

ABSTRACT

PREACHING CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IN A POST-CHRISTIAN SOCIETY

by

James Paton

Preaching Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society can seem like a contradiction in terms. This study provides an examination into the cultural changes taking place in Western society with a view to exploring this issue. The relationship between doctrine and preaching is considered in detail, leading to an inductive, historical research project investigating how this task was accomplished in earlier generations. The results are synthesized and contextualized to present realities in a model that will hopefully prove beneficial to preachers today.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled
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by

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CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

In a society that considers itself to have outgrown Christian faith, and values pluralism above all else, preachers often wonder about the possibility of proclaiming Christian doctrine in a way that will be heard. In a world focused upon image rather than substance Christ followers are concerned as to how can one communicate the core of the Christian faith. Doctrine seems only to be a relic of a bygone era. This study commenced with an overview of post-Christian society and the challenges and opportunities it presented.

Recognizing that preachers today are not the first generation to face similar circumstances possibilities arise to consider how this issue was handled in the past. Early preacher-theologians were faced with the issue of communicating doctrine in their own generation and often did so with remarkable success. Part of the reason for their success was that for them doctrine was no abstract system of thought but was pastoral in nature and deeply rooted in Christian experience.

This study explored the relationship between preaching and doctrine and then considered how a number of highly influential preacher-theologians did so. Synthesizing lessons learned from their approach, a model for preaching doctrine in a post-Christian society was then articulated.

Understanding the Problem

I wondered what was I to preach. I was in my first pastorate, a church named Trinity, and the forthcoming Sunday in the church calendar was Trinity Sunday. I had taken a whole semester course on the doctrine of the Trinity at seminary, but as I prepared my sermon, I was left wondering about what I was to make of trinitarian

doctrine in a local church setting. I contemplated if my sermon would have any relevance for the international executive, the tired homemaker, the recovering drug abuser, the pregnant teen, and the others who made up the congregation. The question of what was I to preach lingered long in my mind.

Several years later I accepted as my second pastorate an international church, located in close proximity to a theological seminary. Many are my memories of standing up to preach in front of a diverse congregation that included people just like those mentioned above, with the notable addition of theological students and faculty. One faculty person was a senior translator of a modern English translation of the Bible; another the foremost theologian within my denomination. Their presence forced me to reflect long and hard about the content of those early sermons. Again, I wondered, how could I preach biblical sermons that were theologically sound and yet both understandable and relevant to the people who had gathered to hear God's Word proclaimed.

Those questions and thoughts have led me to consider the nature of doctrine and its relationship to preaching; however, that issue needs to be considered within a context. All of my ministry prior to this research project had been in Europe, both the United Kingdom and Switzerland, countries that once might have boasted a rich Christian heritage but are fast becoming post-Christian in outlook, a phenomenon Antonie Holleman describes as "the disappearing heaven" (1). Robert W. Jenson explains the term post-Christian as meaning more than personal faith commitments:

[Belonging] to a community—a polity or civil society—which used to be Christian and whose habits of thought and policies of action are determined by that very fact. One can therefore be a post-Christian without knowing anything about Christianity—and many in the West's great cities are now just in that condition. (21)

My experience of ministry in continental Europe has led me to the conclusion that while at a societal level Europeans are prepared to acknowledge their cultural debt to Christianity and, furthermore, that although the vast majority of people consider themselves to be nominally Christian in belief, Christianity has become *de facto* little more than an expression of their cultural heritage. Europeans have seemingly simply outgrown Christian faith and practice. European people respect the great architecture, the cultural artifacts, and the impact Christianity has had upon Western philosophy, ethics, and art, but they believe that at last they have freed themselves from some of the narrow-minded beliefs of the past. Callum Brown remarks, “British people re-imagined themselves in ways no longer Christian—a “moral turn” which abruptly undermined virtually all of the protocols of moral identity” (15). For all of that turning from Christian faith, an aching void remains in the soul of Europe, a void people seek to fill with sensuality, consumerism, and even rage, or spirituality.

Lesslie Newbigin writes, “If our own culture has proved bankrupt, and if all expressions of the gospel are culturally embodied, it is understandable that a collapse of confidence in our culture goes along with a faltering of confidence in the gospel” (191). With this one sentence Newbigin describes much of the Church today in Europe. Something is wrong though church leaders and preachers do not know how to name it, nor are they sure what to do about it. There is a need to re-discover how to preach in an emerging culture.

The dominant feature of Western society that Newbigin chooses to expose is pluralism, that is, the idea that no officially or publicly accepted pattern of belief or conduct exists. All things are relative, and the appropriate stance is tolerance. Newbigin

traces this development to the invention of the telescope, with the resulting questioning of perceived reality. Things around us may not be as they seem. This questioning led Descartes to his methodology of doubt, Kant to work only within the realms of the phenomenal world, and Nietzsche to a position of nihilism. Thus, meaninglessness, a loss of public values, and a sense of anomie, characterize a sick society. An insistence upon separating values and belief from facts and knowledge is commonplace. Only that which can be observed is free from doubt; everything else is opinion. No wonder Christians have difficulty witnessing. Christian witness is considered irrelevant or, at best, opinion.

Given such a situation where Christian faith is sent to the margins of society, both philosophically and with the accompanying cultural manifestations, one may well ask what is a preacher to do. One is forced to ask if preaching itself is at all relevant, and if a case can be made for relevance, is there any room for the further claim that such preaching might be doctrinal. Of course, within the context of a worshipping faith community the possibility exists to provide a resounding positive response to these questions, but I suspect that a lurking doubt remains in the hearts of many preachers that life is not so simple after all.

At another level, popular within the church, is a deep suspicion of academic theology and of the implications of being doctrinaire. Such dogmatism seems to be out of place within a tolerant society and especially so within an outward-focused, seeker-sensitive community of faith. Wade C. Roof notes, "Virtually all [baby boomers] see religion less in doctrinal or ecclesiastical terms, and much more in personal meaning terms, and often in vague and generalized terms. It is not so much what you believe, it is how you live" (93). Designing churches targeted to baby boomers has become something of an art form in North America where I now serve as a pastor and preacher. The success

of megachurches has largely become the focus for studies in pastoral theology and homiletics.

Of course, the marginalization of faith and the suspicion of academic theology are not the only reasons for hostility and suspicion. Alistair E. McGrath has highlighted four further positions that have led to a degree of hostility towards theology, namely the fundamentalist heritage that distanced itself from the academy, a pragmatic emphasis upon success that questions the utility of theology, the academy's engagement with secular educational norms, and images of elitism that run counter to the populist culture of the church (Passion 11-20). D. Mill notes the concern of many Christfollowers today:

Because Christian doctrine is both so elaborate and specific, modern American Christians tend to feel the whole collection is a bit overdone or academic or of interest only to people who care about that sort of thing. They mean well: they love Jesus, but they simply do not see why they should worry about doctrine. It looks irrelevant. True religion can't be that complicated. (109)

If preaching is to have a future, seemingly it must become more relevant, if preachers are to follow the advice of those who have a voice, calling them back to *biblical* as opposed to *doctrinal* preaching. Nevertheless, one might also despairingly note of much contemporary preaching that it is neither biblical nor doctrinal, focusing rather upon moralism and self-help as a means of "hooking" contemporary listeners. Richard Lischer describes preaching in such a manner as "preaching [suffering] from a theological homelessness" (1). The rationale for preaching has become vague and is certainly not theologically determined. Preaching appears to be more driven by crowd-gathering techniques and, hopefully, their retention than by any other single factor. In truth, preaching often has little content to offer in a world that has become devoid of all content and is fixated on image. The result for preaching, Lischer contends, is a lack of

substance, a lack of coherence, a loss of authority, and, finally, irrelevance. Preachers are often left with the haunting question, how then should we preach.

I have discovered during my ministry in a post-Christian society, both in Europe and Canada, that to dumb down and minimize content for the sake of relevance is in fact to become irrelevant. Fergus MacDonald notes, “[W]e do the *kerygma* a disservice if we dumb it down to make it more acceptable to the tastes of our age, for in so doing we run the danger of robbing it of its power” (151). People are searching and lost, looking for direction and meaning, and only as preachers articulate the radical implications of the gospel, both in the preached word and authentic community, will they have something worthwhile to offer to them. David W. Henderson points to the necessity of gospel proclamation:

The Bible is not a self-help guide packed with helpful pointers. It is a door that brings self-absorbed humanity face to face with self-giving God. Presenting it as anything less falls short of communicating what the Bible is all about. (29)

Graeme Goldsworthy echoes Henderson’s position, stating, “To preach about us, our problems, and our way to a better life, and to do so without recourse to the significance of the gospel, is to radically distort the understanding of humanity and the meaning of Scripture” (60).

To preach in a post-Christian society is, in fact, to proclaim the gospel message of salvation that, though people alienated from God and each other by their own sin and brokenness, God in Christ Jesus has entered his creation, reconciling the world to himself (2 Cor. 5:19). The story does not end there. John Calvin writes, “[A]s long as Christ remains outside of us, and we are separated from him, all that he has suffered and done for the salvation of the human race remains useless and of no value to us” (Institutes 1:

537). The story continues for God has poured out his Spirit that all may be redeemed and be incorporated into his Church, with the result that the redeemed might be presented blameless in Christ. To preach in a post-Christian society is, in effect, to preach Christian doctrine.

An Historical Detour

The culture and world around is changing, and at an alarming pace. In a most insightful paragraph concerning cultural change David J. Lose explores the impact of societal change:

In many quarters of our common world there exists an increasingly shared conviction that the modern world is dying, if not already dead. Born some three centuries ago in the aftermath of bloody religious conflict, the modern era was founded upon an optimism that by enlightened application of reason humanity might eradicate disease and suffering, establish a basis for just and moral behavior, foster personal and social liberation, and subdue nature for the good of all people. At the dawn of the twenty-first century—awash in the blood of ideological and nationalistic conflict, beset by pandemic viruses, and standing at the brink of ecological disaster—such confidence has been all but sentenced to the gallows, and the name of its executioner is “postmodernity.” (1)

In order to understand better this chilling conclusion a little better, preachers must pause and reflect upon the modernity that today’s society is beginning to reject. The Enlightenment era and its successors have been fascinated with knowledge, particularly the possibility of the neutral study of phenomena, thereby determining scientific principles that allow people not only to understand the world better but also to begin to improve upon it. As Stanley J. Grenz notes, the goal has been to “unlock the secrets of the universe in order to master nature for human benefit and create a better world” (3). The quest for certainty took both the path of rationalism, marked out by Descartes, and that of empiricism, charted by Locke. Kant summarizes the freedom that comes with certainty:

Enlightenment is Man's leaving his self-caused immaturity. Immaturity is the incapacity to use one's intelligence without the guidance of another. Such immaturity is self-caused if it is not caused by lack of intelligence, but by lack of determination and courage to use one's intelligence without being guided by another. *Sapere Aude!* Have the courage to use your own intelligence is therefore the motto of the Enlightenment. (qtd. in Lose 10)

David J. Bosch provides a helpful summary of the major Enlightenment "doctrines." First among these guidelines is the primacy of reason over any authoritative tradition or concept of revelation. Reason coupled with empiricism provided a scientific framework whereby independent, autonomous subjects could study natural phenomena. Indeed, the whole observable reality was labeled either as subject or object. In order to proceed with scientific analysis, the concept of purpose was dismissed and replaced by a focus upon progress. Thus, true knowledge was factual, value free, and neutral. Problems were inherently solvable, and both science and technology were the vehicles to do so (5-12).

One consequence of such a dependence upon reason, as has already been noted above, was the separation of facts and values, dividing "truth" into public and private realms. Among those private "truths" were matters of faith and religion. Faith and religion could not be evaluated and were consigned to be regarded as "mere opinion." In turn, both the emphasis upon the independent, neutral, observing subject and that of private truth claims resulted in an understanding of the autonomous person, whom Grenz describes as "a self-reflective, self-determining, autonomous subject who stands outside any tradition or community" (168).

The Enlightenment brought great benefits, which society still enjoys today, and that many of the Enlightenment's "fathers" were indeed confessing Christians. Nevertheless, the challenge for the Church during the period of modernity was to bring

God to the bar of rationality. Commenting upon the position of Friedrich Schleiermacher, who, among other things, sought to “make religion acceptable to its cultured despisers,” Bosch notes, “[v]irtually all of Protestant theology, whether conservative or progressive, succumbed to the pressures of the Enlightenment to make the faith rationally plausible” (17). Various “proofs” for the existence of God were offered. Theodicies were written to deal with the challenge of suffering in view of the Christian belief in both God’s absolute goodness and ultimate power. In North America, much more so than Europe, much ink was spilled regarding the inerrancy of Scripture and the veracity of every factual statement contained therein. Creation, evolution, the resurrection, all became matters to be handled by reason alone. All the while the Church assumed that it was explaining itself, when in reality it had sacrificed its calling to be the people of God in order to become the public defender of God against a perceived much higher power, namely, human autonomy. The consequences live with the Church today—a professionalization of theology in order to make the necessary explanations that most people cannot grasp, a divided concept of reality separated into the public and private realms, and perhaps most of all a privatized and individualized religion (17).

While the intent of Enlightenment figures was to abolish established and entrenched power structures in favor of rationality, progress, autonomy and the individual, in reality, the whole project of modernity depended upon the social cohesion and shared convictions necessary to assess truth claims. Such a stance of social cohesion would always involve judgments based upon power and position. Rodney Clapp comments, “Foundationalist rhetoric actually makes conversation and conversion more difficult, since it invites us towards believing that those who disagree are necessarily benighted or ill-intentioned” (Border Crossings 29). A generally accepted determiner of

truth, while seemingly innocuous, has taken foundationalism in the direction of the use of privilege to determine what counts as truth, leading to the oppression and bloodshed so prevalent in the twentieth century. At one time or another Nazism, Stalinism, or capitalism was granted privileged status, with all other claims being rendered null and void. In the end, those who had the power to do so turned people themselves, the ultimate autonomous subjects, into objects. Such contradictions between objects and subjects could not last. In the end, the rejection of hierarchical structure begun by the French Revolution in 1789 came full circle in 1989 with the fall of the Berlin wall and with it, in the minds of many, the collapse of modernity itself.

The individualism so inherent to modernity reacted to the abuse of power, both at a philosophical and an active political level. Such radical individualism has, in fact, birthed what has become known as postmodernism, a period where perhaps society is less sure where it is heading than of what it is leaving behind. Leonard Sweet comments upon the enormity of the change facing the Church:

We have been chosen by God to minister at one of the greatest ecotonic spaces in the history of the planet. God has chosen you to be in ministry during this period, when the modern world, the world that was built over the last 500 years, has given birth to another world called the postmodern world. We are called to do ministry on this edge as the modern era comes to a close and a postmodern world begins. (qtd. in Leith Anderson 4)

Loren Mead, who compares present and past changes, echoes Sweet's sentiment:

We are at the front edges of the greatest transformation of the church that has occurred for 1,600 years. The movement from modernism to postmodernism is by far the greatest change the church has ever experienced...[I]t may eventually make the transformation of the Reformation look like a ripple in a pond. (68)

What can be said, with a degree of certainty, is that modernity contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Fundamentally, the issues of power, and its abuse,

were not adequately addressed by the turn towards rationalism. Relegating values to the private realm, and supposing that morality could be sustained by other means, has been a course fraught with danger. Indeed, Alistair MacIntyre insightfully exposes the contradictions of rationalism:

[Nietzsche's position] depends upon the truth of one central thesis: that all rational vindications of morality fail and that therefore belief in the tenets of morality needs to be explained in terms of a set of rationalizations which conceal the fundamentally non-rational phenomena of the will. (111)

Something of a difficulty emerges in fully understanding what postmodernism is and what it is not. The very term postmodernism focuses more on what it is not. Lose comments, "Postmodernism appears to be simultaneously overwhelmingly present and frustratingly elusive" (7). Nevertheless, some aspects of the cultural shift towards postmodernism can be described, at least at a popular level. As Ronald J. Allen, Barbara S. Blaisdale, and Scott B. Johnston correctly note of postmodernism, "In its folk manifestations, it is less a tight philosophical or theological system, and more a pattern of inclinations by which people understand the world" (10). Again, they comment, "Above all ... postmodernity is a context. It is a way to describe the world in the latter half of the twentieth century. Consequently, it is something with which the preacher *must* [original emphasis] grapple" (29).

Several of the more salient features of postmodernity relevant to the discussion so far, as they are lived and experienced by people, can be readily identified, as can some of the philosophical underpinnings, those not necessarily verbalized by a postmodern individual but, nevertheless, the basis for his or her understanding of the world. At the core of postmodernism is a resistance to the imposition of "truth" from outside, a resistance to coercion and the abuse of power. As Lose remarks, "In place of a

foundationally ordered, centered structure, postmodernists offer a picture of a heteronomous dissensus of competing claims and voices, where no one idea or voice is privileged over the rest” (17). The features relevant to this discussion are the rejection of meta-narrative, ambiguity, pluralism, the priority of pleasure, longing for community, and spiritual hunger. In some ways, these markers describe the experience of life as lived by many postmoderns. I am indebted to Duncan Smart for the first three of these headings (23-28).

No meta-narrative. J. F. Lyotard famously remarked that this era is one of “incredulity towards metanarratives” (qtd. in Smart 23). These so-called meta-narratives are the big pictures of the world with which people operate, such as Marxism, existentialism, or religion. Metanarratives form a paradigm, a foundation for knowledge, a direction for history, and a means of social control. At times metanarratives may replace each other, but in the postmodern era, people have come to recognize that none of the “modern” paradigms delivered the hoped for society. Indeed, the impossibility of understanding the world in the way of modern paradigms has become apparent. Moving beyond the concept of “objectivity” people have come to recognize knowing as a contextual activity and, therefore, localized. Clapp states that, in contrast to the atextualism of the enlightenment, context is everything. In a base 16 system $7+9=10$ (Border Crossings 23).

The shift being described above is one from epistemology to hermeneutics. “We can only see the world from where we stand, from that context, that sub-culture, that language game, that constructed reality, that image, that mask” (Clapp, Border Crossings 8). Knowledge is also relational and personal, and emotions and community are to be considered valid alternatives to true understanding. Knowledge itself is pluralistic; each

individual is involved in constructing his or her own reality. “My way, my thing” is how postmoderns approach reality. In essence, it is an individualized pragmatism for making sense of the world, particularly the context in which people find themselves.

Ambiguity. Because of the lack of meta-narrative, little or no sense of general direction and progress is apparent. In fact, things need not even fit together well. The components of thought are simply an aggregation of individual freestanding choices. C. Jencks, the postmodern architect, refers to this ambiguity as “double-coding” (qtd. in Smart 25). Double coding is a looking back and forward in styles, the elite and the popular together, techno-science and art blended. Neither style nor things need have meaning. Indeed, meaning becomes an open-ended term. In linguistic terms, with no controlling meta-narrative, no means exist to link coherently “signifier” and “signified.” Thus, words themselves can have no meaning beyond what individuals give to them. Any text is open to any “reading.” At the more popular level, ambiguity works out in the high value placed upon diversity, particularly as societies become more multicultural and multi-faith in composition.

Pluralism. Moving beyond pluralism as toleration and nondiscrimination, pluralism has now come to be a cherished value in its own right. Individuals must find their own way in life with no real guiding concepts of right and wrong. To limit choice is, therefore, a bad thing. Typically, this new cultural movement is characterized as “shopping,” choosing between countless options. The ultimate sin is to offend another by assuming something is not correct on their part. At the extreme society has moved into the world of “political correctness.” Here one can recognize the irony of postmodernity, with its absolute insistence upon no absolutes. As Lose comments, “The shadow side of postmodern antifoundationalism and its constructivist view of reality is that in attempting

to free discourse from the restraints of an imposed order it inadvertently renders us mute by robbing us of the power of conviction” (28).

Priority of pleasure. All of the above amounts to a fragmentation of what “self” actually is. Anthony C. Thiselton comments upon such fragmentation:

The self of postmodernity has become *de-centred* [original emphasis]. It no longer regards itself as active agent carving out any possibility with the aid of natural and social sciences, but as an opaque product of variable roles and performances which have been imposed upon it by the constraints of society and by its own inner drives and conflicts. (121)

Generation X, as postmoderns are sometimes called, is adrift with no map, compass, or rudder. In their uncertainty postmoderns have been referred to as “Generation Why?” (Hanson and Innes 8). A pessimism, at least in a European context, about the future that leads to a fixation on the present. The disillusionment after two world wars, and the apparent failure of free-market liberal democracies to bring the hoped-for changes in the Eastern bloc countries, has become entrenched. Hope has evaporated. In an uncertain world, all that is left is shopping both in terms of values, and as pure consumerism. The lack of a hope-filled future results in an interminable now, from which people feel the need to be distracted. Pleasure and desire take priority. The media has become the dominant influence in terms of information and values, and one can note the shift in content towards “real life” drama, whether it be talk shows, survival competitions, or finding a mate. The line separating the virtual from the real has blurred.

Longing for community. I am indebted to Paul D. Clines for the following insights. The shift in the forms of radical individualism has come as more and more people are raised in broken or blended families. Today, a generation has been raised with television and the Internet as nannies. The experience of aloneness, and having to make sense of the world by oneself, has led to a deep desire for community and simultaneously

often a feeling of being handicapped in relationships. Despite the handicap, identity is coming to be recognized as a social construct. The growth of the coffee shop as the expression of community highlights this intense longing, as does its high-tech counterpart, “chatting.”

Spiritual hunger. Notwithstanding the erosion of faith brought about by modernity, in fact because of it, postmoderns are on a quest for authenticity, particularly in the arena of spirituality. This quest has led some to refer to our emerging culture as “post-secular” (Habermas). M. Rex Miller describes some of the features of this spiritual hunger as the emergence of poets and songwriters as prophets, the urge to make a difference in the world, a desire for authenticity, a quest for mystery, and the search for both depth and deep-rooted support structures (122-25). For the first time in post-Christian societies, this spiritual search is being conducted outside of Christianity, with a great diversity of options on the spiritual smorgasbord.

Walking Backwards into the Future

Within this post-Christian context, the Church can and must recover its voice, no longer in the courthouse of modernity, but in reality as those persons who are called and redeemed by the living God, empowered by his Spirit to become witnesses to his grace. Here the call is to live out particularity—to be the “peculiar people” of God. The challenge of how to express the conviction of the particular call to be God’s people in this cultural context may be the greatest the Church faces today. The Church will need to answer the question as to how to speak again. In particular, preachers must answer the question of how will the Church learn to speak of hope. I suggest that answers emerge as preachers move into the future with an eye on the past.

What is postulated is a need for theological enquiry into the practice of preaching.

Friedrich Schleiermacher, the father of the discipline of practical theology, observes that what is required is not just the practice, but also the theory of the practice (12).¹

I would suggest that relearning how to speak will happen when preachers rediscover their calling to proclaim the mystery of God, the faith that has been handed down to them. “The preacher’s task is to supplant amnesia with memory, and despair with hope, while living in the covenantal present, which then gives back our forfeited past and holds out a hopeful future” (McEwan 8). The preacher’s task is to walk backwards into the future, to face the realities and opportunities of a post-Christian society by learning from past experience, particularly from those preachers of the pre-Enlightenment era.

Thiselton notes that the message of hope ought to be one of transformation more than description, with the transcendent being expressed in temporal (ahead) rather than spiritual (above) categories, and that ultimately it is world affirming rather than world denying (146-50). One cannot help but recognize the message of Incarnation, atonement, justification, sanctification, and the kingdom of God within Thiselton’s categories for, ultimately, he is describing the gift of God himself. Thiselton also explains his understanding of gift:

Here we encounter two features which hardly ever appear in the perceptions of the postmodern self. First, *gift* [original emphasis], which *depends on nothing in return* [original emphasis], constitutes the *rejection of manipulative power or self-interest* [original emphasis]. Second, gift comes *from beyond the horizons of the situatedness of the self* [original emphasis]. That is why an “expected” gift may lose something of its character as “gift.” Gift actually includes the delight of surprise. (150)

So far I have argued that the shift towards postmodernity actually frees the

¹ “Der Ausdruck *praktisch* ist allerdings genau nicht ganz richtig, denn praktische Theologie ist nicht die Praxis, sondern die *Theorie* der Praxis” (Schleiermacher 12).

Church to speak in the public forum, doing so from a position of particularity, and with a modesty that aims to persuade rather than coerce. Lose also indicates the postmodernism provides opportunity:

Ultimately, therefore, what we surrender is not the truth, but the ability to prove truth; not faith, but unambiguous certainty; not hope, but a future secured by modernist foundationalism. Indeed, it is the very openness of the future that calls for faith, faith akin to that described in the Letter to the Hebrews as “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (11:1). In this sense, postmodernity renders Christians a tremendous service by clarifying the essential nature of our faith, as we realize and recall that Christian claims can rest upon no ultimate foundation, not even that of nonfoundationalism. Rather, Christianity exists solely by confession, the conviction and assertion of revealed truth apart from any appeal to another criterion; we live, that is, always by faith alone. (62)

The “gifts” of postmodernity are not always obvious, but can be discerned. John Hinkson and Greg Ganssle describe them as creating space for the gospel once again in the public arena, an understanding of the limits of rationalism, the overarching theme of emancipation from bondage, and the desire for community (68-75). Brian D. McLaren refers to the gifts of postmodernity as an appetite for humility, a healthy skepticism, a thirst for spirituality, an openness to faith, a congenial tolerance, and a limited relativism (173-78).

In other words, preachers are free to speak in terms of faith. The message of the Church ought to be one of hope, in the light of Christ’s victory over the powers of sin and death and hell. Jesus is the Redeemer and Liberator. Christ calls people to live in community; a community that is both a foreshadowing and foretaste of the kingdom of God in all its fullness.

The opportunity facing the Church is vast if it can recover its voice and message. Fergus MacDonald rightly notes, preachers do not need to make the *kerygma* relevant,

but the *keryxis*, the method of proclamation (131-40). With MacDonald's thought in mind, preachers can walk backwards into the future.

Clines notes, "In essence the unchurched today are similar to the pagans the first Christians faced 2,000 years ago. The early church existed in a godless, pagan culture that rejected absolute Truth and embraced utilitarian truth" (86). David Platt has identified at least three points of similarity, namely religious pluralism, moral relativism, and biblical skepticism:

Although the challenges facing the Church in the twenty first century may take new forms, the theological issues Christians are called to confront are not completely new. In light of the fact that the theological issues confronting contemporary culture have parallels in third century culture, the Church might benefit from further study in the strategies of the third century Church. (4)

My contention is that in this postmodern context preachers would find it useful to review an earlier age in order to learn how best to preach in their own. Ellen Charry believes looking to the past can inform the present:

The point is not to jump over modernity and reimpose classical theology but to see if there are not terms on which the classical conversation might be a bit less alien to us so that we might be stirred up to take up the task they were engaged in: helping people flourish through knowing and loving God. (6)

In the present era I contend that returning to history to gain some bearings may prove to be a way forward. Jeffrey C. K. Goh describes a return to tradition as gaining freedom from a subjective bias against the past, as well as freedom from a static understanding of the past (83). Goh writes, "We need to begin with the past ... because only with a better understanding of the historic role of the once universal classic hermeneutical framework—a powerful way of interpreting and using Scripture—can we present a cogent argument for present need and possibility" (131-32). Allen, Blaisdale,

and Johnston note, “The past cannot be exhumed and replicated in contemporary society. But many people in the postmodern community believe that people in former times had insights into life that can benefit today’s world” (38). Robert E. Webber is one who has argued forcefully for such a position, with his “ancient-future model.” The conceptual context of postmodernity, including the acceptance of mystery, holism, and interpreted fact, bear such striking resemblance to the premodern situation that preachers would be foolish to ignore it (21-30). Indeed, Webber writes, “The primary reason to return to the Christian tradition is because it is truth that has power to speak to a postmodern world” (29).

With Webber’s model in mind, my intention in this study was to explore a pre-Enlightenment stance of “faith seeking understanding” rather than modernity’s doubt awaiting verification. One of the lessons Karl Barth learned from Anselm was that he needed to reverse the order of knowing and being that had been set up by modernity. “Being comes before knowing, because what something is determines how it can be known” (Schwöbel, “Theology” 29).

To take a stance of notional objectivity in the hope of proving anything is a position that is becoming increasingly untenable, while simply acknowledging one’s particularity and then exploring life from that perspective and set of assumptions is considered today at least as valid as any other.

Following Michael Polanyi, Newbigin mounts a critique of the dualistic epistemology that relegates faith beneath reason:

1. Doubt rests upon other beliefs that are not doubted; indeed, one cannot simultaneously doubt all one’s beliefs;
2. All knowing begins with trust, whether of tradition, authority, or community;

3. Modern science, contrary to public opinion, proceeds by way of faith commitments and poetic imagination;
4. Limited knowledge precludes statements of what can and cannot be known; and,
5. No objective knowledge exists except through knowing subjects. Pure objectivity is an illusion (19-25).

Newbigin's position need not mean a drift into pure subjectivity, however. People can still know. Polanyi describes much of human knowing as "tacit knowledge," such as riding a bicycle. Persons do not learn this from reasoned principles and propositions but by actually attempting to do so. As such, while tacit knowledge perhaps cannot always be articulated; nevertheless, it is both real and effective. Indeed, the articulation of such tacit knowledge is only possible after it has already been gained. In Anselmian terms, tacit knowledge amounts to being before knowing.

Clapp affirms the role of particularity:

Christianity no longer need worry about its "scandal of particularity," since it is recognized that particularity "scandalizes" everyone. The upshot for Christians is that the church does not have to aspire anymore to a supposedly neutral language and story; now we can freely speak our own language and tell our own story. (Peculiar People 83)

The Church's story, recorded in Scripture, and recounted in the creeds, is the defining story of God's relentless love for his creation and of how he has acted to redeem it. The Church's language, articulated and defined for it in the creeds, is the fundamental framework of the life Christfollowers live.

A further feature of this pre-Enlightenment historical period was the corresponding awareness displayed by preacher-theologians of the pastoral function of good theology. Seemingly scholasticism, even in its ultramodern forms, has robbed

doctrine of much of its heritage. Theology has often degenerated into a self-sustaining activity within the academy, with little or no relevance to the faith community. Robert C.

Hughes and Robert Kysar lament the lack of relevance of much theology:

Those of us in the church have too often been given to understand and teach that doctrine has to do with abstractions, conceptualization, and theoretical ideas. It has no basis in real, daily experience and is just a mind game that the gifted play. Somehow many of us have forgotten or failed to communicate that theology is always rooted in real visceral Christian experience. (5)

Nevertheless, for some individuals at least, doctrine did have a pastoral function and one that was primarily demonstrated through good preaching. The distinction is between so-called, first- and second-order theology. Second-order theology refers to the detailed reflection upon and rules for sustaining such reflection upon primary dogma, while first-order theology refers to those primary dogmas themselves. Again, primary theology is the Word *from* God, while secondary theology is a word *about* God (Forde 2). Charry states, “In short, primary doctrines are the practically oriented content of the faith” (5-6). She contends that only when the concept of knowledge itself became problematic that theology began to focus more on the secondary. Theology tended towards the intellectual justification of the faith, rather than paying attention to Christian living. Regardless of Charry’s assertion, it is fair to state that historically speaking theology had more of a practical flavor in the pre-Enlightenment period. As an example, Charry comments, “The patristic age emphasized sapience as the foundation of human excellence. Sapience includes correct information about God but emphasizes attachment to that knowledge. Sapience is engaged knowledge that emotionally connects the knower to the known” (4). Regarding theology as arcane and irrelevant to the ongoing life of the church is a relatively recent phenomenon. Little wonder, for as Gerhard O. Forde notes,

“The secondary discourse is relatively pointless if it does not drive to proclamation, to actual primary discourse” (5). In other words, to quote Michael Jinkins, “The purpose of our study of God is nothing less than the transformation of our lives by the renewing of our minds” (17).

Charry uses the term “aretegenic” to indicate the virtue-shaping function of theology and contends that this has been in the past, and ought to be, the function of theology. The argument for spiritual development is fleshed out by Charry:

The argument here is not to suggest that all classical theology is aretegenic, for it is surely not. Rather, the point is simply that as these major shapers of the Christian tradition formulated, reformulated, and revised Christian doctrine, its moral, psychological, and social implications were uppermost in their minds. Even when refuting their colleagues or opponents, they never forgot that God was seeking to draw people to himself for their own good. (233)

Like all forms of communication, preaching ought to be far more relational and personal than informational.² As Alan of Lille writes, in what is perhaps one of the earliest recorded definitions of preaching, “Preaching is an open and public instruction in faith and behavior, whose purpose is the forming of men” (4).

Biblical Foundations

While one can obviously note that the Bible is not a handbook of systematic theology but rather the source for theological reflection, it nevertheless does contain an emphasis upon the importance of doctrine. Paul writes with a concern that “we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Eph. 4:14, ESV). Likewise Jude writes, “Contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3, ESV). Corresponding thoughts are echoed

² “Communication is the process in which relationships are established, maintained, modified, or terminated through the increase or reduction in meaning” (Fore 2).

throughout the New Testament writings (1 Cor. 4:1-2; 15:3-4; Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Thess. 5:21; 2 Thess. 2:15; 1 Tim. 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:14-15; 1 Pet. 1:18; 1 John 1:4).

One need not think that doctrine is only a concern of the writers of the epistles, either. Jesus himself spoke of the importance of understanding who God is and how he deals with people. Jesus' doctrine was where his conflicts with the religious authorities arose. For example, regarding the Sabbath, Jesus reminded the authorities, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27, ESV), a reminder unacceptable to the religious establishment of the day. Evidently, in Jesus' ministry, one can observe that understanding God and his ways was central to his message.

Such a positive attitude towards doctrine also comes to the fore in the first major issue facing the Church, that is, the Gentile question. The Jerusalem Council, in its deliberations, considered how people can be accepted by God and on what basis (Acts 15). Issues of doctrine, while perhaps not as "developed" as later conciliar formulation, were of vital importance to the Church, not as abstractions but as truths deeply embedded in the warp and woof of life. In the Acts 15 instance the practical issue was how to deal with Gentiles who had received the Holy Spirit and were thus accepted by God within a church setting that was Jewish in both cultural roots and practices. The Gentile question led to consideration of the deeper theological issues of justification, faith, Church unity, the validity of the Law, and Christian ethics. Doctrine obviously mattered and impacted daily life.

Perhaps the attitude that fostered doctrinal awareness may be traced to the Jewish roots of the faith. Moses reminded the children of Israel, "Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your

very life” (Deut. 32:46-47, ESV). The devotion of the Jewish people to the Law, as exemplified by the phylacteries of the Pharisees, is well known, and in such a context the first Christians lived and came to an understanding of God in Christ. The first Christ followers were people of the Word. Gustaf Wingren notes that the Word exists to be made known, while man is both created by the Word and sustained by that same Word (2-5). The Law says, “Man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord” (Deut. 8:3, ESV). Just as Paul notes the danger of an absence of doctrine in Ephesians 4:14, he also reminds the Church of its purpose: “Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ” (Eph 4:15, NIV).

Creedal statements are rarer, but possible to identify in Scripture. In the Old Testament one finds the narrative history of the chosen people and their deliverance in Deuteronomy 26:5-10, while in the New Testament 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 and 1 Corinthians 15:3-5 are examples of the transmission of an oral tradition, as is the hymn possibly contained in Philippians 2:5-11. Even these earliest proto-creedal formulations were statements with a purpose, as Donald English explains:

Paul’s solution to the problem of relationships is not an exhortation on the need to pull together, or the strength of working as a team, or even their need for one another’s gifts. He attempted to solve the problem of human relationships by a profound exposition of who Jesus Christ is, and of what he did in giving himself for the salvation of everyone. (36)

Preaching, on the other hand, has a long, biblical pedigree. God called Moses to serve as his spokesperson (Exod. 3). When Israel later forgot God’s command, God sent the prophets. Several prophets testify directly to their role in proclamation (Jer. 7:1-3; Amos 3:7-8). The New Testament story opens with John the Baptist bursting onto the scene as “the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord” (Matt.

3:3, ESV). Jesus himself preached to the crowds who gathered to hear him. Interestingly, Jesus' first sermon, recorded in Luke 4:16-21, took place in the context of worship, consisting of exposition of a Scripture passage, complemented by prophetic application. Later on Jesus commissioned his disciples to do likewise (Matt. 28:18-20). That commission was to find the empowerment promised by the prophet Joel: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28, NRSV). The command still rings in our ears as it did for Timothy: "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2, NIV).

The New Testament uses numerous words to give shades of meaning to preaching, and I am indebted to R. L. Overstreet for the following summary (1-25). *Anagello* (Acts 20:20) often refers to the didactic reporting of information. *Euangelizo* (Acts 13:32; Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 1:17) has in mind the good news proclaimed with power and authority. *Kerusso* (Acts 9:20; Rom. 10:8; Col. 1:23) is the public declaration of an event, in this case, salvation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. *Martureo* (Acts 23:11; 1 Thess. 2:11) is to bear witness. *Noutheteo* (Acts 20:31; Col. 1:28) is to admonish and to call people to amend the errors of their ways. *Parakaleo* (Acts 24:4; 2 Cor. 2:8) is an exhortation to right living. *Parresiazomai* (Acts 13:36; Eph. 6:20) is a fearless proclamation.

Words spoken in a sermon, while fully human, can indeed be the word of the Lord. "If you utter worthy, not worthless words, you will be my spokesman" (Jer. 15:19, NIV). The prophetic and critically important message is echoed in the apostolic age by Peter: "If anyone speaks he should do it as one speaking the very words of God" (1 Pet. 4:11, NIV).

A powerful word from God is unstoppable (Amos 3:8; Jer. 20:9) and, indeed,

results in various outcomes. When Jesus preached there was both amazement and antagonism (Luke 4: 22, 28). Peter's first sermon resulted in conversions (Acts 2:14-41). The initial response to the gospel was followed by missional breakthroughs in Samaria and beyond (Acts 9:20-31; 10:34-47). Even within the community of faith, the preached word results in edification, encouragement, and comfort (1 Cor. 14:3).

Various images of the preacher are mentioned in Scripture. English highlights those of gardener and builder (1 Cor. 3:5-15), artist (Gal. 3:1), doctor (Heb. 4:12-13), herald (1 Cor. 1:23), and servant (2 Cor. 4:5) (126-145) He is one who is equipped (2 Tim 2:15), produces fruit (Matt 7:20), and displays courage (Acts 20:27) (126-32).

Paul is a particularly good example of preaching Christian doctrine. James W. Thompson remarks, "His thoughtful discourse appears in the context of questions that have been raised in his congregations or the issues that threaten the identity of the church. Paul's theological discourse is interwoven with his pastoral communication" (109). Thus, for example, in Galatians one sees Paul deal with the implications of the gospel for the inclusion of both Jews and Gentiles, while in Philippians he draws out the implications of the incarnation as a means to deal with conflict within the congregation. Perhaps one of the best examples is found in 1 Corinthians 1-4. Here, issues of rivalry (1:10-17) are dealt with by means of a theological response (1:18-2:16). The message of the cross is a reversal of expectations, both in the means of salvation itself, and the people God chooses. God's vision of community is, therefore, very different from the factionalism of this church.

Paul actually takes the time to outline his own theology of preaching in Romans 10:14-17. In this passage Paul drives home four key points (Old 1: 181-89). First, preaching is a means of grace, that is, it is the instrument chosen by God to lead people to

faith. Second, the preacher is sent as a servant. Later on in Romans 15:15-16, Paul describes this as a particular grace in itself. Third, the preacher is to proclaim good news. Finally, the listeners will experience the presence of Jesus himself for when the word is proclaimed, Christ is both present and heard.

Historical Review

The early Church was forced to continue its consideration of doctrine as issues arose that required attention. Christianity was to be not simply an ethnically Jewish faith but was to spread “to the end of all the earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV). As new cultures, customs, and philosophies were encountered the Church had both to translate and clarify its message to the people they sought to reach. Time and again, practical Christian living gave rise to questions that went to the core of the gospel message.

Early creedal statements begin to appear, such as the *Regula Fidei* referred to by Tertullian, The Apostolic Tradition of Hippolytus in 215, and the Roman Symbol referred to by Marcellus around 340 (Johnson 21-39).

When issues were significant enough, councils were called in order to discern the mind of Christ. Throughout Church history several of these have been regarded as ecumenical councils, that is, those accepted by the Church catholic. The following ecumenical councils dealt with issues such as

- Council of Nicaea, 325—Arianism and the divinity of Christ;
- First Council of Constantinople, 381—Apollinarianism and the humanity of Christ;
- Council of Ephesus, 431—Nestorianism and Pelagianism and the unity of Christ’s person;
- Council of Chalcedon, 451—Eutychianism and the two natures of Christ;

- Second Council of Constantinople, 553—Monoophysitism and the two natures of Christ;
- Third Council of Constantinople, 681—Monothelitism and the two wills of Christ; and,
- Council of Nicaea, 787—Iconoclasm and the use of images in worship.

Not all of the specifics of these councils concern this study, yet throughout this study approaching the Scriptures and their interpretation will require turning to the great doctrinal formulations of the early Church, particularly the Nicene Creed as finalized at the First Council of Constantinople, and later amended by the Council of Toledo in 589:

We believe in One God,
the Father, the Almighty,
maker of heaven and earth,
of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ,
the only Son of God,
eternally begotten of the Father,
God from God, Light from Light,
begotten, not made,
of one Being with the Father;
through him all things were made.
For us and for our salvation
he came down from heaven,
was incarnate of the Holy Spirit
and the Virgin Mary,
and became truly human.
For our sake he was crucified
under Pontius Pilate;
he suffered death and was buried.
On the third day he rose again
in accordance with the Scriptures;
he ascended into heaven,
and is seated on the right hand of the Father.
He will come again in glory
to judge the living and the dead,
and his kingdom will have no end.
We believe in the Holy Spirit,
the Lord, the giver of life,

who proceeds from the Father and the Son,
 who with the Father and the Son
 is worshipped and glorified,
 who has spoken through the prophets.
 We believe in one holy catholic
 and apostolic Church.
 We acknowledge one baptism
 for the forgiveness of sins.
 We look for the resurrection of the dead,
 and the life of the world to come. (Book of Common Order 1)

Statement of the Problem

Preachers appear to be adrift in the field of homiletical theology, unsure of where to look for lessons on how to preach Christian doctrine. My belief is that there is a critical necessity to understand how the Church can recover its tradition of doctrinal preaching, while at the same time contextualizing this to the post-Christian world in which preachers find themselves.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore an understanding of preaching Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society through the eyes of the early preacher-theologians of the church who did so in their pre-Enlightenment societal context. I hoped to discover a methodology of preaching Christian doctrine that went beyond cognitive information transfer and thus appropriate to the emerging post-Christian culture. Learning from their example, the conclusion of this research has produced significant proposals for a homiletic theology fit for the twenty-first century.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the principal terms, unless otherwise noted, are defined as follows.

Post-Christian society refers to a society that at one time in its history had, as its

dominant religious belief, the Christian faith but has since moved beyond that such that Christianity is no longer the prevailing influence, persons within society have little or no Christian memory, and church attendance has radically declined.

Doctrine generally refers to the cardinal beliefs of the Church as defined in the Nicene Creed.

Preaching has a dual reference, that is, it is both the Word of God and the word proclaimed by a human preacher in the power of the Holy Spirit within a congregational context with the express purpose of drawing people into an ever-deepening relationship with the Lord God whereby they are conformed to the image of Christ.

Research Questions

Given the nature of the study, that is, inductive historiography, no specific hypotheses were stated in advance. Nevertheless, several foreshadowed questions were highlighted (Wiersma 41-42). These questions were drawn from a study by McGrath on the function of Christian doctrine, which is explained in greater detail in Chapter 2 (Genesis).

Question #1

In what ways did the preachers studied preach doctrinally with a view to forming community?

Question #2

How did they connect doctrine and Scripture in preaching?

Question #3

Was doctrine used as a means of interpreting experience, and, if so, how was this done?

Question #4

In what ways did these preachers expect a response from the people to the truth claims they preached?

Methodology

An historical study of past preachers who were noted theologians and had a significant impact upon both the Church and their society was conducted. Each of the preachers selected was chosen on the basis of four criteria:

1. Preaching ability—they were outstanding preachers of their age;
2. Theological acumen—each was a significant theologian in the history of the Church;
3. Impacting ministry—they each had a ministry significantly affecting the Church and wider communities they served; and,
4. Theological assumptions—those mentioned above, that is, of “faith seeking understanding” and the pastoral function of theology, were prominent in the approach of each of the preachers studied.

An inductive, historical study of the sermons and other writings of the selected preachers was then conducted in order to assess how they understood and executed doctrinal preaching within their own contexts and with a view to identifying appropriate applications for preachers today.

Significance of the Study

This study has significance for churches and specifically preaching pastors in a local church setting. The study was originally designed with a European context in mind and completed during my ministry in Canada, hoping that the results of this study will thus benefit pastors in both continents as they travel further into the post-Christian era.

Overview of the Study

Chapter 2 presents an understanding of the relationship of doctrine to preaching, including a review of current research and literature. Chapter 2 deals specifically with the meaning of doctrine and presents a model allowing the relationship between doctrine and preaching to be established, thereby framing some initial questions that ought to be explored further in the detailed research. Chapter 3 is a detailed explanation of the design of this study including the specifics as to how the preachers chosen were selected. Chapter 4 reports the significant findings of the historical research. Chapter 5 completes the dissertation with a summation and interpretation of those findings.

CHAPTER 2

A SELECTIVE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This review of literature is primarily focused upon the relationship between doctrine and preaching. Since little has been written in the specific field of the relationship between doctrine and preaching this study was intended to fill a gap in the existing body of literature.

Charry has produced a fine monograph regarding the pastoral function of good theology, but does not specifically address the question of preaching doctrine. Charry does argue the case for preaching to be regarded as first-order theology, as will be seen below, but does not venture further into the field. Charry's work does set a precedent for reviewing theology as more than an arcane exercise, however. Hughes Oliphant Old is in the process of producing an outstanding series on the history of preaching, of which five volumes are now available. Doctrinal preaching is considered as one of the genres of preaching, but again, there is no sustained treatment of this throughout Old's work. The extensive study carried out by Old does nevertheless set a precedent for historical review of preachers and sermons with a view to understanding better how previous preachers approached the task. More recently O. C. Edwards has produced a single volume that also covers ample ground, but makes little reference to doctrinal preaching.

Material specifically related to the concept of preaching doctrine is covered later. A review of literature pertaining to the historical preachers relevant to this study has been deemed to be beyond the confines of this work. The review of literature was conducted by means of an exploration into the field from a variety of angles, utilizing such resources as were available.

Biblical or Theological Preaching

Christine M. Smith writes that preaching is a theological act:

A vital preaching ministry includes the skills of the sophisticated communicator, the attentiveness of the biblical exegete, and the social analysis of the most discerning sociologist, but first and foremost it is the craft and act of a working theologian. (1)

Here, an assumption, dormant in many preachers, is made explicit: they all preach theologically, for good or ill. This may come as a surprise to those preachers who insist upon their biblical credentials but who shy away from theology *per se*. As Ronald J. Allen notes, “The preacher who claims not to have an interpretive lens through which to understand the Bible and Christian tradition needs to recognize that such a statement *is* [original emphasis] an interpretation” (12).

Too often the implication in the minds of many preachers is that theologians simply read dogmatic assertions back into texts and that it would be more appropriate to read a theology from the texts, that is, to have a biblical as opposed to a dogmatic theology. Dogmatic theology is often interpreted as alien to the text and as a systematization of truths, which often cannot be exegeted from the texts. Indeed, as the theologian progresses in his or her craft, the distance from Scripture all too often becomes all the greater. Rather than preach doctrine, so the argument goes, preaching should more appropriately stay within the confines of the text itself, leaving these finer points of theology for some other venue.

Well-meaning as this argument for biblical preaching may seem, and indeed the practices of academic theologians have brought much of this derision upon themselves, things are not quite so simple. Thomas A. Noble offers a stinging critique of a simplified biblical position, while at the same time making an important suggestion:

Where Dogmatics is determined to be true to Scripture, the two must work in close partnership. This implies on the one hand that Dogmatics does not dictate to Biblical Theology how it is to exegete specific biblical texts, nor does it insist that all the later dogmatic formulae be *read in* [original emphasis] to Scripture as if they were the *explicit* [original emphasis] teaching of the prophets and apostles. But this also implies on the other hand that Biblical Theology—if it is a truly Christian and Church discipline—must recognize that it is committed to the Trinitarian and Christocentric over-arching shape of Theology, and must understand that this is the hermeneutical framework, drawn from Scripture itself, which must guide our interpretation of it. (7)

In other words, doctrine itself has a function when readers approach the Scriptures. Preachers do not come to the Bible opinion free. The myth of the Enlightenment was that of pure objectivity. Having been again reminded that complete objectivity is not feasible, acknowledging one's starting position is a much more appropriate stance to adopt, and then allowing the Scriptures to "read the reader" as much as they read the Scriptures. This reading of text and reader, in essence, is the meaning of the hermeneutical spiral. E. Farley notes, "Once preachers realize that what-is-preached is the world of the gospel, once that world of interconnected mysteries is opened up, they face a *theological* [original emphasis] task" (169).

As members of the Christian Church, the starting point for interpretation has already been discerned with regard to the overarching features of God's self-revelation, distilled as they are from Scripture in the creedal statements concerning the Incarnation and the triune God. Karl Barth provides a helpful outline for understanding this relationship between the Scriptures and theology. Barth outlines his position on Scripture and theology as follows:

1. Both share a common concern of response to the divine Word;
2. Nevertheless, theology is neither the apostles nor the prophets;
3. Therefore, theology cannot be above the biblical witness;

4. It must therefore be beneath the biblical witness;
5. Theology has at its core the gospel;
6. Nevertheless, as theology reads the Scriptures it discovers that they are polyphonic; and,
7. Theology endeavors to speak of God anew on the basis of his self-disclosure in Scripture (Evangelical Theology 16-28).

A further failure of the refusal to acknowledge the relationship between dogmatic and biblical theology is that the hermeneutical task may well not be accomplished. To say what has already been said with little or no concern for the current context is to say little indeed. As McGrath says, “The essential difficulty with such a “theology of repetition” is that it fails to interpret, contextualize and correlate. In the end, repetition is the last resort of those who are intellectually lazy and spiritually complacent” (Passion 103-04).

Preachers are called to do more than simply read the words of Scripture aloud.

I. Howard Marshall uses the analogy of an ellipse to tease this issue out further. A circle, he notes, is a special case of an ellipse, one where the two foci coincide. A circle is a simplified version of a much more complex geometry; true in itself and also true to the greater complexity. As preachers read the words of Scripture, they too are invited to explore a theological ellipse:

The value of this analogy ... is that it gives us some grounds for moving boldly on from biblical theology to a systematic theology that uses post-biblical concepts and enables us to do our theologizing in a different frame of reference and to relate our theology to other currents of thought. (214)

Thus, theology may still true to Scripture while being contextualized to the contemporary. Theology functions as the grammar derived from Scripture, which leads the preacher back to Scripture.

Approaching preaching in a manner that is both doctrinal and biblical, therefore, ought to be the goal of preachers. As John R. W. Stott states, “Theology is more important than methodology” (92). In a fascinating essay, Christoph Schwöbel outlines how this dual doctrinal and biblical foci might be achieved. Describing the meaning of preaching theologically, Schwöbel enumerates four central components (“Preacher’s Art”).

The first component is *preaching biblically*. “The Christian church is the community of the interpretation of Scripture” (Schwöbel, “Preacher’s Art” 7). Within the Scriptures one finds the record of God’s story in both Israel, and in Jesus, and is where preachers may begin to find their own story. The postmodern quest for meaning within story, as exemplified by popularity of The Lord of the Rings movies, provides the preacher with such an opportunity. The Scriptures are the fundamental bases for preaching. Schwöbel writes, “Preaching biblically, therefore, means to remain faithful to the particulars of the biblical witness, so that God’s truth can become the particular truth of our lives” (8).

Schwöbel’s second component is *preaching pastorally*. Pastoral care is a process of discovery, both of promise and of a new perspective (Schwöbel, “Preacher’s Art” 12). Thus, when the crises of life come, both God’s promise and God’s perspective need to be understood and communicated. Good preaching allows people to come to understand this alternative and divine perspective and to discover the world as God sees it. That is the essence of hope in a culture of despair. “Preaching pastorally, therefore, means opening our hearts to the comforting presence of God himself” (14).

The third component is *preaching doctrinally*. Doctrine has at least three functions: to offer a comprehensive vision of reality, to form community, and to enable

mission to continue (Schwöbel, "Preacher's Art" 15). Doctrine is the continuing conversation of the Church, both internally and with those who do not yet believe. "Preaching doctrinally is thus the way to make doctrine understandable for faith by showing how it developed from the biblical sources and by relating doctrinal formulae again to their biblical foundations" (16).

The final component Schwöbel mentions is *preaching congregationally*. All preaching takes place within a context, and, in general, the pastor is called to serve a local congregation. To be more specific, it is the context of the lives of the persons who comprise that congregation. Good preaching is not abstract but is firmly embedded in a specific context. "Preaching congregationally is, therefore, the continuous interchange between the great words of the Christian message and the small matters of concrete church life" (Schwöbel, "Preacher's Art" 18).

Allen suggests a number of benefits to theological preaching (21-26). First, it shapes the Christian community. Critical reflection upon the guiding convictions of a community will have missional impact. Allen writes, "A congregation tends to pattern itself after the theological vision at the center of its life" (25). Second, doctrine can satisfy the hunger for a holistic interpretation of life. One of the ironies of postmodernity is the desire for holism and the simultaneous rejection of metanarrative. The overarching Christian story, recounted in the creed, can well function as a way forward. Third, preachers are more able to sort through diverse theological claims, and thus can better equip the saints to minister to the world of religious pluralism in which they dwell. Fourth, doctrinal preaching is an antidote to theological illiteracy. The goal, of course, is not so much to gain more information as it is to understand better the world in which Christ followers live, to make sense of it theologically. Again, Allen writes, "In this

scenario, the pastor is not simply the resident theologian who engages in theological reflection for the community. The pastor is a teacher of theology who seeks for the congregation to become a community of theological reflection” (33).

Although written as an indictment, one can also discern the missional possibilities for the local church in William J. Abraham’s words:

We have become so doctrinally indifferent and illiterate that the church is starved of intellectual content. Indeed, in many quarters the church has become internally secularized. It has no shared public discourse of its own, other than that borrowed from the secular world, to think through its pastoral care, its mission in the world, its evangelism and its internal administration. Hence pastoral care is reduced to therapy, mission to sociopolitical action, evangelism to church growth, academic theology to amateur philosophical enquiry, and church administration to total quality management. (104-05)

Both in its mission and preaching greater possibilities exist for the local church. God is a missional God who searches after lost humanity, redeems them, calls them to community, and empowers them for his mission. The recovery of the Church’s doctrinal heritage becomes all the more necessary when understood in these terms.

The Meaning of Doctrine

Doctrine, as has been seen, emerges as a part of the living tradition of the Church as it attempts to articulate its understanding of Scripture within concrete historical circumstances. McGrath distinguishes between living and dead formulations of faith:

A doctrinal hermeneutic was required, in which Scripture and tradition were encountered creatively and profoundly, in order to recast their ideas and interpret their narratives in new images and terms. A theology of repetition—whether of biblical texts or liturgical formulae—left too many theological loose ends. The ideas behind the familiar formulae of the New Testament and the liturgy of the church had to be re-imagined and recreated through conceptual innovation, unless they were to become dead metaphors, petrified verbal moments from the past. (Genesis 7)

English sees powerful life in doctrine:

Doctrine provides guidance as to the direction we should take. It is not intended to be a dead deposit from the past but a lively contribution to our future. It signals a journey so far faithfully completed. It also points us to our forward way. When doctrine comes to life in the church, the world should look out! (34)

Of course, the meaning of doctrine itself can be uncertain and must be clarified.

Here one enters into an area of intense debate as to what exactly doctrine is and what its functions are. Certainly, as McGrath notes, it is multifaceted. McGrath writes, “Christian doctrine is fundamentally an integrative concept, which brings together a number of elements into a greater whole” (Genesis 36).

In order to expedite the discussion, I have utilized four descriptors of doctrine offered by McGrath as a means to approach the debate. In each instance several questions arose that were used as prompters for the purpose of historical research. McGrath contends that doctrine, historically speaking, has had several dimensions.

Doctrine as Social Demarcation

Essentially, so the argument runs, doctrine arises as a response to threats to the identity of the faith community and serves to provide identity to the community:

The original Christians ... were about creating and sustaining a unique culture, a way of life that would shape character in the image of their God. And they were determined to be a culture, a quite public and political culture, even if it killed them and their children. (Clapp, Peculiar People 82)

Initially this self-definition was over against Judaism, but as the faith spread so did the question of definition, particularly with regard to Gnosticism and neo-Platonism.

McGrath notes of doctrine in this era that served to provide identity:

[Doctrine] does not appear to have been understood as an attempt primarily to define what individual Christians believed; rather, it seems to have been intended as a means by which the credentials of a community claiming to be Christian church might be validated. (Genesis 40)

Over time, of course, this defining function narrowed considerably to simply the specific area of combating heresy, until the Reformation offered an increased possibility of a plurality of faith communities. Today in multi-faith societies, if the Church is to maintain its identity as the people of God, then it is going to have to recover this function of doctrine. Again, McGrath notes, “The recognition of the social role of doctrine suggests that doctrine is likely to become of increased, rather than diminished, theological importance in the final decade of the twentieth century and the opening of the new millennium” (Genesis 51).

Immediately, as one considers the implications for preaching, the need to discover how preaching can function to form community, if indeed it does, arises. In most cases current preaching is either individualistic, or on the opposite end of the theological spectrum, targeted at public policy. One must wonder what would happen if preaching doctrinally to form community became the emphasis of preachers and what form that preaching would take. Such study would be valuable, both in knowing how to preach in this manner and what the Church can learn from these preachers.

Doctrine as Interpretation of Narrative

McGrath notes also describes doctrine as the means of interpretation of the sacred narratives:

The community of faith stands in anamnetic solidarity with its apostolic forebear; it has no need to invent this continuity, which is historically and theologically *given* [original emphasis]. The narrative of Jesus Christ, mediated through Scripture and Eucharistic celebration, is presented, proclaimed, *and accepted* [original emphasis] as the foundational and controlling narrative of the community of faith. (Genesis 55)

As has already noted above, doctrine functions as a hermeneutic for the Scriptures. Again, McGrath affirms a hermeneutical function for doctrine:

Doctrine provides the conceptual framework by which the scriptural narrative is interpreted. It is not an arbitrary framework, however, but one which is suggested by that narrative, and intimated (however provisionally) by Scripture itself. It is to be discerned within, rather than imposed upon, that narrative. The narrative is primary, and the interpretative framework secondary. The New Testament includes both the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth and the interpretation of the relevance of that narrative for the existence of the primitive Christian communities; doctrine represents the extension of the quasi-doctrinal hints, markers and signposts to be found within the New Testament. (Genesis 58-59)

Preachers ought to ask how explicit they are about this in their preaching.

Research is required to determine whether previous generations were any different in their approach. Preachers have the opportunity to consider whether preaching might be better if it were more explicitly trinitarian and Christocentric. Fundamentally, preachers today need to know if these doctrinal statements are the core themes of Scripture and the lenses through which they must interpret it.

Doctrine as Interpretation of Experience

Experience is almost impossible to capture in words, and people do so in the language of poetry and metaphor. George A. Lindbeck says, “It is necessary to have the means for expressing an experience in order to have it, and the richer our expressive or linguistic system, the more subtle, varied, and differentiated can be our experience” (37). McGrath comments, “Precisely because the primary language of the Christian community is poetic and rhetorical, doctrine is essential for the sake of responsible preaching to the community in its primary language” (Genesis 69). In this regard Heinrich Ott describes theology as “the conscience of preaching” (22). In other words, doctrine functions as the grammar, the means of expression, of the Christian experience. The evangelistic import of such an understanding of doctrine is significant. Although experience cannot be reduced to words, it can be communicated through words. McGrath

affirms the role of words:

The communal Christian experience may be communicated verbally to those who have yet to discover it, in such a manner that an individual may, in the first place, experience it, and in the second, subsequently recognize this experience for what it is. (Genesis 70)

Perhaps this interpretation of human experience is why Thom S. Rainer, in his study of why unchurched people who convert, and remain in a local church, has identified from their responses that 91 percent do so because of doctrine and preaching (45).

Doctrine can also bring fresh perspective to that experience. Paul Scott Wilson writes, “Stories are our normal way of relating our experiences and doctrines are our normal way of questioning those experiences from a faith perspective” (Imagination 160). Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians is a fine example of theological reflection upon Christian experience and of doctrine acting as a corrective to such:

The preacher’s ideal role resides in *meaning giving* [original emphasis] ... preaching helps people to grasp the world theologically, and to bring theological meaning and understanding to their lives ... it offers theological meaning to a culture that desperately seeks significance but does not know where to turn to find it.” (Loscalzo 26)

Preachers must challenge themselves by asking how often do they pause in sermon preparation or analysis to examine what has been written from a theological perspective. Research must determine if this is how the bygone preachers preached. There exists a need to uncover whether the theology of earlier preachers and their preaching was consistent with experience, or in the alternative, if their theology defined their experience. So too, preachers today need to enquire as to the use of language by their predecessors. Research is required to show whether such use of language was utilitarian, or was it used to evoke sanctified imagination and wonder.

Doctrine as Truth Claim

In stating that doctrine is also a truth claim, one must understand that one is not merely describing realities and requiring mental assent to them. McGrath notes that doctrine correspondingly brings with it a demand for personal involvement:

Doctrines define the object of faith—God—not in order that God may be comprehended but in order that the believer may relate to God in faith. There is an existential, as well as a cognitive, dimension or component to the truth-claims of Christian doctrine. (Genesis 78)

In particular, doctrine functions to form the realities it describes. McGrath writes, “Truth is not simply something one knows about, but something which one possesses and is possessed by” (Genesis 78).

One implication from this truth claim function of doctrine is that response is demanded. Research must endeavor to show how this happened in the past. If earlier preachers sought a response, current preachers need to know in what ways. In doing so, perhaps preachers today can discover how they ought to invite people to respond to God’s Word. Then, perhaps, they can learn to press home truth claims in an age when the existence of truth itself is in doubt.

The validity of these four markers, as identified by McGrath, is confirmed by Goh in his study of George Lindbeck and Hans Frei. Having dealt with the role of doctrine in interpreting Scripture at length, Goh then summarizes its other functions as follows. “Christian doctrines not only present the truth claims of the Tradition, they also articulate the Christian experience, and, as Lindbeck correctly suggests, they are also rules for group identity and authentic practice” (498).

An Ecology of the Word

Neither preaching nor doctrine happens within a vacuum. One means of

considering this wider context from a theological perspective is to consider an “ecology of the Word.” This ecological metaphor is intended to illustrate the interconnectedness of what is actually taking place during the preaching event. The ecology postulated involves the Holy Spirit, Scripture, doctrine, the preacher, and the Church.

Luke writes, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses” (Acts 1:8, NRSV). His account continues with the fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak. (Acts 2:1-4, NRSV)

The mission of the Church and the ministry of preaching have their source in the gift of the Spirit. The Spirit brings the Church itself into being. John D. Zizioulas refers to this as the Church “in-stituted” by Christ and “con-stituted” by the Spirit (140). The one element is a *fait accompli*; the other involves us in its very being. The one is to know Christ *pro nobis*; the other to know Christ *in nobis*:

Pneumatology contributes to Christology this dimension of communion. And it is because of this function of Pneumatology that it is possible to speak of Christ as having a “body,” i.e., to speak of ecclesiology, of the Church as the Body of Christ. (130)

Preaching is, therefore, an activity of the Spirit and implies the preacher’s listening to what the Spirit says, obedience, and prayer. As Michael J. Quicke says, “Preaching is about God communicating his will with purpose and power and immediacy to effect change” (27). My preaching colleague in my current ministry assignment at Foothills Alliance Church continually reminds himself as he moves to the pulpit, “I believe in the Holy Spirit.” The Spirit himself is the breath of life.

I have already described the relationship between Scripture and doctrine as a hermeneutical framework. D. S. Yeago, in a brilliant study, illustrates this relationship by referencing several Pauline texts and the Nicene Creed. In essence, Yeago argues that the creed and the Scriptures are in agreement and that the creed contains “analyses of the logic of the scriptural discourse, formal descriptions of the apprehension of God in the texts, which then serve as guides to a faithful and attentive reading of the texts” (87). As a further example, one may consider the language of Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 where Paul refers to spiritual gifts. Paul writes, “Now there are varieties of gifts but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone” (1 Cor. 12:4-6, NRSV). Undoubtedly, Paul did not possess the later trinitarian doctrines, but nevertheless his language indicated that he shared their deep understanding of who God is, and, in fact, those later doctrines are a faithful interpretation of Paul and the means by which Christfollowers may now interpret his meaning.

McGrath sees this pattern repeated throughout Scripture:

It is evident that there are conceptual frameworks, linked to narrative structures, within Scripture: these function as starting points for the process of generation of more sophisticated conceptual frameworks in the process of doctrinal formulation. On the basis of these scriptural hints, markers and signposts, doctrinal affirmations may be made, which are then employed as a conceptual framework for the interpretation of the narrative. The narrative is then re-read in the light of the conceptual framework, in the course of which modifications to the framework are suggested. There is thus a process of dynamic interaction, of feedback, between doctrine and Scripture, between interpretative framework and narrative. (Passion 112)

Throughout this relationship Scripture remains primary. Scripture is the Word of God, God breathed, Spirit inspired. God has willed to reveal himself in this way. Craig L. Bartow states by way of reemphasis the primacy of Scripture:

The Bible, like the preaching it enables (as God wills), is God's *human* [original emphasis] speech. In it we encounter reality on the turf of human and natural history, and so we encounter divine reality on the turf of human and natural history, and so we encounter ourselves as we are, as we would be, and as God would have us be. So the Bible does not simply contain God's Word. It *is* [original emphasis] God's Word, God's human speech *with* [original emphasis] us, *about* [original emphasis] us, *against* [original emphasis] us, and thereby *for* [original emphasis] us. It is in just this sense that we can say that God authors Scripture and authorizes preaching. (43)

Therefore, McGrath makes possible the interpretation of the Reformation injunctions of *sola scriptura* and *ecclesia reformata, ecclesia semper reformanda* as referring to, in the first place, the primacy of Scripture over the interpretative framework, and, secondly, as the ongoing task of correlation between the Bible and its interpretative framework (Passion 112-15). Doctrine, functioning as the rule of faith, is both derived from Scripture and leads the preacher back to Scripture.

Preaching is, therefore, related to the Scriptures, yet different for preaching, too, is God's human speech. Preaching is God's Word to a particular time and place. Bartow suggests several characteristics for this kind of preaching.

Preaching, as God's Word today has a present tense tone, that is, it does not simply state the historical but evokes fresh meaning now.

Preaching emphasizes the divine initiative—it is God's story, not human's, whose role is to respond. Bartow writes, "If preaching today seems rather tepid as compared to the preaching of the prophets of old, it may not be so because preachers have failed to match the entertainment value of televised discourse. Perhaps it is because they have succeeded" (134).

Preaching offers a Christian interpretation of life, that is, what God would have us to be.

Preaching is in the indicative mood—the response arises from the initiative; the “must” implicit in the “is.” The gospel does more than demand; it enables.

Preaching features a variety of strategies. Although much ink has been spilled over the methodology of preaching, in each instance the emphasis ought to remain upon faithful persuasion.

Burton Z. Cooper and John S. McClure affirm the role of preaching:

The sermon, in principle, is central to the life and thought of a worshipping community. It brings together the fundamental working powers and authorities of a living faith. In the context of a worship service, the sermon is the meeting place of God, Scripture, and the present; it provides a home for faith, theology, and culture; it is where a biblical understanding of reality is confessed, interpreted, and related to our experience of reality; it is where we hear whispered to us an inner word of God addressing the particularities of our lives and times; and finally, it is where gospel and judgment encounter us. (2)

This dual referent of preaching, both human and divine speech, is what a theology of preaching seeks to consider. On the one hand, to focus solely on the word proclaimed is to ignore the human element, both preacher and listener, and leads to homiletical doceticism. On the other hand, an anthropocentric model can rob preaching of its transformative power as the Word of God. F. Gerrit Immink emphasizes the need to hold both poles in tension:

Homiletics is precisely the intertwining of theoretical reflection both on the proclamation of the gospel and on human discourse. We cannot neglect one of these two poles. When we treat homiletics as a theological discipline, preaching cannot simply be considered an act of human discourse. It is also an act of divine discourse, as for example implied in the Protestant saying that *Predicatio verbi Dei est verbum Dei*. The preaching of the Word brings forth the presence of God’s salvific power. Although preaching is enacted as speech and communication, it nonetheless has the dynamics of the resurrection narrative (“Homiletics” 91)

With a depth of understanding as to the role of the Holy Spirit in preaching

Arnold von Ruler works with the concept of “inhabitation,” such that the gospel is not only proclaimed in the power of the Spirit, but also received as such (Immink, “Homiletics” 95-97). “Divine grace is not only bestowed upon us but also accepted, internalized” (97). The Spirit is the ultimate Preacher of the Word, who not only inspires the human preacher but illuminates the listeners, also.

A preacher may ask, what then of doctrine. Perhaps Barth best answers this question:

Confession of faith cannot mean that we are expressing what lives in us, or that we are thinking certain things in common. *Professio fidei* (professing the faith) means stating what we believe, what we who say *credimus* (we believe) must believe and confess because we have been listening to revelation. Confession is response, making answer, to what has been said. Preaching cannot be done except according to the norm of the confessions that are recognized in the church. No sermon can be anything other than an act of response to the call, closely connected to the creed. What happens here does not happen according to a plan or on the basis of an idea. Here something is heeded. We have heard the Word of God and we answer with the confession, with the creed: *Credo*, I believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. (Homiletics 64-65)

This word of faith is proclaimed by the preacher, who, as has already been noted, is no infallible oracle but one chosen for the task of shepherding the flock.

Nevertheless, Barth notes that this task is awesome:

To the extent that the church is the body of Christ, the preacher is the *successor apostolorum vicarius Christi* (successor of the apostles and vicar of Christ). Preaching as the *praedicatio verbi divini* takes place with the same necessity as that with which the church itself exists, for “God’s Word cannot be without God’s people and God’s people cannot be without God’s Word” (Luther). In succession to the apostles, as ministers of the second rank, preachers do in their spheres, i.e. in specific congregations, what the apostles did for the whole church. (Homiletics 67)

The pastor’s task on behalf of the church is both to proclaim and to equip.

Timothy received these instructions: “What you have heard from me through many witnesses entrust to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well” (2 Tim. 2:2,

NRSV). Such a person not only has to master the Word but more importantly be mastered by the Word.

To be a preacher is to live under the authority of Scripture, such that words and actions, thoughts and speech, are congruent, or integrated. This kind of preacher will have integrity, be authentic, and be a man or woman of God. The older notion of “priest,” while fraught with danger, did have this advantage, understanding that the preacher represents God to the people and the people to God.

The preacher is both an ecclesial theologian, one who understands the broader context of Scripture and doctrine, and a local theologian, one who can shape a theology for a particular community (Tisdale 38-47). A local theologian requires the skillful art of one who is familiar with Scripture and the doctrinal contours of Church history, as well as the ability to exegete the local culture, and the bringing of God’s Word to bear upon that culture. Drawing upon the work of Antonio Gramsci, McGrath describes the preacher as “the organic theologian”, that is, “an activist, a popularizer—someone who sees his task as supportive and systematic within the community of faith, and as evangelistic and apologetic outside that community” (Future 151).

Barth notes the following criteria for preachers, observing that these are provisional in the sense that they are human criteria and only God can provide that final validation. First, the inward call, that deep sense of vocation poses by a preacher. Second, the biblical standards for the conduct of preachers that must be observed (1 Tim. 3:1-13; 2 Tim. 4:1-5; Tit. 1:5-9). Third, the preacher must be adequately trained (1 Tim. 3:2; 2 Tim. 2:24). Fourth, one should be called and commissioned by the Church (Homiletics 66-71).

Finally, the final component of the ecology of the Word is the immediate context

of a local church. As Leonora Tubbs Tisdale notes, “Congregational Christian preaching is then, at its best, a highly contextual act of constructing and proclaiming theology within and on behalf of a local community of faith” (38). When one preaches in such a contextual manner, not only can preaching occasion a fresh hearing of the gospel but it reflects God’s own accommodation to humanity both in words, and in the person of Christ. The cardinal doctrines of the Church are few indeed, but the applications of those doctrines, their accommodation to congregational situations, are as varied as can be. In each culture, time, and place, a need exists for doctrine to be preached in order that the community of faith comes to maturity in Christ. As Immink says, “The Spirit not only accomplishes the *re-presentation* [original emphasis] of the Christ-event, but as much the *reception* [original emphasis] of the Christ event in the heart of the believer” (“Inquiry” 7).

The Relationship between Doctrine and Preaching

The basis of an understanding of the relationship between doctrine and preaching has become somewhat more apparent as the discussion has progressed, though it is hardly linear. A sameness and a difference can be articulated. The sameness arises from the one faith and one God. The difference in that doctrine has to do with reflection on the whole of Scripture, while preaching is more focused upon the here and now (*hic et nunc*) (Ott 22-23). Simply put, I am proposing a circular model comprised of three stages. One may break into the model at any point, and while a linear flow between the stages is not necessary, the model hangs together as a whole.

First, doctrine functions to form, guide, and shape preaching. Doctrine is the raw stuff of preaching. Without doctrine preachers would be unable to preach the Scriptures intelligibly. Doctrine is both a general framework, trinitarian and Christological, and the

core of the message, the *euangelion*. To follow Barth for a moment, one may describe the Word of God in its threefold form:

Revelation—where God alone is the speaker;

Scripture—the witness to the revelation, spoken through the prophets and apostles; and,

Preaching—the Word proclaimed by many different people (Church Dogmatics 1: 35).

Now, Barth's point is that doctrine is necessary for the ongoing word of preaching. He writes, "They [dogma and dogmatics] tell us what will do and what will not do, what we may say and what we may not say is to be Christian preaching" (Göttingen Dogmatics 18). Doctrine drives preaching to its core, that is, the gospel. As has already been noted, the hermeneutical function of doctrine becomes apparent here. The Scriptures are to be interpreted and proclaimed within the overarching self-revelation of God.

The calling of the preacher is not merely to repeat the tradition but to translate the tradition or to reimage it to a new generation "because language is power, the re-linguaging of tradition brings the tradition to new reality in a new age" (Hughes and Kysar 15). Doctrinal language, like any other, is metaphorical in nature. What was once an appropriate metaphor may no longer communicate well in another time or place. For instance, the satisfaction theory of the Atonement (regardless of how appropriate one considers it to be) was readily understandable in a feudal culture but easily open to misinterpretation in a pluralist democracy. The art of doctrinal preaching is to find fresh metaphors that communicate God's story in ways people in post-Christian societies can understand.

Doctrine, therefore, mediates between text and sermon, allowing questions to be asked, such as, “Why does this word need to be heard?” “What is its relationship to the core of the faith?” “How can it be communicated appropriately in this culture?” That relationship being so, preachers ought to be masters and keen students of the tradition, thereby capable of exegeting our contemporary culture. Regarding exegesis R. Paul Stevens writes, “The theological task is not only to exegete Scripture but to exegete life, and to do these together” (17). Elizabeth Achtemeier discusses of the role of theology in exegesis:

In order to claim that he or she stands in the long line of that great “cloud of witnesses” who have passed down the Christian tradition from generation to generation, the preacher therefore has to absorb basic Christian theology into his or her own personal faith and experience, until it becomes almost automatically present. That Christian theology then forms the context, checks the content, and illumines the exposition of every sermon preached. (12)

In this regard one may also note that from Lindbeck’s perspective, doctrine functions as the grammar of the faith. Doctrine is the language Christians speak. Daniel L. Migliore states, “The primary purpose of dogma and dogmatics is not to preach but to provide a critical test of preaching” (xxii). Doctrine ensures that preaching remains faithful. The reason, of course, as Barth says, is that “to every age the church’s preaching has been sick” (Göttingen Dogmatics 277). Doctrine, therefore, functions both as a resource and as a touchstone for Christian preaching. Without it good preaching is simply not possible. The Church would lack the necessary raw materials for interpretation and preaching and, in so doing, would quickly forsake its first love. In turning to past preachers, there exists a need to take the time to understand their theological underpinnings and the hermeneutical framework within which they operated. From there arises the possibility of beginning to understand how their theology informed their

preaching.

Second, one may note that preaching itself is doctrine; it is first-order theology. Preaching is a part of the Church at worship expressing itself before Almighty God in all of its human frailty. Preaching is *doxa*. Such preaching is living proof of the ancient precept *lex orandi lex credendi*; the law of prayer is the law of belief. Indeed, preaching is how most people encounter theology. Lischer describes preaching as “the projective function of theology” (14). Not that this standard elevates preaching beyond the realm of human speech to infallibility:

They know fear and trembling whenever they mount the pulpit. They are crushed by the feeling of being poor human beings who are probably more unworthy than all those who sit before them. Nevertheless, precisely then it is still a matter of God’s Word. The Word of God that they have to proclaim is what judges them, but this does *not* [original emphasis] alter the fact—indeed, it *means* [original emphasis]—that they have to *proclaim* [original emphasis] it. (Barth, Göttingen Dogmatics 35)

Later in the Church Dogmatics Barth continues to explore this paradox,

At this point we may recall a noteworthy remark of Luther’s. At one time I used to think ... that its content should be rejected as an exaggeration which leads inevitably to the Catholic doctrine of the infallibility of the Church’s teaching office. But a closer examination of the context has convinced me that if Luther was expressing himself forcibly—we might almost say on the razor’s edge between truth and error—he was only stating the truth when he said: ... “a preacher must not say the Lord’s Prayer, nor ask forgiveness of sins when he has preached (if he is a true preacher) but must confess and exult with Jeremiah: Lord thou knowest that what has gone forth from my mouth is right and pleasing to thee. He must boldly say with St. Paul and all the apostles and prophets: *Haec dixit dominus*, Thus saith God himself.” (2: 747)

Here preaching functions as sapiential theology, to borrow Charry’s phrase (6). Preaching’s function is to build up the community of faith. Again, Lischer says, “The preacher-as-person lives in this world and ministers to it, but only the pastor-as-theologian can accurately assess the mobility, historicism, secularism, banal religiosity,

and, most of all, the anxiety of our age” (8-9). Preaching has the potential to teach right living and thinking by opening hearers to the fresh perspective that comes from God. In the postliberal understanding, Charles L. Campbell writes, “The focus is on learning the distinctive languages and practices—the infrastructure—of the Christian community, which then makes certain ideas and experiences possible” (232). Regardless of the specifics of the postliberal account, one understands that in preaching one hears theology at its finest. Here, in preaching, fragile and fragmented experiences are both named and framed, giving coherence and meaning to life. Robert G. Hughes and Robert Kysar note, “The preacher will understand theology to be essentially about a structural reference into which all experience can be fitted and through which it can be interpreted” (11). Doctrinal preaching, therefore, is the dialectic of experience and conceptuality that provides meaning to that experience. Again, Hughes and Kysar write, “By speaking freshly of experience and abstraction, preaching makes experience new and names doctrine that resides in the listener’s immediate present” (28).

In turning to a study of preacher-theologians, the question must be answered as to how their preaching impacted the churches they served. “How did they build up the community? How did their preaching function to form people of faith? What can be learned from their approach?”

Third, preaching can itself become a source for theological reflection. As the Word of God interfaces with the people of God in their specific historic circumstances, it raises issues for the theologian to consider and allows the process to continue full circle. In other words, preaching turns theology back to its true center, the gospel.

Endless are the issues of the day for which the Church is called to discern the mind of Christ and to discover how to think and act Christianly. Each of these issues

from a local perspective becomes an occasion for theological reflection. As Barth says, “New proclamation results in new consideration of revelation and Scripture, new discovery of the most ancient truth, new criticism of what is preached, and therefore new formulation, new dogma” (Göttingen Dogmatics 40). In the same vein, Warren W. Wiersbe writes, “Theologians need to be preachers to keep doctrine personal and practical, and preachers need to be theologians to keep doctrine accurate and authoritative” (210). Helmut Thielicke, the great German preacher-theologian, says, “The most fruitful theological questions always come from outside of theology” (27). Preachers ought to ask how the preachers of yesterday raised issues that required further theological reflection and how the tradition developed as a result of their ministry.

Two further features of how preaching serves doctrine can be mentioned. First, preaching allows doctrine to recover its orality. Preaching, at its best, is not about manuscripts but is an oral art and a proclaimed word. The tendency of doctrine is to become lost in the minutia of fine print. Second, preaching retains the context of worship when academic study would often rob doctrine of its true home. First-order theology, the primary discourse of the Church, is not about academic debate but rather about the worship of God who loved humanity and gave himself for people. The circle is, therefore, an endless matter with each component heavily dependent upon the others.

The Future of Doctrinal Preaching

That all preaching is theological in nature is beyond question; the real issue is the content and faithfulness of that theology to the gospel. The importance of understanding why preaching is theological and exactly how it is theological cannot be minimized. McGrath notes that preaching doctrine is hardly an irrelevancy but is at the core of who we are:

The liberal suggestion that we defend Christianity by making its ideas acceptable to the secular world has been tried, and found wanting; we must now commend the Christian proclamation of judgment and conversion through Christ, with the invitation to stand within the Christian tradition, as an alternative strategy. It is thus evangelism, rather than just apologetics, which commends itself as of strategic importance in the present situation within western culture. For, properly understood, Christian doctrine is not merely a public description of what Christianity is, but represents an invitation to enter a new community and its associated conceptual and experiential world. (Genesis 199)

One might ask about the future of preaching Christian doctrine. Very few studies exist on this subject, but of those that do several themes emerge. First, preaching doctrine is too easily assumed essentially a matter of communicating information. One need simply gather the material and then proclaim it. This is the approach of Millard J. Erickson and James L. Heflin.

William J. Carl offers a slightly more nuanced understanding, recognizing that doctrinal preaching may emerge from one of three contexts: the life situation of the audience, the scriptural text, or a doctrinal formulation itself. As with Erickson and Heflin, the possibility of discerning the doctrinal content of a passage of Scripture and then finding the appropriate means to communicate that is assumed. Nevertheless, this strategy need not be the only option. Carl suggests that preachers might also take the time to understand their audience more fully, discerning the cultural, ethical, or practical questions facing the congregation. Reflection upon these questions leads to consideration of a specific doctrine and a scriptural text from which to preach. The third alternative is to begin with a specific doctrine itself, perhaps from the creed, the sacraments, or the liturgical year, and then relate it to the Church.

Hughes and Kysar also adopt a similar approach, but in this instance they give more attention as to how the doctrine can be made understandable to the audience. Their

approach is fourfold. First, one should discern the theological motifs of the broader context of the passage. Second, one should discern the specific theological themes of the text to be preached. Third, the preacher begins the process of imagining with the text. They mean “allowing the language of the text to ignite possibilities” (47). Here one can discern the process of transition from history to the contemporary by means of story, image, and questions. Finally, the movement towards the sermon and the creativity involved in that process is highlighted.

As has already been highlighted, dangers abound with any approach to doctrinal preaching if it comes across as doctrinaire. Reflecting upon postmodern responses to such an attitude, Graham Johnston has the following suggestions (94). First, one must choose one’s issues. Not everything is core to the gospel, and the importance of distinguishing cardinal doctrines from other issues and opinions must be stressed. Nothing can be more important than to understand what is critical at that moment. Second, one ought to speak in a positive manner. Taking shots at others is not only unbecoming of a preacher of the gospel but also counterproductive with postmoderns. Third, acknowledging shades of gray between black and white is significant. Not that such acknowledgement means preachers question the doctrine of the Incarnation, but that in its application to a specific cultural issue not all of the answers will be cut and dry. Fourth, preachers must admit struggles. Authenticity and transparency are highly valued by postmoderns, and where the application of doctrine is difficult for preachers, they must acknowledge it. Finally, preachers should not go looking for fights. Far too easily they can get trapped in discussing symptoms rather than the real issues. Allowing doctrine to interpret experience rather than the other way around is vital.

An alternative approach to preaching doctrine has been proposed by Thomas E.

Artmann. Based upon key indicators of the emerging culture, supplied by Grenz, Artmann develops these to highlight some ways in which doctrinal preaching may be meaningfully carried out. The indicators Grenz proposes are post-individualistic, post-rationalistic, post-dualistic, and post-noeticentric (20-50).

By the term post-individualistic gospel, Grenz and Artmann refer to the fact that Christianity is a social faith and involves community. People today are aware of the problems of radical individualism and of the fact they live in a “global village,” yet they are plagued by personal loneliness. Artmann, therefore, suggests that doctrinal preaching ought to stress the community of the ages and of the Church, the “us” factor. Rather than dealing with rational argument, doctrinal preaching should be based upon narrative and story and the relationships involved in those stories, God’s and people’s.

A post-rationalistic gospel is important because rationalism is being rejected as the sole means of establishing truth. In that regard, rather than proving things, doctrine will be better communicated as being integrated to the whole of life. The experience behind the doctrine will be key to communication. Thomas C. Oden emphasizes the experiential and whole-life approach:

When the apostles began to try to express what had happened to them, they did not begin with a system of metaphysics or ethical injunctions or scientific data. Rather, they began with experiential testimony of an interpersonal meeting with the risen Christ who “made all things new. (136)

A post-dualistic gospel is relevant as the fact-value dichotomy breaks down requiring that pastors much preach holistically. Preaching must relate to life in the “real world.” The message needs to be understood in the marketplace. Artmann notes that Calvin Miller makes several helpful suggestions in this regard (51). First, the preacher must talk honestly to the world. Platitudes will not do. Second, preachers must learn to

talk to the culture without yielding to its values. Third, preachers must use preaching to affirm ministry ahead of catechism. Finally, preachers must declare the faith without denigrating others.

A post-noeticentric gospel understands that society is drowning under information overload, and that knowledge for its own sake is being rejected. Purpose in both knowledge and life needs to be considered and articulated. With this viewpoint of purpose, preachers in a post-Christian society are able to provide the following: conversion information, growth information, future use information, and daily coping information (Artmann 56).

Conclusion

Artmann has done a great service in highlighting ways in which the dialogue may be continued further. By interacting with preachers of bygone generations, this study demonstrates ways in which that dialogue may continue into the emerging future.

McGrath reminds preachers that such a continuing conversation is vital:

The doctrinal heritage of the past is both a gift and a task, and an inheritance and a responsibility. What our forebears in the Christian faith passed down to us must be appropriated, in order that we may wrestle with it in our own situation, before passing it on to those whose day has yet to dawn. (Genesis 200)

CHAPTER 3

THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Reviewing the Problem and Purpose

Many Western societies are going through the process of becoming post-Christian, both in terms of the sheer numbers of people who actively profess Christian faith and that of worldview. Likewise, within the Church, a marked shift away from the dogmatic propositional preaching of past generations towards a more seeker-friendly approach, which in its worst moments is often little more than moralism, has taken place. In the twenty-first century society is in danger of becoming driven by image and devoid of content. Tragically, the Church faces the same danger as the culture to which it is called to minister. One may well ask, how then are preachers to preach content in a content-less society. Or again, how are preachers to preach Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society.

In the pre-Enlightenment era, the Church understood doctrine to be more than a detailed summary of the finer points of belief. Doctrine was deeply pastoral in nature and had several functions, including social demarcation, the interpretation of the scriptural narrative, the interpretation of experience, and as a truth claim. Doctrine was vital to the formation and sustenance of the community of faith, to its witness and mission, to its proclamation and practice.

If the Church is to recover something of this great tradition and to find a fresh voice in post-Christian society, it will need to learn how to do so in both a creative fashion, appropriate to the cultural context of today, and with an eye to the past. This study into the preaching of several preacher-theologians is an attempt to learn from them how to do so, thereby providing preachers today with a resource as they engage in

proclamation to a post-Christian world.

Research Questions

While in an inductive study no one can list all of the questions that may arise as one delves into the material, several questions were identified which served as a working design. These were drawn from McGrath's study of the history and function of doctrine, as reviewed in Chapter 2 (Genesis).

Question #1

In what ways did the preachers studied preach doctrinally with a view to forming community?

Doctrine has a function of social demarcation, and in the present age where the role of community is taking on ever-increasing importance, preachers need to know how community is formed, particularly a community of faith, and the role doctrine plays in doing so. The early Church faced the challenge of forming community in openly hostile environments. The Reformation Church had to face the reality of forming alternative communities in bitterly divided societies. The Methodists formed communities to disciple the thousands awakened to faith in their time. Preachers may well be able to learn from the preaching of these earlier times.

Question #2

How did they connect doctrine and Scripture in preaching?

The hermeneutical question is one that has come to the fore today, along with a renewed interest in the role of doctrine in interpreting the Scriptures. In a time when preachers quickly want to move along to application before considering the deeper issues at stake, they need to ask themselves what can be learned from the preacher-theologians of the past, who too faced uncertain times but found resources in the Word and the creed.

Question #3

Was doctrine used as a means of interpreting experience, and, if so, how was this done?

The present tendency may well be to solve problems as quickly as they arise, but preachers need to consider what lies beneath the problems, the experiences, and the solutions. At one time, at least, the deeper issues were considered theological, and doctrine had immediate relevance to practice. Preachers today need to know how was this done, and how can this approach to doctrine be recovered in their preaching.

Question #4

In what ways did these preachers expect a response from the people to the truth claims they preached?

The self-revelation of God calls for a response from humanity. God's revelation is not information for its own sake but truth making an absolute claim upon human lives. Preachers today can learn by asking, how did earlier preachers proclaim the Word in this manner.

Methodology

The study conducted was qualitative research in that it was a descriptive analysis of historical data. Such research, according to William Wiersma, rests upon a peculiar epistemology (198-217). Phenomena are viewed holistically, rather than being reduced to parts. Thus, each preacher-theologian was considered within a cultural and ecclesial setting. Both sermons and additional writings pertinent to the study were considered as primary sources. The assumptions and conclusions of qualitative research are subject to modification as the research proceeds, and following this inductive procedure the bulk of material presented is included within Chapter 4. Finally, since preachers were considered

within their own settings, the methodology is nonexperimental in nature.

Exploratory or inductive research, of necessity, cannot proceed on the basis of an hypothesis. Estelle M. Phillips and Derek S. Pugh note, “This is the type of research that is involved in tackling a new problem/issue/topic about which little is known, so the research idea cannot at the beginning be formulated very well” (50). Nevertheless, the possibility of having a working design that includes foreshadowed questions, such as those listed above, was available. These four questions were the initial questions researched with further clarification being achieved as the study proceeded.

The basic procedure for historical research, historiography, is relatively straightforward (Wiersma 218-36). First, a problem is identified, in this case the preaching of Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society. Several difficulties immediately presented themselves, one of which is the definition of terms. In Chapter 2 I have already examined the relationship of doctrine to preaching, and that is further developed as a result of the research in Chapter 4. A further problem was that of presentism, that is giving past terms present conditions. This anomaly can occur because of the historical distance needed between the researcher and the situation studied. As McGrath notes, “The critical appraisal of another period or another culture demands a certain degree of distance between the investigator and the situation” (Genesis 88). Controls, as discussed below, were set in place to account for presentism.

The second stage was the collection and evaluation of source materials. As has been noted, preachers were selected on the basis of four criteria essential to the argument presented. These criteria were

1. Preaching ability—these preachers were noted as outstanding preachers of their age;

2. Theological acumen—each preacher was a significant theologian in the history of the Church;

3. Impacting ministry—each had a ministry significantly affecting the Church and the wider communities they served; and,

4. Theological assumptions—those mentioned, that is of “faith seeking understanding” and the pastoral function of theology, were prominent in the approach of each of the preachers. By definition, this includes the assumption that these preachers were, for the most part, pre-Enlightenment.

Based upon these criteria, a decision was made to research the following preachers: John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and John Wesley. Wesley is an exception to the pre-Enlightenment consideration, for reasons detailed in Chapter 4.

Primary source materials included published sermons and other significant works relating to the field. Since these have already been attested by prior research, no requirement to engage in external criticism in order to establish the validity of the documents concerned arose. Secondary sources, other works of historical scholarship, were consulted as necessary.

Further difficulties arose at this stage. First, an endless variety of material was available. Each of these preachers has numerous published sermons, and it was beyond the scope of this study to consider all of them. Secondary sources provided a valuable control by identifying key documents that were given primary consideration. Second, not all of the sermons of these preachers were published, and I faced, therefore, limited accessibility to their work. This is the case for most historical research and must simply be acknowledged as a limitation upon the study.

Individual sermons were selected according to the following procedure.

Secondary sources were researched in order to draw together a working bibliography of extant sermons. These secondary sources were then again consulted to identify particular periods in the life of each preacher that might prove fruitful for further investigation.

Criteria such as theological or political controversy, crisis in the congregation or city, religious revival, or major publications were used subjectively, with the intent of finding sermons utilizing doctrine in life transformation rather than as information. From the time period in question, a sermon series, or individual sermon, was identified from the extant corpus for further research. Where necessary to choose one sermon from a series I did so on the basis of the theological significance of the sermon chosen.

The third stage of historical research was that of internal criticism, evaluating the content of the material in order to establish meaning. C. H. Massa argues that establishing meaning becomes overly subjective, although this assumption is based upon his own acceptance of the standards of modernity (1-5). Neutral observation is no longer an accepted hypothesis for any investigation, and as Wiersma notes, "Interpretation is central to the research process when conducting historical research" (219).

The fourth stage of historical research was the synthesis of information from the source materials. This information is presented in Chapter 5 of the study, along with analysis, interpretation, and relevant conclusions.

Location of the Researcher within the Study

Obviously a researcher's interpretation will reflect who she or he is as a reader. With this interpretive acknowledgment in mind, the researcher in any qualitative study must state her or his place within the study.

I am a white, Celtic male, aged forty, who is heterosexual, married with three

children, one of whom is now a teenager. Coming from a British working class background, I am, nevertheless, a self-professed academic. I have some ideological affinities with a Marxist analysis of history but have considerable doubts as to its utopian ideals. Having previously studied politics, political economy, and taxation. I also have sympathies with the liberal free-market approach towards Western society of Friedrich Hayek, Milton Friedman, and Robert Nozick.

I have lived in the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, and, most recently, Canada, and consider myself to be an internationalist more than a patriot. I am committed to the ideals of the European Union. My first language is English, and my second, German.

My religious background is Protestant, evangelical, Wesleyan-holiness, and I am a member by conviction of the Church of the Nazarene. Despite the fact that I am an ordained elder with the Church of the Nazarene, I currently serve on the pastoral team of Foothills Alliance Church, a constituent part of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada. I have pastored three different congregations, in each instance my ministry being primarily focused upon preaching and church leadership.

I have a strong interest in dogmatic theology, given to me by Dr. Noble, my professor at Nazarene Theological College, Manchester. Dr. Noble was taught dogmatics by Professor Thomas Torrance, himself a student of Karl Barth. My presupposition that good preaching depends upon good theology tracks along a similar line to Barth's. I also gained a renewed appreciation for my own heritage and, in particular, John Wesley at Manchester.

Thus, while claiming no strong basis for neutrality or objectivity, I do consider my background and experience sufficiently varied and diverse to at least afford me the

opportunity to ask wide-ranging questions of the texts studied.

In order to validate my readings of the sermons, I checked for internal consistency of these readings with other published writings of the preachers, particularly anything they had written on the theology or practice of preaching. Further controls were exercised by secondary source confirmation of my results.

Controls

The major control exercised in this study was a form of triangulation. Matthew B. Miles and Michael Huberman define triangulation as giving “support to a finding by showing that independent measures of it agree with it, or at least, don’t contradict it” (152). In other words, conclusions need to be tested against other data. In this instance that was done by reference to other primary sources, such as letters and books, and by making reference to the extensive body of secondary literature.

Delimitations

The parameters of the study were that only five preachers mostly from the pre-Enlightenment era would be researched, according to predetermined criteria, and only two sermons from each studied in depth. No attempt was made to evaluate the theological positions adopted by the preachers, beyond their homiletical theology, nor was their character questioned. The preachers were men of their times and read as such. No extensive review of the literature relevant to these individuals was conducted, being deemed beyond the confines of this study, although relevant secondary sources were utilized for the purposes of triangulation.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations and difficulties involved with such a study, McGrath notes, “The genuine difficulties we experience in understanding the past serve as a

paradigm for investigating how we understand *any* [original emphasis] situation which corresponds exactly to our own as observers, whether the differences relate to space, time or culture” (Genesis 98).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Guiding Questions

As an inductive historical study into the practice of preaching Christian doctrine, not all of the potential research questions could possibly be anticipated in advance of the research. Four guiding questions were, therefore, selected in order that the examination of each preacher-theologian could follow a similar pattern. These questions were based upon McGrath's monograph concerning the history of doctrine, as outlined in Chapter 2: In what ways did the preachers studied preach doctrinally with a view to forming community? How did they connect doctrine and Scripture in preaching? Was doctrine used as a means of interpreting experience, and, if so, how was this done? In what ways did these preachers expect a response from the people to the truth claims they preached? (Genesis).

Five preachers were chosen for study on the basis of predetermined criteria. These selection criteria were preaching ability, theological acumen, impacting ministry, and theological assumptions congruent with this study. On the basis of these selection criteria the following preachers were examined in some detail, namely, John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and John Wesley. The findings of a close reading of two sermons from each preacher are presented below on a chronological basis.

John Chrysostom

Chrysostom may not immediately spring to mind as one of the greater theologians among the Church Fathers, but he certainly is recognized as being the premier preacher among them, if not of all Christian history. The name Chrysostom simply means "golden

mouth.”

John was born around 349 in Antioch to Sekoundos and Anthousa, a comparatively wealthy family. Although his father died in his infancy, John was nevertheless able to study with Libanios, a noted pagan scholar, and orator. John’s completion of study in 367 marked his introduction to the theological intrigue of the city (Kelly 5-10).

The Council of Nicaea in 325 had established the Church’s acceptance of the status of God the Son, against the Arians, however, in the intervening years Arianism had somewhat of a resurgence resulting in, for example, the Nicene bishop of Antioch, Eustathios, being ejected and replaced by the Arian Euodoxis. By 360 the Nicene leaning Meletios was elected and then swiftly removed from his oversight of a deeply divided church. The Emperor Julian who delighted in Christian division further complicated this sad situation. In the years to follow, Meletios was to come and go, often depending upon which party had the upper hand in the ongoing debate (Kelly 10-12).

Upon completion of his studies with Libanios, John came under the influence of Meletios, was baptized by him, and then served as his aide, resulting in his appointment as lector in 371. Nevertheless, John refused ordination, and in order to avoid such, joined the ascetic school of Diodore and Caterios where he was grounded in the Antiochene practice of grammatical-historical exegesis of the Scriptures. From there John’s venture into ascetism led him to the hermitage of Silpios, where he remained from 372 until 376. Going further, John entered a period of complete isolation, living in a cave as an extreme ascetic. By 378 John’s health had failed under the rigors of his self-imposed regime, and so he returned to Antioch, as did Bishop Meletios once more (Kelly 20).

John accepted ordination as deacon by Meletios in 380 and as presbyter by

Flavian in 386. While John's deaconate involved the instruction of catechumens, he did not actually preach his first sermon until being elevated to the priesthood. John was quickly chosen by Flavian as his assistant, and given the role of premier preacher in the city, a position he would hold until going to Constantinople in 397 (Kelly 40).

During this period of time, John preached some of his most memorable sermons. John's output was impressive, preaching almost every day using the *lectio continua* method of text selection. The majority of John's preaching was expositional, although being well aware of the context in which he preached, his sermons were applied appropriately to the situation. Antioch had both large Jewish and pagan communities, leading John to emphasize to his congregation the importance of the witness of a godly life. Of John's expositional work, at least sixty-seven sermons on Genesis, fifty-eight on the Psalms, ninety on Matthew, eighty-eight on John, fifty-five on Acts, and over two hundred on the epistles survive (Old 1: 170).

In 397, upon the death of Nectarius, John was taken forcibly to Constantinople and early in 398 accepted his election as bishop of the Eastern capitol (Kelly 85). One must remember that the Council of Constantinople in 381 had elevated the See of Constantinople to the second rank, behind Rome, making this a significant appointment for John. There John continued to preach on a weekly basis in the Hagia Sophia and began a reform of his diocese. The new bishop reigned in excessive expenditures, reformed the clergy, clashed with the city-dwelling monks and their practice of living together with "spiritual sisters," and centralized ecclesiastical control under his own authority. John's preaching themes included social justice and stinging attacks upon the excessive luxury of the imperial court. His preaching made an enemy of the empress, Eudoxia. Henry Chadwick notes, "John was ascetic, aloof, energetic and outspoken to the

point of indiscretion, especially when he became excited in the pulpit. None of these qualities made him easy to live with in a sophisticated and affluent city” (198).

Eventually John’s troubles with the imperial court boiled over, and he was deposed in 403. Although briefly reinstated, John was again removed and died during his exilic journey on 14 September 407. Not until 483 was he fully rehabilitated, with his remains being returned to the great city. In 451 John Chrysostom was proclaimed a Doctor of the Church (Kelly 135).

Selection Criteria

From this brief historical introduction one can discern that John meets the selection criteria of the study. In a rather eloquent statement R. W. Bush commends Chrysostom:

No preacher was ever more perfect and polished in his style—richer in highly wrought metaphors and similes—more argumentative in his reasoning—more stern and terrible at times, and yet more gentle and persuasive on other occasions—more copious in matter—more clear in exposition—more subtle and ingenious in thought—more capable of gaining the ear, appealing to the feelings, and influencing the judgment of his hearers. (328)

John was quite simply the most noted preacher of the age, resulting in both his elevation to Constantinople and his eventual downfall. Although not a strong scholarly theologian in terms of publications, John nevertheless was uniquely close to the events of Nicaea and tackled some difficult theological issues in his preaching, particularly with regard to the Anomoeans. The greatest theological contribution John did make was his sound exegetical insight in a period noted more for allegory, something that came to be valued by those who followed, including Augustine, Calvin, and Wesley.

The impact of John’s ministry stretched beyond Antioch to Constantinople, both in his role during the riots in Antioch and in his eventual elevation. John reformed within

the church and impacted the wider community, never shying away from even political conflict whenever he deemed the message of Scripture to have something to say to a situation. After all, John, too, was aware of the pastoral function of good theology. As Old notes, “For John the emphasis of catechetical instruction is neither the teaching of doctrine nor the explanation of the liturgy but the exploring of the Christian way of life” (2: 197). John’s twelve sermon series on Colossians is a particularly strong example of developing Christian living.

On the Priesthood

During 390-391 John authored a short series of books entitled On the Priesthood (Schaff 9: 33-83). These books take the form of a dialogue between John and his friend Basil. Book 5 concerns preaching. There John describes the situation that many preachers face, that is, “sermon tasting.” “[The] public are accustomed to listen not for profit, but for pleasure” (9: 70).

In order to deal well with such circumstances, a preacher must demonstrate both contempt of praise and use the force of eloquence. Where one seeks praise, pride is sure to follow, and little attention will be given to the transformation of the character of either preacher or congregation:

For I know not whether any man ever succeeded in the effort not to be pleased when he is praised, and the man who is pleased at this is also likely to desire to enjoy it, and the man who desires to enjoy it will, of necessity, be altogether vexed and beside himself whenever he misses it. (Schaff 9: 71)

Simply allowing congregational opinions to drive the preaching agenda will not do, in John’s opinion.

On the other hand, preaching is a skill that must be developed and nurtured if the Church is to receive sound teaching. “For since preaching does not come by nature, but

by study, suppose a man to reach a high standard of it, this will then forsake him if he does not cultivate his power by constant application and exercise” (Schaff 9: 71). That being said, the wise preacher will be his own harshest critic. After all, he has one true focus, “laboring at ... sermons [to] please God” (73).

Although John places some value upon rhetoric, it is never his dominant concern, as he mentions in Book 4. There, John reminds the reader of the significance of the content of preaching, noting, “I take no account of style or delivery; yea let a man’s diction be poor and his composition simple and unadorned, but let him not be unskilled in the knowledge and accurate statement of doctrine” (Schaff 9: 67). The true force of eloquence is the proclamation of the Word of God.

Preaching Ministry

John typically prepared well for a sermon but delivered it without notes. The records available of John’s preaching come via a stenographer, who took notes of the oral delivery for him, with the great preacher himself being able to “finish” the sermon for publication at a later date. That being said, Old states, “If these sermons have come to us in literary form, they have never lost their character as recorded oratory. They have never been reshaped to fit the requirements of written composition” (2: 174).

The typical format of a sermon was in three parts: *exordium*, that is, various things connected with the text might be discussed; exposition, usually verse by verse; and, exhortation on living the Christian life. All three parts were complementary, but perhaps ought not to be considered introduction, body, and conclusion.

Sermon 1

The first sermon selected for analysis was preached in Antioch in 386. As has already been noted above, the Arian question was still very much alive in this divided

church. One group, the Anomoeans, considered the Son to be unlike (*anomoios*) the Father, while another, the Homoeousians, believed the Son was similar (*homoiousios*) to the Father. Neither of these positions was taken earlier at Nicaea, leaving John the unenviable task of teaching his congregation well in a matter of both great significance and great complexity. The sermon chosen is number three of a twelve-part series, “Against the Anomoeans.” This particular sermon is entitled “On the Incomprehensible Nature of God” (Dressler 95-114). No Scripture text is given, John either not having yet adopted his usual style of *lectio continua* or, in this instance, deviating from it.

This sermon was selected as being part of the most overtly theological series of John’s corpus, significant in itself for this study, since as has already been noted his theological output was limited. This debate was also the most crucial issue facing the newly ordained preacher in his first charge. Much of the controversy surrounded the question of what could be known of God *in se*, and in sermon 3 John deals directly with this issue.

John opens with a startling illustration, both commonplace and biblical: cutting down a useless tree, in this case the teaching of the Anomoeans. Not that John sees this pruning as his task alone, and so he invokes the help of the Holy Spirit. “So let us call upon God to send us the grace of the Spirit to blow more violently than any wind and tear the heresy out by the roots and, in this way, relieve us of much of our toil” (Dressler 5).

John is firm that the tragedy of a divided church would not have happened had people been taught the Scriptures, as they ought. Referring to 1 Corinthians 3:6 John remarks, “Paul did not plant it, Apollos did not water it, and God did not make it grow” (Dressler 95-96). This analogy is a fine example of the preacher’s creative use of Scripture to drive his point home.

John then turns to the heart of the matter: people cannot know more of God than he has revealed. Words, true or false, will make no difference because since God is impassible, words will have no effect upon him. To set up his argument, further examples are cited:

Let us call upon him, then, as the ineffable God who is beyond our intelligence, invisible, incomprehensible, who transcends the power of mortal words. Let us call on him as the God who is inscrutable to the angels, unseen by the Seraphim, inconceivable to the Cherubim, invisible to the principalities, to the powers, and to the virtues, in fact, to all creatures without qualification, because he is known only by the Son and the Spirit. (Dressler 97)

The preacher accomplishes three tasks here, only two of which he will expand in greater detail. First, the preacher sets a limit upon human knowledge, unlike his opponents. Second, John illustrates the point by reference to the heavenly host. Third, and not developed much further in this sermon, John implicitly refers to the equality of Father, Son, and Spirit.

The sermon proceeds with an invitation to the listeners to participate in a challenge as to whether what has been said is, in fact, correct. In other words, John invites his congregation to dialogue, albeit internally, with him. After various scriptural references and allusions, again referring to the equality of the Father and the Son, John proceeds to climb the ladder of the heavenly hierarchy he has set out and, with each rung, to demonstrate that not even those beings closest to God can look upon him. In doing so, John is utilizing a common belief of that day, namely a hierarchy of angels and powers, to make his point.

The preacher starts with angels and seraphim, citing Isaiah 6. In passing one gains insight into John's understanding of Scripture. "And when I say Isaiah, I mean what the Spirit states, for every prophet speaks through the action of the Spirit" (Dressler 101).

The angels could only see a condescension of God, who accommodates himself to them, and even then covered their eyes. Next comes the example of Daniel (Dan. 10:3-8) who could not even look upon an angel without fear. Daniel fell down as though he had fainted. John makes the laughable point that Daniel could look into the eyes of a lion but not an angel. Then comes Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:28) who only saw the appearance of the likeness of the glory of God. Citing 1 Corinthians 13:9-12, John makes the *reductio ad absurdum*; humans cannot possibly see or know what the heavenly host cannot.

Having exposed the folly of his opponents, both using Scripture and common sense, John moves on to exhortation. Interestingly, despite strong words regarding heresy at the opening of his sermon, John's exhortation to the congregation is that they pray for the Anomoeans. The pastoral warmth and concern of the man is evident as he urges, "And what is this exhortation? I urge you to pray for the Anomoeans, so that they may one day return to health" (Dressler 180). Just as these heretics are spiritually sick, in a flash, a brilliant "aha" moment, John diagnoses the congregation with spiritual malady, too:

I moaned in my deep grief that, while your fellow servant was preaching, the zeal of your throng was great, your eagerness reached a high pitch, people crowded against one another and stayed till the very end of the homily. But when Christ is about to appear in the holy mysteries, the church becomes empty and deserted. (110)

Here John refers to both the great popularity of his preaching, perhaps even the pervious sermon in this series, and also to the sad reality that as soon as the preaching is done the congregation leaves before the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Amusement is no part of John's agenda, rather, it is the spiritual transformation of the congregation. Using a wonderful simile, John reminds the people that "the benefit derived from our listening runs off like water" (Dressler 110).

John then turns to a brief exposition of the benefits of corporate worship and prayer, citing both biblical examples, as well as an incident some ten years earlier when an unnamed individual was sentenced to death for the abuse of power and the public gathered to rescue him. With a Hebraic hyperbole, John reminds his listeners that they come not to an emperor, but to God, pleading not for one man but for all sinners. With a great evangelical appeal, John invites them to corporate prayer:

You have shown praise for my discourse. You received my exhortation with loud applause. Now show your praise by your deeds. It takes no time to prove your docility and your obedience. Right after the exhortation comes the prayer. This is the praise I seek, namely, the applause which you give by your very deeds. (Dressler 114)

Here John lives out his own instruction for preaching, that is, to set praise aside and to continue to preach well. John's deep theological understanding of both revelation and the limitations of independent human understanding, combined with his commitment to Nicene Christology, are the doctrinal backdrop for this sermon, which leads to a pastoral exhortation to pray for those who are spiritually lost, as well as for each other.

This early sermon from John indicates several things with regard to the guiding questions of this study. First, a need to preserve the identity of the faithful community, particularly under the pressure of alternative teachings. John does not run from this task but, boldly addresses it with a sincere measure of pastoral compassion. Second, John understands Scripture to be the Word of God, has an outstanding grasp of it, can draw major themes together, and chooses to interpret it in the light of the creedal statement adopted at Nicaea. In fact, as J. N. D. Kelly notes, "In all this he [John] was sketching a doctrine which was to become fundamental in eastern Christianity, and which was to be conveyed to the west by the writings of the mystical theologian known as Pseudo-Dionysius" (62). Third, one notices John frame the experience of his congregation in

such a way that their problems are not externalized to a heretical group but brought closer to home in their worship experience. His desire to draw people closer to Christ is evident as he helps them to understand better the consequences of their choices and behavior. Finally, no doubt remains that John expected a response to the truth claim presented.

Sermon 2

The second sermon considered is also taken from early on in John's ministry, again in 386. A riot had erupted in Antioch as a result of changes to the taxation system, resulting in the toppling of various imperial statues. The reprisals were expected to be severe. John had just begun his Lenten series, and in the light of this incident took one week off from preaching before returning to the pulpit with a message of consolation, repentance, and correction. Meanwhile, Bishop Flavian had gone to Constantinople to plead for mercy for the city.

This series, "On the Statues," was selected as representing the most turbulent moment in John's ministry, apart from his own dismissal from Constantinople. Given that the latter had as much to do with John's relationship to the imperial court as anything else, while the former was of city-wide importance, focusing upon the statues incident was of greater significance to this study. Furthermore, as Old states, "The Homilies on the Statues have been acclaimed as among the finest examples of John's pulpit oratory" (2: 81). The sermon chosen, number 2, was the first one preached after the incident in question (Schaff 9: 344-54). The Lenten text was 1 Timothy 6:17.

John, once again, begins in gripping fashion:

What shall I say, or what shall I speak of? The present season is one for tears, and not for words; for lamentation, not for discourse; for prayer, not for preaching. Such is the magnitude of the deeds daringly done; so incurable is the wound, so deep the blow, even beyond the power of all treatment, and craving assistance from above. (Schaff 9: 344)

These powerful words of empathy both capture the attention of the hearers, and grasp the magnitude of the situation now unfolding in the community.

Immediately, John turns to the narrative of Job to find words for his congregation, and here one discovers his insistence upon framing their experience in the light of the biblical narrative. Unlike some of Job's comforters, John immediately identifies himself with the people and the calamity they face. Using corporate language John bewails, "Who, beloved, hath bewitched us? Who hath envied us? Whence hath all this change come over us? Nothing was more dignified than this city! Now, never was anything more pitiable!" (Schaff 9: 344).

Using a series of contrasts, John explains what has happened in recent days. Happiness has become melancholy. This theme is illustrated by reference to bees driven away by smoke and by a garden with no irrigation being laid waste. The sweet has now become bitter, as they await the fire of the emperor's wrath. Buildings and statues once were rocked; now hearts quake. "Lately our city was shaken; but now the very souls of the inhabitants totter! Then the foundations of the houses shook, but now the very foundations of every heart quiver" (Schaff 9: 345). The city forum that once was full is now like a bald head with only patches of hair. Now is indeed a time to turn to God in lamentation.

Quickly, John shifts the congregational focus. "For he who has been insulted has not an equal in dignity upon earth; for he is a monarch, the summit and head of all here below! On this account then let us take refuge in the King that is above" (Schaff 9: 346). John's goal is to lead his people from despair to hope because just as a cloud can hide the sun for a while, so, too, the sun will burn away the cloud. John's means is the Word of

God. “This also I myself expect to do this day; and the word being continually associated with your minds, and dwelling in them, I hope to bust the cloud of sadness, and to shine through your understandings again” (346). The hope John wishes to convey is the hope of Christ, and the church’s response of trust ought to serve as a witness to the pagans in the city.

John recognizes that many of the believers were not a part of the actions that took place in destroying the statues; nevertheless, they are corporately accountable for them. God’s Word should inspire people to action, and by doing nothing to prevent this crime, they are no different from the man who hid his one talent in the ground, also doing nothing, but incurring the wrath of his master. True faith results in action:

With profit ought we to depart hence, and some fresh and great gain should be acquired ere we leave this place. For it is but vainly and irrationally we meet together if we have been but captivated for a time and return home empty, and void of all import from the things spoken. (Schaff 9: 347)

Encouraging and correcting one another is therefore important. With this thought in mind, John turns to the text of the day, 1 Timothy 6:17, and illustrates the futility of wealth with the story of Lazarus and the rich man. Given his ascetic background, John’s tirade against wealth is understandable, although he does temper it by noting that the real issue is not wealth but pride, just as with wine the problem is not so much wine but drunkenness.

True wealth, John asserts, is generosity. “The rich man is not one who is in possession of much, but the one who gives much” (Schaff 9: 349). Since wealth cannot accompany a person once they die, nor will it be of any use in the present political crisis, it is their souls with which they ought to be concerned. “If the power of riches is found wanting before the wrath of man, much rather will this be the case, before the divine and

inexorable tribunal!” (349). A relationship with God is what matters most. “Wouldst thou be rich? Have God for thy friend, and thou shalt be richer than all men!” (350).

Therefore, the people ought to reject covetousness and seek after righteousness.

John is quite realistic about the benefits of wealth, listing luxury, pleasure, and banquets, but asserts that these are of little value compared with God’s bountiful supply to those who trust in him. Even if poor on earth, poverty simply affords one the opportunity to enjoy eternal bliss all the more. After all, the hungry enjoy a meal more than the full. Elijah was poor and left only a coat. Jesus, too, was poor but left the Church a meal, the communion celebration, and invites people to trust in him. With this thought, John closes.

Again, one discovers John using doctrine, as framed in the research questions. Divine providence is handled in a highly articulate fashion throughout this sermon, even as he transitions themes. John has his focus set not so much upon the current crisis but upon eternal destinies and the implications for Christian living. Keeping a sound eschatology, John is able to bring a message of hope to a tragic situation.

John does not allow his congregation to excuse themselves but brings corporate responsibility to their attention, both as Christians and as citizens. Community is not defined narrowly, but envisioning the role of a church impacting the polis, John draws a wide definition, inviting the faithful to participate in it. Welding together scriptural passages and illustrations with the text of the day, John not only speaks to the urgency of their current situation but to their eternal possibilities as well. A message of hope is balanced by one of trust, not in the ephemeral but in the eternal. David G. Hunter states, “As we would expect an effective preacher to do, he puts the experience of his hearers into the context of biblical stores, hoping they will interpret their experience within that

narrative framework” (123). John, in creative fashion, links together in this sermon his Lenten theme with an interpretation of current experience, leading to a call both to astute political action and faith in Christ, and he leads people to the table at the conclusion of his sermon.

Summary

Undoubtedly, John was one of the greatest orators of his age. By his own testimony, crowds flocked to hear him. Nevertheless, John’s significance for this study lies not in his rhetorical skills but as a preacher-theologian.

Research question 1. John continually sought to define his community, both negatively against heresy and positively within the context of society, calling the community to be a witness to God’s grace. In the second sermon on the statues, John reminds the hearers, “For this too is a thing in which it behooves the Christian to differ from the unbelievers, the bearing of all things nobly; and through hope of the future, soaring above the attack of human evils” (Schaff 9: 346). John’s ability to form community emerges from his commitment both to the Nicene interpretation of Scripture, and his fundamental belief in the Church as the called out people of God.

Research question 2. John’s understanding of hope came from a deep-seated belief in Scripture as the Word of God, and he was nothing if not an exegete of the Word. Old writes, “John Chrysostom, faithfully practicing the methods of the School of Antioch, has been recognized not only as the greatest preacher the Church has ever produced, but also as one of the most reliable interpreters of Scripture in antiquity” (2: 170). Using both historical-grammatical exegesis and a trinitarian interpretative framework, John became an exemplar of good exposition. John clearly understood the Spirit to be both the inspirer of the written Word and the teacher of his people today. In

one of his Genesis series, he says, “Come, now, let us see what is today the blessed Moses is teaching us though the text we read, or rather what the grace of the Spirit has to say to us all through his tongue” (Halton 106).

Research question 3. John demonstrates the possibility of the use of doctrine not only to frame an understanding of experience but, in the end, to define that experience. John continually turns his congregation’s attention towards a divine perspective, allowing them to see clearly what the issue is, together with the resources God has placed at their disposal. Speaking to the catechumens, John reminds them, “we should never despair, but so long as we are here, should have good hopes and should lay hold on what is before us, and hasten towards the prize of our high calling of God” (Schaff 10: 165).

Research question 4. One can also recognize that John did not believe a sermon to be complete without a truth claim to which to respond. Time and gain John urges immediate response. “Tell me this. If you were to see your neighbor’s house engulfed in flames, even if he were your bitterest enemy, would you not run to quench the fire” (Dressler 130). Bush confirms John’s call for a response:

He never seems satisfied until he has made some earnest appeal to the hearts of his hearers. He is not content with their simple appreciation or recognition of the arguments he may lay before them, or with their earnestness in following the oratorical appeals which he may make. His intense desire was that by means of his preaching they should become better men and women, better citizens, better fathers and mothers, better husbands and wives, better sons and daughters. His great aim was to impress the truths of religion deeply in their hearts and consciences so that the fruits of the faith might be seen in the daily Christian work and conversation. (115-16)

John was, in Charry’s words, an aretegenic preacher, with a tender pastoral heart in his appeal. Edwards remarks, “What he sought in his scriptural study, and certainly what he wished to leave with his congregation, was moral and spiritual guidance to help them live

the Christian life” (80).

Further findings. Several other things also became apparent during this study. Although neither of the sermons selected in this research project used the *lectio continua*, this method was nevertheless John’s general practice. John was neither tied to a lectionary nor a slave to his own whims but sought to proclaim truth in a systematic and continual fashion.

Kelly notes his clarity of diction, picturesque imagery, and ability to touch both the hearts and minds of his listeners with conviction and passion (82-85). Referring to John’s habit in the Hagia Sophia of preaching from a lectern rather than from his throne Kelly writes, “[I]t is also highly likely that he wished to establish a close personal rapport with his hearers, looking them in the eyes as he spoke” (130). John’s extemporaneous approach would have been significant in this regard.

Perhaps most significantly, John’s contextual awareness shaped his preaching. John understood the complexity of Christian witness in a pluralistic city and sought to equip the church in this mission. Using language as his tool, John discovered how to communicate truth even to a deeply divided church. John grasped hold of the thought patterns of his day, such as the hierarchy of heavenly beings, and both used and baptized them in his ministry.

John was both a preacher and a theologian, offering profound insights into the practice of doctrinal preaching today.

Augustine of Hippo

Aurelius Augustinus was born in Thagaste, Numidia (present day Algeria), on 13 November 354 to Patricius, a pagan, and Monica, a Latin Christian. Well educated, though never more than a catechumen in the catholic Church, Augustine joined the

Manichees in 373, believing in a higher form of Christianity. There Augustine remained, living a fairly wild lifestyle, until 383, when he left his position as professor of rhetoric at Carthage for a similar position in Rome. Augustine then held various similar positions, including at Milan and at the court of the emperor, Valentinian II, bringing him into contact with Ambrose and Neoplatonism (Friend 212-16).

It was in 386, when Augustine considered himself to be more of a Platonist than anything else that he had his conversion experience while reading Romans 13:13-14. Augustine was baptized the following year by Ambrose and returned to Africa in 388. There Augustine was ordained priest in Hippo in 391, becoming bishop in 396. Augustine served in this position until his death on 28 August 430, shortly before the invasion of the city (Friend 212-13).

Selection Criteria

From this brief historical sketch, one can recognize that the influences of Manichaeism, Neoplatonism, and orthodox Christianity were to have a profound impact upon the thought, theology, and ministry of Augustine. Augustine was a profound thinker and theologian who left a lasting legacy, both in terms of impact and his written corpus, to the Church.

During his tenure in Hippo, Augustine inherited the Donatist controversy, which had already been raging for eighty-five years prior to his election as bishop. The issues, as ever, were complex and often more to do with reprisals than theology. Both Augustine and the catholic Church rejected the Donatist position regarding the purity of the church and its pastors and thus held them not to be in communion with Rome. Furthermore, the controversy resulted in different approaches to the sacraments, particularly how those baptized by the other group should be treated (Friend 214-15).

Later in life Augustine was to face the teaching of the Pelagian, Celestius, who had arrived in Africa in 410, following the sack of Rome. Both Augustine's contribution to the debate and the controversy itself, which extended well beyond his death, have made a lasting impression upon the Western Church, bringing him within the selection criteria of this study. T. Kermit Scott states, "It is probably not too much to say that he is unmatched as an ideological force in western civilization" (230).

As one considers Augustine one notes that it was not only the future of the Church that was in some doubt but the empire also. During Augustine's lifetime Rome was sacked by Alaric in 410, and shortly after his own death, Hippo was overrun. In this world of great uncertainty, the great pastor-theologian led and guided his flock.

Augustine dealt with these issues, not only in doctrinal treatises but also in his preaching to the local congregation. At heart, Augustine was a pastor to his flock, a position Bernardin compares to that of the senior pastor of the larger church today (59). Augustine was a regular and frequent preacher who left a rich legacy of sermonic material.

De Doctrina Christiana

In 397 Augustine composed the first three books of De Doctrina Christiana, the final book being added in 426 (Schaff 2: 519-97). Given the significance of this work for Augustine's understanding of preaching, it deserves to be considered in some detail.

His purpose in writing is stated at the close of Book 4:

I have in these four books striven to depict not the sort of man I am myself (for my defects are very many), but the sort of man he ought to be who desires to labor in sound, that is, Christian doctrine, not for his own instruction only, but for that of others also. (Schaff 2: 597)

Augustine begins his presentation by dividing the task into two components,

namely, interpretation, and proclamation. In both instances Augustine has in mind the triune God because learning to love God is also to love one's neighbor for God's sake.³

"No one is to be loved as a sinner; and every man is to be loved as a man for God's sake; but God is to be loved for his own sake" (Schaff 2: 530).

Augustine understands, as did Chrysostom, that God has condescended to reveal himself in Christ, in the Scriptures, and in preaching. Michael Pasquarello writes, "Augustine wrote this work as a bishop of the church, hoping to equip pastors for the practice of interpretation and communicating Scripture so as to enable their congregations to embody the pattern of faith and obedience given in the Word of God" ("St. Augustine" 1). Augustine was little interested in information but passionate about transformation. "Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this two-fold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought" (Schaff 2: 533). Here one can see the interconnectedness in his thought of theology and pastoral practice.

Book 2 moves to the specifics of language, and here one also sees Augustine's Platonism more clearly. He distinguishes between appearance and reality, the sign and the thing signified. Problems then arise when the signs in themselves are either unknown or unclear. That being the case, Augustine advocates certain rules of interpretation. First, any passage ought to be interpreted in the light of Scripture as a whole. Second, an understanding of the original languages would prove helpful. Third, a liberal education would further resource the preacher. Here Augustine mentions history, the natural sciences, logic, and rhetoric. Augustine writes, "[I]f those who are called philosophers,

³ This theme is taken up at considerable length in The Enchiridion (Schaff 3: 275-80).

and especially the Platonists, have said ought that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it” (Schaff 2: 554).

The third book deals with difficulties in interpretation, specifically *tropes*, that is, figurative expressions. Augustine cautions, “[W]e must beware of taking a figurative expression literally” (Schaff 2: 559), something at times he fails to observe. Of course, one may ask, could you know if a sign is figurative. Augustine’s answer is to consider both sound doctrine, that is, in the light of all of Scripture and the law of love, both for God and neighbor. If no literal sense can be derived in this way, then a sign is probably figurative. Nevertheless, Augustine cautions against becoming simplistic in this approach to interpretation. In a remark of which James Barr would be proud, Augustine states, “[W]e are not to suppose there is any rule that what a thing signifies by similitude in one place is to be taken to signify in all other places” (566). Context is everything.

Having dealt with the issues surrounding interpretation, Augustine in Book 4 moves on to consider proclamation:

It is the duty, then, of the interpreter and teacher of Holy Scripture, the defender of the true faith and the opponent of error, both to teach what is right and to refute what is wrong, and in the performance of this task to conciliate the hostile, to rouse the careless, to tell the ignorant both what is occurring at present and what is probable in the future. (Schaff 2: 576)

Theology and pastoral practice continue to go hand in hand. Rhetoric, on the other hand, is merely a handmaiden and one that is best learned by observation for wisdom is always more important than eloquence. In fact, Augustine’s first principle in this regard is perspicuity. “[A] strong desire for clearness sometimes leads to neglect of the more polished forms of speech, and indifference about what sounds well, compared with what

clearly expresses and conveys the meaning intended” (Schaff 2: 582).⁴ As a corollary, delivery must be spontaneous since the preacher will need to explain until he or she is certain the congregation has understood. Old comments, “Here, a thousand years before the Protestant Reformation, one easily detects the guiding principle of the Protestant plain style” (2: 395).

The second principle one may call “preaching to the whole person.” Augustine takes the time to summarize Cicero’s position that in an address the speaker needs to teach, delight, and move. What is said appeals to the intelligence, while the way it is said, both in beauty and persuasiveness, will result in action. Just as “the hearer must be pleased in order to secure his attention, so he must be persuaded in order to move him to action” (Schaff 2: 583). Edwards comments, “While all have their purpose in preaching, the ultimate goal is conversion, and thus the grand style for moving is the most crucial” (108). The speaker must address the mind, the emotions, and the will, taking into account the audience and their capacity.⁵ Without a response to truth, all is lost. “For what does it profit a man that he both confesses the truth and praises the eloquence, if he does not yield his consent” (Schaff 2: 584).

Augustine’s third principle is prayer because only as the speaker is entirely dependent upon God can the Spirit speak through him:

And so, our Christian orator, while he says what is just, and holy, and good (and he ought never to say anything else), does all he can to be heard with intelligence, with pleasure, and with obedience, and he need not doubt that if he succeed in this object, and so far as he succeeds he will succeed more by piety in prayer than by gifts of oratory, and so he ought

⁴ Augustine goes on to cite Cicero: “*Quaedam etiam negligentia estdiligen*” (Schaff 2: 582). The translation would be “a kind of careful negligence.”

⁵ In *De Magistro* Augustine writes, “I would have to *frame* [original emphasis] the question in a way suited to your capacity to hear that Teacher who teaches from within” (Peebles 55). This understanding of the Holy Spirit as the true Teacher will be expanded upon by Aquinas.

to pray for himself, and for those he is about to address, before he attempts to speak. (Schaff 2: 584-85)

Finally, Augustine touches upon the issue of authenticity. Commenting upon 1 Timothy 4:12 he says, “The life of the speaker will count for more in securing the hearer’s compliance” (Schaff 2: 595). Thus, Pasquarello states rhetoric is a double-edge sword:

Augustine warns that rhetoric must be seen for what it is, a technology of the word, an art, a technique that can be used for good or ill. A combination of persuasive power and moral indifference can indeed make it a dangerous tool. Thus preaching that is shaped by rhetoric and for rhetorical effectiveness can easily follow the drift of popular art forms and become mere entertainment. Shorn of depth of character, habits, and dispositions created by careful attention to the triune God in the church’s worship, and Scripture, preachers can very easily accommodate the gospel to cater to the whims of listeners. (“St. Augustine” 9)

Preaching Ministry

In a fashion similar to Chrysostom, Augustine prepared thoroughly for his sermons but preached extemporaneously, with notes being taken by a stenographer. Unfortunately for modern researchers the quality of these notes vary from relatively full texts to the briefest summaries. Apparently Augustine did not consider the necessity to “finish” his sermons for publication. Old remarks, “This very relaxed approach is not what wins the senior preaching prize, but it does meet the spiritual needs of the Church, and it was at this that Augustine aimed” (2: 345).

The majority of Augustine’s sermons are expository, and over nine hundred survive to this day. Augustine liked to preach in series, working on the Psalms, for example, from 392 until 418.

Sermon 1

The first sermon chosen for study comes from his series on John’s Gospel. A total

of 124 sermons are available for study in this series, although only fifty are full reports. The series in question was preached around 416 and demonstrates Augustine's continued effort to deal with the Donatist controversy within his community. The controversy had raged for over two generations and would continue past Augustine's time. The church in North Africa was split into two camps, with Augustine leading the charge for the catholic church.

The sermon selected from the series, number 12, deals with the issue of baptism, one of the major flashpoints in the controversy. The Scripture text is John 3:16-21 (Schaff 7: 81-86). Congregants needed to know whose baptism was valid and why, as well as what would happen were a person to switch allegiances:

One of the beauties of Augustine's sermons on the Gospel of John is that they show us how one of the most profound theological thinkers the Church has ever produced preached theology to a very average, very provincial sort of congregation. (Old 2: 348)

Augustine opens by acknowledging his hearers and, in particular, the large crowd that has gathered. Then, moving right to the heart of the matter, reminds them that just as physical birth happens only once, so too spiritual regeneration can happen only once. A person can only be baptized once, even if that happens in schism. With a touch of allegory, from which Augustine never fully freed himself, he cites the examples of Jacob and Esau, to which he returns repeatedly. Augustine's point is that the sons of Jacob and a bondwoman were made heirs, while the sons of Esau, himself born of a free woman, were not.

Baptism was no small matter to Augustine, echoing the biblical position that those who are born again ought to be baptized. With great use of imagery, Augustine states, "They must be born again of water, and of the Spirit; the Church that is in travail with

them must bring them forth” (Schaff 7: 82).

Naturally, the question of who has been baptized legitimately arises. Augustine recognizes this issue with a flurry of rhetorical questions designed to capture the hearers’ thought process and further draw them into the debate: Who is born of the bondwoman? Will this mean that they too might be disinherited? Taking a swipe at the Donatists, who insisted that the sacraments are only efficacious if administered by priests of the utmost piety, Augustine blusters against them:

Let him that is baptized by holy men still beware lest he be not a Jacob but an Esau. This would I say then, brethren, it is better to be baptized by men that seek their own and love the world, which is what the name of bondwoman imports, and to be spiritually seeking the inheritance of Christ, so as to be as it were a son of Jacob by a bondwoman, than to be baptized by holy men and to become proud, so as to be an Esau to be cast out, though born of a free woman. (Schaff 7: 82)

One needs to pause and understand exactly what Augustine is saying in this passage. He does not question the piety of the Donatist priests, nor the baptism administered by them as such, but he does address matters of the heart, of intention and desire, recognizing that one is born both of water and the Spirit. The challenge comes directly to his congregation to examine their own hearts, lest they, too, be found out to be “an Esau.”

Since Christians are born of the Spirit, they need to know how they can hear the Spirit’s voice, and here Augustine turns immediately to Scripture. Of course, Nicodemus heard the audible words of Jesus, but did not understand them. Jesus even inquires, “Don’t you know?”, not to scorn the great teacher, but to expose the issue of humility. Referring to Psalm 34:18 Augustine remarks, “Jesus pulled down his pride that he might be born of the Spirit” (Schaff 7: 83). Augustine continues by showing Jesus to be the very picture of humility, as outlined in Philippians 2:6-8.

In a masterful turn, Augustine has taken the issue of baptism, so pertinent to his congregation, and brought it into a Christological focus. Augustine now draws parallels between the two natures of Christ and the physical and spiritual births of believers. Without pressing the analogy too far, he concludes, “God has willed to be the Son of Man, and willed men to be the sons of God. He came down for our sakes; let us ascend for His sake” (Schaff 7: 84). Augustine continues by considering the Christian hope, located in the death and resurrection of Christ. Pausing for a moment to explain the symbolism of Moses and the brazen serpent, he continues to explore the issue of hope:

Shall I hesitate to utter that which the Lord has deigned to do for me? Is not Christ the life? And yet Christ hung on the cross. Is not Christ the life? And yet Christ was dead. But in Christ’s death, death died. Life dead slew death; the fullness of life swallowed up death; death was absorbed in the body of Christ. (85)

While the rhetoric in this passage might be impressive, the depth of Augustine’s theological insight is even more so. Having drawn Christology to the fore, Augustine has located salvation and the Christian hope in the objective reality of the Atonement, placing the whole question of baptism within a much larger frame of reference. It is not only the Donatists who need to be reminded of this connection. Augustine drives the point home to his congregation with an evangelistic appeal to turn to Christ as the Great Physician who has come to heal the sick. Again, with profound insight, Augustine reminds his flock that Christ has come to save. Those who refuse judge themselves.

Using rhetorical questions once more to capture the moment and the attention of his audience, Augustine probes the issue as to why only some believe: Why do some love light, and others darkness? If everyone is a sinner, and Christ died for everyone, then why are not all saved? His continual piling up of questions leads to a much-anticipated answer. Some love their sin, while others confess it to God. Christ is ready to forgive

those who will turn to him. With this thought on forgiveness, Augustine brings his sermon to its conclusion, appealing to his congregation to examine their hearts, to confess their sins, and to turn in faith to Christ. Recognizing the diversity of his hearers, Augustine concludes, “The path of this life, however, is troublesome, full of temptations: in prosperity, let it not lift us up; in adversity, let it not crush us” (Schaff 7: 86).

In this sermon Augustine has defined his community against an alternate, not so much by their practices, in this case baptism, as by doctrine. Despite strong words uttered elsewhere, in this particular sermon one sees Augustine’s pastoral concern both for his own community and those outside, with less time spent on condemnation than on appealing for people to turn to Christ. Augustine stays with his text throughout but amplifies and illustrates well with his commanding grasp of Scripture. He shows himself to be a faithful exegete, even if given to allegory at times. Moreover, Augustine allows his creedal framework to guide his interpretation of Scripture. This particular sermon relates to the ongoing controversy within the church and surrounding community, and in it Augustine allows his hearers to gain fresh insight into their situation by casting it in the light of the Incarnation and Atonement, thus creating a new perspective on an age-old problem. In doing so, Augustine presses home the evangelical truth claim that invites people to repent, to receive the gift of faith, and to be baptized.

Sermon 2

The second sermon chosen comes from Augustine’s series on the first Epistle of John. This Johannine selection was a ten-sermon series preached in the week following Easter, sometime close to when Augustine preached his series on the Gospel of John. It can, therefore, be located in the early 400s. The series was selected because, although it does not necessarily reflect a particular controversy or incident, it provides one of

Augustine's clearest introductions to the Christian life, having been designed as catechetical instruction for the newly baptized believers at Easter. Augustine's theme throughout is Christian love, and in expounding upon it one can discover his masterful hermeneutic as he moves between Scripture and congregation.

Sermon 3 was selected because of its theological content and its reflection of the ongoing Donatist issues in the background. The Scripture text is 1 John 2:18-27 (Schaff 7: 475-81).

Augustine commences by recognizing that just as no one can grow spiritually against his or her own will, so too people are reborn, at least in part, by their own will. "No man is "born of water and the Spirit" except he be willing" (Schaff 7: 476). That being said, Augustine wonders why then they would choose not to grow.

Turning to a favorite metaphor, Augustine details how Christians may be nourished with the Church as their mother and the two testaments of Scripture for her breasts. Growth begins with milk, which Augustine understands to be Christ in his humility, revealed as Son of Man. Nevertheless, growth requires that one move on to stronger meat, a Pauline analogy, and this meat is the understanding of Christ in his divinity, that is, coequal with the Father as God the Son.

Before moving into his exposition Augustine chooses to explore this thought further by contemplating why the risen Christ would not allow Mary to touch him in the garden. After all, others not only touched him but, like Thomas, were invited to do so. With a flurry of rhetorical questions, he peaks his hearers' interest, reminding them that this issue is significant, for to be sure, women were the first messengers of the resurrection.

The answer given, with some exegetical license, is to discern the distinction

between a physical touch, concerned only with Christ's humanity, and a spiritual touch, which understands his coequality with the Father. While Augustine's exegesis might be open to some question, no doubt exists as to his doctrinal intent, insisting upon the Nicene confession of Jesus as equal with the Father.

Noting that the last days are these present days, Augustine now turns to the text and the issue of Antichrists, whom he defines as heretics and schismatics. Commenting upon verse 19 that they "went out," Augustine notes that since they went out they were never part of the true Church. If they had been of the true Church, then they would not have gone out. With his typical flair for the dramatic Augustine regards their departure like vomit, which enables the Church to feel better after they have gone.

Continuing to press home his point, Augustine notes that Christ is the truth, whereas those who are Antichrist are liars. He cuts them no slack. "He [John] hath not said that some lie is of the truth. Mark the sentence. Do not fondle yourselves, do not flatter yourselves, do not deceive yourselves, do not cheat yourselves: "No lie is of the truth"" (Schaff 7: 478). Those schismatics who leave the true Church are Antichrist and prove this by their lies.

Again, Augustine returns to rhetorical questions, anticipating the internal dialog of his readers. The Donatists also affirm Jesus is Lord, so, how can one possibly decide who is telling the truth. By way of reply, he comes back to the biblical text, asking "Who left whom?" Since the Donatists went out, they are Antichrist.

Schism, for Augustine, is more than a breach in fellowship, more than an alternate liturgical style, more than a differing doctrinal emphasis. Schism is dividing the body of Christ. "[If] we be in unity, what means it that there are two altars in this city? What that there are divided houses, divided marriages? That there is a common bed and a divided

Christ?" (Schaff 7: 478). As in the first sermon considered above, Augustine again comes back to the Christological import of the matter in hand.

Much as Augustine might preach against the schismatics, his attention does not remain there. Obviously by their actions the Donatists are liars, since they went out. Citing Titus 1:16 he reminds the church that deeds are more significant than words. He then wonders about those in the true church. To press home the point, Augustine lists a number of vices contrary to Scripture, noting that these too make a person Antichrist. One cannot possibly deny the Son of God in his or her actions and yet hope to worship the Father in church.

Recognizing that God's promises are to those who remain faithful, Augustine reminds his hearers of their eternal destinies, the possibilities of eternal life, and eternal fire. With that warning in mind he comes to his conclusion, relying on the Holy Spirit to drive his message home and appealing to the congregation to allow Christ to rule in their hearts:

The sound of our words strikes the ears, the Master is within. Do not suppose that any man learns ought from man. For we can admonish by the sound of our voice; if there be not One within that shall teach, vain is the noise we make. (Schaff 7: 481)

This brief sermon to catechumens is an outstanding example of being able to ask the right questions and of anticipating the questions of the audience. Once again, Augustine is concerned with defining and defending his community in their true faith and uses Scripture as his main weapon. Both utilizing the text and drawing together alternate passages, Augustine builds up tension and pressure in his relentless argument that schism and personal morality and behavior ultimately have to do with the body of Christ. These new believers are going to face difficult choices, both personally as they face temptation

and as a community of faith struggling to understand their identity in Christ. Augustine is determined that they learn to face these challenges aware of the theological significances of both words and actions and, more importantly, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Preached after both the Councils of Nicaea and of Constantinople, Augustine affirms the creedal understanding for both the second and third Persons of the Godhead. Augustine calls these new believers to a life of wholehearted devotion to Christ, and to obedience to the Spirit within.

Summary

Augustine was both an orator and theologian of the first order. As a pastor and preacher, Augustine also deserves praise.

Research question 1. As the shepherd of a flock deeply divided, Augustine refused to minimize the significance of what had caused division. In his sermons, at least, Augustine avoided all unnecessary issues in the Donatist controversy and labored to help his congregation understand the significance of community in the light of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man. Community was not to be preserved for its own sake but for God's, a theme to which Augustine returns time and again in his works. Christians love others for the sake of God. Christians love God for his own sake.

Research question 2. Augustine's call to community came from his deep appreciation for Scripture, as he stood under its authority. Augustine knew well his responsibilities as preacher and deliberately interpreted the Word in the light of the creedal statements handed to him. His ultimate interpretative tool, coming from Christ himself, was the law of love—love of God and love of neighbor for God's sake.

Although rhetoric was not Augustine's focus, he understood the responsibility of proclamation. "There are two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the

mode of ascertaining the proper meaning, and the mode of making known the meaning when it is ascertained” (Schaff 2: 522). Primarily though, the Holy Spirit was the ultimate

Preacher:

[For] Augustine the homiletical moment was different from the rhetorical moment precisely because, despite the power of eloquent words, they could not of themselves move a human soul out of darkness and into light. Such a move took a significantly greater word, the Word made flesh. (Bates 2)

Research question 3. In the sermons examined, Augustine sought to help the church and the newly baptized to understand and interpret their current experiences not so much as conflict in itself but as a matter of both theological and eternal significance. Augustine’s sheer love for God and others shines through, even in polemical passages. T. Bates notes, “It was this shared humanity that made his sermons so filled with humble exhortations for his hearers to be reformed and to reform” (6).

Research question 4. Augustine, drawing upon his rhetorical heritage from Cicero, sought not only to inform or to move but also to gain the response of the whole person. His sermons are filled with calls to respond to the truth of God’s Word, both to those outside and within the Church. Augustine sought to engage the mind and marshal the emotions, all with a view to allow the Holy Spirit to move the will. Edwards comments, “Often the congregation would break into applause, but, like Chrysostom, Augustine was more interested in changed lives” (111).

Further findings. Old provides a very able summary of Augustine as a preacher (2: 362-65). He tackled the great questions of life, leaving the trivia to others. A sense of divine authority was present in Augustine’s message and masterful handling of the Scriptures. He was continually involved in a dialog with this congregation, both anticipating and precipitating it, particularly with his use of rhetorical questions.

Augustine's speech was simple but effective, with variety and vitality in his preaching.

One may note, too, that Augustine was fond of series and preached extemporaneously, so as to be in direct contact with his congregation. Authenticity of life and preaching was vital to the preacher, and this authenticity Augustine modeled effectively in Hippo.

Finally, one must recall Augustine's ultimate hermeneutic: love of God and others for God's sake. Augustine, too, had a heart to see people transformed. Indeed, this goal of personal transformation was how he understood the Creed:

These words which you have heard [the creed] are in the Divine Scriptures scattered up and down: but thence gathered and reduced into one, that the memory of slow persons might not be distressed; that every person may be able to say, able to hold, what he believes. (Schaff 3: 369)

Thomas Aquinas

If John Chrysostom is considered more of a preacher than a theologian, then surely Thomas Aquinas must be considered more of a theologian than a preacher. While his theological output was both comprehensive and magnificent, his preaching legacy is slight. Nevertheless, Aquinas was a brother in the Order of Preachers and has much to teach the contemporary preacher.

Aquinas was born around 1225 or 1226 in Roccasecca, Italy, to a pro-imperial aristocratic family. Aquinas' parents, Landulf and Theodora, in keeping with the customs of the time, offered him to the Church, and in 1231 he went to the boarding school run by the Benedictine monks of Monte Cassino. Showing great promise at age fifteen, Aquinas went to the *stadium generale* of Emperor Frederick II in Naples where he was introduced to Aristotelian thought. In 1243, much to the consternation of his family, Aquinas joined the Order of Preachers, which had been founded by Dominic (1171-1221) (Nichols 22-

25).

After a period of struggle with his family, including both his abduction and attempted seduction by a prostitute, Aquinas was given permission to follow his calling and in 1246 went to Paris for further study. After a brief period in Cologne, where he was ordained in 1251, Aquinas returned to Paris as a teacher, eventually becoming a master at the Sorbonne in 1256. There his duties were threefold: *legere*, to comment upon Scripture, *disputare*, scholarly disputation, and *predicare*, preaching (Nichols 26-28).

Around 1259 or 1260, Aquinas returned to Italy as a preacher with his order and began working on the *Summa Contra Gentiles*. His preaching ministry was confirmed by his appointment as *lector* at the priory of Orvieto in 1261. Aquinas' next assignment took him to Rome in 1265, where he was both able to study and continue writing. He did refuse the archbishopric of Naples at this time, preferring his calling as preacher and scholar. Another brief sojourn in Paris followed and finally a return to Naples in 1272, where Aquinas remained until his death in 1274. Aquinas was canonized in 1325 and proclaimed a Doctor of the Church in 1567 (Nichols 35). At the first canonization enquiry, John of Buiano gave testimony that "[Thomas] was continually occupied with reading, writing, praying, or preaching" (qtd. in Foster 117).

Selection Criteria

Of Aquinas' theological acumen no doubt exists. Richard Woods remarks, "With the exception of St. Augustine, no single individual has had the pronounced influence on Christian theology as the quiet Italian friar once dubbed "the dumb Ox" by his fellow students and known to the world as Thomas Aquinas" (59). His theology marked a transition to new forms of thinking, noting the importance of philosophy for theological work. Aquinas was certain that a unity of divine truth exists and humans can have a sure

knowledge of God.

Aquinas' influence has been profound. David Luscome writes, "Of all the medieval thinkers Thomas Aquinas ... is the best known and has been the most studied in the modern world" (99). This ubiquity was partly due to Aquinas' varied ministry in France, Germany, and Italy, but primarily through his extensive writings.

Nevertheless, in this study Aquinas is considered as a preacher. Old comments, "A reading of his sermons leads one to wonder on just what basis he has been denied a significant place in the history of preaching. His collection of catechetical sermons is certainly a stellar example of this homiletical genre" (3: 408-09). Essentially, Aquinas was an itinerant preacher, serving faithfully, particularly as an evangelist, in the various places he was sent by his order.

Aquinas ministered in turbulent times. The first urbanization of Europe was already underway, as was the proto-renaissance brought about by the rediscovery of Aristotle. Aquinas ministered in relatively difficult times:

Certainly, one cannot appreciate fully the kind of stability that Aquinas' theology and philosophical investigations introduced into the world of Christian thought without bearing in mind the turbulence that marked the social, political, and ecclesiastical milieus during his lifetime. (Cessario 2)

The changes within the Church and its ministry from the patristic era were pronounced. Old highlights several for us (3: xv-xx). First, the Church had considerable difficulty in interpreting Scripture. Distance in both time and place made exegesis of the ancient texts more arduous, as did language barriers and the accretion of additional interpretative methodologies. Second, preachers had come to rely upon the liturgical calendar, raising the profile of festal preaching to the diminishing of book-by-book exposition. Third, with the new monastical orders came the development of new homiletical genres, such as the

spiritual catechism as practiced by Bernard of Clairvaux and the Lenten preaching mission as a form of evangelism as practiced by Bernadino de Siena. Finally, a new rhetoric also emerged within the preaching orders, one that has survived to this day. A colorful introduction followed by several clearly stated points, all well illustrated, and drawn together at the end with an impassioned conclusion is a typical sermonic format.

Other Writings

Aquinas did not produce a preaching manual, though he did comment on the matter at times in his other works. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Aquinas refers to his duty to preach. “I am aware that I owe this to God as the chief duty of my life, that my every word and sense may speak of him” (62). Mary Ann Fatula refers to an act of unrestrained love for God on the part of Aquinas: “[T]he more we know, the more we love; and the more we love, the more we have to *speak* [original emphasis] about the God we love” (Thomas Aquinas 181). This love grew out of an intimate relationship Aquinas had with his Lord.

Aquinas was particularly aware of his dependence upon the Holy Spirit as the true Preacher. In his 1256 inaugural address as Master at Paris, Aquinas drew the analogy of the preacher as an overflowing river disseminating what comes down from above, therefore, preachers ought to pray for the Spirit to rain upon them (Fatula, Thomas Aquinas 188). Fatula clarifies Aquinas’ understanding of God as teacher of the human heart:

Anyone who has ever tried to share God’s Word with others only to see it fall on deaf ears knows that we are *called* [original emphasis] preachers and teachers, but we cannot truly teach others. We can only speak the word of truth exteriorly, to the ears of others. God alone can teach them *interiorly* [original emphasis], by speaking to their hearts. (188)

In his own words, Aquinas explains his thinking:

[T]he teacher only brings exterior help, as the physician who heals: but just as interior nature is the principal cause of healing, so the interior light of the intellect is the principal cause of knowledge. But both of these are from God. (Summa Theologica 178-79)

Commenting upon this passage Aidan Nichols writes, “[T]he *divine Teacher* [original emphasis] knows what he is teaching, and in *sacra doctrina* it is his knowledge that is impressed on human minds by faith” (171). In other words, by action of the Holy Spirit one comes to share in the divine knowledge, a participated knowledge somewhat along the lines advocated by Polanyi.

Aquinas’ commentary upon Psalm 18 also provides additional insight into his understanding of preaching and doctrine. In the commentary on Psalm 18 he outlines three impediments to preaching doctrine (“Psalm 18”). The first impediment is the limitation of human understanding. Citing Paul in 1 Corinthians 3:1-2 Aquinas writes, “Not all things are preached to all people, but clear things to those who are clear, holy things to those who are holy, and great things to those who are great” (6). Second, he mentions the variety and use of language and its interpretation. In a passage somewhat reminiscent of Augustine, Aquinas refers to different uses of language:

There is a humble way in which we speak in common; another way when our speech is colorful; and another when our speech is merely ornate. The first way is right for one who is teaching; the second way is right for one who is seeking to delight his hearers; and the Apostles spoke in all of these modes. (7)

Finally, diversity and sheer distance can be a problem for proclamation, something with which Aquinas was familiar throughout his entire traveling ministry.

Preaching Ministry

Unfortunately, few of Aquinas’ sermons have survived, and those that have are in the form of the briefest of reports, known as *reportationes*, leading Old to remark, “[O]ne

sees the magnificent structure, but the oratorical colors and rhetorical patina have long ago been lost” (3: 409). Further complicating matters is that only a few of those sermons have been translated into English.

Of those sermons that have survived and been translated, his catechetical sermons are among the finest. These catechetical sermons were preached during his final assignment in Naples during the Lenten season of 1273 at San Domenico Majori. The Lenten series consists of four parts, namely, thirty-one sermons on the Ten Commandments, two on the Hail Mary, eleven on the Lord’s Prayer, and fifteen on the Apostle’s Creed. Old comments, “What we have here is the *Suma Theologica* in pulpit form” (3: 409).

Two of the sermons on the creed have been selected for study. Part of the reason for this choice was necessity, that is, the limited availability of material. These sermons indicate those things that Aquinas thought essential for the laity to understand. Furthermore, as was stated by John Coppa at the first canonization enquiry regarding this final period of ministry in Naples, “There was such a devotion to him at Naples that almost the whole city came to every sermon” (qtd. in Foster 116).

Sermon 1

The first sermon selected, “What is Faith?” comes first in the Lenten series, and serves as the introduction to all that will follow.

Aquinas begins by stating the absolute necessity of faith. “The first thing that is necessary for every Christian is faith, without which no one is truly called a faithful Christian” (“What Is Faith” 1). While one may have no idea how Aquinas might possibly have introduced his sermon, it is certain that he was determined to get to the heart of the matter quickly.

Aquinas moves on to outline four effects of faith. First, the soul is united to God. Here Aquinas picks up on a common medieval mystical theme, and draws the analogy of marriage, making excellent use of a quotation from Hosea 2:20. In order to press matters further for his hearers, most, if not all, of whom would have considered themselves at least notionally Christian, Aquinas continues, “Baptism without faith is of no value” (“What Is Faith” 1), citing Mark 16:16 and Romans 14:23 as his authority. While his statement may not be quite what one might expect of a medieval Catholic monk, it does demonstrate both the profound insight that Aquinas had as to the heart of the Christian faith and his evangelical zeal.

The second effect of faith is that eternal life is already begun because eternal life is to know God. Quoting John 17:3 Aquinas reminds his hearers that eternal life begins with faith here on earth and is perfected when we shall see God face-to-face. Quoting John 20:29, he assures his hearers of God’s blessing even though they have not yet seen him.

The third effect is that faith brings right direction to human lives because after all, the just shall live by faith. Here one can discern, albeit briefly, Aquinas’ aretegenic understanding of sound doctrine. Using sexist language typical of the day, Aquinas remarks that “any old woman” can know how to live through faith in Christ (“What Is Faith” 2).

Finally, faith enables believers to overcome temptation. Citing the traditional sources of temptation, that is, the world, the flesh, and the devil, Aquinas reminds his hearers of the victory that comes through faith in Christ. Though the world may offer prosperity, or cause one to fear adversity, the assurance of a better life to come means that believers can forgo riches and need not fear adversity. The flesh may offer fleeting

pleasure but this pleasure is nothing compared to eternal bliss.

The sermon is not yet done. Aquinas now raises a further question regarding the foolishness of believing what one cannot see. In other words, Aquinas is anticipating some of the questions of his audience and does not necessarily assume that they are in agreement with him. Rather, he hopes to convince his hearers of the importance of faith, even in the face of doubts. Aquinas reminds them of the imperfect state of the human intellect in that people cannot always understand what they see. He cites the humorous example of a philosopher trying to understand a bee. Now, if God is so far beyond human comprehension, as Job 36:26 states, how could one possibly hope to understand God:

[The] intellect of the angels greatly exceeds the intellect of the greatest philosopher as much as that of the greatest philosopher exceeds the intellect of the uneducated man. Therefore, the philosopher is foolish if he refuses to believe what an angel says, and far greater fool to refuse to believe what God says. (“What Is Faith” 3)

The reality is that certitude is not possible. “How could one live unless one believed others?” (Aquinas, “What Is Faith” 3). Even the routine tasks of life would prove impossible without trust. Since no one is trustworthier than God, he is more than worthy of complete trust. God even condescends to prove the truth of the things faith teaches by “his seal,” that is by miracles and the Scriptures (4).

Aquinas inquires as to who can confirm miracles. Rather than debate the point, Aquinas simply asserts the fact of the greatest miracle of all, that is, conversion (“What Is Faith” 4).

Although the text available of this sermon is exceptionally brief, one can gain some insight into Aquinas’ preaching. One can certainly observe the new structural form so favored by the monastical orders, but perhaps more importantly, those things Aquinas considers to be the essentials of faith. In a series on the creed, Aquinas begins not with

the first article but with the *credo*. In a very evangelistic, sermon he not only outlines the purpose and benefits of faith but calls people to conversion. For Aquinas, the definition of community is the community of faith.

Recognizing that any researcher must work with the bare bones of Aquinas' outline, one is encouraged that several of his scriptural references survive. The sermon studied is not an exegetical sermon but one that lives in Scripture, being formed by a scriptural understanding of faith.

Aquinas takes this doctrinal statement from the creed and applies it to the everyday experiences of his hearers, both in their temptations and in their doubts and questions. He does engage in some argument, but primarily he adopts the position of "faith seeking understanding." The proof of faith is to know God, to enter into a relationship with him, and to this relationship Aquinas calls people, pressing home the truth claim of the word *credo*.

Sermon 2

The second sermon chosen also comes from the same Lenten series. It is number 11, entitled "I Believe in the Holy Ghost." This sermon was selected because of the emphasis Aquinas laid upon the Holy Spirit in his understanding of preaching itself, as noted above, with a view to discovering how this understanding played out for him as he taught his congregation about the working of the Spirit in their lives. Furthermore, Aquinas deals with a number of doctrinal controversies as he expounds upon his topic.

Quoting Hebrews 4:12 Aquinas commences by reminding the hearer that God's Word is alive and that it is love. "Now as the Word of God is the Son of God, God's love is the Holy Ghost. Hence, it is that one possesses the Holy Ghost when he loves God" ("I Believe" 1). Aquinas proclaims a relational understanding of the faith.

Five phrases in the creed concern the Holy Spirit and Aquinas indicates that he intends to use these as his outline for exposition of the article. First, the Holy Spirit is “the Lord,” that is God himself. Quoting Hebrews 1:14, John 4:24, and 2 Corinthians 3:17 Aquinas makes a strong case of the coequality of the Spirit within the Godhead. Second, the Spirit is the “life giver” who unites the soul to God through love. Third, he “proceeds,” that is, the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and the Son. Again, stating strongly the creedal interpretation of Scripture, Aquinas affirms the Holy Spirit to be of the same substance as the Father and the Son. Fourth, the Holy Spirit is “adored and glorified” that is, equal to the Father and the Son. Finally, the Spirit “spoke by the prophets.” Quoting 2 Peter 1:21 Aquinas affirms the inspiration of Scripture. Having outlined the positive content of the creedal statement on inspiration, Aquinas moves on to refute errors. First, he counters the error of the Manicheans who deny the Old Testament. The Manichean position cannot be credible because the Spirit spoke through the prophets. Second, he challenges the Montanists who believed that the prophets were beside themselves. The Montanist position is also not true to the Scriptures themselves (“I Believe” 2).

Aquinas moves into the second half of his sermon by outlining the benefits of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. First, coming back to his evangelistic thrust, the Holy Spirit cleanses believers from sin. The Spirit of God repairs the good creation made by God that has been broken by sin. The Spirit is love, and referring to Luke 7:47 and 1 Peter 4:8, Aquinas reminds his hearers that sin is removed by love. Second, the Holy Spirit enlightens the intellect. As Jesus promised, the Spirit teaches believers all things. Third, the Spirit both assists and compels believers to keep the commandments, by placing a new heart within them and enabling them to love God. Fourth, the Spirit

strengthens Christians in the hope of eternal life, being the pledge of their eternal destiny. In a fashion of which Wesley would have approved, Aquinas quotes Romans 8:15-16. Finally, the Holy Spirit counsels believers when they are doubting and teaches them the will of God.

Little remains of the conclusion to this sermon beyond the injunction found in Revelation 2:7, “He that hath an ear let him hear what the Sprit saith to the churches” (Aquinas, “I Believe” 8). One would not be too stretched to see Aquinas turning this statement from Revelation into another appeal to respond to the truth of Scripture.

Aquinas, using Scripture as a whole, and interpreted by the creed, presents a clear understanding of both the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. While Aquinas seeks to clarify the creedal statement to his hearers, his focus is on helping hearers both to experience the life filled by the Spirit and to understand how he may assist them in their daily lives. Doctrine is neither abstract nor absent from Aquinas’ preaching.

Interestingly, one can compare the two sermons examined and come to a deeper understanding of Aquinas’ position on both faith and the Holy Spirit. Aquinas outlines four benefits of faith and five of the ministry of the Holy Spirit (see Figure 4.1).

While no direct overlap regarding cleansing from sin is mentioned, one must be recall that Aquinas comes to this point in his Lenten sermon series having just preached several sermons on the second article of the creed and, secondly, that faith does not cleanse but God does. The clear correlations otherwise shown indicate that in Aquinas’ understanding faith appropriates what Christ has done for people and the Spirit does within people. For Aquinas, a proper Pneumatology was vital for truly understanding and living the life of faith.

Summary

Drawing meaningful conclusions from the sermons of Aquinas is more difficult with so few from which to choose, and the quality of what has survived is minimal. Scholars know little of Aquinas’ rhetoric, beyond his use of structured points, but are given some insight into his homiletical theology.

Research question 1. Aquinas ministered at a time of considerable societal and philosophical change. Within Aquinas own context, Naples was the center of much of that change, having both a secular university and being the source of his introduction to Aristotelian thought. As an evangelist Aquinas came to the city with a passion for people to share in the intimate love relationship that he had with his God. His preaching clearly reflects the commitments seen in his other writings. While not defining community against heresy, Aquinas was defining it in terms of a living relationship with a personal God.

Faith	The Holy Spirit
United to God	Cleanses from sin
Eternal life	Teaches
Teaches	Obedience
Obedience	Eternal life
	Counsels

Figure 4.1. Faith and the Holy Spirit

Research question 2. Aquinas had a high regard for Scripture, and while he was subject to the difficulties of medieval exegetes, including the use of allegory, he

demonstrates his comprehensive grasp of the overarching themes of Scripture. Old says, “One is more impressed by the appropriation of the passages he quotes than by any kind of mechanical proof-texting that is sometimes so annoying in other medieval preachers, or modern preachers for that matter” (3: 436).

While conclusions must be carefully drawn, particularly since both of the sermons selected were creedal expositions, one could fairly say that Aquinas interpreted Scripture within the light of the creed and in a fairly dynamic way, as the analysis of the relationship between faith and the Holy Spirit demonstrates.

Research question 3. One gains little insight from the specifics of the sermons chosen as to circumstances in Naples at the time they were preached or the experiences of Aquinas’ congregants. Given that this sermon was a Lenten one is not surprised that the experience upon which Aquinas chooses to focus is that which his hearers have with Christ himself, calling them to repentance and faith. Undoubtedly, for Aquinas, life was to be interpreted in light of a relationship with God himself.

Research question 4. Nothing of the conclusions to Aquinas’ sermons survives, creating difficulty in determining precisely how he would have drawn his point-format structure to a close with specific application. In the first sermon selected for study Aquinas took the argument about miracles and turned it on its head, posing the greatest miracle of all, conversion, as the solution to the problem. In a sermon on faith, one would not be pressed hard to imagine Aquinas the evangelist making an appeal for his hearers to place their faith in Christ. Likewise, in the second sermon, having outlined the benefits of the Holy Spirit in particularly personal terms, one could imagine Aquinas calling for a personal response.

Further findings. Although dealing with abbreviated accounts of the sermons,

one is impressed with the simple quality of the language, particularly in light of the sheer genius of the man:

To the ordinary faithful he spoke the word of God with singular grace and power, without indulging in far-fetched reasoning or the vanities of worldly wisdom or in the sort of language that serves rather to tickle the curiosity of a congregation than to do it any real good. In his sermons Thomas always used his own mother tongue. (Foster 29)

Aquinas was also able to utilize the thought patterns of the day to communicate to his audience, be it in the form of Aristotelian philosophy or medieval mysticism.

Preaching, for Aquinas, sprang forth from an intense relationship with God. In his commentary on Psalm 18, Aquinas says, “I can say that they [God’s precepts] are sweet, because I have tried them: for I love and experience them. Now, no one can give testimony except he who experiences” (“Psalm 18” 18). Fatula comments, “This is why, for Thomas, we truly preach not simply by saying words, but by sharing with others what is rich within us, what we treasure in our minds and hearts” (Thomas Aquinas 186). Such authenticity marked the life and preaching of one of the greatest medieval preachers.

Aquinas continued throughout his ministry the practice learned early on, that is, *legere*, scriptural interpretation, *disputare*, theology, and *predicare*, preaching, and of all three preaching truly defined who he was. Placing words on the lips of Christ, Aquinas says, “Let us go out together, I by inspiring you, and you, by preaching” (Fatula “Contemplata” 23). As he spoke, so Aquinas lived.

John Calvin

Jean Calvin was born in Noyon, France, to Gérard Cauvin and Jeanne Lefranc on 10 July 1509. Calvin’s mother died in his infancy, and his father arranged for him to gain his early education through the church, before, in 1523, being sent to Paris to study. There Calvin came under the Catholic humanistic influence before graduating and undertaking

legal studies at Orléans. Not being quite to his taste, Calvin returned to Paris, following the death of his father, for further literary study. While in Paris, around 1533 or 1534, Calvin converted to the Protestant Reformation and was forced to flee the city, eventually seeking refuge in Basel, where he came under the influence of Bullinger and Bucer (Wendel 16-26). Remarkably, Calvin produced the first edition of the Institutes during his stay in Basel.

Calvin made a brief first visit to Geneva, accepting a position as a reader, but left again around 1537 for Strasbourg. Not until 1541 did Calvin return to Geneva, taking up the ministry that would be forever associated with his name (Wendel 46-56).

Geneva was a city that, by that time, had made its official commitment to be Christian, that is, Protestant Christianity had been accepted as its official worldview. Geneva was deeply influenced not only by the reformation but also by the Christian humanist tradition, including the principles of returning to original sources, the need for careful and rigorous interpretation, and then the communication of findings. The common context for both preacher and listener could be assumed within the city, which had a general, if not necessarily universal, awareness of “the holy.” This shared worldview does not imply a monolithic acceptance of Calvin’s position because he faced opponents, both religious and political, within the Reformation and outside of it (Wendel 75-90).

Calvin continued to provide leadership within the city of Geneva for the remainder of his life, preaching at a tremendous rate, almost right up until his death on 27 May 1567 (Wendel 106-07).

Selection Criteria

No doubt exists of Calvin’s stature as an exegete and preacher. The remarkable influence Calvin exercised upon the city of Geneva, together with his extensive corpus of

sermons and commentaries, testify to that. One need not wonder why that should be so. Calvin's understanding of the Church demanded the preaching of the gospel. In the Institutes Calvin writes, "Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and heard, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, there, it is not to be doubted, a Church of God exists" (2: 1023).

Calvin was undoubtedly the theologian of the reformation, producing in his Institutes and other writings what have become some of the most influential documents within the Protestant tradition. He was a master of classical antiquity and had the linguistic ability to return to original sources as his thought developed.

The impact of Calvin's work was both immediate and lasting. François Wendel writes, "The preaching of the Gospel and the institution of the teaching ministry are intended to awaken the faith and promote the collective sanctification of the members of the ecclesial community" (292). Calvin, too, understood the pastoral function of good theology.

The Institutes of the Christian Religion

Calvin prefaced his magisterial work with a statement of intent. "My purpose was solely to transmit certain rudiments by which those who are touched with any zeal for religion might be shaped to true godliness" (Institutes 1: 9). As Charry remarks, "Calvin begins by identifying himself as an aretgenically oriented teacher of the church who understands the implications of theology for public life" (199). Calvin gives a fuller description of the role of the preacher in the body of his work:

[Pastors] may dare boldly to do all things by God's Word; may compel all worldly power, glory, wisdom, and exaltation to yield to and to obey his [God's] majesty; supported by his power, may command all from the highest even to the least; may build up Christ's household and cast down Satan's; may feed the sheep and drive away the wolves; may instruct and

exhort the teachable; may accuse, rebuke, and subdue the rebellious and stubborn; may bind and loose; finally, if need be, may launch thunderbolts and lightnings; but do all things in God's Word. (Institutes 2: 1156-57)

In his sermon on 2 Timothy 2:16-18, "Pure Preaching of the Word," Calvin again returns to this pastoral theme. "For God will have his people to be edified; and he hath appointed his Word for that purpose. Therefore, if we go not about the salvation of the people, that they may receive nourishment by the doctrine that is taught them, it is sacrilege; for we pervert the pure use of the Word of God" (2).

Ultimately, Calvin's purpose was the glory of God through faithful proclamation of God's Word and through lives being brought into conformity, through faith, with God's will. Old summarizes his purpose as that of warning and promise:

[T]o present to the people of God both the promises of God and the warnings of God that they might be received by faith. If the people of God receive the Word, then it is a word of life which brings them true blessing and thereby magnifies God's eternal glory. (4: 121)

Calvin had no doubt that when the preacher faithfully proclaimed the Word of God, God himself spoke, thereby bringing glory to himself. Challenging those who doubted this gracious possibility of mere men proclaiming the Word of God Calvin affirms preachers:

Those who think the authority of the Word is dragged down by the baseness of the men called to teach it disclose their own ungratefulness. For, among the many excellent gifts with which God has adorned the human race, it is a singular privilege that he deigns to consecrate to himself the mouths and tongues of men in order that his voice may resound in them. (Institutes 2: 1018)

After all, God wills for his Word to be proclaimed. "[The] preaching of the heavenly doctrine has been enjoined upon the preachers" (1017). This divine purpose will be accomplished even through poor, inadequate humanity.

Calvin's vision was always much grander than matters of rhetoric, or even

response. As J. H. Leith notes of Calvin's position, "The validity of preaching does not depend on the response it elicits. It is a witness or a testimony that God wills to be made in his world even if all reject it" (210). Although Calvin's ministry was marked by the response of virtually an entire city, one may note his emphasis upon the sovereign Lord, rather than turning attention exclusively to the hearer.

Picking up on a theme of Augustine and Aquinas, Calvin recognizes the role of the Holy Spirit, not just in the preacher's ministry, but also in the matter of the reception of the Word by the hearer:

[T]he Word of God is like the sun, shining upon all those to whom it is proclaimed, but with no effect among the blind. Now, all of us are blind by nature in this respect. Accordingly it cannot penetrate into our minds unless the Spirit, as the inner teacher, through his illumination makes entry for it. (Institutes 1: 582)

In grand theological fashion Calvin concludes his understanding of the role of the Spirit:

Therefore, as we cannot come to Christ unless we be drawn by the Spirit of God, so when we are drawn we are lifted up in mind and heart above our understanding. For the soul, illuminated by him, takes on a new keenness, as it were, to contemplate the heavenly mysteries, whose splendor had previously blinded it. (582)

Preaching Ministry

Calvin tended to preach using the *lectio continua* method, almost to the point of fixation. For instance, having finished preaching on Easter Day 1538, Calvin was banished from Geneva until September 1541. Upon his return he began preaching once more from the verse following where he left off. Calvin's series on Acts ran from 1549 until 1554. One discovers 159 sermons on Job, and two hundred on Deuteronomy (Leith 206). Calvin's typical pattern was to preach twice on a Sunday and then again on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. By 1549 this pattern had modified to preaching twice on Sundays, and then every other week he would preach every workday. Although

Calvin's sermons were well prepared, he, too, preached extemporarily, with notes being taken by a group of secretaries led by Denis de Raguénier, who have left a rich legacy of his work. Benjamin W. Farley comments on the sermons: "[They] are not inferior to the *Institutes*, however because they do an excellent job of applying Calvin's theological acumen to the issues of his times" (14).

Sermon 1

The first sermon chosen for study is taken from Calvin's series on Deuteronomy, which began on March 1555 and ran until July 1556. This particular sermon, from the Ten Commandments portion, is number nine in the "mini-series," taking as its text Deuteronomy 5:18 (B. Farley 167-83).

The year 1555 was an eventful one in Geneva with the near total collapse of Calvin's opponents. The Liberine Party, led by Ami Perrin, were in disarray, and the consistory's right to excommunicate, as Calvin had proposed, was ratified by the city, thus bringing about a moderate degree of separation between church and state and further strengthening his position. Political and religious intrigue arose in that old differences with the reformed city of Bern had been reopened, particularly with regard to the doctrines of providence and predestination (B. Farley 15-20).

The sermon on adultery was selected from those available because in it one notes repeated references to both the Libertines and the Roman Catholic Church from which Geneva had separated itself.

Calvin begins by stating that the appropriate response to redemption ought to be justice and sobriety. Although Calvin expounds upon a command, this command comes in the context of grace. To be specific, justice and sobriety in this context means that "if we want to grasp the natural sense of this passage let us understand that God commands

us here to lead an honest and chaste life, that there may be no turpitude or dissoluteness in us” (B. Farley 169). Calvin intends to tackle not only adultery but promiscuity saying, “It’s as if he were saying: “Be careful not to fall, for you will break your neck. Don’t think that you will only slip, for the fall will be fatal. Therefore, look out!”” (169). Calvin was a master at paraphrasing the meaning of a passage in a gripping manner.

Citing Proverbs 2:17, where God presides over all marriage, Calvin reminds his hearers that to break covenant is to perjure oneself before God. The issue Calvin is addressing is not simply a matter of good morals or civil behavior, important as they are, but of covenant faithfulness with God himself. Anything less than faithfulness, honesty, chastity, and virtue makes one just like adulterers, therefore, marriage ought to be preserved.

Distinguishing between divine and human laws, Calvin notes that God is not an earthly lawyer, and is interested in the heart, not just actions. Jeremiah 5:3 and Matthew 5:28 are cited to support Calvin’s position regarding promiscuity and the heart’s intention. Calvin says, “Although he [the promiscuous person] is not guilty according to human laws and cannot be chastised, nevertheless in God’s sight he is already condemned as having transgressed this commandment here” (B. Farley 171). Whether one is married or single, a need for chastity both in action and, in the heart exists. No exception from this command is given simply because one is single.

Calvin now introduces his overarching theological focus reminding the audience that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Since God has honored believers in this way, they ought not to wallow in filth. Nothing less than fidelity within marriage and purity of life is a sufficient response to God. Because believers are members of the body of Christ, “when a man indulges in prostitution, it’s the same as if he were to rape the

body of Jesus Christ” (B. Farley 172). According to 1 Corinthians 6:18 adultery is the one sin that is committed actually in the body and leaves its mark stamped upon the guilty. With dramatic language, Calvin has taken the argument beyond what one might have thought possible.

Recognizing that some might object to his strong language, and indeed the libertines did (Calvin provides hints, referring to them as “*bons vivants*”), Calvin challenges those who consider fornication to be only a minor sin with little consequence (B. Farley 173). Numbers 25:1-18 indicates that it is a terrible sin with tragic consequences, and to suggest otherwise is to show contempt for God himself. That being so, one ought to avoid all occasions that might possibly lead to immorality. Moving towards application, a number of possibilities are considered in some detail, including foul language, inappropriate gestures, and dancing, which itself is “a preamble to fornication” (177). The problem is that while everything is clean to those with a pure conscience, by indulging in inappropriate behaviors people “invite room for Satan, and [men and women] lose their natural shyness toward each other” (176).

Other forms of immoderation, while not sexual, must be understood to be prohibited by this command. So, whether drunkenness or gluttony, in Calvin’s mind they are no different. “[We] must soberly use eating and drinking to nourish us and not for the purpose of leading us into immoderation to such a degree that we no longer possess a check on ourselves or any modesty” (B. Farley 178). Chastity, for Calvin, is an all-encompassing lifestyle.

Again, Calvin anticipates the response of the hearer: How will chastity be possible, since one lives in the flesh, and the flesh is weak? His response is to return to the subject of marriage, which is God’s gracious provision for those unable to restrain

themselves sexually. Within marriage no immoderation exists because there sexual desires are sanctified. The Scriptures describe marriage as honorable.

Calvin now turns to counter his opponents, regarding the papal insistence upon celibacy as a higher form of holiness to be not only folly but actually scorning the gift of God. “Does an illness not worsen when in scorn for your doctor, instead of drinking what he has prescribed for our health, you cast it to the ground?” (B. Farley 181). The pope, Siricius, by his own words, has condemned the prophets, apostles, and fathers of the Church, who all approved of marriage and, in doing so, condemns himself.

Given Calvin’s high opinion for the will of God, he pauses to wonder why God would allow Catholic teaching to happen. He wonders what is to be gained by allowing the pope such license to violate the clear teaching of Scripture. The answer, Calvin concludes, is that God has demonstrated his rejection of the Roman Catholic Church (B. Farley 182).

By way of closing exhortation, Calvin reminds his hearers that they ought not to dispose of God’s good gifts, including marriage, but rather build strong families to God’s glory. By offering oneself as a living sacrifice to God one knows that God will indwell his temple.

In this sermon one discovers Calvin defining the boundaries of his community theologically, both against Rome, and by clearly delineating the responsibilities of the civil authorities as opposed to the Church. Boundary definition is accomplished by focusing upon God, who searches the human heart and who has provided in his grace for weak humanity.

A number of scriptural references are introduced to bolster Calvin’s position, but his use of the Bible is less proof texting than a grasp of the overarching narrative of

redemption. The redeemed are incorporated into the body of Christ by action of the Holy Spirit. The behaviors of redeemed people ought to be commensurate with this new reality of being members of Christ's body. Rather than advocating a strong morality for its own sake, to be imposed upon the poor citizens of Geneva, Calvin invites them as members of the body of Christ to live up to their high calling, and to set their experience within the drama of God's redemption of them. Living in response to God's grace is the response Calvin seeks, whether from married or single (B. Farley 183).

Sermon 2

The second sermon chosen comes from Holy Week in 1558. Although pastoring in somewhat of a theocracy, Calvin was astute enough to distinguish between civil and religious authorities and to recognize that not all who lived in Geneva were Christians. A nine-sermon series was designed as a preparation for Easter Sunday and subsequent participation at the Lord's Table. "The conclusion of the series," Old states, "is the invitation to participate in the covenant meal, and thereby make a faith commitment" (4: 124). Investigating one of Calvin's more evangelistic sermons is significant, particularly since they are also overflowing with his understanding of the vicarious atonement of Christ.

These Easter preparation sermons have a pastoral emphasis as well, with Calvin dealing with both the failures and the faith of the various characters presented in the passion narratives of Scripture. This particular sermon, number 6, takes as its text Matthew 27:27-44 and introduces the character of the penitent thief (Calvin, Sermons 134-49).

Nearing the end of a weeklong series, Calvin recapitulates what has already been said so far in his introduction, inviting the hearers to change their perspective, noting that

Christ was not simply shamed in his passion and crucifixion but was shamed on behalf of humanity. Jesus has become the means of grace:

There is, then, no other means to acquire grace, except that we come to our Lord Jesus Christ, and that we have all our refuge in him, since we are unburdened of such a load, when he was willing to be as it were, cursed and detestable for our sakes, in order that we might find favor before God and that we might be acceptable to him. (Sermons 136)

Priests and scribes, who ought to have known better, mocked Jesus but since people today also have God's word they need to be careful, learning from their mistakes rather than repeating them.

Grabbing hold of the hearers' attention, Calvin asks a series of rhetorical questions concerning why Jesus died and, in particular, why it was such a cruel death and why he did not save himself. Calvin's answer to this problem is that there was no other hope but Jesus. By Christ's death people are delivered, ransomed, redeemed. That is why, no matter how difficult one's circumstances may become, they should never think that God has forsaken them.

With a typically curt transition, "So much then" (Calvin, Sermons 139), Calvin addresses the next phrase, "Let God save him." Explaining the background from the Old Testament narrative of David, Calvin reminds hearers that whenever they are robbed of God's promises then they have nothing left. Denying God's promise is Satan's tactic with Christ. Just as Jesus, nevertheless, resisted temptation in the wilderness, so he overcomes temptation in his passion, too. Interestingly, Calvin reminds his audience that while they may not have the same spiritual strength as Jesus to resist such a trial they need not worry because Jesus has conquered on their behalf. Christ's vicarious atonement is more than simply the assurance of forgiveness and eternal bliss, it is powerfully at work in the life of the believer right now, strengthening them.

Jesus had indeed saved others. He had healed people and even raised the dead. He could have saved himself, too, but “He preferred others to himself” (Calvin, Sermons 140). Using strong biblical language, Calvin tells the congregation that Christ was cast into the abyss so he could draw them up from the abyss.

Jesus refused the vinegar, Calvin explains, because he would take nothing to ease the situation or to help him die quickly. Jesus would endure everything on their behalf, both physical and spiritual. Here, Calvin briefly introduces the idea of the next day’s sermon to the crowd, keeping both his sermon series and the whole drama of Holy Week in focus (Sermons 141).

With these aspects covered, Calvin arrives at the story of the penitent thief, cross-referencing from Luke 23. The positioning of Jesus between two criminals indicates both his and humanity’s disgrace. To an even greater measure, the crucifixion demonstrates the love of God for people. Calvin is intent in drawing out this paradox, of both sin and grace:

It is true that God by his most inestimable goodness rises above this curse, when he always declares himself Father in many ways and makes us feel his gentleness and the love which he bears toward us and the care which he has for us, yet we have many marks of our sins, and high and low we ought to perceive that we are cursed by God. (Sermons 146)

Death is common to all. All people are all just as blameworthy as the two thieves, but the Holy Spirit was working in the life of one of the thieves, who makes confession and exercises faith, asking Jesus to remember him. Using rhetorical questions, Calvin wonders with the audience how this prayer and potential answer might even be possible, given that both the thief and Jesus were near death. Using his gift for paraphrase, Calvin puts these words on the lips of the penitent. ““Save me,” says he, “give me life. For if you will remember me, in that consists all my bliss”” (Sermons 148). Salvation lies in the fact

that the risen and ascended Christ remembers his own people.

One of Calvin's gifts was to insert summary statements within his sermons. These summary statements serve as creedal fragments, paraphrases of the essentials of the faith for his hearers to grasp:

And even know that if the Lord Jesus has ascended into heaven, that he has taken possession of the glory which was given him by God his Father, in order that every knee may bow before him, let us no doubt that we are fully restored to his keeping, and conclude that there is wherein consists all our bliss, to know that Jesus Christ remembers us and that he governs us. (Sermons 148)

Just as the thief received grace and died no wonder then that when believers now receive grace they must endure hardship. They have not yet been raised to life eternal. Eternal life is their inheritance and hope but a hope that is certain because the very mention of paradise demonstrates the power of Christ's death on behalf of humanity. Calvin's closing exhortation is to live in the hope of Christ (Sermons 149).

Calvin deals with community in a different way. He is not defining it against another interpretation but in covenantal terms of a relationship made possible with God through the atoning death of Christ. As part of his prelude to Easter, Calvin is calling people to live as members of Christ's covenant community.

Calvin's exegesis is strong and shakes free of the mediaeval understanding of the death of Christ as a model for the believer's own endurance of hardship. He understands well the vicarious nature of Christ's death and brings the creedal phrase "for us and for our salvation" to bear in his interpretation of the passion narrative.

Seemingly Calvin's goal is not so much to interpret experience for his hearers as it is to draw them into the experience of the thief, helping them to understand that they are he, and, like him, need both to confess and to reach out in faith to Christ. The ultimate

conclusion and response will come on Easter Sunday as the congregation gathers around the table:

[W]hen one reads Calvin's treatment of the repentant thief, one realizes that this was just how Calvin understood his preaching ministry during Holy Week. It was his job to present the passion, so that those in the congregation would recognize Christ as their Savior and so come to the Lord's Table and pledge their faith in him by participating in the covenant meal. For Calvin, to preach the cross meant to present Christ's sacrifice as the revelation of God's atoning love for the humanity he had created, and to present it so clearly that those who heard it would come to faith. (Old 4: 124)

Summary

Examining Calvin as a doctrinal preacher one discovers a master theologian applying his skills for the benefit of his congregation.

Research question 1. Although in the midst of creating a new kind of civil community, Calvin understands biblical community to be defined in terms of relationship with God. In refuting error, or setting boundaries for the civil authorities, Calvin is careful to ground his arguments in the biblical understanding of covenant, a covenant expressed no more clearly than by Christ on the cross. One participates in the covenant through faith.

Research question 2. Calvin has a fundamental commitment to Scripture, believing in its authority, necessity, and sufficiency, writing, "The first point of Christianity is that the holy Scriptures are all our wisdom, and that we must listen to God who speaks in them, without adding anything to them" (qtd. in Kincaid 2). As a Christian humanist, Calvin excelled in the biblical languages and interpretation yet was ever mindful of his faith commitments. Old remarks, "Calvin's concern to maintain grammatical-historical exegesis is balanced by recognition of the established Christian interpretation" (4: 116). Calvin's was a faith seeking understanding.

Research question 3. Calvin took the opportunity in his preaching to draw his hearers into the world of the biblical narrative. He did more than make the ancient text relevant to the current situation. Calvin brought the listener into the world of the Word. Creatively, he has listeners identify with characters, or circumstances, assisting them to see themselves within the drama of God's redemption. Calvin's was a ministry of reorienting worldviews.

Research question 4. Calvin understood that declaring truth was not enough. People had to be urged to accept it. Truth made a claim upon the lives of people. The response was to exercise the gift of faith, in receiving salvation, and in living a life pleasing to God and to his glory. Old writes, "Faith, for Calvin, is the means of entering into communion with God and that communion is nothing other than a love relationship. Faith is the means; love is the end" (4: 127).

Further findings. Old highlights a number of significant lessons from Calvin (4: 128-32). First, the sheer intensity of his preaching, and his focus upon Scripture are readily apparent. Second, Calvin's clarity of thought and expression are unique. He pioneered developments in the French language but was careful to speak simply, using great vocabulary and wonderful similes and metaphors. Edwards comments, "His style of preaching is conversational and, in the service of being clearly understood, he sacrifices most of the ornaments that decorate writing" (319). One of Calvin's particular gifts was the paraphrase. Leith notes, "In this most critical task he could paraphrase Scripture with precision and clarity, translating it into the language of the common human discourse of his own time" (212). Third, Calvin's constant concern with application took the sermon beyond information and towards transformation of his hearers.

John Wesley

The final preacher in this study comes from a slightly different mold. His timeline puts him on this side of the Enlightenment, but as will become apparent, there is much that can be learned from his approach to preaching doctrine.

John Wesley was born to Samuel and Suzanna on 17 June 1703, their fifteenth child, but only the seventh to survive. Wesley's father was a priest with the Church of England and a strong anti-Calvinist. Wesley's early education was from his mother, who by all accounts was a remarkable woman. From there he went to Charterhouse, and eventually Christ Church, Oxford. During his time at Oxford Wesley decided to seek "holy orders" and in the process of preparing himself was reading both Thomas à Kempis and Jeremy Taylor, both of whom were to have a remarkable influence upon his life—the first as to religion of the heart and the other the call to holy living (Pollock 14-20).

Wesley was ordained deacon in 1725 and assisted his father for a time. In 1726 he was elected Fellow of Lincoln College, giving him the opportunity not only to teach but also to preach. His ordination as priest followed in 1728. The following year John Wesley and his brother, Charles, formed what became known as "The Holy Club" at Oxford, continuing to strive after the possibility of holy living. A third influence on Wesley's life was William Law whom he began to read at this time, again focusing on the call to holiness (Pollock 46-52).

In 1735 John set out on a missionary venture to Georgia and, while there was heavily influenced by the Moravian, August Spangenberg. John could not settle in his heart that he had made peace with God. After a fairly disastrous two years, he returned to England and met up with another Moravian, Peter Böhler. That relationship led Wesley to his Aldersgate experience in 1738, and he was forever a changed man, having a new

and profound vision of experiential Christianity. From here his ministry was launched (Pollock 59-82).

John began preaching in various churches, as he had opportunity, but not until 1739 at the urging of Whitfield that he began his outdoor ministry, or “field preaching.” The Methodist revival began in earnest with John traveling regularly between London, Bristol, and Newcastle. The Methodist class and band structures were put in place in order to disciple seekers and believers, and lay preachers were appointed to help care for them in the societies.

In 1744 Wesley called his first conference of Methodist preachers to consider the questions of what to teach, and how to teach. The following year Wesley began to increase drastically his level of publication in order to resource the growing movement and particularly the ever-increasing numbers of untrained lay preachers.

In the midst of all of this growth, difficulties were encountered on all sides. Wesley ministered during the emerging industrial revolution in England where the gap between rich and poor was ever widening. Living conditions in the new cities were often appalling, and the sense of hopelessness among people led either to alcohol addiction or fueled the rising revolutionary discontent, which was soon to explode in France. Wesley was berated by the established church for preaching outdoors, faced dissention in the ranks over issues to do with predestination and holiness, somehow had to lead an ever-widening movement, and had to find a solution to the inherent tension to separate from the Church of England. The tasks were enormous, and one can only wonder at how Wesley was able to accomplish so much.

By 1769 lay preachers were sent to the colonies, leading to the controversial ordination of Thomas Coke as General Superintendent of the Methodists in America in

1784. Separation from the Church of England would be sure to follow, but not in Wesley's lifetime. He died on 2 March 1791, leaving behind a movement, an extensive corpus of writings, and a legacy that has impacted Western Christianity profoundly.

Selection Criteria

Wesley's ability as a preacher and evangelist are, quite simply, beyond question. Crowds flocked, and countless numbers were converted. One observer remarked, "He preached today at the forenoon service in the Methodist Chapel at Spitalfields for an audience of more than 4,000 people. His text was Luke 1:68. The sermon was short but eminently evangelical" (qtd. in Outler 7). Wesley kept registers of the sermons he preached, and one can deduce that it was his practice to preach upon arrival at a location, then in the evening, and afterwards to the society. Next morning Wesley would preach at 5 a.m., and once more in the open air before he left. Albert C. Outler remarks, "For Wesley it was preaching that defined his vocation preeminently" (13).

Wesley produced no sustained works of systematic theology, though as Old notes, "throughout the eighteenth century, the major leaders of the day tended to publish their ideas in series of sermons rather than in volumes of systematic theology" (5: 114).

Wesley was a creative theologian, however, spending time investigating the Church Fathers as he began to deepen his understanding of Christian holiness. His greatest gift was in making his theology accessible to his audience:

[As] Wesley understood and produced theology, the defining task of "real" theologians was neither developing an elaborate system of Christian truth-claims nor defending these claims to their "cultured-despisers;" it was nurturing and shaping the worldview that frames the temperament and practice of believers' lives in the world. (Maddox 17)

Randy L. Maddox highlights two very important points. First, Wesley was aware of the pastoral function of good theology, and saw this pastoral function as theology's primary

function. Second, despite ministering within an Enlightenment culture, Wesley did not easily accept its demands for evidence nor its relegation of faith from public society. Wesley was a rationalist. He was influenced by the humanism of Erasmus, but, as Outler remarks, “Wesley had more than an inkling of the drastic consequences for the *fides historica* in the skepticism of David Hume and the critical idealism of Immanuel Kant” (91). What makes Wesley the exception to the pre-Enlightenment location of the other preachers researched was that, perhaps more so than any other, he was able to minister to the Enlightenment culture, preaching with authority and providing leadership to a major Christian movement as a result of the revival. For this contextualizing reason, Wesley became a serious candidate to be studied in the hope that it would be possible learn from him, not only what he did but how he was able to preach within the emerging cultural context of the Enlightenment.

The impact of Wesley’s ministry was huge. Societies were formed with well-defined small group structures. Discipleship processes were established and, over time, preachers trained. What began as the quest of two brothers for holiness of heart and life became one of the greatest revivals in Christian history.

Other Writings

Wesley’s body of written work is extensive, and so, while he did not write a homiletical theology, one can glean from several sources some of his thinking. In 1744 Wesley first gathered his preachers together in conference. The minutes of the preachers’ discussions were published later and became known as “The Large Minutes” (Works 8: 299-338). Question 36 asks, “What is the best general method of preaching?” (8: 317). The answer given is to invite, convince, offer Christ, build up, doing all to some extent in each sermon. Wesley continues, “The most effectual way of preaching Christ, is to

preach him in all his offices, and to declare his law as well as his gospel, both to believers and unbelievers” (8: 318).

Seeking to equip his preachers, Wesley began to publish his own sermons and also to edit the Christian Library, a collection of pieces of theology and spiritual writing designed to educate his colleagues. Thirty volumes were published between 1749 and 1755. The subtitle explains much of Wesley’s understanding of theology: “Extracts from an Abridgements of the Choicest Pieces of *Practical Divinity* [emphasis mine].”

A “Letter on Preaching Christ” was written in 1751, and again Wesley comes back to his theme of law and gospel (11: 486-92). The gospel, as Wesley understands it, is to proclaim the death, resurrection, and benefits of Christ, the law, and his commands, especially the Sermon on the Mount. Here one can see Wesley’s understanding of both the indicative and the imperative contained within the gospel message. Wesley writes, “God loves you; therefore, love and obey him. Christ died for you; therefore, die to sin. Christ is risen; therefore, rise in the image of God. Christ liveth evermore; therefore, live to God, till you live with him in glory” (492).

In another piece, written in 1756, “An Address to the Clergy” outlines Wesley’s belief in a thorough theological and liberal arts education (no surprise coming from an Oxford don) and then gets to the heart of the pastor’s role (10: 480-500). In its intention, the pastor’s purpose is to glorify God; in his affections, to love both God and others; in his practice, to serve as an example.

Preaching Ministry

Wesley’s preaching can be categorized into two realms: field preaching (evangelism) and preaching to the society (encouraging believers and guiding them in their faith) (Maddox 208). Nevertheless, the more important distinction for the purposes

of this study is between written and oral sermons. Unlike the other preachers considered in this study almost no record remains of Wesley's oral sermons, only a body of sermons that were written for publication. The question arises as to whether one can safely assume that by reading Wesley's written sermons one can access to his oral work because ultimately preaching is an oral and not a written activity.

Wesley began publishing sermons in earnest around 1746 at the same time he made a decision to expand the ministry of field preaching through his lay preachers. His written sermons were intended to serve as guidelines for preaching for this company of preachers:

Wesley no doubt had the function of the Book of Homilies in mind [the Church of England standard sermons] as he designed these volumes—homiletical material that provided a solid doctrinal basis and boundary for homiletical proclamation by uneducated preachers. (Heitzenrader, Wesley 177)

Wesley's series of Sermons on Several Occasions were published in four volumes in 1746, 1748, 1750, and 1760, and appear to be a summation of the kind of things he actually preached. Kenneth J. Collins notes, "While there is clearly a difference in form between Wesley's oral and published sermons, there really is little difference in content" (11).

Richard P. Heitzenrader refers to the comparison made by William Gurley regarding Wesley's preaching of his sermon "On Charity" with its published form. Gurley remarks, "It was a most able discourse, just the same as it is printed" (qtd. in Heitzenrader 180). While Wesley prepared manuscripts, he preached extemporaneously. Wesley recalled the first time he preached in the All Hallows church, London, in 1735. He had no sermon ready and was quite perplexed when an elderly lady asked him, "Can't you trust God for a sermon?" He recalls, "That question had such an effect upon me that I

ascended the pulpit and preached extempore, with great freedom to myself and acceptance to the people, *and have never since taken a written sermon into the pulpit* [original emphasis]" (qtd. in P. Smith 8). Outler also emphasizes the importance of oral communication to Wesley:

After 1739 he was even more earnestly convinced that preaching, to be effective, must be an interpersonal encounter between the preacher and his hearers. Hence, he believed that oral preaching was the norm. Written sermons could only be regarded as either preparatory for more effective oral utterance, or else distillates of it: the written word as a substitute for personal presence. (14)

Of Wesley's oral sermons, little remains for examination. John Hampson indicates that Wesley was fond of anecdote and story, rarely found in the published version (P. Smith 11). Perhaps the best access to Wesley's oral sermons is found through the diaries of his friend Hester Ann Rogers, now held in the John Rylands Library, Manchester. Referring to Wesley's preaching on 30 March 1782, Rogers records a first person account. In order to become better acquainted with the intensity of this oral sermon, Wesley's words are quoted at length:

You may now be delivered from the power of your most besetting sins—even this day, this moment. The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand. Crying, "Serve the devil no longer, he is a bad master," yield now to Him who loveth you, who will save you from all your sins here and from Hell hereafter. He loves you all, even thou, poor sinner. He bled for thee and wilt thou resist him still? Doest thou feel thou art a sinner deserving nothing but hell? Art thou willing to know Jesus as thy Savior and art thou afraid to come? Fear not. Look up, He is nigh thee. Doest thou want pardon from all thy sins? Shall I tell thee thou mayest have it next year, next month? Nay, I dare not. I am not sure thou canst. Tomorrow is none of thine own. But thou mayest have it today. (qtd. in P. Smith 18-19)

The intensity of Wesley's appeal is staggering, and leads to the conclusion that while Wesley's doctrine is feely available in the written sermons, the force with which his truth claim is presented will never truly be recovered from them.

Turning to the written sermons, Wesley introduces them to the common person:

I now write (as I generally speak) *ad populum*—to the bulk of mankind—to those who neither relish nor understand the art of speaking, but who notwithstanding are competent judges of those truths which are necessary to present and future happiness. (qtd. in Outler 103-04)

Wesley's sermons typically begin with a *proemium*, that is, a short discourse on matters relating to the text, and is immediately followed by an expository contract where he outlines for the reader what he is going to demonstrate. The exposition then follows and Wesley concludes with exhortation and application.

Sermon 1

The first sermon to be examined, "Justification by Faith" was published in 1746, taking Romans 4:5 as its text (Outler 181-99). This sermon was preached for the first time in 1738 and might be the sermon Wesley famously preached standing on his father's tomb in Epworth in 1742. This sermon was chosen because it comes from the very start of the revival and demonstrates Wesley's understanding of the great evangelical truth he has come to experience for himself. Including it in the first volume of the Sermons on Several Occasions, Wesley obviously intended it to serve as a model for his lay preachers.

Wesley begins by noting that justification is vital because it is the foundation of Christian hope, brings peace with God, and is a source of joy. Sadly, justification is little understood, people having many non-biblical ideas, and so Wesley's intent is to clarify justification for the reader. The expository contract states that he will show the grounds for this doctrine, explain what it is, and who is justified, before stating on what terms people are justified.

Marshalling a large number of biblical quotes and allusions, Wesley points out

that humanity was created perfect and sinless. God had given a perfect law and expected perfect obedience, something of which man was capable. Disobedience meant the loss of holiness and happiness, separation from God, and, finally, death. “Being already dead in spirit, dead to God, dead in sin, he hastened on to death everlasting, to the destruction of both body and soul in the fire never to be quenched” (Outler 185).

Developing the Pauline theme of Romans 5:12 Wesley then explains why God gave his Son as “another common head for mankind, a second general parent and representative of all mankind” (Outler 186). Through Christ’s vicarious atonement humanity is justified, on the one condition, which he enables people to fulfill. Much like Calvin, Wesley then wraps up his point with a great summary statement.

Coming to examine what justification actually is, Wesley begins by pointing out what it is not. This form of negation is a favorite preaching technique of Wesley. Justification is not being made actually righteous, which is sanctification, God’s work in people, the fruit of justification, nor does justification mean people are no longer accused by either Satan or the Law. God is not deceived into thinking sinners are something they are not. (Wesley probably has in mind the already brewing differences with his Calvinist colleagues John Cennick and James Harvey.) Rather, justification is pardon, the forgiveness of sins.

Wesley asks who, then, is justified. Quoting Romans 5:4, the answer given is that sinners are justified. (Here Wesley may well be taking aim at Jeremy Taylor.) One does not have to be made holy before being justified. “To assert this is to say the Lamb of God takes away only those sins which were taken away before” (Outler 191). The sick need a physician.

Wesley pauses to recognize that people might actually do good works prior to

justification. In other words, he is paying attention to the possible objections of his readers. These good works, nevertheless, cannot be truly good. Using a syllogism Wesley reminds the readers that nothing is really good unless God wills it, and since nothing done before justification is done as God wills, then nothing done before justification is truly good.

Wesley's next question is, how then are we justified. Wesley comes back to the one condition he earlier left dangling tantalizingly. That condition is faith. He quotes John 3:18 and Romans 3:22-28 before defining faith:

Justifying faith implies, not only a divine evidence or conviction that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," but a sure trust and confidence that Christ died for my sins, that he loved me, and gave himself for me. (Outler 194)

The evangelical appeal contained within Wesley's definition is obvious. Wesley outlines the sequence of events, just in case it is unclear: repentance, faith, fruit. He then supports his case, quoting the Anglican Homilies, and making numerous scriptural references. Faith is the "necessary" condition for justification.

Of course, not everyone has been aware of that condition, the reason being, perhaps, that God wants to deal with human pride. The fall from Adamic perfection was because of pride. Justification requires that people acknowledge their guilt and helplessness and look only to Jesus to save them.

Wesley then moves towards his appeal for people to turn to Christ in faith: "Go, as altogether ungodly, guilty, lost, destroyed, deserving and dropping into hell, and then shalt thou find favour in his sight, and know that he justifieth the ungodly" (Outler 198).

Here is an excellent example of Wesley's early evangelistic preaching, albeit in written form. His own spiritual journey has led him to personal experience of the great

evangelical truth of the gospel, which he brings to his text. Justification through faith is the lens through which Wesley reads Scripture and invites his hearers to do likewise. It is his overarching interpretative framework.

Wesley was very much forming community, the Methodist Societies, not as human-made constructs, necessarily, but as communities of faith, of those who had come to experience forgiveness and the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit just as he had. This sermon is his invitation to participate in such a community of faith, to reinterpret experience in the light of the gospel truths, and to turn to God in faith. When one recognizes one is a sinner and hopelessly lost, a new perspective dawns, and forgiveness is possible. Thus, Wesley calls people to respond.

Interestingly, one also sees Wesley defend his emerging community against alternative interpretations of the gospel and at the same time marshal the tools of his era, for example the use of a rationalist syllogism, in order to present his case for a complete change in perspective.

Sermon 2

The second sermon selected for study, “The Witness of the Spirit,” comes from 1767 and is actually the second such sermon to bear that title (Outler 285-98). The first sermon with this title is from 1746. Both sermons sit beside one another in the first volume of published sermons, and both are based upon Romans 8:16. The first was written as a basic statement of Wesley’s position regarding the assurance of the Spirit, something he learned from the Moravians, while the second was written in response to the ongoing revival and charges of enthusiasm.

One must remember, as W. Stephen Gunter cautions, that “To call one an enthusiast in the eighteenth century was roughly the equivalent of referring to one’s

neighbor as a “religious fanatic” (15). Two of Wesley’s London preachers, George Bell and Thomas Maxwell, had indeed traveled this path of fanaticism. Bell and Maxwell had made claims to angelic perfection, such that no further growth in grace was possible and, correspondingly, no need for self-examination. This angelic position was followed by apocalyptic predictions, leaving Wesley with little choice but to remove them from their offices in 1763. The second sermon on the witness of the Spirit is intended to clarify and defend the doctrine. The sermon is dated 4 April 1767, at Newry in present-day Northern Ireland, where it may well have been preached, though no record of such has yet been found.

Wesley begins by asserting that the witness of the Spirit is both an important truth and a privilege of believers. He acknowledges the dangers on either side, that is, those on the one hand who deny the possibility, and thus lapse into a religion of formality, and those on the other, the enthusiasts who fail to understand the Scriptures. Since little has been said about this teaching, and given that it is of particular importance to the Methodists, Wesley intends to expound upon it. Interestingly, on this occasion he does not offer an expository contract, or outline, but quickly launches into his topic.

The first question Wesley addresses is, “What is the witness of the Spirit?” Essentially the Spirit testifies that believers are children of God resulting in the fruit of the Spirit. Without the fruit no on-going testimony is possible. Referring back to his first sermon on the subject, Wesley encapsulates his teaching of the witness as “an inward impression of the soul” (Outler 287).

By negation Wesley demonstrates that this witness is not an outward voice, nor necessarily an inward voice. The witness need not even be a passage of Scripture, rather it is an inner peace in the heart. “The stormy wind and troubled waves subside, and there

is a sweet calm; the heart resting in the arms of Jesus, and the sinner being clearly satisfied that God is reconciled, and that all his iniquities are forgiven, and his sins covered” (Outler 287).

Using rhetorical questions Wesley wonders about the witness further. Everyone agrees a witness is real, at least, an indirect witness, including reason, reflection, conscience, Scripture, and the fruit of the Spirit. The issue at hand surrounds a direct witness.

Wesley then comes to his second point, that is, “Is such a witness possible?” His answer is an emphatic “yes,” based, as he says, upon the plain meaning of the text. Wesley quotes the late Bishop of London, Thomas Sherlock, to support his reading of a witness of God’s Spirit, and the witness of the human spirit. The latter witness has to do with the fruit of the Spirit, while the former (in contrast to the bishop’s understanding) is the direct witness of the Spirit. To support his position, Wesley turns to 2 Corinthians 1:12, Romans 5:15-15, and Galatians 4:6. This direct witness is antecedent to any awareness by a person: “We must be holy in heart and life before we can be conscious that we are so” (Outler 290). The reason for this antecedence is that the root of holiness is the love of God, and we cannot know God or his love until the Holy Spirit witnesses such to our spirit. Wesley concludes, “Since therefore the testimony of his [God’s] Spirit must precede the love of God and all holiness, of consequence it must precede our consciousness thereof” (290). Wesley then summarizes by quoting from Charles Wesley’s hymn “Spirit of Faith Come Down.”

Having argued from Scripture, Wesley now turns to experience, alluding to Scriptural quantities found in Romans 7:9 and Hebrews 12:1 to interpret what is happening in his day. Becoming personal, he remarks, “It is confirmed by *your* [original

emphasis] experience and *mine* [original emphasis]. The Spirit itself bore witness to my spirit that I was a child of God, and gave me an *evidence* [original emphasis] hereof, and I immediately cried, “Abba Father!”” (Outler 290). Again, Wesley quotes a hymn from Charles, “Ye Neighbors and Friends of Jesus Draw Near,” but modifies the last two lines of the fourth stanza to read, “Thy sins are forgiven! Accepted thou art! I listened, and heaven sprang up in my heart” (290). The original read “their heart.”

This experience of the Holy Spirit is confirmed in Wesley’s opinion by three groups of persons. The first group is those who are the children of God. Second, those convicted of sin, because nothing else than knowing they are justified will satisfy them. Here follows a brief excursus on justification, leading Wesley to the conclusion that “Everyone therefore who denies the existence of such a testimony does, in effect, deny justification by faith” (Outler 292). Wesley has in fact juxtapositioned two doctrines in such a way that they stand or fall together within the grand scheme of redemption. Finally, the children of the world also confirm this experience because while they may desire to please God, and even live sincere lives perhaps, they still do not talk of knowing that their sins are forgiven.

Wesley’s next major point is to consider objections to the doctrine. Although seven are examined, only the first two receive major treatment. The first objection is that experience is not sufficient proof for a doctrine not found in Scripture. Wesley concurs but again argues that the witness is clearly taught in Scripture. The fact that some have gone to excess is no reason to doubt Scripture. Referring to the Camisards in France, he quips, “A madman’s *imagining* [original emphasis] himself a king does not prove that there are no *real* [original emphasis] kings” (Outler 293).

Second, profession of the witness may not be genuine. Again, Wesley simply

acknowledges that this debate is not his purpose. The assurance is antecedent of any profession. Besides, this objection smacks of a fear of justification by works, whereas God imputes righteousness regardless of works.

The remainder of the objections relate primarily to the character of those professing the witness. Wesley reminds his readers, third, that although different exegetes may come to different conclusions, they ought to stick to the plain meaning of Scripture. Fourth, the fruit of the Spirit must follow the witness. Fifth, this is not a delusion. Sixth, the direct witness helps believers in trials:

Perhaps some of the hottest for it are both proud and uncharitable. But many of the firmest contenders for it are eminently meek and lowly in heart, and, indeed, in all other respects also, “True followers of their Lamb-like Lord.” (Outler 296)

Having dealt with the objections, Wesley now comes to his conclusion. A simple definition states Wesley’s position: “The testimony of the Spirit is an inward impression on the soul of believers, whereby the Spirit of God directly testifies to their spirit that they are children of God” (Outler 296). Recapping the body of the sermon, he reminds readers that the real issue is the direct witness of the Spirit, which is indeed the plain meaning of the text. The objections are summarized once more, leading to two inferences. First, one can never rest on any testimony independent of the fruit of the Spirit; the latter always accompanies the former. Wesley summarizes his position with regard to the enthusiasts. Second, no one should rest in the supposed fruit without the direct witness because doing otherwise fails to press on to lay hold of that for which God laid hold of them. Wesley is addressing the formalists.

In this sermon, Wesley, the master exegete, tenderly opens up a single verse, with wide-ranging references to Scripture supporting his position. Experience is brought in as

a supporting argument, helping those who have had the direct witness to understand better in the light of Scripture and refuting those who would deny it. Wesley seeks to defend his community against attack, from both sides, doing so by a close reading of Scripture and drawing out the wider doctrinal implications for those who oppose his position. Wesley's conclusion appeals to opponents on all sides to come to a full experience of the promised assurance of Scripture by pressing on.

Summary

Although Wesley lived within the Enlightenment culture, he stands out as an exemplar of one who understood well how to minister to it. He adapted the forms of ministry in new ways, seeking to press home the claims of Christ upon his generation. Wesley was adept at rational argument but used it in the service of the gospel, never making the Scriptures subservient to it.

Research question 1. For Wesley the community was primarily a community of faith, an active, living experiential faith. At times community had to be defended against both excess and cold formalism, but for the most part Wesley's mission was to call people to join that community by placing their faith in Christ. The sermons examined demonstrate the evangelical nature of Wesley's ministry, even within polemical situations. Wesley recognized the significance of doctrine for his community and not only defined it doctrinally but defended it in the same manner.

Research question 2. Wesley had an outstanding grasp of Scripture that was informed by his commitment to the creed and the Anglican Articles of Faith. While experience was used to support his position, one would be gravely mistaken suggesting that experience drove it. Wesley sates the primacy of Scripture in the preface to his first volume of sermons:

I want to know one thing, the way to heaven—how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way: for this very end he came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price give me the Book of God! I have it. Here is knowledge enough for me. Let me be *homo unius libri*. (Outler 5)

As he turns to Scripture, one discovers in Wesley's sermons a remarkable commitment to teaching doctrine to laypeople.

Research question 3. Old notes of Wesley that he was a Puritan with regard to plain speech, a pietist who preached *Hertzenreligion*, and a populist who brought theology to the masses (5: 115-17). Wesley placed high emphasis upon Christian experience, and sought to interpret it within the framework of Scripture and the creed. His sermons demonstrate a commitment to helping people understand and live their calling as children of God.

Research question 4. At his core, Wesley was an evangelist who sought to press home the absolute truth claims of the gospel to all who would listen. This evangelical urge took him from the churches to the fields and led him to equip others to do likewise. Wesley intended to preach law and gospel, always with a view to response. His sermons cried out for response to the truth of a God who loved humanity and sacrificed himself for it.

Further findings. Although scholars have access to only a polished written corpus of sermons other sources confirm that, in common with the other preachers studied, Wesley too preferred to preach extemporarily because he understood the gospel as an interpersonal communication of the love of God to sinful humanity. Wesley saw significance in preaching both law and gospel as he sought to draw others into an ongoing relationship with Christ within the community of faith. Preaching itself was a Christological event:

The role of the sermon as a means of grace in worship is to communicate Christ in all three offices: assuring us of God's pardoning love (Priest), while simultaneously revealing our remaining need (Prophet), and leading our further growth in Christ-likeness (King). (Maddox 209)

Wesley did not use the *lectio continua* method, but as an evangelist did apparently make use of a "sermon barrel," that is, a collection of material used over and over again, on each occasion being adapted to the circumstances in question (Old 5: 114). Little can be discovered concerning his oral presentation apart from its intensity but it does emerge that he made full use of the tools available to him within his cultural context.

Wesley liked to use the term "practical divinity," and this understanding of doctrine guided his practice. Collins writes, "The sermons are, for the most part, instances of practical theology, concerned with the day-to-day problems of entering into and living the Christian life" (12).

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Major Findings

The proclamation of the faith once delivered and now to be contextualized within emerging post-Christian contexts, has required a considerable philosophical, theological, and historical journey. Newbigin's awareness of the cultural embodiment of the gospel message still stands as a challenge to such contextualization: "If our own culture has proved bankrupt, and if all expressions of the gospel are culturally embodied, it is understandable that a collapse of confidence in our culture goes along with a faltering of confidence in the gospel" (191). Too often this challenge to homiletical theology goes unanswered.

This study attempted to consider whether the apparent drift in homiletical theology could be redressed. The objective of the research project contained within Chapter 4, being a qualitative, inductive, historical study of selected preacher-theologians who proved able to preach doctrinally to great effect within their own contexts, was to discover if a fresh homiletical theology could emerge. My intent was to learn the practice of doctrinal preaching if possible, from these earlier preacher-theologians, and then to re-contextualize to the present situation.

In turning to the past, Charry indicates the limitations of research:

The point is not to jump over modernity and reimpose classical theology but to see if there are not terms on which the classical conversation might be a bit less alien to us so that we might be stirred up to take up the task they were engaged in: helping people flourish through knowing and loving God. (6)

In Webber's words, "The primary reason to return to the Christian tradition is because it is truth that has power to speak to a postmodern world" (29). Exact parallels

between past and present have not been assumed, but sufficient congruities between postmodernity and pre-modernity suggest a fruitful area for research. Even differences themselves prove insightful, as McGrath notes: “The genuine difficulties we experience in understanding the past serve as a paradigm for investigating how we understand *any* [original emphasis] situation which corresponds exactly to our own as observers, whether the differences relate to space, time or culture” (Genesis 98).

Postmodernity has brought many changes to the world, and many opportunities to the Church. In particular, it has freed preachers from the constraints of modernity, permitting them to speak with conviction within the public arena. Clapp reminds preachers of their opportunities:

Christianity no longer need worry about its “scandal of particularity,” since it is recognized that particularity “scandalizes” everyone. The upshot for Christians is that the church does not have to aspire anymore to a supposedly neutral language and story; now we can freely speak our own language and tell our own story. (Peculiar People 83)

Furthermore, postmodernity has dealt a blow to presentism, which allows preachers to explore the rich heritage of the Christian tradition:

We need to begin with the past . . . because only with a better understanding of the historic role of the once universal classic hermeneutical framework—a powerful way of interpreting and using Scripture—can we present a cogent argument for present need and possibility. (Goh 131-32)

Having such perspectives in mind, five preeminent preacher-theologians were studied, albeit this was not an extensive analysis. The preachers were John Chrysostom, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, John Calvin, and John Wesley. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology of the historical research in considerable detail.

The question as to how one should preach Christian doctrine within a post-Christian society is in essence a theological question. My greatest concern in this study

was the theology of the pastoral practice of preaching, and, in particular, the preaching of Christian doctrine. The study of both the sermons and other published materials of these preachers was conducted with a view to addressing this theological question.

The research was carried out by means of four foreshadowed questions based upon a study by McGrath relating to the history and function of Christian doctrine, which itself is explained in greater detail in Chapter 2 (Genesis). A summary of the major findings is presented below.

Community Formation

Luke T. Johnson writes, “The church today desperately needs a clear and communal sense of identity: what does it mean to be a Christian?” (297). My research indicates that the preacher-theologians of the past were well able to answer Johnson’s question within their own contexts. In examining my stated research question, “In what ways did the preachers studied preach doctrinally with a view to forming community?” I found the issue of community for these historical preachers was not only one of identity, significant as that is, but also one of transformation.

Identity easily carries with it the notion of barrier, a clear demarcation of who is in and who is out of a particular community or association. To an extent one sees demarcation with the preachers studied. Chrysostom preached against explicit heresy, leaving little room for doubt. Aquinas reacted to Manichean teaching. Calvin stood against the excesses of Rome. Wesley resisted excesses within the revival movement, and formalism outside of it. When one considers these preachers more closely apparently they had little interest in barriers, their evangelical appeal being regularly to the fore. The great use of corporate language and rhetorical questions, both to identify with their hearers and to draw them into dialogue, is a clear indicator that for these preachers,

building community was an exercise in personal and corporate transformation.

Doctrine was seldom used as a rod with which to scold, but very much grounded the preachers' understanding of community as the community of faith. Augustine provided depth to his understanding of community through his meditation upon Christ. Aquinas identified community as a faith relationship with Christ. Calvin worked with the biblical concept of covenant. On each occasion their purpose was not only to strengthen the believers but also to invite others to participate by faith in the community of believers. While one would not wish to be shown to be guilty of an historical fallacy, it is not unwarranted to assume these preachers would be in agreement with Zizioulas who refers to the faith community as the Church "in-stituted" by Christ and "con-stituted" by the Spirit (140).

Preaching doctrinally with a view to forming community, then, carries with it the necessity to ground such a call to community within the Christ-event, not simply one's own personal experience or need for communal identity, and to issue such as a call to personal participation within the corporate life of the body of Christ, that is, the Church, through the power of the Holy Spirit. The divine initiative must always take precedence; the indicative over the imperative. The call to community says little about self-help but much about self-surrender. The call to community demands a clear understanding of the meaning of becoming a Christ-follower, dying to self and rising to newness of life in the power of the Spirit, to those already within the community of faith, and to those observing. The call to community also requires instruction in the implications of membership of the body. The Church does not pull together to simply build a strong team or to accomplish stated objectives but is composed of persons joined together as members of the body of Christ.

Preaching doctrinally with a view to forming community has less to do with negative self-definition, that is, over and against where others place themselves, than it has to do with a positive proclamation of the gospel. This positive proclamation ought to be good news to preachers as they inhabit the postmodern world, with less attention needing to be given to proofs for faith and apologetics than does to proclamation of the faith, the preacher's true calling. Preaching to form community is very much "faith seeking understanding." It is preaching "from the inside out," that is, a declaration of faith that invites others to participate in faith.

One specific example that arose during the life of this study concerned a woman who had recently started attending Foothills Alliance Church, where I serve. She had, in her own words, begun a spiritual journey during the time of a sermon series entitled Trading Spaces (see Appendix A). As she began to discover God's love for her, the question arising in her mind was "How do you know? How can you be sure?" Our private conversations centered on knowing how one might be in love and, more significantly, the reality of God's love for her. I told her, "You'll know when you know." She left my office, went outside, and in her own words, looked up to the heavens and said, "God, you do love me! And I love you." In truth, our conversation was less about proof than faith seeking understanding. She had received the gospel in a fashion similar to Polanyi's "tacit knowledge." On the day of her baptism, at the point of her confession of faith, teasingly I asked her, "Do you know that you know that you are a child of God?" No one has ever given a more emphatic "yes" than she did that day.

Doctrinal preaching, with a view to forming community, is evangelistic and results in more than club membership. Community formation requires a clear understanding of who Christ is, the life to which he calls people, and the corporate body

in which they many now participate. In almost every case our historic preachers went further than a simple decision in their evangelistic preaching, and pressed on with the call to discipleship and holy living as the people of God. Doctrinal preaching is therefore more than information transfer concerning right belief. It is the gracious invitation of a loving God to sinful humanity to participate in the community of the redeemed made possible by the sacrifice of Christ on their behalf. Helping others to hear and respond to this invitation is the privilege and responsibility of the preacher.

To accomplish the task of doctrinal preaching today the preacher will have to preach evangelistically in a manner that deals with more than simply personal experience but rather incorporates the call to Christian community.

Scripture Interpretation

My second research question asked, “How did they connect doctrine and Scripture in preaching?” While proximity both in time and place to the biblical drama locates the historic preachers within a different era, much can be learned from them. Chrysostom set the stage with strong biblical exegesis, one that Aquinas built upon with his fluid interactions of creed and Scripture. Wesley appears to have been a master at both skills. Clearly these preachers were attentive to both the Bible and to their theological framework for interpretation. What emerges as one examines this framework is that their clearest interpretative strategy involves the larger salvific picture. The creed was useful to these preachers but, rather surprisingly, was not their ultimate interpretative tool.

Doctrine never became a matter of nitpicking though texts, comparing them to some higher body of knowledge, but was the means for viewing the particular through the lens of the whole. Augustine identified this use of doctrine clearly with his use of the

law of love for both God and neighbor for God's sake as his lodestone. In fact, this larger salvific picture of God's love for humanity, demonstrated on the cross, proved to be the greater interpretative tool. Although being aware of my interpretative bias, as noted in Chapter 3, just as with community formation, a clearly stated, passionate, evangelistic heart throbs in the lives of these sermons and preachers.

Furthermore, the fluid interaction of doctrine and Scripture did not result in Scripture becoming subservient to the lens of interpretation. Rather, Scripture was formative and held in the highest regard. Doctrinal preaching at heart is strongly exegetical. They had less of a need to drag Scripture from the past into the present, however much informed by the creed or the issues of the day, than to take hearers on a journey of faith that allowed them to inhabit the world of the text and to discover themselves within the unfolding drama of redemption. Far beyond parallels that could be made perspectives were changed from the present to the eternal:

Insofar as we allow God's story to become our home rather than a distant land, we no longer approach the Bible as consumers of religion seeking quotations, illustrations, self-help tips, and practical applications; rather, we will reverently receive it as the living Word addressed to God's people, as the story which furnishes our vocabulary, shapes our imagination, and forms our life for the sake of the whole creation. (Pasquarello, "Narrative Reading" 180)

The challenge of moving from assuming preachers today have to make Scripture relevant and applicable, to graciously allowing hearers to discover themselves within the drama of redemption is one to which preachers must rise. It is, in effect, to invite hearers to a change in worldview. Fortunately, preachers are not alone because, as also is evident in the preaching of these historic men, the role of the Holy Spirit in both the proclamation of the preacher and the reception by the hearers is paramount. Chrysostom, Augustine, and Calvin, in particular, all give attention to the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the inner and,

in every sense, the ultimate Teacher, the One who interprets Scripture and acts in the hearts of the hearers.

This community of faith, based upon a divine initiative, is nevertheless marked by a dynamic relationship between God and humanity, bringing the pneumatological dimension to the fore. Immink writes, “The Spirit not only accomplishes the *re-presentation* [original emphasis] of the Christ-event, but as much the *reception* [original emphasis] of Christ in the heart of the believer” (“Inquiry” 7). He continues to explain the role of both the preacher and the Holy Spirit:

Why do we preach? Well, because we believe that preaching is one of the instruments of the Holy Spirit. While we speak faithfully about matters of faith, we meanwhile trust that God’s Spirit is at work. So preaching presupposes that God’s Spirit is a creative Spirit, a Spirit who creates understanding, trust and longsuffering in the human realm. Accordingly, preachers should have an anthropological interest. They not only proclaim God’s redemptive work in Christ, but also point to the Spirit’s work in our human heart and daily life. (12-13)

Doctrinal preaching with a view to interpreting Scripture invites preachers to participate with the Holy Spirit in the lives of their hearers, as worldviews are changed from one that can be described as a sinful, “me-centered” view of reality, to the opening of the eyes of hearers, much like Paul’s were on the Damascus Road, to the reality of the risen Christ. This kind of preaching invites preachers to pay close attention to the Scriptures, treating them with integrity rather than a bag of texts to be reassembled at will and with a single eye to God’s ultimate purpose, the redemption of his creation to his own glory. Preaching Christian doctrine means that the preacher will come reverently and prayerfully to the Bible, listening for the Spirit’s voice, eager to set aside prior agendas with the Spirit’s assistance, and longing for a change in worldview in order that he or she may see both the words on the page and the present reality in the light of who God truly

is and what he has done on humanity's behalf. This reality also ought to be good news to the preacher in the postmodern context because the role of story as a vehicle to carry meaning is highly valued in this age.

To accomplish the task of doctrinal preaching today, the preacher will avoid simple information transfer based on creedal statements choosing instead to allow the rule of faith to draw the hearers into the living drama of the Scriptures.

Making Sense of Life

That life is complex, and that post-Christian societies find themselves somewhat rootless, is nothing startling. Much more significant would be the means to provide understanding and direction within this milieu. I asked, "Was doctrine used as a means of interpreting experience, and if so, how was this done?"

Without exception, each of the preachers studied sought to both frame and define human experience in the light of God's Word. Each was acutely aware of the circumstances within which he ministered. In truth, they were men of their own age and happily engaged with their surrounding culture. Chrysostom utilized the common belief in a hierarchy of supernatural beings to make his point. Aquinas adopted the thought patterns of both Aristotle and the mystics of his day. Wesley was adept at the use of syllogism. None sought to hide from his realities but faithfully engaged with the culture in the light of God's self-revelation.

This approach required the historic preachers to begin with an awareness of the divine initiative in revelation. The interpretation of experience by these historic preachers was not simply to provide meaning to the here and now but to cast the present in the light of God's ultimate drama. Whether a burning city, a reformation, or a revival, all were part of a larger whole. Even so, the human element was never minimized. The shared

common humanity of the preachers studied is clearly evident in their use of corporate language, apt illustrations, depth of psychological insight, and penetrating theological analysis leading to a change in perspective:

A teaching sermon is not solely focused on faith as a human awareness of God, but unfolds the fullness and richness of God and God's kingdom. The teaching preacher is not primarily adjusting to needs and circumstances of the hearer, but brings the hearer in the presence of God's kingdom as it is established in the Messiah of Israel. Such a preacher deals with the ultimate vicissitudes of life and with the destiny of our world in terms of the kingdom to come and the revealed Messiah. This means that the human horizon is broadened and that the work of the Creator and Redeemer illuminates our human experience. (Immink, "Homiletics" 109)

Preaching doctrinally with a view to making sense of life requires the preacher to hold both ends of the tension, broadening the human horizon beyond the immediate to the eternal yet with a profound understanding of and compassion towards the presenting cultural context. Such preachers have to become dedicated students of their emerging cultures, engage with their congregations and surrounding communities, tackling real life as it presents itself, always with a view to this broadening of the horizon. As William H. Willimon says, "You might think of Sunday morning as a struggle over the question, Who tells the story of what is going on in the world?" (129). The call to the preacher is to make God's voice heard.

Preachers ought not to be afraid of using relevant cultural metaphors, nor should they assume that such metaphors are value neutral. Redemptive potential can and ought to be discovered, however. One such example is the use of the popular television show Trading Spaces as a metaphor within a sermon series to communicate God's desire for the internal renovation of the human heart, relationships, and homes (see Appendix A).

Preaching doctrinally with a view to making sense of life has less to do with the modern concept of "how to," seemingly adopted as a homiletical strategy in so many

sermons compatible with a modernistic technological mindset. Such preaching does involve a profound understanding of the world in which people find themselves, their Creator and Redeemer, and their response to those realities. Preaching in this fashion will take seriously the human condition and events but be less concerned with personal satisfaction and happiness than with sanctification and holiness. As Bartow says, “A *Christian interpretation of life* [original emphasis], therefore, is not an exploration into the relevance of the gospel to the exigencies of the moment. It is, instead, a ‘read’ of those exigencies in terms of their relevance to the gospel of Christ” (136).

Preaching doctrinally with a view to making sense of life also requires that the preacher pay close attention to context. In each instance the preacher is this study spoke to their contextual situations with a clarity that allowed present reality to interface with divine truth. To assume that one can take a simple distillation of truth and apply it acontextually is entirely to miss the point of doctrinal preaching. A clear pastoral function of Christian doctrine is to equip people to make sense of life in any particular situation.

Doctrinal preaching never ignores shared humanity, even as it points away from it towards the Lord. Discovering this balance is a part of the task lovingly undertaken by preachers as those who are aware of their own weaknesses and limitations yet living in the sure hope of the transforming power of God’s grace in their lives. As Johnson rightly remarks, “Where else in today’s world can humans hear a humane and healing word, or encounter an alternative vision of reality actually being enacted?” (304).

Context and experience are of immense importance to postmodern people. Discovering the valuable role of doctrinal preaching in these circumstances is once again a gift and an opportunity for the preacher.

To accomplish the task of doctrinal preaching today, the preacher will become a

cultural as well as a scriptural exegete, searching for redemptive value in the metaphors, examples and stories that surround him or her.

Truth and Response

Preachers are generally delighted with a response to their message. Few preachers desire the call of so many of the Old Testament prophets to rejection and abandonment by their people. As I considered these preacher-theologians, I asked, “In what ways did they expect a response from the people to the truth claims they preached?”

Perhaps none more than Augustine clearly stated his purpose in preaching. Interpretation ought to lead to proclamation, and as a preacher his purpose must be to teach, delight, and in the end, move the hearer to action. Augustine’s approach was designed to engage the whole person, not just the intellect. To borrow Chrysostom’s phrase, to use the “force of eloquence,” rhetoric, in the service of piety. This principle was discovered not only in the manuals on preaching written by the subject group but also in the very manner in which they preached. Clarity of thought, simple use of language, visual beauty of metaphors, clear structures, summary statements, and paraphrases were all used, with a view to pressing home a truth claim.

The goal of the historic preachers was always a faith response:

Doctrines define the object of faith—God—not in order that God may be comprehended but in order that the believer may relate to God in faith. There is an existential, as well as a cognitive, dimension or component to the truth-claims of Christian doctrine. (McGrath, Genesis 78)

Mere assent or compliant actions alone were never enough. The purpose of preaching was to evoke faith that, in turn, was lived in action. These historic preachers preached with a view to leading others to faith in Christ and discipling believers in order that their faith might grow and deepen, thereby impacting their wider communities and

world.

Doctrinal preaching with a view to pressing home a truth claim must, therefore, not only expect a faith response but be prepared to address the whole person in order to facilitate such a response. Simply to address the mind would only be to inform. As Augustine rightly notes, preachers need to captivate the heart if the will is to be moved. Doctrinal preaching, much against stereotype, ought, therefore, to be more than informational, however relevant, and contemporary, choosing instead to focus upon the response of faith to the invitation of God.

Of particular interest is the fact that the bulk of preaching from the subject group was not explicitly creedal, that is to say, was not an overt doctrinal series. To be sure, creedal preaching was a part of the ministry of these men, but this type of preaching was generally not reserved for a particular sermon but rather was evident in almost all of their preaching. Perhaps within an emerging post-Christian culture there is a place for creedal preaching. One instance could certainly be baptismal preparation, appropriating methods from preaching forebears. A further instance might be a short series on the creed itself in order to ground and disciple believers. At this point in the journey at Foothills Alliance Church, the church leadership is reexamining our follow-up to the Alpha course, baptism, and membership preparation, with a view to more doctrinal instruction aimed at shaping the lives of new believers. Neither of these options, that is, baptismal preparation or creedal series, ought to relieve preachers of the responsibility that weekly preaching is for the purpose of pressing home God's truth claims upon the lives of their hearers. One of the exciting developments within Foothills Alliance Church during the life of this study has been to move towards a regular weekly prayer altar ministry at all of the weekend services and to witness people responding to God's truth and experiencing his

transforming grace in their lives.

To accomplish the task of doctrinal preaching today, the preacher will never be satisfied with the communication of precepts, choosing instead to become a servant of the Word whose goal is the life transformation of the gathered community.

Additional Findings

Several other common features of note emerged from the study of the five preachers. First, the practice of *lectio continua* demonstrated by Chrysostom, Aquinas, and Calvin is remarkable. This favored method of text selection stands in contrast to both mainstream church adherence to the lectionary and free church tendencies towards aimless wandering throughout the Bible. The practice of the historic preachers not only demonstrates their high regard for the Scripture but also the opportunity this method affords to a more holistic approach to doctrine. A consistent journey through various books of the Bible will naturally take preachers to places they might not otherwise go and afford them the opportunity to explore doctrine in all of its facets, and from many perspectives.

As a result of this the preaching staff at Foothills Alliance Church have chosen to move the bulk of their preaching towards this goal, reserving summer months only for more topical series. For instance, in the fall of 2004 a series on The Ten Commandments, entitled “Rediscovering the Sacred” was preached. Advent 2004 through May 2005 has been reserved for a series on Luke, entitled “The Amazing Race: From Bethlehem to Jerusalem.”

The approach has been to modify the strict adherence of Calvin to a verse-by-verse approach, certainly in the case of Luke’s gospel, to a slightly more flexible model. Foothills does not have daily services, as was customary in Calvin’s time, nor as we seek

to reach into our post-Christian community can we assume regular attendance from a large segment of our congregation. Instead, the preaching staff have chosen to use pericopes, which do greater justice to the narrative of Luke, while at the same time allowing people to jump back into the series a little more easily if they have missed a weekend. As preachers we have been able to preach on the Incarnation, grace, faith, temptation, baptism, healing, the Atonement, and the return of Christ, amongst other things. In each instance doctrine is considered more than information exchange, rather, it is community formation, Scripture interpretation, making sense of life, and a truth claim inviting people to respond.

Second, all of the preachers studied chose to preach extempore, even when making use of a structured outline. The rationale of the historic preachers was the interpersonal nature of communication, which often can be hindered by reading a manuscript. If doctrine indeed functions as has been suggested, considering this approach to preaching becomes all the more necessary. The invitation from God to humanity is not only addressed to persons but also made personal in Christ Jesus.

As children of modernity this has been a stretch for us at Foothills Alliance Church. While I would like to say we have succeeded in this regard, we are still journeying. Several sermons have been preached completely without notes and, to great effect. One of the challenges, and opportunities, at Foothills has been the fact of multiple weekend services. The intent is for everyone to hear the same message, thereby increasing the sense of pressure upon the preacher. On the other hand, the repetition of the message also allows for a much greater freedom from written material.

Interaction with cultural developments has led us to the use of image magnification in the weekend services at Foothills. At times we have been concerned that

the use of technology might represent a move away from interpersonal communication, but the overwhelming response of the congregation has been positive, seeing it rather as an enhancement.

Whatever form preaching does take, the need for it to be personal is paramount. Personal communication involves the use of personal illustration where possible, as exemplified in the Trading Spaces series (see Appendixes A, B, and C), and, more significantly, a profound understanding of the congregation, their circumstances, challenges, and concerns in order for shared humanity to become evident and Christ's shared humanity with all to be revealed in its transforming power.

Finally, the preachers studied were highly evangelistic in their preaching, even Aquinas, much to my surprise. Rather than viewing doctrine as dry academic study, the historic preachers considered it to be a powerful life-changing word. On the other hand, the evangelism of these preachers was not rooted simply in human experience but in the concrete realities of God in Christ reconciling the world to himself. The sample sermons contained within the appendixes were delivered as part of a summer evangelistic series, entitled Trading Spaces, with a view to implementing much that had been learned during the course of this research.

Contextualization of the Findings

The challenge of this study has been to develop a fresh contextualization of learnings from centuries ago to the post-Christian society emerging today. Jenson explains the term post-Christian:

[It is belonging] to a community—a polity or civil society—which used to be Christian and whose habits of thought and policies of action are determined by that very fact. One can therefore be a post-Christian without knowing anything about Christianity—and many in the West's great cities are now just in that condition. (21)

The habits of thought emerging today are much more postmodern in outlook. Several markers were identified in Chapter 1 as being representative of such a development. These markers included the shift from meta-narrative towards localized and contextualized narratives, an emerging ambiguity where truth can take many meanings, a rejection of absolutes in favor of pluralism, a pessimism that tends towards pleasure seeking to dull its ache, a longing for community despite the fracturing of families, and a spiritual hunger that the Church seems unable to satisfy.

My research indicates that much can be learned from the past regarding preaching Christian doctrine, but has left one with the challenge of appropriating such knowledge in fresh ways. The challenge according to David B. McEwan is “to supplant amnesia with memory, and despair with hope, while living in the covenantal present, which then gives back our forfeited past and holds out a hopeful future” (8).

A preacher of Christian doctrine in the twenty-first century, if he or she is to accomplish the task, will learn to embody the practices of the preacher-theologians of the past. Doctrine, functioning as the grammar of faith, enabled past preachers to address the issues of community, Scripture, experience, and, ultimately, Truth. The present day preacher would be wise to incorporate these insights regarding the pastoral purpose of doctrine into his or her preaching. The practices of *lectio continua*, a return to orality, and an emphasis upon evangelism flow from these commitments and facilitate the preaching of doctrine. Contextualization requires that these principles and practices become embodied in emerging post-Christian societies.

One of the more obvious conclusions to be drawn from this study of ancient preacher-theologians was their ability to interpret both Scripture and experience in the

light of the drama of salvation, thereby grounding choices and conclusions in the ultimate self-revelation of God, Jesus Christ. So often preachers face the temptation to address the immediate, for the sake of relevance, forgetting or ignoring the purpose of preaching.

Cooper and McClure clearly state the purpose of preaching:

The sermon, in principle, is central to the life and thought of a worshipping community. It brings together the fundamental working powers and authorities of a living faith. In the context of a worship service, the sermon is the meeting place of God, Scripture, and the present; it provides a home for faith, theology, and culture; it is where a biblical understanding of reality is confessed, interpreted, and related to our experience of reality; it is where we hear whispered to us an inner word of God addressing the particularities of our lives and times; and finally, it is where gospel and judgment encounter us. (2)

The Church needs to be reminded of hearing the Word of God in the words of humanity.

Tragically, much of what can take place in a pulpit is more akin to anthropology than it is to Christian theology. As I was writing these final paragraphs, I had the opportunity to attend a major worship conference in Canada. During the seminars, several keynote speakers emerged as relevant to this study. The first individual spoke for an hour on the deeper Christian life, failing once to mention the provision of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. The most common phrase I heard was “you must.” Another speaker gave a highly motivational talk on dreams for human lives, again with no reference to Christ. Insightful it was; Christian theology it was not. As I despaired that anyone would rise to the challenge, the final speaker of the conference rose, turned to Ephesians 2, and carefully, theologically, and humorously led the hearers into the meat of God’s Word for the day. My heart was warmed and my spirit challenged to live in the grace and power of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Throughout this study I became increasingly aware that unless preaching is to be based upon the fact that “in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor.

5:19, NRSV), it will remain anthropology and never become Christian theology. If preaching is concerned with Christ, the Holy One, it can rest upon an objective foundation for faith and theological enquiry, a rock upon which to build. This reality is where contextualization ought to begin.

What follows is one possibility of how preaching Christian doctrine might look within a post-Christian context. Rather than begin with the research questions themselves, the themes chosen focus upon Christ even as they relate to the four research questions and yet are modified so as to address issues meaningfully, which present themselves within emerging cultures.

Identity Found in Christ

To understand identity is, therefore, to understand it in the light of God's self-revelation in Christ Jesus. Only when people understand not only the "how" and "why" but the "who" of Christ, will they begin to penetrate the depths of who they are called to be. To consider humanity in any other light is to assert our self-understanding over and against the grace of God in Christ.

In the post-Christian context preachers must understand who Jesus is in order to tackle the issues of loss of identity and incoherence so prevalent within society. The cry for meaning that surrounds the preacher is ultimately a cry for identity, and one that finds an answer in Christ. Preachers may well need to spend more time meditating on the realities of the Incarnation as they prepare to preach than on the pressing circumstances of the moment because the answer to the latter will only be found in the former.

Johnson demonstrates how Christian doctrine can be of great assistance to the preacher. Four functions are proposed.

First, doctrine working as definition. The importance of doctrine in defining the

community of faith has already been noted and, in this context, it is necessary to broaden that statement to defining identity in Christ. To preach Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society is to have clear understanding of who Jesus is and then subsequently, what that understanding implies for the believer in Christ. The Church in the post-Christian world must rise to the challenge of definition because in the minds of the wider society what the Church is all about is quite unclear.

Second, doctrine acting as the profession of faith. Christ by his very being calls people to response and personal commitment. The quest for identity and meaning within post-Christian societies ought to be met with an invitation and challenge to discovery through a personal commitment to Christ. Post-Christianity frees preachers from apology and for invitation.

Third, the rule of faith provides a means to interpret both Scripture and experience. Gaining perspective is important to postmoderns, and clearly articulating this one perspective of faith seeking understanding is a specific calling of the Church. Preachers will invite others to join in this journey.

Fourth, the symbol of faith, both the written Scriptures and creeds, the baptistery and table, all provide a visible means to identify this community as a community of Christ-followers. The very things modernity has minimized within the life of the Church need to be recovered for its well-being.

Community as the Body of Christ

The consequence of discovering identity in Christ is membership in the body of Christ. This is a journey far beyond individualism or pluralism and into the heart of the gospel where walls are torn down and barriers destroyed. As the emerging culture struggles with how to build meaningful community the message of the Church needs to

demonstrate community in Christ. Much of the teaching in the Church may well need to be recast from the moralism of a prior generation, seeking little more than behavior modification, towards a complete change in worldviews and horizons, discovering and interpreting life from this new vantage point. An exploration of the possibilities of grace within community, not just for the individual, is required.

Given such an emphasis, Zizioulas is helpful as he attempts to explain this issue by posing three hypostases of humanity (49-65). First, the hypostasis of biological existence as we now know it. Biological existence is characterized by an ontological necessity, in that people do not choose to be born, in comparison to the absolute freedom of God. Biological existence is also characterized by a descent towards individualism, with death being the final seal upon individuality. The despair of many postmoderns is evident. For salvation to be possible, Zizioulas says, not only must a situation where the body is not destroyed emerge but also one where the very constitutional makeup of the hypostasis can be changed. Zizioulas refers to this as the hypostasis of ecclesial existence. Ecclesial existence marks the emergence of true community. Of course, this new existence also leads to the tension between what believers are and what they are becoming, something virtually every Christ-follower has experienced when biblical community fractures in some way.

The third hypostasis that Zizioulas mentions is sacramental or eucharistic. This eucharistic hypostasis represents his understanding of how believers live within the tension of what they are and what they are becoming. The eucharistic hypostasis is a part of the movement toward fulfillment. Significantly, Wesley also saw the sacrament as sanctifying. In Christ believers are becoming, and this is their eschatological hope. "Our becoming involves a waiting for the completion of what was begun in us, and is as yet

only completed in Christ” (Zizioulas 55-56).

Preaching Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society involves deeper meditation upon the meaning of community as the body of Christ, how Christ-followers live in this tension of “already” and “not yet,” and, perhaps surprisingly to some, the role of the Lord’s table as the place the community gathers to celebrate its unity. As Calvin says, this is indeed the covenant meal.

Context Illuminated by the Narrative of Christ

I recall many years ago being given the advice in a class on hermeneutics to always return to the “Christological touchstone” when interpreting the Bible. What seemed like a great idea has been demonstrated to be a significant principle throughout this study. Whether the interpretation is of experience or of the Scriptures, preachers must view it through the lens of, what I like to call, “the big salvific picture.” Time and again the preachers researched took this “big picture” approach, and if only preachers today would apply this lesson from them they might discover not only what it means to handle the issues of perspective and context better but to speak from a position of humility and authenticity.

A fresh contextualization of this “big salvific picture” approach is going to require preachers to be adept theologians, able to bring insight to each situation and, at the same time, be compassionate and authentic as they care for others. The human element cannot be ignored while simply seeking to transfer information. Rather, the goal of preachers ought to be transformation.

To become contextually aware, preachers are going to have to become students of, and participants in, the emerging culture, and not just at a theoretical level. Preachers will need to discover their local culture, be immersed in its rhythms of life, and feel its

anxieties and hurts, if they are to be agents of transformation. As Schwöbel states, “Preaching congregationally is, therefore, the continuous interchange between the great words of the Christian message and the small matters of concrete church life” (“Preacher’s Art” 18).

Wesley stands out as a preacher who could adapt to the emerging cultural realities of his time. Perhaps one of the greatest lessons learned from him is to cling tenaciously to the core of the Christian faith, as expressed in the creed, while the presentation of the faith, preaching, if it is to be effective, must engage with the cultural context and learn to speak the language of the day.

Of course, such a “big salvific picture” stance not only interprets reality as is but calls preachers to a future filled with hope and challenge:

Since Jesus’ resurrection and his exaltation to be Lord is not yet the consummation of his lordship, but the ground and guarantee of his liberating and remedial lordship over all, so the divine righteousness is present in faith and in baptism, yet in such a way that it is engaged in a process which will be completed only at the parousia of Christ. That is why the man who is justified begins to suffer under the contradiction of this world with which he has a bodily solidarity, for he must in obedience seek the divine righteousness in his body, on earth, and in all other creatures. (Moltmann 206)

To persons in community, Christian doctrine presents a fresh interpretation of their experience, even as it draws them into the future hope.

Hope Grounded in Christ

Second Temple Jewish eschatology and apocalypticism were to some extent dualistic: two worlds (heaven and earth), two dimensions (space and time), and two ages (this present age and the age to come). While the first two of these stated polarities were contemporaneous, the final pair were considered sequential. 4 Ezra 7:50 states, “The Most High has made not one age but two” (NRSV). While numerous positions can be

taken on New Testament eschatology, of greatest significance to this study was that the writers significantly modified this sequential understanding, such that the new age has already arrived, although it is not yet consummated. Thus, the present evil age and the new age coexist for a time, and this is a period of tension. Christians are, as Barry L. Callen states, “[b]etween Easter and the Eschaton” (276).

The preachers studied understood well the hope that Christ brings, a hope not simply of a better future but one that actually draws believers into the future by action of the Holy Spirit:

Hope’s statements of promise, however, must stand in contradiction to the reality which can at present be experienced. They do not result from experiences but are the condition for the possibility of new experiences. They do not seek to illuminate the reality which exists, but the reality which is coming. They do not seek to make a mental picture of existing reality, but to lead existing reality towards the promised and hoped for transformation. They do not seek to bear the train of reality, but to carry the track before it. (Moltmann 18)

Preaching in this generation ought to be hope filled, even as it is world affirming, not simply dreaming of a better day to come but actively participating with the Holy Spirit in the transformation of lives, families, communities, and nations to the glory of God. The apparent hopelessness of postmodernity is the very context where preachers ought to preach hope. Preaching, which is easily recognizable without being heard at times, communicates hope because, regardless of words, watching communities will recognize doctrine in every action as the Church discovers afresh how to bless and grace its wider community with its life.

Summary

The preaching of Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society will be Christological, without becoming narrow in focus. To the question of identity in a fast

changing world of plurality and confusion, preachers point to Christ and who believers are in him. To that of community, much of which is virtual and transitory, profound implications are contained within the reality of being members of the body of Christ. Scripture and experience can be framed and interpreted in light of who Jesus is, rather than fitting Jesus into the emerging cultural context, and so bring perspective and clarity. In so doing, preachers will be messengers of hope, based not upon wishful thinking but upon Christ, the hope of glory.

Preaching Christian doctrine has little to do with “dry theology” but everything to do with a vital and dynamic Christian life. Historically, theology was a practical concern, and the pre-modern preachers studied demonstrate the possibility of preaching in such a manner. Just as doctrine functions as the grammar of faith, enabling the faithful to interpret the Scriptures, so, too, doctrine functions as the grammar of Christian preaching. Rather than having to preach a formal catechetical sermon on a particular article of the creed in order to be a doctrinal preacher, one needs to pay attention to this grammar as it informs every sermon. Preaching creedal content does not necessarily mean preaching the creed itself, for doctrine does more than shape the form of the sermon; it undergirds and informs it. Preaching is indeed first-order theology.

Preaching doctrine is not concerned with right belief for its own sake but with the life of faith for God’s sake. A clear call to community is an invitation to personal and communal life transformation. The responsibility of preachers is to clarify who Jesus is and the life to which he calls people. The mechanism easily suited to this purpose is to invite people to inhabit the narrative of the gospel, thereby experiencing a radical shift in worldview. With this shift in mind, prayerfully relying upon the Holy Spirit, preachers preach truth to the whole person, calling for and inviting response. In so doing, one

recognizes the pastoral function of Christian doctrine, whose ultimate aim is the glory of God himself.

Practical Implications of the Study

A work of homiletical theology is not necessarily designed to supply a “how to” methodology but to encourage preachers to think more clearly about their mission and purpose. Nevertheless, one of the more salient features of the research was the affirmation of the human element in preaching, both the preacher himself and the concerns of the hearers. With these thoughts in mind, a number of specific recommendations can be made to enable the preacher in the task of doctrinal preaching.

The first, and most obvious, implication is the need for theological reflection. At worst, sermons may be little more than a religious response to the issues of the day. Thankfully, many sermons are solid expositions of Scripture. This study has indicated a need for clear theological reflection with regard to both Scripture and experience as sermons are produced. One could do no better than to read and reread Chrysostom as he responds to the impending doom awaiting his city to understand the impact such preaching can have. Whether the sermon is driven by the immediate needs of the day or follows something approaching a *lectio continua*, it must be a work of theological reflection, guarded from the whims of the preacher, and grounded in the ancient Christian tradition mediated to believers through the creeds. As Wilson says, “Doctrine ought not sound like an intellectual hurdle the congregation must overcome, but rather like real-life issues being reflected upon with care, understanding and wisdom” (Broken Words 89). The challenge for the preacher is to refrain from the temptation to find solutions before he or she has done the hard theological work. Perhaps an extra period of time needs to be slotted into the weekly sermon-making calendar simply for this reflective purpose.

So often, as products of a technological era, preachers seek to convey simple, straightforward, manageable solutions to complex problems. Preachers deliver advice on marriage, parenting, time management, and the like, often with little or no connection to the heart of the Christian faith. Interestingly, the creed says little about these pressing issues, but as has been discovered from the historic preachers, the creed enabled them to bring the heart of the faith to bear upon the most difficult of circumstances. Paul preached in a manner that brought who Jesus was to bear upon practical issues:

Paul's solution to the problem of relationships is not an exhortation on the need to pull together, or the strength of working as a team, or even their need for one another's gifts. He attempted to solve the problem of human relationships by a profound exposition of who Jesus Christ is, and of what he did in giving himself for the salvation of everyone. (English 36)

If nothing else, this study has reinforced the claim of Smith, who identifies preaching as primarily a theological act:

A vital preaching ministry includes the skills of the sophisticated communicator, the attentiveness of the biblical exegete, and the social analysis of the most discerning sociologist, but first and foremost it is the craft and act of a working theologian. (1)

In preaching doctrine, preachers model theological reflection to the community of faith, gifting them with the possibility of doing likewise in the everyday realities of their own lives. Quite simply, doctrine is highly practical.

Second, preaching ought to be holistic. The doctrinal sermon is not about information transfer but personal transformation. Change of this magnitude requires, in Augustine's words, that just as "the hearer must be pleased in order to secure his attention, so he must be persuaded in order to move him to action" (Schaff 2: 583).

Doctrinal preaching is attentive to the use of language, using words, metaphors, and illustrations that capture the attention, all with a view to action. Little excuse remains for

tired stories and muddled communication in the service of God's Word. Preachers would do well to read more widely and beyond the religious realm, in order to expand their use of metaphor, paraphrase, and illustration. The Church and the world need preachers who can "turn ears into eyes." Furthermore, the question as to how the will can be moved to action in each sermon ought to be addressed.

Aquinas and Wesley modeled well the practice of clear structures, which have informed preaching for quite some time. To the extent that these structures are still useful tools of communication, preachers should follow Augustine's advice and use them. Nevertheless, if in an emerging post-Christian culture the shift towards narrative affords a greater opportunity to proclaim the gospel, then by the same token, preachers should also heed his advice.

Holistic preaching means that doctrine will not be an abstract notion or system of beliefs but discovered to be relevant to the realities of ordinary life. Holistic preaching need not be afraid of the mundane nor the extremities of life but should always be willing to articulate the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ in those circumstances:

Doctrine provides guidance as to the direction we should take. It is not intended to be a dead deposit from the past but a lively contribution to our future. It signals a journey so far faithfully completed. It also points us to our forward way. When doctrine comes to life in the church, the world should look out! (English 34)

Third, preaching is an act of interpersonal communication, just as much as God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is. Meaningful communication calls for authenticity, a willingness to display shared humanity with hearers, and a setting aside of notes if they are getting in the way. The use of the pronoun "we" is probably better than "you." The preacher is not communicating facts but inviting the hearers to discover afresh the God who is speaking to them.

The importance of interpersonal communication requires preachers to adopt a different stance in both preparation and delivery, from monologue to dialogue. Somehow, the “force of eloquence” must be employed to engage hearers in an inner dialogue with the truth of God’s Word that has the power to change lives. Post-Christian people have no intention of being lectured, but remain open to perspective change and are keen to discuss alternatives and possibilities. The goal of preachers ought to be to lead hearers to the possibilities of divine grace. Preaching Christian doctrine in a post-Christian society involves the relinquishment of power and authority that comes with standing “six feet above contradiction” in the pulpit and, adopting a posture of humility and authenticity that seeks to offer fresh perspective upon the realities of life and eternity.

A preacher of Christian doctrine in the twenty-first century, if he or she is to accomplish the task, will learn to embody the practices of the preacher-theologians of the past. A return to the practical nature of doctrine through disciplined theological reflection leads the preacher away from information transfer and towards holistic preaching in the emerging context where doctrine functions as the deep grammar of the sermon. Likewise, the stance adopted will avoid authoritarianism in favor of authenticity through meaningful interpersonal communication. The sermons contained in Appendixes A, B, and C illustrate this process of reflection and holistic preaching that is both doctrinal and contextualized.

Limitations of the Study

By definition an inductive historical study has many limitations. It cannot prove but merely suggest. Terrance W. Tilley in noting that “historical conclusions are textured” remarks, “Historical claims are always probable at best and vulnerable to revision by recovering new data, reanalyzing old data, reevaluating the significance of

established facts, utilizing new forms of warrant, and so on” (159).

The parameters of the study were that only five preachers, mostly from the pre-Enlightenment era, would be researched and only two sermons from each studied in depth. In some cases, notably Aquinas, the published corpus in English was very narrow. Any conclusions drawn are, therefore, open to challenge based upon further research of the selected preachers or of others not included in this study. Of necessity, this study was a narrow selection.

Further, no extensive review of the literature relevant to these individuals was conducted, being deemed beyond the confines of this study, although relevant secondary sources were utilized for the purposes of triangulation. This factor also serves to limit the generalizations that may be drawn.

My intent was not only to learn from the past but also to contextualize to the present, an activity that may be considered highly subjective. Nevertheless, the reading presented here is certainly as valid as any other.

Contribution to Research

The greatest contribution of this research to the field of homiletical theology has been to highlight the significance of doctrinal preaching within a post-Christian cultural context. Given the tacit sense of being adrift in the minds of many preachers, my research has confirmed that the cultural changes enveloping the Church provide opportunity for preaching, and the historical resources available can serve as trustworthy guides as to its practice. The review of literature has also filled a gap in the existing corpus by exploring in depth the relationship between doctrine and preaching.

This study is helpful to new and veteran preachers as they grapple with their cultural context. While the original focus was preaching within Western Europe, where

my preaching ministry began, and where post-Christianity is most prevalent, it also has relevance to North America, particularly Canada, where I now minister. In resourcing preachers this study will also benefit their congregations, grounding them in the faith once delivered to the saints.

Artmann has made, perhaps, the most significant strides in the process of articulating an understanding of preaching Christian doctrine to date. He points towards the need for post-individualistic preaching that emphasizes community, post-rationalistic preaching that validates experience, post-dualistic preaching that is holistic, and post-noeticentric preaching that supplies purposeful knowledge.

This study has highlighted a doctrinal footing for dialogue to continue, demonstrating that doctrine, being multi-faceted, has the ability to allow preachers to address the concerns of post-Christian culture. As preachers seek to form community, interpret the ancient texts of Scripture, make sense out of life, and respond to the One who is truth, Jesus Christ, doctrine must be preached.

Recommendations for Further Study

This research was based upon a very limited sample of preachers and sermons. Further work needs to be done along the lines of that pioneered by Old and Edwards, specifically into the practice of doctrinal preaching throughout the history of the Church. Many questions arise: “Did other preachers throughout Christian history utilize doctrine in the manner in which the preachers selected for this study did? If so, how? If not, why not?” “Have there been good examples of doctrinal preaching since the Enlightenment? What can be learned from this preaching?” “What is the relationship, if any, between doctrinal preaching and spiritual formation?”

Further study also ought to be done with regard to the reception of such preaching

today, its effectiveness, and the role of the Holy Spirit in such reception.

APPENDIX A

Trading Spaces: Where Do I Begin?

The following is the edited transcript of a sermon preached at Foothills Alliance Church on 3 and 4 July 2004. It is based upon an oral presentation and bears both the strengths and weaknesses of such communication. The Scripture passage chosen was Mark 1:14-20. The sermon began with a DVD clip from the Trading Spaces television show.

This sermon illustrates the use of culturally accessible metaphors being utilized in the service of the Word. The goal was to begin with common experiences and understandings, recasting these in the light of Scripture. Despair with the interminable now is illuminated by Christian hope, indicating the gracious possibilities for life transformation. The themes of sin, salvation in Christ Jesus, and the life of discipleship emerge as part of the eschatological hope to which all people are called. Thus, the sermon began with simple lived experience, as mediated through a television show, progressed towards an understanding of the human condition, while remaining Christ focused throughout. The sermon progressed by means of an implied dialogue in which the hearers are invited to participate.

My privilege was witnessing people receive the gift of faith on this occasion, as well as believers testify to a renewed understanding of the call to salvation.

How many of you watch the show Trading Spaces? How many of you watch because your wife makes you? How many of your wives watch because of Ty the carpenter? A simple home decorating show has turned into a cultural phenomenon.

The premise is fairly simple. The show requires two neighbors and two rooms in two different houses. They will supply a crew, complete with a carpenter and two designers. They will give you forty-eight hours and a thousand dollars to spend on each room. The catch is that you do not work on your own house. You work on the room in your neighbor's house. They, in turn, work in the room in your house.

You are able to put up some limitations, saying that under no circumstances will certain things be done. But as far as I can tell, the designers do not pay attention to your restrictions. Near the end of the show, there is an unveiling of the rooms. Each couple returns to their house. They are led into their house by the host of the show, Paige Davis. Their eyes are closed, and when they are in the room, they are invited to open their eyes. What happens next is anybody's guess.

Of course, you can imagine the possibilities. Neighbors going wild. Designers living out their decorating fantasies at someone else's expense. Installations that don't quite fit. Color schemes that would make even me blush! The potential for transformation and disaster is huge. Maybe that is what makes it so entertaining.

In reality, at least for the contestants, their goal, apart from becoming famous for a day, is to have a transformation in their home. They are hoping for a room makeover. They are looking for someone who has better ideas and can do a better job than they can. In fact, when I think about it, it is probably people like me who apply to get on the show.

Last year we decided to decorate our dining room. It was just a plain old room. The walls were the same color as all the other walls in the house. No pictures. Nothing fancy, just a table and chairs. But my wife, a huge fan of Trading Spaces had big plans. She was hoping for a French café. She checked out various ideas, settled on colors, bought pictures, window coverings, candles, the works. In fact, she even let me buy a

new coffee machine! Now, painting I can do. Quite well, if I may say so. Curtains—no problem. My difficulty—she wanted a little decorative high shelf to put bottles and ornaments on. I know how to chop wood and burn it in a fire. I can nail things into wood. I can even sand a piece of wood. But build a shelf? I needed help.

Now we pause for a commercial break. Darrell Fowler to the rescue. What a carpenter. He built a beautiful shelf, which both fitted and stayed up! He even matched the stain to the baseboards perfectly. With help from an expert, someone who knew what they were doing, someone with better ideas and greater skills, the transformation of our dining room was complete, and the French café emerged.

One of my greatest discoveries, perhaps my greatest ever discovery, is that Jesus wants to come into our homes, our lives, our families in order to be the designer who can help us redecorate. He says, “Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Rev. 3:20, NIV).

WHY TRADE SPACES?

Of course, the most basic question is, why would I want to do that? Why should I trade spaces with Jesus and allow him to come into my life. What’s the point?

I think that is a fantastic question. None of us really like disruption. It’s fun when people come to visit with us, but homes have to be cleaned, schedules are messed up, and plans sent into a tailspin. No matter how much we enjoy the visit, it can be disruptive. Of course, friends, even family, only stay for a couple of weeks. But when kids come, do they ever disrupt life; and they stick around for eighteen to twenty-four years! So, why would we want Jesus to come along disrupting our lives? Why trade spaces?

Some of us here today could answer that question more easily than others. Do you remember my shelf? I knew I needed Darrell. I was never going to accomplish that by

myself. I was aware of both my limitations and my wife's expectations. There was a huge gap between the two. A gap I was never going to close by myself. If the shelf was going to go up, someone was going to have to do it for me.

How did I know that? Seventeen years ago when we first married, and lived in Glasgow, Scotland, I tried. Gillian wanted a kitchen shelf, and I was the man to do it, or so I thought. I thought I could impress her. She went shopping and I got to work. Several hours and holes in the wall later I had come to realize I was more likely to end up making a serving hatch that put up a shelf. I couldn't do it.

And some of us have discovered that same reality with other aspects of life. We've not been able to do it by ourselves. Some of us have suffered relational failures—marriages that have disintegrated, kids that will no longer communicate with us, and friendships that went into deep freeze years ago. Some of us have suffered moral failures—unethical financial decisions, sexual relationships outside of the marriage covenant, taking liberties with the truth in order to protect ourselves. Some of us even feel as though we are complete failures—unable to cope with the reality of life without medicating ourselves, struggling with addictions, crushed with poor self-image and low self-esteem, unable to hold a job down, or speechless in the face of death. Some of us know all too well that we need someone to come and to help with the mess, someone to fix what is broken, someone who can bring new focus. We know we need to trade spaces.

But not all of us feel that way. I don't always feel that way. Apart from the shelf failure, my life was just fine. A beautiful wife, a beautiful home, and a fantastic career. I had it made. I fast tracked towards partnership with Ernst & Young as a corporate and international taxation consultant, regularly took on the revenue authorities and won in court, negotiated taxation legislation with government officials, and was handsomely

rewarded for all of it. My life was not falling apart. It was skyrocketing. I didn't need much else to make it successful or fulfilling. So, why disrupt it? Why trade spaces with Jesus? What more was needed?

My very first shelf taught me another lesson. Do you remember, the one that led to holes in the wall, a frustrated husband, and a disappointed wife? I discovered after many futile attempts to get the thing fixed that the little pine shelf was flawed. The ornamental brackets that were supposed to hold it up were not quite square. It was fundamentally flawed. I didn't just learn that about the shelf. It was true of me too. No, I wasn't cruel, or unkind, or overly selfish. But fundamentally, something was wrong.

My story, your story, is the story of everyman, of all of humanity. It is the story of independent minded people who believe they can do life all by themselves, with little concern about a relationship with God. Yet the irony is, that is the very purpose of life, but we don't see it.

Chris McCandless, son of a wealthy family, graduated from college, gave his \$25,000 savings to charity, left his belongings at home, abandoned his car, and in April 1992 walked alone into the Alaska wilderness. He wanted to live off the land and discover meaning and purpose for his life. Noble sentiments. Four months later, a moose hunter found his decomposing body in the bush. It is a chilling story of good intentions and unbelievably horrific consequences. And, I believe, an apt metaphor for our lives.

Few, if any of us, choose a horrific outcome. We don't intend to lose our way. Our plans are admirable, and filled with hope. But things don't necessarily work out as we had hoped. Whether it is lack of information, poor advice, mistakes in judgment, or simply wrong choices, there comes a point when we are bound to realize that we are way over our heads in trouble. Why? The Bible says, "Obsession with self in these matters is a

dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life” (Rom. 8:6 Peterson, The Message).

God created us to be in a relationship with him. Whenever we ignore that fact, we are just like Chris heading off into the wilderness. And whether you realize it or not, you’re heading towards a dead end. Some of us are coming to recognize our need for help, that we need to trade spaces. Others are unsure, so let me remind you of this, “It’s in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone” (Eph. 1:11 The Message).

Why would I trade spaces? Because I want my life to matter, to count for something, to have significance. I want the very best for my wife and children. I want to discover all of God’s plans for me, to walk into the future with him as my guide. I want to know who God is, why he made me, why he cares, why Jesus gave his life for me, what is the difference he can make in my life, my home, my marriage, my job, my frustrations at building shelves! I want to do life to the max—God’s way—and I want to know what happens when life is done and the ultimate realities of death and eternity cross my path.

HOW CAN I TRADE SPACES?

So, where do I begin? How can I trade spaces? What does it mean to invite Jesus into my life and into my home? What will that look like? What is it all about?

A Relationship with Jesus

Fundamentally, it is about a relationship with Jesus. People often ask, “who are you?” An easy question, but the answer is not always easy. Who am I? A son, husband,

father, tax consultant, pastor, student, graduate, foreigner, European, Scottish, white, heterosexual, left-handed, dyslexic, asthmatic. It all really depends upon who is asking and what they want to know. Are they enquiring about my family, profession, education, ethnic origin, habits, or health? For most of the questions the answers depend upon some sort of relationship, whether to people or an institution.

Who we are is all about relationships. And much of how we feel about ourselves depends upon them, too. I was proud of all three of my kids as I read report cards last week. I had a fantastic day hiking with all of my family in Kananaskis last weekend. Sometimes I can be Mr. Wonderful with my wife! I felt quite important when I was asked to read a paper at a theological conference a couple of years ago. Those feelings came from relationships, whether intimate or casual. We all seem to have a need to be loved, to be affirmed, to be wanted, to be useful, to be needed, and to be cared for. Relationships matter.

But whenever we only see ourselves in that light we start trekking towards the dead end. When no one says, "I love you," the conclusion is that I'm unlovable. When no one appreciates what I do, I must be worthless. When no one notices me, then I must be insignificant.

Do you see what the problem is here? It is defining ourselves only in terms of these relationships when Jesus longs for us to find our identity in him. We're going to catch a glimpse of this in Mark's Gospel.

Mark's account of the life of Jesus is all centered on a relationship with Jesus. He begins by announcing, "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God" (1:1, NIV), and in dramatic fashion, concludes his account of the crucifixion of Jesus with the Roman centurion announcing, "Surely this man was the Son of God" (15:39,

NIV). The last person you would expect to make such a statement was the very one who got it. We're going to read together about how this kind of relationship starts.

SCRIPTURE READING: Mark 1:14-20

It's really not all that complicated. Jesus makes two simple statements, and has two simple instructions.

First, the time has come—the moment has arrived. We understand that. We get the difference between chronological time and that defining moment kind of event when you ask someone to marry you, when a child is born, when exam results are posted, when the dentist says “Open wide”—those moments when time seems to stand still as you await the outcome. That's what Jesus is talking about. You see, you can't manufacture that kind of moment. It just happens. In fact, Jesus says, “No one comes to me unless the Father who sent me draws him” (John 6:44, NIV). That kind of a moment is a God thing. Those of you here today who are Christ followers may well remember that moment in your life. Some of you here today might be sensing that this is your moment and that God is speaking to you. Don't let the moment pass. Others might be wondering what that would seem like. You know, it's OK to ask God to grant you that kind of moment. It's where a relationship with Jesus begins. The time has come.

Second, the kingdom of God is near—God's presence and God's rule are here. Jesus says that John first announced it, as a herald. And what he announced has become reality. Not a realm, a geographical place, but One who rules in the hearts and lives of people. Jesus. What he's saying is that the Master Designer has shown up. The Trading Spaces team is good to go. Are you ready? Will you let them in? Will you respond? What are you going to do?

Then come the instructions—simple as well, but sufficient to allow us to get this

relationship going.

Repent—change. Hand over the keys. Let the designer to his job. Invite him into your home and into your life. Be prepared for the changes he's going to make.

Disruptive—yes! A wild ride—yes! But wait for the transformation. Make space for him to get inside your life and get to work. What does that mean? A simple invitation will do. Jesus—I'm going to take a risk. I'm going to allow you into my life. I'm going to invite you to make change. I'm giving you the keys. You see, this relationship is not so much an equal partnership, like a marriage, as it is inviting the Master in. It's about surrendering control—something we're not too comfortable with. We're take charge people. That's one of the things I enjoy about the Trading Spaces show, as the designers take charge and the contestants get little say. It's fun watching them in that predicament—just let it happen to me! But if I'm going to trade spaces from me being in control of my life to Jesus being in control it's going to have to happen. Repent.

Believe the good news—trust the Designer. Let him take charge. Even when it doesn't seem to make too much sense. Even when you think you could make a better job of it. Even when you don't see where all of this is going. Trust. Believe—that he has a plan for you, that he knows where he is going, that the end is going to be better than the beginning, that he can lead me from dead-end living and dying to a life that is filled with purpose and passion.

It's that simple. And as Jesus walked along the lakeshore he found people who would do just that. Peter and Andrew. James and John. They heard his call, quit the way life was going—and that was a pretty successful life in their society—and chose to hand over the keys to Jesus. They followed. They entered into a relationship with Jesus. They traded spaces.

Beginning to Resemble Jesus

Where do I begin? By entering into a relationship with Jesus. A relationship that will result in change. A relationship that invites the Designer, the Trading Spaces crew, into your life and allows change to happen. A relationship that will allow you to begin to resemble Jesus.

You see, if Jesus embodies the fact that the moment has come, that God's rule is here, Peter, Andrew, James, and John show us what it is to repent and to believe. They allow change to happen. They hand over the keys. Jesus takes the lead and they follow. He sets the pace, and they keep in time. The Designer has arrived and begins the process of transforming their lives.

We can't see it all in this brief account, but let me quickly show you what happens next.

Cleaning out the junk—Do you remember the time-lapse photography on the show where they show the contestants removing all of the furniture and junk from the room to be decorated. Makes sense really. We tend to accumulate junk in our homes.

Making an international move is a great way to deal with that. We could never have afforded to bring everything we owned from Switzerland to Canada, so most of it had to go. When our moving truck arrived in Calgary it only took forty-five minutes to unload, unpack, and have everything in place. We were down to a table and chairs, a couch, clothes, toys and books. Now, whenever our neighbors invite us to participate in a cul-de-sac garage sale, they still wonder why we don't. The reason is simple. We have nothing to get rid of. We're still trying to gather things up!

We accumulate junk in our lives, too. Habits, thoughts, relationships, consequences, attitudes—things that act like weights holding us down. We can see that in

the lives of these early Christ-followers. Between chapters 8 and 11 of Mark, they make a journey with Jesus, geographically from north to south, and spiritually from junk to a clean sweep. At three points on the journey Jesus predicts his suffering, and tells them he must die. Each time there is misunderstanding, confusion, argument, and conflict. Yet, each time they learn a valuable lesson about clearing out junk attitudes.

Look at their junk attitudes. These guys understood life in terms of power (Mark 8:31-9:1), but Jesus called them to see as God does, and introduced them to the power of suffering. They thought life was all about prestige (9:31-37), but Jesus called them to think as God does, and to adopt the attitude of a child. They assumed it was all about position (10:32-45), but Jesus taught them to behave as God does, taking the place of a servant.

We're really not all that different. I think it is just as difficult for us to reverse some of our values as it was for these men. In fact, the Bible calls us to "Put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph. 4:22-24, NIV).

We don't have to live the way we used to. This means that Jesus, the Designer, gives us the power to intentionally set the direction of our hearts, to clear out the junk attitudes and thoughts, to make a fresh beginning. The junk may be different for each one of us, but junk there is, and the great news today is that the junk can be cleared out. Past mistakes, poor choices, broken relationships, regrets and failures do not have to be the end of the story. Not when you trade spaces with Jesus.

Getting a new look—and when the junk goes, then space is created to redecorate. The new design begins to emerge. We can get a new look. That's what we are going to

examine next week as we consider “What’s the focal point?”

These guys, who handed over the keys of their lives, but understood so little—they got a new look. It took a while. Three years in fact for some of the most basic changes to happen, but change they did. They became witnesses to the death and resurrection of Jesus, ambassadors sharing the Good News, calling others to follow, fearlessly traveling and witnessing, with many of them losing their lives in the process. Something had changed in their lives. The Designer had given them a new look.

There were no dead-end trails for them. They weren’t going through life alone anymore. They were on a journey following Jesus.

Rick Warren in his book, The Purpose Driven Life, suggests that the three basic issues in life are

Identity—who am I?

Importance—do I matter?

Impact—what is my place in life?

When Jesus asks us to do the trading spaces thing, and invite him into our lives and homes, he intends to help us answer those questions.

Who am I? What relationship defines me? Primarily, that I am God’s child, created for his pleasure, made to have a relationship with him that will transform my life. No other relationship can give the sense of significance and identity that my relationship with Jesus can. In fact, when I try to find my identity in other relationships I just end up disappointed. Because, I was made to be God’s child.

Do I matter? You bet. God loved me so much Jesus came and gave his life so that he could change mine, and bring me into his family. God has been looking for you your whole life, and longs for you to come home. If you have been wondering if this is your

“moment,” let me tell you that you can’t even begin to imagine how much God hopes so. You matter to him.

What is my place in life? To discover all that God has for me and allow him to work in me and through me, changing me from the inside out. The thought of just wandering through life, lost and aimless, purposeless and confused can haunt many of us. God longs to fill your life with meaning, to allow you to make a difference in our world and in the lives of others, to be a catalyst for change, to have eternal significance. The last thing he has in mind is for you to be bored!

HAVE I ALLOWED JESUS INTO MY HOME?

When you think about it, the question we ought to ask ourselves today is, have I allowed Jesus into my home, into my life? Have I dared to hand over the keys of my life? Have I traded spaces?

Last month we went camping in BC, in a tipi. Though this was no ordinary tipi—running water, electricity, and cable TV! I suppose the question is were we just taking our home with us or really doing something different? Are you doing anything different? Have you allowed Jesus into your home?

PASTORAL PRAYER

Author C.S. Lewis had a conversion on a roadway. He’d started out his journey as an atheist, and with a strong dislike of church, yet the more he considered the Bible, the more he came to recognize the truth with its pages. “Nothing else in all literature was just like this,” he admitted. Fellow author J. R. R. Tolkien urged Lewis to consider the claims of Christ. Lewis, in return, encouraged Tolkien to finish a book he was working on, The Lord of the Rings. In a trip to the zoo, of all places, in his car, Lewis made the final step. He says, “When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when

we reached the zoo I did.” He traded spaces. He allowed Jesus into his life.

Jesus is here saying, “Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in” (Rev. 3:20, NIV).

APPENDIX B

Trading Spaces: Disappointment with the Designer

The following is the edited transcript of a sermon preached at Foothills Alliance Church on 17 and 18 July 2004. It is based upon an oral presentation and bears both the strengths and weaknesses of such communication. The Scripture passage chosen was Ps. 22:1-21. The sermon began with a song performed by our worship team, “What a Good God You’ve Been to Me.”

This sermon illustrates an attempt to deal with the common human experience of suffering in both a compassionate and theological manner. It seeks to engage with the lived and painful realities of the people to whom we are ministering on a daily basis in northwest Calgary.

It proceeds by way of a close reading of an Old Testament text interpreted through a New Testament framework. It is less of a theodicy and more an exploration of faith in the light of the Atonement. Again, it utilizes cultural motifs, both the Trading Spaces show and the movie Star Wars, to lead people to a deeper understanding of the human predicament and to offer the hope that Christ brings.

I had the privilege to pray publicly for over one thousand people on this weekend who expressed a renewed desire to reach out in faith to God.

Many of us can relate to those words, beautiful words of affirmation, reminding ourselves of God’s goodness and provision. Words of comfort and assurance. Words that speak of our faith and trust in Jesus.

But I’m guessing some of us were probably just singing empty words. We’re not

trying to be hypocritical. It is just not how you feel. Nothing like it. God doesn't seem good. At best he seems distant or uninterested, perhaps even vengeful or malicious. What is going on? Where is God? Why is life so tough? Why does he ignore me? Will anything ever be different?

We've been working with the theme Trading Spaces for a few weeks now, thinking about what it would be like if you traded spaces with Jesus, invited him into your life as the Master Designer and allowed him to redecorate your soul. There could be all sorts of possibilities. We've considered where we could begin—by starting up a relationship with Jesus. We've thought about the focal point—of a life that has our relationship with him as the center, and the implications of that.

But just as in the TV show, there are times the outcomes may not be what we expected. There are moments of shock, horror, frustration, and disappointment. See if you remember this episode.

VIDEO CLIP (disaster scene from the Trading Spaces television show)

Everything seems to have gone wrong. The one thing that should not have happened has, in fact, happened. If you have ever been there, if suffering or hardship has ever come your way I have no doubt that like the rest of us huge questions arise in your mind. Questions like “why?” Or “how could God allow this?” “Where is God?”

Perhaps you have asked that question for yourself. Maybe you have witnessed terrible suffering in someone else's life and wondered to yourself where is God?

Where is he when a child dies?

Where is he when a marriage collapses?

When the chemo, and then radiation therapy don't work, where is God?

Where is he when the fatal car wreck happens?

When my babysitter abuses me, where is God?

When my father is beating my mother, where is God?

When I'm so lonely I don't think I can go another day, where is God?

When the person I've invested my love in rejects me or betrays me, where is God?

Where is he when my prayer is not answered?

Where is God?

You've been there, and you've asked that question for yourself or for someone you love. The reality is that there are times we feel extreme disappointment with the designer. It has not turned out the way we had hoped for. Most of that disappointment begins with unanswered questions.

We've experienced the dark side of life. In the Star Wars movies, Anakin Skywalker has to face the challenge of the dark side of the force. And it seems like he is not alone. There is a dark side to life that we would prefer not to encounter. We can attempt to hide from it, we can hope we won't encounter it, we can assume we've been able to bypass trouble, but it's not so. Even if you've traded spaces with Jesus, and invited him into your life to become your Master Designer, there are no exemptions from the harsh realities of life. In fact, Jesus himself said, "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33, NIV). No kidding! But what do we do with it? What do we do with the sense that God has let us down? Where do we go with the pain? What do we do with our disappointment with the designer? Where is God?

You know this is nothing new. It may be very personal and real to you right now, but it's not new. As long as there has been pain and suffering, there has been the question, "Where is God?" King David is the most popular person in the Bible, apart

from Jesus. More chapters and verses concern him and his life than anyone else. He gets, by far, the most press of all the Bible characters. David, the great king of Israel, shared those depths of despair that sometimes cross our path. In fact, he wrote of them, baring his own soul, and allowing us to witness his struggle. We read of them in Psalm 22.

SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 22:1-21

GOD IS NOWHERE

As we listen to David's words, it seems as though the most obvious answer to the question is that God is nowhere. Listen to the cry of his pain again. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (22:1, NIV). That is real. It is as though God is nowhere to be found. He cries out for help and there is no reply. Nothing. Just silence. Have you ever been there, when there was just silence and God was nowhere to be found? Have you cried out and received no answer? In a hospital perhaps, or a funeral home, or a divorce court, or just alone in a room that once was filled with romance and joy? The pain of such a moment is so real it dominates everything. Listen to David's desperation:

Verse 2—Seeking an answer from the One who does not answer—"O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer."—But the only response is silence. Is that how you feel? The God who no longer answers you? Only silence when you pray? No response.

Verse 11—Imploring the One who is far away to come near—"Do not be far from me for trouble is near and there is no one to help."—Instead all he experiences is abandonment. Is that it? God has left you behind. There is no one around who cares or understands. God is nowhere to be found?

Verse 15—Seeking deliverance from the One who has brought him close to death—"You lay me in the dust of death."—There is nothing left but to blame God. It might be different if I had gotten myself into this, but I didn't. I traded spaces with Jesus,

and this is all I got. It's God's fault.

My guess is that many of you can identify with those emotions that David must have felt in the silence, the abandonment, and the desire to find someone to blame. He wasn't unique, and neither are you in your pain.

And do you know what is so difficult about this? Do you know what really agonizes us in those moments? It is not just the hurt. It is not just the silence, or abandonment. It is that faith has come into conflict with experience. However strong or weak your faith might be, in those moments when faith has run headlong into the raw experience of life, it seems as though it was not enough.

We had longed for so much. Hoped for so much. Had great expectations when we traded spaces and invited Jesus to be the designer. We had faith. And now what? God is just nowhere to be found. God's absence thunders so loudly in our ears we experience, what Victor Hugo described in Les Misérables as, an earthquake of the soul.

That is how it was for Jesus, God's own Son. His followers had witnessed him heal those who were sick. He had even raised the dead. The forces of nature were compelled to obey his voice. They had seen him bring wholeness into lives that were broken. People were forgiven, relationships mended, new beginnings taken. But even with all of this, there came a moment as he hung on a cross dying when he cried out these very words of David: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, NIV). Abandoned and alone on a Roman cross, Jesus died with no one to answer his question.

His followers had hoped that he was the Messiah, the one who would deliver them from Rome and bring God's rule to their land. Now as they cowered for fear it seemed to them, too, that God was nowhere to be found. There was no one to answer

their questions either. Life seemed completely hopeless.

GOD IS PRESENT

And yet, God was present, but they did not know it until a few days later when Jesus rose from the dead. For, you see, our feeling of God's absence is not the last word on the subject. God was there, on the cross, but they could not recognize it. Obscure perhaps, and hidden from view, but present all the same. Jesus was God. He was right there in the situation, and they were unaware of it.

Elie Wiesel, in his book Nacht, describes a chilling scene. It is a Nazi concentration camp: "The SS hanged two Jewish men and a youth in front of the whole camp. The men died quickly, but the death throws of the youth lasted for half an hour. "Where is God? Where is he?" someone asked behind me. As the youth still hung in torment in the noose after a long time I heard the man call again, "Where is God now?" And I heard a voice in myself answer: "Where is he? He is here. He is hanging there on the gallows."

I'm not sure what Elie Wiesel was saying. I don't know if he meant that the evil he endured and witnessed killed God for him. That is, if on that day, he stopped believing in God because surely if God exists he wouldn't have allowed such atrocities. That is a very real possibility. Many people have come to the very same conclusion after experiencing horrendous atrocities.

Some people answer the problem of evil and suffering by writing God off. Either God is completely loving but not completely powerful, or God is completely powerful but not completely loving. So, we write off either his goodness or his power.

If God was completely loving, our assumption is that he wouldn't want us to suffer, and likewise if he was completely powerful we assume that he would do

something about it, preventing these things from happening. Maybe he just is like one of the regular old designers on Trading Spaces and just not able to deliver the goods after all.

Or maybe there simply is no God after all, and that's why things are the way they are. We're simply adrift upon a sea of fate and need to take what comes our way. The only answer to life's problems is to "suck it up." or to end it all. Tragic choices, both of them.

However, there is another option.

[There followed a long quotation from the playlet, "The Long Silence."]

You see, as a Christ follower, I, too, could say that God was there swinging on the gallows in the concentration camp. Because God came to this earth as Jesus Christ and experienced the full extent of our suffering on a Roman cross. The Jesus who was tortured and murdered is, in fact, the God who is present.

In the depths of our sorrows, God is there. God came as Jesus to enter into our suffering and pain, to experience the horrors, the loss, the abandonment, and finally even death. He is in Martin Luther's words, "the crucified God." The Bible describes Jesus as, "despised and rejected—a man of sorrows, acquainted with bitterest grief" (Isa. 53:3, NIV).

Those agonies you have experienced, so has he. The loss that is so bitter in your life—he has known it, too. The silence, the abandonment, the abuse, the loneliness, the pain—all of it. Ours is not a distant God, but one who is deeply involved in life, even its horrors, and its darkest moments.

But, notice this, and notice well. Jesus delivered us through death, not from death. Did you get that? There is no magical escape from death. There is no "get out of jail free"

card when it comes to suffering. There was not for Jesus, and neither is there for us. No one is exempt, not even Jesus. No wonder someone once said, “God never promised us an easy time, but a safe arrival.”

Jesus told his followers that he was the resurrection (John 11:25). That sounded good at the time, but now it had become reality. Those first Christ followers were witnesses to that reality. They had seen the risen Lord Jesus. And that reality is our basis for hope as Christ followers. That is what allows us to face the hurt and pain, the disappointment and frustration, knowing that there is more than we can easily recognize with our eyes. For God is present.

What this means is, that no matter the situation, no matter how tragic or traumatic, God will be there with us and will bring us through it. He has promised, and made good on that promise, that the tragedies of this life are not the final word. There is more. He has come in Jesus to rescue us to himself. Do you remember Jesus said, “In this world you will have trouble” (John 16:33, NIV)? But that was not the end of the quote. It was not simply a predication of pain. He also said, “But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33, NIV).

Jesus came and entered into the desolation we feel in order to conquer it on our behalf. He came so the pain and loss, and even death itself, would not be the final word. He came to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. He came to bring us life and hope when all around is pain and despair. He came to rise again, to conquer death itself, and to live forevermore. He entered into our despair and hopelessness in order to conquer it. That’s why it has been said, “He matches the depths of distress with a rescue of the highest order.”

This rescue was not just to hand out some good advice, so you could all come

here today, and leave with some tips to improve your lives, with Band-aids to patch up the wounds and Tylenol to dull the hurt. No. It's way more than that. Much more profound. The final tragedy of life, death itself, is no longer all that can be said. There is more. There is hope that goes way beyond a grave or a tomb. There is the hope of a glorious end. Jesus has come to rescue us.

Look again at Psalm 22 (NIV) with me, for right there in all of the emotions and pain we see this very thing:

Verse 2—"O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer." Followed up by

Verse 4—"They trusted and you delivered them." From abandonment to deliverance. There is more. Oh, there was disappointment with the designer in David's life, but God was there with him, however much hidden from sight, and David eventually discovered his presence and care.

Verse 7—"All who see me mock me." Followed up by

Verse 9—"You kept me safe on my mother's breast." From mocking to nurture. David discovered that God cared for him and, even in the hurts, would take care of him.

Verse 15—"You lay me in the dust of death" Followed up by

Verse 21—"You have rescued me" From death to salvation. Not even death could be the final word. Because Jesus is the resurrection and the life. Whoever comes to him, whoever trades spaces with him, will never die, but have eternal life.

What is going on here in Psalm 22? It is a movement from pain and suffering to God himself. It is recognizing that nothing is beyond God. He is here and he is present. There is no situation so bad that God cannot be present.

Martin Gray is a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, which was made famous in the movie, The Pianist. He survived the Holocaust, and told his story in a book called For

Those I Loved. After such a tragic period of time, he married, had a family, and became quite successful, settling in the south of France. One day a forest fire erupted and spread quickly, consuming his beautiful home and taking the lives of his wife and children. The compounded tragedy upon tragedy pushed him towards breaking point. Friends tried to comfort him. Others urged him to demand an enquiry and find out why. But as he took his time, he chose instead to pour his energies into a movement to protect the environment from fires. His reason—an investigation would focus only on the past, on blame, and sorrow and pain. Whose fault was it? Who should be punished? He wanted to focus on the future. His conclusion—life has to be lived for something, not just against something.

David knew that truth, too. Even in the very cry “My God why?” there is a bridge between despair and hope. For in the despair of asking “why?” there is the possibility of hope as we address God. For all the while, God is reaching out to us. Right as life throws its worst at you, and you stand alone at midnight in the garden of evil, and God seems so very far away, there he is reaching out to you.

WHERE ARE YOU?

But what will you do with disappointment? Where are you when it hurts? Are you wrapped up in self-pity? Focusing on the problems, the past, the despair, and only on yourself? Mad at the designer, wishing you had never traded spaces with Jesus? When that is the case, there is not much God can do for you. When we seek to cocoon ourselves, not even God can break through the walls of protection we build around ourselves. He will never force his way into your life. But what a tragic life.

C. S. Lewis writes in The Four Loves, “To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to

make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to not one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully around with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in the casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable ... The only place outside heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers ... of love is hell.”

That is not our only choice. Disappointment is not the final word. It could be that you reach out beyond yourself even if only in protest—that protest of faith—“My God why?” for faith has no reason to hide from trouble. Faith does not have to be afraid to express true feelings. God is not embarrassed by your feelings. He won’t reject you because of your questions or frustrations. But nor does faith fail to reach out into the apparent nothingness to the God who is there. Faith allows us to reach beyond ourselves, beyond the cocoon, beyond the casket.

I often remember when my children were very small and they placed their hands in mine to climb the stairs. They wanted reassurance, support, and balance in order to master those stairs. And all the while my big hand held their little hands, they would never fall back down. It didn’t really matter how hard they held onto my hand, only that I held theirs as they climbed.

Right now, perhaps in the experience of God’s absence, would you stretch out your hand for him to hold? Would you dare to believe in his presence, and come to discover as you reach out that God is already reaching out to you? That is exactly what Jesus did, dying alone and abandoned on a Roman cross, with no one to answer his question. He cried out, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46, NIV). He reached out in faith to the God who is there.

Paul wrote, “I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings” (Phil. 4:10, NIV). I don’t quite understand all that that means. But I do know that as a Christ follower there is a close intimacy where we can experience the presence of Jesus in suffering because we are going through something that he went through. You can know that he has been there and that he is right here with you now. You can fellowship with him in the midst of your darkness. And in that fellowship, in that relationship with Jesus, there is power and strength and comfort to enable us to do life. The God who is present is the God who can walk all of life’s paths with us. Even the disappointing ones.

Those who are going through sickness, reach out and not only will you find Jesus, you will find that you can be closer to him than ever before.

Those who are going through divorce, you have been abandoned, reach out and not only will you find Jesus, but his love and acceptance.

Those who have watched a loved one die, reach out in faith and you will find Jesus, the very giver of life.

Those who have awful memories and scars of abuse, reach out in faith and you will find that Jesus is more real than the air you breathe.

Those who seem to be losing their kids, drugs, teenage pregnancies, quitting school, reach out in faith to the God who understands the loss of a Son.

And for all of us, who face the certainty of death, we can reach out and discover that the final tragedy of life, death itself, is no longer the bottom line. There is more. There is hope that goes way beyond a grave or a tomb. There is the hope of a glorious end. Jesus has come to rescue us.

PASTORAL PRAYER—inviting people to reach out one hand as they pray

Benediction: Revelation 21:1-4

APPENDIX C

Trading Spaces: Renovations Every Home Needs

The following is the edited transcript of a sermon preached at Foothills Alliance Church on 24 and 25 July 2004. It is based upon an oral presentation and bears both the strengths and weaknesses of such communication. The Scripture passage chosen was Colossians 3:18-21.

This sermon illustrates a possible means of dealing with family issues through a doctrinal grid. While not specifically community focused, relational issues are addressed as being grounded in participation in Christ, while the subject of sanctification is explored through the lens of the reality of domestic relationships.

Not surprisingly, this sermon created quite a stir in our church family and did indeed lead to the conversations suggested at the end.

I heard of a psychologist who didn't believe in corporal punishment. Many times he argued with his neighbor because the neighbor spanked his child. The psychologist never spanked his own boy. He insisted that's not how a child should be raised. One day, after deciding that he'd looked at his torn up path long enough, the psychologist mixed up some concrete, filled in the cracks, and smoothed it out real nice. And as it was setting, along came his little boy, and he ran right through the setting concrete making a mess everywhere. Seeing this, impulsively the psychologist ran outside and spanked his son. The neighbor came out on the porch and said, "Hey, wait a minute. Don't you remember what you've always told me? You said a parent should never spank their child." And the

psychologist said, “I know, I know, but it’s easier to love my boy in the abstract than in the concrete!”

How about you? Is it easier to love in the abstract or in the concrete? We’re pretty good at loving in the abstract—in the ideas and thoughts that float around our heads. But God calls us to love one another in the concrete—in the moments and minutes, in the hours and days of our existence. What does it mean for husbands and wives to love each other in the messiness of wet concrete? What does marriage look like in God’s concrete? How do you love your kids in the realities of life? And what about kids loving their parents? How concrete are our notions of faith?

This past month we’ve been thinking about Trading Spaces—not just the TV show with two designers, two sets of neighbors, and all sorts of decorating possibilities—but also what it would be like if you traded spaces with Jesus, invited him into your life as the Master Designer, and allowed him to redecorate your soul. There could be all sorts of possibilities. We’ve considered where we could begin—by starting up a relationship with Jesus. We’ve thought about the focal point—of a life that has our relationship with him as the center, and some of the implications of that. We’ve even paused to contemplate those moments where life does not work out quite as we had planned, and we feel disappointment with the designer.

Today, we’re going to get much more concrete. We’re asking what does it look like when you trade spaces with Jesus? What would it be like if Jesus came into your home and relationships? What would he do? What are some of the renovations that every home needs?

Well, lets start with a quick overview of what Trading Spaces might mean in the concrete.

SCRIPTURE READING: Colossians 3:1-4**THE NEW LIFESTYLE**

In this passage, Paul uses images of death and life. In fact, he has been doing so throughout this letter. He tells these people that although their past may not have been God honoring, it has now been put to death. Having traded spaces with Jesus, and invited him to become the Master Decorator and Designer of their lives, entered into a new relationship with God, they now have a new life and a new way of living. This relationship with Jesus brings forgiveness for the past, hope for the future, and the reality of a new life in the present.

Many of you here today are in just that position. You have entered into a relationship with Jesus, and this is where you are at. Others may well still be wondering what this is all about. A while back we described it as handing over the keys of your life to Jesus, quitting trying to be in control, and inviting him to take charge, to bring a new design and a new look to our lives. When we do, an old way of living comes to an end and a new way of living begins.

What Paul is saying here is that when we make this new start, living the way we used to live does not make sense for who we are now. Why redecorate but keep the same tatty old furniture, especially when you can get new stuff for free? The new life we now have in Christ is not the old life we used to have. There should be no carry over. Why would you want to live the way you used to when God has given you a fresh start? The old way was a way of death. The new way is a way of life.

BRINGS NEW PROBLEMS

The problem was, and is, that this doesn't become an automatic experience for people. Look down at verse 5 and you'll begin to see a list of things that Paul describes as

“earthly things”: sexual sins (immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires) relational sins (anger, rage, malice, slander, filthy language). Paul knew where the Colossians lived, and he sure knew where we would live, too. That old way, the way of death, doesn’t disappear too easily.

But it’s not just in these behaviors and attitudes that we struggle. It is with our families as well. How come we can be so nice to other people but treat our partners, kids, or parents so badly? What’s up with that? It’s that old way of life that still seems to linger on. In the abstract, we can be very loving, talk about all the right sort of things. But in the concrete, it can often be a different story. That’s what Trading Spaces is all about.

So, where do we go from here? What’s the solution?

THE SOLUTION

Paul says we have been raised with Christ! We were dead, but now we have Christ’s life—the life of the powerful, all-sufficient Savior that Paul has been describing in the first two chapters of Colossians—the life of the one who is the “invisible image of God”—the life of the one who “created all things”—the life of the one who “holds all things together” in the universe—the life of the one who has supremacy over all things—the life of the one who at this very moment is in the position of authority at God’s right hand.

Please note carefully; this is not just a theological figure of speech. This is our new reality in the resurrected Christ. If you have traded spaces with Jesus, then you are alive whether you feel like it, or act like it, because of your relationship with Christ. You have this new life.

I had a teacher once who tried to explain to me the difference between the “seen real” and the “unseen real.” At a very basic level the “seen real” is what is before our

eyes. But so, too there is an “unseen real”—atoms, energy—and this new life that is in Christ.

Paul tells us in verse 1 that “Christ is seated at the right hand of God” (NIV). Here he alludes to Psalm 110:1. In fact, that verse from the Psalms is the most quoted or alluded to verse in the New Testament. Our Lord Jesus now sits on the throne of all eternity, as its powerful ruler, and Lord of all creation. Although we may not see it, the reality of Jesus at God’s right hand and our new life that is in Jesus and flows from Jesus, is the “unseen real.”

Paul says in verse 3 we “died” and “your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (NIV). The life we have now is indistinguishable from the life Christ has because it is the same life. That’s why Paul says in verse 4 when Christ comes back we’ll be connected with that appearing because we share the same life. It’s the “unseen real.”

That can be tough to get your mind around. If I’ve traded spaces with Jesus my life is really the same as Jesus’ life. The relationship he has with God, so do I. The power he had to live this new life, so do I. The love and compassion, the tenderness and purity, so do I.

But if I don’t see this in myself, where is it? It’s the unseen real that God wants to make visible in your life. Trading spaces is not just about inviting the designer to come in for a coffee and chat. It is about making real change. God wants to change your life. He wants the unseen real to become visible, so that you will see the changes, and so that everyone else will, too.

I’ve told you about our dining room and our reception room. Well, there is another room. You may know that we have three kids and so life can get hectic. Too hectic. Sometimes I just long for a place to be quiet. A place to read, study, reflect, and

pray. One day this spring, my interior designer, my wife, came up with the brilliant idea that I should stop talking about it and actually do something about it. Amazing how women have these insights. With the kids' permission, we changed some of our basement rooms. Their toys and stuff moved into the family room down there, and I was able to make a little study.

Now, for those of you who love details, the walls are green, finished with a textured roller. The bookshelves are from IKEA, and the picture on the wall from RONA. But here's the rub. As long as my dream of a quiet place was only a thought in my head, the abstract, if you like, I could never enjoy it. It needed to become visible, to become a place I could go to read and to pray. The change became a reality because I allowed my designer to make those changes. I allowed Gillian to move me from nice thoughts, the abstract, towards the concrete.

So, how does that happen? How do we move towards the concrete? Well, we allow Jesus to change us. The great thing about trading spaces with Jesus is that I don't have to try very hard to clean up my life or to change. It's not all about me. Instead, I'm coming to rely on Jesus, the designer, to do that for me. It is his power, his life that is changing mine. All I need to do is to let him. Unlike on the TV show, he'll never change my life without my permission. All I have to do is to focus on him—to make him the focal point of my life and my home. He'll take care of the rest.

Paul says, "Set your heart and set your mind" on this truth—focus on reality as it really is, on the "unseen real." Don't focus on what just seems real in this earthly existence.

SET YOUR HEARTS ON THINGS ABOVE (v. 1)

Whenever the Bible speaks of the heart, it's not just talking about an organ that

pumps blood around the body, bringing life to our tissues and cells. Nor is it using it simply in terms of Valentine's Day: love and romance. When God talks about your heart, he means the center of your affections, your attitudes, your priorities, the ultimate direction of your life. Proverbs 4:23 puts it like this, "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life" (NIV).

I've had the privilege of being able to travel to many places in the world. But in all of those places, I've had one common experience. Something inside of me always turned towards home, to Gillian and the kids, wondering what they were doing, trusting that they were safe, and looking forward to the day when I would be with them again. My heart was set towards my family. That's where I longed to be.

What do you long for? What are your greatest desires? What is your heart set upon? The default mode of humanity is to focus away from God, to allow our passions to control us, to be careless with our speech, to be prejudiced, to turn towards the material.

But living in the "unseen real" means that we don't have to live in the default mode. We don't have to live the way we used to. When the Bible says, "Set your hearts," it means that the living Christ gives us the power to intentionally set the direction of our hearts, to make choices that focus your life on more than the material, on more than the "seen real." To "set your hearts on things above" is to

Recognize the reality of your new life in Christ,

Live in the presence of God,

Live in the light of eternity,

Live life with his power and strength, not your own.

Where is your heart set today?

SET YOUR MINDS ON THINGS ABOVE (v. 2)

But it is not only our passions that Paul takes to task here. He questions our thinking. If we are to deepen our understanding and experience of this new reality, of this “unseen real,” then we need to train our minds as well. We need to set our minds on things above.

I’ve read that the average North American family watches TV for fifty hours per week. That is a lot of influence and input to the mind. Now, there is nothing wrong with TV per se. Many of you know I’m a huge Alias fan. I can’t wait for series four. But let me ask you, what are you filling your mind with? Is it only the TV and the Calgary Herald?

If life change begins by refocusing our passions and energies, it certainly continues by redirecting our minds to something else—to the reality of the “unseen real”—this new life we have as a free gift in Christ.

To set your mind on things above is to

Focus your attention upon Jesus,

Take the Word of God daily into your life by reading and mediating upon the Bible, and

Train your mind and refocus your thinking, by the power of the risen Christ.

It is, as Paul wrote to the Philippians, to think new thoughts. “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praise worthy—think about such things” (Phil. 3:8).

Where is your mind set today?

LET'S GET CONCRETE

Ok. Well and good, setting our hearts and minds on things above, but we want to get concrete with all of this. Let's get more specific. We want to consider the renovations that every home needs. That means we are going to think a little about our relationships at home—renovations in relationships. Why? Because our faith needs to come home with us. The true test of our relationship with Jesus is how we relate to others, particularly our families. That is where we live our faith out first and foremost. So, let's look at some renovations in those relationships.

SCRIPTURE READING: Colossians 3:18-21

That is heady stuff! Someone described these verses as “impressive and disconcerting.” So let's look at what it means. Let's get concrete.

WIVES

I know that I'm a man here addressing women. And I know many women feel as though they get the short straw in church. And to be honest, the church has not always done a great job at listening to and empowering women. That is something we ought not only to be ashamed of but also need to change. So, let's listen for a moment to what Paul actually says.

The issue being addressed is function, not inferiority. Colossians 3:11 says, “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (NIV). This Christ life, the unseen real, is just as much for women as men. In fact, in Galatians 3:28 Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus” (NIV).

Cultural, racial, and even gender distinctions are no longer obstacles when it comes to Jesus. Everyone is equal in Christ regardless of status. Having said that,

individuals have a role to play in the family. Those who have traded spaces with Jesus are all followers of Jesus with different responsibilities. For instance, the husband and wife are personal equals before God, but they each have different roles for functional purposes. The same is true for children and parents.

These relationships are meant to be reciprocal. The instructions we read together actually show a special concern for those who were looked down upon in the first century: wives, children, and, further on, slaves. It's striking that Paul would even give them attention, since the culture denigrated these three groups of people.

Josephus, the Jewish historian of the day, said, "A woman is inferior to her husband in all things. Let her, therefore, be obedient to him." Philo said, wives were to "serve as slaves" to their husbands. Not very flattering. Yet here is the Bible saying that we are all equal in Jesus.

Christianity actually elevated women, valued children, and set things in motion to sabotage slavery. It's also interesting to note that Paul admonishes those in authority as he tells husbands, fathers, and masters to be loving, kind, and fair. These pairs are to be studied together because the relationships are reciprocal.

So, what is the Bible saying to wives here? It's saying that for a woman who is a Christ follower, her relationship to her husband mirrors or reflects her commitment to Jesus. She doesn't have to submit to God or to her husband. She's got the freedom of choice. But she can voluntarily submit herself to her husband based on the order God has set up. It is how she can express her desire to serve Jesus.

In fact, it is very much how Jesus, God the Son, chose to submit to God the Father. Colossians 2:9 says, "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (NIV). He was equal with God the Father. Yet, as we read in 1 Corinthians 15:28,

“The Son himself will be made subject to him [The Father] who put everything under him [Jesus], so that God may be all in all” (NIV). These are profound statements, and no matter how much of them you grasp, this much is obvious. Jesus, the Son, is equal to the Father, yet voluntarily submits to him.

That is because submission is not the same as subjection. No one is called to be a doormat. Abuse is wrong, whether it is physical, verbal, or sexual. Such treatment of your wife is sin, and falls under the judgment and condemnation of God.

Voluntary submission is a recognition of our equality in Christ Jesus, a recognition of the freedom that he brings to us, tempered by our choice to not make ourselves number one. It is a way of saying, “It’s not all about me.” Submission to a husband is a way of demonstrating in concrete fashion that a woman is submissive to Jesus—that she really has traded spaces and allowed the Master Designer to take control of her life.

So, let’s look at the other partner in this pair to fully understand how this reciprocal relationship works.

HUSBANDS

Love your wives. Jesus set the standard here, voluntarily surrendering his own life for those he loved most—us. That’s what is expected of husbands. A husband’s love for his wife must mirror or reflect the deep, sacrificial love of Christ for the wife and husband (and all people). A man expresses his service to Jesus through his service to his wife.

So, before the men here get too smug, let me say that bad marriages are usually the result of the husband’s refusal to love his wife instead of the wife’s refusal to be submissive. I’ve yet to meet a wife who would not be willing to follow the leadership of a

man who loves her unconditionally.

Paul writes similar things in Ephesians 5 and 6—a much longer passage. There he refers to the husband as the head of the wife. That just seems all the more inflammatory, until we realize that the word could just as easily be expressed as the scout, or the point person. What does point do in a military operation? Goes out in front to check the way is clear and provide a safe path for the others.

In reality, the call to husbands is to be the one who leads by example, the one who dares to step out in front, the one who loves sacrificially. Love like that means submitting my will for the sake of another. That's why in Ephesians 5:21 we read to both husbands and wives, "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (NIV). I wanted orange in the study—Gillian wanted green—green it is, for she is the designer!

Sacrificial love is recognition of our equality in Christ Jesus, a recognition of the freedom that he brings to us, tempered by our choice to not make ourselves number one. It is a way of saying, "It's not all about me." Loving your wife is a way of demonstrating in concrete fashion that a man is submissive to Jesus—that he really has traded spaces and allowed the Master Designer to take control of his life.

What does it look like when we trade spaces with Jesus and allow him to renovate our relationships? What does it mean in concrete when God lives in your house? When God lives in the house, husbands and wives will submit to one another, will love one another. Husbands and wives relate to one another as Jesus relates to us. That's what it is. We relate to one another in marriage the way Jesus relates to us.

SINGLES

Of course, not everyone here is married. Some are. Some used to be. Some wish they were. Some would rather not. So, what do we do with singleness? Many of you here

in that position are often subject to a barrage of questions and you've fielded most of them and countless other remarks for which any answer seems inadequate. You've probably mastered the courtesy laugh and polite smile, and chances are you're an expert at shifting conversations away from your marital status.

Some singles do their best to focus on the road ahead, carrying lists of adventures to have and goals to achieve. They busily check things off alone, but nagging deep inside is a disappointment with the way life has turned out. Unfulfilled expectations have planted seeds of discontent. The grass looks greener on the other side of "I do," and being single is a phase to endure until true happiness whisks them over the fence.

For them, singles' activities, even at church, become "hunting grounds." Side-glances intimate true love, and small conversations are laden with significant undercurrents. Sometimes we call them "desperate," but desperate is just a symptom of a deeper issue: discontentment. You don't have to be with someone for long to know they're unhappy and dissatisfied. It's heard in their cynical statements; it's seen on their faces. Singleness wasn't their plan. The weight of discontent drains their joy.

Sometimes we think what's missing is the joy of a relationship and marriage. Ironically, what's really missing is joy in general—joy of life, joy of singleness. I can hear the skeptical laugh of some single friends—"joy of singleness?" Yes. If there's not joy in singleness, there won't be joy in marriage either. Joy is not the result of favorable circumstances. Rather, it's the outpouring of a contented heart.

For many of you, singleness is a way station on the road to marriage. Some do, however, remain single all their lives, either by choice or by circumstance. Considering that God blesses marriage and that our sexual desires make singleness more difficult, why would anyone choose lifelong singleness? There are lots of bad reasons, and some single

people should be married instead—but the best reason for remaining single is that the vocation of singleness offers fewer distractions from serving God. When God says, “Would you do this for me?” you don’t necessarily want to find yourself replying, “I’ll check with my spouse and my real estate agent and get back with you.”

If God wants you to be single, he will also provides the spiritual gifts that make it possible. Notice that I didn’t say “that make it easy.” The Bible tells us that if you are attempting to remain single but find that you cannot bear the burden, it is not a sin to marry. Better to switch to the other way of life God honors than to be aflame with lust.

Learning contentment and true joy in singleness, or in marriage, is a recognition of our primary relationship in Christ Jesus, a recognition of the freedom that he brings to us, tempered by our choice to not make ourselves number one. It is a way of saying, “It’s not all about me.” Accepting singleness is a way of demonstrating in concrete fashion our submission to Jesus—that we really have traded spaces and allowed the Master Designer to take control of our lives.

CHILDREN

By now I hope you’re getting the point. Our homes, not our church buildings, are where our faith is made concrete. It is in the renovation of those relationships at home that we make visible our commitment to Jesus.

That’s not always easy as a teen. There comes a point in every teenager’s life where Mum and Dad are no longer cool. If you absolutely **MUST** go to the mall together, you make sure to keep at least ten feet of distance between you and your parents as you’re walking through the crowded areas. And God forbid any one of your friends sees you and asks you if you’re with your parents. Or when Mum or Dad drops you off at school and lean over to give you a peck on the cheek to start off your day? You quickly

have to dodge their kiss and dart out the door.

Teens, kids, who are Christ followers, are also equals before Jesus, yet they are called to obey. It is the relationship that allows us to grow towards maturity and independence. Real quickly, here are some helpful suggestions that would allow all of us to better honor our parents:

Do your chores without someone asking you to do them,

Offer to help with something around the house that is not usually your responsibility,

Think of a compliment you can give your mum, dad, or both,

Ask your parents if there is anything you can do to improve your behavior,

When asked to do something, don't procrastinate even for a minute—go right to it,

If you have a brother or sister, treat your sibling with the same respect that you would want in return, and,

Be polite, thoughtful, and helpful outside of your home, at school and in other activities.

Practicing obedience to our parents is a recognition of our equality in Christ Jesus, a recognition of the freedom that he brings to us, tempered by our choice to not make ourselves number one. It is a way of saying, "It's not all about me." Obeying parents is a way of demonstrating in concrete fashion that we are submissive to Jesus—that we really have traded spaces and allowed the master designer to take control of our lives.

PARENTS

There is a reciprocal relationship here, too, that of the parent. Being a parent is not about acquiring free labor at home. It's not about being authoritarian, or a bully. It is to

love and to nurture faith in the hearts of our children. To build up, not to tear down.

I came across this survey to both teens and their parents this week.

The question posed to the teenagers was “What would you really like to ask your parents?” Here are some of their responses:

Are you glad you had me or was I a mistake?

Why did you two marry each other?

Why do you treat me like a baby?

Why do you make everything so complicated?

Why do you wear such dorky clothes?

Why do you yell at everything I do?

Why do you make me feel guilty?

Are you proud of me?

The question posed to the parents was, “What I really wish my teenager would ask me?” Here are some of their responses:

How was your day? What’s bothering you, mum?

How did you feel as a teenager?

How do you decide what is right from wrong?

How do you feel about my friend?

What more can I do to help the family? How can I help out more around the house?

Loving our kids sacrificially. Not embittering them, may well result in conversations like that. Honoring and nurturing our families is a recognition of our equality in Christ Jesus, a recognition of the freedom that he brings to us, tempered by our choice to not make ourselves number one. It is a way of saying, “It’s not all about

me.” Devoting yourself to your kids is a way of demonstrating in concrete fashion that we are submissive to Jesus—that we really have traded spaces and allowed the Master Designer to take control of our lives.

Well, we’ve redecorated our dining room, our reception room, and my study. Guided tours are still open for one more week! But perhaps if you are anything like me, the renovations needed most of all are relational. My spirituality, my faith, needs to be made visible, needs to be made concrete in my relationships. If I am to live this new life, the one the master decorator Jesus is giving to me, if I am to set my heart and my mind on things above, that needs to be seen in my family most of all.

Maybe lunch today will give an opportunity for the most important conversation you will have this week. Here are some questions to ask God, yourself, and each other today:

Have I handed over the keys of my life to the Master Designer and traded spaces with Jesus?

Has my soul been redecorated, or am I still living in the same old way?

Am I allowing the life of Jesus to empower and change me?

Are those changes being made visible in my relationships?

Does my faith come home with me?

Have I learned that it’s not all about me?

Dare to have the conversation. And dare to pray with me that God would renovate us and our relationships, that he would revive us and our families, that we would know what it is to have our souls and our homes decorated by the One who loves us most of all.

PASTORAL PRAYER

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