

The International Journal of Homiletics



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Editorial

Welcome to the Supplementum issue of the *International Journal of Homiletics*. The articles in this volume are edited, peer-reviewed versions of keynote lectures and papers¹ presented at the *Societas Homiletica Conference* on August 3rd – 8th 2018, at The Divinity School of Duke University, North Carolina, USA. The theme of the conference was “Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World? Homiletical Explorations” – a topic that resonated with homileticians from all over the world and engendered rich reflections and discussions during the conference. In what follows are four keynote lectures, a keynote response and six papers discussing the theme of fear from theological perspectives of South Africa, Brazil, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United States.

The first article is the presidential address by Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship at Bethany Theological Seminary in Richmond, Indiana. Ottoni-Wilhelm’s article emphasizes that the theme “Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World? Homiletical Explorations” is both theologically and existentially oriented; it plays a significant role in Scripture, and it marks our contemporary lives at several levels. Through dialogue with Aristotle, Martha Nussbaum, Julian of Norwich, and others this article opens up for homiletical reflections on what the theme of fearing God may mean in the socio-political, cultural, and religious contexts of our time.

The next article is titled “Pauli Murray: In & Out of Pulpit” and is written by Donyelle C. McCray, Assistant Professor of Homiletics at Yale Divinity School. McCray explores the relationship between preaching and identity by introducing American civil rights activist, lawyer, women’s rights activist, Episcopal priest, and author, Pauli Murray. McCray analyzes principal influences on Murray, namely: Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, and James H. Cone, and argues that Murray makes an outstanding contribution to the study of African American preaching. The article is followed by a response by Júlio César Adam, Associate Professor of Practical Theology at Faculdades EST, in São Leopoldo, Brazil. Adam describes the crossroads of Murray and her African-American context with that of a Brazilian context marked by ethnic-cultural and religious diversity, social injustice and daily fear on one hand and hope, dance and feast, resistance through art, and articulation of contextual liberation theologies on the other hand.

The fourth article carries the title “Linking Emotion, Cognition, and Action within a Social Frame: Old Testament Perspectives on Preaching the Fear of the LORD” and is written by Anatheia E. Portier-Young, Associate Professor of Old Testament at Duke Divinity School, North

¹ The articles will also be published in the book series *Studia Homiletica* (vol. 12) by LIT Verlag, edited by Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm and Theo Pleizier.

Carolina. Portier-Young demonstrates how connections between fear and worship, obedience, and wisdom, as attested in Old Testament texts, express recognition of the fundamental link between emotion, cognition, and action. From fear in the Hebrew Bible we move unto fear in today's popular culture as analyzed by Professor of Practical Theology in Münster, Germany, Traugott Roser in "The Reality of Fear: Preaching in a Frightened World." Based on a discussion of sociocultural discourses on fear, Roser turns to the psychology of fear as found in the field of pastoral care and health care chaplaincy and concludes by analyzing the preacher's own fear in reference to Martin Luther and German theologian Otto Haendler.

Anders Göranson, General Secretary of the Swedish Bible Society, poses the question in his article "What happened last night in Sweden?" and analyses the possibilities and challenges of preaching without fear in a Scandinavian Folk Church, in a situation when populist nationalism rises in the context of migration. Professor of Practical Theology at the Theologische Universiteit Apeldoorn, Netherlands, Maarten Kater, provides "A Homiletical Analysis From a Biblical-Theological Perspective" on "Mark 6:45–52 as a Fear-Increasing and Fear-Decreasing Passage." In "Preaching from Sanctuary" Tito Madrazo, Assistant Teaching Professor, and Alma Ruiz, ThD Candidate, analyze cases from their experience as directors of Duke Divinity School's Hispanic-Latino/a Preaching Initiative. Amid the tense immigration debates taking place in the United States, the authors share insights from several sermons preached by first-generation Hispanic immigrants as part of a preaching peer-group.

From the Hispanic-Latino/a context we move unto Professor of Practical Theology at Stellenbosch University, Ian Nell's article "Preaching in a Xenophobic Culture: A South African Perspective." Nell analyses the pressure of coming to terms with the reality that large number of xenophobic attacks occur in a country that is globally considered to be an example of reconciliation. In the article the impact of violence and fear on the practice of preaching is discussed. Theo Pleizier, Assistant Professor of Practical Theology at Protestant Theological University Groningen, The Netherlands, shares initial insights from an empirical homiletical study of the practice of Military Chaplains in "Do Military Chaplains Preach? Exploring Sermons for Soldiers by Protestant Military Chaplains in the Dutch Army." Three concepts emerge from these data, namely that in their homiletical practices military chaplains redefine the liturgical conditions for preaching, witness to sources of wisdom, and dignify the individual soldier in the presence of Christ. The final article "From boring to divine encounter: Can we preach without the violence of certitude and hegemony?" is written by Peter Woodward, Australia. The article explores an approach to preaching which eschews certitude and hegemony by providing a reflective and invitational approach.

We hope you will find the articles inspiring and thought-provoking, and also encourage you to submit papers for the 14th meeting of *Societas Homiletica*, which will take place in Budapest, Hungary, from August 7th to 12th 2020. The theme for the next conference is:

“Preaching toward truth” Societas Homiletica conference in Budapest 2020

Preaching is driven by the quest for truth – and at the same time, this quest is contested in church, theology, and our societies. In a ‘post-truth era’ and in a fake-news world, it is a challenge to preach the good news of God’s truth and of Jesus who claims “I am the truth” (John 14:6). On the one hand, the longing for clarity may lead to reducing truth to all-too-easy propositional statements; on the other hand, the theological complexity of truth may lead to powerless sermons that have no impact on a world full of lies.

“What is truth?” (John 18:48) – Pilate’s question remains a spiritual, theological, and homiletical challenge. When Pilate posed the question, truth was standing in front of him. In Christ, truth is relational and dialogical. Accordingly, preaching toward truth is moving toward the acknowledgment of a reality external to our small lives and our global contexts. From a homiletical perspective, the following three questions among many others may be asked: (1) How do we preach if we accept that we do not possess truth but believe that truth is revealed in God’s active presence in the world and through God’s final coming? Theologically speaking, eschatology (the promise that the truth will be revealed) and economy (the facts of daily life and work) have to be brought in a critical relation to one another. (2) Who is the preacher, and what is her or his role when the church does not own truth and at the same time cannot be silent and has to proclaim truth? Humility and authenticity as well as boldness and the charisma of the preacher also need to be addressed. (3) How do we preach in a ‘post-truth era’, in which the grand – often oppressive – narratives are lost and yet there is a deep longing for stories to live in? How do we honor ‘facts’ and ‘emotions’ in our sermons? What language will help us to address these needs; poetical, metaphorical, referential, or mythical?

We face the challenge of preaching that opens up truth and moves toward truth. In Budapest we will have five days in August 2020 to work on these basic and relevant homiletical questions and to share our perspectives with colleagues from around the world.

Call for papers for 2020

As it is our regular practice, researchers, ph.d. students and teachers of preaching are encouraged to send in an abstract (300 words) for a paper presentation or workshop before February 29th 2020. Paper sessions consist of two or more 20-minute paper presentations, each followed by 20 minutes of discussion.

Abstracts may be sent to the International Secretary of Societas Homiletica, Theo Pleizier at: t.t.j.pleizier@pthu.nl. Within 3 weeks you will be notified as to whether your proposal has been accepted. First consideration is given to papers that clearly connect with the theme of the conference.

On behalf of the Editorial Board of the *International Journal of Homiletics*,

Alexander Deeg, University of Leipzig and

Marlene Ringgaard Lorensen, University of Copenhagen

Co-Editors of IJH

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World? Homiletical Explorations

Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm¹

Abstract

The presidential address introduces the 2018 conference theme through rhetorical, political, spiritual, and biblical understandings of fear as well as communicative and homiletical strategies for addressing fear in preaching. In addition to Aristotle's Rhetoric, the prevalence of fear amid current U.S. political discourse is examined in light of the rhetorical analyses of Martha Nussbaum, professor of law and ethics at The University of Chicago. To develop an appropriately reverent fear of God while addressing the myriad anxieties around us, we may query our fears to better understand what is at stake in ignoring or addressing socio-political concerns. Beyond the rhetoric of fear, the spiritual writings of Julian of Norwich as well as numerous biblical texts (including the Book of Job and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount) suggest communicative strategies that invite a homiletical poesis of divine love and compassion, including musical and theopoetic expressions of faith.

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” So says the Book of Hebrews, chapter 10 verse 31. A fearful thing. Why, of all the ways that we may know, understand, and relate with God, should *fear* be such a prominent part of faith and the world we inhabit? The conference theme for this year focuses our attention on fear because the board of Societas Homiletica not only recognizes that it is a prominent theme in Scripture but fear is also rampant among us – in our nations, schools, churches, students, and even within ourselves.

Our theme, “Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World? Homiletical Explorations” holds at least two important considerations. First, it is both theological and existential in its orientation. *Theologically*, it calls attention to a long-standing biblical emphasis on fearing the Lord our God, a

¹ This essay represents an edited version of the Presidential Address of *Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm* delivered at the Societas Homiletica Meeting on 4 August, 2018, at The Divinity School of Duke University, Durham, North Carolina, USA.

theme that has inspired preachers around the world and is central to many Christian understandings of what it means to be in right relationship with and to God. *Existentially*, we may say that fear is experienced personally and corporately; we may certainly feel fear but also sometimes generate and perpetuate it as collective fears are often given political and cultural expression. Throughout the keynote addresses, responses, and papers from the conference that are recorded in this edition of *The International Journal of Homiletics*, both the theological and existential import of fear and its relationship to preaching are addressed.

Second, the theme includes a question mark. Not a colon or a period but a question mark follows the juxtaposition of “Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World?” In discussing this theme, our board members recognized that there is a great deal we wonder and worry about fear: What rouses or inspires fear among us? Under what conditions does it thrive? How do we sense or recognize fear? Are there healthy, even God-given fears? Which fears inhibit – if not strangle – our voices? Is fear sublimated, ignored, or impossible to ignore? Overwhelming or subtle in its approach? Obvious or insidious? What is it about *God’s* being, presence, and activity that necessitates and calls forth a fearful allegiance, relationship, or response? In what ways may the fear of God empower or repel us? In what ways may fear be an expression of reverence and how does it call for relational accountability – not only to God but to all creation?

As homileticians, what fears do our students face? What do we fear in our research, writing, preaching, and teaching? When is it wise *not* to name and address fear and how do we discern whether or not we do so? AND what are the words we use and the strategies we employ that may help us name, describe, unmask, address, understand, encourage, or challenge fear?

In other words, *How do we speak of fearing God in our fear-filled world?*

By way of an introduction to our conference theme, I want to first explore what fear may mean to us ... Then consider what one spiritual elder of the medieval church, Julian of Norwich, has to offer in helping us to better understand the nature of godly fear ... Finally, I will suggest a few questions for further discussion – all of which I believe will be relevant to our homiletical engagement with fear.

First, what do we mean by fear? What are we talking about?

In Book 2 of Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, the 5th century BCE philosopher explores several emotions that are important and useful for orators to understand and make use of in their public speaking.² Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* provides us with the earliest systematic discussion of human psychology on

² *Aristotle, On Rhetoric. A Theory of Civic Discourse* (George Kennedy trans. and ed.), New York, NY 1991.

record, giving speakers insights into human feelings, motivations, and how best to address one's audience. Among human emotions or sensations, Aristotle devotes great attention to fear which he defines as "a sort of pain or agitation derived from the imagination (Gr. *phantasia*, which also suggests the *appearance* or *visualization*) of a future destructive or painful evil [...]."³ Not all evil is to be feared, according to Aristotle. For example, we do not fear becoming unjust or slow witted. However, he argues that two features dominate our sense of fear: it involves that which is near at hand (something dangerous is about to happen, impending, imminent) and we feel that we are powerless to ward it off. Although Aristotle is careful not to dwell on our fear of death (because, he contends, we all know that we will die and when death is not near at hand, he believes that we take little note of it), I suspect that death does indeed loom large in our minds as natural disasters strike indiscriminately, cancer and other ills inflict widely, and abuses of many kinds push us to desperation, trauma, and death's door.

The ancient Greeks also provide us with psychosocial resources to better understand fear through their theological rendering of gods and goddesses. You may remember that Ares, the Greek god of war, was united with Aphrodite, the goddess of love (the two of them representing what were believed to be the two greatest passions of humankind, war and love), to produce the twin sons Phobos and Deimos. *Phobos* (from whom we derive the word, *phobia*) means *fear*: it includes not only fear but a sense of panic, flight, and routing one's enemies. *Deimos* means terror, dread. The two brothers accompanied their father into battle, driving his chariot and spreading fear and dread in his wake.⁴ Interestingly, Ares and Aphrodite also bore a daughter, *Harmonia*, the goddess of harmony, order, and symmetry. From the richness of these personifications of divine power and presence in ancient Greek culture, Aristotle identified the importance of fear as a perception – something that is felt before it is spoken; he contended that fear is not always seen but is real and present. When our words tap into these primal feelings, we powerfully re-present them for public, shared perception. We may consider fear and other primal feelings that Aristotle describes to be rhetorical instruments that we may cultivate, examine, or manipulate.

Is it any wonder that each language includes a range of terms to depict and decry the reality of fear in its myriad expressions? In English, for example, we speak of being anxious, scared, frightened, perturbed, intimidated, feeling panic and being overwhelmed. We add to this a sense of *disgust*, a term that has recently been explored by feminist scholars as a concurrent factor along with fear, envy, and misogyny that contribute to the oppression of women.⁵ Also, the word *dread*

³ Ibid., 139.

⁴ As the sons of both Ares and Aphrodite, Phobos and Deimos also represented the fear of loss.

⁵ *Martha C. Nussbaum*, *The Monarchy of Fear. A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis*, New York, NY 2018, 193–

reflects a particularly poignant and powerful emotion that includes foreboding and the fear of being stricken.

To be sure, fear is often an appropriate and even healthy response to perceived and real dangers. In fact, our species has survived by developing instincts for detecting dangerous situations. Whether they are beasts in the jungle or bullies in the school yard, human beings have learned to fear the tigers in our midst, including those who threaten us with physical, psychological, emotional, and/or verbal harm. Similarly, it is realistic to fear declining health and we teach our children to fear opiates and other harmful, illegal drugs.

But fear may also become toxic and unreasonable. We may be swept up in tides of fearful response to strangers and other persons who are undeserving of our suspicion, and we may be incited to fear situations that do not pose real threats.

Recently, U.S. philosopher and professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago, Martha Nussbaum, has investigated the role of emotions as they impact law, political discourse, and democratic societies. In particular, she has studied fear which is proving so perilous to American socio-political life. In her book, *The Monarchy of Fear. A Philosopher Looks at Our Political Crisis*, Nussbaum examines the role of fear and its narcissistic, antisocial intensity, asserting that “Above all, fear responds to rhetoric ...”⁶ After describing the roots of childhood fears that are universally experienced among us and contrasting these with what Nussbaum calls a “facilitating environment” of trust, stability, and the provision of basic physical and psychological needs that are necessary to moderating human fear, she goes on to examine the rhetoric of fear in U.S. politics, offering the examples of two recent U.S. presidents who both belong to the Republican Party and the rhetoric they use in referring to Muslims and Islam.

Nussbaum notes that President George W. Bush, in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, insistently told Americans that “we are not at war with Islam.”⁷ At a meeting with United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan on Nov. 13, 2002, Bush asserted, “Islam, as practiced by the vast majority of people, is a peaceful religion, a religion that respects others. Ours is a country based upon tolerance and we welcome people of all faiths in America.” At a press conference a week later Bush said, “Ours is a war not against a religion, not against the Muslim faith. But ours is a war against individuals who absolutely hate what America stands for.” Again, on Dec. 5, 2002, at the Islamic Center of Washington D.C. he insisted, “Muslim citizens are making many

196.

⁶ Ibid., 55.

⁷ Ibid. This and other quotes of then-President *George W. Bush* are recorded *ibid.*, 55–57.

contributions in business, science and law, medicine and education. Muslim members of our Armed Forces and of my administration are serving their fellow Americans with distinction ...” However much many of us may have protested the U.S. invasions of Afghanistan in late 2001 and Iraq in 2003 as well as Bush’s unsubstantiated claims of Weapons of Mass Destruction ready to strike the United States, Nussbaum notes that President Bush acted as a responsible leader in the face of popular fear: “he calms escalating confusion and anxiety, leading people toward a more fact-based and pinpointed strategy, and reminding them of cherished American values that must not be sacrificed.”⁸

By contrast, President Donald Trump, both during and after his campaign, repeatedly alluded to Islam as if it were as a whole a source of danger. Nussbaum notes that “The rhetoric preceding the controversial travel ban singled out Muslims as potential enemies, often using the words *Muslim ban*.”⁹ The speech Trump gave in Warsaw in July of 2017, which was widely praised, speaks ominously of “another oppressive ideology” that “seeks to export terrorism and extremism all around the globe.” He names this threat “radical Islamic terrorism,” subscribing to the old familiar notion of a clash of civilizations. Nussbaum calculates that in that speech Trump refers ten times to “the West” and five times to “our civilization” and she asserts that from this and other speeches it is evident that “the West” is not a geographical entity nor even a political or economic term (since Trump does not include Japan, South Korea, and India in his references), but, according to Nussbaum, “it is an appeal to shared religion and shared racial identity: to Christianity (with some Jews included) and to whiteness (since Latin America does not appear to be included).”¹⁰ In other words, President Trump not only contributes to an atmosphere of fear in the U.S., he draws on the deeply emotional and amorphous fears of people, “generated in a climate of ignorance and fed by imprecise and alarmist rhetoric, [which] is the enemy of any sane dialogue about our future.”¹¹

Nussbaum describes fear as intensely narcissistic: it pulls us into ourselves as we react to protect ourselves from an imminent or perceived threat which we try to control, dominate, or bully. Furthermore, it is deadly to democratic reciprocity. Fear that runs over us in this way threatens the fabric of democracy because democracy asks us to think not only about ourselves but the shared, public good of all: “democracy requires us to limit our narcissism and embrace reciprocity.”¹²

⁸ Ibid., 56. Nussbaum also summarizes her analysis by saying, “President Bush typically used the rhetoric of universal human dignity and progress, rather than the rhetoric of a clash of ‘civilizations.’” (57)

⁹ Ibid., 57. This and other quotes of President *Donald J. Trump* are recorded *ibid.*, 57–60.

¹⁰ Ibid., 58.

¹¹ Ibid., 59.

¹² Ibid., 62.

But fear is having its way in the United States right now. Some of it mirrors an anxious fear of immigrants, refugees, and people of color who have in many cases become the scapegoats of other fears – such as the loss of Euro-American socio-political and cultural dominance and economic security in the United States. Fear is felt in our anxious awareness of the climate crisis and the fear-filled pleas of environmentalists working on behalf of endangered species and national parks; in the reports of innumerable women posting in the #metoo movement; fear is provoked by gun violence and, in particular, the escalation of violence targeted against people of color and LGBTQ persons; and many of us fear not only for the safety of immigrants who enter our land but also the long-term traumatic impact of the Trump administration’s wrongful policy of separating parents and their children, who are held in detention centers. Fear runs rampant in the rising tides of nationalism and populism. According to cultural philosopher Rob Riemen from The Netherlands, populist politics is always deceptive because it offers up our current fears, reinforcing the crises we feel without examining or critically evaluating them.¹³ Our conference theme, “Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World?” calls us to examine not only the particular individual encounters with fear but also the myriad ways that nationalism and fear-filled populist movements have gained a hearing and momentum across the globe. When fear runs rampant, Nussbaum warns, “some very bad things can easily happen. Citizens may become indifferent to truth and prefer the comfort of an insulating peer group who repeat one another’s falsehoods. They may become afraid of speaking out, preferring the comfort of a leader who gives them a womb-like feeling of safety. And they may become aggressive against others, blaming them for the pain of fear ...”¹⁴

But our understanding of fear not only comes from ancient and recent philosophical, rhetorical, and political resources; not only from what we witness through the manifestations and rhetoric of fear around us today. We may also turn to spiritual and biblical resources to better understand our fears and how to address and engage them.

Let us consider a voice from deep within our Christian traditions: Julian of Norwich,¹⁵ a 14th century anchoress who lived through a terrible, violent, plague-ridden time in England. You may be familiar with one of her better known affirmations: “All shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.” It is a phrase I have often repeated to myself and others during times of frustration, struggle, hardship, even desperation and grievous loss. Less known to most people is that Julian heard these words from Jesus at a time of her own grave physical suffering at the age of 30. It was

¹³ *Rob Riemen, To Fight against This Age. On Fascism and Humanism*, New York, NY 2015, 79.

¹⁴ *Nussbaum* (note 5), 62.

¹⁵ Because her family/surname is unknown to us, Julian is referred to by her first name alone throughout this essay.

during this period that she received 16 divine visions or “showings.” She heard Jesus say to her that “*Sin is inevitable, but all shall be well,*

and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.”¹⁶

Julian had a sharp response to this divine message of love: It does not look well to me! How is it possible that all will be well and love is the meaning of all when the cruelest suffering and sin are attacking us without respite? She did not receive easy answers to her questions. For 20 years Julian meditated on the visions that God gave her during her own affliction then began to write her great spiritual reflections titled, *Revelations of Divine Love*. She offers an account of spiritual wisdom that centers on the greatest of God’s passion: the love of God for all, in all, and through all. Her writings provide a remarkably holistic, wise, and spiritually relevant treatise, and the last of her reflections on the last of her divine encounters describes the potency and pervasiveness of fear.

Julian writes that “when we begin to hate sin and amend ourselves by the command of Holy Church, still there persists a fear that hinders us . . .”¹⁷ She goes on to describe four kinds of fear:

- (1) The first is *simple fright*. It is what pierces us suddenly because of our human weakness, startling us because of our human frailty. Simple fright does us good, Julian believes, because it helps to purge us just as bodily pain or illness releases something ill within us. When something startles us, we cannot help but to focus our attention on it for a time, wondering if we do or do not have reason to be concerned. Simple fright can make us look and draw our attention to something wrong.
- (2) The second is *fear of pain*. When we fear some act of pain against our bodily person, “we are stirred and wakened from the sleep of sin” and when we are awake, alert, and watchful we begin to receive the “gentle comfort of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁸ Through the fear of pain and bodily death, Julian suggests we may have contrition and turn to God as we seek comfort and mercy from God. This may be “the sort of fear that Jesus has in mind with his call to fear God, who can destroy soul and body in hell” since there is something far more important to fear than one who can kill the body alone (Mt 10:26–31).¹⁹

¹⁶ *Father John-Julian*, O.J.N. (trans. and ed.), *A Lesson of Love. The Revelations of Julian of Norwich*, The Order of Julian of Norwich, U.S. 1988, 61.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 190.

¹⁹ See *Keith Beasley-Topliffe*, “The Beginning of Wisdom” in: *Weavings*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, March/April 1999, 34.

- (3) The third is *doubtful fear*. It arises through awareness of our own limitations and sinfulness and often draws us to despair. Julian teaches that such fear is transformed by God's grace as the "bitterness of doubt is turned into the sweetness of kind love by grace ..." ²⁰ It may also be described as a kind of "formation anxiety" since doubtful fear can lead us to humility and direct us to true "self-knowledge" and examination, away from arrogant posturing. ²¹ Doubtful fear, when it is not resisted but held, examined, and offered to God, promotes openness to receive grace, God's forgiveness and love. As preachers and teachers, we would be wise to remember that when doubts are acknowledged and honored, they provide us with opportunities to wonder, reflect, wrestle, examine, and scrutinize what we think and feel. We must be willing to embrace doubtful fear before it may bear the fruits of spiritual wisdom and loving ourselves and others amid our doubtful wonder.
- (4) Finally, the fourth fear that Julian describes is *reverent fear*. This is the only fear that truly pleases God, according to Julian. It is the most gentle or "soft" of fears because "the more of it one has, the less it is felt because of the sweetness of love." ²² If only she had expounded further on reverent fear because it seems in Julian's accounting to be the nearest to health and wholeness in one's relationship with God. But she does elaborate at length on the relationship of fear and love as her treatise draws to a close.

In her reflections on these four kinds of fear, Julian does not speak of them as sequential in their development, as if one must begin with the first before proceeding to the second. But there is no doubt that the fourth, reverent fear, is most fully pleasing to God. We may or may not agree with her, of course. Or we may think that our time and culture call us to abide with one of the first three. For example, in the U.S. we may need to spend more time with "doubtful fear" (i.e., more carefully examining what we are suspicious of in order to better understand what we fear before hastening on to judgment against others or reacting to others out of our insecurities).

But none of these four kinds of fear comes easily, according to Julian, and all inflict us with pain or are born through some experience of pain that is deeply felt within us.

²⁰ *Beasley-Topliffe*, *Encounter with God's Love. Selected Writings of Julian of Norwich* (Upper Room Spiritual Classics – Series 2) Nashville, TN 1998, 60.

²¹ See *Beasley-Topliffe* (note 19), 34, quoting the work of *Adrian van Kaam*, *Human Formation*, New York, NY 1989, 205.

²² *John-Julian* (note 16), 190.

How very significant it is, then, that immediately following her brief description of reverent fear, Julian says:

“Love and fear are brothers;
And they are rooted in us by the Goodness of our Creator
and they shall never be taken from us without end.”²³

Love and fear are brothers in Julian’s medieval conceptualization: not *love and war*, but *love and fear*.

Julian’s insight into love and fear and the intimate and reverent relationship they share recalls the teachings of Deuteronomy, chapter 10 verse 12: “So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to *fear* the Lord your God, to *walk* in all his ways, to *love* him, to *serve* the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and his decrees . . .”²⁴ According to these verses, not only fear and love but walking in God’s ways and serving God are all necessary and vital companions to one another.

Remarkably, they are *commanded* of God’s people. That is; love and fear are commanded of us as surely as following God’s teaching/Torah and serving and walking with integrity according to God’s will are commanded of us.

But how can one *command love*?! And how can one *command fear*?! To our 21st century ears, it sounds incredible that God commands us to love and fear. As someone who did not grow up in the church, I remember well as a young adult hearing the command to love God with heart, soul, mind, and strength. How outrageous, I thought, that one could think of commanding love! But as the years passed, I realized and learned that the command to love God and neighbors is linked with and in the context of God’s issuing commands to follow divine teaching and laws. Love has to do with following these laws and *fear* with living in right relationships with God and others. When we violate or ignore these commands, we risk alienating ourselves from God and one another.

No wonder love is such an integral part of fear and fear of love and that God commands them both.

Of course, we may also remember a passage from the First Epistle of John, chapter 4 verse 18 that says “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love.” Aware of our many imperfections (including our repeated failure to love ourselves and others well), this verse may

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ This and other biblical quotes are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

incite guilt: If I fear, is it because I do not have enough love? Or because my love is less than perfect? But in light of Julian's multi-faceted appreciation of fear, in light of the many kinds of fear we experience personally and corporately, we may say that the kind of fear John wants to be purged from our lives is certainly not *reverent fear* but the more insidiously damaging kinds of fear that plague us; fears that instill self-doubt, inhibit our creativity and courage, destroy our hope, turn strangers into enemies, sever us from one another and make scapegoats of those whom we fear. Love, I think Julian would agree, casts out those kinds of fear.

But many preachers have not learned the difference, and many have commanded a fearful response to God that damages our reverence for God and our love of others.

Remembering the Puritans during the 17th and 18th centuries, their so-called "fire and brimstone" sermons certainly held sway in many pulpits across North America as preachers hoped to instill a fear of God into their parishioners. Jonathan Edwards' sermon, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" was first preached in 1741 at his home church in Massachusetts, was subsequently published and circulated for decades thereafter and it continues to reverberate today; its vivid imagery intending to shock and awaken listeners to repent and call on Christ for salvation from the torments of hell. Its commanding tone and content urge people to fear God as one who is ready to condemn but also to forgive our sins and arrogance.

But as a communicative strategy, commanding people not to be afraid usually does not attract listeners but repels them! We may want to stop fear in its tumultuous tracks, but it does not respond well to such commands. No doubt that is another reason why godly fear is often paired with love: the myriad expressions and experiences of fear and love invite us to consider something beyond commanding people to fear God. Are there not other ways to preach and teach about fear and the fear of God? Other than commanding fear or instilling images of a wrathful God, are there ways to honor fear and move us toward a more blessed sense of awe and relational accountability, infused with divine love and compassion? Are there not ways to cultivate an appropriately reverent fear of God and also to understand, describe and address fears of different kinds as they inflict damaging and woeful effects upon us? These are among the questions that preachers need to raise as we encounter fear around and among us.

In fact, when fear causes our people and congregations, our schools, communities and nations to clench our fists in silence or yell in anger at others, one of the greatest communicative strategies we have to offer is to query our fears: to develop questions that address the real roots of our fears and what is at stake in the fears that turn us away from God and against our neighbors.

As the last president of Societas Homiletica, John Cilliers of South Africa, said to me this week: “It is better to raise questions that have no answer than to give answers that shut down or leave no room for questions.”

As a rhetorical strategy, raising questions in our sermons may not only make room for careful, thoughtful examination of our private and public fears; they may also invite opportunities to look at what we need to fear: such as violence in our streets, schools, and homes, opioid addictions, and climate crises. Preaching may put fear to good use as we engage questions of social, political, and religious import: we may not only examine fear but be on the look-out for fear and challenge it. Walter Rauschenbush, the late 19th – early 20th century U.S. preacher and leader of the Social Gospel Movement (that wedded evangelical fervor for the gospel with the great social concerns of his time) said that a clergy person should “be the master of politics by creating the issues which [political] parties will have to espouse.”²⁵ How may preachers do this? By choosing the questions we need to discuss for our particular time, in our particular contexts. For example:

- Why has it become such a risky and controversial thing to say that “Black Lives Matter?”
- Which biblical texts about violence against women are not in our lectionaries and when will we listen to and address them?

The New Testament records many instances when Jesus encountered fear. He sometimes questioned people’s fear but often simply recognized and addressed it. In fact, fear plays a central role throughout the stories of Jesus’ miraculous acts of power and the Gospels and Letters attest that fear is experienced by many people for many different reasons: the disciples respond in fear when Jesus calms the storm (Mk 4:40); people are afraid when Jesus exorcizes the man inhabited by demons (5:15); the woman healed of her 12 year hemorrhage is afraid when she falls at Jesus’ feet (5:33); and when receiving news that his daughter has died, Jesus urges Jairus not to fear (5:36). Jesus frequently reassured people, telling them not to be afraid because we are of more value than sparrows (Lk 12:7b); not to be afraid because it is our Father’s good pleasure to give us the kingdom (12:32). The angels, God’s message-bearers, also urge people to “Fear not!” (e.g., Mt 1:20; Lk 1:13; 1:30; 2:10; Acts 27:24).

Surely Jesus and the angels are not simply dissuading us from what Julian of Norwich called “reverent fear.” Instead, they were instead trying to move us away from “simple fright” or “holy

²⁵ Paul Rauschenbush (ed.), *Christianity and the Social Crisis in the 21st Century. The Classic That Woke Up the Church*, New York, NY 2007, 295.

dread” toward a deeper, more nuanced and empowering encounter with divine presence among us; a holy fear in which fear and love are indeed siblings.

There can hardly be a more moving and meaningful account of Jesus’ response to human fear and suffering than his beatitudes. Like the blessings and woes of Lk 6:17–26, the beatitudes of Mt 5:3–12 are a touchstone of faith for many of us. They also address our deepest fears as each blessing addresses a different source of anxiety and concern: poverty (economic and spiritual), mourning (whether grieving the death of loved ones, a lost home, job, or another tragic event), meekness (being overlooked, unrecognized, or stepped upon by others), hunger and thirst (for food as well as justice), lack of mercy, a conflicted heart, war mongering and violence, persecution. Jesus blesses all of these. He offers the blessing of God who transforms even our greatest fears and sorrows into that which is touched by grace and hope.

Consider for a moment what Jesus is saying:

Blessed, happy, divinely touched are you as you experience poverty of body or spirit: when all of your external and internal resources have been drained and you fear that there is nothing left for you to be or do. That is when you may be open to receiving God whose kingdom and rule is near.

Do you mourn the loss of the person most dear to you? The work that sustained you? The home you loved? The marriage you cherished? Do not fear these losses in your life. Know that you are embraced by God whose arms will embrace and comfort you.

You who are meek, whom no one ever notices, whose gifts are least prized and often taken advantage of by others: do not be afraid. You are blessed. Whether or not others yet recognize it, you are the true owners of everything that is precious and priceless. You will inherit all.

Blessed are you who know that things are not right or fair and who fear for the well-being of creation and the future threatened by oppression and injustice. Your hunger for these things will be satisfied and all that you are and do on behalf of God’s love and justice in this world will not only bear fruit but you will enjoy the feast of your labor alongside that of many others.

Are you afraid that there is no mercy for you and others? That loving kindness is overruled by malice and retribution is considered just punishment with no other means of relational accountability in this world? You will be blessed with God’s care for you and for all others, in God’s way and time.

Is your heart, your will, undivided and well- focused? Or are you troubled by your lack of clarity, scattered schedule, and divided loyalties? Keep seeking integrity of intention and wholeness

of heart that is devoted to God alone. When you examine your own heart, God will bless you with insight, wisdom, and love.

You who struggle to make peace amid hardship and violence, even as others avoid conflict at all cost: continue to pursue peace, develop cooperative relationships instead of competitive ones, collaborate thoughtfully with others rather than tearing down others in order to lift yourself up. God will bless you as a beloved child and you will find your home in God's family.

When you risk sticking your neck out, taking courage to say and do what is right according to God's teaching, even when others are sharpening their knives, eager to cut you down if not kill you altogether: no matter how fearful the situation, remember that you are in the company of God and of prophets with whom you share the fullness of God's love.²⁶

In the beatitudes, Jesus speaks pastorally and prophetically to some of our greatest fears – not by ignoring them, brushing them aside, or analyzing them but by blessing them, holding them in God's gracious care, speaking in ways that encourage and uplift as surely as they challenge and redirect our priorities. Whether or not Jesus ever preached an uninterrupted sermon in the form of Mt 5–7 or Lk 6, the sayings, analogies, metaphors, brief parables, and teachings that comprise what we call “The Sermon on the Mount” or “The Sermon on the Plain” offer us a wellspring of preaching resources and rhetorical strategies that may inspire us to study, teach, and preach anew about what it means to fear God in our fear-filled world.

And dare we remember Jesus' most fearful moment? At the garden of Gethsemane, the Synoptic Gospels give us the sure impression that Jesus knew danger was imminent and that he had given his power to God, into whose hands he committed himself. We learn in Mark 14:34 that Jesus was distressed and agitated as he entered the night vigil with Peter, James, and John. Nearly two millennia later, Brother Jacques Berthier of the Taizé community created a meditative, memorable, and worshipful song centered on the words of Jesus asking his closest companions to stay and pray during his time of greatest fear and travail:

Stay with me,
Remain here with me.
Watch and pray,
Watch and pray.²⁷

²⁶ My paraphrase is inspired by that of *Eugene H. Peterson*, *The Message*. The New Testament in Contemporary English, Colorado Springs, CO 1993, 15f.

²⁷ *Jacques Berthier*, *Stay with Me*, in: *Songs & Prayers from Taizé* Chicago, IL 1991, no. 8.

Music is yet another way to preach. It is perhaps the most effective way of preaching with our hearts and heads together, joining our theology with our humanity. Through hymns and religious songs, we confess our sins, express our needs, address, bear, and engage our fears. In his book *Dem Dry Bones*, Luke Powery examines African American spirituals as these also preach of the ways songs of suffering and faith help to move us through the worst of times.²⁸ In them, we, like Jesus, not only seek comfort and divine presence, but we proclaim our need for companions and companionship; for God who sees us, knows our fears, and loves us through all our lives.

The poetry of music is another way that we may draw people into new and transformative encounters with our fears, including godly or reverent fear. It may seem extraordinary to consider poetry as means of disclosing or pointing us toward salvation, but the English translation of Martin Luther's great hymn, "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott" ("A Mighty Fortress Is Our God"), evokes the power of God through music's poetry:

*And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him.
His rage we will endure,
for lo, his doom is sure.
One little word shall fell him.²⁹*

If fear responds to rhetoric, as philosopher Nussbaum contends, then surely also to *poesis* – the creating of new language and a new imaginary. In his *Poesis*, Aristotle describes the poetic act as the invention of a fable-plot: a creative act. Poetry invents a mythos, argues Paul Ricoeur, which is distinct from rhetoric that so often builds upon logical argumentation.³⁰ Rhetoric and poesis are not opposed to one another, to be sure; but whereas rhetoric draws from conventional ideas and centers on deliberative, judicial, and epideictic settings, poetry is a creative act, Ricoeur insists. It "points to the breach of newness that the creative imagination opens."³¹ The "conversion of the

²⁸ Luke A. Powery, *Dem Dry Bones*, Minneapolis, MN 2002, 21–38, 57–69, 109–112.

²⁹ Martin Luther, *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, in: *Geistliche Leiden* (tr. Frederick H. Hedge), 1852. See *Hymnal. A Worship Book*, Elgin, IL 1992, #165.

³⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Rhetoric – Poetics – Hermeneutics*, in: Michel Meyer (ed.), *From Metaphysics to Rhetoric*, Boston, MA 1989, 137–149.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

imaginary is the central aim of poetics” Ricoeur contends, and “it is less a matter of *settling a controversy* than of *generating a new conviction*.”³²

According to past president of Societas Homiletica, Thomas Troeger, our old and tired words may become idols and are ever in need of reaching through clarity to uncover or reveal new forms of expression. In his essay, “A Poetics of the Pulpit for Post-Modern Times” Troeger writes: “A post-modern homiletics does not so quickly grab at the right verbal formulation. Instead, it begins at the level of human suffering and the trust and empathy awakened when our pain is recognized by another.”³³ Or as founding member of Soc. Hom., Richard Lischer outlines in his book, *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence*, the violence of the 20th century has made a mockery of words. “The preacher’s vocation,” Lischer writes, “entails a dying to the norms of those who control language in our culture. It offers a resurrection of freedom to speak of God in a God-free society and to join our words to the suffering and joy of God’s people.”³⁴

The late great poet Jane Kenyon put it this way: “The poet’s job is to tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, in such a beautiful way that people cannot live without it.”³⁵

Beautiful, yes. But the truth of poetry, like the truth of preaching and the truth of suffering, injustice, and fear, can be a terrible thing, however robed in beauty we may find it.

Just ask Job. Amid horrific suffering and loss, having his worst fears realized upon the death of his sons and daughters, the annihilation of his home, livestock and livelihood, inflicted with sores from head to toe, Job sat with friends in silence for 7 days. When at last he opened his mouth it was to curse the day he was born – and he spoke in the form of a poem with images of light and dark, night and day, appealing to the sea and stars. Wailing amid darkness he called out, “Truly the thing that I fear comes upon me, and what I dread befalls me. I am not at ease, nor am I quiet; I have no rest; but trouble comes” (3:25).

His friends cannot resist the urge to offer their interpretation of things, even questioning whether Job truly fears God. Each takes a turn speaking in poetic verse, with Job responding to each in kind. But also, and remarkably, Job at times directs his speech to God: in fact, he is the only one to do so, setting a precedence for all who hope that their words flung into the void will find a landing place in the heart of God.

³² Ibid., 143 (emphasis mine).

³³ Thomas H. Troeger, A Poetics of the Pulpit for Post-Modern Times, in: Richard Eslinger (ed.), *Intersections: Post-Critical Studies in Preaching*, Grand Rapids, MI 1994, 63.

³⁴ Richard Lischer, *The End of Words. The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence*, Grand Rapids, MI 2005, 91.

³⁵ Quoted in *The Christian Century*, April 26, 2017, 3.

But between Job and his friends, is a poetry slam of the worst kind: back and forth they contend with one another, his friends addressing and accusing Job of suffering the result of his own wickedness or faithlessness. No artful unveiling of sympathetic queries to God are raised on his behalf; no tenderness of affection is felt. Their words are ponderous and vindictive, fulfilling their own need to blame the victim of Satan's cruel test.

Remarkably, in chapter 28 Job breaks out in a hymn. His poetic song searches for God's ever-elusive wisdom. Frustrated that neither he nor his friends can offer a satisfactory explanation for the travesty of his losses, Job calls out: "But where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding?" (28:12). Culminating in his most astonishing affirmation, Job declares:

God understands the way to it [wisdom],
and he knows its place.
For he looks to the ends of the earth,
and sees everything under the heavens [...]
And he said to humankind,
'Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;
and to depart from evil is understanding.'
Job 28:23,28

There is no language to contain his grief; no mortal way to understand what has happened. All has been taken from Job EXCEPT his words.

And God also has words, if not answers to Job's questions. In fact, Job's comfort is in hearing God's questions after issuing so many of his own:

'Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?' (38:4)
'Have you commanded the morning since your days began,
and caused the dawn to know its place ..?' (38:12)
'Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty?' (40:2)
'Will you condemn me that you may be justified?' (40:8b)

There are no answers given by Job or God and no explanations are made for his predicament. But God is with him. Job's ears have heard and his eyes have seen God. His friends are rebuked, his

fortune restored, more children are born to him. But it is in hearing God's questions, being in God's presence, that Job finds his place. The controversy over suffering is not resolved but a new conviction arises: the beginning of wisdom and understanding resides with the God whom we fear.

Poetry gives voice to wisdom and our fearsome relationship with God. It both cries out and holds silence, lives in images as well as gray places. It is perhaps especially well-suited for both invoking and evoking a reverent fear of God because it holds the paradoxes of awe and annihilation, of anger and anguish, of judgment and humility, of universality and particularity. A theopoetics of fear is needed in our preaching because we need language that suffuses suffering and transcends it; calls out to God and remains true to our fears and failings, needs and desires. In the words of poet Gregory Orr:

Let's remake the world with words.
Not frivolously, nor
To hide from what we fear.
But with a purpose.

Let's
As Wordsworth said, remove
"The dust of custom" so things
Shine again, each object arrayed
In its robe of original light.

And then we'll see the world
As if for the first time,
As once we gazed at the beloved
Who was gazing at us.³⁶

I think this is what African American homiletician Valerie Bridgeman described in her response to Henry Mitchell's 2005 book, *Celebration and Experience in Preaching*, when she insisted that the preacher needs to speak as if life matters. That is, we need to "preach to matter"; the flesh-and-blood, earthbound creatures who live and struggle, wonder and worry, celebrate and sing their way

³⁶ *Gregory Orr*, *Concerning the Book That Is the Body of the Beloved*, Port Townsend, WA 2005, Part Three, 99. Used with permission.

to faith.³⁷ And to do this, Bridgeman contends, we need *poetic sermon forms* that will meet people in their everyday lives. It is what homiletician Frank Thomas calls “keeping it real” – something that the hip-hop music of Jay-Z and other musicians insist upon in their existentially authentic performances.³⁸ There is both logical and emotional truth in “real rap,” Thomas asserts: descriptive imagery and word play, honestly addressing the profane side of life [...] knowing that our profane lives are sacred to God [...]. These are all part of keeping it real amid life’s challenges and fears.³⁹

Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World? As homileticians, we are called to explore what this may mean for us, our people, nations, and the socio-political, cultural, and religious contexts of our time. We raise questions and search for words beyond words, wisdom through suffering, fear and love. And in this conference we ask ourselves and one another:

- What are the fears or what kinds of fear do we recognize in our teaching contexts or nations?
- Given the many kinds of fear that Julian of Norwich identifies and the many fears that claim our attention, what ways may we address these fears? If, for example, it is not helpful for us to “command” fear, what other rhetorical strategies may we use to help one another identify, address, engage, and/or challenge fear?
- Are we afraid of fear or do we know the life-giving potential of reverent fear of God? What does reverent fear of God look and sound like in our lives, churches, and communities?
- What poetic moves, metaphors, sights, and sounds call us into and through a fearful love (or loving fear) of God and one another?

So it is that we listen and learn, wonder and wait, hunger and hope – fearing God in this fear-filled world.

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³⁷ Valerie Bridgeman, “Response,” in: O. Wesley Allen, Jr. (ed.), *The Renewed Homiletic*, Minneapolis, MN 2010.

³⁸ Frank A. Thomas, *Introduction to African American Preaching*, Nashville, TN 2016, chapter 4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 117–120.

Pauli Murray: In & Out of the Pulpit

Donyelle C. McCray

Abstract

This keynote address was delivered on August 6, 2018 at Societas Homiletica at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina and explores the relationship between preaching and identity. The lecture introduces Pauli Murray, a local saint whose activism, writings, and ministry challenged the church and broader society. After a detailed introduction, I consider three principal influences on Pauli's voice: Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, and James H. Cone. Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, Pauli's maternal grandmother, provided a lens for thinking about the ethical and spatial contexts in which sermons arise. Langston Hughes, a fêted poet and author, offered literary inspiration and a model for moving among different genres. James Cone, a path-breaking scholar, gave Pauli vital theological footing and a framework for linking preaching, identity, and activism. Overall, I argue that Pauli Murray makes a singular contribution to the study of African American preaching.

It is an unparalleled honor to address Societas Homiletica and talk about a person who has epitomized the preaching life and its associated risks: Pauli Murray. A luminary of the twentieth century, Pauli Murray was an activist, poet, attorney, memoirist, professor, and Episcopal priest. This lecture, entitled “Pauli Murray: In & Out of the Pulpit,” explores her contributions to homiletics and to the study of African American preaching. This lecture has a local thrust because Pauli grew up here in Durham. Her family home is just southeast of this campus, but in many ways, a world away from Duke University. Pauli lived in part of the black community in a marshy area behind Maplewood Cemetery called “The Bottoms.”

In our time together, I will first provide an overview of her life and then, discuss the evolution of her voice. I will discuss three teachers who shape her theology and preaching. In doing so, I will examine womanist preaching as dissent rhetoric that protests the evils of white supremacy, sexism, and authoritarianism in light of the gospel. And here, dissent is not merely reactive but constructive; it is a means of fashioning an alternative culture in which memories are exhumed and used to shape ethical behavior in the present, and bonds of solidarity among oppressed people

around the earth are strengthened. Overall, I intend to reveal Pauli Murray as one who preaches in Christian liturgies through sermons and the celebration of the Eucharist and disrupts anti-Christian liturgies of violence when preaching through poetry, speeches, and demonstrations.

1. Biographical Sketch of Pauli Murray

First, who was Pauli Murray? Pauli is not very well known but led a remarkable life. What follows is a robust summary. Born on November 20, 1910, she was the fourth of six children born to her parents, Agnes Fitzgerald Murray, a nurse, and William Murray, a school principal. Agnes and William were a turbulent pair, continually breaking up and getting back together. Part of the strain on the marriage was William's mood swings. Due to a severe case of typhoid fever and encephalitis, he was prone to violent frenzies that frightened Agnes so much that she would periodically go to her family in Durham, North Carolina and take the children with her. This pattern lasted a few years and ended abruptly in March of 1914 when Agnes, just thirty-five years old and pregnant with the couple's seventh child, died of a stroke. Since William was unable to care for the children himself, Pauli and her siblings were separated and cared for by other relatives. Pauli came here to Durham to live with her aunt Pauline, her namesake, and her maternal grandparents, Robert Fitzgerald and Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald.

Shortly afterwards, tragedy struck again. In 1917, William was committed to Crownsville State Hospital, the Hospital for the Negro Insane of Maryland. The social stigma associated with his confinement would trouble the family for years. Then, in 1923, William became the victim of a racially-motivated attack. He was beaten to death by Walter Swiskowski, an inexperienced hospital guard. After the deaths of her parents, Pauli's other relatives told vivid stories about them that deepened her sense of their presence. And throughout her life, she sensed her parents as twinkling lights reaching out to her from the invisible world. Pauli's early calamities contributed to her sensitivity and urgency – she was aware of the fragility of life and the need to speak to the moment.

As early as age eight, Pauli preferred wearing boys clothing and, especially in her twenties and thirties, felt she was inwardly male and outwardly female.¹ “My little boy-girl,” is the term her Aunt Pauline used to convey her acceptance of Pauli's identity.² In addition to buying boys' clothing, she even allowed Pauli to chop wood and take up a paper route – roles typically reserved for boys. Considering the way Pauli describes herself in letters and in medical records, we might describe Pauli as nonbinary or possibly transgender today, but these descriptors were not available to her

¹ *Rosalind Rosenberg*, Jane Crow. The Life of Pauli Murray, New York 2017, 2.

² *Ibid.*

and nor were gender neutral pronouns.³ So, for historical purposes, I am using female pronouns when referencing Pauli. While her birth certificate reads “Anna Pauline Murray,” Pauli used several names that reflect her gender identity, including “Paul,” “Pete,” and “Pixie,” but legally changed her name to Pauli. Because of its gender ambiguity and significance to her, I am breaking with the scholarly custom of referring to individuals by surname and using her first name.

Pauli felt loved and accepted by her immediate family and the black community but felt humiliated here in Durham by the racial segregation, the activity of the Ku Klux Klan, and the constant threat of racialized violence, which she described as “the atmosphere one breathed from day to day, the pervasive irritant, the chronic allergy, the vague apprehension which made one uncomfortable and jumpy. We knew the race problem was like a deadly snake coiled and ready to strike, and that one avoided its dangers only by never-ending watchfulness.”⁴

She fled Durham in 1928 to attend Hunter College in New York, matriculating slowly due to limited finances. During the Great Depression, she took whatever work she could find waitressing at the Alice Foote McDougall Restaurant, operating a switchboard, and serving as a typist. As dire as her situation was in New York, she preferred it to a segregated existence in the South, an existence she compared to living under Nazi rule.⁵ Curious about ways to resist authoritarianism and learn from freedom movements around the world, she lived for a time in a Harlem Ashram, a small intentional Christian community guided by Christian scriptures, Gandhian principles, and a commitment to resist colonialism. In 1938, Pauli applied to the sociology department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill but was denied admission due to her race.

During the 1940s, Pauli broke new ground in challenging Jim Crow laws. She was jailed in Virginia for protesting segregated seating on a Greyhound bus and led successful sit-ins at two Washington, DC restaurants to integrate them. As a law school student at Howard University, she came up with an argument to unsettle the doctrine of separate but equal in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*. People chuckled at the time, but her argument later became a key resource for Thurgood Marshall and Spotswood Robinson in the *Brown vs. Board of Education* cases. She applied to Harvard Law School’s graduate program in law but was denied admission based on gender. The University of California did not have race or gender restrictions at that time, so Pauli went there and flourished in its International House, a living community modeled around the United Nations with “more than

³ *Rosenberg* provides a helpful note on her decision to use female pronouns for Pauli Murray given the binary culture she navigated. *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁴ *Pauli Murray*, Pauli Murray. *The Autobiography of a Black Activist, Feminist, Lawyer, Priest, and Poet*, Knoxville 1989, 36.

⁵ She sees similarities between Southern bus drivers and Nazis that include hostile treatment of African Americans, a “swaggering manner,” and uniforms. *Ibid.*, 109.

150 students of all colors and some thirty nationalities [...]. Chinese, Icelanders, Panamanians, [...] Mexicans, Palestinian Jews, British, Indians, Latin Americans of many complexions and political hues, as well as white and negro North Americans from the United States and Canada.”⁶ She delighted in hearing over a dozen languages at dinner tables and listened to discussions about the “rights of small countries and the responsibilities of large ones.”⁷

Pauli went on to practice Civil Rights law and then, in 1956, joined Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton and Garrison, an influential law firm in New York. She became the firm’s first black female associate attorney. Shortly afterwards, her global consciousness took her to Accra where she taught law at the University of Ghana. Upon returning to the United States, she studied at Yale Law School and became the first African American woman to receive its doctorate degree. She went on to serve as one of the founders of the National Organization for Women (NOW) and teach law and political science at Brandeis University from 1968–1973. It was around this time that she discerned a call to ordained ministry which she saw as the summation and chief end of all her prior work. On her ordination day in January 1977, she said “all the strands of my life had come together.”⁸ Pauli became the first African American female priest in the Episcopal Church, U.S.A.

Inspired by the power of language, Pauli authored several books, including two legal texts, a memoir, a book of poetry, and an autobiography.⁹ She also authored numerous essays and articles and was inspired by her friendship with writers like Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, and Countee Cullen. Creative partnerships with people like Maida Springer, Bayard Rustin, Ella Baker, Eleanor Roosevelt, A. Philip Randolph, and Howard Thurman also spurred her work.

On November 30, 1930, Pauli married William Wynn, but the relationship ended within a few weeks. Her most significant attachments were to women. She and Irene Barlow shared a deep bond that lasted more than sixteen years. Pauli Murray died of pancreatic cancer on July 1, 1985, and she was buried next to Irene Barlow, whom she called her “silent partner,” in New York.¹⁰

Interest in Pauli’s life has sparked in the last decade, and she was recently included in the Episcopal Church’s *Holy Women, Holy Men: Celebrating the Saints*. In 2016, Yale University named one of its new undergraduate colleges “Pauli Murray College.” Honors like these recognize the power of Pauli’s witness and her insistence that the world reckon simultaneously with all the

⁶ Ibid., 258.

⁷ Ibid., 259.

⁸ Ibid., 435.

⁹ *Pauli Murray*, *States’ Laws on Race and Color; and Appendices Containing International Documents, Federal Laws, and Regulations, Local Ordinances, and Charts*, Cincinnati 1950; *Proud Shoes. The Story of an American Family*, New York 1956; *Dark Testament and Other Poems*, Norwalk (CT) 1970); *Song in a Weary Throat. An American Pilgrimage*, New York 1987; *Leslie Rubin/Pauli Murray*, *The Constitution and Government of Ghana*, London 1964.

¹⁰ *Rosenberg* (note 1), 353.

dimensions of human identity. She saw herself as a woman of color who was also over age seventy, and short, and hard of hearing, and left-handed, and all these aspects of her life counted. And, just so that you have a fuller sense of her, she loved cigarettes, dogs and camping and named her car, a black Volkswagen, “Sojourner Truth.”

2. Pauli the Preacher

Pauli brought her expansive worldview and chutzpah with her into the pulpit. Sermon manuscripts are notoriously inadequate in conveying the color and energy in a sermon, and this problem arises when reviewing Pauli’s sermon manuscripts. Cassette tapes help, but some of the power in her preaching is representational. She brings her queer, black body to a space where it had not been welcome, and this boundary crossing applies regardless of the racial demographics of the congregations in question.¹¹ Her body presented a new aesthetic of authority to pulpits where intellect, charisma, and masculinity made the preached word compelling. Pauli embodied intellect, charisma, and masculinity, too, and used them to nurture the church’s inventiveness – that is, its ability to offer life-giving responses to moral dilemmas. She thought this work required reliance on the “three-legged stool” of scripture, tradition, and reason while recognizing that each leg of the stool had been tainted by colonialism and a failure to respect human and ecological diversity. Attending to human experience was paramount.

In her sermons, she addresses the kinds of ethical issues one would read about in newspapers during the 1980s, but she tries to stretch her listeners’ understanding of who God is, how God is recognized, and what it means to be human. Enlarging the congregation’s vision of God is instrumental for her, and she finds using feminine imagery especially effective. As much as she values images of God as Father, King, and Lord, her soul is fed by God the midwife who helps human beings birth new possibilities, and God the woman in labor who we meet in Isa 42:14:

For a long time I have held my peace,
I have kept still and restrained myself;
Now I will cry out like a woman in labor;
I will gasp and pant.¹²

Equally intriguing were images of God as mother (Isa 66:13), scorned lover (Ps 123:2), and Divine Wisdom (Wis 7:25).¹³ Through exposure to such images, Pauli thought Christians would see

¹¹ It is important to note, however, that she generally preaches in mainline congregations.

¹² Isa 42:14 NRSV. The image of God the midwife appears in Ps 22:9 and Isa 66:9.

¹³ In an article that opens with a reference to Julian of Norwich’s maternal image of God, Pauli argues for the inclusion of more feminine imagery of the divine. Pauli sees “scriptural basis for symbolizing God as ‘Mother’ as well as ‘Father,’” and suggests that exclusively masculine images of God stifle the church’s faith and imagination. *Pauli Murray*, *The Holy Spirit and God Language*, in *The Witness* 66, 2 (1983), 8,19.

themselves as responsible and capacious rather than passive. And more, drawing on such images would end the church's attraction to authoritarians. Christian preaching was about raising the dead. Even if the preacher was half-dead herself, the task was to awaken strength and tenderness in the listeners, to stir commensurate supplies of joy and courage.¹⁴

2.1 Lessons from Cornelia

Pauli had an unconventional approach to preaching, and the first lessons came early, before she even knew she was being taught to preach. The teacher was her maternal grandmother, Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald (1844–1923). Enslaved until age twenty-one, “Cornelia” was the daughter of an enslaved woman named Harriet and her owner, Sidney Smith, an attorney.¹⁵ Cornelia was baptized in her father's church at age ten, but she was only allowed to sit in the balcony. Little else is known of her early faith formation, but she developed an active spirituality that she expressed by sharing food and medicine with people in need. God was, for her, a Righteous Judge who weighted human action with significance but also intervened mightily in cases of apparent defeat. Her favorite bible stories were Daniel in the Lions' Den and Ezekiel in the Valley of Dry Bones, and she never tired of hearing Pauli read them.

Pauli describes Cornelia as affectionate and warm with a habit of calling her “Baby” and slipping little treats to Pauli when Aunt Pauline, the disciplinarian, was not looking. Cornelia's sweetness did not extend to her neighbors in the Bottoms whom she found nose-y, messy, lax about respecting property lines, and prone to bother her vegetable garden. The response to any of these violations was to walk up to the edge of the property line she shared with said offending neighbor, garden tools in hand, and offer a sermon on the spot. Looking back Pauli remembers, “Let one of the neighbors or their cattle stray onto our property by an inch when they weren't coming to see us, and Grandmother was ready to preach a sermon. You could tell when somebody had provoked her and one of her preaching spells was coming on. She'd always start singing ‘By and By.’”¹⁶ That is, Charles A. Tinley's “We'll Understand It Better By and By.”

After this prelude, she would begin by naming her neighbor's transgression and the character faults that precipitated it. Then, Cornelia would select a text and launch into her sermon. Sometimes she appealed to scripture, “I'm old enough to be your grandmother. The bible tells you

¹⁴ A former professor of mine, *Judy Gebre-Hiwet*, described her teaching vocation as the half-dead raising the dead. I find this metaphor helpful in describing *Pauli Murray's* understanding of preaching.

¹⁵ I am using “Cornelia” deliberately for honorific purposes.

¹⁶ *Murray*, *Proud Shoes* (note 9), 8.

those that don't honor gray hairs will be cut off and cast into hell's fire."¹⁷ Other times she drew on Christian principles like "Right is right and right don't wrong nobody."¹⁸ Her tone, direct, accusatory, and insistent on ethical decision-making, was reminiscent of John the Baptist calling his listeners to task with lines like, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [...] Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees [...]"¹⁹ Cornelia was equally poetic.

The African American literary scholar Houston A. Baker, Jr. suggests the black preacher must "seize the word," and for Cornelia, this seizure is evident in the way her message is unmoored from notions of respectability and strewn with insults and expletives to scald the listeners.²⁰ She assumes her listeners have numb consciences that can only be awakened with a shock. Two kinds of truth are operative here: first, scripture or biblical truth, and second, a form of temporal truth that is proto-womanist in form. To quote Zora Neale Hurston, this truth involves being "free from other people's fictions."²¹ Cornelia's preaching is a form of dissent rhetoric designed to interrupt troublesome patterns like disregarding a person's boundaries.²²

Now historically, African American women who were loud and angry in white spaces have been ignored, discredited, or counseled to be "civil" when raising grievances. But Cornelia speaks in a black space, and her listeners do not misread her as giving mere rants. In the Bottoms, Cornelia's speech is legible as "sermon." Pauli's aunts and her grandfather call them sermons to signify their authority and make it clear that she was not simply pouring out her thoughts but speaking a word that was understood to be inspired. Neither the spontaneity nor the setting undermines this classification for Cornelia's listeners. Pauli remembers that during Cornelia's sermons, "The Bottoms rang with 'Amens,' catcalls, and loud handclaps."²³ Some would urge her on, "Aw preach it, Miz Fitge'!"²⁴ The hybridity of the setting made it possible for listeners to be more than spectators; they were witnesses at a tribunal. Dolan Hubbard suggests that preaching in such "extrachurch" settings encourages listeners to judge not only the preacher, but themselves, their circumstances, and God.²⁵

In this ritualistic speech, the meaning is carried linguistically but also in the rhythm that characterized the delivery. "She stamped her feet, shook her head, waved the mattock in the air

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Luke 3:7.9 NRSV.

²⁰ *Houston A. Baker, Jr., The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*, Chicago 1980, 31.

²¹ *Dolan Hubbard, The Sermon and the African American Literary Imagination*, Columbia (MO) 1994, 52.

²² *Cornelia's* boundaries came to signify the community's disregarded boundaries. *Charles Campbell/Johan Cilliers, Preaching Fools. The Gospel as a Rhetoric of Folly*, Waco (TX) 2012, 33.

²³ *Murray, Proud Shoes* (note 9), 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁵ *Hubbard* (note 21), 23.

and brought it down to earth again with loud guttural sounds to emphasize her points.”²⁶ These guttural sounds unmasked the voice and communicated in a purer way than language allows. David Applebaum, in his book, *Voice*, says language conceals the human voice and when we cry out, groan, laugh, or cough we reveal a part of the voice that is ordinarily concealed in human speech.²⁷ In those instances, we reveal the depths of ourselves as the body negates the mind’s life.²⁸ Luke Poverly illumines the homiletical implications in *Dem Dry Bones: Preaching, Death, and Hope*, when he explains that sound is freighted with as much content as language.²⁹ For Cornelia, preaching means offering up all the sound her body can muster. She does not conclude with a celebration or even a formal ending; the sermon ends when she is exhausted and hoarse.

The music in Cornelia’s message energizes and expands the forum in which she and her neighbors are situated by pointing to the limits of the rational world. In doing so, she elevates the ethical situation and asserts that there is something of eternal significance at stake. To draw on the analysis of womanist ethicist Katie Geneva Canon, Cornelia vocalizes “biblical conflicts of dominance and submission, assertion and deference, the righted and the outlawed, the propertied and dispossessed.”³⁰ Listeners are urged to reckon with these conflicts in their common life.

Through her syncopated exhortations, Cornelia gave messages of racial uplift. Often, she pushed her listeners to assimilate and adhere to white upper-class norms of respectability. Tensions with her own blackness pervade her messages. For example, she is wedded to black exceptionalism and prone to colorism. Despite these shortcomings, Cornelia’s offers a capacious vision of blackness and encourages her neighbors to bring honor to the black community. And, her words compel a response. Occasionally, her invectives provoke a reciprocal insult from a listener. In these cases, her pattern is to select another text and start again.³¹

On the whole, Pauli remembers the neighbors respecting Cornelia as their local prophet. Pauli recounts a time when Lucy, a teenaged neighbor, allowed her horse to trample corn in Cornelia’s garden. When rebuked, Lucy scoffed, and Cornelia pointed an accusing finger at her and pronounced doom. “As the Lord is my witness, you and that horse is marked for a bad end. Vengeance is mine saith the Lord, and I will repay.”³² Later that day, the horse fell over an embankment and suffered a broken leg. It had to be put down. Within a few months, Lucy had to

²⁶ *Murray*, *Proud Shoes* (note 9), 15.

²⁷ *David Appelbaum*, *Voice*, Albany 1990, xi.9.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Luke A. Poverly*, *Dem Dry Bones. Preaching, Death, and Hope*, Minneapolis 2012, 56.

³⁰ *Katie Geneva Cannon*, *Womanist Interpretation and Preaching in the Black Church*, in *I Found God in Me. A Womanist Biblical Hermeneutic* (ed., Mitzi J. Smith) Eugene (OR) 2015, 60.

³¹ *Murray*, *Proud Shoes* (note 9), 17.

³² *Ibid.*, 22.

withdraw from school due to an unwed pregnancy. For Pauli, and perhaps others in the Bottoms, these events suggested Cornelia was a contemporary prophet whose words did not fall to the ground.³³

To say that Pauli admired Cornelia is an understatement. Cornelia becomes an invisible companion in Pauli's ministry. In 1977, after her historic ordination, Pauli celebrated her first Eucharist at the Chapel of the Cross in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, the church where Cornelia was baptized in 1854. CBS journalist Charles Kuralt did a segment on Pauli Murray for his show, "On the Road." In his interview he asked, "Do you think your grandmother would've been pleased to have been there at that communion service? Maybe sitting at her old seat in the balcony and looking down on you holding communion?" Pauli answered, "My grandmother was much closer than that. She was right behind me."³⁴

I share Pauli's reflections on Cornelia because I believe they clarify some of the assumptions Pauli brings to the preaching task. First, Cornelia helps Pauli see the ethical situation as the engine for a sermon and the determiner of the text. Any text's suitability is determined by its ability to distill a pressing ethical dilemma and honor the emotions arising from that dilemma. Second, Cornelia also teaches Pauli that a sermon is not an exclusively rational form of discourse but a manifestation of the Holy Spirit. Third, she teaches Pauli that anger is generative, and its energy should be put to good use. Fourth, Cornelia shows Pauli that prophets must speak outside the pulpit where the conflicts of life occur. Pauli's preaching reflects all of these characteristics.

2.2 Lessons from Langston Hughes

On December 12, 1982, Pauli gave a sermon called "The Prophetic Impulse," which begins:

In every age of political and social crisis, human prophets appear to sound warnings of what is to come unless humanity changes its course. They may be humble, untutored individuals, like Amos, the sheep-farmer of the eighth century B.C. They may be learned public figures; they may be gentle poets, or wild creatures driven by some inner fire to burst suddenly upon the scene and command attention [...]. Long before the riots of the late 1960s that called attention to the racial crisis in the United States, a genial

³³ 1Sam 3:19.

³⁴ Charles Kuralt, Interview with Pauli Murray, On the Road, 1985. <https://episcopalarchives.org/church-awakens/exhibits/show/leadership/clergy/murray> (accessed May 20, 2018).

poet of Harlem (who encouraged my own poetic efforts), Langston Hughes, wrote:
What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
Like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
Like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
Like a heavy load.
*Or does it explode?*³⁵

Pauli sees Hughes as a prophet because his poems outline the implications of moral situations.³⁶ He amplifies many of the lessons she learns from Cornelia and his impact on her voice is tremendous.

James Mercer Langston Hughes was a literary phenome. He is perhaps the most celebrated Harlem Renaissance writer and author of *I, Too Am America* (1926), *The Weary Blues*, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, *The Ways of White Folks* (1934) and a host of other volumes. Hughes was concerned about black liberation and the equality of workers around the globe. He was cynical about the notion that white elites would share power based on moral conscience alone and for a while supported socialist movements. His curiosity even took him to Moscow for a time to examine Communism.

Like Pauli, Hughes had a rocky childhood. His father left his mother and moved to Mexico while he was a child, and afterwards his family struggled financially. Throughout his life, he was conflicted about Christianity due to the extent of human suffering and the longing for a personal experience of God that he never had. At times, he sounds like a prophet lashing out at God with an anti-sermon, as in his poem, “God to Hungry Child,” in which God scolds a hungry child and

³⁵ *Pauli Murray*, Pauli Murray. *Selected Sermons and Writings* (ed. Anthony B. Pinn), Maryknoll (NY) 2006, 166; *Langston Hughes*, Harlem [2], in: Arnold Rampersad/David Roessel (eds.), *The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes*, New York 1995, 426.

³⁶ *Murray* (note 35), 166.

asserts that the world was created for the rich.³⁷ Other anti-sermons made him a symbol of agnosticism. Despite his apparent conflicts with God, Hughes had an unwavering faith in black people and was captivated by the defiance to oppression that was woven throughout African American culture. Simple rhyme and black dialect have special appeal to him because he heard self-definition and the rhythm of resistance in them.³⁸

Pauli met Langston Hughes in the early 1930s when she was living at the YWCA in Harlem where he had been invited to read his work. What Pauli appreciated most about Hughes was his precision, his ability to mine an ethical dilemma and plumb an emotion. Soon after their first meeting, Pauli was sending him drafts of her own poems to get his opinion, and he was publishing her work in a magazine he was editing and recommending her to others. Before long, the friends were writing on parallel themes. They both explore black disappointment in President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Hughes writes “Ballad of Roosevelt” to comment on the New Deal. The refrain, “waitin on Roosevelt” begins with jazzy hope but escalates into jarring rage, “Damn tired o’ waitin’ on Roosevelt.” It ends with a demand for response, “Mr. Roosevelt, listen!/What’s the matter here?”³⁹

Pauli also has questions to pose regarding President Roosevelt. In 1943, race riots break out across the country due to the unequal treatment of African Americans who are expected to absorb white hostility at home and fight for the United States abroad. The riots prompt an icy statement from Roosevelt, “The recent outbreaks of violence in widely spread parts of the country endanger our national unity and comfort our enemies. I am sure that every true American regrets this.”⁴⁰ Pauli composes a poem, “Mr. Roosevelt Regrets,” in which she fumes about the paltriness of the President’s statement in the light of the missing teeth and cracked skulls black men suffer.⁴¹

The friends also explore similar themes in August of 1943 when a riot breaks out in Harlem, killing six people and leading to 600 arrests. The riot began after Margie Polite, an African American hotel guest, was mistreated by a white police officer, James Collins. When Robert Bandy, an African American soldier, intervened on Polite’s behalf, he was shot by the police officer. While Bandy survived the shooting, rumors of his death triggered the riot. Sympathetic to the rioters, Hughes penned “The Ballad of Margie Polite,” which begins:

³⁷ *Hughes*, *God to Hungry Child*, in: *The Collected Poems* (note 35), 48; *Faith Berry*, *Langston Hughes Before and Beyond Harlem*, Westport (CT) 1983, 10, 328.

³⁸ *Michael Gomez* sees black dialect in a similar way. *Michael A. Gomez*, *Exchanging Our Country Marks. The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*, Chapel Hill 1998, 172–177.

³⁹ *Hughes*, *Ballad of Roosevelt*, in *The Collected Poems* (note 35), 178–179.

⁴⁰ *Murray*, *Mr. Roosevelt Regrets*, in *Dark Testament* (note 9), 34.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

If Margie Polite
Had of been white
She might not've cussed
Out the cop that night.⁴²

He goes on to celebrate the community's resistance to violence and criticize the voice of the "race leader" who attempts to quell Harlem's justified anger.⁴³ Though equally cynical about racialized violence in the United States, Pauli could not side with the rioters as easily. She worried about larger scale violent attacks against people of color and had doubts about what anger could achieve by itself. Her poem, "Harlem Riot, 1943," reveals a longing for divine insight in the wake of the riot. She speaks as "a prophet without eyes to see" and the poem has the haunting quality of a desperate but unanswered prayer.⁴⁴

What she could see by 1943, was that writing poems stirred her prophetic voice. Through her poems, she could explore the spiritual implications of social events before a broad audience. Pauli came to see sermons and poems as overlapping genres.⁴⁵ Poetry proved an effective way to expose injustice and urge a faithful response. So, when Mack Parker, a young black man, is lynched near Poplarville, Mississippi in 1959, she writes, "Collect for Poplarville," drawing on petitions from the Book of Common Prayer. Her poem weds the careful, stately syntax of the Prayer Book with sounds and images of mob violence that are equally deliberate and predictable. The poem juxtaposes those who "follow" the cross and those who "burn" it.⁴⁶

Verna Dozier says, "theology has to be in the language of poetry because no other language can contain the extravagance of the idea."⁴⁷ Pauli finds this to be true in her own experience. Through poems she lays her anger and grief before God and the broader public. On the page, the direct language that is deemed unbecoming for a woman thrives. Pauli explicitly credits Hughes for helping her claim her voice as a poet.

⁴² *Hughes*, *The Ballad of Margie Polite*, in *The Collected Poems* (note 35), 282.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 283.

⁴⁴ *Murray*, *Harlem Riot, 1943*, in *Dark Testament* (note 9), 35.

⁴⁵ *Murray*, *Selected Sermons* (note 35), 207.

⁴⁶ *Murray*, *Collect for Poplarville*, in *Dark Testament* (note 9), 38.

⁴⁷ *Verna Dozier*, *The Dream of God: A Call to Return*, Cambridge (MA) 1991, 15.

Part of his influence stems from his understanding of an author's task. He moved among different genres as he deemed necessary based on his core message, writing not only poems but plays, short stories, novels, an autobiography, an opera, and journalistic prose. This movement allowed him to demand more from the audience and point to a level of truth that defied categorization.⁴⁸ He saw the project of large-scale human liberation as vast enough that it required multivocality. Genre functioned more as a means of indicating the mood and duration of a message than as a firm category with rules one had to respect. Rather than genre, what had to be respected, even revered, was the anger and fear that surged in the human heart. Examining anger and fear was central to the writer's task. Pauli knew it was this skill that had made *Cornelia* so compelling. So increasingly, Pauli had questions about the theological implications of black suffering.

2.3 Lessons from James H. Cone

Pauli discerned a call to ordained ministry while in her 60s. She hoped seminary would help her integrate the advocacy and freedom fighting she had done in her vocations as an activist, lawyer and professor, and she hoped seminary would be a place where her unique voice would be nurtured. She was disappointed. Over the course of three years, Pauli attended two Episcopal seminaries, and found the process difficult because at that time, like most American seminaries, the curricula and the institutional cultures were designed around the needs of young, married white men.

Signs of a problem appeared early – even at the application stage. One of her seminary applications includes multiple areas where she has corrected the application and instructed the school not to assume all applicants are men.⁴⁹ She responds to several of the questions with sarcastic remarks. “Have you ever seen a physician regarding emotional or mental difficulties?” the form asks. “Who hasn’t?” she responds.⁵⁰ “What part did you take in student athletics and activities?” Her response: “Hardly applicable at this late date, wouldn’t you think.”⁵¹ Such exchanges foreshadowed her experience as a student. Repeatedly, she found that her urgent theological questions were of little interest to her professors (though they were well-meaning).

⁴⁸ Concerning the fluidity of genre, Jennifer Heinert argues that genre categories are “no less slippery” than racial categories. *Jennifer Lee Jordan Heinert, Narrative Conventions and Race in the Novels of Toni Morrison*, New York 2009, 8.

⁴⁹ Pauli Murray Seminary Application, V26.01, Virginia Theological Seminary Archives, Alexandria, Virginia.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

With rare exception, faculty members had little grasp of all that was at stake in the development of her theology and preaching voice.

She was thrown a lifeline by a professor at Union Theological Seminary named James H. Cone, who died just a few months ago. In Cone, Pauli found a theologian who read the meaning of Christianity through the lens of African American experiences of suffering and survival. He made an indelible imprint on Pauli's theology and understanding of preaching. For one, Cone shared her view of Langston Hughes as a poet-prophet exposing the moral bankruptcy in white America. Hughes's ability to articulate the sense of divine abandonment that often accompanies experiences of social exile intrigued Cone. He celebrated the prophetic tenor in Harlem Renaissance poetry and used it as a primary source for theological reflection.⁵²

In addition, Cone spoke of preaching the truth in ways that Cornelia would have approved. He had a high view of truth and argued that the preacher had the responsibility to "speak truth to people."⁵³ "To know the truth is to appropriate it, for it is not mainly reflection and theory. Truth is divine action entering into our lives and creating the human action of liberation. Truth enables us to dance and live to the rhythm of freedom in our lives as we struggle to be who we are."⁵⁴ This kinetic vision of truth resonated with Pauli who felt abstract understandings of truth had little to offer people living in the grip of imperialism.

Pauli also found Cone's discussions of freedom compelling. Cone explains, "The preaching of the Word must itself be the embodiment of freedom. When freedom is a constituent of the language itself, then that language refuses to be bound to the limitations of categories not indigenous to its being. Possibilities are thus given for the communication of the Word that transcends intellectual concepts."⁵⁵ The idea that freedom is elemental to the preached word stretched the normative paradigms of preaching and offered a theological foundation for Pauli to see her activism as proclamatory. Her protests of segregated seating on Greyhound, her sit-ins at segregated Washington lunch counters, her protests of the poll tax, police brutality, and executions of people like Odell Waller had been rooted in her faith-based outrage at injustice and her sense that she had to make her objections known. She had long before rooted this activism in Christian witness. For example, as she was arrested on Easter weekend in 1940 for refusing segregated seating on a Greyhound bus, she made a stern declaration to the bus driver, saying, "You haven't

⁵² *James H. Cone, God of the Oppressed*, New York 1975, 27.

⁵³ *Cone* is inspired here by the poet, *Mari Evans* who says, "Speak the truth to the people/Talk sense to the people/Free them with reason/Free them with honesty/Free the people with Love and Courage and Care for their being." *Ibid.*, 16; *Mari Evans, I Am a Black Woman*, New York 1970, 91.

⁵⁴ *Cone* (note 52), 30.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

learned a thing in two thousand years.”⁵⁶ Now she could see this incident as a prophetic sign-act like those of Isaiah and Ezekiel.⁵⁷ This, too, was preaching.

Pauli was eager to join Cone in criticizing and revising the language of the church, and Cone made it clear that this task involved “not only language as uttered speech but the language of radical involvement in the world.”⁵⁸ Theology did not operate as “intellectual exercise” but as “worldly risk.”⁵⁹ Pauli celebrated ministers who made direct links between preaching and social activism. Rev. Walter Fauntroy, for instance, tried to “translate the gospel he preached on Sunday into his political activity in Congress on Monday.”⁶⁰ The correlation was critical.

Another reason Pauli was drawn to James Cone had to do with his generative understanding of anger. In his introduction to *Black Theology & Black Power*, Cone plainly states that the volume is written “with a definite attitude” of “an angry black man disgusted with the oppression of black people in America and with the scholarly demand to be ‘objective’ about it. Too many people have died, and too many are on the edge of death.”⁶¹ Cone makes it clear that his anger is borne of love for black people and desire for their flourishing. Anger provides a long-burning fuel source for doing the emotionally expensive work of examining the history of African American suffering and working toward a response that can justifiably be called Christian. Anger, then, is not an emotion to be feared but interrogated, because as Audre Lorde argues in her famous essay, “The Uses of Anger: Women Responding to Racism,” anger is first and foremost informative, a sign of a relationship that needs attention.⁶² Anger is a vital resource for healing that which is deeply broken.

“I am critical of white America,” Cone explains, “because this is *my* country; and what is mine must not be spared my emotional and intellectual scrutiny.”⁶³ He agrees with Kenneth Clark, who says:

[W]here [...] moral issues are at stake, noninvolvement and non-commitment and the exclusion of feeling are neither sophisticated nor objective, but naïve and violative of the scientific spirit at its best [...]. Where anger is the appropriate response, to exclude the recognition and acceptance of anger, and even to avoid the feeling itself as if it were an

⁵⁶ Murray (note 4), 142.

⁵⁷ Murray, Selected Sermons (note 35), 166, 168.

⁵⁸ James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power*, New York 1989, 84. Cone also says relevant action should accompany the church’s speech. *Ibid.*, 67.80.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶⁰ Murray, Selected Sermons (note 35), 214–215.

⁶¹ Cone (note 58), 2.

⁶² Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider. Essays & Speeches*, Freedom (CA) 1984, 124.127.

⁶³ Cone (note 58), 4.

inevitable contamination, is to set boundaries upon truth itself. If a scholar who studied Nazi concentration camps did not feel revolted by the evidence no one would say he was unobjective but rather fear for his sanity and moral sensitivity. Feeling may twist judgment, but the lack of it may twist it even more.⁶⁴

Rational analysis and emotion are not mutually exclusive.

Cone's discussion of the theological role of anger had a personal impact. Pauli was known for her short temper, a trait she said she inherited from Cornelia. But, as far as I can tell, neither were prone to self-centered or irrational anger. Rather, theirs mirrors the ire of the Hebrew prophets who were in touch with divine passion.⁶⁵ This righteous anger animated their responses to injustice.

Pauli also knew from personal experience that anger can have corrosive effects on the psyche. Being an advocate for justice in her queer, black body had come with steep emotional costs. Sometimes anger turned inward, and she found herself depressed. On at least three occasions, the despair was deep enough to demand psychiatric hospitalization. One of these hospitalizations occurred in December of 1937 at the Long Island Rest Home in Amityville, NY.⁶⁶ Pauli wrote a long list of questions for her doctor that included the following:

7. Where do you think is the seat of conflict – in the brain, the body, the glands- or where?
8. Where could I go to get an answer? What fields are doing experimentation and have the equipment?
9. Why this nervous exciteable [sic] condition all my life and the very natural falling in love with the female sex? Terrific breakdowns after each love affair that has become unsuccessful? Why the willingness to fight instead of running away in this instance?⁶⁷

More questions follow regarding attraction, heteronormativity, and her desire for monogamy. She presses also questions about the limits of psychiatry: “12. Why is it that I believe that psychiatry

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 2–3; *Kenneth B. Clark*, *Dark Ghetto*, New York 1965, 79–80.

⁶⁵ *Abraham Heschel* says the prophets had “fellowship with the feelings of God, a sympathy with divine pathos.” *Abraham Heschel, The Prophets. An Introduction*, New York 1969, 26.

⁶⁶ Since this hospital had a “no Negro” policy, *Pauli's* physician described her as Cuban.

⁶⁷ *Pauli Murray, Papers, 1827–1985*, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., Personal and Biographical. MC 412, Series I, Box 4, Folder 71; *Rosenberg* (note 1), 121.

does not have the answer to true homosexuality, but that experimental science does?” “15. Why do I prefer experimentation on the male side, instead of attempted adjustment as a normal woman?” She also wonders “what hospitals, fields or medical institutions” are experimenting “in this and other countries?” Question number 17 is especially poignant, “Do you think this conflict is an ego drive, or any organism (this one human) fighting for survival?”⁶⁸

I share these details because it is important for you to know the chiseling effects of anger and sorrow on Pauli’s spirit. Her questions show that she is decades ahead of the medical science in some respects, but they also reveal tremendous frustration. She is angry about the pressure to conform to white, cisgender, heterosexual norms.

During this hospitalization in New York, she can articulate her concerns. But during others, like one at Freedman’s Hospital (affiliated with Howard University), tears are Pauli’s primary mode of speech.⁶⁹ She wept for a week and had to be sedated. Betsee Parker says, “Weeping is the most deeply communicating sound that the human can make. And words don’t get in the way of the sound of weeping. Words only hide the depth. But when one hears the sounds – unobstructed sounds, no words in there – you really feel the depths of the emotion that’s in the person.”⁷⁰

Pauli needed theology that could account for these experiences. So, when James Cone argues that “the reality of black people—their life of suffering and humiliation” must serve as the “point of departure of all God-talk,” when Cone says that Jesus takes on black suffering as his suffering, and identifies with those who are despised, Cone’s words resonate with Pauli.⁷¹ When he says Christianity ought to free people “to create new possibilities for existence” and help them unlearn humiliation, she is inspired.⁷²

Pauli does not have an especially demonstrative preaching style, but her words are fueled by righteous anger about oppression. She urges self-determination and warns against leaders like Jim Jones who usurped his congregation’s freedom in Jonestown, Guyana.⁷³ And she insists on accountability to those in previous generations who suffered and died and did not get to see their hopes for equality materialize. Their struggles and triumphs are, as Cone advises, the “point of

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Kimberley Christine Patton/John Stratton Hawley (eds.), *Holy Tears. Weeping in the Religious Imagination*, Princeton (NJ) 2005, 12.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 292.

⁷¹ *Cone* (note 58), 117; *Cone* (note 52), 136.

⁷² *Cone* (note 58), 130. *Murray* also cites *Major J. Jones’* influence on unlearning humiliation. *Murray*, *Selected Sermons* (note 35), 213.

⁷³ *Murray*, *Selected Sermons* (note 35), 209.

departure” for her God-talk. In her sermons, Pauli shines a bright light on black women, and this includes historical figures, local heroines, and members of the congregation. For a time, this emphasis on black female experience reflects her critique of Cone, who, at least initially, foregrounds black male experience. Pauli is quick to applaud him when he corrects this pattern and urges preachers to “relate the story of our mothers’ and fathers’ struggles to our present struggles and thereby create a humane future for our children.”⁷⁴

For Cone, preaching involves remembering. He counsels preachers to lead congregations in remembering biblical narratives and in remembering the histories of oppressed people. Pauli does this remembering in her sermons and in her celebration of the Eucharist which, as an Anglican priest, she usually celebrated each week. In black Anglican circles, the Eucharist functions as a ritual and as a sermon proclaimed in unity with clergy around the world. While the focus is on remembering Jesus’ suffering, resurrection, and return, the Eucharist also proclaims the kinship between the living and the dead and encourages worshippers to live in that consciousness. So, in celebrating the Eucharist, Pauli unites her memory of black struggle with Christ’s work of reconciliation.

More could be said about James Cone’s theology and his vast impact on black preaching. I have only attempted to trace his influence on Pauli’s preaching and illumine the ways he appears on the surface and in the deep tissue of her thought. Pauli saw preaching as the church’s lifeblood. She preaches in a way that honors black anger, liberates the oppressed, respects the world beyond the church, and embodies Christian love. She also foregrounds the experiences of black women in her sermons. Womanist theology is in a nascent stage during her ministry, but she demonstrates many of the hallmarks.

Conclusion

In our time together, I have introduced Pauli Murray and described three influences that I see as primary in her growth as a preacher. From her grandmother, Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, Pauli learned the primacy of the ethical dilemma and the proclivity for the Word to erupt outside the pulpit in secular spaces where the conflicts of life arise. When Cornelia was told to hush once, she responded by saying, “The Lord gave me a mouth and I aim to use it whenever and wherever I’ve

⁷⁴ Cone (note 52), 29.

a mind to.”⁷⁵ In claiming her voice, Cornelia passed on an invaluable lesson to her granddaughter, Pauli. Langston Hughes helped Pauli build on that foundation. Through their friendship, she learned that poetry can articulate experiences of exile and reach those on the fringes of the church. She also saw the value of moving in and out of genres. James Cone helped Pauli build on Cornelia’s foundation even more by offering a theological frame for re-imagining truth-telling in light of the experience of oppressed people in black America and throughout the world. He also pointed to the plasticity of the pulpit and married the preached word to relevant social action. To be sure, Pauli had other theological influences, including J. Deotis Roberts, Jacquelyn Grant, Bayard Rustin, Marianne Micks, and Letty Russell. A comprehensive examination of Pauli’s theology would examine their influence on her thought and practices in detail. Yet, in tracing the evolution of her preaching voice, Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, Langston Hughes, and James Cone have profound impact. They enriched her preaching and her understanding of the preaching task and helped Pauli recognize that she did not become a preacher upon ordination. Preaching was a mainstay of her life’s work. The impact of her contribution is just beginning to surface.

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⁷⁵ *Murray*, *Proud Shoes* (note 9), 13.

Pauli Murray: In & Out of the Pulpit

Comments on the Keynote by Júlio César Adam

Introduction

The Brazilian poet Adélia Prado says that our eyes are our only tiny window to look at and perceive the world in the restricted 24-hour period of each day. This little lens is all that we have to see the world. Therefore, what we fail to see is always far bigger than what we are able to see. Until last year, when I came to Durham to attend the meeting of the council of Societas Homiletica, Paul Murray, this “luminary of the 20th century,” was completely out of my view. By coming here I had the opportunity to get to know her, her story, her struggle, her life ... With its profound sensitivity to life and to a theology born from life itself, Donyelle McCray’s paper offered us a brilliant view of this activist, poet, lawyer, professor, Episcopal priest, and preacher.

I would like to present here a few aspects of my response to this excellent talk. I speak out of my own context, Brazil, a context marked by ethnic-cultural and religious diversity, by social injustice and the vulnerability of an immense part of the population, by prejudice against differences, by violence and daily fear, but at the same time also a context marked by hope, dance and feast, by resistance through art, improvisation and joy, by reflection and articulation of contextual liberation theologies. I consider this the crossroads of so many worlds – Pauli Murray, the view of Donyelle McCray, my little window through which I look at things from Brazil, and all of us here bringing so many perspectives – to be a fertile ground to remember the greatness of Pauli Murray considering our task of preaching in a world full of fear.

First, I would like to make a few comments about the talk in itself. Then I intend to take up a few aspects of Pauli Murray’s preaching and finally to risk establishing a few connections with the topic of our conference, viz. the relationship between fear and preaching.

The talk

McCray’s talk had a profound impact on me because it starts from the concrete, real, conflictive life of a person and of persons, their time, their people. It focuses on Pauli Murray’s life in its full

intensity. This way of doing theology and of doing homiletics is important particularly in the southern hemisphere of the world, where even today voices are often silenced and persons and contexts are rendered invisible to much of the northern hemisphere. In Latin America the seeing-judging-acting method offers—in spite of all limitations involved in it—an enormous contribution that enables us for the first time and in the first place to look at reality, to look at the lives of people, and to understand the meaning of a theology that emerges from life in order to transform its own context.

The approach developed by McCray goes in this direction. I would say that to adopt this path means to reinforce a rhetoric of dissent and protest against the classic means used in academia and in theology. When I was doing my doctorate in Germany, I established a dialog between a Brazilian landless, semi-illiterate, female peasant and Friedrich Schleiermacher on “*darstellendes Handeln*,” which was seen by some people as an attack against theological science. Talking about Grandma Cornelia as a theological and homiletical inspiration for Pauli Murray is something that strongly resonates with the way we try to do practical theology in my context. Besides that, by describing not only the life of Murray but also of those who marked her, McCray retrieved the memory of Murray – of a time, of a people, and of a struggle that is still relevant.

In this way, when we experience a little bit of Pauli Murray’s life and work, other lives are illuminated and brought to our memory. I remembered many people, some I know and others I do not, who marked the lives of persons and social groups for having dared to be who they are. I remembered, for instance, Marielle Franco, a Brazilian woman, black, homosexual, a sociologist, politician, feminist, advocate of human rights, especially of young people, black people, and women. She was a member of the Socialism and Liberty Party (PSOL, in the Brazilian acronym), had been elected city council member of Rio de Janeiro with the fifth largest number of votes, and constantly denounced abuses of authority by police officers against dwellers of needy communities. On March 14th of this year, Marielle was shot dead in the downtown area of Rio de Janeiro due to her agitating and challenging preaching. The case was shared through the international media, but so far those responsible for her murder have not been identified or punished.

Doing theology out of concrete life, particularly starting from places where life hurts, strengthening a rhetoric of dissent, protest, and retrieval of memory are lessons that we learn from Pauli Murray herself. In other words, McCray’s talk not only offers us a very rich content but is also organized in a way that is very much in tune with Murray herself, which helps not only to broaden our view, but also to experience Pauli Murray “in and out of the pulpit.”

Preaching

Even if we restrict ourselves to Pauli's writings, it becomes evident that her preaching was marked by a broad and critical view of the world, by physical and emotional energy, and by a new aesthetics of authority, without giving up essential foundations of preaching, i.e. the "three-legged-stool" of Scripture, tradition, and reason. McCray helps us to realize that Pauli Murray's preaching, as well as her poetry and multifaceted activity as a professional and as a citizen, comes from various sources of inspiration and empowerment, among which at least three are taken into account: Pauli's grandmother, poetry, and academia.

Her grandmother, Cornelia Smith Fitzgerald, is the affective, maternal voice. At the same time she is a strong, loud, angry, energetic, clear, pragmatic, and fair voice, full of gestures, bodily, paced, guttural, the voice of someone like Daniel in the lions' den (her favorite story), of someone who experiences a spirituality that dives into daily life, impelled by the Spirit and engaged in order to change what is ethically wrong.

Langston Hughes's poetry leads Murray to use poetry as prophecy. Poetry amplifies Cornelia's voice as protest directed to the world. Poetry is the most adequate language for theology because it enables us to give a voice to the unutterable in the midst of a symbolic, metaphorical space, thus expressing that which cannot otherwise be said. In poetry, Murray takes preaching beyond the pulpit, outside the sanctuary, but she also integrates it into her preaching as well as into other literary genres.

James Cone's black theology gives Pauli what she did not find in seminary, viz. the possibility of integrating her voice in the struggle for rights, justice, and freedom within the conception and perception of God in the midst of the cruelty of black people's lived experience. "In Cone, Pauli found a theologian who read the meaning of Christianity through the lens of African American experiences of suffering and survival" (D. McCray). This is preaching that speaks the truth to the people: divine truth that enters life and creates human action for liberation, a liberation that rocks the dance for liberation, a preaching that embodies liberation.

Paul Murray and the theme of the conference: "Fearing God in a Fear-Filled World? Homiletical Explorations"

In her approach, McCray offers us many clues about the relationship between fear and preaching. Last year, the international board of *Societas Homiletica* had a lengthy discussion that guided us toward this theme. We also discussed Pauli Murray. In spite of that, I returned to Brazil with a question that concerns me: How do our sermons deal with fear? The fear of violence, first of all.

When I speak about violence, maybe some of you are not able to imagine the fear that it causes in some parts of my country. Last year 59,103 people were killed in Brazil; on average, one every 9 minutes. The overwhelming majority of these deaths is related to drug trafficking, concentrated in the favelas and peripheries of cities. Most of the victims are either young, black men or women who are attacked by their partners in the domestic realm. How can one talk about fearing God in a world full of fear such as this?

Pauli Murray experienced fear. She was afraid of disrespect, of having her yard invaded by neighbors, which her grandmother considered an aggressive act. She had the fear of not being listened to because she was a woman and black, the fear of concrete aggression by the police in protests in which she participated by occupying seats in buses or places in restaurants that were reserved for whites, and the fear of attacks by white supremacy groups (e.g., the Ku Klux Klan). Murray also faced a more symbolic fear of not being able to bring justice and offer care for the dignity of her African American people. Additionally, there was also a more personal and intimate fear, which can be inferred from the list she gave to her doctor describing her condition during the occasion of one of her hospital admissions: the fear of not being able to be herself, the anguish of understanding herself as black, as woman, as queer.

How does Murray deal with fear? Not just by preaching! This may be something of fundamental importance for reflection in our homiletics. Fear is not a problem solved only with and in preaching. Murray faced fear by resorting to all means available to her in life. Perhaps for this reason she was so many Paulis in one and the same person. Like her grandma, Cornelia, she faced fear by speaking, gesturing, using her body, writing, making poetry, and teaching. She faced fear by acting concretely and symbolically. As far as preaching is concerned, the preacher Pauli used poetry and all other possible genres in order to speak. Preaching in a world full of fear means preaching politically, taking sides, denouncing profound injustices. Poetic prophecy permeates her preaching as a veritable embodiment of peace, revolt, and the cry for rights and justice. Preaching means to keep alive the memory of those who are present and absent. Preaching memory is held together with the liturgy and in the eucharist where the dangerous memory of Christ is celebrated (Johannes Baptist Metz). Murray's preaching faced fear not only through her use of reason, but also through the use of emotion, indignation, and anger, of tears and frustration at what we cannot change and where we can only trust. In this way she inspires us not only to preach but also to live and struggle.

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Linking Emotion, Cognition, and Action within a Social Frame: Old Testament Perspectives on Preaching the Fear of the LORD

Anathea E. Portier-Young

Abstract

Modern accounts of the meaning of “fear of the LORD” in the Hebrew Bible have tended to distance this important concept from the emotion of fear, offering alternative understandings as worship, obedience, or wisdom. This essay examines phrases such as “fear of the LORD,” “fear of God,” and “God-fearer,” across four sets of texts in the Hebrew Bible: 1) narratives in Genesis and Exodus; 2) Deuteronomy and other Deuteronomistic literature; 3) wisdom literature; and 4) Psalms. I argue that fear of the LORD/God in the Hebrew Bible typically does connote an emotional fear response that has in view divine power over life and death. The links between such fear and worship, and obedience, and wisdom that are attested in numerous biblical texts are not evidence of synonymy but a recognition of the fundamental link between emotion, cognition, and action. Recent developments in the study of emotion illuminate their interrelationship and the ways in which fear of the LORD/God is also socially shaped and shaping.

Modern biblical scholarship has frequently attempted to distance the concept of “fear of the LORD” in the Hebrew Bible from emotional experience in general and a response to threat of harm in particular.¹ Some have argued that “fear of the LORD” does not refer to what modern readers would understand as fear, but instead denotes reverence, piety, or worship. Others, noting the repeated linking of fear and wisdom in the Bible’s wisdom literature, have understood “fear of the LORD” to be a synonym for wisdom. And some have hypothesized that the phrase has multiple, distinct meanings, or that its meaning evolved over time, originally denoting an emotional fear response but later denoting an attitude of worship or a cognitive faculty of discernment.²

¹ In one recent example, *Phillip Michael Lasater* argues that “emotions” are not present in the Hebrew Bible, as they are a modern category, unknown prior to the eighteenth century CE (*Phillip Michael Lasater*, *The Emotions in Biblical Anthropology? A Genealogy and Case Study with yr’*, in: *Harvard Theological Review* 110, no. 4 [2017], 520–540). Using “fear” as a case study, he argues instead for an Aristotelean classification as a passion or affection. A key to *Lasater’s* argument is that fear in the Hebrew Bible “relates to rationality and intentionality, including at a behavioral level” (535). These links contradict the modern understanding of emotion that *Lasater* traces, in which emotion is understood as “non-cognitive and involuntary” (526). As I explain later in this article, my understanding of “fear” in the Hebrew Bible as primarily referring to an emotion relies on a different, complex understanding of emotion as affect that emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century.

² I address examples of these approaches later in this essay. For a helpful summary see *Brent A. Strawn*, *The Iconography* [42]

By contrast with these approaches, I argue that the relationships between fear, worship, and wisdom in the Hebrew Bible are not due to synonymy, but a fundamental linking of emotion, cognition, and action. I challenge the idea of discrete technical meanings or semantic evolution by examining the theme of fear of the LORD across four sets of texts: 1) narratives in Genesis and Exodus; 2) Deuteronomistic literature; 3) wisdom literature; and 4) Psalms.³ I argue that across all four sets of texts, “fear of the LORD” is primarily an emotional response to and disposition cultivated in recognition of divine power over life and death.⁴ This fear is not synonymous with worship, obedience, or ethical behavior.⁵ Rather, it motivates them.⁶ Nor is fear synonymous with wisdom or knowledge. The wisdom literature repeatedly asserts the close interrelationship between emotion, cognition, and action, but does not confuse them.⁷ The interplay of emotion, cognition, and action is evident across all four sets of texts and is a key to understanding the function and importance of fear of the LORD in the Hebrew Bible.⁸

A brief discussion of lexical forms and frequency clarifies the Hebrew terminology that is the subject of this essay. A selective review of twentieth and twenty-first century studies of the meaning of “fear of the LORD” locates the present study in relation to existing debates. Analysis of “fear of the LORD” in the four sets of texts identified above then demonstrates the interplay of emotion,

of Fear: Yir’at YHWH in Artistic Perspective, in: Izaak J. de Hulster/Joel M. LeMon (eds.), *Image, Text, Exegesis. Iconographic Interpretation and the Hebrew Bible*, London / New York, 2014, 91–134, 94–96.

³ I use the adjective Deuteronomistic to mean “pertaining to Deuteronomy and material included within the so-called Deuteronomistic History.” The length of this article does not permit examining every part of the canon, nor will my consideration of these sections be exhaustive. I choose the narratives of Genesis and Exodus as a starting point because they challenge an overly systematic account of the phrase’s meaning or possible development, while also revealing key aspects of its social dimensions. Deuteronomistic literature, biblical wisdom literature, and Psalms are chosen for analysis because of the relatively higher concentration of references to “fear of the LORD” in these texts by comparison with other major groupings. If there were space to consider prophetic texts as well, key texts would include Isa 25:3, 29:13, 41:5, 50:10, 57:11, 59:19, 64:2; Jer 5:24, 10:7, 26:19, 32:39–40, 44:10–11; Hos 10:3; Amos 3:8; Joel 2:11, 31. It is noteworthy that fear is not a major concern of Ezekiel nor of the cultic/holiness material in Leviticus.

⁴ This fear thus may result from but does not presume direct encounter with the deity. On this point see the critique of *Jason A. Fout*, *What do I fear when I fear my God? A theological reexamination of a biblical theme*, in: *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2015), 23–38, 27–29.

⁵ For the interpretation of fear as obedience, see for example *Gerhard von Rad*, *Wisdom in Israel*, trans. James D. Martin, London, 1972, 66: “In a few prominent passages it means simply obedience to the divine will [...]. The modern reader must, therefore, eliminate, in the case of the word ‘fear’, the idea of something emotional, of a specific, psychical form of the experience of God. In this context, the term is possibly used in a still more general, humane sense, akin to our ‘commitment to’ [...]”

⁶ *Matthew Schlimm* recognizes the complexity of the relation between fear and ethics in the Hebrew Bible, noting that “an important task of biblical ethics is to explain texts that describe fear so positively.” *Matthew Schlimm*, *The Central Role of Emotions in Biblical Theology, Biblical Ethics, and Popular Conceptions of the Bible*, in: F. Scott Spencer (ed.), *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions. Exploring Emotions in Biblical Literature*, Atlanta (GA), 2017, 43–59, 53.

⁷ For interpretation of Job 28:28, a verse which does seem on the surface to equate fear with wisdom, see *David Clines*, “The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom’ (Job 28:28). A Semantic and Contextual study, in: Ellen van Wolde (ed.), *Job 28. Cognition in Context*, *Biblical Interpretation Series* 64, Leiden, 2003, 57–92, 73–75, 83. *Clines* interprets the verse in the light of Job 37:24, thus contextualizing the statement in relation to other wisdom teaching and interpreting the verse not as a grand epistemological claim but rather as a poetic statement that it is wise to fear the LORD.

⁸ The examination of “fear of the LORD” and related phrases in Psalms in this article will also highlight a specialized use of a substantive adjectival or participial form we might translate as “fearer” of God or the LORD. This specialized use will be shown to designate group belonging and promote social and religious conformity. It draws on the same matrix of associations, emotions, and motivations found in other literature of the Hebrew Bible examined herein.

cognition, and action in a wide range of texts where the concept “fear of the LORD” is present. This analysis also highlights social dimensions of fear of the LORD. After situating these findings in relation to modern (twentieth and twenty-first century) studies of emotion, I conclude by suggesting some implications of this analysis of fear of the LORD in the Hebrew Bible for the work of preaching today.

1. The Vocabulary of Fear

In the Hebrew Bible, the Hebrew root most frequently translated “fear” is *y-r-*, attested in the verb *yārēʿ* (finite forms occur approximately 289 times), two adjectival or participial forms *nôrāʿ* (44 occurrences) and *yārēʿ* (45 occurrences), and the nouns *yirʾā* (45 occurrences) and *môrāʿ* (12 occurrences).⁹

Though not fear’s only object in the Hebrew Bible, the LORD / God is its most frequent object. The phrase “fear of the LORD” occurs thirty times in the Hebrew Bible, with two lexemes, *yirʾā* (23 x) and *paḥad* (7 x), commonly rendered by the English word “fear.”¹⁰ The expression “fear of God” occurs only five times in the Hebrew Bible.¹¹ Far more common than noun phrases are occurrences of the verb “to fear” with the LORD and/or God as its object and substantive participial/adjectival phrases referring to “fearers” of the LORD or God.¹²

The Hebrew Bible makes use of a broader lexicon of fear than the terms highlighted above, including words that can be translated as dread, terror, or panic, and trembling, shaking, and

⁹ Statistics from *Hans F. Fuhs*, *yārēʿ*, *yārēʿ*, *yirʾā*, *môrāʿ*, in: G. Johannes Botterweck/Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 6, Grand Rapids (MI), 1990, 209–315, 292–293. According to *Fuhs* the noun *yirʾā* is technically a “nominalized infinitive” (293).

¹⁰ *yirʾat*: 2Chron 19:9, Pss 19:10, 34:12, 111:10; Prov 1:7, 29, 2:5, 8:13, 9:10, 10:27, 14:26, 27, 15:16, 33, 16:6, 19:23, 22:4, 23:17, 31:30; Job 28:28 [*ʾadonay* instead of YHWH]; Isa 11:2,3, 33:6. *paḥad*: 1 Sam 11:7, 2Chron 14:13, 17:10, 19:7, Isa 2:10.19.21. “His fear” or “fear of him” (*yirʾatô*) occurs at Ex. 20:20. Note that in Gen 31:42, 53 God is named “the *paḥad* of Isaac.” While there is some debate about the meaning of this name, it may identify God metonymically by reference to the experience of terror. See *Emil Puech*, *Fear of Isaac*, in: David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 2, New York, 1992, 779–80, and *Matthias Köckert*, *Fear of Isaac*, in: Karel van der Toorn/Pieter Willem van der Horst (eds.), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, Leiden, 1995, 622–627. Puech argues that fear is “a principal attribute of the God of Isaac, whose protective power sows terror among all his enemies” (780).

¹¹ *yirʾat ʾēlōhîm*: Gen 20:11, 2Sam 23:3, Neh 5:15; *paḥad ʾēlōhîm*: 2Chron 20:29, Ps 36:2 MT. 2Chron 26:5 may merit inclusion in this list, although it is textually uncertain: *birʾot hā ʾēlōhîm* is variously translated “visions of God” (NJPS) and “fear of God” (NRSV).

¹² By my counting I arrive at the following occurrences: Finite or infinitive verb fear (*yārēʿ*) with the LORD as explicit object occurs 25 x; Elohim 20 x; the LORD Elohim (frequently possessive, “your/their god”) 19 x; God or God’s action represented as pronominal or implied object approximately 41 x; God’s word or command 4 x; God’s name 4 x (in one of these occurrences the verb has two direct objects, name and glory). By this reckoning God or God’s attribute or command is object 113 times. (In five occurrences “other gods” are the object.) Verbal adjective fearer/fearing with LORD as explicit object occurs 14 x; Elohim as object 6 x; God represented as pronominal or implied object 18 x; God’s name as object 2 x, yielding 40 occurrences total. God is easily the most frequent object of fear. *Fuhs* (note 9) states that “in almost 80 percent of the passages, the object of fear is God” (296), although my math does not bear that out (see also *Clines* [note 7], 62). The next most common type of usage is in the injunction *not* to fear (*Fuhs* [note 9], 296, counts 75 occurrences of the expression *ʾal tîrāʾ* alone, and thus must not be including these in the total of which God is the object 80% of the time), grounded in divine power, protection, and ability and will to save. These uses are related.

writhing.¹³ In some instances collocations of such forms with references to fear of the LORD can clarify the types of emotional and physical responses envisioned by biblical writers, thereby helping us to better understand the concept's meaning.

2. Debating the Meaning of Fear of the LORD

In 1955, Robert Henry Pfeiffer famously wrote that “fear of God” “may be the earliest term for religion in biblical Hebrew.”¹⁴ While Pfeiffer emphasized the terror this phrase was meant to connote for ancient audiences, his contemporaries were eager to strip such a prominent biblical concept of its frightening connotations.¹⁵ Sanitized interpretations migrated well outside of biblical studies. For example, in 1969, in defense of including religious education in public school curricula, a scholar writing in the *British Journal of Educational Studies* cited the well-known statement from Proverbs that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.” He asserted that “the expression ‘the fear of the LORD’ is a semi-technical term meaning religion,” such that the proverb teaches that “the heart of wisdom is religion.”¹⁶ For the writer, fear thus understood has nothing to do with the *emotion* fear and, thus unmoored from its lexical meaning, could be generalized to apply to any world religion.

But many preachers have been taught in seminary to be more careful in their lexical work, consulting theological dictionaries to analyze keywords in the passages they will preach on. Hans Fuhs, author of the widely read and cited *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* article on the root *y-r-*,¹⁷ there asserts that biblical Hebrew shows evidence of “a semantic evolution in the fear of God: when the element of literal fear recedes, ‘fear of God’ becomes tantamount to ‘religion’ or ‘spirituality; i.e., fear of God becomes synonymous with reverence, worship, and obedience to God’s command.”¹⁷ Fuhs argues that this evolved meaning appears in Deuteronomy and

¹³ These include forms derived from the roots *g-w-r*, *h-w-l*, *h-r-d*, *‘-r-š*, *h-t-t*, *s-‘-r*, *š-t-‘*, *b-‘-t*, *š-r-‘*, *‘-y-m*, and more.

¹⁴ *Robert Henry Pfeiffer*, *The Fear of God*, in: *Israel Exploration Journal* 5 (1955), 41–48, 41. *Pfeiffer* emphasized the genuine fear involved in biblical ideas of fearing the LORD, but concluded his essay by asserting that the prophetic reformers (Amos, second Isaiah, et al.) effected a shift in Israelite religious sensibilities away from God the “despot” and toward God the (loving) “father” who seeks not sacrifice but virtue (48). This developmental view of Israelite religion has since been shown to be greatly inaccurate.

¹⁵ This effort should be situated in the context of developments in theology, psychology, and popular culture among Europeans and white Americans following World War II that sought to present a more optimistic vision of human life and relationship with God. Examples include the theological writing of *Paul Tillich*, the demythologizing New Testament interpretation of *Rudolf Bultmann*, and the popular self-help writing of *Norman Vincent Peale* (*The Power of Positive Thinking*, 1952) and *Thomas Anthony Harris* (*I’m OK – You’re OK*, New York, 1967, which was influenced by *Paul Tillich*, *The Shaking of the Foundations*, New York, 1948 and *Idem*, *The New Being*, New York, 1955). These developments were memorably critiqued in *Philip Rieff*, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic. Uses of Faith after Freud*, New York, 1966, and *Karl Menninger*, *Whatever Became of Sin?* New York, 1973.

¹⁶ *Attfield, D. G.*, “The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom”: A Defence of Religious Education in County Schools, in: *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 17, no. 3 (1969), 249–61.

¹⁷ *Fuhs* (note 9), 298.

Deuteronomistic literature, where it means “to worship Yahweh faithfully as the covenant God,” with an almost exclusively “cultic sense (‘fear’ = ‘worship’).”¹⁸ Fuhs finds similar meanings (e.g., cultic devotion, faithfulness, worship) governing usage in Psalms and a broad range of other texts.¹⁹ For Fuhs its meaning in the Wisdom traditions is more complex and varied, but he seems to summarize it as “knowledge of Yahweh and dependence on him.”²⁰ In a similar vein, Tremper Longman suggests that in wisdom literature the phrase “sometimes functions as a close synonym of wisdom.”²¹

The idea that we could, semantically speaking, replace “fear” with “piety,” “devotion,” or “worship” was taught to me in graduate school in the late 1990s.²² I taught it to a batch of divinity students in the aughts. It felt like a righteous blow in the war against supersessionist interpretation of the Old Testament to be able to say to students, you thought the Hebrew Bible was scary, but it’s not. There’s no fear to fear here, only reverence and religion.²³ But this uncomplicated and less threatening substitution did not do justice to the evidence of the Hebrew scriptures.

In recent years, two scholars have pushed back on the predominant interpretation that fear of God is not really a matter of emotion. David Clines employs cognitive linguistic analysis to argue against the semantic-evolution hypothesis and instead proposes that “the [y-r-ʾ] word-group always signifies the emotion of fear.” In his analysis of non-theological uses of the term “fear,” he observes that the occasion for fear is commonly a situation that may lead to death.²⁴ In a similar vein, rather than viewing “fear” as a *synonym* for ethical behavior, Clines traces within many biblical texts a *causative* relationship between fear of punishment and the choice to behave ethically.²⁵ Brent Strawn has similarly challenged the hypothesis of evolution or development, noting the great difficulty of establishing chronology for the texts in question. By pairing iconographic and textual evidence, Strawn argues that “the fear of the Lord [...] is shown to be predicated on God’s power and the

¹⁸ Ibid., 308.

¹⁹ Ibid., 308–309.

²⁰ Ibid., 311.

²¹ *Tremper Longman III*, *Fear of the Lord*, in: idem/Peter Enns (eds.), *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings*, Downers Grove (IL), 2008, 201–205, 202.

²² A concise and helpful summary of major scholarly treatments of the theme of fear of the LORD can be found in *Ettienne Ellis*, *Reconsidering the Fear of God in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Bible in the Light of Rudolf Otto’s Das Heilige*, in: *Old Testament Essays*, 27, no. 1 (2014), 82–99. *Ellis* is particularly interested to document the influence of Rudolf Otto’s idea of “the Holy” as *mysterium tremendum et fascinans* in order to open space for interpretations that do not prejudge the evidence on the basis of *Otto’s* theory.

²³ *Longman* (note 21), 201, wants to avoid connotations of “unhealthy dread”. Elsewhere he writes, “the word respect seems much too weak and horror, dread, or terror much too strong” (*The Fear of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes*, in: *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 25, no. 1 (2015), 13–21, 14). An exception for *Longman* is *Qohelet*, who urges his readers to fear God, not in this sense of humble reverence, but in the sense of an attitude that would lead one to keep one’s distance and not stir up God’s anger.

²⁴ *Clines* (note 7), 60.

²⁵ Ibid., 64. I largely agree with *Clines’* analysis, with the exception of *Clines’* assertion that fear is a mental state rather than a physical experience. Studies of affect and emotion have now established that emotions such as fear entail a complex interweaving of cognitive and physical processes. I thus do not agree with *Clines’* exclusion from the semantic field of *yir’á* terms that describe “physiological symptoms” (67, 69).

threat that power poses [...]”; God is simultaneously life-giving and “death-dealing.”²⁶ Across a broad range of contexts, fear of the LORD recognizes that human life hangs in the balance. In the analysis that follows I will build on the arguments of Clines and Strawn while offering further insights into the interrelation of emotion, cognition, and action in biblical portrayals of “fear of the LORD.” I will also attend to ways that fear of the LORD both is socially shaped and shapes relationships and social structures.

3. Narratives in Genesis and Exodus

Narratives in Genesis and Exodus associate fearing God with behaviors ranging from avoidance to hospitality, radical obedience, and clemency. Fearing God is viewed as a predictor of integrity. It is also a response to theophany. These narratives do not present a systematic concept of fear but help us begin to map its complexity, noting in particular fear’s close relationship to human behavior and its shaping effects on relationships and social structures.

The first instance (canonically speaking) of ‘fear’ in biblical narrative is closely linked with shame elicited by human vulnerability and particularity. Adam claims that he heard God in the garden, was afraid, and hid, because he was naked (Gen 3:10). While God is not the explicit object of fear, Adam’s fear results in avoidant behavior, such that he hides from God at the very moment that God seeks encounter with the humans God has made.²⁷

Later, the men of Abimelech’s household respond with fear when they learn that God has promised that their lives will be forfeit if Sarah is not restored to Abraham (20:8). Though the fuller phrase “fear [of] God” or “fear [of] the LORD” is not used here, the context clarifies that they fear God’s explicit threat of imminent death. Abraham, however, rationalizes that he deceived Abimelech because he says he thought that “there [was] no fear of God in this place” and for that reason its inhabitants would be likely to murder him in order to seize his wife for their own (v. 11; cf. Deut 25:18, Ps 55:19–20).²⁸ For Abraham, fear of God correlates with lawful behavior, in this instance hospitality toward and safe passage of strangers.

In the well-known tale of the binding of Isaac, God stays the hand of Abraham, declaring, “now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me” (Gen 22:12 NRSV). Here God finds evidence of Abraham’s fear of God in Abraham’s willingness to slaughter his own son in obedience to God’s command.

²⁶ *Strawn* (note 2), 112–113.127.

²⁷ *Daniel Castelo*, *The Fear of the Lord as Theological Method*, in: *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2.1 (2008), 147–160 uses this example to describe an (inappropriate) “Adamic fear” which he contrasts with (proper) “Mosaic fear.” I resist what I perceive to be an overly tidy and systematizing account of two types of fear responses to God in the Hebrew scriptures, but affirm *Castelo*’s linking of this instance of fear with a condition of alienation.

²⁸ Where a version is not specified, translations from the biblical text are the author’s own.

In Gen 42, Joseph, formerly sold by his brothers into slavery and now in a position of power among the Egyptians, responds to his brothers' petition for freedom and survival. This scene and the one after it is fraught for the brothers, for whom lives are at stake beyond their own (see esp. vv. 36–38). The brothers describe a movement of distress or anguish from Joseph (in the past) to themselves (in the present) (v. 21). Despite their past abuse of him, he tells his brothers: “Do this and you shall live, for I am a fearer of God” (Gen 42:18). Joseph has named his own fear of God as a powerful counterbalance that will prevent him from committing acts of injustice and violence toward the men he has imprisoned and to whom he offers a conditional freedom. This fear of God competes with a memory of past injury that has transferred a trauma from victim to abusers and risks turning a past victim into an abuser too (vv. 22,24).

As in Genesis, so in Exodus, fear of God is viewed as a predictor of integrity; it is also a response to theophany and motivator of obedience. In both cases, fear plays a role in shaping social and political relationships and structures, a role which will also be observed in Deuteronomic literature, wisdom literature, and Psalms.²⁹

Ex 18 provides a kind of template for political and judicial leadership among God's people. Up until this moment, Moses has apparently been attempting to render rulings for the people on his own. He is now instructed to select captains (chiefs of thousands, fifties, and tens) who will judge alongside him. They should be “fearers of God,” “men of truth,” “haters of profit”: that is, the attitude or disposition of fearing God is here presented as a predictor of honesty and integrity, preventing individuals from seeking their own gain at others' expense (Ex 18:21).

Fear is also a prominent motif in relation to theophany. While the motif is introduced in Moses's response to God's first self-revelation to Moses (Moses hides his face, fearing to look at God, Ex 3:6), it is more fully developed in the narrative of the Sinai theophany (Ex 20). At Sinai, when the Israelites experience the thunder, lightning, blare, and smoke that accompany God's presence, they respond fearfully, physically trembling (Ex 20:18), and ask Moses to prevent God from speaking to them, lest they die (v. 19).³⁰ Moses responds paradoxically that they should not fear, because God is testing them so that “fear [of God]” will be “upon your faces [...] so that you do not sin” (v. 20).

In this passage (Ex 20), multiple connotations of ‘fear’ intersect. The first connotation is the emotional (including physical) fear response. Thunder, lightning, loud noise, and a smoking mountain each may elicit fear responses in humans due to learned associations: they are signs

²⁹ On social and cultural dimensions of affect/emotion, see *Sara Ahmed*, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh, 2004. *Ahmed* argues that emotion is a form of “world making” (12). *Jennifer L. Koosed* applies *Ahmed's* work on emotion to an analysis of the Israelites' fear response to Moses's face in Ex 34:30 in *Moses: The Face of Fear*, in: *Biblical Interpretation* 22 (2014), 414–429.

³⁰ In 20:18, most ancient versions state that the people “feared”; MT, however, states that the people “saw”. The physical response of tottering, waving, or trembling is reported in MT as well as other ancient versions.

accessible to senses of sight, sound, vibration, smell, and taste of deadly natural events and forces, including lightning, fire, avalanche, and volcano. Beyond the “natural” dangers these signs may accompany and foretell, the people deduce that in this instance these are also signs of God’s dangerous presence. They fear that a more direct encounter with the deity will end in their death. The second connotation of ‘fear’ in this passage is a lasting disposition that shapes behavior. This dual, intersecting meaning accounts for Moses’s seemingly paradoxical instruction in 20:20, cited above. The instruction seems to say, do not fear for your life right now. God wills your present and future well-being. But from this moment, let the fear of God be a deterrent to sin and an inducement to obedience.³¹ The connection here between fear of God and obedience or righteousness is explicit: fear of God is meant to discourage sin. But the reader should not imagine that this second connotation of fear, as a disposition that shapes behavior, has no connection to the first, an emotional and physical fear response to the threat of death or harm. The case law that follows clarifies that fear of death remains in view: in the subsequent chapter (ch. 21), the death penalty is prescribed for at least five different crimes.

4. Deuteronomic Literature

Here I consider passages from three Deuteronomic books: Deuteronomy, 1Samuel, and 2Kings. Consistent with Genesis and Exodus, Deuteronomic writers recognize fear as a response to theophany and a motivator of obedience. For the Deuteronomists, fear also motivates worship. Deuteronomy strengthens the explicit linking of emotion, cognition, and action in its treatment of fear of the LORD by introducing the motor metaphor of walking. Deuteronomy also contributes new ideas: people must *learn* to fear the LORD, and fear of the LORD is meant to forestall pride. First Samuel reinforces the links between fear, obedience, worship, and death, while 2Kings demonstrates that the relationship between fear and worship is not synonymous but causative and evidentiary. Each book further highlights social and even political effects of fear of the LORD.

In Deut 4, Moses reminds the people of their encounter with God at Horeb (cf. Ex 20), quoting God’s earlier instruction to him as follows: “assemble the people for me and I will cause them to hear my words, so that they will learn to fear me, all the days that they live on the earth, and they will teach their children” (Deut 4:10). In this passage, fear of God is acquired by two means: For some, it is instilled by the learned association, formed through direct experience, between God’s words and the blazing mountain and cloud of smoke (v. 11).³² For those who lack this direct

³¹ For *Fout* (note 4, 31), “Moses is correcting the Israelites, saying that they are not simply to be overawed or (to read in somewhat) paralyzed by fear of God’s impressive presence, but rather are to have the kind of fear that will result in following the Law just given, to do what is right and not sin”. The exhortation to let fear be upon their faces may be linked to *Abmed’s* (note 29, 6–7) treatment of the “impression” formed by contact with an object, which shapes both emotion and the orientation to the object.

³² Moses later confirms that the people “were afraid of the fire” to such a degree that they entrusted all mediation to

experience, it is instilled by parental catechesis (v. 10). This learned fear is intended to be a life-long motivator of covenant obedience, as spelled out in the remainder of the book.³³ “Fear me” is closely linked to “keep[ing] my commandments,” and carries with it a promised reward of prosperity and long life for self and descendants (5:29, 6:2,24). Fearing the LORD is necessary for welfare (*tôv*/good) and for staying alive (6:24).

Deut 6, 8, 10, and 13 intensify the link between the emotion “fear” and attendant action (such as keeping commandments) by means of a repeated motor metaphor of walking. The commandment in Deut 6:13, “The LORD your God you shall fear, and [the LORD] you will serve, and by [the LORD’s] name you will swear,” precedes a prohibition of walking after other gods. That is, only God’s power is to be feared and only God is to be served/worshiped or “walked after.” The penalty for walking after other gods is destruction/death (v. 15). In Deut 8:6 fear of the LORD occurs in parallel to walking in God’s ways, highlighting the pairing of disposition or emotion and action as two necessary components for keeping God’s commands. In ch. 10, fearing “the LORD your God” is presented within a summation of what God asks of God’s people, along with walking, loving, and serving/worshipping with heart and throat (*nepeš* 10:12). The conjoining of emotions, actions, and embodiment (heart and throat) suggests that the terms fearing and walking, loving, and serving/worshipping are not meant to be synonymous but rather to complement one another. The next verse links all of these with keeping the commandments and with the motivator “for your good” (10:13).

As in Exodus, so in Deuteronomy, the linking of fear and right conduct is motivated in part by the threat of death.³⁴ At 13:5 Moses commands: “after the LORD your God you shall walk, and [the LORD] fear, and [the LORD’s] commandments keep, and [the LORD’s] voice hear/obey, and [the LORD] serve/worship, and to [the LORD] cleave.” The context for this instruction is a warning regarding prophets and diviners who would encourage the people to follow other gods. In this broader context, while the instruction to walk, fear, keep, hear, and cleave is not accompanied by an explicit motivation-clause, fear is nonetheless portrayed as an inducement to obedience. To this end, three subsequent verses (6, 10, and 11) add that those prophets or diviners who would lead people away from God should be killed by the community, specifically by stoning (v. 11).

Moses (5:5).

³³ In Deut 31 the people (men, women, children, immigrants) will learn to fear the LORD God and “to keep to do all the words of the teaching” by assembling to hear (31:12). Like Deut 4, ch. 31 foregrounds the need for children to learn to fear the LORD God (v. 13). The pairing of fearing and “keep[ing] to do” emphasizes that fear is meant to be a learned, lifelong disposition that produces consistency and conformity of behavior.

³⁴ On fear of God as a “dread or anxiety that God, who is seen as the ultimate power, threatens, destroys, or kills people,” see *Pieter de Villiers*, *Fear as Dread of a God Who Kills and Abuses? About a Darker Side of a Key, but Still Forgotten Biblical Motif*, in: HTS Theologies Studies / Theological Studies 69.1 (2013), Art. #2018, 3. *De Villiers* cautions that biblical texts that project or construct this type of fear of God may “create space for violence and abuse” (7).

Communal enforcement of the death penalty is here explicitly intended to generate fear that will deter others from engaging in the forbidden behavior (v. 12): “and all Israel will hear and fear and will not again do this evil thing in your midst.” Through repetition of the key word “fear,” the disposition of “fear [of]the LORD your God” (v. 3) is closely linked with fear for one’s life (v. 11; likely also for the lives of loved ones, cf. v. 6) that is felt in response to learning that such a thing has occurred (v. 11). The prescribed human act of stoning, which implicitly mimics, enacts, and participates in divine power over life and death, here aims to elicit obedience to God’s commands.

The phrase, “and all [...] will hear and fear and will not again do [...],” which marked the conclusion to the instruction regarding prophets and diviners examined above, is repeated with minor variation in three other passages in Deuteronomy, regarding obedience to (levitical) priests and judges (17:13), jeopardy for witnesses (19:20), and rebellious children (21:21) respectively. While these three examples do not explicitly refer to “fear of the LORD,” they illustrate the close linking of fear, obedience, and the threat of death or harm within the book of Deuteronomy. In Deut 13:8–13, a death penalty is meant to instill fear that will elicit precise and unswerving obedience to the rulings of Levitical priests and judges: “And whoever acts in pride, by disobeying the priest whose office is to minister there to the LORD your God, or [by disobeying] the judge, that person must die” (17:12). In this case, fear of death motivates obedience by curbing prideful overconfidence in one’s own judgment rather than that of the appointed priests and judges. In Deut 19:15–21, a broader *lex talionis* that includes the possibility of death (“Do not have pity: neck for neck, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot” v. 21) is meant to generate fear that will in turn deter individuals from falsely accusing others. While these two examples reinforce structures of authority and justice within the wider community, a similar deterrent reinforces the authority of parents over their children, situating their authority in relation to that of local elders and making the stoning of one rebellious child an occasion for fear throughout Israel (21:18–21).

The preceding three examples linked fear of death or harm with obedience in order to reinforce the authority of local priests, judges, elders, and parents and to ensure the integrity of the judicial system. Deuteronomy also takes care to ensure that, if over time the structure of government changes to that of monarchy, the king will not place himself above those he governs or “turn aside from the commandment” (17:14–20, v. 20). The king must instead learn to “fear the LORD his God” by writing a copy of the law, keeping it with him, and reading it out loud every day (vv. 19–20).³⁵ In this passage fear of the LORD is meant to shape perceptions of self in relation to others and to shape behavior. The king’s learned fear aims to deter presumption and pride that would

³⁵ Fear is also learned by eating in God’s presence (14:23). In this passage, it is less clear how the action would instill or relate to the emotion of fear. The passage elsewhere associates the event with desire and rejoicing (v. 26). The meal seems intended to be a celebration, including grain, wine, oil, and meat. The seeming contradiction may further complicate the picture that has developed up to this point.

induce him to veer to one side or another, making his own judgments and adjustments rather than adhering to God's teaching (17:20; cf. 17:13). As elsewhere, the fear of the LORD will lead to longevity, in this case to lasting rule and a dynasty (v. 20). Together, the examples in Deut 13, 17, 19, and 21 underscore not only the relationship between cognition (learning, evaluating, and decision-making), emotion (fear) and action (behavior, including obedience, worship, and upholding the law), but also the complex ways in which fear is socially shaped and socially shaping.

The threat of harm and death articulated in 6:15, 13:6, 10, and 11, 17:12, and 19:21 haunts other Deuteronomic passages. In Deuteronomy, the Name of God functions as a hypostasis that represents and/or mediates divine power, presence, and protection.³⁶ It is not only God who must be feared but also the Name, on pain of death and grievous calamity: "Unless you keep, to do (them), all the words of this teaching, which are written in this scroll, to fear this Name that is honored and feared, the LORD your God, the LORD will 'miracle' [*wēhīplā'*'] you with blows, your offspring with blows, blows great and constant and sicknesses evil and constant" (28:58–59).³⁷ Implicitly, through use of the verbal root *p-l-ʿ*, God promises to turn "wonders," which have previously been the means of Israel's liberation (cf. Judg 6:13), into the means of their destruction, now generating faith and fear not through acts of redemption, grace, and mercy but by striking, wounding, and devastating the people.³⁸

First Samuel further illustrates the link between fear, obedience, and death. In his farewell address, Samuel frames the people's choice to have a king on earth within the context of their broader history with the LORD. Their future will be secure if they "fear and serve the LORD," obey and do not rebel, and if people and king alike follow the LORD (1Sam 12:14). Samuel summons unnatural thunder and rain in the midst of harvest heat to demonstrate that the people's request for a king is evil in the LORD's eyes (vv. 17–18), with the result that the people "feared the LORD and Samuel" (v. 18) and begged the prophet to intercede to save their lives (v. 19). In a seeming paradox similar to that of Ex 20:20, Samuel's response to the people includes the exhortation "do not fear" and the command "fear." Samuel responds to their immediate fear of death by enjoining them to serve God alone (v. 20) and ignore "gods who are nothing" (v. 21). That is, their choices in this moment and in the future will determine their fate. At the conclusion of his speech he again

³⁶ See *Benjamin Sommer*, *The Bodies of God and the World of Ancient Israel*, Cambridge, 2009, 59, drawing on the widely cited but unpublished study by *S. Dean McBride*, *The Deuteronomic Name Theology*, PhD. Diss., Harvard University, 1969.

³⁷ The word "constant" renders the niphil participles *ne'ēmānôt* and *ne'ēmānîm*, from the root ²*m-n*, "to believe." The participles might also be translated "believed," "believable," "to be believed," or "that have been believed." In more idiomatic English, "blows you'd better believe," or "blows that will make you believe."

³⁸ When we create logic pretzels to sanitize the biblical connotations of fear of God we fail to recognize the brutality that is sometimes explicit and often implicit within this biblical concept. When law-enforcers, parents, spouses, teachers, or church leaders refer to "putting the fear of God in" someone, they are hewing rather closely to the explicit threat of violence in this passage.

reiterates the double command to “fear and serve the LORD,” adding the modifiers “in truth, with your whole heart” (v. 24). If they do not fear and serve, they will do evil and be “swept away” (v. 25). Throughout this passage fear of the Lord is linked to actions including service, obedience, and exclusive worship; it is motivated by explicit fear and threat of death.

Finally, a passage in 2Kings 17:24–41 focuses on the difficulty of foreign peoples’ learning to fear the LORD. In this passage, eleven-fold repetition of the verb “to fear” signals that fear of the LORD is its central, thematic focus. The narrator of 2Kings reports that when, after Israel’s exile, people from Babylonia, Cutha, ‘Avva, Ḥamath and Sepharvayim (17:24) were first settled in the region of Samaria, “they did not fear the LORD” (v. 25; NRSV and NJPS both here translate “fear” as “worship”). Consequently, the LORD sent lions to kill them (v. 25). Numerous texts examined thus far have warned that failure to fear the LORD will result in calamitous death. This passage, by contrast, narrates such a consequence as having already occurred.

This chain of cause and effect, by which failure to fear LORD results in death, is reported to the king of Assyria, but with a variation: a different phrase is used to explain the cause of the settlers’ deaths. The report that the Assyrian king receives does not state that the settlers “did not fear the LORD,” but instead states that the settlers are being killed by lions because “they did not know the god’s *mišpaṭ*,” i.e., judgment, ruling, or justice (v. 26).³⁹ This substitution charts a close connection, perceived by the emissaries to the king, between fear of the LORD and cognition, whether a recognition of broader divine governing principles of cause and effect or knowledge of specific commands and consequences attributed to this god. On hearing this report, the king responds that priests should be sent to teach the god’s justice (*mišpaṭ*, v. 27, curiously translated by the noun “worship” in this verse by NAB). A priest is accordingly sent to Bethel, where he teaches the settlers “how they should fear the LORD” (v. 28).

As the narrative unfolds, despite the intervention of the priest at Bethel, the settlers continue to “make gods,” set up shrines to other deities, and pass children through fire. They also feared the Lord (v. 32). “They were fearing the LORD and serving their gods according to the judgment/ruling [*mišpaṭ*] of the nations they had been exiled from” (v. 33). Within the framework of Deuteronomic theology examined above, the juxtaposition of fearing the LORD and serving other gods presents an implicit contradiction (cf. Deut 6:13-15). That contradiction is made explicit in the verse that follows: “to this day they are acting according to the former judgments/rulings [i.e., the ones they had known before they came to Samaria]. They were not fearing the LORD and they were not acting according to the statutes and rulings and teaching and commandment which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob ...” (v. 34). The narrator then summarizes part of God’s covenant with the

³⁹ “the god’s justice” rather than “the LORD’s justice” because, as far as the king of Assyria is concerned, the LORD is one local deity among many.

Israelites with the commands: “you shall not fear other gods, or bow down to them, or serve them, or sacrifice to them” (v. 35), but fear, bow, and sacrifice only to the LORD, whose great strength and outstretched arm delivered them from Egypt (v. 36). They are then instructed to “keep to do” the statutes, judgments, teaching, and command written by God for them, and not to fear other gods (v. 37; cf. Deut 31:12). The latter phrase is repeated in the next verse (v. 38), followed again by the command to fear the LORD, who would deliver them from enemies (v. 39). Despite this intervention and instruction, the pattern of foreign settlers’ fearing the LORD and serving other gods nonetheless persisted (v. 41).

This passage (2Kings 17:24–41) appears to have the densest repetition of the motif of fearing the LORD within the Hebrew Bible (11 occurrences in a span of 17 consecutive verses). The writer here parses behavior that contradicts fearing the LORD primarily in terms of non-Yahwistic cultic practices. That is, fear is to be manifested in the choice of whom and how to worship. The relationship between fear and worship is not here synonymous but causative and, in theory, evidentiary. That is, fear is here presented as motivation for worship practices, while worship practices are viewed as evidence of fear when done correctly and evidence of the lack or misplacement of fear when done incorrectly, as in the worship of deities besides the LORD. Moreover, for this writer, fear should motivate not only obedience to commandments related to worship, but also adherence to the entirety of the law and justice of God. Yet the narrative also emphasizes the importance of communal memory and formation in shaping such fear and the behavior that would or “should” follow from it.⁴⁰ The narrative illustrates that in the absence of the direct revelation and/or lengthy, even lifelong catechesis envisioned in Deut 4:10 (and in the presence of alternative cultural catechesis), fear – even fear of death – has unpredictable results.

5. Wisdom Literature⁴¹

Among the wisdom books, Proverbs is generally viewed as articulating an empirically grounded and orthodox wisdom perspective, with Job and Qohelet challenging and disrupting Proverbs’ overly tidy worldview and instruction on the basis of contrary evidence. The frequent use of the noun phrase “fear of the LORD” as well as verbal commands to fear the LORD in Proverbs have similarly come to represent a certain comfortable orthodoxy regarding the phrase’s meaning, that fear is not fearing but knowing, not terror but wisdom. I argue that, rather than negating the word’s emotional meaning, Proverbs locates fear within a wider matrix of strong emotions that include

⁴⁰ Cf. *Ahmed* (note 29), 7, 45–46, 69.

⁴¹ I do not treat here Qohelet due to considerations of the length of this article. On fear in Qohelet, see *Longman* (note 21), Fear of God in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

hatred, despising, and envy. Like the Deuteronomist(s), the sages recognize the strong link between emotion, cognition, and action.

The book's introduction describes "the fear of the LORD" as "the beginning of knowledge," contrasting this disposition with that of fools who despise instruction (Prov 1:7; cf. 9:10–18; see also 13:13). In this verse, the affective experience of fear is counterposed to the emotion of despising. The latter has negative consequences: Scoffers and fools who have ignored wisdom's teaching (vv. 22–25) will experience destruction (v. 32) "because they *hated* knowledge and did not choose the *fear* of the LORD" (v. 29; note again the affective contrast).

The book's addressee, by contrast, is urged to seek wisdom, and thereby "understand the fear of the LORD and [...] find knowledge of God" (2:5). This parallelism between fear and knowledge is not synonymous. A few verses later the addressee is offered understanding of "righteousness and justice and equity, every good path" (2:9 NRSV). This parallelistic progression highlights causal connections between fear, knowledge, and action. The knowledge here prescribed includes consequences for actions: the upright will abide in the land [...] and the wicked will be cut off" (vv. 21–22). With these dichotomous fates in view, the addressee is urged to keep commandments that lead to life (3:1–2), and to trust in received teaching above personal insight (v. 5): "Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and turn away from evil" (v. 7; cf. 14:16, 16:6). This disposition is paired with openness to divine correction (v. 11), a path that leads to healing, life, wealth, and honor (vv. 8, 16, 35; see also 14:26–27; 22:4).⁴²

While Prov 1 highlighted a contrast between affective states of fearing and despising, in ch. 8 Wisdom yokes them together: to fear God is also to hate evil, and mirrors Wisdom's own declared hatred of "pride, arrogance, the road of evil, and twisted speech" (8:13). Later, Proverbs again emphasizes the contrast between fearing and despising, asserting that "one who walks straight fears the LORD, and the one whose roads are crooked despises [the LORD]" (14:2). That is, conduct provides evidence of attitude and affective state. Fear of the LORD is matched by an affective opposite, despising the LORD (cf. 15:32: "they despise themselves"). Social and political dimensions of fear of the LORD are emphasized in the instruction to the book's audience to "fear the LORD and the king" while distancing themselves from "haters" (24:21).

Elsewhere, fear of the LORD is counterposed to a different emotion: envy. "Let not your heart be jealous of sinners, but only fear of the LORD all your days" (23:17; translation preserves ambiguous syntax). That is, desire should not extend to the apparent material prosperity of sinners. Fear of God ought to clarify that such envy is misplaced, because God is able to cut off their

⁴² Cf. 15:33: "The fear of the LORD is wisdom's correction, and humility precedes honor." The sages acknowledge that fear doesn't always generate prosperity. But even in the absence of riches and honor, "a little with fear of the LORD" is better than wealth that brings sorrow (15:16; cf. 16:8).

prosperity in an instant. It is the person characterized by fear of the LORD who should be praised (31:30). By designating appropriate objects of fear, hate, praise, and desire, Proverbs aims to train its audiences' emotions and thereby shape their interactions with the world.

Using language similar to Proverbs', the book of Job famously asserts that "the fear of the Lord is wisdom and avoiding evil is understanding" (28:28; cf. Ps 111:10). These very qualities are attributed to Job three times at the book's beginning: he is described by the narrator and God as "blameless and upright, and fearing God and avoiding evil" (1:1.8; 2:3).

But God's counselor, the Satan, poses a provocative question: "does [Job] fear God for nothing?" (1:9). The Satan's reasoning is that God has provided Job with inducements – in this case, rewards for loyalty – without which Job would cease to fear God. The logic seems at first blush to depart from such inducements as fear of death. However, God's power to protect and to show mercy stems from the same source and reflects the same prerogatives. The Satan emphasizes precisely this protection as the root of the blessings Job has experienced (1:10).

Job, by contrast, dwells at length on his fear. He has been plunged from protection into nightmare: "I dread a dread (*paḥad pāḥadī*) and it comes upon me; and the thing I fear (*yāgōrī*) comes to me" (3:25). The terror (*ḥātat*) he experiences causes fear in others (6:21) because the "terrors of God" are now arrayed against him (6:4). The rod and "terror" (*'ēmā*) of God terrify (*teba 'ātannī*) Job (9:34; cf. 21:9 where the rod of God occurs in parallel with *paḥad*), making Job "fear [God]" as he speaks (9:35).

The association between rod (of discipline) and fear/terror is later matched by Bildad's pairing of fear/terror and divine rule: "rule and terror are with [God]" (25:2). The remainder of Bildad's speech draws attention to God's uncountable armies and the lowly status of mortals.

Elsewhere, the friends largely echo the Satan's reasoning. Eliphaz argues that Job's fear of God is Job's confidence (4:6). God "wounds but binds up," "strikes and heals" (5:18). With God's protection, one need not fear destruction (v. 20) or wild animals (v. 21). Zophar claims that turning from evil would remove Job's fear (11:14–15). Elihu, meanwhile, declares God's fearsome majesty (37:22) and power, justice, and righteousness that elicit mortal fear (vv. 23–24).

The combination of narrative frame and poetic dialogue yields a book that is far from systematic. What is certain is that fear of God in this book is not divorced from emotional and physical experience or from concerns of life and death. Job testifies to his personal experience of divine terror. The book underscores the inadequacy of all simplistic formulations.

6. Psalms⁴³

⁴³ In addition to their use of active verbal and participial forms, the psalms also use passive participial and verbal forms to declare that God and God's deeds are "fearsome" (*nōrā*). In 47:3, the psalmist declares to all nations that "the

Within the Hebrew scriptures, fear's social dimensions are perhaps nowhere as strongly emphasized as in the psalter. Participial or adjectival forms of "fear" appear frequently in the psalms as a designation of group belonging, while verbal forms denote a fear response that may also be enjoined on outsiders.⁴⁴ As a group designation, the claim to shared identity as fearers of the LORD promotes behaviors that strengthen bonds within the group and discourages behaviors that weaken them. Promise and observation of belonging, reward, protection, and salvation for fearers of the LORD can have a proselytic force or strengthen existing attitudes and behaviors.

Ps 15 inquires who may sojourn in God's tent.⁴⁵ The answer is one who "walks with integrity, does righteousness, speaks truth with their heart" (15:2), avoids slander and does not harm their neighbor (v. 3), who despises a rejected one and "honors fearers of the LORD" (v. 4). Overall, the psalm promotes attitudes and behaviors that lead to group cohesion and trust and discourages behaviors, such as slander, oath breaking, lending at interest, and harm to a neighbor that would corrode relationships within the group. Fearing God is contrasted with a status of social rejection, and thus appears to be a designation for group members in good standing. In a similar vein, Ps 22 locates "fearers of the LORD" within the assembly and congregation and places the phrase in parallel with the "offspring of Jacob/Israel" (22:23–24, 26; cf. Ps 115:9–12, 118:2–4, 135:19–20).⁴⁶

Ps 119 similarly links God-fearing with social approval and belonging, while also highlighting an embodied fear response. "I am a companion to every fearer-of-you, to every keeper of your precepts" (119:63); "those who fear you will see me and rejoice" (v. 74). In the face of adversity the psalmist prays, "let them turn to me, those who fear you" (v. 79). These expressions of companionship, welcome, and alliance present God-fearing as a visible marker of group identity. The same psalmist provides insight into her experience of fear of God: "my flesh shudders with dread (*paḥad*) of you; I fear your judgments" (v. 120 NAB; cf. NJPS "my flesh creeps from fear of you..."), demonstrating that in this didactic psalm, while fearing God clearly functions as a group

LORD is to be feared, great king over all the earth." Fear is here linked to God's royal role, which is transferred to God's people, for the king "led peoples under us, nations under our feet" (v. 4). In Ps 66, God's deeds are fearsome (vv. 3, 5), leading enemies to "cringe" (v. 3) and all earth to worship and praise (v. 4). In Ps 76:7, God is fearsome, because no one can stand before God's rage. When God made God's judgment heard from the heavens, "earth feared and was still" (v. 8; NJPS "the earth was numbed with fright"; NAB "the earth was terrified and reduced to silence"). Tribute should be brought to "the terror" (*môra'* v. 12), who is "feared" (*nôra'*) by the earth's kings (v. 13). God is also feared (*na'ārās*) in the council of holy ones and feared (*nôra'*) by all around [the LORD] (89:8). God's fearsome name is associated with God's royal power (99:3) and redemption (111:9). Ps 96 declares: "Great is the LORD and highly to be praised, and to be feared [*nôra'*] above all gods" (Ps 96:4; 1Chron 16:25).

⁴⁴ A longer treatment would also consider nouns and other lexemes within the semantic field of fear. For relevant uses of *yir'á* see Pss 2:11, 5:8, and 90:11. For the possibly related form *môra'* see Ps 9:21: "put terror [*môra'*] to them, LORD, let nations know: they are human." Examples of the root *b-h-l* include the following: Ps 2:5, "he will terrify them in his fury"; 83:16 "terrify them with your hurricane" (cf. v. 18); 90:7: "because we are done-in by your anger, and by your rage we are terrified [*nibhálnū*]" because God is mindful of human sin and human life "ebbs away" under God's fury (v. 9).

⁴⁵ Psalm numberings vary among ancient versions and among modern translations. I follow the numbering in MT.

⁴⁶ The psalm emphasizes God's power to save (vv. 21–22) and divine rule or kingship (v. 29), and encourages those who fear the LORD to give praise (v. 24).

identity marker, its meaning has not drifted away from its affective connotations. Vivid description of bodily sensation presents a sobering portrait of the experience of fear before the judgment of God.

In Ps 31, fearers of the LORD will receive great good that has been stored up for them. The substantive participial phrase “fearers-of-you” is parallel to those who take refuge in the LORD (cf. 115:11) and receive good “in the sight of the children of Adam / humankind” (31:20): while refuge may otherwise suggest hiding from view (see v. 21), naming all human beings as witnesses of their reward emphasizes public affiliation and may have an “evangelical” force.

A similar witnessing by “many” occurs in Ps 40: God intervened for the psalmist’s welfare and “put a song” in her mouth. As a result, “many will see and fear and trust in the LORD” (40:4). The same phrase, “see and fear” occurs at Ps 52:8: the righteous will see God’s striking down of the treacherous boaster; they will fear and laugh. This complex, twofold reaction is superficially paradoxical but reflects the twinning of reward and punishment and the logic that fear should motivate one to avoid the latter. They fear the power of God to punish. They laugh at the one who failed to fear God’s power and sought security elsewhere. Here “see and fear” is not evangelistic in the sense of recruiting new believers. It marks a moment within an iterative process whereby observation of reward and punishment reinforces and shapes existing attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors among the righteous.⁴⁷

Another psalmist imagines a wider audience: when God strikes down the wicked “all humankind will fear and tell” what they have seen and what God has done (64:10). For the righteous, this will be an occasion for joy (v. 11).

The mingling of fear and joy is also found in Pss 65 and 67. God’s fearsome deeds are hope for the ends of the earth (65:6);⁴⁸ dwellers at the ends of the earth fear God’s signs, and lands far to the east and west shout for joy (v. 9). Ps 67 envisions universal recognition of God’s way, power (67:2), and equity (v. 4), leading to joy, praise (vv. 4–5), and fear (v. 7). Another psalmist declares that “nations will fear the Name of the LORD, all the kings of the earth [will fear] your glory” (102:16).

Elsewhere, a response of fear (*yirʾā*) combined with dread (MT *yagʾūrū*) or shaking (LXX) is enjoined upon all the earth and its inhabitants (33:8). This fear response is motivated by God’s powerful acts of creation (including creating the armies of heaven), the efficacy of divine command and enduring plan, divine knowledge, and God’s ability to “frustrate” plans of nations. The psalm contrasts God’s universal sovereignty with the relative powerlessness of earthly kings and nations, and highlights God’s choosing of God’s people: “the eye of the LORD is on the fearers of [the

⁴⁷ In a similar vein, in Ps 111, fear of the LORD is something one does or practices to achieve insight (v. 10).

⁴⁸ Cf. Ps 106:22, which recalls God’s fearsome deeds at the Reed Sea.

LORD], who await [the LORD’s] faithfulness” (33:18).⁴⁹ Here, by contrast to the universal use of the hortatory verb, the substantive participial or adjectival phrase “fearer of the LORD” designates the group of people the LORD has chosen as an inheritance (v. 12; cf. Ps 147:11,19–20). The psalmist highlights the protection and aid God provides for the fearers (vv. 19–20) and associates fearing with companion attitudes of trust and expectation (vv. 18, 21–22).⁵⁰

Protection becomes a visible marker of group identity in Ps 60. God has set up a banner in a place of safety, where fearers of the LORD can rally together during danger (v. 6). Such a banner allows group members to gather together when they are away from the sanctuary or their local community and functions as a socially-structuring signal to insiders and outsiders alike.

In a similar vein, the didactic Ps 34 asserts that an angel provides “fearers of the LORD” with supernatural protection (34:8). Fearers receive not only protection but what is needed for life: “Fear the LORD, [the LORD’s] holy ones, because [the LORD’s] fearers do not lack” (v. 10).⁵¹ The psalmist promises to teach children “fear of the LORD” (34:12), entices with a suggested promise of long life, and offers ethical guidance regarding integrity of speech, forsaking evil, doing good, and seeking shalom (vv. 12–14). She further underscores God’s propensity to rescue and save the righteous and the destruction that awaits the wicked. In this psalm, we see the use of “fearer of the LORD” as an emic in-group designation that overlaps significantly with holy ones, the righteous, the LORD’s servants, and those who take refuge in the LORD, and contrasts with the wicked, doers of evil, and haters of the righteous. The psalmist’s exhortation to fear the LORD is at least partly catechetical, and is framed as a response to learning the punishments and rewards God doles out for human behavior. That fear response, in turn, is intended to elicit “righteous” behavior.

In a similar vein, Ps 85 declares “truly, near to fearers [of the LORD] is [the LORD’s] salvation. The goal is to ensure that the LORD’s glory – a visible manifestation of God’s sovereign power — will dwell in the land (v. 10). Fearers are parallel to faithful ones, “[the LORD’s] people” (v. 9), and

⁴⁹ Cf. the rewards described in Ps 103: toward fearers of the LORD, God’s faithfulness is as great as the height of the heavens (v. 11) and compassion is like that of a parent (v. 13). God’s faithfulness is eternal (v. 17). Here ‘fearing’ is parallel to keeping commandments (v. 18).

⁵⁰ On the close connection between fear and trust in the psalter, see *Christine Brown Jones*, *When I am Afraid*. Fear in the Book of the Psalms, in: *Review and Expositor* 115.1 (2018), 15–25.

⁵¹ Other psalmists assert that “fearers of your Name” receive an inheritance (61:6), and the LORD gives food to fearers of [the LORD] 111:4; the LORD fulfills the desire of [the LORD’s] fearers, hears their cry, and rescues them (145:19). By contrast, the LORD destroys the wicked (v. 20). Ps 25 emphasizes God’s instruction (vv. 4–5, 8–9). “Whoever is a fearer of the LORD, [the LORD] will teach the path they should choose” (v. 12). Similarly, “The LORD’s counsel/council belongs to fearers of [the LORD], and [the LORD] reveals [the LORD’s] covenant to them” (v. 14). Members of the set “fearer of YHWH” will thus receive knowledge from God that will enable them to remain in relationship with God. In Ps 112 fearing the LORD (v. 1) obviates fear of ill-report and enemies (vv. 7–8). The “fearer of the LORD” is “blessed” or “fortunate” (cf. Ps 115:13; 128:1, 4) and delights in God’s commands (v. 1; cf. 128:1 “fearer of the LORD” is parallel to “walker in the LORD’s ways”). The psalm emphasizes the blessings of wealth, prosperity, longevity, and progeny, pairing these with a life-long commitment to justice and care for the poor.

ones who turn to God in their hearts. That is, the phrase aims both to evoke group identity *and* to encourage a disposition toward God.⁵²

7. Conclusions

Analysis of “fear of the LORD” and related forms in Hebrew biblical texts does not reveal fear to be *synonymous* with wisdom, nor with obedience, worship, or piety. Rather, Hebrew biblical texts that thematize fear of the LORD/God highlight a robust relationship between affect (disposition/emotion/feeling), cognition (learning/teaching/knowing/evaluating/choosing), and action (walking, doing, keeping commandments, worshiping, praising). Moreover, these texts consistently affirm the relational and social dimensions of fear of the LORD/God, emphasizing how these are simultaneously socially shaped and shaping of social realities.

Understanding emotion and affect

The interrelation between emotion, cognition, and action is well established in contemporary studies of affect. Klaus Scherer defines emotions as “clearly delineated, intensive patterns of affective processes” that have four distinctive features:

- 1) they are elicited by the combination of event and appraisal, in which a person judges an event to be relevant to their “needs, goals, values, and general well-being”;
- 2) they “have a strong motivational force, producing states of *action readiness*” [italics original] and preparing a person “to deal with important events in their lives”;
- 3) “Emotions engage the entire person,” including “somatovisceral and motor systems”;
- 4) they exert considerable power in relation to behavior and experience.⁵³

In this understanding, emotion includes not only subjective *feeling*, on which popular (and constructivist) understandings tend to focus, but also “elicitation processes, physiological symptoms, motor expression, and motivational changes.”⁵⁴ As such, emotion, like the broader

⁵² In Ps 86:11 the psalmist prays God to “unite my heart in order to fear your name.” This prayer recognizes the other fears or objects of fear that compete with fear of the LORD.

⁵³ Klaus R. Scherer, Emotions are emergent processes: they require a dynamic computational architecture, in: Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences 364, no. 1535 (December 12 2009), 3459–3474, citing Nico H. Frijda and Klaus R. Scherer, Emotion Definitions (Psychological Perspectives), in: D. Sander and K. R. Scherer (eds.), Oxford Companion to Emotion and the Affective Sciences, Oxford/New York, 2009, 142–144. Compare Scherer’s definition of emotion elsewhere as “an episode of massive synchronous recruitment of mental and somatic resources to adapt to and cope with a stimulus event that is subjectively appraised as highly pertinent to needs, goals, and values of the individual.” Klaus R. Scherer, Unconscious Processes in Emotion: The Bulk of the Iceberg, in: Lisa Feldman Barrett/Paula M. Niedenthal/Piotr Winkielman (eds.), Emotion and Consciousness, New York, 2009, 312–334, 314. See further Klaus R. Scherer, What are emotions? And how can they be measured? In: Social Science Information 44, no. 4 (2005), 695–729.

⁵⁴ Scherer, Emotions are emergent processes (note 53), 3461–3462. See also Klaus R. Scherer, On the Nature and Function

category of affect, is not divorced from reason and discernment, nor from body and action. It is deeply linked to each of these.

While Scherer's understanding places a great deal of emphasis on the individual person, Donald Wehrs characterizes affect in terms that open into a more socially located understanding, as "sensations, intensities, valences, attunements, dissonances, and interior movements shaped by pressures, energies, and affiliations embedded within or made part of diverse forms of embodied human life."⁵⁵ Wehrs' definition, though a bit fuzzy around the edges, subtly emphasizes the social embeddedness of the person and the multiform ways in which embodied social experiences impinge upon and shape affect and its interpretation. Margaret Wetherell takes a further step, explicitly emphasizing the interplay between individual and social domains and in particular drawing attention to the "relation between affect and discourse," encompassing in the latter category not only utterance but embodied communication, diverse media, and social contexts, all of which she broadly characterizes as "language in action."⁵⁶ Sara Ahmed's study of emotion as "cultural politics" further emphasizes ways in which emotions not only take shape and must be understood within a social world but also contribute to "world making."⁵⁷

Implications for Preaching

In a general sense, we do well to recognize the powerful insight of the biblical writers that fear does indeed shape our judgments and motivate our behaviors. The scripture writers understood all too well that the LORD was not the only possible object of our fear. Learning and practicing the fear of God was considered a path to life in part because it countered fear of other powers. In the midst of current events we do well to remember that in Exodus 1, the midwives chose civil disobedience to preserve the lives of children because their fear of God outweighed the command of Pharaoh (vv. 17 and 21). And the frequent biblical injunction "do not fear" placed uncertainty, lack, lies, and attacks within the wider frame of God's providence, promise, and protection.

If, as I have argued, fear of God in the Hebrew Bible is predicated on God's power not only to create and protect life but also to destroy it, some, though surely not all, of us will find ourselves confronting certain theological claims we do not ascribe to. To put it bluntly, do you think God sends (or sent) lions to eat people who do/did not fear the LORD? If you do, I may have other questions for you. If you don't, how much of this edifice falls away? How exactly *do* we understand

of Emotion: a Component Process Approach, in: Klaus R. Scherer/Paul Ekman (eds.), *Approaches to Emotion*, Hillsdale (NJ) 1984, 293–317, 294, where he documents this understanding as an emerging consensus view.

⁵⁵ Donald R. Wehrs, Introduction: Affect and Texts. *Contemporary Inquiry in Historical Context*, in: idem/Thomas Blake (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Affect Studies and Textual Criticism*, Cham, Switzerland, 2017, 1–93, 2.

⁵⁶ Margaret Wetherell, *Affect and Emotion: A New Social Science Understanding*, London, 2012, 51.

⁵⁷ *Ahmed* (note 29), 12.

God's power over life and death? The answer to that question, however difficult, uncertain, or complex, will necessarily shape how we approach "fear of the LORD" in our preaching.

We saw in Deuteronomy and Proverbs that discourse of fear aimed to inculcate specific emotion-responses, decision making, and behavior. Psalms used "fearers of God" as an in-group label, constructing a discourse of belonging and reward to reinforce affect, disposition, group identity and cohesion, and conformity of social and religious practice. Yet conformity within one group often means opposition to another. Discourses of fear, including fear of God, continue to divide people from one another.

The insights of Wehrs, Wetherell, and Ahmed highlight the critical, contemporary role of scripture, parent, teacher, politician, news media, social network, troll farm, faith community, and preacher in constructing affective discourses that guide judgments and motivate behavior. How do we do this responsibly? In some ways I think that for all its violence, 2Kings 17 offers us much needed guidance, helping us to shed our willful romanticism so that we can view biblical discourses of fear with a more sober eye. We see that catechesis can fail, theological discourse can be coopted for manipulative ends, and the results are often difficult to predict. But fear is not something we wish away. We can try to hide from the God who knows our sin, and from the objects of our fear on earth. Or, we can answer fear with courage, naming and calling upon the God of justice and mercy as we challenge and respond to the fears that haunt and shape our world today.

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The Reality of Fear: Preaching in a Frightened World

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Abstract

Fear is a recurrent theme in today's popular culture. Film director Steven Spielberg's lifelong work presents the full range from awe and fear to terror, heading towards a deeply humanist approach of overcoming fear. This article puts homiletics into the context of current sociocultural discourse by applying the concept of 'paradigm scenario' (Ronald de Sousa) to fear in media culture and preaching. Preaching, like film, works with emotions such as fear and anxiety, initiating strong physical and mental reaction. To preach within a fearful world demands that one be aware of the psychology of fear. As much as preachers are ready to face their personal fears, they abstain from frightening others. At best, preaching is the art of supporting people to live life liberated by the gospel, speaking up against those who create an atmosphere of fear. The gospel provides numerous paradigm scenarios of courage and vision.

Prologue

In a haunting Episode of the first season of the TV-series, "House of Cards,"¹ US congressman Frank Underwood (Kevin Spacey) delivers a homily of sorts to a devout congregation, inserting all the right phrases and pushing all the right buttons, offering the perfect image of a god-fearing Christian. He encourages the faithful to trust God, love God, even if God's ways are not their ways. In the middle of his sermon he abruptly turns to the camera and talks to us, the all-knowing audience, declaring that what he says has nothing to do with what he truly thinks. His real thoughts would not make for powerful speech. So, he consciously betrays the congregation. Frank Underwood, who will be President, does not care about God, fears neither God nor any sort of punishment for all his pretense about being a devout Christian. This is meant to 'scare the hell out of' anyone watching, for we know that nothing is scarier than a powerful politician who does not shy away from using religious sentiments when it suits him.

¹ House of Cards, Season 1, episode 3 (USA 2013).

My approach to preaching in a frightened world consists of three steps. First, I will turn to sociocultural discourse on fear, introducing the concept of *paradigm scenario* developed by Ronald de Sousa, applying it to fear in the media culture. Second, I will turn to the psychology of fear found in the field I am most familiar with, pastoral care and health care chaplaincy. The third and final part will focus on the experience of the preacher's own fear, leaning upon both Martin Luther and German theologian Otto Haendler.

1. Sociocultural discourse – paradigm scenarios in the movies and in preaching

1.1 Generating fear in the movies

Fear is an emotion that screenwriters, composers of sound and sight, editors, and directors skillfully play with. Suspense and horror movies by Alfred Hitchcock, M. Night Shyamalan and Steven Spielberg, to name but a few of the masters of this genre, have demonstrated how deep emotions can be evoked by technical means. To be frightened by an unnamed monster that dives deep down below the surface until it closes its *jaws* around our imagination, delivers an irresistible thrill to millions of paying viewers. The fascination with the sheer emotion of fear, while securely settled in a recliner, lures millions of people to the theater. Steven Spielberg, director of the movie *Jaws* (1974) later confessed that he drove viewers with an emotional whip to bring them to the point he wanted them to be. His protagonist, police officer Brody (Roy Scheider), living life as a loving middle-class father, is afraid of water. Of course, his fears materialize in a huge great white shark. Brody has to face and confront him and – through self-denial and the willingness to sacrifice – master him.

1.2 Playing with fear in preaching

By diving into the world of Steven Spielberg's cinema, I want to explore the art of playing with fear in the movies, for it is not all that far removed from the art of playing with fear in the history of preaching. Emotions experienced in the darkness of the movie theater have in earlier times been experienced by many Christians sitting in the pew, listening to masterly crafted "*fire and brimstone preaching*." Gregory S. Jackson, scholar in English and American studies at Rutgers University, published an in-depth analysis of evangelical preaching and its contribution to North American culture. His study of preaching during the era of the Great Awakening and subsequent revival movements demonstrates how sensations of fear were manufactured through narrative patterns and lively imagery, which drove congregants toward anxious, yet heartfelt conversion. By the eighteenth century, "Protestant pedagogy reinstated increasingly visually oriented language into

sermons [describing] ‘Sinners in the Hands of An Angry God.’”² Jackson demonstrates how homiletics of this period used a “Hermeneutics of Fear” and followed what he names “Hell’s Plot.”³ The 16th century Reformation had overcome the vivid use of purgatory-images (depicted in detail on the canvases of Dutch painter Hieronymus Bosch) which formerly served as sufficient motivation for people to partake in the Church’s means of salvation. The Reformation turned to the image of the redemptive cross of Christ, abolishing purgatory as such. However, 17th and 18th century preaching returned to using fear, literally scaring the hell out of congregants by painting pictures of hell – this time with words. While purgatory was at least a temporal, finite punishment, hell is eternal. Preachers were so eloquent in describing a personalized hell that imagining being in hell became a psychological experience leading to real action: an immediate submission to the preacher’s rigid morals, omitting any theory-based reflection. Fear, thus, “came to be [...] an important mechanism of conversion in homiletic pedagogies.”⁴ This kind of homiletics has rightfully been called “sensational savagery.”⁵

1.3 A short theory of Spielberg’s and current cinema’s presentation of fear

Let me return to the world of the arts, as homiletics has often done,⁶ order to learn more about the cultural discourse concerning fear. I will concentrate on the art of film.

Steven Spielberg has – since his first films – put the more complex aspects of fear on the silver screen: especially the emotion of awe. I remember the moment when Roy Neary, the leading character played by Richard Dreyfuss, witnesses the advent of a giant spaceship in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (USA 1977/1980). A symphony of light and organ-like sound precedes the moment when a ramp reaches down from above, a flock of celestial beings descends, and the message “do not be afraid” is conveyed into our burning hearts. Actually, the moment of awe is followed by a very short sequence of common (Jewish and Christian) prayer together with a military chaplain. The prayer is: “May God grant us help and safe passage / to show us his path / and lead us in his ways.” Before Roy Neary enters the spaceship to join the friendly aliens, a blessing is spoken by the priest: “May the Lord God give this pilgrim a safe journey.” Strengthened by biblical words of blessing, the audience is ready to indulge in pure awe.

² Gregory S. Jackson, *The Word and its Witness. The Spiritualization of American Realism*, Chicago/London 2008, 29.

³ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶ Cf. *David Buttrick’s* (1927–2017) concept of moves & structures: *David Buttrick*, *Homiletic. Moves and Structures*, Philadelphia 1987; and – most influential in Germany – *Martin Nicol/Alexander Deeg*, *Im Wechselschritt zur Kanzel. Praxisbuch Dramaturgische Homiletik*, Göttingen 2013, 20.

Close Encounters, like *Jaws*, came to the theaters in the 1970s, amid an oil crisis, the Cold War, and a deep, frightening economic recession in Western countries. Richard Dreyfuss starred in both movies. What made both his characters so accessible to the audience was that his fear of the unknown – the creature from the depths as well as the being from above – resembled struggles in his and our inner and private life.

Spielberg, always the master of the varieties of ambivalence between fear and awe, played skillfully with basic fears and our longing for awe. Many of Spielberg's movies center on phobias, reaching back to his own childhood experiences. But cinema, for Spielberg, has always been a way to transform himself from someone who is afraid to someone who frightens.⁷ The *Jurassic Park* series started with a sense of awe watching dinosaurs grazing in a soft meadow, depicted as a pastoral scene. Through human greed however, a paradise garden turns into hell. The only escape is either through innocent, childlike faith, or, as Richard Attenborough's character explicitly does, a confession of sin. The *Jurassic Park* series entertained viewers after the end of the Cold War, during a prolonged period of neo-capitalist economics, and the rise of the ecological movement, and both are reflected in the plot. Spielberg's deeply humanist message, however, has not prevailed. Capitalism rules like dinosaurs, and climate change can be denied. Spielberg is in some ways an entertaining preacher; one whose parables fascinate, albeit without lasting effect on an audience that loves the thrill but hates to be called to action. Over the years, while I was becoming fascinated by Spielberg's cinema, Protestant preaching in Germany focused heavily on ethical issues of peace, justice, and preservation of creation, all themes of the World Council of Churches (WCC). "Lead me from death to life, from falsehood to truth, / Lead me from despair to hope, from fear to trust. / Lead me from hate to love, from war to peace, / Let peace fill our beings, our world and our universe."⁸ This Prayer for Peace composed by Philip Potter for the WCC assembly in Vancouver 1983 intoned both fear and a longing for awe.

Finally, Steven Spielberg dared to take a close look at the most frightening monster of all: the human being, represented by Amon Goeth (played by Ralph Fiennes) in *Schindler's List* (USA, 1993), is not so different from ourselves, who randomly aims his gun at women, children, and men, and sends hundreds into the gas chambers of German Concentration camps. The camera takes us into the chamber of death. Fear is all around, but the most frightening thing of all is that this was not fiction, but fact. Still, *Schindler's List* also spoke about awe, when a rogue-like Oskar Schindler's soul is touched by the naked, vulnerable face of another human being, who must depend solely on

⁷ "Kino, das ist für Steven Spielberg immer auch ein Mittel, sich von dem, der Angst hat, in jenen zu verwandeln, der Angst macht." Georg Seesslen, *Steven Spielberg und seine Filme*, Marburg 2001, 68.

⁸ <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/1983-vancouver/prayer-for-peace>, inspired by the Peace Prayer of *St. Francis of Assisi* (early 13th century).

him. It is a moment Martin Buber (1923) described as the “I-Thou-relationship.” While the relationship between the human person and God is always an I-Thou one, the relationship between two people is very frequently an I-It one, in which the other is treated as an object. This is frightening. According to Buber, a human person’s relation to other creatures may sometimes enter the I-Thou realm – and this is the moment of awe. Somehow, Steven Spielberg’s work artfully illustrated Buber’s philosophy. Conversion of the heart starts with the realization that we must overcome our fear of the other by connecting, relating, communicating.

Movies, novels, and theater have been teachers for homileticians for many years now. Movies, like preaching, are part of our cultural discourse. Movies are indicators of the sense of fear and awe that we hold for the world we live in. This is the world we speak in and speak to when we preach, either prophetically, intensifying feelings of anxiety, or caressing the soul with the angelic greeting: Do not be afraid! Peace be with you.

Current trends in the movies, therefore, should closely be followed by homileticians. The superhero movie genre of the last two or three years, for example, has undergone a transformation. In the beginning, characters like Spiderman, Superman, Wolverine, or Katniss Everdeen from *The Hunger Games* were Christ-like figures, wounded healers, sacrificing themselves for the good of others, humble in their disguise, fearful of public recognition. Current super-hero-movies like *Avengers – Infinity War* however, present ultra-rich, narcissistic characters who fight to win, not caring for humans or any particular values. Film critic Susan Vahabzadeh wrote that the current trend of movies reflects pure escapism by repressing the frightening dangers in the real world.⁹ Today’s superheroes know nothing of fear, nor are they troubled by –or even aware – of the inner twists and frailties of character. Something seems to be changing in the emotional field of fear and awe.

1.4 The emotion of fear and sermons as paradigm scenarios

Ronald de Sousa’s theory of emotions describes a “rationality of emotion.”¹⁰ De Sousa understands emotions to have a cognitive dimension as well as a social dimension. While emotions are deeply subjective, they are also generic, accessible to different individuals. We learn to understand emotions by participation or observation of what de Sousa calls ‘paradigm scenarios.’ Being exposed to certain scenarios in culture not only teaches us about emotions, but trains us in appropriate action and reaction to them. For example, the paradigm scenario of the witch being

⁹ <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/kino-und-gesellschaft-vergessst-robin-hood-1.4026677-2>

¹⁰ Ronald de Sousa, *Die Rationalität des Gefühls*, Frankfurt a.M. 2016. First published as *The Rationality of Emotion*, Cambridge 1987.

burned can be exploited in political campaigns, generating shouts to “lock her up”: De Sousa says, “[we] are educated in the ways of emotions through fairy tales, fables, songs, plays, paintings, novels, and films as much as through direct experience.”¹¹ Biblical narratives can certainly be understood as paradigm scenarios.

Relating de Sousa’s theory to the study of religion, Dutch author Desiree Berendsen writes: “Emotions [...] function in a context. This context determines their meaning and their rationality.”¹² As we have seen with Steven Spielberg’s movies, sociocultural contexts determine meaning and reception. Berendsen applies this to religious context: In a “religious tradition [...] one learns to interpret specific emotions as religious emotions. [...] religious traditions are the paradigm scenarios for religious emotions in the sense that they are the context in which religious emotions are learned and that they provide ways to cope with those kinds of emotions.”¹³ If we want to understand fear in terms of religious emotions, we need to understand religious traditions of fear and awe as paradigm scenarios, because “religious communities are the places where people can become acquainted with these kinds of emotions.”¹⁴ What does this mean for preaching?

As we learn from cultural artefacts like film, experience can be simulated, invoking fabricated emotions by rhetorical means.¹⁵ Preaching, like film, works with emotions. Of course, it is only a small step between moving and manipulating. Emotions such as fear and anxiety are able to initiate strong physical and mental reaction, even generating behavioral responses.¹⁶ Demonizing or dehumanizing an individual or an ethnic group are well-known manipulative tricks in films and videos, and are able to raise populist sentiment. The world of preaching is no stranger to this. Shortly before and at the beginning of World War I, sermons preached to congregations in Germany, France, the United Kingdom, and even Russia, made heavy use of nationalist sentiments, creating apocalyptic fears and demonizing other nations¹⁷ to persuade congregations to follow in the call to war.

¹¹ *Murray Smith*, *Film, Art, and the Third Culture. A Naturalized Aesthetics of Film*, Oxford 2017, 199.

¹² *Desiree Berendsen*, *Religious Traditions as Paradigm Scenarios. Applying Ronald de Sousa’s concept to William James’ View on Religious Emotions*, in: Willem Lemmens, Walter van Herck (ed.), *Religious Emotions. Some Philosophical Explorations*, Cambridge 2008, 59–74, 63.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Author *Jörg Herrmann* quotes the famous title of *Ed.S. Tan*, „Film as an Emotion Machine” (1996). Cf. *Jörg Herrmann*, *Zuflucht für die Seele. Über Kino, Gefühl und Religion*, in: Lars Charbonnier/Matthias Mader/Birgit Weyel (eds.), *Religion und Gefühle. Praktisch-theologische Perspektiven einer Theorie der Emotionen*, Göttingen 2013, 203–216.

¹⁶ Cf. *Thomas Anz*, *Künste des Umgangs mit Gefühlen und ihre Wirkungen. Reflexionen zur Homiletik aus Perspektiven kulturwissenschaftlicher Emotionsforschung*, in: Alexander Deeg (ed.), *Erlebnis Predigt*. Leipzig 2014, 61–80.

¹⁷ Cf. *Martin Greschat*, *Christentum und Kirchen im Ersten Weltkrieg*, in: *Liturgie und Kultur* 5.2 (2014), 6–16.

If emotions like awe and fear are means of persuasion in preaching,¹⁸ then ethical issues arise. Fear is a strong emotion, one of the basic dimensions of what it means to be human. To preach on fear, as well as to arouse such emotions in preaching, requires a respect of the autonomy of the congregant, their emotional experience, and the dignity of their emotions in relationship to faith, religion and spirituality.¹⁹

2. The psychology of fear: fear as *conditio humanae*

2.1 When fear is an appropriate reaction to danger

Considering religious traditions of fear, let me share with you a story about Ms. Goldschmidt.²⁰ It is a paradigm scenario for my own preaching on fear.

I met her when I was working as chaplain in a Palliative Care unit of a large German university hospital. Ms. Goldschmidt was a woman in her 60s, diagnosed with incurable, advanced metastatic breast-cancer. Goldschmidt, who was single, had taken care of her late father who had died one and a half years before of cancer. She had two sisters, one of which she had felt very close to, but who had also died of breast-cancer one year ago, in the same clinic. We first met at that time. This time, the hospital staff informed me that she had severe symptoms of anxiety. Neither medication nor short-term psychological intervention improved her situation. She would not sleep at night, turning her into a nervous wreck and an unfriendly patient. Goldschmidt was a devout Roman Catholic, but responded well to me as a Lutheran chaplain, with a warm welcome whenever I offered a visit. After she had told me of her grief, we turned to the anxiety that kept her awake each night, trembling and shivering. “Is there something specific you are afraid of?” I asked. She replied: “No, there is nothing I could name.” She was not afraid of death as she looked forward to being back with deceased family members. She was not afraid of the process of dying as she had witnessed peaceful death. Nor was she afraid of God or divine punishment, as she trusted in a loving and forgiving God.

“You’re Catholic, aren’t you?” I asked, “do you have a special regard for the saints?”

“Oh yes,” she said, “I am especially fond of St. George.”

¹⁸ Cf. *Manuel Stetter*, *Die Predigt als Praxis der Veränderung. Ein Beitrag zur Grundlegung der Homiletik*, Göttingen 2018, 259ff.

¹⁹ German Practical Theologian *Friedrich Niebergall's* homiletic “Die modern Predigt” encouraged preachers to study congregants’ emotions, psychologically and statistically. He also admonished preachers to respect their feelings. Cf. *Albrecht Grözinger*, *Predigt und Gefühl. Eine homiletische Erkundungsreise*, in: Lars Charbonnier/Matthias Mader/Birgit Weyel (eds.): *Religion und Gefühle. Praktisch-theologische Perspektiven einer Theorie der Emotionen*, Göttingen 2013, 314–325.

²⁰ The name is a pseudonym. The patient allowed me to tell her story for educational purposes.

“Isn’t he the one who killed dragons?” I asked. She nodded. Since she had no picture of the saint, I returned to my office, printing out a b/w copy of one of the traditional images. I suggested that she might meditate on this picture and pray for St. George’s support when the anxiety returned at night. Goldschmidt followed my advice, and the next day she smiled and said that it had worked well; but, alas, the next night, the painting and the prayer didn’t help anymore. The art therapist who had seen the b/w print on the table, asked if she could work with the patient. They put colors to the picture, gold for George’s armor, grey and black for the dragon. Focusing on the dragon, they worked on its contours, defining it, thus limiting its extent. As they colored St. George’s lance, Ms. Goldschmidt suddenly said: “He doesn’t kill the dragon. He just keeps the lance in its mouth as if to contain it.” In fact, the dragon on the picture seemed to stay alive. Goldschmidt later told me that through the process of coloring the image she learned that her fear, just like a dragon, would not go away, but with the help of others, especially her faith in saints, it could be contained and limited in extent. She was able to live with fear, finding peace of mind, and getting some rest while still living with fear until death. The picture of St. George – not as a dragon slayer, but as a tamer of fear – functioned as a paradigm scenario, teaching her to cope with fear. Her Roman Catholic tradition, while sometimes blamed for teaching negative religious coping skills, in this case was helpful. Her appreciation of the saints, often assumed to be an aspect of extrinsic religion, had become a personal faith experience, becoming intrinsic religion (Allport), helping to cope with fear-related problems in a positive way.

Psychologist of religion Kenneth Pargament describes how religious coping performs five major functions: to discover meaning, to garner control, to acquire comfort by virtue of closeness to God, to achieve closeness with others, and to transform life.²¹ In Ms. Goldschmidt’s case, all five functions were fulfilled during the art therapy process. She discovered meaning and self-efficacy; she gained control over her situation; she experienced closeness to a saint and thus to God; she found a connection with others, especially hospital staff; and her life was transformed from being fear-ridden to being able to approach death and the afterlife with hope and courage.

2.2 Symptoms of fear in End-of-Life Care

Preaching is a different form of communication than one-on-one counseling or silently being with a person. But communication, in the end, needs to reach both the heart and soul of each individual congregant. Preaching is a transformative praxis, engaging both preacher and congregant.²²

²¹ Kenneth I. Pargament/Harold G. Koenig/Lisa M. Perez, The many methods of religious coping. Development and initial validation of RCOPE, in: *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 564 (2000), 519–543.

²² Cf. *Manuel Stetter* 2018. Cf. also *Albrecht Grözinger’s* remarks on Niebergall’s homiletic: the essence of preaching according to Niebergall is transformation, ‘Veränderungen in Menschen’. *Grözinger* (note 19), 321.

Preachers first need to understand the subjective emotions of people, before they start working with them. Ms. Goldschmidt helped me to understand the religion-related aspects of fear in psychological terms: differentiating between extrinsic and intrinsic religion, and asking about their contribution to coping mechanisms. Following this approach, I want to explore more deeply the emotion of fear using existential situations such as Palliative Care.

Within Palliative Care, fear and anxiety – next to depression – are the most common psychological symptoms of patients suffering from terminal disease. Manifestations of fear differ vastly, from fear as appropriate reaction to sickness to psychopathological forms described in the International Code of Diagnosis (ICD 10). Almost 50 % of all cancer patients are heavily burdened by fear of some sort, more than 11 % from pathological fear (panic etc.). Fear is correlated with poor communication with others, especially health care staff, a lack of social support, and recurring experience of pain and breathing problems.²³ Objects of fear differ: some are illness-related, others are related to impending death. Objects of fear can include religious themes such as fear of punishment, feelings of guilt, and fear of God. Fear manifests itself in somatic forms like increased heart rhythm, shortness of breath, trembling, diarrhea, sweating, dry mouth, and weakness. Symptoms of fear disable patients' concentration and ability to think clearly. Fear sometimes is a reaction to concrete danger or an ill-defined expectation that something bad is going to happen. It can come as a sudden panic attack or as permanent insecurity. Very often, fear results in an inability to take action, leading to tenseness and fatigue, suppressed aggressiveness and growing depression.

Current psychological theories – apart from Palliative Care – understand fear as *conditio humanae*. Following S. Freud's approach, psychoanalytical concepts try to understand fear from the depths of human existence and human disorders. Fear has both constructive and destructive dimensions.²⁴ It is first encountered as affective reaction to a baby's separation from its mother causing a sensation of existential danger, guilt, and shame. Psychoanalysis assumes that fear always signals relationship disorders, pointing at dangers to a person's connectedness with others, with the self, or with transcendence. All forms of fear have to do with the loss of something one feels closely connected with, the experience of utter isolation and a lack of purpose. But, according to Jean-Paul Sartre's (atheistic) reading of Gen 3, the experience of fear is the core condition of the possibility of human freedom, forcing the person to fully become one's self.²⁵ From a theological

²³ Cf. Leitlinienprogramm Onkologie der Arbeitsgemeinschaft der Wissenschaftlichen Medizinischen Fachgesellschaften e. V. (AWMF), Deutschen Krebsgesellschaft e. V. (DKG) und Deutschen Krebshilfe (DKH) (Hg.), S3-Leitlinie Palliativmedizin für Patienten mit einer nicht heilbaren Krebserkrankung, Teil 2, Entwurf (publication in 2019); cf. also James C. Ballenger et al., Consensus statement on depression, anxiety, and oncology, in: J Clin Psychiatry 62 (2001) Suppl 8, 64-67.

²⁴ Cf. Sabine Ibben-Bahl, Angst und die eine Wirklichkeit. Paul Tillich's transdisziplinäre Angsttheorie im Dialog mit gegenwärtigen Emotionskonzepten. Inaugural Dissertation, Münster (manuscript 2018), 263.

²⁵ Cf. Angelika Ebrecht-Laermann, Angst, Gießen 2014, 14f.

point of view, the situation of being disconnected and estranged is the utter meaning of sin: being separated from oneself, from others, from God. Existential fear is, in a way, a non-dogmatic experience of sin. Experiencing fear is a deeply emotional process of realizing oneself as a sinner. Thus, it makes no sense – neither on a theological nor on an empathy-oriented level – to tell someone: “You don’t need to be afraid. Everything is going to be alright!”²⁶ Someone suffering from a severe illness or experiencing existential fear needs to be taken seriously. His or her existential feelings have a place in the realm of the sacred. As the hymn “Amazing Grace” puts it, a fear-stricken patient considers himself or herself to be a “wretch like me.” Sometimes, terminally ill patients blame themselves, taking a review of life lived, of missed opportunities, broken relationships, broken promises, unanswered prayers. Very often, patients are afraid that the isolation, meaninglessness, and disconnectedness will never go away. This is what “a wretch like me” feels like.

The constructive aspect of fear is that fear of separation proves that relations are real and meaningful. That there is “amazing grace.” Paul Tillich, in his classic *The Courage to Be*, demonstrated that fear fundamentally reveals the reality of the human being as well as the reality of God as Being-Itself or Ground of Being. Fear, in Tillich’s terms, is a sense of reality and one’s perception of reality. Fear is a genuine perception of transcendence. Fear represents reality, revealing the existential need for being connected. Nevertheless, fear can be a heavy burden and thus should not go untreated.

2.3 Treating symptoms of fear

Treatment suggestions within Palliative Care as well as in Psychotherapy clearly advise an open approach to fear and a deep exploration of fear by validated assessment tools like the GAD-2 (Generalized Anxiety Disorder)²⁷. Exploration of fear means that patients are being asked precisely what it is that they are afraid of, exactly how they feel fear, where they feel it in themselves, when it began, and how often and how long these feelings occur. Assessment tools help therapists to understand how heavy the symptoms of fear weigh on a patient. A therapist’s goal is not the elimination of fear, but an understanding and, eventually, a transformation of fear.²⁸

²⁶ Cf. *Shelly Lyons’* report on her experience in the Anxiety Series, a series from The Lily, published by The Washington Post. *Shelly Lyons*, Constant knots and an uneasiness in my stomach, in: The Washington Post, July 19, 2018. *Lyons* writes she doesn’t “need to be pitied, judged, or told, ‘Just don’t worry so much’ or ‘Oh, just do it!’ In those moments, what’s most helpful is empathy, a reminder to take slow deep breaths and ground [one]self, maybe a hug, and eventually a good laugh.”

²⁷ <https://adaa.org/understanding-anxiety/generalized-anxiety-disorder-gad>.

²⁸ Cf. *Ebrecht-Laermann* (note 25), 98.

If there is any advice for preachers in this it is to respect the reality of fear. Emotions of fear exist within congregants and can be experienced as physical, psychological, social, and spiritual reality. Fear must not be created. Many congregants may have concrete histories of fear, some may presently be burdened with fear. Preparing for sermons, it may be helpful to reflect upon these assessment tools with specific congregants in mind. Can a sermon help them explore their feelings? Can it transform fear of isolation into a sense of being connected to the Ground of Being, in order to be able to hear and understand the gospel message, “Do not be afraid!”?

As the art therapist in Ms. Goldschmidt’s case was able to do, the explorative process sometimes needs to transcend verbal conversion and include *gestalt*, nonverbal, creative forms. This is something that is easily applied to homiletics as sermons are always embedded in a liturgical context, and include sensual elements, especially music.²⁹ I was reminded of this when President Barack Obama, in his eulogy for the Reverend Clementa Pinckney, after the Charleston shooting in June 2015, inserted lines from “Amazing Grace” as a refrain, and finally started to sing the hymn in a hesitating, broken manner. It not only encouraged the whole congregation, but many others to hum and finally sing along, facing the terror of mass shootings by singing a song known to be meaningful and powerful, a song that could be trusted.³⁰

Music, songs, like touch, sometimes allow for regressive reassurance. Childhood images, symbols, and rituals of faith (i.e., remembering what felt consoling and reassuring as a child) very often hint at ways to re-connect and overcome the sense of isolation. The caressing touch of a parent’s hand, the lullaby helping to go into a dark night’s sleep. In Palliative Care, chaplains often work to help patients and families reconnect to childhood memories and family rituals and recreate these in the current existential situation. Past paradigm scenarios are remembered to cope with current situations.

To sum up my point from pastoral care: Fear is part of the *conditio humanae*. Fear need not be spiritualized or theologized but needs to be understood from experience. Emotion and cognition belong together and can be described neurologically. Former experiences of fear and consolation are recorded and stored in our brain. Sometimes emotions, both of fear and of consolation, can be triggered by words and symbols which reconnect to earlier experiences.³¹ Fear is a reality in itself, or at least is experienced as real. Ignoring fear in proclamation (that is, a “fearless proclamation”) is not an option. Consolation, however, is real as well. Situations of consolation, very often

²⁹ Cf. *Patrick Archie/Eduardo Bruera/Lorenzo Coben*, Music-based interventions in palliative cancer care. A review of quantitative studies and neurobiological literature, in: *Support Care Cancer*, 21.9 (2013), 2609–2624.

³⁰ https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/06/26/transcript-obama-delivers-eulogy-for-charleston-pastor-the-rev-clementa-pinckney/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.fddf6a913bd1.

³¹ With this, I follow *Williams James*’ classical approach to emotions in *William James*, *What is an emotion?* First published in: *Mind* 1884.

contained in scripture and Gospel readings, are paradigm scenarios, teaching anxious beings the courage to be, to trust and to believe.

3. Understanding fear from within: The anxiety of the preacher

I will never forget one evening in 2001, when I attended an ecumenical evening prayer service at the Cathedral in Munich, a few days after 9/11. The presiders at the service were Roman-Catholic Cardinal Friedrich Wetter and Lutheran Bishop Hermann von Loewenich. They did not try to explain anything of what had happened. They did not even describe the devastation that had taken place in Manhattan. All they did, at least in my recollection, was to recite Psalm 46 line by line, with long pauses in between.

“God *is* our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. / Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the heart of the sea; / Though the waters thereof roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling” (ESV, Ps 46:2–3). In hindsight, Psalm 46 functioned as paradigm scenario for a rightfully frightened crowd to experience trust: “God *is* in the midst of her; she shall not be moved: God shall help her, *at break of day.*”

I remember how I felt on 9/11 and the days after. I remember how important it was to share my anxiety with others, trying to find consolation in the words of scripture and the hymns of our mothers and fathers. I remember how *Angst* felt to me as a congregant. It was fear in more than one dimension: from terror’s rough grip to the lingering fear of inevitable war, from fear for a beloved friend’s life who lived in a Manhattan to anxiety that the world as we knew it would never be the same. I was thankful to the Cardinal and the Bishop for turning to the words of the Psalms. There was ‘containment’ in them, *they contained my fear, a container of emotion*. It was, alas, way too early for consolation.

How, if anything, does consolation feel? Let me take you to a church service on Easter Sunday morning in 2007. I had recently become a widower, due to the death of my partner from cancer. I was going through the complete grief’s handbook of emotions. I went hoping for some experience of ‘Easter.’ The hymns were helpful, sung by the congregation around me, including friends and family. But the sermon, delivered by an accomplished and theologically sound pastor, didn’t mean anything to me. I remember almost nothing of the sermon – which mainly reflected upon a symbolic understanding of Easter. But I strongly remember my growing hostility towards the

preacher: “You have no idea how it feels! You have no idea what death and grief means. If you don’t know that, how dare you tell me about resurrection?”

I know that my sentiments were unjust. I may simply have not been able to listen carefully and with the right attitude. But that is not my point. What I learned from this experience is an understanding that congregants always attend religious services for a reason. Some may be there for entertainment, some to escape everyday life for an hour of praise and glory. But there will always be someone who is going through a time of anxiety and who is in need of being reconnected to real faith. Someone within the congregation needs “the preacher as witness,”³² to testify “on behalf of the people, for their belief and understanding.”³³ This listener will critically weigh the preacher’s claim to truth. Tom G. Long writes that “the preacher as witness is not authoritative because of rank or power but rather because of what the preacher has seen and heard.”³⁴ While the witness is “testifying to a gospel larger than the preacher’s personal faith,”³⁵ he or she is involved in it by some sort of personal experience. Preaching testifies to the truth of the gospel before the internal court of each listener – and foremost – the internal court of a conscious preacher.

3.1 Martin Luther as witness to transforming fear

The best witness to this is Martin Luther. Fear was, in Luther’s early years, helpful in the salvific process, as fear of judgement leads to confession of sin.³⁶

Luther’s experience and theological reasoning developed. In 1519, Luther published sermons that give insight into his experience as a pastor to others as well as his own frightened conscience. He no longer appreciated fear; Luther had also experienced the devastating effects of fear and concluded: “Fear does nothing good. Thus, one needs to be free and cheerful in all things and stand firmly.”³⁷ Luther understood that the constant confrontation with anxious self-reflection perpetuates anxiety. Rather, Luther turned to the image of the suffering Christ. Meditating upon Christ’s trembling in the passion narratives, he understood that Christ took fear on himself as part of human existence, going through and finally overcoming fear. By faith alone, there is no need to fear. Fear to Luther has no religious or spiritual quality. Also, fear has no pedagogical function.³⁸ Justification happens by grace alone. Luther is fully aware that fear still holds him in its grip as it

³² *Thomas G. Long*, *The Witness of Preaching*, Louisville, KY 2005.

³³ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁶ In an early sermon from the year 1515, *Luther* talks about fear as “timor Dei”. Cf. *Thorsten Dietz*, *Der Begriff der Furcht bei Luther*, Tübingen 2009.

³⁷ Translated from WA 2, 107: “Forcht thut nichts guts.”; quoted by *Dietz* (note 36), 228.

³⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 250.

does others. During the 1520s – with war and upheaval, pestilence and death all around – there were many things to be afraid of. Luther was himself struck by panic attacks and anxiety. His treatment for himself as his advice to others was – more than the spoken word – music, especially hymns based on psalms. These hymns do not ignore fear but put fear into words and sound, thus defining fear, and then call upon God to break fear’s spell. Shortly before Martin Luther’s father died, Luther wrote a letter to him, referring to Psalm 91: “He will cover you with his pinions, / and under his wings you will find refuge; / his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. / You will not fear the terror of the night, / nor the arrow that flies by day, / nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, / nor the destruction that wastes at noonday” (ESV, Ps 91:4–6). Luther writes, “Trust Christ, who strangled death, complete with all sins, who will await you.”³⁹

Martin Luther is a witness to the reality of fear even as he testifies to the power of faith. Martin Luther’s theology is a theology of experience: “Sola experientia facit theologum.”⁴⁰ The external word of scripture needs to become heartfelt truth, “Herzenglauben.”⁴¹ Luther learned as much from life-long contesting, by being challenged by fears, the dangers of life and work, inner demons, and desperation, as he learned from studying scripture.

3.2 The preacher’s need to face and confront one’s own demons

Nevertheless, reading Luther’s sermons we understand that, fear-ridden as he was, his inner emotions caused him to demonize his adversaries. Right until his last sermons, days before his own death, his sermons were full of anti-Jewish sentiments,⁴² hinting at internal turmoil turned outwardly, victimizing others.

In German homiletic literature, it took until the second half of the 20th century to understand that the character and personal traits of a preacher have greatly influence his or her preaching. Fear as a *psychological* reality within the preacher’s mind was considered peripheral, since the preacher as subject was not of interest, being nothing but a herald of the truth. It took brave theologians to finally take a closer look at the psychology of preachers, against the tendency of mainstream homiletics. Psychological insights, mainly Sigmund Freud’s and Carl G. Jung’s psychoanalytic theories, opened new understandings of the role of the preacher as person.

³⁹ *Martin Luther’s* letter is included in Albrecht Beutel (ed.), *Martin Luther. Den Menschen nahe. Briefe an Freunde und an die Familie*, Leipzig 2011, 53–56. There is no need to be afraid. Even if *Luther* in his *Small Catechism* (1529) starts his explanation of the first commandment with the words “We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things”, the accent is not on the verbs fear, love, and trust, but God. God is sufficient – fear can be dealt with, because God is above all things.

⁴⁰ *Albrecht Beutel*, *Theologie als Erfahrungswissenschaft*, in: idem (ed.), *Luther-Handbuch*, Tübingen 32017, 503–509.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 507.

⁴² Cf. *Heinz Schilling*, *Martin Luther. Rebell in einer Zeit des Umbruchs. Eine Biographie*, München 32017, 590.

One of the pioneers of pastoral psychology in Germany is Otto Haendler (1890–1981), who lived and published in East Germany. Haendler, a close friend of Paul Tillich since his early youth, started studying psychoanalysis in 1935 in Berlin, including 150 hours of training analysis following C.G. Jung’s school. Being ousted by the Nazis from a teaching position, he published a book on preaching in 1941 based on the psychology of the unconscious.⁴³ Haendler focused on the importance of the preacher as subject: “I am condemned to preach the way I am. It cannot be more, and it should not be less.” Only preachers who know their own inner depths, will be able to reach the depths of the souls of congregants. Wherever a preacher is violent against himself, he will use violence against others. No wonder, then, that Otto Haendler wrote in length on the subject of fear. In the early 1950s, after surviving the terror of the Nazi regime and WW II and being faced with the threat of atomic war in the Cold War, Haendler wrote on “fear as humanity’s scourge that rules horribly in all parts of the world.”⁴⁴ This forced him to try to understand its origin and to discuss the means by which it might be overcome. Distinguishing the different forms of fear, Haendler was able to show that faith does not eradicate fear. Faith, as trust in God, helps us instead to embrace and understand one’s innermost fear and its deepest roots. Most of all, Haendler encouraged readers to face their own fear, trying to understand and differentiate, to become aware of and not be afraid of it. Haendler’s goal as a psychotherapist as well as a preacher was “Lebenshilfe”: helping people to live their lives. A preacher’s goal is not to move people to fear God. The fear of God helps people to not be afraid in a frightened world, but to be free to love, to be free of fear, and free to hope. Haendler developed his psychologically informed concept of preaching from the teaching experience. The inner struggles of the preacher all showed in the outspoken word of the sermon, very often leading to judgmental, moralist sermons.

Preaching, however, is the art of supporting people to live life, liberated by the gospel. After my partner died of cancer, I had to deal not only with my own grief. I had to grapple with inner struggles: what if the God I believed in simply did not exist? What purpose was there in my life as a chaplain and preacher if life can be taken away from you when you’re only 48 years old – or even younger, as many of my patients were? What if my own professional existence is built on self-deception? What can I be a witness to if I can only witness to the reality of death?

One verse from Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians helped me, supported by some 60 hours of psychoanalysis. “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Fear is not weakness, but fear weakens. Preaching in a frightened world means preaching from

⁴³ *Otto Haendler*, *Die Predigt. Tiefenpsychologische Grundlagen und Grundfragen*, Berlin 1941. Cf. *Traugott Roser*, *Otto Haendler (1890–1981). Pionier psychologisch fundierter Pastoralpsychologie*, in: Klaus Raschzok/Karl-Heinz Röhlhlin (eds.), *Kleine Geschichte der Seelsorge im 20. Jahrhundert. Biographische Essays*, Leipzig 2018, 113–122. Cf. also *Michael Klessmann*, *Pastoralpsychologie. Ein Lehrbuch*, Neukirchen-Vluyn 2004, 626f.

⁴⁴ *Otto Haendler*, *Angst und Glaube*, Berlin 1952.

within, aware of our own frightening personal traits, yet witnessing to a gospel that sets us free to live life and inspires us to overcome obstacles. To witness to truth is to witness to what we find to be true in our lives; that which is worth living for. Upon returning to chaplaincy, I found deep gratification in my work with patients, *simply being with* frightened patients and their families. There is more truth to love than there is reality in death.

Epilogue

In his 2017 movie “The Post,” Steven Spielberg tells the story of Katharine Graham, the first female publisher of a major American newspaper. Against threats by Richard Nixon’s government that she would be sentenced to jail and the newspaper The Washington Post be destroyed, she published classified documents on the Vietnam War. Katharine Graham, played by Meryl Streep, faces her fears and decides to stick with truth, even if lies seem to prevail. It is her mission to speak up against those who create an atmosphere of fear. Steven Spielberg knows how to create paradigm scenarios of courage desperately needed in a time of leaders who are seemingly not afraid of anything, not even exploiting the fear of God.

It is never too late for preachers to do likewise: “May God grant us help and safe passage / to show us his path / and lead us in his ways.”

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What happened last night in Sweden?

To preach without fear in a Scandinavian Folk Church, in a situation when populist nationalism rises in the context of migration.

Anders Göranson

Abstract

This article focuses on the situation in the Church of Sweden, one of the largest Lutheran churches in the world. The links between the state and the church in Sweden were only recently cut. Political parties still engage with church policy and form the majority of the Church Assembly as well as many local Church councils. When nationalistic parties also are involved in church policy this becomes a challenge. Homiletics is taught at the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education as part of the final, ministerial year. At the Institute we make use of North American literature by authors like Brueggemann, Lose, Tubbs Tisdale and Troeger. There are many differences between the Scandinavian and the North American contexts. This paper seeks to investigate how homiletical training in one context is carried out with the use of textbooks from another, different context. How can homiletics based on North American theologies fit into a Folk Church context? How does a North American homiletic approach encourage Swedish students to preach a prophetic word of God, without fear, in a situation when populist nationalism rises in the context of migration? How can prophetic preaching, as described by for instance Brueggemann and Tisdale, be contextualised in this situation? This article discusses when and how prophetic preaching inspired from the Biblical example, with its narratives and with metaphors and poetic language, should be used and when a more confrontational, head-on witness is needed.

Prelude

“[Y]ou look at what’s happening last night in Sweden. Sweden, who would believe this?”¹ 19 February 2017 the 45th President of the US made a comment about the situation in Sweden. The

¹ Sewell Chan, “Last Night in Sweden”? Trump’s Remark Baffles a Nation. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/19/world/europe/last-night-in-sweden-trumps-remark-baffles-a-nation.html> [Accessed 2018-07-22].

statement was applauded by some, ultra-right wing Swedish politicians. Most of the Swedes were left baffled.

Introduction

As in the rest of the world, migration is a contested phenomenon in Sweden. Recently a bold stance against racism was taken at a conference held in Rome on “Xenophobia, racism, and populist nationalism in the context of global migration” organized jointly by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches. The statement recognized the context of fear, both in the sense of fear of the other and the fear that migrants experience. At the same time the conference declared racism to be a sin “in both its personal and systemic expressions, radically incompatible with the Christian faith.”² I am writing this article with “fear of the other” in mind, when I discuss how prophetic preaching may be taught at the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education.

The link between populist nationalism and preaching has already been established in the public discourse. On Tuesday, 5 October, 2010, Right Rev. Eva Brunne preached this in Storkyrkan, the Diocesan Cathedral of Stockholm. The tradition is that a Church Service is held just before the opening of the Parliament. Most of the parliamentarians are present.³ There is nothing provocative in the sermon until she mentions a nation-wide manifestation that has been held the night before in a number of Swedish cities. People have been protesting to the fact that the ultra-right wing party, the Sweden Democrats, has managed to take seats in the Parliament.⁴

Last night thousands of people gathered in Stockholm and in different parts of the country to voice their opinion. Shouting their disgust about the showing of partiality. The racism that says that you don’t have the same worth as I have. [...] And this based on the notion – that we happen to be born in different parts of the world. It is not worthy of a democracy to show partiality. [My translation].⁵

² *World Council of Churches*, Message from the conference “Xenophobia, Racism and Populist Nationalism in the Context of Global Migration”. Available at: <https://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/message-from-the-conference-xenophobia-racism-and-populist-nationalism-in-the-context-of-global-migration-19-september-2018> [Accessed 2018-09-26].

³ Since 2012 an alternative, secular, ceremony is held simultaneously at another venue: *Humanisterna*, Riksmötets öppnande. Available at: <http://humanisterna.se/riksmotets-oppnande/> [Accessed 2018-07-22].

⁴ *Sveriges Radio*, Stor manifestation mot SD. Published 4 October 2010. Available at: <https://sverigesradio.se/sida/artikel.aspx?programid=103&artikel=406780> [Accessed 2018-07-03].

⁵ ‘I går kväll samlades många tusen människor i Stockholm och i olika delar av landet för att ge sin mening till känna. Ropa ut sin avsky mot det som gör skillnad på människor. Den rasism som säger att du är inte lika mycket värd som jag. [...] Och detta av en enda grund – att vi råkar vara födda i olika delar av vår värld. Det är inte värdigt en demokrati som vår att göra skillnad på människor’ (*Expressen*, Läs biskop Eva Brunnes predikan – ord för ord. Published 5 Oct 2010. Available at: <https://www.expressen.se/nyheter/val-2010/las-biskop-eva-brunnes-predikan---ord-for-ord/> [Accessed 20180703].

The Bishop never mentions the Sweden Democrats directly, but it is obvious that she speaks about them. At this point most of the Sweden Democrats leave their seats and exit the Church.⁶

Since the year 2000, the Church of Sweden is no longer a state church. However, due to a number of remaining links⁷ between Church and State, the political parties are, with no exception, involved in Church politics. The majority of the Church Assembly consists of members who have been elected via a party political nomination list. There are only a few nomination groups⁸ without direct or indirect links to political parties. Paradoxically Sweden is regarded as one of the most secularised countries in the world.⁹ This may, however, be contested. Around 70% of the population is organised in various faith communities.¹⁰

Prophetic preaching addresses power. One specific challenge in the Church of Sweden is that political power and church power often are combined in the same organisation. How will we preach on the day when [if] the Sweden Democrats become the largest party in the Parliament? Or even the largest nomination group in the Church Assembly? And even more challenging: how do we teach students to preach prophetically, in a church context were polls claim that up to 25 percent are prepared to vote for a policy that is described as populist nationalistic?¹¹

⁶ *Aftonbladet*, SD lämnade Storkyrkan. Ber kungen om ursäkt. Available at: <https://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/a/WL6Mnd/sd-lamnade-storkyrkan--ber-kungen-om-ursakt> [Accessed 2018-07-03].

⁷ With the exception of Stockholm and Tranås, the Church of Sweden is responsible for all cemeteries in Sweden. Even the Jewish and Muslim graveyards are generally looked after by staff employed by Church of Sweden. The constitution states that the regent of Sweden has to belong to the Evangelical Lutheran Confession. 'Såsom 2 § i 1809 års regeringsform uttryckligen stadgar, att Konung alltid skall vara av den rena evangeliska läran, sådan som den, uti den oförändrade Augsburgiska bekännelsen, samt Uppsala mötes beslut av år 1593, antagen och förklarad är [...]'. ['As 2 § in the Constitution of 1809 states, the regent of Sweden has to abide to the true Evangelical doctrine, adopted and explained in the Augsburg Confession and by the decisions of the Convocation of Uppsala.' My translation] *Sveriges riksdag*. Successionsordning. Available at: https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/successionsordning-18100926_sfs-1810-0926 [Accessed 2018-07-31]. Other faith communities may apply to the receiver of revenue to get help with the collection of Church fees. Church of Sweden, however, is guaranteed this service. Other religious functionaries may apply to be marriage officers. Pastors of the Church of Sweden are guaranteed this. As a matter of fact there is a specific law that describes what kind of denomination Church of Sweden should be and how it should be organized.

⁸ *Nomination group* [nomineringsgrupp] is the technical term for an organization, often a political party, which participate in Church elections.

⁹ Richard F. Tomasson, How Sweden Became So Secular, in: *Scandinavian Studies* Vol. 74.1 (2002), 61–88. Available at: https://www.jstor.org/stable/40920355?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents [Accessed 2018-07-31].

¹⁰ According to statistics from Church of Sweden, the denomination consists of 6.1 million members. *Svenska kyrkan*. Available at: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/english> [Accessed 2018-06-18]. There are a number of other faith communities. The Swedish Agency for Support to Faith Communities is a governmental body supporting approximately 40 different faith communities with grants. Adding the members of these faith communities – 795 482 – to the 6.1 million, the number of organised believers in Sweden would count close to 68 % of the population. Myndigheten för stöd till trossamfund. *Statistik om trossamfund*. Available at: <http://www.myndighetenst.se/kunskap/statistik-om-trossamfund.html> [Accessed 2018-06-18]. Sweden has 10 151 588 citizens. *SCB*, Population statistics. Available at: <http://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/population/population-composition/population-statistics/> [Accessed 2018-06-18].

¹¹ *Reuters*, Anti-immigration Sweden Democrats poll record high ahead of September election. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sweden-election/anti-immigration-sweden-democrats-poll-record-high-ahead-of-september-election-idUSKCN1I00TA> [Accessed 2018-07-31]. At the general election held 2018-09-09 the Sweden Democrats remained the third largest party in the parliament but increased their percentage of the votes. In

I visualise, as an example listener, a young, frustrated man, who is brought up in Church, with a mother active in the Parish. When his father – the parents are long time divorced – joins the Sweden Democrats, the young man decides to take this opportunity to get closer to his dad and begins to show interest in the party. How do I preach to this church member? At the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education we need to prepare the students for this and similar challenges.

How can a prophetic Kairos¹² be described in the Church of Sweden?

When I teach prophetic preaching to both Pastors- and Deacons-to-be, I have asked them about which *Kairos* they see in their context. A variety of answers have been offered. Some mention climate change either in general or more particularly as a matter of animal rights. Human sexuality and the rights of LGBTI persons are also common themes. Mental illness is another suggestion and linked to that the challenge with a high rate of suicide, especially amongst the youth. Xenophobia and more especially Islamophobia also comes high on the list. Common to all classes is the lack of consensus.

These different expressions of Kairos could all be linked to an overarching concept used by Brueggemann, namely *military consumerism*. According to him it is “the dominant narrative of our time.”¹³ He continues:

In our time and circumstance, the narrative of US military consumerism and the YHWH narrative of social transformation, justice, and compassion are deeply intertwined and there is a great resistance to sorting them out.¹⁴

It resonates with Lose’s concept *hyperconsumerism* which is opposed to the Christian story.¹⁵ A Swedish theologian, Patrik Hagman, introduces a related concept.

Capitalistic Honor Culture is a way to be human where we define our relationships to each other through consumerism. In other times and in other cultures honor was achieved through one’s position in the family, clan, profession or through deeds.

2014 they got 12,86% and in 2018 17,53%. *Valmyndigheten*, Valresultat2018. Available at: <https://www.val.se/valresultat/riksdag-landsting-och-kommun/2018/valresultat.html> [Accessed 2018-09-21].

¹² For an extended discussion about the *Kairos* concept, see: *Anders Göransson*, *The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990 – Searching for a Renewed Kairos*. Salty Print, Cape Town 2011, 32-36.

¹³ *Walter Brueggemann*, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination. Preaching an Emancipating Word*, Minneapolis 2012, 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ *David J. Lose*, *Preaching at the Crossroads. How the World – and our Preaching – is Changing*, Minneapolis 2013. 24.

Today we defend our honor through consumption of goods, thoughts and relations.

[My translation].¹⁶

This could be one way of focusing a *Kairos* in our time and our context. It also challenges the nationalistic narrative, that we see develop in many countries, where Sweden is but one example. The Sweden Democrats describe their vision like this, explaining what they want to achieve through their engagement in Church Politics:

Our vision is instead a broad and radical folk church where the Christian identity is strong and the love for one's own Country has a natural place next to the more general humanity. A Church that confirms its role as bearer of culture and defender of a Swedish, Nordic and Western cultural heritage.¹⁷

Members of this party are found in congregations and church councils. I can foresee a situation when preachers need to take a firm stand against this ideology. As already mentioned, even today, these sentiments are present in every congregation and this fact needs to be included in the preparation of a prophetic sermon.

Irrespective of how the students discern the *Kairos* or describe competing narratives in their contexts, they are bold in their preaching. But the way I experience the sermons held by students at the institute, social activism in different forms are often expressed in a way that Brueggemann would describe as *prose reductionism*.¹⁸ By prose he refers “to a world that is organized in a settled formulae, so that even pastoral prayers and love letters sound like memos.”¹⁹ There are examples when they manage to use another language, but not seldom their sermons are phrased the way Brueggemann describes. I agree with Tubbs Tisdale and Sharp when they write:

We hear too few “I Have a Dream” sermons that inspire the people of God with a new vision for the future of justice and equality that God intends, and too many sermons dedicated to analyzing the social ills of our day, calling people to accountability but offering little in terms of hope for the future.²⁰

¹⁶ ‘Den kapitalistiska hederskulturen är det sätt att vara människa där vi bestämmer våra relationer till varandra genom konsumtion. Då man i andra tider och i andra kulturer uppnår heder genom den plats man har genom sin familj, släkt, sitt yrke eller genom de handlingar man utfört, får och försvarar vi vår heder genom att konsumera varor, tankar och relationer’ (*Patrik Hagman*, Om sann gemenskap. Att leva i en kapitalistisk hederskultur, Skellefteå 2014).

¹⁷ ‘Vår vision är istället en bred och offensiv folkkyrka där den kristna identiteten är stark, där kärleken till det egna landet har en naturlig plats vid sidan av den allmänna människokärleken. En kyrka som bejaktar sin roll som kulturbärare och förvaltare av ett svenskt, nordiskt och västerländskt kulturarv’ (*Sverigedemokraterna*, Tro och tradition. Available at: <https://sd.se/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/kyrkomanifest.pdf> [Accessed 2018-06-18]).

¹⁸ *Walter Brueggemann*, Finally comes the poet. Daring Speech for Proclamation, Minneapolis 1989, 141.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Leonora Tubbs Tisdale* and *Carolyn J. Sharp*, The Prophets and Homiletics, in: Carolyn J. Sharp (ed.), The Oxford Handbook of the Prophets (E-book), Oct 2016.

Inspiration from North American homiletical frameworks

Tubbs Tisdale and Sharp define what the term prophetic preaching means. First, it signifies a “preaching that confronts and challenges the status quo in light of the witness of the Scriptures.” Second, it can also be said about, “preaching that mediates for contemporary believers any of the dimensions of truth-telling and identity formation performed by the prophetic books.”²¹ Tubbs Tisdale claims that it is easier to experience prophetic preaching (and theology) when the church is oppressed or stands with the oppressed. She refers to her encounter with South Korean prophetic witness.²² According to Tubbs Tisdale, a prophetic preacher must however be clear that the task is either to be “afflicting the comfortable” or “comforting the afflicted” depending on context.²³ This is an important insight. If the preacher has not discerned in which context s/he is preaching, prophetic preaching becomes difficult. Most preachers do not preach to the parliament, like Bishop Brunne in the introduction of this paper. Most of the time, the listeners are ordinary citizens. How do we preach prophetically to them and to ourselves?

Tubbs Tisdale refers to Brueggemann when describing the role of the prophets of old. They “*criticized* the old order” but they also “*energized* the hearers with a vision of the new reign of God that was to come.”²⁴ Brueggemann elaborates on how the prophets both lament and proclaim hope. One example is Isaiah who “at the beginning and at the end, lines out *the drama of loss and the possibility of restoration.*”²⁵

When Tubbs Tisdale develops a “spirituality for activism” (with the terminology borrowed from James Forbes) she warns about a divide, where churches either focus on the interior or the exterior life of faith.²⁶ Brueggemann on the other hand, is not satisfied with this distinction. He notes that the Old Testament prophets were no social activists.²⁷ He then suggests that today’s prophetic preaching must be more than the *prose reductionism* just mentioned.²⁸ His inspiration are the prophets:

More important to them than concrete social issues is the fact that they characteristically spoke in poetic idiom with rich metaphors, so that their language is

²¹ Ibid.

²² *Leonora Tubbs Tisdale*, *Prophetic Preaching. A Pastoral Approach* Louisville 2010, xi.

²³ Ibid., xiv.

²⁴ *Tubbs Tisdale* (note 22), xii.

²⁵ *Brueggemann* (note 13), 99.

²⁶ *Tubbs Tisdale* (note 22), 22.

²⁷ *Brueggemann* (note 13), 2.

²⁸ *Brueggemann* (note 18), 141.

recurringly teasing, elusive, and evocative, with lesser accent on instruction or didacticism.²⁹

Tubbs Tisdale brings in the specific role of parish pastors. They “are called to be both priests and prophets.”³⁰ From the early years of her ministry she learnt that “the prophets’ style of confrontational, head-on witness didn’t play very well in the Parish.”³¹ Her “goal is to discern how preachers can ‘speak truth in love’ in ways that enable congregations to genuinely hear and respond to the Word.”³²

This is also my objective. With my example listener in mind, I ask how I as a teacher assist preachers-to-be in finding a way to preach truth in love. Like De Gruchy³³ applies this bible quotation³⁴ to both the struggle against *apartheid* in South Africa and the German *Kirchenkampf*, it is a fitting approach in many other contexts.³⁵ Is there a risk in the Western world in general and therefore also in Sweden, that we might end up in a situation similar to the German or the South African? We are not there yet. But it would be naïve to say that there is no risk.

In order to reach to congregants in this context I find myself, more and more, longing for narratives, poetic language and metaphors in this world that Brueggemann describes as *Prose-Flattened*.³⁶ For myself and the students I teach, I seek to find a language that goes beyond instruction or didacticism. Therefore it has been natural to use course literature by homileticians like Brueggemann.

Other perspectives

Even though the textbooks that are used at the Church of Sweden Institute for Pastoral Education come from a different continent, the books are written by authors who have a similar social location as most ministerial students in the Church of Sweden. With few exceptions, students come from the white middle class. This is a challenge. The members of the Sweden Democrats, a majority being members of the same white middle class,³⁷ are however experiencing some kind of alienation.

²⁹ Brueggemann (note 13), 2.

³⁰ Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), xii.

³¹ Ibid., 41.

³² Ibid., xiii.

³³ John W. de Gruchy, *The Tension between Confessing Christ and the Unity of the Church in the Struggle for Justice in Living on the Edge. Essays in Honour of Steve de Gruchy, Activist & Theologian*, James R. Cochrane, in: Elias Bongmba/Isabel Phiri/Des van der Water (eds.) (Cluster Publications: Pietermaritzburg, 2012), 4.

³⁴ ‘But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ’ (Ephesians 4:15 NRSV).

³⁵ See also Anders Göransson, *How to speak the truth in love – Lutheran unity in diversity or mere division?* SMT 102.2 (2014), 113–137.

³⁶ Brueggemann (note 18), 1.

³⁷ Scholars from the renowned SOM Institute at the University of Gothenburg claim that supporters of the Sweden

Anders Hellström³⁸ refers to both the occasion when the Sweden Democrats left the Church service already mentioned and the fact that their party leader, Jimmie Åkesson, was not invited to the prestigious Nobel Banquet in 2010. These events are both important, national Swedish rites, where national unity is displayed. The fact that the Sweden Democrats either are excluded or exclude themselves from such events, supports the idea that they are alienated. If one claims that a prophetic sermon challenges the establishment – what does it mean in the Swedish context? Sweden Democrats who describe themselves as Christians might suggest that their presence on the scene is an example of a prophetic voice. As a matter of fact, there are some voices in the charismatic churches that do exactly this. A proponent of the prosperity gospel in March 2018, on a positive note, prophesized and stated that “the Sweden Democrats constitutes the only alternative for a change of political course.”³⁹ It would therefore be interesting to explore how pastors that sympathize with the Sweden Democrats would preach. It might however be difficult to find such pastors in the Church of Sweden. In a survey made by a Church publication, only 2.4 % of Pastors and Deacons in Church of Sweden answer that they are prepared to vote for the Sweden Democrats.⁴⁰

So the question is dire: who are the marginalized groups in Sweden? If prophetic preaching takes the standpoint of the oppressed – who are they? And how does this influence the prophetic voice? In this respect it would be helpful to bring in voices from other contexts than Western Europe and North American white middle class.

When Tubbs Tisdale and Sharp state that prophetic preaching today all too often “aligns itself with one political party or another, advocating its agenda and criticizing its opposition”⁴¹ they clearly have the US in mind. One can question if this, generally speaking, also could be said about Scandinavian preaching. Be that as it may, the preacher is always part of a context and that matters.

With the help of Marvin McMickle I realize that both preachers, homiletical students, and homileticians need to make decisions, based on which social location they find themselves in. McMickle highlights the fact that some Christians worship in “neighborhoods that look like bombed out war zones”⁴² while others never see this.

Democrats are ordinary members of the society. Cf. *Anders Sannerstedt*, Sverigedemokraternas sympatisörer, in: *Mittfåra och marginal. SOM-undersökningen 2013*, 445–458, 451.

³⁸ *Anders Hellström*, Varför vi älskar att hata Sverigedemokraterna, in: *Det vita fältet II. Samtida forskning om högerextremism. Specialnummer av Arkiv, Tidskrift för samhällsanalys No. 2, 2013*, 69–99, 72.

³⁹ “[...] SD utgör det enda alternativet till en ändrad politisk kurs” (*Lars Enarson*, Omvändelse är enda räddningen!, in: *Dagen*. 1 mars 2018. Available at: <https://www.dagen.se/debatt/lars-enarson-omvandelse-ar-enda-raddningen-1.1107919> [Accessed 2018-09-21]).

⁴⁰ *Lennart Lundberg*, Annie Löf – när präster och diakoner får välja, in: *Kyrkans Tidning*. Available at: <http://www.kyrkanstidning.se/nyhet/annie-loof-nar-praster-och-diakoner-far-valja> [Accessed 2018-09-07].

⁴¹ Tubbs Tisdale/Sharp (note 20).

⁴² *Marvin A. McMickle*, Where Have All The Prophets Gone?, in: *Ashland Theological Journal* 2005, 8. Available at:

For those who live and worship in exurbia and who never get close enough to the grimy side of America for anything to rub off on them, prophetic preaching becomes even more urgent.⁴³

During my years in South Africa I constantly moved between different spaces as part of my ministry. In my present position this is not the case. It might be the same with a majority of the students. When I teach students at our institute this perspective therefore needs to be included. Not only in theory. In order to fully grasp the importance of our location, we need to go from theory to practice. On the contrary, some of the students do carry that experience in their bodies, so it will be crucial to allow them to share their experiences.

At the same time, it will be of importance to take into consideration the diversity not only in social location but also in political views, both amongst students and parishioners. How the prophetic sermon can be heard by the churchgoer, irrespective of her or his ideology, is a challenge. This brings us to the issue of defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanisms

In my doctoral thesis the question was how the South African Council of Churches (SACC) had managed to find a renewed *Kairos* after 1990, when the African National Conference (ANC) had been unbanned and the SACC therefore had changed and become more of a mediator than a liberation organization.⁴⁴ The addressee of statements and resolutions was often the Government of South Africa. In analyzing the prophetic voice, I made use of Brueggemann's distinction between Davidic and Mosaic trajectories.

The Mosaic tradition tends to be a movement of protest which is situated among the disinherited and which articulates its theological vision in terms of a God who decisively intrudes, even against seemingly impenetrable institutions and orderings. / [...] [T]he Davidic tradition tends to be a movement of consolidation which is situated among the established [...]⁴⁵

When I ponder the role of the Church of Sweden a few decades after the separation between Church and State, I wonder if more of the Mosaic trajectory needs to find its way into the sermons.

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/ashland_theological_journal/37-1_007.pdf [Accessed 2018-09-27]

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Anders Göransson, *The Prophetic Voice of the South African Council of Churches after 1990 – Searching for a Renewed Kairos*, Cape Town 2011.

⁴⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Trajectories in Old Testament Literature and the Sociology of Ancient Israel*, in: Norman K. Gottwald/Richard A. Horsley (eds.), *The Bible and Liberation. Political and Social Hermeneutics*, Maryknoll 1993, 202.

On the other hand, ordinary parishioners, like my example listener, are persons without any political power. Preachers therefore need to be able to preach in a way that both addresses those with power and those who regard themselves (or are regarded by others) as people without power. Not least in relation to the migration issue the vision *to speak truth in love* is important.

In this regard it is crucial to show respect to the listener. Tubbs Tisdale states that "... one of the most difficult challenges in prophetic preaching is how to gain a hearing."⁴⁶ Together with Troeger she uses the word *resistance* in a way that could be problematic in a Swedish context. When writing on how to address congregational resistance through preaching they are aiming for "a style and mode of communication that helps people set aside their initial resistances to what Scripture may say to them, and open themselves to a fresh hearing of it."⁴⁷ In an ordinary Swedish Parish context a critical distance to the Scripture is usually encouraged.

They have in a previous chapter, with inspiration from Barbara Lundblad, stated that fear of change is at the heart of people's resistance to sermons. Inspired by James Dittes they also underscore that "the 'No' from congregants may indicate the minister is dealing with something of crucial importance to them."⁴⁸

Tubbs Tisdale points to the risk of a "style of confrontational, head-on witness."⁴⁹ From especially Brueggemann we can learn to make use of poetic language, narratives, and metaphors in this regard. In relation to people with power, Brueggemann writes:

Those like Nebuchadnezzar, insulated in their self-deception and surrounded by 'yes-men' and 'yes-women', cannot be addressed frontally [...]. It is that fanciful communication, made when the royal muscles are relaxed and the king is vulnerable, that creates a fresh moment of discernment.⁵⁰

More important, however, is the objective to reach people with less power – the ordinary church member. We can get some help from pedagogy in order to problematize what we mean with resistance. Illeris writes about barriers to learning. He makes a distinction between *defense* and *resistance*.

Whereas the defense mechanisms exist prior to the learning situation and function reactively, resistance is caused by the learning situation itself as an active response.

⁴⁶ Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), 41.

⁴⁷ Thomas H. Troeger/Leonora Tubbs Tisdale, *A Sermon Workbook. Exercises in the Art and Craft of Preaching*, Nashville 2013, 97.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 94.

⁴⁹ Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), 41.

⁵⁰ Brueggemann (note 18), 136.

Thus resistance contains a strong mental mobilisation and therefore also a strong learning potential, especially for accommodative and even transformative learning.⁵¹

If we aim to utilize this learning potential, then response, feedback and a possibility of opposition to what the sermon entails, cannot be underestimated. An open conversation around the sermon between preachers and parishioners is essential. An open-ended preaching style is helpful here. I find resonance in the use of the concept of imagination, as used by Brueggemann,⁵² with a definite aim of both giving lament, relinquishment, and loss enough time but also to paint hope with prophetic imagination.

One side of this respect is to avoid rushing away from situations of despair. With Brueggemann we get inspiration from the prophets, who realized that “loss was a consequence of failed fidelity. In the depth of the night, however, theological reprimand is not what is needed. What is required, rather, is the honest voicing of the reality of loss.”⁵³ Tubbs Tisdale supports this when she refers to Emilie Townes and invites her congregation to stand with LGBT⁵⁴ persons in their suffering. She quotes the sermon of Townes:

but we often move too hastily to console the wounded
assuring them that everything will be alright
in our rush to help
we cover up their pain
diffuse their agony
and ignore their misery
before *they've* had a chance to even experience the pain for themselves.⁵⁵

Equally important is the answer to this. Brueggemann continues: “The divine response, in lyrical force, each time overpowers the lament.”⁵⁶

Conclusion

⁵¹ Knud Illeris, *A Comprehensive Understanding of Human Learning*, in: idem (ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Learning. Learning Theorists ... in their own words*, London/New York 2009, 7–20, 16.

⁵² Brueggemann: 2012. 22.

⁵³ Brueggemann (note 13), 81.

⁵⁴ Tubbs Tisdale uses the acronym like this. Tubbs Tisdale (note 22), 48.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 48.

⁵⁶ Brueggemann (note 13), 83.

In this paper I have started to map out a simple but manageable form of prophetic preaching based on thoughts from especially Brueggemann. The question is still how we as preachers express loss and relinquishment in a Swedish set-up, when too much lament could play into the hands of ultra-right wings? The question: ‘What happened last night in Sweden?’ has many answers.

To express hope is even more challenging. The motto of the Sweden Democrats is Security and Tradition.⁵⁷ Bishop Eva Brunne, in her sermon, tried to express something different. Her motto comes from James 2:1, “show no partiality.”⁵⁸ The challenge is how to paint a picture that has the potential of becoming hopeful to both convinced antiracists and to church members and citizens who are fearful when it comes to migration.

In the present situation and in an ordinary congregation, I believe that this could be achieved with prophetic preaching inspired from the Biblical example, with its narratives and with metaphors and poetic language. There might come a situation when a more confrontational, head-on witness is needed. Especially if the Sweden Democrats grow. Their objective is to take over the church. There are also signs that other political parties have changed their policies in a more xenophobic direction.

Swedes have for a long time regarded the nation as a unity. We have much to learn from homileticians like Brueggemann and Tubbs Tisdale, who write from a more diverse context. Likewise, we would benefit from perspectives that Sharp and McMickle can give from yet another point of view.

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⁵⁷ ‘Trygghet och tradition’ (Sverigedemokraterna. Available at <https://sd.se/> [Accessed 2018-07-22]).

⁵⁸ ‘Gör inte skillnad på människor’ (*Svenska kyrkan Stockholms stift*, Biskop Eva Brunnes valspråk – Gör inte skillnad på människor. Available at: <https://www.svenskakyrkan.se/stockholmsstift/biskop-evas-valsprak> [Accessed 2018-07-31]).

Mark 6:45–52 as a Fear-Increasing and Fear-Decreasing Passage: A Homiletical Analysis From a Biblical-Theological Perspective

Maarten Kater

Abstract

This article wants to show that it is fruitful for homiletics to continue to listen to what is offered from a biblical-theological perspective, especially when it comes to addressing a life of fear. After a short introduction, an overview is given of some important homiletical-exegetical notes, followed by the insights obtained from a focus group following a sermon on Mark 6:45–52. Finally, a number of homiletical insights received from listening to this text will follow.

Introduction

Undoubtedly, it is very important to analyse from different points of view what we are talking about when we use the phrase, “fear of God,” in particular, and the word “fear,” in general. We can learn much from Biblical scholarship on the thought-provoking expression, “the fear of the Lord” as well from psychological analyses of different kinds of fears and phenomenological approaches when observing a fear-filled world.¹

I begin by analysing some Dutch sermons on Mark 6:45–52 in order to see if fear is addressed in these sermons and, if so, how it is dealt with in this remarkable part of the Jesus story according to Mark. After analysing these Dutch sermons, I preached myself on this portion of Mark. Why? Not, because I see myself as a better preacher, but because I fear sermons that are too balanced, too egalitarian: “Yes, you have fear, but Jesus is there, so you have not to fear anything any longer; the Lord bless you, go in peace.” After the Sunday morning service, I organized an interview with a focus group (men/women, youngsters/elderly, easy/difficult path of life) in order to learn what they experienced while listening to the sermon. I will present some instructive reflections from within that group in order to highlight some homiletical lessons from them.

All in all, this contribution intends to show how certain notions from this part of the Jesus story could be very helpful in addressing in our sermons the fears of our audience. I hope to

¹ Cf. the keynote lectures of Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Anatheia Porter-Young and Traugott Roser.

demonstrate that preachers are often enticed to try to silence another's fear too early. This leads to a kind of estrangement – we do not give a deep attention to “the homiletical situation” of killing fear – and this soothing does not work at all.²

1. Outline with insights from Mark³

Mark 6:45 Καὶ εὐθὺς **ἠνάγκασεν** τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐμβῆναι εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ προάγειν εἰς τὸ πέραν πρὸς Βηθσαϊδάν, ἕως αὐτὸς **ἀπολύει** τὸν ὄχλον.

Mark 6:46 καὶ ἀποταξάμενος αὐτοῖς **ἀπῆλθεν** εἰς τὸ ὄρος προσεύξασθαι.

Mark 6:47 καὶ ὀψίας γενομένης ἦν τὸ πλοῖον ἐν μέσῳ τῆς θαλάσσης, καὶ αὐτὸς μόνος ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς.

Mark 6:48 καὶ ιδὼν αὐτοὺς **βασανιζομένους** ἐν τῷ ἐλαύνειν, ἦν γὰρ ὁ ἄνεμος **ἐναντίος** αὐτοῖς, περὶ τετάρτην φυλακὴν τῆς νυκτὸς **ἔρχεται πρὸς αὐτοὺς** περιπατῶν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης καὶ **ἤθελεν παρελθεῖν** αὐτούς.

Mark 6:49 οἱ δὲ ιδόντες αὐτὸν ἐπὶ τῆς θαλάσσης περιπατοῦντα ἔδοξαν ὅτι φάντασμα ἐστίν, καὶ ἀνέκραζαν.

Mark 6:50 πάντες γὰρ αὐτὸν εἶδον καὶ ἐταράχθησαν. ὁ δὲ εὐθὺς **ἐλάλησεν** μετ' αὐτῶν, καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς· **θαρσεῖτε, ἐγὼ εἰμι· μὴ φοβεῖσθε.**

Mark 6:51 καὶ **ἀνέβη** πρὸς αὐτοὺς εἰς τὸ πλοῖον καὶ ἐκόπασεν ὁ ἄνεμος, καὶ λίαν [ἐκ περισσοῦ] ἐν ἑαυτοῖς ἐξίσταντο.

Mark 6:52 οὐ γὰρ συνῆκαν ἐπὶ τοῖς ἄρτοις, ἀλλ' ἦν αὐτῶν ἡ καρδία πεπωρωμένη.

⁴⁵Immediately Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to Bethsaida, while he dismissed the crowd. ⁴⁶After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray. ⁴⁷Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake, and he was alone on land. ⁴⁸He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn he went out to them, walking on the lake. He was about to pass by them, ⁴⁹but when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost. They cried out, ⁵⁰because they all saw him and were terrified. Immediately he spoke to them and said, “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.” ⁵¹Then he climbed into the boat with them, and the wind died down. They were completely amazed, ⁵²for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened.

² This term is especially coined by the German homiletician, Ernst Lange. Cf. Jan Hermelink, Die homiletische Situation. Zur jüngeren Geschichte eines Predigtproblems, Göttingen 1992.

³ I have marked the aorists in which the moving picture in this story becomes clear: Jesus is on his way.

Homiletical-exegetical notes

My first reading of this passage strikes me in various manners. I would like to share three of them. Firstly, the moving picture comes to my mind when reading the aorists which Mark used in telling this story. The structure of this pericope reveals the ongoing action of Jesus. Jesus is on his way, even as we do not see one single sign that this is true. No one should be in any doubt that Jesus sees us, although we experience nothing but storm and all circumstances seem to be against us. What really matters is *καὶ ἰδὼν αὐτοὺς* before *οἱ δὲ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν*. Secondly, too often we suffer from certain setbacks because we reckon on tailwind when we are going in Jesus' way. The word *ἠνάγκασεν* seized me: he "forced" them to have their take off from the shore. They experience headwind *while* they were doing his will. Thirdly, I wonder how it could happen that they are so embarrassed by seeing Jesus, while he was going out to them. Of course, they were exhausted from great bodily efforts and psychic tensions. Nevertheless, Mark's commentary was not a medical explanation nor a psychological report, but a theological one: "for they had *not understood* about the loaves."⁴ What is going on here? "Their hearts were hardened." Definitely the same expression is used when Jesus was grieved and angered by the hardness of heart of the Pharisees. Jesus' friends are put on par with these enemies? How painful.

During the process of meditating on these aspects I realized that ultimately this story should be read from the end (eschatological) too. We worship *this* Jesus as the crucified One (night, all things we ever believed seem to die, our love cries for great loss and our hope has gone) and the risen One (dawn, his resurrection is his ultimate "walking on the water"!). This reading from the end of Mark does not level the tension ("Hey guys, this story is of great trouble, but now He is the living one, so do not trouble and do not fear"). Quite the reverse: the last word of this Gospel is: "they were afraid"! The reality of a fear-filled world is obstinate. Yet, from the other side of the grave, in his eternity Jesus still is coming. And as the book of Revelation shows us, his footsteps are so often frightening to us. Nevertheless, Jesus, the last and everlasting word for all who are "on board," is present.

Special attention must be given to the mysterious expression, the curious statement, "He was about to pass them by." Our audience will have connotations like "what in the world is he doing now? He only came to wave to them without any help for these troubled men?!" It seems to me that those commentaries are right by pointing to this "pass by" as a *terminus technicus* for "revealing" (Ex 33:19, 22; 1Kings 19:11).

⁴ This "sea-session" should be connected with two other parts like a triptych: on the one hand Mark 4:35–42 and on the other hand Mark 8:10–21, that is, assuming the connection between this 'sea story' and the 'eat story' is historically true. Opinions among commentaries are (of course) divided.

Jesus as the “It is I” (representing the basic revelation of God in the theophany at the burning bush, Ex 3:14) comes unto us in the *performative words* of a sermon and He surely will decrease our fear in due time. It’s a very exciting experience that the *object* of fear ultimately becomes *the subject* of another ‘happy fear’ just by showing who He is. Jesus speaks words of great comfort and when He comes on board everything will change. Jesus’ words are performative: “Don’t be afraid” is not just a couple of kind words, but these very words do what is said. Since fear increases as long as one does not recognize the One, “I am He,” surely it will decrease by these very words. Preaching as “Naming God” (Rudolf Bohren). Ultimately this is not a story about our fears, but of “fearing God.” It is an epiphany, a story of the appearance (manifestation) of a divine figure.⁵

2. Overview with Insights from a Hearers’ Response

In order to evaluate the sermons, I asked the focus group to reflect on five questions. For each question I sketch the backdrop of that question (i.e. why I asked them that particular question), and I give a concise summary of the variety of reflections I received.

1. *Did our “Fear-Filled World” get enough profile so that what was said addresses you/appeals to you?*

Backdrop: This question is asked in order to know if the hearers were able to be drawn into this story from their “homiletical situation.”

Reflections: The most exciting insight for me is that fear increases while Jesus comes nearby. The concrete examples of headwinds were helpful and recognizable, especially because I was listening with my sick colleague in my mind. Apart from what has happened last week, I would like to suggest you should have dealt more with the problem of living in a world which seems to be so empty of God. The world full of fear makes me aware of the fact that although God seems to oppose me, nevertheless He is on his way to help me.

⁵ Cf. Lamar Williamson Jr., *Mark. Interpretation: a Bible Commentary on Teaching and Preaching*, Louisville 1983, 130; Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Band 1, Zürich 1978, 267.

2. *Jesus came in order to pass by them, i.e. getting more acquainted with Him (revelatory). Did you feel/realize for yourself Jesus passing by you during the sermon? Does this knowledge comfort you/serve as a wake-up call/frighten you?*

Backdrop: Preaching is a kind of re-present-ion. There is a world of difference between listening to an old story and remembering that this story is an ongoing story in the present, because Jesus as the resurrected Lord is still here.⁶

Reflections: During the sermon I feel like the Spirit speaks to me indeed. I did not think about this in relation to this sermon, but Jesus has passed by me during my whole life. At first glance I was confused that Jesus was about to pass by them, so it was a great surprise that you explained this just as coming to the end of revealing himself more. I did not get it, I was wondering why Jesus did not come immediately on board. At the outset you said “this is nothing but mean”: people pass by and then you asked “isn’t it?” and I agreed, but afterwards I understand the meaning of “passing by them” as graceful. To be honest I realized myself that he came during the morning service just when you spoke very emphatically: “It is I”!

3. *“It is I. Don’t be afraid!” What did help you the most: Explanation of these words (YHWH, His story) or repeating these very words several times during the sermon (in order to the ‘now’)?*

Backdrop: A sermon is not just meant to give information, but has to do with faith formation. According to the speech-act theory (philosophy) words are *performative* and do not have only illocutionary character.

Reflections: The explanation of the phrase “It is I” as YHWH revealed himself, as was shown from other OT-passages, helps me, but I do really like to hear such short sentences again and again during the sermon. Repetition makes these words much stronger. Your question: “do you really perceive this voice in your midst this morning ...”; “It is I, my dear ...?” was a very evocative moment. No, I don’t like the reiteration, because otherwise it seems to function as a mantra. I prefer the second option, too many words of explanation devalue the power of a short sentence. No preference.

⁶ Theo Pleizier, Hearing Sermons and the Vision of God, in: Lucy Hogan/Theo Pleizier (eds.), *Preaching As Picturing God in a Fragmented World* [Studia Homiletica 8], Delft 2012, 181–191.

4. Statement: *A hardened heart is a heart which is too little impressed with/overwhelmed by who Jesus is and as a consequence filled with too much fear.*

Backdrop: Mark's comment is an explanation of what really was at stake in this story. I would like to know whether or not the audience has felt this as a shocking, striking remark.

Reflections: All the respondents agree with this statement, although some of them uttered that we are not in the position to condemn the disciples.

5. *Was I really one of you (communion) during the sermon, so that you feel my own being touched (harsh side and soft side of the pad/sponge) by this story as His story?*

Backdrop:

In my sermon's introduction I used a sanding/scrubbing pad (abrasive sponge) as a *metaphor* in order to answer the question I start with: does this portion of Scripture function as the harsh side or the soft side of this pad (sponge)? I asked this because too many people start by saying to themselves either "Oh, such a wonderful story: our Jesus could walk on the surface of the lake. Wow!", or in the opposite way: "This story nobody could believe to be true in the 21st century: a man walking on the water. Preacher preach, but I could not believe one single word of this story."

Why did I ask about this pad/sponge? Because first of all I felt some *embarrassment* when reading the text for the first time in my preparation. Puzzling questions struck me: "Is it me, who has too much fear, because I do not really know who Jesus really is? Do I not recognize the 'I am He' while He comes to me in the words of Scripture or otherwise? Does all my fear actually come from my hardened heart?" So, then, this is the harsh and rough side of this story.⁷ The softening and comforting side is: He comes in order to pass by, and to speak the marvellous words "It is I" in order to comfort me, although my nerves still are very strained: existential (stand outside myself, literally!). And in the end and ultimately he comes "on board"!

Reflections: All agree that I was one of them and this makes the sermon for them: upright, vulnerable, existential involved, otherwise you would have been a stranger crossing our path and now you were walking with us in this dialogue.

⁷ Cf. *David Kelsey* writes on the danger of 'domesticating God' in "Picturing God Theologically in a Fragmented World," in: idem (note 7), 21–34, especially 27 on radical otherness and radical intimacy.

3. Homiletical insights through the window of this text

Ultimately, we look from a biblical-theological perspective through the window of this text in order to see some homiletical notions or guidelines – although not a full set – which could be helpful for our preaching practice in general and for addressing fear in particular.

1. Style:

- Use the Greek *aorists* to show what matters (may be in *staccato* sentences) in order not just to retell the well-known story (that's very boring!), but to let the audience “feel” the tension in this story of a “fear-filled world” and are drawn in the *special structure* of the sermon.⁸
- Use the *imaginative* material of this pericope (images, words, echo, and references from the Old Testament).⁹

2. Arrangement:

- Consider at which time you will bring in Mark's commentary (V. 52). This is important because the homiletical room for “screaming” in great fear can be closed too early.
- What will be the best moment in this story to start with? My suggestion is to start in the midst of the story: screaming disciples, Jesus at hand and they were shocked full of fear.
- Suggestions for a possible outline:

A. Theme/Focus: *Jesus Comes into our Fear-filled World:*

Three aspects could be highlighted:

- Our Fear Filled in the Absence of our Master.
- Our Fear Fuelled in the Approaching of our Master.
- Our Fear Stilled in the Presence of our Master.

B. Theme/Focus: *Jesus Is Coming in His Way!*

In sum: Behind the Screens, On Our Scenes, With His Means.

⁸ Wilfried Engemann, “On Man's re-entry into his future, The sermon as a creative act,” in: Gerrit Immink/Ciska Stark (eds.), *Preaching. Creating Perspective* [Studia Homiletica 4], Nieuw-Lekkerland 2002, 25–49, 40.

⁹ Some illustrations: sea and water, storm, journey to the other side, passing by, the ‘I am He’ or ‘It is I’: burning bush, exodus, and Deutero-Isaiah's pictures, even paintings, of the ‘I am He.’

3. Focus on some details:

As an example: “shortly before dawn,” i.e. dark decreased/night abandoned. This in relation to the central motion and notion: “Jesus comes.” This is like the “exodus” early in the morning (Ex 14:24).¹⁰

Preaching always is a kind of remembering, resounding, recalling.

4. We preach after Good Friday and Easter. From an eschatological point of view the threatening ‘water’ is also a symbol of the ultimate dreadful death, and the ‘walking on the sea’ a picture of the resurrection. God rather finds his way even over the sea (Ps 77:20, Job 8:9). The power of the future comes in our sermon (eschatological aspect). The anticipating of the future shapes the present.¹¹

5. Addressing fear:

- Fear as a faith apprenticeship: although we live in obedience to the Lord, nevertheless darkness hit us, headwind against us and an apparent absence of the Lord (as they were forced into the boat!)
- Fear (terror) increases when one comes aware that a ‘fantasmos’ has to do with God himself; not that simplistic talk, “Here is God, and now your fear must be silenced.”
- We do not live in a “haunted house” as such: Jesus comes in our world filled with fear.
- In our fears sounds and resounds the Name “It is I.”

6. Other aspects of the multifaceted activity of what preaching is about:

- Offering space for fear-filled people. The preaching of (this part of) the Gospel can be an opening up of a “homiletical space” wherein someone is allowed to scream his or her fear and while screaming may hear the “I am He.”¹² Or, to use another metaphor, preaching can be a “being drawn into the cloakroom” where a person’s fear would be changed in character. The same fear can be experienced in another way by different feelings.

¹⁰ *Gnilka* (note 6), 268–269: “Die Zeit vor dem Morgen ist die Zeit Gottes.”(cf. Isaiah 17:14; Ps. 46:6). *Walter Grundmann*, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*, Berlin 1959, 143, indicates this moment the time of the morning prayer.

¹¹ Cf. *Paul Scott Wilson*, *Textual Perspectives: Preaching as an Event of Hope*, in: *Immink/Stark* (note 9), 50–59.

¹² Cf. *Leif Andersen*, *The Language of Hopelessness in Preaching: Pastoral Care in the Preaching of Hope*, in: *Cas J.A. Vos/Lucy L. Hogan/Johan H. Cilliers* (eds.), *Preaching as a Language of Hope [Studia Homiletica 6]*, Pretoria 2007, 203–213; *Alexander Deeg*, *Preaching God’s Wisdom: Response to Marilynne Robinson*, in: *Jan Hermelink/Alexander Deeg* (eds.), *Viva Vox Evangelii – Reforming Preaching [Studia Homiletica 9]*, Leipzig 2013, 43–53, 52; “Christian preaching needs a new language again and again – a language that interrupts and disturbs. That breaks open the boundaries of this world and opens up a new perspective. Martin Luther once called it the ‘nova sprach de resurrection mortuorum’, the ‘new language of the raising of the deads.’”

Therefore, in my opinion Walter Brueggeman is too fast in concluding:

“This is not a happy miracle tale, but an exposé of the feebleness of the church where Farao still operates. The story will not lie about us. But the story does not lie about Jesus either. [...] The storm cannot resist him. The chaos is no force against him. *Fear is undone by his Easter*, “Do not fear” [...] Jesus and his “do not fear” continue to be uttered and will finally utter us beyond fear. Quit watching the storm and listen!”¹³

- Showing what’s going on behind the screens and on our scenes (the preacher is not like an archivist, but like an astronomer: interpreting reality from the perspective of our texts).
- Facing our hardened hearts (cf. 3:5; 8:17) when we are blinded by our unbelief.
- Unmasking our “fantasma”, i.e. what we see when we do not take Jesus seriously as the Son of God (Mark 1:1).¹⁴ “Discipleship is more endangered by lack of faith and hardness of heart than by external dangers.”¹⁵
- Presenting the “It is I” as real presence, Jesus literally is *inter-esse* (being in their midst). There ultimately is no sinister or shady silence in the midst of our fears. The encouragement is that God does not forsake us when our hearts are hardened. “God continues to take the initiative [...] God comes to us in the night when we are making absolutely no headway.”¹⁶

Hopefully these guidelines offered in this homiletical analysis from a biblical-theological perspective will be inspiring to address fear in a fear- filled world in a pastoral, theological manner.

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¹³ Walter Brueggemann, *Inscribing the Text. Sermons and Prayers by Walter Brueggemann*, Minneapolis 2004, “Uttered Beyond Fear”, 51–57, 56.

¹⁴ Grundmann (note 11), 141, refers to Rudolf Otto, the famous writer of *The Idea of the Holy (Das Heilige)* and quotes him from his *Reich Gottes und Menschensohn*: “Typus des in Stunden der Not und Todesgefahr aus der Ferne in Phantom erscheinenden und helfenden Charismatikers. Der Charismatiker erscheint, obwohl er selbst am fernen Orte ist. Er erscheint halluzinativ sichtbar. Im Unterschied zu zauberhaften Vermögen der Yogis handelt es dabei im einen *Akt tröstender und helfender Gegenwart*, nicht um ein Zurschaustellen übernatürlicher Kräfte, sondern um eine Gnadengabe *gewillt, verborgen zu bleiben, verliehen zu Heils- und Liebeszwecken und verbunden mit gottgeweihtem und geheiligtem Leben*” (italics added).

¹⁵ James R. Edwards, *The Gospel according to Mark*. Pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids 2002, 201.

¹⁶ Ronald J. Kernaghan, *Mark. IVP New Testament Commentary Series*, Downers Grove 2007, 133.

Preaching from Sanctuary

Tito Madrazo and Alma Ruiz

Abstract

In the midst of the tense immigration debates taking place in the United States, the authors share insights from a number of sermons preached by first-generation Hispanic immigrants as part of a preaching peer-group. The preachers delivered these messages in a church that was providing protective sanctuary for an undocumented immigrant who was a member of the peer-group. The sermons were developed and delivered for an imaginary audience of either Hispanic immigrants or native-born Anglo-Americans and offer prophetic words of both comfort and judgment.

Gathering in The Garden

It was a Saturday morning in the spring, and Amor,¹ our first of six preachers for the day, had just taken her place at the pulpit, double-checked that her notes were in the right order, and launched into an introduction. This has become the usual rhythm of our Saturday mornings over the last few years as we have directed Duke Divinity School's Hispanic-Latino/a Preaching Initiative (HLPI), a Lilly Endowment funded project providing a peer-group learning experience for current and aspiring Hispanic-Latino/a preachers for whom traditional seminaries or divinity schools are often out of reach, in part due to issues related to their immigration status. We have spent many Saturday mornings watching our fellow preachers grow into their vocation as proclaimers of God's word. But this Saturday was different in several significant ways.

Rather than meeting in one of the classrooms at Duke Divinity School, we had gathered instead at The Garden, a multicultural United Methodist congregation in the Durham area.

We had come out of solidarity. We had come for Elías. Like several other HLPI participants over the years, Elías was an undocumented immigrant. He first came to the United States from Mexico more than twenty years earlier as a laborer in eastern North Carolina's agricultural sector. Eventually, he found work as a skilled installer of insulation and sheet rock. More significantly, he

¹ In writing this paper, the authors have utilized *Luke Eric Lassiter's* collaborative model for ethnography as described in "The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography". Foremost among the commitments Lassiter enumerates for researchers is "an ethical and moral responsibility to consultants" that takes precedence over the quest for knowledge. Given the immigration status of many of our collaborators, we have chosen to employ pseudonyms for each of them as well as for the congregations in which they have served or gathered. Although this choice does present certain problems of its own (the authors are aware of the irony of presenting a "collaborative" work in which their names are the only real names to appear), the current immigration policies of the United States require us to use the utmost care when protecting the identities of our collaborators and friends. Cf. *Luke Eric Lassiter, The Chicago Guide to Collaborative Ethnography*, Chicago 2005, 79.

married another immigrant who gave birth to their son, and their family came to faith and grew to fill leadership roles within a local congregation.

Elías had always been the primary breadwinner for his family due to the devastating case of Lupus his wife had been battling for years. Four years previously during a trip to Mexico to visit a sick family member, Elías's wife's health deteriorated dramatically. She re-entered the United States in order to undergo a life-saving heart operation in January of 2014. Elías came soon after but was apprehended by the Border Patrol and detained for a brief time until the details of his story—a desperately ill spouse and a U.S. citizen son—could be confirmed. Following Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) priorities in place at that time, Elías was released and given a work permit to be able to provide for his family, which he did faithfully for the next three years.

Once a year, Elías had renewed his temporary work permit without issue until the summer of 2017, when his application was denied. This rejection was one incident within a larger overall movement in the United States against immigration, both documented and undocumented, that has grown dramatically in recent years

Immigrants in Crisis

According to the Pew Research Center, the U.S. foreign-born population reached a record high of 43.2 million in 2015, with immigrants from almost every country in the world.² Research shows that “immigrants today account for 13.4% of the U.S. population, nearly triple the share (4.7%) in 1970.”³ The majority of immigrants (76%) are in the country legally, while a quarter are undocumented.⁴ Regardless of their immigration status, immigrants contribute in many positive ways to this country, including their significant role in offsetting what would otherwise be a stark “decline in the working-age population by adding about 18 million people of working age between 2015 and 2035.”⁵

In spite of the positive outcomes related to immigration, current U.S. President Donald Trump has frequently pointed to immigration as one of the factors he believes stands in the way of making America “great again.” Julia G. Young affirms this negative focus on immigration:

² *Gustavo López/Kristin Bialik*, Key Findings About U.S. Immigrants, Pew Research Center (May 3, 2017), <http://pewrsr.ch/2qz2zvx>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Since the very first week of the new administration, when the president released three executive orders, two to crack down on undocumented immigration and one to restrict travel from Muslim-majority nations and to cut the US refugee admissions program, the Trump administration has made it very clear that its vision for American greatness is a nativist one.⁶

Although the rhetoric has heated up considerably in the last few years, a crackdown against unauthorized immigration in the U.S. existed even before Trump administration. According to the Pew Research Center, “The Obama administration deported about 3 million immigrants between 2009 and 2016, a significantly higher number than the 2 million immigrants deported by the Bush administration between 2001 and 2008.”⁷ Throughout President Trump’s first year in office, arrests of undocumented immigrants increased by roughly 30 percent (from 110,104 to 143,470).⁸

Seeking Sanctuary

Elías appealed the decision denying the renewal of his work permit based on his family’s situation, but his requests seemed to fall on deaf ears. After exhausting all of his other available options, Elías entered into protective sanctuary at The Garden in December of 2017.

The sanctuary movement in the United States currently comprises more than 700 individual congregations that have pledged themselves to protect and stand in solidarity with immigrants facing deportation.⁹ Erin Guzman describes the origins of the movement in *The Christian Century* as a response to humanitarian needs and a concern for justice:

In the 1970-80s, Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua were rife with civil war. [...] The conflicts prompted thousands of Central Americans to migrate North to the U.S. hoping to find temporary stay and safety. This is the context in which the modern Sanctuary Movement was born.¹⁰

In this current age of sanctuary, at least forty-five undocumented immigrants have taken refuge in churches across the United States so far. Five of these individuals are in North Carolina.

⁶ Julia G. Young, Making American 1920 Again? Nativism and U.S. Immigration, Past and Present, in: *Journal on Immigration and Human Society*, Vol. 5 No. 1 (2017), 218.

⁷ López/Bialik (note 2).

⁸ Fiscal Year 2017 ICE Enforcement and Removal Operations Report, in: U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, <https://www.ice.gov/removal-statistics/2017> (accessed August 1, 2018).

⁹ “Sanctuary,” Beloved Community, at: <https://belovedcommunity.online/sanctuary/> (accessed August 1, 2018).

¹⁰ Erin Guzmán, Reviving the Sanctuary Movement, in: *The Christian Century* (December 29, 2016), <https://www.christiancentury.org/blog-post/revivingsanctuary>.

Advocates of the Sanctuary movement look to scripture to authorize their actions, drawing inspiration from Old Testament passages detailing the ethical treatment of “foreigners” and New Testament passages like the parable of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus provides an example of extending grace and hospitality to those who are in need even if it goes against the norms of society.

Preaching in Sanctuary

Elías had informed us of his immigration difficulties early in the fall of 2017, not long after he had begun participating in that year’s cohort. Alma Ruiz, one of this paper’s co-authors and a member of The Garden, was instrumental in working with the leadership of the congregation and the North Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church to facilitate Elías’s relocation to The Garden, where Elías still lived at the time this article was written. During his time there, Elías used his construction skills to renovate the lower level of the church’s facilities, but he wanted to continue developing his homiletical skills as well and asked us how he could continue to participate in HLPI.

We approached this issue cautiously since several other HLPI participants were also undocumented immigrants or DACA¹¹ recipients. Asking them to come regularly to a location that was a known provider of sanctuary could potentially place them at some risk as well. Ultimately, they all expressed a desire to relocate to The Garden as a way to support Elías during his ordeal. Over the following months, we not only preached for one another, but we also celebrated birthdays, Christmas, and Easter. Our celebration of Epiphany was particularly memorable as one of our members from Mexico brought a *rosca* – a round ring of sweet bread from which everyone takes a slice. One of the slices contains a figurine of the baby Jesus – his concealment representing the time period during which the Holy Family fled into exile as refugees. Even during our celebrations, we could not help but return to themes of migration and redemption.

During our preaching sessions, however, we found that many of our participants were hesitant to preach from passages related to immigration justice or to refer to their own immigration experiences at all. This was true even of Elías, whose immigration story was already well known. When asked why he was hesitant to include references to immigration in his sermons, Elías responded:

¹¹ Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) came into existence on June 15, 2012 as a program offering deferred action for certain immigrants who were brought to the United States as children and met several guidelines. The deferral period would be for two years and was subject to renewal. DACA participants received official documentation that allowed them to pursue their education and work in the same way that resident aliens could. Under the Trump administration, DACA was rescinded on September 5, 2017. This action is still being litigated and the future of DACA remains uncertain.

Cf. Consideration of Deferred Action of Childhood Arrivals, at: U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, <https://www.uscis.gov/archive/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-daca> (accessed August 1, 2018).

“No. Si hablo de esas cosas, van a pensar que solo estoy diciéndolo por mi propia situación.”¹² “No. If I talk about those things, they are going to think that I am only saying it because of my own situation.”

This experience led the authors to change the format for the last round of sermons that year’s cohort would be preparing and preaching for one another. We began with a workshop in which the cohort members brainstormed the homiletical possibilities of various scriptural passages touching on human migration. At the end of the session, each member chose a passage around which she or he would develop a sermon with an intended audience of either Anglo-Americans or Hispanic-Latino/a individuals. Having different imagined audiences allowed the participants to reflect upon the various roles they often occupied as preachers, as either bearers of good news during troubled times to their own congregations or as prophetic voices speaking to the Anglo-American constituency within their denomination (or even to the members of an Anglo-American congregation with which they shared facilities). The remainder of this paper focuses on the various ways in which the participants proclaimed God’s word regarding immigration to these disparate audiences.

Good News for Troubled Times

Although the preachers who were speaking to Hispanic-Latino/a audiences all chose different texts and approached them from unique vantage points, there were also several ways in which their sermons overlapped. The gospel for oppressed immigrants took three principal forms during our final preaching session. It was good news 1) that God himself was on their side, 2) that they had one another for support, and 3) that they had a role in being and bearing good news for others.

The Presence and Provision of God

The most common form of good news our collaborators proclaimed was the steady presence and provision of God for those suffering due to their immigration status. In the introduction to her sermon, María assured her hearers of the goodness and unfailing provision of God in the midst of turmoil. According to Deut 10:18, God is the one “who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing.” Building upon this image,

¹² Another key commitment of collaborative ethnography is for the researcher to engage in clearer and more accessible writing in order to facilitate “open dialogue about interpretation and representation.” In keeping with this commitment and because we believe that every act of translation is also an act of interpretation, we will first present all quotations and sermon excerpts in the language in which our collaborators spoke them before also presenting our translation of them in English. Cf. *Lassiter* (note 1), 132.

María began enumerating the many in ways in which her audience had experienced God's love for the stranger:

Sabemos que Dios ha sido bueno. Sabemos que Dios está con nosotros. Sabemos que sus promesas se han cumplido. Lo hemos visto. Lo hemos palpado entre nosotros. Y le damos la honra y la gloria a nuestro Dios. Hemos visto que no nos ha dejado y no nos dejará.	We know that God has been good. We know that God is with us. We know that his promises have been fulfilled. We have seen it. We have felt it within ourselves. And we give the honor and glory to our God. We have seen that he has not abandoned us and will not abandon us.
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As María spoke these words, the volume of her voice increased with each assertion. The actual congregation of eleven other first-generation immigrants nodded their heads in affirmation. A few joined their voices to María's, saying "Amén" and "Gloria a Dios / Glory to God."

Elías also had chosen to preach to a Hispanic-Latino/a audience, and he chose for his text Gen 12 in which the Lord calls Abram to leave the territory of his ancestors to travel to an unknown land. This command also comes with promises of blessing and provision for Abram, and Elías grounded his and Abram's trust in these promises in the faithfulness of God:

Vemos que Dios – lo que Él dice, Él lo cumple porque no es Dios de mentira. Es un Dios de verdad. Porque siguiendo la descendencia de Abram llegamos al nacimiento de Jesucristo. Mateo 1 capítulo 1 nos dice: "Libro de la genealogía de Jesucristo, hijo de David, hijo de Abraham."	We see that God – what He says, He accomplishes because He is not a God of lies. He is a God of truth. Because following the descent of Abram we arrive at the birth of Jesus Christ. Matthew 1 chapter 1 says: Book of the Genealogy of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham."
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Elías saw the distant birth of Christ as the ultimate fulfillment of God's promise to Abram, and he also understood it to be further evidence that he could trust God in the midst of his own circumstances. By the time he preached this sermon, Elías had been living in the basement of The Garden for four months. He had only been able to see his wife and son on weekends, and he was going to miss his son's high school graduation. And yet, he believed that God's promises to him of continued presence and provision would also be fulfilled. His faith rested not only on Abram's experience but also on his identification as one of Abram's descendants:

Es preocupante lo que está pasando ahorita en este país con las leyes migratorias. Pero si confiamos en Dios no tenemos por que preocuparnos porque Dios ya nos dio la victoria. Porque somos parte de esa descendencia de Abram. Por eso hermanos les digo – diga lo que diga el gobierno de este país, haga lo que haga – Dios está con nosotros. Y si Dios está con nosotros, ¿quién contra nosotros?

What is happening right now in this country with its immigration laws is worrying. But if we trust in God, we have no reason to worry because God has already given us the victory. Because we are part of that genealogy of Abram. That is why I tell you brothers – say what they say the government of this country, do what they do – God is with us. And if God is with us, who can be against us?

It was a stirring declaration from Elías, who was usually a fairly reserved preacher. Yet here he stood, not far from the bed in which he had slept for more than a hundred nights during his resistance against the overwhelming power of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, declaring that his victory was a foregone conclusion. God was with him and with his hearers.

The Power of Identification

For many undocumented immigrants, the experience of living in the United States without official recognition involves an attendant loss of identity. Timothy L. Smith writes that “the search for community and identity in a world of strangers” becomes a primary quest “the moment the nearest range of hills shut out the view of the emigrant’s native valley.”¹³ The sense of loss that Smith identifies surfaced in Teresa’s sermon as she spoke poignantly of the pain accompanying transitions in culture and identity for many immigrants.

Nos sentimos lejos de nuestras raíces, lejos de nuestra cultura. Nos sentimos que perdemos nuestra identidad para poder formar parte de esta cultura. A veces hasta dejamos nuestras creencias para poder entrar en un nuevo sistema social. A veces cambiamos nuestros nombres—Juan por John, Miguel por Michael.

We feel far away from our roots, far from our culture. We feel that we lose our identity in order to form part of this culture. Sometimes we leave behind our beliefs in order to enter into a new social system. Sometimes we change our names—John in place of Juan, Michael in place of Miguel.

¹³ Timothy L. Smith, Religion and Ethnicity in America, in: The American Historical Review 83, no. 5 (1978), 1174.

While this is true to some degree for all immigrants, those living without documentation often experience other losses of identity as well. Amor, a DACA recipient, spoke poignantly of the moment when she became aware of her problematic status as an undocumented immigrant:

Mis papás me trajeron aquí cuando yo tenía cuatro años. Cruzamos la frontera y yo no me acuerdo cuando ni como. Mis recuerdos de mi infancia son que yo ya estaba aquí, que yo crecí aquí. Cuando yo quería seguir con mis estudios [en una universidad] me di cuenta que no tenía papeles. Hasta ese momento, yo había pensado que era una persona normal. Fue algo duro para mí. Me ofrecieron becas por mis grados, pero ninguna [universidad] me pudo aceptar por no ser residente. Fue un golpe difícil.	My parents brought me here when I was four years old. We crossed the border and I do not remember when or how. My memories from childhood are that I was here, that I grew up here. When I wanted to continue on with my studies [in a university] I found out that I did not have papers. Until that moment, I thought I was a normal person. It was something hard for me. They offered me scholarships for my grades, but none [of the universities] could accept me because I was not a resident. It was a difficult blow.
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As Amor spoke, several others in the room nodded their heads. They might not have been DACA recipients themselves, but many of them experienced similar moments in which the illusion of their belonging had been cruelly pierced by the reality of their status.

The Importance of Being Good News for Others

Amor stepped to the pulpit and read 2Cor 8:13-15, recounting Paul's words regarding the need for balance between abundance and need in the early church. We expected Amor to focus on the abundance experienced by Anglo-Americans and the needs of immigrant communities, but she surprised us with her subsequent words:

Trabajo en el departamento de la salud pública, y muchos de ellos dicen, “Esos ilegales no más vienen a agarrar nuestros servicios. Están robando nuestra ayuda.” Para mí es bien difícil oír eso. Entonces lo que hago es orar por ellos.	I work in the department of public health, and many people there say, “Those illegals only come to take our services. They are stealing our help.” For me, it is very difficult to hear that. So what I do is to pray for them.
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Una de esas personas que hablaba mucho era mi jefa. Una vez salimos a almorzar y salió el tema como siempre. Yo decía, “Dios mío ayúdame a mantener mi calma y mi paz. Ayúdame para que seas tú quien habla por que, si no, voy a perder mi trabajo.”

One of those people who talked a lot was my boss. One time we went to lunch and the subject came up like always. I said, “My God, help me to maintain my calm and my peace. Help me so that it is you who speaks because, if not, I am going to lose my job.”

Entonces, ella me dijo, “¿Tienes algo? Te veo estresada.” Y le dije, “Sí, tengo algo. Ahorita con lo de las elecciones...” Y me interrumpió, preguntando, “Ah sí, ¿por quien vas a votar?” Y yo dije, “Por nadie. Yo no tengo derecho para votar.” Y se quedó [callada].

So, she said to me, “Is something wrong? You seem stressed.” And I said, “Yes, something is wrong. Right now with the elections...” and she interrupted me, asking, “Oh yes, who are you going to vote for?” And I said, “For nobody. I do not have the right to vote.” And she sat there [quiet].

Amor recounted telling her boss about her fears of losing her work permit if DACA were to be withdrawn, of potentially being separated from the family she had formed and nurtured here in the United States. Her boss was deeply moved by Amor’s words:

Y empezó a llorar conmigo. Y me dijo, “No lo puedo creer. ¿Tú no tienes papeles? [...] Nunca imaginé en mi vida que tú no tuvieras papeles. Hablas perfecto inglés, eres muy inteligente, estás estudiando ...”

And she began to cry with me. And she said, “I cannot believe it. You do not have papers? [...] I never in my life imagined that you would not have papers. You speak English perfectly, you are very intelligent, you are studying ...”

Yo dije, “Eso es el problema, que, como personas, como seres humanos, no nos tomamos el tiempo de ver verdaderamente a quien tenemos al lado.”

I said, “That is the problem, that, as people, as human beings, we do not take the time to truly see who we have at our side.”

In Amor’s story, her boss was guilty of obliviousness – guilty still, even in this moment of revelation, of clinging to gross generalizations regarding the character and abilities of undocumented immigrants. She needed to “take the time” to truly see the people around her. Rhetorically, however, this story functioned not to condemn members of the dominant culture for

their sins, but to awaken immigrants of faith to their calling as ministers of reconciliation. After all, Amor was preaching to an immigrant audience, and her message was that the dominant culture, in spite of its seeming abundance, was actually in need of redemption for its sins of pride and obliviousness. According to her view, immigrants were not merely victims of an unjust system – they were among those who might best embody the gospel by following the path of Christ in the midst of suffering. They were not just those huddled within the sanctuary offered by The Garden – they were also like those early Christians huddled together in the second chapter of Acts, who – once filled with the power of the Holy Spirit – might go forth and usher in a new kingdom, redeeming even their oppressors from the sin in which they had become ensnared.

A Prophetic Word to the Dominant Culture

Just as the sermons delivered for an imagined Hispanic-Latino/a audience highlighted common themes, those developed for Anglo-Americans also shared significant areas of overlap. Most of our collaborators focused their messages toward one of the following ends: 1) bearing witness to current suffering, 2) pointing out the importance of the ministry of reconciliation, or 3) offering a warning of coming judgment.

Humanizing the Issue

Several of our collaborators sought to push back against the portrayal of immigrants as a faceless, invading horde by offering a more personal portrait of undocumented immigrants. José Luís did this in a particularly clever way, beginning his sermon with a catalogue of well-known Americans who had broken immigration laws. He mentioned Arnold Schwarzenegger, the famous actor, former governor of California, and Austrian immigrant who had worked for a construction company in violation of the terms of his tourist visa. Next, he spoke about Michael J. Fox, the entertainment icon and Canadian immigrant, who had also once been an undocumented worker. Finally, he mentioned the well-known dog behaviorist and television personality César Millán, who came to the United States from Mexico without documentation.

José Luís followed this introduction by reading his chosen scripture, Lev 19:33-34 which not only condemns the oppression of aliens but also requires that the Israelites “love the alien as [themselves].”¹⁴ At this point, those of us in the audience expected José Luís to share his own story as an immigrant and were surprised when he instead began to speak of his struggle when he was still in his native Argentina to understand those who immigrated from other countries:

¹⁴ Lev 19:34, NRSV.

Yo recuerdo, por ejemplo, en Argentina una vez conocí a un muchacho que vino de Perú. El había inmigrado porque su país tenía poco trabajo, y lamentablemente no tenía por sostener a su familia. Y quizás en ese tiempo no lo entendí. Y eso es lo que relaciono muchas veces con el ciudadano americano. Si ellos se han criado acá y si viven acá, a veces no pueden verlo con la misma lente que los inmigrantes porque no han sufrido aquí en su lugar de origen. En ese momento, yo estaba en Argentina en mi lugar de origen y no entendía como un señor de otro país, de Perú, podía dejar toda la familia para venir a trabajar. No entendía eso.

I remember, for example, in Argentina one time I met a young man who came from Peru. He had immigrated because his country had little work, and unfortunately he did not have enough to sustain his family. And maybe back then I did not understand. And that is what I often relate to the American citizen. If they have been raised here and live here, sometimes they cannot see through the same lens as immigrants do because they have not suffered here in their place of origin. Back then, I was in Argentina in my place of origin and I did not understand how a man from another country, from Peru, could leave his whole family to come and work. I did not understand that.

It had been easy for José Luís to misunderstand the plight of an immigrant when he had been comfortable in his country of origin. He recognized that most U.S. citizens would never have an experience of immigration like his to reorient their vision, but he said that forming a real friendship with an immigrant could provide a similar result. Over time, his friendship with a Peruvian immigrant had transcended the gulf in his understanding. He had grown to love an alien as himself and he would never look at immigration the same way again.

A History Lesson

Marisol began her sermon by reading her chosen text from the second chapter of Ephesians in which Paul describes the Gentiles as “being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world.”¹⁵ In the face of this alienation, the mediating work of Christ transforms the Gentiles into “saints and also members of the household of God” thus making one people of two.¹⁶ Then she segued into a story about a former teacher she had known in Mexico City:

¹⁵ Eph 2:12, NRSV.

¹⁶ Eph 2:19, NRSV.

Cuando yo era más chica y estaba en “middle school,” tenía una maestra muy apasionada por la historia. Siempre decía que aprender historia era importante. Pero no sólo aprender fechas y nombres, no. Siempre decía, “Quien no conoce el pasado está condenado a repetir los mismos errores en el futuro.”

When I was much younger and I was in middle school, I had a teacher who was very passionate about history. She always said that learning history was important. But not just learning dates and names, no. She always said, “Whoever does not know the past is condemned to repeat the same mistakes in the future.”

In spite of her teacher’s warning, Marisol only focused on memorizing the names and dates which would help her pass her tests while overlooking the connections between the people and historical movements she was studying. When she was thirty years old, however, Marisol came to the United States as an undocumented immigrant and began to see things from a radically different perspective. She described the difficulty of her immigration as a blessing in disguise which allowed her to understand the pain of displacement and of packing an entire life into a single suitcase. Then she proceeded to help her imagined Anglo-American audience locate themselves within the scripture she had read:

Los de la circuncisión sigan siendo conocidos hoy como las clases privilegiadas. Aquellos de nosotros que somos mayoría. Aquellos de nosotros que tenemos la piel más clara. Aquellos de nosotros que somos ciudadanos de este país y tenemos derecho al voto y nos decimos ser fieles cristianos. Y aquellos – los incircuncisos – aquellos de nosotros que somos minorías. Aquellos de nosotros que tenemos la piel más oscura. Los que no tenemos un estatus legal en este país y vivimos en las sombras con temor.

Those of the circumcision continue being known today as the privileged classes. Those of us who are in the majority. Those of us who have lighter skin. Those of us who are citizens of this country and have the right to vote and who call ourselves faithful Christians. And those – the uncircumcised – those of us who are minorities. Those of us who have darker skin. Those who do not have legal status in this country and live in the shadows in fear.

Marisol was careful all through this section of her sermon to use inclusive language, continually speaking to “those of us” rather than “those of you.” At this point, Marisol returned to the story of her middle school history teacher’s lesson on the importance of knowing history. She reflected on the ways in which cities and nations have built walls and fortifications for protection from

foreign invasion and influence. Then she discussed the ways in which we do the same thing as individuals, fencing in our property for privacy from those around us. But finding these physical fences to be insufficient to shield us from others whom we deem too different, we erect other barriers as well:

Empezamos a levantar murallas emocionales – murallas de odio, de injusticia, de egoísmo, de apatía hacia aquellos que son diferentes. Y los muros cada vez son mas altos. Y cada vez son mas anchos. Y no nos dejan ver más allá. Y no nos dejan hacer lo que Cristo nos ha enviado a hacer a cada uno de nosotros	We begin to raise up emotional walls – walls of hatred, of injustice, of selfishness, of apathy toward those who are different. And each time the walls are taller. And each time they are wider. And they do not allow us to see over there. And they do not allow us to do what Christ has sent us to do—each one of us.
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These walls, Marisol assured us, needed to be torn down just as desperately as did the walls that stood between Jews and Gentiles in the first century. They could only be torn down by believers who would move past the easy aspects of Christianity and truly allow themselves to be troubled by the suffering of their brothers and sisters:

No seamos uno cuando las cosas son fáciles, cuando los problemas de otros no crucen el muro de mi jardín y empiezan a incomodar mi casa y empiezan a invadir la zona en que yo estoy cómodo. ¡Incomódate hermano! ¡Incomódate hermana! Deja que el espíritu santo entre en tu corazón. Incomódate y deja que [el espíritu] derrumba todos esos muros, todas esas barreras que tu mismo has levantado. Y con las piedras que quedan, deja que Cristo construya un edificio con cimientos nuevos.	Let us not be one when things are easy, when the problems of others do not cross the wall into my yard and begin to inconvenience my house and begin to invade the zone in which I am comfortable. Give up your comfort brother! Give up your comfort sister! Allow the holy spirit to enter your heart. Give up your comfort and allow [the spirit] to tear down all those walls, all those barriers that you yourself have raised up. And with the rocks that remain, allow Christ to construct a building with a new foundation.
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A Warning of Coming Judgment

When we were selecting our passages, Joaquín immediately settled on Ex 12:49, which declares that “there shall be one law for the native and for the alien who resides among you.” The immediate

context for this mandate is the observance of the first Passover in which aliens were welcome to participate if they also had been circumcised. Joaquín, however, reflected more broadly on the placement of this verse and the Passover meal itself within the series of devastating plagues visited upon the Egyptians who, as the dominant culture in the text, had oppressed the Hebrew people with laws that treated natives and aliens in vastly different ways. Throughout his sermon, Joaquín drew a subtle line between the actions of the Egyptians and their leaders and the actions of U.S. citizens and their leaders.

Joaquín preached this particular message toward the end of April, 2018. Just a few weeks earlier, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security had implemented drastic changes in its border policy. According to section 1325(a) of the U.S. Code, improper entry into the United States has always been addressed with civil penalties, including fines of between \$50 and \$250.¹⁷ Aliens found to have entered the U.S. without proper documentation were deported, but not charged with criminal activity. Beginning on April 6, 2018, U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions issued a memo requiring the Justice Department to “prosecute all Department of Homeland Security referrals of section 1325(a) violations.”¹⁸ This policy meant that all aliens apprehended along the Southwest border and suspected of improper entry would thenceforth be treated as criminals. In order to hold adult aliens in federal custody long enough to be able to prosecute them, the Justice Department also began taking their children from them and housing them in separate detention centers. This practice certainly opened a gulf between the treatment of natives and aliens.

Joaquín stated clearly that the United States was not living up to Ex 12:49 in its current treatment of undocumented immigrants in the United States. He described this new country in which he lived as “una tierra prometida / a promised land” and a nation that had been blessed by God, but that blessing could not be taken for granted:

Si Ud. y yo no estamos cumpliendo lo que dice la escritura, Dios no puede bendecirnos más allá de lo que ya nos ha bendecido. El quiere bendecirnos más pero si nosotros no estamos haciendo su voluntad de hacer una sola ley para el extranjero entre nosotros, Dios puede detener la bendición. Y puede dársela a aquellos que están abrazando su palabra.	If you and I are not fulfilling what the scripture says, God cannot bless us beyond how he has already blessed us. He wants to bless us more but if we are not doing his will in having just one law for the foreigner among us, God can hold back his blessing. And he can give it to those who are embracing his word.
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¹⁷ These penalties are spelled out in the U.S. Code, Title 8, Chapter 12, Subchapter II, Part VIII, Section 1325. Cf. <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/8/1325>.

¹⁸ Attorney General Announces Zero-Tolerance Policy for Criminal Illegal Entry, in: The United States Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-announces-zero-tolerance-policy-criminal-illegal-entry>.

Conclusion

What then can be made of these sermons preached from sanctuary? Given the vast power of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security deployed against them, what possible impact can a few immigrant preachers gathered in solidarity have on the current state of immigration policy in the United States? We do not know, but these are not the first followers of Christ who gathered together in fear before going forth in power. They will all continue to preach – they and many others – calling their congregations to remember the presence and power of God in their midst, to stand in solidarity with one another, and to provide a faithful witness to those who see them as something less than bearers of God’s own image. They will preach, when granted the opportunity, to members of the very dominant culture that oppresses them, humanizing the demonized, offering gracious lessons in history and theology, and speaking a word of warning to those who might listen.

In this work of collaborative ethnography, our purpose has been to find a wider audience for their words and their embodied witness – to amplify their message so that it carries beyond the brick walls of The Garden. We believe that their message is needed both to provide hope to the hopeless and sight to the blind. It is our desire that their words and witness move others in the way they have moved us.

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Preaching in a Xenophobic Culture: A South African Perspective¹

Ian Nell²

Abstract

The large number of xenophobic attacks that broke out in different places in South Africa during 2008 is still continuing unabated ten years later. We are still under pressure to come to terms with the reality that this occurred in a country that is globally considered to be an example of reconciliation. In this article the primary causes of these xenophobic outbreaks stemming from fear are scrutinised and placed within the wider framework of a culture of fear. Finally, the impact of violence and fear on practice of preaching within a Christian context is discussed, asking the question: How do we go about preaching within this fearful context?

On Madiba's 100th birthday, we now stand at a crossroads, a moment in time in which two very different visions of humanity's future compete for the hearts and minds of citizens around the world. Two different stories, two different narratives, about who we are and who we should be.

Barack Obama

Speech commemorating Mandela's legacy, 17 July 2018

Introduction

The world celebrated the legacy and memory of one of Africa's most illustrious leaders, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, on 18 July 2018, just two weeks ago. The last few months have been special because it is the centenary celebration of his birth. His leadership was significant in reprioritising humanity and dignity by accentuating reconciliation and forgiveness, respect for all, the protection of human rights and equal opportunity. Thabo Leshilo asked Cheryl Hendricks and Keith

¹ This material is based on work supported by the National Research Foundation under grant number IFR170223223384. Any opinion, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and the National Research Foundation does not accept any liability in regard thereto.

² Paper delivered at the conference of *Societas Homiletica* in Durham, North Carolina, 3–5 August 2018. Theme of the conference: "Fearing God in a Fear-filled World? Homiletical Explorations".

Gottschalk to reflect on Barack Obama's speech³ commemorating Mandela's legacy by asking: What are the three most important things to take away from the speech?

Cheryl Hendricks: His key points were firstly that we are at a crossroads. What we have built and achieved over the last 100 years is being contested by those who espouse *the politics of fear* and resentment, fueled by the contradictions of globalization, failures of governance and political elites that have assumed a monopoly of power. This is manifested in *xenophobia*, terrorism, chauvinism, narrow nationalism, gender inequality, economic greed and authoritarianism. It's in direct opposition to the values, ideals and principles embodied by Madiba and the many who fought for democracy and freedom. It is uncertain which one will win, but we need to resist the cynicism, the divisions, hatred, corruption and be guided by universal principals, love, and servant collective leadership. *Gottschalk*: We have to address *the fears* of those who feel left out or left behind by globalization. We must work harder and smarter to realize Madiba's vision for freedom.⁴ [Emphasis mine]

From Obama's speech it is very clear that we are confronted by the politics of fear, which are manifested in xenophobia and all the other -isms he refers to. Before we start reflecting on a culture of fear and xenophobia, I think it might be worthwhile to attempt to define fear.

On defining fear

Martha Nussbaum recently published a volume on fear with the title *The Monarchy of Fear: A Philosopher Looks at our Political Crisis*.⁵ Christopher Borelli from the *Chicago Tribune* asked her in an interview on her book: "What is fear?" She answered as follows:

Fear is the sense that there are things that are bad for you and your well-being, looming over you, and you are not fully in control of warding them off. That is how Aristotle defines fear and what everyone agrees on. Fear can also be archaic and infantile. We have fear as soon as we are born, we are born into a state of physical helplessness. Humans can't do anything to get what they want for quite a long time. Unlike horses we can't even stand. So we are in a state of constant fear – "Will I ever have my hunger assuaged?" It leaves a mark. Then we learn we will die. We learn early on, and fear

³ The title of the address by President *Barack Obama* was "Renewing the Mandela Legacy and Promoting Active Citizenship in a Changing World".

⁴ *Cheryl Hendricks/Keith Gottschalk*, Obama Pays Tribute to Mandela. And Invites the World to Find its Better Angels, in: *The Conversation* (17 July 2018), 1.

⁵ *Martha Nussbaum*, *The Monarchy of Fear. A Philosopher Looks at our Political Crisis*, Oxford 2018.

never goes away, we are all powerless over it. So fear can be easily hijacked and grow out of control – arguably more so than other emotions, I would argue.⁶

She further discusses aspects of fear and shows how often fear comes with a narrow self-interest that can include things such as one's family, city or country. She points out that fear often leads to anger and that one can then be under the wrong impression that one is in charge of one's fear. Fear also brings other emotions such as jealousy and despair to the surface, which means we do not want other people to enjoy the good things in life. Having some understanding of fear, we can now move on to a culture of fear.

A culture of fear

The first thing one realises when thinking and reflecting on the xenophobia that President Obama spoke about is that it is sustained by a culture and politics of fear and that it is not a phenomenon restricted to South Africa. We find a culture of fear all over the globe and it is normally associated with the workplace, politics and the impact of the media and publications. In 2013 the French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, who lives in Algiers and Berlin, titled his work *The Culture of Fear: An Invention of Evil*, and it was shown as part of Attia's major exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Australia.

He was born in France in 1970 and grew up travelling between his ancestral home of Algeria and his birthplace in the suburbs of Paris. In the catalogue interview with the exhibitions curator, Attia tells of being part of two cultures, citing this experience as the basis of his practice. The Culture of Fear is a kind of library, displaying images and illustrations from 19th, 20th and 21st century books, newspapers and magazines. These are hung from hardware variety steel shelves usually synonymous with household garages. In Attia's creation the shelves are interlocked and transformed into dangerously high towers, evoking New York's Twin Towers.⁷

One realises that a primary source for this fear relates to the horror of the 9/11 event in the USA, but Attia's work prompts one "to distinguish between the perpetrators' acts, the images of this terror then produced and disseminated *en masse*, and the effect the images have in creating dangerously divisive stereotypes."⁸ He writes that today's culture of fear did not start with the 9/11

⁶ Christopher Borelli, Our Summer of Fear. A Conversation with Chicago Philosopher Martha Nussbaum, in: Chicago Tribune (4 July 2018), 1–2.

⁷ Cherine Fahd, Terror, Muslims, and a Culture of Fear: Challenging the Media Messages, in: The Conversation (10 May 2017), 1.

⁸ Ibid., 3.

events, but was with us all along and is shaped by cultural suppositions about human vulnerability. In a recent article, Robinson⁹ writes about white American Protestant evangelicals who voted for Trump because “[t]hey feared that immigration was destroying America’s European heritage, and that as white Protestantism waned, democracy itself would collapse.”

Structure of the argument

This article also concentrates on fear, but in this case on the ‘fear of the stranger,’ particularly from a South African point of view. I will start with some general comments on the phenomenon of xenophobia within the context of fear and violence in South Africa, trying to answer the question: Why are we still struggling with this phenomenon more than a decade after it first appeared on South African soil? I will be looking at what is lying behind the culture of fear underlying these acts of violence. After exploring some of the factors related to a culture of fear by making use of a sociological frame, I want to move on and try to answer a second question: How do we, as preachers, researchers, and practical theologians, respond in a theological way to the challenges posed by a xenophobic culture in our preaching activities?

An unhealthy South African society

In his reflection on xenophobic violence, Chris Kenyon came to the conclusion that “we are a sick society”.

If we judge South African society by this measure, the brutal beatings, burnings and displacements of our emigrant communities over the past few weeks must suggest that we are still a sick society. Responsibility for the wave of xenophobia sweeping across South Africa has been laid at the feet of various factors and actors: criminal groups, our present and past governments for lack of service delivery, and institutions responsible for law and order.¹⁰

While there might be considerable truth in some of these perspectives, it is important that in our reaction as practical theologians we look for wider reasons. This causes many questions, such as: What is behind all of this? What are we grappling with here? What are the reasons? To be honest, we don’t know yet. What we do know, is that this is a complex phenomenon with various possible

⁹ *Marilyn Robinson*, What it Means to be a Christian in America Today, in: *The Conversation* (19 June 2018), 1–2.

¹⁰ *Chris Kenyon*, What do the Xenophobic Attacks Reveal about the Health of South African Society?, in: *SAMJ* 98 (7) (2008), 531.

descriptions. But that doesn't remove our accountability to search for some deep causes. The following is an effort to trace some of these reasons.

Mapping the pattern of a xenophobic culture

Many motives for this life-threatening form of social exclusion have been offered. Explanations for xenophobic prejudice often focus on three types of factors: "(a) *interactive factors* related to the amount of exposure inhabitants have to strangers, (b) *cultural factors*, which include identity and nationalism, and (c) *material or economic factors* related to employment opportunities, available resources, and so forth."¹¹ A useful starting point in illuminating the causes of this xenophobic endemic is to map out the pattern of xenophobia. With this in mind, I want to use an adapted version of the work of Johannes Van der Ven¹² in distinguishing between factors relating to identity, integration, politics and economics that can help us in identifying a pattern of some of the complexities involved in a xenophobic culture.

Factors related to identity

The first factor is identity and the word 'latency' is used as descriptor to show that norms, values, and convictions are lying latent under the surface of society until a crisis breaks out or a conflict is experienced.¹³ It is then that the norms, values, and convictions awake and start to play an important role. To begin with, it is difficult to understand the current crisis with xenophobia without carefully accounting for the cultural-historical past of our country; in other words, for the issues involving the identity and culture of our country's various population groups.¹⁴

Here we think about South Africa's colonial past, which is long not over yet. British colonisation formed the basis for further political and economic development of the Cape from 1806 onwards. Western Europe exported modernity to Africa and other regions through colonisation during the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century. Included in these endeavours was the idea of the nation-state with one main language, a national education system, a developed economy, and modern technology.¹⁵ This led to economic impoverishment, inhuman treatment and cultural humiliation of South Africa's indigenous communities. Home-grown cultural norms were damaged to such a degree that it led to the biggest colonial heritage, namely

¹¹ *Jonathan Crush*, Wade Pendleton, *Public Attitudes toward Immigration in the United States, France and Germany*, Cambridge 2007, 75.

¹² *Johannes A. van der Ven*, *Ecclesiology in Context*, Kampen 1993.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴ *Sampie Terblanche*, *A History of Inequality in South Africa 1652–2002*, Pietermaritzburg 2002.

¹⁵ *Herman Giliomee*, *The Afrikaners. Biography of a People*, Cape Town 2003, 15.

the silent recognition of South Africa's imported colonial modernity as norm by people who were dishonoured by the system.

This silent recognition of modernism in its colonial cloak is characteristic of the African continent.¹⁶ In South Africa we find this in the activities of the two strongest indigenous political movements after they came into power, namely Afrikaner and African nationalism. Both movements were of the opinion that liberation lay in taking the state over from the colonialists. This thought gained such momentum that both groups were prepared to turn to violence in pursuing that cause. What happened in the process was that the needed state and economic administration skills were not established and that the real challenge was only recognised later, namely how to reconcile imported colonial modernity with local needs.

A result of the aforementioned was that the new elite started to use the state as means of patronage for their ethnic supporters. By taking this route, the previous colonial elite was simply substituted as conduit to local wealth, but with very few changes in the financial policy and the lives of the majority of residents. This was the case with both the National Party and the African National Congress.

Without going into unnecessary detail, the results are very clear in South Africa today. Through affirmative action and black economic empowerment, a small but strong middle class has developed. Unfortunately, in the lives of 60% of the poor people in our country very little changed, most of whom live in informal settlements and squatter camps. This state of affairs, together with poor service delivery, ongoing poverty and a shaky infrastructure, gives one some understanding of the xenophobic attacks and associated violence. Black South Africans who are desperate and have rarely disclosed xenophobic behaviour in the past but who were left behind by the government turned onto foreigners in their frustration and accused them of stealing their homes and jobs. It is very clear that we are dealing here with the actions of distressed victims seeking recognition by resorting to violence and exercising it on the weaker party.

Factors related to integration

The second factor is integration, and this relates to the binding strength and cohesion in society. What are the things that bind people or hold them apart and what is the strength of the underlying social relations? How do people handle conflict and how is it resolved? What is the role of leaders in all of this?¹⁷ It is well known that a spiral of violence has entrenched itself over a long period in

¹⁶ *Samuel Kobia*, *The Courage to Hope. The Roots for a New Vision and the Calling of the Church in Africa*, Geneva 2003, 10.

¹⁷ *Van der Ven* (note 12), 69.

our country. Theories underpinning this spiral of violence all start by pointing to the presence of “institutional” or “structural” violence. It is, in other words, about the radical disparities concerning opportunities, resources, and privileges in society kept together by different forms of power. One main example of this kind of violence is of course the ideology of apartheid.¹⁸

It is also further evident that this kind of violence is particularly widespread in deprived communities where people are attacked who are seen as strangers.¹⁹ In South Africa, this “baseline rate of violent crime” is one of the highest in the world.²⁰ Swart states: “There is a direct connection between poverty and the problems of violence, criminality and other social ills that are plaguing this society.”²¹ This all leads to different kinds of tension and works against processes that aim to promote social cohesion.

Factors related to politics

The third factor is politics and it relates to the concept of “goal attainment,” referring to that which one is striving for or what one wants to achieve in life. In other words, it is about the different actions one plans in reaching one’s goals.²² We know that violent attacks on foreigners in South Africa did not occur out of the blue. It was the result of violent crime which, according to the Human Development Report 2016, was among the highest in the world.²³ It was planned and purposeful action by a number of people, including politicians and state officials.

According to Michael Neocosmos,²⁴ xenophobia must be understood as a political discourse that is the result of a politics of fear that is widespread in both society and state. According to him, this politics of fear has at least three major components: “a state discourse of xenophobia, a discourse of South Africa exceptionalism and a conception of citizenship founded exclusively on indigeneity.”²⁵ He discusses each one of these factors in detail, and I will try to summarise his argument briefly.

¹⁸ *Dirkie J. Smit*, Mainline Protestantism in South Africa – and Modernity? Tentative Reflections for Discussion, in: Proceedings of the International and Interdisciplinary Meeting on Religion and Development. Crisis or New Opportunities?, Amsterdam, 14–15 June 2007, 5.

¹⁹ *Kenyon* (note 10), 531.

²⁰ Kevin Watkins (ed.), Human Development Report 2007/2008: Fighting Climate Change: Human Solidarity in a Divided World, New York (NY) 2007, 6.

²¹ *Ignatius Swart*, Meeting the Challenge of Poverty and Exclusion: The Emerging Field of Development Research in South African Practical Theology, in: International Journal of Practical Theology 12(1) (2008), 104–149.

²² *Van der Ven* (note 12), 69.

²³ *Selim Jaban* (ed.), Human Development Report 2016: Human Development for Everyone, New York (NY) 2016.

²⁴ *Michael Neocosmos*, The Politics of Fear and the Fear of Politics: Reflections on Xenophobic Violence in South Africa, in: Journal of Asian and African Studies 43(6) (2008).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 587.

Concerning “a state discourse of xenophobia,” we find that government departments and especially the police have been reinforcing messages that we are being invaded by illegal immigrants who are a personal threat and a threat to national stability and the very fabric of our society. Already back in 1998, the Human Rights Watch concluded that “in general, South Africa’s public culture has become increasingly xenophobic, and politicians often make unsubstantiated and inflammatory statements that the ‘deluge’ of migrants is responsible for the current crime wave, rising unemployment and even the spread of diseases.”²⁶ In this regard the press also played a huge part in contributing to a climate of fear of migrants through numerous news reports warning people that the migrants are flooding into the country to steal the jobs of the locals.

On the topic of “a discourse of exceptionalism,” Neocosmos writes that there is the idea that the country “is not really in Africa and that its intellectual and cultural frame of reference is in the USA and Europe.”²⁷ This attitude often stems from the idea that Africa is understood as the place of “the other” and that what is happening in the rest of Africa (in terms of genocide and wars) could not possibly happen here. If you add to this the view that South Africa must be extraordinary, as it is coveted by the rest of the world for having succeeded in running a successful reconciliation process, one can see what is meant by the discourse of exceptionalism.

Concerning “the discourse of indigeneity,” Neocosmos reflects on a letter that was written to the *Mail & Guardian* in which the author argued that black economic empowerment should be restricted to the indigenous, meaning that Indians and brown people should be excluded, being somehow less indigenous.²⁸ It is also a common way in which many people argue in public while historically, the only truly indigenous people would be the San, with all the other groups migrating from the North.

It is clear from the above that xenophobia can be seen as a political discourse, but then one that has not been contested successfully and has been allowed to become hegemonic. According to Gous, this is happening in a time of growing globalisation where we find a return to nationalism, creating a certain paradox in the sense that on the one hand, one finds more openness over boundaries, while on the other hand, one finds growing xenophobia and violence against immigrants.²⁹

²⁶ Human Rights Watch, *Prohibited Persons. Abuse of Undocumented Migrants, Asylum Seekers, and Refugees in South Africa*, New York (NY) 1998, 4.

²⁷ *Neocosmos* (note 24), 590–591.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 591–592.

²⁹ *Amanda Gous*, *Ons het nie nog ’n vader nodig* [We do not Need another Father], in: *Beeld* (14 February 2018), 10.

Factors related to economics

The fourth factor is economics and the word “adaptation” is used to describe the material needs that are necessary for survival. One needs financial provisions to adapt to changing circumstances.³⁰ According to Wilkinson, one of the main factors playing a role in xenophobic attacks are economic inequalities.³¹ He believes that greater income inequality leads to the escalation of social distance between the different income groups and that it also renders it difficult to develop a common and shared identity.

Vast differences in material wealth could also be seen as a difference in status as well as a difference in people’s inherent worth. Where one finds communities where one’s self-worth is determined by one’s material wealth, it will happen that people finding themselves at the bottom end of the social hierarchy end up with low self-esteem and frustration because of exclusion from the different means of making a living. In this regard, it is normally young adult men who are prone to react on the slightest provocation. One also finds with every outbreak of xenophobic violence in South Africa the refrain “the *kwerekwere* are stealing our jobs,” where *kwerekwere* can be translated as “foreigners.”³²

Looking at the four factors, one finds a multi-layered and complex picture of the prevalence of xenophobia among South Africans, which brings us to the next question: How do we preach in a xenophobic culture?

Preaching in a xenophobic culture

In the introductory note on the conference on the website of *Societas Homiletica*,³³ Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm asks a number of questions related to the conference theme. The last question she asks is: “How do we describe and develop homiletical spaces in which fear needs to be expressed?” It is to this question that I want to respond in the second part of my own homiletical exploration. I want to propose that one way to approach an answer to this challenge is by putting the concept of reconciliation in the middle of the homiletical space. In concentrating on reconciliation, I want to open up at least three ways in which we can speak and preach about reconciliation within a xenophobic culture.

³⁰ *Van der Ven* (note 12), 70.

³¹ *Richard Wilkinson*, *The Impact of Inequality*, New York (NY) 2005, 15.

³² *Kevin Wilkinson*, *South Africa’s Xenophobic Attacks. Are Migrants Really Stealing Jobs?*, in: *The Guardian* (20 April 2015), 1.

³³ <http://www.societas-homiletica.org/upcoming/>

But before we get to that, first something about the importance of reconciliation. The South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey³⁴ is a nationally representative public opinion poll conducted annually by the Institute for Justice and Reconciliation (IJR). The barometer focuses on progress in reconciliation in South Africa. Key issues addressed in the survey include human security, political culture, political relationships, dialogue, historical confrontation and race relations. The barometer aims to gather how these aspects impact reconciliation in South Africa. It is a joint project of the Khayabus opinion poll of Ipsos-Markinor and the IJR, which collects data through interviews with a nationwide representative sample of 3 487 South Africans. There is a presumption that 95% of the data is accurate and a possible deviation of 1.7% is calculated. The 2017 barometer indicated the following:³⁵

- Many unresolved legacies of the apartheid and colonial eras remain. They continue to this day to present an obstacle in the way of achieving a truly fair and equitable society. As such, these legacies have to be confronted head-on and acknowledged.
- Despite some decline in the acknowledgement of the injustices of apartheid, a significant majority is still of the view that the apartheid system could be categorised as a crime against humanity.
- A majority of South Africans, furthermore, agree that the legacies of apartheid continue to persist to the present day, although differences between race groups are evident in this regard. Combined with perceptions of political and economic power and related fears born out of perceptions in this regard, unaddressed legacies remain divisive and limiting to reconciliation.
- Most South Africans feel that reconciliation is still needed, and that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a good foundation for reconciliation in the country. However, just over half of the population feel that progress in terms of reconciliation has been made, while less than half of South Africans report having experienced reconciliation themselves.

With these indicators in mind I want to propose three ways in which preaching in a xenophobic context can benefit, namely through focusing on the logos, the pathos and the ethos of reconciliation.

³⁴ The South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey is a public opinion survey conducted by the IJR since 2003. It is the only survey dedicated to critical measurement of reconciliation in South Africa, and is the largest longitudinal data source of its kind globally.

³⁵ *Elnari Potgieter*, South African Reconciliation Barometer Survey, 2017 Report.

<https://www.ijr.org.za/portfolio-items/south-african-reconciliation-barometer-survey-2017-report/>.

The logos of reconciliation – the Triune God

With the logos of reconciliation, I have in mind *what we believe* and *why* it ought to make sense for Christian believers in a homiletic context that is challenged by xenophobia. These include issues such as the following: What kind of theological discourse do we need in a country where there is so much distrust and misunderstanding? What vision and biblical images do we need to enter into dialogue about God, creation and humanity at this moment? How can a culture of fear be transformed into a culture of self-respect and human dignity? In other words, what would be the good news for the people of South Africa in a context of xenophobia? The choice of reconciliation in this regard is not without certain risks. Hay³⁶ wrote in 1998:

Religious groups, churches, political groups and others found it a convenient word on which to hang their ideological clothing. The apartheid regime blithely used talk of reconciliation to maintain the status quo. On the other side, those in the struggle spoke about no reconciliation without justice.

Nevertheless, I agree with Rohr and Morell's view on reconciliation as a comprehensive concept for healing processes at different levels, including the entire cosmos and communities, and also on the personal level.³⁷ For the Christian tradition, reconciliation is the result of God's radical presence in the world through his Son and in the Spirit. In this regard, it serves as opposition to any form of exclusion, power abuse and alienation. Reconciliation seen in this way has its origin in God and finds its ultimate and final point of reference in the power of God's healing love and compassion with humankind. In one sense, one could say that it is the heart of the Christian faith community's identity, and we constantly need to be reminded of this through the act of preaching.

A metaphor often used in expressing the New Testament's alternative vision of reconciliation is the understanding of God as a living Triune God. Volf³⁸ uses the suffering of Christ to explain something about the internal dialogue within the Trinity and this eventually becomes the most decisive model for reconciliation. The cross, says Miroslav Volf, is "giving up of God's self in order not to give up on humanity."³⁹ He develops his theology of embrace in terms of these two dimensions of the cross: the self-confessed love of Christ that overcomes human hostility and the creation of space in Godself to accept alienated humanity.

³⁶ *Mark O.M.I. Hay*, *Ukubuyisana: Reconciliation in South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg 1998, 13.

³⁷ *Richard Rohr/Mike Morell*, *The Divine Dance: The Trinity and your Transformation*, Kensington (PA) 2016, 131–136.

³⁸ *Miroslav Volf*, *Exclusion & Embrace. A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*, Grand Rapids (MI) 2010.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

In light of the latter, we can say that the Triune God is fully open and that there is equal power between God, Jesus, and the Spirit while making in themselves space for the other. This necessarily leads to a dynamic understanding of our own identity that enables mutual non-hierarchical relationships and creates community – a community of mutual forgiveness and liberation, integrity and integration, wholeness and interdependence.⁴⁰ Hereby we find a radical reinterpretation of power in the light of God's healing love and compassion, in God's impartiality and in his ability to reconcile and restore the dignity of life.

The pathos of reconciliation – the liturgy

In the logos of reconciliation, I propose an alternative vision for reconciliation by concentrating on the Trinitarian self-giving of God embodied in Christ's suffering on the cross in order for us to live a reconciled life full of dignity. The questions are now: How does this alternative vision work in practice? What in our context can give a counter-experience to xenophobia and what impulses are powerful enough to move people to other insights?

In his book *Desiring the Kingdom*, James Smith⁴¹ puts forward one alternative vision in very practical terms that can help create a counter-intuitive experience, helping us to move to new insights regarding a reconciled life. Smith explains passionately and in everyday language how worship contributes to the formation of our lives and how both can also be associated with education. He explains how the embodiment of God's love through Christ's suffering, which worship offers us, is central to a life of reconciliation. Therefore, our teaching and learning need to pay close attention to the ordering of our love, and by implication, also of our desires.

He also develops a new vision for higher education, focusing on the fundamental desires of the heart. He describes very well how liturgies in our contemporary society are being worked out and performed in our churches, while the same underlying principles are also at work in sports arenas, shopping malls and even the world of work. He continues and re-imagines the Christian university not only as a place where students are busy with the formation of their thinking, but also as a place where they ought to be taught to love the world in the right way. It stands in stark contrast to all our fears because we know from our tradition that love overcomes fear. The ordering of our love therefore starts with the order of the liturgy, and from there it flows into the ordering of our lives.

⁴⁰ Rohr/Morrell (note 36).

⁴¹ James K. Smith, 2009. *Desiring the Kingdom (Cultural Liturgies)*. Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation, Grand Rapids (MI) 2009.

The ethos of reconciliation – integrity as liberating and healing ethos

With the ethos of reconciliation we come to understand the acting individual who has to perform and take the lead, who has to convey the message of reconciliation with integrity and character on the basis of the correct ordering of his/her loves and desires. Rather than trying to provide a catalogue of virtues, I thought it best rather to return to the legacy of Nelson Mandela and to try to determine what made him such a remarkable leader and advocate for reconciliation. Hendricks summarises Mandela's leadership as follows:

Mandela was a humble, visionary leader of international stature seeking to bridge the divides between the North and the South to promote a common humanity, to reinvigorate multilateralism, to fight inequality and provide a moral compass for the world. His ideas about attaining peace in Africa through negotiations and mediation and creating more inclusive societies is one that still shapes conflict management on the continent. In South Africa his contribution remains his vision of a united, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic society that eschewed tribalism and patronage politics, and that promoted collective and servant leadership. He was a unifier in a deeply racially divided society.⁴²

In this context, it is not surprising that young people from across the continent of Africa are taking seriously the challenges Mandela posed for the next generation. In a recent article in *The Conversation* under the title "How Young Activists are Keeping Mandela's Legacy Alive across Africa," Alan Hirsch⁴³ tells us that some of these young people are the leaders of powerful civil and political organisations and campaigns.

According to Hirsch, one such example is a person named Sampson Itodo, who succeeded in organising a campaign that would benefit young Nigerians in their pursuit of political positions. Itodo is one of a number of innovative, efficient young Africans who know Mandela's actions spoke louder than his words. For Itodo it became clear that Mandela was not at all interested in building some heroic cult around himself and that he also left explicit orders that he should not be treated as a half-god and that no statues should be erected for him. Of course, it has been ignored and today, more than 10 larger-than-life-sized statues of Mandela are found in some of the major cities in South Africa, not to mention all the statues of him around the rest of the globe. To return to Itodo's story:

⁴² Note 4.

⁴³ Alan Hirsch, How Young Activists are Keeping Mandela's Legacy Alive across Africa, in: *The Conversation* (5 July 2018), 1–2.

On May 31 this year, Sampson's bill was passed overwhelmingly in the Nigerian Senate and House of Representatives. President Muhammadu Buhari signed it into law. Any Nigerian from the age of 35 can now run for President, and from 25 years for the House or State Assembly.⁴⁴

Itodo, however, did not drive the process on his own. He did it through hard work and by strategically mobilising and organising young people for two years – young people for whom representation was important and who wanted to have a voice in the political system, which many believed have failed. For someone like Itodo and many other young people on the African continent, Mandela's legacy and his belief in the power of young people's activities inspire them and keep them going.

Conclusion

I want to conclude by returning to Obama's speech where he in a very succinct way and almost in the form of a sermon pointed out a way forward by keeping the tension between hope and fear.

We have a better story to tell. But to say that our vision for the future is better is not to say it will inevitably win. Because history also shows the power for fear. History shows the lasting hold of greed and the desire to dominate others in the minds of men. Especially men. History shows how easily people can be convinced to turn on those who look different, or worship God in a different way. So if we're truly to continue Madiba's long walk towards freedom, we're going to have to work harder and we're going to have to be smarter ... I mean, it shows a poverty of ambition to just want to take more and more, instead of saying, "Wow, I've got so much. Who can I help? How can I give more and more and more?" That's ambition. That's impact. That's influence. What an amazing gift to help people, not just yourself. And that's what we need right now, we don't just need one leader, we don't just need one inspiration, what we badly need right now is a collective spirit.

And the congregation responds ... "Amen".

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⁴⁴ Ibid., 3.

Do Military Chaplains Preach?

Exploring Sermons for Soldiers by Protestant Military Chaplains in the Dutch Army¹

Theo Pleizier

Abstract

The practice of Military Chaplains has been studied from various angles (sociological, historical, ethical) except from an empirical homiletical perspective. What do military chaplains do when they preach, if 'preaching' is the correct label for their (religious) speeches. This paper provides a first introduction to study the actual sermons of military chaplains in order to contribute to homiletical theory. It presents the outline of a research design and presents some of its initial results. The paper is based upon 10 sermons by army and naval chaplains within the context of peace-keeping missions. Three concepts emerge from these data, focussing upon the homiletical activity of military chaplains. They redefine the liturgical conditions for preaching, they witness to sources of wisdom, and they dignify the individual soldier in the presence of Christ. The paper closes with a proposal to understand religious discourse in the military context by presenting a tentative typology that is based upon the ceremonial setting of discourse and its religious referentiality.

Introduction and Preliminary Observations

Among the many fears soldiers face, soldiers that work in modern armies and contribute to peace-keeping missions have to deal with the threat to intimate relationships and with the insecurity of being able to continue as a human being *compos mentis* after military service. In a complex variety of personal, relational, work, and battlefield related fears, military chaplains² (MCs) empower soldiers in the moral and existential challenges they encounter. One of the ways they do this is to speak publicly within or outside the setting of Christian worship, commonly called 'preaching.' Various

¹ This article is based upon a paper presented at the biannual conference of *Societas Homiletica* "Fearing God in a fear-filled World," August 2018, Durham NC.

² 'Military chaplain' (MC) is used in this article for chaplains that work within the legal and institutional boundaries of the ministry of Defense and are attached to a specific military unit. In the Dutch context, it is possible to speak about army chaplains, air force chaplains, military police chaplains or navy chaplains, depending upon the unit that the MC is attached to. This is relevant due to the fact units have different histories and cultures, including religious cultures. This article does not address these differences between the various types of MCs.

historical, sociological and moral-philosophical studies have been devoted to the work of military chaplains,³ including their practice of spiritual caregiving.⁴ The interest, however, among practical theologians in general and homileticians in particular, is strikingly scarce. When it comes to homiletics, we find references to memorial services and services for veterans or the topic of ‘war’ in Christian preaching,⁵ but a comprehensive homiletic study of the practice of MCs is lacking. In the literature ‘war sermons’ usually refer to sermons that were preached in the public domain during a time of war but not specifically with military personnel as audience.⁶ These sermons are important to understand the relationship between public religion and war but they do not pay attention to the practice of worship and preaching by MCs.

The literature that pays attention to sermons to soldiers tends to reduce the practice of preaching by MCs to those situations in which MCs are called to boost the morale of soldiers or to provide them with a – questionable – divine legitimation of the battle they are about to fight. This reduction of the military context to actual combat, means that liturgy and preaching are immediately turned into moral issues. A sermon from the 9th Century may function as an example of this rather stereotyped image of the MC as ‘morale booster’: “Men, brothers, fathers [...] Act on this campaign in such a way that God does not desert you in the day of tribulation. Whatever you do, do it for God and God will fight for you.”⁷ Obviously, this kind of preaching raises many ethical questions. Yet it also raises the question whether the moral ambiguities that surround the “preparation for war” preaching by military chaplains create obstacles for a homiletical or practical-theological approach to preaching for soldiers by MCs. If so, empirical research in practical theology and homiletics may help to move beyond a rather one-sided ethical interest in the military by theologians.

This lack of research stimulates the design of open research questions to study the sermons and speeches of military chaplains and to move beyond the rather dominant perspective of theological ethics. So in this paper I ask the question: What do military chaplains (MCs) actually do

³ Els Boon/Jan Hoffenaar/Wilco Veltkamp (eds.), *Met het Woord onder de wapenen*, Zoetermeer 2016; Torkel Brekke/Vladimir Tikhonov (eds.), *Military Chaplaincy in an Era of Religious Pluralism: Military-Religious Nexus in Asia, Europe, and USA*, Oxford 2017; *Kim Philip Hansen*, *Military chaplains and religious diversity*, New York 2012; *Ron E. Hassner*, *Religion on the Battlefield*, Ithaca 2016; Andrew Todd (ed.), *Military Chaplaincy in Contention. Chaplains, Churches and the Morality of Conflict*, Farnham 2016.

⁴ *David Alexander*, With Doug. An Eastern Orthodox Gestalt Framework for Pastoral Psychotherapy in the Armed Forces, in: *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling* 67 (2013) 4, 1–16; *David Coulter/Giles Legood*, *Military Chaplaincy*, in: Revd Dr Christopher Swift/Revd Dr Mark Cobb/Revd Canon Dr Andrew Todd (eds.): *A Handbook of Chaplaincy Studies. Understanding Spiritual Care in Public Places*, Burlington 2015, 201–214; *Carrie Doebring*, *Military Moral Injury: An Evidence-Based and Intercultural Approach to Spiritual Care*, in: *Pastoral Psychology* (2018), 1–16.

⁵ *Terry W. Eddinger*, *Preaching during War*, in: Paul Scott Wilson/Jana Childers/Cleophus J. LaRue et al. (eds.): *New Interpreter’s Handbook of Preaching*, Nashville (TN) 2008, 285–286.

⁶ *Michael Bledsoe*, *Sermons in War. Reflections One Decade After 9/11*, 2012; Gilles Teulié, *War Sermons*, Cambridge 2009.

⁷ *Michael McCormick*, *The Liturgy of War from Antiquity to the Crusades*, in: Doris L. Bergen (ed.): *The Sword of the Lord: Military Chaplains from the First to the Twenty-First Century*, Notre Dame (IN) 2004, 58–60.

when they preach for soldiers in war zones?⁸ This question focuses upon empirical phenomena (what do MCs actually do), it is driven by a practical-theological interest (when they preach) within a particular military domain or substantive area⁹ ('war zones'). An open research question helps to hold open possibilities to discover how the sermons of contemporary military chaplains are much more diverse than the stereotyped pastor who is called to bless the guns.

In the next section I describe a worship service led by a Dutch military chaplain in Kunduz, Afghanistan in 2013 to illustrate the nuanced practice of worship and preaching in the military.¹⁰ After outlining the empirical-homiletical research project on "sermons for soldiers," I present some of its initial findings.

Exemplary Case: Analysis of Worship in Kunduz

A group of soldiers assembles in a temporary building, built in a camp that is part of the NATO Trainings-mission Afghanistan (NTM-A), and located somewhere in the Afghan region Kunduz. Some of them wear camouflage, others are dressed in civilian clothes. The building is used for multiple purposes. The room contains a small library. We see photos on the walls; religious symbols, such as candles and crosses. Thirty soldiers are sitting in chairs. The chaplain is clothed in military uniform, without any recognizable liturgical symbols, except a cross on the uniform that designates his religious function which designates him as a non-combatant under international humanitarian laws because of his special religious duties as described in the Geneva Conventions. From the scene it can be concluded that the chaplain acts in a sacred space, indicated by the burning candle that bears a cross, the light of Easter; in front of the soldiers a simple wooden cross is placed at the centre of the room. As the service unfolds, the chaplain starts to dress the plain cross with a military uniform. Slowly he adds new pieces of military equipment to the cross. Finally, he adds a helmet on top of the cross. It gradually turns into some kind of soldier.

How do we analyse this scene? It obviously depends upon our liturgical theology and the assumptions we have concerning the military. Seeing a chaplain dressing a cross with a military uniform may generate resistance: the symbols of violence, death, and war on the cross, which is the ultimate symbol for God's victory over violence and death and Christ's reconciling love. This first reaction, however, connects to the stereotype that chaplains foremost relate to soldiers as

⁸ 'War zone' is used to indicate the situation between the base and actual combat, such as 'peace-keeping' missions.

⁹ Also called: 'area of interest' or 'substantive field' Barney G. Glaser, *Doing Grounded Theory. Issues and Discussions*, Mill Valley 1998, 118–131.

¹⁰ The example is taken from a recording by a Dutch Television channel that broadcasted an Easter service from a war zone. The documentary was broadcasted at Easter Sunday, March 31, 2013, on Dutch national television as part of a program called 'Zendtijd voor de kerken' [Airtime for churches], a Dutch television program that broadcasts religious services.

combatants. From this assumption, the cross and the violence of military combat cannot go together. The moral ambiguity is obvious. Yet there is another possibility to analyse the scene in the documentary on the Easter service in Kunduz. Suppose that the chaplain was standing in front of a group of doctors and that he puts a white doctor's coat on the cross. Suppose he was preaching for politicians and puts a suit on the cross. We may not like the idea of messing around with liturgical symbols. Yet the meaning that the preacher conveys becomes broader than the context of violence and moral ambiguity with which reflection on the military is permeated.

If the uniform symbolizes the daily life of the soldier, his or her daily clothing, like the doctor's coat or the politician's suit, then the cross is also the symbol that God comes into our everyday lives and that we are allowed to bring to God those things that we carry around in our everyday life. If we analyse the scene from a less ethically loaded and more descriptive practical-theological point of view, the association with violence and combat may not be gone entirely but it is put into its proper place. This theological point also illustrates that the soldier is not immediately put into the category of sinners, at least not quicker than anyone else. There is more than ambiguity alone. The soldier is a human being and the chaplain's vocation is to come as close as possible to the everyday life experience of the military personnel. Hence, the ultimate Christian symbol of the cross has meaning for the daily existence of a soldier, symbolised by the uniform and the soldier's safety equipment.

In the final analysis, we must conclude that in this scene the military chaplain does not primarily deal with soldiers in their role as combatants – or a group of morally vulnerable or even questionable people - but he approaches military personnel as human beings by bringing their everyday life in the reality of Christ's presence.

Research Design

This paper is part of a research project on preaching in the military. The central question in this project is how protestant chaplains fulfil their roles in worship and preaching in the context of the military within the changing conditions of modern war, including peacekeeping or state building. The data in this study varies according to types of sources, to sites, and to military units. For this paper, participatory observations (Afghanistan 2016), interviews with MCs (2017–2018) and 10 sermons are studied as a first step in the project that aims to reconstruct the homiletic practice of protestant army chaplains. The sermons are from three different chaplains, a navy chaplain and

two army chaplains, and all sermons are part of services that were held during deployments, in Mali, Afghanistan and Horn of Africa.¹¹

Two assumptions guided the initial collection and interpretation of the data. First, the conditions of contemporary warfare have an impact on the way military chaplains provide religious services to military personnel. This has consequences for function and topics of preaching. Though the complexity of modern war requires more discussion¹² peace-keeping missions changed the role of chaplains to a large extent¹³ and the fact that many Western armies moved away from conscription and changed into professional armies had consequences for the interaction between chaplains and military personnel.

Second, armies usually reflect the religious situation in the nations they serve and military chaplains adapt their work to this situation. For Western armies, such as the Dutch defence forces this means that military chaplains work in a highly secularised environment. The army is even more secularised than Dutch society, due to the young age of the soldiers. Though 19% feels affiliated with Protestantism, it is estimated that 3-4% of the soldiers regularly attends church; research, however, also shows that 18% of the soldiers attended a service led by a chaplain at least once during the year.¹⁴ These figures do not provide evidence of 're-churching' but they rather show that military chaplains are able to connect to soldiers that are not used to attending religious services.

Though theory formation might be an ultimate goal for empirical research, the outcomes presented in this paper are rather modest. The second part of this article presents three conceptual ideas that have emerged during the analysis of the data.¹⁵ They point to patterns in the data that provide promising leads to enrich existing theory in homiletics. One of these patterns is a model that describes the various types of religious discourse in the context of the military.

¹¹ The manuscripts of the sermons were coded in Atlas.ti, following procedures of 'open coding' according to Grounded Theory methodology *Kathy Charmaz*, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, London/Thousand Oaks (CA) 2014, 47–56; *Judith A. Holton*, *The Coding Process and Its Challenges: Coding Process*, in: *Kathy Charmaz/Antony Bryant* (eds.): *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*, Los Angeles (CA) 2007, 265–289.

¹² *E.A. De Landmeter*, *The relevance of Clausewitz's On War to today's conflicts*, in: *Militaire Spectator* 187 (2018) 7/8, 386–399; *Richard English*, *Modern War. A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford 2013.

¹³ *Angelika Dörfler-Dierken*, *The Changing Role of Protestant Military Chaplaincy in Germany. From Raising Military Morale to Praying for Peace*, in: *Religion, State and Society* 39 (2011) 1, 79–91; *S. K. Moore*, *Military Chaplains as Agents of Peace: Religious Leader Engagement in Conflict and Post-Conflict Environments*, Plymouth 2014; *Miroslav Volf*, *Agents of Peace in Theaters of War: Rethinking the Role of Military Chaplains*, in: *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 7 (2009) 4, 33–41.

¹⁴ In a research report on the scope and distribution of military chaplaincy in the Dutch armed force almost 18% of the military personnel report that they attended a religious service led by an army chaplain during the previous year *Ton Bernts/Ruurt Ganzevoort/Carlo Leget* et al., *Omvang en verdeling van de geestelijke verzorging in de krijgsmacht vanaf 2016*, Universiteit van Humanistiek, Vrije Universiteit, Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen, KASKI, (2014), 20.

¹⁵ *Theo Pleizier*, *Religious Involvement in Hearing Sermons. A Grounded Theory Study in Empirical Theology and Homiletics*, Delft 2010, 85–94.

Emerging Conceptual Ideas: First Results of Data Analysis

The first conceptual idea that emerges from studying the empirical material is that chaplains *redefine the liturgical conditions for preaching*. Second, the analysis points to a highly *personal use of Scripture as a source of wisdom*. Third, military chaplains are particularly sensitive to the *dignity of the individual soldier*.

Redefining the Liturgical Conditions for Preaching

Military chaplains conduct worship services in unusual circumstances. Despite exceptions, such as a chapel that is built at camp Marmal in Northern Afghanistan, the services conducted by Dutch protestant chaplains are usually held in informal and transient circumstances: in a bar, in the back of a truck, or in a dining room. If there is anything structural in Christian worship it is time and place: Sunday, as the day of the Lord; a church building that carries the traces of history and breathes the life of today's church that gathers for worship at this place. With some exceptions Dutch protestant military chaplains choose not to work within a traditional liturgical structure. In an interview with a chaplain, he compares the Dutch practice of worship with his German colleagues. Every Sunday the German chaplains in Afghanistan organise services in a specially built chapel at camp Marmal in Mazar-e-Sharif, part of the NATO mission "Resolute Support." The Dutch chaplains, however, he explains, are very pragmatic. They conduct services at the times that the soldiers are available.

Since the Dutch soldiers have their day off on Friday, the Islamic day of rest, the chaplain organises a service on Friday. The trainers of Afghan police and the Force Protection that provides the necessary security for the trainers, do not leave the camp that day. The soldiers are free, and the chaplain uses this time to offer a religious service. Sunday is a day of work for the military and they would probably not turn up in church unless they are highly motivated churchgoers. Therefore, liturgical time becomes redefined within the framework of "pastoral presence."¹⁶ The chaplain does not expect the soldiers to come to him when it suits the chaplain's religious time and place, he or she adapts the time of worship to the schedules of the soldiers. Another chaplain tells a story of accompanying soldiers on multiple day-trips for security checks in the desert of Mali. "Are we going to have a worship service," the soldiers asked him before they left, and they agreed that when the schedule allowed for a service, the chaplain would organise a "moment for reflection."

¹⁶ "Pastoral presence" reflects a particular pastoral attitude and practice. It falls beyond the scope of this article to explain the importance of the concept of "pastoral presence" for the work of chaplains. Cf. *Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, A Ministry of Presence. Chaplaincy, Spiritual Care, and the Law*, Chicago 2014; *Sarah Dunlop, Is 'Being There' Enough? Explorations of Incarnational Missiology with Chaplains*, in: *Practical Theology* 10 (2017) 2, 174–186.

Likewise, liturgical space is being redefined in chaplaincy contexts. The redefinition of liturgical space in Western Europe is connected to processes of increasing multi-religiosity and secularisation. For example, Christian chapels in prisons and hospitals have transformed into multi-faith environments to facilitate diverse religious expressions of worship.¹⁷ Military chaplains have been redefining liturgical space for ages. They have used all sorts of terrains and places to celebrate worship where the soldiers are. Contemporary MCs provide worship services at the base where soldiers are located. The multi-religious and secular context strengthens the ancient practice of praying where the soldiers are: if the soldiers spend leisure time in a room with couches, television sets and a bar, the chaplain does not try to move them out of their space into a sacred space of a specially built chapel but rather uses the space of the soldiers and starts hosting small worship services in the room where they spend their spare time.

During the already mentioned trip in the desert of Mali, the chaplain used the back of a truck and creates a small worship space around the truck. This practice is also performative. One chaplain records the incident that soldiers started to ask whether they are allowed to use the room that is used on Fridays as sacred space, as they themselves had made a sign on the wall saying 'Lion's Rock Chapel' (named after the building at the Dutch part of the international military compound). The sign referred to the fact that this place is used as place for worship and it seemed appropriate to ask the chaplain's permission to use the space for leisure activities

Liturgical time and space become redefined, so is the definition of preaching itself. It is relevant to ask whether the Dutch protestant chaplains preach. They do not speak about preaching nor do they call their speeches sermons. Instead, they use terms like "moment of reflection," or even more accessible: "musings." A naval chaplain uses "column" for his speeches, like a column in a newspaper with an informed yet personal opinion. These redefinitions not only move away from church jargon but they help the chaplains to develop their own personal approaches to the practice of preaching. It creates a new theological attitude to the act of preaching in general and to the language, structure, and content of sermons in particular. It also demonstrates openness towards military personnel from all walks of life. They are not preached to nor are they offered sermons but they are invited to join the space of meditation and to engage with opinions on existential matters offered by the chaplain with help of Biblical texts and the Christian faith.

These redefinitions of liturgical space, liturgical time and liturgical elements such as preaching¹⁸ signals to the soldiers that the chaplain wants to meet them within the conditions of their life and

¹⁷ *Sophie Gilliat-Ray*, From 'Chapel' To 'Prayer Room': The Production, Use, and Politics of Sacred Space in Public Institutions, in: *Culture and Religion* 6 (2005) 2, 287–308.

¹⁸ The discussion is limited to space, time, and preaching as element of worship. Obviously, a more in-depth analysis of 'worship' with soldiers and how chaplains prepare for and lead worship also requires a discussion of the structural

work as military personnel. It also does justice to the widely expressed experience by soldiers that worship is a moment to relax, and to ponder life and especially home. As one of the soldiers told me during a visit in Afghanistan: “I am not religious but I usually go to these meetings with the chaplain because they make me feel human instead of useful.”

Using Biblical Texts: Witness to Sources of Wisdom

The connection between preaching and Scripture barely needs further argumentation. From a Protestant perspective, preaching may even be considered the “primary” use of Scripture. When the congregation assembles to hear God’s Word in preaching, the Biblical text is at the centre of attention, both liturgically and homiletically.¹⁹ Yet the situation for a military chaplain is rather different. The chaplains encounter a situation without a congregation that considers itself to be God’s people waiting for God’s word. Instead, as one of the chaplains tells in an interview, “most of the soldiers do not know anything about church, they do not mind the chaplain talking about God either.” The Bible as authoritative, sacred text for preaching is intrinsically related to the liturgy of the community of faith. How do military chaplains deal with Scripture if they cannot rely upon a commonly shared notion of a sacred text?

Despite differences in style, chaplains take a similar approach when it comes to the use of Scripture in their preaching. One of them, for instance, addresses the issues that are at stake in the mission, such as the dreams of peace that are shattered by cynicism. He raises the question whether their work in Afghanistan has any effect when they leave? The chaplain relates these hopeless experiences to Heman’s cry in Psalm 88: has God forsaken his people? In doing so, he helps to put shattered dreams in perspective, offering wisdom from the text of Scripture.

Another chaplain cultivates the hope of peace in the weeks of Advent with help from the story of Luke 1. The chaplain is realistic about the soldier’s quest for freedom and their contribution in the peacekeeping mission. But taking his cue from Luke 1, while he quotes the Biblical text that for God nothing is impossible, we should not recoil in cynicism nor lose our hope. “Even if you do not believe in God, even if there is enough reason for cynicism, leave the final word to someone else.” A third example: the story in Exodus about God who delivers his people through the Red Sea. The naval chaplain asks the question, “where does this journey lead us” and he refers to Jacob

elements of worship (what theological pattern is used in worship?) and other elements in worship, like prayer and (the use of popular) music. See also A. W. Velema, Gaandeweg, over liturgie in de krijgsmacht, in: G. W. H. Wildering (ed.): *Geestelijke verzorging bij de krijgsmacht als ambacht: over het gebruik van methodiek binnen morele vorming*, Budel 2016, 61–74.

¹⁹ *Theo Pleizier*, Using the Bible as a Protestant Religious Practice, in: Mathias Sonnleithner/Klaus Fitschen/Marianne Schröter et al. (eds.): *Kulturelle Wirkungen der Reformation/Cultural Impact of the Reformation*. Kongressdokumentation Lutherstadt Wittenberg August 2017. Vol. 2/2, Leipzig 2018; Pleizier (note 15).

who dreamed about a different reality, “for Jacob this has to do with God.” He closes by saying: “you don’t have to proceed in your own strength, God is also there, I would like to say.” These chaplains consult the Scriptures as sources for wisdom that communicate values as hope and expectation.

In these speeches, wisdom is not presented as general truths but shared in the form of personal testimony. It is common for chaplains to use phrases in the sermon like “for me as a Christian” or “I take this as.” The wisdom in Scripture is communicated through personal witness. The spirituality of the chaplain warrants Biblical wisdom. Speaking with a chaplain about this, she explained how spirituality and professionalism come together: “I tried other texts, but I came back to the Bible, because it speaks to me and I am able to enter these texts more than any other text.” Scripture as a treasure of wisdom, professionally communicated in a way that embodies personal spirituality. Chaplains become witnesses to the wisdom in Scripture and in doing so they combine professional competences with a spiritual attitude. They share wisdom grounded in the Scriptures. This wisdom has helped them and is offered to the soldiers to make sense of their life in the military. Though the image of the witness is well-known in contemporary homiletics,²⁰ empirical research shows how witness functions in contexts that do not assume the Christian church as an interpretative community.

Dignifying the Individual Soldier in the Presence of Christ

One of the army chaplains writes: “It is simple. Churchgoers are under no obligation. They choose their moment: not to be lived but to be aware of themselves. That’s the route into inner silence.” These thoughts reflect what chaplains aim for in the moment of worship and what they try to touch upon in their sermons. They remind the soldiers that they are more than functions within a closed system but foremost human beings to be cared for and to be respected.

In one of his sermons, the chaplain starts with naming the feelings that the soldiers might have after four months in Afghanistan. They start thinking about their return to home and with these thoughts necessarily come questions like: what are the sacrifices that we make, as a nation, as a unit, as individuals. “What do we actually think about the political decisions to participate in these missions?” The chaplain gives ample space for discontentment, sadness, and even cynicism. The soldiers are loyal towards the politicians that send them abroad, they are loyal towards the army as

²⁰ David J. Lose, *Confessing Jesus Christ. Preaching in a Postmodern World*, Grand Rapids 2003; Anna Carter Florence, *Preaching as Testimony*, Louisville (KY) 2007; Thomas G. Long, *The Witness of Preaching*, Louisville (KY) ³2016.

organisation, yet they have ambivalent and mixed feelings about the value of their contribution: will everything fall apart at the moment they leave?

In his sermon on the first Sunday after the navy vessel departed for a mission in the Caribbean, the chaplain ends his sermon with a reminder of home. He helps the marines to both remember home, but also to cherish their work. While referring to Easter, the light of Christ's resurrection, he helps his listeners to accept who they are in their work as marines, not as a duty or as a functional element, but as individuals that work together. In a brief reflection during a mission in Mali the chaplain refers to king David – a young man, the age that the soldiers can identify with. In a simple movement, the chaplain helps his hearers to link their responsibility and the hardship of their work with the child of Ps 131. "Believe it or not," he suggests, "this has to do with the Lord." A simple proclamation, in which the soldier is affirmed in his dignity.

The contents of the sermons are usually close to the everyday life of the military personnel. The chaplain deals with a variety of topics in a light, accessible but profound way: soldiers feel there is more to the everyday issues; chaplains provide hints, but do not force the soldiers into a particular Christian religious framework.

Contextual Types of Preaching: A Tentative Typology of Situated Religious Discourse

Military chaplains engage in a wide variety of situations that, following their redefinition of sermons, could count as preaching. In a broad sense, however, preaching can be used for any situation in which an ordained person speaks before an audience in his or her role as ordained minister or religious representative. MCs do engage in various situations of public discourse. These incidents of *situated religious discourse* contribute to reflecting on preaching as empirical reality: what does count as preaching and what does not? This section integrates the concepts presented in the previous section with examples of situated discourse. This integration tentatively points towards a conceptual pattern in the data that classifies preaching in the military according to *types of situated religious discourse*.

One feature seems to apply for all the sermonic activities that MCs engage in: they are all incidents of *contextual* or *occasional* preaching because every situation is specific and requires a unique act of religious communication. To some extent, this is also the case with parish ministers: their preaching relates the Scriptures to contemporary contexts and each instance of preaching stands by itself as a very contextual act of religious speech. Further, in homiletics we find the distinction between Sunday worship as "regular" preaching and other types of preaching that are usually connected to special occasions, such as weddings and funerals. The distinction between regular and

occasional, however, does not seem to apply for preaching in the military. For MCs every event of preaching is contextual. The distinction between regular and occasional does not apply.

Comparing the various situations of religious discourse, the material in this study can be analysed with the help of two dimensions. First, the ceremonial dimension: official (or ceremonial) versus informal (or spontaneous) contexts. Second, the dimension of religious language: implicit versus explicit religious references. Let me give three examples:

- (a) The chaplain organises an Easter service with Holy Communion. This service is ecumenical in the sense that it aims to unite Christian soldiers from various Christian denominations and traditions. The service has the feel of a regular church service. The chaplain wears some kind of clerical robe, not entirely hiding his uniform but he is officially recognized as a member of the clergy. In the service in which communion is celebrated, the chaplain uses specific ecclesial language. During the service it is clear that this also is a very contextual instance of preaching. The chaplain addresses the problems of the mission, he speaks about those of the soldiers that are about to return home after four months of service in Mali, and he encourages them not to become a cynic about the effects of the many sacrifices they made. While this is a very contextual service and the sermon addresses issues that were meaningful for those present at that very moment, the language contains many *explicit religious references* and the service is rather *formal* as it can be recognized as a regular church service with Holy Communion.
- (b) Other examples of *formal occasions* in which the chaplains speak publicly, are examples of remembrance services. Given the ceremonial and public nature, the chaplain will not use very explicit religious language. Kim Hansen refers to civil religion which requires for preaching “a spirituality that is bland and generic because they (MCs, TP) have to integrate a large number of people who are diverse.”²¹ These services are not held for a specific, religious group of people, but they must include the wide variety of the military. If these services contain religious language it is only done very implicitly due to the public nature of these services. Perhaps “service” already is too explicit and too ecclesial. In the material used for this study one chaplain narrates the process in which he prepares his speech for a memorial day. The commander of the mission in Uruzgan had asked him: “Are you going to say something, Reverend?” In the story of his preparation, the chaplain shows how he is aware of the special place (earlier two Dutch soldiers were killed and the square was named after them) and how the theme of remembrance brings alive the stories of many soldiers that have been injured or killed. “How

²¹ Hansen (note 3), 34.

can the sacredness of human life be connected to the sacred, or ‘the glory of God?’” the chaplain wonders.

- (c) Then there are the *informal or spontaneous services*. These are most frequently done during missions abroad. The chaplain does not lead a formal worship service in church, but transforms the space of the common room into a temporary sacred place. The chaplain takes the initiative for the service. He puts candles on the table and uses the television set to play secular music or to show video-clips of popular songs, reads a few lines from a biblical story and gives a short talk in which he connects life issues with the biblical sources, all related to the life and work of the soldiers abroad. The “sermon” takes an existential topic, such as “farewell,” “comradeship,” or “relations.” In one of his services, one chaplain explicitly addresses non-believers by entitling the services as “A Special for Atheists.” The language in these meetings is not specifically religious, but the chaplain feels free to include his or her own spirituality and to share religious sources. Here we find a type of contextual preaching that moves between implicit and explicit religious language. The occasion is very informal: only those soldiers are present who choose to be here, regardless of their religious affiliation. There is no “congregation” that expects the MC to preach. Yet at the same time, the informality develops into more formal structures with expectations, regularities, and durability. Soldiers start to ask whether there will be a service, the chaplain designs a leaflet with his own personal approach to the services, and MCs that start to develop the informal services during the mission into something permanently back home at bases and veteran homes, an new initiative currently coined as “Soldiers-church.”²²

These three examples indicate a tentative typology of contextual preaching. From this an hypothesis that needs further research can be formulated: the formality of the speech-situation determines the use of religious language.

Concluding Remarks and Further Research

These first reflections on the sermons by Military Chaplains indicate a few possible contributions to homiletics as an academic theological discipline and to enrich the theory of preaching. First, what does preaching look like without a typical liturgical community? Second, how can we understand preaching as an existential hermeneutic? Thirdly, how can empirical research add to the growing interest in the role of the spirituality of the preacher for the practice of preaching? Homiletics in its turn can help in answering a broader set of questions, two of which particularly

²² Soldiers-church (Dutch: Soldatenkerk) is a recent initiative by a few Protestant MCs to have monthly services at various bases in The Netherlands, keeping the soldiers connected to the informal services that they attended when they were abroad during in mission.

emerge from this first study of the sermons of military chaplains: what contribution can practical theology make at the intersections of missiology, chaplaincy studies, and empirical research; and how does preaching as religious communication contribute to public theology?

Military chaplains have a specific professional experience in communicating *extra muros ecclesiae*. In a time in which the church invents itself again with help of fresh expression of church or pioneering spots as they are called in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, the experiences of military chaplains can contribute to rethink the practice of preaching in creative ways of being church. They know how to do church when there is no church. Though they do not see themselves as missionaries, Victoria Slater is right in connecting the ministry of chaplains to the mission of the church.²³ Military chaplains have a mission in the mission though they have to reinvent and embody this mission constantly. The institutional framework of separation of church and state makes it necessary to reflect on the relationship between mission as Christian ministry and the context of this ministry, namely the military missions of the ministry of Defence. Preaching could be one of the practices to clarify this relationship and practical theology could contribute to appropriate the theological language of mission within chaplaincy studies which, according to Dunlop, is a “much-needed paradigm.”²⁴

For soldiers in peacekeeping or state building missions boredom is a bigger enemy for the soul than fear of death. Soldiers fear that they might lose their unique selves or experience different emotions as they are cut off from their loved ones. The secularised contexts in which military chaplains operate create a unique situation of preaching. In some ways, they operate in a religious vacuum: many young soldiers have never attended a church service before. The chaplains adapt to that situation by speaking as personal as possible in a public setting. They share the life of soldiers and in their role as chaplain they speak to the existential dimension against the functionalist bordering on the potentially dehumanizing structures in the army. They guard the soldier’s humanity before God. Or, as one of the chaplains in the interviews said: “Even if they do not believe in God, they welcome the thought that God cares for them.” Military chaplains preach though they would never call it preaching.

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²³ Victoria Slater, *Chaplaincy Ministry and the Mission of the Church*, London 2015.

²⁴ Dunlop (note 16).

From boring to divine encounter: Can we preach without the violence of certitude and hegemony?

Peter Woodward

Abstract

“Preaching is boring,” is the expectation for most who sit in the pews Sunday after Sunday. The dominant paradigm for that preaching is “preaching the gospel” as the truth that listeners need to hear - a message delivered with certitude and directiveness. This presentation of the Good News of Jesus Christ has the marks of hegemony and violence visited on both listeners and the preacher. This paper explores an approach to preaching which eschews certitude and hegemony by providing a reflective and invitational approach; using five categories:

What is God doing?; What is the aim and intention of preaching; Preaching and the preacher; Preparation and Delivery; and Evaluation.

Introduction

Imagine what it would be like if, every time you were a participant in a preaching event/drama, as preacher or listener, you came away knowing, positively or negatively, that life could never be the same again. It is my contention that preaching, which is a proclamation of God’s imaginative and alternate vision for creation and the community of faith, should invite preachers and listeners into the creativity, humility and vulnerability of divine encounter - seeking and living in God’s continued presence and action in the world. The alternative is to deliver a pseudo gospel which has limited viability in the lives of preachers and listeners.

This “high” expectation of preaching stands in stark contrast to a widely held view of “preaching” and “sermon” virtually as synonymous with “boring.”¹ My experience of growing up in a Christian home, attending church regularly and listening to sermons for more than 60 years confirms the descriptor “boring.” Out of this experience and a growing realisation that faith has to be a lived reality rather than a recitation of “ancient history”, I have developed a passion for preaching which has resulted in a strong desire to both preach and listen to sermons that breathe

¹ I recall one faithful churchgoer’s response to the idea looking for more effective preaching as: “I wouldn’t know about that, because that is when I sleep!”

life and faith into heart and soul, in short, that are a divine encounter rather than boring and life denying.

It would be presumptive to imagine that I have answers to all the problems that preaching presents to preachers and to listeners; but I am confident that these five issues are key to any approach to preaching:

1. What is God doing?
2. What is the purpose, intent and meaning of preaching?
3. Preaching and preacher;
4. Preparation and delivery; and
5. Evaluation.

These are not discrete variables, having inevitable overlaps and interrelatedness. Nevertheless, they are helpful ways of looking at God's mission – *missio deo* – through the ministry of preaching with the intention of avoiding certitude and hegemony.

What is God doing?

*If preaching is a place where we meet Christ,
then we must imagine that God is somehow present in this act.²*

Raewynne Whiteley firmly grounds her approach to preaching in her sacramental life. Her tentative approach expresses the humility, even vulnerability, of seeing preaching as an act of living faith – a genuine encounter with God – making it much more than an intellectual exercise, a display of public speaking, or an obligatory part of the ritual of a church service.

In contrast to the humility and searching of Whiteley's statement, we need to acknowledge or confess the idolatry so prevalent in our approach to God. Instead of knowing ourselves as made in God's image and therefore belonging to the mystery of creation and redemption (re-creation), we often seek to define, manage and control our reality through our attachments to the idols that are amenable to personal and group psyche. These idols include fundamentalism, bibliolatry, theological certitude, materialism in a prosperity gospel, propositional faith, "a ticket to heaven" faith, intellectualism and, conversely, anti-intellectualism. In a wide variety of expressions "believers" attempt to generate belief systems where "we know that we know that we are right" so

² Raewynne J. Whiteley, *Steeped in the Holy. Preaching as Spiritual Practice*, Lanham 2008, 14.

that God can be accommodated into our theology and worship forms.³ Though some would deny it, these are typically expressions of control. and hegemony

Through the Reformation and the Enlightenment in particular, we have inherited a virtual addiction to rationality, often expressed as objective truth and evidence-based practice. The advent of postmodernism has inexorably drawn us into the epistemological questions of the nature of language and truth. However, the servant, “rationality,” has become a demanding master that will not easily release us from the hegemonic notion that, when we have the *objective truth*, we are in control of the way in which knowledge is disseminated and received by others. Preaching delivered in this manner is inevitably an expression of certitude and hegemony which can be seen to be attractive; but is by its nature coercive.⁴

In contrast to this certitude and hegemony, God reveals God’s self to us; but will not be subject to any facility of definition, management or control. In past generations we defined God with the “O’s” –omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence. Brueggemann rightly criticises this view of God as unworkable: “it will not work [...] in Trinitarian terms because it is impossible that the Father of the three O’s would have sent such a compassionate, self-giving Son into the world.”⁵

Preachers must ask the question: “What is God doing?” to remain faithful to their calling as witnesses to the One, active and present. The question is both highly presumptuous and utterly necessary. It is presumptuous because we dare to imagine that we can have the intimacy with God that gives us access to God’s present activity. That assumption has led to some dangerous outcomes in the life of the church. Nevertheless, the invitation to listen to and wait on God is utterly necessary. Any other starting point for preaching, apart from seeking God’s purpose and love in ministry and preaching, means that we deliberately usurp God. In doing so we negate our exclusive allegiance to and complete dependence on the one who comes to us as the God of faithful love, and to use Brueggemann’s words

the God *artistically rendered*;

the God rich in *internal complexity*;

the God free in *dialogical externality*;

the God saturated with *fidelity and freedom*.⁶

³ Richard Rohr, *Quest for the Grail*, New York 2016, 58.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Cadences of Home. Preaching among Exiles*, Louisville 1997, 40.

⁵ *Idem*, *Disruptive Grace: Reflections on God, Scripture, and the Church*, Minneapolis 2011, 23.

⁶ *Ibid.*

My Protestant upbringing gave me an unhealthy distrust of anything Roman Catholic. I am now much more cognisant of the rich traditions that belong to all of us. Of interest in this context is the mystic tradition that calls us to know God intimately, always recognising that we are in the midst of mystery which is utterly benevolent and beyond the confines of the human mind. Paul R. Fagan, in his Doctor of Ministry thesis: “Towards a Spirituality of Preaching: the preacher as friend of God”⁷ gives a good summary of the mystic expression of faith through the centuries in terms of friendship with God as a necessary component of the life and faith of the preacher.⁸ Thus the question, “What is God doing?” becomes the quest for an intimacy with God which dares to express itself in terms of heart and soul and directs the preacher away from the temptation of certitude and control.

The importance of asking, “What is God doing?” can also be viewed through the lens of two-way theology – both top down and bottom up.⁹ The preacher cannot preach without being attentive to the theology of the people. S/he must be attentive - carefully and lovingly - to the explicit and the implicit theology of the people of God to bear witness to God’s activity in their lives. Theological reflection requires ministry practitioners – preachers, ministers, pastors – to engage in critical and prayerful reflection seeking the faith and understanding of their own relationship with God as well as that of their faith community.¹⁰ In this context the rich diversity of theologies and voices provides opportunity to enrich the processes of theological reflection and the practice of preaching.¹¹

Two examples of the importance of asking: “What is God doing?” come from Adam Hamilton and Andy Stanley. Hamilton is the Senior Pastor of the United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas whose mission, to be a church where the unchurched and those on the fringe can grow in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ determines the preaching.¹² Enacting this strong sense of mission has resulted in spectacular growth in the multi-campus congregation. Similarly, at Northpoint Church in Atlanta, Georgia, Senior Pastor Andy Stanley, together with a group of church members, determined that they would be a church “that

⁷ *Fagan, Paul R., C.P., Towards a Spirituality of Preaching. The Preacher as Friend of God, Doctor of Ministry Thesis, Aquinas Institute of Theology, Saint Louis 2012.*

⁸ *Ibid*, 12–44.

⁹ The view of top down theology where “the expert” theologian imparts faith and theology to the faithful, also called trickle-down theology is not valid and does not work. See *Mary McClintock Fulkerton, “Introduction,” in Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church, Oxford 2007, 8.*

¹⁰ *Peter Woodward, “Theological Reflection as a Key to Practical Theology,” Australian Electronic Journal of Theology, 22.2 (August 2015) 131–132.*

¹¹ *Nicholas Thomas Wright, The New Testament and the People of God, London 1995, 44–46; David F. Ford, The Future of Christian Theology, Chichester 2011, 8; David J. Losse, Confessing Jesus Christ. Preaching in a Postmodern World, Grand Rapids 2003, 59–60; J. Wentzel van Huyssteen, Essays in Postfoundationalist Theology, Grand Rapids 1997, 5.*

¹² *Adam Hamilton, Unleashing the Word. Preaching with Relevance, Purpose, and Passion, Nashville 2003, Chapter 1.*

unchurched men, women, and children love to attend.”¹³ Again dramatic growth in attendance has occurred. The growth in these two churches – one liberal, the other conservative – is not a guarantee that they have “got it right”. However, their intention to discern their calling and mission, and then to plan, deliver ministry and preaching, and evaluate accordingly calls the church to ask, “What is God doing and where are we being led?”

In summary, the question, “What is God doing?” challenges any view of preaching as an exercise in rationality accompanied by certitude and hegemony; and in contrast seeks a relationship with God which is intimate, ready to enter the mystery of God, attentive to the theology and faith of all – “naïve” or “learned,” and filled with the passion of engaging in God’s purpose and mission.

What is the purpose, meaning and intent of preaching?

Seen through the lens of white, western Christianity, from Constantine’s acceptance of Christianity and on through the centuries in a culture of Christendom, the dominant version of preaching has typically been an expression of power, certitude and hegemony.¹⁴ This coercive approach has continued, and been reinforced, with the prominence of rational thinking in the Enlightenment. Sermons resulted from interpreting and determining the “real” meaning of the Scripture so that texts were explained and applied to the lives of listeners, whatever their status as attendees.¹⁵ Allen describes two highly influential forms of this preaching.¹⁶ First, the “university sermon” as developed by the Franciscans and Dominicans in the late Middle Ages with a propositional approach: “name the point or thesis at the beginning and break it into smaller didactic propositions for analysis” and application. Secondly, several centuries later the Puritan approach to preaching used the exposition of Scripture – “biblical exegesis, theological interpretation, moral exhortation.”

By the second half of the twentieth century white, western Christianity and the milieu in which it had grown were undergoing seismic cultural shifts. Postmodernism, the emergence of alternate theologies such as liberation and feminist, and increasing secularisation displacing the church from the “centre” of society are three important changes that challenge propositional and didactic preaching. New forms of proclamation are required unless the church is content to remain in a fossilised form of faith and worship.

¹³ *Andy Stanley*, *Deep and Wide*. Creating Churches Unchurched People to Attend, Grand Rapids 2012, 11.

¹⁴ *Brueggemann* (note 4), 38–39.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 39.

¹⁶ *O. Wesley Allen, Jr.*, : *idem* (ed.), *The Renewed Homiletic*, Minneapolis 2010, 3.

The experience of the young Weary Dunlop gives a practical example from the 1920s:

In 1920 Ernie (later known as Weary) gained his Merit Certificate, ... and discarded his religion. He was 13. 'I decided this heaven and hell approach to life seemed a bit illogical. Saints, sinners, cardinals, popes – who really knew about these things? I'd better make up my own mind.'

[...] (The preaching) was fundamentalist Christianity [...] which threatened hellfire and brimstone [...]. Yet not even the fiercest efforts of these well-meaning prophets intimidate Ernie and the 'admirable but very rigid faith of my near-Calvinist parents' satisfied Weary neither spiritually nor intellectually.

After church, while the grown-ups gossiped round the door, the boys retreated to the banks of the billabong ... and Ernie would mimic whichever portion of the morning homily appealed most to his sense of the ridiculous. Thus, said Alan (his brother) 'purging our minds and souls of fears, making the whole thing a joke ending with hearty laughter.'¹⁷

For some the old certainties of biblical faith are the necessary and sufficient conditions for correct and vital preaching using a didactic approach. For example, Jackman¹⁸ opposes the "virus" of post modernism and for Goldsworthy the approach has to be to:

the plan of salvation revealed in the Bible [...] consistent only with a God who alone is God [as] truth [which] is absolute and coherent because it is the truth of an absolute and coherent God. [Thus] Postmodernism and popular relativism are expressions of ideological atheism and must be resisted.'¹⁹

Similarly, Carter, Duvall and Hays write in terms of connecting the sermon to the concept of biblical authority so that the sermon "follows closely the intended meaning of the biblical text" and draws its authority from that text using deliberate and precise approach to produce highly deductive sermons.²⁰

While the thoroughness and passion of such an approach are obvious and can be argued to be laudable, it comes from a highly didactic mindset which reflects the hegemony and certitude of past generations. Mystery, openness and vulnerability are relegated to virtual irrelevance.²¹ This didactic approach gives priority to correct theology and biblical interpretation – orthodoxy – over the praxis of love which is inevitably vulnerable, even ambiguous.²² Any experience of a divine encounter must come through the "correct" approach to Scripture.

¹⁷ *Sue Ebury*, Weary. The Life of Sir Edward Dunlop, Ringwood, Vic 1995, 31–32. *Weary (Sir Edward) Dunlop* was one of the heroes of Australian life. Notable was his role as a doctor and prisoner of war on the infamous Burma Railway.

¹⁸ *D. Jackman*, "Preaching that Connects 1. External Connections: Strategy and Resources," *Trinity Journal* 29NS 2008, 3–17.

¹⁹ *Graeme Goldsworthy*, Teaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture. The Application of Biblical Theology to Expository Preaching, Grand Rapids 2000, 13.

²⁰ *T.G. Carter/J.S. Duvall/J.D. Hays*, Preaching God's Word – A Hands on Approach to Preparing, Developing and Delivering the Sermon, Grand Rapids 2005, 22.

²¹ I have found reading "Acts" in the New Testament an evocative experience in terms of mystery, openness and vulnerability. The early church sees God as always present to the Christians with an immediacy than seems to be absent in the church as I currently experience it.

²² Loving God and loving one's neighbor – as oneself can be fine; but loving enemies, especially those who disagree violently or are intractable in their viewpoint, and praying for their wellbeing are surely challenging.

The approach to preaching from Christendom and the Enlightenment demands correct interpretation. In so doing real intimacy with the text is avoided. Florence expresses this in terms of “badgering” the text, nagging it to death, or torturing a confession from it so that the meaning arrived at “may or may not bear any resemblance to the truth the text knows and really wants to tell us.”²³

In contrast to this didactic preaching a non-didactic approach uses an invitational and non-coercive approach to witnessing to what God is doing through scripture, faith, knowledge and community. Consistent with a well-developed understanding of Theological Reflection,²⁴ it is much more important to engage in respectful interchange(s) in an attitude of loving kindness, vulnerability, humility, and readiness to give and receive critical reflection. The marks of non-didactic preaching must include love, vulnerability, humility, mystery, mutuality and invitation which contrast with the intensity of certitude and hegemony.

At this point it is appropriate to outline a variety of non-didactic approaches to preaching. In the “Preparation and Delivery” section details of the practice of these approaches are provided.

Anna Carter Florence sets out a non-didactic approach with preaching seen as “testimony.” Her study of women’s preaching in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, when women’s preaching was a marginal, even suspect, activity, describes their preaching as testimony to their living faith. This she combines with a strong call to “live in the text,” not for explanation, application, or proclamation of the text; but to experience life and faith in the text. Then the preacher must bear witness to “what has been seen and heard” as a testimony which will be typically evocative, even challenging:

Preachers in the testimony tradition do not go to the text for answers or explanations. They go to the text to live in it, to encounter, to get inside the passage itself and experience what the text is saying to them. The sermon is the aftermath of that encounter: we tell what we have seen and heard in the text, and what we believe. We offer our testimony.²⁵

Robert C. Dykstra invites the preacher to play with the text; and, while the metaphor evokes the call to become as little children, this play has the deliberate intent of reaching into the depth of heart and mind to “discover” a sermon, or rather be discovered by the sermon. In his approach Dykstra sees the preacher being drawn into the text and the sermon out of attentiveness that calls for love and vulnerability much more than any accuracy or eloquence.²⁶

²³ *Anna Carter Florence*, “Put Away your Sword” in: Mike Graves (ed.), *What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?* Louisville 2004, 98.

²⁴ *Woodward* (note 10), 131–132.

²⁵ *Anna Carter Florence*, *Preaching as Testimony*, Louisville 2007, 133.

²⁶ *Robert C. Dykstra*, *Discovering a Sermon*. Personal Pastoral Preaching, St. Louis 2001, 128.

John Addison Dally takes as his starting point the opening of the Gospels: “Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”²⁷ He calls for a fresh reimagining of the kingdom with a strong emphasis on present lived reality; and for inviting the congregation to be participants who know themselves drawn together out of common allegiance to “being” and “becoming” people of faith. In particular he calls for an abandonment of the Exegesis/Illustration/Application approach to adopt a Proclamation/Implication/Invitation presentation. Rather than telling the congregation how to believe and act to maintain their faith and the church; the kingdom is proclaimed so that all are participants - preacher and listeners – and all are called to the life of the kingdom.²⁸

Similarly, John W. Wright calls for a conviction that the Christian life is about an “alternative community” or a “contrast society” inaugurated by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Preaching must contrast the middle-class assumptions of a “saved” cohort with a community of faith shaped and challenged by the death and resurrection of Jesus.²⁹ This resonates with Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s 1939 criticism of preaching at Riverside Church, New York as “respectable, self-indulgent, self-satisfied religious celebration” which contrasted with his passion for preaching which was thoroughly Christological.³⁰

Gordon W. Lathrop’s approach contains three significant elements: firstly that preaching belongs in the life of the church and beyond – firstly, it is liturgical, exegetical and eschatological–prophetic; secondly, that it is intensely aware of the cultural milieu - as transcultural, contextual, countercultural and cross-cultural; and thirdly that it will call for the preacher’s (and the listener’s) heart and soul - requiring attention and imagination.³¹ Lathrop maintains that preaching belongs firmly within the worshipping community to create and enable faith; and will be an occasion either for offence or for the meal of faith.³²

The purpose of the texts is not for the assembly to imagine how things might have been in other times, but to encounter the biblical God, the God who comes now to this time with all biblical judgment and promise.³³

²⁷ Mark 1:14b–15 NRSV.

²⁸ *John Addison Dally*, *Choosing the Kingdom. Missional Preaching for the Household of God*, Herndon 2008, Chapter 4 and 113–117.

²⁹ *John W. Wright*, *Telling God’s Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation*, Downers Grove 2007, 10–11.

³⁰ *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, *Worldly Preaching: Lectures on Homiletics*, Edited and Translated, with Critical Commentary, by *Clyde E. Fant*, New York 1991, 17.

³¹ *Gordon W. Lathrop*, *The Pastor: a Spirituality*, Minneapolis 2006, Chapter 2.

³² He contrasts the response to Jesus’ words in Luke 4 at Nazareth, where the worshippers wanted to kill Jesus, with the response in Luke 24, where the shared meal in Emmaus was a crucial moment of revelation.

³³ *Lathrop* (note 31), 49.

Preaching must create the possibility that God's newness can invade, take root, and grow within the gathered community. Lathrop's approach resonates with Brueggemann's witness to God's "imaginative or" – seeking to imagine and give voice to God's new and yet to be fully revealed alternative to the closed and hegemonic cultures which so easily seduce with their certitude and promise of a closed reality.³⁴ Or to put this in terms of living the faith:

Preaching the human experience of God is not a matter of just knowing God in theory but rather of knowing God in the personal experience of human joy, suffering, of human life in our world today. The preacher names the grace, the face of God in the faith community.³⁵

Both Hamilton and Stanley as preachers with their strong sense of mission to the *unchurched* may be seen as didactic in terms of content; but their approach to preaching requires an alternative mind-set. "Begin with the audience in mind – not your message."³⁶ The preaching will be imaginative, creative, collaborative, transformational, spiritual, not afraid of the hard questions, and enjoyable.³⁷

In summary, non-didactic preaching does not seek to explain, apply or proclaim the text – the approach of certitude and hegemony; but rather through love, vulnerability, humility, mystery and invitation calls preacher and listener alike to live in the text and there to experience God's "imaginative or" still in process of being disclosed.

Preaching and the preacher

The approach to preaching which is invitational and non-coercive requires that preachers are living expressions of the call to give testimony to God's "imaginative or":

The audience does not hear a sermon, they hear a person. "Preaching is the art of making a preacher and delivering that" [quoting Bishop William A. Quale].

[...] Ultimately God is more interested in developing messengers than messages, and because the Holy Spirit confronts us primarily through the Bible, we must learn to listen before speaking of God.³⁸

³⁴ *Walter Brueggemann*, *The Word Militant. Preaching a Decentering Word*, Minneapolis 2007, 67.

³⁵ *Fagan* (note 7), 67.

³⁶ *Stanley* (note 13), 239–241.

³⁷ *Hamilton* (note 12), 86–97.

³⁸ *Haddon W. Robinson*, *Biblical Preaching. The Development and Delivery of Expository Messages*, Grand Rapids 2001, 26–27.

My ministry as an Army Chaplain gave me opportunity to reflect on the motivations I saw in myself and in other chaplains.³⁹ Not surprisingly, I subsequently found that they also apply to ministry in general. Four primary motivations became clear:

- a. *Self-interest* – where chaplains seek enjoyment and self-satisfaction and may be attempting to avoid difficulties encountered in parish ministry;
- b. *Keeping the rules* – typically by ensuring that people believe the correct things and or follow denominational requirements;
- c. *Caring for people* – expressed in a strong pastoral care ministry; and
- d. *Response to what God is doing* – seeking to know and act consistently with God’s action in the lives of people and in the community. If the first three motivations – enjoyment, keeping the rules, and care for people - are not part of the experience of ministry, it inevitably becomes a perfunctory job rather than a vocation. However, the fourth motivation transforms every aspect of ministry, including preaching, placing the emphasis on God’s action and mission which is both liberating and highly challenging. It frees the preacher from the requirement to achieve since God is the source of all ministry. However, it challenges preachers and listeners to “Prophetic Imagination,” to use Brueggemann’s term: “The prophetic tradition [...] proclaims a God who is an active agent, who is manifestly present in the life of the world and is always up to the business of creating newness.”⁴⁰ A preacher cannot expect to preach a vital and living faith without a spirituality that is radically grounded in the activity – loving presence – of God, always beyond human definition and control and always summoning into God’s “imaginative or.”⁴¹

Similarly, Fagan offers the insight that the art and craft of preaching are important; but of greater importance is the preacher’s calling from and relationship with God. This relationship must be expressive of a deep spirituality. Paul Fagan’s summary of spirituality is a fitting description for preachers:

visionary – we see reality in a new way through a spiritual lens;

sacramental – It involves the presence of God;

relational – living in this way demands sensitivity to the needs and gifts of others; and

³⁹ Peter Woodward, “Spirituality for Army Chaplains” (unpublished, 1995); cf. also *idem* (note 10), 130.

⁴⁰ John M. Buchanan, “Foreword” in Walter Brueggemann, *The Practice of Prophetic Imagination. Preaching an Emancipating Word*, Minneapolis 2012, xiii.

⁴¹ Brueggemann, *ibid.*, 4.

transformational – It puts us in touch with the presence of the Spirit that heals, reconciles, renews, bestows peace, sustains hope and brings joy.⁴²

Fagan also describes this relationship as “friendship with God;” having the qualities of benevolence, mutuality, becoming another self⁴³ and accompaniment. Friendship with God thus creates a relationship where God gives life – fullness of life - to the preacher and to the community and generates the assurance of God’s grace active in contemporary human life.⁴⁴

This relationship with God carries with it a critical sense of being alternative to the dominant culture. Brueggemann draws from the Old Testament prophets the calling to courageously relinquish the seductions of contemporary culture and to announce the newness that a faithful and loving God is yet creating.⁴⁵

In this discussion of “Preaching and the Preacher” it is important to consider the “voice” of the preacher – hegemonic or invitational. Dykstra provides an analysis of the reasons for boring preaching using insights gained from psychology. Seminarians and seasoned preachers alike sometimes comment on the tension between their ministries of preaching and pastoral care, rightly noting that these two tasks require seemingly contradictory ways of communicating with their parishioners so that the concept of “pastoral preaching” appears little more than an oxymoron.⁴⁶ Pastors and preachers have learned to perform according to the expectations of the church – both parishioners and church authorities – and their own idealised understanding of ministry. Ministry determined by the expectations of others easily creates a contrived, even controlled, approach. Preachers can be significantly out of touch with the forceful issues of their lives, whether those issues are serious or apparently trivial or even embarrassing. In this dislocation preaching lacks authenticity as the preacher attempts to deliver an “expected” role and not the vitality and reality of their own genuine and personal voice.⁴⁷ Similarly, Eduardo Samaneigo asks the question of: “Whose voice?” Is it a voice of limited relevance from times past; or is it a voice bearing the assumed authority of “another;” or is it the preacher’s “own voice” which comes with the

⁴² Fagan (note 7), 116–117.

⁴³ “Becoming another self” may seem strange at first sight. The incarnation is surely the ultimate expression of God’s becoming another self for the sake of humanity. Additionally, Paul expresses it as: “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some” (1Cor 9:22b NRSV); and “it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.” (Gal 2:20a NRSV)

⁴⁴ Fagan (note 7), 72–73.

⁴⁵ Brueggemann (note 40), 41.

⁴⁶ Dykstra (note 26), 5

⁴⁷ Ibid., 4; Robr (note 3), 58–59.

congruence of personal experience and depth of inner self and is more likely to convey a lived reality.⁴⁸

In this vein I have concluded that in preaching: “We only ever tell our own story,” or put it another way, “When we preach, we preach the Gospel according to – *here add you own name.*” In fact, it is the only gospel that we can offer. As Taylor puts this reality:

Every word I choose, every image, every rise in my voice reveals my involvement in the message. That is why I have never understood preachers who claim to “stay out of” their sermons, preaching the word of God and the word of God alone. It is not possible, but there is no reason why it should be.⁴⁹

In consequence preachers need to regularly, both formally and informally, undertake critical reflection of their own story to carefully examine their own expression of the Gospel, their biblical and spiritual foundations, and the consequences of those beliefs. Engagement with a Spiritual Director and or Professional Supervision is a vital part of preaching ministry to maintain an approach which avoids the pitfalls of a coercive faith.

Preparation and Delivery

Preparation and delivery are naturally as individual as each preacher. In this section we will look at a range of approaches which seek the humility and vulnerability that avoid coercive preaching.

Every preacher has a different routine for preparing a sermon. My own begins with a long sitting spell with an open Bible on my lap, as I read and read the text. What I am hunting for is God in it, God for me and for my congregation at this particular moment in time. [...] I am hoping for a moment of revelation I can share with those who will listen to me and I am jittery, because I never know what it may show me. I am not in control of the process. It is a process of discovery, in which I run the charged rod of God’s word over the body of my own experience, and wait to see where the sparks will fly.⁵⁰

Taylor’s description indicates that preparation is both intentional and serendipitous. She engages the text; but in a manner that allows it to speak to her and to listeners. Because they are good representatives of this process of discovery and the vulnerability that accompanies it, I give particular attention to Florence’s and Dykstra’s approaches, together with shorter reference to Brueggemann and Lathrop. Each offers opportunity for preachers to work out their own method of discovering a sermon and of being discovered by a sermon in the quest for a delivery which avoids the violence of certitude and hegemony.

⁴⁸ *Eduardo A. Samaneigo, SJ*, *If you preach it, they will come*, San Jose 2006, 15–16.

⁴⁹ *Barbara Brown Taylor*, *The Preaching Life*, Cambridge 1993, 84.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 85–86.

Florence engages in a three-part process: “Attending: What do you see?”; “Describing: What do you believe”; and “Testifying: What are you going to say?”⁵¹

Attending is a deliberate discipline, especially for the sacred text, requiring openness, even a “blessed idleness,” which prefers receptivity and paradox rather than closure and absolutes.⁵² Florence offers a range, fourteen in all, of exercises, not as a formulaic approach; but giving the opportunity of using at least three of them either individually or in group settings. The intention is for the preacher to be immersed in the text using their observations and imagination, and even taking risks – being pushed – in the experience of living in the text through attending to it.⁵³

Describing moves from giving deliberate and creative attention to the text to a similar range of exercises for describing what has been *seen and heard* during the immersion in the text. This describing, for which she recommends a large sketch pad to enable an expansive imagination that is not limited by a keyboard and screen, is the means of stating what is believed from this experience of living in the text. This can take the preacher into the space of imagining a sermon that might be delivered if there were no limitations or hindrances of politics or personalities.⁵⁴

Testifying moves to the stage where preaching as testimony can take place, but Florence adds, not without an enormous challenge to the preacher. To testify to that which has been seen and heard in the text the preacher must face for themselves and for their listeners all the possibilities of personal crucifixion and resurrection; and there are many systemic constraints which would divert preachers and listeners away from knowing the life changing reality of the gospel. However, when the preacher knows and acts on their calling of genuine love, the preaching will share the interpretative space with others even when that challenges fixed or sentimentalised views of religion.⁵⁵

Testimony comes with a cost, for us and for our listeners, and this is the place where we decide if we are willing to pay it. And the matter is complicated, immensely so, because we are preaching to people we love. We do not want to *correct* them. We want to *liberate* them through the power of the Word we meet in the text. We want to give them hope, not hurt, for a future that liberated and redeems.⁵⁶

The challenge of Florence’s approach to preparation and delivery is to be able to move forward believing that in living in the text we will receive a testimony which is God’s word for that moment delivered with invitation rather than certitude and hegemony.

⁵¹ *Carter Florence* (note 25). These are the three major subsections of Chapter 7, “The Wide Awake Sermon”.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 139–143.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 146–150.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 150–154.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 151. *Florence’s* challenge to love listeners came as a moment of “strange awareness” as I could not recall anywhere in training and formation being instructed to love the congregation.

Dykstra, as indicated above, sees preaching as the preacher both discovering and being discovered by a sermon. This discovery brings both preacher and listeners the challenge to search any preconceptions, usually enshrined in orthodoxy and coercive propositions, and to enter the ambiguities that can give them a deeper faith:

An orthodox sermon, which I take to include any sermon that expresses what the preacher and listening congregation already know or, worse, what they are supposed to know and believe and that thereby moves to a predictable conclusion, [it] is [...] simply another form of pre-figuring [assuming that there is nothing of newness or revelation] and [is] therefore, perverse.

[...] ironically, a sermon teetering on the edge of so-called heresy may actually come closer to an authentic witness to a personal, vital, complex faith and doubt.⁵⁷

His preparation for preaching is to encounter in a creative way the affirmations, ambiguities and dissonances of the text, of life and of the liturgical situation; and this activity he calls playing with the text.

Firstly, he sets aside up to four hours to allow the text to be evocative – to write down whatever comes to mind – through his own reading and rereading. This process produces all manner of associations: some trivial, some embarrassing, some creative, all of them accepted in this part of preparation. This does not become the sermon; but becomes the seedbed out of which a sermon might grow.⁵⁸ Next he moves to about two hours of a similar exercise with his own life – a point of interest or incident – that he “plays” with, somewhat like Florence’s blessed idleness in “attending,” making it a virtual catalyst in the sermon process.⁵⁹ This is followed by “playing” with other resources, typically commentaries, to engage both their familiarity and their strangeness and to reveal the more intricate and complex issues that may be hidden to the “naked eye.”⁶⁰

Finally, in “Playing with Fire”⁶¹ Dykstra reaches the point of writing a sermon where he sees the most important task as “getting out of the way” and permitting the thoughts and insights generated, especially the dissonant ones, to come together in a way that seems independent of the preacher, a virtually serendipitous occasion:

A sermon’s coherence seems to emerge quite removed from, and not infrequently contrary to, the preacher’s own intentions ...

⁵⁷ *Dykstra* (note 26), 88.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1: “Playing with the Text.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 2: “Playing Witness to Life.”

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 3: “Playing with Strangers.”

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4: “Playing with Fire.”

Although I cannot fully explain it and though it remains for me almost always disconcerting, so frequently have I experienced what may best be described as being written *by* a sermon even while I am writing it that I now simply attempt to respect the sermon's own insistent claims on me.⁶²

In a similar manner to Florence Dykstra points to a faith that the Word of God will be known and preached invitationally, expecting new, but not coercive, expressions of the life of faith.

Brueggemann's studies of the Hebrew scriptures means that his approach to preaching focusses on the text; but, not to produce its definitive meaning, rather to hear God's newness:

Rightly understood, the occasion of preaching requires both preacher and listening assembly to suspend many assumptions and to entertain the possibility that there is indeed a word other than our own, a word that comes from outside our closed systems of reality. In the word other than our own, the world is re-characterized, re-narrated, and re-described, shown to be other than what we thought when we entered the meeting.⁶³

Brueggemann is, thankfully, very aware that many, even most, preachers are caught in the busy schedules of demanding pastorates and proposes a five-step approach to the text to elicit its deeper and potentially alternate meaning:

1. Undertake a rhetorical study of the text to examine the structure of the words in the text.
2. A word study follows "to focus on the freight carried by particular words" and with attention to "cross references" in the Scriptures.
3. After this exploration examine the vested interests in the text and their relationship to contemporary vested interest in the lives of preacher and congregation.
4. Consider the text "as if it were the only text we have" so that a "radical nonfoundationalist" interpretation is possible without "reference to protective universals."
5. Then in a final step look at the text in the context of the wide scope of scripture and of ecclesial traditions.⁶⁴

Thus, the preacher is enabled to recognise and deliver God's "imaginative or" knowing that preachers and congregations are always tempted to look for a definitive or coercive pronouncement: "Anyone who imagines that he or she is a benign or innocent preacher of the text is engaged in self deception."⁶⁵

⁶² *Ibid.*, 110.

⁶³ *Brueggemann* (note 34), 13.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 77–78. Brueggemann writes of three-step process; but then goes on to add the additional two stages (steps) in the sermon preparation.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 87. From my *Spiritual Director*: we can both cry and laugh about our personal ego – cry, because of the way it intrudes in ministry; and laugh, because it is always present; but that awareness gives less power to personal ego in preparation and delivery.

Lathrop gives emphasis to “attentiveness,” that is, to feeling the impact of the strangeness of text, to the pastoral situation, to the context, and to the cross-cultural import. His preparation method is instructive and challenging. He begins the week reading the texts to get them in his mind; and during the week gives attention to life, to mystery, to people, to the world in finite detail and on a global scale, and to his imagination to encompass possibilities of difference and closeness evoked by the text. On the day prior to preaching the text is given deliberate and careful consideration as well as attention being directed to the Eucharist – the central themes of the faith narratives. His method reads like a creative, almost frightening, adventure which he knows will not suit everyone – each must find their own method of articulating what the Eucharist embodies: “In the power of the Spirit, here is the gift of Christ that you may live. You are free to this life with the wretched and the poor.”⁶⁶

Lathrop’s advice that each must find their own method (and giftedness) in preaching resonates with the vital challenge of a non-didactic approach. God’s invitation to know and respond to an “imaginative or,” always in process of being made present, is confronting to those for whom preaching requires a didactic, even formulaic, approach; but witnessing to God’s ongoing self-revelation and relationship with humankind demands humility and openness which avoid certitude and hegemony:

There is no such thing as infallibility or inerrancy; there are no universal truths for us to own or access at will. There are only fleeting glimpses of the truth we see and confess in Jesus Christ, the truth, that encounters us in our concrete human experience, by the grace of God.⁶⁷

Evaluation

Evaluation is critically important in all forms of ministry. In the context of the thesis presented here evaluation examines the quality of preaching against non-coercive faith. As with any form of Theological Reflection, there will be one or more steps of critical reflection and evaluation. For preaching, the preacher and listeners, the occasion and context, the preparation and delivery, the theology and liturgy, and the responses will all be carefully, lovingly, extensively and prayerfully examined.⁶⁸ The resulting evaluation should always be delivered with care and humility such that offence is neither given nor received; and positive outcomes are optimised.⁶⁹

For some evaluating preaching may feel like the discomfort of preaching classes experienced in their theological education. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge four important aspects of

⁶⁶ *Gordon W. Lathrop* (note 31), 60.

⁶⁷ *Carter Florence* (note 25), 65

⁶⁸ *Woodward* (note 10), 138.

⁶⁹ *Mark Dever/Greg Gilbert*, *Preach. Theology meets Practice*, Nashville 2012, 110.

evaluating preaching. Firstly, virtually no one leaves a preaching experience without personally, or in groups, assessing the quality and effectiveness of the worship and of the sermon in particular.⁷⁰ Secondly, when improvement in effectiveness is accepted and desired, evaluation is a necessary part of the process. Thirdly, because the preacher is performing in public, the risks of vulnerability and denial are always present and the need for a caring approach is reiterated. Fourthly, being intentional in evaluating preaching requires a commitment to a culture of change avoiding the typical default: “We’ve always done it this way.”

Where the vision and mission of the congregation and preacher include the desire for improvements, including assessment and evaluation, there will be the readiness to tackle the challenging questions and move forward.⁷¹ The alternative is hoping for change, but being reluctant to face the necessary accountability; and allowing such inertia to determine the culture.⁷² In consequence, the change of culture required will include initial “training” and even hours of debate by leadership in determining strategy.

Chadwick and Tovey offer suggested settings for review and evaluation of preaching including:

1. supervision by a specialist supervisor or peers,
2. consultancy with experienced preacher(s),
3. feedback from peers and or congregation;
4. learning partnerships; and
5. journaling to review one’s preaching.⁷³

The preacher desiring greater effectiveness will employ at least two of these techniques.

The praxis employed in evaluation sessions is critically important. Dever and Gilbert provide a good outline of evaluation strategy. They indicate four key competencies:⁷⁴

1. Giving Godly criticism:
 - offered in the context of love, appreciation and encouragement;
 - addressing specific issues;
 - offering positive alternatives as part of negative assessments;
 - given gently and firmly, avoiding any grandstanding; and

⁷⁰ “Roast parson” for Sunday lunch is an expression from yesteryear; and see the description of *Weary Dunlop* above (note 17).

⁷¹ *Stanley* (note 13), 302–305.

⁷² Members of Alcoholics Anonymous inform me: The definition of insanity is to continue doing the same thing and to expect change.

⁷³ *Charles Chadwick/ Phillip Tovey*, *Developing Reflective Practice for Preachers*, Cambridge, UK 2001, 12–14.

⁷⁴ *Mark Dever & Greg Gilbert* (note 69), 133–139. Some might criticise Chadwick and Tovey’s use of the word “Godly;” but it serves as a reminder that not only should preaching seek a divine encounter, but that evaluation should continue with that intention.

- aimed simply at helping.
2. Receiving Godly criticism:
 - requiring appropriate vulnerability;
 - desiring growth and improvement; and
 - in an atmosphere of trust and supportive community.

 3. Giving Godly encouragement:
 - which is realistic, neither understated nor overstated; and
 - addressing the impact on the heart and mind.

 4. Receiving Godly encouragement:
 - acknowledging the gift and the giftedness;
 - always in thankfulness; and
 - with grace and humility.

Andre Resner gives an interesting perspective on evaluation in that one of the pleasing outcomes of his Seminary course on the evaluation of preaching is that students who have taken his course are better prepared to move into a homiletics course to learn the art and skill of preaching.⁷⁵ Presumably they are then grounded in the concept of evaluation. He provides 21 questions which comprehensively address the intention, language, theology, scripture and outcome of preaching so that preacher and listeners can ask themselves: “What change in faith and action, individually and corporately, does the sermon invite; and how will we pursue that change?”

Evaluation as a strategy for improvement and accountability is essential, even if it involves risk. Preachers desirous of presenting faith which is invitational and avoids the traps of certitude and hegemony will seek ways to enter an accountability and evaluation program.

Conclusion

⁷⁵ *Andre Resner*, “No Preacher Left Behind: A new Prerequisite for the Introductory Preaching Course,” *Teaching Theology and Religion*, Volume 13, Issue 4, 2010, 339 – 349.

While the typical view both inside the church and beyond is that preaching is boring, more effective preaching is not an unrealistic goal. This requires a careful examination of the underpinning assumptions and practices of preaching as expressed by Florence and Dykstra:

preaching will never change without new theologies of proclamation.⁷⁶

Trying to make everything fit into a set dogma won't work. There's no such thing as a central dogma into which everything will fit.⁷⁷

Some will continue to argue for didactic preaching which sets forth the timeless truth of God as revealed in the scripture; but they risk the “violence” of certitude and hegemony that bespeak an imperialist church where correctness is prioritised over the praxis of love.

Preaching requires critical analysis and reflection if we are seeking greater effectiveness and this paper has done this using the headings:

1. What is God doing?
2. What is the purpose, intent and meaning of preaching?
3. Preaching and preacher;
4. Preparation and delivery; and
5. Evaluation.

This provides a cogent and effective of approach to vulnerable, invitational and deeply reflective testimony to God's “imaginative or.” Preachers can be encouraged and enabled to deliver a proclamation which speaks to the heart and soul of both preacher and listener as a non-coercive faith.

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⁷⁶ *Anna Carter Florence* (note 25), 103. Italics as in the text.

⁷⁷ *Dykstra* (note 26), 82 quoting *Barbara McClintock*, Nobel Prize winning microbiologist in *Evelyn Fox Keller, A Feeling for the Organism. The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock*, New York 1983, Chapter 2 “The Capacity to be Alone”, 179.