CORE
Metadata, citation and similar papers at core.ac.uk
Provided by Newman University Repository

‘When Noah built the ark…’

Metaphor and Biblical stories in Facebook preaching

Stephen Pihlaja

This article investigates the use of Biblical stories and text in the preaching of Joshua Feuerstein, a popular Facebook evangelist, and focuses on how Biblical stories are used to position the viewer in comparison to Biblical characters and texts. Taking a discourse dynamics approach (Cameron & Maslen, 2010), a corpus of 8 short videos (17 minutes 34 seconds) and their comments (2,295) taken from the Facebook are analysed first, for the presence of metaphorical language and stories taken from the Bible. Second, they are analysed for the role of metaphor in the narrative positioning (Bamberg, 1997) of the viewer, particularly as it relates to Gibbs’s notion of *allegorises*, or the ‘allegoric impulse’ (Gibbs, 2011). The corresponding text comments from the videos are then also analysed for the presence of the same Biblical metaphor, focusing on how commenters interact with the metaphor and Feuerstein’s positioning of them. Findings show that Biblical metaphorical language is used to position viewers and their struggles in the context of larger storylines that compare everyday experiences to Biblical texts. This comparison can happen both in explicit narrative positioning of viewers with explicit reference to the Bible, and implicit positioning, through

the use of unmarked Biblical language. Analysis of viewer comments shows that use of metaphorical language is successful in building a sense of camaraderie and shared belief among the viewer and Feuerstein, as well as viewers with one another.

Keywords: Bible, Josh Feuerstein, social networking sites, Facebook, preaching, Evangelical Christian

1 Background

1.1 Metaphor dynamics

The Bible is full of stories and the use of narrative storytelling in Evangelical Christian sermons is a well-established and accepted form of homiletics, one practiced by Jesus (Allison, 1987) and taught and encouraged in training literature for pastors (Watson, 2014) and a proliferation of online resources for preaching with titles like “Three Great Reasons to Tell Stories in Your Preaching” and “How to Increase the Power of your Preaching Through Stories”. While preaching has long served an expository function, Bass (1982) describes a shift in approach to preaching in evangelical Christianity. No longer is the act of preaching primarily one of exposition and teaching. Instead, in the Evangelical tradition, sermons have become primarily functional (Davis, 1958), used to evoke a response from the hearer. The focus is less on explaining the meaning of scripture and more on how hearers can apply the teaching to their own experiences. Although this form of preaching is largely accepted, a concern remains for preaching to be “anchored firmly in a given text(s) of Scripture” (Jensen, 1980, p. 151). The use of narrative in preaching must therefore be both useful for the hearer and scripturally sound, coming from the Biblical text and with an awareness of its authority and primacy (Packer, 1978).

The use of scripture in sermons in this way must then always contain a metaphorical element, in which hearers are encouraged to compare and contrast their own contemporary context with those of the narrative world of the Bible. Gibbs's (2011) notion of *allegorises* provides a theoretical basis for describing and explaining talk about the ways in which speakers engage with the Biblical text. Allegorises is "the 'allegorical impulse' fundamental to human cognition, in which we continually seek to connect, in diverse ways, the immediate here and now with more abstract, enduring symbolic themes." (2011, p. 122) Gibbs sees the evocation of symbolic themes as creating "diverse, rich networks of meaning that are both metaphorical and often deeply embodied," (2011, p. 122) something which has also been observed in analysis of narratives about religious experience and conversion (Richardson, 2012). For the religious, these allegories are not arbitrary, but represent the intersection among beliefs, sacred texts, and lived experience. The use of scripture in day-to-day life to 'make sense' of lived experience has been documented in the reading of scripture by Evangelical Christians by Malley (2004) and on interpretation of Biblical metaphor in YouTube videos and comments (Pihlaja, 2013). The Biblical narrative then provides a useful way of activating and mobilising the network of beliefs and narratives to affect social action in religious communities.

Mapping the effects of this use of metaphor requires looking at different elements of production and reception. Cameron and colleagues (Cameron & Low, 1999; Cameron et al., 2009) have effectively shown how metaphor enters discourse activity, and how subsequent talk develops in and around the use of metaphor, resulting in the potential for empathetic responses to others (Cameron, 2011). This approach to metaphor sees metaphor use as a dynamic interaction among a myriad of components in a complex system (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Zanotto, Cameron, & Cavalcanti, 2008). How and when metaphor enters the dynamic system of interaction among discourse participants depends on the particular status

of the system at the time of interaction and who is involved in the interaction. A discourse dynamics approach to metaphor focuses on metaphor as an emergent phenomenon, one undeniably affected by metaphor in cognitive processes, but one that emerges from the unique circumstances of interaction. It focuses on tracing the development of metaphorical language in discourse activity and using the insight gleaned from understanding its development to describe and understand the social world, in this case how the preaching of scripture and its subsequent reception is affected by metaphor use.

1.2 Narrative positioning

In a narrative approach to preaching, the use of metaphor in sermons and Biblical exegesis serves not only a theological purpose, but a practical social purpose as well. It is, as noted above, functional and works to position both the person delivering the sermon or performing the exegesis, and the hearer of the message as well. This is particularly true in Evangelical Christian communities in which the Bible is not only thought of as a collection of spiritual teachings, but the ‘living word’ of God that describes contemporary social issues and contexts, and serves as a guide of making moral decisions in the world (see Noll, Bebbington, & Rawlyk, 1994; Packer, 1978 for a descriptions of Evangelical belief about the Biblical text). The Bible is not simply a sacred text with authority, but a dynamic text that can and should be applied to the contemporary world.

Positioning analysis (Bamberg, 1997, 2004; Davies & Harré, 1990; Harré, Moghaddam, Cairnie, Rothbart, & Sabat, 2009; Harré & van Langenhove, 1998) provides a useful frame for thinking about the use of the Bible in social interaction. Positioning analysis posits that social positions, unlike static ‘roles’, are fluid and dynamic. Positioning suggests that in social interaction, speakers and hearers are engaged in a co-operative process of

allocating, defining, and negotiating their own positions and the positions of others in the course of discourse activity. This positioning can occur implicitly, with an allocation of incumbent responsibilities and expectations based on how people interact, or it can occur explicitly, with people explicitly naming and describing their own and others' positions. A key part of narrative positioning is the concept of 'storylines' (Harré & van Langenhove, 1998) or 'master narratives' (Bamberg, 1997, 2004). These storylines are established ways of talking about and experiencing the world, and they providing interactants with moral directives and heuristics to navigate the world. They can be tied to common sense understandings of moral action or they can, as I will show in my analysis, be tied to specific sacred texts.

Narrative positioning, in Bamberg's (1997, 2004) framework, is a process that occurs on three levels, taking into account the different social spaces and positions that story telling affords. At the first level, there are the positions allocated to characters within a given story or narrative. The second level is the positioning of the speaker and the listener as a story is being told. Finally, the third level is the speakers' own positioning of themselves beyond the context of the story being told and how they see themselves in the larger social world. These three levels of positioning can be explicitly separated in narratives to show how the elements of the story being told (the first level) relate to the social interaction in which the telling is occurring (the second level) as well as storytellers' own values and beliefs about themselves (the third level).

1.3 Metaphor in online interaction

Considering the dynamics of metaphorical language use and positioning, social networking sites (SNS) provide a particularly interesting site for investigation, as users can interact without a shared history of interaction tied to a physical space. Here, the dynamics of

interaction may be particularly unpredictable, with the possibility of new, unexpected users entering the system and affecting social interaction. This dynamism of community interaction can have both positive and negative effects. Although research has historically focused on the negative aspects of online 'deindividuation' (Kiesler, Siegel, & McGuire, 1984; Siegel, Dubrovsky, Kiesler, & McGuire, 1986), more recently interest in online communities has shown how users can develop meaningful relationships in online settings, including religious communities (Gillespie, Herbert, & Greenhill, 2013; Hutchings, 2007). What emerges from the interaction of users around religious issues depends on the context in which videos or content are made and viewed, whether or not the site for interaction is moderated or not, and for whom the content is explicitly produced.

Social media in particular complicate the use of Biblical metaphor and the ability of users to assume common knowledge among interlocutors. Marwick and boyd (2011) describe the notion of 'context collapse' in SNS, where users attempt to maintain many public personas in front of a diverse audience. While this causes difficulties relating socially to friends, colleagues, and family on sites like Facebook, for religious users, SNS further complicate interaction by including another dimension of whom they are online: the need to represent their theological beliefs. While pastors and Christian leaders delivering sermons in physical churches often speak to relatively small audiences, where there is a relationship between the pastor and congregation, on SNS, users speak to a variety of different audiences: members of their own community; users who might have an interest in the video or post, but are not members of the community; and users who are openly hostile to the message being presented (see Pihlaja, 2014 for a full description of the difficulties this complexity affords). The user posting content in these situations cannot assume that the viewer necessarily has any background or shared knowledge, particularly when the videos are produced with the explicit goal of 'reaching out' to users who are not members of the community.

In this article, I will focus on the use of Biblical stories as resources for both implicit and explicit positionings in an SNS context, specifically Facebook. Spiritual teaching and the telling of stories in teaching settings can be used not only to relate theological points about the nature of God or moral judgements about right or wrong action, but also to relate the experiences of Biblical characters to the lives of religious hearers. This article argues that users, particularly preachers and leaders in religious communities, use the resource of the Bible and specifically the retelling of Biblical stories, as a means to position themselves and others on Facebook. I will argue, looking at Facebook data, that Biblical stories are an effective resource for positioning oneself and others on social media, by connecting the contemporary world to lasting symbolic themes and stories, often taken from the Bible.

2 Data collection and method

The data for this article is taken from a larger dataset of videos and comments from YouTube and Facebook, with atheists, Muslims, and Christians presenting their beliefs or lack of belief in a variety of different settings. For this article, I will be looking specifically at how the Bible is used by a Christian Facebook user, Joshua Feuerstein, to encourage viewers of his videos to think about their own experience in terms of larger Biblical narratives. Joshua Feuerstein is a popular Facebook preacher with over two million likes on his page (as of September 2015). Feuerstein's use of Facebook is a mixture of posting short videos of himself delivering messages for his followers, text posts, and links to both theological and general interest content online. Although Feuerstein's posts are often oriented towards theological and religious content, he also posts about politics and has taken controversial political positions.

The whole of the video corpus for the larger project includes 27 videos made by Feuerstein. For this article, I will look at two videos from the dataset (Feuerstein, 2014a, 2014b) as a case study of explicit and extended use of Biblical narrative in his videos posted to Facebook. Feuerstein's videos, in general, feature Feuerstein looking directly at the camera with only his face showing. He frequently wears a red baseball cap backwards and rarely shows more than his face. The videos are usually shot on a smartphone in portrait mode, with Feuerstein's face dominating the frame and suggesting that they are also best viewed on mobile devices. The resulting effect is an 'in your face' perspective for the viewer, looking directly at Feuerstein as he looks directly at the viewer, addressing the viewer in the second person.

After identifying the videos for analysis, I transcribed Feuerstein's talk and mapped vehicle development and grouping of semantically-related metaphor vehicles in videos and comments, following the principles of the discourse dynamics approach to metaphor (Cameron & Maslen, 2010). Given the focus of this research on the comparison of Biblical narratives to the contemporary life of the viewer, my analysis was led by the elements of Biblical stories that were explicitly highlighted in the videos. For example, in a video analysed below, the Biblical story and application to the viewer focused on metaphor vehicles relating to 'storms'. In this case, I focused my analysis on how a particular metaphor ('Troubles in life are storms') was developed both in the video transcript and in the comments. I then identified positioning in the discourse activity following Bamberg's (1997, 2004) taxonomy and have presented my transcripts of data and analysis in narrative form for ease of reading.

Although all of Feuerstein's videos and comments in this study were gathered from a public site and were not password protected, I have chosen to anonymise the comments on the videos, as the users' real names are visible. Where I have quoted my own transcripts, I

have cited the videos with their original URL addresses, which were active and accurate at the time of access, but may not necessarily remain available. I have included comments in their original forms with no proofreading or editing, so any non-conventional spellings or constructions are those of the user and have been preserved without any notation.

3 Analysis

3.1 Use of scriptural metaphor

Josh Feuerstein's videos represent a small microcosm of the use of stories and scriptures in preaching in social networking sites, where users move quickly through links and posts on their timeline or wall, sharing interesting content with friends and ‘liking’ posts. Often no longer than two or three minutes, Feuerstein’s videos are produced for the world of Facebook, where users engage with short, high energy videos and use the networking tools of the site to ‘share’ the videos with others. The overall structure of Feuerstein’s use of Biblical narrative is often similar, with some reference to scripture, followed by an admonishment of the audience, either to draw comfort from the story or to act in the light of it.

In a video posted on 22 April 2014, Feuerstein’s typical use of the Bible in his videos can be observed. The video was posted with the following description: “The Beauty in The Storm! MUST WATCH for anybody going through a dark season! #SHAREifyouCARE.” Running just one minute and one second, Feuerstein says the following:

1

2 Hey guys, Josh Feuerstein here. Have you ever been going through a
3 situation, particularly a storm in life, where it just seems like the wind and
4 waves just constantly pound and pelt against you. Well check this out. Not all
5 not every storm is a curse. Some can actually be a blessing. In fact, check this.
6 When it was that when Noah built the ark, well he was in a valley. He built
7 the ark in valley. In a low place. In a desert land. But when he goes through
8 the storm, well the storm takes him and rests him on the mountaintop. There's
9 time in your life that God can allow you to go through a storm. But it's not to
10 persecute you and it's not to punish you. It's actually to elevate you. To take
11 you to another level… I want you to know and be encouraged today that God
12 has a strategy in the storm. God bless you guys. Please take a moment, like it.
13 Comment below. And always, please take a moment and hit share.
14 Somebody in your newsfeed or your timeline needs to hear this little word of
15 encouragement. So God bless you guys. Remember: share if you care. Have a
16 very, very beautiful day. (Feuerstein, 2014b)

In this video, Feuerstein begins by addressing the viewer and drawing a direct comparison between a 'situation' and a 'storm' in life (line 2). The metaphorical 'storm' in life is then connected to a Biblical story in which a physical storm is present: the story of Noah building an ark (line 5). Feuerstein highlights how Noah survives the storm to be taken out of the valley where he began (lines 6–7). He returns to the viewer with the deictic reference "There's a time in your life…" (line 8) which compares the viewer to Noah. The aim of the video, for the viewer to "be encouraged today" (line 11), is highlighted in the closing of the narrative. The video ends with an encouragement to comment on the video and/or share it, deputising the viewer to help others "hear this little word of encouragement" (line 14).

Feuerstein's use of Biblical narrative invites a comparison between the story of Noah and the experience of the viewer. It shows first how metaphor can function explicitly in a sermon text for a particular function (to encourage others), and second, how metaphor can activate an implicit network of beliefs, embodied experiences, and abstract, enduring themes. Feuerstein's story of Noah assumes that the experiences of the Biblical Noah have some bearing on the lives of contemporary viewers of the video; namely, that God may allow bad things to happen, but they are meant to serve a good purpose in the lives of believers. Metaphor is essential to understanding how the interpretation develops both in Feuerstein's preaching and the subsequent comments. The use of metaphor involves a network of different embodied experiences, knowledge, and beliefs to be activated for the full effect of the comparison to be felt. The metaphor appeals to the viewer's embodied experiences of storms, their own knowledge of the Biblical story (which is well known and requires little description to activate), a belief about God's provision and care for (implicitly) those who follow him, and continuity between the experiences of Biblical characters and the contemporary world.

The effectiveness of this comparison can be seen in the 64 comments on the video that, albeit moderated by Feuerstein, are largely positive and do not challenge the comparison or question his claims. Instead, the comments are filled with users thanking Feuerstein and 'tagging' other friends, so the video will be shared more broadly, as Feuerstein requests. Comments like "I so agree with this," "Amen!! Very true!!" and "God Bless to All Amen" are indicative of the ways that people respond positively to Feuerstein's preaching. Moreover, 60 of comments appeared in the first three days after the video had been posted, suggesting the responses to it occurred when the video appeared in a user's newsfeed and was not something that was returned to again.

Of the 64 comments on the video, 12 use vehicles from the semantic field of 'storms'. The vehicles describing 'storms' are used dynamically, exhibiting vehicle repetition,

explication, and elaboration, all key components of discourse dynamics (Cameron, 2003). I will focus on two exemplar cases, made by two separate commenters:

C1. ok have been in the valley for years, i am praying for rain to left me to the mountain top before i dig myself a hole and say forget it forget it all.

C2. Thank you for this word Josh. We have been going through a storm for some time now. The sun peeks through but then the storm seems to get worse again. I know God has a plan and that He is right here with us. Just hearing that God sometimes let's the storm rage and uses it to lift us up out of the valley is encouraging.

In these comments, the ‘storm’ and ‘mountain/valley’ vehicles are particularly salient, not necessarily in terms of the story of Noah, but in metaphorical scenarios (cf., Musolff, 2004, 2006) including storms and climbing mountains. The first commenter follows the same narrative that Feuerstein has: that when storms come to you in valleys, they can lead to ‘mountain top’ experiences. The commenter, however, retells the story in a decidedly less optimistic way: they are praying for rain, but instead of being transported to the top of the mountain, they have further exacerbated their experience in the valley, by ‘digging a hole’. The use of ‘digging a hole’, which does not occur in the story of Noah, suggests that the user is extending the metaphor to a related idiom, one that connects to the embodied experience of being in a low place, rather than the story of Noah. The second commenter also starts at the same point as Feuerstein, but elaborates on the story to include the use of the sun, which comes through the clouds, but does not appear permanently. This elaboration also follows a more pessimistic outcome, but ends with a belief in the positive outcome Feuerstein suggests and which relates back to the Biblical story.

Interestingly, direct reference to the story of Noah in the comments is more difficult to identify beyond users commenting on and about storms. The words *Noah*, *ark*, and *flood* (key lexis in the Biblical story) are absent from the comments. The use of Noah in this story appears then to be less useful for the commenters in elaborating the narrative to their own experience, but is necessary because it provides a needed positive ending, where the person experiencing the 'storm' is transported to the 'mountain top'. If users understand their own experience in terms of Noah's experience, they can expect a positive outcome in their own lives, not only looking forward with optimism, but reinforcing a belief in the 'strategy' or 'plan' of God, a key point that the second commenter repeats from Feuerstein's video. Metaphor, in this case, operates not only in a universal human embodied experience of storms and their eventual completion, but involves a particular storm, Noah's flood, with a specific outcome.

While Biblical metaphor is frequent in Feuerstein's preaching and he regularly uses Biblical stories to convey points, very rarely in the posts does Feuerstein or any of the users actually quote the Bible. While this has been identified in other sites of interaction in YouTube videos (cf., Pihlaja, 2013), Feuerstein avoids a sort of 'chapter and verse' approach to the Bible where particular scriptural passages are quoted to support specific points. The use of scripture is in most cases a paraphrase, taking well-known stories such as Noah's Ark as well as less known stories, such as the story of the prophet Hosea being compelled by God to marry a prostitute. In this latter case, Feuerstein uses the story to encourage users that no matter how many times they have 'messed up', they are still forgiven and loved by God. There are instances where Feuerstein does mark certain points as scriptural, for example, by introducing one example stating, "the one thing the Bible says, it says, With God all things are possible." While this is a word-for-word quote from a part of Matthew 19:26, Feuerstein

does not draw the attention of the reader to the citation, nor encourage the reader to look into it in more depth.

What is key to the use of Biblical stories in the interaction is not a theological soundness in Feuerstein's exegesis, but a consistency in the message of the video to encourage users to see themselves as similar to Biblical characters. However, the Bible is not the only resource that Feuerstein uses to draw comparisons. In a video posted on 2 May 2014, Feuerstein uses a contemporary film, "127 Days," to provide an illustrative story. In the story, a mountain climber is trapped in a canyon and makes the difficult decision to cut off his own arm to escape. Feuerstein, after telling the story, addresses the viewer, "So I ask you: is there a relationship or a friendship or maybe you're just tied to the memories of your past. Maybe there's something in your life that you need to cut away from today." The use of the story is, structurally, similar to the use of the Bible in the Noah's Ark example above, with a retelling of the story and an 'allegoric shift' where the listener is explicitly encouraged to think about the film in terms of their own life and how it might be applied to their own struggles. The video contains little reference to God beyond Feuerstein saying "God bless you guys" at the closing of the video and the message of the video, "To cut the dead things out of your life" is not presented as explicitly religious.

The responses to the video include similar vehicle repetition as 'storm' in the previous example, with nine commenters of 122 making reference to 'cutting' something out of their lives. Commenters write, for example, "Time to cut it all out and focus and TRUST on the one GOD put in front of me!" and "I think I should do this today. I need to cut whatever is left in my heart. Thanks. God bless you." In contrast to the first video, however, there is not extension or elaboration of the story and no users take on a full comparison, placing themselves in the position of the main character of the film in the way they have appeared to do in the story of Noah. This may suggest that the viewer response to the video has a weaker

embodied element — in that most viewers have not physically cut something off of their body — but it is still one that is resonates with users, as evidenced in the supportive comments, and one that implicitly references Jesus's teaching to cut off a hand if it causes sin (see Matthew 5:29–30). While the video makes no explicit reference to the scripture, the symbolism of cutting off a hand could be seen as an implicit reference to Biblical narrative, one which users, even without directly commenting on it, would be aware of.

Having identified the use of Biblical stories and the evidence for an 'allegoric impulse' in the data, I now turn specifically to the role of metaphor in positioning.

3.2 Metaphor and Positioning

In Feuerstein's preaching, reference to the Bible and Biblical narratives plays an important role in giving Feuerstein authority. The use of the Bible frames his extolment of the viewer as the 'Word of God', not just his own personal opinion. This is particularly clear in a video posted on 6 July 2014 with the description,

> It's TIME for your COMEBACK! 3 minutes of Life Changing ENCOURAGEMENT and TRUTH! Share w/ anyone down, discouraged, hurting, depressed or beaten up by life!!! (Feuerstein, 2014b)

In this video (which runs for 3 minutes and 32 seconds), Feuerstein mixes cultural references to 'comeback stories' with a Biblical narrative to position users as capable of 'coming back'; that is, recovering from difficulties in their own lives with the help of God. Feuerstein starts by saying,

1 …if you haven't been knocked out then that means it's time for your
2 comeback. In fact, every great story every great movie, whether it's Rocky,
3 Cinderella Man or Karate Kid… They all involve somebody who was
4 knocked down, but who got back up. (Feuerstein, 2014b)

He then shifts to the story of David and the Amalekites, taken from 1 Samuel 30,

5 In fact one of my favourite stories actually comes from scripture in fact it's
6 the story of David when he's down to nothing it seems. He's in the middle
7 of a desert and the Amalekites have come through. They've burned down
8 his house. They've stolen his cattle. They've stolen his wife. They've stolen
9 his children. They've stolen everything and here he is in one of the darkest
10 deepest moments of his life and all of the people around him are talkin' all
11 of this trash. They're talkin' all of this mess. In fact, the Bible says that
12 they're-they even speak of stoning him. They wanna kill David. Some of
13 his closest friends. How could God let this happen? And yet, what did
14 David do? David said, "I'm gonna shut my ears to all of the haters and I'm
15 gonna hear what God has to say about me and God told him." He said,
16 "David if you get back up on your horse and if you ride you will recover
17 all — you're gonna get back everything that was stolen from you." Check
18 this out. David got back on his horse and he rode after the Amalekites that
19 night. He catches up to them and what are they doing? Well, they're just
20 sippin' forties [of alcohol], having a good time at a bonfire. They think that
21 they have dealt David a blow he can never recover from and that's why
22 David caught the enemy by surprise. They never saw David coming. They
23 never thought that he could get back up. They never thought that he would
24 have a comeback. (Feuerstein, 2014b)

Feuerstein ends the video by explicitly positioning the reader in terms of David's experience, saying,

25 I need you to know today that if your feet are-are planted in God; if your
26 feet are planted in that rock; if you're weighted on the bottom so that even

27 though life may knock you down, it's time for your come back. It's time

28 for you to bounce back it’s time for you to get back up and do life again.

(Feuerstein, 2014b)

This video provides an exemplar case of Feuerstein’s use of the Bible, both in an allegoric way (encouraging users to think about their own lives in terms of David’s experience) and to position viewers in a storyline that God empowers the faithful to overcome difficulties in their lives. The theological basis for the encouragement comes from the first-level positioning, in which the positions of the Biblical characters in the Biblical narrative are defined. David is positioned as a fighter and a hero, with characters from popular Hollywood films about fighting (Lines 3–4), but one who has fallen on hard times, when he’s “down to nothing” (Line 6). David then speaks to God and is promised that everything will be returned to him (Lines 16–18). As a result of listening to God, David is positioned as a victorious warrior, one who comes back despite being afflicted and despite the expectations of others (Lines 23–24).

The first-level positioning in the story has several important theological ramifications. First, it positions God as being predisposed to particular people and speaking directly to them. By presenting God’s speech in a colloquial way, Feuerstein also positions God as a kind of companion and encourager who wants David, the person God favours and supports, to recover. It positions God as eminent, involved in David's life and working for his good, despite allowing hardship to enter his experience. Hardships are recast as opportunities for David to achieve more and be rewarded for persevering.

This first-level positioning provides the basis for the second level of positioning, which is again marked by a deictic shift from the story of David to Feuerstein's direct address to the user in Line 25: “I need you to know today…” The statement places the video back into the present and the interaction between Feuerstein and the viewer, where the viewer is

now positioned as the person who has been “knocked down” (Line 27) and in need of a ‘come back’. The positioning of David in the story is then explicitly mapped onto the viewer as Feuerstein says, “…. [David] got everything that the enemy had stolen from everybody else. I want you to know that god has that same kind of blessing for you.” The viewer’s position in the story is then the same as David’s, who is both favoured by God and who overcomes incredible difficulty to be victorious.

At the third level of positioning, Feuerstein himself is an authority on the scripture and as someone whose words are worth sharing. By publicly presenting himself doing exegesis, and encouraging others to spread his video, it becomes a means for Feuerstein’s influence to grow within his own community, as users who follow him regularly show support for him and for the community to grow, as Feuerstein encourages viewers to “share if you care”. The act of preaching is then implicitly an act of self-promotion, one that is facilitated by the authority of the scripture in second-order discourses (Foucault, 1981) and by Feuerstein’s ability to draw effective comparisons that are relatable. The position that Feuerstein takes is made possible by the response of the viewers, who empower him by agreeing with the message and praising him with comments like “I love listening to your uplighting messages!” “You always hit on what I am going through,” and “Thanks brother josh I needed that.” Feuerstein’s own self-positioning as a leader and authority is secured as users follow him, ‘like’ his Facebook page, share his videos, and ‘tag’ other users in the comments.

Feuerstein uses the Bible to encourage users to understand their own lives in terms of Biblical stories, by retelling Biblical stories with an explicit encouragement to relate the story to their own experience. This can happen with an extended telling and exegesis of scripture or in the use of short, well-known anecdotes from the Bible that readers can quickly understand and apply to their own experience. Feuerstein’s talk often does not necessarily require

theological or biblical background knowledge to understand either the story he is telling or the positioning of the listener within the story. By refraining from reading from the Biblical text, Feuerstein can retell the story with a mix of elements from the Bible and the contemporary target, and help spread the video as a tool of encouragement that is not excessively religious for users who are nominally Christian. This recreates an effective mixing of the sacred symbolic and the contemporary, something Feuerstein's register also betrays as he slips from language of contemporary cultural references ("What if I told you I was in love with a prostitute… I know it sounds like something that would be on tmz.com.") to the language of the King James Version of the Bible several lines later ("But I want you to know that where sin doth abound, Christ doth much more abound"). This dynamism in first-, second-, and third-level positioning encourages metaphorical thinking and subsequent discourse activity, connecting the world of the Bible to the contemporary world of the viewer, a key element of the allegoric impulse (Gibbs, 2011).

The nature of the 246 comments on these videos suggests users are aware of the stories that Feuerstein is telling and are able to engage with him in the same register. Overwhelmingly, the responses to Feuerstein's use of the Bible and encouragement to viewers to think about their own experiences in terms of Biblical stories are positive. *Amen* occurs 26 times and *God Bless* 28 times in the comments, with users most frequently responding to Feuerstein with supporting comments that affirm his overall message. There are no instances of users taking issue with Feuerstein's use of Scripture or his exegesis. The extension and elaboration of the metaphorical language also suggests that users are aware of the texts that Feuerstein is using and are primed to make use of it in the same way as Feuerstein. Using scriptural reference, they offer each other support, as in the case of a commenter writing, "Keep trusting in the Lord, reading through Scripture to hear Him more intensely. Some of my favorites are Psalm 139, Zephaniah 3:17, Romans 8:28, 1 Peter 1:5–

9...so many!" Here, the metaphorical language of 'hearing' God from the video is repeated with further examples from the Bible to support another commenter. The use of scripture in this way then has an implicit effect of adding authority to the words of the preacher in a second order discourse, borrowing and appropriating the language of the Biblical text (Foucault, 1981).

4 Conclusion

This article has shown the way in which Biblical metaphor in Facebook preaching quickly and effectively activates the allegorical impulse in viewers. The preaching of the Bible activates a complex interaction of embodied experiences, knowledge, and beliefs, leading to camaraderie and encouragement in the community. The analysis has shown the ways in which the use of metaphor can be straightforward in preaching when drawing direct comparisons between contemporary contexts and Biblical stories, or it can involve a mixture of metaphorical language and stories taken from a variety of Biblical sources and drawn together implicitly to serve a particular function in a video. In the case of Josh Feuerstein, this is to encourage others in the community and produce content that is easy to share with others, increasing his reach on Facebook. The analysis has shown that metaphor operates on a variety of different levels in talk about religion and spirituality, suggesting the need to approach such talk about religion from a variety of theoretical models to provide robust and complete descriptions of the discourse activity of religious practitioners. The language of the Bible in the examples here is embedded in a particular social context, existing alongside other metaphor scenarios and stories. The different scales of the complex system are not clearly delineated, but interrelate with one another as users interact with the videos.

References

Bamberg, M. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of narrative and life history, 7*(1-4), 335-342.

Bamberg, M. (2004). Considering counter narratives. In M. Bamberg & M. Andrews (Eds.), *Considering counter narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense* (pp. 351–371). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Cameron, L. (2003). *Metaphor in Educational Research*. London: Continuum.

Cameron, L. (2011). *Metaphor and reconciliation: The discourse dynamics of empathy in post-conflict conversations*. London: Routledge.

Cameron, L., & Low, G. (1999). *Researching and applying metaphor*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cameron, L., & Maslen, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Metaphor analysis: Research practice in applied linguistics, social sciences and the humanities*. London: Equinox.

Cameron, L., Maslen, R., Todd, Z., Maule, J., Stratton, P., & Stanley, N. (2009). The discourse dynamics approach to metaphor and metaphor-led discourse analysis. *Metaphor and Symbol, 24*(2), 63–89.

Davies, B., & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour, 20*(1), 43–63.

Feuerstein, J. (2014a). Untitled Facebook Video. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=480606392042048

Feuerstein, J. (2014b). Untitled Facebook Video. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=449019238534097

Foucault, M. (1981). The orders of discourse. In R. Young (Ed.), *Untying the Text: A post-structuralist reader*. London: Routledge.

Gibbs, R. (2011). The Allegorical Impulse. *Metaphor and Symbol, 26*(2), 121–130.

Gillespie, M., Herbert, D. E. J., & Greenhill, A. (2013). *Social Media and Religious Change*: De Gruyter.

Harré, R., Moghaddam, F., Cairnie, T. P., Rothbart, D., & Sabat, S. R. (2009). Recent advances in positioning theory. *Theory & Psychology, 19*(1), 5–31.

Harré, R., & van Langenhove, L. (1998). *Positioning Theory: Moral Contexts of Intentional Action*. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Hutchings, T. (2007). Creating church online: A case-study approach to religious experience. *Studies in World Christianity, 13*(3), 243-260.

Kiesler, S., Siegel, J., & McGuire, T. W. (1984). Social psychological aspects of computer-mediated communication. *American Psychologist, 39*(10), 1123–1134.

Larsen-Freeman, D., & Cameron, L. (2008). *Complex Systems and Applied Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Marwick, A., & boyd, d. (2011). I tweet honestly, I tweet passionately: Twitter users, context collapse, and the imagined audience. *New Media & Society, 13*(1), 114-133.

Musolff, A. (2004). *Metaphor and political discourse: analogical reasoning in debates about Europe*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Musolff, A. (2006). Metaphor scenarios in public discourse. *Metaphor and Symbol, 21*(1), 23–38.

Noll, M. A., Bebbington, D. W., & Rawlyk, G. A. (1994). *Evangelicalism: comparative studies of popular protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and beyond, 1700-1990*: Oxford Univ. Press.

Packer, J. I. (1978). *The Evangelical Anglican Identity Problem: An Analysis*. Oxford: Latimer.

Pihlaja, S. (2013). 'It's all red ink': The interpretation of biblical metaphor among Evangelical Christian YouTube users. *Language and Literature, 22*(2), 103-117.

Pihlaja, S. (2014). *Antagonism on YouTube: Metaphor in Online Discourse*. London: Bloomsbury.

Siegel, J., Dubrovsky, V., Kiesler, S., & McGuire, T. W. (1986). Group processes in computer-mediated communication. *Organizational behavior and human decision processes, 37*(2), 157–187.

Zanotto, M. S., Cameron, L., & Cavalcanti, M. C. (Eds.). (2008). *Confronting Metaphor in Use: An applied linguistic approach*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Author's address

Stephen Pihlaja

Newman University

Genners Lane

Birmingham B32 3NT

Biographical note

Stephen Pihlaja is a Senior Lecturer in Stylistics at Newman University, Birmingham. He is the author of two monographs on religious discourse online: *Antagonism on YouTube* (Bloomsbury, 2014) and *Religious Talk Online* (CUP, forthcoming). He is interested in discourse analysis, metaphor in online discourse, and talk about religion and religious identity.