritually speaking there is no such thing as the “haves and the have-nots.” “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

The effect of Forde’s sermon thus far is that he speaks of the sovereignty of God in such a way that it is unsettling. He does not, as is often the case, try to alleviate anxiety or fear by reassuring the congregation that they are loved and that all is or will be

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<sup>80</sup>Forde, *Proclamation*, 157.

<sup>81</sup>Gerhard O. Forde, *A More Radical Gospel: Essays on Eschatology, Authority, and Ecumenism* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 203.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 204.

well in God. Instead, Forde tries to invoke a sense of appreciation of the generosity and love of God in light of the realization that apart from God we are nothing. As can be expected, sanctification is treated only slightly; assuming that if God's sovereignty is realized the rest might just take care of itself. "And maybe, just maybe, if we catch a glimpse of what that means, all those other arguments about rights would begin to fall into place."<sup>83</sup>

The importance of proclamation is also clearly evident in this first sermon. Forde writes, "It is God who has brought us to this, so now there is no way around it—I *must* say it: "You are God's own! You were claimed as God's own in baptism. God did what he wanted, did what he chose—with you. And if you have forgotten that, hear it again."<sup>84</sup> Notice that the proclamation is present tense, 2<sup>nd</sup> person, singular and plural. We can easily perceive working in the background of this sermon the previously articulated conviction that it is the word of forgiveness and reconciliation from God by the preacher, that does the actual work of causing "the deed" of dying and rising to life to occur.

The second sermon, entitled "Exsurge Domine!," is based on Psalm 74:22-23, particularly the first line, "Arise, O God, and plead thy cause." It is a sermon intended for the commemoration of Martin Luther. The opening line of the text quoted is in fact the opening line of the Bull of Pope Leo X threatening Luther with excommunication.

The sermon is a very fine treatment of Luther as a revolutionary character, a proponent of justification by faith alone, and the scandal and controversy that ensued from this most difficult of doctrines. Although Forde does not spend much time

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<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 205.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 205.



elaborating on justification, he does manage to establish a striking sense of its significance both at the time of Luther's campaign and even today.

Luther is not presented as a saint. Instead, Forde refers to Luther as a "permanent outsider."<sup>85</sup> "He can't be domesticated. His unrevoked excommunication should remind us, especially now, that we find it convenient or at least polite to agree more often with the sort of things against which he argued so bitterly."<sup>86</sup> The sermon, while contributing little to our discussion of the nature of grace, at least puts something of the revolutionary essence of the doctrine of justification by faith alone, within the historical context of Luther's Reformation. It is almost a call for that same reformation to take place once again. We may consider Luther to be our hero, our champion, but that is his domestication and the end of what he preached. In fact, "Those ready to go the whole way with this man are very few and far, far between."<sup>87</sup>

This sermon in particular also begins with this same preoccupation with beginning with the offence rather than "some cute story." The various "offences" or "hard sayings" at least in terms of the life of Luther include:

- 1 - that he cannot, no matter how much we might like him to be, be our hero, our saint
- 2 - that he is either too big or the church is too small
- 3 - that he was a wild man at a time, as is often the case, when the church preferred only control; power
- 4 - that he was "acrimonious"
- 5 - that to preach grace is to preach the constancy of sin (think "progress")
- 6 - that he was jovial amid great controversy
- 7 - that he was at times crass and cutting
- 8 - that he valued our God-given creatureliness

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<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 207.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 207.

Much of what has been listed here is summed up near the end of the sermon:

Arise, O lord, and judge your cause. We have learned, since historical fate has saddled us with Luther's name, to try to make our feeble excuses for him, launder him, somehow to make him a saint to relieve our embarrassment. After all, we can excuse that in him for that was only human. It was due to the nature of the times and we in our day know so much better, and so on and so on. But, he would neither want to be excused for that nor countenance our excuses. I expect, at bottom, we find him upsetting and offensive because it is really *we* who are being attacked!<sup>88</sup>

Not only, then, is the Gospel not what we expect it to be, but also those who preach the gospel are not what we expect them to be. The offence, or better yet here, the mystery once again is that God chooses to use the outcast and the sinful to preach of his unconditional love.

The sovereignty of God is the latent theme of this second sermon as well, and God's sovereignty is celebrated and proclaimed explicitly but sparingly throughout. Proclamation seems less intentional in this sermon than the last; however it is clear that Forde values what it is that Luther proclaimed and he ends the sermon with a call for a return to such a bold mission. "The theologian of glory," [Luther] said once, 'calls the bad good and the good bad. The theologian of the cross says what a thing is.'" Somebody has to tell it like it is. Even if just for once! What about you? Arise, O Lord, and judge your cause! Amen."<sup>89</sup>

The third sermon entitled, "Hidden Treasure," is based on the parable of the kingdom as found in Matthew's gospel (13:44). Forde begins by speaking of two dreams in life. The first is of worldly success, the dream of "making it"; of being well known, remembered, and liked, perhaps even rich. It is a dream that we work at day to day, schedule by schedule. The progress, if we are so blessed, is slow and steady and looking

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<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 210.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid., 210.

back, the journey kind of makes sense. We worked hard and made some right decisions, and we are able to gaze upon all that has been achieved because of our diligence. Forde is not particularly dismissive of this dream; “In itself, it is not a bad dream. That is the way things run in this life.”<sup>90</sup> If however the dream becomes a replacement for God or if we believe that it will lead to God, as is often the case, “Then we are lost.”<sup>91</sup>

There is also another dream. It is the dream of “having our ship come in.” It is the dream of winning the lottery, or of being left a great deal of money by a distant relative. It is the dream of getting it all at once. We may try to deny this dream, we may suppress it or grow tired of waiting, but the dream remains.

The surprise is that the parable of the treasure hidden in the field is exactly the fulfilment of this second dream. It is the fulfilment of getting it all for nothing. “Out of the blue” it comes to us and fulfils every spiritual longing and hope that we ever kept secret. It is not something that can be controlled. If it were, it would not be a hidden treasure. We may try to control it, as we do with all things, but it cannot be controlled. “It *is* hidden treasure, and it *stays* that way.”<sup>92</sup>

Although Forde does not use the term justification at any point in this sermon, he is speaking of the unconditional love of God throughout the entire sermon, the majestic, irreducible, uncontrollable, limitless love of God. It is actually quite a moving sermon. His treatment is simple, conversational, and focused. Forde manages to impart a sense of awe at what God has done and provided for us, freely in Christ. There are also several

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 211.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 214.

contrapuntals put to good use. Forde highlights objections we might raise regarding “cheap grace” and our determination to speak of something more manageable. “But, you say, if the kingdom is like that, like treasure hidden in a field, doesn’t that make it arbitrary and capricious? Maybe. But how else can you talk about an absolute, sheer gift?”<sup>93</sup>

Sanctification, in true Forde fashion, is absorbed into justification. He does at one point admit, and this will also bring us finally to the issue of proclamation, “But if that is the way it is, what can we do finally with this parable? What, ultimately, can be said? I can’t give you a plan. I can’t set you up with a schedule. I can’t send you on a treasure hunt. It would seem as though I had talked myself into a corner. Am I not reduced finally to silence? No! For there is only one thing left I can do. I can only *give* you the treasure. I can only say: Repent, for you have stumbled on it today, *here and now*. For I say unto you, your sins are forgiven for Jesus’ sake. *There it is!*”<sup>94</sup> Indeed, theology is for proclamation.

Clearly, and not surprisingly considering his theology, the preaching of Gerhard Forde is almost entirely related in some way or other with the doctrine of justification by faith. Sanctification may be important but it is justification that matters, and nothing matters more than present tense proclamation of what it is that God has accomplished in Christ on our behalf. Quoting from the book of Acts, “...we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:11).

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<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 213.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 214.

What is distinct about the theology and, by extension, the homiletic of Gerhard Forde is that he is concerned to speak of God's unconditional love toward us as a kind of challenge. Obviously, Forde is not alone in his concern for present tense, 2<sup>nd</sup> person singular and plural declarations of God's love in the occasion of the sermon, however it is his appreciation of such declarations, as a challenge to and relief from the bondage of sin through "death," that sets his homiletic apart.

However, admittedly, there are a number of limitations in terms of Forde's homiletic. As stated earlier, Forde's homiletic is relatively undeveloped and his preaching to some extent suffers as a result. The main contributing factor to the limits of Forde's homiletic stems in relation to his discussions concerning the need for relevancy when a sermon is preached. Re-quoting from *Justification by Faith*, "we might have recourse to the two other ways in which the relevance of it all might come home to us. The first of these ways we might call the attempt to establish the need for justification *sola fide* as unconditional, promise, death and life; and the second more of an attempt to drive to proclaim justification in such a way that the proclamation itself does the deed."

However, the question is raised as to whether or not simple, clear, unencumbered proclamation is the most effective means of "doing the deed"? To illustrate, near the end of Forde's sermon entitled, "God's Rights," the first sermon considered here, he writes,

God claims the right to butt in here-and-now and permits his word of grace to be said to you: *I declare unto you the forgiveness of your sins!* There it is. Isn't that preposterous? Something absolutely novel! Not an ideal, not a generality, but a meeting, a new word, God's choice to do something here and now. You have heard it, there it is.<sup>95</sup>

Having closely examined the theology and homiletic of Forde, we can appreciate something of his thinking behind this "climax" to his sermon. The problem, mainly, is

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<sup>95</sup> Forde, *Radical Gospel*, 205.

that his declaration comes across as a bit flat and he even seems somewhat apologetic about what he has just said. Forde goes on to write,

Now perhaps you may be a little bit disappointed: Is that all there is? Should there not be something more? Have we not heard this before? As we like to put it now and then, 'Do we always have to be talking about salvation? Is there not something beyond that?'<sup>96</sup>

However, this contrapuntal of Forde's, which in a sense does express something of his uneasiness with the lack of desired "dynamic" upon actually making this valued proclamation in speech, is not necessarily the result of the limits of his theology but rather reflective of an unwillingness to speak of how the desired effect of proclamation might be heightened through an appreciation and concern with style and form.

### ***Tom Long's Metaphors for the Preacher***

Tom Long, in his excellent work entitled *The Witness of Preaching*, discusses the various images of the preacher, including that of the "herald." Long states that every preacher has a general understanding of who they are and the role of the church and although there is room for a great deal of variety within each minister's understanding of their ministry, it is possible to incorporate much of this variety within three "master images." The first of these images, and the one of particular relevance for us here, is that of the "herald." According to Long, "The herald image was the most prevalent metaphor advanced by homileticians of the last generation when they sought to describe what they believed the role of the preacher ought to be."<sup>97</sup> Recognizing that the herald image is biblical, in the sense of "*kērusso*," Long highlights that an understanding of the preacher

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989), 24.

as herald has an inherently high theological understanding of the sermon, in the sense that the preacher is the conduit for the proclamation of God as revealed in Christ Jesus.

Those of the “herald school” of homiletics would be suspicious of an excessive preoccupation with literary device or storytelling in relation to preaching. Instead, the “herald has two responsibilities: to get the message straight and to speak it plainly.”<sup>98</sup>

We can almost hear Gerhard Forde cheering as Long quotes D.W. Cleverly Ford, “Preaching is being a herald because what it proclaims is the word of God which in itself is dynamic.”<sup>99</sup>

Long also highlights that in emphasizing the importance of the message, there is a de-emphasizing of not only literary forms of the sermon, but also the personality of the preacher.<sup>100</sup> The concern of the herald is to speak the message of the king. Once the task is completed the herald reverts back to being just another ordinary citizen, until of course that time when the herald is called to speak the message again.

Long does mention a number of weaknesses in terms of the herald image that are important to highlight here. Firstly, this general disdain of those that ascribe to the image of the preacher as herald “for matters of rhetorical form and communication runs counter to what we now know, through literary approaches to biblical interpretation, about the character of the scriptures themselves.”<sup>101</sup> In other words, “the biblical writers were about the business of creating effects with words, and they were doing so not as ornament or merely to create interest but because these effects were extensions of the impact of the

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

gospel itself.”<sup>102</sup> “As Martin Buber once expressed it, ‘situations have a word to add as well.’”<sup>103</sup>

However, the advantage of understanding the act of preaching in terms of the herald is the underlying conviction that the gospel we preach, we preach to sinners, and that there is no common ground whatsoever between the two. Forde’s manner of expressing the task of preaching, conscious of the mutually exclusive nature of the gospel and sinners, is to maintain the offence of the “Good News” that is proclaimed. The sinners we preach to are not fully conscious of the extent of their sin. They are not, by nature, conscious of the extent to which the “economy of the world” is in opposition to the “economy of God.” However, we as preachers proclaim this gospel, strangely enough, both as sinners and as friends of the people to whom we preach.

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 30.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CRITIQUE AND SYNTHESIS

#### *Critique*

It is not my intention here to reduce Wilson's homiletic to a caricature of itself through vast generalizations that do not acknowledge the complexity and sophistication of his homiletic and then to somehow easily dismiss the methodology that he encourages. Wilson is in fact an asset to the field of homiletics and a benefit to many preachers who utilize his approach.

Indeed there are many aspects of Wilson's homiletic that are not easily dismissed or in fact are to be commended. For example, in keeping with our theological treatment of law and gospel, Wilson is not out of step with much of the material presented in this paper. When Augustine, as quoted earlier, speaks of the "letter as nothing but law without grace," and the "Spirit as nothing but grace without law," we can easily understand these words as very much in harmony with Wilson's understanding of the difference between law and gospel. As well when Luther writes, relying on Saint Paul, "The law kills, but the grace of God gives life," likewise we see no immediate contradiction between Paul, Luther, and Wilson.

We also must admit that Wilson's commitment to utilizing Stuempfle's distinction between the "law as judgement" and the law as "mirror of existence" is an improvement over preaching that always and only "smashes our pretensions and brings us to our knees in prayer." I believe that Wilson is correct in stating that congregations

that would benefit from preaching that only utilizes the law as judgement are few in number.

Further, Wilson is to be commended for bringing to fruition in a manner previously undeveloped the initial hints of a methodology for preaching law and gospel. Law and gospel undoubtedly have always been topics for consideration in terms of Christian theology in general, but in the field of homiletics Wilson is the first to explore the implications of a specific methodology for preaching that takes law and gospel seriously in a manner that is explicit and intentional.

However, we must admit at this point that there is a single glaring discrepancy between the homiletic of Paul Scott Wilson and the theology for preaching of Gerhard O. Forde. The main difference being that Wilson to a great extent is concerned, as quoted earlier, to “encourage the lamb,” “console the unconsolable,” “comfort the uncomfortable,” and “reconcile the irreconcilable.” However for Forde, unlike Wilson, it is not only the law but also the gospel itself that confronts, disarms, and ultimately “kills” the hearer. To be clear, for Wilson the law is to be preached (as judgement or mirror) up until the “reversal point,” which again consists of “the depth of our awareness of our sin.” Once this point has been reached the gospel is then utilized to encourage, console, comfort, and reconcile. On the other hand, for Forde (re-quoting passages already treated in this paper), “The divine judgement flowing from the death and resurrection of Jesus, the word of forgiveness and justification pronounced for his sake, *is* the doing of death and resurrection to us” (italics not mine), and “Justification by faith means the death of the old and the resurrection of the new.” Notice that it is proclamation itself that brings about this paradoxically desirable spiritual death.

When Forde speaks of justification by faith as “doing the deed,” the deed he is speaking of is the utilizing of proclamation to both kill and give life. Again, “we might have recourse to the two other ways in which the relevance of it all might come home to us. The first, of these ways we might call the attempt to establish the need for justification *sola fide* as unconditional, promise, death and life; and the second more of an attempt to drive to proclaim justification in such a way that the proclamation itself does the deed.” To be clear, for Wilson the gospel restores what sin and the law has destroyed but for Forde the gospel itself is that which both kills and gives life. The gospel in a sense is bad news *while* it is good news, and remains bad news/good news every time it is preached. The gospel is bad news in the sense that it confronts and disarms the hearer but good news in the sense that it sets them free from death *through and even in death*, to a life grounded in faith alone; *sola fide*. The hearer is then set free, not to arm themselves once again (which they will inevitably and always do to some extent in this life), but rather to live as one that secures themselves in God and his grace only.

It is perhaps important to highlight that implicit in the theology for preaching of Gerhard Forde is an embrace and appreciation of Martin Luther’s two offices of the gospel. Although Forde does not, in any of his works examined in this paper, explicitly refer to the two offices of the gospel there is a certain degree of resonance with Luther’s distinction. For Luther the first office of the Gospel is to effect the spiritual use of the Law.<sup>104</sup> This “strange work” of the Gospel is to be understood in terms of God’s wrath. What we are concerned with here is not simple sentimentalism but rather the Word of

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<sup>104</sup> Philip S. Watson, *Let God Be God! An Interpretation of the Theology of Martin Luther* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2000), 157.

God, which calls us to repent in light of our sinfulness being revealed to us (either by hammer or mirror).<sup>105</sup>

To those who thus presume, there comes the interpreter of the Law, namely, the Gospel, and says: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In saying to all men, "Repent!" it undoubtedly declares all to be sinners, and so it brings sad and unwelcome tidings, which is *Cacangelium*, i.e. bad news and a strange office. When, however, it says, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand", this is good news and a pleasant and joyous preaching; it is the proper office, namely, of the Gospel.<sup>106</sup>

However, it is the intention of this paper to highlight that the difficulty inherent in the gospel is not only to be understood as the essential call to repentance by Christ but also in relation to God's sovereignty, which challenges and confronts the human will with the Divine purposes. The gospel is not a simple comfort but rather intrinsically interwoven with not only knowledge of sin but also with God *as God*.

### ***Synthesis***

How then do we utilize the fine methodology for preaching law and gospel as developed by Paul Scott Wilson and incorporate something of the notion of Gerhard Forde that proclamation itself "*is* the doing of death and resurrection to us"?

Furthermore, what might be the advantages of this synthesis?

Firstly, it must be admitted that Forde cannot really be considered a law/gospel preacher. The basic reason that he is not a law/gospel preacher is that he does not, in a manner that at least is deliberate, preach the law. It is difficult to avoid preaching the law altogether. Anytime an imperative of some sort is mentioned the law is preached and all preachers inevitably to some extent or other explore the obligations of the Christian faith. In this sense, all preaching is law/gospel, but again Forde is not deliberate in utilizing the

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<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid.

preaching of the law toward a specific end, although on occasion he might inadvertently do so.

But what might be the advantage of introducing the preaching of the law into Forde's theology for preaching? Obviously Forde is concerned to affect some kind of spiritual death in those that hear the word of God preached. Why not then begin this confrontation with the preaching of the law? Wilson presents a very skilled methodology for utilizing imagination to show trouble in the world and in the bible. The purpose behind Wilson's preoccupation is to in some way prepare the hearer for the necessity of the gospel. If only the gospel is preached the hearer is less likely to understand the gospel in relation to human sinfulness. In preaching the law as "mirror of existence" the congregation begins to feel concern regarding the present state of the world and their own inability to effect the desired change that most would like to see occur. By preaching the law in this manner, the radical expression of God's activity in the world and bible is then set against the troubling themes presented in the first half of the sermon, in such a manner that does not place its confidence in yet another attempt by humanity to save itself but rather in God's grace. By exploring God's sovereignty as the means for resolving trouble past, present, and future, in fact the implication is that we are not capable of effecting the desired change ourselves. This disarming or dis-empowering of the congregation through the preaching of the law is very much in keeping with the concern of Forde to make the congregation aware of its limitations and the need for God's saving power. It seems then only natural that those committed to the theology of Forde utilize something of a deliberate if only basic methodology for preaching the law in their actual sermons.

However, the final and most important question remains. How can we go about preaching the gospel, understood as a liberating offence, in a manner that does not just repeat over and over again simple declarations of God's grace? How can we go about giving shape to proclamation so that the "doing of the deed" might be more effective?

There is no need at this point to dismiss or even offer extensive suggestions to improve the sermon methodology of Paul Scott Wilson. The only significant change or addition that needs to be made for the gospel to be understood as a liberating offence is that as we speak of the grace of God in the bible and in the world, we simultaneously speak of the strangeness of God's love despite the paradox. We are quite right to show both biblically and in the world the activity of God to our congregations but at the same time there is some benefit in acknowledging that God does not meet our needs in the manner that seems most obvious to us.

God's love in no small way remains a mystery. If we limit our discussion of God's love to only those things that comfort us something of the mystery is lost. God in his sovereignty is not easily understood. Sometimes we can identify God's action in the bible and in the world and sometimes we cannot. Perhaps acknowledging this disappointment might instil an aspect of realism that is missing from many sermons. This is not to say that the people need to be discouraged but rather that they need to be continually and gently reminded that God's love is and remains beyond understanding. In fact, to live by faith is to trust God even when we cannot feel, see, or discern his faithfulness whatsoever. To show God's grace in the manner that Wilson encourages is commendable but at the same time in order to move beyond faith that is encouraged

primarily by what can be seen or shown perhaps it is appropriate to acknowledge those instances when God's love is strangely absent.

Admittedly, Wilson touches on the primary concern of this paper in his section entitled, "Allow for Ambiguity." Wilson writes, "The gospel does not make everything 'all better.'"<sup>107</sup> Quoting from the writings of Edmund Steimle, Wilson also highlights that "the power of God is not primarily a resource to get us out of pain and suffering and death."<sup>108</sup> However, Wilson speaks of the need for ambiguity really only in passing. One page in a book of nearly 300 pages does not sufficiently encourage preachers to deliberately acknowledge what can at times seem to us to be the sheer absurdity of God's love. The nature of God's love as expressed in this world can sometimes be a comfort to us but also at other times it can shake us to our very core and perhaps we need both equally. Perhaps to die in the arms of God in a manner that never quite becomes cozy, no matter how many deaths we die and no matter how many years pass, is also part of coming to a faith beyond that which can be shown, seen, or experienced.

I offer the final following suggestions for preaching that deliberately and regularly acknowledges the need for ambiguity and paradox:

- 1) On occasion, as the preacher, admit that you do not know why God has not acted differently or more conclusively in the bible and in the world.
- 2) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that to expect God to act in a manner that conforms to our expectations is to live by sight rather than by faith.
- 3) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that our uneasiness regarding the perceived distance of God is not a sign to us that there is something

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<sup>107</sup> Wilson, *Four Pages*, 221.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

we should be doing, outside of trusting God, in order to appease God and gain his favour.

- 4) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that faith is the “evidence of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1).
- 5) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that we cannot measure our salvation based on how we feel or by our experiences.
- 6) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that bad things happen to good people in part because life is not a “virtue vending machine” and that we are justified by faith and not by works.
- 7) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that to be justified by faith, strangely enough, means that there is no privileged position or guarantees.
- 8) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that faith to some extent is *not* knowing.
- 9) On occasion, as the preacher, remind the congregation that being justified by faith means that they have been set free to live joyously and confidently, trusting in God regardless of what happens.
- 10) Finally, as the preacher, regularly remind the congregation, in particular at the end of every sermon, that God is active in the world in a manner that is sometimes satisfying for us and sometimes is not, but that ours is in the end a supernatural plight and that we have been redeemed, our sins have been forgiven by God, through the gift of his son Jesus, crucified for the world and that there is nothing we need do, say, or think in order to access God’s unconditional and eternal kindness toward us.



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